

LEARN WELL, LIVE WELL

BUILDING AGENCY IN AN AGE OF AI

National PTA

JUNE 27, 2025



@JENNYANDERSONWRITES



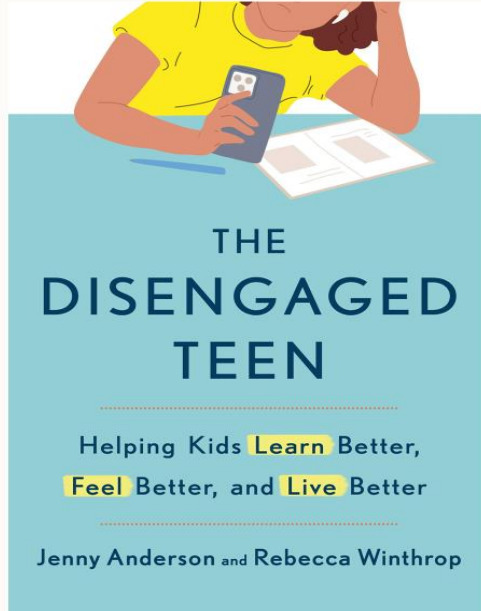
SUBSTACK: HOW TO BE BRAVE



A 3-YEAR JOURNEY INVESTIGATING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



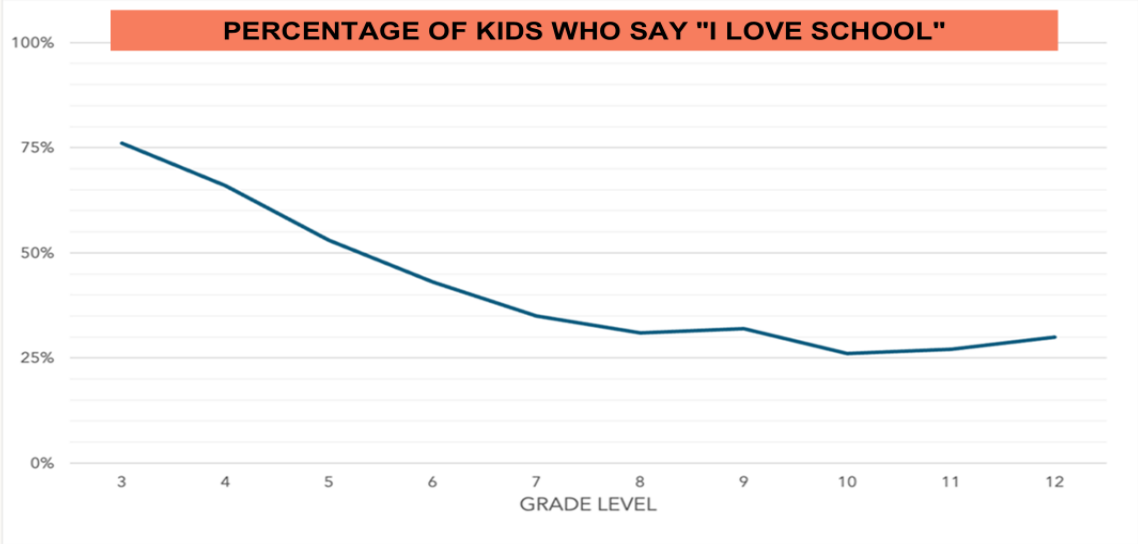
- Interviewed 100 students
- 65,000+ student survey (with Transcend)
- 2,000 parent survey (with Transcend)
- Interviewed Educators, Ed Leaders, Academics





WHAT WE FOUND

MOST STUDENTS BECOME DISENGAGED...



Source: Rebecca Winthrop, Youssef Shoukry, David Nitkin, *The Disengagement Gap: Why Student Engagement Isn't What Parents Expect*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution and Transcend, 2024)

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

(What students *do* with their motivation)

WHAT PERCENT OF 10TH GRADERS SAY:

- At school I get to develop my own ideas.
- Most of the time, I feel I belong at school.
- At my school I get to learn things I'm interested in.

WHAT DO 10TH GRADERS SAY?

I get to develop
my own ideas.

33%



Most of the time
I feel I belong.

39%



I get to learn things
I am interested in.

29%



Source: The Disengagement Gap: Why Student Engagement Isn't what
Parent's Expect. Brookings and Transcend, January 2025.

WHAT DO PARENTS/CAREGIVERS OF 10TH GRADERS SAY?

My kid gets to
develop their
own ideas

69%



My kid feels like
they belong

62%



My kid learns
things they are
interested in

71%



Source: The Disengagement Gap: Why Student Engagement Isn't what Parent's Expect. Brookings and Transcend, January 2025.

ENGAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL FOR LEARNING

ENVIRONMENT

Class
Home
Extracurricular
Peers

ENGAGEMENT



STUDENT OUTCOMES

Attendance & Completion

Attendance ↑
Graduation ↑
Behavior Problems ↓

Achievement

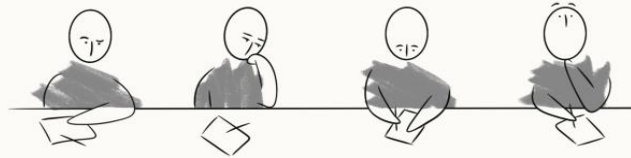
Grades ↑
Achievement ↑
College Attendance ↑

Wellbeing & Mental Health

Prosocial Behavior ↑
Depression ↓
Substance Abuse ↓

A LOT OF ENGAGEMENT IS HARD TO SEE

WHAT YOU SEE



WHAT THEY FEEL AND THINK





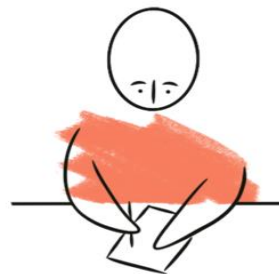
**A NEW WAY TO SEE ENGAGEMENT:
THE FOUR MODES**



**RESISTER
MODE**



**PASSENGER
MODE**

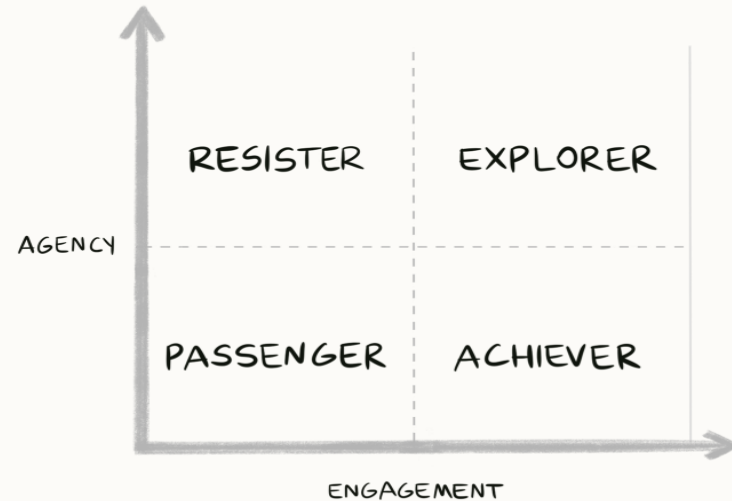


**ACHIEVER
MODE**



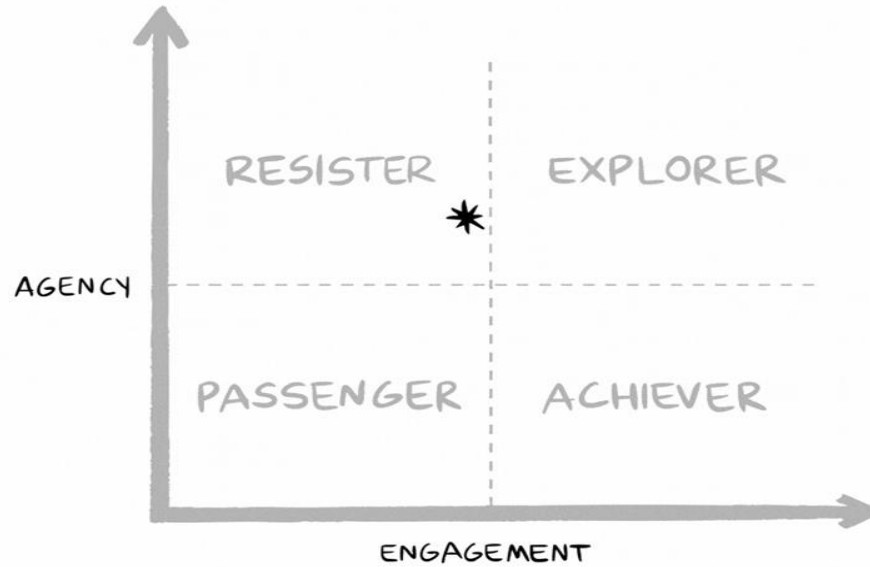
**EXPLORER
MODE**

THE FOUR MODES OF ENGAGEMENT



Engagement: what kids think, feel, and do. Agency: what kids initiate.

ENGAGEMENT IS DYNAMIC



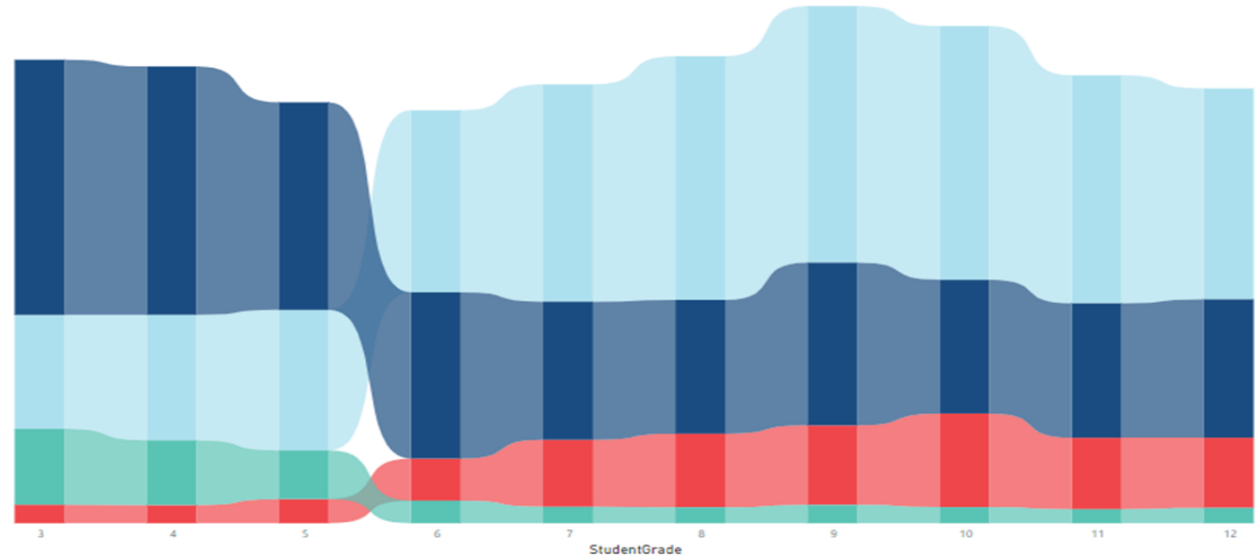
There is a constant flux between the four 'modes' of engagement which is influenced by one's environment.

STUDENTS REPORTED EXPERIENCES SUPPORT...

engagementGroup Resistor Passenger Achiever Explorer

KEY

- Exploring
- Achieving
- Coasting/
Passenger
- Resisting



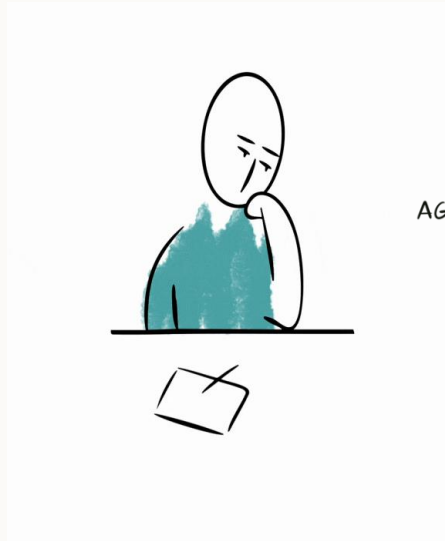


WHY DO KIDS GET STUCK?

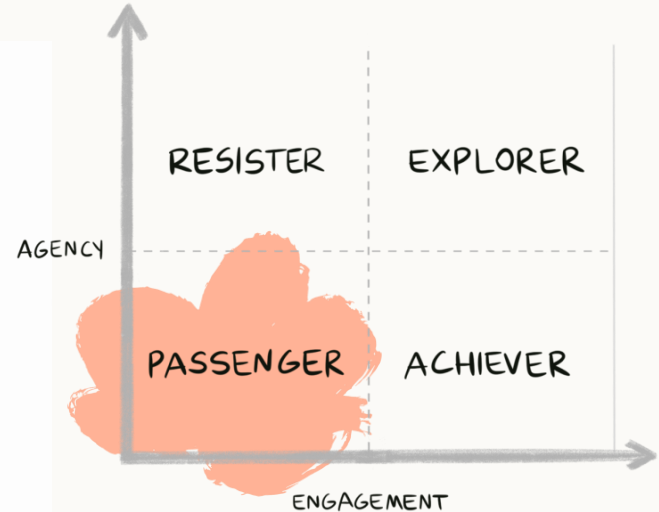
PASSENGER MODE

Why?

- Outside ZPD (Too easy/too hard)
- Lack perceived relevance (to life/work)



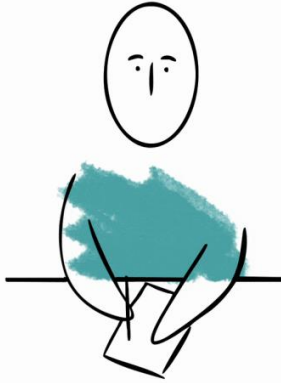
THE FOUR MODES OF ENGAGEMENT



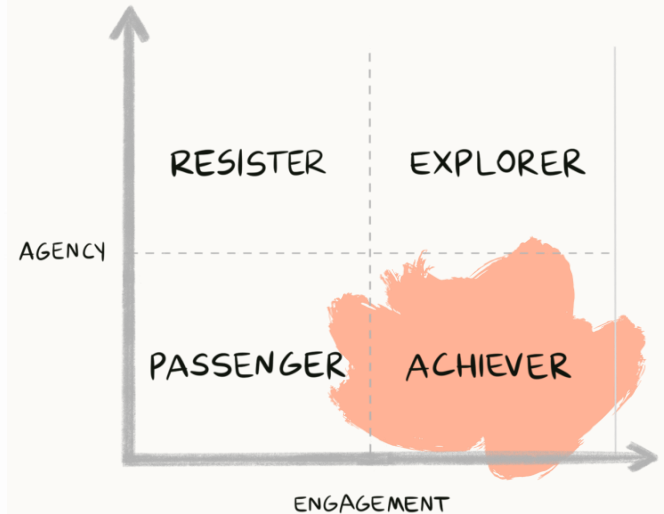
ACHIEVER MODE

Why?

- Strive for excellence (or perfection)
- Competitive
- Afraid of failure



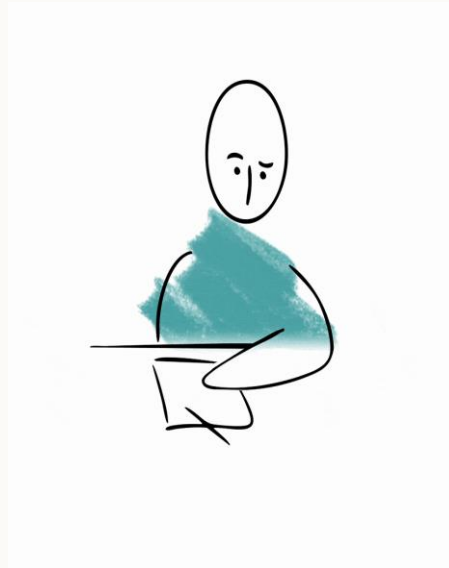
THE FOUR MODES OF ENGAGEMENT



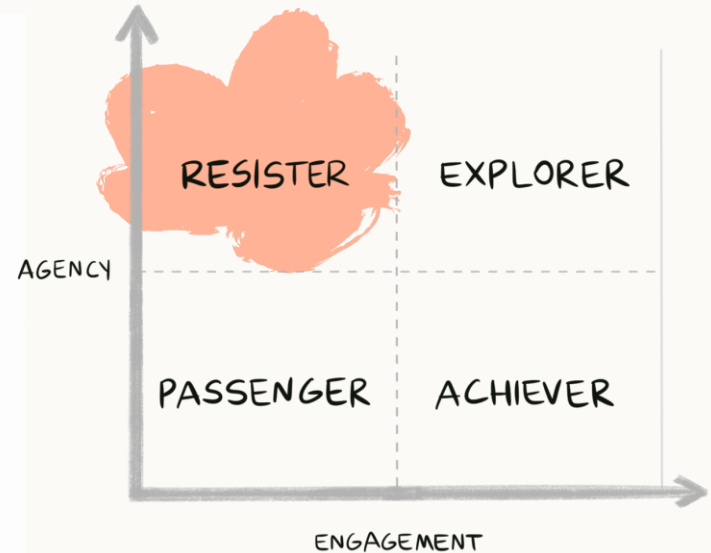
RESISTER MODE

Why?

- Belonging Uncertainty
- Overwhelm
- Bullying
- Mental Health Challenges



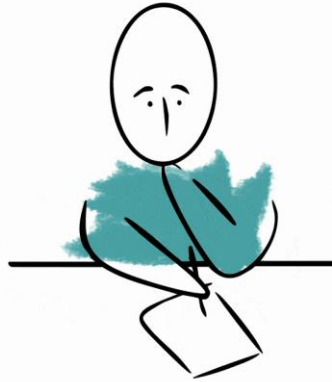
THE FOUR MODES OF ENGAGEMENT



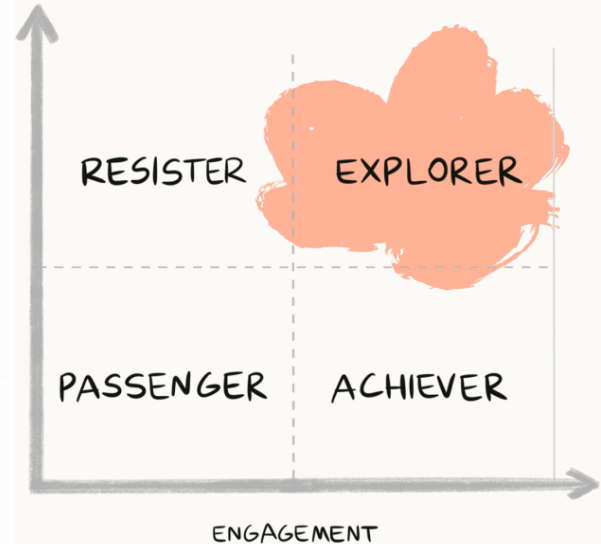
EXPLORER MODE

Why?

- Self-awareness
- Opportunity to make choices
- Ability to pursue interests
- Productive struggle
- Knowledge use



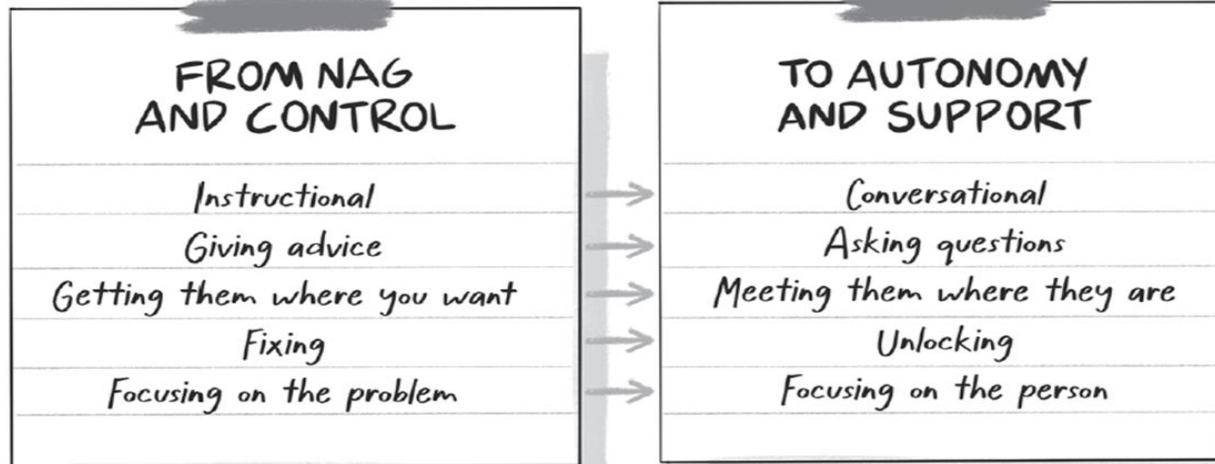
THE FOUR MODES OF ENGAGEMENT





WHAT TO DO WHEN THEY GET STUCK

A SIMPLE WAY TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT



WHAT TO DO WHEN THEY ARE STUCK: PASSENGER



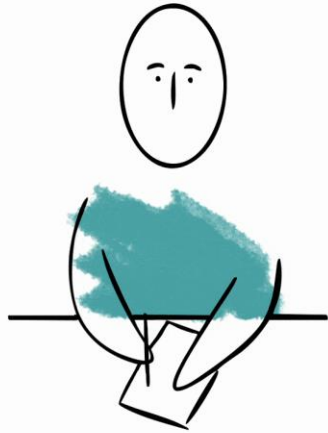
Less

- Nagging
- Planning for them

More

- Autonomy
- Helping them make a plan

WHAT TO DO WHEN THEY ARE STUCK: ACHIEVER



Less

- Focus and praise on Achievements
- Pushing them Harder

More

- Focus on taking risks
- Encouraging sleep, breaks and radical downtime

WHAT TO DO WHEN THEY ARE STUCK: RESISTER



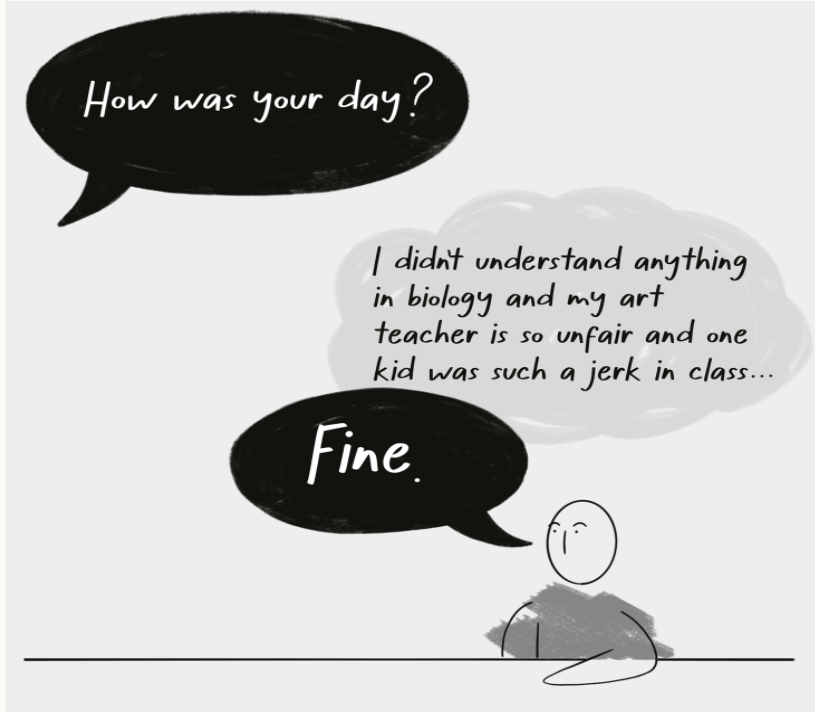
Less

- Confronting
- Offering your answer

More

- Getting in the trenches
- Understanding their why

KEY TO UNLOCKING EXPLORER MODE



- Better discussion
- Model the thrill of learning
- Talk about the process and content, not just outcome of learning
- Share your own productive struggles
- Support healthy tech use



THANK YOU