

THE ADVOCATE



Be a Champion

A creative campaign inspires students to take a stand against negativity on social media.

4



Activity Connection

Knitting clubs teach students valuable lessons about patience and perseverance.

5



Make the Time

Imagine the possibilities when you let x = more diverse activities.

6

The Tools of Engagement

Mapping, Measuring, and Managing Student Participation

BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

The evidence is too important to ignore. Student activities offer an affordable, common-sense strategy for keeping kids in school and helping them to thrive. So how can educators ensure that all students are engaged, especially those who are at risk of slipping through the cracks? An easy-to-use web-based application from the Alliance for Student Activities and Software 4 Schools is providing the answers. With ENGAGE, educators can efficiently map activity participation, measure performance, and build a community that offers nurturing connections for all students.

“If you look at studies that have been done over the past two decades, there is a clear and recurring connection between students that thrive and their level of engagement in arts, athletics, and activities,” said Bob Tryanski, executive director of the Alliance for Student Activities. “In an age where everything is data-driven, research-based, and meticulously measured, why aren’t we gathering data on the metrics that matter most and using that information to better understand each student’s interests? Educators need an easy way of measuring student involvement, identifying students who are at risk, and matching students with the significant adults who can provide guidance.”

To illustrate the positive impact of tracking and using data in promoting student success, Tryanski points to work done by Robert Balfanz, PhD, a research professor at the Center for the Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University School of Education in Baltimore, MD. Through his research, Balfanz has identified factors—described as the ABCs—that can predict how likely a student is to drop out of high school; these indicators are attendance, behavior, and course performance. →

$A+B+C+X = \text{Metrics That Matter}$

Let A = Attendance

Let B = Behavior

Let C = course performance

Let X = Student Engagement



“Once you know who the disengaged students are, it’s much easier to get them back in the game by helping them to explore their interests and connecting them with significant adults who care.”

Balfanz explains that, for most students, the process of dropping out begins in middle school when students develop habits that predict whether or not they will graduate. The ABC indicators can provide an effective early warning system when educators make the time to regularly review data and then design appropriate interventions that can help students stay on track.

School-sponsored, adult-supervised, student-driven activities are an intervention that makes sense. “Student activities are excellent examples of two powerful approaches,” Balfanz said. “They make school an engaging place where students want to be and where they can feel valued and successful, and they increase the number of adults who can form supportive relationships with students.”

Michael Buss has made it his business to make the lives of teachers easier. As a partner and application developer at Software 4 Schools, Buss creates quality software products that meet the needs of educators. Research detailing the value of student activities spurred Buss’s interest in developing a product that could help teachers and administrators manage student activities programs more efficiently. With ENGAGE, educators can easily monitor all the metrics in the education equation, including activities participation, attendance, and performance. The program uses information from the school’s database and an online student survey to identify student interests, create club rosters and distribution lists, and manage forms and calendars. The data is readily searchable so that administrators can focus on the details that are most important to them. The best part is that the information is delivered on an all-in-one platform that makes it easy to manage every aspect of an activities program, from recruiting and scheduling to organizing resources and communications.

For Buss, one of the most exciting applications is the use of key indicators to identify students who may be at risk. In this way, the program functions much like the early warning system described by Balfanz. “My goal is for educators to be excited about the ease

of managing their activities and to discover, in time, that they are making a difference in the lives of their students based on actions they are taking as a result of the data,” said Buss.

The ability to identify at-risk students facilitates the mission of the California Association of Directors of Activities (CADA). A goal of the organization is to promote healthy connections and a positive school environment for all students. CADA president Mike White explained that a way of tracking and reporting on school-wide activities through one user-friendly program has been a missing link in education for too long. Beginning in the fall of 2014, more than 20 CADA-member schools started using ENGAGE. “We know that kids who are involved in school are more likely to stay in school,” said White. “This system is going to give us an easy way to see what our kids are doing and to look for those who are not doing anything. That is valuable information that can help a school improve its climate and help us do our jobs better.”

Daniel Keever, principal at Salem High School in Virginia Beach, VA, is hoping that information obtained through ENGAGE will increase graduation rates and facilitate student connections with activities and adult advocates. A recent accreditation review revealed that not every student at Salem High could identify with at least one adult mentor. Keever wants to improve those results and plans to use the metrics captured by ENGAGE to identify students who aren’t connected and to then take corrective action. “I’m convinced that activities participation beyond the normal school day puts students in a position to enjoy what they are doing, see the relevance of their time in school, and add to their options when they graduate,” said Keever. “When we can easily identify disconnected kids, we are provided with a recruiting opportunity and a chance to invite students to be involved. We have not had a way to effectively track this information in the past. Easy access to this data will allow counselors, advisers, and other staff members to target disconnected kids and will lead to important conversations about student interests.”

For Leslie Miller, student council adviser at Salem High School, it was her own experience as a high school student that convinced her of the value of activities, and she believes that all students should have opportunities to participate. But with 1,700 students on campus, tracking involvement has been a daunting task. She is looking forward to an easy solution that allows information to be mapped, measured, and reported in a variety of ways. “As a student, my life completely changed when I got involved in activities. I felt like I was a part of something and no longer just a number,” said Miller. “As a teacher, I have students who are self-starters, but I also teach a lot of at-risk kids who aren’t involved and feel like they don’t belong. With this program, we can find those kids and help them to feel more comfortable getting connected to their school.”

In addition to identifying at-risk students, educators at Salem High School plan to use the information provided through ENGAGE to reward students who are already actively involved. Miller hopes to use the system to track a class competition that will recognize students for their participation.

Miller is also pleased about the time-saving features that the program offers. Once populated with student information from the school’s database, the program can create club rosters, show attendance, record service hours, manage a calendar, and create a mailing or distribution list.

At Edison Preparatory School in Tulsa, OK, educators plan to put ENGAGE directly into the hands of their students. Through the program, students will be able to view a list of all organizations,

clubs, and service opportunities at the school. Students can easily find information about each group, connect with other students who share a common interest, request to add their names to the roster, or send a quick message to the adult sponsor. Students will also be able to create a transcript-in-progress that allows them to actively track their own activities and service hours.

Former Edison activities director and recent retiree Gayle Wallace was part of the team who selected ENGAGE as a tool for sparking student engagement. She will continue working with the Edison administration throughout the program's implementation. "It is important for staff to monitor student involvement, or the lack of it, when looking at indicators regarding student performance," said Wallace. "But we also plan to use ENGAGE as a tool to help students find organizations and clubs in which they may have an interest. Communication is important, and ENGAGE will facilitate this by listing all of our groups and allowing our students to check out opportunities. We also plan to use this as a tool for our students to keep track of their own involvement, which will help with resume writing."

Activities matter. That's a fact. "We know that when a high school student is meaningfully engaged in at least two activities for about 10 hours a week, then that student is in the zone. Every performance metric improves: test scores, grades, graduation rates, college and career readiness, and life choices. It all gets better," said Tryanski. "The challenge is to find a way to take a quick snapshot of the student body and instantly identify those students who are outside the zone. Once you know who the disengaged students are, it's much easier to get them back in the game by helping them to explore their interests and connecting them with significant adults who care."

Keever believes that ENGAGE will provide that important snapshot, and he is looking forward to the prospect of having access to indicators about performance, involvement, and attendance all in one flexible platform. "My main job is to ensure that our kids graduate on time and have options after high school. I believe that it's important to track student participation because involvement puts students in a better position to succeed," he said. "This type of information will empower me, as an administrator, to make decisions that will best serve the needs of our students."

By mapping participation, measuring performance, and efficiently managing the student activities program, educators can establish an early warning system that identifies disengaged students and create a campus that invites the involvement of all students. ●

FOR MORE INFORMATION regarding research studies that document the positive impact of student activities, go to a4sa.org/Bibliography.



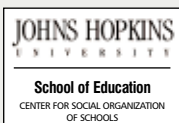
"Activities participation beyond the normal school day puts students in a position to enjoy what they are doing, see the relevance of their time in school, and add to their options when they graduate. When we can easily identify disconnected kids, we are provided with a recruiting opportunity."

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

a4sa.org/resources



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF ACTIVITIES (CADA) As the largest statewide support network for activity directors in the nation, CADA's mission is to promote leadership development through student activities. The organization offers extensive resources and training opportunities for both advisers and their students.



CENTER FOR THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS This center at Johns Hopkins University concentrates its considerable research and development resources on improving low-performing schools and the education they offer their students.



ENGAGE This easy-to-use web-based application is an efficient way to track activities, monitor performance, and efficiently manage any student activities program. The application provides educators with tools to identify students who might be slipping through the cracks. Students are also able to locate information on activities of interest and to track their own participation.



SOFTWARE 4 SCHOOLS This organization works with educators to design software applications that meet the needs of teachers. They have recently partnered with the Alliance for Student Activities to create ENGAGE, a tool that eases the management of student activities programs.

#iCANHELP: Creating Compassion on Social Media

IT'S NO SURPRISE that social media use among teens is on the rise. Recent studies indicate that 77 percent of teens in America have a cell phone, and the majority of them communicate through social networking sites.¹ Unfortunately, the statistics show cyberbullying is also increasing at a disturbing pace. An analysis of adolescents who use social media found that 33 percent have been the victims of cyberbullies, 95 percent have witnessed online bullying, and 90 percent of those witnesses have ignored social media attacks made on others.²

For Kim Karr, leadership teacher at Excelsior Middle School in Byron, CA, a cyber-attack aimed at a colleague provided a telling view of the impact of online negativity. While the content of the online comments troubled Karr, she was equally concerned about the lack of action on the part of student witnesses. Through her investigation, Karr discovered that many students wanted to do something about bullying and negativity on social media sites, but they lacked the tools to respond.

The incident inspired Karr to cofound #iCANHELP, a program designed to help kids take a stand against cyberbullies and online negativity. Through assemblies, presentations, social media campaigns, and student leadership training, students are empowered to become champions in the fight against negativity. Kids learn how to lead by example, report negative behavior, block repeat offenders, and spread the word about the power of encouraging messages.

Karr explains that the positive school climate promoted by #iCANHELP is contagious. She originally designed the program for students at Excelsior Middle School, but it was so impactful that she now spends her breaks presenting #iCANHELP to other schools. "I get messages from students every day thanking me for creating a much-needed campaign," said Karr. "#iCANHELP has completely changed my campus,

and educators from other schools have shared the change it has made on their campuses as well. I love that our students feel empowered and enjoy coming to the happiest school on earth."

Through her work with #iCANHELP, Karr has discovered that students aren't the only ones who need to hear the message about the harmful effects of negativity. Teachers have reported that the program has caused them to reevaluate the way they communicate with their students. Parents are also reminded to set a positive example. "I have had to contact several parents about negative posts," said Karr. "It is really hard to educate students on what not to do when adults are doing it." In the case of adult negativity, Karr advises sending a private message to the offender with a respectful request to delete any negative comments.

The positive concepts stressed by #iCANHELP can be used to promote kindness throughout the school year. At Excelsior Middle School, #iCANHELP is now being offered as a club so that all students have the opportunity to be involved. Educators from other schools have also contacted Karr for advice on establishing #iCANHELP clubs and kindness events. "The compassion piece has been missing [in social media communications], but now we are making it cool to be nice," said Karr. ●

TO LEARN MORE about #iCANHELP and how you can join the campaign to delete negativity on social media, see icanhelpdeletenegativity.org.

TO VIEW VIDEOS from the campaign, go to a4sa.org/iCANHELPvideos.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Amanda Lenhart, "Teens, Cell Phones, and Texting," *PEW Internet*, March 19, 2012, pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Teens-and-smartphones.aspx.
- 2 "Cyberbullying Statistics," *Internet Safety 101*, accessed August 8, 2014, www.internetsafety101.org/cyberbullyingstatistics.htm.



Staying the Course: Relief for At-Risk College Students

IN A RECENT ARTICLE from the *New York Times Magazine*, writer Paul Tough explored trends in college graduation rates. He noted that more than 40 percent of American students who start at a four-year college have not earned a degree after six years. In addition, whether a student graduates or not seems to be related to how much money his or her parents make. Only a quarter of college freshmen

The New York Times

from families in the bottom half of income

distribution earn a bachelor's degree by age 24, while almost 90 percent of freshmen in the top income quartile will complete their degrees.

For researchers at the University of Texas (UT) in Austin, these findings are no surprise. Thousands of students at UT have arrived on campus with good intentions but have then been derailed by financial obstacles, fear of failure, or lack of emotional and social support. UT educators' experience with simple, effective interventions is proving that if you want to help low-income students succeed, you must address their fears and help them establish a sense of belonging.

UT chemistry professor David Laude has been helping at-risk students since 1999. Influenced by his own experiences as a college freshman, Laude suspected that many students weren't failing because they lacked ability. As he began his research, he discovered that most of his struggling students were from low-income families, and many of them fit into certain ethnic, racial, and geographic profiles. The default strategy for dealing with failing students was to place them into remedial programs. "This, to me, was just the worst thing you could possibly imagine doing," Laude said. "It was saying, 'Hey, you don't even belong.' And when you looked at the data to see what happened to the kids who were put into precalculus or into nonmajors chemistry, they never stayed in the college. And no wonder. They were outsiders from the beginning."

continued on page 6

Crafting a Close-Knit Community

AT EVANSTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL in Evanston, IL, the knitting club usually serves less than 10 students a year, but for faculty sponsor Nancy Wolf, involvement with the club is time well spent. The small-group setting provides students with a comfortable place to build connections and gives them an opportunity to learn important skills that extend beyond the knitting circle.



Wolf has been involved with the club since 2005, when a group of students approached a colleague about the possibility of starting a knitting club at school. Currently, the group meets once a week after school, and any student or staff member with an interest is welcome to attend. Wolf explains that the club often appeals to a diverse group of students who are all looking for a place to belong. Over the years, the club has attracted artistic students, nonathletic students, quiet or shy students who feel more comfortable in a smaller group, and those wanting to learn a new skill. "Some of our members have been girls or boys who are new to the school, special education students, and those who just need a place to go and a regular group to talk with," said Wolf.

Kellye Self is the faculty adviser for the knitting club at Hoover High School in Hoover, AL. She believes that the smaller size of her group, 20–25 members, can help students find their niche. "We have close to 3,000 students in our school. This makes it a challenge to find a group or a place to belong," said Self. "The knitting club creates a smaller group that students can connect with."

In addition to making important connections with peers and an adult mentor, students learn beneficial skills like cooperation, dexterity, and stress reduction. Both the Evanston and Hoover clubs also include an element of community service, and students work together to create knitting projects that are later donated to a charity.

Wolf believes that, for many of her students, lessons learned in the knitting club are invaluable. Wolf has been a knitter for forty years and has applied the skills she gained as a knitter to many aspects of her life. As a club sponsor, she enjoys sharing these life lessons with her students:

- **You can learn** to be patient, to persevere, and to pay attention to the details.
- **You can master** something that once seemed intimidating.
- **You can learn** to deal with mistakes; for example, it's okay to rip it out and start over—but sometimes it's okay to leave the mistakes behind and keep going.
- **You can discover** that there are purposes for math that you've never even considered, such as calculating the number of stitches per inch and determining how much yarn you need.

For some students, knitting clubs provide the ideal setting for developing meaningful skills and building quality connections. The benefits can be long lasting. "One of my students returned to the high school a few years after she graduated to tell me how she was doing in college and to update me about the knitting projects she had been working on," said Wolf. "Another student completed a hat entirely at knitting club. She was so proud of her accomplishment. Before she graduated, she took the time to make a handmade card for me with a beautiful message about how much the club meant to her." ●

TO LEARN HOW to start a knitting club at your school, review the resources suggested by the Craft Yarn Council at www.a4sa.org/KnittingClub.

TO LOCATE service opportunities for your knitting club, view information from Warm Up America! at www.warmupamerica.org.

At the beginning of the fall semester in 1999, Laude identified 50 students who possessed at least two adversity indicators and invited them to a new program. Rather than “dumbing down” the curriculum, Laude insisted that they master the same material as other students. He supplemented his lectures with extra instruction, paired students with dedicated advisers, and coordinated meetings with peer mentors. The intervention strategies were a success, and the impact went beyond the chemistry class. The group of students, who were statistically on track to fail, returned for their sophomore year at a rate above average, and three years later, their graduation rate was also above the UT average.

Two years ago, Laude was promoted and charged with improving UT’s graduation rate by bringing the strategies he had introduced to his struggling chemistry students to the whole Austin campus. To manage this task, Laude enlisted the help of the Institutional Research team, who analyzed the performance of thousands of recent students. From this analysis, they developed Dashboard, a tool that predicts how likely a student is to graduate by considering 14 variables.

With Dashboard, Laude and his team identified students that had less than a 40 percent chance of graduating. Each of these students was assigned to one or more newly created or expanded interventions including smaller class sizes, peer mentors, extra tutoring opportunities, engaged faculty advisers, and community-building exercises. Some of these students were also invited to participate in University Leadership Network, a new scholarship program that aims to develop leadership skills.

Most college students experience setbacks, but for students with few resources, these obstacles can be devastating. By tracking at-risk students and reaching out to them through simple interventions, UT educators are finding positive ways to help students stay on course. ●

TO READ “Who Gets to Graduate?” by Paul Tough from the May 15, 2014, issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, go to www.a4sa.org/NYTimes-Graduate.

⌚ **MAKE THE TIME**

let $X =$ more diverse activities

Knitting Club
a4sa.org/KnittingClub

Learning to knit is a fun, creative, and cost-effective way for students to practice fine motor coordination and problem solving. With a resurgence in the popularity of this craft, a variety of cool projects and patterns are currently available.

Film Club
a4sa.org/FilmClub

Members of Springfield Public Schools’ film club have experienced all aspects of the film-making process including screenwriting, acting, scoring, marketing, and distribution.

Science Olympiad
a4sa.org/ScienceOlympiad

What began as a grassroots assembly of science teachers is now one of the premiere science initiatives in the nation. Competitions in all 50 states provide rigorous, standards-based challenges to thousands of students each year.

Origami Club
a4sa.org/OrigamiClub

The ancient Japanese art of paper folding can teach students patience and perseverance. It is also an ideal outlet for creative expression.

Game Club
a4sa.org/GameClub

If you love games and want to share your hobby with others, gathering a group of gamers at school can be the perfect, low-cost activity for a wide variety of students.

Green Schools Initiative
a4sa.org/GreenSchools

Do you want to help your school measure and reduce its ecological footprint? The Green Schools Initiative offers the tools for taking action.

Fishing Club
a4sa.org/FishingClub

High school fishing clubs can foster leadership, teach responsibility, promote environmental awareness, and instill a fondness for the great outdoors.

Disc Golf
a4sa.org/DiscGolf

Promote physical fitness and take advantage of the latest trend. In this game, players use a flying disc or “Frisbee” to compete in the ultimate game of golf.

Make the Time.

Alliance for Student Activities

a4sa.org

THE ADVOCATE

The Advocate is published ten times a year by the Alliance for Student Activities, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the value of student activities through advocacy, training, resources, and networking.

a4sa.org

Submissions of student activities research and other inquiries are welcome. Contact advocate@a4sa.org

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