



# Student Engagement

*Why does it matter?*



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A young child with dark hair is sitting on a colorful play mat. The child is wearing a quilted jacket and light-colored pants. They are looking down at several colorful wooden blocks (red, yellow, and blue) that are scattered on the mat. The child's hands are near the blocks, suggesting they are playing or thinking about them. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## Student Engagement

*“The importance of student engagement with school is recognised by educators, as is the observation that far too many students are bored, unmotivated, and uninvolved, that is, disengaged from the academic and social aspects of school life.”*

– Appleton et al. 2008

## Engagement: essential for life and learning

Student engagement is best seen as active involvement by our boys in school, through their thoughts, feelings and actions.

Our boys' level of life satisfaction is related to broadened thinking and openness to experiences. Research evidence suggests that there is direct link between life satisfaction and emotional engagement. Conversely, boys with low levels of satisfaction were at an increased risk of disengagement and drop out.

At BGS, we know that the teacher/student relationship is vital in keeping our boys engaged. On this, Fisher et al. (2018) identify three factors of engagement:

- Student: our boys' role in the classroom is to gather, discover, process, understand, integrate and learn information.
- Teacher: our teachers are responsible for sharing, presenting, guiding, instructing and facilitating the boys in gaining knowledge. They must know the content and have the skills to present the content in a relevant and easily understood manner.
- Content: the information being taught and the way in which the information is shared between the boys and their teachers.

The art of education is coordinating these factors effectively. When meaningfully interconnected, we see positive relationships, challenge and teacher clarity (Fisher et al. 2018). This results in a significant and positive impact on both the academic and personal outcomes for the boys.

## About engagement in a school

If we were to pass by a classroom and see all boys sitting at their desks with pens in hand and focused on the page in front of them, could we assume then that all boys were engaged? The simple answer is: no.

Engagement is a multi-dimensional concept. In the book *Engagement by Design*, Fisher et al. (2018), explains that student engagement can be broken down as follows:

<p><b>Behavioural Engagement</b></p> <p><i>Academic behaviours and actions.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participates in school functions</li> <li>• Attends and participates in class activities and discussions</li> <li>• Follows school rules</li> <li>• Studies</li> <li>• Completes assignments</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cognitive Engagement</b></p> <p><i>The psychological effort students put into learning and mastering content.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desires challenge</li> <li>• Self-regulates</li> <li>• Plans, monitors, and evaluates one's thinking and learning</li> </ul>
<p><b>Emotional Engagement</b></p> <p><i>How students feel about their relationships in the school environment, primarily with teachers and peers, and their general sense of belonging in the school community.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfortable talking to peers</li> <li>• Engages in group learning</li> <li>• Asks questions of teachers</li> <li>• Interested, inquisitive and curious about academic content</li> </ul>

(Fisher et al. 2018)

These dimensions represent the most widely acknowledged domains of engagement amongst current researchers (Lewis et al. 2011).



## Some interesting facts about engagement

School	Home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of engagement were recorded by students from independent schools compared with Catholic and government schools</li> <li>• Students from single-sex schools were more highly engaged than students from co-educational schools</li> <li>• When students viewed their school as having a good climate, high quality teachers, effective discipline, high levels of student learning and positive school spirit, they were more likely to be highly engaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students were more highly engaged if they had future aspirations to enrol in tertiary studies compared with students who planned to enter the workforce immediately upon leaving school</li> <li>• Higher levels of engagement were recorded by students who were intrinsically motivated (e.g. 'I find school work interesting', 'I like to do my best') than those who were not</li> </ul>

*(Fullarton 2002)*

## How can I help my son engage

**To help your son be engaged in all aspects of his life, try the following strategies:**

- Follow the PROSPER model (below) both at school and at home:
  - Encourage **POSITIVITY**: support your son to develop skills to be positive and experience positive emotions
  - Build **RELATIONSHIPS**: support your son to develop social skills and pro-social values that underpin positive relationships
  - Facilitate **OUTCOMES**: provide optimal learning environments and opportunities to learn skills that enhance outcomes and accomplishments.
  - Focus on **STRENGTHS**: take a strengths-based approach with the boys, teachers and community.
  - Foster a sense of **PURPOSE**: support your son to develop a sense of purpose and meaning.
  - Enhance **ENGAGEMENT**: provide opportunities for high student engagement.
  - Teach **RESILIENCE**: support your son to develop skills and attitudes that underpin resilient behaviour.
- Follow Jim Knight's Partnership Principles namely to: see each other as having equal voice, provide choice, enable reflection, set the conditions for healthy dialogue and develop an understanding of reciprocity.
- Improve times at home for connectedness and relatedness. Spend less time on technology and more time engaged in family life/activities.

- Participate in activities that encourage critical and creative thinking and praise curiosity, interest and absorption of new information.
- Practise mindfulness and keep gratitude journals.
- Incorporate a shared language to learning. For example, our Effective Learner Model at BGS – come along to a parent workshop to learn more!

The Victorian Government also propose some strategies for improving student engagement including: student support groups, individual educational plans, behaviour support plans, attendance improvement and return to school plans as well as re-engagement programs. For more information on the government strategies, please visit: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/behaviour/engagement/Pages/strategies-improve-engagement.aspx>

## References

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