

Engagement in Learning

Description: Engagement in Learning is a young person’s energy, excitement, and curiosity around learning new things. This may be academic or non-academic.

Youth who struggle with Engagement in Learning often:	Youth with strong Engagement in Learning often:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disengage from activities that require them to try or learn new things • Choose activities that are familiar or easy to them already • Doubt their ability to learn • Avoid school work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy new challenges • Choose activities that are new or difficult • Reflect on their learning experiences • Ask a lot of questions • Enjoy sharing things they have learned with others

Best Practices and Evidence

Variety of Activities: Many youth may not have had the experience of learning something they enjoy or are personally interested in. Providing a wide variety of activities helps all youth to find something they can get excited about.

Evidence of a program that offers a Variety of Activities includes:

- The program offers a mixture of academic, arts, sports, and hobby activities.
- Activities offer multiple ways to participate or access the learning. For instance, a theatrical production may allow youth to act, make costumes, play music, or write a script.
- Youth have multiple opportunities to choose their own activities, daily or at regular intervals.

Growth Mindset: Growth Mindset¹ is the belief that everyone has the capacity to grow and will grow, given the right support and environment. Youth sometimes avoid learning because they doubt their intellectual capacities or their ability to pick up new skills. When adults express this belief in youth, the youth can begin to believe it in themselves.

Evidence of a program that incorporates Growth Mindset includes:

- Staff often express their belief in youths’ abilities (“I know you can get this!”).
- When youth disparage themselves, staff share the strengths they see in the youth, perhaps engaging peers to reinforce the message.
- When youth struggle or fail, staff continue to believe that the youth can be successful with additional support or time.
- No one is excluded from activities they want to try because they do not have the skills or talent to do them “well.”

¹ Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House, 2006.

Supporting Youth Voice: Youth may be more engaged if they have the opportunity to add their own ideas, thoughts, questions, or interests to the learning process. Making space for and respecting youth voice can increase buy-in.

Evidence of a program that Supports Youth Voice includes:

- Multiple opportunities are available for youth to offer ideas, and all ideas are respected and taken seriously.
- When youth ask a question, staff pause to address it or communicate when they will answer it, even if it seems silly or irrelevant.
- Activities are youth-led and offer many opportunities for leadership.
- Project-based learning and service learning are used to engage youth who may not express interest in typical program activities.

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<p>There is no evidence of strategies to support youth with Engagement in Learning.</p>	<p>There is some evidence of strategies to support youth with Engagement in Learning.</p>	<p>There is moderate evidence of strategies to support youth with Engagement in Learning.</p>	<p>There is extensive evidence of strategies to support youth with Engagement in Learning.</p>
<p>There are no opportunities for youth to speak or to make decisions (“voice and choice”).</p> <p>When youth “opt out” of activities, there is no encouragement from staff to re-engage them.</p>	<p>There are some opportunities for “voice and choice” in the activity, but they are superficial (e.g., youth choose where they sit or pick a team name).</p> <p>When youth “opt out” of activities, staff prompt them to re-engage briefly, but give up quickly and are not successful.</p>	<p>There are multiple opportunities for “voice and choice,” but not all youth are heard, or there are missed opportunities to support it.</p> <p>When youth “opt out” of activities, staff eagerly or repeatedly attempt to prompt them to re-engage but are not successful.</p>	<p>There are multiple opportunities for “voice and choice” and all youth are heard.</p> <p>When youth “opt out” of activities, staff eagerly and successfully prompt them to re-engage.</p>