

I. WHAT IS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

User's Guide and Toolkit for the Surveys of Student Engagement: The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) and the Middle Grades Survey of Student Engagement (MGSSE)

By Jonathan Martin and Amada Torres

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Although there is considerable variation in how “student engagement” is defined and measured, the term is generally used to describe *meaningful student involvement throughout the learning environment*. Thus, “student engagement” is best understood as a relationship between the student and the following elements of the learning environment:

- The school community
- The adults at school
- The student’s peers
- The instruction
- The curriculum

Student engagement is a multidimensional (multifaceted) construct that can be measured with all the dimensions dynamically interrelated. Student engagement typically includes three dimensions:

- *Behavioral engagement*, focusing on participation in academic, social, and co-curricular activities
- *Emotional engagement*, focusing on the extent and nature of positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school
- *Cognitive engagement*, focusing on students’ level of investment in learning

Student engagement is a function of both the individual and the construct. It varies in intensity and duration. For example, a student may feel very engaged one semester but not so much the next; another student might enjoy some of his or her classes but be bored in others.

Student engagement is increasingly viewed as one of the keys to addressing problems such as low achievement, boredom and alienation, and high dropout rates.¹

¹ Jennifer A. Fredricks, Phyllis C. Blumenfeld, and Alison H. Paris, “School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence,” *Review of Educational Research* 74, no. 1 (2004): 59; online at <http://www.isbe.net/learningsupports/pdfs/engagement-concept.pdf>.

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Engaged students are more likely to perform well on standardized tests and are less likely to drop out of school. The conditions that lead to student engagement (and reduce student apathy) contribute to a safe, positive, and creative school climate and culture.

Research indicates that student engagement declines as students progress from upper elementary grades to middle school, reaching its lowest levels in high school. Some studies estimate that, by high school, 40 to 60 percent of youth are disengaged.² Given the serious consequences of disengagement, more and more educators and school administrators are interested in obtaining data on student engagement and disengagement for needs assessment, diagnosis, and preventive measures.

² Helen M. Marks, "Student Engagement in Instructional Activity: Patterns in the Elementary, Middle, and High School Years," *American Educational Research Journal* 37, no. 1 (2000): 156; online at <http://gtnpd46.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/file/view/Marks.pdf/538414934/Marks.pdf>.