

gradient learning poll

2023

# Student Engagement



**80% of teachers**  
say they are  
concerned about  
their students'  
engagement  
in classroom-  
based learning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2023 Gradient Learning Poll - Student Engagement

**50% of students** say they are not engaged in what they are learning in school most of the time.<sup>2</sup>

**Strong student engagement in learning is characterized by curiosity, participation, and a drive to learn more.**

Low student engagement is top-of-mind right now for many educators, families, and communities. There is a common understanding of the connection between student engagement and student academic achievement—if students are engaged in what they are learning in school, the process of learning is more effective, and that will result in demonstrable academic outcomes.

According to the Gallup Student Poll, “engaged students are 2.5 times more likely to say that they get excellent grades and do well in school, and they are 4.5 times more likely to be hopeful about the future than their actively disengaged peers.”<sup>3</sup>

“We all intrinsically want to engage our minds in learning, it is the fun part of life...**If you start from the premise that human nature is to want to think and learn, it changes how you teach.** Teaching needs to unleash the innate desire to learn.”

Grade 9-12 Teacher  
UT

**According to the 2023 Gradient Learning Poll, among the top reasons teachers say students are struggling to stay engaged are<sup>4</sup>:**

**Lack of intrinsic motivation for learning in school**



(chosen by 75% of the teachers)

**Need for skills to self-direct the learning process**



**Need for development of skills in reading and math**



**Students do not see the relevance of what they are learning in school**



**Long-term impacts of school disruptions**



<sup>2</sup> 2021-22 Speak Up Research Project

<sup>3</sup> Gallup Poll, 2018

<sup>4</sup> 2023 Gradient Learning Poll - Student Engagement

**50% of students say they are not engaged in what they are learning in school most of the time.<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> 2021-22 Speak Up Research Project

# How do we measure student engagement?

**“[When students are engaged] student curiosity, discussion, questions, and participation increases. It is contagious and all or most students get involved when students are energized about the learning activity.”**

High School Teacher  
IA

**“When students are highly engaged in my classes, I see them coming back to me and sharing how they have experienced what we have learned about in the real world.”**

Grade 6-8 teacher  
NM

When describing what student engagement looks like in the classroom, educators often reply “I know it when I see it.” Student engagement can be a difficult outcome to measure, with many teachers (65%) basing their assessments on physical cues such as head-nodding and tracking eyes.<sup>6</sup> However, given the evolution of today’s classrooms, this measure can be subjective and may not account for sustained engagement in a conversation, lesson, or virtual classroom setting.

The 2023 Gradient Learning Poll asked teachers to consider the multitude of ways that they identify and measure student engagement in their classrooms. **Teachers agreed that focusing on how a student is connecting with the classroom content and activities can help determine their level of engagement.** Here are the key ways that teachers say they identify and assess their students’ engagement levels:

**79%** Students making connections between topics and ideas

**77%** Level of student participation in discussions

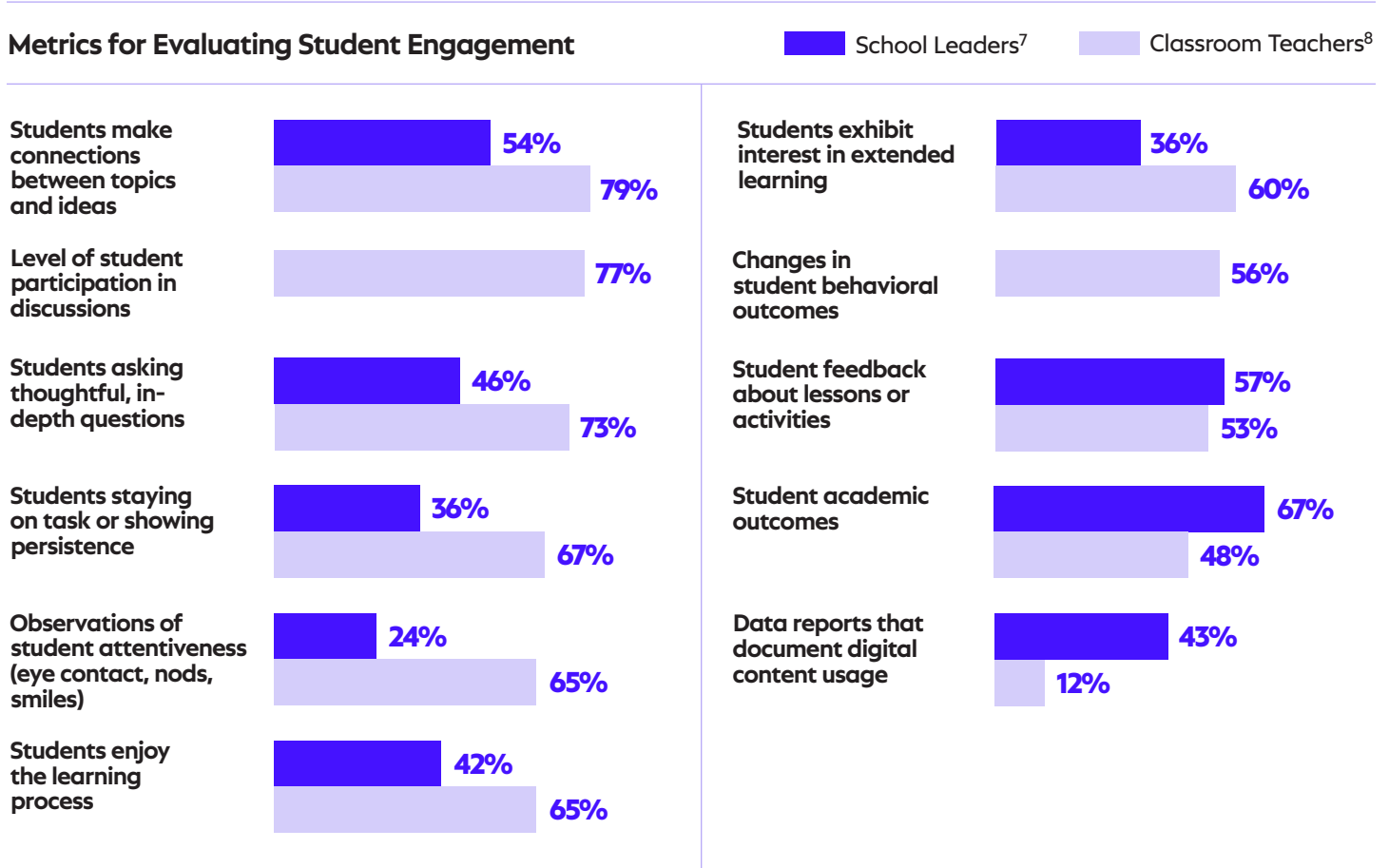
**73%** Students asking thoughtful, in-depth questions

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<sup>6</sup> 2023 Gradient Learning Poll - Student Engagement

## Interestingly, school leaders and classroom teachers had differing views on the most impactful methods of measuring student engagement.

The table below compares responses from school leaders (2021-22 Speak Up Research Project) and classroom teachers surveyed for the Gradient Learning Poll regarding the best ways of measuring student engagement.



Noteworthy in this principal-teacher comparison is the metric of student academic outcomes. School principals (67%) identified academic outcomes as one of the best ways to assess student engagement, while student academic outcomes rank #10 overall on teachers' list of best ways to evaluate engagement with only 48% of the teachers choosing this response.

This difference in perspective, as well as the others reflected in this survey, may help point to opportunities for school leaders to align with their teaching teams on the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement as they work together to close gaps.

**“Outcomes I have observed with highly engaged students: More on-task behavior, more creativity and critical thinking, more cooperative learning, deeper understanding of the standards. It’s more learning focused, more collaborative, and definitely more joyous.”**

Grade 4-5 teacher  
IL

<sup>7</sup> 2021-22 Speak Up Research Project

<sup>8</sup> 2023 Gradient Learning Poll - Student Engagement

# How do we increase student engagement?



**“Students become more curious about what we are learning and will continue their learning about the topic on their own, they ask good questions, and they share what they are learning about with others... The classroom has more energy and in general is a more positive place.”**

Grade 6-8 teacher  
CA

Educators know their students best, and their insights are critical for identifying ways to boost student engagement. Teachers ranked the following strategies as “highly effective” ways to engage students in the learning process<sup>9</sup>:

**Building stronger teacher-student connections**



(78% rated as “highly effective”)

**Connecting learning to real-world skills**



**Leveraging students’ personal interests and passions within learning**



**Incorporating active, hands-on learning experiences**



**Celebrating class and individual student successes and growth**



**Facilitating meaningful student collaborations**



**Helping students develop trusting bonds with each other**



The emphasis that the teachers surveyed place on building personal connections and relationships support the long-held premise that student engagement is essential for educational success.

<sup>9</sup> 2023 Gradient Learning Poll - Student Engagement

## What support do teachers need?<sup>10</sup>

Providing teachers with appropriate tools and strategies to engage with their students is essential. Here's what teachers say they need:

### Planning time to revise current lessons to support student engagement



### Dedicated classroom time to get to know students better



### The ability to select curriculum/resources that meet the needs of their students



### Best practices for classroom management when providing students with more choices



### Structured 1:1 time with students



### Professional learning on student engagement strategies



These numbers indicate teachers have both an understanding of the role of the student-teacher relationship in student engagement and are also interested in opportunities for further professional learning to become more purposeful and intentional to increase student engagement.

**Educators agree that student engagement is important, and they are concerned about low student engagement in classroom-based learning.**

To support teachers as they create classroom environments that nurture student engagement, it is essential for school and district leaders to **explore what teachers need to be more effective in combating this engagement gap.**

**95% of teachers say it should be a priority for every school to support teachers with the tools and strategies they need to increase and sustain student engagement.<sup>11</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> 2023 Gradient Learning Poll - Student Engagement

<sup>11</sup> 2023 Gradient Learning Poll - Student Engagement

# gradient learning poll

## About the Gradient Learning Poll

The Gradient Learning Poll is conducted in partnership with [Project Tomorrow](#), a nationally recognized, education nonprofit organization with a focus on understanding the impact of new learning models and interventions on student outcomes and teacher effectiveness. From October–December 2022, the Gradient Learning Poll conducted an online survey of over 400 educators across the country—including respondents from all 50 states—to better understand their views on the state of education, specifically related to student engagement.

- Outreach focused on teachers with grade-level assignments of 4-12
  - 85% classroom teachers
  - 8% special education teachers
  - 7% instructional coaches
- Highly experienced teachers
  - 68% of respondents have 11+ years of teaching experience
- Grade level assignment:
  - Grade 4 – 5: 29%
  - Grade 6 – 8: 46%
  - Grade 9 – 12: 22%

To learn more about our findings on topics that impact education, please visit [Gradient Learning](#).

## Thank you