Tiers 1, 2 & 3

Student Engagement

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A 2013 poll found that approximately 55% of students across the United States are engaged in their current school, leaving 28% of students who are not engaged, and 17% who are actively disengaged (Gallup, 2013). Austin and Benard (2007) report that more than 40-60% of low-income, minority, and urban students are chronically disengaged in school. Prior to dropping out, students report a process of disengagement from school activities and school demands (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009). By understanding and promoting student engagement, schools can actively work to increase the engagement of their students, and thus their school success. Student engagement is necessary for students to gain knowledge and skills to succeed in post-secondary programs and future careers (Wang & Eccles, 2012a, 2012b). Understanding student engagement is essential to schools that want to promote positive youth development (Li & Lerner, 2011).

What is Student Engagement?

Student engagement is a term used to describe an individual's interest and enthusiasm for school, which impacts their academic performance and behavior (Gallup, 2013). Student engagement is a complex term, making it all the more difficult to understand. Student "engagement involves positive student behaviors, such as attendance, paying attention, and participation in class, as well as the psychological experience of identification with school and feeling that one is cared for, respected, and part of the school environment" (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004, p.97). It is evident from this definition that the concept of student engagement is multidimensional and multifaceted; students vary in their level of engagement as they progress through school. Also, students can change within specific aspects of engagement (Archambault et al., 2009). For example a student may demonstrate high levels of engagement for reading, but demonstrate low levels of engagement during math and science classes. Varying degrees of engagement are evident both within an individual student and across specific students. The Great Schools Partnership's definition of student engagement provides a thorough description of student engagement:

Tier 1, 2 or 3 Intervention

"In education, student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education. Generally speaking, the concept of "student engagement" is predicated on the belief that learning improves when

students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged." Stronger student engagement or improved student engagement are common instructional objectives expressed by educators." (Student Engagement, 2014)

Due to the complexity of the definition of student engagement, schools might define or interpret it differently. From this definition, the Great Schools Partnership has provided methods that schools can use to engage students in several ways; we will address these later on in the brief.

Components of Student Engagement

Archambault et al. (2009) identified three distinct categories of student engagement: behavioral engagement, affective engagement, and cognitive engagement. The first type of student engagement, behavioral engagement, includes a student's compliance to rules and involvement in the classroom and with extracurricular activities. The second type of student engagement, affective engagement, includes the experience, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions a student has towards school, specifically the student's sense of belonging, interest, willingness to learn, and general sense of liking school. The third type of engagement, cognitive engagement, refers to the cognitive functions involved in a student's learning process. Because behaviors, emotions, and cognitions are all apart of development, it is important to consider all three categories (i.e., behavior engagement, affective engagement, cognitive engagement) when implementing a prevention program (Archambault et al., 2009). A student's perceptions of the school environment influences their motivation for academic achievement, which can be influenced by all three of these types of engagement (Wang & Peck, 2013).

Motivation and engagement. It is evident that student motivation is intertwined with engagement; however, these terms are not interchangeable. Motivation is defined as "a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior" (Brophy, 1998, p. 3; See the Motivation Strategy Brief). While both encompass a variety of student behaviors, motivation is specific to goal-direct behaviors while student engagement includes all positive student behaviors as well as the student's psychological experience.

Connectedness. A student's physical experience within their school is an aspect of engagement and represents a student's connectedness to the external environment of the school or school climate. School climate can have an impact on how "connected" a student feels to their school. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) identify school connectedness as "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (See Strategy Brief on School Climate). Therefore, school climate is one avenue through which schools can influence student engagement.

Continuum of engagement. As discussed previously, student engagement occurs on a continuum from disengaged to engaged (Bryson & Hand, 2007). Assessing the level of student engagement within a school is essential because school failure and dropout are often the final outcomes for these students (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2012). Although students might be disengaged, they might be succeeding academically. Indicators of disengagement include a student's feelings toward school and behaviors while at school (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2012). In order to minimize student failure and dropout, it is crucial to assess student engagement.

Parent engagement. Another component of student engagement is parent involvement, or parent engagement. Parent involvement is de-

fined as "parents and families working together to improve the development of children and adolescents" (Strait & Rivera, 2013, p. 5). Parent involvement increases academic and behavioral performance of students, thus increasing student engagement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2003; see the *Strategy Brief, Parent and Family Involvement*).

What Do We Know About Student Engagement?

It is evident that the term student engagement has many aspects and meanings. This is a broad topic and makes identifying appropriate research articles difficult. When using PsycINFO database to search "student engagement," approximately 5,000 articles were found and about 3,000 of them were research-based articles. Similar results were found when student engagement was searched in the Academic Search Premier database. Additionally many studies focused on other strategies such as parent involvement, school climate, motivation may also be pertinent to the larger topic of school engagement. As a result the number of studies which may pertain to student engagement may be very large. A brief summary of a few studies are summarized here.

Students who are engaged in school achieve greater academic success (Skinner et al., 2008). Student engagement not only predicts grades, achievement test scores, and learning; it also predicts attendance, retention, school completion, and academic resilience (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003; Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003). Student engagement was assessed using self-report measures. Students reported their own level of engagement in the classroom using a five-item measure. This measure was designed to assess the individual's behavioral and emotional engagement. A considerable amount of research has concluded that student engagement is one of the key contributors to academic success (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Skinner et al., 2008).

One way schools can proactively work to increase student engagement is to increase teacher support and engagement in their respective classrooms. Research conducted by Bryson and Hand (2007) found that students are more likely to engage in school if their teachers engage with them and the materials being taught. Teachers who are engaged are those who show enthusiasm, are concerned with students' success, and provide academic support for students (Bryson & Hand, 2007). Teachers can show their concern for students by establishing positive relationships with them. These relationships can "positively affect student engagement" (Anderson et al., 2004). Kamenetz explained this saying, teacher's "working conditions are our student's learning conditions" (p. 2, 2014). A Gallup study found that principals who facilitate collaboration within the school increase teacher engagement, thus increasing student engagement (Kamenetz, 2014).

Another important benefit of student engagement is that students who are engaged in school are less likely to fall victim to potential adolescent troubles. For example, O'Farrell and Morrison (2003) have suggested that student engagement protects against behaviors that are not a part of the school environment, such

as substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, and delinquency. Other research has shown that students' sense of belonging at school, which can come as a result of facilitating student engagement in school activities, gatherings, and access to adults and other students, influences students' psychological and academic results in a positive way (Kortering & Braziel, 2008).

Why Is Student Engagement Important?

The process of this psychosocial disengagement starts early and is driven by the interaction between the student and the environment (Archambault et al., 2009). Transitional periods (e.g., transition from middle school to high school) are considered to be critical periods for increased disengagement and dropout (Stout & Christenson, 2009). Some populations are at increased risk for disengagement during and beyond the transitional period. Based on early correlational studies, some of these "at-risk" factors include: minorities, males, students of single parent homes, students with low grades or test scores, students with disciplinary problems or absenteeism, and students in highly populated schools (Jordon, Lara, & McPartland, 1999; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Rumberger, 2004). Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) found that 60% of students who drop out of high school could be predicted with early warning signs at the middle school level. Although certain risk factors can give schools an idea of the particular needs of students, the path to school dropout is not entirely clear or predictable.

How Can Schools Assess Student Engagement?

Measuring engagement can be difficult since it is made up of multiple factors which can include intrinsic and extrinsic student motivation, relationships, family and community expectations and support, as well as factors associated with the school such as climate. The Regional Education Laboratory (2011) released a report that provides schools with a comprehensive list of instruments that can be used to assess student engagement for upper elementary through high school aged students. This report summarizes the literature pertaining to assessing student engagement, as well as a description of each instrument including what is measured, the purpose, appropriate use, and psychometric properties. Student self-report, teacher report, and observational measures are included in this list of instruments as well.

Instruments are used to assess student engagement, but different instruments target different aspects of engagement. It is important to know what the instrument is measuring in order to understand the extent to which that instrument measures the multidimensional nature of student engagement (i.e., emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement). Several purposes or uses of these instruments include: (a) research on motivational and cognitive theories of learning; (b) research on disengagement and dropping out; (c) evaluation of school reform efforts and interventions; (d) monitoring of engagement at the classroom, school, or district level; (e) diagnosis and monitoring at the student level; (f) and needs assessment of students' developmental assets. Each instrument includes a description of its purpose to ensure its appropriate use. Schools can use these twenty-one instruments to assess the engagement of their students.

Engagement places a heavy emphasis on personal desire to learn. Self-determination theory (SDT) in which the overall goal is to engage the student in educational activities (Hardre & Reeve, 2003) is one way to analyze and measure engagement. The Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (ASRQ) identifies the student's motivation for going to school by pinpointing items related to intrinsic reasons (i.e., "Because I enjoy the experience", "Because it's interesting"), identified regulation/extrinsic reasons ("Because I see the importance of learning", "Because I really appreciate and understand the usefulness of school"), and lack of self-determined motivation ("Because, basically, I have to—it's required, "I wouldn't go if I had a

choice"; Hardre & Reeve, 2003). Studies on the SDT state that teachers who provide students with interesting activities and autonomy in the classroom help nurture motivation and desire to complete school rather than to drop out (Appleton et al., 2008; Hardre & Reeve, 2003). When controlling for SES and student achievement, Alivernini and Lucidi (2011) found that self-determined motivation had significant effects on dropping out of school.

Teacher Practices That Foster Engagement

There are likely a variety of practices which educators can implement which would support student engagement. Lent has suggested these as examples (2014):

- Teachers create opportunities for active rather than passive learning.
- Teachers encourage autonomy and further independence through choice.
- Teachers create relevance in assignments and topics.
- Teachers value and use collaborative learning methods.

- Teachers use technology as a tool to increase learning opportunities and depth of study.
- Teachers employ multiple learning methods and texts.
- Teachers develop lessons and assignments that incorporate both challenge and success.
- Teachers differentiate and scaffold learning.
- Teachers create authentic assessments and offer timely and frequent feedback.
- Teachers develop a culture of inquiry within the classroom.

Programs That Facilitate Student Engagement

In addition to individual educators, schools must create environments in which the students feel safe, respected, and have a sense of belonging (Austin & Benard, 2007). All students fall somewhere on the continuum of engagement; therefore all students can be influenced by student engagement programs put in place to increase relationships at school as well as increase their sense of belonging, accountability, motivation, efficacy, optimism, and effort. These programs ultimately maximize student engagement from early on through the completion of school in hopes of decreasing disengagement and dropout. There are a variety programs which might be implemented by schools either for all students, or specifically for at-risk students, as a way to increase student engagement by increasing motivation, relationships at school, effort, and participation. Although these programs may indicate that increasing student engagement is a goal, they often address a variety of more specific topics including attendance, behavioral problems, early adult responsibilities, lack, of effort, and others. These are typically school programs which include multiple strategies, and in some cases they include community services and programs coordinating with school services. A few representative examples of these types of programs are provided on the graphic (next page) with a web link for additional information.

Examples of Programs Which May Facilitate Student Engagement

- CASASTART;
  https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=284
- Check & Connect;
  http://www.checkandconnect.umn.edu/
- Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program;
  http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/October_2006_School_Holding_Power/Coca-Cola_Valued_Youth_Program_-_Strengthening_Student_Connections_with_School/
- Families & School Together
  https://familiesandschools.org/
- The Incredible Years;
  http://incredibleyears.com/
- Multidimensional Family Therapy
  http://www.mdft.org/
- Nurse-Family Partnership;
  http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/
- Prevention Programs;
  https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/programs/schoolbased/
- Program Archive on Sexuality, Health and Adolescence (PASHA)
  http://www.socio.com/pasha.php
- Quantum Opportunities;
  http://www.socio.com/paspp09.php.
- Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition (SOAR);
  https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/SPT/Programs/118
- Teen Outreach Program;
  http://advocatesforyouth.org/publications/1133-teen-outreach-project-top

Conclusion

Although it is a broad term which includes many potential components, student engagement is a critical component to both academic and behavioral success. Various research studies have linked positive student engagement to an increase in school success, a decrease in adolescent troubles, and a decrease in dropout risk (Skinner et al., 2008; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003; Stout & Christenson, 2009). Increasing teacher engagement and support has been identified as a key way to increase student engagement (Bryson & Hand, 2007). Various instruments can be used to assess the levels of student engagement within schools, and a variety of programs can be implemented to increase student engagement (Regional Educational Laboratory, 2011). Schools that understand student engagement can actively work to improve student success in school by increasing student engagement.

See Related Briefs:

See the briefs: *Parent and Family Involvement; Motivation;* and *School Climate & Culture.*

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