

How to Keep Students Engaged

How to Keep Students **ENGAGED:**

What's Killing Engagement
and How to Get Them Back



 **Applied**
educational systems

Strategies and Tips from Teacher
and Student Perspectives

 **Applied**
educational systems

APPLIED
EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEMS

How to Keep Students Engaged: What's Killing Engagement and How to Get Them Back

strategies and tips from teacher and student perspectives

Applied Educational Systems, Inc. • Lititz

How to Keep Students Engaged: What's Killing Engagement and How to Get Them Back

Contents

How do you get and keep your students' engaged?	1
part 1. What's Not Working	
1. What's Killing Student Engagement	7
2. How Can I Force Students To Spend More Time Learning?	9
3. Keeping Students Engaged: A Student's Perspective	13
4. Teacher-Centered: An Oxymoron for Student Engagement	17
5. Student Engagement Suffers When Lessons Are Too Easy	21
part 2. Strategies for Keeping Students Engaged	
6. Foster Student Responsibility	25
7. Let's Chat: Keeping Students Engaged via Class Discussion	27
8. Healthy Competition = Student Engagement	31
9. Student Engagement on Rocket Fuel: Flow	35
10. Student Engagement can be Challenging...Literally	39
11. Student Engagement: The Story Is Key	43
12. Invite Guests	45

13. Use Media	49
14. Embrace Online Learning	51
15. Rewards, Empathy, and Excitement...Oh My!	53
16. Variety, the Spice of Life	57
17. 5 Student Engagement Tips: If You Have Just a Second	61
18. Re-Engaging Students: 10 Simple Strategies	65
19. Two Articles Every Health Science Teacher Should Read	67
20. Engaged Learning: How to Make Your Teaching Sticky	69

part 3. Inspirational Teachers Keeping Students Engaged

21. How One School Provides Effective, Affordable eLearning for Health Science Content	75
22. Why is Rita Griffith so Successful with Elearning for Health Science?	77
23. Computer Applications Lesson Plans: Keeping Content Relevant	79
24. Battling Student Boredom and Absenteeism	81

part 4. It Can't Be Just You

25. The Student Engagement Dilemma: Fireworks in Your Classroom?	87
26. Parent Engagement...Can You Have Student Engagement without It?	91
Stay Connected to Applied Educational Systems	95

How do you get and keep your students' engaged?

We've gathered expert advice from teachers, students, instructional designers, and within AES to provide you with some best practices, tips and strategies to get your students engaged and re-engaged. We hope you find it useful and would love to hear what you think or what you would add. Let's continue the conversation on [Facebook](#).

part 1

What's Not Working

1. What's Killing Student Engagement

Your biggest challenge—the ability to catch and hold the attention of today’s learners, which may be the achievement most elusive and most coveted by you, the teacher.

First, more distractions than ever before (smart phones, texting, social networks, etc.) mean students have shorter attention spans. A traditional lecture-based classroom will no longer capture students’ attention and keep them mentally active in the classroom.

Next, these “digital natives” require interactive learning rather than passive learning. They expect immediate response and instant assessment. They are bored by traditional textbooks and lectures. From a young age, today’s students are constantly entertained by video games, TV, movies, and everything and anything on the internet. To expect them to sit in a classroom and learn with no “entertainment” is almost unrealistic.

Additionally, students’ motivation needs a boost. The promise of employment after education looks grimmer than in the

past. This leaves you, as educators, with the need to find ways to revitalize students' interest and passion in their education. And students now more than ever need to actively participate in and take responsibility for their learning success.

How do you get and keep your students' engaged?

2. **How Can I Force Students To Spend More Time Learning?**

Written by [Dick Carlson](#)

A client recently relayed a comment to me from a classroom teacher. The teacher was disappointed in our e-learning unit because some students would just quickly “click through” the content, rather than spending several minutes on each screen. The instructor wanted to know if we could modify the product to force the students to spend a couple of minutes looking at each screen, before they were allowed to click “next” and proceed. My client asked how I would respond to the question.

Here’s what I said — I’m curious, how would YOU respond?

WOULD FORCING LONGER TIME ON A SCREEN HELP?

I usually start this answer (if I think the teacher can take a little gentle ribbing) by asking if, before they hand out the textbooks, they glue down the corners of all the pages. When they say “no” I let this lead into having the group list the uses of a textbook – not just a front-to-back read, but for reference, to use for review before testing, to quote in projects, to refresh memory during open-book tests, and so forth.

From there, I start talking about how e-learning content can be used in many different ways by a learner. Some learners will start at the beginning, and go from front to back. Some will dip their toes in at different places. Some will scan for subjects of interest. Some will use the “search” function to find a specific subject. (I stop to point out that, as educators, we don’t get a vote in this. It’s how learners build knowledge in the world today.) So we need to understand that, and build it into our understanding of how we help them facilitate their learning.

WHAT HAS CHANGED IN LEARNING, ANYWAY?

Back when I was in the 3rd grade, Mrs. Solem had a huge amount of control over what I learned and exactly how that happened. Today, learners expect to be able to make a lot of decisions about what and how they’re going to learn. (They make GOOD and BAD decisions, of course. That’s to be expected.) Our job as teachers and facilitators is to help guide them as they do this, to show them how to make good choices, and (ultimately) measure the outcome of their choices and achievement. The learners own their success or failure.

Technically, it’s easy to set a minimum screen time. Practically, we’ve found that learners just go browse the web or

read email or paint their nails or do something else. I've seen no solid research that there's a corresponding increase in learning. Much like gluing the pages down in a textbook to force students to spend more time on each one, you're just going to frustrate the participant.

The larger question that needs to be asked here is why does the learner skip through the content, not learn, and end up with "some quiz and test scores so low"?

GIVEN GOOD CONTENT AND TEACHING, WHY DON'T THEY LEARN?

If we assume the content is good quality, and the teaching is good quality – why do students skip through it and fail the tests? There are enough answers there to fill a thesis dissertation, but I'll focus here on just one. Motivation.

If we're trying to teach a student how to write an MLA footnote, and the student sees no reason that they need to learn to do so – I could make them stay on that page for an hour and they probably won't learn the content. (Unless I tell them there's a test they have to pass to graduate.) Google the [difference between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" motivation](#) for extra credit.

But if I tell the student the next screen will show them how to double their score at "Angry Birds" they will stay on that screen until they've squeezed every drop of knowledge out of it. Because they want that information for themselves and see the value.

So as a teacher, one of the most useful things you could possibly do is to show your students that what you're teaching is connected to their real lives, and actually means something to them. And that's a huge, huge job.

So – what do you think? Do you glue your virtual pages down?

*Dick Carlson is an **Instructional Designer**, author, speaker and project manager who develops amazing learning experiences for technical audiences. He writes a blog called "[TechHerding](#)" that started when he began herding technical cats at the Microsoft Corporation over seven years ago.*

3. Keeping Students Engaged: A Student's Perspective

Some input from a student, Bri Richard.

Have you ever had a student fall asleep in class? Though I've never fallen asleep in class, I will admit some classes make me wish I would have stayed in my room and napped the afternoon away... Keeping students engaged for longer than a roller coaster ride is a tricky thing, I know. What could those teachers have done to avoid nappers in the classroom?

Today I will share some opinions from myself and fellow students on keeping students engaged and interested during class time.

DON'T JUST LECTURE!

A lecture is the worst way to convey information to most students. It gets repetitive and boring, especially if there are no visuals to

go along with the topic. Lecture alone has no hope of keeping students engaged.

How to get away from it:

- Try asking the students questions during the lecture to keep them alert, while also creating better student-teacher interaction. (Knowing names helps a lot in this situation!)
- Spend a few classes having discussions on the topic. Ask for questions and ideas to spark new thoughts and understanding.

KEEPING IT RELEVANT=KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED

If a student learns a concept, but doesn't know how it relates to anything else they are learning, it's hard to remember, let alone care about!

How to stay relevant:

- Tell the students why they need to know it.
- Work with other teachers and cover the same time period in the same week so students can make connections. (Works great with History and Literature!)

GET CREATIVE!

Putting some personality into a lecture is better than listening to a drone, trust me. Also, any different way to introduce new topics or have students do work is great.

How to spruce it up:

- **Humor.** Students like a teacher who isn't afraid to get a little silly. You could be the teacher they look forward to seeing! Humor is a fantastic, simple way of keeping students engaged.
- Use **social media and pop culture** references to keep the interest up. If you read something about Lady Ga Ga in the paper that morning, find a way to relate her to the topic that day.
- **Technology** is your friend! Powerpoint presentations, Youtube videos, music, anything you can think of can be used as a tool to present your information in a new, exciting way. (You could even have a class discussion on Facebook)

The biggest thing to remember is that your students are there to learn. Keeping students engaged in the content and interested in listening is the best way to help them reach that goal. For some other tips on keeping students engaged, view some of our other [posts](#).

Bri Richard, is a Senior English major at Millersville University. Currently she is an intern at Applied Educational Systems, mainly working with the Development Department.

[How to resolve six common challenges you face as a teacher.](#)

4. **Teacher-Centered: An Oxymoron for Student Engagement**

Is this you? Do you stand at the front of class and talk to your students, expecting their rapt attention for the majority of (if not the entire) period? Are your pontificatin' finger and expressin' hand your main lecture aids? If your delivery is teacher-centered, your students might dread coming to your class. I suggest that "teacher-centered" may be an oxymoron for student engagement.

How much can YOU learn passively?

We all hear information on a daily basis and sometimes we are able to recall that information. Even better, there are times when we can use that information to our benefit. However, in a setting where learning is expected to take place, passive listening is not creating the learning experience that excites, ignites, and incites this generation of students to learn.

One of the first lessons most of our parents teach us is not to put our little hands or mouths on something that is “hot.” However, until we have a context for what hot means, we don’t understand the danger. Though we may not touch the open oven door or take a bite of that oatmeal until the steam lessens, we will eventually get a hold of something that helps us to understand “hot.” In the first instance, we did not touch because Mom or Dad said so. Once we have learned, we don’t touch because we understand intense heat on flesh is painful; lesson learned.

Student engagement begins with you.

Most of us are comfortable with doing things the way we’ve always done them. Hey, I do believe in ‘If it ain’t broke...’ But, there are a lot of schools in which real learning is broken. It’s time to change things up a bit. While there are students who will survive and succeed where antiquated methods are being used, there are many more who are not being reached. Students can’t actively learn when that is not an option in a classroom.

Is it hard and time-consuming to try new methods? Yes! It absolutely is. But, I’ll bet when you begin to see the fruits of your labor, the time and effort will be worth it.

What’s in it for you?

I recently bumped into one of my high school teachers, who throughout my education proved to be one of my favorites. I told her how much she inspired me to love reading and writing. I told her how writing was a big part of my life, both at work and at play. She teared up when I shared this with her and she told me I’d made her day.

Teaching can sometimes be a thankless job. There are days when students don't get it, and even more where they obviously don't care to. If you stretch outside your comfort zone and try each day to meet students at their point of need (which includes meaningful engagement and interaction), you may find more students with a desire to learn the lesson.

How do you begin?

Start with your next lesson. Seek an unusual method that you would never have tried before to teach it. As the colloquial saying goes, "think outside the box." If you are already stretching yourself and trying new methods, stretch yourself even farther and try even more.

Pictures, music, video, movie clips, etc... are all little ways to start. Even the hardest subjects can implement something to make learning a bit more interesting.

5. **Student Engagement Suffers When Lessons Are Too Easy**

Student engagement suffers when lessons are too easy. The AES development team recently read an article with the controversial title of “Idiot Proofing is for Idiots.” The title caught my attention and made think about how we engage students with our online content.

It should be as easy as possible for students to navigate and complete the lessons. The theory is that we don’t want the system to get in the way of learning. Students should flow through the lessons without having to stop and think about what they are doing.

Did I just say that we don’t want students to stop and think?

Perhaps it would be better to design online lessons that are difficult to navigate. Students would be forced to stop and think

about what they are supposed to do next. Maybe we are making things too easy for learners.

Does student engagement suffer when lessons are over simplified?

Of course, reality is much more complicated. CTE teachers know about the challenges of teaching to a diverse student population. They know that it's difficult to create lesson plans that work for every student. Your lessons could be too easy for some students and too difficult for others.

I believe that lessons should be designed to make students stop and think, but that engagement must be centered on the learning objectives of the lesson. Complicated navigation does cause students to stop, but it takes them out of the learning flow. Drag/Drops, Questions & Scenarios do make the student stop and think about the content.

Here's a link to the original article. What do you think? Are we sacrificing student engagement to make things easier for students?

<http://37signals.com/svn/posts/3415-idiot-proofing-is-for-idiots>

part 2

Strategies for Keeping Students Engaged

6. Foster Student Responsibility

Are you looking for ways to encourage students' ownership of their learning? Here are some ideas to foster student responsibility.

INCORPORATE ONLINE LEARNING

Online curriculum is a remarkable tool for getting students to take responsibility for their learning. Most online curriculum by its anytime/anywhere nature supports student independence in learning. Students can learn on their laptops and tablets at the park, at a friend's house, or at 3am in their own room. They get to decide when and where they'll focus on their learning. They may make some bad choices, but come quiz and test time, they'll soon learn to make better decisions about their work habits.

ASSIGN LESSON PLANS TO STUDENTS

Another way to get students to take ownership of their learning is to hand over the reigns. Give each student or small groups of students the responsibility to teach particular areas of curriculum to the rest of the class. These lessons tend to become informal and hopefully generate lots of questions and discussion.

INCLUDE GUEST SPEAKERS

Field trips are great, but can be a logistical difficulty. Instead, bring the field trip to your classroom. Have a guest cover the content of your lesson plans. Dig into your smart phone contacts for some friends, family, and professional associates. If possible, have the class take place somewhere on campus more casual than your classroom, like a lounge or cafe or outside. The change in atmosphere may help students feel more in their element.

Keep in mind that while encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning, the other side of that is that you as an instructor may have to give up some control. Try to view it as a shift in responsibility. So, in order for them to take some on, you have to give it over to them.

7. Let's Chat: Keeping Students Engaged via Class Discussion

Let's chat! Class discussion is effective in keeping students engaged, if you can keep the conversation going. So why do so many teachers minimize class discussion time or exclude it altogether?

There's no discussion in my class discussion.

We all know that you can lead the horse to water... But how do you get students to participate and contribute to class discussion? It likely won't happen overnight, but by setting a precedence of importance to class discussion, students will soon be clued in that participation is critical. How? Make class discussion an important part of your lesson plans. Do it regularly. Give students

participation grades...not the 2 points that will get them from the 79% to the 80% at the end of the semester, but REAL points that make an impact on their overall grade. And, be sure to include important points from class discussion on assessments.

Anything can happen in my class discussion.

To some extent, that is true. Class discussion means that the CLASS has some control over where the lesson goes. And with all the other distractions going on in the classroom I'm asking you to give up even more control. To minimize irrelevant tangents and to keep students on the learning highway when they're trying to take the scenic route, jump in and redirect. And when the scenic route looks promising, be sure to allow them to wander a bit. Provide questions ahead of time and ask students to prepare for discussion. You can be specific. To make sure everyone participates, assign different questions to different students or groups of students.

What if my class discussion fizzles or fails?

Yeah, it's probably going to happen. Initially, class discussion probably isn't going to be on your students' list of favorites. But stay positive. If you are in the least uncomfortable with it, they're going to smell your fear. Have a few new and interesting and thoughtful questions to ask. Encourage students to ask questions. Allow students to use their smartphones or tablets to find answers and share from their different sources. If a class discussion completely bombs, move on to something else...but don't give up on it. Remember, you have to establish class discussion as routine and relevant and fun. Ask students to suggest topics for future

class discussions. Students will get the hang of it after several attempts.

My inspiration today? This [article in Edutopia](#) that includes strategies to motivate students to participate.

8. **Healthy Competition = Student Engagement**

The opportunity to compete against fellow students, other classes, or other schools guarantees student engagement from my kids. Is healthy competition a key to student engagement? Certainly, for some students. Unfortunately, it seems that competition has gained an unfavorable reputation these days, particularly in today's schools.

It turns out that people feel pretty strongly about competition within schools, both for and against it. Hmm...wonder which side'll win? 😊

Take a look at this [survey](#) that includes the participants' comments.

What's your competitive nature?

Personally, I think that nearly every human's nature responds to competition. However, that response may not be the same in every person. And I also believe that it's not as simple as labeling someone as competitive or noncompetitive. I think there's more to it than that. And, I think the arena in which you are competing also affects that nature.

For example, I'd call myself "quietly competitive" or a "closet competitor." I enjoy competing and winning is great, but I'm not devastated if I lose. I'm not one to throw out a challenge, but I find it difficult to walk past a gauntlet without picking it up.

Then there are those who make a competition out of everything...the first to have the next iPhone, the first to see the next blockbuster, the leader in sales, the biggest house and flashiest car. But before you start negating those folks, keep in mind that their competitiveness may also make them the first to find a cure for cancer or balance our budget.

And then there are those whose response to competition is to remove themselves from it. They refuse to compete and therefore refuse to participate. These are the peacemakers and the arbitrators. They compromise with elegance.

How competition can give you an edge

I think a little competition is good for everyone. We all need to be able to perform gracefully in the face of it.

As I watch my kids play basketball for the the first time this year, I see two completely different approaches to competition and learning the game. My daughter is fiercely competitive. This nature allows her to jump in the game from the start and figure out the game as she goes. She's aggressive and willing to take a chance

at making a mistake. And she'll learn from those mistakes. My son is a little more cerebral about the game. He's learning the rules and skills and putting them together in his head and then letting that come out on the court as he gains knowledge. He doesn't take risks or try something in a game that he hasn't learned in practice. They are both moving forward with their abilities. But my daughter is moving ahead at a faster pace, and I think that is due to her competitive nature. It takes over when the clock and scoreboard are in action. It gives her a little bit of an edge.

When it comes to school, roles are a little reversed...my son is competitive in the classroom. He's very proud of his achievements and it spurs him on towards achieving more and doing even better the next time. For both kids, any opportunity to compete against other students fills them with a desire to perform and work hard. And regardless of the outcome, they're just thrilled to be a part of something that has meaningful results at the end. Yeah, they lose sometimes, probably more than they win. But they get right back in there and try again.

Healthy Competition = Student Engagement

In thinking about our theme this month of student engagement, I wanted to be sure that we talked about competition. I think many teachers and schools shy away from competition because where there are winners, there must also be losers. And this has become taboo. But let me tell you something. Kids can handle it. They are tougher than we sometimes give them credit for. So, make a game or contest out of that lecture you planned for tomorrow. Give the winner book or gift card. If "winners and losers" makes you really uncomfortable, try competition that is a little more ambiguous and impersonal, such as anyone who scores a 90% or higher on a quiz doesn't get homework that night. Watch student engagement

transform as you add in some opportunities for a little healthy competition!

Are you using competition to get your students engaged? Share with us what you do!

9. Student Engagement on Rocket Fuel: Flow

A quick Google search of ‘student engagement’ will turn up many scholarly articles, blogs, forums, and even graphic depictions. I confess, when I was told this month’s topic for my blog post was student engagement, my shoulders slumped a bit. I’m not sure I have anything to add to the student engagement conundrum that hasn’t already been said, written or diagrammed. But deadlines loom large, eh? So let’s try looking at the extremes of the topic to change up the pace and possibly bring new insights, or at least a pleasant diversion.

Student Engagement to Extreme Engagement to Flow

So what is extreme engagement? I’m talking engagement on rocket fuel...its Flow.

If you're new to the term, [Wikipedia](#) tells us that **Flow** was named by a physiologist in 1975 and defined as:

“...the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity ... characterized by complete absorption in what one does...”

If you're into sports, you might call a flow state being 'in the zone'. In flow a person loses their sense of time and even their sense of self, totally focused on the activity or task, which becomes intrinsically rewarding.

Experiencing Flow

The first time I recall experiencing flow in an *academic* setting was in college. I wasn't a particularly good student and I sometimes had trouble putting in the long study hours I needed to keep up with the demands. But on this day, I had settled into the library's reference room for a morning of problem solving. I liked this rather small room in the university library with its heavy wooden tables and Spartan décor. A curtain of hanging ferns obscured the view from the only windows on the north wall. And the no-talking rule was strictly enforced in the reference room. I started around 9:00 am working through the textbook, reading and doing problems, trying to identify a strategy for how to solve them. I can still recall, even after so many years have passed, the surprise I felt when I surfaced from my task to realize that it was dark outside – and no, I hadn't fallen asleep! I felt totally in command of the material. I was tired but also very energized – and hungry! Many hours had passed, people had come and gone, and I hadn't noticed any of it. The time had flown by as if it were nothing – certainly not the norm for my study regimen.

It was not until many years later that I came to recognize this experience as flow. I have had similar experiences in my professional and personal life and really enjoy these periods of intense concentration when they occur.

How about you?

Can you think of occasions when you were in flow? What do you recall about your experiences?

And what about your students? What would they say if you asked them?

OK – so I’m long on questions and short on wisdom. But I often find banging around the periphery of an issue, for example looking at flow as a way to see student engagement in a new light, to be a valuable exercise.

Reflect on it while and let me know what comes to you. I’ll do the same.

Mary Seward spent many years leading the Curriculum Development team at AES. She now does consulting work for AES while also pursuing an adventure in micro-scale sustainable farming in rural PA. Thank you, Mary, for contributing your insight here!

10. Student Engagement can be Challenging...Literally

I'm in Introduction to Computer Programming 101 and I'm learning how to code using C/C++. I'm stuck and I'm sitting at my work station with my hand raised. My Professor, Mr. Davis, comes over and asks, "How can I help you?" I respond, "Could this parenthesis be causing this syntax error?" Mr. Davis shrugs and responds..."I don't know. Could it?" And then...he walks away. This was my freshman year in college and this professor used to make me so angry. He would never just give me the answer; he would always respond to my question with a question. Some would call this technique lazy or even mean. I call it a challenge. You see, my professor knew me well enough to know I was stubborn and competitive. He knew I would get angry, but that I would have the issue figured out and fixed if it took me the entire class. Talk about engaged. Student engagement can be challenging...literally!

What about students who don't have that personality type?

This technique will probably frustrate students with a different personality type to the point of quitting. Mr. Davis did not use this strategy with every student; however, he still did not just give away the answer. For some students he would ask questions to guide the learner in the right direction. "Have you seen that syntax error before?" "What caused the error when you saw it?" "Do all of your open parenthesis have a matching closing parenthesis?" He would force us to stop and think about what could possibly be causing the issue instead of simply saying, "Yes, you didn't close all of your parenthetical statements."

And my point relates to student engagement how?

Forcing critical thinking can help to enhance student engagement. It may just nudge them into wanting to find out the answer or understand a process. Figuring out why something is or is not happening helps with deeper understanding. Deeper understanding translates to meaningful learning and meaningful learning often translates to being able to apply what you have learned. Even though that was (coughs and clears throat) years ago, I can still look at a piece of code in C/C++ and catch syntax errors.

I practice what I preach.

I've had to deal with my share of teenage angst in regards to classwork/homework and I've used this technique myself. I've dealt with eye-rolling, teeth-sucking, loud sighs and mild tantrums

all in response to not just giving out the answer. What was my pay-off for enduring these amusing responses?

The students learned a few lessons:

- Don't come to Ms. Celestial unless I have already done a certain amount of investigation. I need to be able to intelligently answer questions about my problem.
- I'm not going to just get the answer, so I better be prepared to analyze and discuss why I think this is happening.
- I know she's tough, but in the end her questions will help point me in the right direction so I can find the answer on my own.
- I'm pretty smart because I figured it out and I am confident that I can learn this material.

If you are not already using this technique, you can start by identifying common areas of struggle in your course. Preparing these questions ahead of time and having an idea where the answers can be found will help you to gain confidence in using this technique to engage your students.

11. Student Engagement: The Story Is Key

I like really great story telling in the form of feature films, and Netflix is a great way to access a very wide variety of movies. A good story backed by high quality production can be an unbelievably engaging thing... but the story is key. Without the story, even an over-the-top production from Hollywood will fall flat. I've often thought, after seeing some recent blockbuster, if someone spent that much money on production (special effects, famous actors, etc.), why don't they put a little more effort into the story and make something truly worthwhile? Is the story also the key to student engagement?

I see some analogies between what I like about engaging movies (great stories backed by quality production) and how I tend to think about curriculum design – especially on-line. With today's ubiquitous and generally user friendly computer technology, it can be tempting to throw together snazzy media,

gaming, over the top features, etc. But without some thoughtful work on the story, so to speak, the curriculum, no matter how flashy, will not work well.

Some key points in 'the story' for student engagement:

- What are the most important things I want the student to understand?
- What is the best way to measure that learning?

The eventual delivery for the curriculum could be in-class with a teacher, on-line, blended, with variations on synchronous vs asynchronous and a million other twists. But FIRST and foremost the story. Just as in good movie making, good curriculum relies on having some big picture ideas in mind and carrying them through every aspect to the learning experience.

I like to use [Grant Wiggins's](#) and [Jay McTighe's](#) model for curriculum design, published by the [Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development](#) (ASCD) and called [Understanding by Design](#). Sometimes the Understanding by Design model can be challenging – but it yields high quality results.

What model for curriculum design do you like to use?

Mary Seward spent many years leading the Curriculum Development team at AES before embarking on her dream to build a farm. Thank you, Mary, for contributing your insight here!

12. Invite Guests

Get creative about your resources! With the vast amount of content to cover in a course, are you trying to be everything to everyone?

ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH CREATIVE RESOURCES

You can't be a subject matter expert in everything. Take a page from the New York City Schools and consider implementing a mentorship program. With the help of [Citizen Schools](#), they started an enrichment [program that provides business mentors to middle school students](#). The program matches up students with volunteer business mentors who help the students to budget and market a fictional business. At the end of the 10-week period, the students present their work to their mentors and teachers. The program has been proven in other cities to increase attendance and achievement.

INVITE GUEST SPEAKERS TO PRESENT TO YOUR CLASS

Perhaps including guests such as local business volunteers or visitors into your lesson plans can help stretch your content coverage and get your students interested and engaged in their learning. Your students would likely enjoy a new voice or face, and the opportunity to learn from a variety of people, not just you. (Don't take it personally!)

HOW TO FIND GUESTS

- Local business owners might like to come in and share a specific experience or aspect of their business.
- Check with your students. What do their parents and networks do? They might have someone perfect for your next class on personal finance.
- Work with your local chamber of commerce. They might be willing to include a mention in their upcoming e-newsletter.
- And of course, your own networks. Who's on Facebook talking about their latest achievement? Ask them in to talk about it to the class.

HOW IT WOULD WORK

You can make it as simple or as elaborate as you desire.

- Have your volunteers come in for a class period or two.
- Business volunteers can do more than talk about THEIR business and what they do. Assign your volunteers a

topic, such as GNP, and allow them to cover that content.

- Perhaps having on-site visitors is too complicated or too much of an imposition on your volunteers. Why not have them “visit” your classroom via [Google+](#), [Skype](#), or [Ovoo](#)? All you and your volunteers need is a Web cam and a (free) account.
- Before the guest arrives, make sure your students understand this is material for which they will be responsible.

Being a teacher doesn't mean you have to be a subject matter expert in all areas of content. It means you know how to lead, engage and take advantage of creative resources.

Take advantage of the resources that are all around you—your local business people.

13. Use Media

Have you ever picked up a book in a bookstore or library just because there was an interesting photo or illustration on the cover? No matter how hard you try, it can be difficult not to “judge a book by its cover.” In these cases, the visuals probably sparked your interest in the story before you even flipped the book over to read more. The cover serves as a “hook” to get you interested in the book’s contents. Let’s be honest—your lesson plans aren’t always the most engaging for students.

So how can you use media to keep students engaged in *your* story and improve their learning outcomes?

GET YOUR STUDENT’S ATTENTION

Remember the book cover—“hook” your students into your lesson plans by creating a motivating real-world context for your lesson. Next, add images or photographs to reinforce the narrative. The scenarios let the students know why they should be interested, and the visuals add more engagement. One of my favorite tidbits about supporting media is that it’s most effective at improving

learning outcomes for students who are new to a topic (just like computer applications lesson plans!).

DECREASE COGNITIVE LOAD

Cognitive load theory suggests that information is processed through two channels: an auditory channel and a visual channel. Each channel is limited to the amount of information that it can process at one time. You can use media to decrease cognitive load by off-loading some of the essential processing from the auditory channel to the visual channel.

Let's look at an example from Spreadsheet Basics: Basic Formulas and Functions:

In this assignment, our context makes the student the owner of The Trusty Cup Café who needs to set up a spreadsheet, using formulas, to manage inventory. Through verbal storytelling, we tell them about how their business is growing, what inventory is, and why it is important. We present the remainder of the details about the Café to the students visually, including what the store looks like and the types of items they are selling. Most importantly, off-loading some of the story (that important “hook”) to the visual channel leaves cognitive processing available for focusing on the specific tasks of the project!

FURTHER READING ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA AND ENGAGEMENT

Want more information about including media in your Computer Applications Lesson Plans? Check out [The Importance of Using Media in Your Computer Applications Lesson Plans](#) and learn how to make your content more memorable.

14. **Embrace Online Learning**

From talking to teachers like you, we know that perhaps your greatest challenge in today's classrooms is capturing and keeping students' interest.

Using online learning tools in a blended environment is one way to combat your learners' elusive attention. By nature of being delivered electronically, online courses are able to capture and keep students' interest with truly interactive, multimedia content.

Beyond that, online courses typically demand a greater investment from students by handing them the reins of responsibility for their learning success. Providing online software to students allows them to take control and master the ever-important skill of time management. The flexibility of choosing when and where to do their learning empowers students.

Students discover the correlation between their own input of time and effort and their knowledge and preparedness for scoring well on quizzes, tests, exams and skills assessment.

15. **Rewards, Empathy, and Excitement...Oh My!**

Before the holidays, I, like many students, tend to lack motivation. If we, as grown adults, have trouble concentrating, we should certainly understand that our students do too. So how can we engage students?

REWARDS

There is a lot of debate over offering students rewards. If you are someone who isn't opposed to this idea, think about offering your class weekly rewards. You need to cover a certain amount of material each week. To help keep the students focused, make a deal that as long as you get through everything you have planned for the week, the students can use the last 10 minutes of class on Fridays as free time. Keep your goals realistic and show the students exactly what you need to accomplish for the week. My guess is you won't miss much educational time during those 10

minutes. With the distraction of the weekend and the upcoming break, many students will have already tuned out of your class as it is. As an added bonus you have built-in “free time” that struggling students may use as an opportunity for additional help from you.

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Next, remember what it is like to be in their shoes. I remember having teachers that insisted on using every available second to cram in as much information as possible – I dreaded those classes. Now, having been on the other side of that coin, I understand that teachers have a very limited amount of time with their students and need to make the most of what they have. Part of being a teacher involves recognizing there will be both good and bad days for learning. On those good days, take full advantage of your students’ willingness to learn – this may mean you cover more material than you originally planned. On the bad days, recognize that forcing information on students who are unwilling to learn is futile. A student must be an active participant in learning. On these days, cover the basics but don’t go too in-depth.

EXCITING LESSONS

Finally, as we mentioned in Monday’s blog, make sure your lessons are something your students will want to pay attention to. Now is the time of year when you should put away your days of lecture-based learning and pull out some fun activities that revolve around the topics you need to cover. Sometimes teachers fall into the trap that if students are having fun, they must not be learning. I believe that is probably the furthest thing from the truth. If students are having fun on a project/activity directly related to the topic you need to cover, they will most likely retain

the information better than if they were a non-active participant in a lecture. When is a better time of year to allow your students to have fun then right before a break?

How do you keep your students engaged during the most distracting times of year?

16. **Variety, the Spice of Life**

Keeping students engaged in any class can be a challenge—there is such diversity among each group of students! How do you meet all of their needs? Variety is the key. (They don't call it the "spice of life" for nothing) Here are some instructional strategies we use in our computer applications and introduction to business lesson plans to support your learners as they construct knowledge:

THE "HOOK"

Also called the *anticipatory set*, this is where you get the student's attention—which you need before any learning can take place. A great way to draw students in is to share a story. And while generating interest is certainly one benefit, using stories also has additional value. They can provide a context for the learning that's about to take place and help students relate new information to something they already know.

MULTIMEDIA DELIVERY OF INFORMATION

Once you have their attention, the next challenge is keeping students engaged, especially during direct instruction. Presenting information through multimedia is an effective strategy to overcome this obstacle. Again, it's about more than just looking pretty. The “multi” part means that more senses are being engaged as students get information through both visual and verbal channels. When you combine images and words in a meaningful way, it fosters deeper learning. See our related post on the [importance of media in student engagement](#).

GUIDED PRACTICE

Once students “get” information, they need to do something with it in order to make it “stick.” And it's also good to make sure that they understood it correctly early on. Questions and interactive exercises embedded throughout the computer applications and introduction to business lessons support active learning. They typically focus on asking students to apply knowledge through examples and answer “why.” They also provide automatic feedback individually to each student—it's almost like having your own private tutor!

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Assignments give students a chance to “put it all together” in a real-world context. For example, students may take on the role of a small business owner and practice their word processing and writing skills by creating a memo for their “staff.” Assignments extend the active learning process, but with less guidance. Sample answers are provided, and feedback can come from self, peer, or teacher review.

We are always thinking about keeping students engaged when designing any lesson, including creating computer applications and introduction to business lesson plans. Not only does it promote better learning for the student, it also helps you with your work as a teacher—a WIN, WIN!

17. **5 Student Engagement Tips: If You Have Just a Second**

HOW ARE YOU KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED?

Have you ever thought: “My students don’t want to be educated, they want to be entertained!”? It’s all about keeping students engaged!

Keeping students engaged in class can be a real challenge for teachers. And students who are bored or distracted can be a disruption to other students as well.

You don’t have to learn to “sing and dance” to engage students in your health science education classes (though it might be fun!). Instead, try integrating blended learning tools like those included with HealthCenter21 to keep your students interested, motivated, and engaged.

Here are 5 ways to help engage students in your health science program:

KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED: STUDENT-DIRECTED LEARNING

If your students are bored in class, it doesn't necessarily mean that you are boring! Students have different learning styles, and they often learn at different paces. Traditional lectures and "lock-step" activities may be too fast for some students and too slow for others.

Try mixing in activities and assignments that students can complete at their own pace, such as the [HealthCenter21 online](#) learning lessons. Assignments can still have "due dates." But allowing students to control when and how they work on those assignments will help to make sure you are not boring your faster students or leaving your slower students in the dust!

KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED: INTERACTIVE EXERCISES

Computers and mobile devices are quickly replacing newspapers, magazines and even television as our primary sources for news and information. And the main reason is "interactivity." Just as we prefer to interact with our information sources, students also want to interact with the instructional materials you provide.

Are there ways that you can transform some of your passive reading or listening lessons? For example, interactive exercises such as HealthCenter21's "drag-and-drop" activities engage students in simple vocabulary lessons by drawing them in as active participants, and providing them with immediate feedback.

KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED: MULTIMEDIA CONTENT

When large blocks of information must be learned in a short amount of time, “reading assignments” may seem like the only alternative. But some students have reading difficulties, and others simply refuse to read.

To keep students motivated and engaged with these types of assignments you could try reading *to* them... (better get out your tap shoes!). Or you could provide them with *multimedia content* such as the online content in HealthCenter21. Through photos, animation, and video, students receive information in a way that is visually interesting. And narrated text ensures that all students can *hear* as well as see the written words.

KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED: HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES AND GROUP PROJECTS

Although multimedia content and interactive activities can be very engaging, students can get too much of a good thing. (My own kids even take occasional breaks from Facebook and Angry Birds!) So to *keep* students engaged it’s important to mix it up.

In health science education, there are lots of opportunities for students to move around the classroom, work with their hands, and to interact with other students. That’s why HealthCenter21 lesson plans include hands-on activities such as medical skills and procedures practice, as well as small group projects, experiments and role-playing scenarios.

KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED: TEACHER-LED PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Sometimes teachers just have to teach. In fact, standing in front of your students and sharing your healthcare knowledge and

experience with them is often the most valuable blended learning tool of all. And just because it may be called a “lecture” doesn’t automatically make it boring!

Many teachers are now comfortable using Microsoft’s *PowerPoint* software with their lectures. And HealthCenter21’s ready-made PowerPoint presentations can enhance those lectures further with visually appealing graphics and photographs, as well as discussion questions that help transform a one-way talk into a two-way conversation. Now that’s engaging!

18. Re-Engaging Students: 10 Simple Strategies

As teachers, we have all experienced moments where we have been sure we sounded like the teachers from *Peanuts* cartoons. The lecture you were delivering about CPR or Microsoft Word has left your lips in English, and by the time it reaches your students' ears has translated into, "Wonk, wonk, wonk."

Similarly, I'm sure you've all sat through classes where no matter how hard you tried to focus on what the teacher was saying, you were distracted by something going on outside of the window, the hype surrounding the royal wedding, or just your lack of sleep the night before.

My favorite teacher was my eleventh grade math teacher. This teacher knew his subject, he knew his students, he was up on the latest research, but most importantly, he *engaged* his students. As a frequent day-dreamer, I can honestly say I never lost focus in that class. My teacher kept me engaged and interested.

Engaging – or if need be, re-engaging students is something all teacher’s struggle with at some point in their careers. Andrew Marcinek’s blog, *Ten Simple Strategies for Re-engaging Students*. His steps include:

1. Have fun
2. Learn beyond the walls
3. Expand your audience
4. Collaborate
5. Deconstruct an issue transparently
6. Make many mistakes along the way
7. Share
8. Provide Constructive Criticism
9. Eat a sandwich
10. Engage Others

19. **Two Articles Every Health Science Teacher Should Read**

There are times when as I scour resources for blog ideas, I come across an article that hits on exactly what I'm thinking. That happened to me twice today. Here are two articles every health science teacher should read today. I don't want you to miss out on these articles. You really need to read these for yourself. Please do. And enjoy!

[“COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS WHO FEAR EDTECH”](#)

This article gives great arguments against the most common objections to using technology in the classroom, including:

- Time
- Cost
- Assessment

- Control (I think this is the one that I hear the most from our instructors)
- Lack of Training

“TEACHING AS LEADERSHIP: DEMYSTIFYING THE ‘NATURAL BORN’ TEACHER”

I particularly liked this statement, “what these **teachers** do *not* use is a **pedagogical** formula or a “**teach to the top**” **philosophy**. They make sure that students—*all* of them—comprehend the material.” This article resonated with me because I know that there are a number of instructors using our program that are not educators by, well, education. Many of them are from the nursing field or have a business background. Teaching has been a career change for them. This one’s for you guys!

For Business & Computer Applications educators: “[Closing the gap between what is and what students need for the workplace.](#)”

For Health Science educators: “[Online engages and challenges a diverse body of students.](#)”

20. **Engaged Learning: How to Make Your Teaching Sticky**

On Wednesday, AES hosted a “non-webinar” on student engagement, specifically “Engaged Learning: How to Make Your Teaching Sticky.” Here’s the full recording. I’ll summarize below.

Dick Carlson invited Marcia Connor to talk about engaged learning. Connor is a consultant and author who advises executives in some of the world’s largest companies to unite technologies, analytics and human power into the energy that drives best-around-the-globe performance.

Connor is obviously a firm believer in physical movement and it’s connection to learning. Fortunately, CTE tends to invite kinesthetic learning more readily than perhaps algebra. Connor points out that even simple movements provide subtle benefits,

such as deep breathing, pausing. One of her favorites? Playing with silly putty. Very relevant in today's classrooms, Connor points out that she doesn't necessarily begin a session with the "Turn off your cell phones" mantra. Rather, her philosophy is that in today's world, as long as your listening while multi-tasking, manipulating your phone isn't the worst thing.

How engaged learning differs from learning learning

Connor insists that for engaged learning, you must be there physically and mentally. You need to have your heart AND your head in the process.

Why should we care about engaged learning?

Connor stresses that we should care for retention. She knows that the more parts of the brain that are lit up, the more likely we are to retain and be able to use what we take in. We learn in our muscles and in our hands and with our full bodies, which helps seat information in our brains so that we can recall it...It's not just what can go in, but what we can get back out and use that is important.

differentiating play from learning is trial and error, practice and fail are a huge part of the process of learning.

Tips for promoting engaged learning

Connor explains that asking people to teach someone else what they have just learned is a simple and effective way to make learning engaging.

Be conscious of overwhelming students with classrooms with floor-to-ceiling stuff. White space is needed here and there to

give the brain a moment to pause. Inspiration is wonderful, but overwhelming students shuts down engagement and learning.

And my favorite take-away from the meeting? Connor shares, “She who is speaking is learning. Nothing reminds me more to speak less.” Think about that when your making your lesson plans that include a lot of lecture time.

Sincere thanks to Marcia Connor and Dick Carlson.

part 3

Inspirational Teachers Keeping Students Engaged

21. How One School Provides Effective, Affordable eLearning for Health Science Content

CHALLENGE

The Health Technologies program at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School nearly tripled in enrollment two years ago. Although thrilled to have more students in the program, Kathy Regan, along with the other instructors, needed to find an economical and effective way to provide the content for the larger class sizes. And the content needed to be able to reach learners with varying strengths and weaknesses. Regan found that elearning for health science was worth investigating.

SOLUTION

At about the same time, Regan was made aware of the online program that not only provided content, but also provided a means of gauging student understanding with online quizzes and tests. Regan liked this idea as they already had more than enough computers to get started with the program.

RESULTS

Regan is happy with how HealthCenter21 has helped her comply with her administration's desire for instructors to see immediate assessment. The quizzes and tests are scored automatically at the time the students complete them. When she sees that a student has performed poorly on a quiz, she can intercede and help that student get back on track before it is time for the module test. "HealthCenter21 helps meet those standards that [administrators] want for us as educators," says Regan.

IS ELEARNING FOR HEALTH SCIENCE RIGHT FOR YOU?

[Read Kathy's story about her discovery, implementation, and success with eLearning for health science.](#)

22. **Why is Rita Griffith so Successful with Elearning for Health Science?**

Rita Griffith, who teaches the Medical Assistant course at Chesterfield Technical Center, runs a very successful course that incorporates elearning for health science.

Rita Griffith, RN, Chesterfield Technical Center

What is her elearning for health science tool? “We absolutely love HealthCenter21!” says Griffith.

Griffith typically works one-on-one with individual students practicing skills while other students learn with HealthCenter21. “We use it every day in my class. I am so glad our school purchased the curriculum, it makes teaching essential skills so much easier, plus the students enjoy the visual aspects of the program.”

“HealthCenter21 is an excellent teaching tool in that students can be self-directed learners by working at their own pace, allowing for more individual instruction time and demonstration for hands-on skills with the instructor. Students can take notes while working through each unit and have immediate access to their results on unit quizzes, which helps them stay current with their grades.

Griffith explains that the HealthCenter21 curriculum is very effective in aiding students to become self-directed learners and gives them the confidence they need to be successful in the clinical setting. “Students are taking the skills learned in the classroom and applying them directly to patient care,” Griffith says. “Grading is much more manageable with HealthCenter21; there is less time spent on grading papers. I have more time to complete other valuable projects needed to keep my class up-to-date on the ever-changing world of healthcare! Students love it. I love it! It is a valuable part of my curriculum. Now that I have HealthCenter21, how did I manage without it?!?”

Click [here](#) for the full version of Rita Griffith’s Case Study.

23. **Computer Applications Lesson Plans: Keeping Content Relevant**

Finding relevant computer applications lesson plans can be quite a challenge. Lynn Huggins, a teacher at Merrill F. West High School in Tracy, CA, is a veteran teacher of career pathways. Huggins uses Business&ITCenter21 to bridge the disconnect between what students learn and what they need for their futures.

The Struggle to Find Relevant Computer Applications Lesson Plans

Huggins has always struggled with the lag between the available curriculum for her computer applications lesson plans and the knowledge needed in her students' immediate futures. She had

concerns about their preparedness for the ever-changing skills required to move ahead.

The Solution

In her search for relevant computer applications lesson plans, Huggins found Business&ITCenter21. “Business&ITCenter21 is the first bold step towards bridging the big disconnect, the lag between what we are teaching and what students need to know to be successful in the workplace,” says Lynn Huggins.

She explains how the program is “a different way of teaching the same information for

Computer Literacy, Computer Applications, and Entrepreneurship.” And sets them up “to have a viable career and also have the skills when they get to the employer, the skill sets they need for employability,” Huggins adds.

The Results

“Ten years I’ve been waiting for this,” Huggins explains, “the way the program teaches the different kinds of elements of what someone who will work in IT will need, such as hardware, software, accounting, management...it is all integrated in these online computer applications lesson plans. So you’ll get some marketing, some computer applications—a comprehensive education. But you will have the skills to hold down a job and have the skills that industry is telling us you absolutely have to have or they have to choose someone else.”

For more information about Lynn Huggins’ success with Business&ITCenter21, read the [case study](#).

Download your **Free** copy of [6 Common Challenges in YOUR classroom](#) now and start reading in 60 seconds!

24. **Battling Student Boredom and Absenteeism**

I recently had the opportunity to interview Stephanie Avery, a health science teacher at Father Patrick Mercredi High School in Alberta, Canada. Our northern neighbors face the same challenges as teachers that we do here. Here is Avery's story about how she uses blended learning tools to conquer common challenges like student boredom and absenteeism.

Word is getting around in Alberta, Canada about the Science and Technology program at Father Patrick Mercredi High School. The program includes introductory courses for careers involving power engineering, information technology, welding, and health science. In fact, the school has had several visitors in to see their remarkable new building and program. Avery has spent the past two years developing the health science program to introduce students to career options in the health science field while also preparing them for a great start towards those career goals.

Blended Learning Approach Provides Many Benefits

Avery uses a truly blended approach to teaching and learning. She mixes online learning with workbooks and activities that she's developed. And there is lecture. With her students ranging in age from 15 to 18, Avery emphasizes, "I need to teach. Some of the more complex content requires more than just one touch with online learning." So, blended learning is ideal for her courses. Students are learning in a variety of ways, including online, teacher-led lecture, clinicals, hands-on activities, and power points.

When students are assigned online work, Avery makes herself available to students. She walks around the classroom answering questions that come up. She's a facilitator during these moments, or as she describes, "I'm still here, but they are doing the work." And while she facilitates, she asks students questions, as well. If students struggle with concepts they've learned online, this allows Avery to see which material they can do solely online and what material she will need to go over with them in another way.

Battling Student Boredom and Absenteeism

As with all teachers, Avery fights to keep student engagement high and student boredom low. She credits blending so many tools into her classroom as a key in keeping students engaged. With the high variety of learning opportunities, her students "don't have a chance to get bored!" And if they get to a more lengthy skills section online, Avery motivates students by getting them excited about the hands-on activities and clinicals that will follow the lessons. Avery also appreciates the anytime/anywhere aspect of online learning. "It's a huge assistance because they can finish at

home if needed,” she explains. Fewer students fall behind due to absenteeism.

Check out [Avery’s full case study](#).

part 4

It Can't Be Just You

25. **The Student Engagement Dilemma: Fireworks in Your Classroom?**

The student engagement dilemma...many are facing it. Are you?

So, teaching students about how to use spreadsheets or how to take a patient's temperature isn't exactly like fireworks, right? Your lectures don't make students "ooh" and "ahh"?

Could they? Wait, *should* they?

I may be in the minority, but I get a little frustrated reading article after article about how to entertain and keep students engaged. Wait, I *write* some of those articles! I certainly understand the importance of student engagement. And I applaud all the efforts of others like myself as we try to provide solutions to what we've heard is your biggest challenge. I just don't think the burden of student engagement should entirely rest on the shoulders of educators. So, while all those articles are relevant and

certainly worthwhile, I want to take a step back for a minute and get something off my chest.

ON THE SOAPBOX

School was pretty darn boring when I was a student. However, I still managed to stay engaged and did very well in school. No offense to all those teachers, but my engagement and investment in their classrooms was more about *me* and less about *them*. I distinctly recall my parents telling me on several occasions, “You are not at school to be entertained; you’re there to learn. That’s your job. Do it well.”

Teachers can only do so much and bring so much to the table to get students engaged in their learning. Now this is not a get-out-of-jail-free card for teachers either. Teachers must move with trends in education and learning. They must embrace technology, mobile learning, project-based learning, the flipped classroom, etc...

But the rest of us, administrators, parents, and students, need to acknowledge that teachers are not *solely* responsible for student engagement. Students are responsible for keeping themselves engaged. They must be encouraged to do so. Motivated to do so. In the home and from within themselves.

FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES

Lo, and behold, when I opened up my email this morning, SmartBrief’s Accomplished Teacher had an article titled “[Are Today’s Students Motivated to Learn?](#)” From the mouths of babes. Please watch this 60 second video. Student, 17-year-old Joseph A. Ryan, Jr believes that the biggest problem with our schools is students’ unwillingness to learn. I remember those kids that didn’t have any willingness to learn. Although years ago, I think

they were fewer of them. They annoyed me beyond belief. I really couldn't relate to those who didn't want to do well, didn't want to perform, didn't want to set themselves up for a bright future. Why are there so many of them now? What has caused this disinterest in equipping yourself for a life as good or better than your parents?

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT SOLUTION?

Well, we are soon going to release an eBook on Keeping Students Engaged. I stand behind these suggestions and recommendations for keeping students engaged. However, we serve them up with a word of caution. If students don't cross your threshold with a willingness to learn that comes from the home and from within themselves, you could set off fireworks in your classroom and still not be able to engage them.

DON'T BE DISCOURAGED

Okay, my apologies for that big dose of negativity. But please don't be discouraged. You have the opportunity to help change lives and impact our future workforce. Do your part to keep up with techniques and recommendations for student engagement that you can implement in your classroom. For those students that arrive with a willingness to learn, you'll be certain to get and keep them engaged. They need you! And cut yourself a bit of a break with those students that don't yet realize how much they need you.

Start using HealthCenter21 or Business&ITCenter21 TODAY with a [30-day FREE trial](#).

26. **Parent Engagement...Can You Have Student Engagement without It?**

Note: This is a previously published post. In case you haven't noticed, our theme this month is student engagement. So, I wanted to throw this one on parent engagement back into the mix before the month was over...just in case you missed it!

I've written or posted countless times about student engagement. But what about keeping parents engaged. I read an article today on dallasnews.com about how even in this digital age, parent involvement is still hard to come by. What can be done to get parents engaged in their kids' educations? And if you build it, will they come?

In Dallas, disappointment abounds after only 13% of parents are using their new Parent Portal to check on their kids' grades and attendance. Wow! Only 13%?

Who are these loser parents?!

Before you class the entire other 87% as losers, let's chat.

Probably no surprise, I'm a bit of a Parent Portal junkie for my two elementary age kids. I fall into the category described in the [article](#) by parent, Dawn McMullan, who says, "It's like crack for a parent. It's very tempting to log on. If I were the perfect parent, I would never get on. He [her 10th grader] needs to do it himself."

However, with more introspection, I recall that even though Parent Portal was available to me since my eldest began kindergarten, I didn't get involved until she started receiving letter grades in third grade. Could this be some kind of clue into why some parents fail to become engaged? I'll be absolutely honest and say that there was nothing in the least bit engaging about "exceeding expectations," "meeting expectations," or the watered down, nauseatingly politically-correct "developing skill" labels that were given for my kids in the younger grades. Seriously? Developing skill? Let's call a spade a spade. Heck, even the slightly more personal "comments" attached to grades are scripted. My kids usually get the 32, 21, or 10.

Wow, I'm so engaged.

As parents, my husband and I were frustrated and confused by these ratings that meant absolutely nothing to us. In fact, I recall clearly my husband asking my daughter's first grade teacher what her class rank was. You laugh (and so did I in some embarrassment) at what at first may sound absurd. But in reality, what he was really trying to figure out was how our daughter

was performing in relation to how everyone else was performing. That's actually a very reasonable question. It's not like we were going to punish her if she wasn't "first" in her class. But please, we needed SOME frame of reference that had SOME meaning.

Keeping parents engaged...Same deal, okay?

You want students to be engaged, then you better make sure you're engaging. You want parents to be engaged, then throw us a bone, please!

Now that my eldest gets letter grades and percentages that I can wrap my head around, checking in on her via the Parent Portal makes sense. However, some frustrations still occur. In my experience, there have been a few times when I've received notices about missing work that weren't accurate. There have also been some times where there's been a significant lag between the grade given and the grade appearing on the portal. The outcome? I still look at the portal to stay in tune, but I don't necessarily trust what I see there. This leads to emails between teachers and myself. Which, I suppose you could say is a good thing, but they're busy, I'm busy...you get the picture.

As I'm climbing down from my soapbox, I'm thinking that you may be wondering what value my experience has in regards to getting and keeping parents engaged. Honestly, maybe none. But if you haven't stopped to think about keeping parents engaged from an ENGAGED parent's perspective, then you might be missing some really basic stuff. I mean, I'm engaged in spite of just about everything being done to kill any interest I have. So if the engaged parents are just hanging on, it's no wonder that so many parents aren't engaged at all.

And I know it's not your fault

If you are still with me, let me say that I know that the fault lays not at your feet. My daughter's first grade teacher begged me to write to our superintendent about our frustration with the grade reporting system for our kids. She was equally frustrated and felt constrained (at least on paper) in regards to sharing with us how our daughter was performing in her class. That's just awful.

I hope her frustrations are echoed by all teachers out there. I hope that you are wanting to share more relevant and meaningful information with parents, but that you are restricted or scripted into corners. I equate teaching in today's world with an action movie scene where the special agents twist, turn, and contort themselves through the room with the red laser beams criss-crossing everywhere.

And let's face it...unfortunately, there really are some loser parents out there, too.

Stay Connected to Applied Educational Systems

Start using HealthCenter21 or Business&ITCenter21 TODAY with a [30-day FREE trial](#).

For more information,

Visit our [Web site](#)

Like us on [Facebook](#)

Subscribe to our [blog](#)

Follow us on [Twitter](#)

Join us on [LinkedIn](#)



Applied
educational systems