

Minnesota Principals Academy - Action Learning Project

Scott J. Brekke

How to Engage the “Tough to Engage” Students

Abstract

Our school has had a difficult time engaging “the tough to engage” student in their academics at our high school. Like most schools we have tried a number of things to engage students in the learning process. The purpose of this study is to explore why some students do not engage in their own learning while in high school. This study seeks to answer these research questions, learning is about making connections, are we as a school making the correct connections with our students in school and in the classroom? I also need to ask why these students do not come to school? What is the reason for skipping school?

Vision: Engage “the tough to engage” student at LHS so they will have emotional, social and academic success.

Background/Context: Lincoln High School has roughly 600 students in grades 9-12. We do not have a lot of diversity in our school. We are a working class community with great support for our school system. In the recent year we have been struggling with mental health in our community and school system. During my seventeen years as associate principal of Lincoln High School it has always been a struggle to engage “the tough to engage” student in school.

Why a Change: These students are struggling with their attendance, grades and test scores. We also notice that more of these students go to our ALC to finish out their high school career. We need to make sure that we can make the adjustments to try and help these students more at Lincoln High School. Lincoln High School staff has always shown a great ability to change for the best interest of our students.

What We Did: I meet with 10 students several times throughout the 2016-17 school year and talked with them about how we can work together to make them more successful at Lincoln High School. These students were non special ed students. They had some attendance issues, academic issues and were in the 10th grade. I interviewed each student at the end of the school year and asked them several questions about how we can engage “the hard to engage” students in our school. I also surveyed the staff and asked them 3 questions on their thoughts on “hard to engage” students in their classrooms. I interview 5 teachers at the end of the school year who the students said they liked working with.

What We Found Out: When I started this project out I thought I was going to have attendance issues with these students because they had problems last year as 9th graders, but I was pleasantly surprised that their overall attendance was 94.8%. So I realized that attendance was not a big issue with these students that I worked with. The other information that I found out was that our staff does a very nice job of connecting with “hard to engage” students. Lincoln High School will continue to try and make sure that all teachers make a connection with these students.

Implications For Practice:

1. Impact on student.
 - a. Students have better attendance.
 - b. Students have better grades.
 - c. Students want to be in school.
 - d. Students want to learn.
 - e. They want to be engaged in the classroom.

2. Impact on teacher.
 - a. Make a connection with your students.
 - b. Show you care about each student.
 - c. Be positive with your students.
 - d. Make them want to be in school.
 - e. Make it fun and have a sense of humor.
 - f. Have hands on activities in your classroom.

