Building a Healthy School Culture Through Communication

Maximizing Outcomes for Students

Challenge: Building Connection through Relationship

Arguably the most difficult aspect of teaching virtual learners. The loss of the bricks-and-mortar captive audience benefit requires us to set building relational quality and connection as one of the primary tasks for virtual programs.

Basic Psychological Needs of At-Risk Youth

Feelings Essential for Effective Learning

- Competence
- Belonging
- Usefulness
- Potency
- Optimism

Characteristics of Discouraged Learners

- Low self-confidence
- Avoiders
- Distrustful
- Pessimistic
- Think of themselves as 'dumb'
- Fragile homes
- View success as a matter of luck not achievement

Think about how your communication could either support feelings for effective learning or the feelings discouraged learners experience.

Cox, J., & Sagor, R. (2004). *At Risk Students: Reaching and Teaching Them* (2nd ed.). Routledge, New York.

Creating an Inviting Environment for Learning*

Trust - *Optimism* - *Respect* - *Intentionality*

Intentionally Inviting**
- Consistently Positive
- Communicates a Growth Mindset
- Purposeful
- Sensitive to Student Needs

The Student's Perspective

Intentionally Uninviting**
- Dismissive
- Alienating
- Harsh
- Vindictive

Student Excels

Student Struggles

Key Strategies for Engaging Students in Virtual Learning Environments

Research Questions:

1. *What strategies do teachers of virtual courses employ to engage students?*

2. *What student engagement strategies do teachers of virtual courses believe to be most effective?*

3. *How do teachers of virtual courses develop relationships that nurture student engagement?*

Findings:

Relationships

- Communication
- Feedback
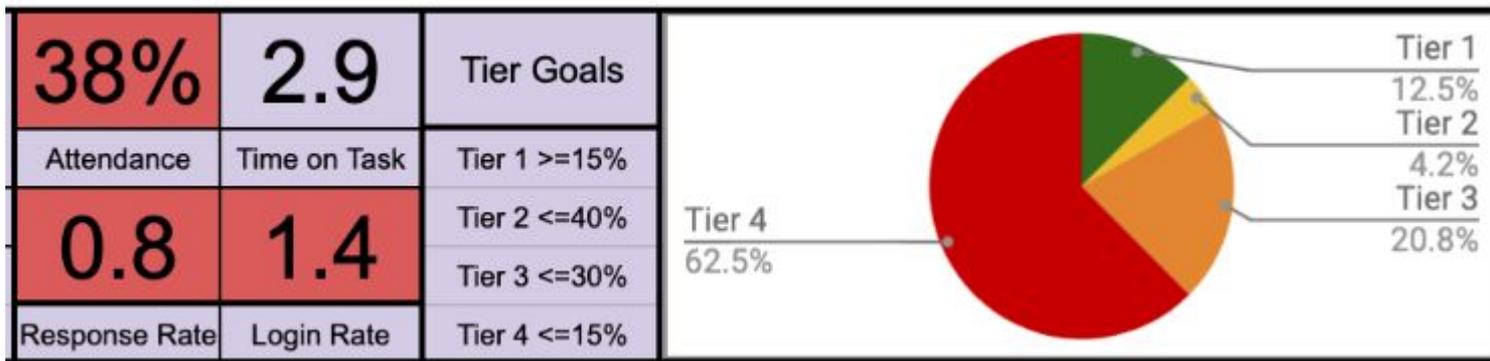- Appealing to students' interests
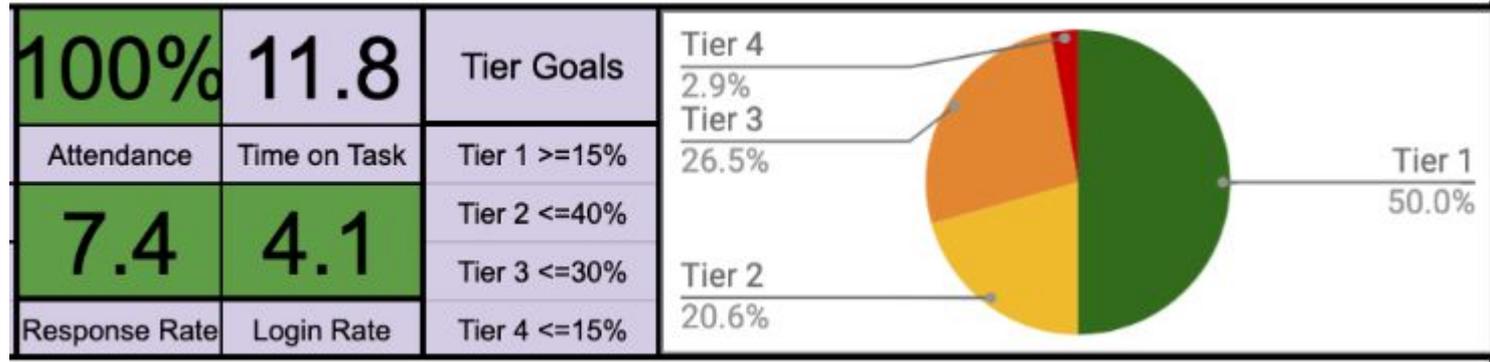- Humanizing
- Synchronous meetings

Harrington, C. & DeBruler, K. (2021). *Key strategies for engaging students in virtual learning environments*. Michigan Virtual University. https://michiganvirtual.org/research/publications/key-strategies-for-engaging-students-in-virtual-learning-environments/

Question:

How are you monitoring the quality of relational connection in the virtual classroom?

How Link Learning Tracks Connection - Dashboards

100%	11.8	Tier Goals	Tier 4 2.9%
Attendance	Time on Task	Tier 1 >=15%	Tier 3 26.5%
7.4	4.1	Tier 2 <=40%	Tier 1 50.0%
		Tier 3 <=30%	Tier 2 20.6%
Response Rate	Login Rate	Tier 4 <=15%	

38%	2.9	Tier Goals	Tier 1 12.5%
Attendance	Time on Task	Tier 1 >=15%	Tier 2 4.2%
0.8	1.4	Tier 2 <=40%	Tier 3 20.8%
		Tier 3 <=30%	Tier 4 62.5%
Response Rate	Login Rate	Tier 4 <=15%	

How Link Learning Tracks Connection - Text Thread Captures

Student/Teacher Interaction #1

Student/Teacher Interaction #2

Can you predict what each teachers' dashboard might look like? - High or low attendance? High or low student response rates? Student outcomes?

Message Preparation

- *Positive*
- *Relational*
- *Intentional*
- *Reflective*

0 - Ineffective
1 - Minimally Effective
2 - Effective
3 - Highly Effective

Message Practice

- *Reliable*
- *Consistent*
- *Balanced*

0 - Ineffective
1 - Minimally Effective
2 - Effective
3 - Highly Effective

Message Outcomes

- *Connective*
- *Effective*

0 - Ineffective
1 - Minimally Effective
2 - Effective
3 - Highly Effective

SUCCESS!

Message Preparation(1)

Description	Ineffective	Highly Effective
1. Positive - language is honest and uplifting in nature. It is important to identify and celebrate student actions that get them closer to achieving their goals. Does the language demonstrate a 'with' approach that shows the educator as a partner in the learning process?	Uses **negative** tone. Language uses **fear, shame, and/or threats** to attempt to get the student to complete work. When negative consequences of a student's lack of engagement occur, the staff member uses **negative reinforcement.**	Uses **encouraging, warm** tones and words consistently. Language is consistently **clear and direct,** with a focus on positive reinforcement and a message of belief in the abilities of students. The staff member engages students when negative consequences from a lack of student engagement exist, but consistently with a **positive expectation** of the students abilities.
2. Relational - language should reflect a relational context - does it appear that the staff member is authentic and showing a personal and individual interest in each student? Does the log content demonstrate a depth of knowledge of the student's life situation, and a caring attitude?	No follow-up communication is happening on **personal items** of interest or concern to the student. Communication appears to be '**all business'** and primarily one sided. The majority of messages appear to be template messages and there is **no sign of personalizing** communication or response from students.	Conversations reflect a **continuing personal knowledge** of students' life situations, and a sensitivity of the challenges students are experiencing individually. These conversations are consistently **individualized** and happen frequently and naturally. Mass messages are only used for informational purposes.

Message Preparation(2)

Description	Ineffective	Highly Effective
3. <u>Intentional</u> - Does the language demonstrate an educational intent? When the staff member reaches a student and has a conversation, does it eventually result in reconnection to an educational goal or purpose? Does the staff member create scaffolding goals for the student in time-on-task, log-in-rates, activities, or other student-centric measurements?	**Mass progress messages** are the primary means of establishing expectations with students, which show a total lack of individualized goal setting. Responses **do not relate** to a previous statement and demonstrate listening. No specific goal setting has been done with students. There is little to no communication about student weekly schedule or any direction given on what is expected of students and how they are doing. Parents/Guardians are totally disregarded as a viable support.	Uses very specific language with students that is **individualized.** Responses **relate** to a previous statement and demonstrate listening. **Goals are identified** and specific steps are shared to reach that individualized goal. Staff intentionally ask about **student schedules** so they can create a plan together to be successful that week. If the student is not responding then staff intentionally implore the help of **parents/**guardians.
4. <u>Reflective</u> - Does the language demonstrate an encouragement for the student to reflect on efforts, outcomes, and benchmarks established from prior conversations and goals established with the staff member?	The staff member does not encourage students to reflect on students' contributions to either positive or negative outcomes. Outcomes are not in reference to previously established expectations, and they do not discuss goals, set achievements, and determine next steps.	Staff member **encourages the student to reflect** on how they contributed to either positive or negative outcomes regularly. **Outcomes are in reference to previously established expectations, and they regularly discuss goals, set achievements, and next steps on a daily basis.**

Message Practice

Description	Ineffective	Highly Effective
5. <u>Reliable</u> - When the staff member communicates with the student about goals, plans, and timeframes, does the staff member demonstrate reliability with regular connection, follow through, and availability?	Student messages are not acknowledged and/or **go unanswered.** If the staff member establishes a benchmark goal with the student, it seems forgotten in the next conversation. The staff member may commit to an action, but does not follow through.	Responds to messages daily, many times **within minutes,** and consistently closes conversations with the student. Staff member **consistently follows through** with action items or requests from students. There is **always follow-up** - that day or the next - on goals set with the student.
6. <u>Consistent</u> - Does the staff member attempt to use a consistent method and timeframe for communicating with the student based on the students' availability, setting schedules and establishing a standard method for communicating in order to increase stability and predictability for the student?	Staff member uses **several ways to communicate** with students causing confusion on how to reach students or for students to respond back. Staff member **'chases'** the student to find them virtually, and does not establish one predictable and expected line of communication.	Staff member uses the s**ame line of communication** each time so there is never a question of how to reach a student or how a student is to respond to the staff member. Staff member is aware of the **best times to reach out** to individual students and does so accordingly. When a student stops communicating, the staff member redirects the student back to the primary communication channel.
7. <u>Balanced</u> - Are there too many informational messages being sent out, with no student response? Most of a staff member's messages should result in a conversation with the student.	Messages appear to be all informational and/or commanding, and **do not request a reply** from students. Staff member **does not reach out to parents** when students do not reply. Communication from the staff member is t**oo long** and filled with many topics (3+), potentially overwhelming the student.	The staff member regularly attempts to draw students into conversation by **asking questions.** If the staff member does not get responses, **parents** are being reached out to for support to work as a partner in their child's education. Messages are very **short and to the point**, with no more than one topic in each message so students do not get overwhelmed with what is being asked of them.

Message Outcomes (Benchmarking Section)

8. <u>Connective</u> - How frequently does the staff member have dialogue with each student. Ideally students and staff members are communicating multiple times during the day. **(Dialogue Rate = Student Response Rate*Student Count/Staff Message Count), Communication Rate = Staff Message Count/Student Count)**	Messages are not getting any responses from students. (Student Response Rate < 1) Messages are sent very infrequently to each student. (Communication Rate <=3) There is little, if any, dialog occuring between staff and students. (Dialogue Rate <15%) A large share of the student caseload is not having conversation with the staff member (Attendance Rate < 50%)	Students are responding at least daily to the staff member.(response rate greater than 4) Staff member communicates with students several times during the week. (Communication rate >5) Staff and students have conversation regularly during the week. (Dialogue rate > than 40%) Very few students are not communicating with the staff member (Attendance Rate > 90%)
9. <u>Effective</u> - this is a continuum metric. The longer a staff member performs in the higher categories above, the more they will progress to the higher bracket here.	Students are not showing improvement and or maximization in time-on-task, log-in-rates, and/or progress metrics; based on the specific goals of the staff member.	There is clear indication of maximization of engagement metrics within the staff member's caseload. The staff member is considered a top performer in student engagement statistics, with other, comparable caseloads.

Conclusion

"Good communication practices are essential to getting and keeping students engaged!"

- Things to consider
- Next steps in your own journey
- A hands on workshop will be provided during the QM Connect Conference - We'll review teacher logs and apply the rubric in practice
- Questions

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