

MindPeace

Quick Tips Guide



Strategies and Ideas for Boosting Student Attendance & Engagement

What gets students to show up (and want to stay) isn't just policy or consequence. It's connection, relevance, and the feeling that what happens in school matters to them. This guide brings together practical, research-informed strategies to help schools increase student engagement in ways that naturally strengthen attendance, because when students feel seen, valued, and invested, showing up becomes the easy choice.



Defining engagement:

Student engagement isn't all-or-nothing. It exists on a continuum that reflects how connected, motivated, and invested students feel in their learning. **Understanding the different levels of engagement** helps educators move beyond surface behaviors and recognize what students are communicating through participation, compliance, withdrawal, or resistance. Thought leader, Dr. Phillip C. Schlechty introduced the idea of The 5 Levels of Engagement.

1. The 5 Levels of Engagement by Schlechty

- ▶ Engagement
- ▶ Strategic Compliance
- ▶ Ritual Compliance
- ▶ Retreatism
- ▶ Rebellion



How to get started with your district or school team:

Work with staff to define engagement at the classroom level, grade level and school level. Begin by viewing this [video](#) from John Spencer which breaks down the Schlechty engagement model.



Next, review the framework below, developed with Schlechty's model in mind, to help create actionable steps to **create common language around engagement** and learn how to spot disengaged students. Understanding how to move from disengagement to engagement comes from digging down to the why.

Table generated with OpenAI. ChatGPT. 20 Feb. 2026

Level of Engagement	Student Behavior	Student Motivation	What It Looks Like in the Classroom	Teacher Considerations
1. Authentic Engagement	▶ Highly focused, persistent, committed	Intrinsically motivated; sees value in the work itself	Students ask questions, revise work voluntarily, show pride, continue working even without supervision	Design meaningful, relevant tasks connected to real-world problems; allow choice and ownership
2. Ritual Engagement	▶ On-task, compliant, follows directions	Motivated by grades, approval, or rules	Students complete assignments carefully, but rarely go beyond requirements	Increase relevance and challenge; shift from compliance-based tasks to purpose-driven learning
3. Passive Compliance	▶ Does minimum required	Avoids negative consequences	Students appear attentive but invest little effort; minimal participation	Increase active learning strategies; incorporate discussion, collaboration, and problem-solving
4. Retreatism	▶ Withdrawn, disengaged, not disruptive	No perceived value in work; feels unable or uninterested	Students daydream, avoid participation, incomplete work	Build relationships; differentiate instruction; scaffold tasks for success
5. Rebellion	▶ Disruptive, off-task, resistant	Seeks to avoid work or challenge authority	Students distract others, argue, refuse tasks	Address root causes; create meaningful alternatives; increase student voice and relevance

Understanding and measuring student engagement is an important first step — but insight only matters if it leads to action. Once educators recognize where students fall along the engagement continuum, the real work begins: responding intentionally to strengthen connection, relevance, and belonging.

The eight strategies that follow are designed to help schools move from awareness to impact, offering practical ways to re-engage students, build momentum, and create learning environments that encourage students not just to attend, but to participate fully. **Use the framework above to identify key areas for improvement and then select 1-2 focus areas from the 8 strategies below.**

8 Strategies to Boost Student Engagement

1. Foster Connection & Belonging

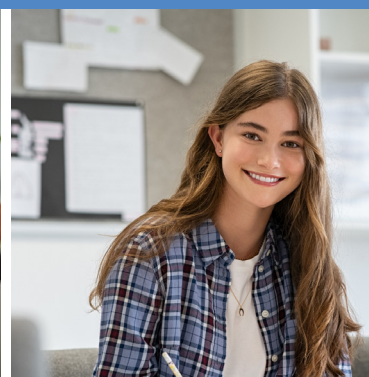
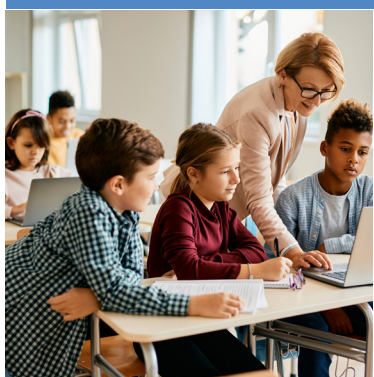
- ▶ A great place to start is this [Defining a Safe & Trusted Adult](#) resource from our partners at [HEY Cincinnati](#).
- ▶ Also, be sure to check-out MindPeace's NEW [Guide to Fostering Classroom Connection and Belonging](#).

2. Elevate Voice and Choice

- ▶ **Why this matters:** While there are many benefits for centering student voice and choice in schools - including enhanced engagement and ownership over one's learning - one key social emotional advantage is that it increases a student's sense of **agency**, which in turn bolsters their confidence and fosters a growth mindset, where students see the potential within themselves to grow, adapt, and change.
- ▶ **Unsure where to start?** Check out these planning resources:
 - [Youth Voices Toolkit](#), After School Alliance
 - [The Importance of Student Choice Across All Grade Levels](#) article by Edutopia offers 8 ideas for extending student choice across various grade levels.
- ▶ **Sample strategies:**
 - "Making curriculum a conversation" - [Student Voice and Choice](#) video (Vermont Agency of Education)
 - [Student-led meetings](#) video (Edutopia)
 - [Senior Talks](#) video (Edutopia)

3. Develop Rhythms and Norms

- ▶ Set the stage with shared classroom norms ([Edutopia video](#))
- ▶ Plan for a brain break every 20 minutes in grades K-8 ([curated brainbreak resources](#)).



4. Address Attendance from a Multi-tiered approach

- ▶ **In order to be impactful, attendance strategies need to be year-long.** (check out the Ohio Department of Education’s [Attendance Activities Plan](#))
- ▶ **Consider multi-tiered level approaches** to Chronic Absenteeism. Here are a few resources to get started...
 - [Ohio’s Attendance Guide](#), Department of Education and Workforce (Pages 22-26 focus on multi-tiered approaches to attendance.)
 - State Taskforce Findings: [Ohio Attendance Taskforce Recommendations Report](#) (Pages 18, 19, 24-26 include practical resources for tiered level support).
 - Resource: [Guidance Document](#), The Supreme Court of Ohio (Pages 21-24 include nice visuals of sample Tier I, II, & III Attendance Interventions)
- ▶ **Additional resources:**
 - Event recap: MindPeace Forum, Dec. 2024 - Panel #1: [Increasing Attendance and Engagement](#)
 - State Training Opportunities: [Attendance Webinar Series](#), Ohio Department of Education and Workforce

5. Invest in Family Engagement

- ▶ **Family engagement is a key factor in attendance.** Review MindPeace’s NEW resource - [6 Strategies for Increasing Family Engagement in Schools](#).
- ▶ **Communicate the cumulative effects of absences** in a way that families and students understand.
The data below is provided by the Hamilton County Educational Service Center ([HCESC](#)). Reach out to Wellness Supervisor Kristy Anderson (kristy.anderson@hcesc.org) with any questions.



Attendance Matters
1 or 2 days doesn’t seem like much

If you miss	That is
5 minutes per day	3.5 days a year
15 minutes per day	10.5 days a year
30 minutes per day	21 days per year
1 day every 2 weeks	4 weeks a year
1 day per week	8 weeks a year
2 days per week	16 weeks a year

Data provided courtesy of HCESC

6. Rethink Classroom Learning

▶ Ready to level up?

- Make the shift from engaged students to empowered learners with this brief [video](#) from John Spencer.

▶ Ideas for building increased engagement into the classroom

- Letting students take a lead in classrooms (TED talk [video](#))
- Rich tasks (math class - KIS Pride [video](#))
- Leveraging self-directed learning and choice through their 'Thinkering Studio' classes (Edutopia [video](#))

7. Set Goals and Track Progress

Measure engagement school-wide

- Behavior and attendance data
 - Look at the lists together to determine overlap. For older students, grades are another key component to data gathering.
- Teacher observations
 - Create checklists to use in walkthroughs and for teachers to use in their own classroom to rate engagement and set goals.
- Student voice
 - Set goals to gather student voices annually.
 - Consider going beyond representative groups and work on systems that get information from all students in more personal ways than surveys.

8. Celebrate Successes and Highlight Bright Spots

▶ Locate and highlight your school's very own 'Trailblazers'!

- **Administrators:** Encourage your teachers to invite you in to observe their classrooms on days when they are leading an engaging classroom lesson. Take pics or videos and interview students about their thoughts on the lesson - what they enjoyed most, what they learned, etc. Then, invite that teacher to provide a brief overview of their classroom activity with other teachers at an upcoming faculty meeting.
- **Teachers:** Invite an admin or a fellow teacher to visit your classroom to observe (or perhaps even participate in) one of your engaging classroom assignments and then offer to do the same for them.
- **For more trailblazing ideas,** check out this [article](#) from the Schlechty Center.

▶ Bright spots beyond your school - what's working:

- *Ohio Blueprint for Beating Chronic Absence* [success stories](#).
- *Partnerships:* In November of 2025, Oak Hills Local School District announced new partnerships with Ohio's [Stay in the Game](#) and FC Cincinnati to provide attendance incentives for students - see the [news release](#).
- *Join a national network* to broaden ideas such as [NASAAP, Attendance Works](#)

Improving attendance starts with understanding engagement—not just as a behavior to monitor, but as a signal of connection, relevance, and belonging. By focusing on relationships, student voice, family partnerships, and thoughtful systems of support, schools can create environments where students feel valued and motivated to show up, participate, and thrive—every day.



Remember:

Your MindPeace Consultant is here to help you build your student attendance and engagement game plan. Keep us posted on how we can support your efforts!

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