Engaging Students

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Child Trends
Our Mission

Child Trends *seeks to* improve outcomes for children by providing research and analysis to the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children:

- Programs that serve children and families
- Policy makers
- Foundations and philanthropists
- The media
What We Do

- Track & analyze trends and identify emerging issues
- Evaluate programs and policies
- Provide data-driven, evidence-based guidance on policy and practice
- Design, field, and analyze surveys
- Design and conduct qualitative studies
- Summarize, synthesize and communicate research literature
- Help inform the nation’s research agenda for children
Two out of three HS students are bored at least every day in class (High School Survey of Student Engagement)
  ◦ Lack of interest and relevance of material
  ◦ Level of difficulty of material (too easy or hard)
  ◦ Inadequate interaction with teacher

20% of HS students think about dropping out

Engagement is declining, especially among boys

It declines as students age

Students disengage from contexts that do not meet their needs
Disengaged students have:
- Low academic achievement
- Poor attendance
- Behavior problems
- Poor emotional, social, and mental health
- Higher risk for dropping out
- Higher risk for early sexual activity and substance use and delinquency

Improving student engagement may be the best way to close the achievement gap
Ways that Students Engage

- Behavioral engagement
- Emotional engagement
- Cognitive engagement
What is Behavioral Engagement?

- Good attendance
- Coming to class prepared
- Doing homework and class work
- Positive conduct/not disruptive
- Participating in class
- Participating in after-school activities

Students who participate in class, complete coursework and participate in activities, particularly service learning, have higher attendance and test scores, and higher rates of graduation.
What is Emotional engagement?

- Liking school
- Being a student identity is an important part of who they are
- Feeling connected to school through positive relationships with other students and staff

- Emotional engagement is related to higher motivation, confidence, attendance, grades, test scores, and fewer suspensions
- Students who fail or dropout report feeling disconnected from teachers and peers
What is Cognitive engagement?

- Interest in subject matter in and out of school
- Working hard to do well
- Mastery motivation
- Self-regulation to complete work
- Going beyond basic requirements
- Thinking highly of their academic abilities
- Setting goals for academic success

- Cognitive engagement increases achievement and graduation and supports life-long learning
How Can Engagement be Improved?

- What can students do?
- What can teachers do?
- What can other school staff do?
- How can school climate help?
- What can parents do?
- How can connections to work help?
- How can connections to community help?
- What programs work to improve engagement?
Students

- Healthy habits: sleep, nutrition, exercise, safety, bathroom breaks, avoid drugs and alcohol
- Age appropriate autonomy and choice
- Students centered learning—identify interests
- High standards, expectations, and goals
- Understand steps to reaching goals
- Respect for teachers and other students
- Character development and social/emotional learning skills
Student Participation

- Group/team learning
- Participate in class and after-school activities
- Participate in community service
- Peer support for studying, participating in class and activities
Teachers

- Create interesting, relevant, challenging curricula centered on student interests
- Connect curricula to the world of work
- Set clear and consistent goals
- Support and reward student effort, not grades
- Invite participation in class and decision-making
- Create interactive and group learning opportunities and avoid lecturing
- Teachers as coaches, facilitators
...and other school staff

- Restorative Justice, not punitive
- Learn child development
- Honor and mirror the whole child: background, culture, physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual strengths
- Develop positive, supportive, trusting relationships with students and each other
- Model good character and social skills
- Encourage family involvement
School climate: Engaging

- Caring community
- Respect for all students
- Community of learners with high expectations for all
- Mentoring
- Tiered interventions: individual, groups, and whole school (PBIS)
- Access to services for those in need
School Climate: Safe

- Proactive physical and emotional protection
  - Foster emotional support
  - Prevent hate speech/bullying
  - SEL and character education programs that teach conflict resolution, anger management, positive communication rather than metal detectors

- School-wide effects of violence, bullying, substance use
School Climate: Positive Environment

- High quality and personalized instruction
- Academic support for struggling students
- High expectations
- Collective responsibility for promoting achievement and discipline
- Clear, fair, consistent discipline and restorative justice
- High teacher satisfaction
- Good teaching materials and conditions
- Clean, comfortable environment
- School-wide celebrations of success
Parents

- Take interest in school work
- Reinforce academic, social, and emotional lessons at home
- Provide time and materials for school work
- Model doing math and reading
- Take child to activities related to school work
- Get involved in school
  - Attend school-wide meetings
  - Help with discipline policies
  - Attend parent-teacher conferences and keep in contact
  - Hold staff accountable
  - Show up when child performs
  - Volunteer and fundraise
Workplace connections

- Go beyond job fairs
- Provide linkages to employers and employment
- Internships
- Mentorships
- Field trips and visits to schools by professionals
- Link class content to occupations
- Organize several classes around work themes
  - Example: environment
  - Make it REAL!
Community connections

- Community service increases engagement in school
- Develops skills such as leadership, teamwork; accountability, compassion, social skills, working with diverse groups
- Positive feedback...appreciation...giving is the gift
- Seeing immediate results
- Learning about one’s own gifts to develop
Evidence-Based Program Examples

- Building Assets—Reducing Risks
  - Builds social competency and positive relationships
  - Increases student engagement
  - Prevents substance abuse

- First Things First
  - Small learning communities of students/teachers
  - Family and student advocate system
  - Engaging and rigorous instruction
Evidence-Based Program Examples

- **Caring School Community**
  - K–6
  - Builds community
  - Strengthens student connectedness
  - Increases student motivation and achievement
  - Reduces violence, drug use, delinquency

- **Big Picture Schools (HS)**
  - Taps student interests and community needs

- **Diploma Plus (HS)**
  - Competency based and real world projects/internships
Evidence-Based Program Examples

- Career Academies
  - Schools within schools offering career-related curricula and work experience

- Career and Technical education (CTE)
  - Keeps students engaged with hands on training
  - Pathways to work and postsecondary ed

- Transfer schools
  - Blended GED programs and intensive career exploration, counseling and workforce readiness

- Dual enrollment and early college initiatives
Resources

- CASEL  http://casel.org
- Child Trends LINKS database  http://childtrends.org
- National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence  
  - http://promoteprevent.org/publications/ebi-factsheets
- Safe and Supportive Schools TA  
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