**Improving Student Engagement**

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**What is Student Engagement?**

Student engagement refers to the extent to which students are actively involved in learning activities in school.1,2 Three types of student engagement are most recognized by researchers: emotional, behavioral, and cognitive.3-5

* *Emotional engagement* refers to students’ affective reactions and feelings toward learning, school, teachers, and classmates. It includes a sense of belonging, liking of school, and general happiness with school.3,6
* *Behavioral engagement* refers to students’ active involvement in academic and other school-related activities, as seen in attending to tasks, following rules, and participating in school activities.
* *Cognitive engagement* is closely related to behavioral engagement (and thus many measures combine the two), but refers more so to motivation, especially intrinsic motivation — the desire and willingness to exert one’s best effort toward learning and to apply the best learning strategies.

**How Is Student Engagement Assessed on the Delaware School Surveys?**

TheDelaware School Surveys (DSS) assess school engagement *school-wide* and engagement of the *individual* *student*. As one of multiple subscales on the *Delaware School Climate Scale* of the DSS, the *Student Engagement School-wide* subscale appears on both the student and teacher/staff versions of the survey. On this subscale, students and teachers/staff respond to six items designed to assess their perceptions of the extent to which students school-wide, or throughout the school, are engaged emotionally (e.g., “Most students like this school.”), cognitively (e.g., “Most students try their best.”), and behaviorally, (e.g., “Most students work hard to get good grades.”).

A separate scale, the *Delaware Student Engagement Scale*, appears on the student and home versions of the *Delaware School Surveys*. This scale assesses engagement of the individual student, as reported by the student (e.g., “I try my best in school.”) and by his/her parent or other adult at home (e.g., “My child stays out of trouble at school.”). It includes three subscales: Emotional, Behavioral, and Cognitive.

**Importance of Student Engagement**

Ample research shows that student engagement promotes academic achievement, positive social relationships, and emotional well-being. It also helps prevent a wide range of negative outcomes. For example, research shows that student engagement:

**Promotes Academics**

* Promotes greater academic achievement3,7-12
* Fosters school attendance11 and school completion3,8,13

**Promotes Prosocial Behavior and Reduces Antisocial Behavior**

* Fosters peer acceptance14
* Reduces behavior problems in school,21,22 aggression, and bullying.23 Thus, there are fewer suspensions in schools with greater student engagement, especially among African-American students.24
* Reduces gang membership, delinquency, and violence8,20

**Promotes Student Personal Wellbeing**

* Promotes positive self-esteem and self-efficacy,15,16 and less risk of depression17
* Helps prevent health-risk behaviors, including cigarette smoking, alcohol and substance use, and sexual activity (including teenage pregnancy)8,13,18,19

In light of the above, it should come as no surprise that student engagement is commonly viewed as a critical component of school climate, with school-wide student engagement characterizing schools perceived by students, teachers, and parents as having a positive school climate.15 Perhaps more importantly, it is viewed as central to democratic education and citizenship in a democratic society. That is, it is through active engagement in schooling that students learn the value and skills for future citizenship.

**Primary Factors Contributing to Student Engagement**

Student, teacher, classroom, and school characteristics related to student engagement are listed below. Particular attention is given to factors that are malleable and thus can be targeted most effectively for intervention.

**Student Characteristics**

*The following characterize students who are emotionally, behaviorally, and/or cognitively engaged in school:*

* + - * Social, emotional, and learning competencies that facilitate learning and positive social relationships.3,25-30 As covered in a separate module, “Integrating Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [SWPIBS] and Social-Emotional Learning [SEL]),” these competencies include responsible decision making, relationships skills, social awareness, self management, and self-awareness.
      * Absence of behavioral and emotional problems that interfere with engagement and learning, including antisocial and aggressive behavior,30-33 depression,34 and stress35
      * Positive perceptions of school climate, including teacher-student relationships,27 student-student relationships,27,30,36 fair treatment of students,37 and school safety38
      * Parent support, and students’ perceptions thereof, including parents being involved in their children’s learning/schooling.9,27,29,36,39 This also includes positive teacher-parent relationships characterized by mutuality, warmth, and respect.39

*Important note:* Although not malleable, other student factors influence student engagement and should be considered in prevention and intervention efforts. Primary among them are age, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES).

* *Age*. As students progress from elementary to middle to high school, they become less engaged.11,28,40,41
* *Gender*. Boys tend to be less engaged than girls.15,28,29,41
* *SES*. Students from low SES homes tend to be less engaged.30,42

**Teacher, Classroom, and School Characteristics**

Two general characteristics of teaching maximize student engagement in the classroom: *classroom management* and *instructional strategies*.43 Additionally, there are *school characteristics* that promote student engagement. These three types of characteristics are described briefly below.

*Classroom Management*

An authoritative approach to classroom management, and school discipline, characterizes not only the most effective teachers and schools, but also schools with a positive school climate.10,44 This approach consists of a balance of *structure* and *social support*. Research shows that the combination of structure and social support promotes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement and is particularly effective in helping prevent behavioral disengagement.3,11,26-29,43,45-48

* *Structure* refers to such practices as having clear and efficient routines and procedures that avoid “down time;” monitoring student behavior closely; holding clear and high expectations, both academically and behaviorally; and responding to behavior problems (including disengagement) immediately, consistently, and fairly.
* *Social support* refers to caring, respect, and responsiveness to students’ psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Supportive social relationships not only entail warmth, caring, and respect, but also modeling and reinforcement of engagement-related behavior. Support from teachers, staff, administrators, and parents is particularly important in student engagement. The lack of such support is commonly found to be a major factor associated with dropping out of school, as well as other indicators of disengagement, such as absences and poor participation in class and school activities.26,33,49,50 Support from peers also is important. This would include classroom and school-wide norms that promote emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement.

*Important note:* The importance of teacher-student, student-student, and home-school relationships, including with respect to engagement, is highlighted in three other modules: *Improving Teacher-Student Relationships, Improving Student-Student Relationships,* and *Improving Home-School Relationships*.

*Instructional Methods*

A number ofinstructional methods have been shown to characterize teachers and classrooms in which students are actively engaged behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally.3,28,51-59 In general, they include the following methods, each of which is further described in the later section on recommended methods, strategies, and interventions.

* Learning activities that, *where appropriate and feasible*, have the following qualities:
  + They are matched with the ability level of individual students, and with their interests, talents, and goals.
  + They are challenging, not too difficult, and not too easy.
  + They emphasize higher-order thinking skills, rather than memorizing discrete facts (especially in adolescence).
  + They are stimulating, often novel and fun.
  + They are quickly paced, allowing little down time.
  + They allow for choice.
  + They allow for and encourage collaboration with peers.
  + They are authentic, emphasizing real-life applications.
  + They encourage students to assume ownership of the learning activity’s conception, execution, and evaluation.
* In addition to providing learning activities with the above features, as well as implementing the classroom management strategies also presented previously, teachers who are most effective in engaging students tend to exhibit the following practices:
  + They support student autonomy, allowing for choice and encouraging shared decision-making.
  + They use a great variety of tasks and activities.
  + They provide peer-assisted activities that are completed in pairs, or small groups
  + They incorporate use of modeling to highlight behaviors associated with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Models include the teacher, students, and others in and outside of school.
  + They incorporate the strategic and wise use of praise and rewards, providing effective feedback and reinforcing engagement-related behavior.

*School Characteristics*

At the school level, the following additional strategies help promote engagement:38,51,60,61

* Smaller classes and school size (including learning academies in secondary schools). This provides more opportunities for students to be engaged, including participation in social relations.
* Multiple opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, sports, and school governance.
* An environment that is safe and conducive to learning, which includes the absence of bullying.
* Having a high proportion of teachers of similar race/ethnicity as the students, particularly in schools with large numbers of racial and ethnic minority students of lower socioeconomic status.

*Important Note: The relations between engagement and many of the variables above are reciprocal*. That is, the direction of influence likely goes both ways. For example, positive teacher-student and student-student relationships foster student engagement, but student engagement also fosters positive relationships. Likewise, the relation between many teaching strategies and engagement is often reciprocal (e.g., less structure is often needed in classes of engaged students). An important implication for interventions is that whereas student engagement can be improved by targeting characteristics of teaching and schools, so too can certain characteristics of teaching and schools be improved by directly targeting competencies underlying emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement of individual students.63,64

**Recommended Evidence-Based Strategies and Interventions**

**for Improving Student Engagement**

In this section, evidence-based strategies and interventions are presented for improving student engagement at Tiers 1, 2, and 3. First, Tier 1 strategies and interventions are presented, which consist of those designed to be implemented for *all* students at the classroom and school-wide levels. For heuristic purposes they are grouped into six general categories: **(I)** use data to help determine the need for classroom and school-wide interventions and which interventions might be most effective; **(II)** implement authoritative strategies of classroom management and school-wide discipline that promote student engagement; **(III)** implement a variety of instructional methods and practices that stimulate student motivation and engagement; **(IV)** challenge students to set realistic academic and behavioral goals, and to develop plans for achieving them; **(V)** emphasize the critical importance of effort and persistence in achieving one’s goals; and **(VI)** consider implementing an evidence-based SEL curriculum that has been shown to strengthen students’ social-emotional competencies and particularly those most related to emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement.

Next, strategies and interventions more specific for Tiers 2 and 3 are presented. These are most appropriate for individual students at Tier 3 who demonstrate signs of disengagement over time despite use of Tier 1 interventions. They also are appropriate, however, for students deemed to be at great risk for disengagement (i.e., those at Tier 2).

*Important Note:* *Each strategy and intervention should be viewed considering its developmental appropriateness, feasibility, and the anticipated likelihood of being implemented with fidelity and effectiveness.*

**School-wide and Classroom Strategies and Interventions at Tier 1**

1. **Use data to help determine the need for classroom and school-wide interventions and which interventions might be most effective.** It is strongly recommended that interventions for improving student engagement be guided by a needs assessment. Sources of engagement-related data that should be considered include academic achievement, absences, truancies, office disciplinary referrals, suspensions, dropout rate (in high school), and the number of students participating in extracurricular activities and sports.

Student, teacher/staff, and parent surveys also are valuable sources of data on student engagement. As noted previously, the *Delaware School Surveys* include two different measures of student engagement: (1) the *Delaware School Climate Scale*, which assesses general student engagement *school-wide* (as reported by students and teachers/staff) and (2) the *Delaware Student Engagement Scale,* which assesses emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement of the *individual* *student* (as reported by the individual student and his/her parent).

I.1. *Use survey scores for student engagement to help answer such important questions*:

*Do students and teachers/staff report that students throughout the school are engaged? That is, is the school viewed as one in which students are engaged?*

*To what extent are individual students engaged emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively, as reported by individual students and their parents? Are results of the two questions above the same or different across grade, racial/ethnic groups, and gender?*

Reports of high engagement across the three groups of respondents and across subgroups (i.e., race, grade, and gender) would indicate little or no need for the interventions that follow or for related staff development.

* + Reports of low engagement would indicate the need for comprehensive and sustained interventions, including related staff development. Reports of low engagement for specific subgroups would indicate the need for more targeted interventions for those subgroups (e.g., African American students in the school, male students in fifth grade, African American males in fifth grade).
  + Survey data should always be interpreted in light of other sources of data listed above. If data do not converge, reasons for disagreement should be explored and addressed. For example, if students report low engagement but all other data do not support their low perceptions, then the validity of students’ perceptions might be targeted, such as in focus groups with students about how they interpret specific items and the inconsistencies between their survey responses and objective data.

*Important note: In examining scores it is very important to consider not only the extent to which students, teachers/staff, and parents agree/disagree that students are engaged or disengaged, but also the developmental differences in students’ scores. For example, schools should recognize that less engagement tends to be reported with increasing age, especially from elementary to early high school.* The *Delaware School Climate Survey Interpretation Worksheets* are designed to help schools do this. See <http://wh1.oet.udel.edu/pbs/school-climate/use-of-school-climate-data/>

I.2. *Compare responses across the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive subscales of the* *Delaware Student Engagement Scale.* Students might report high emotional engagement, but low behavioral or cognitive engagement, or vice versa. Interventions should align with the school’s strengths and weaknesses on the subscales (and on other measures).

I.3. *Examine responses to specific items on all four subscales*. Remember, whereas the *Student Engagement School-wide* subscale of the *Delaware School Climate Scale* assesses students’ and teachers’ perceptions of engagement school-wide (e.g., “Students work hard in this school.”), the *Delaware Student Engagement Scale* assesses emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement as reported by individual students (e.g., “I work hard in school.”) and their parents (e.g., “My child works hard in school.”).

Examine if responses are consistent across items. For example, negative responses to “I turn in my homework on time,” but positive responses to all other items, would indicate that the school should examine homework completion rather than engagement in general.

I.4. *If data from the surveys indicate that student engagement is an area of need (and especially for more than one year), additional data should be gathered and examined to help determine why respondents report low emotional, behavioral, and/or cognitive engagement*. Scores on other subscales of the surveys and data from other sources should provide some clues. For example, low scores on the Student-Student Relationships subscale might indicate that poor relationships between students are a major source of disengagement (especially emotional disengagement). Thus, interventions targeting peer relationships would be warranted.

I.5. *Share survey results and other data with focus groups comprised of representatives of subgroups that responded unfavorably to the items*. For example, if fifth-grade teachers, African-American students, or Hispanic/Latino parents report low engagement, consider meeting with members of that group to gain insight into their perceptions of poor student engagement, as well as opinions about and their perceptions of which interventions, as recommended below, are likely to be effective.

1. **Implement authoritative strategies of classroom management and school-wide discipline that promote student engagement.**

***The strategies for preventing and managing student misbehavior listed in other modules, especially on Improving Teacher-Student Relationships and Improving Student-Student Relationships, apply to improving student engagement, particularly emotional and behavioral engagement, and should always be implemented in combination with the methods and strategies in this module.*** They include strategies reflecting an authoritative approach to classroom management, which consists of a balance of *social support* and *struc*ture, as described previously in this module. Although nearly all strategies in those two modules should be implemented to improve student engagement, several are particularly important and thus are repeated below.

II.1. *Ensure social support: Prevent behavioral problems and promote engagement by establishing and maintaining positive relationships in the classroom and school.*As noted earlier, connectedness, or a sense of belonging, is a large part of emotional engagement. It also is related to behavioral and cognitive engagement: When students feel connected to teachers and classmates, they are likely to be more engaged in learning. Thus, all efforts to improve student engagement should include social support strategies that help establish and maintain positive teacher-student and student-student relationships.

Likewise, positive relationships between a student’s teacher/school and his/her home, especially as seen in effective communication and collaboration, also are important in student engagement, and especially when targeting students who are disengaged. Thus, readers also are referred to the module in this series on *Improving School-Home Collaboration*.

II.2. *Ensure structure: Prevent behavior problems and promote engagement with use of classroom management practices that help keep students on-task and engaged emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively.* Structure is as important as social support, especially in preventing behavior problems that often stifle engagement. Thus, structure-related strategies, such as those found in the *Improving Teacher-Student Relationships* module, should be emphasized. These would include providing clear behavioral and academic expectations, routines, and procedures; fair rules and consequences; quickly paced lessons with little “down time,” and close monitoring and supervision of student behavior. They also would include the use of a variety of instructional methods for motivating and engaging students (and also for fostering positive teacher-student relationships). Those methods are presented in Section III.

II.3. *Use praise, rewards, and other recognitions wisely and strategically to promote emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement.* Praise and rewards help promote both social support and structure, and also serve multiple functions in fostering engagement. For example, not only do they often reinforce engagement and related behaviors, but they also serve as a valuable source of feedback to students. Appendix A presents tips on using praise and rewards wisely and strategically to promote intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and thus engagement, but especially cognitive and behavioral engagement.

1. **Implement a variety of instructional methods and activities that stimulate behavioral and cognitive engagement.**

As noted previously, teachers who are most effective in engaging and motivating students embrace a wide range of evidence-based methods, of which the following are commonly found in reviews of the research literature,65,66 including studies of interventions that have been shown to be effective in improving engagement.67 They should be considered for implementation, *when feasible and appropriate* (i.e., depending on grade level, need, availability of resources, training, etc.).

*Important note:* The following methods and strategies are tailored more for behavioral and cognitive engagement than for emotional engagement, although they are likely to enhance all three areas. Multiple strategies more specific to enhancing emotional engagement, particularly students’ sense of belonging and connectedness, are included in the modules on *Improving Teacher-Student Relationships* and *Improving Student-Student Relationships*.

III.1. *Maximize variety in the use of instructional methods and learning activities, with greatest use of those that require active participation of students.* This would include project-based learning, inquiry based learning, peer-assisted learning, class discussions, role plays, debates, simulations, computer and other technology-based activities, educational games, dramatic readings, and so forth.

III.2. *Offer challenging and authentic tasks—those that center on the realistic application of skills learned, and especially higher order thinking skills*. With increasing age, the tasks should entail more complex and multidimensional problems.

III.3. *Ensure that instructional materials match the abilities of individual students.* When needed, provide accommodations to help enable students to learn the material.

III.4. *Offer students choices in activities—in what to do and how to do it.* When provided with choices, students are likely to feel more intrinsically motivated to complete the activities or assignments, feel more competent in the content and materials, and perform better on assignments and tests. For example, give students a choice between two similar homework assignment options, the difficulty level of an assignment, or how they might demonstrate a skill they are taught.68

III.5. *Make learning activities fun by incorporating game-like features*, novelty, surprise, fantasy, and humor*.*

III.6. *Emphasize the relevance of academic material and activities to the individual lives of students.* This isespecially important for secondary students. It requires identifying students’ interests, values, goals, and preferences by such means as surveys, interviews, discussion, and observations. For example, upon learning their goals, have students think of examples of applying what they are learning to their present or future lives (and to write about it).69,70,71 For a sample interest/preference survey for elementary and secondary students, see the resources section for this module on the Delaware PBS website (http://wh1.oet.udel.edu/pbs/scss-modules/).

1. **Challenge students to set realistic academic and behavioral goals, and to develop plans for achieving them.**

IV.1. *Challenge students to identify and reflect upon their values and goals, and to choose engagement-related behaviors that are consistent with their values and goals.*

IV.2. *Help students adopt challenging standards and methods for monitoring the progress toward achieving their value-oriented goals*.

IV.3. *Challenge students to set short-term goals (for all ages), and long-term goals (especially students in higher grades).* For long-term goals*,* challenge students to reflect upon their possible selves in the future: What does it mean to be a successful student and adult? What must one do to achieve one’s goals? Offer multiple activities for students to explain and develop steps and strategies for attaining their short-term and long-term goals. For example, activities might focus on the importance of homework, time management, and cooperating with others in obtaining one’s goals.72,73

IV.4. *Throughout the curriculum, highlight how important values* (e.g., altruism, family, etc.), and including positive ones identified by students, are important and necessary for success in certain subjects/career fields (e.g., sciences, arts).74

IV.5. *Emphasize mastery goals over performance goals*. For example, although

importance of grades is recognized, emphasize that of greater importance is mastery of the material taught.75,76

IV.6. *Emphasize mastery in external and self-evaluations*. Encourage students to focus on evaluating their personal progress toward learning new skills (e.g., during the past two months), and the information contained in grades rather than on their grades per se or how their skills compare to those of others.

1. **Emphasize the critical importance of effort and persistence in achieving one’s goals.**

Regardless of the instructional method employed, if one’s aim to promote students’ motivation, persistence, and learning, it often helps to frame learning activities in terms of intrinsic goals instead of extrinsic goals.

V.1. *Emphasize effort and challenge much more so than ability; thus, adopting a growth mindset instead of a fixed ability mindset.* Teach and emphasize the idea that people can change and that a growth mindset can help make one smarter.77,78

V.2. *Provide feedback that is frequent, substantive, and constructive.* This includes clear and specific guidance as to how to improve.79

V.3. *Make grade criteria clear and fair, and explain why high standards, external and internal, are important*. Communicate the belief that the student is capable of meeting those standards. (This has been shown to be particularly effective for African American students, especially those who feel mistrusting of school).80

V.4. *Promote self-evaluation in meeting one’s goals.* For example, have students record daily, or weekly, something new they have learned or something at which they have excelled.79 This might include evaluating progress toward more specific goals students have identified.

V.5. *Incorporate student self-evaluation into daily tasks and assignments to allow students to identify and learn from their mistakes, and to reflect upon achieving their goals and mastery of material*.81

1. **Consider implementing an evidence-based SEL curriculum that has been shown to strengthen students’ social-emotional competencies, and particularly those most related to emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement.**

Integrate teaching of SEL competencies, especially those linked most directly with engagement, such as self-management, relationships with others, and self awareness.

VI.1. *Look for programs that include lessons on emotional, behavioral, or cognitive engagement skills* *and that have been shown in empirical studies to improve engagement*. Such programs should include lessons and strategies that target such skills as attending and listening skills, study skills, goal setting, self-efficacy, self-management, and relationship skills. A number of programs have been shown to improve engagement, including those specific skills. See www.casel.org/guide/ for a list of such programs, and descriptions of each. Packaged programs available for purchase and/or training and with the most substantial research evidence follow.

*Responsive Classroom Approach (K – Grade 6)*

<http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>

* This is a comprehensive approach to classroom management and developing SEL skills, with an emphasis teacher support, morning meetings, home-school collaboration, and active involvement of students in decisions making and social problem solving.
* Research has found that the program promotes greater teacher-student closeness, more positive student perceptions of the classroom environment, improved student achievement, and increased teachers’ focus on student interests.

*Second Step (Preschool – Grade 8)*

<http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step/elementary-school>

<http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step/middle-school>

* Emphasis on curriculum lessons that target comprehensive SEL skills.
* Research has found improved social skills and prosocial behavior; reduced several externalizing and internalizing behaviors, including aggression, compliance, anxiety, and poor on-task behavior and academic engagement; (see Fitzgerald and Van Schoiack-Edstrom, 2012, for review of program and research)

*PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) (Preschool – Grade 5)*

<http://www.prevention.psu.edu/projects/paths.html>

* Emphasis on social and emotional development (e.g., self control, feelings and relationships, social problem solving).
* Studies show that the program improves social emotional skills, prosocial behavior, a number of internalizing and externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, anxiety), and classroom engagement and attention.

*RULER (K – Grade 8)*

<http://www.therulerapproach.org>

* Focuses on teaching empathy, perspective taking, and social awareness. Encourages teachers to integrate these skills into their curriculum and parents to promote these competencies at home.
* Studies show that the program leads to greater connection between teachers and students, increased teachers’ focus on student interests, and improved academic performance.

*Leader in Me (K – Grade 8)*

[www.theleaderinme.or](http://www.theleaderinme.or)g

* Emphasis on developing students’ leadership and life skills. The process includes student participation in goal setting, data tracking, leadership roles, student-led conferences, leadership environments, and leadership events. The *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is a key component of the Leader in Me process and is a synthesis of principles of personal, interpersonal, and organizational effectiveness (e.g., responsibility, integrity, teamwork).
* Third-party research studies via surveys have shown that principals, teachers, and parents perceive positive impacts of the program, such as increased student leadership skills, improvements in school climate, improved student attendance, improved student, teacher, and parent satisfaction and engagement, and improvements in student behavior.

**Strategies and Interventions for Students at Tiers 2 and 3**

1. **Apply the strategies and interventions listed above at the universal level, as appropriate.** Every strategy and intervention listed above applies to all students who are lacking in emotional, behavioral, or cognitive engagement, including those at Tiers 2 and 3. However, for those students at Tiers 2 and 3, who are either at greatest risk for lack of engagement or are currently exhibiting serious and/or chronic problems of disengagement, the above interventions should be:

* Of greater frequency and intensity. For example, teachers may need to devote more frequent and greater attention to matching lessons to students’ interests and abilities and use of a variety of instructional methods.
* More comprehensive. This would include targeting multiple skill areas, such as the development of a full range of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive skills, and doing so using multiple strategies and across multiple settings.
* More individualized and guided by a more thorough assessment of the student’s interests, values, and goals, as well as additional individual and environmental factors that might help explain and contribute to lack of engagement. For example, where appropriate, an individual assessment by a school psychologist might use observations; student, teacher, and parent interviews and behavioral checklists; and student self-report measures to identify:
  + Specific areas of engagement (cognitive, behavioral, or emotional) and specific behaviors (e.g., completing homework, following rules) that are individual weaknesses and strengths.
  + If deficits are primarily skill deficits or motivational deficits (or both). That is, is the primary problem that the student can’t do it, or won’t do it?
  + Individual strengths that might be used to help foster emotional, behavioral, or cognitive engagement.
  + If classroom management and school-wide discipline need improvement. This may indicate the need for staff development in instructional methods for improving student engagement.
  + Systems of social support and resources, including those in school, home, and community, that might be necessary and useful in fostering student engagement. Strategies and interventions would be individualized and aligned with the assessment results, as commonly found in behavioral intervention plans.

1. **Provide additional social skills/SEL training.** This would be in addition to that provided in the regular classroom and would target specific skills of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Such additional training might be provided in small groups or individually by the school counselor or school psychologist.

* This might be done using lessons from a universal curriculum (e.g., Second Step) that are delivered not only when lessons are taught to the entire class, but also to selected individuals before (pre-teaching) or afterwards (booster sessions).
* It also might be done using evidence-based curriculum lessons that are designed more specifically for use at Tiers 2 and 3 instead of Tier 1, such as Incredible Years (preschool-grade 2; see incredibleyears.com).A focus on teaching study skills has shown to be especially effective in preventing dropping out among middle and high school students.82

1. **Work closely with the home in targeting engagement skills** (see Home-School Communication and Collaboration module). This might include homework completion, involvement in extracurricular activities, a daily report card, and so forth.

* Daily report cards, where teachers rate the student’s behavior, share the ratings with the student and parent, and provide praise/reinforcement based on positive behaviors, have been found to be effective in decreasing disruptive behaviors in younger children.83 This strategy can be applied to engagement behaviors, and adapted based on the student’s needs and age (e.g., using a weekly “report card,” including electronic posting, in upper grades to notify parents of homework completion, attendance, etc.).

1. **Where appropriate (e.g., Tier 3), develop a behavioral contract** that targets specific engagement skills. For details on how to develop and implement a behavioral contract, see the National Center on Intensive Intervention website (<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/Behavior_Contracts.pdf>)
2. **Implement Check and Connect, or otherwise provide individual mentoring, especially that which offers support via a positive teacher-student relationship, monitoring, and guidance.**

* Research on Check and Connect has demonstrated that compared to students not in the program, those in the program are less likely to drop out of school and are more engaged.
* Check and Connect increases students’ engagement in school by fostering relationships and problem solving. A school staff member is responsible for developing a supportive relationship with not only the student but also with his/her family. Although most commonly implemented in secondary school, the program can be implemented at all grade levels.
* The school staff member meets individually with the student at least once a week and maintains communication with their family through phone calls, notes, or in-person interactions. This continues over multiple years.
* The staff member regularly assesses the student’s behaviors associated with engagement, such as attendance, grades, and behavioral referrals. The staff member connects with others to implement interventions to increase engagement.
* For more information, visit: <http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/resources.html#adminresources>
* Consider adopting other programs shown to be effective in preventing dropping out. In their review of the research literature on effective drop-out programs, Freeman and Simonsen (2015) found that the most effective ones targeted one or more of the following components of school organizational or structural changes: academic strategies, behavioral strategies, attendance strategies, and study skill strategies.
* For example, the FUTURES program84 incorporates all five of the above components into a five-year program that involves ongoing support for students beginning as they transition from middle to high school. This support includes academic tutoring, social-emotional and behavioral skill development (e.g., social skills instruction, character education, leadership training, access to mental health support), work experience, incentives for attendance, and smaller class sizes.

1. **Arrange or provide additional intensive supports, resources, and organizational changes, as needed.** In addition those listed above, this might include individual counseling, family therapy or parent management training, and social services. It also might include organizational or structural changes to foster implementation of addition services.

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Appendix A

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| ***Checklist on the Strategic Use of Praise and Rewards for to Improve Student Engagement*** | | | |
|  | **YES** | **NO** | **Not applicable** |
| 1. Praise and/or rewards are used often, not only to reinforce specific engagement behaviors (e.g., paying attention, completing homework, participating in classroom and other school activities), but also to help establish and maintain a positive classroom or school climate that promotes emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. |  |  |  |
| 2. The informative, or feedback, function rather than controlling, function of praise and rewards is emphasized. For example, students are praised for their effort or progress, as opposed to being told “If you do well, you will earn a reward.”). |  |  |  |
| 3. Deliberate efforts are made to avoid teaching students that the most important reason to exhibit engagement-related behaviors is to earn rewards or to be praised. |  |  |  |
| 4. Praise and rewards are used to recognize and acknowledge the processes and dispositions associated with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, such as prosocial behavior, self-discipline, effort, setting goals, and self-evaluation. |  |  |  |
| 5. Rewards are used only occasionally for behavior that is intrinsically motivated, and used more often for behavior that is not intrinsically motivated. Rewards are used just enough, and not overused, to produce the desired behavior. |  |  |  |
| 6. Specific engagement behaviors are praised and rewarded, and students know what these behaviors are. Expectations should not be set too low (i.e., “easy” behaviors) or too high (i.e., “unrealistic” behaviors) and should change as behavior improves. For example, if the class earns a homework pass as a result of 80% of students completing their homework that week, the criterion should be raised to 85% for the following week. |  |  |  |
| 7. Praise and rewards are made contingent upon success in demonstrating the desired behavior, especially effort expended. |  |  |  |
| 8. Praise and rewards are used in a sincere and credible manner. |  |  |  |
| 9. Praise is much more common than rewards, and tangible rewards are used the least, especially after early elementary grades. After elementary grades, private praise receives emphasis. |  |  |  |
| 10. The present and future usefulness of the engagement behavior praised or rewarded is highlighted (e.g., “Excellent, Bobby. People really appreciate it when you try your best and work hard even when things are hard for you. That will help you a lot next year in high school, as well as in college and when you get your first job.”) |  |  |  |
| 11. Students are encouraged to self-evaluate and self-reinforce their engagement behaviors and take pride in their own behavior. |  |  |  |
| 12. Students are actively involved in determining rewards and the engagement behaviors to be rewarded, (e.g., privileges earned for working hard, such as for 100% of the class completing their homework). |  |  |  |
| 13. Rewards are often administered in an unexpected, or surprise, fashion. For example, free time is awarded on Friday for the class working hard all week. |  |  |  |
| 14. When rewards are used, all students have an equal opportunity to earn them. |  |  |  |
| 15. Developmental, cultural, and individual differences are recognized in the use of rewards. |  |  |  |
| 16. Students are encouraged (and recognized) for praising each other for engagement-related behaviors. |  |  |  |