Improving Student Engagement — A Practice Guide

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Why Student Engagement?

Student engagement unlocks untapped potential within classrooms. Igniting this spark illuminates a path for students to chase dreams, transforming classrooms into launchpads for success. This guide provides more than a roadmap for engagement; it empowers educators to build the future they want for every one of their students. This work unites teachers and administrators to dive deeply into engaging young minds. Recall what excited you as a student. By blending educator expertise with student interests and needs, we shape a future they can passionately embrace, which is the intent of this guide.

Student engagement is widely believed to be a critical prerequisite to student attendance, behavior, learning, and graduation. Engagement, however, has been an abstract and elusive component of school success. This practice guide will offer a practical and working definition of student engagement and a concept map for local analysis and action. It will also offer instruments for assessing both schoolwide and individual student engagement levels, and for selecting target areas for individual and campus engagement improvement.

Framing Student Engagement — A Reflection Activity

Consider beginning your exploration of student engagement with a simple action research activity individually or as a faculty pursuit. Ask yourself or a group of educators three simple questions:

1. What is your fondest memory from your K-12 school experience?
2. What is the most vivid memory from your K-12 school experience?
3. What was the most important thing that happened to you during your K-12 school experience?

Did each of your three responses focus more on people, activities/events, or instruction? If your responses are typical of educators, most responses focused on people or events, with few or none focusing on instruction. Now consider three likelihoods:

1. Professional educators are likely to have had positive K-12 school experiences.
2. Professional educators may have been more engaged with one or more areas of K-12 instruction than the general population.

3. In general, we are more likely to remember as fond, vivid, and essential those elements of our past that were the most focused at the time and with which we were the <u>most engaged</u>.

If educator memory can be trusted to accurately reflect past K-12 school engagement, two conclusions may be derived from this simple action research activity:

1. Student engagement with school tends to focus primarily on people, activities/events, or instruction.
2. Many school engagements tend to be people-centered and activity-centered, with less engagement being instruction-centered.

History of Student Engagement

Student engagement with school is a relatively complex and somewhat abstract concept considered critical for success. Student engagement's complexity and abstract nature have made it difficult for educators to quantify and address it with specific action steps and strategies.

Early studies of student engagement in the 1930s focused on college student engagement with instruction (Tyler). Studies in the 1980s and 1990s expanded the concept to include student participation in non-instructional activities and addressed satisfaction with the college environment (Pace).

Student engagement is a growing concern in K-12 education, showing a noticeable decline in recent years. A 2018 Gallup survey revealed that only about 47% of students felt engaged in school, while nearly one-fourth (29%) reported feeling 'not engaged' and the remaining 24% were 'actively disengaged' (Hodges). This trend suggests that more than three and a half million high school students across the nation are disengaged. While recent metrics of school effectiveness and accountability systems have included student engagement measures (e.g., climate surveys), engagement remains a challenging concept to quantify. Consequently, educators often prioritize more tangible indicators of school effectiveness, including behavior, truancy, academic success, and graduation rates. Nonetheless, the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) asserts that student engagement—or the lack thereof—is a fundamental cause of truancy, behavioral issues, academic failure, and dropout rates. All of which merit significant attention and intervention from educators.

Measuring Student Engagement

Student engagement can be, and is, measured in a variety of ways. Many state accountability systems use school climate surveys to assess and rank student and parent satisfaction with school and include those metrics in school ratings. For example, South Carolina's school report card utilizes a "School Quality" measure, which indicates if and how students feel engaged in their school and is considered a measure of school climate. (South Carolina's School Report Cards)

Educators' observations and locally developed surveys and inventories may also assess student engagement. It is worth noting that these assessment methods usually address schoolwide, subgroup, and cohort-wide engagement rather than individual student engagement. While group engagement measures are helpful, it should be noted that student engagement is an individual student matter. It is a perception of whether the individual student is satisfied with and connects with the school experience and instruction. This practice guide will offer tools for assessing the schoolwide engagement landscape and the engagement need areas of the individual student.

Defining Student Engagement

The concept of student engagement is multifaceted. The *Glossary of Educational Reform* outlines the primary definition as the degree to which students exhibit attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion during the learning process. This encompasses their motivation to learn and advance in their education. An alternative perspective, less commonly emphasized in K-12 settings, views student engagement as the involvement of students in the governance and decision-making processes of schools. This includes their participation in designing programs and learning opportunities, as well as engagement in the civic life of their community (Sabbott).

Student engagement is broadly viewed as a key factor influencing learning and development. It encompasses not only the level of student participation in educational activities but also their perceptions of the school environment and its support of their learning and development (Kuh, 2001; 2009) (NSSE Conceptual Framework).

For practical use by K-12 educators, NDPC recommends that student engagement be defined as a level of student underline interest in and underline satisfaction with a school that produces underline voluntary attendance, underline willing cooperation, underline active participation, and underline learning progress toward graduation. NDPC further contends that it is worth pursuing if a higher level of student engagement can lead to better attendance, improved behavior, increased participation, more learning, and graduation. Stated differently, if increased student engagement can produce the desired outcomes, it may be the key to fulfilling the outcomes we seek.

Why Focus on Student Engagement

It might seem unnecessary to justify the focus on improved student engagement. Few educators would argue that improved engagement does not result in improved attendance. School leaders must, however, consider that student engagement initiatives may require some complex changes, such as:

- staff members changing how they relate to students
- schedules changed to increase positive peer interaction
- coaches and activity sponsors changing their practices
- teachers changing their instructional delivery methods.

The justification for addressing student engagement, while requiring complex actions, is simple. Suppose student engagement is a level of interest in and satisfaction with a school that improves attendance, cooperation, participation, and learning. In that case, we must do whatever is possible to increase student engagement and maximize those four critical indicators of school effectiveness.

A Working Engagement Model for School Leaders

Since student engagement has historically been an abstract and complex concept, a challenge for K -12 educators attempting to improve it is conceptualizing the issue in a way that is easy to communicate to staff and allows specific actions to achieve the desired improvement. NDPC recommends considering student engagement from two perspectives: a people-activity-instruction concept map and a schoolwide and individual student analysis model.

Consider student engagement across three domains: with people, activities, and instruction.

1. People

Students engage with people at school, both adults and peers. We know that the more frequent and positive those engagements are, the more likely an individual student is to be interested in and satisfied with school. Dr. Bill Daggett stated, "We believe that successful schools begin with relationships." (Sparks) We further know that some students will attend school and even graduate primarily to maintain and enjoy engagement with others, whether those be a favorite teacher or an athletic team.

Questions for school leaders relative to engagement with people are:

- What is the quality and distribution of student connections with adult staff members, and how do we maximize that quality and distribution?
- What is the quality and distribution of student peer connections at school, and how do we maximize that quality and distribution?

Leveraging People Connections to Improve Engagement

Engagement with Educators

Students often form connections with certain school staff members. However, the quality and availability of those connections vary greatly depending on the student's perspective. For student engagement to improve, these interactions must be overwhelmingly positive, appropriate, and enjoyable across all students.

If students view their relationships with staff as negative or a haphazard mix of positive and negative, engagement suffers. Just a few negative interactions from staff can negate many positive ones in a student's mind. All school employees need training to understand how critical positive connections are. Staff must evaluate how students perceive them and actively avoid unnecessary sarcasm, criticism, or belittling when interacting with students. It is also vital that

staff maintain professional boundaries guided by clear norms of appropriate student-educator relationships.

Equally important is ensuring positive connections reach students most prone to disengagement. Oftentimes, strong bonds exist between educators and some students while others are left out. Schools must proactively evaluate connection distribution across grade levels and groups. By identifying less-connected students, customized strategies can then expand positive interactions through mentoring programs, graduation coaching, teacher-advisor systems, and more. Implementing inclusive connection-building models is crucial so that no student falls through the cracks.

Engagement Among Peers

Student-to-student connections may seem organic and outside the scope of educator influence. However, these connections can be positive or negative and may be few or many. We typically assume that we cannot, or should not, attempt to influence or structure student connections with each other. However, we cannot ignore that peer-to-peer connections, both in quality and frequency, shape, and color the individual student's interest in and satisfaction with the school experience.

We recommend that educators assess the nature and distribution of student-to-student relationships within their student groups, classrooms, and whole schools. If subtle or overt bullying, ostracism, or exclusion of some students exist, strategies such as targeted counseling, peer mediation, closer supervision, or restructuring of groups should be selected and implemented.

Guiding questions that will help <u>leaders</u> assess and improve the quality and spread of enjoyable peer-to-peer relationships toward improved engagement include:

- What is the quality and nature of our school's peer-to-peer relationship climate from the student perspective?
- Is the school day scheduled, organized, and supervised to allow for the formation of positive informal student connections and peer groups?
- Do we consciously identify the most peer-isolated students and attempt to connect or group them with other students positively?
- As teachers organize their classrooms and as coaches and sponsors structure teams and groups, do they consciously attempt to pair and connect the most isolated students?

2. Activities

Students may engage in a variety of activities at school. These may include organized sports, clubs, student organizations, and subjects with group activities such as band, chorus, or drama. Students may also engage in less structured activities at school, such as small lunch clusters, friend groups, or two friends that always sit together on the bus.

Educators should remember three guiding principles:

1. The higher the percentage of students who are positively engaged with school activities, the greater the level of student satisfaction with school and the better the student engagement within the school.
2. The more an individual student is positively engaged with a school activity, the more likely he or she is to attend, behave, participate, and be successful in other aspects of school.
3. Staff members, coaches, and sponsors of activities and teams should monitor various elements of participant student school success (attendance, grades, behavior) and encourage school success across the school experience.

Consider that schools as a whole and various activities within a school typically have reputations, informal norms, and formal rules of admission, acceptance, and inclusion. Many of us remember, or even currently know, school teams, clubs, or activities that are perceived as "for" specific categories of students and not "for" other groups. Informal norms may be tied to perceived social or economic status, academic reputation, or ethnicity. More formal admission, acceptance, and membership maintenance rules may involve team or organization size limitations and standards for grades, behavior, or attendance. It is not uncommon for some sports or clubs to require students or their parents to purchase uniforms or pay for group trips, which may unintentionally exclude students with limited resources.

It is recommended that educators carefully assess the norms and assumptions around various school organizations and activities to identify and eliminate both perceived and actual barriers to the participation of all students, with particular attention to the involvement of those most at-risk and disengaged. It is also recommended that school leaders periodically inventory and review the formal policies, procedures, and costs of student activities, organizations, and groups to eliminate barriers to broader student participation whenever possible.

Schools cannot rely solely on traditional teams and activities to attract and positively engage all students. Teams like football, basketball, softball, baseball, volleyball, track, and soccer can be counted on to attract and engage many athletes but are not likely to attract all students, particularly those who do not perceive themselves as athletic. Creative schools have found that adding non-traditional sports like e-sports, step teams, and bass fishing can engage students not likely to "go out" for traditional sports and can significantly increase the percentage of the student body participating in athletics.

Similarly, traditional clubs and student organizations like Beta Club, Honor Society, and the Student Council are an excellent way for some students to engage with school. Traditional organizations, however, cannot be counted on to attract and engage everyone, particularly the most at-risk students. Some schools have significantly increased student participation in clubs and groups by creatively introducing a variety of non-traditional organizations. Some non-traditional student clubs that attract and engage more students include Improv Clubs, Fashion Clubs, Rubik's Cube Clubs, Baking Clubs, and Junior Investor Clubs. It is recommended that

schools creatively expand club and organization offerings, assign inviting sponsors to those clubs, and schedule time for these groups to engage more students in positive school-connected experiences.

Activity offerings can include some elective courses that blend instruction with added activiti*es*. Middle and high schools typically offer elective courses that are both instructional and activity-based, such as band, chorus, and Junior ROTC. It is recommended that school leaders pay particular attention to the number, accessibility, and popularity of these instructional/activity courses because they can increase student satisfaction and engagement. These instructional/activity courses typically provide structure, peer support, and a sense of belonging, significantly increasing participant levels of school satisfaction. To maximize the engagement benefits of instructional/activity courses, school <u>leaders</u> should ask questions such as:

- Are there sufficient numbers of, and diversity of, instructional/activity courses to engage large numbers of students?
- Do the teachers of these instructional/activity courses invite a broad base of student participation, foster enjoyment of participants, and conduct their courses and activities in ways that motivate other areas of school success?
- Are the school's instructional/activity courses offered to all students, particularly the most at-risk students, and are they accessible as early in the student's grade progression as possible?

To maximize schoolwide engagement benefits of activities, it is suggested that school <u>leaders</u> pose the following questions:

- Are there sufficient student "slots" in organized school activities to accommodate all students?
- Are there diverse traditional and non-traditional school activity offerings to attract all students, including those most at-risk?
- Are school activities, groups, and sports led by inviting staff members in ways that maximize student enjoyment and belonging within these activities.
- Are organized school activities structured and offered for ease of access by all students and to achieve widespread distribution of membership?

3. <u>Instruction</u>

Engagement with instruction, not just with school people or school activities, is typically our primary focus and goal. We may be glad that student engagement with people and activities improves attendance, behavior, and graduation outcomes but learning is our primary mission, and it is generally agreed that more engagement with learning produces higher levels of student achievement.

However, instructional engagement is usually the most challenging domain to address and improve. If engagement with instruction is defined as a <u>high level of interest in and satisfaction</u>

with instruction, how do educators and school leaders achieve that level of interest and satisfaction? A helpful concept model is to consider instruction in two areas that can enhance engagement: instructional content and instructional delivery method.

Content Engagement

Without considering delivery methods, curriculum content, from kindergarten reading to high school history, has varying levels of interest, which depend on individual student perceptions. Some course content, such as the steps to rebuild an automobile engine, can be innately attractive to a high school student rebuilding a car. Other content, such as rules for diagramming sentences, may not interest that same student.

Assuming that some instructional content is more interesting than other course content, two strategies may be employed to maximize student interest in and satisfaction with content.

1. Identify, focus on, and highlight the most exciting elements, lessons, and units within course content. This strategy requires that teachers be thoroughly familiar with the content they teach, know the most exciting elements of that content, and skillfully mix the most interesting elements within the total content. This strategy will require well-prepared teachers, content-specific professional development, and sharing of strategies among teachers.
2. Make the content relevant to students. This is best accomplished by linking the content to things, activities, and aspirations that are meaningful to students. Dr Bill Daggett, developer of the Rigor/Relevance Framework, stated, "Educators need to know what interests their students, whether football, baseball, or the arts. Those are the ways to engage students. Successful teachers focus on student interests. Relevance makes rigor possible." (Sparks) Stated differently, we must identify the most exciting elements of any instructional content, identify our student interests, and link the two.

Delivery Method Engagement

Consider delivery methods of content as a continuum, illustrated at one extreme as reading a hard-cover book in black print with no pictures, to the other extreme being a virtual student experience that is action-packed, challenging, hands-on, and colorful. Almost any content at any grade level may be delivered via various methods along this continuum. Student engagement can be expected to increase as the delivery method shifts toward higher-interest delivery.

There are almost limitless numbers of content delivery strategies that make instruction more interesting, relevant, and engaging for students. Examples include gaming, humor, art, career connection, service learning, creative use of technology, student publishing, debates, and role play. At issue is that more and higher levels of educator creativity, skill, time, and focus are required to deliver a given content using more engaging delivery strategies. The challenge is moving teacher behavior from dull to fascinating. Instructional leaders can accomplish this by
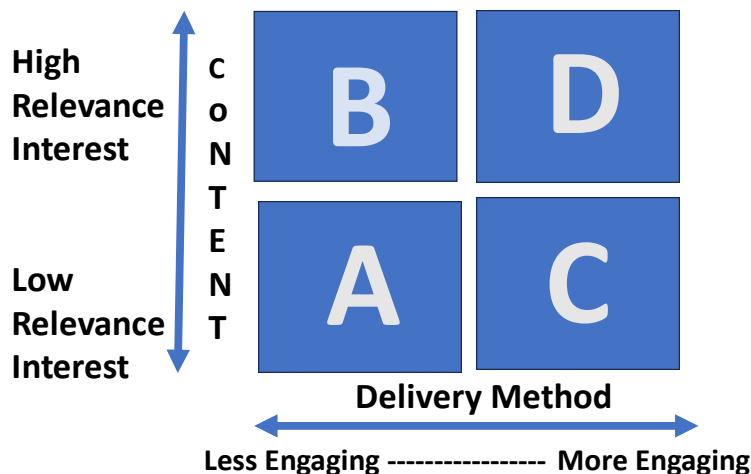
monitoring classrooms for creative delivery methods and celebrating and reinforcing high-interest teaching strategies.

Questions that can guide school <u>leaders</u> to achieve maximum instructional interest, relevance, and engagement might include:

- Do our teachers consider and understand the topics of high interest to their students and integrate high-interest topics with existing curriculum content?
- Are our teachers knowledgeable of and familiar with curriculum content to the extent that they can identify and focus on the topics of the highest interest?
- Do we provide teachers with professional development that prepares them to deliver content creatively and interestingly?
- Do we evaluate, recognize, and reward teachers for their methodology that engages students with instruction, not just for their content delivery?

Teachers and instructional leaders can use the graphic below to conceptualize and communicate the desired shift from the least engaging to the most engaging content and delivery. Using this model, the educator should first locate the teacher's or classroom's position inside the graphic and then move toward the "D" quadrant, instruction with high interest, relevant content, and the most engaging delivery. Instruction in quadrant "D" is the most engaging and can be expected to contribute to higher levels of interest, student satisfaction, and the best outcomes.

Achieving Engaging Instruction

High Relevance Interest — Low Relevance Interest (CONTENT, vertical axis)

B | D
A | C

Delivery Method

Less Engaging ----------------- More Engaging

Fostering Engaged Self-Directed Learning in Students

In the realm of education, the transition from traditional pedagogical methods to a more engaging and self-directed approach is crucial for developing lifelong learners. This shift is vital for students to thrive not only in the academic setting but also as they progress into adulthood, where andragogical (adult learning) principles become more relevant.

1. **Understanding the Learning Process**: It is essential for students to grasp how they learn. This understanding empowers them to take control of their educational journey, making learning a more personal and engaging experience. By recognizing their learning styles, strengths, and areas for growth, students gain academic confidence and can tailor their study methods to optimize learning.

2. **Transition from Pedagogy to Heutagogy**: The traditional educational model that often generates minimal student engagement relies heavily on teacher-led instruction, where learning is structured and directed by the educator. However, this can inadvertently foster a dependency on external guidance. Introducing heutagogical practices, which focus on self-determined learning, can bridge the gap between dependent learning and the self-directed approach seen in adult learning (andragogy). This shift encourages students to set their own learning goals, explore resources independently, and reflect on their learning process.

3. **Building Confidence and Engagement**: As students become more adept at understanding how they learn, their confidence as independent learners grows. This increased self-awareness leads to higher engagement in the classroom, as students feel more connected to the material and empowered in their ability to grasp and apply it. They become active participants in their education rather than passive recipients of information.

4. **Practical Application**: To implement this transition and improve engagement, educators can incorporate strategies that promote self-reflection, offer choices in learning paths, and encourage inquiry-based projects. These methods help students to actively engage with the material, apply their learning to real-world scenarios, and develop critical thinking skills.

5. **Long-term Benefits**: Developing self-directed learners enhances student engagement in the classroom and equips students with the skills necessary for engagement with lifelong learning. In an ever-changing world, adapting and learning independently is invaluable.

By focusing on helping students understand how they learn and transitioning to a more self-directed learning model, we can foster a generation of confident, engaged, and adaptable learners ready to meet future challenges.

Strategies for More Engaged and Self-Directed Learning:

1. **Choice-Based Learning**: Allow students to choose topics, projects, and ways to demonstrate mastery that interest them. This can be done within set boundaries to maintain curriculum goals.

2. **Inquiry-Based Learning**: Encourage students to ask questions and lead investigations. This can be integrated into regular lessons or specific projects.

3. **Flipped Classroom Model**: Provide materials for students to learn at their own pace outside of class, using class time for discussions and applying knowledge.

4. **Collaborative Learning**: Facilitate group projects where students can learn from and teach each other and build engaging peer connections.

5. **Reflective Journals**: Have students maintain journals reflecting on their learning process, challenges, and achievements.

Probing Questions for Teachers:

- How do my teaching methods encourage or discourage student autonomy?
- What opportunities do I provide students to pursue their interests or learning styles?
- How can I balance curriculum requirements with student-led learning?
- How can I incorporate student feedback to shape the learning experience?
- How can I support students in setting and achieving their own learning goals?

By integrating these strategies and reflecting on these questions, educators can effectively transition to a more student-centered approach, promoting self-directed learning and greater engagement.

A Schoolwide and an Individual Student Analysis Model

After conceptualizing student engagement in the three domains of people, activities, and instruction, NDPC recommends a two-pronged approach to improving student engagement: schoolwide and individual engagement. First, establish a measure or assessment of the school's engagement level, accomplished by either a state accountability metric or a local survey and observation assessment. Next, analyze the engagement need-for-improvement areas using NDPC's *Schoolwide Student Engagement Assessment Instrument* or something similar. The NDPC instrument is provided below. Lastly, identify and implement steps to increase schoolwide student engagement in the identified need areas.

Schoolwide Student Engagement Assessment Instrument

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The following guiding questions are recommended for schools' self-assessment of their student engagement initiatives. The guiding questions are grouped to address the three domains of student engagement: <u>People</u>, <u>Activities</u>, and <u>Instruction</u>. After the self-assessment, it is recommended that specific steps be taken to achieve a "Yes" response to each question.

#	Domain	Guiding Question	Yes	No	Some-what	Comments
1	People	Are there mechanisms to ensure every student connects positively with a responsible adult at school?				
2	People	Does the school day allow time and opportunity for students to have controlled time to interact positively with peers and staff?				
3	People	Are staff members prepared to structure their connections with individual students appropriately and uniformly?				
4	Activities	Are there enough extra-curricular activities to allow all students to select and participate in activities that meet their individual interests?				
5.	Activities	Is there a wide and varied range of extra-curricular opportunities that extend beyond traditional sports and clubs?				
6	Activities	Are extra-curricular activities managed to attract and engage reluctant students?				

#	Domain	Guiding Question	Yes	No	Some -what	Comments
7	Activities	Is there a mechanism to ensure that all students participate in one or more high-interest extra-curricular activities?				
8	Activities	Are extracurricular activities scheduled to allow all students to participate easily?				
9	Activities	Are cost barriers removed from extracurricular activities?				
10	Instruction	Are motivating and engaging elements part of all academic courses?				
11	Instruction	Are teachers trained to integrate motivating and engaging elements into academic instruction?				
12	Instruction	Are teachers motivated to make academic instruction motivating and engaging?				
13	Instruction	Is all instruction monitored to ensure that motivating and engaging elements are included?				
14	Instruction	Are the most engaging and motivating courses of study readily available to the most at-risk students?				
15	Instruction	Are the relevance and benefits of each course and subject clearly represented to students?				

While school leaders may consider student engagement as a schoolwide or cohort-wide matter, actual engagement occurs at the individual student level. While part of a student body, individual students either engage with or do not engage with their school's people, activities, and instruction. To improve engagement at the student level, educators must identify the least engaged students, analyze the nature of their disengagement, and work directly with those individuals to increase their engagement level. To support that work, NDPC offers the following *Individual Student Engagement Assessment Instrument*. NDPC recommends that educators familiar with an individual student (counselors, graduation coaches, deans, or advisor teachers) complete the assessment instrument and identify areas of potential engagement improvement and action steps to support that student. Having their engagement levels enhanced, numerous individual students will produce higher levels of schoolwide student engagement.

Individual Student Engagement Assessment Instrument

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Student Name: _____

Staff Member _____

The following engagement instrument is intended for professional educators to informally assess the extent to which an individual student is positively engaged with school and to guide educator efforts to improve the student's level of school engagement. This instrument is not designed to be completed by an individual student. This instrument is based on the theory that engagement with school may occur in three areas: engagement with people, activities, and instruction.

#	Engagement Area	Guiding Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Notes
1	People	Does the student respond positively to interpersonal communications and interactions with staff members?				
2	People	Does the student have a positive, appropriate, and ongoing connection with at least one staff member?				
3	People	Does the student have multiple positive, appropriate, ongoing connections with staff members?				
4	People	Does the student get along well and interact positively with peers at school?				
5	People	Does the student integrate easily with peer groups in most situations?				

#	Engagement Area	Guiding Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Notes
6	People	Does the student have at least one good friend among peers at school?				
7	People	Does the student have multiple good friends among peers at school?				
8	School Activities	Does the student willingly participate in school activities and events when offered?				
9	School Activities	Is the student positively engaged when participating in a school activity or event?				
10	School Activities	Is the student a part of at least one organized school activity or team?				
11	School Activities	Is the student a part of multiple organized school activities or teams?				
12	Instruction	Does the student have at least one favorite subject?				
13	Instruction	Does the student appear willing to participate in classes and instructional situations?				
14	Instruction	Is the student attentive in classes?				
15	Instruction	Does the student make a genuine effort to complete class assignments?				

#	Engagement Area	Guiding Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Notes
16	Instruction	Is the student making average or better grades in all subjects taken?				
17	Instruction	Is the student making A or B grades in all subjects taken?				
18	Instruction	Does the student understand and have ownership of his/her own goals relative to courses taken?				
19	General	Does the student have and understand an "end game" goal for successful school completion?				
20	General	Does the student express or demonstrate greater satisfaction than dissatisfaction with school?				

Educators wishing to select more specific strategies for improving student engagement and self-directed learning may utilize the list of research-based strategies itemized in **Appendix A**.

Additional Assistance

The National Dropout Prevention Center offers *Improving Student Attendance: A Practice Guide* and the recommended assessment process to support local schools and districts. NDPC also acknowledges that local circumstances such as limited personnel, limited time, insufficient engagement expertise, and the need for external validation may sometimes require the assistance of external engagement experts.

The National Dropout Prevention Center employs several experienced engagement specialists who can assist local schools and districts in addressing this complex issue. NDPC support for engagement improvement, while always customized to meet local needs, may include:

- Guidance and coaching to apply the Engagement Improvement Practice Guide
- Facilitation of Engagement Task Force work to develop new and more effective strategies and action steps.
- Expert evaluation of current and new engagement practices and reports of findings.
- Analysis of local student engagement problems and recommendations for improvement.
- Ongoing guidance and coaching of the local Engagement Task Force to monitor, improve, and sustain local initiatives.
- Professional development for leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders to establish and sharpen student engagement skills.

For support or more information, email NDPC at ndpc@dropoutprevention.org or call 518-723-2063.

Appendix A

Strategies for Increasing Engagement with Instruction

1. **Active Learning**: Engaging students in active participation improves retention and understanding.
   - **Example**: Interactive activities like group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and hands-on experiments encourage active involvement.
2. **Student Autonomy**: Allowing students to have a say in their learning process increases engagement.
   - **Example**: Choice boards or letting students choose their project topics can empower them to take ownership of their learning.
3. **Relevance and Real-World Connection**: Making learning relevant to students' lives and future careers enhances engagement.
   - **Example**: Integrating real-world problems and current events into the curriculum helps students see the practical application of their studies.
4. **Collaborative Learning**: Collaboration fosters a sense of community and improves engagement.
   - **Example**: Group projects or peer-learning sessions where students can share knowledge and learn from each other.
5. **Feedback and Recognition**: Timely and constructive feedback, along with recognition of achievements, motivates students.
   - **Example**: Regular feedback sessions and acknowledgment of student progress in front of the class or through awards.
6. **Self-Regulated Learning**: Encouraging students to set their own goals and monitor their progress leads to more engaged learning.
   - **Example**: Teaching goal-setting skills and providing tools for self-assessment and reflection.
7. **Incorporating Technology**: The use of technology can make learning more engaging and accessible.
   - **Example**: Digital tools like educational apps, online resources, and interactive whiteboards can enhance the learning experience.
8. **Emotional Engagement**: Addressing emotional aspects of learning, such as interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging, is crucial.
   - **Example**: Creating a supportive classroom environment where students feel safe to express themselves and take risks.
9. **Personalized Learning**: Tailoring the learning experience to individual student needs increases engagement.
   - **Example**: Differentiated instruction strategies and personalized learning paths based on student assessments.
10. **Culturally Responsive Teaching**: Recognizing and respecting cultural diversity in the classroom promotes engagement.
    - **Example**: Including diverse perspectives in the curriculum and being sensitive to cultural differences in teaching methods.

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