



## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

# Engage Kids With 7 Times the Effect

The way to engage students is to make sure that they care about the material and know how much you care about them.

By Todd Finley (<http://www.edutopia.org/users/todd-finley>)

August 25, 2014 Updated September 9, 2015



© breity via flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0) (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/76875951@N00/4101210859>)

In education literature, engagement is a linchpin, routinely cited as essential. Yet many experts offhandedly provide vague definitions of the term, or skip defining it altogether. So what exactly is engagement?

It depends on whom you ask. In a survey of education majors, Shari Steadman and I found that preservice teachers often confuse compliance with engagement—essentially flattening the meaning of the term. Wrote one education major, “Engagement is an agreement between student[s] and teachers to be there and present during class.” This explanation implies that

merely breathing and looking at instructors constitutes student engagement. In contrast, Ruth Schoenbach and Cynthia Greenleaf elevate the term with a **more robust definition** (<http://www.guilford.com/books/Handbook-of-Adolescent-Literacy-Research/Christenbury-Bomer-Smagorinsky/9781606239933/contents>) : “By adding the word *engaged*, we mean to distinguish between the skilled but rote and unsophisticated kind of academic literacy that many ‘successful’ students master, and the more analytic, critical, and discipline-specific ways of making meaning emblematic of engaged learners.”

**Get the best of Edutopia in  
your inbox each week.**

Your email address

**SIGN UP**

Adam Fletcher’s definition is **more succinct** (<http://soundout.org/defining-student-engagement-a-literature-review/>) : “Students are engaged when they are attracted to their work, persist despite challenges and obstacles, and take visible delight in accomplishing their work.”

The term hails back to a mid-17th century association with fencers. Imagine competitors facing off with their foils, all senses focused on the micro-adjustments of their opponent’s blade as well as their own physical, emotional, and intellectual potential. When fencers lunge, circle, and feint, this fierce ballet is called engagement.

## **Benefits of Engagement**

According to multiple research studies, engaged students:

- Experience improved academic achievement and satisfaction
- Are more likely to persist through academic struggles
- Earn higher standardized test scores
- Have better social skills
- Are less likely to drop out of school

In contrast, disengagement:

- Lowers cognitive performance
- Increases disruptive behaviors
- Causes academic avoidance behaviors
- Exacerbates learning, behavior, and emotional problems
- Increases absenteeism and dropout rates

Disengagement isn't merely the plight of a few outlier students in your classroom. In the early grades, eight out of 10 students are engaged. By middle school, the number is six out 10, and then four out of 10 in high school, according to a 2013 Gallup poll. "The drop in student engagement for each year students are in school is our monumental, collective national failure," said Brandon Busteed, executive director of Gallup Education.

## Research-Supported Methods to Engage Students

From *The Highly Engaged Classroom* (<http://www.marzanoresearch.com/the-highly-engaged-classroom>) to *School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs>

[/schooleng.pdf](#)) (PDF) to “**Strengthening Student Engagement** (<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept95/vol53/num01/Strengthening-Student-Engagement@-What-Do-Students-Want.aspx>) ,” the books and articles that have been written on the subject of increasing student engagement could fill a gluttonous orca. But Kristy Cooper’s rigorous study “**Eliciting Engagement in the High School Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Examination of Teaching Practices** (<http://aer.sagepub.com/content/51/2/363.abstract>) ” does an exceptional job of showing what works.

Cooper, an award-winning researcher at Michigan State University, examined the impact of three well-supported strategies that teachers employ to increase student engagement. As you read each summary below, try to guess which practice had the greatest impact.

### **Engagement Method #1: Lively Teaching**

This method involves group work, games, and projects. Think social and fun. The emphasis is on the students constructing knowledge, not on the teacher delivering content.

### **Engagement Method #2: Academic Rigor**

The instructor creates cognitively demanding tasks and environments—a culture called “**academic press** ([http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/77686/dberebit\\_1.pdf?sequence=1](http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/77686/dberebit_1.pdf?sequence=1)) ” (PDF)—and emphasizes that students will need to work hard. The teacher also shows passionate investment in the content.

### **Engagement Method #3: Connective Instruction**

The teacher helps students make personal connections to the class, content,

and learning. The power of connective instruction comes from the instructor helping students see the curriculum as critical to their current lives, their future, and their culture. Additionally, six instructor behaviors play into creating high-quality relationships where, according to **Andrew Martin** ([https://books.google.com/books?id=m64u0ZkMgNoC&pg=PA193&lpg=PA193&dq=%22Connective+Instruction%22+%2B+engagement&source=bl&ots=gOgWrnqpaR&sig=heVOSJ24Ei7J2pK8BRXvpc-u2FA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=5NPwU8uuA4WbyAT\\_9IKwBA#v=onepage&q=%22Connective%20Instruction%22%20%2B%20engagement&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=m64u0ZkMgNoC&pg=PA193&lpg=PA193&dq=%22Connective+Instruction%22+%2B+engagement&source=bl&ots=gOgWrnqpaR&sig=heVOSJ24Ei7J2pK8BRXvpc-u2FA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=5NPwU8uuA4WbyAT_9IKwBA#v=onepage&q=%22Connective%20Instruction%22%20%2B%20engagement&f=false)) , students “actually internalize the beliefs valued by significant others.”

1. **Promoting relevance:** relating content to students’ lives
2. **Conveying care:** understanding learners’ perspectives
3. **Showing concern for students’ well-being:** demonstrating knowledge of students’ lives
4. **Providing affirmation:** telling students they are capable of doing well and using praise, written feedback, and opportunities for success
5. **Relating to students through humor:** showing that you enjoy working with young people (not as a class, as individuals)
6. **Enabling self-expression:** connecting learning and identity by encouraging students’ expression of ideas, values, and conceptions of self

Although lively teaching and academic rigor independently and collectively increase engagement, the single biggest effect, according to Cooper’s study, resulted from connective instruction—it was seven times as effective as the other two well-established practices. Why? Because of kids’ desperate longing for high-quality relationships. When a teacher fulfills that desire, students’ **achievement behaviors** ([http://www.icire.net/Docs\\_Photos/Key-note\\_Andrew\\_Martin\\_ICIRE2012.pdf](http://www.icire.net/Docs_Photos/Key-note_Andrew_Martin_ICIRE2012.pdf)) (PDF) and intellectual functioning soar.

For all teachers, regardless of subject or grade level, intensive effort to connect with learners is a nonnegotiable prerequisite for engagement.

## FILED UNDER

Student Engagement (<http://www.edutopia.org/blogs/tag/student-engagement>)

Social and Emotional Learning (<http://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning>)

Teaching Strategies (<http://www.edutopia.org/blogs/tag/teaching-strategies>)

All Grades (<http://www.edutopia.org/grade/k12>)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Todd Finley** (<http://www.edutopia.org/users/todd-finley>)

Blogger and Assistant Editor (Contractor)

@finleyt (<http://www.twitter.com/finleyt>)

## SHARE THIS STORY

**Source:** [www.edutopia.org/blog/engage-with-7x-the-effect-todd-finley](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/engage-with-7x-the-effect-todd-finley)

**Reprint Policy:** [www.edutopia.org/terms-of-use](http://www.edutopia.org/terms-of-use)

**Privacy Policy:** [www.edutopia.org/privacy-policy](http://www.edutopia.org/privacy-policy)

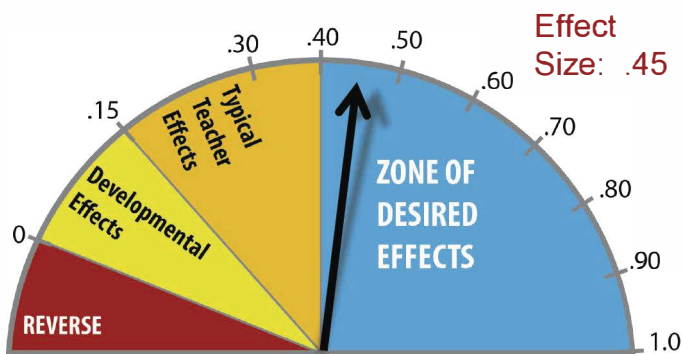
# Engaging Student Learners

## What is Student Engagement?

"Student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, value, and perseverance that students show when they are learning or being taught."

(Olson & Peterson, 2015)

## The Research



## Benefits

Students who are engaged learn at high levels and have a profound grasp of what they learn, retain what they learn, and can transfer what they learn to new contexts.

(Phillip Schlechty, 2011)

## Purpose

The core business of our schools is to ensure that every student, every day, is provided challenging, interesting, and satisfying work.

(Phillip Schlechty, 2011)

## Components of Engagement

### 1. Attentive

Student pays attention to and focuses on the tasks associated with the work being done.

### 2. Committed

Student commits without the promise of extrinsic rewards or the threat of negative consequences.

### 3. Persistent

Student sticks to the task even when it presents difficulty.

### 4. Meaningful/Valuable

The student finds meaning and value in the tasks of the work. (Phillip Schlechty, 2011)

## Evidence of Engagement

If I have trouble understanding a problem, I go over it again until I get it.

I challenge myself to study more so I'm not just getting by.

With what I've learned I can show leadership and make a difference in my community.

I can explore, experiment and ask questions.

I learn about topics that matter in the world.

# Goal Orientations

## *Performance Level-*

- Works to exceed performance of others or to hide learning needs
- Believes initial lack of success indicates lack of ability
- Quits, cheats, or chooses easier work when faced with difficulty
- “I don’t know what I’m doing, so I’m not smart enough to do this”
- “How do I get the highest ‘A’?”
- “How do I avoid being seen as not smart enough?”

*Notes:*

## *Task Level-*

- Works just hard enough to get assignments turned in and/or to get points
- Believes that effort in school is about getting points- it matters less who does the work
- Looks for alternative ways to get points when faced with difficulty
- “When is it due?” or “How much is this worth?”

*Notes:*

## *Learning Level-*

- Develops willingness to try and persistence to keep trying
- Believes that effort will lead to eventual success
- Exhibits “Failure tolerance” when faced with difficulty--initial failure can be overcome by a change in strategy
- “What can I learn from this mistake?”

*Notes:*

**Research:** Chappuis, J. (2015). *Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning* (2e). Boston: Pearson.





STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

# Igniting Student Engagement: A Roadmap for Learning

AUGUST 5, 2015

By John McCarthy, Education Consultant, Advocate for Student Voice in Learning



The opening months of school are a time of optimism and new beginnings. Each school year's start rejuvenates educators and students. Yet these feelings can quickly turn sour if we do not encourage students to find meaning in what we ask them to do. There are ways to engage learners into lessons and units. Here are three practices that, when incorporated by teachers, offer entry points for students to invest in their learning.

## Practice One: Be Real

Communicating authentic purpose (<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/differentiated-instruction-authentic-purpose-audience-john-mccarthy>) to students is critical if we want their attention. Beyond the school walls, there is much that captures peoples' notice -- games, social media, entertainment, events, and friends. All of these often out-match the potential value of school curriculum. Keeping learning real requires three easy steps:

### *1. Connect skills and concepts to students' interests.*

Curriculum is often taught as non-concrete concepts that are steeped in academic abstractions (just like this sentence). Learning happens when we connect concepts with practical applications, such as the effects of centripetal force from a tight turn on a skateboard, bike, or car. Understanding also happens through reflection on and revision of creative writing, or prototypes that demonstrate the targeted skills and concepts.

### *2. Engage students in professional dialogue with experts in the field.*

Parents, friends, and colleagues either have expertise or know "the right people" who can talk with (not to) your students. Professional dialogue is authentic practice that provides context for the subject-based skills. Often, a guest will say something that the teacher has already said many times, yet now the students embrace the idea because it came from that outside person. Professional dialogue is not the guest talking at the learners. Instead, the conversation is a give-and-take. Students recognize when they are included as contributors.

### *3. Challenge students to solve a problem, design for a need, or explore their own questions.*

Give students real-world challenges to solve. The experiences may be a single activity, a collection of lessons, or an entire unit. Discovery in science, math, games, and other areas happens through trial and error. Opportunities to apply concepts in practical ways are important to learning. Reflecting on successes and

mistakes is where growth occurs, sparking new ideas and innovations. The process takes time in the short term, but if sustained learning is key, then the long journey to the destination outcomes is worth the effort. Otherwise, students see the work as a checklist (<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/differentiated-instruction-quality-beyond-checklist-john-mccarthy>) to be completed and forgotten.

## Practice Two: Launch Events That Matter

Relevance matters. As in the professional arena, students need to know why the content is worth taking the trip to accomplish the tasks. When starting a unit, launching an event can help students make an emotional connection to the major themes and concepts to be explored. Some examples include:

### *Creative PSA*

Show The Sneeze (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKiQA5e-fPg>) . The dialogue after watching this Australian public service video can raise interest in the study of germs and infectious diseases.

### *Personalizing History*

As an invisible theater exercise, the Teaching Channel's Making the Declaration of Independence Come Alive (<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-declaration-of-independence>) can help students recognize the value of historical events and ideas by making personal or contemporary connections. (Spoiler alert: students make the analogy of the Declaration of Independence to a break-up letter.)

### *Guest Professional*

Invite someone to ask your students for help on some real-world task. A travel agent needs persuasive media on regional travel sites (geography), or an organization director needs an awareness campaign about cancer to raise donations. Many guest opportunities can be found in your own networks. Three Degrees of Connection (<http://openingpaths.org/blog/2014/06/3-degrees-of-connections/>) is a professional development activity for staff to identify experts among their networks. The future guest may be someone that you or a colleague knows.

## Practice Three: Keep the End in Mind

Driving in heavy rain or a snowstorm is especially difficult behind a semi truck. The spray sweeps up a wall of mist that limits vision of what's beyond. Yet if we get past the truck, our vision of the road is clearer. Students need a clear view of the roadmap that they're expected to follow. Inform them of the outcomes for each lesson and unit at the beginning, making sure that they understand what you intend to teach them. *Essential Questions* (<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109004/chapters/What-Makes-a-Question-Essential%A2.aspx>) (as discussed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe) and driving questions (<http://openingpaths.org/blog/2014/01/concept-based-driving-questions/>) are like road signs, providing reminders of how the current content connects to the final destination. Key assessments for learning, like exit cards, revision work, and journal entries, are mile markers that we use to let students know their progress and distance left to travel.

## If You Engage Learners, They Will Take Over

Each new school year is a crossroads of many travel options. Students drive their learning when we share the maps, empowering them to chart their way to the various unit destinations. Provide them a clear view to a purposeful outcome that has meaning to them, and they will want the wheel. They will invest the time and practice needed to become confident drivers. When they want control, our best option is to give them the keys.

There's always the extra set of brakes available to us -- but we should tap them only when needed.



## Getting (and Keeping) Students Engaged

Create experiences so students invest in their learning.

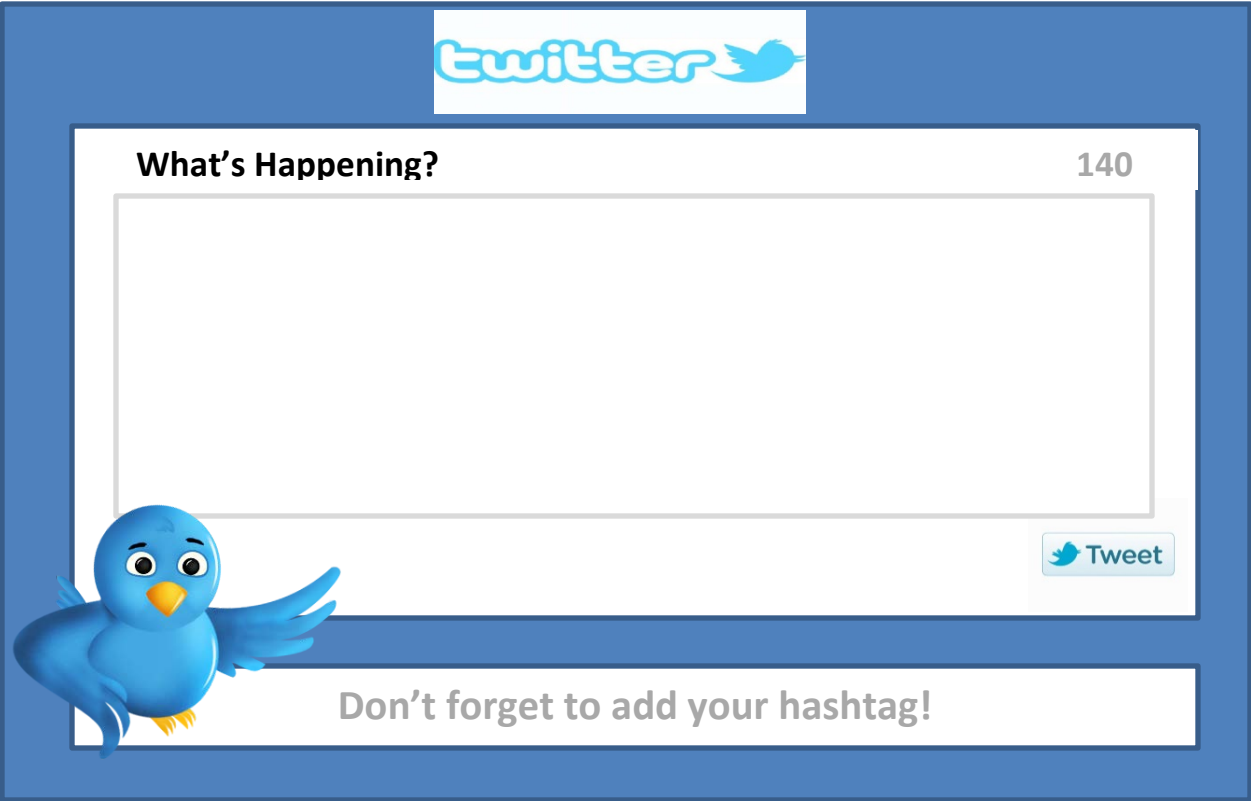
Next

---

**Source:** [www.edutopia.org/blog/ignite-student-engagement-roadmap-learning-john-mccarthy](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/ignite-student-engagement-roadmap-learning-john-mccarthy)

**Reprint Policy:** [www.edutopia.org/terms-of-use](http://www.edutopia.org/terms-of-use)

**Privacy Policy:** [www.edutopia.org/privacy-policy](http://www.edutopia.org/privacy-policy)



## Student Engagement Do's and Don'ts

	Do or Don't?
Talk more than your students do.	
Design activities that encourage your students to speak with each other.	
Deliver a combination of written and verbal directions and check for student understanding.	
Confuse your students by giving hurried or unclear directions.	
Plan more work than you think your students will be able to accomplish.	
Allow your students to sit around with nothing to do while they wait for class to begin or end.	
Plan alternate lessons in case the pace you initially set for a lesson needs adjustment.	
Allow yourself to drift when it comes to finding the correct pace for delivery of instruction.	
Turn any occasion into a learning event in your classroom.	
Let the push for accountability cause you to neglect those "teachable moments".	
Create lessons that allow your students to be passive.	
Skip the worksheets and ask students to solve puzzles, debate points, engage in other open-ended thinking activities.	

Adapted from Thompson, J. G. (2009). *First Year Teacher's Survival Guide: Ready-To-Use Strategies, Tools & Activities for Meeting the Challenges of Each School Day* (Vol. 30). John Wiley & Sons.

## Phillip Schlechty's Design Qualities of Student Work

### CONTEXT (Must be present)

Design Quality	Definition	Clear and Apparent	Missing or Unclear
<b>Content and Substance</b>	What is to be learned and the level of student interest in the subject or topic		
<b>Organization of Knowledge</b>	How the work is organized—problem solving approach, discovery approach, didactic teaching—with consideration for learning styles that are assumed or are to be addressed		
<b>Clear and Compelling Product Standards</b>	The extent to which students are clear about what they are to do, what the products they produce would look like, what standards will be applied to evaluate these products and their performances, and how much value students attach to the standards that are to be used; that is, do the students believe in the standards and see them as personally compelling?		
<b>Protection from Adverse Consequences for Initial Failures</b>	Extent to which the task is designed so students feel free to try without fear that initial failures will bring them humiliation, implicit punishment, or negative sanctions		

As you review a lesson, first determine if these qualities are present. Add notes about what you observed as well as what you *did not* see in the lesson.

Adapted from Schlechty Center. (2017). Introduction to the Schlechty Center. Retrieved from <https://schlechtycenter.app.box.com/s/v0q4o9j9il36w17py9mjxpggga0gqyw>. Accessed 16 August 2017.

## Phillip Schlechty's Design Qualities of Student Work

### CHOICE (Not all must be present)

	Definition	Clear and Apparent	Missing or Unclear
<b>Product Focus</b>	The opportunity to structure tasks and activities so that what students are to learn is linked to some product, performance, or exhibition to which the student attaches personal value.		
<b>Affirmation of Performance</b>	The possibility of designing tasks and activities so that the performance of students is made visible to persons who are significant in their lives, as well as designing the work in ways that make it clear that the quality of the performance of the student has meaning and value to peers and other whose opinions the student values and cares about.		
<b>Affiliation</b>	The possibility of designing tasks so that students are provided the opportunity to work with peers as well as with parents, outside experts, and other adults, including but not limited to the teacher.		
<b>Novelty and Variety</b>	The possibility of providing students the opportunity to employ a wide range of media and approaches when engaged in the activities assigned and encouraged.		
<b>Choice</b>	The possibility of designing tasks and activities so that students can exercise choice either in what they are to learn or how they go about learning that which it is required they learn.		
<b>Authenticity</b>	The possibility of linking learning tasks to things that are of real interest to the student, especially when the student is not interested in learning what adults have determined s/he needs to learn.		

As you review a lesson, first determine if these qualities are present. Add notes about what you observed as well as what you *did not see* in the lesson.

Adapted from Schlechty Center. (2017). Introduction to the Schlechty Center. Retrieved from <https://schlechtycenter.app.box.com/s/v0q4o9j9il36w17py9mjkxpggga0ggyw>. Accessed 16 August 2017.



## Engaging Student Learners Practice Profile

Implementation with fidelity requires clearly described implementation criteria. The Practice Profile framework has recently been developed by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) as a way of outlining implementation criteria using a rubric structure with clearly defined practice-level characteristics (NIRN, 2011). According to NIRN, the Practice Profile emerged from the conceptualization of the change process outline in the work of Hall and Hord's (2006) Innovation Configuration Mapping (NIRN, 2011).

The Practice Profile template includes four pieces and is anchored by the essential functions. First, as a header is the foundation of implementation that philosophically grounds implementation. Then moving from left to right across the template are the essential functions of the practice, implementation performance levels, and lastly, evidence which provides data or documentation for determining implementation levels.

## How to Use the Practice Profile

The essential functions align with the teaching/learning objectives for each learning package. Four levels of implementation are described for each teaching/learning objective: exemplary, proficient, close to proficient, and far from proficient. The professional development provider should review the practice profile with the educator-learners, referring to the data and artifacts listed as suggested evidence. It is an important tool for self-monitoring their own implementation, because it serves as a reminder of the implementation criteria and is also aligned with the fidelity checklists and the electronic practice profile self-assessment tool. These sources provide data regarding further training or coaching.



**Engaging Student Learners  
Practice Profile**

Essential Function		Exemplary Implementation	Proficient	Close to Proficient <i>(Skill is emerging, but not yet to proficiency. Coaching is recommended.)</i>	Far from Proficient <i>(Follow-up professional development and coaching are critical.)</i>
1	Educator understands and plans for optimum student engagement.	<p><b>All of the following criteria are met:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educator develops engaging lessons with clear learning targets and transparent success criteria.</li> <li>• Educator plans for a range of instructional strategies in each lesson.</li> <li>• Educator plans and implements lessons in which effective practices are used.</li> <li>• Educator plans lessons that require students to persevere.</li> <li>• Educator implements lessons that require students to problem solve.</li> </ul>	<b>4/5 criteria are met</b>	<b>3/5 criteria are met</b>	<b>Fewer than three criteria are met</b>
2	Educator practices techniques that foster student engagement.	<p><b>All of the following criteria are met:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Design Qualities of Context are present.</li> <li>• One or more of the Design Qualities of Choice are evident in instruction.</li> <li>• Educator consistently monitors and observes levels of student engagement during instruction and makes adjustments when needed.</li> <li>• Educator provides opportunities for students to engage in self-assessment and reflection about their learning.</li> </ul>	<b>3/4 criteria are met</b>	<b>2/4 criteria are met</b>	<b>Fewer than two criteria are met</b>

**Engaging Student Learners  
Practice Profile**

Essential Function		Exemplary Implementation	Proficient	Close to Proficient <i>(Skill is emerging, but not yet to proficiency. Coaching is recommended.)</i>	Far from Proficient <i>(Follow-up professional development and coaching are critical.)</i>
3	Educator assesses and reflects on student engagement.	<p><b>All of the following criteria are met:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educator provides formal opportunities for student input on their levels of engagement with lessons.</li> <li>• Educator reflects on student engagement and plans for improvement based on observational notes.</li> <li>• Educator reflects on student conversations and input for plans to improve student engagement.</li> <li>• Educator expands on personal assessment and student input by using this information as a measure of personal growth and may share with colleagues, parents, and protégés.</li> </ul>	<b>3/4 criteria are met</b>	<b>2/4 criteria are met</b>	<b>Fewer than two criteria are met</b>

## Next Steps: Actions = Results

### Content Focus: Engaging Student Learners

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Next Steps Form Written: \_\_\_\_\_

Teams (e.g. grade level or content): \_\_\_\_\_

<u>Action Planned</u> What?	<u>Responsible Person(s)</u> Who?	<u>Timeline</u> When?	<u>Resources/Support Needed</u>	<u>Results</u> So What?

