

Acknowledgments

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Overview

The best schools have realized that the lifeline to academic achievement is student

With the focus on meeting expectations of state assessments and the many distractions to youth today, ranging from iPods and Instant Messaging to family issues and socioeconomic standing, it is not surprising that many schools are concerned about an increasing number of disengaged students. This concern has brought student engagement to the front burner, where it needs to stay if we want all students to achieve the skills and knowledge that will provide the basis of success and fulfillment throughout their lives.

The purpose of this resource kit is to assist school leaders and teachers in grades K-12 in the intricate task of increasing student engagement. The kit, which explains the psychological underpinnings of why students behave in certain ways, is loaded with practical suggestions on how to make student engagement a data-driven process. It also suggests how to improve school climate and support teachers in developing engagement-based learning and teaching strategies. Best practices from exemplary schools, checklists, and professional development activities are included.

The International Center for Leadership in Education has found that the highest performing schools recognize that student engagement is the lifeline to academic achievement. Engagement encompasses a student's individual and social needs and requires a stimulating environment that is motivating and stretches the learning process. Academic achievement is not just about test scores. It is about helping each student develop his or her abilities and acquire the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics of an engaged learner.

Experienced educators know that increasing student engagement is not easy. Solutions are individual and complex, and they require persistent effort and staff collaboration. The effort, though, is certainly worth it. If we can be successful in engaging students in rigorous and relevant learning, their futures, and the future of this nation, will be much brighter.

Chapter 1: Engagement — Essential for Rigor and Relevance defines student engagement and its connection to rigor and relevance as well as the consequences to learning if we lose sight of this critically important issue.

Chapter 2: Student Perspective delves deeper into what students are saying about school and learning. Several reports and data summarize the scope of the problem of disengagement.

Chapter 3: Student Engagement — A Closer Look explores the psychological basis of how and why students engage or disengage in school and focuses on relationship building as the key factor in increasing student engagement. The chapter also discusses the important role that family plays in the student engagement process.

Chapter 4: Engagement-Based Learning and Teaching is the heart of this kit and describes the conditions necessary to create high levels of student engagement. The engagement-based learning and teaching model outlines the steps that educators can take to address the problem of student engagement.

Chapter 5: Improving Engagement Through School Culture expands on school culture and how educators can provide the conditions that students innately desire.

Chapter 6: Successful Engagement Practices includes a wealth of best practices gleaned from K-12 schools across the country. These dozens of practical examples are concrete initiatives that can be adapted to improve student engagement in other school environments.

Chapter 7: Professional Development and Leadership Activities offers leadership and professional development activities to elevate the importance of student engagement by helping teachers and

administrators reflect on and modify education practices. Activities for students are included as well. Numerous checklists are provided to keep track of progress and measure success. Electronic versions of these checklists are included on the accompanying CD.

Resources: This section includes three items. The first is the Core Habits of Student Achievement. These seven habits are mentioned in the text and used in some of the activities in Chapter 7. The second item is the *My Voice* Student Report, which shares data on student aspirations surveys from schools in the International Center's "Models, Networks and Policies to Support and Sustain Rigor and Relevance for ALL Students" initiative. Finally, the Resource section lists references used in the kit plus additional useful materials.





Chapter 1

Engagement – Essential for Rigor and Relevance

The Engaging Classroom

"I wish my students acted as well as these students. Teaching would be much more enjoyable," Kathy whispered to her colleague, Kris. The two teachers were observing a 6th grade mathematics class at a neighboring middle school. They were part of a visiting team of faculty, which spent two days at this model school to learn about best education practices that could be applied to their own middle school.

"Certainly these students are engaged in learning," Kris replied. "Did you notice how they immediately opened their notebooks and started working on the bell ringer activity of scrambled vocabulary words on the board?"

Meanwhile, the teacher in this classroom asked students to move to their cooperative groups to work on the problem of the day. One student assigned as a helper quickly distributed copies of the problem to each group. The rest grabbed their notebooks and moved to other parts of the room, linking their desks in groups of four. Students appeared eager to read and discuss the problem on the handout. Several students raised their hands and asked questions.

"How much time do we have?" one student asked.

"The usual 10 minutes," replied the teacher.

"Do we get the same prize for this one?" asked another student

"Sure," said the teacher, smiling. "Bonus coupons for the monthly prize drawing."

The teacher reminded the student groups, “Your group recorder must not only have the answer, but also must be able to show the work on the board.”

Students in every group were talking, listening, debating, writing, and searching for the answer to the math problem. Kathy, the visiting teacher, noted the marvelous class experience and wrote the words “students very engaged” on her notepad. Engagement was evident in this classroom.

Was it really that the students were naturally better behaved than her students? Did this teacher have a better lesson or procedures that created this level of engagement? Did the school policies have some influence on engagement? How could Kathy and Kris replicate this in their own school? They recalled how disruptive their own students were, resisting working in groups, frequently forgetting their notebooks, and constantly having to be reminded to “get to work.”

When Kathy and Kris met with the rest of their visiting team, they realized that other teachers had made the same observation: students were clearly engaged in this school. They spent more time on a given task, worked creatively, and ultimately achieved at high levels.

Some of Kathy’s colleagues also had the same first impression that the level of student engagement was easy to achieve because these students were somehow “better.” They were more disciplined, respectful, and had better work habits. Others on the team, however, disagreed. “These students come from family situations similar to our students,” said one colleague. “They have similar challenges and levels of support.”

Kathy listened to several other comments and then offered this challenge to her team: “Clearly, student engagement is a key to

academic achievement. When we return to the school tomorrow, let's look closely at the instructional practices and school procedures to see what we can learn and apply to our own classes."

Student Engagement: Critical to the Learning Process

Student engagement can be quantified and measured like many other school dimensions.

To achieve at high levels of rigor and relevance, not just at the levels measured by state tests, students must be engaged. Student engagement is not something that happens when a teacher is assigned a "good" class. It can be planned for, improved, and measured. It is not a subjective notion of good teaching, but an important dimension of rigorous and relevant learning.

Student engagement can be quantified and measured like many other school dimensions. Yet, student engagement is not a simple single technique; it is a complex and important dimension in providing an excellent and meaningful education. This resource kit explores the multiple aspects of engagement and reviews the best practices in schools to increase student engagement. With increasing amounts of student engagement, higher levels of achievement can be attained.

Engagement in learning is like spice in cooking. Food prepared without herbs and spices becomes a tasteless meal. The food may be good for you, but you don't enjoy it. The same is true when engagement is left out of the learning process. Can students learn without being engaged? Yes, but that learning is unappealing at best. And, the truth is, engagement improves the process of learning.

There are examples of good student achievement without any attention to engagement. Some teachers routinely drill students in practice tests to prepare for a high-stakes exam. This type of instruction pays little attention to the engagement process. The message is: "Do the work, get the right answer." Still, two problems occur with this position.

First, using state test results as a measure of academic achievement is a narrow slice of what is important to learn and the goal of most schools. Student learning is far broader than knowledge in selected subjects as measured on a few tests. The goal of academic achievement at high levels of rigor and relevance, as defined in this resource kit, requires the full participation of students in many learning activities over a long period of time. If students are to succeed in the broader definition of academic achievement, educators must pay attention to student engagement. If students are truly engaged in academic achievement and school life, they will learn to value and be responsible for their education.

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Second, learning does not end for students when they graduate from high school or college. Not only do they leave school with an acquired set of skills and knowledge, they leave with an attitude toward learning and a set of behaviors on how to approach learning. By paying attention to student engagement, schools not only enhance student achievement, but also better prepare them for the continuation of their education in whatever form it takes throughout their lives.

Student engagement is the positive behaviors that indicate full participation by the student in the learning process. We know it when they see it. When students are engaged, we can hear, see, or feel their motivation in completing a task, taking pride in their work, or going beyond doing the minimum work required. Student engagement not only applies to regular classroom instruction, but also extends to extracurricular activities, such as a school play, a sport, or a school club. Engaged students demonstrate a feeling of belonging by the way they act, the positive things they say about school, and through their passionate involvement in classroom activities.

What Is Student Engagement?

Student engagement is not a single behavior. Rather, it is a broad set of behaviors. This resource kit will describe many of these behaviors and provide ways to improve engagement.

Student engagement is not a single behavior. Rather, it is a broad set of behaviors. This resource kit will describe many of these behaviors and provide ways to improve engagement. While there is limited research in student engagement as a school measure, it is an area of increasing interest and attention. As in most dimensions of education, there is not a single linear approach to reaching high levels of student engagement, and there are a number of ways to measure it.

First, student engagement can be observed and measured as an aspect of school and student success. In 2004, the International Center for Leadership in Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) embarked on a five-year initiative to identify and analyze the nation's most successful high school practices and policies for achieving a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students. A key part of the project was to develop a more objective and comprehensive set of indicators to measure academic success that resulted in the Learning Criteria to Support Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships (explained in more detail later in this chapter).

This set of criteria uses student engagement indicators, or quantitative measures, to determine whether the practices of schools (curriculum, instruction, school activities, policies and procedures, culture, and facilities) make a difference in the level of student engagement.

Second, student engagement is used to describe the ways in which teachers facilitate effective instruction by engaging students. This is more accurately called “instructional student engagement.” The instruction designed and facilitated by the teacher is more effective when strategies such as anticipatory set, advanced organizers, bell ringer, or inquiry serve as engaging beginning strategies. Also,

teaching strategies such as project-based and cooperative learning are more engaging than the typical lecture or demonstration. So, the choices that teachers make in designing and delivering instruction can increase the level of instructional student engagement.

Instructional student engagement is more fully addressed later in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

Third, the term “engagement” can apply more broadly to best practices in schools, such as extracurricular activities, 9th grade initiatives, parent involvement, and advisory programs. In this case, the practices can collectively be described as the “school engagement culture.” Here, the focus is on school civility and discipline, and staff behaviors in creating a welcoming environment, as well as programs and staff roles and responsibilities, all of which influence whether students have opportunities to learn in a challenging and supportive atmosphere.

Engagement through school culture is further discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

While we often hear the call for rigor and relevance, many education leaders are beginning to add a third “R”—relationships. In the current context of school reform, as driven by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), schools are struggling to cope with new accountability requirements and increasingly they are recognizing that relationships are critically important to learning.

Rigor, Relevance, and the Third “R”— Relationships

The destination for education has to be rigor, relevance, and relationships. Getting to that destination requires school staff to work together toward common goals, analyzing data, adapting best practices, taking risks, and embracing change. One of the key dimensions in achieving rigor, relevance and relationships is student engagement. When students have positive relationships with their teachers, parents, peers, and the community at large, they become more fully engaged.

The International Center has examined some of the most successful high schools in the country — schools that have challenges of poverty, mobility, and diversity but still have high rates of student

success. In these schools, relationships among students and staff are deliberately nurtured. Students feel that the staff genuinely care about them and encourages them to achieve at high levels. These schools have shown that when educators raise student expectations, they also need to focus on supporting the quality of their relationships with students. If there is not a high level of positive relationships, students will not respond to higher expectations.

The goal for all schools in preparing students for the future should be rigor, relevance, and *relationships*. The following eight trends reinforce the need to meet this mission.

Changing Nature of Work

Recent advances in science and technology are mind-boggling. Three areas of technological change that have far-reaching implications are information technology, biotechnology, and nanotechnology. While technological innovations bring many benefits, there is little argument that they add to the complexity of our world and increase the skill level every person needs to function effectively in our society. We don't know exactly where the future will take us, but as technology continues to evolve, it will alter the workplace and our homes, our personal lives, and education systems.

It's a Flat World

Friedman,
Thomas L.
*The World
Is Flat*

The term “flat world,” made popular by syndicated columnist Thomas Friedman, explains how global competition is driving economic changes. The confluence of a “wired” world, new ways of doing business driven by information systems, and rapidly growing educated populations in China and India affects employment opportunities in every local community. For students to compete in this world, they

will need to be adaptable, creative, independent, and driven to be successful.

Changing Youth

Today's generation of students provides our traditional classrooms with interesting challenges and opportunities. When this group is seen playing video games, those of us who teach often liken it to the passive activity of watching television as we knew it growing up. In fact, the similarities end when looking at the screen. Video games provide students with an opportunity to participate in a multitude of roles and scenarios. Youngsters sometimes are accused of having short attention spans. However, researchers now believe that students of this generation have a strong ability to process multiple stimuli at once. They always have been able to work between multiple applications on their computers and electronic devices. Here again is their strong ability to multitask. Mark Prensky, internationally acclaimed speaker, author, and information technology designer in the critical areas of education and learning, refers to today's students as "digital natives." They are the native speakers of the digital language that drives cell phones, the Internet, and video games. Prensky explains that their teachers are the "digital immigrants," who generally must struggle to learn this new language. Like all immigrants, educators can learn a great deal if they listen to the native speakers.

New Skills Required

Learning for the 21st Century report, which resulted from a combined effort of the National Education Association, the CCSSO, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Ford Motor Company Fund, takes a fresh look at learning and thinking skills, information

Daniel Pink. *A Whole New Mind*

and communication technology literacy skills, and life skills that high school students should master by graduation. Certainly, the recent events in terrorism, genetic engineering, and global disease transmission raise the need for scientific literacy and global perspective. Another intriguing analysis of important skills for a highly technological future is Daniel Pink's book, *A Whole New Mind*. The book makes a logical argument for students to engage in more right-brain learning of design, storytelling, empathy, symphony, play, and making meaning so that a transition can be made from an information age to a conceptual age.

Increasing Accountability

The gap in achievement is unacceptable to the well-being of our nation and our youth. Four in 10 students read below basic on the National Assessment of Education Progress.

Political and education leaders no doubt will continue to debate the specific requirements of NCLB. While changes most likely will occur, one constant that we can all expect is the public demand for increased accountability in schools. The federal law also has brought about an important shift of focus, from measuring teaching to measuring learning. Zeroing in on rigor, relevance, and relationships as defined by the International Center helps to keep the attention appropriately on student learning.

Achievement Gap

The gap in achievement, which can be measured many ways, is unacceptable to the well-being of our nation and our youth. Four in 10 students read below basic on the National Assessment of Education Progress. The well-documented work of the Education Trust has shown how the average 17-year-old African-American or Hispanic student reads or computes at the level of the average 13-year-old white student. Moreover, the National Governors Association

cites in its research that less than 20% of a given age cohort completes any college degree by age 25. Internationally, U.S. students rank 24 out of 29 nations in the Program of International Student Assessment.

Education Trust.
*Measured Progress:
Achievement Rises
and Gaps Narrow, But
Too Slowly*

Unified Perspective and Focus

One weakness in many schools is that teaching, testing, school improvement, and resources emphasize different skills and knowledge. A school may have highly qualified teachers, good assessments, abundant technology and library resources, and extensive professional development. However, the sum of all of the parts may not lead to high levels of student achievement. Schools need to do more than create the components of quality education. They must have all of these parts working in alignment and emphasizing similar perspectives. Applying the concepts and levels of rigor, relevance, and relationships is useful in bringing curriculum, instruction, and assessments into alignment.

Preparation for State Tests

The expansion of high-stakes testing programs over the last decade has led many teachers to “teach to the test.” Some have criticized this focus as detrimental to “real” learning. However, teaching to the test is not bad as long as it is a good test. States are working to make these exams more valid and without bias. These tests also are becoming more difficult, and efforts are underway to create questions that demand complex thinking. In its review of these exams, the International Center has found that many of them are rigorous and do include complex questions and application of knowledge. With this in mind, educators need to teach to higher levels of rigor and relevance to prepare students for state tests. However, if teachers only teach to the test and ignore the long-term

movement toward rigor and relevance, students always will be behind the curve, trying to catch up.

Application Matters

Students who are effectively engaged in the pursuit of academic success are not only learning in a more productive fashion, they are learning how to *apply* that information and apply *themselves* to the learning process. When students' interests are sparked by events in their world and their lessons are personally challenging, they are more likely to succeed because they are engaged. When students are engaged, they become absorbed in the *process* of learning. They are not simply studying academic content. Students are learning how to learn; they are not merely learning the appropriate information for a test. Whether students become atomic scientists or carpenters, marital partners, parents, or community members, they need to know how to apply their knowledge to everyday life.

Teaching through application is an effective way to engage more students in pursuit of high standards and to ensure that graduates can use what they have learned. When students see the relevance of what they are learning, they are more motivated to learn. Simply put, students retain more of what they have learned by doing instead of reading or listening.

In the United States, the word “applied” has at times become synonymous with “lower level.” However, the truth is, all students need to be taught theoretical and content knowledge *and* how to apply those theories and content. There is overwhelming evidence that supports the increasing concern that the knowledge acquired in the typical U.S. school curriculum fails to equip students for the increasing rigors of the workplace.

Students become better problem solvers when they have the opportunity to solve real-world problems and to reflect on what worked and what didn't. Real-world problems do not come neatly packaged in predictable, easy-to-solve formats. Students need experience in grappling with problems that mirror the world beyond school.

This process of learning also is replete with “hidden lessons” embedded in the curriculum. Hidden lessons include tasks, activities, and mental processes such as learning how to organize time for studying, how to organize material for presentations, how to memorize effectively, and numerous other skills. In short, students are learning a variety of processes that with practice and application become lifelong skills. Learning the hidden lessons is critical to all future roles in life.

The most effective teachers naturally tune into the hidden lessons, breaking lessons down into a few steps. Students may not even realize the steps they used to write a stellar report or complete another assignment. A teacher talking to a student about a completed report could say:

Positive response: “Good job on that report, Sue!” This praise is good, but it does not give the student clear feedback about what she actually did that showed good organizational skills or help her to understand the steps she took to organize the material effectively.

Engaging response: “Great job organizing the material for your report, Sue! Tell me a little about how you decided to organize your paper?” (Sue speaks.) “Good thinking, Sue. I really liked the way you introduced the topic in a personalized way, followed up with in-depth topic information, and then provided creative examples to back up the main points of your paper.”

Hidden Lessons

Learning the hidden lessons is critical to all future roles in life.

If students do not understand the underlying steps inherent in a specific academic activity, some may give up quickly and disengage.

When students are engaged in this latter instructional mode, with clarification of underlying steps and processes inherent in academic instruction and activities, as well as praise for their achievements, they improve with time and practice. If students do not understand the underlying steps inherent in a specific academic activity, some may give up quickly and disengage. If teachers can help students learn and apply the hidden lessons, then they may help those who might otherwise fall by the wayside or perhaps even drop out of school.

Other Student Engagement Terms

Other related terms are part of any exploration of student engagement and will be used throughout this resource kit. The first two may be familiar to educators who are conversant with the International Center's Rigor/Relevance Framework,TM which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Rigorous learning: Students demonstrate a thorough, in-depth mastery of challenging tasks to develop cognitive skills through reflective thought, analysis, problem solving, evaluation, or creativity. Rigorous learning can occur at any school grade and in any subject. Bloom's Knowledge Taxonomy describes the levels of rigor.

Relevant learning: Students apply knowledge, concepts, or skills to solve real-world problems. Relevant learning is interdisciplinary and contextual. Student work can range from routine to complex at any school grade and in any subject. Relevant learning is achieved through authentic problems or tasks, simulations, service learning, connecting concepts to current issues, and teaching others.

Relevant instruction: Relevant instruction connects to students' daily lives, community, language, and experiences. This is different than relevant learning in which the curriculum and student performance are measured against real-world expectations. Relevant learning is more about what is taught. Relevant instruction is about how teachers teach. If instruction is more relevant to students, it leads to higher levels of engagement behaviors.

Relationships: Personal connections are built when we show others that we care. Relationships among people – student, peers, staff, parents, and community – influence learning. High levels of achievement for all students will occur only if schools address the issue of relationships as a major component of pedagogy. Student engagement is influenced by the quality of relationships that support the student as learner.

School climate: The overall patterns and acceptable norms of student behavior make up the “school climate.” The absence of distractions, conflict, violence, and other disruptions all contribute to a positive school climate. Schools also create a positive school climate by having students learn and practice guiding principles, such as honesty, respect, and responsibility. Likewise, having high levels of positive behaviors of student engagement contributes to a positive school climate.

Student compliance: Students may complete academic assignments by complying with requests, acquiescing to pressure, or obeying authority, but may not be motivated achievers. In other words, students may meet the minimal requirements or even perform quite well, but they are not truly engaged.

Student motivation: This is the psychological state that causes students to take action toward a desired goal. There are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic.

1. Intrinsic motivation occurs when students are motivated from within themselves. Motivation is not based on external rewards such as money. Rather, it is an intrinsic, or a natural, positive state of motivation in which students have a compelling desire to engage in the learning process to achieve their own personal goals. Terms such as pride, personal satisfaction, internal drive, and dedication describe motivation.
2. Extrinsic motivation occurs when students are motivated to learn through receiving an external reward or to avoid an imposed penalty or punishment. For instance, parents may create extrinsic motivation by offering \$5 for each “A” in a subject that their children receive or threatening to ground them if they perform poorly on a test. Grades, high-stakes state tests, and graduation requirements are examples of extrinsic motivation.

Measuring Student Learning

A key to increasing student engagement is finding efficient ways to measure it. When something is measured, summarized, and reported, it becomes important and people pay attention. Student engagement has a sound educational and psychological basis for inclusion in learning. However, it will routinely be perceived as a marginal component unless school leaders measure, quantify, and report the data.

Many schools are working diligently to improve rigor, relevance, and relationships. Frustration can occur, however, if schools embrace this goal without a systematic approach to measure current student learning, set goals, monitor progress, and recognize success.

Some school improvement initiatives are carefully constructed, viewed appropriately through the lens of a school's mission, driven by data, and accountable to multiple stakeholders. Other initiatives, however, are not so meticulously conceived. Rather than allowing data to drive goal setting and decision making, some schools still are guided by good intentions, hunches, and impressions. Often, these schools inadvertently lose sight of learners' needs as they struggle to ensure compliance with state regulations. The quest for rigor, relevance, and relationships must be conducted in the context of a comprehensive data system for measuring student learning. The same holds true in pursuing the implementation of successful engagement practices.

The quest for rigor, relevance, and relationships must be conducted in the context of a comprehensive data system for measuring student learning. The same holds true in pursuing the implementation of successful engagement practices.

The International Center's Learning Criteria Support Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is one tool that supports school improvement processes through data collection and analysis process. The set of criteria was a result of and has become a key part of the International Center and the CCSSO's ongoing collaboration to identify and analyze the nation's most successful high school practices and policies for achieving a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students. To help accomplish this mission, the two organizations worked with a broad coalition of the following national groups, which represent many key constituencies:

- Achieve, Inc.
- American Association of School Administrators
- American Federation of Teachers
- American Institutes for Research
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- The Education Trust
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- National Education Association

**Learning
Criteria to
Support Rigor,
Relevance, and
Relationships**

- National School Boards Association
- U.S. Department of Education

The International Center developed the Learning Criteria to identify “proven” schools and to help “promising” schools move to proven status by nurturing academic performance in all its forms. The International Center has found that schools which strive to be great broaden their focus beyond core academic achievement. They expand their mission to include ways to:

- motivate students to engage in learning and participate in a broad spectrum of activities
- provide mechanisms for each student to realize his or her interests, talents, and potential
- create a nurturing and secure learning environment with strong adult-student relationships
- ensure that every student is prepared for the world after high school — postsecondary education, careers, lifelong learning, citizenship, and other adult roles.

Data Indicators

The Learning Criteria is arranged in four data categories that education leaders can use to determine the success of their school in preparing students for current assessments and future roles and responsibilities.

1. **Core Academic Learning** is achievement in the core subjects of English language arts, math, and science, and others identified by the school.

Sample data indicators:

- percentage of students meeting proficiency level on state tests
- average scores on ACT, SAT, PSAT

2. **Stretch Learning** is the demonstration of rigorous and relevant learning beyond minimum requirements (participation and achievement in higher level courses, specialized courses, etc.).

Sample data indicators:

- number of credits required to graduate
- percentage of students earning three or more credits as a major in the arts, technology, or trades.
- interdisciplinary work and projects, such as a senior exhibition

3. **Student Engagement** is the extent to which students (a) are motivated and committed to learning, (b) have a sense of belonging and accomplishment, and (c) have relationships with adults, peers, and parents who support learning. Engagement was included as one of the four measures of successful schools for two reasons.

The first reason originates from observing the efforts in some schools to raise student test scores. The learning environment in some of these schools can best be described as mind-numbing rather than mind-expanding, with extended time devoted to routine practice of test items. In observing this type of test preparation, the consensus reaction is that students may pass

the test but are turned off to the learning process. If this is the result, their education has been a waste because they are unlikely to approach the goal of becoming a lifelong learner. Developing core academic achievement must include student engagement. If students are to retain and apply what they have learned, they have to enjoy the learning process.

Second, student engagement is interconnected and enhances the other three data categories (core, stretch, and personal skills).

Sample data indicators:

- student satisfaction surveys
- student risk behaviors (asset survey)
- dropout rate
- attendance rate
- graduation rate
- discipline referrals
- participation rate in extracurricular activities
- follow-up survey on enrollment in higher education
- percentage of students taking ACT/SAT
- tardiness rate
- surveys on degree to which teachers know their students
- surveys on positive peer relationships
- percentage of students going to two-year colleges
- percentage of students going to four-year colleges

4. **Personal Skill Development** is (a) measures of personal, social, community service, and leadership skills and (b) demonstrations of positive behaviors and attitudes.

Sample data indicators:

- participation or hours in service learning
- students holding leadership positions in clubs or sports

Increased expectations and testing demands have placed a heavy burden on schools. The Learning Criteria helps educators clarify their mission, prioritize problems and interventions, and critically review school performance. Further, this set of criteria provides a solid rationale for establishing goals and developing action plans. Most importantly, the data generated by the Learning Criteria reflect the needs of learners in ways that traditional, less complex measures overlook.

The Learning Criteria is designed to provide a robust, comprehensive, and detailed portrait of school performance that clearly maps out a route for school improvement efforts. It delivers data that can fuel accountability reports to the community at large and underlines the notion that school improvement is a multifaceted enterprise. The Learning Criteria also challenges schools to leverage data as a means of monitoring continuous, long-term growth and improvement efforts.

This model also redefines success in terms that are unique to each school, meets standardized test measures of school success, and reveals the school environment in all of its complexity and depth. It clarifies four important aspects of a well-educated student (core, stretch, engagement, and personal skills) and elevates the attention to student engagement as an important measure of school effectiveness. Student engagement is not the sole purpose of education, but an essential part of overall student achievement and school success.

Increased expectations and testing demands have placed a heavy burden on schools. The Learning Criteria helps educators clarify their mission, prioritize problems and interventions, and critically review school performance.

Data derived from the Learning Criteria empower school communities to craft meaningful, cogent, and comprehensive school improvement plans, to set powerful school change agendas, and to envision critical interventions that fortify the efforts of learners, teachers, and school administrators to achieve academic excellence.

Measurement of the Learning Criteria

The data indicators used will vary among schools based upon state requirements and school philosophy, focus, and curriculum. To identify success, all data indicators must be quantifiable in the following five categories:

1. **School Performance** — expressed in objective terms
2. **Sustained** — trend data to show improvement or maintenance at high levels for three to five years
3. **Disaggregated** — comparisons in achievement among all subgroups
4. **Benchmarked** — comparisons to similar schools on a state or national level, or accepted norms from national/state surveys and reports
5. **Exceptional** — significantly exceeds similar schools on a state or national level, or accepted norms from national/state surveys and reports

Making Comparisons

The Learning Criteria should not be used to compare schools universally, such as is done on state report cards. It is difficult to

compare schools using the same data since all schools are different from one another and their students differ in experiences, aptitudes, and abilities. However, educators should not avoid comparisons altogether. Benchmarking the Learning Criteria to another set of schools is a necessary part of completing the data analysis as long as the benchmark schools are carefully selected to enable comparisons to similar schools based on demographics, community, and school structure.

The data indicators will help school leaders distinguish data that relate to success in student learning versus data that relate only to school practices. All proposed innovations and improvements should be considered with the data indicators in mind. Not all the indicators need to be compared to the same group of schools. The comparable group might include schools in the region, in similar socioeconomic communities, with a similar focus, of the same size, or all high schools in a state. In the end, educators should reflect on the appropriate indicators that are consistent with their overall school goals and focus. Not all of the indicators selected will have data readily available. This will require additional data analysis or collection.

State tests cannot be compared across states. Moreover, state tests measure only a portion of core academic skills that all students should acquire. Proven schools go far beyond this achievement and can demonstrate student learning in multiple ways.

Engagement-based learning and teaching (EBLT) is an approach to instruction that recognizes the essential component of engagement. It includes effective instructional planning, motivational coaching, engagement strategies and practices, and interacting effectively with students. It is based on the idea that developing high levels of student engagement begins with the teacher applying

Introduction to Engagement- Based Learning and Teaching

Chapter 4 describes EBLT in greater detail.

systematic strategies to actively motivate and engage students in the process of learning and academic achievement.

EBLT is based on extensive educational and psychological research, which demonstrates that there is a clear relationship between motivation and student engagement that results in an increase in academic achievement. While this fact is intuitive and has been demonstrated through research, there has been little emphasis on developing schoolwide initiatives that:

- employ teacher-delivered, rigorous, and relevant systematic engagement practices
- focus on cultivating positive student beliefs, feelings, and habits that enhance engagement academically and in school life
- create a school culture supportive of high levels of student engagement and academic success

The EBLT approach delivers a clear message to students and the community that teachers and the entire school will dedicate themselves to helping students develop high levels of motivation and engagement that can lead to strong academic achievement and ultimately to a better quality of adult life.

EBLT is based on the notion that teachers are a critical source of social influence for students. Social influence is based primarily on the nature of the student-teacher relationship that occurs every day, both in and out of the classroom. Just as there are styles of parent-child relationships, there are also styles of student-teacher relationships. A style of parenting or teaching may be based simply on an adult's unique personality. Becoming an effective parent or teacher demands learning the skills, methods, and strategies that have proven to be successful in relating to children.

The EBLT approach to teaching is a systematic method for providing academic instruction *through* a teaching style that emphasizes specific strategies to develop increased levels of student motivation,

strengthen student habits that lead to high levels of engagement, and promote positive character attributes. This approach is demonstrated in the way teachers relate to students as well as how they coach students to increase motivation, integrate core habits of student engagement, and promote guiding principles of sound character into the content of classroom lessons.

Two systematic practices work together to develop EBLT:

- Teachers learn and apply specific strategies and skills to facilitate student engagement.
- Students learn and apply specific skills and habits that help them engage more effectively in academic achievement and involvement in school life.

EBLT comprises five key components:

1. **Motivation** — cultivating strong feelings of motivation to help students actively engage in a specific subject.
2. **Beliefs** — developing and strengthening beliefs that support student engagement; how and what students learn now will be important for their future.
3. **Values** — establishing the feelings and passion about the value of knowledge, the importance of lifelong learning, and the personal significance of attaining a good education.
4. **Behavioral habits** — learning and practicing particular action steps toward reaching engagement goals.

5. Skills — developing effective skills and abilities that can be learned during the process of higher levels of engagement.

Research consistently shows the connection between engagement and achievement.

Miller, Beth M.
*Critical Hours:
Afterschool
Programs and
Educational
Success*

“Students who are engaged in learning behave better in school, have better work habits, higher educational aspirations, improved attitudes towards school, a greater sense of belonging in the community, and better relationships with parents,” according to Miller.

National Research
Council and the
Institute of Medicine
of the National
Academies, 2003

According to the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, “High schools that successfully engage students in learning have many things in common. They set high academic standards and provide rigorous, meaningful instruction and support so that all students can meet them. Their structure makes it possible to give students individual attention. The teachers take an interest in students’ lives, drawing on their real-world experiences and current understandings to build new knowledge. Teachers also show students the connections between success in school and long-term career plans. Unfortunately, too few of the nation’s high schools fit this description. For many teens, school is an impersonal and uncaring place.”

Brewster, C. & Fager, J.
*Increasing Student
Engagement and Motiva-
tion: From Time-On-Task
to Homework*

“While the link between engagement and achievement may seem obvious, this issue frequently slips through the cracks in discussions about school reform and improvement,” say Brewster and Fager. As schools focus on helping all students achieve high standards, however, reaching out to disengaged and discouraged learners becomes increasingly important. Clearly, students who are not motivated to engage in learning are unlikely to succeed.”

The growing amount of research shows the essential role that student engagement plays in the learning process. Clearly, academic

achievement is enhanced when students are engaged. Increasingly cognitive scientists are recognizing that individuals learn within systems in which the actions of one person only have meaning within a larger context of shared understandings as a kind of “group mind.” Others demonstrate how learning takes place in “construction zones,” that is, social school settings in which talk and action among students with different skills motivates intellectual development. Neurological studies of brain suggest that learning is a constructive process that engages students in active interchanges with the physical and social environment.

Hutchins, E. *Learning to Navigate*

Newman, D., Griffin, P., & Cole, M. *The Construction Zone: Working for Cognitive Change in School*

Student engagement is not only a result of individual teacher practices, but also is heavily influenced by the overall culture of a school. The arriving student feels the impact of culture somewhere between the extremes of the engaging culture and disengaging culture. The overall culture of a school directly impacts each student’s engagement in learning. The engaging culture seems inviting, exciting, empowering, safe, and comfortable to a student. The disengaging school seems impersonal, cold, unfeeling, overwhelming, and threatening. Not all students will respond in the same manner but culture does make a difference.

An Engaging School Culture

People, policies, procedures, community partners, and the physical structures all contribute to defining the school culture and the degree to which it is engaging to students. Following are components to an engaging culture:

Chapter 5 is devoted entirely to the subject of school culture.

- Interactions between and among students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc., are respectful, collegial, and warm.
- There is a sense of mutual accountability; people feel a sense of responsibility to one another and to the larger school community.

Conner, J. "Cutting
Edge: Brain Compatible
Learning"

Caine, R., and Caine,
G. *Education on the
Edge of Possibility*

- Signs of positive community identity and a sense of belonging permeate the school.
- Students take a leadership role in representing and "owning" the school, exhibiting energy and enthusiasm about their institution.
- Students are treated with respect.
- The physical space is clean and safe.
- A strong sense of interconnectedness exists on the part of all stakeholders.
- Regular forums, structures, and interactions acknowledge and celebrate school and individual success.
- The school actively involves and engages family and community members in the life of the school (e.g., student exhibitions, tutoring, etc.).
- Leaders share information that highlight both school successes and challenges as well as decisions impacting the school with families and other community members in public forums.
- The school promotes and supports student activism, helping students engage in community change.
- The school engages parents and community members in assessing student work and defining mastery.
- The learning environment is both welcoming and relevant to students.
- Diversity is valued and encouraged.

School reform initiatives during the past several years have focused on increasing the common focus and collaboration to create the characteristics of an engaging school. At the high school level, large impersonal schools often are reorganized into smaller learning communities for a more collaborative and a more focused learning environment to create the characteristics of an engaging school.

Lee, V.E. & Smith, J.B. *Effects of High School Restructuring and Size on Early Gains in Achievement and Engagement*

Simply creating smaller learning communities will not make large schools better. However, working in smaller groups, staff can create a more engaging climate by working toward a common focus, sharing ideas on what constitutes engaging instruction, and developing stronger relationships with students. Lastly, restructuring schools to provide greater degrees of rigor also contribute to greater gains in student engagement.

Libbey, H.P. *Measuring Student Relationships to School: Attachment, Bonding, Connectedness, and Engagement*

In the current context of academic standards, many national organizations today are calling for more attention to student engagement. Accountability pressure to deliver higher academic performance because of mandates at the national, state, and local levels has never been greater. This environment provides the impetus for schools to adopt more meaningful teaching and learning practices to increase achievement. New and improved strategies are receiving attention, exploration, support, and adoption. This trend coupled with serious changes in the world reiterates the need to adopt successful engagement principles. To do so, schools must:

- develop engagement-based teaching and learning
- foster a school engagement culture
- measure student learning through student engagement indicators

Summary

Takeaway Messages

- ✓ The International Center launched a five-year study of the nation's most successful high school practices and policies for achieving a rigorous and relevant curriculum. One outcome of the study has been the development of the Learning Criteria to Support Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships, a set of four criteria to gauge school success. Engagement is one of the criteria.
- ✓ An emphasis on student engagement is a cornerstone to a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students.
- ✓ Student engagement is something that we can hear, see, or feel from a student. We know it when we see it. Students are engaged when they show behavior that indicates they are actively participating in tasks and activities that lead to academic achievement or socially appropriate involvement in school life.
- ✓ Emphasizing student engagement is most effective when developed as a schoolwide, systematic initiative.
- ✓ Classroom initiatives must have the support of the entire school community.
- ✓ Disengagement can become a crisis in the student's life. Early intervention is key to turning around the downward cycle of hostile, apathetic, or disengaged behavior.
- ✓ In the current context of standards, many national organizations today call for more attention to student engagement. Accountability pressure to deliver higher academic performance because of mandates at the national, state, and local levels has

never been greater. This environment can provide the impetus for schools to adopt more meaningful teaching and learning practices to increase achievement.

- ✓ Students who are effectively engaged in the pursuit of academic success not only are learning information in a more productive fashion, but they also are learning how to apply that information and apply themselves to the learning process.
- ✓ Engagement-based learning and teaching (EBLT) provides an approach for integrating motivational coaching and engagement strategies and practices with a teacher's natural style of teaching and interacting with students.



Chapter 2

Student Perspective

The Silent Epidemic

Students can tell us a great deal about disengagement and what would increase the level of their interest in schools. The reasons for disengagement are many, but the staggering result is the same: Each school day, 3,000 secondary students drop out, according to the Alliance for Excellent Education.

The report, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, examines why students drop out of high school. Although some of the 500 dropouts surveyed had experienced academic problems, the vast majority said they left school because:

- classes weren't interesting (47%)
- they missed too many days and could not catch up (43%)
- they had too much freedom and not enough rules in life (38%)

The study, in which students could check more than one category, also looked at factors that dropouts thought might have kept them in school, including:

- more real-world learning opportunities (81%)
- smaller classes with more individual instruction (75%)
- better communication between parents and schools and more involvement from parents (71%)

Research over the past 25 years has found a large number of disengaged students. The number is even higher for students at risk.

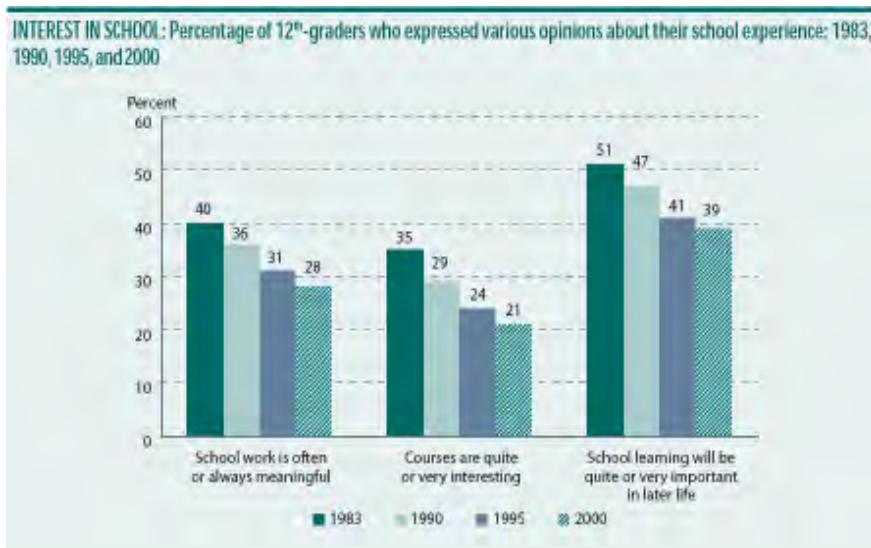
Bridgeland, J.M.,
Dilulio, J.J. Jr., &
Burke Morison, K.
*The Silent Epi-
demic: Perspec-
tives of High
School Dropouts*

Meece, J., &
McColskey, W.
*Improving Student
Motivation: A Guide
for Teachers and
School Improvement
Teams*

Goodwin, B. *Raising
the Achievement of
Low-Performing
Students*

The Condition of Education report, released in 2002 by the National Center for Educational Statistics, focused on 12th graders' perceptions of meaningful schoolwork, course interest, and whether school learning will be important in later life. The report analyzed and compared statistics from 1983, 1990, 1995, and 2000. In each subsequent year, the percentages of students with positive perceptions in these areas decreased significantly.

Many changes have occurred in schools over this time period. Since the early 1980s, the continual introduction of a plethora of new requirements has been part of an ongoing effort to raise standards. The result is that learning has become less interesting, less meaningful, and less connected to students' perception of the future. In light of this, the current rate at which students are dropping out of school is not surprising.



If student engagement is not addressed more collectively, systematically, and strategically, academic success, career satisfaction, and lifetime happiness will be at risk. The stakes are high.

My Voice®

The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations, in Portland, Maine, has done extensive research in the area of student aspirations. As a result of its work, the Institute established the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference.™ Research by Quaglia has identified a correlation between these conditions and student achievement. The conditions are:

1. **Belonging** means that a student is a valued member of a community while still maintaining his or her uniqueness. A sense of belonging contributes significantly to a student's sense of well-being, social engagement, and competence. The condition of belonging increases intrinsic motivation because it fosters self-confidence and investment in the community. Belonging is an important first condition. The degree to which a school builds a sense of belonging is a springboard to developing the additional conditions and a foundation for learning.
2. **Heroes** are people with whom a student can connect. They have a positive influence and listen and value students' ideas. Heroes build trust in others and belief in oneself.
3. **Sense of accomplishment** signals student success in relation to effort, perseverance, and citizenship. Sense of accomplishment is viewed in terms of personal growth and effort, not just through measurable outcomes and countable successes.

4. **Fun and excitement** constitute the condition by which students are inspired. Students are actively engaged and emotionally involved in their schoolwork. Those who exhibit fun and excitement are usually self-confident, curious, and prepared. They are willing to meet the challenges of the day.
5. **Curiosity and creativity** constitute the condition characterized by inquisitiveness, eagerness, a strong desire to learn new things, and a desire to satisfy the mind with new discoveries. Curiosity triggers students to ask, “Why?” Creativity gives them the initiative to ask, “Why not?”
6. **Spirit of adventure** is characterized by a student's ability to take on positive, healthy challenges at school and home. Students experience the spirit of adventure when they tackle something new without the fear of failure or pressure of success.
7. **Leadership and responsibility** constitute the condition by which students are able to express their ideas and willing to accept consequences for their actions. This condition cultivates accountability for the classroom environment and school community.
8. **Confidence to take action** is the extent to which students believe in themselves and are encouraged to dream about their future while being motivated to set goals in the present. This condition is what we strive for. All other conditions must be established and supported for students to attain this level of aspiration. Confidence to take action is characterized by a positive and healthy outlook on life and by looking inward rather than outward for approval.

To measure the level of these conditions, the Quaglia Institute developed the *My Voice Student Aspiration Survey*, which has formed thousands of questions related to student engagement. The International Center has partnered with the Institute and recognizes that the survey is one of the excellent data instruments to help educators objectively determine the level of student engagement in their schools.

During the 2005-2006 academic year, 65,517 students completed the survey, which was analyzed in *The My Voice® National Results Report Academic Year 2005-2006*. The report revealed both positive and negative findings.

Eighty-eight schools representing various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds from 22 states were included. Of the students surveyed, 7% were in grades 6-8 and 93% were in grades 9-12. Of the students surveyed, 51% were male and 49 % were female. The participants were from a range of ethnic backgrounds: Caucasian (55%), African-American (12%), Hispanic/Latino (19%), Native American (1%), South Asian (3%), Chinese (4%), and other (6%).

Putting in the Effort

Students participating in the survey appear to understand what schools expect of them in terms of academic achievement. Although the percentages could be higher, the majority of students reported that they want to get good grades and that they understand the significance of testing.

Of the students surveyed, 84% agreed with the statement, “Getting good grades is important to me,” and 67% said that tests are an important part of their education.

While most of the students surveyed want to do well in school, many do not put forth the effort needed to achieve to their fullest potential. Close to 20% of those surveyed give up when they encounter difficult schoolwork. Similarly, only three out of five students report that they try their best in school, a finding that is strikingly similar to the three out of five who state that teachers recognize them when they try their best. The gap between wanting to achieve and persevering to meet that goal must be examined as does the role teachers play in recognizing effort and perseverance.

To be engaged in learning and want to persevere, students must find their studies enjoyable and worthwhile. Of the students surveyed, 50% said that they enjoy being at school and 56% said that they enjoy participating in their classes. While a higher percentage (65%) agreed with the statement that “learning can be fun,” 46% said that “school is boring.”

One of the most positive findings of the survey was based on students who believe that learning can be fun. However, the disparity between the finding that students believe learning can be fun and that so many do not experience engagement in their school must be addressed. Students have to be considered the potential, not the problem. Schools must explore more effective ways of tapping into that potential for engaged learning.

While schools should be proud of their accomplishments, there is much work to be done to improve even the most positive of these findings.

In spring 2005, the National Governors Association surveyed teenagers as part of a high school policy initiative. More than 10,000 teens nationwide completed the *Rate Your Future* survey. In this large sample, more than one-third said high school has been “easy.”

The My Voice report on the schools in the International Center’s “Models, Networks and Policies to Support and Sustain Rigor and Relevance for All Students” initiative can be found in the Resources section of this kit.

Other High School Surveys of Student Engagement

Two in three students agreed with the statement, “I would work harder if high school offered more demanding and interesting courses.” More than 70% think taking courses related to the kinds of jobs they want is the best way to make their senior year more meaningful.

The *High School Survey of Student Engagement* (HSSSE), developed by Indiana University, also measures levels of student engagement. The survey questions students about their attitudes toward learning and their involvement in practices linked to effective education, such as writing papers, working on team projects, and taking part in discussions. The survey is available to schools for a fee.

The survey asks about assignments and participation. Students are more likely to benefit from school when their assignments are challenging and they have opportunities to actively participate in classroom discussions and small group activities (National Research Council, 2004).

In the 2005 report, *Getting Students Ready for College: What Student Engagement Data Can Tell Us*, the university analyzed data from the 2004 HSSSE in which more than 90,000 high school students nationwide participated. The report, based on students’ post-high school aspirations, compared study habits and reading and writing practices to those of first-year students at two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. Following are some selected findings:

- More than 40% of the students (37% of females and 47% of males) indicated that they had never or only sometimes worked on a paper or project using information from several sources, such as books, interviews, Internet, etc.

- About 65% of the respondents said that they frequently (often or very often) worked with other students on projects/ assignments during class.
- Close to half of the honors/college prep students said that they frequently put ideas together from different subjects, whereas less than one third (32%) of the general educational students said they did so.
- Only 37% of all respondents indicated that they frequently made presentations in class.

Contribution to class discussions is another area of the survey. When students participate in discussions, they are showing engagement and are more likely to value learning and take pride in their school work.

- Yet, 57% of the respondents said they frequently contributed to class discussions.
- African-American (60%) and white students (58%) were more likely than other racial groups to frequently contribute to class discussions; Latino and Asian students were the least likely to do so.
- Slightly more than half of the respondents said they frequently asked questions in class.

In another part of the HSSSE survey, students were asked about their perceptions of school expectations and student effort.

- Of the respondents, 75% said their school places substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on continuing education beyond high school.

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- Respondents were more likely to say their school places substantial emphasis on athletic achievement (72%) than on academic excellence (63%). Indeed, 41% said their school places “very much” emphasis on athletic achievement, whereas only 27% indicated that academic excellence is emphasized to that degree.
- The vast majority of the respondents (84%) agreed it is important to make good grades (89% females and 79% males).
- Close to 70% of the respondents agreed they place a high value on learning (74% females and 64% males).
- More than half of all respondents agreed that what they learn at school is useful. Asian (62%), Latino (60%), and African-American (58%) students were more likely than White (51%) or American Indian (47%) students to voice this sentiment.
- Africa- American (60%) and Asian (60%) students were more likely than white (53%), Latino (52%), and American Indian (48%) students to agree that they devote a great deal of effort to school work.
- Only 43% of all respondents agreed that they worked harder than they expected to work in school (39% of males compared to 47% of females).
- African-American (49%), Latino (47%), and Asian (47%) students were more likely than white (42%) and American Indian (41%) students to say they worked harder than they expected to work.

- Only about half agreed they are challenged to do their best work at school, and less than half (47%) said that their school work makes them curious to learn about other things.
- Slightly more than half of the respondents agreed that they put forth a great deal of effort in their school work.

In the 2002 study *Finding Out What Matters for Youth*, Michelle Alberti Gambone and her colleagues examined whether higher levels of student support contributes to higher levels of student engagement and achievement.

Teacher Support

The study showed that youth with good developmental outcomes late in high school are 69% less likely to have difficulty as a young adult. In addition, youth having the opportunity to experience challenging, engaging learning activities early in high school have a 71% higher probability of having good developmental outcomes. 2004.

The results indicate that teacher support is important to student engagement. Students who perceive teachers as creating caring, well-structured learning environments in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school. In turn, high levels of engagement are associated with higher attendance and test scores — variables that strongly predict whether youth will ultimately pursue postsecondary education and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Unfortunately, the reality for a significant number of students is they do not receive the support they need. They do not experience school as a place in which they feel a sense of connection, support, and safety. In the *My Voice* survey, less than half (46%) said they believe that teachers care about their problems and feelings. While most teachers would claim that they care deeply about their students,

it is critical that they express their concern in ways that are more meaningful.

Students do not perceive teachers as especially engaged in the learning process; they do not see their instructors as individuals who enjoy working in the classroom or who even enjoy being with students. Those who agreed with the statement, "Teachers enjoy working with students," constituted 58%. Yet, just 32% agreed that "teachers make school an exciting place to learn" and only 39% agreed that "teachers have fun at school."

Students do not perceive teachers as especially engaged in the learning process; they do not see their instructors as individuals who enjoy working in the classroom or who even enjoy being with students.

There were some positive areas of the *My Voice* survey, however. Of the students surveyed, 64% agreed with that "school is a welcoming and friendly place" and 60% said that teachers recognize them when they try their best. When asked about whether accomplishments are recognized or citizenship is celebrated in their school, 71% stated that teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful while 21% reported that they have never been recognized for something positive at school.

Toppo, G. "U.S. Students' Well-Being Scrutinized"

Despite that these last few findings were somewhat positive, it is clear that the lack of overall teacher support should indicate a professional concern for all educators. Schools need to focus harder on keeping students connected to teachers, other students, and the fabric of the education community. As much as 60% of high school students report they don't feel cared for or included in their school.

The Environment Factor

According to the National Research Council, students who think they are not respected or who feel socially isolated do not perform to their full potential. This finding corresponds with the HSSSE survey, which asked students a number of questions about the school

environment, their sense of belonging, what their school emphasizes, and how their school experience has affected them.

- More than half of all respondents agreed that they care about their current school; 9th graders (56%) were more likely to agree or strongly agree than were 12th graders (50%).
- About 30% of all respondents (31%) agreed that school rules are fair. Asian students (38%) were the most likely to agree with this sentiment, while African-American students (24%) were least likely to agree.
- Less than half (47%) of the students agreed that they would select the same high school again if given the opportunity.
- Only half said that their school places substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on treating students fairly.
- About 65% of the respondents said that people at their school, overall, accept them for who they are.
- Only slightly more than half of the respondents agreed they feel safe at school. Those strongly agreeing that they were supported by teachers were far more likely than those strongly disagreeing to say they feel safe in school (74% compared to 19%).
- African-American students (41%) were far less likely than white students (60%) to agree they feel safe at school.
- Ninth graders (52%) were less likely than 12th graders (61%) to say they feel safe.

National Research
Council. *Engaging
Schools: Fostering
High School
Students' Motivation
to Learn*

More than half of schools have environments that are not welcoming to new students.

- About 40% of the special education students agreed that they feel safe at school.

MetLife has released an annual survey of teachers since 1984. The 2005 survey included the experiences of secondary school students upon entering a new school. The survey, *American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships*, analyzes national data on relationships and student engagement. One question asked students if they observed newcomers being teased or bullied. Of the national sample, 18% replied often or very often. Another 33% answered sometimes. This indicates that more than half of schools have environments that are not welcoming to new students.

Forty Assets for Student Success

The Search Institute, an independent, nonprofit organization in Minneapolis provides resources to schools, community organizations, and others seeking to survey the developmental assets of young people. The Institute's work is based on a framework of 40 developmental assets, which the organization defines as positive experiences and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Schools and communities across the country have used the Institute's survey that incorporates these developmental assets to determine the needs of youth in school.

The assets are divided into two lists of 20. The first 20 are external assets, which relate to support, empowerment, boundaries, expectations, and constructive use of time. The internal assets are 20 additional characteristics, which are organized into the categories of commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. The following table shows the national percentages of students possessing these assets based on the

surveying of nearly 150,000 students in grades 6-12 in 200 communities across the nation in 2003.

Asset	% of Students Possessing Asset
Commitment to Learning	
• Achievement Motivation	65%
• School Engagement	55%
• Homework	47%
• Bonding to School	52%
• Reading for Pleasure	22%
Positive Values	
• Caring	50%
• Equality and Social Justice	52%
• Integrity	68%
• Honesty	66%
• Responsibility	63%
• Restraint	45%
Social Competencies	
• Planning and Decision Making	29%
• Interpersonal Competence	45%
• Cultural Competence	43%
• Resistance Skills	41%
• Peaceful Conflict Resolution	40%
Positive Identity	
• Personal Power	42%
• Self Esteem	48%
• Sense of Purpose	57%
• Positive View of Personal Future	72%

Summary

These surveys and research studies indicate that many students are not engaged in learning. The following observations can be made about the perceptions of students and the directions that all schools need to take to increase engagement among our young people.

- ✓ A large percentage of students find school learning experiences dull and uninspiring.
- ✓ The introduction of a plethora of school improvement initiatives over the last two decades may be one reason that students have found school less meaningful and interesting in recent years.
- ✓ Students will put forth their best effort only if the work is meaningful and relevant.
- ✓ Students indicate they would work harder in school if they could take courses related to the kinds of jobs they want after school.
- ✓ Students do not put forth their best effort if they do not feel a positive relationship with the teacher.
- ✓ Many students feel that their teachers do not respect them or care about their problems or feelings.





Chapter 3

Student Engagement — A Closer Look

Engagement Begins at Home

Lumsden, L.S. *Student
Motivation to Learn*

To a great extent,
parents continually
help their children
engage in life
experiences.

The roots of young children's understanding about how to engage in learning experiences begin at home. Parents and families, of course, have a huge influence on their children's lives, helping them understand what is important in life and providing direction for the future. Parents teach and engage their children from the beginning by encouraging, coaching, and showing them right from wrong, as well as how to be responsible, show respect, and develop good character.

The vast majority of information that parents provide to their children is channeled through modeling, discussions, and family interactions. Lumsden summarizes the powerful influence on the home well:

Children's home environment shapes the initial constellation of attitudes they develop toward learning. When parents nurture their children's natural curiosity about the world by welcoming their questions, encouraging exploration, and familiarizing them with resources that can enlarge their world, they are giving their children the message that learning is worthwhile and frequently fun and satisfying. When children are raised in a home that nurtures a sense of self-worth, competence, autonomy, and self-efficacy, they will be more apt to accept the risks inherent in learning. Conversely, when children do not view themselves as basically competent and able, their freedom to engage in academically challenging pursuits and capacity to tolerate and cope with failure are greatly diminished.

To a great extent, parents continually help their children engage in life experiences. Students' academic success in reading was prevalent when their parents frequently vocalized their expectations that their children fully participate in academics and other school activities and ultimately complete four years of college.

Clark, R. *In-School and Out-of-School Factors that Build Student Achievement*

There is little doubt that a positive school climate can be promoted with increasing parent and community involvement. Findings in *The Silent Epidemic* underscore just how vital parents are to the prevention of dropouts:

Gottfredson, D. *Schools and Delinquency*

Seventy-one percent of young people surveyed felt that one of the keys to keeping students in school was to have better communication between the parents and the school, and increasing parental involvement in their child's education.

Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J. Jr., & Burke Morison, K. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*

Sixty-eight percent of respondents said their parents became more involved only when they were aware that their child was on the verge of dropping out. The majority of parents were "not aware" or "just somewhat aware" of their child's grades or that they were about to leave school.

Fifty-nine percent of parents or guardians of respondents were involved in their child's schooling, with only one-fifth (21%) "very" involved. More than half of those parents or guardians who were involved at all were involved mainly for discipline reasons.

Parent Strategies

How do parents motivate their children to cooperate, engage in family and community life, and to achieve in school? Parental motivation in the 21st century differs dramatically from 25 years ago when guilt, fear, threats, and corporeal punishment were used. Today, many of these methods are unacceptable. Parents may still argue, pressure, or threaten their children. However, they often find it difficult to motivate or effectively discipline them using such negative methods.

The more positive motivational techniques that parents may use today include:

- reasoning and logical discussions to resolve conflicts
- praise and positive reinforcement for good behavior
- loss of privileges for inappropriate behavior

Instilling meaningful personal and family values is important to help ensure that motivating young people will result in responsible behavior, respectful relationships, academic achievement, and engagement in school and school-related activities. Students do not simply engage in academic studies out of obedience to authority as they once did. By the time children reach adolescence, they are entering school with their own specific needs, feelings, perceptions, and motivations. Therefore, the older children become, the more important it is that teachers build motivation strategies for achievement based on a comprehensive, schoolwide approach. When a school creates a culture that focuses on strong expectations for engagement in academic success, students will likely, over time, be motivated by the culture and engagement will result.

Developing a balance and synergy between the roles of parents and teachers is the best way to help to ensure that motivating students to do well in school and helping them to engage in the process of learning will be as meaningful and productive as possible. Such a partnership can be even more effective and powerful when the entire school and community are involved in developing and maintaining a culture that yields high levels of student engagement.

Academic achievement can be positively impacted when parents focus their children on family life, values, and the education expectations the family holds. Likewise, when teachers and others in the school setting focus students on the basic guiding principles and good academic habits, academic achievement can be facilitated. Families need the strong support of the schools and the community in their efforts to instill successful academic engagement practices in their children.

Contrary to popular perception that teachers have no control over students' attitudes about learning, they, in fact, do. The school or teacher's role regarding student engagement is secondary, relative to parents. However, teachers and other adults at school serve as role models for students and have an immense impact on the extent to which students effectively engage at school.

Once students enter school, understanding about how to engage in learning experiences is facilitated greatly by teachers, administrators, and classmates. Young students begin school with a high level of curiosity and motivation, enjoy new things, and want to succeed. They also tend to expect and accept their failures. With each passing grade and accumulating outside influences, young students tend to become less engaged.

Starting the Engagement Process Early

Anderman, L.H. & Midgley, C. *Motivation and Middle School Students*

Creating rewarding experiences and cultivating positive attitudes toward academic achievement at an early age are critical to successful engagement at the middle and high school levels.

As students progress through school, they develop positive and negative beliefs about a wide range of academic and school life experiences, successes, and failures. Creating rewarding experiences and cultivating positive attitudes toward academic achievement at an early age are critical to successful engagement. Appropriate engagement beginning as soon as children start school will help to ensure that they will be more receptive to continual efforts later in school.

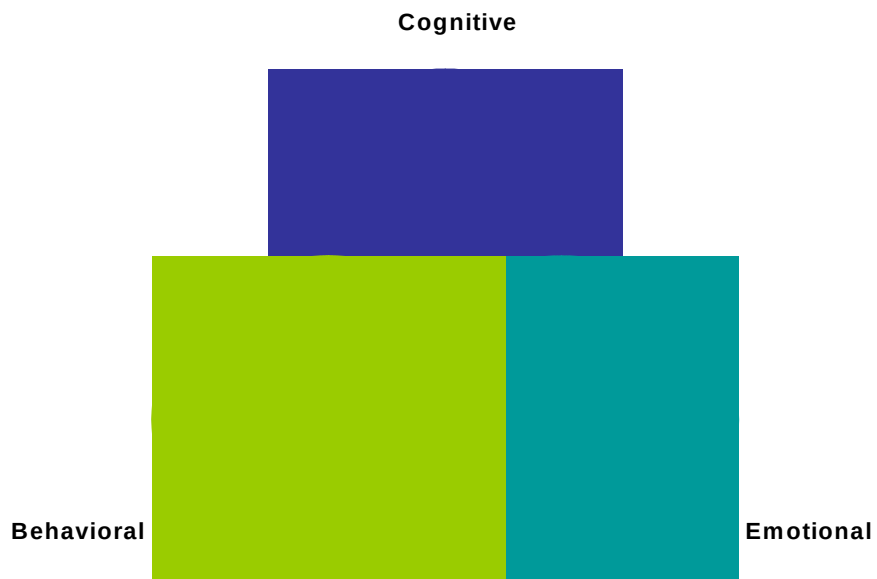
Moreover, as a rich schoolwide culture of student engagement emphasizes and cultivates the beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that create success in school, students will have a greater appreciation of the steps required to be successful in school and ultimately throughout life.

To further help educators dig deeper into the process of student engagement, the International Center has developed three psychological domains, which are interdependent components that contribute to the process that we call student engagement. These domains are cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

This three-part framework can assist teachers in understanding how to promote higher levels of student engagement. The framework also can help raise teachers' awareness of the important psychological underpinnings of student disengagement so that intervention can be more focused, accurate, and effective.

The Three Domains of Student Engagement

The Three Domains of Student Engagement



The 12 Guiding Principles of Exceptional Character are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Cognitive Domain

The cognitive domain of student engagement is comprised primarily of beliefs, principles, and values that relate to the importance of working hard to attain a good education. For example, parents may tell their children that it is important to get a good education. When children hear that statement, they understand it, but they may not *believe* it or *act* on it. Similarly at school, it is important for students to hear teachers describe the value of working hard to get a good education, but the concept only is worthwhile if they believe it. Many important beliefs and principles can be introduced, reinforced, and strengthened through the power of the collective effort of the school leadership as well all teachers and the rest of the staff.

In the cognitive domain, the 12 Guiding Principles of Exceptional Character become an important foundation for the set of positive beliefs, which will help guide students to higher levels of achievement and greater involvement in school life.

Emotional Domain

The emotional domain comprises emotions that are connected to school-related relationships, activities, and instruction. Much of what we call motivation really involves feelings of importance about something, such as how a student feels about her teacher, classmates, doing homework, studying for a test, getting good grades, or going to college. While all three domains of student engagement are interrelated, the emotional domain is the most critical in the development of student engagement. For both children and adults, feelings and emotions typically trigger behavior. On the one hand, if students are hurt or angry because they were rejected by other students or their teachers, that could easily lead to a lack of involvement in academics and school life. On the other hand, if a

student is motivated to play football, most likely he believes that and has a feeling of self-worth. These powerful feelings could drive him to work hard to succeed at football. In terms of schoolwork, if students are surrounded by a schoolwide culture of enthusiasm, encouragement, and excitement about academic achievement, imagine the powerful impact that this would have on them.

Behavioral Domain

In the behavioral domain, beliefs and feelings about involvement in school life and the pursuit of academic achievement are transformed into observable behaviors. For example, if students believe that classical literature will personally be important to their future and feel confident in their ability to master the content, the likely outcome is that they turn in their homework and study for tests.

Behavior based on being engaged is the goal of any school engagement initiative. While positive beliefs about school, good feelings about relationships with students and teachers, and motivation to do well are important, it is still the application of those beliefs and feelings that is key to effective engagement for academic achievement. Teachers who create positive feelings that result in academic achievement will help students to transform beliefs into behavior, guiding principles into guiding practices, and intent into action.

Teachers can cultivate behaviors that are expressive of student engagement if they:

- help students understand how to take behavioral steps that transform guiding principles of engagement into guiding practices in a variety of roles and situations
- use discussions and role-playing to highlight the importance of taking action that engages the student in academics and school life
- “catch” students exhibiting behaviors that are expressive of engagement and praise and celebrate them
- craft a supportive, schoolwide culture of engagement that focuses on transforming intent into action

Behavioral Signs of Student Engagement

Schools can use a wide spectrum of behavioral indicators that show student engagement. Some indicators may be more concrete and easy to measure while other signs may be more complex and difficult. Schools frequently select indicators that are quantifiable such as attendance rates, dropout rates, tardiness, disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, etc. However, not all measures of student engagement are readily quantifiable, and schools should devise their own lists of factors to be observed.

Behaviors that show student engagement include:

- grades that are consistent with or surpass the student’s general level of intellectual ability
- a high attendance rate
- few instances of tardiness
- few instances of disciplinary referrals
- maintaining attention and concentration in class
- active class participation

- language and behavior that show an interest, eagerness, or enthusiasm to learn
- behavior that is focused on the process of completing assigned academic instruction
- participation in extracurricular activities
- putting in extra effort in academic projects or assignments
- vocalized or shown dedication to the school community
- positive peer relationships.

Students engage in academic achievement when:

- physical, cultural, and emotional blockades to engagement are minimized, managed, or eliminated
- they are motivated to achieve in a specific content area or school activity
- they understand the process of engaging in the specific content area or school activity
- they have the necessary skills to engage at the level expected of them
- the learning environment facilitates/promotes student motivation and engagement
- the teaching style facilitates/promotes student motivation and engagement

Whenever a student shows behavior that is reflective of academic engagement or engagement in school life, the teacher and other adults in the school immediately can cultivate and reinforce it. Teachers can take five steps to strengthen the behavior and maximize the potential that it will persist.

Strengthening Student Engagement Behaviors

1. Identify or recognize the specific engagement behavior that the student displayed.
2. Clarify specifically what the student did.
3. Praise the actual behavior that resulted in achievement.
4. Describe why the behavior was so important.
5. Encourage the maintenance of the behavior.

These five steps are important because students may often complete an assignment or accomplish a goal and not even realize how they did it or why it was important. Instead of simply saying that the student did a good job, teachers should use the above five steps to say what was accomplished, why was it important, and encouraging the student to continue on the same path of behavior.

On the other hand, if educators observe behavior that reflects disengagement, they can redirect the behavior. For example:

- A minimum response may be: “You did not do an adequate job with this report. That’s why I am giving you a ‘D.’”
- A better response might be: “Rachel, you did a good job with what was contained in your report, and I’m pleased with that. However, you didn’t include much of what was needed for this paper. As you know, completing an assignment fully and to your best effort is important. When you start a job next year after high school, your supervisor will want to see work that is completed to the best of your ability. I’d like you to go back and review the requirements for this report and then write those sections. Remember, you did do a good job with what you included in that report. Make some corrections and additions, and it will be much better.”

In the second response, the teacher has redirected behavior by saying that the student was not fully involved in completing the report

while at the same time suggesting responsible behavior that encouraged her to take the initiative to monitor her work. The teacher has given the student praise for a portion of the work that was completed, explained why careful attention to details will be important to her next year on the job, and ended a brief conversation in a positive way that also encourages Rachel's continued effort to stay engaged.

Some types of disengagement behavior will reflect disrespect, which may be a sign of disengagement. Rude behavior, the use of inappropriate language, etc., initially may be interpreted as signs of behavioral problems. In reality, they are also signs of a student who is disengaging. If teachers remember that they are looking at a disengaging student who is hurting, feeling like a failure, and feeling as if no one cares, then the student can be redirected back to engagement. Redirection is not a simple task; however, it is a critical one.

Students in the 21st Century

In today's society, families are no longer "isolated islands." Children beginning at an early age spend a good deal of time away from their families. In addition, youngsters today face many powerful distractions that can take them away from engaging in an academic environment. These distractions, coupled with greater difficulties of motivating and disciplining children and adolescents, make engagement strategies in educational settings an absolute necessity. Creating a schoolwide, systematic culture of engagement can help break the downward spiral of disengagement that diverts many

Disengagement

Any signs of disengagement behavior should be addressed immediately, and some form of redirection or intervention should be taken promptly.

Signs of possible academic disengagement become apparent when a student has:

- poor or declining test scores and grades
- frequent absences
- frequent tardiness
- lack of interest in learning
- failure to pay attention or following directions in class
- failure to complete school assignments or homework
- cheating on tests

Signs of possible social disengagement become apparent when a student:

- has little or no social involvement with peers and feel alienated from other students, teachers, and the school community
- avoids social situations such as sports events and clubs
- has poor quality relationships with teachers and peers
- skips classes
- avoids working in groups
- dresses significantly different from other students
- displays disruptive behavior—disturbs the class, annoys the teacher
- is overtly aggressive, sullen, hostile, belligerent, rebellious, pushes the limit, displays violence at school, damages school property, bullies other students
- talks about suicide

Possible signs of emotional disengagement become apparent when a student:

- has a “I don’t care” attitude, does not try hard, gives up easily on academic assignments, and does not see academics as useful in the future
- is bored and seem uninspired
- is easily frustrated
- has low self-esteem that surfaces in self-protection, does not try so that failure will not be risked
- feels anxious, angry, depressed, blames self or others and ultimately drops out of school

students from achieving high academic standards. A schoolwide focus on student engagement also will most likely facilitate the civil school environment and class setting that is so necessary for learning.

Potential problems that can shift students’ focus from academics include the use of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes as well as peer pressure, violence, being bullied, and lifestyle issues, such as teenage pregnancy and abuse at home. Then there are all the Information Age distractions, such instant messaging, cell phones, chat rooms, video games, etc.

If students become more focused on negative social behavior and/or negative habits, such distractions can be trigger points for early stages of disengagement. Compounding this negative progression is an increasing “100-year epidemic” of childhood depression. Children today are far more likely to be depressed, even with many

luxuries of modern life including cell phones, computers, CDs, DVDs, etc.

However, if students are focused on engagement in academic achievement because the entire school at every level is focused in this way, then students are less likely to be focused on disruptive, inappropriate behavior and are more likely to focus on the positive behavior and habits that lead to higher levels of academic achievement. If all the adults in the school are focused on engagement, then a powerful expectation is established.

The Behavioral Signs of Student Disengagement

When teachers and parents are more aware of the behavioral signs of the impending crisis of disengagement, then early, more effective intervention can occur. The behavioral signs of student disengagement can be understood in three major categories — academic, social, and emotional. Educational research traditionally examined only the academic roots of disengagement. Increasingly, studies are incorporating the pivotal social and emotional learning that can have such a profound impact on the level of engagement. As a direct result of this trend, the International Center has incorporated student engagement and personal skill development as two of the four key Learning Criteria into its massive five-year study to identify promising schools

See Chapter 1 for more detail.

Students may display some of these signs from time to time without any serious consequences. However, since any of these signs may be potentially serious, attention and intervention need to occur to combat an escalating pattern of disengagement. The following conditions represent escalating disengagement:

- They perform poorly on tests — perceptions of failure and shame can escalate to create feelings of anxiety and increased likelihood of additional failures.
- They feel alienated from other students because they are being ridiculed or bullied — feelings of rejection and anger can occur that can escalate to avoidance, withdrawal, and helplessness.
- They demonstrate repeated failures — apathy and helplessness can escalate to feelings of futility.

While perhaps subtle at times, these signs could mark the beginning of a pattern of a more serious state of disengagement. If any one group of disengagement signs is evident (e.g., emotional signs), but signs in another group (e.g., academic signs) are not evident, the student still may not be effectively engaged and should either be monitored or steps should be taken to help facilitate a greater level of engagement.

Intervention for Disengagement

Disengagement may begin as early as kindergarten. Teachers may watch it evolve over time, but it can reach a point in which it is extremely difficult to turn around. It may start with something seemingly minor that evolves into a serious behavioral pattern, which is difficult to break. Once a history of failure develops, efforts to continue to engage the student become less achievable. The earlier the signs of disengagement are observed and addressed, the sooner a positive pattern of academic engagement and engagement in school life can be established.

When a teacher or administrator observes an evolving pattern of disengagement, intervention needs to occur in the form of an action

plan. Of course, many of the signs of disengagement are disruptive behaviors and are also signs of behavioral problems. Often, these problem behaviors are only dealt with from a disciplinary perspective. Disciplinary actions can often be effective at suppressing negative behavior. However, that action does not address the engagement behaviors that the student is supposed to be applying in school.

An action plan should address the appropriate disciplinary steps to be taken as well as also attempting to break the pattern of disengagement. A teacher, guidance counselor, school psychologist, or administrator needs to begin intervention by looking for other possible signs of disengagement that may not be easily observable. Understanding the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of disengagement for a specific student is critical to developing an effective action plan.

A student who is showing a minor degree of disengagement may need a conference with his or her teacher or guidance counselor. Another student, who exhibits behavioral problems in combination with disengagement behavior, may need a more comprehensive action plan. In this case, the teacher or administrator may recommend counseling with either the school psychologist or a private therapist. Parental involvement also may be requested in a focused effort to help:

- strengthen the student's beliefs that could facilitate engagement behavior (the cognitive domain)
- establish positive feelings attached to the students' efforts to work harder on their schoolwork through increasing praise and support (the emotional domain)
- establish more clear-cut positive behaviors and habits that would show responsibility, perseverance, and initiative (the behavioral domain)

Motivation

One of the barriers to high achievement most often cited by teachers is that students lack motivation to learn what is being taught. When we hear that an individual is not motivated, often we presume that little that can be done to change the motivational state. This is not necessarily the case. For teachers, instead of framing the situation as a lack of motivation, the problem might be better defined as lack of student engagement in the learning experiences being offered. This definition establishes the view that the situation can change and stimulates thinking about how to effect that change. We can then consider whether parents need to be involved in making the appropriate changes or whether a new teaching style can be introduced to better facilitate learning.

What inspires one student to perform at an exceptional level while another student is barely able to make it to class? It is motivation, which:

- involves beliefs, feelings, and values
- drives students to achieve a specific goal
- provides the encouragement to do well
- facilitates engagement

While students may be motivated to engage, they may not know *how* to effectively engage or *how* to apply their motivation to a specific behavior. For example, if students are motivated to go to college, this motivation will facilitate engagement. However, motivation alone will not result in the behavior necessary to be accepted to college or to succeed in college. Students are motivated or unmotivated for a variety of reasons, including to:

- achieve
- excel
- receive approval

Russell, V.J.,
Ainley, M., &
Frydenberg, E.
“Student Motivation
and Engagement”

- have fun
- satisfy curiosity
- please
- rebel
- seek revenge
- get attention
- avoid hurt and embarrassment
- feel proud

The student’s motivation and end goal shape the type of behavior that is observed. Russell, Ainley, and Frydenberg point to the large body of research on the influence of engagement on achievement by identifying significant relationships between various motivational variables, such as achievement goals and specific aspects of performance. Furthermore, they cite Covington’s review of a wide range of research that found students’ patterns of motivation plus engagement are reflected in the strategies they use for learning (see chapters 6 and 7). These strategies, in turn, influence achievement.

Brooks et al. S.R.
*Improving Elementary
Students Engagement
in the Learning
Process Through
Integrated Thematic
Instruction*

Wiggins, G. and
McTighe, J.
*Understanding by
Design*

Two Types of Motivation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic

Hundreds of studies on school-aged children have investigated the two basic types of student motivation — intrinsic and extrinsic

- **Intrinsic motivation** means students are motivated to achieve because they want to work on something that is challenging, enjoyable, interesting, new, or curious to them. For example, students may be motivated by their curiosity to figure out why the Earth revolves around the sun.
- **Extrinsic motivation** means students are motivated to achieve because it leads to a tangible reward, or they want to avoid

punishment. For example, students may be motivated to participate in a lesson on nutrition because they will be able to eat the food they are preparing after the lesson.

Motivation varies across the K-12 school spectrum. Young children are interested in and motivated by just about everything. They seek the approval, love, nurturing, and attention of their parents. By the time students reach middle school, motivation may no longer be positive. Instead, they may be negatively motivated by feelings of hurt, anger, or resentment. Perhaps they may still be seeking attention, but have been hurt, embarrassed, or failed in some school-related experience. They then would be motivated to avoid situations that, in their perception, would only lead to further hurt, embarrassment, or failure.

The Power of Positive Feelings

Real motivation is in large measure the result of internalizing positive feelings about how important it is to pursue a task or goal. Children and adults are intrinsically motivated to feel good about themselves. We all want to feel a sense of self-worth, to have self-respect, and to feel proud about our accomplishments.

Accomplishing all these objectives in school may involve taking time to help students understand more clearly, in ways that are meaningful to them, why working harder in school is so important. It also may involve increasing emotional support for the student in terms of the learning process and providing significant praise for taking the initiative and showing progress. When a teacher or any school personnel notices a student accomplishment and then praises that student for work well done, intrinsic motivation is being reinforced.

We all want to feel a sense of self-worth, to have self-respect, and to feel proud about our accomplishments.

Students don't care what teachers know until they know that their teachers care.

Think for a moment about an unimaginable situation in which no adult ever praised any student at school.

- How would students feel?
- How motivated would they be to accomplish anything or even go to school?
- What would the emotional climate of that school be like?
- How would you feel being a teacher at that school?
- Would you want to work at that school?

Although the answers to the questions are obvious, remember that every day of every school year we have the choice of focusing either on the positive or negative aspects of any situation. Schools can focus on developing a partnership between students and teachers — a partnership that concentrates on cultivating positive beliefs, feelings, and behaviors.

When such a partnership exists, a win/win situation within each of the three domains (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) also exists. When developed in the context of academic achievement and social relationships, students, teachers, parents, and the community all benefit. The number of positive feelings that can be shown at school is almost endless. The number of accomplishments for which students can be praised is equally endless.

One of the most important steps that every adult can take on a daily basis at school is to be positive and optimistic about students. This, in and of itself, is a critical variable in the development of student engagement.

Relationship Building

It is no surprise that an important building block of student engagement is relationship-building between teachers and students. A caring relationship in which students feel a special connection to their teacher can foster and enhance participation in the process of

academic achievement and involvement in school life. Quality relationships are even more important for students who are at risk. Caring relationships always will bolster and cultivate student engagement. In *The Silent Epidemic*, the author's reported a startling finding among dropouts:

While two-thirds (65%) said there was a staff member or teacher who cared about their success, only 56% said they could go to a staff person for school problems and just two-fifths (41%) had someone in school to talk to about personal problems. More than three out of five (62%) said their school needed to do more to help students with problems outside of class. Seven in ten favored more parental involvement.

Bridgeland, J.M.,
Dilulio, J.J. Jr., &
Burke Morison, K.
The Silent Epidemic

One of the best methods for building intrinsic motivation for academics is by developing a school culture based on relationship building composed of an abundance of positive feelings of caring, encouragement, praise, and a genuine enthusiasm for learning that is modeled by adults and conveyed to students in many different ways. When students are highly valued and their learning accomplishments are celebrated, high levels of motivation develop, engagement is enhanced, and academic and social achievement can flourish.

Martinez and Klopott report that the prevalence of strong social networks that supports a student's academic and emotional development also can determine the student's likelihood of going to college

They further report on their overwhelming compilation of similar studies:

Martinez, M. &
Klopott, S. *The Link
Between High School
Reform and College
Access and Success
for Low-Income and
Minority Youth*

Maton, K., Hrabowski, F.,
& Schmitt, C. "African-
American College Students
Excelling in the Sciences

Students who have stronger beliefs in their ability to succeed, and are more pro-school, who have higher aspirations, and who attend schools in which relationships with teachers appear as caring and supportive, are more likely to attend college.

Other related research points to the academic *and* social integration of students leading to higher grade-point averages, persistence, and retention.

The core concepts of any student engagement initiative are to build strong, caring relationships with students and then model, encourage, coach, and link strong positive feelings and high levels of motivation to the pursuit of academic achievement and involvement in school life.

Positive student-teacher relationships with young children are typically cultivated and characterized by early parental-type nurturing behaviors, such as the teacher or the principal hugging the child for good behavior. Young children, more so than older ones, need more nurturing and need teachers and other adults at school to be more like parents and other family caregivers who provide attention, approval, and at times displays of affection. Since young children feel far less pressure than older children, quality relationships between teachers and young children can be fostered simply through a free and somewhat unguided exploration of natural interests and pleasures. This also is an excellent time to begin self-discovery and self-inquiry techniques.

Positive student-teacher relationships with middle and high school students evolve into more mature, adult-like behaviors. The increasing rigorous nature of instruction places teachers in the role of adviser, coach, and mentor. For example, teachers may

encourage students to plan for their life by motivating them toward a particular career.

Strengthening Relationships Leads to Better Communication

Schools need to make sure that at every grade level students are connected to their teachers. This connection especially is important for middle school and high school students, since at these grade levels students may tend to avoid connections with adults or even with other students. When relationships between teachers and students are strong and caring, then communication about the importance of academic achievement and involvement in school life can be more readily accepted and more effective.

Creating an effective environment at school that helps promote student engagement is a complex process of translating motivation, beliefs, feelings, principles, and habits into engagement behavior. The process may begin as a simple conversation between a teacher and a student in which the teacher encourages the student to work hard to get an “A” in the class or join the student council. It also may be far more complicated, involving parents, a team of professionals at the school, and a detailed action plan for success. However, true academic engagement is more than teachers simply telling students that they need to get motivated. High levels of student engagement take place through a combination of elements and strategies that are:

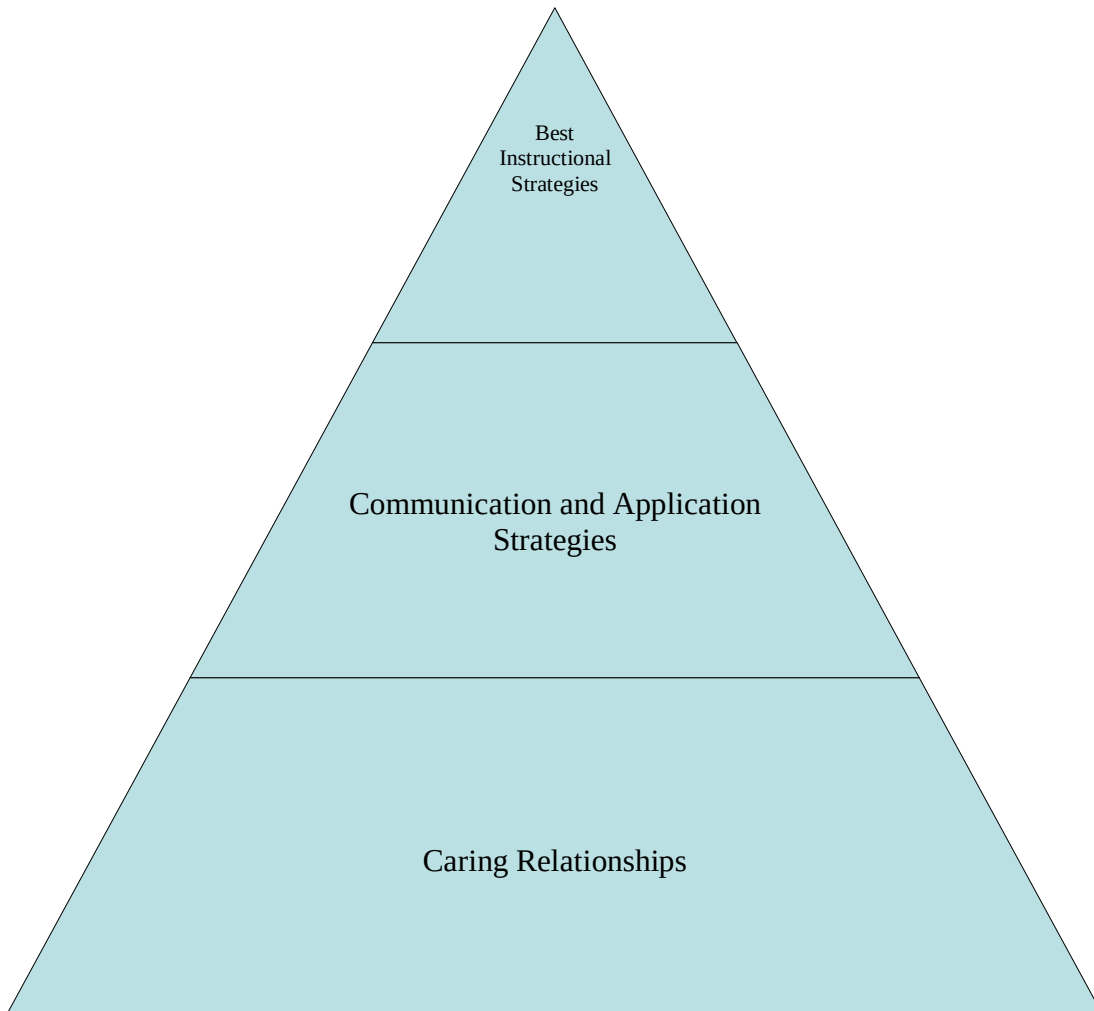
- set in the context of positive, caring relationships
- facilitated through communication that coaches students how to engage effectively in their education
- rigorous and relevant

Martinez, M. and Klopott, S. *The Link Between High School Reform and College Access and Success for Low-Income and Minority Youth*

See Chapter 4 for more on relationship building and a description of the Relationship Framework.

Combining All the Elements

Context of Increased Engagement



Facilitating and developing student engagement is an art. Some teachers possess a natural ability to motivate and engage students, even under the most difficult of circumstances. These teachers may use numerous strategies, but at the same time they are artfully

integrating the strategies in the context of academic lessons with a clear understanding of the needs of both individual students and the entire class. The art of creating student engagement is far more easily learned and maintained when a schoolwide culture of student engagement is focused on helping every student in the school to be the best they can be academically and socially.

Voke, H. *Student Engagement*

Voke cites, “As Stipek (1996) writes in the *Handbook of Educational Psychology*, engaged students are more likely to approach tasks eagerly and to persist in the face of difficulty. They also are more likely to seek learning opportunities for learning when the intrinsic awards are not available — for example, after formal schooling has been completed, positioning them to learn more over time than their disengaged peers.” Researchers Sheldon & Biddle go so far as to say:

Sheldon, K.M. & Biddle, B.J. *Standards, Accountability, and School Reform*

A huge literature now documents the relative advantages of intrinsic motivation. Although externally-motivated persons can demonstrate impressive feats of short term, rote learning, intrinsically motivated learners retain such rote learning longer, demonstrate a stronger understanding of both rote and more complex material, and demonstrate greater creativity and cognitive flexibility. This happens because intrinsically motivated persons are more wholly engaged and absorbed in their activities, bringing more of their previous knowledge and integrative capacities to bear in their pursuit of new understanding and mastery.



Chapter 4

Engagement-Based Learning and Teaching

Philosophy and Approach

Engagement-based learning and teaching (EBLT) is more than simply telling or encouraging students to engage themselves in their class work. EBLT forms the foundation in developing and strengthening student engagement and the overall learning process. This foundation is built through specific principles, habits, skills, and strategies.

All members of the school community can join forces to develop schoolwide practices that cultivate student engagement beliefs, values, feelings, motivation, behavioral habits, and skills that are at the crux of high levels of student engagement.

The three domains of student engagement, as described in Chapter 3, unfold in EBLT as follows:

- **Cognitive domain** consists of beliefs and values.
- **Emotional domain** consists of motivation and feelings.
- **Behavioral domain** consists of habits and skills.

In the EBLT approach, teachers and parents work systematically across all three domains to ensure an integrated and effective approach to cultivate and support student engagement at the highest level. The core habits of student achievement and other skill sets such as organizational skills and self-discipline also will be developed in the student through this approach.

Key Elements of EBLT

The EBLT approach encompasses the following six objectives.

1. **Cultivate one-on-one relationships.** The one-on-one relationship between student and teacher is the critical element that can lead to increased student motivation and higher levels of engagement in academic achievement and school life.

2. **Learning new skills and habits.** Teachers can learn new skills and habits that help them to develop, polish, and enhance their already natural inclination to motivate and engage students.
3. **Incorporate systematic strategies.** Teachers can learn systematic strategies and approaches that facilitate student engagement. Students can develop behavioral skills and habits that lead to increased academic achievement and greater involvement with school life.
4. **Take responsibility for student engagement practices.** It is primarily the teacher's responsibility to engage the students, as opposed to the teacher expecting students to come to class naturally and automatically engaged.
5. **Promote a schoolwide culture of engagement.** The best way to promote high levels of student engagement is to develop and maintain a schoolwide initiative that is dedicated to creating a culture of student engagement, involving students in school life activities, and a rigorous and relevant education for all students.
6. **Professional development is an important part of increasing student engagement.** Staff development, combined with staff ownership and recognition, will be a critical part of developing and maintaining a culture of effective student engagement.

It is easy to observe the lack of student engagement when students in the classroom are slouched in their chairs and not listening to the teacher or participating in the classroom discussion. Many teachers who constantly see disengaged students put the burden on the student and lament that they could be better teachers and have better learning results if they had the opportunity to work with a

**Laying the
Foundation for
Student
Engagement**

Classrooms with high levels of student engagement are not simply a result of “student quality.”

“better” group of students. But classrooms with high levels of student engagement are not simply a result of “student quality.”

Depending on their prior experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, students can make it easier or more difficult to create a highly engaged classroom. But teachers are not limited to poor learning results because students are not engaged. When educators examine more closely the characteristics of engaging instruction, they can begin to identify the elements that contribute to high levels of student engagement. These elements are a combination of the background of students and the influence and expectations of family and peers, but they also include schoolwide and classroom practices.

For teachers to deal with levels of poor student performance, they must begin to reflect on the elements that contribute to student engagement. Teachers can have direct control and make changes instantaneously in some areas. For other changes to occur, it will take time to develop new skills for both the student and the teacher, plan and seek out new solutions, or work on making changes at the schoolwide level.

Regardless of the time it takes to make significant changes to improve student engagement practices, educators should become familiar with the two basic elements that together provide the roadmap for teachers to focus on and facilitate student engagement. These elements are: preconditions and pedagogy.

Preconditions

Preconditions are the factors that must be in place even before classroom instruction begins. The factors are:

Learning relationships. Most students will not do their best in classes when they feel that teachers do not have an interest in them

or care about their future. Students can sense whether the teacher cares or is simply “going through the motions.” All of the characteristics that we know about building relationships are essential to contributing to highly engaged classroom instruction. Students show increased effort in classroom activities when teachers take an interest in students as individuals, get to know them by name, and talk to them not only in the classroom but during other activities in the school as well.

Rewards and incentives. There is much discussion within education communities, researchers, and practitioners about the role that rewards play in stimulating student work. Probably every teacher at some point has used a “bribe” of food, recreation, or some other reward to encourage students to finish a project or to follow a specific procedure, such as being quiet in a classroom.

There is some concern, and rightly so, that if rewards are used routinely, students are only exhibiting the learning behavior to receive the reward. When the reward disappears, the behavior will stop. Rewards and incentives do have their place, but they must be incorporated carefully.

A key to effective use of rewards is whether it is offered in advance of a behavior. A bad use of the reward system is when a teacher says to students, “If you are quiet for the next 30 minutes, you will get a piece of candy.” In this scenario, the student associates the behavior with the reward. It is a better practice to routinely and spontaneously give the reward after the behavior.

Grades are the big incentive system in schools. Students do the work, but often they do the minimal amount of work possible in order to receive the grade. Some students even openly avoid doing any work that is not tied to a grade. In this scenario, students see their learning experiences as meaningless activities, but they have

Preconditions are the factors that must be in place even before classroom instruction begins. The factors are: relationships, rewards and incentives, guiding principles, habits, and fundamental skills.

to get the good grade to move on toward the next phase of their lives.

Where could students have gotten this gross misunderstanding of the importance of grades? It is the fruition of how we as educators have misguided students as to what is important. We have tried to spur student engagement in otherwise boring and meaningless activities by tying it directly to a grade, by giving a reward in hopes that students would complete their school work.

Also many students, from prior experiences in school feel labeled as “C” or “D” learners and see little motivation to improve their efforts. Grades are not a motivation to these students, who are comfortable in completing very little of their work or skip it altogether. Many schools need to reexamine grading policies both at the schoolwide and classroom level to ensure that this reward system provides a situation in which students are encouraged to work hard.

In general, teachers need to reflect on the appropriate use of rewards in the classroom. The goal should be to build a stronger student perspective on intrinsic motivation as an incentive for student work and student learning, such as the pride of completing a difficult task or the satisfaction that comes from a job well done.

There is not a perfect grading system or time to give or withhold rewards. However, schools and teachers need to constantly examine current practices and consider changes that will increase the level of student engagement with respect to using incentives and rewards.

Guiding principles. These are positive character attributes and appropriate behaviors for achieving in school and becoming good citizens as adults. In recent years, however, many schools have moved away from programs that deal with behavioral issues and

character education to avoid divisive community debates about whether schools should be teaching anything beyond the 3 Rs.

The development of a child's character and appropriate behavior is first and foremost the responsibility of the family, but schools can play a strong supporting role. Schools with the highest levels of student achievement do not sidestep the issue of character education. They embrace it. These schools acknowledge that their success is due in large measure to their attention to guiding principles, through which they have been able to create the supportive learning environment that is essential for students to achieve high standards.

Following are some guiding principles used by many schools.

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Contemplation
- Compassion
- Initiative
- Adaptability
- Perseverance
- Honesty
- Optimism
- Trustworthiness
- Courage
- Loyalty

Habits. These are the routines and procedures that teachers create in the classroom. Habits include the way that students enter a classroom or engage in an activity at the start of every class period. Other habits include the ways that students open and organize

materials that they need for the day, move from large to small groups for various activities, and work on individual problems.

Teachers can create improved classroom environments and higher levels of student engagement if they focus on appropriate procedures and have students practice those procedures until they become habits. When students fail to follow the procedures, teachers need remind them of the rules and ways in which they can practice them. Good habits help to make effective use of classroom instructional time and reduce the disruption that distracts students from the learning process. It is through practices that these procedures become powerful habits and keep students engaged in learning.

Fundamental skills. These are the basic necessities that all students need to be able to participate in class and complete their work. Student need basic reading skills, for example, to be able to understand directions and materials used in any subject area. Students also need to acquire the skills to facilitate discussions and to learn how to listen to the teacher as well as other students in group discussions. They also need basic skills in technology when doing Internet research or preparing PowerPoint presentations. In addition, students need to learn basic social skills. To function in the classroom and workforce and as responsible citizens, they have to learn how to greet others, respect space, resolve conflicts, and ask questions. Teachers should ensure that students have these skills through pre-assessment and by constantly monitoring student engagement levels.

Pedagogy

The following key aspects of pedagogy help teachers create an environment in which rigorous and relevant learning can take place.

Designing for rigorous and relevant learning. One of the barriers to high levels of student engagement is the lack of rigorous and relevant instruction. While it is essential that students acquire fundamental skills before they proceed to more complex work, teachers should not keep students hostage by implying that they must complete all the isolated basics before they have the opportunity to engage in challenging and applied learning experiences. Relevance is just as critical as rigor. Relevance can help create conditions and motivation necessary for students to make the personal investment required for rigorous work or optimal learning. Students invest more of themselves, work harder, and learn better when the topic is interesting and connected to something that they already know.

Personalized learning. Each student brings a unique set of characteristics to the classroom. Every one has different background knowledge, a unique learning style, a variety of interests, and varied parental support and expectations. To anticipate that each of them will learn in the same way, at the same speed, and using the same material is an unrealistic expectation.

Some teachers fall into the false assumption that the student is the failure when he or she fails to demonstrate adequate achievement. But often it is the lack of personalizing learning that is the source of failure. There are many individual practices and strategies that contribute to overall personalization. As a start, teachers can create a more engaging classroom situation by getting to know their students and using examples during instruction that relate to their background, culture, and prior experiences.

Parent involvement also is a part of personalizing learning. By reaching out to parents and establishing cooperation and support for learning expectations, teachers are able to achieve greater personalization.

The key aspects of pedagogy that help teachers create an environment in which rigorous and relevant learning can take place are: personalized learning, active learning strategies, focus on reading, and creating the ideal classroom environment.

Students also need to experience differentiated instruction that is not constantly large group instruction moving at the same rate of speed. There should be opportunities and challenges for them to do individual assignments, to work at their own speed — to move more slowly on more difficult material or move more quickly on concepts or skills in which they have higher proficiency levels.

Active learning strategies. While it may sometimes be efficient to have students listen to a short lecture, view video material, or read a textbook, doing these types of isolating, sedentary activities on constant basis becomes mind numbing rather than mind engaging. There are strategies that naturally contribute to a much higher level of student engagement. For example, cooperative learning strategies in which students are organized into structured discussion groups and play specific roles in the brainstorming process in analyzing problems and seeking solutions are more engaging than listening to a long lecture. Moreover, varying instructional strategies adds interest and increases engagement. Even the most exciting activities, if done constantly, lose their appeal.

Focus on reading. It may seem as a misplacement to talk about literacy as a key ingredient in student engagement. However, many successful schools emphasize the importance of focusing on literacy instruction for continuous learning in all subjects.

Having a literacy focus means that every teacher, regardless of his or her subject area, knows the reading levels of the materials that they are working with, whether the material is incorporated in textbooks, classroom directions, Internet-based resources, or other reading sources. They also know the reading levels of their students. They are able to match the gaps of expected reading materials in the classroom with individual students and identify where there are significant gaps that might require a change in instructional strategy.

Teachers also need to incorporate vocabulary strategies as part of their individual course instruction. Paying attention to specific terms related to a topic of discussion and using strategies to gradually introduce and reinforce the vocabulary leads to comprehension and better student engagement in every subject course. Teachers need to use comprehension strategies such as pre-reading and summarization that provide an opportunity for students to be more engaged in a required piece of reading for a particular instructional activity. Reading is fundamental and cuts across all learning. If teachers expect high levels of student engagement, they need to pay attention to reading levels and establish instructional strategies with literacy as a primary focus in all they do.

Creating the ideal classroom environment. All of the previously identified variables can contribute to an ideal classroom environment. With these variables, good instruction can take place in a variety of environments. However, there is no question that better designed and better maintained classroom facilities have a positive impact on student engagement. Classrooms should be physically comfortable for students in temperature, space, furniture, and structural organization. Classrooms also need to be mentally stimulating, with attractive displays that include samples of student work, and colorful designs. Good teachers pay attention to the physical learning environment and any changes to that environment that become obstacles to student learning.

Strong positive relationships are critical to the education process. Students are more likely to make a personal commitment to engage in rigorous learning when they know teachers, parents, and other students care about how well they do. They are willing to continue making the investment when they are encouraged, supported, and assisted. Building good relationships complements rigor and

Learning Relationships

relevance. For students to engage fully in challenging learning, they require increased levels of support from the people around them.

Perhaps what is needed is a taxonomy to help educators identify and quantify relationships that improve learning. The International Center has developed such a tool, called the Relationship Framework, which consists of seven levels of relationships.

Level 0 is Isolated. This is the lack of any positive relationships. The individual feels alone and isolated from social relationships that would enhance learning.

Level 1 is Known. A person must know someone before a relationship is formed. When teachers seek to develop positive relationships with students, the first step is getting to know them—their families, likes, dislikes, aspirations, and learning styles.

Level 2 is Receptive. Often, a learning relationship is described in terms of providing the assistance and support that a student needs. However, a preliminary step is showing that we are interested and genuinely care about developing a relationship. This comes from frequent contact in multiple settings and taking an active interest.

Level 3 is Reactive. In this case, one person receives guidance or support from another. This relationship yields emotional support or cognitive information.

Level 4 is Proactive. At this level, people have made a proactive commitment to do more than assist when needed and take an active interest in supporting the other person.

Level 5 is Sustained. Positive support is balanced from family members, peers, and teachers. It is a relationship that will endure

Students invest more of themselves, work harder, and learn better when the topic is interesting and connected to something that they already know.

over a long period of time. This is the level of relationship that effective parents have with their children.

Level 6 is Mutually Beneficial. Although this is the highest level, it rarely in education, for at this point, both parties contribute support to one another for an extended period of time.

The following chart describes the degrees of student support at each level of the framework.

Once teachers make relationships important, they can begin to reflect on current practices and discuss how to improve them. Relationships are not simply good or bad; they exist on a continuum. Furthermore, relationships can change over time.

The Relationship Framework first helps teachers understand that there are degrees of relationships. When they think about their relationships with students, teachers can use the framework to apply a qualitative measure to the relationships they make. This qualitative measure helps teachers reflect on their current levels and allows them to decide if they wish to make changes to improve relationships. When relationships are categorized as a simple dichotomy of good or bad, teachers are not likely to reflect on their practices or make self-directed changes. If relationships are “good,” there is no need for change. If relationships are “poor,” it is easier to become defensive, blame the other party, or accept things for the way they are. When a specific framework is used for describing relationships, it has a different effect on teachers. Even if relationships are poor, there are at least some positive aspects on which to build. This makes teachers less defensive.

At the other end of the scale, relationships categorized as generally “good” are usually never as good as they could be. There is the potential for growth and further improvement. This motivates even

For further information and activities, refer to the resource kit Leadership for Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships

Clearly relationships are important. How do we define and improve them?

Relationship Framework

0. Isolated
1. Known
2. Receptive
3. Reactive
4. Proactive
5. Sustained
6. Mutually Beneficial

the best teachers to continue to work on improving relationships and strive to reach higher levels. In this scenario, all teachers need to work on improving relationships regardless of the current level of success.

The various levels in the Relationship Framework help to identify the changes that need to be made to improve relationships. If a teacher observes that a student is isolated, the first step is to engage in interventions by getting to know the student and facilitating activities among peers to expand what they know about one another. Just because students “hang out” together does not mean that they really know much about each other. Sometimes a student in a group can be just as isolated as one who sits alone in a school cafeteria.

Relationship Framework	
Learning Relationships Support for Students	
0. Isolated	Students feel significant isolation from teachers, peers, or even parents. Students lack any emotional, social connection to peers and teachers.
1. Known	Students are known by others, frequently called by name. Teachers know students and their families, interests, aspirations, and challenges. Students are known by peers that they interact with in school.
2. Receptive	Students have contact with peers, parents, and teachers in multiple settings. Teachers exhibit positive behaviors of “being there” that show genuine interest and concern.
3. Reactive	Teachers, parents, and peers provide help to students when requested, but support may be sporadic and inconsistent among support groups.
4. Proactive	Others take an active interest in a student’s success. Teachers take initiative to show interest and provide support. Students and others express verbal commitment for ongoing support and validate this commitment with their actions.
5. Sustained	There is extensive, ongoing, pervasive, and balanced support from teachers, parents, and peers that is consistent and sustained over time.
6. Mutually Beneficial	Positive relationships are everywhere and commonplace among the way that students, teachers, and parents interact and support the student as learner.

If a teacher observes that current student relationships are at the “known” level, relationship interventions can focus on frequency of contact and exhibiting behaviors of receptivity. The next level moves to behaviors that provide support to students.

The teacher’s responsibility in teaching and learning in the classroom often is divided into instruction and classroom management. Instruction refers to the content and pedagogy of what is learned. Classroom management refers to the processes and techniques that teachers use to set the climate for learning. It creates the impression that the classroom is an industrial process rather than a collaboration among people. Classroom management suggests that the teacher applies certain management techniques without any emotion to make sure that the classroom runs smoothly and efficiently. The term originates in the industrial model of education, the same model that gives us a rigid bell schedule, differentiation of labor, and large school houses.

School leaders have begun to question many of these industrial model characteristics. Perhaps one of the changes schools should make is to abandon the term “classroom management” and replace it with “relationship building.” Teachers need to create a climate for learning in the classroom. However, this is not a process to be managed. The classroom is made up of a group of students who desire and deserve high-quality personal relationships with adults and peers. It is the quality of these relationships that drives their behavior and leads to learning. The following table describes some differences in looking at the climate of instruction as relationship building rather than as classroom management.

Classroom Management vs. Learning-Based Relationships

When relationships are categorized as a simple dichotomy of good or bad, teachers are not likely to reflect on practice or make self-directed changes.

	Classroom Management	Relationship Building
Classroom Rules	Mandated	Negotiated
Power	Without question	Power with respect
Observation of Effectiveness	Students sitting passive and quiet	Students actively engaged
Risk-Taking	Discouraged	Encouraged
Control Mechanism	Negative punishments	Positive reinforcement
Primary Teacher Role	Absolute attention	Source of encouragement

Relationships in school always can be improved. Schools engage in specific practices to improve the quality of those relationships that influence student learning and the operation of a school. In regard to student learning relationships, school practices fall into three categories:

1. Supportive behaviors are ways in which teachers act and interact with students to support positive learning and good relationships.

2. Supportive initiatives are school initiatives that contribute to positive learning and good relationships.

3. Supportive structures constitute major organizational changes that contribute to learning and good relationships.

Following are examples of adult and peer **behaviors** that influence learning relationships in a positive manner.

- Showing respect
- “Being there” for students and frequent contact
- Active listening
- One-on-one communication
- Encouraging students to express opinions
- Avoiding “put-downs”
- Writing encouraging notes
- Students praising peers
- Displaying students’ work
- Identifying unique talents and strengths
- Exhibiting enthusiasm
- Using positive humor
- Serving as a role model
- Celebrating accomplishments

Following are specific supportive **initiatives** that influence learning relationships in a positive way.

- Social activities to start the year
- Team building
- Mentoring
- Rewards, recognition, incentives
- Student advocacy
- Advisory programs
- Peer mediation
- Students as teachers
- Character education
- Parent partnerships
- Business-community partnerships

Further information on building relationships in schools can be found in the International Center resource kit, *Leadership for Rigor, Relevance and Relationships*.

- Service learning/community service
- Extracurricular and co-curricular activities
- Sports programs

Schools also can implement major changes to their **structures** that can make it easier to develop positive learning relationships.

- Small learning communities
- Alternative scheduling
- Team teaching
- Teaching continuity
- School-based enterprises
- Professional learning communities

Further Reading

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In *Punished by Rewards*, Alfie Kohn challenges many of the traditions in education by attacking the reward and incentive systems used to encourage students to learn. He argues that rewards, no matter how innocuous, undermine learning. This is difficult for many educators to accept because most of us have experienced positive attributes of various incentives. However, every now and then we need to step back and reflect on how we use rewards and question whether we are moving students toward higher levels of achievement and authentic student engagement when using any reward or incentive system.

Rewards and Incentives

Kohn, Alfie. *Punished by Rewards*

Types of Rewards and Incentives

Rewards and incentives typically are placed into two categories: extrinsic and intrinsic.

Extrinsic rewards do not originate in the task itself. They are external and have a tangible and measurable impact. Examples extrinsic rewards are grades, prizes, candy, scholarships, and money.

Intrinsic rewards and incentives are inherent in the task and are obtained immediately through the senses. The rewards arise from within. When a student plays a musical passage perfectly after weeks of practice or makes that first three-point field goal in basketball, he or she feels an intrinsic reward.

Extrinsic rewards have their place, but teachers need to think carefully about the kind of reward given. Schools have long relied on external recognition systems, primarily the use of grades, to encourage and quantify student achievement. However, grades do not by themselves sufficiently motivate high levels of learning. Teachers also should work to help students develop the ability to derive emotional and

intellectual satisfaction from doing high-quality work. It is this sense of personal goal setting, commitment, and being satisfied with the final “product” that will drive students to want to learn more. Students who are highly engaged rely more on intrinsic rewards.

Effective reward and incentives include:

Verbal feedback. One of the most powerful rewards is simple teacher feedback, or instructional reinforcement. Student need to know that they are doing something right to feel a sense of accomplishment. Praise and other verbal reinforcement can be used for correct answers during discussions, improved test scores, and accurate projects, worksheets, and homework.

Verbal feedback also is helpful in building intrinsic rewards by helping learners identify what “good work” is. Verbal reinforcement should be precise, appropriate, and a shift from frequent to intermittent as the learner becomes more skilled at the task.

Symbols. Gold stars, stickers, and work posted on bulletin boards are used routinely in elementary schools, but high school students are not too old to respond to visible recognition. Similar to this are token rewards, such as points or chips that can be redeemed for a prize.

Activities. Rewards can be activities such as special class outings, field trips, and free time.

Food. Food is an often-used and convenient form of reward. Giving candy or desserts are enjoyable forms of rewards. However, teachers need to be cautious in this area as well as we strive to promote good eating habits. The use of food rewards should be

done in the context of school policies and promoting student healthy lifestyles.

Teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members all agree that we need better grading and reporting systems. Often, these systems are inadequate because they are part of a tradition that can go unexamined and unquestioned for years. The purposes of grades are to communicate progress to the student and parent, hold students accountable for the learning process, and to be used as an incentive for engagement. The impact of grading on student engagement is powerful but not always positive.

Grading Systems as Incentives for Engagement

Grading Pitfalls

The following grading practices often negatively affect student engagement.

Grading on the curve. In a system in which students are being held to the same standards, grading and reporting must be done in reference to specific learning goals rather than in reference to normative criteria, or “on the curve.” In other words, students must be graded in terms of what they have learned, not in terms of their relative standing among peers. Schools that use normative grading attempt to have consistent grade distributions from one teacher to the next. Consequently, in this type of grading system, every teacher’s classes have the same percentage of As, Bs, Cs, etc.

While this practice is more common in colleges, many high school teachers feel they are not teaching to high standards unless a certain percentage of students receive failing grades. But the consequences of this practice are detrimental to the relationships among students and between teachers and students. It also gives students a false sense of learning.

Valedictorians and class rank. There is nothing wrong with recognizing excellence in academic performance. But in selecting a class valedictorian, many schools operate under the traditional premise that there can be only one truly excellent student. Also ranking students may be convenient for college admission offices, but it is counterproductive to stimulating good student work. It is a myth that colleges require high school class ranking. Excellent students without class rank still are selected by elite universities. Early in their high school careers, top students figure out the selection procedures and, often with the help of their parents, find ingenious ways to improve their standing in comparison to classmates. More schools are finding it more positive to recognize a group of outstanding students based on multiple criteria rather than a single student.

Using grades as a reward. Teachers realize that one of the tools to which most students respond is the grading system. However, when teachers use grades as bonus points for attendance, good behavior, or doing something extra in the classroom, they are really reducing the importance of grades for academic achievement and poorly communicating the value of learning. When grades as rewards becomes a frequent practice, students become less interested in learning because they know they can do some extra work or “be good” to bring up their grades.

Using grades as punishment. Likewise, when teachers reduce grades for late papers or take off points for poor behavior, they diminish the value of grades. No research supports the use of low grades or marks as punishment. Instead of prompting greater effort, they more often cause students to withdraw from learning. To protect their self-images, many students regard low grades as irrelevant and meaningless.

Good Grading Practices

Use separate systems for grading behavior. Many elementary schools have long had the practice of reporting dual grades by subject – academic achievement and effort. The negative student behaviors of handing papers in late, not doing homework, arriving late to class, acting out in class, or not having necessary materials can all be translated into a work habits grade. In this system, it is appropriate to award points to students who do additional work. For example, a student might come in for an after-school tutoring session and erase a tardy designation in the work habits grade.

Use incompletes rather than zeros. Teachers feel obligated to punish students who fail to do work. Rather than giving zeros to students whose work assignments are incomplete or not turned in on time, teachers might require those students to attend after-school tutoring sessions or special Saturday classes until the work is completed to a satisfactory level. In other words, they are not “let off the hook” with a zero. Not every late assignment triggers an after-school session. Late or missing routine homework assignments can be handled with daily work habit grades. Students learn that they have certain responsibilities in school and that their actions have specific consequences. Not completing assigned work in time means that students must attend special after-school sessions. Implementing such a policy may require additional funding and support, but the payoffs likely will be worth it. This approach is more beneficial to students than simply assigning a zero and helps make grades a more accurate reflection of what students have learned.

Use systems that reflect the highest level of student learning. The goal of instruction is for students to master certain skills or acquire certain knowledge. The grading system should reflect this

gradual development of skills. For example, in an art class, one student may start with inadequate skills to complete even the most basic assignment. But that student makes considerable progress and by the end of a course produces outstanding work. Another student starts with mediocre skills and doesn't improve. If all work in the course is graded equally, the first student has some low and some high grades while the second student has all medium grades. Their grade averages might be similar even though the first student learned more and achieved at a higher level.

For a good discussion of role of assessments, read W. James Popham's book, *Test Better, Teach Better: The Instructional Role of Assessment*.

A better grading system recognizes the highest level of skill attainment. In a performance area such as art or music, it is easy to see that grades should reflect the best work and not be a simple average. But what about academic subjects? It is convenient to divide a subject such as math or science into a series of weekly objective tests, average the grades, and give the student an overall grade at the end of the marking period. There are three weaknesses here. First, remember objective tests are only inferences of learning.

Tests are not the actual or direct measure of learning, for we do not know what is in the student's head. We can never be perfectly certain that the test question measures learning. When we consider the potential for poorly written questions, the chance for error dramatically increases. Second, giving numerical grades for all of exams and test questions assumes equal value. Not all questions are equal in difficulty or in revealing what a student has learned. Third, even the most content-laden subjects have some gradual development of concepts that should be measured.

Teaching and grading practices that support measuring students at the highest level include:

- having students write a major paper or complete a project near the end of the course that counts a large percentage of overall grade
- allowing students to drop one or two of lowest test grades
- using a final exam with essay questions that reflect the major concepts of the course
- using a portfolio assessment in which students select their best work

Use performance-based assessments. Performance-based assessments are an effective way for teachers to learn whether students can understand concepts and apply their knowledge. It is not unusual for students to know all the facts but are unable to understand the connections between those facts or how to use them. Many students learn by rote, with little understanding of why, or they draw erroneous conclusions. Well-constructed performance tasks help teachers determine if their students really understand the coursework or if they are merely parroting information they have memorized. Traditional short-answer tests tell little about how students think, whether they can use knowledge, or to help teachers decide what to teach next.

On the other hand, good performance-based assessments ask students to explain and justify their work. As the students begin to justify their answers, they begin to reflect more on their own learning and take more responsibility for ensuring that they really understand *why*, not just *what*. In this way, learning becomes more than just filling in the blanks on a test on Friday afternoon. Performance-based assessment involves gathering evidence about how students think, what connections they are making, and what strategies they use to

Good performance-based assessments ask students to explain and justify their work. As the students begin to justify their answers, they begin to reflect more on their own learning and take more responsibility for ensuring that they really understand *why*, not just *what*.

solve problems. Teachers use this type of assessment so that they know how and what to teach, not just to give students a grade.

Performance-based assessments differ from traditional multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank tests in several ways. With performance-based assessments, student performance is compared to a set standard rather than against the performance of other students. Connections and higher-level cognitive skills are easier to assess. Traditional tests have an element of surprise. Students, and even the teacher in the case of standardized state and national tests, never know what questions will be asked. With performance-based assessments, students know exactly what is expected of them.

Scoring guides should reflect qualitative differences in students' development. At its best, a scoring guide describes student performance at a given level of development. Moreover, while the scoring guide is used to assess each student's performance on the assessment task, students often refer to the scoring guide as they work through a task. The guides can be designed in many formats, although there are four basic types: holistic, checklist, analytic and mini-rubrics.

Sometimes performance assessments can be converted to a grade, but this is not a requirement. Teachers can use scoring guides to communicate to students about the quality of work without translating that work into a grade.

Move toward a proficiency scale and away from percentages.

One of the most nonsensical debates in education circles is what percentage out of 100 should constitute a passing grade. Should 60% become the passing grade? Does 70% mean that students are learning more? If we drop the passing grade to 55%, are we lowering standards? These questions are meaningless because

we are talking about arbitrary numbers that allow us to erroneously assume that there are uniform test questions that measure learning.

Current high-stakes assessments do not report results based on percentages, and there is a valid reason for that. Test questions vary in difficulty and the pattern of questions that students get right and wrong can be used to varying degrees to approximate learning. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) sets an appropriate model of translating scale scores from an assessment into simple levels. These levels are below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. Grading systems for courses should target getting all students to meet the proficient level.

- **Below basic** means students have not demonstrated partial mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills.
- **Basic** denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.
- **Proficient** represents solid academic performance in which students have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.
- **Advanced** signifies superior performance.

A teacher can build an appropriate grading system by translating each quiz, project, assignment, or test into these four levels. The overall grading system would then define how much of the student's work must be at each level to attain that level in each course. To bring this system to some traditional measures in education, schools could designate the grade A or 4.0 to Advanced; B or 3.0 to Proficient and C or 2.0 for basic. Schools may or may not want to use a grade

of D and 1.0. Robert Marzano details an example model of this type of system in his book, *Classroom Assessment and Grading that Work* (Marzano, 2006).

There is no perfect grading system or school grading policy. Some degree of consistency across a school is helpful to students and parents. However, any school policy needs to be flexible enough to allow the unique characteristics of each course and each student. Grading systems influence student engagement. Schools and teachers may need to examine grading policies as a precondition to stimulating engagement. Often, just making little changes and considering some of the ideas presented here can have big impacts on student work and learning. If the current level of student engagement in a school is unsatisfactory, it may be time to challenge the status quo of school grading.

Further Reading

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Commonly held “guiding principles,” such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and perseverance, should be the focus of a school’s character development initiatives. Since these guiding principles are not being debated, we would assume that they are both accepted and understood. Yet, our children are increasingly lacking these principles that provide the foundation for student engagement as well as a successful and fulfilled life.

Guiding Principles

If schools expect students to become committed to various guiding principles, they need to assume more responsibility to assist families in the development of these common core beliefs. The best way to do this is by involving parents immediately and continually in the process. Educators must not assume that they can determine in isolation what should be taught or modeled. Broad-based involvement by parents, the general public, and educators is essential in identifying and defining the guiding principles to be addressed in school.

The pluralistic nature of our society means that we must approach the teaching of guiding principles differently from other nations. The unifying force that religion plays in many nations enables them to link character education to religion. The United States, on the other hand, is a country of many cultures and religions and, therefore, many belief systems. But we can teach guiding principles in using common values and virtues without impinging on or promoting specific religious beliefs.

Many schools continue to be paralyzed on issues that relate to attitudes, values, and beliefs. When a district proposes to teach guiding principles, disagreement may arise about whether these principles, and character development in general, are an area in

which schools should be involved. However, there is agreement on the importance of students possessing certain positive characteristics, such as honesty and respect. For this reason, districts should not shy away from community discussions to determine where there is common ground in student character development. While the International Center is aware of the contentious nature of the subject, character development is too critical to ignore simply to avoid controversy.

Twelve Guiding Principles

The International Center has developed Twelve Guiding Principles of Exceptional Character as a model for schools to draw from as part of their character development programs. Schools can use this model or devise their own lists of appropriate principles that guide good character.

The Twelve Guiding Principles are as follows:

- responsibility
- contemplation
- initiative
- perseverance
- optimism
- courage
- respect
- compassion
- adaptability
- honesty
- trustworthiness
- loyalty

Habits

Students come to school motivated in many different ways, including:

- to learn and excel in all their coursework
- to learn and excel in only specific subjects
- to participate in extracurricular activities
- to get a diploma that will enable them to get a good job
- to socialize with friends
- to be the center of attention
- to escape a negative or destructive home environment.
- to have fun

School, home, and social life compete each day for students' time, energy, and attention. As discussed previously, in an era of the Internet, instant messaging, e-mail, CD players, video games, music videos, and cell phones, student distractions can run high. In addition, students today tend to have part-time jobs and greater access to the society around them, adding to the time students might not be thinking about school.

To rein in these distractions, educators can teach students to recognize, internalize, and apply specific habits that will facilitate academic achievement. Students can be surrounded by teachers, parents, and others who encourage engagement by incorporating habit strategies that:

- provide a basic awareness of habits that lead to high achievement
- help students learn habits
- emphasize the importance of habits
- support the implementation of habits through positive feedback and encouragement

If we think about the students we have known, we probably can quickly remember those individuals whose habits consistently interfered with their learning. These students often exhibited habits of excessive socializing with friends, playing computer games when they were supposed to be studying, and waiting until the last minute to complete schoolwork. These students probably did not realize their full academic potential.

Similarly, we likely can recall students whose habits consistently produced a high level of achievement. These students made a habit of typically doing their homework, studying for tests, maintaining a positive attitude, actively participating in school life, and doing what was necessary to achieve at a higher level.

The Ethic of Working Hard

It is imperative that students realized why it is important to work hard in school. Too often, they believe that school is merely something to get through, graduate, and then move on to live their “real” lives. But working hard academically can turn into a pattern of successful, lifelong learning and engagement in adult life in endless ways.

The following list, “12 Reasons Why I Will Work Hard in School,” only portrays examples. Students, teachers, and the entire school should develop their own list depending on their school needs, student population, and community orientation. Again, the student’s voice is especially important.

12 Reasons Why I Will Work Hard in School

I will work hard in school because:

1. I want to get into college.
2. I want a good job after high school.
3. I know it is the right thing to get ahead in life.

4. I want to get good grades so that I can get a scholarship.
5. I want to work hard because I want my parents to be proud of me.
6. I want to excel so that I can attend a good college and become a _____.
7. I like to feel good about myself, and I feel really great when I work hard and accomplish something meaningful.
8. I will work really hard so that I can feel proud of myself.
9. I want to excel in school so that I can have a good life when I am an adult.
10. I know that if I work hard, I can have a good job and take care of my future family.
11. I know that if I work hard, I can get a good job and make a lot of money.
12. I want people to know that I am a hard worker so that they will choose me for a job.

Working hard in school reflects a passion for learning. Teachers can describe and show their own passion for a particular topic, subject, or for learning and education in general. Rather than tell students why it is important to work hard in school, teachers can help students ponder on the idea (the guiding principle of contemplation) of working hard. This process fuels self-discovery.

Students make an enormous number of choices each day. They choose whether to complete a homework assignment, how hard to work on a particular assignment, and how much to study for a test. Each choice can lead to positive behavior and a strengthening of core habits. As with any other aspect of student engagement behavior, teachers can encourage hard work on homework, specific projects, and test preparation. They can “catch” and praise individual students who work hard to do well in school. When students are working in teams on an assignment, or perhaps when a whole class

For more on
strategies for
promoting
engagement,
see Chapter 3.

works together on a project, the team or the class can be praised for its hard work through a special celebration.

The Synergy of Beliefs, Emotions, and Behavior

Whether the focus is on core habits, guiding principles, a school creed, school life keys, or any other cognitive component of student engagement, students are bringing together beliefs that stress hard work to acquire a good education that eventually successful adult roles. This set of beliefs becomes the cognitive foundation upon which teachers can build the emotional and behavioral components of student engagement.

Successful techniques for transforming beliefs into behaviors include methods in which students are discovering ideas about good behavior. One technique, for example, might be the Socratic dialoguing approach. Teachers can encourage, prompt, coach, and praise behavior that reflects engagement beliefs and feelings. They can support the emotional component as it is expressed in the form of intrinsic motivation, pride, curiosity, or special interests in a subject or activity. In numerous different forms, students can attach positive feelings and associations to learning, studying, completing homework, competing at a high level, and involvement in school life.

Fundamental Skills

Many times, the barrier for students in becoming engaged in learning is not attitude or behavior, but rather they lack one or more basic skills. Many students are aware that they lack these skills, but instead of asking for help, they become embarrassed and withdraw from class. Teachers need to identify student skills and needs carefully. Sometimes the solution is to teach particular skills to an entire class.

Other times, working with individual students during class or after school is more effective. Following are some skills that students frequently lack.

Note-Taking

Students must have the skills to routinely record important information from classroom instruction. Many schools use the traditional Cornell note-taking method.

The Cornell system for taking notes is designed to save time but yet be highly efficient. There is no rewriting or retyping of your notes. It is a “do it right in the first place” system.

1. First Step — Preparation

Use a large, loose-leaf notebook. Use only one side of the paper. (you then can lay your notes out to see the direction of a lecture.) Draw a vertical line 2 1/2 inches from the left side of you paper. This is the recall column. Notes will be taken to the right of this margin. Later key words or phrases can be written in the recall column.

2. Second Step — During the lecture

Record notes in paragraph form. Capture general ideas, not illustrative ideas. Skip lines to show end of ideas or thoughts. Using abbreviations will save time. Write legibly.

3. Third Step — After the lecture

Read through your notes and make it more legible if necessary. Now use the column. Jot down ideas or key words which give you the idea of the lecture. (REDUCE) You will have to reread the lecturer’s ideas and reflect in your own words. Cover up the right-hand portion of your notes and recite the general ideas and concepts

of the lecture. Overlap your notes showing only recall columns and you have your review.

Memorization

Memorization still has a place in school. Students should understand that some information is most efficiently accessed through direct recall rather than by looking it up in a reference source. There are many techniques for remembering information. Some students learn information by using mnemonic devices in which they connect key information, such as making the first letter in a series of words into a new word that is easy to remember. Students also can use visual images to memorize information.

Active Listening

Active listening means “listening for meaning” in which the listener checks with the speaker to see that a statement has been correctly heard and understood. The goal of active listening is to improve mutual understanding. When interacting, people often are not listening attentively to one another. They may be distracted, thinking about other things, or thinking about what they are going to say next (the latter case is particularly true in conflict situations or disagreements). Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding. It focuses attention on the speaker. Suspending one’s own frame of reference and judgment is important in order to fully attend to the speaker. It also is important to observe the other person’s behavior and body language. After listening to the speaker, the listener may then paraphrase the speaker’s words. The listener does not have to agree with the speaker. What is important is that he or she understands what has been said. In emotionally charged

communications, the listener may listen for feelings. Thus, rather than merely repeating what the speaker has said, the active listener might describe the underlying emotion (“You seem to feel angry,” or “You seem to feel frustrated. Is that because...?”). An active listener needs to focus full attention on the person who is speaking. The way that we can show that we are actively listening is to:

- ask good questions
- listen nonjudgmentally
- paraphrase
- empathize the speaker

Classroom Social Skills at A.J. Moore Academy

Teaching students how to get along with their peers, school staff, and family members is becoming an increasingly important role of the educator. Contemporary research has shown again and again that developing social skills is critical to students’ academic and personal successes. One school that places a strong emphasis on social skills is A.J. Moore Academy in Waco, Texas. Following are examples of the social skills practiced at the school.

How to Change Classes

- Exit room orderly.
- Get Materials for next class.
- Walk quickly to class using low voice tones.
- Keep hands, feet, and other body parts to yourself.
- Greet the teacher and enter the room before the tardy bell rings.

How to Begin Class

- Enter the room orderly.
- Sit in your assigned seat immediately.
- Have materials ready.
- Begin focus activity.
- Wait quietly for further instructions.

How to Take a Test

- Prepare materials.
- Listen to directions.
- Work quietly.
- Do your own work.
- Stay seated and don't violate others' space.
- Raise hand and wait to be acknowledged for; questions and teacher to collect tests.

When Work Is Completed

- Turn your work into the tray quietly.
- Return to your seat quietly.
- Read your Accelerated Reader book quietly.

Ending Class

- When the bell rings, wait for the teacher to dismiss you.
- Get up slowly.
- Push chair in and clean-up area.
- Walk out in orderly manner.

How to Go To and From Lunch

- Keep moving. Walk and talk in low tones.
- Keep hands, feet, and other body parts to yourself.

- Arrive at lunch on time. Stay in the cafeteria until lunch is over.
- Stay out of classrooms that are not at lunch.

Following Instructions

- Look at the person.
- Say “okay.”
- Do what you’ve been asked right away.
- Check back.

Accepting Criticism or a Consequence

- Look at the person.
- Say “okay”
- Don’t argue.

Accepting “No” for an Answer

- Look at the person.
- Say “okay.”
- Stay calm.
- If you disagree, ask later.

Greeting Others

- Look at the person.
- Use a pleasant voice.
- Say “hi” or “hello.”

Getting the Teacher’s Attention

- Look at the person.
- Raise your hand. Stay calm.
- Wait until the teacher says your name.
- Ask your question.

Making a Request

- Look at the person.
- Use a clear, pleasant voice.
- Explain exactly what you are asking for. Say “please.”
- If the answer is “yes,” say “thank you.”
- If not, remember to accept “no” for an answer.

Disagreeing Appropriately

- Look at the person.
- Use a pleasant voice.
- Say, “I understand how you feel.”
- Tell why you feel differently.
- Give a reason.
- Listen to the other person.

Giving Criticism

- Look at the person.
- Stay calm. Use a pleasant voice.
- Say something positive or “I understand.”
- Describe exactly what you are criticizing.
- Tell why this is a problem.
- Listen to the person. Be polite.

Resisting Peer Pressure

- Look at the person.
- Use a calm voice.
- Say clearly.
- That you do not want to participate.
- Suggest something else to do.
- If necessary, continue to say “no.”
- Leave the situation.

Making an Apology

- Look at the person.
- Use a serious, sincere voice.
- Say clearly that you do not want to participate.
- Suggest something else to do.
- If necessary, continue to say “no.”
- Leave the situation.

Talking with Others

- Look at the person.
- Use a pleasant voice.
- Ask questions.
- Don't interrupt.

Giving Compliments

- Look at the person.
- Smile.
- Speak clearly and enthusiastically.
- Tell the person exactly what you like.

Accepting Compliments

- Look at the person.
- Use a pleasant voice.
- Say “thank you.”
- Don't look away, mumble, or deny the compliment.
- Do not disagree with the compliment.

Volunteering

- Look at the person.
- Use a pleasant, enthusiastic voice.
- Ask if you can help. Describe the activity or task you are offering to do.
- Thank the person.
- Check back when you have finished.

Reporting Other Youths' Behavior

- Look at the teacher or the adult.
- Use a calm voice. Ask to talk to him or her privately.
- Describe the inappropriate behavior you are reporting.
- Explain why you are making the report.
- Answer any questions the adult has.
- Thank the adult for listening.

Introducing Yourself

- Look at the person. Smile.
- Use a pleasant voice.
- Offer a greeting. Say, "Hi, my name is...."
- Shake the person's hand.
- When you leave, say, "It was nice to meet you."

Teaching and Learning in the Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework™ is a tool developed by staff of the International Center for Leadership in Education to examine curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The Rigor/Relevance Framework is based on two dimensions of higher standards and student achievement.

First, there is a continuum of knowledge that describes the increasingly complex ways in which we think. The Knowledge Taxonomy is based on the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy: (1) knowledge/awareness, (2) comprehension, (3) application, (4) analysis, (5) synthesis, and (6) evaluation.

The low end of this continuum involves acquiring knowledge and being able to recall or locate that knowledge in a simple manner. Just as a computer completes a word search in a word processing program, a competent person at this level can scan through thousands of bits of information in the brain to locate that desired knowledge.

The high end of the Knowledge Taxonomy labels more complex ways in which individuals use knowledge. At this level, knowledge is fully integrated into one's mind, and individuals can do much more than information. They can take several pieces of knowledge and combine them in both logical and creative ways. Assimilation of knowledge is a good way to describe this high level of the thinking continuum. Assimilation is often referred to as a higher-order thinking skill; at this level, the student can solve multistep problems and create unique work and solutions.

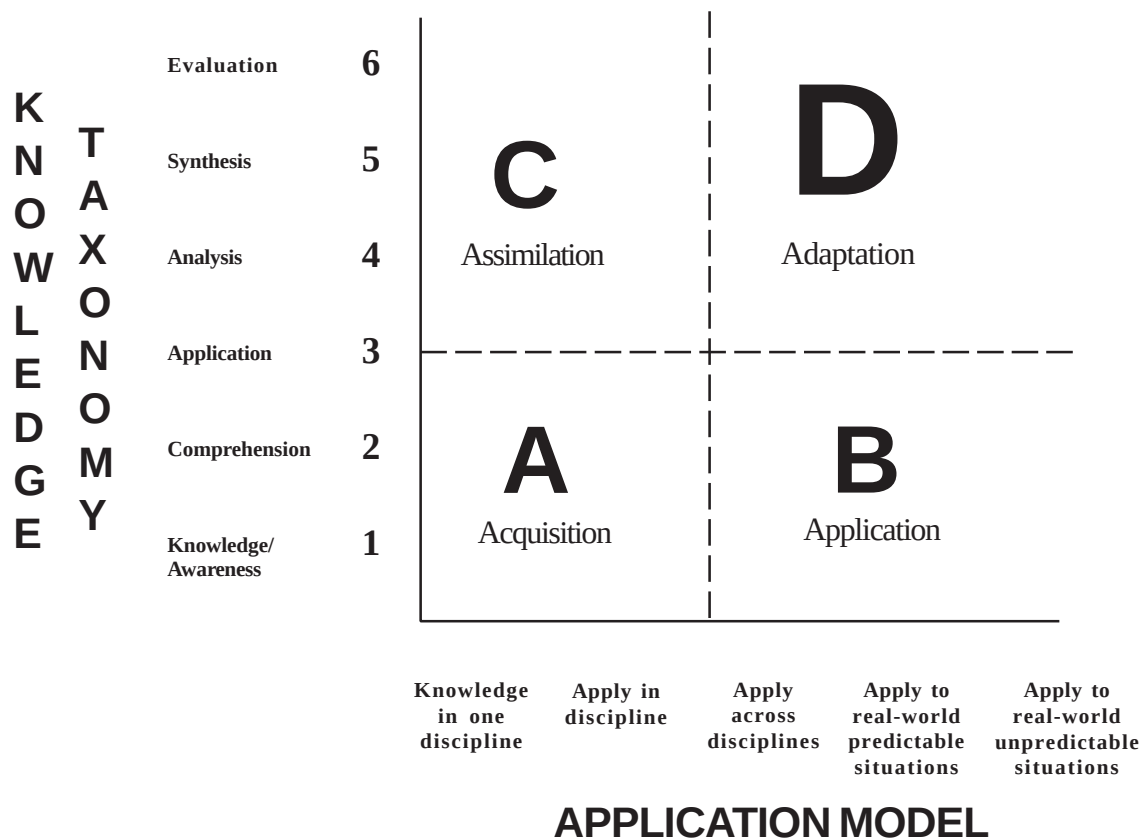
The Rigor/Relevance Framework has four quadrants. Quadrant A represents simple recall and basic understanding of knowledge for its own sake. Quadrant C represents knowledge for its own sake, as well as more complex thinking. Examples of Quadrant A knowledge are knowing that the Earth is round and that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*.

Quadrant C embraces higher levels of knowledge, such as understanding how the U.S. political system works and analyzing the benefits and challenges of cultural diversity in this nation versus other nations.

Quadrants B and D represent action or high degrees of application. For example, Quadrant B includes knowing how to use mathematics skills to make purchases and count change. Quadrant D knowledge explores the ability to access information in wide area network systems and the ability to gather knowledge from a variety of sources to solve a complex problem in the workplace.

Each of these four quadrants can also be labeled with a term that characterizes the learning or student performance.

Rigor/Relevance Framework™



Quadrant A — Acquisition

Students gather and store bits of knowledge and information. Students are primarily expected to remember or understand this acquired knowledge.

Quadrant B — Application

Students use acquired knowledge to solve problems, design solutions, and complete work. The highest level of application is to apply appropriate knowledge to new and unpredictable situations.

Quadrant C — Assimilation

Students extend and refine their acquired knowledge to be able to use that knowledge automatically and routinely to analyze and solve problems, as well as create unique solutions.

Quadrant D — Adaptation

Students have the competence to think in complex ways and also apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Even when confronted with perplexing unknowns, students are able to use extensive knowledge and skills to create solutions and take action that further develops their skills and knowledge.

A Fresh Approach

The Rigor/Relevance Framework is a fresh approach to looking at curriculum standards and assessment. It is based on traditional elements of education, yet encourages movement to application of knowledge instead of maintaining an exclusive focus on acquisition of knowledge.

For further information and activities, refer to the resource kit “Using the Rigor/Relevance Framework for Planning and Instruction”

The Rigor/Relevance Framework is easy to understand. With its simple, straightforward structure, it can serve as a bridge between school and the community. It offers a common language with which to express the notion of a more rigorous and relevant curriculum and encompasses much of what parents, business leaders, and community members want students to learn.

The Rigor/Relevance Framework is versatile; it can be used in the development of instruction and assessment. Likewise, teachers can use it to measure their progress in adding rigor and relevance to instruction. It can also help select appropriate instructional strategies to meet learner needs and higher achievement goals.

Personalizing learning involves using is a set of instructional strategies and approaches that take into account the individual uniqueness of each student. Teachers may be committed to common learning goals, but getting every student to achieve those goals requires personalizing the process. These strategies include:

- Make each student feel unique.
- Involve parents.
- Connect to the youth culture.
- Recognize cultural differences.
- Consider the student point of view.
- Be aware of different learning styles.
- Attend to students with special needs.
- Differentiate instruction.
- Intervene early.
- Create small learning communities.

Personalizing Learning

Make Each Student Feel Unique

All of us have experienced listening to a speaker that caused us to be intensely engaged – a politician at a rally, a religious leader preaching a sermon, an actor in a movie or play, or a poet reading a passage. In these instances, we feel that the speaker is speaking to each of us personally. The message, mannerism, and language all combine to create a unique personal experience.

Teachers may not have the gift of oratory and charisma of a political leader or actor, but they should work to make their teaching seem personal to each student. Techniques, such as making eye contact, proximity, calling students by name, and using positive personal examples are all good ways to make students feel special.

Give individual attention to each student by having 60-second conferences. While students are working at their desks, walk around the room. Stop by each desk and whisper a comment to the student about the work he or she is doing. When students are absent, tell them you missed them and make them feel that they are an important part of the class. If a student is absent because of a long illness, have the class write get-well messages and mail them. If a student experiences a death in the family, teach the class how to write sympathy notes.

Try to give students choices and respect the choices they make. For instance, give a general writing assignment such as writing about a memorable childhood experience. Then, help students brainstorm ways in which they can handle the assignment individually.

Sometimes allow students to choose their own reading material within guidelines that you set. Students are more invested in their own learning if they are given opportunities to make choices within boundaries.

Involve Parents

Involving parents in their children's schooling has been a goal of education for many years. Many educators pay "lip service" to the notion of increasing parent involvement, but lack the training, ideas, and strategies to implement it. Parent involvement is not only good practice, it is demanded in the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Teachers and schools must create a climate in which parents are active partners in their children's learning. When parents are involved, they help become more connected to the learning process.

Researchers have developed a comprehensive program designed to address the issues and concerns expressed by many teachers and parents about how to address increasing parent involvement. The program was incorporated into the National Parent Teacher Association Standards in 2001. Partnership is viewed as an essential component of the school program, not an optional activity carried out by a select group of parents and teachers. The standards describe six types of support for parent involvement:

Type 1. Parenting

- Help all families to develop home environments that support learning.
- Help families with information about important issues such as child development, child-rearing skills, and setting home conditions that support children.

Type 2. Communicating

- Design more effective forms of communications between the home and school.
- Provide information about school expectations, curriculum, and state tests in a language parents can understand.

Type 3. Volunteering

- Recruit and organize parental help.
- Provide training and flexible scheduling in schools and other settings.

Type 4. Home Learning

- Provide information to parents concerning how to assist their children at home.
- Provide information and workshops about how to assist their children.

Type 5. Decision Making

- Include parents in school decision making.
- Provide information and training about how to serve on PTO and shared decision-making teams.

Type 6. Collaborating with the Community

- Involve the local community in the life of the school.
- Provide and coordinating the resources of the community to provide services in the school.

Connect to the Youth Culture

One effective way of raising engagement in any subject is to incorporate youth culture in the classroom. Research tells us that for the brain to learn, it needs to make a connection for meaning. New information needs to have a “hook” to be retained as important knowledge. Students watch and hear what the teacher is saying in the classroom, but if none of that experience is perceived as important or connected to what already has been learned or experienced, it becomes wasted time.

As children grow, their brain constantly is developing patterns of learning that is connected to strong emotions — pleasure, fun, belonging, independence, and aspirations that reflect the youth culture and how they spend their time. Music, television, advertising, sports, Internet chat, friends, clothes, family, and neighborhood conditions are all strong influences.

Hip hop, for example, has become the defining social movement of today’s generation. A generation of youth — urban, rural, racially-diverse, poor and rich — define themselves according to their pop culture idols. Youths follow the trials and tribulations of hip-hop and teenage pop stars with a degree of intensity and commitment historically reserved for religious worship.

Some worry that this has created a generation of youth overly concerned with material gain, a distorted view of gender relations, and broader lack of community responsibility. Every generation of adults cringes at the characteristics of whatever the current youth culture is at the time. One difference today is that ubiquitous and instantaneous media make counterculture more visible than any previous generation. But teachers can use pop culture as a tool to turn learning into a more engaging experience. For example, students

could create a rap song to learn vocabulary words or compare lyrics of a popular song to a theme in classic literature.

Recognize Cultural Differences

The use of classroom “cultural relevancy” tactics to engage minority students is essential to help them do better in school. The National Urban Alliance for Effective Education has taken the lead in conducting nationwide teacher training workshops to show thousands of K-12 educators how to improve the performance of underachieving students by drawing out student strengths and incorporating their culture into learning activities.

The National Urban Alliance describes an example of “getting it wrong” when an inner city teacher tried to explain the geometrical concept of a slope by using skiing terms. His students were hard-pressed to get the notion of a “bunny slope” — skiing jargon for a gentle decline where beginning skiers start. Skiing was not part of this group’s cultural context. Not one of these kids in his classroom had any clue what he was talking about. Another inner city middle school math teacher did better working with students on the subject of ratios and proportions. This teacher asked students to record the number of alcohol billboards and liquor stores they passed on their way to school and calculate the number of each per block. This was their cultural knowledge. The National Urban Alliance maintains an extensive list of resources to assist teachers in adding culturally appropriate learning experiences.

Erin Gruwell is an inspiring example of a teacher who turned around a group of disengaged students in Long Beach, California, who were dubbed as “unteachable, at-risk” teenagers. These students felt

abandoned by the education system and saw themselves as the students whom no one wanted to teach.

In the first few weeks of class, the students made it clear that they were not interested in what their teacher had to say and made bets about how long she would last in their classroom. When a racial caricature of one of the students circulated the classroom, Erin intercepted the drawing and compared it to the Nazi caricatures of Jews during the Holocaust. To her amazement, Gruwell discovered that many of her students had never heard of the Holocaust. When she asked how many in her class had been shot at, however, almost all of them raised their hands.

After realizing her students were all too familiar with violence, she introduced them to Anne Frank's book, *The Diary of a Young Girl* and Zlata Filipovic's book, *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*. Reluctant at first to read the books, the students soon were comparing their lives to those of Anne and Zlata, teenagers who, like them, were surrounded by violence. The students connected to these stories. Each student began to tell and write about their own experiences and ultimately called themselves the "Freedom Writers" in honor of civil rights leaders. Many of these students turned their lives around because of the connections made by Gruwell and her unconventional teaching methods.

Teachers also can design some lessons and activities that incorporate strong African-American or Hispanic cultural values of community and teamwork and the contrast with individualism and competition as primary strategies for success. Be willing to discuss issues concerning gender/racial bias, discrimination, racial profiling, etc. Take a stand against social injustices. Create a multicultural atmosphere in the classroom. Exhibit pictures of all racial groups as well as students with disabilities. Remember to balance the genders. Get to know your students, their communities, and their

cultures. Make connections and celebrate the diversity of backgrounds.

Consider the Student Point of View

Good teachers know their content areas deeply and thoroughly. Their role is to help students acquire appropriate knowledge in a particular subject. To do that effectively, they need to look at their content areas not from what they know, but based on what the student knows.

Students should be given the opportunity to construct learning by developing their own links to new knowledge through self-discovery. Just as our ancestors explored their world and learned what items were edible and where danger existed, so too can students explore their world through carefully designed instruction.

For example, a math teacher using the naming strategy to teach about the associative properties in mathematics typically gives students the term, defines it, and gives examples in symbols: $x=a(bc)$ is equivalent to $x=(ab)c$. In contrast, a constructivist approach might start with students solving a two-digit multiplication problem in their heads. After the students explain how they arrived at the answer, the teacher would note that not all students followed the same sequence of steps, yet each arrived at the correct answer. After students discover that numbers can be multiplied in any sequence, the teacher can label this the commutative process. Students will retain the links to this new knowledge because it has been largely constructed from their own experience.

A personalized teaching strategy might be to start a class with inquiry-based instruction instead of reading long passages or term memorization. Start with observations. This creates a more

personalized approach in which students are more engaged in active learning as they move into the heart of a lesson.

Be Aware of Different Learning Styles

Another aspect of personalizing learning is recognizing the unique learning styles of students. Understanding the different ways that students learn, interact with, and process information can help teachers modify instructional strategies so that all students have an opportunity to succeed. The learning styles theory is rooted in the classification of psychological types and based on research, which has shown that, as the result of heredity, upbringing, and environment, different individuals have a tendency to perceive and process information differently. There are many categories of learning style theory models, which all have some validity. The most common model incorporates three learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Visual learners:

- need to see it to know it
- have a strong sense of color
- may have artistic ability
- often have difficulty with spoken directions
- might overreact to sounds
- might have trouble following lectures
- often misinterprets words

Auditory learners:

- need to hear it to know it
- may have difficulty following written directions

- might have difficulty with reading
- might have difficulty with writing
- may have trouble reading body language and facial expressions

Kinesthetic learners:

- prefer hands-on learning
- often can assemble parts without reading directions
- have difficulty sitting still
- learn better when physical activity is involved
- may be well coordinated

Teachers should design instruction to connect with all learning styles, using various combinations of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Varying teaching strategies ensures that students will learn in a manner compatible with their own learning preferences. It also expands the repertoire of alternative learning strategies experienced by the entire class.

In surveying students and building an inventory of interests, teachers can obtain a better sense on how to modify instruction and activities to enhance their students' interests.

Differentiate Instruction

To understand what differentiation is, it is helpful first to understand what it is not. Differentiation is not planning individual lessons for each student every day. It does not mean teaching to the middle group and giving more work to accelerated students and less work to underachieving students. Finally, differentiation is not placing students in cooperative learning structures and failing to hold them accountable for individual roles and achievement.

In cooperative learning groups, differentiation engages each student in an individual role based on his or her knowledge, learning style, and interests that contribute to group learning. Differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and to adjust the curriculum to student need rather than expecting the students to adapt themselves to the curriculum.

- **Differentiate the content.** Pretest students to identify those who require direct instruction and those who can move quickly to apply the concept/knowledge/skill. This pre-assessment should provide a clear representation of knowledge and skills that entail more than a litany of facts. It should measure what the student knows, understands, and is able to do.
- **Differentiate the teaching process and activities.** Vary learning activities or instructional strategies to provide alternative methods for students to explore the concepts.
- **Differentiate the product.** Vary the complexity of the results that students must produce to demonstrate mastery of the concept.
- **Differentiate by manipulating the environment to accommodate individual learning styles.** Change the lighting or sound levels, eliminate visual distractions, or provide a more casual seating arrangement for students. Vary teaching strategies to ensure that students will at least occasionally learn in a manner compatible with their learning preference.

Attend to Students with Special Needs

Often, the group representing the most serious gap in educational performance has been students with disabilities. While many

plausible explanations are offered for the size of this performance gap, there also is growing recognition that it should not be as wide as it is. One aspect of personalizing learning is making sure that in the course of classroom instruction the unique learning needs of students with disabilities are addressed.

The International Center believes that:

- all children can learn
- not every child with a disability can meet general education standards, but most can
- more students with disabilities can meet standards than we have expected
- many more students with disabilities can meet standards than have so far
- the expectations of the education system for these students is too low

Many general and special educators were trained to have lower expectations regarding the potential of students receiving special education services. Furthermore, these educators have a long way to go in understanding the world in which today's students will live. As understanding increases, it will reinforce why schools must improve performance to give students with disabilities greater opportunities to reach the vision the laws have set out for them.

Following are some of the important strategies that teachers and administrators can use in attending to students with special needs.

- Consider the general education teacher as the first line of support for students with disabilities. Ownership of student progress by these teachers is important.
- Develop a culture of achievement regardless of students' ability levels. Arrange ongoing, explicit discussions with students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators regarding high expectations for academic performance.
- Ensure constant communication between teachers and parents concerning assignments and student progress via e-mail, phone, meetings, and face-to-face meetings.
- Arrange for additional time on tasks in courses that are challenging for students with disabilities. Plan instructional sessions before and after school with general education teachers to learn content and skills.
- Assist special education teachers (or designees) in understanding the content areas in which they are supporting students. Have them participate in content-area focused professional development activities, meetings, curriculum development activities, etc.
- Provide courses that may extend beyond one semester or one year to provide students with more learning and practice opportunities.
- Expect students with disabilities to be engaged independently after school hours with assignments and studying.
- Develop a method to assist students with the organization of their program/courses, such as planners and notebooks.

- Create study guides for students. This should be a shared responsibility of general education and special-education teachers.
- Teach students to develop their own study guides for unit exams. This process will enable students to prioritize and organize information independently.

Intervene Early

Schools that have the most success with struggling students do much more than failing students who do not meet expectations. Reaching the goal of all students succeeding requires having several levels of intervention — and early intervention is key. These levels of intervention are components of personalizing learning. Teachers must monitor student progress frequently with formal and informal assessments and use this information to help decide what to teach. Share assessments results with students, parents, and tutors.

Possible academic interventions early in the school year include:

- three-week academic progress reports mailed to all parents
- extracurricular coaches and advisers who serve as academic support
- monitoring academic success on a regular basis
- quarterly academic improvement awards granted to students

- a special effort to make one positive telephone call each quarter to the parents of these students, who might never have received a phone call from school bearing good news
- tutoring during lunch, before or after school by teachers, upper-class students, parent volunteers, and retired teachers, etc.
- special Saturday literacy improvement classes
- individual students meet with an entire grade level team that joins forces to present a united front
- special preparation sessions for state tests

Create Small Learning Communities

Numerous studies and successful models in middle and high schools are substantiating the value of small-scale schooling for academic and social benefits as well as improved attendance and graduation rates. This is particularly true for minority students and those who are socioeconomically status disadvantaged. Students achieve higher test scores in small schools. They are more likely to pass their coursework, graduate, and attain a higher level of education than students attending larger schools. Smaller class size and integrated curricula enhance and encourage the growth of teacher-student relationships.

The personalization possible in a small learning community also enables the teacher to be more cognizant of a student's performance and thus increases student accountability. Administrators and teachers can more easily reform curricula, teaching methodologies, instructional strategies, and assessment systems in small schools.

Students feel valued and cared for in the personalized environment that a small school offers. They feel better about themselves and their academic progress and have more positive attitudes. Students and teachers experience a strong sense of belonging in which interpersonal relationships are fostered. Students in small schools feel less alienated and have more opportunities to participate in school activities because there is less competition for selection and membership on athletic teams and in extracurricular and youth leadership organizations. This is significant because involvement in extracurricular activities is often related to positive attitudes, high self-esteem, and appropriate social behavior.

Disciplinary problems are reduced in small learning communities, and this can be attributed to the strong teacher and other adult relationships that students have and the personalization of the environment. Students are suspended less often and use drugs less than their counterparts in larger schools. Also, there are fewer instances of vandalism, assault, gang participation, theft, and aggressive behavior reported in small schools.

Students from small learning communities perform as well or better than students from large schools on college-related success areas such as entrance examination scores, acceptance rates, attendance, grade-point average, and program completion.

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All teachers should incorporate active learning strategies in their classrooms. Active learning means that the learner is more than a passive receiver of knowledge. Instead he or she becomes an active participant in the thinking or discussion process. Examples of active learning strategies include:

Brainstorming stimulates thinking and allows students to generate vast amounts of information and then sort that information in a conversation with others.

Community service involves learning opportunities in which students do unpaid work that adds value to the community and allows them to feel good about themselves.

Compare and contrast learning activities require analysis to identify similarities and differences.

Cooperative learning places students in structured groups to solve problems by working cooperatively.

Active Learning Strategies

Creative arts are artistic products or performances that can be used to develop skills in classes other than art.

Games are exciting, structured activities that engage students in individual or group competitions to demonstrate knowledge or complete an academic task.

Group discussion is any type of verbal dialogue among students used to explore ideas related to an instructional topic.

Inquiry engages students in posing questions and making observations in an intriguing investigation, which also encourages group dialogue.

Instructional technology means multimedia computer applications that enable the tailoring of programs directed toward student questions or interests.

Internship is a formal placement in an employment situation for additional learning while the student is still in school.

Presentations/exhibitions are oral demonstration by students in which they organize ideas and express them in their own words.

Problem-based learning introduces concepts through use of problem-solving skills on a real-world problem or investigation.

Self-processing allows the learner to organize and internalize information through connections to their own experiences.

Project design requires students to integrate their skills and knowledge to create their own literary, technological, or artistic work as individuals or in a group.

Research means students locate and retrieve information from several sources, such as library references, textbooks, other individuals, and electronic databases.

Simulation/role playing replicates the way that skills or knowledge are used outside school, ranging from role-playing to computer-generated virtual reality.

Socratic seminar combines the elements of teacher questions, student inquiry, and discussion around key topics.

Total physical response requires students to engage in a physical activity as well as mental processes.

Work-based learning is when students learn through on-the-job experiences, ranging from job shadowing to full employment.

The Physiology of Active Learning

The importance of active learning strategies comes not only from classroom observation, but also from current research in brain physiology. Modern technology has enabled biologists, medical researchers, and cognitive scientists to better understand how the human brain functions and how people learn.

In discovering how the brain develops, educators can create a better environment in which real learning can take place, providing students with opportunities to explore within the safe boundaries of the classroom. Experimentation and exploration will develop critical thinking and decision-making skills and prepare students for the challenges that await them beyond school.

The brain is a vastly complex and adaptive system. Its hundred billion or so interconnecting neurons build patterns through synapses from which our daily experience is constructed. The more frequently these patterns are used and enhanced through new experiences, the stronger they become. This is the process of learning.

The brain seeks meaning from the experiences around us. Learning that is relevant and meaningful and connects to previous mental, emotional, and physical experiences strengthens memory. When the brain is challenged, learning is enhanced. For instance, instruction that involves emotion and physical energy engage many parts of the brain simultaneously and we become involved in the learning process. Brain research has confirmed that emotions are linked to learning by assisting us in recall of memories that are stored in our central nervous system.

Senses

The brain is stimulated through the senses. The more that teachers can create learning experiences that embody new sights, sounds, and manipulations, the more learning will occur. The brain records these many new stimulations, but they are only retained as a result of rehearsal, practice, or connection to other knowledge and experiences. All five senses — hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste — all play a role in the learning process.

Hearing. Students convert sounds such as the spoken word into meaningful information. Teacher lectures and discussions among students and teachers provide sources of knowledge through listening.

Sight. Visual images contribute a great deal to the information students store as a part of their learning. For example, when giving a short lecture, providing PowerPoint slides of key points or pictures

reinforces what students are learning and increases the likelihood that they will remember what is being taught.

Touch. Certain skills and some types of work and recreation require the act of physically doing something to acquire knowledge. A musician or athlete acquires skills primarily through the act of playing the instrument or sport. The physical task of writing, as another example, reinforces many cognitive skills.

Smell and taste. The senses of smell and taste also lead to acquisition of knowledge. We all have vivid memories connected to certain smells such as a campfire, and certain tastes such as a particular food, that remind us of past events.

Speech

A skill that is critical to learning and is related to but not considered one of the basic senses is speech. Speech is related to hearing in that it often represents a reaction or reply to something heard. Speaking is an active type of skill similar to writing, playing an instrument, or engaging in a sport. Speaking applies new knowledge, requires references to what has been remembered, and reinforces existing knowledge.

Learning Through Experience

The old adage that we learn best from experience is true. Recent research confirms that more learning occurs when students are immersed in a rich, stimulating environment. Learning that involves a physical component, such as writing or design and construction, results in greater brain activity than simply listening to or viewing instruction.

When a student cannot recall a new piece of information, it is because that information never made it into long-term memory. Research confirms that there is a process for converting short-term memory to long-term memory. Research also shows that greater learning takes place when students are challenged and engaged. Too often, according to Caine and Caine, the rote teaching of facts leads students to become intellectually disengaged from the learning process and the brain stops learning. This finding does not mean that we should cease requiring students to memorize information, just that it needs to be done in a manner that keeps students interested, which is often through real-world, integrated tasks.

Application of knowledge results in better learning. The compilation of research in communication and learning by William Glasser reinforces what we all know innately — that we retain information better when we use it. Students retain 75% or more of what they experience through application. Gathering new information only through lecture results in a retention rate of 5%. Reading can increase that rate to 10%. Adding audiovisual material results in a 20% retention rate. These are the instructional practices used in most U.S. classrooms. Application of learning is not only a worthy learning objective but also an effective route to greater retention of knowledge and higher levels of learning.

Three characteristics that drive the need for active learning and apply what we know about brain research are:

Immersion means creating learning experiences that fully immerse students in an educational experience.

Relaxed alertness is when students are in a challenging environment, yet they feel supported, safe, and relaxed.

Self-processing is when students create personal mechanisms for organizing and internalizing learning.

Making Active Learning Strategies Stick

One of the characteristics that Malcolm Gladwell defines in his book, *The Tipping Point*, is the “stickiness factor,” which refers to a memorable message or event that “sticks” in our long-term memory. Gladwell describes how “stickiness” was created by emotional connections coupled with incorporating different approaches in reaching a goal or result.

Gladwell, M. *The Tipping Point*

In their book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Chip Heath and Dan Heath divide this stickiness factor into six characteristics, all of which can be used to enhance active learning strategies. The characteristics are: simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotion, and stories.

Simplicity

One of the most effective ways to create learning that sticks is to present information in a simple manner and build on the knowledge that students already have. When teachers are deeply knowledgeable about the content of their subject matter, it is difficult to step outside of that knowledge and look at a lesson from a student’s perspective. Teachers who can build a lesson that starts with what students already know and by simplifying ideas are much more able to engage their students.

Unexpectedness

Students remember messages, activities, and events that are unique and contain an element of surprise. Teachers tell stories about highly

engaged lessons in which they dressed like Abraham Lincoln to talk about the *Emancipation Proclamation* or put on a Halloween costume to describe the characteristics of a living cell. These examples of humorous and colorful performances create memorable lessons. This is not to say that teachers need to dress in costumes or constantly entertain students, but when they change a routine or teach a lesson in a new way, they create learning experiences that are more likely to stick.

Concreteness

The more teachers can offer metaphors, connections, and specific examples to illustrate a concept, the more likely students will understand and remember what is being taught. For example, it is difficult for some students to understand the three-dimensional structure of cells and how they form tissues or organs. Creating gelatin models of cells with bits of fruit as cell structures gives students a concrete image that helps to better visualize cell structure.

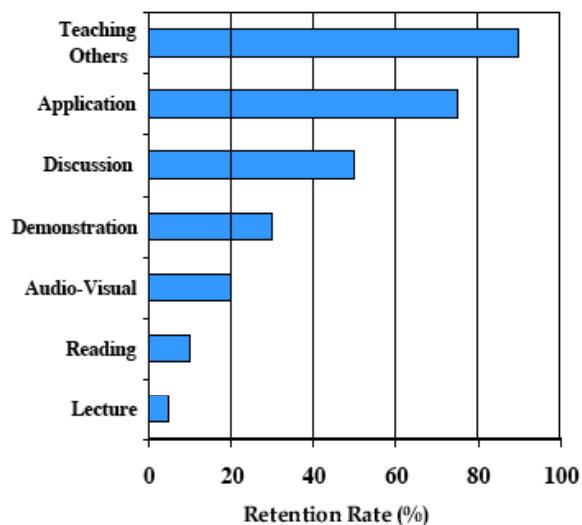
Credibility

One strategy advertisers use to emphasize the credibility of their products is incorporating well-known athletes in their marketing campaigns. Teachers can bring credibility to instruction by providing some source of endorsement beyond the teacher and the textbook. By connecting learning to current events, local businesspeople, or other credible sources can help to affirm the realness a particular lesson. For example, having a lab technician speak to a biology class about blood testing or a police detective discuss DNA evidence collection procedures makes a science lesson more interesting and credible.

Emotion

Emotion, both on the part of the teacher and student, influences learning. Most teachers recognize that their passion and dedication have a significant impact in student engagement. If teachers do not appear excited and committed to instruction, it is no surprise that students become disengaged. It is important for teachers to look for opportunities to not only express their enthusiasm, but also to try to build an emotional connection for students in showing the relevancy to what they are learning to their individual futures and their own situations.

Learning Retention



Glasser, W. *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion*

Stories

Creating lessons that include storytelling is an ideal way to enhance student engagement. Storytelling is one of the oldest and most powerful communication techniques. Yet, it is rarely practiced by teachers as part of classroom instruction. Stories illustrate, dramatize, and reinforce key concepts. When introducing stories, change the setting. While it is not necessary to put on a costume or prop such as a hat, doing so can add to the drama of the setting and help students remember. Use a picture or other visual to add imagery to the story. Use local examples of places and people to help students connect and put themselves in the story.

Focus on Literacy

An increasing number of students are ill-equipped to read and comprehend the textbooks designed for proficient high school readers. This fact is well recognized by teachers everywhere. What may not be so widely accepted, however, is the idea that content-area teachers can assist struggling readers. Does this mean that these teachers should become reading teachers? No. But it does mean that they can structure lessons to assist struggling readers.

In most school districts, formal reading instruction on a regular and systematic basis ends in 6th grade, as the focus on “learning to read” shifts to literary appreciation and “reading to learn.” Content material becomes a focus of everyday reading activity, and yet no consistent effort is made to teach students how to improve their reading and comprehend content.

While content-area teachers often are the first to recognize the problem of inadequate reading skills, most feel unprepared to address the issue because they have little training in the area of reading. And, with the increasing pressures of proficiency testing,

they are concerned that teaching reading will take time away from the primary subject they are responsible for teaching.

When homework is assigned, students are expected to read the textbook independently, organize and synthesize information, and present it in written format. Why are teachers and parents surprised when students become frustrated and unmotivated? Consider the challenges that students face:

In middle and high schools, textbooks and instructional materials are content driven, with no uniform degree of reading difficulty. Teachers select the text that covers the content, not the text that is most appropriate for the reading levels, interest, or ongoing proficiency development levels of most students.

Each subject is likely to have its own specialized vocabulary, forms, formats, document types, writing styles, visual aids, and concepts presented through a variety of text sources and writing styles. Some courses have hundreds and even thousands of new vocabulary words that students are expected to learn. One high school biology teacher estimated that in the course of a typical general biology course students are introduced to more than 3,500 subject-specific terms. Multiply this by six different courses of study, and the challenge facing readers in school today becomes daunting.

Students beginning a course of study at the secondary level encounter more than words on a page. They face:

Concept density. More ideas and skills are squeezed in an already overloaded curriculum.

Specialized forms and formats. Informational presentation and reporting devices are either general conventions of informational documentation or specific to a subject.

Specialized vocabulary. Terms typically have multiple meanings or are unique to a particular text.

Graphs/charts/maps. More functional graphic organizers and presentation tools are used to convey increasingly complex information and require interpretation.

Purpose for reading. Students need to shift purpose to deal with facts, summaries, glossaries, formulas, and highlighted text.

Readability. The readability levels of many text are higher than student reading skill levels.

Length. Texts are long and comprehensive.

Nonprint sources. Online references, formats, sources require special skills.

Instructional materials. Schools do not use a viable framework for comparing or matching ability levels of students to text.

How can teachers help students face the challenges of reading to learn? What are the habits and skills of effective readers in middle and high schools? Key reading strategies engage students' interest in content, maintain their focus, and improve their understanding and application of what they have read. When students are able to select appropriate skills to complete a task before them, strategic reading takes place in which they are able to:

- understand and use textbook aids
- select strategies that ensure effective processing of information
- monitor their learning
- reflect on their learning

Students who are strategic readers are able to demonstrate a repertoire of strategies automatically, independently, and in a variety of ways. Effective readers use these cognitive processes and strategies competently and unconsciously to achieve academically. These strategies affect the processing of text, enhancing the ability of the reader to retrieve, remember, and use the material. Examples of learning strategies include outlining, note-taking, highlighting, underlining, summarizing, and questioning.

Effective readers at the secondary school level:

- devote time to previewing material before reading
- seek to control the time, place, and location best suited for their learning
- develop multiple learning strategies that apply to a variety of reading assignments
- understand their ability to concentrate and adjust their reading times into smaller units
- employ techniques to recite, retell, or summarize orally what they are reading
- engage in a process of “self-talk” to identify important statements and text structure that aid comprehension
- engage in reflective questioning to ensure an active processing of the material

Teachers need to assist students in learning how to use strategies intuitively so students can move from frustrated novices to

competent readers. Each task needs to be tackled with the knowledge of:

- the type of reading material being encountered
- the purpose of the reading task
- the demands of that type of content
- available strategies for the reader to use

Using a history textbook requires a reader to employ different strategies from what would be used when reading an owner's manual for a DVD player. The history book requires the reader to understand cause and effect, for example, rather than follow a step-by-step procedure found in an owner's manual. Equally different are the tasks involved in reading mathematics, science, test forms, applications, school newspapers, online reference sources, and student handbooks, to name a few.

Readers who do not automatically activate and employ strategies struggle with reading tasks throughout their lives. It is the job of educators to teach all students how to acquire and apply a wide variety of strategies across a wide variety of forms, genres, and types of reading content to ensure that they become independent, competent readers.

Before, During, and After Approach to Reading

Following a framework of “before,” “during,” and “after” reading strategies helps teachers to give students a clear idea of what they need to accomplish to become successful, lifelong readers. The Before, During and After Approach to Reading contains the following strategic elements:

Before Reading

Activating background knowledge. Students are taught to elicit prior knowledge of the reading topic. They build background relating to what they already know. Questions that students can use to inventory their prior knowledge might include:

- What do I already know about mammals?
- What have I read, heard, or watched about mammals?
- What other words do I think of when I see the word “mammals”?

Investigating text structure. Students are taught to analyze the text before them: its print features, the layout, and illustrations. They are taught to consider the language and the literary features of the text. They learn to discriminate between the narrative and the expository text.

- Does the author use headings and subheadings?
- Does the author use illustrations, graphs, tables, or maps?
- Are important words highlighted or italicized?

Setting a purpose for reading. Students are taught to question themselves about why they are reading the material.

- What is my goal?
- What questions do I need to answer after reading?
- What will I do with the information from the reading?
- What do I want to learn from reading this?

After students determine their own purpose for reading, they are then able to select their own reading style to best suit the purpose. They decide whether to skim, scan for specific information, or read and reread to recall details. They are also taught to question what the author’s purpose was for writing the selection.

Predicting the text content. Students are taught how to form ideas about what is going to happen in the text. They are taught how to combine and use the information they are reading to make meaningful guesses about the material.

- What do I know about the topic already?
- How can I combine my knowledge with the clues of the text?
- How will making predictions help me understand this material better?

Reviewing and clarifying vocabulary. Students are taught how to use word-solving strategies to pronounce a word correctly and understand its meaning.

- How do the other words in the sentence give me clues to pronounce this word?
- How do the other words in the sentence give me clues to understand the meaning of the unknown word?
- How does the sentence before and after help me solve the unknown word in this sentence?

During Reading

During the reading process, students establish the purpose for each part of the text: Students are taught to ask themselves why they are reading a particular text — whether it is to retell, answer questions, gather information, make comparisons, or to get the main idea.

- What is my purpose for reading this chapter?
- Do I need to define and understand the meaning of terms?
- Do I need to identify the main idea?

- Do I need to participate in a discussion?
- Do I need to summarize important ideas?
- Do I need to confirm predictions?

Self-monitoring. Students are taught how to check themselves while they are involved in the process of reading material. They ask themselves if what they are reading makes sense. They learn how to self-correct to monitor their own accuracy.

- How does what I am reading fit with what I am understanding?
- What information do I need to understand better?
- Did what I just read make sense?
- Do I need to go back and reread to understand?

Visualizing. Students are taught how creating mental images help them to construct details leading to comprehension.

- Can I see in my head what the author is trying to explain?

Summarizing. Students are taught to stop and think during their reading to answer who or what they read about and where the action is taking place.

- What were the most important ideas on the page I just read?
- How were the ideas related to each other?

Confirming or rejecting predictions. Students are taught how to revise predictions made before reading, using the information gathered during their reading. They are taught how to locate evidence to assist them in confirming or rejecting the predictions they made.

- Were my predictions correct?
- What did I find out that was different from my prediction?

Identifying and clarifying key ideas. Students are taught how to reflect on information, ideas, and words as they read. They learn how to think about what they are reading. They learn to reread for clarity and to distinguish between important and the less important information contained in the text.

- What was important in what I just read?
- What did I already know, and what was new information?
- How can I combine sections to get a deeper understanding?

Questioning. Students are taught to use the text to answer different questions posed by the teacher. They learn to distinguish among literal, inferential, and critical types of questions.

- Is this a question that I can go back and find “right there” in the text?
- Is this a question that I need to use information I already have and combine it with clues from the text?
- Is this a question that requires my opinion and reasons for that opinion?

After Reading

Assessing if the purpose was met. Students are taught how to think back to the before-reading process and decide if the purpose was met and what to do if they did not accomplish the goal.

- Were my purposes for reading met?
- Did the author accomplish his/her purpose?

Paraphrasing. Students are taught how to interpret and restate the author’s ideas, using information from the reading and their own knowledge. They are taught to rewrite the main ideas in their own words.

- How can I put this into my own words and not leave out important ideas?

Identifying main ideas and details. Students are taught first how to identify facts or ideas that are relevant to understanding and then how to use that information to select the primary focus of the text.

- What is the most important idea in the chapter?
- What details support the most important idea?

Making comparisons. Students are taught how to compare and contrast information within a text and between texts. They are taught how to look for similarities and differences.

- What other information is this like?
- How is this information different from other ideas in this book?
- How is the information similar to other sources?
- How is the information different from other sources?

Connections. Students are taught how to draw on their own experiences to help clarify the text. They connect to experiences or relationships to further construct meaning.

- How can I use this new information combined with what I already know?
- What, where, when, why, and how did I see or use this information before?
- How can what I know help me understand these new ideas?

Drawing conclusions. Students are taught how to use the text or visual clues in addition to the information they already have acquired to come up with a conclusion.

- What has the text implied?
- How can I use the clues in the text and ideas in my head to understand the overall meaning?

Summarizing. Students are taught how to give a brief statement about the main parts of the text, story, or chapter. They are taught to extract and organize the important information gained from their reading.

- What information do I need to remember?
- How can I sort the ideas to make good sense?
- Which ideas can I connect together?

Analyzing. Students are taught to make judgments about what they read and to support their opinions using explicit information from the reading.

- How did all the information fit together?
- What reaction do I have to the author's stance?
- Why do I feel the same or differently about the topic?

The Before, During and After Approach to Reading is an important part of a lesson or unit design. Teachers spend their prep time searching for reading selections that are appropriately matched to students' reading levels and on the topic of the lesson objective. Teachers assess throughout the activity to correct misconceptions and address questions about the topic as they arise.

Matching Text to Student Reading Levels

If students are not engaged in reading, it may be because the reading level is too difficult or too easy. Even if text is appropriately matched to student reading levels, students may be having trouble using a comprehension skill (such as cause and effect, main idea, key terms and definitions, using the context of the sentence to define difficult terms, etc.). Review specific skills, such as those previously described, for students as needed. Continue to work on any subskills that seem to be giving students difficulty until reading comprehension is no longer a problem.

Assume that student reading levels will change or vary by type of format or content being read or according to student interest or prior knowledge of the subject. Continue to monitor student results on exams and class presentations to determine if they are ready to move to a higher reading level. Students must show fluency (reading automatically without having to decode or use brain power to figure out new words) before they are ready for the challenge of the next level.

Monitor student performance at least twice per month and make necessary adjustments to the level of student reading selections. As teachers frequently and appropriately monitor and adjust reading selections based upon student performance, they will see reading comprehension and class performance continue to rise.

The Lexile Framework® for Reading

The Lexile Framework® for Reading, developed by MetaMetrics in conjunction with several leading U.S. universities, is an excellent tool for teachers to:

Further information on schoolwide literacy programs can be found in the resource kit *Leading with Reading in Grades 7–12*.

Further information on strategies for reading in content areas can be found in the resource kits, *Strategic Reading in the Content Areas — Boosting Achievement in Grades 7-12*; *Reading Strategies for Career Academies and Career-Technical Education*; and *Redefining Literacy in Grades 7-12: Strategies for Document, Technological, and Quantitative Literacy*.

- select text in articles or textbooks that is matched to individual reading levels
- cluster or group individuals with similar reading levels.

The Framework uses a computer program called the Lexile Analyzer® to examine and analyze the readability of a whole text, not just samples from it. The Analyzer measures such characteristics as sentence length (a highly reliable proxy for syntactic complexity) and semantic difficulty (recognized vocabulary measured against high frequency word lists) and then reports a “Lexile” measure for the text.

Documents that have been analyzed using the Lexile Analyzer receive a score on a scale from 200-2000L. (Very simple documents, such as early literacy materials that would score below 200L, are deemed unsuitable for Lexile analysis because they do not contain a sufficient amount of text.) For example, Lexile measures for some well-known works of literature are: *Frog and Toad Are Friends* – 400L; *War and Peace* – 1200L; and *The Scarlet Letter* – 1400L. For comparison, the middle 50% of students in 4th grade have Lexile measures between 445L and 810L; in 8th grade, between 805L and 1100L; and in 11th and 12th grade, between 940L and 1210L.

Unlike grade equivalent measures of readability, the Lexile scale is based on uniform increments of 100L, which is constant in terms of appropriate increases in semantic and syntactic complexity. A one-grade difference expressed in grade equivalents, however, is not. For example, the difference in reading difficulty between 3.2 and 4.2 may be much greater than the one-grade difference between 9.2 and 10.2. Moreover, Lexile measures avoid the problem of labeling reading expectations for a particular grade level. Referencing Lexile measures also reinforces the notion that reading abilities differ broadly within any grade.

Publishers of educational tests, such as CTB/McGraw-Hill and Northwest Evaluation Association, use Lexile measures for their readability measures and testing reports.

By equating Lexile measures with test scores, Lexile equivalent measures have been determined for more than one million students and continue to be reported on widely administered achievement tests used across the nation. As a result, MetaMetrics has established Lexile measures for students in each grade level.

For example, the middle 50% of students in grades 11 and 12 is between 940L and 1210L. Working with a wide variety of educational publishers, MetaMetrics also has analyzed the readability levels of textbooks and numerous other instructional materials. There clearly is a gap between students' reading levels and the readability level of the texts they must read in school. Of the students in grades 11 and 12, 25% read below 940L, yet typical instructional materials range between 1100L and 1300L.

Many states and several national standardized test providers already have enlisted the Lexile Framework to provide individual student reading levels as part of the reporting process to districts and teachers on the standardized testing results report. This means that when each student gets his/her results on achievement tests, a Lexile reading level is reported. Lexile levels also can be determined by using the Scholastic Reading Inventory or the Northwest Evaluation Association MAPS assessment.

This Lexile research points out what teachers already know. Students in the same classroom have different levels of reading proficiency, yet all of them typically read the same materials. The result is a mismatch for many students, who cannot learn from textbooks they cannot read. For them, this means lower comprehension, lower test

scores, and less progress on attaining proficiency, not just in reading, but across the curriculum in math, science, social studies, and all other subjects. Once teachers know the students' Lexile measure, they can help them choose text written in their Lexile range (50L below to 150L above the established reading level).

Not only does using the Lexile measures help the students whose reading skills are lacking, but it also improves skills of students who are competent and exceptional readers. A comprehensive reading program should include both independent reading and instructional reading practices.

Creating the Ideal Classroom

Learning is hard work, and students are expected to expend significant effort to achieve their learning goals. At the same time, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that the school provides an optimal physical setting for students to engage in their work. Everyone works better in comfortable surroundings. By attending to the physical classroom, teachers can reduce one barrier in the learning process. The following list can be used to measure the extent to which students have an appropriate physical learning environment.

- Extensive learning materials are available.
- There are distinct areas for individual, small group, and large group activities, or they can be easily created.
- The classroom is modified continually to meet the needs of students and the work being undertaken.
- The classroom is orderly; materials are organized and easy to locate.
- Provisions are made for students to work in quiet areas.

- Space is organized to encourage independence for students to find materials on their own and take responsibility for equipment.
- Space is provided to display student work.

Learning is a physiological brain activity that records various stimuli received by the senses. The brain then stores and processes this information. Certain conditions contribute to high levels of brain functioning, while others interfere with the normal functioning of the brain in learning. Research has shown that the neurological activity of the brain shuts down when these inhibitors occur. It is the teacher's role to maximize good learning conditions and remove learning inhibitors.

There are several excellent references on brain research that can expand teachers' knowledge of the classroom conditions that contribute to or inhibit learning. Some of the negative conditions that inhibit learning are fear, confusion, inconsistency, and frustration. Students need a learning environment that is free of fear. They should feel safe physically and emotionally. A school that has a climate of violence or tolerates verbal abuse and unruliness cannot produce high levels of learning.

On the other hand, positive stimulations improve the functioning of the brain. One of the best methods of stimulating students is by creating visually attractive and interesting classroom displays. In addition to being varied and colorful these displays should spark interest and curiosity.



Chapter 5

Improving Engagement Through School Culture

Creating the Right Balance

What teachers and students believe, along with their collective behaviors, defines the culture.

School culture is the observable behaviors and actions of people coupled with the visible aspect of the “things” — school building, displays, possessions, appearance, and equipment. What teachers and students believe, along with their collective behaviors, defines the culture.

Many educators accept a school’s culture as a given, even though often they become frustrated because the ingrained culture — the “way” of doing things — does not make room for new initiatives and programs that promote a change in structure or learning strategy. But, school culture can be changed to include new ways of encouraging student engagement practices. To begin this process of change, schools need to focus on three key elements of a positive, nurturing school culture.

Practices are the individual initiatives that can, over time, begin to influence culture. The success of these practices requires persistence and follow-up.

Conversation is the most important transformer of school culture. People, and students in particular, can change what they believe to be true. However, they need an opportunity to express their opinions to test out a new belief. Leaders begin to change the culture by cultivating conversations in which ideas can be introduced, challenged, and contemplated. What we talk about in school matters. Teachers, administrators, and others can influence the beliefs in school by paying attention to the topics of conversation. They encourage discussion that moves in the direction of the positive culture the school wishes to adopt.

Artifacts are the tangible evidence of a particular school culture. Examples include academic award banners and displays of student work. Introduce, move, or replace the artifacts to begin to influence the characteristics of the culture.

For the culture within a school to change, educators must consider the developmental needs of students. In summarizing their work in the report, *Student-Centered High Schools: Helping Schools Adapt to the Learning Needs of Adolescents*, researchers at the University of Brown developed a model based on student needs. The model is based on shadowing two dozen students through their day-to-day class routines and observing eight high schools in New England where personal engagement is a high priority.

The model includes six developmental needs of adolescents:

1. **Voice** is the need to express a personal perspective.
2. **Belonging** is the need to create a unique identity while feeling like a part of a group.
3. **Choice** is the need to examine options and select a personal path.
4. **Freedom** is the need to assume increasing accountability for personal actions and their effects.
5. **Imagination** is the need to create a projected view of self.
6. **Success** is the need to demonstrate mastery of adult skills and knowledge.

These six elements are aligned with six dimensions of school practices:

1. **Equity** encompasses the democratic processes that allow each student in a group a voice in decision making.
2. **Community** is the commitment among students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community at large to the personal growth of each student.

Creating a New Culture

For the culture within a school to change, educators must consider the developmental needs of students.

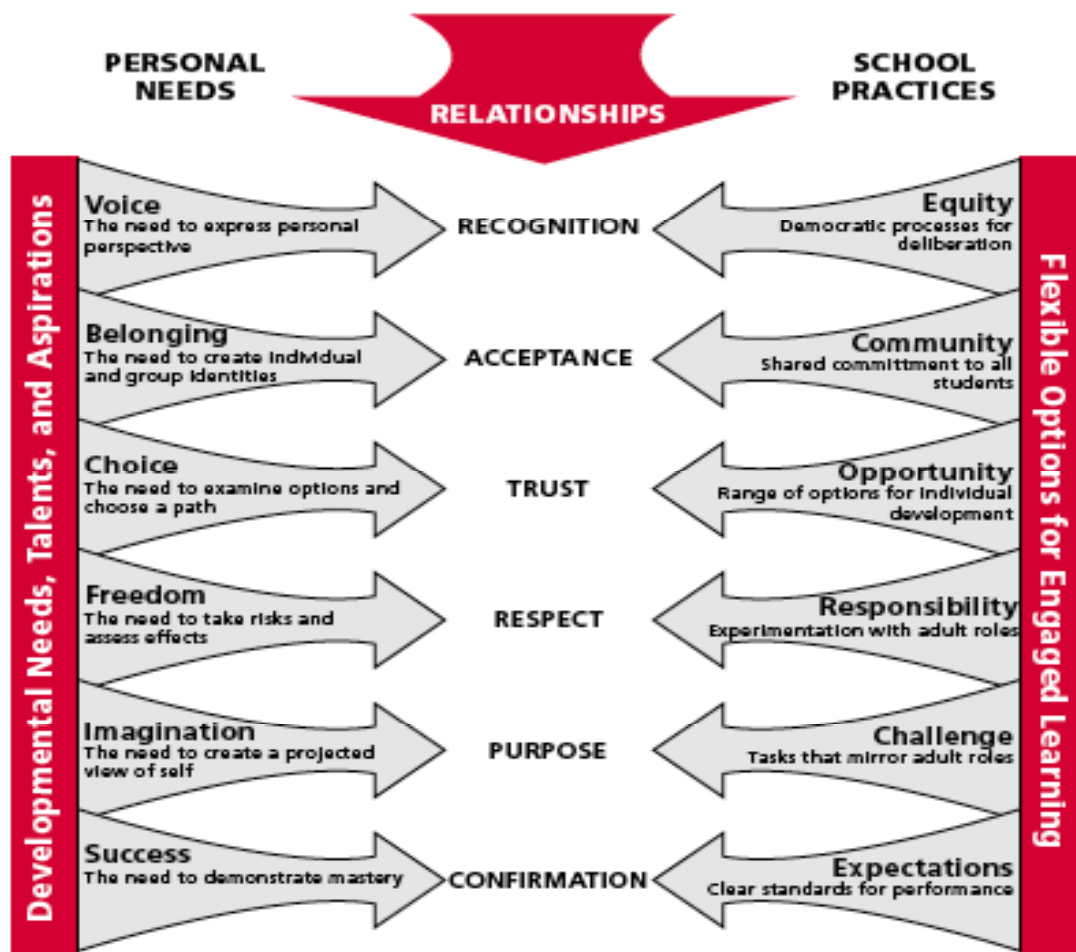
The Education Alliance, Brown University. *Student-Centered High Schools: Helping Schools Adapt to the Learning Needs of Adolescents*

3. **Opportunity** means there is a wide range of options for the development of individual talents, interests, knowledge, and skills.
4. **Responsibility** involves learning tasks in which students experiment in adult roles.
5. **Challenge** exposes students to complex tasks.
6. **Expectations** are clear standards for performance that represent the real challenges of college and career.

The model also connects the process of building relationships. Important aspects in building relationships are:

1. **Recognition** offers opportunities to express viewpoint and participate in decision making.
2. **Acceptance** enables individuals to pursue their own paths with the support of their peers and teachers.
3. **Trust** increases opportunities to choose and assume independent roles in the school and larger community.
4. **Respect** earns admiration for unique contributions in responsible roles.
5. **Purpose** creates relevance by allowing students to project their future selves through complex tasks that replicate adult roles.
6. **Confirmation** emphasizes performance in a wide variety of ways such that different students can represent what they know and are able to do.

Developmental Needs and Responsive School Practices



As schools create a culture of student engagement, they need to create a balanced structure for student development and engagement. Students need limits and structure to develop. However, this structure cannot be so stifling that students simply comply with rules and lose responsibility for their learning. Neither can the structure be so loose that students acquire the sense that the school has little interest in what they do. Following are examples that schools can use to begin to create a balanced school culture. The examples are described within each of the six student developmental needs.

1. **Voice.** Dress codes and student procedures are established that strive toward equity but allow for personal expression.
2. **Belonging.** Group formation and time for socializing is encouraged without allowing the formation of isolated cliques, which negate the larger community.
3. **Choice.** Students' personal choices from a limited number of options are allowed. An overwhelming array of confusing options that are difficult to understand is discouraged.
4. **Freedom.** Students are given limited personal independence that is earned rather than offered unlimited options to come and go as they please.
5. **Imagination.** Student creativity is encouraged and ideas are considered that enhance the school environment and student learning.
6. **Success.** Students receive a clear vision of how success is defined and can envision themselves reaching their goals.

School Practices

To provide practical steps and guidance for educators to address school culture, the International Center has expanded Brown University's six school practices to include the following components: suggestions for specific practices, conversation, artifacts, and examples from model schools.

Equity

Equity is a sense that students are an equal part of the whole. It is driven by the student need to express their own opinion and feel that they have a sense of worthiness. A negative school culture that demeans certain individuals or creates the impression that students are powerless for whatever reason creates separation and discourages full participation in the school environment.

School engagement practices: equity, community, opportunity, responsibility, challenge, expectations.

Practices

Practices that contribute to equity include establishing forums that provide opportunities for students to express their opinions. A school newspaper, a Web site, weblog, special student events, and focus groups provide opportunities for students to express concerns, issues, and problems that can be discussed within the wider education community. The role of student leadership that represents the student body is another way to create a sense of equity.

Consistent disciplinary policies and procedures also play a role in equity practices. For example, if athletes or other select groups receive different disciplinary measures for an infraction, students quickly adopt an attitude of unequal treatment within schools.

Conversation

Students' ideas and concerns should be taken seriously, and teachers, principals, and other staff should spend time talking about those issues instead of dismissing them.

Artifacts

Important artifacts that represent equity are slogans that can be expressed around school that show a commitment to equal opportunity for students and a respect for diversity.

Model School Practices

Equity is a difficult aspect of school culture to achieve. Students come with different backgrounds, potentials, and levels of achievement. However, the perception of equity in which every student feels that they have the same opportunity to achieve is a critical ingredient in having high levels of student engagement. If students do not feel that they have equal opportunity or feel inferior to others, they tend to “shut down” and not contribute their best effort.

Harrisonburg High School in Harrisonburg, Virginia, has seen significant demographic changes in the last decade, moving from a primarily white community to one with a large Hispanic population along with a number of families from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Although the diversity in some ways has challenged the school environment, student achievement at Harrisonburg is high, primarily because of the way it approaches students who are new to the community.

The school personalizes instruction in many ways, depending on the students' levels of literacy and individual needs. Morning announcements are given in Spanish as well as in English. Parents

whose language is other than English are welcomed to the school with greetings in their native tongue.

It often is difficult to integrate students who have completed part of a semester in another school environment. In Harrisonburg, students may spend part of the time with tutors in the school's alternative education program and enroll in regular classes in English language arts and history. The high school also has extensive inclusion programs, with special education teachers co-teaching alongside regular classroom teachers, thus providing equal opportunity for students with disabilities and those who are English language learners.

Creating a community in which students are invited to participate and feel a part of something is essential in creating a positive school culture.

Community

Creating a community in which students are invited to participate and feel a part of something is essential in creating a positive school culture. The desire to belong is so strong that, unless the school environment creates that sense of belonging, students will find other, and often troubling, ways to feel like they belong to satisfy their needs as human beings.

Practices

To help students feel a sense of belonging, incorporate induction celebrations in which students are identified, introduced, and welcomed into the school community. Longstanding traditions, such as graduation ceremonies, also encourage students to feel that they are a part of a close-knit community.

Another way to build a sense of community is to provide opportunities for meetings that involve the entire school. Small schools, in

particular, engage in community-building activities such as morning meetings in which students and staff meet on a daily basis to share news items and other information. In large school environments, look for opportunities to create smaller communities that can meet frequently.

Conversation

Conversations need to emphasize common interests in building a sense of community. Students bring unique sets of experiences and backgrounds to the school culture. They quickly identify differences in appearance, clothes, family background, and interests. In order to build a sense of community, conversations need to constantly be focused on things that students have in common versus the characteristics that differentiate one from another. Valuing diversity also is important. Schools need to show that it is possible to maintain diversity but still share common interests.

Artifacts

Artifacts that build community include school banners and logos that are prominently displayed throughout schools and provide a sense of pride and identity as to the unique characteristics of the school. This is a long standing tradition and still a powerful one. Images that represent the school in a variety of locations provide a constant reminder of common interests and that a school has come together as a community. In addition, colors can serve as a common identifier. School colors expressed in a variety of ways — clothing, book bags, jackets, or displays throughout the school — reinforces the notion of community.

Model School Practices

A school that exhibits outstanding community characteristics is the International School of Americas in San Antonio, Texas. In 9th grade, students are challenged to go into the local community and identify unmet community needs. They then plan a community-service project to meet those needs and implement it throughout their high school career.

Infusing a theme of diversity in all it does, this highly engaging magnet school also is a place where teachers constantly are creating an international-based perspective in literature, mathematics, science, and history. Juniors spend a week in Mexico. In addition, students have a chance to participate in an international program, sponsored by Heifer International, in which they are divided among living arrangements, each based on a different world culture.

Opportunity

A school culture that provides opportunity presents students with a number of options to support the student need to have choices in the education process.

Practices

Schools provide options to students through multiple pathways to achievement. It is important for schools to have high expectations and common standards in any program. However, there must be varied opportunities for students to meet those lofty education goals. Not every student learns at the same speed or in the same activity. The diversity of curriculum moving toward a common set of learning is important in giving students opportunity. Students also need

Personal invitation is the best way to encourage student participation.

opportunities to accelerate their learning once they have failed to meet academic expectations. Schools should provide tutoring options and additional academic programs as available choices.

Extracurricular activities, such as athletics, community service programs, and clubs that allow students to explore a particular interest and develop talents also provide opportunities.

Conversation

Conversations about opportunity need to focus on the choices that students make. A primary concern at school is behavior. Students must recognize that how they behave is a choice. Reminders about appropriate behavior need to begin with students recognizing that the choices they make may expand or limit opportunities.

Students should be informed of the options available to them. Having a large number of athletic teams and extracurricular activities is of little value unless all teachers are aware of those options and constantly talk to students and invite them to participate. It is insufficient to merely publish the options in a handbook and assume that students will make those choices. Personal invitation is the best way to encourage participation.

Artifacts

Frequent announcements should be made, including verbal or displays within schools that emphasize the diversity and expansive opportunities for students. Specific events that showcase extracurricular activities or athletic teams help to remind students of the diversity of opportunity within schools.

Model School Practices

Comprehensive high schools provide extensive opportunities for students. Valparaiso High School in Valparaiso, Indiana, has dozens of courses with multiple levels and advanced specialization. The school has extensive offerings in academics, music, art, and technical fields. But perhaps its greatest demonstration of opportunities is the offerings in interscholastic sports. The athletic program comprises 47 different teams and involves nearly 80% of the students. By providing different sports with multiple levels of teams, many students experience the pride of representing the school in a competitive athletic environment.

Valparaiso also has extensive service-learning opportunities that involve partnerships with community organizations. School staff are devoted to creating and supervising service-learning projects within the wider community.

The high school is an ideal example of an education community that spends time collecting data on the degree to which it has maximized the experiences for its more than 2,000 students.

Responsibility

Responsibility is the aspect of school culture in which students can begin to test out adult roles in being accountable for their actions. Responsibility is driven by students' desire for independence, which only can be attained when individuals take responsibility for their actions. Schools do a tremendous service when they help students gradually develop responsibility and move toward increased independence.

To increase student responsibility, schools might allow students to negotiate classroom rules and academic procedures, such as in deciding disciplinary actions or taking specific courses.

Practices

To increase student responsibility, schools might allow students to negotiate classroom rules and academic procedures, such as in deciding disciplinary actions or taking specific courses. Another way to increase responsibility is to give students the ownership for maintaining certain aspects of the school's everyday operations, such as the school's Web site or other computer and administrative tasks that might be tied to their career interests.

Conversation

The conversations about student responsibilities should include discussions about taking risks and inviting students to take on new responsibilities or to try new initiatives. Conversations also need to focus around how to succeed in new responsibility roles and then avoid making failure a permanent bar in students taking on additional work. Discussions also need to focus on creating a certain level of trust and giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their responsibilities.

Artifacts

Make students visible. When they have responsibilities for certain functions in the school, they should be recognized and praised.

Model School Practices

Students take significant responsibility for operating the Met Center, a network of six small public high schools in Providence, Rhode Island. The “big picture” philosophy that was developed here by Dennis Littkey involves students in real-world learning.

They address important learning standards and learn about themselves by connecting to places, adults, tools, and language out in the world and back at school. A considerable amount of student learning is done in community organizations and neighborhood businesses. When students are out in the community doing productive work with adults, the learning process and structure change. As part of the big picture philosophy, students learn about adult roles by actively becoming involved in the school decision-making process. Town meetings are held with all staff and students. Older students take the initiative to teach and remind younger ones of proper behavior and the “way” things are done at the Met.

Students also take responsibility for leading and learning at Hamilton High School, a small school in Hamilton, New York, where the morning meeting contributes to the sense of community. The day begins for the 300 students with a 20-minute meeting. Doors close at the appointed starting time and students sit in assigned seats by grade level. Teachers stand in the back of the auditorium and quickly take attendance by noting the empty seat. The program, run by students, includes announcements, recognition, and discussion of issues.

When students are challenged, they feel motivated to tackle difficult work and stretch beyond their previous experience.

Challenge

When students are challenged, they feel motivated to tackle difficult work and stretch beyond their previous experience. Children have a natural sense of imagination and creativity. They have a desire to express their unique abilities and ideas to achieve some aspect of individual recognition. Schools can channel this desire to create a challenging and engaging environment.

Practices

The more competitions that are available, the more opportunities there are for students to rise to the challenge and demonstrate their individual abilities. We are well aware of athletic competitions that give students a sense of challenge. Schools also should provide opportunities for students to participate in academic competition in a variety of arenas. In addition, schools might consider establishing competitions between grades or subgroups. These types of competitions provide opportunities to showcase individual talents and also build a sense of community.

Establishing deadlines for assignments also is an important aspect of putting challenge into motion. Sometimes, creating ambitious deadlines for a project or other work can spur students to go beyond what they thought they were capable of doing.

Conversation

Teachers might pose public challenges that encourage students to go beyond what they think they are capable of doing. Some suggested challenges should be introduced carefully to make sure that they do not negatively influence the student from rising to the challenge. Sometimes, though, a challenge issued with a negative perspective can spur students to action.

Along with the public challenges is the important aspect of having more private conversations to encourage them to work harder and to take on more difficult tasks. These private conversations are important in providing the support and encouragement for individual success.

Artifacts

Recognizing students as they achieve success in sports, academics, and other forms of competition is an important artifact in focusing on challenge. Celebrating the success of those individuals is an important part of showing other students how they, too, can be recognized if they rise to the challenge.

Recognizing students as they achieve success in sports, academics, and other forms of competition is an important artifact in focusing on challenge.

Model School Practices

There are many ways in which students are challenged in highly engaged schools. One example is the Los Fresnos Independent School District in Texas. The town of Los Fresnos is a community with high levels of poverty and where many families are not educated. For many students, completing high school is an achievement beyond their parents' expectations. However, the school challenges students to even greater levels of academic excellence. The school places a strong emphasis on having as many students as possible earning dual credit. Advance placement courses provide opportunity in academic areas to take more challenging work in the option of earning credit. Also, through partnerships with the local community college, college courses are offered on the high school campus through distance learning.

Expectations

Students are expected to participate and achieve in school. Fulfilling expectations is driven by students' desire for personal success. A school culture should express expectation for students and show them the path to which they can become successful.

Fulfilling expectation is driven by students' desire for personal success.

Practices

Providing awards is a way to showcase high expectations. Awards need to reflect the diversity of the school community and objectives. Providing many forms of recognition helps students envision the many different ways in which they can become successful.

An important part of establishing expectations for students is to have specific intake procedures as they transition to school. Having students participate in special activities and meetings as they begin a new school are ideal opportunities to show them what is expected of them in their new school environment. Without these special intake activities, students just observe and then decide for themselves what the appropriate expectations are. These intake activities can include social activities for students to get to know one another and programs that introduce mentors to assist them in the new school environment. Additionally, providing contracts for students and parents to indicate in writing their commitment to fulfill their responsibilities within schools helps clarify behavior and academic expectations and strengthens learning.

Traditionally, schools provide manuals and handbooks to clarify students expectations. These written documents are useful, but they would be even better if schools conveyed these written expectations to students in some more interesting or entertaining manner. For example, having students create skits and visual presentations to convey the expectations in a student handbook becomes a fun way to personalize school expectations.

Conversation

Conversations about expectations need to include stories that provide examples of successful students or those who show great persistence in overcoming initial difficulties. These messages about

achieving success are powerful in conveying to other students and to staff the many different ways that students can achieve success in a particular school.

Educators can instill in students the notion of expectations simply by making frequent contact with them — calling them by name, asking questions, and talking to them in the hall between classes, after school, and during other activities. Teachers also need to show attention to individual students, especially those who may not be fully participating in the school environment because of family problems or other issues. An interesting initiative in one school was a process called the Top 20. Each week an interdisciplinary team of administrators, counselors, and students would meet to discuss the top 20 students who were most at risk in the school. These conversations focused on what more the school could do to help them become more successful and monitor progress.

Teachers also need to show attention to individual students, especially those who may not be fully participating in the school environment because of family problems or other issues.

Artifacts

Schools should have pictures of successful students and incorporate other visual images and inspiring quotes in halls, classrooms, and other areas. For example, a hall of fame of graduates helps to establish a culture of high expectation.

Model Schools Practices

A.J. Moore Academy in Waco, Texas, is a small magnet high school that is culturally diverse, has a high level of poverty, and its special education population is more than 20%. The school's consistent expectations distinguish the school's culture. The collective process of meeting with parents and students as a group, establishing contracts for performance, pretesting students and providing compensatory learning before entering high school sets the foundation for high expectations.



Chapter 6

Successful Engagement Practices

The following descriptions of best practices are from selected schools that are members of the Successful Practice Network and/or have participated in the International Center's Model Schools Conference.

Elementary and Middle Schools

Asking "Why" Five Times

At A.B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina, students developed the following mission statement for an after-school program through a process of asking why five times.

Q: Why are you at Kids Club?

A: To get help with homework.

Q: Why do you need help with homework?

A: So we can pass to the next grade.

Q: Why do you want to pass to the next grade?

A: So we're not in the same grade next year.

Q: Why don't you want to be in the same grade?

A: So we can go to college.

Q: Why do you want to go to college?

A: To make our dreams come true.

Faculty and staff ask, “How can we help our students make wise choices both personally and academically?” At A.B. Combs, these choices are reflected in students taking responsibility for their actions and doing their best in all areas of their lives. Goals are for students to:

- perform at or above grade level in all curriculum areas
- celebrate diversity and embrace differences to build synergy
- teach the life skills of setting goals, honoring the talents and strengths in others, and drawing from within to give back

These skills and goals are grounded in the belief that building cooperative relationships and nurturing responsibility, kindness, and good judgment are the basis for creating a successful community of engaged learners.

Achieve Here — Succeed Everywhere

Students at Awtrey Middle School in Kennesaw, Georgia, work on critical thinking skills to solve both predictable and unpredictable real-world problems through the use of a schoolwide problem-solving plan. Teachers integrate technology to improve instruction and student engagement.

- Teachers utilize blogs and podcasts to increase home-school communications.
- Every staff member has his or her own blog linked to the school Web site to highlight important class details, upcoming events, and assessments.

- Teachers post assignments and class resources for students to access at home.
- The PTSA uses a blog as its primary method of communication for newsletters and announcements.
- The principal's blog posts timely and specific updates about school improvement efforts, progress, and information about the ever-changing society and the impact it has on students.

Each grading period, students are recognized with a breakfast or afternoon reward party for making the honor roll. Students who showed improvement and were “on-a-roll” for the last three grading periods were also recognized for their success along with the honor roll students. The front lobby lists the honorees’ names on the Wall of Honor.

Reading Rocks Retreat

A special Reading Rocks Retreat at Beverly Hills Intermediate School in Houston, Texas, rewards students for their reading efforts and creates a fun atmosphere for reading. The retreat is a culmination of the Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) program, which is observed in every classroom for 15–30 minutes a day.

The library is a hub of active engagement and central to the students’ literacy success. Students are required to have a library book with them in every class to participate in SSR. In the Accelerated Reader (AR) Program, students read books of interest and take comprehension tests.

To engage students so that they will read even more:

- Teachers challenge them to accumulate schoolwide point totals.
- Students are given gold seals on their library cards when they achieve Reading Star status.
- All Reading Stars participate in the Reading Rocks Retreat after school on Fridays.
- At the retreat, students play games, watch movies, participate in hands-on activities, go to the gym, and enjoy pizza.

Satellite Telephone with Antarctica

Community Consolidated School District #15 in Palatine, Illinois, places a high priority on ensuring that its students:

- can access and understand information from a variety of sources
- are proficient in oral and written communication
- have reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills
- learn about human relations

In science alone, the school is at the forefront in using technology to engage and enhance students' learning experiences.

- Carefully structured Internet-based projects, such as Marslink, an Internet space simulation, and the Jason Project, which studies ecology, geography, and different cultures, provide valuable information and interaction among students and between students and experts.
- Video production studios have enabled live interviews with former astronauts. A teacher exchanged research data with students in

real time, using a satellite telephone while in Antarctica on an expedition with Captain James Lovell of Apollo 13.

- The school has converted a school bus into a space shuttle model in which students participate in mission control simulations. There also is a Discovery Learning Center for earth science and geology experimentation, and students are involved in real space shuttle missions. Seven astronauts have visited the school as part of its space shuttle program.

Metacognition

At Conrad Ball Middle School in Loveland, Colorado, the integration of research-based critical thinking strategies across all content areas enhances an engaging learning environment for student achievement. Opportunities for discovery learning through constructivist approaches are woven throughout the curriculum at Conrad Ball. Metacognitive strategies are in every subject so that students can think and reflect on their own learning (metacognition) and become actively engaged. The metacognition model that the school focuses on encompasses:

- activating background knowledge
- making connections
- determining importance
- questioning
- visualizing
- inferring
- synthesizing

These thinking strategies are tools that students and teachers use to impact their learning. The tools are the means by which students and teachers construct and monitor meaning. By thinking

metacognitively, students and teachers not only deepen their comprehension, they learn to how to repair their thinking when meaning breaks down.

Utilizing a common set of critical-thinking strategies across content areas has strengthened students' abilities to make connections and apply their knowledge and skills throughout their classes. This critical thinking approach enhances relevance and engagement by building the focus of the lessons from essential questions that need to be addressed to in-depth knowledge and achievement.

Through this model, Conrad Ball:

- embraces and energizes its students through continual learning and experimentation
- encourages a collaborative climate
- honors both the importance of the individual and the strength of the collective
- Strives for all students to become successful learners, not for all students to change the way they learn so that they fit the existing school parameters
- defines success in terms of student achievement and well-being, rather than in terms of what adults are doing

Think Aloud

The “think aloud” philosophy of Hermitage Elementary School in Virginia Beach is simple: When teachers encourage students to

think aloud and incorporate metacognitive reflections in teaching students how to interact, engage, and learn from the text, students become more aware of their own thinking. Once the awareness is present, students then learn strategies to refine their thinking and reflect upon it to monitor their own comprehension.

Mini-Courses Model

At Dansville Middle School in Dansville, New York, five-week mini-courses of exploratory content curriculum and standards provide opportunities for students to create and define their interests. The courses are effective interventions in laying the groundwork to address the needs of students and to create a culture in which learning is important. Dansville Middle School's new mini-courses:

- provide students and teachers with ownership of the content and instruction
- provide students with choice in their scheduling
- provide student choice in class selection
- link the middle school program to high school career clusters, interests, and diploma requirements
- provide time within the regular school day to address the unique needs of middle school students by providing intense academic, social, and/or behavioral interventions

The content of the courses provides is interconnected with Dansville High School's various Career Academies, graduation tracks, four-year plans, and ultimate student career goals.

Parent Involvement Pledge

Student-led conferences at English Estates Elementary School in Fern Park, Florida, empower students to take a more active role in their education. As a result, parental involvement has increased. Classes that have fully implemented student-led conferences report 100% parent attendance and participation. Parents even have developed their own commitment and pledge:

As a parent, I pledge that, to the best of my ability, I will:

- show my child that I value education
- encourage my child to be a reader
- talk with my child about his or her schoolwork
- require my child do to his or her homework
- check the backpack each day for news from school
- visit the school and meet the principal, teachers, and staff
- attend parent-teacher conferences
- participate in classroom/school activities
- become actively involved in the decision-making process

Parent commitment:

- to be my child's first teacher by being an active participant in my child's daily learning
- to promote respect for self and others
- to assure and facilitate daily attendance and preparation

You Miss School, You Miss Out

At Flagstaff Middle School in Flagstaff, Arizona, students learn that success is dependent on being present and engaged in learning. A student/parent/teacher contract helps to ensure high attendance.

The contract requires 96% attendance for each student. If students miss more than 10 days, including excused absences, they must spend two days in an after-school study for every day they miss after day 10. In addition, students must maintain at least a “C” average. If their grades fall below this academic target, they must attend after-school tutoring sessions until the grades improve. Students also must agree to specific consequences that occur for inappropriate behavior and/or poor choices.

Every teacher recognizes that genuine high self-esteem is related to each child's own success and that academic success is the key to genuine self-esteem. Students learn through experience that when they do well, they feel good about themselves. Sometimes it is hard work, but effort does produce results. The program reaches out to all levels of students from all ethnic, economic, and academic backgrounds. Students do not have to be “A” students to be in the program. However, they must have the commitment to be the best they can be. Many students are “C” and “D” students when they enter. They all are high achieving by the time they graduate from the program.

Nothing Less Than the Best

Flagstaff Middle School also emphasized small learning communities to enhance the participation and engagement of students in teams and with their peers. The Nothing Less Than the Best program consists of small learning communities of 55 students with two teachers who teach all core-subject areas. Thus, these students

become a cohesive unit with each other and their two main teachers. This is an effective way of taking a larger school population and designing small core groups. Everyone is responsible for everyone else's success. If students are failing, classmates learn to help them. Among other responsibilities, teachers must:

- function as team players in all aspects of small learning communities
- develop student-centered instruction
- understand and show in their teaching that they have high expectations and will afford their students all opportunities to achieve these expectations
- believe that all students can be successful and model good character and work ethic
- encourage and engage parents to become more involved in the academic process
- sponsor and coach students in academic competitions, and work with students in after-school programs

Portfolio Parties

At Four Oaks Elementary School in Four Oaks, North Carolina, students lead portfolio parties for their parents as a means of expressing and celebrating their engagement in school projects. At the end of each grading period, parents attend evening student-led conferences/parties to review their children's work. Students discuss:

- portfolio selections
- needed improvements
- goals for the next quarter

Parents enjoy a variety of performances and displays by their children. The performances result from a number of elective programs, dance, violin, and electric keyboarding, as well as math, social studies, and science courses.

Instructional teams assess teacher passions and student interests. They use the latest research on learning and motivation to transform instructional programs into student achievement at higher levels.

Read Aloud

Educating parents about the importance of reading aloud to help students develop literacy skills so that they can engage more fully in reading development lessons is an important focus of the Frazier School District in Perryopolis, Pennsylvania. One unique program that the school has adopted is the Beginning with Books: Raising Readers Parent Club.

- Parents meet weekly for eight weeks to learn more about the importance of reading aloud and other activities that encourage their children's literacy development.
- Parents are taught skills and strategies that make their read-aloud sessions enjoyable and beneficial to their children.

- Students come to school having associated fun with learning and are ready to embark on more reading assignments.

The attention to literacy skills has included the development and implementation of outside reading requirements in grades 3-5. Students are required to read a minimum of 16 Accelerated Reader books per year (four books in each core subject) and receive a grade for their 16 highest exam scores. Library circulation of content-area books has increased significantly as a result of the program.

Positive People Program

The Positive People Program (PPP) at Kendale Elementary School in Miami, Florida, supports the school's mission, vision, and values by aligning schoolwide performance areas to an incentive plan that reflects the strong belief in student engagement.

Areas of focus in the PPP include points being awarded for:

- attendance
- punctuality
- achievement
- behavior
- showing school pride
- school uniform use

The PPP works like this:

- Points are recorded on charts maintained by each homeroom teacher.

- Completed charts are submitted monthly to the PTA representative who manages the documentation and forwards the information to the principal.
- Monthly winners are announced for each grade level over the closed circuit television system.
- Each student in the winning classrooms receives a bookmark with his or her picture on it as well as award tokens donated by other community business partners that include coupons for meals at local restaurants, pencils, etc. Quarterly grade-level winners are announced at Honor Roll assemblies and are provided with an ice cream sandwich celebration funded by the PTA.

The values of respect, responsibility, kindness, cooperation, and support form the foundation for positive behavior and citizenship. The school follows the belief that excellence is not a destination, but a continuous journey of improvement.

Book-in-a-Bag Reading Program

Lincoln Elementary School in Mount Vernon, New York, focuses on developing the whole child by enriching all aspects of student life. In its schoolwide reading incentive programs and other initiatives, students are rewarded for meeting their goals. Throughout the year, the following scheduled reading programs take place:

- December: Reading Is a Gift you Give to Yourself
- February: Reading Is at the Heart of Everything We Do
- April: Spring into Reading
- June: Reading and Race Across America (end-of-year major event)

- Summer: a summer reading program accessible to parents on the school Web site

Other successful programs that Lincoln has established to engage students in reading include:

- The Book-in-a Bag Reading Program provides students with books and requires them to read for a minimum of 20 minutes a night, keep a home reading record, respond to their reading with creative or written activities, and obtain a sign-off from parents.
- The school holds a Book Swap Shop and Celebrate Reading Days.
- The PTA helps to support programs, which are largely sponsored by corporations and local merchants.

Good Friends

At Morris Early Childhood Center in Lincoln, Delaware, incorporates an early childhood education model for 4- to 6-year-olds called Good Friends.

- Each month, students sign a Good Friends of the Principal bulletin board when they demonstrate acts of kindness and helpfulness. At the end of the month, an assembly is held in which all the names are read so that those students can stand and be recognized.
- A student is recognized once a month from each of the 16 1st grade classrooms. A certificate and personalized letter from the principal are given to each of the students.

- The behavior of students in pre-K through 1st grade is tracked for each class. If no student in that class has had a write-up, then a sticker is placed on a chart in the lobby. Any class that has used 90% of its available stickers by the end of the month is given a coupon for ice cream from the cafeteria.

Discourse Is the Right Course

Discourse is the way in which knowledge is constructed and exchanged in the classroom. This practice is highly prioritized at Smithfield Elementary School in Smithfield, Pennsylvania. When asked to take center stage in formulating and expressing ideas and strategies, students begin to take ownership of their own learning. Smithfield's mission in promoting discourse is to:

- support students taking appropriate risks
- encourage mastery
- embrace a curriculum that challenges students' minds, engages their imagination, and use instruction to build on students' prior knowledge

To facilitate discourse, teachers provide monthly hands-on workshops. For one math workshop called, Under the Big Top, the cafeteria is turned into a three-ring-circus area where students participated in math games and activities. Parents are separated into groups and escorted to three stations: geometry, algebra, and fractions. Parents are then given instruction on learning styles used in the classroom, games, activities, as well as given suggestions to assist students at home.

In addition, math training has taught teachers to question more and to provide students more opportunities to talk and exchange ideas. Students are continually involved in crucial elements of mathematical

discovery and engage in an active process of learning through the use of manipulatives, models, and real life experiences. Real-world materials engross the students' senses, can be manipulated to illustrate the concept concretely, and be experienced visually by the student. Rubric scoring, journal writing, and especially student discourse directly involve students in the learning process.

Tiger Traits

Real learning does not happen without a strong behavioral framework. Clear rules and expectations at South Hills Middle School in Riverton, Utah, are promoted through a uniform, schoolwide program of positive behavior support known as the Tiger Traits, which emphasize five rules:

1. takes responsibility
2. is in the proper place
3. goes prepared
4. engages in learning
5. respects self and others

The Tiger Traits are posted in classrooms, the library, cafeteria, halls, auditorium, and counseling center. All staff, teachers, and students are expected to know and model school expectations of the traits.

With the goal of establishing positive behavior supports, a team was appointed to learn about behavioral strategies in classroom and nonclassroom settings. The team trains staff on how to use behavioral strategies to promote positive behavior. Parents and community members also are trained on expectations through newsletters and parent training opportunities. The program has reduced referral rates, built staff morale, and facilitated better classroom management

Students and staff receive frequent and timely rewards for their positive behavior through this incentive-based program. Teachers reward students as soon as they are “caught” doing something positive. Students receive refresher trainings when their behavior begins to slip. However, exemplary behavior is the norm rather than the exception.

Bicycles for Perfect Attendance

Stewart Middle Magnet School in Tampa, Florida, places importance on students arriving to school everyday, on time, and ready to learn. Incentives for perfect attendance have a heavy influence on students. On a monthly basis, the homeroom with perfect attendance receives:

- a visit from key administrators for a picture opportunity
- presentation of a trophy that travels from classroom to classroom
- treats

Schoolwide, students with perfect attendance enjoy:

- popcorn once a month during lunch
- monthly drawing for prizes, such as two bicycles per grade per month

Other ways the school manages attendance include:

- The first course of action is a call to the student’s parents at home or work the day of the absence. This early intervention method enables staff to verify the reason for the absence, to

notify parents of their child not being at school in case they are unaware, and to reinforce the school's commitment to the students and their parents that students have to be in school to learn.

- Absences are investigated by calling students who are out of class and discussing the reasons for their absence.
- If responses to parent phone calls, letters, and discussions with student are not satisfactory, then a home visit is made to meet with the parents to verify information.

Up the Ante

Sunset Park Elementary School in Greensboro, North Carolina, has a motto, "Up the Ante," which involves students, parents, staff, and community members who raise expectations for high student achievement through multiple programs and approaches that facilitate engagement. These initiatives include:

- lengthening the school day by 15 minutes
- adding an intense after-school remediation program
- adding an after-school enrichment program for students at or above grade level
- making reading fun and the focus of the school with programs and initiatives, such as Books on Board, Family Reading Night, and Reading Fun Day.
- PIT (Protected Instructional Time), a 90-minute uninterrupted reading block

- building reading fluency and comprehension through schoolwide mandate that requires students to read uninterrupted for 30 minutes a day
- facilitating writing groups
- training volunteers for tutoring

Building Good Character

Sunset Park also places a strong emphasis on building solid relationships between students and staff and shaping positive character traits. Achieving excellent results requires more than the acquisition of academic skills. The learning environment must be safe, positive, and orderly. The school encourages this in a number of ways.

- The principal's newsletter, published monthly, informed parents of a character trait that was reinforced during the school day.
- Character education is included in the "daily book" discussion on the intercom, and the trait of the month is discussed everyday in classrooms.
- Students are frequently "caught" displaying characteristics of the trait and their good deeds are highlighted.
- Students practice and learn values that lead to good citizenship and hard work to engage and achieve.

Curriculum Mapping

At Thurgood Marshall Middle School in Chicago, Illinois, teams of teachers work intensively on “curriculum mapping” to develop curricular cohesion. Supporting the “school-within-a-school” concept, individual teachers then use these maps as guides to planning challenging and exciting curriculum. Teachers are allowed to differentiate instruction in their classrooms to meet the needs of individual students, such as those who are learning English as a second language or students with special needs.

Students are allowed a voice in the choice of topics through individual research assignments, daily silent reading, fishbowl reading, and inquiry-based learning projects. The teachers are firmly committed to integrated curriculum and interdisciplinary units.

- Each team of teachers emphasizes reading across the curriculum and the use of daily silent reading and read-aloud activities.
- Writing is a cross-curricular activity.
- The school’s Writer-in-Residence Program brings in professional writers (poets, journalists, novelists) to work with the students during a week-long intensive writing project to produce a published work that includes student contributions.

Partnering for Differentiated Instruction

Teachers at Tinton Falls Middle School in Tinton Falls, New Jersey, have flourished by creating partnerships with other teachers in projects that meld their unique teaching styles into one interdisciplinary unit. In this way, students become engaged through rich and varied instructional strategies.

It is not unusual to hear singing in a math or science classroom, French spoken during a social studies presentation, or to see a movie such as *The Patriot* or *Life Is Beautiful* in a reading class. Through regular use of differentiated instruction, students engage deeply in areas such as art, oral presentations, group work, independent practice, technology, and collaborating with community professionals.

Teachers participate in summer training to learn:

- brain-based learning
- multiple intelligences
- thematic instruction
- cooperative learning
- differentiated instruction

After the teachers have completed their training, they act as curriculum instructors during daylong districtwide staff development sessions. Each session is focused on a tutorial of the skills needed for the reform and then time is provided for teachers to develop lesson plans, materials, and manipulatives to use in their own instruction later in the school year.

Loaded with a solid understanding of their students' different learning styles, brain-based learning, and differentiated instruction strategies, teachers provide a more tailored, engaging experience for each class and for each student.

Storybook Character Parades and Much More

Walter Matthys Elementary School in South Houston, Texas, is recognized for its extracurricular activities and community partnerships to assist with student achievement and enhance

engagement practices. Matthys students have the opportunity to participate in a multitude of unique extracurricular activities, including storybook character parades, 100-Day parades, author visits, and faculty-versus-student baseball.

In addition, community relationships have grown into solid partnerships in the goal of meeting the needs of all students. The Campus Improvement Team includes the director of the South Houston Community Center and the pastor from the church across the street from the school.

- The church holds banquets at the school, and the community center has provided gifts for students during the holidays.
- The church and the community center provide mentors for struggling students.
- The Matthys Helping One Student to Succeed (HOSTS) program allows community members and parents to assist students academically. The HOSTS program has been the beginning point for relationships with the Houston Aeros (the local professional hockey team), the South Houston Chamber of Commerce, and South Houston Intermediate.

Wake Up Will Rogers

Will Rogers Middle School in Fair Oaks, California, is committed to challenge and engages its students in self-directed learning. One of its most creative daily activity is *Wake Up Will Rogers*, a live, 10-minute morning news show planned, staffed, and anchored by

students and broadcast on a closed-circuit network to all classrooms. The show begins with the Pledge of Allegiance, pertinent news, student activity announcements, student-of-the-week recognitions, staff information, school sports updates, special events, birthday announcements, and the weather.

After the show, the students retreat to a computer lab where they create character-based commercials that focus on six character education pillars: responsibility, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, citizenship, and caring.

The news show and commercials resulted from a planning committee, which consisted of only staff, who organized activities such as chalk art representing the character trait pillars, Mustang Moments for students who were “caught” doing something positive, dress-up days to represent historical pillars in society, and end-of-the-year barbecues.

The committee since has been expanded to include students. These students act as ambassadors to visitors on campus, organize student-centered activities, promote the pillars through morning announcements, and sometimes act as conflict managers. The students are given T-shirts that highlight their commitment.

Family Barbecue Open House

Will Rogers’s concerted effort to involve parents in numerous venues pays off in creating a caring community to promote student engagement and success. Parents and community members are

invited to participate in all school events. Because many students are from immigrant or single-parent working families, parent involvement has been difficult to maintain in traditional activities such as Parent Club, Parent Information Night, and Back-to-School Night. To compensate for that, the school had found more creative ways of drawing parents' attention and enthusiasm to their children's learning.

- All mailed communications are translated into Spanish, Russian, and Ukrainian as needed
- Administrators and staff members make home visits.
- Open House has become a family barbecue and activity night, welcoming families to the whole school.
- Interpreters in Spanish, Russian, and Ukrainian are on staff during the school day to facilitate non-English-speaking parents.
- English classes for parents are held at the school on weekends and evenings.

The Magical Mailbox

Celebrating the unique voice of each student through writing and the arts is a proven way to engage students in learning. At Wolcott Elementary School in West Hartford, Connecticut, a Magical Mailbox designed by students sits prominently in the school's lobby to symbolize student motivation and engagement and to celebrate literary skill achievements.

- Teachers in all grade levels at Wolcott facilitate the writing process as they work with students during the Writers' Workshop to create essays, poems, stories, and songs.

- Students are encouraged to submit their finest pieces to the Magical Mailbox, knowing that their work will be read aloud and celebrated.
- Every piece of submitted work is read by the editorial board, composed of 4st and 5st graders, who decide how to celebrate each piece of writing in a variety of ways, including:
 - **Window Poster.** One piece of writing per week is made into a brightly colored poster and hung in the front window of the school.
 - **Pingo Poet.** One student is chosen to read his or her poem to the school over the loudspeaker each Wednesday morning. The poem is then e-mailed to all teachers, who can use the poem as part of instruction. It also is posted on the school's Web site. In addition, students are encouraged to submit their artwork to illustrate each week's Pingo Poem. The poem and accompanying illustrations are then displayed. Pingo Musicians are also chosen each week to play a short live piece of music before and after the poet reads.
 - **Word Wall.** About 65 pieces of writing are displayed for three-week intervals on a 20' x 7' bulletin board. An interactive literary scavenger hunt is developed (one version for primary students and another for intermediate students). Students visit the Word Wall with clipboards to search for the answers to scavenger hunt questions, which are drawn from student wall writing.
 - **Writer of the Week.** One piece of writing is chosen and displayed all week on a Writer-of-the-Week bulletin board, with a Photoshop poster designed by 5st

graders to represent the piece of writing visually. Teachers bring their classes to the bulletin board to read and discuss the writing. The Writer of the Week is interviewed during the school's weekly town meeting. On Friday afternoon, the piece is removed from the Writer of the Week board, framed, and displayed for a year along with other Writer of the Week pieces on the Writers' Gallery.

- **Peanut Butter Poetry Jam.** An extracurricular group of students in grades 3-5 interprets selected pieces of writing through creative movement.
- **Wolcott Songs.** Students submit drafts of songs, work with the music teacher to further develop lyrics and melody, and record their song in a studio. Songs are debuted during the town meeting and also distributed as part of a *Wolcott Songs* CD to all families in June.

Engaging Parents in Their Children's Success

Wolcott Elementary School continually works to bring parents in the school, especially those who earn low incomes and do not speak English as their primary language. Celebrating students during a weekly town meeting is one way the school achieves this goal. It has found that parents who normally are reluctant to come to school are eager to attend the town meeting to celebrate their children's success. Components that are a constant part of each week's town meeting include:

- For the Writer's Spotlight, four students are selected to read their writing. Students who are members of the editorial board serve as emcees. All writers then receive a HOT (Higher Order

Thinking) School pin, which is delivered by the Prince or Princess of the Pins (a primary grade child who applies to serve in this regal position).

- A three-minute video, written and filmed by 5th graders, highlights the Artist of the Week. This video also shares information about the famous artist after which the student fashioned his or her art.
- The Writer of the Week student is interviewed by a teacher and receives a copy of the Photoshop poster that was displayed during the week, along with a HOT School pin.
- Student-produced, four-minute digital videos that highlight classroom learning or school activities are shown.
- World Premiere Songs are written and recorded by students and shared for the first time publicly at the town meeting. The school year's collection of these songs is recorded on a *Wolcott Songs* CD and distributed to all Wolcott School families in June.
- In the Works of the Great Masters, students in grades 3-5 choose a classic piece of art and a piece of music through which to interpret the visual artwork. They then design and perform an interpretation of the two through movement.
- Students in grades K-3 who are part of the Sign Language Club interpret a poem in sign language.

The school's success in motivating parents to be more involved in their children's education has evolved into the Celebrating Children's Voices Volunteers program. Parents are recruited and trained to work, either during the day at school, at home in the evenings, or

on weekends on projects such as:

- typing student work for the *Literary Magazine*
- designing an innovative Writers Wall
- making copies of DVDs for each student that include all of the student-produced videos shown each week at the town meeting

Parents are recruited during kindergarten registration meetings and town meeting and through parent newsletters.

Revise to Rise

High Schools

Realizing that 9th grade is the most important one for students, especially those prone to dropping out, Atlantic High School in Delray Beach, Florida, created the AERIE (Atlantic Eagles Rising Into Excellence) Academy, with the motto, “Failure is not an option.” The Academy is lead by teacher teams that have made changes to grading, instruction, and assessment to reduce failing 9th graders. One of these changes has been a new grading system — A, B, C, I, F — that replaced the “D” with an “I” (for incomplete). Convinced that “D” letter grade worked to the detriment of students largely by lowering GPA, the “I” replacement allows students a chance to make up or redo assignments through teacher-directed revisions until they meet expectation.

Capturing Kids’ Hearts

Each teacher at A.J. Moore Academy in Waco, Texas, negotiates a social contract with his or her students. Using the Capturing Kids Hearts model, these contractual agreements, posted in all classrooms, include answers to the following questions:

- How do we want to be treated by our leaders?
- How should you treat each other?
- How do you think the leader wants to be treated?
- How should we handle conflicts that come up between us?

Finding a Voice in Poetry

Extracurricular and co-curricular activities add extensively to student engagement at Caprock High in Amarillo, Texas. The Spoken Word Poetry Group, for example, is composed of 20 students who meet with two English teachers for 45 minutes, three mornings a week. Initiated because of the large student interest in slam poetry, students write poetry and present it at community bookstores or open forums three Friday nights a month. Many of the creative, but shy students have found a new voice in demonstrating their interest and love of the arts.

Choice and Mastery

From remedial to college-level courses, students have a strong voice in the creation of their four-year personalized learning plan at David Douglas High School in Portland, Oregon. The diversity of course offerings — there are more than 150 electives to choose from — helps to ensure that students can be engaged as they fulfill their individual abilities and learning styles.

Most students are expected to complete the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) by the end of the 10th grade. CIM conferences, which include students, parents, and teacher mentors, allow students to share work samples, discuss competency requirements, and identify progress toward achieving mastery. The curriculum has

seamless links and pathways among core academic subjects, career exploration courses, and a wide variety of electives that are integrated with students' career choices to facilitate engagement as they strive for academic success.

“Kid-by-Kid” Approach

The “kid-by-kid” approach was initiated in the math department at Del Valle High School in El Paso, Texas, and now is a schoolwide initiative in designing instruction to meet individual student needs. Each student's achievement results are known by every staff member to determine his or her individual strengths and areas of improvement. Professional learning communities promote collaboration on all aspects of teaching and learning and provide motivation for improvement. The spirit of collaboration is enhanced by:

- interdisciplinary team meetings
- common conference (planning) time
- a school leadership style of shared decision making

The Link Crew

The Link Crew is a high school transition program at El Camino High School in Oceanside, California, that welcomes freshmen in making them feel comfortable, engaged, and successful throughout the first year of their high school experience. In the program, juniors and seniors are trained as Link Crew Leaders, positive role models, who guide freshmen into discovering what it takes to be successful

in the transition to high school. The program starts off with an orientation day to allow freshmen to begin developing relationships and strategies that will contribute to their academic success.

Link Crew's goal is to provide a structure within which students make real connections with each other. Through this program, students learn that people at school care about them and their success.

At the heart of the program is the belief that the older students on campus are capable of incredible bonding. The Link Crew Leaders are not necessarily the most known students on campus, the ones with the best grades, or the most involved. They are a cross-section of the student body, thus giving as many freshmen as possible a Link Crew Leader to identify with. Through identification and connection with a Link Crew role model, freshmen gain a greater sense of belonging and engagement in their school experience.

Personalized Learning Plan

At Excelsior Education Center in Victorville, California, students may elect to participate in on-campus workshops, labs, and online courses. Dual credit and/or college credit may be earned through a partnership with Victor Valley Community College. Under a personalized learning plan, students may choose any combination of these options and advance at their own pace, which results in many students completing requirements in less time than it takes in a traditional high school.

In addition to these multifaceted delivery options, students meet rigorous academic requirements within the context of relevant, career-oriented learning through required participation in small learning communities or academies. These academies provide

students with many opportunities, including: being introduced to career possibilities, achieving state standards through an integrated approach within the career program of study, mastering a specialty area within a career academy, participating in work-based internship programs, and engaging in on-campus, student-run business enterprises. An individual education team, made up of a student, parents, and a staff member, builds a partnership that develops a custom-designed curriculum that meets the unique needs of the student.

A Culture of Reading

The culture of reading permeates Florin High School in Sacramento, California, through the following methods:

- The librarian visits 9th grade classrooms to inform students about the numerous reading options available at the library. The librarian begins the discussion of books with the statement, “This book will interest you because ...”
- The Book Talks program features student book reviewers in recorded promotional video clips.
- Teachers in 9th and 10th grades maintain classroom libraries of high-interest books so that books are convenient and students do not have to travel to the library.
- Contests reward students who have read the most books.
- Teachers model literacy behavior by sharing book selections with students.

- Instead of traditional book reports, English teachers use innovative “book interview” methods to assess if and how attentively students have completed assigned readings.
- Once a week, a schoolwide silent reading period occurs in each English class.

Focus on Literacy

Harrisonburg High School in Harrisonburg, Virginia, supports the belief that literacy is the key to school and lifelong success. Harrisonburg has a full-time literacy coordinator to provide leadership and technical assistance to staff, who are trained in the use of data and instructional practices to improve vocabulary, reading, and writing skills.

The focus on literacy begins with student assessment and an extensive analysis of data on student reading levels. Students are assessed frequently, and data are made available to all staff. Students are continuously monitored and placed in programs to ensure that instruction is an appropriate challenge to their reading levels. Staff are trained to incorporate reading practices in all content areas. Library and textbooks are categorized to assist students and staff in selecting materials at an appropriate level.

Self-Directed, Comprehensive Learning

At High Tech High School in San Diego, California, students are organized into self-selected learning groups for project work.

Students can then focus on their own learning style for contributions to design, research, development, and project presentations. The instructional day unfolds with one block of two hours devoted per class to ensure ample time to delve deeply into topics with a second block occurring in the afternoon.

- The teacher presents a brief lecture outlining core principles.
- Students break into small learning groups for project work, while others use computers for research and study.
- Students with special knowledge are invited by fellow students to tutor them if that information is needed for their project.
- The teacher mingles from one group to another observing, commenting, and suggesting as appropriate.

International Context

At the International School of the Americas in San Antonio, Texas, learning is interdisciplinary with an emphasis placed on real-world applications of skills and content. All students participate in international travel, community service, a career exploration internship, and a final portfolio assessment of their learning at the end of their senior year.

The curriculum emphasizes an international perspective, and the school believes that the best way to learn about other countries and cultures is to interact with them. Throughout the school year, students accompanied by teachers may travel to Mexico, Europe, Japan, or other countries. The education community works to raise funds to make travel affordable for as many students as possible. Moreover, every year the sophomore class takes a five-day academically

oriented trip to Zacatecas, Mexico. After the experience, students are asked to reflect on their experiences and create a product that exemplifies their memories and new understandings. For many students, this experience is a memorable highlight of their high school years.

Power Standards

The “power standards” approach at Littleton High School in Littleton, Colorado, help teachers take a fragmented, ever-expanding curriculum and put it into an organized and coherent format to simplify which standards are most important. By narrowing the breadth of curriculum being covered and teaching essential learning in more depth, increased student motivation, engagement, and achievement has resulted.

Power standards represent the knowledge and skills that, once mastered, equip students to do well in coursework and on standardized tests in high school, as well as to succeed in college and a career later in life. The standards form connections among curricular objectives and are highly transferable across academic disciplines. The four power standards adopted by the faculty are:

- writing/speaking
- information literacy
- critical thinking/reasoning
- citizenship/work habits

A common research-based learning theory guides all decision-making. Staff have asked, “What should teaching and learning look like for our students?” As a result of their research and discussions, many changes were made to the curriculum, including the

elimination of all remedial courses. The belief is that all students can become engaged and master proficiency when challenged and supported. A common curriculum was designed in mathematics and science.

Final course assessments ask students to bring personal meaning to essential learning. This process empowers and engages the students to integrate all aspects of a course in a relevant way.

School Pet

At Logansport High School in Logansport, Indiana, Scholar, the school pet dog, encourages student participation and engagement. The school believes that having a pet to visit classrooms and administrative offices can help students to become emotionally connected to their school. As a result of a school pet, students may:

- enjoy the idea of coming to school
- participate in school activities
- take initiative with schoolwork, as the dog's presence makes schoolwork more enjoyable (e.g., reading a book with a warm, loving, furry friend by the student's side)
- start conversations with teachers and administrators
- exhibit good character the encompass consideration and qualities of caring
- be encouraged to exhibit good behavior

- enhance personal bonds with teachers and administrators

Code of Conduct

A culture of genuine honesty, trust, and respect is prevalent at McFatter Technical High School in Davie, Florida. The McFatter Honor Code contributes to this culture. The foundation of the program is a list of rights and responsibilities for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. All have rights to receive benefits, as long as they fulfill their responsibilities. The responsibilities of students are:

- attend
- behave
- try
- respect

Recognition of the code is reinforced almost daily in the form of an Honor Pledge that is signed by all students on all submitted written work, quizzes, and tests. However, it also is clear that a rigorous and relevant education that is driven by positive relationships between students and teachers is the main reason that civility is exemplary.

Advisers — Not Teachers

Reaching out to one student at a time is the underlying principle at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) in Providence, Rhode Island. Every student's individual learning plan is a personal and academic summary of interests, strengths, and needs. This personalized curriculum, along with strong model of

coaching, provides the impetus for high engagement and achievement.

There are no teachers at The Met, only “advisers,” who meet with students daily and follow their assigned cohorts over four years of high school. Students are comfortable with this type of relationship. Many have failed to connect with their teachers in traditional schools. Students tend to relate to their advisers as trusted adult friends. The adviser redefines the role of teacher into something much closer to a personal trainer or mentor.

The Met is designed, in both pedagogy and infrastructure, to educate one student at a time. It has no required courses or credits. Instead, the student's interests, background, needs, and learning styles determine the real-world learning experiences, activities, projects, and priorities that make up the curriculum.

A personal learning plan for each student is developed by a learning team, which consists of the student, adviser, parent/guardian, and internship mentor. Student work is in the form of individual projects, which grow out of personal interests and the needs of mentors and internship sites. Unlike traditional schoolwork, work of Met students results in real products or consequences that matter to a larger audience in the Providence community.

Learning plans are not restricted by school walls or by schedules, pupil-teacher ratios, attendance, or conventional notions of curriculum and instruction. The plans include:

- the personal development areas that students will work on
- advisory periods, projects, coaching sessions, individual study, exhibitions, and related work within the school

- internships that take the student into the world of the workplace
- books that will be read, reading lists, and other areas of self-development in which the student needs to focus
- student-chosen after-school and evening programs

Project-Based Learning

A project-based learning (PBL) curriculum at New Technology High School in Napa, California, motivates and engages students through real-world examples and applications. Instead of daily assignments, teachers periodically assign projects and problems with multiple and varied components. For example, students might show a PowerPoint presentation accompanied by a photo essay.

- Projects are designed by teachers, consultants, and others in the New Tech Network.
- Most projects are interdisciplinary and require students to demonstrate proficiency in core outcomes across multiple subjects.
- Project due dates are set well in advance so that students can develop time management and independent learning skills.
- A typical New Tech course includes 10-15 projects in a year, with each project taking three to eight weeks to complete.
- Example projects are stored and published in an online Project Library accessible to all teachers in the New Tech Network.

The focus on independent, rigorous, and relevant project-base learning has captivated students. As they engage in a challenging, meaningful curriculum, their incentive to work hard helps them develop personal learning styles with skills that include: problem solving, communication, decision making, interpersonal, information gathering, critical thinking, responsibility, self-management, respect for others, time management, collaboration, research and development, and presentation skills.

Students' self-confidence is greatly enriched knowing that they are in engaged in real-world tasks. When they are expected to engage in relevant tasks that challenge their abilities, they rise to the level of expectations set by the faculty.

Break the Glass Ceiling

Break the glass ceiling, a theme used throughout Norview High School in Norfolk, Virginia, reinforces high engagement and expectations and helps to raise the previous year's levels of achievement on state exams. There are various ways that this theme is infused throughout the school.

- Posted next to the "Break the Glass Ceiling" signs are the percent of students passing the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) last year in each of the tested subject areas.
- Students who pass each SOL receive a blue ribbon for passing or a gold ribbon for exceeding the required score.
- Individual student goals are posted along the top of the walls throughout the school.

- Strips of paper with a student's name and a statement, such as "I'm going to college," "I'm going into the military," or "I'm going to start my own business," are posted end-to-end along the hallway walls.
- Blue banners that hang in a hallway celebrate the many awards the school has received.
- The Pilots of Distinction wall has pictures of alumni with a description of their accomplishments.

Clubs Abound

At Saunders Trades and Technical High School in Yonkers, New York, a rich pallet of club options encourage students to further engage in areas of interest and passion. Ethnic clubs, in particular, reflect the diversity of the student body. There are African-American, Japanese, Cultural Exchange, Asian, European, Italian, and Latino clubs. The club members celebrate the qualities of their own culture as well as encourage the appreciation of other cultures with activities, such as shows and field trips. Other clubs include: Astronomy Club, Chess Club, Drama Club, Flagship Academic Team, Key Club, Language Clubs, Literary Magazine, National Honor Society, Students Against Destructive Decisions, Science Honor Society, Senior Class, and Student Government.

Career Growth Plan

All teachers at Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire, are members of the Critical Friends Group (CFG), which meets monthly to improve student engagement.

In this collaborative professional community, teachers support each other's work and reflect on their teaching practices, annual improvement plans, projects, and research. A teacher can present a Career Growth Plan to the group that asks an essential question related to a relevant teaching practice. Once approved by the group, the staff member begins a three-year process of researching the question, developing a report, and presenting it to peers. The CFG provides the teacher with guidance during this process.

The school's community rules, referred to as The Souhegan Six, reflect the work of the CVG. The rules heavily address active engagement in learning through asking questions, collaborating, and seeking solutions. The mission statement, on the wall at the entrance to the school, includes a commitment to:

- support and engage an individual's unique gifts, passions, and intention
- develop and empower the mind, body, and heart
- challenge and expand the comfortable limits of thought, tolerance, and performance

BEEP: Beginning, Engaging, Ending, Practicing

To reach all students at Stuart High School in Falls Church, Virginia, staff move beyond the "what" to the "how" of teaching in using a learning-focus model of instruction, called BEEP.

- **Beginning:** The lesson focus, essential question, and activating strategies lead to the acquisition of the lesson content.

- **Engaging:** Students acquire knowledge, higher order thinking skills, cognitive strategies, graphic organizers, and peer accountability.
- **Ending:** Students summarize their learning; teachers ask for student assessment of their learning and bring closure to the lesson.
- **Practice:** Students learn within the lesson, in homework, and in after-school tutoring.

Teachers change learning strategies and check for understanding every 13 to 17 minutes. Full-group responses are encouraged throughout the distributed/guided practice segment of the lesson. Students summarize and assess their learning. Teachers check for understanding frequently. The school believes that guided practice in the classroom will lead to independent practice at home. Teachers emphasize that homework is the application of already acquired knowledge that allows the students to become more fully engaged and, hence, successful.

Writing Across the Curriculum

At University Park Campus School in Worcester, Massachusetts, the schoolwide strategy of writing across the curriculum accelerates advancement in literacy skills, increases student engagement, and enhances problem solving and critical thinking skills.

In science, students learn technical writing, such as how to write lab reports. They also work on creative projects, such as short stories about how humans impact the water cycle or slam poetry about environmental justice. In math, students explain their answers through “Dear Confused” letters as a way of writing to learn.

Seventh graders typically enter the school with a significant skill gap in their reading and writing abilities. Three-quarters of the students do not speak English in their homes. The closure of this literacy skill gap is not, nor could it be, the domain of English teachers alone. It is only when all teachers address these deficiencies that students are able to catch up to and then exceed the standards for their grade.

Students become better writers and thinkers by wrestling with ideas and then writing about them. By creating opportunities for them to practice writing and thinking in a wide variety of settings in the school, the opportunities for engagement are greatly enhanced.

Academic Resource Center

The academic resource center at Upper St. Clair High School in Upper St. Clair, Pennsylvania, is a centrally located “pod” that engages and empowers students to make their own decisions about the best use of their time to match their learning needs.

- The resource center is a large, inviting, open area designed to look comfortable and informal, but businesslike.
- Two coordinators oversee its operation in which students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. They can receive help on learning tasks and specific topics, assignments, test preparation, research, and projects.
- A subject-specialist teacher from each core discipline is on duty at all times during the day.
- The ambience of the center is conducive to conversation or quiet reflection. Students value and respect that atmosphere.

Grade-Level Teams

At Withrow University High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, students view their teachers and administrators as outstanding role models who believe that failure is not an option.

The staff at Withrow are organized into grade-level teams. These teams meet on a regular basis to collaborate on across-the-curriculum instruction, share instruction strategies, and debrief each other on their collective students.

As a result of the 9th grade pretest administered during the Summer Bridge program, each student has a personal profile that is utilized by the 9th grade team. The pretest data and the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) results are analyzed on a subject-by-subject and student-by-student basis. Each core-subject teacher then intervenes with each student who needs help. Teachers work with students as facilitators of learning, with the goal of each student becoming an engaged, self-directed learner.

The school's extra-help structure is extensive and includes:

- Saturday School (intervention, OGT prep, tutoring, remediation)
- individual tutoring before, during, and after school
- credit recovery during the school year and in summer school

Students who need additional extra help are scheduled into smaller classes that are designed to offer even more one-on-one support to build engagement behavior to the highest extent possible.

Ramp Up Literacy

Students who enter Woodland High School in Cartersville, Georgia, with less than minimal skills in reading take the Ramp Up Literacy course designed to bring them up to grade level. Small groups of students who need to improve reading and writing skills work in a highly structured environment that teaches and reinforces basic skills. In literacy, for example, a typical class engages in three ways:

- specific teaching of reading strategies
- an opportunity to choose from a wide variety of high interest/low reading level paperback books
- a time to write reports about their reading in a workshop setting

A visitor to a 9th grade Ramp Up Literacy class would not be able to distinguish it from an advanced-level class. The students are attentive, answer willingly, tackle a reading comprehension task with confidence, and perform well on a practice comprehension activity. The classroom has multiple copies of attractive paperbacks.

In addition, the school has a cross-age tutoring activity that provides 9th graders with opportunities to tutor elementary students in reading strategies. This benefits the freshmen as well as the younger students in that one learns a concept or skill more easily if one teaches it to someone else.

- Tutors prepare lesson plans and evaluate their tutoring experiences.
- Tutors take the responsibility seriously. One student asked the assistant principal to reassign his detention period because he had a commitment to his elementary school reading partner.



Chapter 7

Professional Development and Leadership Activities

This chapter provides activities for staff to use working toward increasing student engagement. Each activity gives an overview of the purpose that describes where it might be used most appropriately. Some activities have suggested time indications. The activities provide step-by-step directions, and many include templates for handout sheets.

These examples are a compilation of activities from hundreds of interactions with teachers in workshops and from best practices observed in schools. Feel free to modify the activities based on the school culture and staff needs. Electronic copies of the activity handouts are included on the companion CD.

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CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGHS

Purpose

Classroom walkthroughs are specific, short observations in classrooms. These may be done by school administrators, instructional coaches, or teacher peers. Classroom walkthroughs are not a traditional supervisory evaluation of the teacher. They are shorter snapshots that focus on a specific instructional practice. They may be conducted by an individual or a team of educators.

Walkthroughs should be introduced after all staff involved fully understand the purpose and expectations. Teachers who will be observed should be contacted beforehand, and the criteria and specific observations that will be examined should be explained. It is important that teachers understand what administrators or coaches will be looking for.

Procedure

All walkthroughs should have a common set of criteria. The purpose of this activity is not to evaluate the teacher, but to make classroom observations and talk to students to obtain specific information about the level of engagement. During a walkthrough, the observer should avoid disturbing the classroom lesson. Once walkthroughs are common practice, teachers and students will accept them as routine procedures.

Before the walkthrough, observers should introduce themselves briefly to the teacher and obtain any background information that will help them better understand what the students are engaged in at that particular time. Since the observation is not an evaluation, observers make no judgments nor give any feedback to students or the teacher. The focus should be on students interacting with their peers or how engaged students are in the work they are doing. A good rule of thumb is to conduct walkthroughs in classrooms once or twice a month.



After a walkthrough, arrange to have debriefings. These can be handled in two ways. If the intent is to determine the overall student engagement levels of a school, the debriefing would be for the entire group of staff members without making references to individual teachers. If the feedback or observation is intended to coach teachers after observing how they conducted their classrooms, then it is important to meet with these teachers individually to discuss the observations made during the walkthrough.

Student Engagement Characteristics Checklist

Many classroom walkthroughs blend measures of student engagement with measures of instructional practice. Although this is a good way to view effective learning, sometimes we need to pay more attention simply to how well students are engaged rather than on what kind of instruction is being delivered or how the classroom is set up. In this way, we become more focused on the learner rather than on the teacher.

The Student Engagement Walkthrough Checklist that follows examines the degree to which students are exhibiting engaging behaviors, regardless of what is being taught. This observation is meant to help reach agreement in defining high degrees of student engagement.

As administrators and instructional supervisors conduct classroom walkthroughs, they can use the checklist to rate the level of student engagement in each of the categories. The first part is based on direct observation of students and includes these criteria: positive body language, consistent focus, verbal participation, student confidence, and fun and excitement. The second part of the checklist requires more than direct observation. It requires talking to students to determine more about their mental engagement. These criteria include: attention to individual needs, clarity of learning,



meaningfulness of work, rigorous thinking, and performance orientation. There are several questions for each criterion to gauge the level of student engagement. Each criterion is rated on a scale from “very low” to “very high.” An overall level of student engagement can be determined using the compilation of the criteria ratings.

Teachers can use this checklist as a reflective tool to examine themselves and determine the level of engagement in their classrooms. Sometimes it is difficult for teachers to evaluate themselves. However, sharing this checklist with them can help to establish common definitions of highly engaged students, reflect on practices, and share instructional ideas that contribute to increased levels of student engagement.

Student Engagement Characteristics: Part 1

First, the observer must examine the following set of characteristics of engagement. These direct observations include:

- **Positive body language.** Students exhibit body postures that indicate listening and attention to the teacher and/or other students. Eye contact, head position, leaning forward or backward, and positions of arms all indicate a student’s level of interest and attention.
- **Consistent focus.** Students are focused on the learning activity with minimum disruptions. Consider these questions regarding student behavior during the entire observation: Are students focused on the learning experience? Does their attention waiver because of lack of interest, lack of knowledge of how to proceed, frustration, or some outside distraction?
- **Verbal participation.** Students express thoughtful ideas and answers. They ask questions that are relevant or appropriate to learning. Student participation is not passive; it involves sharing opinions and reflecting on complex problems.



- **Student confidence.** Students exhibit confidence to initiate and complete a task with limited coaching or approval-seeking and can actively participate in team-based work.
- **Fun and excitement.** Students exhibit interest and enthusiasm and use positive humor.

Student Engagement Characteristics: Part 2

The second part of the observation requires conversations with students to gather details about the degree to which they are engaged in a learning experience. There are five strategies for measuring perception of engagement. For each aspect, questions are provided to encourage conversations with students.

- **Individual attention.** Students feel comfortable in seeking help and asking questions.
- **Clarity of learning.** Students can describe the purpose of the lesson or unit. This is more comprehensive than describing the activity based on the lesson of the day.
- **Meaningfulness of work.** Students find the work interesting, challenging, and connected to learning.
- **Rigorous thinking.** Students work on complex problems, create original solutions, and reflect on the quality of their work.
- **Performance orientation.** Students understand what quality work is and how it will be assessed. They also can describe the criteria by which their work will be evaluated.



Student Engagement Walkthrough Checklist

OBSERVATIONS

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Positive Body Language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students exhibit body postures that indicate they are paying attention to the teacher and/or other students.					
Consistent Focus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
All students are focused on the learning activity with minimum disruptions.					
Verbal Participation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students express thoughtful ideas, reflective answers, and questions relevant or appropriate to learning.					
Student Confidence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students exhibit confidence and can initiate and complete a task with limited coaching and can work in a group.					
Fun and Excitement	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students exhibit interest and enthusiasm and use positive humor.					

PERCEPTIONS

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Individual Attention	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students feel comfortable seeking help and asking questions.					
<i>Question to Ask:</i> What do you do in this class if you need extra help?					
Clarity of Learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students can describe the purpose of the lesson or unit. This is not the same as being able to describe the activity being done during class.					
<i>Questions to Ask:</i> What are you working on? What are you learning from this work?					
Meaningfulness of Work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students find the work interesting, challenging, and connected to learning.					
<i>Questions to Ask:</i> What are you learning? Is this work interesting to you? Do you know why you are learning this?					
Rigorous Thinking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students work on complex problems, create original solutions, and reflect on the quality of their work.					
<i>Questions to Ask:</i> How challenging is this work? In what ways do you have the opportunity to be creative?					
Performance Orientation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students understand what quality work is and how it will be assessed. They also can describe the criteria by which their work will be evaluated.					
<i>Questions to Ask:</i> How do you know you have done good work? What are some elements of quality work?					
Overall Level of Student Engagement	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



More Student Engagement Checklists

Administrators and instructional supervisors can also use one or more of the following checklists to rate practices related to student engagement. Schools also could combine or modify the checklists to give staff more ownership and agreement about what are the best instructional practices.

Relationships

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The teacher exhibits behaviors that indicate care and concern about students.
☐	☐	☐	2. The teacher calls students by name.
☐	☐	☐	3. Students have opportunities to ask the teacher questions about what they are learning.
☐	☐	☐	4. The teacher pays attention to all students, not just the top students.
☐	☐	☐	5. The teacher is willing to provide extra help in order for students to succeed.

Guiding Principles

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	8. Instruction is free of negative attitudes and behaviors (e.g., biases, stereotyping, put-downs, racial slurs, gossip, insensitive gender remarks).
☐	☐	☐	9. The teacher models and practices social skills that demonstrate guiding principles (e.g., interrupting politely, active listening, constructive feedback, respectful communication).



☐	☐	☐	3. Students have opportunities to put guiding principles into action in ways that promote student autonomy, social responsibility, and caring relationships (e.g., cooperative learning, community service, class meetings, democratic participation, cross-age and peer tutoring, student governance, conflict resolution).
☐	☐	☐	4. Instruction integrates academic content with guiding principles.
☐	☐	☐	5. Student recognition encourages intrinsic motivation (i.e., helping students recognize the internal “feel good” benefits of positive acts) and discourages reliance on extrinsic incentives (e.g., material rewards).

Rewards and Grading

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The teacher gives frequent verbal feedback about the quality of student work.
☐	☐	☐	2. Student praise is primarily public, and student criticism usually is made privately.
☐	☐	☐	3. The teacher routinely uses symbols or public displays to recognize high-quality student work.
☐	☐	☐	4. The teacher maintains a system for tracking completion of students' assignments.
☐	☐	☐	5. Students reflect on the quality of their work as part of the grading process.

Student Habits

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The classroom routines are consistent and predictable from day-to-day.
☐	☐	☐	2. Routines for entering, exiting, and moving within the classroom are taught, reviewed, and reinforced on a regular basis.



☐	☐	☐	3. Classroom rules regarding behavior expectations are posted, taught, reviewed, and reinforced on a regular basis.
☐	☐	☐	4. Students follow classroom procedures.
☐	☐	☐	5. Routines for handling materials and supplies occur smoothly, with little loss of instructional time.

Foundation Learning Skills

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Students use planning/organizational skills to complete in-class tasks and homework.
☐	☐	☐	2. Students take notes and record key information for future reference.
☐	☐	☐	3. Students practice active listening (e.g. body posture, giving feedback, asking questions, and summarizing a lesson).
☐	☐	☐	4. Students possess abilities to stay on task and work independently.
☐	☐	☐	5. Students work cooperatively in small groups.

Design for Rigor and Relevance

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Instruction is well planned and prepared in advance.
☐	☐	☐	2. Instruction has a clear expectation for levels of rigor and relevance using the four quadrants of the Rigor/Relevance Framework.
☐	☐	☐	3. Instruction is built with the goal of culminating in a performance task.
☐	☐	☐	4. Instruction call for students to demonstrate their understanding and apply knowledge and skills in activities and tasks.
☐	☐	☐	5. Instruction uses varied resources; the textbook is only one resource among many.



Active Learning Strategies

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Students discuss and solve open-ended questions and problems.
☐	☐	☐	2. The teacher engages all students in higher order thinking activities.
☐	☐	☐	3. The teacher challenges students to think deeply and critically with a standards-based curriculum.
☐	☐	☐	4. The teacher facilitates students' active construction of meaning (rather than simply telling).
☐	☐	☐	5. Instruction is student-centered, with emphasis on student choice of materials and activities, interaction, and construction of knowledge.

Literacy Focus

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	8. The teacher makes selections of instructional materials to challenge students appropriately.
☐	☐	☐	9. The teacher uses pre-reading strategies to improve comprehension.
☐	☐	☐	10. The teacher uses vocabulary strategies to introduce new words and improve reading in the content area.
☐	☐	☐	11. The teacher uses post-reading strategies to improve comprehension.
☐	☐	☐	12. The teacher personalizes instruction to accommodate different levels of reading in the classroom.

Personalization

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Students express themselves through writing and classroom discussion tied to learning.
☐	☐	☐	2. Assignments provide opportunities for individual choice.



☐	☐	☐	3. The teacher provides timely, formative feedback to students on the quality of their work.
☐	☐	☐	4. The teacher connects instruction to the daily lives of students and aspects of their experiences.
☐	☐	☐	5. The teacher accommodates students' questions about an interest in external events.

Classroom Environment

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The classroom is colorful and has several mentally stimulating displays.
☐	☐	☐	2. Seating arrangements facilitate collaboration and discussion.
☐	☐	☐	3. The classroom comfortably accommodates the number of students in it.
☐	☐	☐	4. Evidence of student work is displayed in the classroom.
☐	☐	☐	5. Learning goals and objectives are posted.



REFLECTING ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

✿ Purpose

The following ten checklists are useful for staff and school leaders to reflect on the characteristics necessary for high levels of student engagement. These checklists cover many areas of school culture and teacher practice. Reflecting on the checklists will be useful in conversations on how to improve student engagement and in identifying areas of strength and areas in need of improvement.

✿ Procedure

The checklists may be used individually to review one aspect of engagement, or they may be used as a group to complete a more comprehensive reflection on school culture and student engagement. The lists are designed for teacher leader teams to reflect on school characteristics. They are best used by a group.

The group should read each item and reach consensus as to the rating. After reviewing the entire list, the group can then focus on those characteristics that are lowest rated and begin conversations on how school improvement practices can address each characteristic.

The checklists should be reviewed periodically to measure progress.

Relationships Checklist

Definitely	Partially	No	
☐	☐	☐	1. The teachers exhibit behaviors that indicate care and concern about students.
☐	☐	☐	2. The teachers call students by name.
☐	☐	☐	3. The teachers are familiar with the school community and surrounding neighborhood.
☐	☐	☐	4. The teachers take an interest in students' education plans and future goals.



Definitely	Partially	No	
☐	☐	☐	5. Students have opportunities to ask teachers questions about what they are learning.
☐	☐	☐	6. The teachers talk with parents regularly, including providing positive feedback on student work.
☐	☐	☐	7. The teachers are willing to provide extra help.
☐	☐	☐	8. The teachers treat students with respect.
☐	☐	☐	9. The teachers pay attention to all students, not just to the top students.
☐	☐	☐	10. The teachers make students feel that they belong (are accepted and liked) at school.
☐	☐	☐	11. The teachers talk with his or her students in settings outside of class.
☐	☐	☐	12. Students feel comfortable enough to ask their teachers questions.
☐	☐	☐	13. The teachers trust students.
☐	☐	☐	14. Students work well in groups.
☐	☐	☐	15. Students treat other students with respect.
☐	☐	☐	16. The teachers expect students to do their best at all times.
☐	☐	☐	17. Students feel supported by their teachers.
☐	☐	☐	18. Classroom interactions reflect collaborative working relationships among students and between teacher and students.
☐	☐	☐	19. The teachers frequently talk to other students outside of class.



Guiding Principles Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The school has an identified list of common guiding principles to which all agree.
☐	☐	☐	2. Guiding principles are displayed prominently throughout the school.
☐	☐	☐	3. Efforts are in place to decrease detrimental attitudes and behaviors (e.g., biases, stereotyping, negative remarks, racial slurs, bullying, gossip, insensitive gender remarks).
☐	☐	☐	4. Students reflect on character-related issues (e.g., in journal writing, essays, class meetings, class discussions, artistic expression).
☐	☐	☐	5. Staff model and practice social skills that demonstrate guiding principles (e.g., interrupting politely, active listening, constructive feedback, respectful communication).
☐	☐	☐	6. Students have opportunities to put guiding principles into action in ways that promote student autonomy, social responsibility, and caring relationships (e.g., cooperative learning, community service, class meetings, democratic participation, cross-age and peer tutoring, student governance, conflict resolution).
☐	☐	☐	7. Instruction integrates academic content with guiding principles.
☐	☐	☐	8. Student recognition encourages intrinsic motivation (i.e., helping students recognize the internal "feel good" benefits of positive acts) and discourages reliance on extrinsic incentives (e.g., material rewards).



Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	9. Students have ongoing teacher mentoring and support.
☐	☐	☐	10. Parents/guardians are involved in the school through newsletters, shared homework assignments, parent workshops, family-based activities, and evaluation surveys.
☐	☐	☐	11. The school uses community resources extensively (e.g., community volunteers, youth groups, business partnerships, after-school programs, local government agencies).
☐	☐	☐	12. Students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and practice of guiding principles (e.g., surveys, portfolios, projects, skill demonstrations).



Rewards and Grading Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The teachers give frequent verbal feedback about the quality of student work.
☐	☐	☐	2. Student praise typically is made public, and student criticism usually is made private.
☐	☐	☐	3. The teachers routinely use symbols or public displays to recognize high-quality student work.
☐	☐	☐	4. The teachers maintain a system for tracking completion of students' assignments.
☐	☐	☐	5. The teachers maintain a system for information on student progress in learning.
☐	☐	☐	6. Students understand in advance the grading system.
☐	☐	☐	7. The teachers communicate frequently with parents about student progress.
☐	☐	☐	8. Students reflect on the quality of their work as part of the grading process.
☐	☐	☐	9. The teachers avoid using grades as an incentive for good behavior, such as bonus points.
☐	☐	☐	10. The teachers avoid reducing grades as punishment for poor behavior.
☐	☐	☐	11. Contracts are used for finishing incomplete work or doing additional honors work.
☐	☐	☐	12. Grades reflect the highest level of student learning and not simply an average of all work.
☐	☐	☐	13. Grading scales emphasize proficiency rather than percentage of correct answers.
☐	☐	☐	14. Rewards offered in advance as an incentive for hard work are used in moderation.
☐	☐	☐	15. Food, especially high-sugar treats such as candy and desserts, is used in moderation.
☐	☐	☐	16. Behavior grades, if used, are separate from academic grading.



Student Habits Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The classroom routines are consistent and predictable from day-to-day.
☐	☐	☐	2. Routines for entering, exiting, and moving within the classroom are taught, reviewed, and reinforced on a regular basis.
☐	☐	☐	3. Procedures for transitions at recess, lunch, dismissal, and other predictable times are taught, reviewed, and reinforced on a regular basis.
☐	☐	☐	4. Classroom rules regarding behavior expectations are posted, taught, reviewed, and reinforced on a regular basis.
☐	☐	☐	5. Classroom rules are stated in positive language.
☐	☐	☐	6. Homework policies are reviewed and reinforced on a regular basis.
☐	☐	☐	7. Student practice acceptable ways to seek the teacher's attention.
☐	☐	☐	8. Students follow classroom procedures.
☐	☐	☐	9. Routines for handling materials and supplies occur smoothly, with little loss of instructional time.
☐	☐	☐	10. Efficient systems for performing non-instructional duties are in place, resulting in minimal loss of instructional time.
☐	☐	☐	11. Teachers' responses to misbehavior are appropriate.



Foundation Learning Skills Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Students use planning/organizational skills to complete in-class tasks and homework.
☐	☐	☐	2. Students take notes and record key information for future reference.
☐	☐	☐	3. Students have techniques for memorizing information.
☐	☐	☐	4. Students practice communication skills appropriate to the goals of the class.
☐	☐	☐	5. Students practice active listening (e.g. body posture, giving feedback, asking questions, and summarizing a lesson).
☐	☐	☐	6. Students can stay on task and work independently.
☐	☐	☐	7. Students effectively use questioning, coaching, and feedback to stimulate reflection on their work.
☐	☐	☐	8. Students work cooperatively in small groups.
☐	☐	☐	9. Students use appropriate social skills (greeting guests, responding to adults and peers, entering conversations, accepting criticism).
☐	☐	☐	10. Students use appropriate skills to resolve conflict and negotiate compromises.



Design for Rigor and Relevance Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Instruction is well planned and prepared in advance.
☐	☐	☐	2. Instruction has a clear expectation for levels of rigor and relevance using the four quadrants of the Rigor/Relevance Framework.
☐	☐	☐	3. Instruction is built with the goal of culminating in a performance task.
☐	☐	☐	4. Instruction is planned using data about students' prior experiences and achievement levels.
☐	☐	☐	5. Instruction informs students of the expected performance, essential questions, and assessment criteria at the beginning of the lesson or unit.
☐	☐	☐	6. Instruction facilitates acquisition of basic knowledge and skills necessary for student performance.
☐	☐	☐	7. Instruction shows how student work samples exemplify proficient/nonproficient levels of performance.
☐	☐	☐	8. Instruction is guided by "big ideas" (abstract concepts) and essential questions.



Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	9. Instruction includes teaching the knowledge and skills necessary for expected student performance.
☐	☐	☐	10. Instruction calls for students to demonstrate their understanding and apply knowledge and skills in activities and tasks.
☐	☐	☐	11. Instruction shows the relevance of learning beyond school.
☐	☐	☐	12. Instruction uses a variety of teaching resources. The textbook is only one resource among many.
☐	☐	☐	13. Instruction is linked to priority state standards.
☐	☐	☐	14. Instruction assesses standard(s) at the appropriate level of rigor.
☐	☐	☐	15. Instruction uses authentic assessments.
☐	☐	☐	16. Instruction uses clear evaluation criteria and performance standards.
☐	☐	☐	17. Instruction uses information from ongoing assessments to analyze student learning and dispel misconceptions along the way.
☐	☐	☐	18. Instruction uses rubrics/scoring guides to delineate levels of proficiency.



Active Learning Strategies Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Students collaborate in groups to accomplish meaningful tasks.
☐	☐	☐	2. Students discuss/solve open-ended questions/problems.
☐	☐	☐	3. Students engage in hands-on activities when appropriate.
☐	☐	☐	4. The teachers engage all students in higher order thinking activities.
☐	☐	☐	5. The teachers model instructional strategies for active learning.
☐	☐	☐	6. The teachers challenge students to think deeply and critically.
☐	☐	☐	7. The teachers draw students' interest when introducing a lesson.
☐	☐	☐	8. The teachers facilitate students' active construction of meaning (rather than simply telling).
☐	☐	☐	9. Technology is being utilized appropriately.
☐	☐	☐	10. The teachers use a variety of resources and ways to promote understanding, such as audio or video sources, the Internet, and class demonstration.
☐	☐	☐	11. The teachers use questioning, coaching, and feedback to stimulate student reflection.
☐	☐	☐	12. Instruction is student-centered, with emphasis on student choice of materials and activities, interaction, and construction of knowledge.



Literacy Focus Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Literacy is an important priority throughout the school.
☐	☐	☐	2. There are clear, measurable goals for levels of student reading.
☐	☐	☐	3. A standard measure of reading, such as Lexiles, is used to describe all aspects of reading achievement.
☐	☐	☐	4. Literacy development is addressed in all disciplines.
☐	☐	☐	5. Student literacy levels are measured continuously, and the data are compared to literacy achievement goals of the school.
☐	☐	☐	6. The teachers have convenient access to data about student reading levels.
☐	☐	☐	7. The teachers know the reading levels reflected in the textbooks and other instructional materials.
☐	☐	☐	8. The teachers make selections of instructional materials to appropriately challenge students.
☐	☐	☐	9. Students below target reading levels are tested frequently.
☐	☐	☐	10. Students are assigned to academic courses based upon reading level data.



Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	11. The teachers use prereading, vocabulary, and post-reading strategies to improve reading in their content areas.
☐	☐	☐	12. The teachers know the reading level requirements for postsecondary opportunities, including college, employment, and personal use.
☐	☐	☐	13. The teachers regularly share reading strategies with students.
☐	☐	☐	14. Academic intervention services are available to provide additional reading assistance.
☐	☐	☐	15. Instructional coaches are available to assist teachers in improving instructional strategies related to reading.
☐	☐	☐	16. The teachers personalize instruction to accommodate different levels of reading in the classroom.
☐	☐	☐	17. The school media center or library is aligned with reading-level information and is an integral part of the literacy program.
☐	☐	☐	18. Students have opportunities to apply reading skills by tutoring younger students.
☐	☐	☐	19. Students are challenged to increase reading fluency and comprehension.
☐	☐	☐	20. State assessments in all subjects have been analyzed based on student reading levels.



Personalization Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. The teachers have high expectations for all students to achieve expected performance goals.
☐	☐	☐	2. The teachers use a variety of instructional strategies that match the varied learning styles of students.
☐	☐	☐	3. Students have opportunities to demonstrate their talents during the learning experience.
☐	☐	☐	4. Students have an advocate, such as a teacher, principal, or guidance counselor, they can talk to about school issues.
☐	☐	☐	5. Students with disabilities are provided opportunities for full participation in the curriculum.
☐	☐	☐	6. Appropriate accommodations are provided for students with learning disabilities.
☐	☐	☐	7. The teachers frequently confer with individual students about academic progress.
☐	☐	☐	8. The teachers adjust instruction based on student reflection and feedback.
☐	☐	☐	9. Students express themselves through writing and classroom discussion tied to learning.
☐	☐	☐	10. Assignments provide opportunities for individual choice.



Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	11. The teachers provide timely, formative feedback to students on the quality of their work.
☐	☐	☐	12. Supplementary learning options are available for struggling learners.
☐	☐	☐	13. Intervention takes place long before students fail their classes.
☐	☐	☐	14. Instruction is free of derogatory statements about individual cultures and backgrounds.
☐	☐	☐	15. The teachers use examples in activities that reflect the cultural diversity of students.
☐	☐	☐	16. The teachers connect instruction to the daily lives of students as well as aspects of their community and life experiences.
☐	☐	☐	17. The teachers accommodate students' questions and interests in relation to lesson plans.



Classroom Environment Checklist

Definitely	Partially	Not Observed	
☐	☐	☐	1. Classrooms are colorful and have several mentally stimulating displays.
☐	☐	☐	2. Classrooms are clean, and furniture and equipment are well maintained.
☐	☐	☐	3. Seating arrangements facilitate collaboration and discussion.
☐	☐	☐	4. Classrooms comfortably accommodate the number of students in them.
☐	☐	☐	5. There is appropriate lighting for students to conduct their tasks.
☐	☐	☐	6. Classrooms are free of visual distractions that conflict with learning.
☐	☐	☐	7. Technology is available for information presentation.
☐	☐	☐	8. Internet access is available.
☐	☐	☐	9. Classrooms are free of safety hazards.
☐	☐	☐	10. Room temperature is not a distraction.
☐	☐	☐	11. Classroom procedures are posted.
☐	☐	☐	12. Evidence of student work is displayed in classrooms.
☐	☐	☐	13. Learning goals and objectives are posted.
☐	☐	☐	14. Curriculum standards are posted.
☐	☐	☐	15. Communication systems are available to send and receive messages in an emergency.



PERSONALIZATION SURVEY

Purpose

One of the strategies to get all students to a high level of rigor, relevance, and relationships is through personalization. The opposite of personalization is letting student fall through the cracks.

Procedure

Use the following survey to collect information on the degree of personalization in your school. This survey of 6-12 grade students' attitudes toward school was designed by the Endicott Center for Research and Educational Advancement. Although not all of the questions relate to personalization, a great many do.

Personalization Survey

School/Classes

YES	NO	
☐	☐	School is a welcoming and friendly place.
☐	☐	I am proud of my school.
☐	☐	I know the goals my school is working on.
☐	☐	I enjoy being at school.
☐	☐	I have been recognized for something I have accomplished at school.
☐	☐	I think bullying is a problem at school.
☐	☐	School is boring.
☐	☐	At school I am encouraged to be creative.
☐	☐	Students have a say in important decisions made at school.
☐	☐	My classes help me understand what is happening in my everyday life.

Teachers

YES	NO	
☐	☐	Teachers care about my problems and feelings.



☐	☐	Teachers care about me as an individual.
☐	☐	Teachers are concerned about my learning.
☐	☐	My teachers are aware of my learning needs.
☐	☐	Teachers care if I am absent from school.
☐	☐	If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk.
☐	☐	I have a teacher who is a positive role model for me.
☐	☐	Teachers enjoy working with students.
☐	☐	Teachers have fun at school.
☐	☐	Teachers make school a fun and exciting place to learn.
☐	☐	My teachers have time for me.

Respect

☐	☐	Students respect teachers.
☐	☐	Teachers respect students.
☐	☐	Students respect each other.

Parents

☐	☐	My parents care about my education.
☐	☐	My parents like my school.
☐	☐	My parents think going to college is important.
☐	☐	My parents feel comfortable talking to my teachers.
☐	☐	Teachers let my parents know what I do well in.



STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

Purpose

Students, particularly those in high school, can provide excellent feedback about factors that contribute to their engagement. This can be done through a survey, but having direct conversations with groups of students also is an excellent way to gauge the level of engagement in school.

Procedure

Select students randomly to include in focus groups. The groups should have 8-12 students. Encourage students to be honest in their observations. The discussion is intended to measure the level of engagement in the school. The purpose is not to evaluate any specific teacher, administrator, or student, so avoid referring to any teacher or student by name.

Time

30-40 minutes for each group

Consider using third-party facilitators and recorders. Another option is to work with a partner school that is also interested in conducting student focus groups. Train student facilitators and then schedule them to conduct the focus groups in the other school. Students are often open and honest with a peer whom they do not know.

Following are potential questions to use in the focus group:

- Are you challenged in your work, or can you “slide through” classes?
- What are examples of work you do in classes that makes you think?
- What are examples of work you do in classes that you feel will be useful in the real world?



- What are examples of the type of classroom work that you find most interesting and engaging?
- How do teachers provide additional help when you need it, and how often does that occur?
- How can you tell if a teacher or staff member does not care about you or respect you? How do they behave? What do they do?
- What percentage of time in class are you fully engaged in learning?
- What things happen or do not happen in classes that cause you to be bored or uninterested?
- Are classrooms comfortable and safe?
- What are the kinds of activities that make you work hard and wish the class would never end?



LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Purpose

Engaging students is critical if we want them to achieve high levels of rigor and relevance. As with most school improvement, change starts with good leadership. This activity is for administrators to review, reflect, collect evidence, and plan strategies to address student engagement in order to make it an important priority throughout the school.

Procedure

This activity is designed to be used as a working document. It will assist in the planning and reflection process as your school moves forward in achieving high levels of student engagement. The activity has four parts:

- 1 **Benchmark tasks.** Incorporate these tasks in a checklist of what to do and steps to take. Rate the progress of school staff periodically to reflect on where progress is being made and what remains to be done.
- 2 **Implementation actions.** Record your personal goals and actions for further implementation.
- 3 **Evidence.** Collect examples of school success. Consider them a student engagement scrapbook. Insert good examples of high student engagement lessons or practices. Specific examples of relationship development should be kept here as well. This evidence can be used to show progress to new staff, district leaders, or visiting educators.
- 4 **Reflection.** Periodically make notes of progress and needs. The reflection questions (on page 274) will guide you to the important aspects of change. The idea is to jot down some notes to organize thoughts and reminders for future work.

Benchmark Tasks for Student Engagement

Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent	
					Student Learning
					Establish Learning Criteria and data measures that relate to student engagement and personal skills development.
					Analyze Learning Criteria data on Core Academic and Stretch Learning related to student engagement.
					Analyze data on improvement of the Learning Criteria on Student Engagement.
					School Culture
					Foster a school culture that provides students with a sense of equity.
					Foster a school culture that provides students with a feeling of community.
					Foster a school culture that provides students with expansive opportunities.
					Foster a school culture that provides students with individual responsibility.
					Foster a school culture that provides students with challenging experiences.
					Foster a school culture of high expectations.
					Involve staff in discussions to understand, embrace, and reflect on the need for student engagement.
					Establish and implement guiding principles in the school.
					Celebrate achievement.
					Establish common definitions of student engagement and how to measure it.
					Make instructional coaches available to assist teachers in improving strategies for better engagement practices.
					Conduct student and staff focus groups to determine ways to improve engagement.
					Review and revise school grading policies to encourage high levels of student engagement.
					Instructional Practice
					Identify and share examples of positive student engagement.
					Develop staff ability to create classroom procedures that build learning relationships.
					Encourage teachers to personalize instruction to accommodate unique student needs.
					Make literacy an important priority throughout the school.
					Conduct frequent walkthroughs to observe instruction.
					Provide for and monitor classroom space to ensure that it is safe, clean, adequate in size, properly equipped, and well maintained.



Implementation Actions

Plan your specific actions. What will you do? Refer to reference materials from this resource kit you will use and set specific goals and deadlines. Use any of the included forms, or create your own. Following is a template for an action planning form.

Identify the objective of a follow-up action. Then brainstorm and identify actions to be taken, indicate who will take responsibility, and make a deadline for when these actions should be accomplished. Identify the data or measure that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken.

Identified objective: What do you plan to accomplish?		
Actions to be taken: What do you plan to do?	Who will do this?	By when?

Planning and
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Evidence

Keep a scrapbook or journal of the progress made in enhancing student engagement. Place copies of written materials, model lesson plans, memos, photographs of student work, descriptions of students, and other items in this section.

Reflection

Jot down reflections on progress made in improving student engagement. Use the following reflection questions as a guide to analyze the changes toward improved student engagement.

Reflection Questions

- Is the vision clear and accepted so that you hear others repeat the vision?
- Is the focus of decisions on the needs of students?
- Do staff identify current successful student engagement practices without defending all current practice?
- Are the right people involved in leadership roles?
- Do staff feel comfortable and empowered to take risks and innovate?
- Is there a consensus of action agreed upon by all staff?
- Are staff excited about continual learning and frequently sharing ideas?
- Are staff needs identified and met?
- Do staff feel supported in making changes?
- Are adequate resources provided?
- Has the school focused on success and celebrated achievements?
- Do leaders follow through?

Planning and
Reflection

RECOGNIZING GOOD CHARACTER

✿ Purpose

Recognizing good character validates the student behavior and encourages its practice. When guiding principles are displayed by students, feedback and recognition are important so that they will recognize these principles in practice. Feedback enriches their self-esteem. Everyone likes to be recognized for effective work, activities, and thoughts. Public recognition of the guiding principles sends a message to everyone that these are significant and worthy of practice.

✿ Procedure

On occasions when a student shows good character and demonstrates one or more of the guiding principles, have teachers complete the recognition slip, “You Were Caught Showing Your Good Character.” A template for this form follows.

 You Were Caught Showing Your Good Character!

Student _____ Date _____

Teacher _____ Grade _____ Given by _____

Guiding Principle(s) Observed

- ☐ adaptability
- ☐ compassion
- ☐ contemplation
- ☐ courage
- ☐ honesty
- ☐ initiative
- ☐ loyalty
- ☐ optimism
- ☐ perseverance
- ☐ respect
- ☐ responsibility
- ☐ trustworthiness

How the Student Displayed Good Character:



MORNING MEETING

Purpose

The morning meeting is an important component in creating a culture of student engagement. It helps set a positive tone for the full day ahead by building community, creating a positive climate for learning, and reinforcing expectations and social skills.

Meetings can be by classroom group or by school. Small schools can facilitate school-wide meetings more easily. In large schools, it may be possible divide into smaller communities for meetings.

Procedure

For an in-depth discussion of morning meetings, see:
Kriete, Roxann. *The Morning Meeting Book*

Greeting. Students greet each other by name. There are many different greeting activities that can be used throughout the year, including handshaking, singing, clapping, and greeting in different languages.

Sharing. Each day, two or three students share information about an event in their lives. Listeners take turns offering empathic comments or asking questions for clarification.

Group activity. Students participate in a brief, engaging activity such as singing, chanting, playing a game, reciting a poem, dancing.

News and announcements. Students read the news and announcements that their teacher has written, which usually includes an activity that reinforces academic skills.

At the high school level, most would not find singing and clapping appropriate activities; however, at this level, students can take more responsibility for planning and conducting the morning meeting. Older students may use the time to discuss local issues affecting teens, plan community service projects, and share information on key dates such as college entrance tests. An important use for this time is to provide recognition of staff and students, introduce guests, and welcome new students.

Planning and
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ACTION STEPS FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION

✿ Purpose

The following action steps are suggested to develop character-centered teaching and incorporate guiding principles into the school culture. Before initiating any of these activities, discuss the value of character education and the guiding principles. Share examples of what the principles might look like in practice during the everyday activities of the school.

Focus your discussion on the Twelve Guiding Principles of Exceptional Character:

Adaptability
Compassion
Contemplation
Courage
Honesty
Initiative
Loyalty
Optimism
Perseverance
Respect
Responsibility
Trustworthiness

✿ Procedure

1. Share information and reflect on the character education initiative the school is implementing at school meetings.
2. Conduct brief monthly character education seminars to develop a greater understanding of guiding principles, means for integrating them into the curriculum, and ways to promote them in everyday interactions with students.
3. Provide time for teachers to share successful strategies and practices with colleagues.

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4. Develop an action plan for the year to provide a variety of strategies for staff development in character education. Be sure to include the entire staff.
5. Create a guiding-principle-of-the-month program, with one guiding principle emphasized each month by the entire school community.
 - a. Use a morning announcement format, with closed circuit television, a public address system, or simple paper announcements.
 - b. Emphasize how the guiding principle applies in a different role each week (individual, student, friend, family member, worker, community member).
6. Encourage faculty to post the guiding principles in their classrooms and make the principles part of the language of daily interactions.
7. Devote a section of the school newspaper to guiding principles, for example, “The Character Corner.”
 - a. Have students write articles about individuals who display solid character.
 - b. Ask faculty to write articles highlighting how character relates to school life and beyond.

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BOOK STUDY GROUP

Purpose

Book study groups are an effective form of professional development that can be used by educators at all levels. Reading a common education-related book gives a starting point for conversation and avoids slipping back into discussions about past or current practice. The book study group is a way to build a consensus around innovative practices that might be considered in your school. The book study group can be facilitated by any member of the staff and is often rotated. The following five steps explain the process of book study groups, from forming a group to implementing the discussion and follow-up strategies.

Procedure

Step 1. Form a Book Study Group

Book study groups work best when they include less than 15 people. Small groups of less than five may not provide sufficient interaction or variety; larger groups make it difficult to allow all members to participate actively. If you have a large staff, divide the group into smaller study groups. It is helpful if the group is composed of individuals with similar interests or working with common groups of students, although varying viewpoints are important because they provide diversity of opinion and discussion.

Time

Varies.
Study groups meet for
no more than one hour.

The group should determine a schedule for reading and discussion. The schedule should permit time for group members to complete the reading assignments. However, the schedule should not be so extended that participants forget what they have read and discussed between meetings. Most groups settle on weekly or biweekly meetings. Usually book clubs meet face-to-face, but some clubs are successful using asynchronous online conversations.

Consider the meeting length. One hour usually works well for a schedule of four to eight meetings. Focus on the book study during the meetings, rather than being distracted by other school issues. Refreshments are always a good idea. Keep the meetings friendly, yet purposeful.



Step 2. Choose a Book and an Objective

Choose a book on a topic that interests everyone in the group but is sufficiently open-ended to encourage new learning through reading and discussion. It should be thought-provoking and with enough depth to stimulate debate. Give group members an opportunity to choose and recommend books.

Questions to consider while choosing a book include: Why read this book? What does the group want to learn? The study group should clearly determine one or more learning objectives before completing reading. The book's length also needs to fit within a reasonable schedule. Longer books will mean either heavy reading assignments or an extended schedule.

Step 3. Decide How to Read the Book

Some books should be read by all group members. For example, a first assignment might be to read chapters one through four, followed by discussion, and then carry on in a similar fashion. In other cases, it makes sense for members to read different parts of a book and then report back to the group during scheduled meetings. For example, this procedure works well with collections of essays. Whichever approach is chosen, it is a good idea to develop a series of discussion starters—questions or challenging statements that stimulate discussion. These starters can be framed for before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Step 4. Read and Discuss the Book

Follow the schedule. Some groups find it beneficial to choose a discussion leader to get the ball rolling and a recorder who will summarize the discussion. Make connections between the text and real-life examples. Consider questions such as: How are the ideas

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in this book important to my professional life? How can I use what I learn?

Step 5. Evaluate the Book and Plan for Future Book Study

At the conclusion of the book study, take time to consider questions such as: Did the book stimulate thought and discussion? Did the group study meet the learning objectives? How might the group study experience be improved? Taking such evaluation into account will allow the group to bring in new members, reform, or simply continue on, developing a new “cycle” of study.

Recommended Reading List for Student Engagement

- Abernathy, Rob. (2002). *Hot Tips for Teachers: 30 Steps to Student Engagement*. Chicago: Zepher Press.
- Blackburn, Barbara R. (2005). *Classroom Motivation from A to Z*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Blankstein, Alan M., Cole, Robert W., & Houston, Paul D. (2007). *Engaging EVERY Learner*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
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Leadership
Activities

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help teachers brainstorm and share ideas about student interests and dislikes in planning engaging instruction. This activity encourages groups of teachers to think and share ideas about characteristics that will enhance and help create engaging instruction. The activity can be done with the entire faculty and compiled into a schoolwide list. It also can be done with small groups of teachers at a grade level or within a department.

Procedure

- Organize teachers in small groups of no more than 10.
- Distribute the worksheet, “Student Engagement Characteristics” (on the next page).
- Ask teachers to complete the worksheet on their own. In the left-hand column, “Opportunities,” they will complete the sentence, “My students like....” In the right-hand column, “Obstacles,” they will complete the sentence, “My students don’t like....”

After teachers have done the written assignment, have them share their responses. Make a complete list of opportunities and obstacles, eliminating any duplicates. Summarize the list for future reference.

Brainstorm the student characteristics that provide opportunities and obstacles for engagement.

Opportunities	Obstacles
My students like ...	My students don't like ...

 Leadership
Activities

PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS

Purpose

This technique is useful in presentations to help an audience better understand the goals of an organization. Goals are sometimes hard to fully understand. What people do understand is personal experience. This activity helps to relate the goals of an organization to personal experience by analyzing characteristics of personal experience.

Preparation

Before trying this technique in a presentation, experiment with a couple of people or small group to test the scenario and questions that you will pose. It is helpful to have visuals that give the beginning of the scenario and list the questions. State the goal. List four to six criteria that could be used to evaluate characteristics of that goal. Then, for each criterion, list two extremes, one positive characteristic and one negative.

Goal: Student-Centered Instruction

Criteria	Characteristics	
	Positive	Negative
Initiation	Self-started	Required
Dependency	Work with others	Work alone
Use of Time	Flexible	Fixed time
Rewards	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Learning	Application	Theory



Procedure

1. Introduce to participants the specific goal of the organization that you are trying to get them to internalize. For example, remind school staff that a goal is to develop student-centered instruction.
2. Ask them to think about a specific type of personal experience. Pick a type of experience that has some connection to the goal on which you are focusing. For example, for student-centered instruction, ask them to think about a personal learning experience, perhaps as a student, that transformed their lives by opening new opportunities or giving them greater satisfaction.
3. Ask a series of questions with a choice of two extreme alternatives. For example, in focusing on student-centered instruction, ask questions about the characteristics of their personal learning experience: Who initiated it? Did they work alone or with others? Were there time limitations? Were the rewards intrinsic or extrinsic? Was the learning primarily applied or theoretical?

As you pose each question, have audience members raise their hands in response to their choice. If you have constructed your questions well, the characteristics of individuals' personal experiences will relate to the student-centered learning goal of the organization.

It is even more powerful if you have a slide that lists the positive characteristics, which you present after polling the audience. Their opinions should represent exactly the characteristics of the goal you are working toward. When personal experiences are linked to a school goal, support for that goal is greatly enhanced.

Leadership
Activities

THE TRUTH ABOUT WANTS AND NEEDS

Purpose

This facilitated discussion focuses on the needs and wants of students in the area of relationships. Schools strive to provide for the needs of students, such as basic nutrition, safety, a sense of belonging, and recognition and development of self-esteem through learning and competence.

Meeting these needs is often a challenge because of limited resources and outside influences. However, another obstacle is that wants often seem to conflict with needs. For example, students need structure and discipline, but they want freedom.

At one level, these seem to be opposites. In truth, good parents create family rules and activities that provide structure and discipline but still allow choice and recognize individuality. It is an oversimplification to say that students want freedom and it will make them happy. The truth is that they need both structure and freedom.

Schools that are creating a vision to meet the needs of students in the area of relationships will find that this activity stimulates teachers to think about the inherent contradictions in student needs and wants. Using this discussion as a background, teachers can then better define the vision of what the school should be doing to meet the relationship needs of students.

Preparation

In advance, write the following statements on 3-by-5-inch cards.

Students need/want friends.
Students need/want to be singled out.
Students need/want relationships with adults.
Students need/want to be known.
Students need/want to belong to a group.
Students need/want to feel that others care about them.
Students need/want a mentor.
Students need/want recognition.



Students need/want to be left alone.
Students need/want to be seen as individuals.
Students need/want to be like everyone else.
Students need/want to be listened to.
Students need/want to be winners.

Procedure

1. In a meeting with school staff or a leadership team, introduce the group to the challenge of creating a school vision in regard to student relationships. Begin by discussing some student needs or wants related to relationships.
2. Distribute the cards to people in the group.
3. Tell the group that these cards reflect statements that some people use to describe students. Select one person to read his or her card, choosing either *need* or *want* when reading the sentence (the reader must decide whether that statement is a need or a want). Then ask the group to react to the statement that has been read. Is it true? Are there exceptions among students?
4. During the discussion, list those characteristics that are true needs, those that are wants, and those that are perhaps both.
5. Next, begin a discussion of the vision of the school regarding student relationships. Answer this question: What would a school look like if it had positive learning relationships for students?



SHARING SUCCESS

✿ Purpose

This activity is particularly useful in an organization that is undergoing significant change from outside pressure or is distracted with a number of negative influences. It could be the creation of a new school or the appointment of a new administrator. In the midst of significant turmoil, there is a tendency to focus on the most negative aspects of the organization's condition.

This group activity forces staff to think about the positive, particularly about the characteristics of the organization when a positive climate existed. By reliving some of the stories of an effective organization, a group can begin to move the focus of attention from the negative aspects of a current situation to the conditions that need to be created to have a positive work environment and a progressive organization.

✿ Preparation

Participants should be in groups of no more than six to eight and have the opportunity to sit comfortably around a conference table. If working with larger groups, divide into smaller groups, each with a facilitator who understands the purpose of the activity and can keep the group on task and focused on the objectives.

✿ Procedure

Time
45-60 minutes

The presenter introduces the activity by openly talking about some of the outside pressures and negative aspects of the organization with which it must deal. The presenter then encourages the group to put those tasks aside.

If a group is particularly distracted, a useful technique for getting people to put those ideas aside is to have them write down the current problems or issues that occupy their thoughts on small sheets of paper. Then the presenter collects all of those sheets of paper and puts them in a box or container in the corner of the room, saying that these problems are set aside right now and will be addressed at a later time.



Tell the group that in order to address the current problems adequately and to focus on the real goals, it is useful to reflect on previous successes within the organization. Encourage group participants to discuss success stories from their experiences in the organization. These stories should be examples from when they personally felt empowered and successful and there was a strong sense of cooperation and effectiveness within the organization.

Ask each of the facilitators to charge each member of the group to think about an example. Ask each facilitator to give three to four minutes of quiet time so that each person can think about the story to share with the others. These should not be brief descriptions but should tell a detailed story that mentions specific people, describes what happened, and how people felt. After each group has shared individual stories, if time permits, share some of the best stories with the entire group.

Follow up with a discussion of the characteristics of the organization present in those stories that created this feeling of success. These characteristics become important to focus on in identifying the goals to work toward in the current problem or crisis.



CAROUSEL

✿ Purpose

This activity engages participants in brainstorming. They will become familiar with the technique, practice the guidelines for effective brainstorming, and evaluate their own success in using the strategy and its effectiveness in helping them to generate ideas.

✿ Preparation

- Large sheets of newsprint
- Colored markers
- Masking tape or thumb tacks

✿ Procedure

Time

45-60 minutes

1. Post large sheets of newsprint on the wall at various places around the room. Have a brainstorming topic or question on each sheet.
2. Review the guidelines for effective brainstorming.
3. Divide the participants into groups of six.
4. Have each group choose a recorder.
5. Designate a timekeeper for the activity and instruct the timekeeper to give a signal after three minutes.
6. Have each group start with a different colored marker in front of one of the pieces of newsprint.
7. Instruct the groups to brainstorm responses to the question/topic. Indicate that they will only have three minutes for each topic.
8. After three minutes and the time signal, direct the groups to move to the next sheet to their right.
9. Have the groups brainstorm quickly and add to the new sheet.



10. At the time signal of three minutes, direct the groups to move again to their right and repeat the process.
11. Continue this procedure until each group has brainstormed responses to all of the topics posted.
12. Have each group return to the topic where they began. Have groups look over ideas and see what was added to the list.
13. Instruct the groups to organize the ideas into categories and eliminate repeated ideas.
14. In their same groupings, have the participants discuss the effectiveness of brainstorming in helping them to generate ideas and evaluate how well they followed the guidelines for effective brainstorming.

Sample Topics

- How can I get students to work quickly at the beginning of class?
- What do I do with students that repeatedly fail to do homework?
- How do I handle tardy students?
- How do I keep all students engaged when one is reading or answering questions?
- How do I handle sleeping in class?
- What types of rewards work best?

Leadership
Activities

BUMPER CLUMPER

Purpose

This is an effective brainstorming and sharing technique that can be used to pinpoint popular opinions of a group. For the leader or facilitator, it is a creative way to discover the opinions of a large group.

Preparation

This activity requires 3-by-5-inch index cards (three per person). The meeting room needs to be large enough for group members to move around. The facilitator should create a series of example sentence starters to be used during the activity. Each example should be written on a separate index card.

Procedure

Time
15-20 minutes

1. Pass out three index cards to each person.
2. Explain that participants will jot down opinions to complete a particular sentence starter on each card. (Example: "The three most important skills a student should learn are ...")
3. Collect the cards.
4. Shuffle and add in example sentence starters. (To make the procedure work more smoothly, as well as to enrich it, prepare additional cards ahead of time.)
5. Redistribute three cards to each person.
6. Instruct group members to rank the cards in order of their perceived importance.
7. Ask participants to exchange cards with other group members to try and collect three cards that best represents their own thinking. Each person must always have a total of three cards. It may be useful to give a time allotment for this portion of the activity.



8. Instruct individuals to form coalitions of likeminded people. Say something like, "Find kindred souls who can agree on a total of three cards, discarding all others." It may be useful to give a time allotment for this portion of the activity.
9. Invite coalition groups to share their findings with the large group. It may be necessary for each coalition group to choose a speaker. Discussion or reactions may follow.

Leadership
Activities

IMAGES OF SCHOOL

Purpose

The very nature of school requires goals — for teachers, parents, and students. Without a clear vision, it is difficult to understand how to do what is best to help students meet and/or exceed expectations. Used at the beginning of a school year, this activity stimulates a discussion regarding expectations for learning. It also enables teachers, parents, and students to share what is important to them about the coming school year.

Preparation

This activity often involves parents without their children present. Prior to meeting with parents, ask the students to make a list of their academic goals. The facilitator for this activity should create his or her own list of expectations for the coming school year. It will be shared as part of the activity.

Procedure

1. Ask students: “What are your goals for this year in school? What would you like to learn? What would make this a successful school year?” After a few minutes, allow time for students to share their answers. Write their responses on the classroom chalk or whiteboard or on poster board. Some common answers are listed below:

Time

30-40 minutes
with each group

Typical Elementary Responses

- Learn to read.
- Learn to work with numbers.
- Draw pictures.
- Play nicely in groups.
- Have other children like me.
- Write better.
- Make new friends.
- Learn what I do well.
- Follow directions.
- Have fun.



Typical Secondary Responses

- Learn more about _____.
 - Get a good grade.
 - Improve my writing or speaking.
 - Learn about career options.
 - Explore my interests.
 - Prepare for tests.
 - Learn about real-world applications.
 - Work on interesting projects.
2. Ask the parents: "What goals do you have for your child in school this year? What would like him or her to learn? What would make this a successful school year for your child?"
 3. Reveal the list of responses developed earlier by students. Allow time for parents to read them.
 4. Have parents share their answers. List them on the chalkboard or on poster board. Give parents time to compare their responses with the students' responses.
 5. Show parents a similar list that you have prepared prior to the meeting that reflects your own expectations for the year. This list should include school priorities such as achievement on state tests, exceeding state or national standards, and development of character skills.
 6. Discuss the similarities and differences between the three lists of expectations. Explain that the similarities show the common ground and the differences show where increased communication is necessary. Say: "Good school experiences come from teachers, parents, and students sharing common expectations. While we assume we all have similar expectations, this exercise points out how there are three dimensions to expectations. They are all valid, but they might not all be the same."

 Leadership
Activities

IMPROVING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT SUPPORTS

Purpose

This activity focuses on teacher practices that support student engagement. It raises awareness about the need to make a conscious effort to reach out to students and encourage engagement and learning. The practices that teachers use can increase student engagement and foster learning.

Procedure

Before initiating this activity, discuss examples of teaching practices that may positively affect students' participation and engagement. Ask teachers to choose one student or a whole class. Over the course of two weeks, encourage the teacher to make a concerted effort to strengthen engagement with that student or class. At the end of two weeks, ask teachers to reflect on their practices and the students' responses.

Teacher Summary

What did I do to improve the student engagement?

How did the student/class respond to my actions?

What student changes were noticed?

Improved test scores	Yes	No
Improved participation	Yes	No
Improved attendance	Yes	No
Improved relationships with peers	Yes	No
Higher level of engagement	Yes	No
Coming to class with materials	Yes	No
Completing assignments on time	Yes	No
High quality student work	Yes	No

After the two weeks, teachers continue their efforts with these students and select another class to focus on during the next two-week block of time. The process goes on throughout the school year.



PEER TEACHING OBSERVATION

Purpose

No matter what the format of a peer review, the objective is always the same — to help teachers improve instruction. For every type of review, it is important to have a clearly defined process that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the reviewer(s) and the teacher whose practice/work is being reviewed. Equally important is a set of criteria for the review. This guides the teacher's work and provides the reviewer with a focus for commenting on that work.

Preparation

Peer observations in education involve using one's peers to examine aspects of teaching and learning. It is an opportunity for staff to reflect on strengths and weaknesses and to work together for improvement. The overall goal is to establish a culture of self-study that stimulates continuous inquiry, reflection, information sharing, and improvement. Through a peer observation process, teachers can periodically examine and reflect on where they stand in relation to their goals for improving teaching and learning.

Procedure

Education groups universally endorse the value of peer observations. However, it is difficult to find the time to do it. To make the peer observation truly valuable, the full process of conferencing is essential.

Time

30-40 minutes
with each group

- discussions about teaching prior to delivery of instruction
- classroom observations
- discussions about teaching after delivery of instruction

Having a peer in the classroom to judge performance can initially be threatening to many teachers. Both the teacher being observed and the reviewer will be more comfortable if there is a well-defined focus. Therefore, it is best to perform peer observations around a specific purpose rather than judging overall instruction. For example, the observation might focus on the effective use of group learning or the integration of technology. A Peer Teaching Observation Form is provided.

Peer Teaching Observation Form

Observer Name _____	Date _____
Teacher(s) Observed _____	Time _____
Class _____	Length _____
Number of Students _____	

Focus of Observation: Describe the aspect of instruction on which the peer group has agreed to focus for the peer observation.

Observations: Describe the strengths and areas of improvement related to the focus of the observation.	
Strengths	Needs Improvement

Rigor and Relevance: Describe the degree to which students were challenged to think in complex ways and apply their learning.	Student Engagement: Describe the degree to which students were motivated, interested, and committed to learning activities.



Teaching Behaviors Appropriate for Peer Teaching Observation

Here are some specific purposes that might be the focus of data gathering during a peer observation. Choose no more than two for each observation.

- examples of real-world applications
- patterns of calling on students
- balance of negative and positive feedback
- clarity of directions
- using open-ended questions
- body language that supports building learning relationships
- wait time for student response to teacher questions
- balance of teacher and student talk
- correlation of objectives and activities
- effective use of cooperative learning groups
- strategies for helping individual students
- recognizing different learning styles
- strategies for encouraging students who choose not to participate
- reducing interruptions
- “kid watching” to give feedback on certain students’ behavior
- collecting data for action research projects
- coaching skills

Leadership
Activities

REFLECTION ON LEARNING

 Purpose

Effective instructional leaders can encourage teachers and others to change practices through self-reflection. Good communication skills are instrumental in guiding and stimulating such reflection. A well-timed, thoughtful question can be the most effective way to stimulate a person's thinking about his or her own practices. The leader who is able to ask the right questions at the right times is well on the way to being not only an active observer, but also one who is able to influence change thoughtfully without resorting to mandates or forced practice.

 Preparation

Prepare a list of thought-provoking questions on chart paper or index cards for easy access. Instructional leaders and teachers may want to keep written journals to record reflections or key points made during the discussion process.

Time

30 minutes for
individual meetings,
45-60 minutes for
group reflection

Individual reflection conversations should follow classroom observations in order for both parties to have a common experience to discuss. Reflection also can be done in a group setting. A group should be comprised of six to eight teachers. Create a series of reflection questions that easily can be accessed by teachers and instructional leaders. Questions may include:

The most important
timing consideration is
to reflect on practices
regularly.

- What did you do well? Why do you feel this way?
- What do you need to improve upon? Why do you feel this way?
- How will you go about making changes or additions to your practice?

 Procedure

1. Give teachers reflection questions (on the next page).
2. Ask teachers to identify a lesson and reflect on the answers to each question.



3. Allow time for teachers to share their lessons.
4. Allow time for teachers to reflect on their practices with thought-provoking questions. Reflections may take place orally or in written journals.

Reflective Questions

- What do you want students to learn?
- What are the levels of rigor and relevance that you incorporate in class?
- How do you know students are learning?
- How does the level of student engagement influence the level of achievement and learning?
- How are you trying to increase the level of student engagement?
- Are you meeting the needs of all students?
- What strategies do you use to address individual learning styles?
- What can I do as an instructional leader to support your efforts?
- What was the most successful part of this particular learning experience? Why was it successful?
- If you teach this lesson again, how would you change it?

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INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

Purpose

The use of instructional coaching as an effective on-site, job-embedded professional development strategy is based on current research and effective instructional practice. It creates a collaborative professional learning community and provides sustained support for individual teachers and school improvement efforts. An instructional coach instructs teachers about strategies and classroom routines that have been validated through research. The coach assists the teacher in a specific content area while integrating the goals of the school and district, focusing on and improving instructional practice, and improving student achievement. Teachers, students, instructional leadership, and district and school leadership can all benefit from an instructional coaching program.

Following are two activities that will help your school assess whether or not instructional coaching would be appropriate and to raise awareness about this professional development strategy.

Procedure

Activity A

To determine whether or not instructional coaching would be appropriate for your school community, hold focus groups to assess the interest, readiness, design, and support.

Time
Varies

Focus groups may consist of teachers, school and district administrators, and board members. Everyone should be encouraged to participate openly in discussion. In some cases, an outside facilitator and recorder should be considered to ensure full participation in the discussion. Potential questions to consider are:

1. Why consider coaching?
2. Are district/building goals tied to coaching outcomes?



3. Has the school developed content-focused guidelines?
4. Is there a belief in the value of embedded, on-site professional development?
5. Is there time allotted for teachers to meet and discuss their practices?
6. Will the coaching program respond to needs suggested by data analysis?
7. Will coaching reach all teachers as a means of sustaining changes and growth in instructional practice?
8. How is differentiation of instruction possible under a coaching system that centers on universal best practices?
9. How important is it to share generic teaching practices versus content-based teaching ideas within each subject?
10. Is there adequate school and central office support?
11. Where will the coaches come from?
12. What criteria will be used to select coaches? Will there be any monetary compensation for them?
13. What indicators will be used to measure the success of the coaching program and the effectiveness of the coaches?

**Activity B**

This activity will help to raise awareness about instructional coaching, its value, and the role and responsibilities of a coach.

1. Divide staff into small groups.
2. Ask each group to brainstorm the characteristics of an athletic coach and the value that the coach brings to individual team players, the team as a whole, and the organization the team represents. Encourage participants to refer to examples from their own lives or that of their children and/or students who have been influenced by a coach.
3. Invite a respected coach to address the group and share his or her perceptions of the coach's role, responsibilities, and contributions.
4. Invite a successful student athlete to address the group and share how a coach influenced him or her. What was learned from the coach? What value did the coach bring to the individual player?
5. Compare the findings from the group discussion and the presentations by the coach and athlete with the function of an instructional coach. What might be similar? What might be different?



INTERVIEWING STAKEHOLDERS

Purpose

Interviewing stakeholders is an excellent way to help a team reflect on current practices and develop creative solutions. This process supports social learning and gives adults access to new ideas or an opportunity to hear the viewpoints of others.

This procedure works best when a team is “stuck” and needs a creative boost to solve a problem or has a long to-do list. It also can be used to reorient the group to the purpose of the work at hand or to celebrate success.

Preparation

Depending on the size of the venue, microphones may be necessary, one for interviewee and one to pass around to team members. For small groups, only seating furnishings are needed. Create a list of questions that will be relevant for the interview. Choose a facilitator. Identify the individuals you want to invite to the interview.

Procedure

1. Identify a major roadblock or a fork in the road in your plan for improvement.
2. Invite one to three stakeholders to the interview: those who will benefit from, receive, or need to contribute to the work.
3. Orient the interviewee(s) to the work being done ahead of the interview. Also give them a few starting points or questions to answer.
4. Have the facilitator start the interview with a prompt from the questions or points given to the interviewee ahead of time and allow time for the interviewee(s) to respond. (5 to 10 minutes)
5. Invite the rest of the team members to ask the interviewee follow-up questions (10 to 15 minutes).



6. After the interviewee leaves, process what you have learned. Use any conversation starter that allows individual reflection first and then group processing. Decide how what you learned will influence the next steps of your work.

Examples and Uses

- A team manages to boost math scores. Invite three students who were successful to be interviewed. The students may be at various performance levels; however, all should have shown growth. Ask students what strategies had the greatest payoff and what they are the most proud of with their math gains. The interview is a great way to celebrate and move the team to next steps in the work.
- A high school team is restructuring the 9th grade year. Several students are interviewed — some who dropped out, some who went through tough times but stayed in school, and some who met with success. This interview will help the team know where to start and how to prioritize steps that help students succeed when they reach a fork in the road.
- An elementary team is trying to increase parent involvement. Several parents are brought in or home visits are conducted using the same questions. This will help the team choose the best solutions that make parents feel welcome and involved.
- Interview new teachers at the end of the year to determine what effective support they received and what was lacking. This will help a district or school structure new teacher support for maximum success or even differentiate the support by need or experience. This also may help a team plan for second- and third-year follow-up support.

Sample Interview Questions

Students

1. What were your biggest successes, and what were your challenges?
2. What could we do differently to help you be more successful?
3. When you reached the point in which you had to change your behaviors and experiences, what happened at school or home that helped you the most?
4. What are your favorite strategies that work for you in _____ (list content area or skill)?
5. What do you want us to know as we plan for _____ (list initiative)?
6. What could we do differently to support our students?
7. What really helped you learn _____ (English, math, etc.)?

Parents

1. How could we make our school and staff more welcoming?
2. What do you need to know about our students to help you help your child?
3. How can we support you and your family?
4. What would make your experience with our school better or more positive?
5. What is something we could have done differently for you or your child? Why?
6. How is our communication with you and your family? What method works best for you (notes, e-mail, Web site, telephone, etc.)?
7. What aspects of our school are the most confusing? What processes are the clearest?

Teachers

1. What support do you need with _____ (list initiative)?
2. What is the greatest need you have? What kind of support do you suggest?
3. Which populations of students are the most challenging? Why? What would help you better meet the needs of these students?

Leadership
Activities

Adapted from Kuzmich,
Lin. "Adult Learning
Framework for Coaches,
Mentors and Staff
Leaders"

4. How difficult is it to communicate with the parents of your students? What would help you?
5. Do you know how decisions get made at this school/district? Do you participate? What would make this process work better?
6. What kind of training format works best for you (workshop, coaching, video, book studies, student work analysis, lesson study, data review, cooperative planning, etc.)?
7. As an expert in your content area or grade level, what is the best advice you can give us for improving student achievement (meeting diverse student needs, choosing the strategies to teach new teachers, sharing the practices that have the highest payoff for students, etc.)?
8. What could we do to help you feel more involved as a valued member of our team, school, or district? Do you need to be better informed or more supported? Do you have access to the right resources to do your work?

Interview Follow-Up Ideas

1. What surprised you? Tell a partner and then share with the whole group.
2. What did you learn that should guide our work? List two examples.
3. Did anything you learned change your mind about our priorities, the direction we are heading, or the solutions we have chosen?
4. What else do you need to know to help move our work forward? Who else do we need to hear from?
5. What was the most powerful thing an interviewee said today? How will this influence your thinking and beliefs about our work?



ACTION RESEARCH

Purpose

Action research is a process in which teachers examine their own practice systematically. It is a process or approach for solving problems. By carefully using research techniques, the teacher collects data and makes objective observations on the implementation of a particular strategy to determine if it is working. Action is a good term to describe this process because these are active steps that a teacher takes to raise student achievement. Action researchers seek systematic answers to education problems or issues.

Action research is a powerful improvement technique, since teachers work best on problems they have identified for themselves. Teachers become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently.

For example, a teacher might use action research to evaluate two algebra classes. The students in one class had instruction supplemented with computer-based instruction. The other class did not. Were there differences in achievement or in areas of strengths and weaknesses? Another example would be to measure whether students working in groups who have greater choice in research topics prepare better reports than groups with assigned topics.

This type of research leads to the continuous improvement of instruction. Teachers look for innovations they can introduce and systematically collect data to determine whether one technique works better than another. Teachers should continually pose questions about their innovations and apply action research techniques to reflect on which innovations led to greater improvement.



Action research is more extensive than teachers simply thinking about their teaching and how it can be improved. It is systematic and involves collecting evidence on which to base rigorous reflection.

Collaborative action research involves teams of teachers inquiring about the teaching responsibilities that they share. Often this might involve use of outside experts, such as university professors. Action research also can be schoolwide; the entire staff undertakes a problem and collects data for a course of action.

Action research begins with a question — with wanting to know whether a strategy does or does not improve learning. By continually asking questions about their own instruction and collecting data, teachers become proficient researchers.

It is important that the educational practice being studied is one to which the participants are committed. This is often difficult to accomplish, which is why action research usually is done by individual teachers. If a team or the entire staff engages in a research question, it should be a question that directly affects everyone.

Once the question is identified, decide how to collect data. Student test scores are an important source, but often there are not test scores to measure the question being addressed. In this case, other forms of data will work fine. Written materials such as interviews, observations, logs, journals, and other reports all provide data that can be used for comparison and reflection. Data might also be in visual form, such as a videotape. When collecting data through interviews or observations, try to have a specific set of questions to guide the data collection. By carefully thinking through the questions in advance, the information collected will be more precise.



Benefits of Action Research

- increased sharing and collaboration across departments, disciplines, and grade levels
- increased dialogue about instructional issues and student learning
- enhanced communication among teachers and students
- improved student performance
- revision of practice based on new knowledge about teaching and learning
- increased teacher motivation
- teacher designed and initiated staff development
- development of priorities for schoolwide planning and assessment efforts
- contributions to the profession's body of knowledge about teaching and learning.

Stages in Action Research

1. Posing research questions around student learning
2. Collecting research data systemically
3. Taking action to make changes based upon data
4. Evaluating results by collecting more data

Procedure

Time
varies with type
of research

Steps in Action Research: A Guide for Classroom Teachers

1. Develop research questions based on your own curiosity about teaching and learning in your classroom.
2. Collect data from and with your students systematically.
3. Share and discuss your data and research methodology with fellow teacher researchers.



4. Analyze and interpret your data with the support of your colleagues.
5. Write about your research.
6. Share your findings with students, colleagues, and members of the education community.
7. Discuss with colleagues the relationships between practice, theory, and research.
8. Assume responsibility for your own professional growth.

Source: Fairfax
County Public
Schools, Office of
Research and Policy
Analysis



RSVP

✿ Purpose

This activity is designed to elicit multiple solutions to various problems in a group with expertise. This activity generates hundreds of ideas in a few minutes.

✿ Preparation

Materials

- Standard #10 business envelopes (one per participant)
- 3-by-5-inch scratch pads or 3-by-5-inch index cards (10-15 per participant)

✿ Procedure

Time

30 minutes

1. Explain that this activity will allow each participant the opportunity to pose a problem and get ideas for solutions to this problem.
2. Divide participants into groups of three or four.
3. Pass out a blank envelope and five index cards to each person.
4. Ask each person to make a personal mark on the back of the envelope (e.g., a letter or squiggle) for later identification.
5. Say: "On the front of the envelope, write a question or pose a problem for which you want an answer or solution."
6. Collect the envelopes, shuffle, and redistribute a new envelope to each person.
7. Say: "Read the question or problem on the front of the envelope, and write an answer or solution on an index card. Insert the card in the envelope." Allow them 60 to 90 seconds in order to keep the process moving.



8. Instruct participants to pass envelopes (with their card inside) to the person to their right and, without looking at the card in the new envelope, repeat Step 7.
9. Continue the process for about 10 turns.
10. Instruct participants to place the envelopes face down on the center of the table and retrieve their own.
11. Ask them to take turns sharing favorite responses, adding new thoughts, and posing additional questions.



THIS AND THAT

Purpose

This activity engages groups to think about the constant work needed to implement changes. Participants focus on improving the characteristics of the new skill or concept learned and reducing the behaviors or characteristics of the old paradigm. This works well as a follow-up activity after groups have had initial professional development and some experience implementing a change.

Preparation

Prepare a visual with the question or statement about change on which you want the group to work. The question/statement should reflect the objectives of a staff development activity. For example, if teachers have participated in a workshop on performance assessment, a follow-up might be: "The use of performance assessment is not an instant transformation of all student assessment but rather a gradual, continual process that involves using more of THIS and less of THAT. What are the examples of THIS and THAT?" Participants can then respond by summarizing in the THIS column the new assessment practices they have learned and wish to use and place in the THAT column the "old" assessment practices they wish to reduce or eliminate. This can be done as an individual reflection. It also can be done in grade level or department teams, with the goal being to reach consensus. Organize a large group into small groups of six to eight people.

Materials

Chart paper or another means for teams to record suggestions.

Procedure

1. Display the visual with the question or statement you want the group to address.
2. Allow the group time to think about the question or statement.



3. Explain that “THIS” is the positive characteristic needed for full implementation and “THAT” is the old behavior the organization is moving away from.
4. Ask each person to work independently to brainstorm characteristics for “this” and “that” (4-5 minutes).
5. Divide participants into small groups.
6. Allow time for group members to discuss individual ideas.
7. Have each small group report on the characteristics it has identified. Discuss those that are most important and may require additional follow-up development activities.
8. Post the best ideas from the groups to be used as future references.



This and That
Increasing Student Engagement

Making a change requires a vision of what is possible. Consistent steps over time work toward that vision. For progress to continue, we need to do some new things and stop doing some things we currently do.

I need to do a little more of THIS...	I need to do a little less of THAT...
My education team needs to do a little more of THIS...	My education team needs to do a little less of THAT...



UNDERSTANDING LEARNING STYLES

Purpose

A factor to consider in selecting instructional strategies is student learning styles. Certain strategies are more effective with a particular learning style. When matched to students' learning styles, these strategies can help students achieve at higher levels. Understanding different learning styles provides a better understanding of students' and fellow professionals' behavior, likes and dislikes, and preferred approaches to tasks, work, and learning.

Procedure

Time
20-30 minutes

1. Introduce the four broad categories of learning/working styles:

Concrete-Sequential (practical and well-organized): These learners respond well to organized instruction that requires them to recall and construct correct responses. These workers also respond well to organization. They like to plan their work tasks and work best in a structured setting.

Abstract-Sequential (logical): These learners respond to more collaborative instruction that requires them to analyze information and explain answers. They are analytical; they like order and focus on ideas.

Concrete-Random (practical and desire options): These learners respond to opportunities to be creative and design products and individual responses. These workers are intuitive, creative, and learn by trial and error.

Abstract-Random (people and feelings matter): These learners respond to creative learning activities. They prefer group harmony and activities; they focus on more than one thing at a time and like unrestrictive environments.

2. Administer a learning style assessment to staff. Encourage them to use one with their students. A simplified version of a learning style assessment follows. Individuals select one side of each of the first two visuals that best represents their preferences.



PERSONAL VISION FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to challenge each staff member to clarify his or her personal vision for student engagement. Much of the existing literature and best-practice studies are about creating an organizational vision. Unfortunately, the aspect of a personal vision often is neglected.

Typically, selected staff members meet and reach a consensus on a vision statement that is then communicated to all staff. An important next step is to have all staff reflect on their actions and commit to a personal vision consistent with the organizational vision. Because of the complexity of student engagement, it is important that each staff member takes the time to create a personal vision around the goal of relationship building.

Procedure

Time
2-3 hours

These individual and group activities help teachers relate a school vision to their own practices. Activities should be done after a school vision for student engagement has been established. Following are three separate activities (A, B, and C) leading up to creating a personal vision (D).

A. Describe the School Vision in Your Own Words

After the teachers have reviewed the school's vision or mission statement, ask them to describe the vision or mission in their own words. Then divide teachers into pairs and have them share their responses with each other. Depending on the size of the group, ideas may then be shared with the larger group.



"Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens."
— Carl Jung

B. Reflect on Personal Goals and Values

Have teachers work in pairs to complete this activity. To save time, don't allow the pairs of teachers to report their answers to the entire group.

C. Connect School Vision with Personal Mastery

Have teachers discuss the student behavior characteristics that they want to embrace.

D. Describe Your Personal Vision

Have teachers write a draft of their personal vision. Allow time for drafts to be shared. If the group is large, teachers may share their drafts with a partner and present feedback that could strengthen the personal vision statement.

Example: Personal Vision for Student Engagement

Activity A. Describe the School Vision in Your Own Words

Describe the ideal classroom that supports a learning environment in which students enjoy school, encourage each other, take risks, show initiative, and celebrate achievement. Focus on what the teacher is doing. What does he or she do and say? Consider the teacher's behaviors that lead to a highly engaged classroom.

Activity B. Reflect on Personal Goals and Values

A personal vision must be connected to your personal values and goals. Before beginning to define your vision, reflect on your goals and values as they relate to teaching. This can be done alone or



"Vision without action
is a daydream. Action
without vision is a
nightmare."
— Japanese proverb

"We know that once
the vision is clear,
the how is invented
along the way."
— L. Tice

with a colleague. If done with a partner, ask each other the questions, and then summarize your answers.

Questions to help reflect on your goals values:

- **Motivation:** Why do you teach? Is your reason for teaching now the same as when you initially began teaching? Would you enter the teaching profession again? Why or why not?
- **Goals:** What do you want to accomplish in teaching? What are your personal goals? What are your goals for your students? What is the goal for your school?
- **Values:** What makes a good teacher? What are the characteristics you value in other teachers? Who are your role models in this profession? Why?
- **Competence:** How do you measure success? How do you know you have done a good job? What gives you satisfaction in teaching?

After the questions have been answered, write a summary of your responses.

Activity C. Connect School Vision with Personal Mastery

Fold a sheet of paper in half, creating two columns. Title one side "Embrace" and the other side "Let Go." List examples of your teaching that enhances student engagement under the "Embrace" column. Include teaching strategies, procedures, specific lessons, activities, clubs, behaviors — anything that you currently do that improves engagement. Under the "Let Go" column, identify specific practices or behaviors that may inhibit your students and you from achieving highly engaged learning



"Some men see things
the way they are and ask,
'Why?' I dream things
that never were, and ask
'Why not?'"
— George Bernard Shaw

Activity D. Describe Your Personal Vision

Write a statement of your personal vision for student engagement that includes ways to improve current student engagement practices. Describe what it would be like for an outside person to observe the way your students work, interact with each other, and relate to you. Include a description of your actions and how you fit into the picture.



SCHOOL CREED

✿ Purpose

A school creed is an important component of student engagement because it helps to create a sense of connectedness at school. The message can be written to promote collaboration by using the word “we.” In essence, the creed is a message that states, “This is who we are, what we do, and what is expected of us.” The creed defines the identity and character of the school.

✿ Procedure

Writing a School Creed

Similar in concept to a company’s mission statement, a creed should:

- define the school’s primary purpose
- define a clear set of expectations for students, faculty, staff, parents, and the community
- invoke a sense of unity
- provide a positive, motivational message about the importance of education
- stress the critical link between behavior for academic achievement and the attainment of personal goals

A committee can be appointed to define, design, and craft this special message. The committee should be composed of students, teachers, other school personnel, parents, and community leaders. Student input is critical to the process of developing the school creed and should not be overlooked. Each school can personalize the creed to fit its own school needs, student population, and community orientation.



Promoting the Creed

The school creed should be an important, powerful statement that can be published or posted in yearbooks, school newspapers or newsletters, letters to parents, Web sites, classrooms, hallways, the library, the cafeteria, the school lobby, etc.

The creed is just a piece of paper unless actions are taken to show that the school community lives the creed. Teachers and other staff need to be good role models, reflecting the school creed as they deliver high-quality education. This goal can be accomplished by showing that they are caring and responsive to students' needs, feelings, and academic responsibilities.

This message can be an important part of the curriculum and the natural flow of academic instruction. Schools can demonstrate and apply the meaning of the creed through activities, projects, and special events. Academic lessons can focus on understanding and applying the creed. For example, in a English language arts class, students could write a newspaper story that incorporates one of the creed's messages, and then they could discuss how the message affects their lives personally or how they see students and teachers showing the behavior in school that is described in the creed. Through multiple representations, the creed becomes a reflection of the culture of the school.

The USA Elementary School Creed

At USA Elementary School, we believe that we need the best education possible so that we can achieve our dreams. We believe that parents, teachers, and students need to work together so that all of us as students will receive the best education possible to become the best that we can be.

As students, we know that the education we receive at USA Elementary will prepare us for middle school and high school. We are responsible for completing our work. We know we should always respect our teachers. We appreciate our teachers and school. We know that our teachers value us, respect us, and work hard to give us the best education possible.

As teachers, we believe that an excellent education is the link to a successful future for our students. We strive to provide a high-quality education that is relevant to our students' needs and prepares them for middle school and high school. We know that we are role models for our students, and we will show good character, be responsible, work hard, and respect our students.

Together, by working hard, we know we will build a better future for the world through education.

It's the USA way!

The USA High School Creed

At USA High School, we believe that education is critical to a successful career and life. We believe that it takes the collective effort of the faculty and staff, parents and the community, and every student in the school in order for us to receive the best education possible.

As students, we know that the education we receive will be an important investment throughout our lives. As we complete our assignments, work hard every day, and excel at school, we know that our daily efforts are an important investment to our future happiness. As we take responsibility for our education and complete our work, we are enhancing our lives and preparing for the future. We respect and appreciate our teachers and school. We know that our teachers value us, respect us, and work hard to give us the best education possible.

As teachers, we believe that an excellent education is the link to a successful future for our students. We strive to provide a high-quality education that is relevant to our students' needs and prepares them for the future. We know that we are role models for our students and we will show good character, use good work habits, and respect our students.

Together, by working hard, we know we will build a better future for the world through education.

It's the USA way!

Student
Activities

SCHOOL LIFE KEYS

Purpose

School life keys are another springboard to cultivate student engagement. The keys are basic lessons, words of wisdom, or beliefs about achievement in school and life that students can use to develop a clear understanding of the importance of being engaged in their learning. Following are examples of school life keys:

- In this school, the pursuit of academic achievement is everyone's number one goal.
- Achieve the life you want by applying yourself in school everyday.
- Applying yourself in school is the best way to prepare for life's future challenges.
- Contemplate the consequences of angry intentions before acting.
- Completing homework conscientiously will assure better grades.
- Showing respect to teachers and other students is always the right thing to do.
- Accomplish a lot in life by accomplishing a lot in school.
- Achievement in school will create achievement in life.
- Invest yourself in school and you make a wise investment for life.
- Your school life is not determined by what happens to you but by how you react to what happens to you.
- The right attitudes about life and school will determine your success or failure.
- If you encounter a defeat in school, have the courage to learn something from it.
- Don't be discouraged about your mistakes. Have the courage to learn something from them and move forward.
- If you believe you can succeed in school, you will.



A committee can be appointed to define or redesign these special student messages. The committee should comprise students, teachers, other school personnel, parents, and community leaders. Student input is critical to the process of developing the school life keys and should not be overlooked. Each school should personalize the keys to fit its needs, student population, and community orientation.

Procedure

The school life keys can be integrated easily into school life. Following are some examples.

- A key can be used as the basis for a “Key of the Day” (week, month, etc.) celebration.
- One of the school life keys for academic achievement can be used with morning announcements.
- Teachers can integrate a key into classroom instruction and other aspects of school life, such as clubs, athletics, or special events.
- Parents could receive keys in letters or newsletters.
- Students can participate in a contest in which they submit a school life key that could become a part of the school’s complete list of keys. The contest also could include submissions from parents and community members.
- Students could develop ideas about how to apply the school life keys to life outside of school, thus transforming beliefs into behaviors.

These beliefs can help students become aware of, understand, and rigorously apply engagement behaviors.

Student Activities

STUDENT GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT

Purpose

Creating a student guide to achievement combines the elements of a school creed and the school life keys to provide another tool for facilitating engagement behavior. The guide transforms many of the concepts of student engagement presented in chapters 1-3 into a useful, portable, and highly personalized plan for each student. As you work with your students on their individual guides, they should be involved in every step of customizing and producing the guide.

Procedure

To create an 8 ½ by 11 trifold brochure, here are some suggestions.

The outside panels might contain:

- the school creed
- school life keys
- the school's name
- a picture of the school

The inside panels might contain:

- the student's main purpose in school
- some guiding principles of student achievement
- the core habits of student achievement
- ways to communicate with parents and teachers
- ways to maintain a positive attitude
- a list of appropriate school behaviors
- the important role the student plays in the school community

The inside panels also contain four sections with questions that ask students what they want to be when they grow up, why they think school is important, as well as to write down three specific goals they want to achieve in school. Members of the “learning team” — students, teachers, and parents — sign the guide at the end of the process.



Examples of inside and outside panels for elementary and high schools are provided on the next few pages.

The guide is no more than a piece of paper until you work with your students to transform the words into behaviors and make this a plan for personal identification with the school. When viewed in an guide format and signed by all relevant parties, the words can serve as a catalyst for stimulating beliefs, feelings, and behaviors consistent with student engagement.

If teachers establish a regular schedule for reviewing the guide, new beliefs, values, and behaviors can be incorporated. Teachers might try revisiting the guide with each student on a weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis. At the time of the review, ask students to come to class prepared to speak about changes that they might want to make to their vision of the future, why they value their education, and their three specific school goals.

Name: _____	Engaged in Learning	Achieving at School	Proud of My Accomplishments!
What I want to be when I grow up: My purpose at school is: My purpose at school is to work hard to get the best grades I can and prepare myself for college or a job after high school. Why I think school is important: Guiding Principles: • Responsibility – I am responsible for my schoolwork. • Contemplation – I will think carefully before I act. • Initiative – I will take the initiative to complete all my homework and projects to the best of my ability. Core habits of student achievement: • Think about your future. • Set goals. • Do the right thing. • Believe to achieve • Become really good at something. • Get organized. • Never give up.	I will talk to my parents and teachers. • I will tell my parents about my accomplishments and problems. • I will ask my teachers for help when I have a problem. My positive attitude: • Perseverance – I don't give up. • Optimism – I hope for the best. • Courage – I do what is right even when I am afraid. My behavior at school: • I am a responsible person. • I respect my teachers and other adults as well as other students at school. • I cooperate and share with other students in school activities. My goals at school are: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ I am an important part of the school community. • I know that I am valued and I belong in this school as much as any other student. • I will participate to the best of my ability in school activities.	My Learning Team: • As a student, I will work hard to do my best at school. Signed: _____ Date: _____ • As a teacher, I will encourage and guide this student. Signed: _____ Date: _____ • As a parent, I will support my child to attain the best education possible. Signed: _____ Date: _____	

The USA Elementary School Creed	School Life Keys	USA (Insert name of your school)
At USA Elementary School, we believe that we need the best education possible so we can achieve our dreams. We believe that parents, teachers, and students need to work together so that all of us as students will receive the best education possible to become the best that we can be.	• In this school, the pursuit of academic achievement is everyone's number one goal. • Achieve the life you want by applying yourself in school everyday. • Applying yourself in school is the best way to prepare for life's future challenges.	The Student Guide to Achievement The USA Way!
As students, we know that the education we receive at USA Elementary will prepare us for middle school and high school. We are responsible for completing our work. We know we should always respect our teachers. We appreciate our teachers and school. We know that our teachers value us, respect us, and work hard to give us the best education possible.	• Contemplate the consequences of angry intentions before acting. • Completing homework conscientiously will assure better grades. • Showing respect to teachers and other students is always the right thing to do. • Accomplish a lot in life by accomplishing a lot in school. • Achievement in school will create achievement in life.	Insert picture of school here
As teachers, we believe that an excellent education is the link to a successful future for our students. We strive to provide a high-quality education that is relevant to our students' needs and prepares them for middle school and high school. We know that we are role models for our students, and we will show good character, be responsible, work hard, and respect our students.	• Invest yourself in school, and you make a wise investment for life. • Your school life is not determined by what happens to you, but by how you react to what happens to you. • The right attitudes about life and school will determine your success or failure." • If you encounter defeat in school, have the courage to learn something from it. Don't be discouraged about your mistakes. Have the courage to learn something from them and move forward. If you believe you can succeed in school, you will.	Planning for the Future Engaged in Learning Motivated to Succeed!
Together, by working hard, we know we will build a better future for the world through education. It's the USA way!		

Name: _____	Engaged in Learning	Achieving at School	Proud of My Accomplishments!
A vision of what I want in my future: _____ _____ _____ _____	Core Habits of Student Achievement: • Picture your future. • Establish great goals. • Take the right action today. • Believe to achieve. • Become really good at something. • Get organized. • Never give up.	My behavior at school will show: • I am a responsible person. • I respect teachers, staff, and other students at school just as I want to be respected. • I am a team player with other students in school activities.	
My main purpose at school: My main purpose at school is to actively engage myself in every course I take, work hard to get the best grades I can, and use my education to prepare myself for college or a job after high school.	I can exceed expectations by following these principles: I will communicate with my parents and teachers. • I will keep my parents informed of my accomplishments and problems. • I will ask my teachers for help and guidance when I have difficulty.	My specific goals at school are: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	
Why I value my education: _____ _____ _____	My positive attitude will show: • Perseverance – I don't give up. • Optimism – I hope for the best. • Courage – I do what is right even when I am afraid.	I will remember that I am an important part of the school community. • I know that I am valued and I belong in this school as much as any other student. • I will participate to the best of my ability in school activities.	
Guiding Principles of Student Achievement: • Responsibility – I know that I am responsible for getting a good education • Contemplation – I will give careful thought to the consequences of my actions • Initiative – I will take the initiative to complete all my assignments to the best of my ability, every day		The Learning Team • As a student, I will work hard to achieve the best education possible. Signed: _____ Date: _____ • As a teacher, I will encourage and guide this student. Signed: _____ Date: _____ • As a parent, I will support my child to attain the best education possible. Signed: _____ Date: _____	

The USA High School Creed	<i>It's the USA Way!</i>	USA
At USA High School, we believe that education is critical to a successful career and life. We believe that it takes the collective effort of the faculty and staff, parents and the community, and every student in the school in order for students to receive the best education possible.	School Life Keys	High School (Insert name of your school)
As students, we know that the education we receive will be important investment throughout our lives. As we complete our assignments, work hard every day, and excel at school, we know that our efforts are an important investment to our future happiness. As we take responsibility for our education and complete our work, we are enhancing our lives and preparing for the future. We respect and appreciate our teachers and school. We know that our teachers value us, respect us, and work hard to give us the best education possible.	• In this school, the pursuit of academic achievement is everyone's number one goal. • Achieve the life you want by applying yourself in school everyday. • Applying yourself in school is the best way to prepare for life's future challenges. • Contemplate the consequences of angry intentions before acting. • Completing homework conscientiously will assure better grades. • Showing respect to teachers and other students is always the right thing to do. • Accomplish a lot in life by accomplishing a lot in school. • Achievement in school will create achievement in life.	
As teachers, we believe that an excellent education is the link to a successful future for our students. We strive to provide a high-quality education that is relevant to our students needs and prepares them for the future. We know that we are role models for our students and we will show good character, use good work habits, and respect our students.	• Invest yourself in school, and you make a wise investment for life. • Your school life is not determined by what happens to you, but by how you react to what happens to you.	
Together, by working hard, we know we will build a better future for the world through education.	• The right attitudes about life and school will determine your success or failure." • If you encounter defeat in school, have the courage to learn something from it. • Don't be discouraged about your mistakes. Have the courage to learn something from them and move forward.	
• If you believe you can succeed in school, you will.		The Student Guide to Achievement
		The USA Way!
		Insert picture of school here
		<i>Planning for the Future</i>
		<i>Engaged in Learning</i>
		<i>Motivated to Succeed.</i>

Student
Activities

ACADEMIC STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PLAN (ASAP) — GRADES K-6

Purpose

The Academic Student Achievement Plan (ASAP) is a tool to help students in grades K-6 create a vision for their lives. The ASAP includes a description of how to write a plan for achievement and a place where students can write down their plan. The plan contains six steps that reflect the seven Core Habits of Student Achievement, which can be found in the Resources section at the end of this kit, and methodologies for succeeding through academic achievement and involvement in school life.

1. Think About Your Future
2. Set Your Goals
3. Steps to Achieve Your Goals
4. You Can, If You Think You Can
5. Check Your Progress
6. Never Give Up

In the ASAP, students create a clear vision of the future they want, write their academic and school-related goals, describe the active steps they will need to take to achieve those goals, and develop empowering beliefs that will help to support their plan. The ASAP helps to focus the student's attention, motivation, and energy in an organized fashion on the right beliefs, feelings, and behavioral steps that will create better engagement practices.

In some schools, parents may be the primary individuals who guide their children in formulating their ASAPs. In other schools, students may receive help from their teacher to write their ASAPs. Teachers could reference the plan during class and perhaps use it to develop academic lessons in which engagement behavior is emphasized.



Procedure

1. Have students read “How to Create Your ASAP.”
2. Refer to the list of the Core Habits.
3. Review with students the “Example of an ASAP.”
4. Write your own ASAP on the worksheet titled, “My Personal ASAP.”

How to Create Your ASAP

Step 1. Think About Your Future

Answer the following questions.

- What do you want your future to be like?
- What kind of job do you want to have when you grow up?
- What will you have to do to achieve the job of your dreams?
- Which core habits will be important?
- Which guiding principles will you use to achieve your job goal?

Step 2. Set Your Goals

In Step 2, set at least:

- two goals for your future
- two goals for school

Make each goal specific. Goals are like destinations on a map. They tell you where you want to go. For example, for a school goal, you might set a goal to get an “A” in English or have a “B” average for the next marking period. You might set a goal to complete your homework before watching TV every day for this week and then repeat the goal next week. You might set a goal to join a student club or make a new friend. Your goal could be as simple as asking a question in class tomorrow or asking a teacher for help. All of these goals are meaningful and motivational.

**Student
Activities**

Goals can be long term or short term. For example, a long-term life goal could be to become a computer programmer. A short-term school goal could be to study hard and get an “A” on a mathematics test. Getting the “A” is a step that will help you reach your long-term life goal of becoming a computer programmer.

Step 3. Ways to Achieve Your Goals

Think about one of your goals and imagine the steps you need to take to make sure you accomplish it. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What is the first thing I need to do to reach my goal?
- What do I need to do after that?
- Whom do I need to talk to for help or guidance?
- What core habits or guiding principles will help me reach my goal?
- Whom can I use as a role model as I take each step toward my goal?

Step 4. You Can, If You Think You Can

One of the most important things you can do to reach your goal is to motivate yourself and believe in yourself. You can do this by using what psychologists call “positive self-talk.” When you use positive self-talk, you are thinking positive thoughts. As you tell yourself these positive thoughts repeatedly, they can help you to reach your goal.

Here are some examples of positive self-talk you can use:

- I have to remember that this goal is important to me.
- I know I can do this.
- If I think this through carefully, I will figure out how to reach my goal.
- I am smart enough to reach my goal.



- I will work hard to reach my goal.
- If I need it, I will ask for help to reach my goal.
- I will believe in myself and feel good about every accomplishment I make toward my goal.
- If I make mistakes or problems develop, I will learn from them and keep moving forward.
- I will stay focused on my goal and work on achieving it everyday.

Step 5. Check Your Progress

Ask yourself questions to check your progress toward your goal. For example, you can ask yourself:

- What am I doing to make good progress toward my goal?
- What can I do today to help reach my goal?
- How can I work harder to reach my goal?
- What is a smart thing to do to reach my goal?
- If what I am doing isn't working, then what else can I do to reach my goal?
- What help do I need to reach my goal?
- Whom can I talk to for help?
- What responsibilities should I assume to reach my goal?

Step 6. Never Give Up

We give up on our goals if we stop believing in ourselves or if we think we will fail.

- Learn from your mistakes and keep going. Don't give up.
- Remember that, even if you're afraid, find the courage and keep working toward your goal.
- If you're discouraged, you can think differently and choose to reach your goal.
- Ask for help at anytime. Get support from your family, teachers, and friends.



Example of an ASAP

Step 1. Think About Your Future

Doing well in school so that I can become a math teacher is important to me since I am great in math and want to help other people be great in math, too.

Step 2. Set Your Goals

Future Life Goals:

1. Graduate from college.
2. Become a great math teacher.
3. Own a house.

Academic Goals:

1. Achieve an "A" in all my math courses.
2. Maintain a "B+" average in all my courses.
3. Participate in class.

Step 3. Ways to Achieve Your Goals

My plan is to take the initiative every day to complete all my schoolwork on time and get good grades. When I have a test, I will study and ask for help if I don't understand some of the material. I will participate in class by raising my hand and answering questions.

Step 4. You Can, If You Think You Can

I will try to keep a positive attitude even when I have a lot of homework or a big test. I will believe in myself and if I feel discouraged, I will tell myself, "I can, if I think I can."



Step 5. Check Your Progress

I received a 95% on my test last week and a 100% for this week's test. If my grades start to slip, I will work even harder to bring up my average.

Step 6. Never Give Up

My goals are very important. I will make sure I know my grades in all my subjects. If I am having trouble getting good grades, I will ask my mom and my teacher for help. I will use the guiding principles of student achievement that we learned about and make sure I am applying perseverance, optimism, and courage in order to achieve my goals.

My Personal ASAP

Name _____

Step 1. Think About Your Future. (What do you want to be when you grow up?)

Step 2. Set Your Goals

Future Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Academic Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 3. Ways to Achieve Your Goal

Step 4. You Can, If You Think You Can

Step 5. Check Your Progress

Step 6. Never Give Up



MOTIVATIONAL ACTION PLAN (MAP) — GRADES 7-12

Purpose

The Motivational Action Plan (MAP) is a tool to help students in grades 7-12 create their life vision. The MAP includes a description of how to write a plan for achievement and a place where students can write down their plan. The MAP contains six steps that reflect the seven Core Habits of Student Achievement described in the Resources section at the end of this kit.

1. Picture Your Future
2. Establish Your Goals
3. Ways to Achieve Your Goals
4. Believe to Achieve
5. Monitor Your Progress
6. Never Give Up

In the MAP, students create a clear vision of the future they want, write their academic and school-related goals, and describe the action steps and empowering beliefs they will need to achieve those goals. The MAP can assist students in becoming more engaged by helping them to focus attention, motivation, and energy in an organized fashion. By encouraging students to write their thoughts and proposed actions on paper, their level of engagement in both school and the real world will increase.

In some schools, parents may be the primary individuals who guide their children in formulating their MAPs. In other schools, students may write their MAPs with help from their teachers. Guidance counselors and school psychologists could help students fine-tune the MAPs and use the plans for postsecondary education planning or occupational counseling. Students may carry their plans with them in notebooks, and guidance counselors could keep a copy in the student's folder. Teachers could reference the plan in class and perhaps integrate its use into academic lessons in which engagement behavior is emphasized.



Procedure

1. Read “How to Create Your Academic MAP.”
2. Refer to your list of core habits.
3. Review the “Example of an Academic MAP.”
4. Complete the worksheet titled “My Personal Academic MAP.”

How to Create Your Academic MAP

Step 1. Picture Your Future

Spend some time thinking carefully about your future. Ask yourself questions such as,

- What do I really care about?
- What types of careers interest me the most?
- What do I want to do after high school?

Next, clarify your thinking about the lifestyle you want. Ask yourself more specific questions, and be detailed as you describe why this lifestyle is important to you. Consider the following questions:

- Do I want to work for a company or an organization or be independent and have my own business?
- Do I want to live in an apartment or own my own house? Do I want to live in the suburbs, the city, or in a rural community?
- How much money will it take to support the lifestyle I want?
- Why is this lifestyle important to me?

Visualize yourself with the lifestyle you just described.

- What will you have to do to create the lifestyle you want?
- Which core habits will be important today and throughout your education?
- Which guiding principles will you use in order to succeed?



- What beliefs will empower you as you work hard to create the life you want?

Step 2. Establish Your Goals

Establish at least three life goals that you think will bring you future happiness and success and three academic goals for school. Define each goal carefully. Clear and specific goals will help you create the future you really want.

Goals are like destinations on a map. They tell you where you want to go. For example, for a school goal, you may set a goal to get an “A” in English or have a “B” average for the next marking period. You may set a goal to complete your homework every day before watching TV for this week and then repeat the goal next week. You may set a goal to join a student club, make a new friend, join a school sports team, or volunteer at a nursing home. Your goal could be as simple as asking a question in class tomorrow or asking a teacher for help.

There are short-term and long-term goals. For example, a long-term life goal could be to become a computer programmer. A short-term school goal could be to study hard and get an “A” on a test so that you can reach your long-term life goal of becoming a computer programmer. Goals are more useful when they are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and have a timeframe for attainment.

Step 3. Steps to Achieve Your Goals

The right steps must be established to reach your goals. To develop these steps, ask yourself questions such as:

Student
Activities

- What is the first action I need to take to reach my goal?
- What is the next step after that?
- Whom do I need to work with or talk to in order to reach my goal?
- What core habits or guiding principles will help me reach my goal?
- Whom can I use as a role model as I take each step toward my goal?

Step 4. Believe to Achieve

As you take each step toward achieving a goal, it is important to believe in yourself. If you really believe that you can accomplish your goal, you will succeed. You have to believe to achieve. The opposite is also true. If you believe that you can't accomplish a goal, it is far more likely that you won't.

One technique you can use to motivate and believe in yourself is what psychologists call "positive self-talk." When you use positive self-talk, you are consciously thinking positive, powerful thoughts. As you tell yourself these empowering thoughts repeatedly, they turn into a personal belief system that will help strengthen you as you take steps to reach your goal.

Here are some examples of positive self-talk:

- This goal is important to me. I know I can do this.
- If I think this through carefully, I will figure out how to reach my goal.
- Nothing will stop me from reaching my goal.
- I know I am smart enough to reach my goal.
- I will work hard to succeed.
- If I need it, I will ask for help.
- If I just stick with it, eventually I will achieve my goal.



- I won't get discouraged. If I make a mistake or come upon a problem, I will become more determined to reach my goal.
- I will believe in myself and feel good about every accomplishment I make toward my goal.
- I know it will take courage to reach this goal, but I can do it.
- It is up to me to succeed.
- I will take the right step today toward reaching my goal.

Step 5. Monitor Your Progress

Ask yourself probing questions to monitor your progress and maintain momentum. For example, you can ask yourself:

- What kind of progress am I making toward my goal?
- What can I do today to help reach my goal?
- What is the next step?
- How can I work harder to reach my goal?
- If what I am doing isn't working, then what else can I do to reach my goal?
- If I keep going at this pace, will I reach my goal on time?
- What help do I need?
- Whom can I talk to for help?
- What is a creative step I can take to reach my goal?
- What responsibilities should I assume to reach my goal?

If what you are doing is not working well, try again. Fine-tune or modify your plan. Research what you can do differently to reach your goal.

Step 6. Never Give Up

We give up on our goals if we stop believing in ourselves or if we think we are going to fail.



- Redefine failure as a mistake you can learn from or an opportunity to accomplish something even better.
- Remember that, even if you're afraid, you can develop courage and keep working toward your goal.
- Transform discouragement into determination.
- Look to your family, teachers, and friends for support.
- If there is a problem that is keeping you from meeting your goal, define the problem, focus on solutions, solve the problem, and keep going.

Example of an Academic MAP

Step 1. Picture Your Future

Getting a good education so that I can become a mechanical engineer is most important to me. I would like to build better cars, maybe even electric cars, that will help reduce smog and improve the environment. I would like to own a house someday.

Step 2. Establish Your Goals

Future Life Goals:

1. Graduate from college.
2. Become an engineer.
3. Own a house.

Academic Goals:

1. Achieve an "A" in all my math, science, and technology courses.
2. Maintain a "B+" overall school average.
3. Obtain a "B" or better on my Advanced Placement courses.



Step 3. Achieve Your Goals

My plan is to work hard every day to complete all my school assignments on time and to the best of my ability. When I have a test, I will study in advance and ask for help if I don't understand some of the material. I will participate in class and help other students who may need help, especially in my math and technology classes. I will participate in the Debate Club and volunteer to be a student mentor for younger children.

Step 4. Believe to Achieve

I will stay optimistic about getting into college and about my future. I will try to keep a positive attitude even when I have a lot of homework or major tests. I will believe in myself, and if I feel discouraged, I will use positive self-talk to change my feelings.

Step 5. Monitor Your Progress

I will make sure I know my grades in every course. If my grades start to slip, I will work even harder to bring up my average. If I'm not on track to achieve my goals, I will talk to my guidance counselor or my teachers.

Step 6. Never Give Up

My goals are very important to me and I promise myself I will achieve — and maybe even exceed — my goals. I won't give up. If I am discouraged, I will talk to my older brother, Mrs. Giles in the math department, or my guidance counselor, Mr. Frank. I will use the guiding principles of student achievement that we learned about and make sure I am applying perseverance, optimism, and courage in order to achieve my goals.

My Personal MAP

Name _____

Step 1. Picture Your Future. (What do you want to do after high school and in life?)

Step 2. Establish Your Goals

Future Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Academic Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 3. Ways to Achieve Your Goal

Step 4. Believe to Achieve

Step 5. Monitor Your Progress

Step 6. Never Give Up



SHARED VISION FOR A CLASSROOM

Purpose

To be effective, classrooms need to have rules and procedures. As a teacher introduces classroom procedures, engaging students in a brainstorming activity such as this one will help them to understand what is expected of them in relation to their individual needs. For this activity, students should have experience in brainstorming. If they do not, they will need preliminary activities to understand the guidelines for effective brainstorming.

Preparation

Materials

Large sheets of newsprint, craft paper, or a blackboard

Procedure

Time

30–40 minutes

1. Review with students the rules of brainstorming: all responses recorded and no judgmental comments on others' ideas.
2. Indicate to students that everyone has needs that must be addressed. This brainstorming activity will ask each student the following:
 - What would you like this classroom to be like?
 - How would you like to be treated by the teacher and other students?
 - What would make this an effective class for you?
3. It is often helpful to use a go-around procedure, which gives every student the opportunity to reflect on the question personally, form a response, and then offer brainstorming suggestions. This is particularly true with younger students, who may be more hesitant to offer opinions.
4. All responses are recorded so that the group can see them. Many of these comments will be negative such as: "I don't want to be embarrassed" or "I don't want to be picked on." It is



acceptable at this brainstorming level to record negative comments.

5. Review the list of ideas suggested by students and consolidate or link ideas that are similar.
6. Begin to draft a second list of classroom rules and procedures that address the ideas in the first list — how students wanted to be treated and how to achieve an effective class. In many cases, you will need to form the negative statements into positive classroom procedures. For example, the statement, “I don’t want to be embarrassed,” could be rephrased as: “All individual grades will be kept confidential” or “All students will value the ideas of other students.”



BELL RINGERS

Purpose

Bell ringer is a term applied to any activity that begins a period of instruction and is meant as a focus activity to get students started thinking about the class they just have entered. Bell ringers also keep the class busy while the teacher checks attendance and tends to other administrative duties. Bell ringers establish a routine so that, as students enter the classroom, they know they need to start an assignment that will be due a few minutes after the bell rings. These short activities are an excellent step in increasing student engagement

Bell ringers may or not be credit-bearing assignments. Some teachers collect them on a random basis or have students take an open-notebook test, using a list of bell ringers for the week or as part of a notebook grade. Try to arrange a method that will not add a lot of grading.

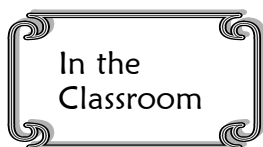
Procedure

Set the rules for bell ringers, starting on the first day. That way students get used to how things are going to be done in a classroom.

Preparation

Bell Ringer Activities

- Pick a foreign language and have students do conjugations, translations, matching, identifying, etc. Play a song from that culture while they complete the assignment. When the song ends, so does the bell ringer.
- Have students submit questions on a given topic. The students whose questions get chosen for use on different class days receive rewards.
- Print out short biographies of famous scientists and have students read a biography on the first day. The second day, the students write a short summary; the third day, they exchange



the summaries and edit each others work; and the fourth day, they rewrite their summaries and turn in the assignment.

- Use short current-event articles and even cartoons. Have student explain how the article ties in with what they are studying.
- Post a math question of the day on the board.
- Provide a paragraph with 10 built-in errors of basic spelling, grammar, punctuation, or capitalization. Send students on a hunting expedition. Then review the work with them.
- Start a class with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture, or cartoon on a slide or transparency to focus on the day's topic.
- Give students a random list of historical events and have them put them in chronological order.
- Put statements on the board for students to determine if they are fact or fiction. Keep a running record of how many students are correct each day.
- Create anagrams or other word puzzles for students to figure out words.
- Have student write as many words as possible related to a topic.
- Provide a brainstorming activity.



One way to check if the activities are being completed is to give each student an index card to write bell ringer responses on. Sometimes the teacher can collect them right after the roll call. Other times they can be collected as a ticket to get out the door. Teachers can scan them to make sure students are not writing junk. As students get into the habit of participating in these activities, it may not be necessary to constantly check on student compliance.