

School Engagement (SE) is defined by Fredricks et. al. in three ways, behavioral, cognitive and emotional. Behavioral draws on the idea of participation and involvement in academic and extracurricular activities. Examples from the Flash presentation include attendance, class participation, extracurricular activities and homework. The second “type” of engagement is cognitive engagement. This is defined as an area of investment. How invested are students in their school? It incorporates “thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills” (Fredricks et. al.) Cognitive engagement involves the distinction between memorization and learning to obtain deep understanding and knowledge that can be applied to the context of the real world. The final form of engagement is emotional, which is a students’ positive or negative reactions to their teachers, classmates, academics and school as a whole. Participating in sports teams and school events will help develop emotional engagement, which in turn can lead to willingness to complete the work. These three types of engagement are strongly related and should not be isolated processes (Fredricks, et. al., 2004)

The school district with which I am employed has recently adopted this idea of School Engagement and has focused a lot of time and energy into helping its teachers understand the concept and focus on it within their classrooms and school environment. Before my principal did her yearly observations she reminded the teachers to try to pay attention to the difference between “engagement vs. compliance”. Typically classrooms have three groups of students, those who are engaged, compliant, and off-task/disruptive. Unfortunately, like the students who are academically “on-level”, the compliant students are often given the least amount of attention in the classroom. Consequently this group can actually begin to develop a more negative attitude toward school and become less engaged than they already were because they’re boredom increases. Compliant students tend to sit in the back of the classroom. They are well behaved and appear to be paying attention, but they are often uninterested in truly understanding and using the material and more interested in completing the assignment to simply earn the grade. They lack cognitive engagement, or desire to learn for the sake of increasing their knowledge base, but are often unnoticed by their teachers due to their good behavior and compliance in the classroom. They also lack behavioral engagement because they have little desire to participate in class discussions and are often uninvolved in extracurricular sports and activities. One way I try to encourage these students to participate is by differentiating instruction and giving students more choice. Determining and incorporating student interest in curriculum is crucial to increasing engagement and decreasing boredom. I also hold these students accountable for their learning by moving their desk closer to the front of instruction and calling on students randomly by pulling sticks. Calling on students randomly prevents me from constantly calling on the kids who always have their hands raised or the ones who or are blatantly not paying attention/disruptive.

The second type of engagement that my school focuses on is emotional engagement. We have huge PTA support, which actively involves the parents, teachers, and

community in creating a positive school environment, and encourages pride and school spirit in our students. Much of our focus this past year was on academics; setting goals and making our students proud of their academic achievements. We set specific goals for our students and had celebrations when we met them. One example of this was the “Math Bash”. One of our academic focuses this year was on math fact fluency. Teachers set individual goals within their math classes and students attended a “dance party” in the gym where they earned popsicles and Esther Jackson Jaguar key chains if they met the goals. Students’ “willingness to do the work” definitely improved, but it was very specific to that one area of math class and not relevant to the rest of their classes and work. Although I supported this event, I typically tend to disagree with extrinsic motivation within a classroom. This idea ties back to cognitive engagement; we must develop ways to promote emotional and behavioral engagement without focusing on extrinsic tangible rewards. Parental involvement is key when it comes to this. Students learn from an early age that if they have good behavior or do well in school they will earn a reward, whether that is a sticker, a piece of candy or a letter grade. We live in a very materialistic society and unfortunately I think it will be difficult to break this cycle and find ways to cognitively engage our students without providing extrinsic rewards.