



# HOW TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AT YOUR SCHOOL



A Guide To  
Connecting  
Learning and Life  
Through Three  
Dimensions  
Of Student  
Engagement



## ABOUT HOBSONS

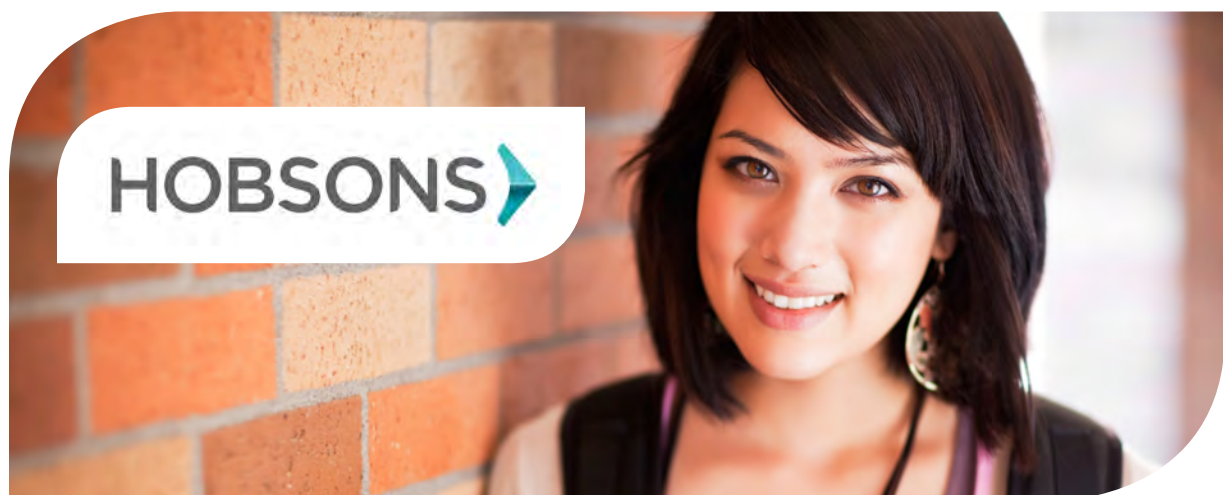
### Education Advances

At Hobsons, we maximize student success and institutional effectiveness to create the world-changers of tomorrow. Since our founding in 1974, we've evolved from a traditional publishing house to an innovative education solutions company that serves millions of students across more than 7,500 schools, colleges, and universities worldwide. Our solutions allow students to develop personalized academic and career plans based on their goals, interests, abilities, and learning styles, plus enable institutions to reach and connect with students that are the right fit and help them stay on track to achieve their goals.

***“We maximize student success and institutional effectiveness to create the world-changers of tomorrow.”***

***— Hobsons Mission Statement***

We measure our achievements by the achievements of our clients. When our clients are more successful, their students are more successful. We believe that through our work, we can transform the world – and ourselves. After all, education doesn't just advance our business; it advances us.



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### Measure What Matters: Why Student Engagement Matters as Much as Grades and Test Scores

If our nation's education system was graded, we would barely be passing with a C+. Shockingly, at least one out of every four students still do not graduate from high school in this country, putting our graduation success rate at a paltry 78.2%<sup>1</sup>. However, to begin improving the graduation rate, we have to understand why students drop out in the first place. Although there is never a single clear-cut factor that can determine a student's fate, the fact is that the dropout process begins with disengagement from the school environment, which results in students leaving school entirely. The student's relationships with teachers and school officials, classroom work, their peers, and extracurricular groups and activities have been weakened and will eventually be broken, meaning those relationships were never strong enough from the start. To prevent students from dropping out of high school, engagement needs to be encouraged in the school community.

The researchers at the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy at Indiana University have investigated what it means for students to be engaged in their report, *Charting the Path from Engagement to Achievement: A Report on the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement*. Since 2006, more than 350,000 students in over 40 states have taken the High School Survey of Student Engagement

**21.8% of students in the US do not graduate high school.**

(HSSSE), in which they were asked why they were disengaged or if they have ever considered dropping out, and why. The most common responses to the questions on disengagement and dropping out are not surprising: students are bored and are not understanding the real-life relevance of the material being taught.

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<sup>1</sup> Everyone Graduates Center, *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic - 2013 Annual Update*, 2013. PDF, 6. [Link](#).

## WHY ARE STUDENTS DISENGAGED?

Engaging in learning activities is an active action. It takes focus. But since focusing can be tiring, students will often decide to “switch off” if they don’t find the effort rewarding enough. This is where boredom comes in.

Two out of three respondents (66%) in 2009 are bored at least one day a week in class in high school; nearly half of the students (49%) are bored every day and approximately one out of every six students (17%) are bored in every class.<sup>2</sup>



BORED ONE DAY



BORED EVERY DAY



BORED EVERY CLASS

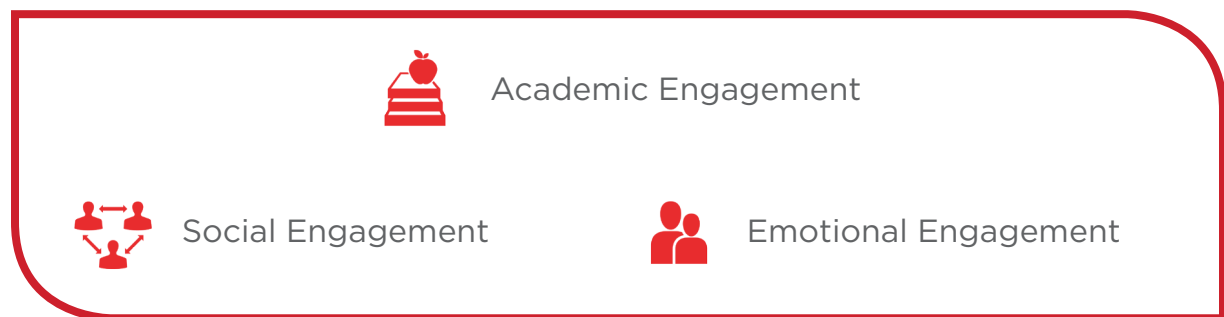
When asked why they felt so bored in class, 81% of the students responded that the material wasn’t interesting and 42% of the students felt that lack of relevance caused boredom.

Another way to measure disengagement is by directly asking if students have ever considered dropping out of high school. Of the HSSSE respondents, approximately 21% have considered dropping out at least once, and 7% have considered dropping out “many times.” When asked why, 42% of those students gave their reason as “I didn’t see the value in the work I was being asked to do.”

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2 High School Survey of Student Engagement, *Charting the Path from Engagement to Achievement: A Report on the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement*, 2010. PDF, 6. [Link](#).

Clearly, when it comes to disengagement, the perceived lack of relevance of classroom materials is the biggest contributing factor that needs to be improved upon. As adults, we know how important high school education is, not only for teaching us practical skills like math and grammar, but also for understanding the process of learning itself, to become life-long learners. To help students understand this concept, they need to be connected to their education through three separate dimensions of student life that directly affect their daily lives:



**Academic engagement** refers to how students react to their classwork, lessons, homework, testing, and the hands-on learning that occurs in a school environment. **Social engagement** contains any participatory activities that happen in school, such as friendships with other students, clubs and activities, special events (e.g. dances, pep rallies), or sports. **Emotional engagement** refers to the personal relationships that students make with adults in their school community. Students will be engaged emotionally when they feel cared about, valued, listened to, and encouraged by teachers, counselors, coaches, principals, and any other school staff that they have a connection with.

The most engaged student will be deeply involved with the school through all three of these channels, but reaching a student through just one of them may be the lifeline of support they need to show up in class every day. In the next five chapters of this white paper, we will lay out different strategies to engaging all of your students through these three parts of their school community.

### Engage Students Socially by Asking for Their Opinions and Acting on Them

To begin increasing student engagement at your school, first find out how engaged your students already are. You can analyze traditional engagement benchmarks, like dropout rate, time on task, and attendance records, but to get a more holistic look at how your students feel, try asking them directly. You can create a custom student poll for your school to ask them if they have ever thought about dropping out, if they have friends and role models in school, and what activities they are involved in, if any. But the easiest way to measure your school's student engagement is to register for the Gallup Student Poll that is administered every year.

The Gallup Student Poll is an online poll made up of 20 well-researched questions designed to assess the hope, engagement, and wellbeing of American children. The poll takes eight to ten minutes to complete, and is entirely free to any public or private school in the United States. The poll will indicate how your students respond to these three key factors of student success.<sup>3</sup>

**Hope:** Determines whether students have the energy and ability to achieve goals in the future. Results indicate whether students are “hopeful,” “stuck,” or “discouraged.” Hopeful students tend to have higher grade-point averages and attendance rates.

*Sample statements measuring hope:* “I know I will find a good job after I graduate,” and “I can find lots of ways around any problem.”

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3 The Washington Post, *What the Gallup Student Poll measures and sample questions*, 2013. [Link](#).

**Engagement:** Determines how involved and enthusiastic students are about school. Results indicate whether students are “engaged,” “not engaged,” or “actively disengaged.” High-performing schools tend to have more engaged students.

*Sample statements measuring engagement:* “My teachers make me feel like my schoolwork is important,” and “At this school, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.”

**Well-being:** Determines how students are doing in their lives. Results indicate whether students are “thriving,” “struggling,” or “suffering.” Thriving students are better able to focus on academic work because they are not distracted by meeting basic needs or other life demands.

*Sample question measuring well-being:* “Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?”

After your students complete the poll, you will receive a detailed report on the engagement level at your school. This report can be monumental in discovering elements of your school community that can be improved upon to increase student engagement.

The act of administering the Gallup Student Poll, or any poll designed to research student engagement, is also an excellent opportunity to connect with your students. Explain to them why you are asking them to complete the poll and let them know that their school cares about their wellbeing. Reassure your students that you are listening to their feedback and that the results will be studied carefully and acted



upon. Once you have a good idea of how engaged your students are, you can start to create activities and programs to increase their engagement.

## ACT ON STUDENT POLL RESULTS

It may take some creative thinking, but giving students the ability to control a few things that matter to them is a great way to get them invested in their school environment. Offer students the option to choose lunch menus, pep rally activities, or school dance themes. In English class, offer them the ability to choose which book to read, either by letting them create their own reading list or by choosing from an approved list. You can also create polls designed just for fun, like favorite vacation spots and sports teams. These types of polls will help students feel more connected to their fellow peers and help them start conversations with people they may not usually interact with. Often, just the act of asking can be enough to encourage student participation. Be sure to display the results of these polls where all students can see them, such as on bulletin boards, TV monitors in classrooms or hallways, or even your school's social media accounts.

The easy way to create these polls is through the Naviance Survey Builder and Family Connection tools. If you are using Family Connection, you can create an unlimited number of custom surveys for your students, parents, and even alumni. Bring popular voting events onto your college and career readiness platform to encourage students to sign in and use the tools that will help them plan their future. You can create surveys targeted to a specific class year to vote on student council elections or prom court nominations, for example.

The Family Connection homepage is also a great place to host your school-wide polls. With a little bit of HTML help, you can create a custom poll widget from popular survey tools like [SurveyMonkey®](#) and place it on your school's Family Connection homepage. You can also display the results of the last poll on the page, making signing into Naviance a part of your students' weekly schedules. Getting students more involved in the social aspect of coming to school will help them become more engaged with their peers and academics, and can even encourage them to get excited about planning their future with tools in Family Connection.

### Engage Students Mentally Through Self-Discovery

If you think it is difficult to get students excited about learning Chemistry, it is decidedly less hard to get them excited about learning about themselves. So why not harness that willingness to engage and put it to good use, in the form of self-discovery? There are three major types of self assessments that can give students the foundations they need for college and career readiness success: individual strengths, learning style, and personality type/career exploration. Completing the assessments in this order will reiterate the importance of planning for your future and help students engage with the school and feel like their educators value them as individuals.



Strengths-based Assessment



Learning Style Assessment



Personality Type Assessment

#### STRENGTHS-BASED ASSESSMENT

The strengths-based assessment included in Naviance is called StrengthsExplorer®, and is based on 40 years of research by Gallup, world-renowned polling experts. Gallup conducted thousands of studies on the talents of individuals to help students in grades 6-10 discover and develop the unique talents within them. StrengthsExplorer assesses 10 talent themes for individuals and identifies each student's three strongest emerging talents, such as Confidence, Dependability, or Future Thinker. It provides explanations of these themes, strategies for capitalizing on each, and action items to help students gain insight into their greatest talents – natural patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior – to leverage in the classroom and in life.



Once your students have discovered their top three talent themes, devote some time to discussing what each student's themes mean to them. Have each student share their top three themes and ask them to think about a time in their lives when they've used their talents successfully, either in the classroom or daily life. Having students complete these activities early in their education, between grades 6-10, will allow them to use the knowledge throughout their entire high school and college career, for far-reaching results.

## LEARNING STYLE ASSESSMENTS

Another way to engage students is to help them discover their learning style through assessments like the Learning Style Inventory and MI Advantage, available for purchase through the Naviance platform. The Learning Style Inventory online assessment diagnoses students' unique learning styles based on an analysis of their personal preferences in 16 different areas. Those areas include the student's immediate environment (sound, light, heat, and design), emotionality (motivation, persistence, and structure), sociological needs (self-oriented, peer-oriented, or adult-oriented), and physical needs (perceptual preference(s), food intake, time of day, and mobility). MI Advantage similarly uses the Multiple Intelligence theory to reveal students' individual intelligence strengths and challenges, such as bodily-kinesthetic, musical, or interpersonal intelligences. At the end of each assessment, a personally tailored report identifies each student's unique learning style and provides guidance on how to maximize learning potential.



These reports can be utilized in the classroom to separate students into groups that learn the same way. Students will be able to help each other learn if they all speak the same “learning language.” For example, a quiet table in the back of the classroom could be reserved for those that prefer to study in silence, or group projects could be divided by which students prefer to learn through tactile, visual, or auditory methods. Or, you could pair up students with high and low levels of particular intelligences for peer learning groups and tutoring or coaching sessions. Understanding how your students learn will allow you to customize their experiences to give them the best environment for their success.

## PERSONALITY TYPE ASSESSMENTS

Another type of self-assessment in Naviance is personality type. The act of discovering personality types is where many high school students will start on their journey to planning their future careers. There are several assessments available to schools, each assisting in discovering the students’ interests and hobbies and combining his or her personality type to suggest relevant career paths that would be good matches for each individual.

- ▶ **Do What You Are®** is a personality type assessment. It reveals information about a student’s strengths and blind spots, recommended career paths and college majors, as well as tips for conducting the most effective career search.
- ▶ **Career Interest Profiler and Career Key™** are online career interest assessments for students based on Holland interest codes.
- ▶ **Career Cluster Finder** is an online questionnaire that helps students discover career industries that are most interesting to them.

You can create a comprehensive college and career readiness program based solely around these assessments and the results. Start by having students take the assessments, preferably as a guided activity with school counselors or teachers nearby to help. As the assessments are completed, career pathways will be suggested that

match the students' personality types and interests. Students can then save careers and career clusters to their Family Connection portfolio and research potential colleges and majors they can study to pursue that career path. College counselors can also use information about saved careers to plan a career fair and guest speakers. Students could participate in a career fair scavenger hunt, needing to collect information on all of their saved career clusters in return for a prize.



Engaging students through self-discovery is an easy way to get students to think about college and career readiness, which is a double-whammy in terms of school success. Learning about themselves and thinking about future career options are also ways to alleviate boredom and increase the relevancy of coursework in the classroom, both of which can contribute to overall increased student engagement. As any school with winning sports teams can tell you, getting students to rally around a common goal (like winning a championship) is one of the easiest ways to keep students engaged. And while a school can't always produce winning sports teams on demand, praising the good work being done by individuals is an excellent and more reliable way to help students feel like they are a valued part of the learning community.

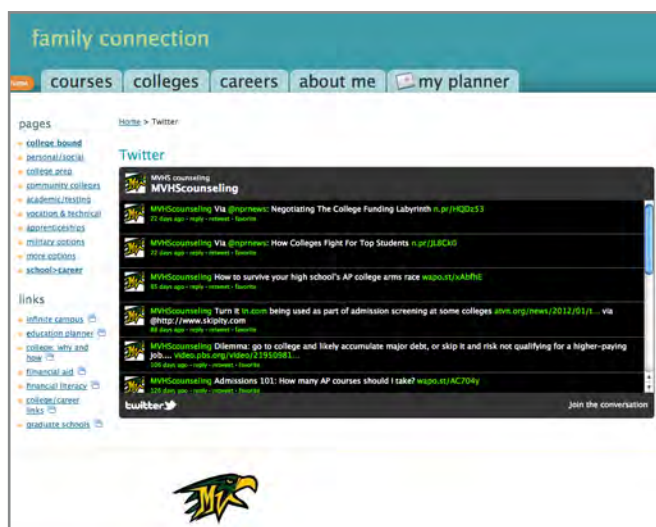
## CHAPTER 3

### Engage Students Socially by Praising Student Achievements

There is a multitude of ways to highlight student achievements, and you're probably doing some of it already, but to really have an effect on student self-esteem, it needs to be a regular, recurring, and important part of the school communications. One of the easiest ways to do it is to use social media channels where the students already spend their time.

#### HIGHLIGHT YOUR STUDENTS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram...pick a channel or two (or three!) that your students respond to and create a school account. That's the easy lift. The more time-consuming part of the process will be finding stories to publish on those channels. Posts can be about the chess team tournament win, students that make the honor roll, homecoming court nominations, spirit week winners, or even student profiles to focus on the students that seldom make it to the spotlight. Offering to re-tweet or share student photos will also encourage participation and engagement in school events. You can even embed your Twitter feed directly into your Family Connection homepage so that students can stay up to date by logging in to Naviance.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Gerba, T. (2013, June 6). What the heck is a twitter and what does it have to do with Naviance? Message posted to the [Naviance Network](#).

One way to keep social media efforts to a minimum is to hand the responsibility off to the students themselves. The student council members of each class would make a good team, or perhaps your school has a student marketing club, newspaper publishing team, or Future Business Leaders of America group that could take it on. You can even just ask for volunteers, which can create a more diverse group. Giving responsibility of the school's voice to the students is a great way to encourage pride and a sense of belonging among the student population. Plus, their participation will look great on their college applications!

## WRITE A COUNSELOR'S BLOG

Another idea to encourage student engagement is to write a school counselor's blog. A blog can be hosted at any of the popular free blogging sites (e.g. [WordPress.com](https://www.wordpress.com), [Blogger.com](https://www.blogger.com), or [Edublogs.org](https://www.edublogs.org)), and posts can be placed on the Family Connection homepage. This is a great way to get college planning advice into the hands of your students, especially if your school has a large counselor to student ratio. For example, you can write about college application and resume-writing advice, scholarship deadlines, essay writing tips, summer internship opportunities, recent alumni success stories, featured Naviance tools, "day-in-the-life" guest career bloggers, or highlight time-sensitive aspects of the college planning process. For even more exposure, publish links to your latest blog posts through your school's social media channels.

Sometimes reaching out to each and every individual student in a high school can be difficult, but thanks to the consuming presence of technology in modern students' lives, building the feeling of connection and belonging within the school community is easier than ever.

### Engage Students Emotionally by Providing Examples of Career Success

One of the biggest factors in a student's decision to drop out comes from the fact that they do not see how their education is relevant to their daily and future lives. And sometimes it's hard to believe that education is relevant and important without proof and concrete examples, especially if students don't have access to a good role model inside or outside of the classroom. For those students that learn by example, bringing in real-life professionals to talk about their careers is an excellent way to help connect learning to life and keep students engaged in school.

#### HOST A CAREER DAY

To begin planning a career day, first create a list of careers that you think would be interesting to feature, and ask the school staff to contribute their ideas, too. Then, ask around to see if your contacts know anyone in those fields that might be willing to come and speak to the students. Once you have a good list, it might be a good idea to survey your students to find out which careers have the most interest. If you do not have any contacts in popular careers, try researching local businesses at your Chamber of Commerce or any local colleges or universities for volunteers. Once you decide on and make contact with your speakers, ask them to talk about how they chose their career, what education was needed, how they use their education in their daily lives, and which character traits are needed to perform their jobs. Also make sure to advertise your career day in the school newspaper, morning announcements, and social media channels, as applicable, to make sure that students are aware of the opportunity to hear real-life career experiences.



## FIND REAL-LIFE INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

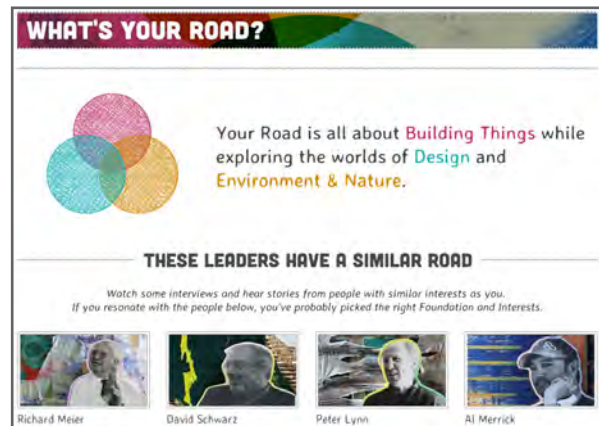
Sometimes students are grappling with tough emotional issues at home that can't be solved with traditional classroom activities, making it hard to concentrate on their schoolwork. Similarly, showing these students how others managed to find emotional strength and happiness in their careers can give them hope and guidance, and bring them back to the right path to graduation. In this case, another type of guest speaker can be helpful: an adult that has overcome personal challenges to emerge successful in life. It may be harder to find a guest speaker like this, but try calling local non-profit organizations like [\*Big Brother Big Sister\*](#)<sup>®</sup> for inspiring stories or search online for national motivational speakers.

The easiest way to get your students access to inspiring emotional stories is to introduce them to the Roadtrip Nation Interview Archive. Included in Family Connection, the



interview archive features over 3,500 videos of individuals who have forged through challenges to accomplish unique goals. Interviews in the archive include Howard Schultz (Chairman and CEO of Starbucks), Michael Dell (Founder and CEO of Dell Computers), Soledad O'Brien (CNN broadcast journalist), Wanda Sykes (comedian), Barney Frank (Massachusetts Congressman) and many other national and local role models. These leaders candidly discuss hardships, successes and the obstacles they overcame to create a meaningful life on their own terms. Students can explore the interviews by 48 themes such as fear, failure, and perseverance to learn how leaders overcame challenges similar to what students may be facing today. Or, they can explore the archive by interests like film, entrepreneurship, writing, or science to find leaders whose interests align with their ambitions. All interviews are conducted by young people who traveled the United States to ask leaders how they turned a passion into a livelihood.

Roadtrip Nation also offers the “What’s Your Road?” self-guided experience in which students answer self-assessment questions about their interests and personal attributes. The results match them with leaders in the Roadtrip Nation Interview Archive who share students’ interests. Students can then watch video interviews and learn how these accomplished individuals got to where they are today, gaining valuable insight on how to bring their own passions to life.



By exploring the diverse personal stories of those that have gone before them, students using the Roadtrip Nation Interview Archive gain exposure to career pathways they may not have known existed, and can actively begin thinking about colleges, majors, and career goals that reflect their unique talents and aspirations. And the best part is that they can do all of this at home, on their own time, when some extra hope and guidance could be needed the most. A little extra inspiration and motivation might be all a student needs to keep getting out of bed and coming to class every day, and it’s all available right at their fingertips.

### Engage Students Emotionally by Connecting Them to Adults

For some students, the motivation to stay in school is present, but challenges outside of academics can get in the way. Bullying, financial issues, dangerous home environments, language barriers, and any number of other societal problems are common factors affecting the dropout rate, especially in major metropolitan schools. When students are faced with these types of challenges, connecting them to a mentor or adult role model can often provide the support they need to stay in school. But the biggest question is, “How do I find the students that do not have a support system?”

#### MONITOR KEY DROPOUT INDICATORS

Setting up an early warning system in your school database will not only help you find the students in danger of dropping out, but will give you enough time to intervene and get them back on track. Monitoring key factors, such as individual course completion rates, course grades, and attendance records, especially during the first month of high school, can help you identify students that may be struggling.

Naviance reports offer an easy and automatic way to monitor key dropout indicators and are integrated directly with your school information system (SIS). Data can be synced with your SIS and Naviance every night, which can flow into customized reports that will highlight information about your students, like course grades and completion, GPA, standardized test scores, course planning rigor, individualized learning plan status, and custom task completion. You can even track how often your students and their parents are logging in to Family Connection. These reports can be automated and scheduled to be sent via e-mail to yourself or other key stakeholders at your school.

Once you set up your reports to find the students that are in danger of dropping out, set up a mentorship program that can help with individual student needs, either internally or externally through local nonprofit groups. You could also survey your students to find out if they are struggling with staying engaged in school or if they would like to be paired up with an adult role model.

## ENCOURAGE PARENT ENGAGEMENT

For the students that are not in extreme danger of dropping out, encouraging parents to become more involved with their children's education will also help them stay more engaged in class. Frequent communication with parents is a key factor affecting student success, but printing out materials to send home is costly and time consuming. Plus, many communications get lost in school bags, lockers, or mailboxes before they even reach the parents' hands.

A better way to communicate with parents is through e-mail. Parents will be able to read it on their own time, on their mobile phones, or at work, when they have a moment to spare. You can also link to relevant materials, like forms to sign and send back, or FAQs, timelines, and other reference materials. Naviance makes this process easy by including an e-mail tool right inside the platform. You can even segment your e-mail by grade level, assigned counselor, GPA range, recent Family Connection activity, or custom groups that you have in your school (e.g. students in the AVID program.) You can also upload documents to the document library in Family Connection to make it easy for parents to learn about what their children are doing in school.

Everyone needs a role model in their life. For those students that do not have access to a coach, teacher, religious figure, or family member for support, staying engaged in school can be difficult. But once you determine which students do not have a support system, connecting them with an adult mentor is straightforward. For students, having a school official show personal and individual attention to them may be the difference between dropping out and graduation.

### How to Increase Student Engagement at Your School or District

Now that you know how the three factors of school life affect academic success and graduation rates, you should feel confident in creating your own strategy to increase student engagement. There is no end to the number of methods and programs that you could implement to achieve mental, social, and emotional engagement with your school environment, but we hope that the ideas presented in this white paper will give you a head start and inspire you to create solutions that will be tailored for your own students.

We also know that implementing programs and tracking the effectiveness of your efforts through a single platform will increase the results exponentially. Naviance is a one-stop shop that allows students to discover college and career pathways that are right for them, and helps schools and districts measure student outcomes.

At Hobsons, our mission is to maximize student success and institutional effectiveness to create the world-changers of tomorrow, but we won't get that chance unless we are able to help all students stay engaged in school and connect learning to life.



**LET'S GET STARTED!**

# WE CAN HELP YOU INCREASE YOUR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.

Whether you are starting a college and career readiness program from scratch or are already an advanced Naviance Network member, we have the expertise to help you increase student engagement at your school or district. Contact a Hobsons representative to request a free college and career readiness consultation today.

[▶ CONTACT US](#)

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