

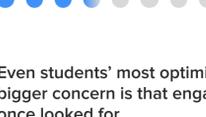
THE HIDDEN Engagement PROBLEM (And What Educators Can Do)

Highlights from Education Insights 2025–2026 Fueling Learning Through Engagement

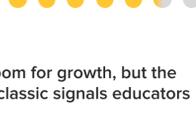
Data based on *The 2025–2026 Discovery Education Insights Report: Fueling Learning Through Engagement*

Consider THIS

Students say they're engaged more often than teachers think they are, and the gap grows with grade level.



And Yet



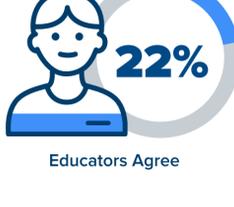
Even students' most optimistic self-assessment shows major room for growth, but the bigger concern is that engagement often doesn't look like the classic signals educators once looked for.

Engagement CAN BE QUIET

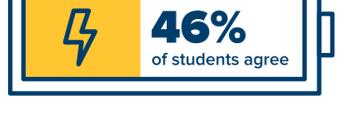
Many students engage internally, and it's easy to overlook or misread that engagement as "checking out."



Students are present and focused in class



Students often zone out in class



The data suggests a mismatch: Students may be attentive in ways that don't look like participation (reflecting, imagining, quietly processing).

Engagement Has More Than One Look:

- Sketching while listening
- Looking away while thinking (processing)
- Choosing to work alone rather than in a group
- Observing other classmates
- Spending more time with a problem before starting (planning, not avoiding)

Broaden the Engagement Signals

Look for evidence beyond participation: quick writes, exit tickets, choice-based responses, and silent processing checks (especially for quieter students).

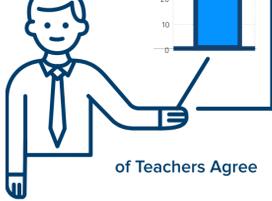
QUICK TIP

WE OVERWEIGHT ONE SIGNAL: Questions

Teachers value questions as a sign of engagement, but students often won't risk asking them.



Students frequently ask questions in class



In middle school, **91% of students feel nervous** about asking questions in class (a 29-point jump from elementary).

If asking questions is a teacher's main engagement measure, they may underrate students who are mentally present but socially hesitant, especially in middle grades.

Four Ways to Lower Risk When Students Aren't Asking Questions

- 1 Use index cards or digital walls to have students submit anonymous questions
- 2 Use low-risk prompt language: "No wrong answers!" "Half-baked ideas welcome!"
- 3 Have students ask in pairs and share the best question
- 4 Model uncertainty: "I'm wondering..."

Reduce the Social Risk of Speaking Up

Normalize draft thinking, anonymous Qs, and think-pair-share before whole-group share.

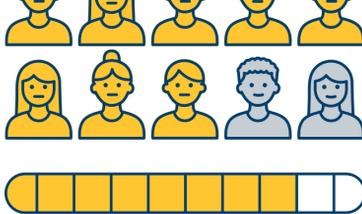
QUICK TIP

Bored + Overwhelmed = PASSENGER MODE

Students can feel bored and overloaded at the same time. Incomplete work may be a sign of too many competing priorities, not work that is too challenging.



8/10 students struggle with boredom at least weekly



And Yet

Students report feeling overwhelmed

72% of students believe more challenging lessons would create a more engaging learning environment.

This isn't a simple rigor problem.

Students may be able to do the work, but they do not feel connected to it. This dynamic of simultaneous workload and boredom is often referred to as passenger mode.

Rich Task Checklist

- Students think vs. recall
- Students connect ideas
- Students support a claim
- Students apply new knowledge

Incorporate challenge that isn't overload

Focus on fewer, richer tasks with a clear purpose to avoid passenger mode.

QUICK TIP

Motivation ISN'T MISSING, RELEVANCE IS

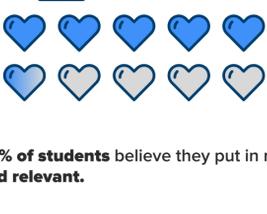
Students say they're motivated. Teachers aren't always seeing it.



Low Motivation Is the Primary barrier to Learning



Students Love Learning



93% of students believe they put in more effort when lessons feel **meaningful and relevant.**

Students are reporting they have motivation, but teachers worry they aren't motivated. Schoolwork doesn't consistently tap into it. What looks like apathy can be a relevance and meaning problem.

Four Phrases to Make a Lesson Feel Relevant

- Here's where you can see this in your everyday life...
- You've already seen this, but maybe you haven't realizing it...
- This is useful anytime you need to...
- If you can do this, you can...

Meaningful, relevant lessons are the strongest lever.

Students often do what "counts" turning in homework to get credit and studying to pass the class. These actions don't necessarily mean students are interested. Build in movements for reflection: How is this meaningful? Why does this matter in your life? How will you be able to use what you've learned today in the future?

QUICK TIP

When Engagement Is Hard to Spot, It's Time to Widen the Lens.

Students are bringing motivation and curiosity, but they're also navigating pressure, hesitation, and overload. The path forward is clarity and access: create more entry points, make participation feel safer, and anchor lessons in meaning. When students can engage in ways that fit them, engagement becomes easier to notice and easier to sustain.

To get a deeper look at engagement data and discover new insights and practical tips, download the full **2025–2026 Discovery Education Insights Report: Fueling Learning Through Engagement.**