"21 Ways to Engage Students in School"

NCSE is committed to pursuing and learning what schools and communities are doing to promote school engagement.   In April 2007, NCSE hosted a contest, called "21 Ways to Engage Students in School", to create a list of successful and practical strategies that contribute to school engagement. The overarching goal of the contest was to create a greater awareness of strategies that are asset-based. Schools, community-based groups, and public agencies were encouraged to submit their own successful strategies that foster school engagement.

 "Strategies" included (but were not limited to):
- Activities/Special Events for students, families, and communities
- Best practices (evidence-based and researched-based)
- Incentives
- Instructional and/or curricular innovations
- Professional development for educators and program providers
- School policies
- School-wide programs

The response to the contest was positive and NCSE received entries for over 50 different strategies for school engagement. To select the top strategies the contest was judged by 20 school and community leaders, which included school personnel, a student intern, NCSE Advisory Board Members and staff, plus board members and staff of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (NCSE's parent organization.) Judges used the NCSE Framework for School Success (see below) to rate how well each strategy addressed those objectives.

The NCSE Framework for School Success is based on school engagement that integrates three necessary elements, known as the 3A's – *attendance, attachment and achievement*:

Attendance involves promoting the design and implementation of evidence-based strategies to reduce excused and unexcused absences, and address issues of high mobility.

Attachment involves establishing positive connections among schools, communities, youth and their families through support, and mutually-defined expectations. It includes creating welcoming school climates, family and community engagement, and student-focused programs and activities.

Achievement involves ensuring that students have the tools, credits and resources to complete courses and graduate from high school.

The NCSE framework is supported by family involvement in schools, community partnerships, and quality programs and resources for students, especially those at high-risk of dropping out of school.
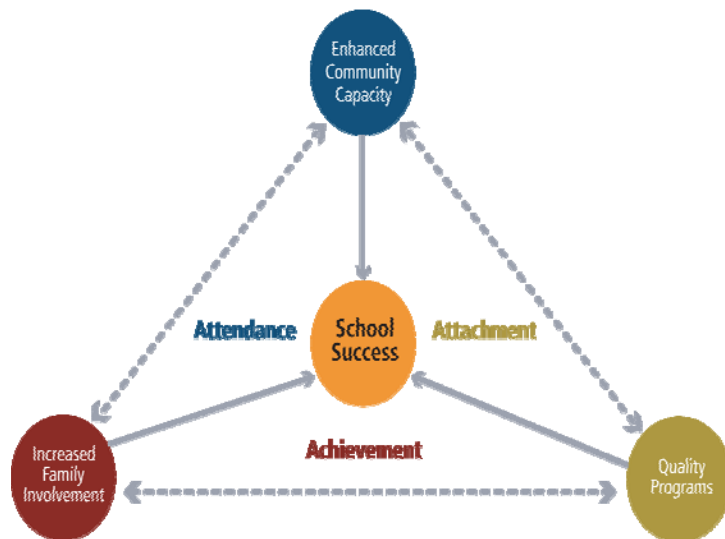
21 Strategies to Engage Students in School

Strategies are grouped by topic and highlight activities that were submitted as part of the NCSE contest on school engagement. Best practices in applying and implementing strategies are provided in the next section.

1. Factor in Math Fun
In Oswego, New York, a Factoring Fan Club was created for 9th grade math students to get them excited about factoring, to keep it fresh in their minds, and to be "good" at factoring. Source: Oswego School District, Oswego, NY

2. Celebrate Pi Day on 3/14
This event was created to help students enjoy math by offering a fun-filled day honoring Pi. Events included a pie eating contest, measuring the diameter and circumference of round objects to calculate pi, and other games related to circles. Source: Independence School District, Independence, VA

3. Promote "Paired Reading"
In Tampa, Florida, parents were taught how to implement "paired reading" with their first grade child in the home for 10 minutes a day. Source: Tampa School District, Tampa, FL

4. Offer After-school Programs
An after-school program in Englewood, Colorado, was designed using many aspects of instructional best practices: establishing guiding questions, webbing with students, etc. Through this approach, learning experiences are created with intentional learning in mind. Source: Englewood Schools, Englewood, CO

5. Increase Public Awareness Around School Attendance
Public Service Announcements (PSA's) were developed and aired on local television stations. The 30-second PSA's featured parents talking about failure to send children to school, the consequences of such action, and that obstacles can be overcome. The PSA's also featured students encouraging good school attendance and the importance of a high school diploma. Source: State Attorney Truancy Arbitration Program, Jacksonville, FL

6. Promote Family-School-Community Events
A school in California participated in International Walk to School Day in October in which 200 students and families walked. The school was able to partner with the Nutrition Network who supplied water and fresh vegetables to the participants. For more information on this event visit www.walktoschool-usa.org. Source: Schmitt School, Westminster, CA

7. Mobilize Community
Community Now! is an asset-based community development tool of the Connection Institute. It uses asset-based language and planning to bring the community together to discover what values the community shares as a whole. It then works to mobilize community members around its assets and shares values to become proactive in its planning rather than reactive. Source: Kittery Children's Leadership Council, Kittery, ME

8. Collaborate with Higher Education
In Mesquite, Texas, a local college delivers 3.5 hours of continuing education courses ("Educational Opportunities") to truant students and their families. The curriculum includes the negative consequences associated with poor school attendance and the positive consequences associated with scholastic achievement. Discussion of transition from high school to college is discussed and a tour of the college is provided. Source: Dallas Independent School District, TX

9. Expand Family and Community Involvement

In addition to attending the standard "parent night", parents and students are required to complete hours toward building community partnerships (i.e. volunteering at the local museum, city clean-up day, etc.). These types of strong, supportive partnerships lead to the development of leadership, community involvement, attendance accountability and responsibility.
Source: Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX

10. Coordinate Bullying Prevention Activities

Bullying prevention efforts seem to work best if they are coordinated by a representative group from the school and communityl. A student advisory group also can be formed to focus on bullying prevention and provide valuable suggestions and feedback to adults. For more information visit www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.go. Source: Brush School District, Brush, Colorado

11. Host a Family Dinner Night

Family Day is celebrated on the fourth Monday in September. Over the past few years Colorado CASASTART programs, students and their families have celebrated Family Day by hosting special school-based events. Schools and local businesses contribute to the success of the event that supports positive family communication and builds family-school-community partnerships. CASA created Family Day — A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™ in 2001, as a national effort to promote family dinners as an effective way to reduce substance abuse among children and teens. For more information go to- www.casafamilyday.org.
Source: CASASTART Columbia and Colorado CASASTART

12. Offer Programs to Support Children and Parents

FAST is an example of an after-school program designed to build protective factors for children (0-16 years old) and empower parents to be the primary prevention agents for their own children. Source: FAST National Training and Evaluation Center, Madison, WI

13. Track and Mentor Students

A "Daily Attendance Accountability Log" is an example of a tool to help redirect truant students with a proactive approach to time management and attendance accountability. Through the use of an attendance log and mentoring, students are shown structure, responsibility and accountability and begin to understand the importance of attendance and academic achievement.
Source: Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX

14. Collaborate in Attendance Planning

In Virginia, students and their families along with the school, court, and community come together to discuss and implement appropriate levels of intervention including an attendance contract, monitoring, and treatment. Source: School District Alexandria, VA, Alexandria, VA

15. Re-engage Truant Students

Project Reconnect is a court-ordered, 30-day tracking program that re-engages students back in to school. Students use a tracking form that must be completed every hour by every teacher. The form records attendance, homework and behavior. Students are also required to complete community service hours based on the needs of that student.
Source: Warner Robbins Schools, Warner Robbins, GA

16. Offer Incentives

As a reward, a lunch-time soccer game is organized for students with good attendance by school staff. Source: Summit School District, Frisco, CO
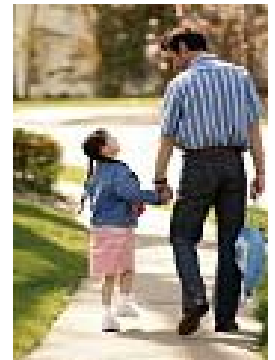
17. Support Positive Behavior
Jacksonville School District adapted the principles of Got Fish? (a book to build business moral) for the classroom. Principles include: being there, play, choosing your behavior, and make their day. Students are recognized when observed "living" each of the principles.
Source: Jacksonville School District, Jacksonville, FL

18. Create Student-Generated Classroom Rules
In Eugene, Oregon, students create a list of classroom rules to be followed. Each student signs off on the rules and is held accountable by fellow students. In addition, they developed their own "honor roll", in which students are recognized for doing their best, following directions, and not talking out more than 3 times a day.
Source: Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene, OR

19. Develop Leadership Skills
In Australia, children are a part of a team chosen to start the class in "morning circle" with the support of the teacher. Children have different roles that rotate weekly: welcomer, organizer, writer, and collector/messenger. Source: Elementary School, Sydney, NSW, Australia

20. Organize Interest Clubs
Interest clubs were developed and organized in Madison, Wisconsin, to provide all students an opportunity to participate in an activity of their choice. The clubs are run by teachers and staff every Friday during the school day for 45 minutes. Each student gets to join 3 clubs during the school year. Source: School District, Madison, WI

21. Facilitate Positive Student-Teacher Connections
Some schools in Oregon encourage students to sign up for a one-on-one lunch with their teacher during school time. The teacher uses this time to get to know the student and offers them encouragement and praise. Children and youth benefit when their teachers demonstrate that they care about student well-being in addition to academic success.
Source: Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene, OR

Best Practices

The effectiveness of a strategy is influenced by its implementation and application. Since 2003, NCSE has been identifying culturally-relevant practices that promote school success. The following best practices are based on research and community dialogs on school engagement and are outlined using NCSE's 3A's of school engagement.

Attendance

- <u>Clear expectations</u> of students, families and school staff-roles are understood and contracts are developed to support student attendance.

- <u>Monitoring and rewarding good attendance</u> is supported by consistent and accurate tracking of absences and timely follow-up with truant students, and incentives and rewards are provided to recognize good/improved attendance.

- <u>Outreach</u> to families and communities emphasizes the importance of school attendance and family involvement in the education of children and youth.

- <u>Effective policies to promote attendance</u> are developed, implemented and evaluated.

Achievement

- <u>Educational practices and instruction</u> are based on relevant, rigorous and culturally competent curriculum.

- <u>High expectations for academic achievement of all students</u> are the norm. There is an expectation that every student is important and every student is expected to do well, plus teachers support and encourage their students.

- <u>Flexible instruction to address different learning styles</u> involves data-driven instruction to meet the educational needs of all students and tutoring for students who fall behind and/or struggle academically.

- <u>Multi-measures of success are in place for</u> college bound, technical/trade school bound, and workforce bound students.

Attachment

- <u>Positive relationships among key stakeholders</u> (student-teacher, teacher-family, and school-community) are facilitated to foster collaboration and caring communities.

- <u>Welcoming school climates</u> are created. Office staff are responsive and welcome visitors, students and families; adults model respectful communication; and positive peer relationships are developed.

- <u>School-based supports and resources</u> such as, after school programs, family support programs, mentoring, sports, arts/music are affordable, accessible and provided in cooperation with community groups.

- <u>Safety</u> – Students, staff and families feel safe and issues of bullying and student harassment are effectively addressed.

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