

HLP 18: Use Strategies to Promote Active Student Engagement



High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities

Higher levels of student engagement are often associated with improvements in academic achievement and higher levels of student satisfaction with school. However, maintaining a high level of engagement can be challenging for teachers. An effective special educator is responsible for designing and delivering engaging instruction for students' progress toward academic and behavioral objectives. There is no one roadmap for this HLP; however, students are more likely to be engaged when the learning activity is appropriately challenging, if they are not distracted by things occurring around them, and if they are able to use strategies to support their success. Using a combination of HLPs and evidence-based practices is a good entry point. For example, the teacher providing explicit instruction (HLP 16) and high-quality feedback (HLP 8/22) within a consistent, organized and respectful learning environment (HLP 7) is a solid foundation for keeping students engaged. Using other HLPs such as systematically designing instruction (HLP 12) to meet individual learning goals (HLP 11) with relevant adaptations (HLP 13) such as technology supports (HLP 19) and scaffolds (HLP 15) can also help keep students engaged.

This resource is intended to support school leaders looking to embed the HLPs in professional development, implementation, teacher observation and feedback efforts at their school site.

The major source for content within this resource is the chapter by William L. Heward in *High-Leverage Practices in the Inclusive Classroom*; the book *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: The Final Report of the HLP Writing Team*, and content on www.highleveragepractices.org.

Teachers Who Effectively Promote Active Student Engagement

- Build and maintain positive relationships with students.
- Individualize active engagement using technology (e.g., augmentative communication device), visuals, or other structured supports as needed.
- Acquire and implement a wide repertoire of research-supported active student response practices such as fluency-building activities, guided notes, class-wide peer tutoring, digital tools, and collaborative learning strategies.
- Provide students with frequent and varied opportunities to respond and encourage students to engage with peers as well.
- Deliver academic- and behavior-specific feedback, providing students with detailed information about how they are meeting expectations and increasing the likelihood that students will continue to meet expectations.
- Encourage “good noise” when students are participating in group activities by incorporating games and contingencies, and recognizing and praising participation in such.

Tips for School Leaders to Support Teachers

- Provide educators with instruction, professional development, and/or coaching in a wide range of strategies that promote active student engagement.
- Observe teachers' implementation of strategies used to promote active student engagement and provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses.
- If struggling to implement strategies that promote active engagement, work with teachers to identify barriers and provide coaching or other supports around specific areas of need.
- Encourage educators to be creative when identifying and implementing strategies with the intent of actively engaging students.
- Be knowledgeable and keep teachers informed of newly developed strategies that promote student engagement.

Questions to Prompt Discussion, Self-Reflection, and Observer Feedback

- Why is it critical to embed strategies that promote active student engagement when designing and implementing lessons?
- How do elements of explicit instruction support student engagement?
- How can teachers individualize active student engagement/response strategies?
- What does it mean to encourage “good noise” during class activities? Why is it important to do so?

References & Additional Resources

Online Resources

[High-Leverage Practices: A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders](#)

A downloadable online guide providing school leaders, including administrators, principals, mentors and coaches, with practical tools for engaging staff members in learning about how high-leverage practices can enhance student learning in the school and district.

Journal Articles

Brunvand, S., & Byrd, S. (2011). Using VoiceThread to promote learning engagement and success for all students. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 43(4), 28–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991104300403>

Carnahan, C. R., Hume, K., Clarke, L., & Borders, C. (2009). Using structured work systems to promote independence and engagement for students with autism spectrum disorders. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 41(4), 6–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990904100401>

Conroy, M. A., Sutherland, K. S., Snyder, A. L., & Marsh, S. (2008). Classwide interventions: Effective instruction makes a difference. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 40(6), 24–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990804000603>

Elder-Hinshaw, R., Manset-Williamson, G., Nelson, J. M., & Dunn, M. W. (2006). Engaging older students with reading disabilities: Multimedia inquiry projects supported by reading assistive technology. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 39(1), 6–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990603900101>

Goodman, G., & Williams, C. M. (2007). Interventions for increasing the academic engagement of students with autism spectrum disorders in inclusive classrooms. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 39(6), 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990703900608>

Nagro, S. A., Hooks, S. D., Fraser, D. W., & Cornelius, K. E. (2016). Whole-group response strategies to promote student engagement in inclusive classrooms. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 48(5), 243–249. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059916640749>

Swanson, E., Stevens, E. A., & Wexler, J. (2019). Engaging students with disabilities in text-based discussions: Guidance for general education social studies classrooms. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 51(4), 305–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059919826030>

