

# Student Engagement: What it Means for English Language Learners

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## ABSTRACT

Student engagement is a multidimensional construct made up of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components. Higher student engagement has been linked to better grades and high school graduation rates, while lower engagement is correlated with poor grades, dropout, and retention. Therefore, engagement is crucial for groups who are at-risk of academic failure. This study examines levels of student engagement between English language learners and native English-speaking students, and between males and females within these groups.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

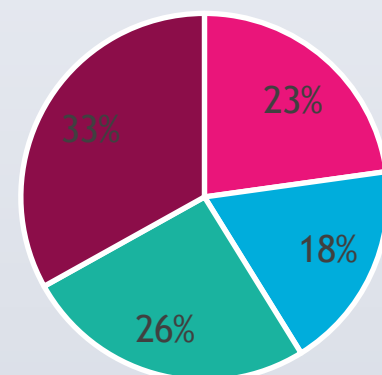
- In 2015, the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NELA) reported that one in every ten students in U.S. public schools is an English language learner (ELL).
- Data retrieved by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2013 revealed that the average reading and math scores for ELL students in 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades were significantly lower than non-ELLs.
- Student engagement is considered to be a multidimensional construct that includes behavioral, cognitive, and emotional components (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris 2004).
- Higher student engagement has been linked to better grades and high school graduation rates, while lower engagement is correlated with poor grades, dropout, and retention (Parsons, Nuland & Parsons, 2014).
- Engagement is malleable and can develop from factors within the classroom and school (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris 2004), which places a special importance on building an inclusive, collaborative, and multicultural school climate.

## METHODS

### Participants

- Participants were 136 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from 2 elementary schools in Wisconsin.
- 56 ELLs (25 boys and 31 girls) and 80 native-English speakers (35 boys and 45 girls) took part in this study.

Demographics of Participants



■ Girl ELL ■ Boy ELL ■ Boy Non-ELL ■ Girl Non-ELL

### Measures

- Student participants completed the Student Engagement Measure developed by Blumenfeld & Fredricks (2005), which measured levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.
- Students also responded to demographic questions regarding ELL status and grade level.
- Three qualitative questions were asked to gather additional information on school engagement.

### Reliability

- To assess whether survey items formed reliable scales, Cronbach's alpha was computed. The alphas for the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral subscales are noted in the table below.

Scale	Mean	SD	Min	Max	$\alpha$
Behavioral	17.12	2.88	5.00	20.00	.59
Emotional	21.70	6.41	6.00	30.00	.89
Cognitive	14.97	4.96	5.00	25.00	.81

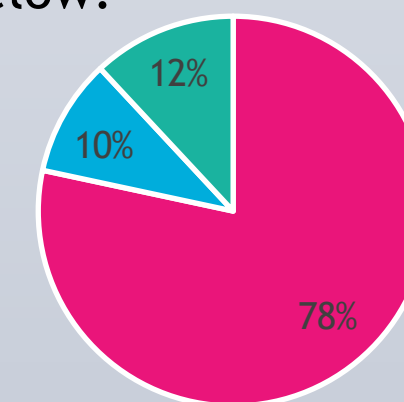
## RESULTS

### Data Analyses

- A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine differences between the groups' levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement as a function of language status and gender.
- The interaction was not statistically significant,  $F(3, 72) = .624, p = .602$ .
- The main effect for gender was not statistically significant,  $F(3, 72) = .646, p = .588$ , indicating engagement levels did not differ for boys and girls.
- The main effect for ELL status was not statistically significant,  $F(3, 72) = .84, p = .476$ , indicating engagement levels did not differ for ELLs and native-English speakers.

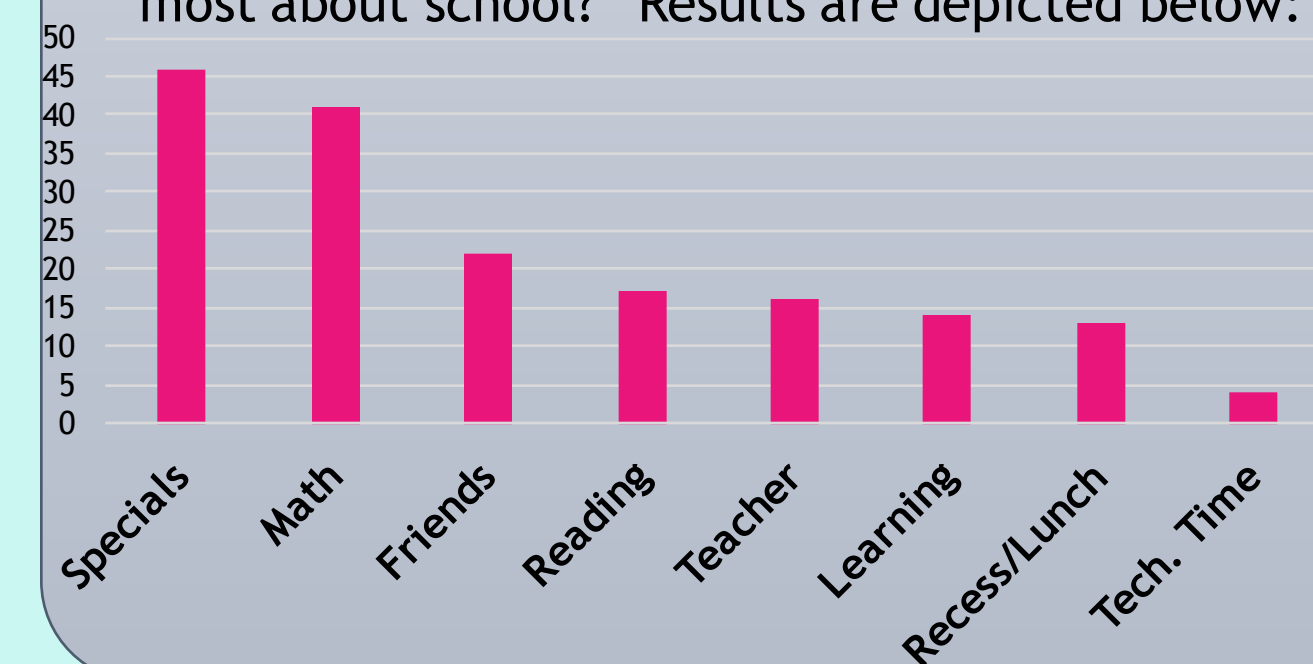
### Qualitative Questions

- To gather supplemental information about student engagement, students were asked, "Do you feel connected to your school?" Results are indicated below:



■ Yes ■ Sometimes ■ No

- Students were also asked, "What do you like the most about school?" Results are depicted below:



## DISCUSSION

- Results revealed that there were no significant differences between engagement levels of elementary-aged ELLs and native-English speakers, or between boys and girls who took part in this survey.
- Qualitative questions revealed that while 78% of students feel connected to their school, 22% do not. Specials classes (P.E., art, music, etc.), math, and friends are students' favorite aspects of school and may contribute to connectedness.

## IMPLICATIONS

- School psychologists and other educators should continue to devote time and effort toward cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally engaging all students.
- Future research should continue to investigate ways to increase student engagement; capitalizing on students' interests (specials classes, math, friends, etc.) may be a pathway to enhancing feelings of connectedness to their school.

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