



GETTING DISENGAGED STUDENTS BACK ON TRACK

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In a recent report from the Grattan Institute, 40% of students are disengaged from learning and falling one or two years behind their peers. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the risk of disengagement from school due to challenges in learning from home, health and wellbeing factors.

Students are disengaged when they do not participate in areas of school including academic, social and extracurricular activities, feel excluded not feeling they belong in school and do not take responsibility for their learning demonstrating limited time on task

behaviour. Of additional concern to schools are the increasing numbers of disengaged students who are not enrolled, have very poor school attendance and who display behavioural problems leading to suspension.

What to do about student disengagement

To reduce disengagement, we have to do something about students' social and emotional competence. Here's what's happened.

As a result of the stresses associated with returning to school, COVID, at home learning and social isolation, many students' social-emotional developmental capabilities -resilience, confidence, frustration tolerance- have taken a step backwards – and need to be strengthened as quickly as possible through social and emotional learning (SEL). Higher levels of social-emotional competence are associated with greater degrees of school belongingness and engagement.

Social-emotional learning increases the likelihood of students' sense of belongingness as well as social and academic engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

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SEL is essential for school belongingness

Dr. Kelly-Ann Allen
Monash University,
international researcher
and thought leader



This is what I think.

If you want to intervene immediately to prevent/reduce disengagement and increase students' sense of belonging, one great place to start is from the beginning of Term 1, ensure that you have in place and timetabled in the curriculum for all students, a best-practice, social-emotional learning program (like You Can Do It! Education recognised by Beyond Blue – Be You).

Here's why.

1. For students to feel connected to school and want to be involved, they need to anticipate and experience success (academic, extra-curricular) as well as positive relationships (peers, teachers). Success and friendships are not automatic. They take time and work and require the ability to persevere and manage learning frustration, work in teams and different social skills. It is clear that in order for students to be successful and make friends, they need a well-developed array of social-emotional competencies -positive attitudes (e.g., self-acceptance, optimism, growth mindset) and social-emotional skills (e.g., resilience, confidence, persistence, goal setting/time management, teamwork). These we teach in our **Program Achieve** curricula.
2. In order to cope with the stresses of COVID-19 including home schooling, social isolation, students need to continue to have opportunities through social-emotional learning to develop self-awareness/self-management of emotions and behaviour, social awareness (empathy) and social skills (conflict resolution, teamwork).

While not the focus of this blog, school practices and teaching pedagogy can promote student engagement including but not limited to relationship building, finding the right balance between structure and student autonomy, enhancing student participation in decision making and employing technology to enhance instruction (<https://www.cfchildren.org/blog/2020/10/building-student-engagement-through-sel/>).