



Student Involvement Series: Working with Elementary, Middle, and High School Students

Three Ways to Engage Elementary School Students

- 1. Develop subcommittees.** Involve elementary students in the school's RTI²-B plan by developing RTI²-B student subcommittees. Subcommittees can be formed so students can reflect and share ideas on topics like: (a) teaching behavioral expectations, (b) acknowledging student behavior, (c) improving the school's RTI²-B plan, and (d) planning upcoming school-wide events or celebrations.
- 2. Build relationships.** Engage students in the RTI²-B plan by building relationships with them. Strong student-staff relationships can help students feel like significant and accountable partners in the plan. Collaborating with students on subcommittees is just

one way to build relationships. Relationships can also be built by allowing students to submit their input and ideas on school initiatives.

- 3. Gather student input.** Involve students in the RTI²-B plan by providing multiple ways for students' knowledge, opinions, and ideas to be validated. Meetings with students from different grade levels, student subcommittee meetings, and morning meetings, for example, can be used to gather student input and improve the school's RTI²-B plan.

Three Ways to Engage Middle School Students

- 1. Build Relationships.** The transition to middle school typically coincides with rapid changes in physical, emotional, and interpersonal development.¹ This transition may lead to declines in academic performance, self-image, perceived social support, and social relationships. A strategy to help students in middle school feel heard and supported is to intentionally build relationships with students. By doing this, their motivation to participate in class and engage in positive behavior will improve. Just think, would you do well in a class where you felt the teacher didn't support you?
- 2. Survey students.** Another way to engage middle school students is to gather their input through student surveys. Questionnaires can be used to ask students about all aspects of the Tier I plan, including the acknowledgment system, types of rewards, the behavioral expectations matrix, teaching expectations, and the discipline process. Using the

survey results to make changes to the Tier I plan and then telling students how their ideas were used will help students feel like they have a say in what happens at their school.

- 3. Create Subcommittees.** Like student surveys, student subcommittees can also be used to meaningfully engage middle school students. Similar to elementary school subcommittees, developing these subcommittees allows students to share ideas, provide feedback on the Tier I plan, and discuss what could be changed to make it more successful. Students on these committees should have regular contact with faculty, which will build positive relationships as students and staff work together towards a common goal.

Three Ways to Engage High School Students

1. Form youth-adult partnerships. High school students are keenly aware of the problems that face their communities and their schools. When involving high school students in RTI²-B, it is important to create youth-adult partnerships.² These youth-adult partnerships exist in government agencies, foundations, community-based organizations, and businesses; however, they are less common in schools.

In meaningful school-based partnerships, students and adults collaborate by making decisions, developing projects, and implementing change efforts. Successful partnerships are established through authenticity, meaningful roles, and trust and safety.² The following bullet points describe how these elements are present in meaningful partnerships between students and adults.

- **Authenticity** – Students are involved in the planning and implementation of RTI²-B because the initiative directly impacts them.
- **Meaningful roles** – Students are given roles on teams or subcommittees that utilize their strengths and skill sets.
- **Trust and safety** – Adults and students have

discussions about the students' role on the team with dedicated time for reflection. Strong relationships are built by allowing students to fully become part of the RTI team. This means students meet regularly with the adults on the RTI team, review school-wide data, and action plan as a member of the team.

2. Create “student-voice” initiatives. Another strategy to engage high school students is to have “student-voice” initiatives which intentionally allow for students to be part of the planning process. These initiatives give students an opportunity to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers. Allowing students to share their voice increases their sense of belonging, agency, and competence.² Prioritizing student voice also benefits the school by improving teaching, curriculum, and student-teacher relationships.²

3. Include students as part of both planning and implementation. When schools are rolling out new initiatives, students should be part of the planning process. This decision improves student buy-in and increases the likelihood that it will be well received by students. As teams implement, it is important to regularly check back with students for their input and discuss any potential changes to the plan.



Summary

Effective Tier I plans and RTI²-B frameworks involve students in decision-making. Students can be involved in a variety of ways that are based on the needs of their school. RTI teams should collaborate with students throughout the year to ensure that student voices are heard and their ideas are validated and mobilized.

For Further Reading

Feuerborn, L., Wallace, C., & Tyre, A. (2016). A qualitative analysis of middle and high school teacher perceptions of school wide positive behavior supports. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 18*(4), 219-229.

Mitra, D. (2006). Increasing student voice. *The Prevention Researcher, 13*(1), 7-10.

Smyth, J. (2006). When students have power. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 9*(4), 285-298.

Endnotes

¹ Scales, P. C., Van Boekel, M., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2020). Effects of developmental relationships with teachers on middle school students' motivation and performance. *Psychology in the Schools, 57*, 646-677.

² Mitra, D. L. (2009). Strengthening student voice initiatives in high school: An examination of the supports needed for school-based youth-adult partnerships. *Youth & Society, 40*(3), 311-335.

