



Cognia Student Engagement Survey: Now What?

Why does student engagement matter?

“Student engagement occurs when young people have invested themselves, their energy, and their commitment to the learning environment, both within and outside the classroom. They willingly put forth the required effort to find a level of personal success academically, socially, and emotionally. They care about others’ successes. ... They contribute meaningfully to the school and classroom climate. They understand that their presence matters,” (Dary et al., 2016).

Research states that student engagement is a key lever for increasing academic achievement and learner outcomes. In K–12 education, student engagement is generally accepted as “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” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2016).

The Cognia™ Student Engagement Survey (SES) collects feedback directly from students about their learning experiences. Results from this survey generate a valuable summary of the insights learned from student responses and provide schools and districts with the opportunity to understand their students’ engagement in greater detail. By understanding students’ responses, educators can determine and implement instructional strategies that promote engagement and thereby improve student achievement, interactions with peers, attendance, and interest in school. The SES provides information on student engagement in three domains: Behavioral, Cognitive, and Emotional.

It can be misleading to take an “I’ll know it when I see it,” approach to student engagement. Equating committed engagement with participation or attendance limits the range of engagement. To truly address students’ motivation and involvement in the learning process, all facets of engagement should be examined. By understanding what engagement looks like in each domain, and the type of engagement students demonstrate in each, educators can more effectively and directly implement strategies to improve engagement.

How do I understand the survey results?

The SES report identifies the percentage of students within each engagement type in each engagement domain (Behavioral, Cognitive, and Emotional).

- **Behavioral Engagement:** A student’s observable actions or participation while in class considered through the student’s conduct, effort, and participation (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).
- **Cognitive Engagement:** A student’s cognitive processing effort brought to academic tasks, as well as the amount and type of strategies the student applies (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006).
- **Emotional Engagement:** A student’s feelings toward their school, learning, teachers, and peers (Jimerson, Campos, & Grief, 2003).

Within each domain, student responses reveal one of three types of engagement:

- **Committed:** Student finds personal meaning and value in tasks.
- **Compliant:** Student meets expectations, follows rules, and actively avoids consequences.
- **Disengaged:** Student is unmotivated, does not participate, and actively avoids completing tasks.

To promote committed engagement, educators should try to decrease the percentage of “Compliant” and “Disengaged” students and increase the percentage of “Committed” students in their classrooms and schools. By identifying specific domains where students are revealing disengagement or compliance, educators can select strategies and interventions to increase engagement. For more information on how to read score reports, see the *Student Engagement Survey Score Reporting Guide*, which provides item-level descriptions to further help educators understand where students are or are not demonstrating committed engagement.

What do I do with this information?

Educators should use the survey report to first identify priority domains of engagement to address. After identifying domains where students are indicating high levels of compliance and/or disengagement, educators can begin to examine and determine which instructional practices inhibit committed engagement. Note that students often exhibit different types and levels of engagement depending on the lesson, activity, or group assignment. To be aware of students’ changing levels of engagement, the following general characteristics can be used as a guide to change instructional strategies so that students are actively engaged throughout the lesson:

- **Behavioral:** Students who are behaviorally committed participate and are involved in academic, social, or extracurricular activities. They demonstrate positive conduct, adhere to classroom norms, and avoid disruptive behavior.
- **Cognitive:** Students who are cognitively committed are thoughtful, strategic, and willing to exert necessary effort for comprehension of ideas and mastery of skills. They ask questions in class, contribute to discussions, and make presentations.
- **Emotional:** Students who are emotionally committed have a sense of belonging. They appreciate success in school-related outcomes and feel important to the school. They care about the school, feel safe at the school, and believe they have a voice in the school and classroom.

The strategies listed below are examples that can increase student engagement.

Promoting behavioral engagement

Students are more likely to be behaviorally engaged when activities, both in the classroom and schoolwide, are connected to their interests and provide some degree of structure. Strategies that increase behavioral engagement promote a culture of high expectations, a culture of learning, and the development of positive student dispositions. These strategies include effective and efficient classroom management strategies that increase active learning and minimize distractions or opportunities for disengagement. Providing students with choice over their tasks or activities also helps minimize off-task behavior and increase effortful engagement.

Promoting cognitive engagement

Students are more likely to be cognitively engaged when working on tasks that they feel connect to their lives, receiving feedback on their work, and receiving acknowledgement of their strengths, accomplishments, and progress. Strategies that increase cognitive engagement encourage learner self-direction, supporting active learning, and high expectations. Practices that promote deep thinking and processing encourage cognitive engagement. Questioning methods such as convergent thinking, divergent thinking, and evaluative thinking, as well as self-regulation strategies, are also effective.

Promoting emotional engagement

Students are more likely to be emotionally engaged when the tasks and assignments they complete feel connected to their personal learning needs. Strategies that increase emotional engagement encourage student safety and sense of belonging. These include promoting a supportive and equitable learning environment, where students feel their teacher is interested in them and their lives outside of school. Receiving praise or acknowledgement of effort and progress, as well as specific feedback to increase understanding, are all ways to promote emotional engagement.



Suggested instructional strategies to consider

While examining student engagement through distinct domains supports deeper understanding of student needs, many of the instructional strategies identified may stimulate engagement in more than one domain. Further, this guide is intended as a starting point for understanding and acting on student engagement in the classroom. Numerous other strategies and interventions to increase engagement in the classroom exist and should be explored to identify the most effective strategies to meet each classroom's unique context.

- **Carousel:** Carousel is a cooperative learning strategy that can be employed in small groups or a whole class. Using different stations, write the same question/prompt, which can be responded to in myriad ways (e.g., using different positions or points of view). Ask students to respond, then have them rotate stations. When students arrive at their new station, have them read the previous response before adding to (or refuting) it. Continue having students rotate and respond until they have been to each station. End with a facilitated small- or whole-group discussion.
- **Chalkboard Splash:** Chalkboard Splash is an active learning and total participation technique where the teacher provides a topic or prompt and asks all students to respond (e.g., complete the sentence, write down everything you know about ____, etc.). Students read each other's responses and are provided an opportunity to comment, question, and make observations.
- **Concept Mapping:** Students create a visual representation of interrelated knowledge. This can be done individually or in small groups. Students identify key concepts and the relationships between them. The key concepts and ideas can and should build off prior material to facilitate connection. Students use arrows and linking terms to indicate and describe relationships between concepts.
- **Jigsaw:** Jigsaw is a cooperative learning strategy where students are expected to learn from each other as opposed to learning exclusively from their teacher. Each student in the group is provided an essential task or part to play in the overall activity or goal. Students come together as a team and listen to, teach, and learn from one another to complete the task.
- **Literature Circles:** Small groups of students come together and are given a choice of reading options by their teacher. After selecting a text, they read and discuss. Students help one another understand and make sense of the text via this discussion.
- **Relationship Building:** A key component of emotional engagement is student-teacher relationships. Relationship-building strategies such as interviewing/questioning, positive feedback, and daily greetings all promote strong relationships and can reinforce a positive classroom culture.
- **Utility Value:** Utility value relates perceived usefulness of learned course material to interests and goals that are valued by the student. For example, a student may write a personal story about how the learned material can help them towards achieving their current wants or needs. Students may also expand the scope of their writing to include the utility of the material for others.

References

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