



Inyo County Office of Education
Barry D. Simpson, Superintendent

The Inyo Insight

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Moving From Absent to Present *By Susan Shebby and Tameka Porter*

Lack of engagement is often a school-environment issue, not a student characteristic

In March 2020, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that more than 15,000 L.A. high school students were not checking in online after school closures, thus highlighting one of the most critical consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on K–12 education: absent students (Blume, 2020). Since then, we've had additional clarity to the scale of the issue—approximately three million U.S. students may have stopped attending school when the pandemic forced many schools to physically close in spring 2020 (Korman, O'Keefe, & Repka, 2020).

Studies on chronic absenteeism suggest that while some students miss school due to family or personal circumstances, others are voluntarily absent because they are simply not engaged with the classroom materials, their teachers, or both (Welsh, 2018). Specifically, when students feel cognitively challenged and emotionally supported in classrooms, feel connected to their schools via extracurricular activities, and have meaningful relationships with adults in the building, they are more likely to attend school (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, &

Paris, 2004).

For many students, the rapid shift to online learning in the spring of 2020 appears to have accentuated existing disparities in engagement. Recently, McREL International (Holquist et al., 2020) invited focus groups of students to share their learning experiences before and after the shift to remote learning. Many reported remaining adequately engaged after the shift to remote learning—but only in classes with teachers whom they found to be engaging prior to the pandemic.

Focus First on Relationships

Relationships do matter. Decades of research show that students who have mutually respectful, trusting, and cooperative relationships with their teachers are more likely to develop confidence in their academic abilities, increase their interest and investment in learning, improve achievement, and have better social-emotional outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

These simple practices can promote positive teacher-student relationships:

- *Notice your students as individuals.* Students value regular, consistent, meaningful, and individual interactions with their teachers (Yu et al., 2018).

They respond well to teachers who correctly pronounce their preferred name, are aware of their academic abilities, and celebrate their success both inside and outside of the classroom.

- *Show them you care.* A meta-analysis of 119 studies with a sample size of 300,000 students linked teacher empathy and warmth to better student behavior, motivation, and achievement (Cornelius-White, 2007). In a seminal study, Kleinfeld (1972) observed the most effective teachers integrated "high personal warmth with high active demandingness." Their students, in turn, demonstrated high levels of engagement, working hard to please their so-called "warm demander" teachers (p. 29).
- *Engage in "same-level" conversations.* Studies find higher levels of student engagement and learning in classrooms when teachers interact with them as human beings, not merely pupils. One simple way teachers can show students they value their knowledge is to encourage them to share their ideas, rather than just recall information.

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History Day Results

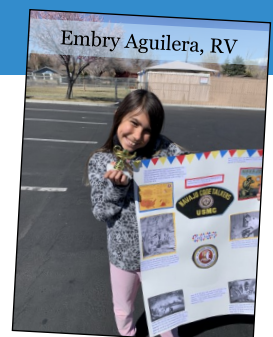
Inyo County's virtual History Day contest was held on March 24th. Students from Bishop Elementary and Round Valley Elementary submitted posters covering a variety of topics capturing this year's contest theme of *Communication in History: the Key to Understanding*.

Students were judged on the historical quality, relation to theme, clarity of presentation, and compliance with rules. The following students will be advancing to the state competition in May:

Colin Noesser from Bishop Elementary, *Telegraphs*
Cosmo Schwartz from Bishop Elementary, *Ernest Shackleton*
Embry Aguilera from Round Valley Elementary, *Code Talkers*
Turquoise Stone from Round Valley Elementary, *The Pony Express*

Thank you to coaches Tiffany Randall and Randee Arcularius, for working with their students to prepare History Day projects at the competitive level, and Pete Schlieker from Big Pine school for working with his students to complete History Day projects at the process level. In addition, ICOE would like to thank Lo Lyness and Betsy McDonald for judging the county History Day competition.

For more information about History Day, please [visit our website](http://www.inyocoe.org) or contact mdoonan@inyocoe.org.

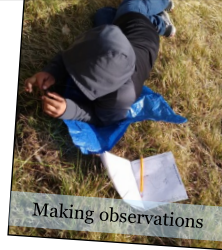


Outdoor Programs are “Branching Out” to 5th Grade!

In the 2020-21 school year, getting kids outdoors to learn has been an ongoing goal, and challenging to achieve due to shortened days, staggered schedules, and hybrid classes. We have been very successful with our 3rd Grade Taking Root outdoor field classes. We created virtual lessons and pivoted between outdoors and online as needed. We always prefer to get students outdoors when possible – not only is engagement for science learning high outdoors, but risk is low for Covid-19 – especially since, along with being outdoors, we are still wearing masks, social distancing, and instructors carry ample hand sanitizer. Students and teachers have been so grateful for the outdoor learning opportunities – Breanne Leeson, of Bishop Elementary, recently said, *“Thank you for all the hard work to keep Taking Root alive. The kids are loving it all and I’m so thankful for the little bits of joy that we can continue to find in our crazy school days.”*

Based on this success, and the desire of 5th Grade Teachers to get their students outdoors to learn science, we are running a pilot 5th Grade program based on the Taking Root monthly field lesson model, and we are calling it (of course) “Branching Out.” We have been working with the Bishop Paiute Tribe through their Americorps member, McKenzie Dale, to find ways to incorporate indigenous ways of knowing and traditional ecological knowledge into the science lessons, and hope to end the year with a service project in the Tribe’s COSA (Conservation Open Space Area).

Students in this program have been going out monthly to explore natural areas near their schools, observe closely, record their observations in science journals, and share their findings with their classmates, while studying local ecosystems and interactions. We hope to expand the program next year, and use Science Camp as a “kick off” for these monthly field lessons to reinforce and build on outdoor science learning.



Spring into Professional Learning

~Building Comprehension, April 12: Support learners to make meaning of and connect to rigorous texts. Use this session to consider practices that help learners take information and make it meaningful and usable knowledge. Register with this [link](#).

~Antiracism and UDL: Building Expressways to Success, Four Part series begins April 13. Teachers and leaders will build expressways to success by examining their inclusive and equitable practices in light of the book *Antiracism and Universal Design for Learning: Building Expressways to Success* by Andraatesha Fitzgerald. [Link](#) to register.

~Universal Design for Learning for Paraeducators, April 8. Part of an ongoing series. For more information and registration, see this [link](#).

~Leading Forward in 2021, asynchronous conference. Join leading educators across California and the nation to learn about strategies, tools, and tips to accelerate learning, equity and well-being. For more information and course offerings see this [link](#).

Browse the Inyo COE PD calendar for other opportunities: learn.inyocoe.org/teachers/professional-learning.

Earth Day Youth Art Contest

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust is inviting all 5th-12th grade students to celebrate Earth Day through art!

[Click this link to view the flyer](#)

All art must be submitted by April 30th



Moving from Absent to Present *continued*

Challenge and Encourage

Disengaged students are rarely overwhelmed; they are more typically, underwhelmed and bored (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). So, instead of “dumbing down” material to reach disengaged learners, teachers should increase the cognitive demands of their classrooms by engaging in these promising practices:

- *Share high expectations and high hopes for learning.* Setting a high bar for students and communicating confidence in their ability to master the material through effort helps students develop a growth mindset, which has been found to mitigate the effects of poverty on achievement (Claro, Paunesku, & Dweck, 2016).
- *Help students connect effort with*

success. Research links student academic self-efficacy—believing that with effort, they can succeed as learners—to engagement and academic performance (Dogan, 2015). Encourage students to track effort and progress over time and reflect on the link between them.

- *Personalize learning.* Ask students what interests them about a particular topic. It not only shows respect for their voices, but also gives them choices in learning, which a meta-analysis of 41 studies showed to be strongly linked to intrinsic motivation, task performance, and engagement in challenging learning tasks (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008).

“I’m Here”

We have long known that students who do

not feel engaged in school are more apt to be frequently absent (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Perhaps the most important takeaway from research, though, is that student engagement is often an environmental condition, not a student characteristic. Thus, it's relatively easy to change. Although approximately three million U.S. students may have stopped attending school when the pandemic began, all hope is not lost. While systemic issues or challenges involving technology access, family situations, or lack of resources are often involved in student absenteeism, educators can often play a role in re-engaging students by supporting them, making them feel connected to the classroom environment, and helping them move from absent to present.

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