

TARGET INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

Master Capstone Project

Addressing Disengagement and Lack of Participation with Intervention, Prevention, and

Differentiation Strategies

A Classroom Action Research Study

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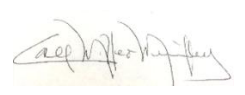


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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate methods, strategies, interventions to increase engagement, participation, and motivation, specifically, to prevent students from being left behind in grade-level progression. The research indicated that interventions increased engagement, performance levels, improved behavior, and closed or shortened gaps in grade-level deficiencies. Selected students were studied that were identified as those whom lack participation, engagement, and had low performance in academics. By implementing a range of intervention strategies, students' deficiencies were addressed and able to see growth over the course of this study. While interventions were not closed to those that were not selected for the study, interventions proved to benefit others as well outside of the study.

Introduction

Education is introduced to children as a positive journey and as a foundation to their future as adults. Common questions such as, “What do you want to be when you grow up,” are introduced to motivate students as they are transitioned through the education system. Through old folklore we learn that success requires sacrifice. Sacrifice is something most adolescent aged children do not yet understand. Compulsory education laws require students to sacrifice time to gain the education/life skills needed to function in everyday life. Success is earned and education provides pathways for every individual to earn and establish a career that can sustain financial means to support their success in life. Technological advancements have taken students away from books and replaced them with gadgets and games that now seem essential to them. Strobel expresses that engagement declines after elementary grade levels (2010). This investigation sought to validate the apparent link between how engagement/participation produces student confidence and contributes to academic success for students. There are many contributing factors that cause students to gain or lose confidence in their abilities.

As someone who has valued education and understands the importance of gaining the skills to advance with age, this study motivated me to give back to those who may not understand the importance of education. While students may not understand the importance or lack confidence, this study is personal to me because I want to be able to connect with students and ensure all leave my classroom with growth. Every student’s disengagement or lack of confidence may not derive from the same issue, but this study sought to understand the many avenues to intervene and find pathways to achieve academic success.

Dilemma Statement

In classrooms, some students disengage during a lesson, display disinterest, and often do not attempt the skill. It is my interpretation that these students lack self-confidence in their ability and automatically give up when challenged with some or all. The challenge is that as instructors, the responsibility to give students the same educational opportunities for all students in their classrooms is a right afforded to students. Teachers must fulfill their obligations and make sure that we do not leave students behind in the curriculum. However, the students will suffer if instructors spend too much time helping a small group of students by holding the whole population back in curriculum progression. Progress monitoring, state testing, and other assessments illustrate the effects of students who did not get full exposure to the required curriculum and students' test results show they are behind grade level expectations.

Rationale

The students in my fourth-grade class all exude the character and innocence expected of their grade level. Washington state and the school district outline state standards curriculum for English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, Science, and Social Emotional Learning to meet standards needed to show proficiencies on the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA). It became evident that some students disengaged or failed to attempt/participate in certain lessons and the results became evident in performance in their state benchmark scores and performance in classroom instruction. I felt the need to study how to improve engagement and participation to ensure these students gain the skills needed to progress to the next grade level.

Question/s

- Do incentives motivate students to improve their performance/engagement in academic settings?

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- How does building relationships/trust improve students' confidence?
- How might teachers accommodate and build relationships with students who demonstrate resistance?
- How effective is differentiation in addressing lack of participation, engagement, and performance?

Literature Review

Intervention and Prevention Strategies

The purpose of intervening in education is to reduce risks identified by means of testing, observations, and diagnosis. Such interventions are used to bring students to or approach levels of expectation set forth by grade-level standards. Intervention and prevention strategies in reading seek to help students before they fall behind in school (Reading Rockets, 2024). Positive effects happen with intervention and prevention strategies. The *First Step to Success* program is a student-centered approach designed for students in kindergarten who exhibit aggressive behavior. The program has shown significant positive effects from decrease in aggression, academic engagement time, adaptive, and maladaptive behavior that have been maintained over time (Golly et.al., 1999). Research by Campbell et. al. (1994) conducted an experimental study of early childhood educational intervention for children from poverty families. Early intervention resulted with positive effects of preschool treatment on intellectual development and academic achievement were maintained through age 12 with the use of educational interventions in early childhood. Bradshaw et.al. (2009) research also examined the longitudinal effects of 2 first-grade universal preventive interventions on academic outcomes (e.g., achievement, special education service use, graduation, postsecondary education) through age 19 in a sample of 678 urban, primarily African American children. Bradshaw et. al's research found that the classroom-

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centered intervention was associated with higher scores on standardized achievement tests, greater odds of high school graduation and college attendance, and reduced odds of special education service use. A study by Leach and Dolan (1985) evaluated a service-delivery strategy of minimal complexity and intrusiveness, designed to increase academic engagement rate in the regular classroom. Intervention, initiated and withdrawn in 2 classrooms of 12–25 yr olds from an Australian school, involved (1) informing teachers of relevant research on time-related controllable classroom variables and (2) telling teachers whether academic engagement rates of selected low-engaged target students were increasing or decreasing after each lesson. The study resulted with academic engagement rates increased substantially for target students in both intervention classes, and marked increases were evidenced for their non-target peers. Withdrawal of intervention resulted in decreasing levels of student engagement.

Teachers and researchers choose interventions that can occur within the general education classrooms. Such interventions are altered to fit the needs of students. Simple to extreme interventions such as: customizing content to fit understanding of students, targeted academic intervention strategies, rearranging desks/students, incentives, social emotional lessons, routine changes, manipulatives, implementing student teaching/voice, and many more strategies. Teachers can apply/change instructional practices to implement intervention strategies. Research by Abbott et. al. (2010) used intervention to modify teaching practices in grades five and six and was evaluated. Results showed that higher levels of teacher implementation of the modified practices favorably influenced students' levels of classroom opportunity, involvement, reinforcement, and bonding to school. Levels of academic achievement were also increased. Harpin et. al. (2016) tested a 10-week Mindfulness program that was integrated daily at the morning homeroom check-in with a classroom of 4th graders and

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compared to a matched comparison classroom. Results showed there were no significant differences on the Mindfulness measures, teachers reported significant differences in prosocial behaviors, emotional regulation, and academic performance within group and across comparison groups. Harpin et. al.'s study found that intervention/change produced differences in students' academic performance.

Incentive-Based Learning

Incentive-based learning is a reward system used to motivate students and reward them for positive performance. Ginsberg's (2015) publication described incentives as extrinsic motivators that are frequently used in education, especially in high-poverty schools. Ginsberg describes it as a popular metaphor for extrinsic motivation is the "carrot and the stick." Ginsberg suggests this way of thinking contrasts with intrinsic orientation to motivation whereby we learn because the learning experience is rewarding in and of itself.

Discussing a student's data with the student can serve as an incentive and motivator. Progressing with intervention produces the ability to become less dependent on interventions and assistance. Rock (2005) studied the effects of a strategic self-monitoring intervention on the academic engagement, non-targeted problem behavior, productivity, and accuracy of students with and without disabilities. Seven boys and two girls of elementary age who received their educational services in two different inclusive classrooms participated in this investigation. Rock's study consisted of students that were taught to use the ACT-REACT strategy during independent math/reading seat-work. ACT-REACT is a combined self-monitoring of attention and self-monitoring of performance intervention designed to help chronically disengaged students take control of their learning. The study found that ACT-REACT was an effective

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strategy for fostering self-management and enhancing the academic performance of students with differing needs in inclusive classrooms.

Incentives for students can vary by needs and circumstances. Rewards range can from monetary rewards, toys, free time, edible treats, parties, and school supplies. Research by Dulleck et. al. (2014) found that using a differences-in-differences strategy; and found that the program improved behavioral and academic grades and reduced the number of unexplained absences for female students, but not for male students. Science Direct defines differences-in-differences as a quasi-experimental technique that measures the causal effect of some nonrandom intervention (Angrist and Krueger, 1991; Wooldridge, 2002; Stock and Watson, 2011). It has been widely used in economics, education, and law to test the effectiveness of policy intervention. In the simplest quasi-experiment, an outcome variable is observed for one group before and after it is exposed to a treatment (Science Direct, 2025). Dulleck's et. al. program was of special interest as it used in-kind (non-monetary incentives) incentives conditional on achievement of a specific target for academic grades, behavior, and attendance, coupled with information sessions on the importance of educational achievement. Using a differences-in-differences strategy, found that the program improved behavioral and academic grades and reduced the number of unexplained absences for female students, but not for male students. In contrast, the program improved scores on a standardized national assessment test for male students.

Modifying/Differentiation Lessons Promoting Students Relationship to Content

Educational content is published as curriculum to support teachers to meet standards set by the state. Norms and customs by geographic regions. The content in textbooks may not be relatable to students across cultures or in every region of the country. Using familiar/relatable

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topics to replace generic text topics, games, and altering lessons are examples of differentiation. A study by Wade (2024) found that modified lessons improved students' engagement, sense of belonging, and learning outcomes. Wade's study focused on student engagement, sense of belonging, and learning outcomes for elementary-age Black students at an inner-city elementary school. Wade's findings also found that when the lessons were modified to be more culturally responsive the student and teacher relationships were observed to become stronger. Study by Zens (2021) focused on student motivation and engagement when differentiated instruction was provided. Study was conducted with two student groups in the 9th grade English course; one group was provided with differentiated learning activities catered to their learning intelligences and the second group was not provided the differentiated learning options. Study found that students in the differentiated group were motivated to complete their work more frequently than students in the non-differentiated.

Modifying lessons to incorporate more collaboration from students promotes peer-learning. Research by Harris (2008) utilized a phenomenographic approach to investigate teacher conceptions of how to facilitate student engagement. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data and a phenomenographic process of analysis was employed to identify qualitative differences between participant understandings. Teacher self-reports of success when using a collaborative approach suggest that more research should be conducted using a range of approaches to investigate the fruitfulness of this strategy.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The Institute of Education Sciences defines Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Goldston, C., 2017). Research by

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Hidayati et. al. (2024) studied collaborative properties of solutions through the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, using a Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach and homogeneous group discussions. His approach studied the engagement of students that ranged from high engagement to no engagement. Hidayati used the problem-based learning model combined with the CRT approach to enhanced student engagement, as the problems presented in learning activities were aligned with real-life situations experienced by the students in their daily lives. After the study, all students' engagement level had increased. Additionally, a study by Anyichie et. al. (2023) found that teachers were able to build on the Culturally Responsive-Self-Regulated Learning (CRSRL) framework to guide their design of a CRSRL complex task. The study was conducted with two elementary school teachers and their 43 students (grades 4 and 5) participated in this study. The study used a multiple, parallel case study design that embedded mixed methods approaches to examine how the teachers integrated SRLPPs and CRPPs into complex tasks; how culturally diverse students engaged in each teacher's task; and how students' experiences of engagement were related to their teachers' practices. Integration of SRLPPs and CRPPs into complex tasks offered content that was beneficial to students' engagement when those practices were used. Anyichie et. al. closed the study by highlighting implications of these findings, limitations, and future directions. To address this challenge, literature on self-regulated learning (SRL) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) both document practices that foster engagement, although from different perspectives.

Multilingual students have challenges of learning a new language and understanding new cultures. Prior research used in a study by Chen et. al. (2017) indicated that ESL students were not interested in instructions that ignore or isolate their home culture or targeted language

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culture. Chen et. al. studied three adult students from Asian countries with intentions to improve their English learning participated in the study. Using an ABAB design (a systematic approach to evaluating the impact of an intervention on behavior), students' participations in the class discussions were recorded and counted. The results showed that the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies increased the frequency of students' classroom participations.

Student Voice/Peer Learning

Washington's Professional Educator Standards Board defines student voice as an ongoing reflective self-assessment communicated by the learner for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. Student voice is important evidence, in addition to student work, of student understanding of his/her own learning process and progress toward the learning targets (Professional Educator Standards Board, (2019). Peer learning is a collaborative practice that involves students working in groups or within their classroom being able to openly discuss and share thoughts and opinions. Peer learning and student voice relates with using those voices to collaborate in educational settings.

Research by Conner et. al. (2022) conducted a study on student self-report survey data. The study examines student engagement across 67 urban high schools in the School District of Philadelphia. Results show that schools with higher rates of affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement differ significantly from schools with other engagement profiles in students' average reports of teacher care and student voice. Path analyses lend support for self-determination theory and corroborate qualitative research that observes that student voice can improve student engagement. By highlighting the roles of teacher care and feelings of competence and belonging, this study identifies key means by which student voice influences student engagement.

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Indications of student voice usage required students to engage frequently to see improvements with their classroom participation and engagement.

Student voice gives indication of participation and engagement by students' acknowledgement and reflections provided. Research by Kahne et. al. (2022) resulted in academic benefits. Kahne et. al. studied student records collected in Chicago Public Schools from the 2017–18 and 2018–19 school years, as well as students' responses to questions administered in the district's 2019 5 Essentials Survey. The research found that in schools that students regard as responsive to their expressed critiques, students have better grades and attendance and reduced rates of chronic absenteeism.

Peer learning affords students the ability to hear content and explanation with communication styles that entails the use of age-appropriate vocabulary and expressions. Silverman et. al. (2017) conducted a study that evaluated the effects of a cross-age peer learning program targeting vocabulary and comprehension in kindergarten and fourth-grade classrooms with substantial proportions of English Learners (ELs). The study followed a quasi-experimental design with 12 classrooms (6 kindergarten and 6 fourth grade) in the intervention group and 12 classrooms (6 kindergarten and 6 fourth grade) in the comparison group. Students were assessed before and after the 14-week intervention via curriculum-aligned and norm-referenced vocabulary and comprehension assessments. The study resulted with analyses of researcher-developed measures that showed positive and significant intervention effects on receptive and expressive vocabulary in kindergarten and fourth grade and comprehension (i.e., understanding of text and strategy use) in fourth grade. Also, the research found positive and significant intervention effects on receptive vocabulary in kindergarten. In general, the intervention had similar effects for ELs and non-ELs.

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Theory of Change

The theory of change for this study is students will increase their engagement and participation when the teacher applies strategies to correct targeted needs.

Methodology

This action research study of a fourth-grade classroom investigated the effects of implementing focused strategies in areas of studies students lacked engagement and confidence. Some students selected have different focuses. Communication with families offered extra support and allowed for opportunity to send additional practice work home that was targeted to their needs.

Baseline data was collected during my initial observations with performance, attendance, and academic progress measured throughout the study.

Additional data will be provided from the following:

1. Progress monitoring.
2. In class assessment scores.
3. Individual observations from engagement/participation.

Context

This study was conducted in a suburban elementary school. Although not a Title 1 school, this school has a diverse community and systems of support for all stakeholders. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) report card for 2024-2025 indicated that the school's families reported (or identified) as 38.2% White students, 27.4% Latino/Hispanic students, 8.8% African American students, 8.6% Asian students, 14.2% students who identified as 2 or more races, 4.9% Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders students, and 6% Native American/Native Alaskan.

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The study consisted for most of the normal school day except for the following: after lunch and recess some students would be pulled for 30 minutes of small group instruction, Multilingual Education (MLE) students would have an additional 25 -30 minutes, focus group time for two that was during math for guided instruction, and one additional student who was pulled for 30 minutes before dismissal for one-on-one instruction for ELA.

Participants

There were 2 groups of students that were identified for this study. Each group had 6 or more students and separated into different groups due to their lack of engagement/participation in different areas of study (Mathematics and English). The class asked to be monitored for progression when they found out there were students selected for the study. This was beneficial to monitor all students to gain insight into the effectiveness of interventions with the whole population. Four students were in pullout groups that received specialized instruction with the aid of paraprofessional. One student had an IEP and 504 plan with specialized instruction and aid of a paraprofessional and a resource teacher.

Actions

Cycle One

Students were identified and target research began. Cycle one included observation to measure their engagement and participation amongst general education classroom, pullout groups, and one-on-one time with resource teachers. Data was collected from initial benchmark, analysis and completion of classwork assignments, and observation of students' engagement and participation of classroom activities. Also, setting goals and establishing a star chart to have their performance rewarded with a stamp if goal was met for the school day were used as self-management strategies. There were set goals individualized initially for the students to achieve.

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After progress was made, students met with the teacher to select new goals they wanted to achieve related to improving their deficiencies.

Cycle Two

Cycle two consisted of implementing the following strategies : incentive based learning with immediate rewards during lessons, full day performance, monitoring participation, intervening with guided practices, building trust/relationship for students to gain comfort communicating with teacher, modifying lessons with multiple strategies for effectiveness, CRT, and evolving to accommodate changes (effectiveness of intervention, evolving with student, and different approaches. Observations of students' participation/engagement, being able to work independently, and academic performance were used to notice if interventions were effective.

Cycle Three

Cycle three sharing data and celebrating with students. Allowing students to see the growth with data provided some with motivation to carry it forward, allowed students to gain confidence, and some to lose dependency on some of the strategies used to make them successful.

Data Gathering Instruments/Assessments

Assessment #1: Benchmark Testing and Class Academic Performance

The initial Benchmark test (Appendices A, B, & C) and classroom academic performance were given to the whole class population. Linking their scores, observations, and building relationships offering insight of those who were struggling. Participants were identified and discussed implementing strategies

Assessment #2: Observation Running Records

The teacher made daily observations and kept records of performance to identify areas of weaknesses. Interventions were done throughout the study. Students lost track of observations due to relationship increasing and they trusted my guidance.

Results

Before the study began, the participants communicated that they were not confident, did not understand the content, or felt incapable of doing the assignments. Most of the students were identified as at-risk of failing to meet grade level standards with their math performance on benchmark scores and a couple that struggled with English Language Arts (ELA). Appendix A & B highlights show progress from beginning of study until completion of performance measures. Some students had performed on their latest benchmark with the highest growth of 50% percentile increase in mathematics and 41% increase in ELA from their initial testing scores. The population of the study had resulted in 83% meeting or surpassing grade level standards and 17% at or approaching grade level standards, which is the complete opposite from initial scores (Appendix D). We ended the study with 3 students over the 99th percentile in mathematics in the whole country. There was also a 95% percentile growth for a student that were below grade-level. That growth is explained on their Benchmark as 95% greater growth than the national sample. All growth was celebrated, regardless of the amount of progress. Additionally, unit assessment scores showed positive results from intervention strategies.

Differentiation of instruction contributed to an increase of the selected students' participation in classroom discussions and raising their hands to answer or contribute to lessons. One student's growth has led to being disappointed if they were overlooked to answer questions

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in whole group discussions. Explanations of how teachers should not call the same students and overlook others helped the student to understand.

Using extrinsic rewards helped encourage participation and engagement and improve behavioral problems. Extrinsic rewards motivated students to achieve goals, obtain growth, and become successful. Extrinsic rewards created competitions with some students, which also motivated students to engage and participate. This method was used for the individuals selected for making their goals and using it as a classroom system for model behavior and academic progression. Rewards ranged from school supplies, sensory items, prize box choices, educational games, choice of work, extra minutes for recess, healthy snacks, and choice of activities. There were chances to save up rewards to earn items like water bottles. Students gained intrinsic rewards for their achievements and were always proud to show their parents their work products. This added the ability to hone in selected students to participate more in classroom discussion and group work because they sought the same rewards.

Building relationships with the selected students rebuilt the foundation of their presence in the classroom. There were connections the students made that helped them gain trust and comfort to be able to be more vulnerable with everyone. The targeted students were observed with an increase in their request for additional help and were able to get help in areas of struggle. Overall, there was a confidence boost in these students and translated to them wanting to help others in areas of struggles that the selected student felt more confident.

A mixture of interventions was applied for a new MLE that did not yet have any reading skills in English. He arrived in the classroom late fall. His transition was sudden, and he did not have much exposure to education in his country. His family communicated that he went to school when he wanted. This student came to us as a 4th grader with the ability to communicate

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in English at a pre-school level. With a mixture of all the interventions and support groups, the student has gained skills that have progressed through kindergarten to having the ability to perform at higher grade levels in just a few months. Appendix C shows the growth in math the student achieved in such a small amount of time. He is able to read and write one syllable words and now asks to help him spell things.

Participation and engagement from those whom the study focused on showed major improvements. Those students who would wander, misbehave, and fail to stay on task have made tremendous improvements. There are instances currently where a few of those students would voice their frustration or sadness if they were not called to give answers or opinions during lessons. Building those relationships and using differentiation to give interest in lesson content really made education relative and interesting. The time and dedication used in this study helped to address the problem and defeated obstacles preventing their participation and engagement.

Conclusion

Before the study, many students lacked confidence in themselves and would disengage, not complete assignments, and never participated in classroom discussions. Their character and confidence showed positive results after the study was completed. Students now ask to help others when they hear a student ask for help or explanation. Students communicate more about their misunderstandings and feelings. The presence of self-doubt was obvious for many students at the beginning of the study. After building relationships, implementing interventions, using strategies to make learning fun and relatable, and gaining confidence these students are flourishing and demonstrating a can-do attitude. Those students now are becoming leaders and helping other students, which promotes peer learning.

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The results were positive and heavily emphasized the use of student voice. Strategies and accommodations were tailored to fit topics with relevance to the students. Giving options to students made them feel valued and helped the success of those who were behind in the classroom. Engagement and participation have increased tremendously with the overall production higher performance in academics.

Limitations

Students were pulled out from 1:10PM till 1:40PM for small group intervention. Some students had additional pull outs for resource during math and ELA. They could affect the results of the study because of the time missed from instruction. There were factors outside the scope of the study that could have affected the results that are as follows: class size, integration of technology uses, and implementing additional support/resources (additional paraprofessionals provided to help intervene). The school doesn't allow students to be assigned homework. Homework and consistent family involvement could have increased students' growth over the course of the study. Students had increases in scores, but extra time would allow more time for intervention strategies.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is that this type of study should be completed throughout a full school year. This would allow more time to see growth over the whole academic year. Schools measure performance with their year-end testing. The second recommendation is that I would recommend new teachers complete this study as part of their professional growth plans. This study focused on differentiation strategies for students. Every classroom is not the same and we have a new set of students each year. I would recommend all teachers have growth mindsets or receive training to ensure you provide students with the absolute best education systems.

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Completing such studies will help prepare teachers to identify problems that can be addressed early in the year.

Reflections

This study allowed me to first-hand explore the effectiveness of good teaching. I had a great mentor to reflect and debrief with during the course of the study. I learned that having a growth mindset is important with teaching and it is our responsibility to ensure students have the best opportunities of learning under our charge. It is imperative to get to know and understand students to have best practices with students. Differentiation strategies are needed to accommodate the needs of classrooms and students value making connections with them. I now have learned to understand that not every year will be the same and as the teacher, I must get to know students, their struggles, and apply my skills to make them successful.

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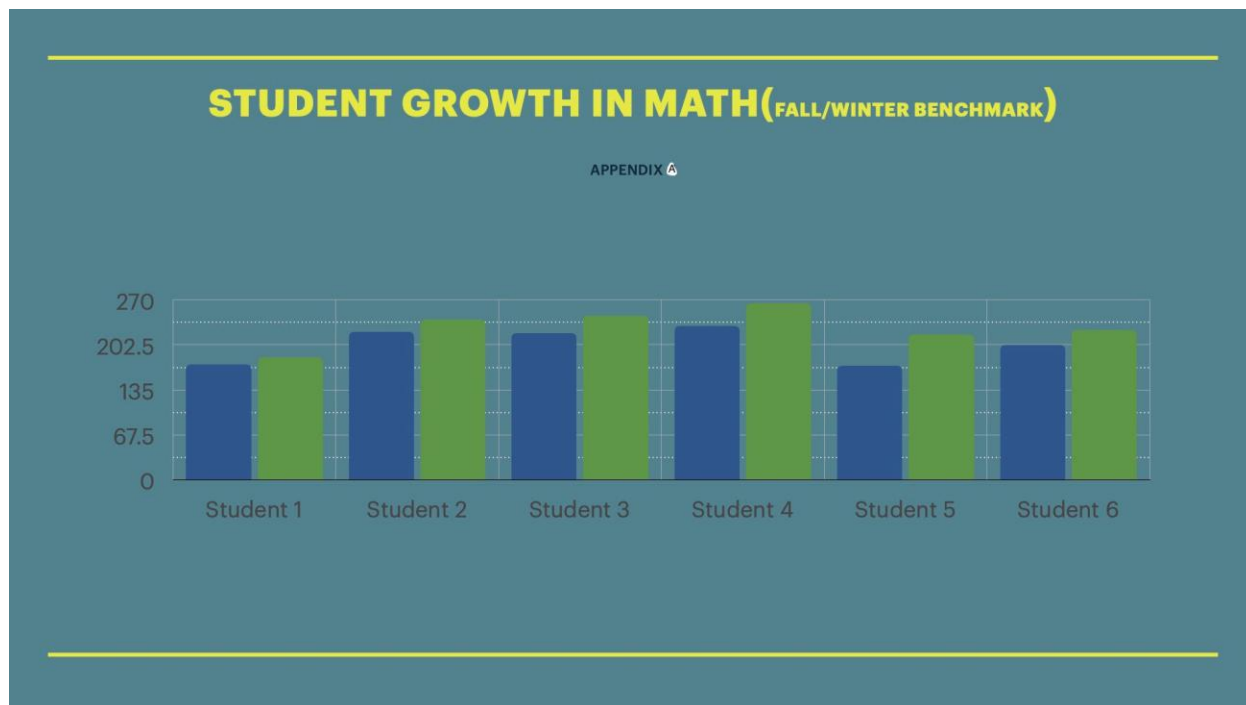
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Wade, M. (2024, June 11). *Exploring the Impact of Culturally Responsive Read-Aloud/Text-Talk on Black Student Engagement, Sense of Belonging, and Learning Outcomes at an Inner-City Elementary School* Northeastern University. <https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:4f24j656n/fulltext.pdf>

Uwe Dulleck & Juliana Silva-Goncalves & Benno Torgler, 2014. "Impact Evaluation of an Incentive Program on Educational Achievement of Indigenous Students," CREMA Working Paper Series 2014-13, Center for Research in Economics, Management and the Arts (CREMA).

Appendix A

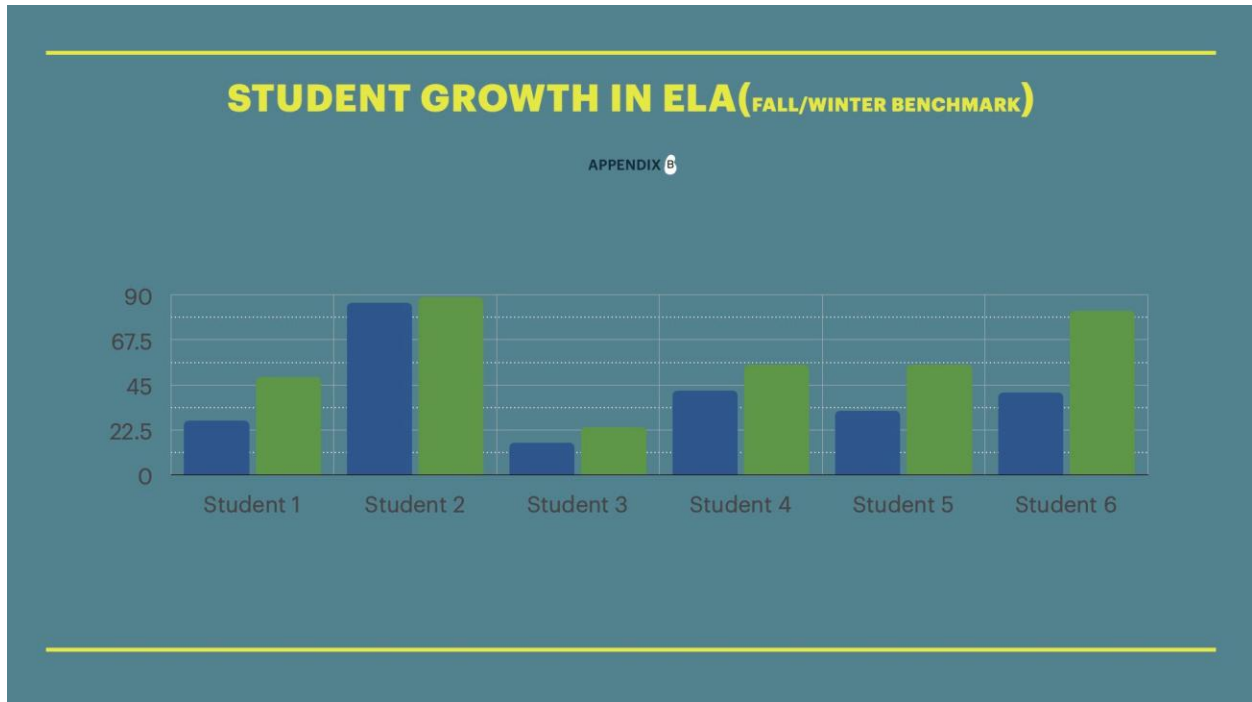
Math Benchmark Test Scores Before and After Study



Note: Blue indicates students' test results from the fall (September) and green indicates scores from winter (January).

Appendix B

ELA Benchmark Test Scores Before and After Study

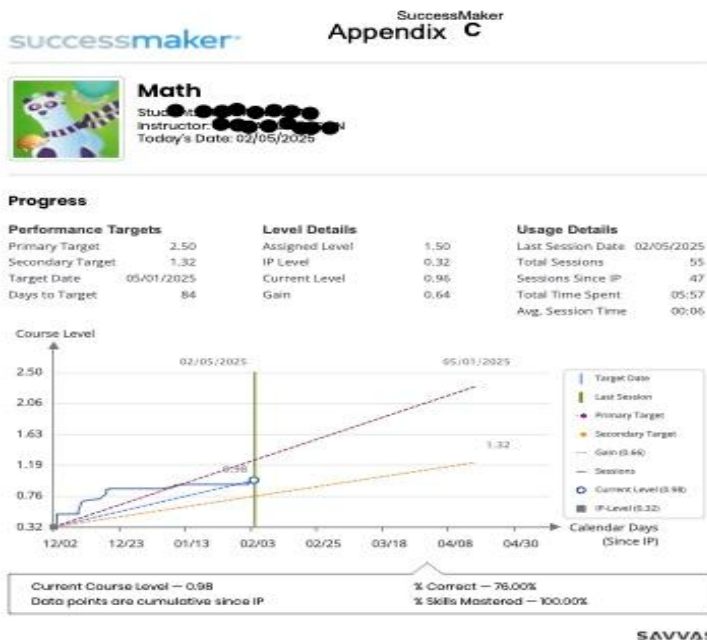


Note: Blue indicates students' test results from the fall (September) and green indicates scores from winter (January).

Appendix C

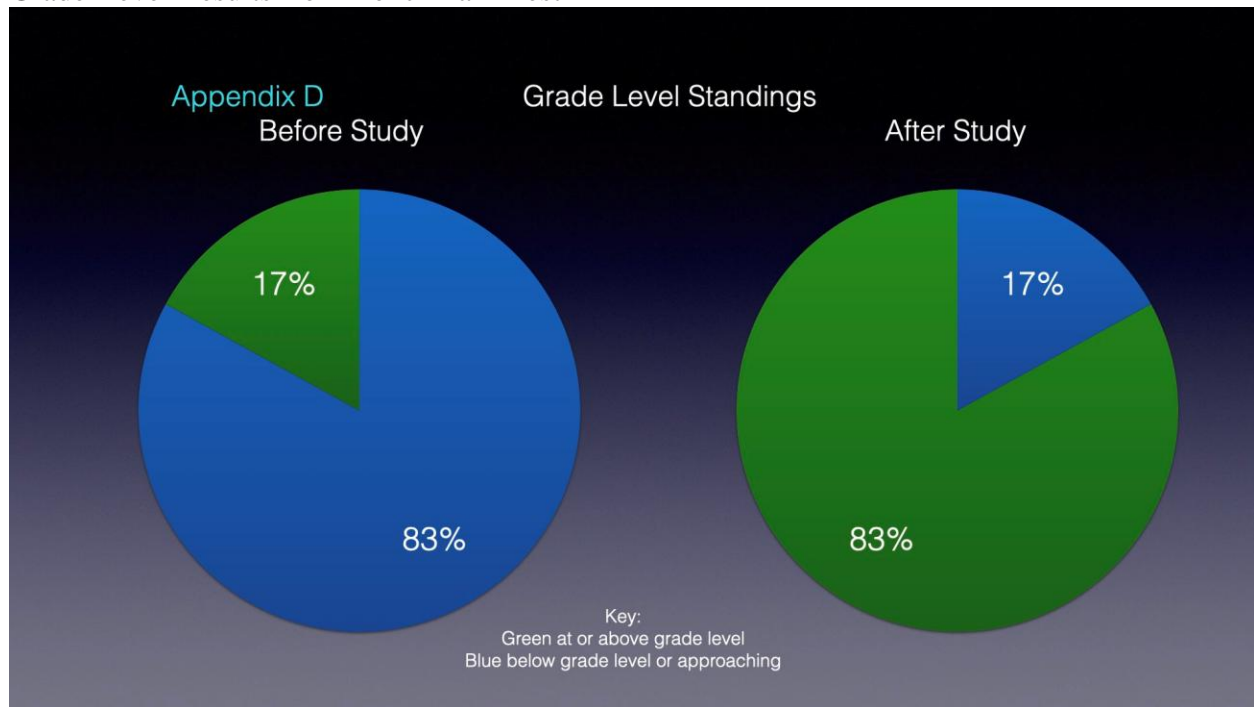
New MLE Progress Monitoring with Success Maker

2/5/25, 3:17 PM



Appendix D

Grade-Level Results from Benchmark Test



Acknowledgements

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I want to thank all the students that were in the classroom during my student teaching. Building relationships, gaining skills in teaching, and seeing the growth occur so rapidly made this experience so rewarding. I will remember you all and hope to see you flourish in the future.

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