

Thoughts from school administrators

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Introduction

This paper contains strategies, techniques and tools that school administrators recommended for effectively engaging students in their learning. The suggestions were contributed and prioritized by members of the Canadian Association of School Administrators (CASA) via Thoughtexchange's online engagement software. We have also included thoughts from students who participated in a similar Thoughtexchange process. You can download our Student Voice paper, for even more student engagement ideas.



Student-Led Inquiry and Project-Based Learning

Educators said ...

Class Wiki Textbooks

"Students can "create textbooks" by editing wiki pages and adding information researched."

Have Students Work Together in Flexible Working Environments

"Students choose to work collaboratively in problem-solving groups using multimedia, with the teacher as facilitator rather than the source of direction and information. Critical thinking skills are emphasized. The teacher plans the lesson to encourage skill development rather than the acquisition of information"

Get Students to Teach Each Other

"Give students skills and allow them to teach each other. Students can learn in many ways - other than from the teacher. They are more engaged the more they are allowed to show what they know and be challenged to find information."

Create Small "Learning Groups"

"Enabling students to work in small informal groups using computers and having extensive discussions in a more informal setting"

"working in learning groups from as small as 2 to class groupings as well as multi-aged groupings."

Projects and Assignments Involving Research and Reporting.

"Creative students still enjoy working on a problem or project. They truly enjoy using the internet etc to help them gain information."

Integrated Technology to Connect Different Subjects

"In our secondary schools, we have approached integrating three subject areas using ipads. The tool is less relevant than the fact the students can see the connection between the different subjects and can explore more personalized directions in their education, while the teacher serves as facilitator."



... Students said

Experiments and Learning Discoveries

"If students get the chance to see what they learn first hand, it can help reassure what they have just learned. These demonstrations can be group activities, movies, interactive games, or projects."

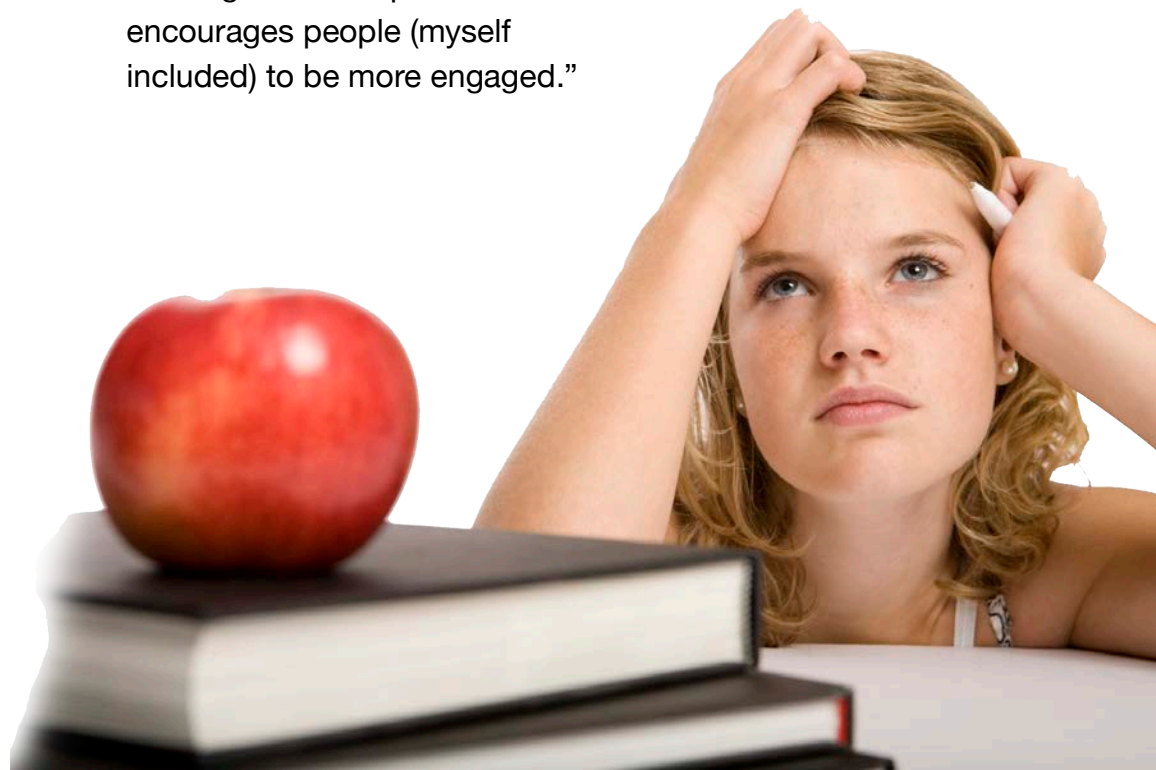
More In-Class Discussions and Debates

"Lectures are outdated and do not teach the content as well as other techniques. The same can be said when talking about notes. Interactive discussion work much more effectively and spark interest in the students. New teaching media is available and is very effective."

"I know myself, and most others, are most engaged during a 'two way' style learning. Mild competition also encourages people (myself included) to be more engaged."

Opportunities to Teach Each Other

"I hate sitting and listening to a teacher drone on about a topic. It is so much better if I have to go out and find out about a topic myself. It is also great when I am able to discuss it with my peers and even teach it to them. That is honestly the best way to learn something: to teach it to someone else."



Giving Students a Voice

Educators said ...

Makes Student Thoughts a Priority

“Use student data to make changes in the way school is presented.”

“Tell Them From Me Surveys can give a ton of information about how students learn. Actually listening to them is the key.”

Create an In-Class ‘Community of Learning’

“Tapping into the students’ resources, knowledge and questions help foster a community of learning.”

“Make it fun by listening to their ideas and integrating them if possible.”

Student Leadership Groups to Seek Student Voices

Student leadership groups in each school create process to gather and respond to the voices of students within their building, focusing on hearing from all groups within the school (attention to the voices that are not always heard).

Student Voice in Course Work

“Every student chooses the courses they work on and at the pace they wish to work. We are an alternate school and deal with students with significant mental illnesses and behavioural disorders. We ensure that their voice is heard and that they have power over the decision process.”

Build Personal Connections

“Personal connections; get to know them.”



... Students said

Show Genuine Interest in Student Thoughts

“Lots of teachers never really take interest in what kids want to talk about, so if they try and talk more about what kids want then things might be more interesting.”

Listen to Student Thoughts on Things Outside of Class

“Try to ask the students once in a while if they have clubs or projects they would like to take on around the school, include more modern ideas and make sure they are fun so kids enjoy them!.”

A Teacher Who Truly Wants to Help Students...

“listens to the students and add their input to the class.”

“asks what they would like to learn about so everybody’s interested.”

“includes students interests in their assignments” finds out the best way they learn and teach that way.”

“asks them for ideas on how to make the class better for them.”



Using Interactive Collaboration Tools and New Technology

Educators said ...

Use Digital Resources to Assess Students

"Assessment includes student video, student songs, poems and student led activities."

Smart Boards

"Using interactive whiteboards, tablets and web-based collaboration tools."

"use technology (smart boards, handheld devices, multimedia.)"

Video Games that Teach

"Students enjoy playing video games so bringing that into the classroom will only engage them further. I used an iPad app called "where's my water" to teach student about the properties of fluids."

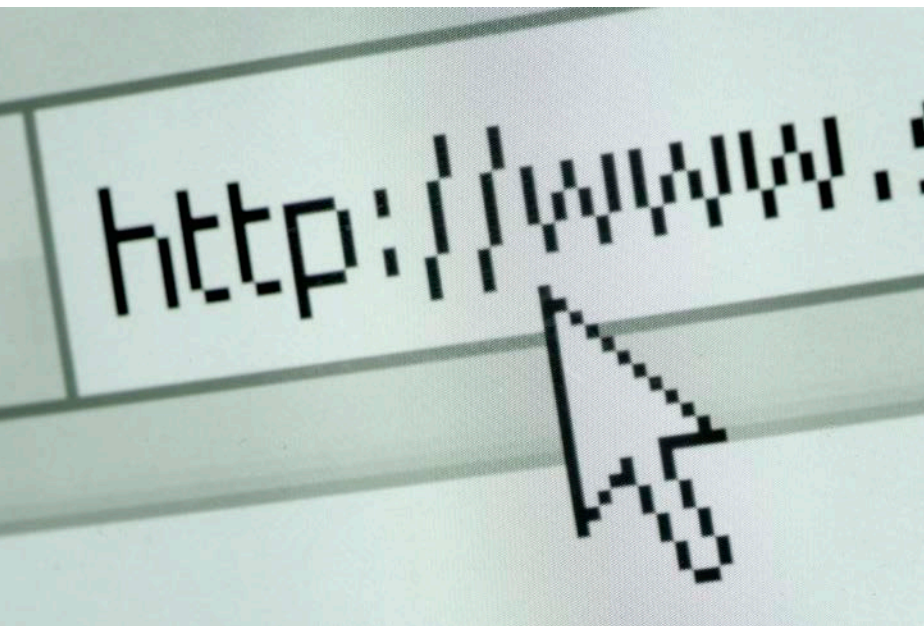
Internet Exploration of Concepts

"Students are motivated to use technology in their learning. Rather than reading a book about a concept they can go on the internet and experience."

Use their Communication Methods and Tools

"Why not make our classrooms more relevant by using the technologies that students are bringing to school everyday. More post secondary institutions are using social media and mobile learning, and K-12 still has to play catch up with this."

"I have seen some great examples of using blogs to engage students in their learning. We need to remove firewalls while teaching ethical use of technology."



... Students said

Utilize Audio-Visual Aids

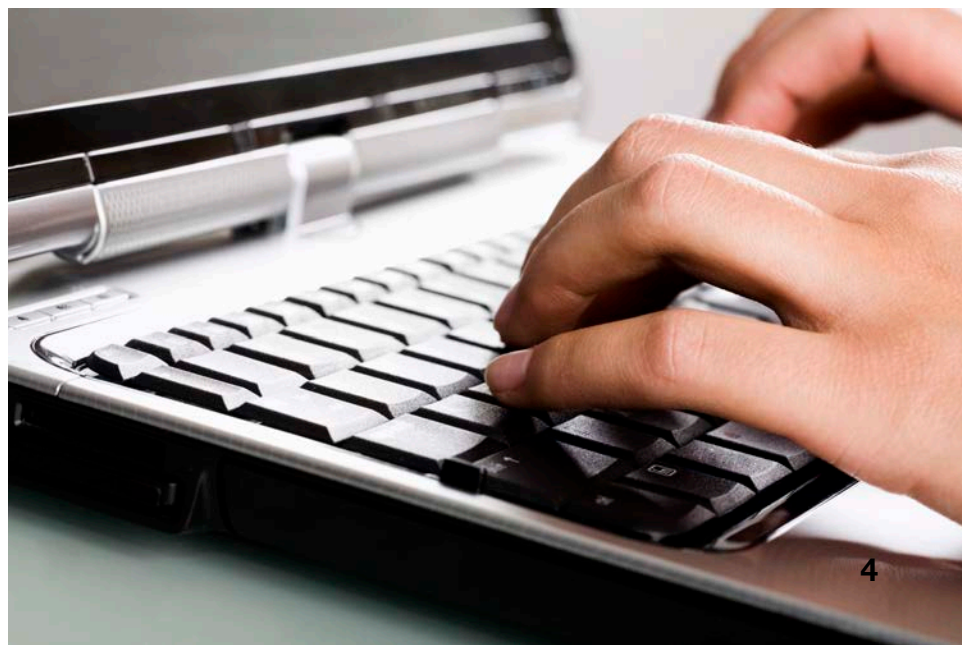
“Take advantage of recent technology such as Youtube. I think that students learn better visually. If the teacher showed a video or power point demonstrating the subject they are learning, I think it would be easier to understand and also interest the students.”

Use Tech to Connect to “Real World”

“Using technology is a smart and sensible way to bring us into the “real world” with a breath of expectancy of what to see and excitement of what to come.”

Use Technology to Communicate with Students

“...since almost every high school student has either a computer or a cellphone, I think that more technology should be used to make communication between teachers and students easier.”



“Real World” and Relevant Learning

Educators said ...

Create Dialogue with People Outside of Class

“Find ways to promote meaningful dialogue not only within the classroom but outside with those with lived experience.”

Engage Students in Social Justice that is Meaningful

“With the onset of ‘WeDay’ we must not lose sight of the need to take care of our backyard before we look to international matters.”

Connect to Outside World and Community

“We have started to develop a Cultural Village concept where we have established 4 tipis and are developing the program which teaches students in a traditional setting by using Elders and community members as instructors to teach traditional things like beading, leather work, tracking, story telling, bannock making, etc. The intent is to eventually offer this experience to other schools and have our students involved in the teaching.”

Student Action

“Learning is maximized when the tasks are authentic and there is a direct connection between the learning and the students own life and well-being. Activities that engage the students in projects that harbor a positive social message are becoming more evident in our schools. For example, learning that challenges students to research and volunteer for a community development project, fund raise for a worthwhile cause, or research an issue and suggest solutions that can be acted upon are always powerful ways to engage students and excite their sense of social responsibility. Tasks such as these - authentic and practical - help feed a sense of power, responsibility and accomplishment and significant amounts of learning can be integrated into projects such as these.”



... Students said

Take Students Outside of Class

“Being able to go somewhere where they actually do the things we learn would keep me way more interested.”

Incorporate News and Current Info to Lessons

“In courses like math it doesn’t seem like I will ever need to use some of the stuff they are teaching us and stuff like socials they need to keep the history but as well add more current events and newer things that are resourceful for us.”

Apply Lessons to Real World and Future

“I want more subjects in my classes made more useful and interesting, and about stuff we do need for the future, not something to just pass the year.”



Personalized Learning for Students

Educators said ...

Give Students a Voice and Choice in What They Learn

"Allowing students more choice in what they learn both within a subject area and also to pursue an interest in a focused area like the arts music, dance, science etc"

Vary Up Teaching Techniques to Meet Different Individual Learning Styles

"Providing students multiple ways to express what they understand and having the teacher teach concepts multiple ways to engage all learners. The use of technology, group work, hands on creativity and written work, creating videos, etc."

"Differentiating instruction according to learning styles is important - kinesthetic and tactile learning engages students and improves retention and understanding."

Choice in How They Demonstrate What They Learn

"Engaging them in creating a 'product' (e.g. music video, Youtube video) that incorporates a variety of information and learning goals."

"Students who are given the opportunity to design an activity that will show they know the material often put more effort than if they are restricted in the methods of demonstrating the material."

"Students could use 'Glogster' to write a blog for a research project."



Create New Learning Experiences

“There will never be a perfect way of teaching every student. There are different ways of learning and different subject areas that all students will have different opinions on. The best we can do is to vary the way we are educated in order to offer areas that will connect with at least a few students at all times. Education is a beautiful thing; they say: knowledge is power. Experience allows us the greatest amount of growth. The greater the number of varied experiences, the more we will grow.”





thoughtexchange

Thoughtexchange is used by school districts across North America to connect people, information and processes in one experience. It's where engaged participants can exchange thoughts and ideas, and work together to reach shared goals. The process was developed to address a lack of engagement and participation that plagues more traditional forums, like focus groups and surveys. With Thoughtexchange, stakeholders are onboard faster and find the process easy and flexible to use. As a result, you get insights from a broader spectrum, allowing you to move forward with confidence.

Get in touch today.

I believe school communities are starving for this kind of input, and I couldn't be happier that we chose to go with Thoughtexchange to engage our parents."

Cam McKeage
Associate Superintendent
Prairie Land Regional Division

