How-to

Strategies to engage your students

1. **Start your class with a smile and teamwork.**

   Begin your class with genuine enthusiasm and a collaborative task. Be excited to teach and students will be more likely to be excited to learn. When students are thinking, they are engaged. Pose a question to them or assign a task that challenges them to solve a problem. Have groups made up of students below grade level and above grade level work together with assigned roles and present their work. This grouping strategy is a powerful review tool and a collaborative way to explore a new concept.

2. **Movement is a must.**

   Provide opportunity for movement during your lesson, regardless of the age level of the class. Collaborative groups should be encouraged to talk and move. The classroom should be an active learning setting the majority of the time. If you start losing your students, get them up and get them moving. Jumping jacks, musical chairs or just a stretch are all effective strategies.

3. **Teach students how to engage in activities.**

   One mistake teachers make in their lessons is that they include engaging activities without teaching the students HOW to participate in the activity. Collaborative groups are used frequently, but often students do not collaborate or engage in the learning process when they are in their group. They need to be taught how to interact, how to assign roles, how to hold one another accountable and how to complete their task successfully as a group. You can teach the students these skills by modeling them and then assigning practice collaborative tasks.

4. **Allow students to think.**

   Whether students are working independently or in a collaborative group, all students must be allowed to think. Thinking is engagement and engagement is learning. Allow time for thinking tasks such as quick-writes, reflection, debate and research.
5. **Provide structure.**

Classroom management strategies and routines are essential. Engaging activities by their very nature can be disruptive, and disruption causes students to disengage from learning. Having set routines, organized materials and clearly communicated academic and behavioral expectations will help provide structure for successful student engagement. Teachers must monitor student activity and reinforce structure with students and collaborative groups through questioning techniques, cuing and prompting.

6. **Distribute questions equitably and use wait time.**

Teachers should lead and facilitate discussions through effective questioning techniques. Use methods that ensure all students are being called on, such as drawing Popsicle sticks from a cup. Strategically direct questions to students who seem to be disengaged. Choosing a student too soon after posing a question lets the other students “off the hook,” so use wait time to ensure all students are engaged and actively thinking of the answer to the question. Challenge students and collaborative groups with difficult questions, and use incentives and rewards for engaging behavior and correct answers.

7. **Each lesson should have a variety of activities.**

It is essential that there are a variety of activities in a single lesson. A lesson should include whole group, small group and independent activities that incorporate movement, questioning, discussion and formative assessment.

8. **Create ownership.**

Students should take ownership of their own learning. When students take ownership of their learning, they partner with the teacher and accept accountability. Roles must be clearly defined and each person needs to be held accountable for fulfilling his or her responsibility.

9. **Differentiate instruction.**

Although students will be held accountable for the standards for their particular grade level or subject area, teachers must still differentiate learning activities according to the academic needs of their students. Activities or texts may have to be modified to meet the needs of students who are functioning either below or above grade level, to meet the students’ educational needs and to provide appropriate intervention or to increase depth and rigor.