Independent Learning & Student Autonomy

Give students the opportunity to explore concepts of their own choosing to increase student engagement, achievement, and attendance. (Strategic Plan Goal Areas 1.1.1, 1.2.2, 2.3.1, 2.3.2)

It’s often called student voice and choice. Teachers give students the information they need, frame the essential questions, or pose a challenge, and then they allow their students to determine, within guidelines, how to demonstrate their learning. Any number of effective ways to foster student ownership of their own learning have been used by teachers: project wheels or grids, menus of options, PBL, open-ended assignments, etc. All of those are great ideas, but how does one implement that in a real classroom full of live students? A few pieces in place at the beginning can make the difference.

1. Clear focus and directions: Make sure the desired results are clear to you. If you don’t know what you want, it is unlikely that your students will know, either. Try writing rubrics before writing the directions. Once you know what you expect, clearly communicate those expectations to your students. Make sure your students know what is expected of them in terms of depth of knowledge, product, process, end results, craftsmanship, and goals. Students need to have a clear understanding of the required final outcomes and what is acceptable evidence of their learning. Give students the rubric first, and make sure they understand it.

2. Time and space to plan, iterate, and make mistakes: Students need sufficient time to plan their projects, create several drafts, and correct their mistakes. Make sure to allow enough class time for the results you seek, but don’t let projects drag on. Set reasonable deadlines and let students finish on their own time if needed. Allow students the chance to redo on their own time as well.
3. An authentic audience: Gallery walks are an excellent evaluative tool that puts student work in front of the students’ peers. Flip Grid, SeeSaw, Google Sites, blogs, TED Talks, publications, showcases, and displays are all ways to get student work in front of an authentic audience rather than the usual audience of one.

4. Allow students to choose their end product: Guide students to learn what they need, but give them choices in how to demonstrate that learning. Try giving students the rubric and allowing them to design a learning experience that fulfills the objectives and demonstrates mastery.

**Strategies for Independent Reading**
(Strategic Plan Goal Areas 1.1.1, 2.3.1, 2.3.2)

SSR, DEAR, Independent Reading all have a few traits in common: they use class time and that time doesn’t typically include instructional supports. Research indicates that is not the best practice in independent reading, especially for struggling readers. Readers need instructional supports to grow, improve, and mature. Below are a few best practices in engaging and supporting student reading.

1. Use independent reading to reinforce classroom instruction. Whatever skill students are learning in class likely can be found within their independent reading selection. Preview or review that skill at the beginning of their independent reading time and ask students to explore that understanding through their independent text. Build in a conference or discussion time to gauge their understanding at the end. Meet more often with your reluctant or struggling readers.

2. Peer Conference/Accountability Partnering: Small groups of students can hold each other accountable through peer conference. Set guiding questions for the groups for discussion. Students don’t need to be reading the same books.

3. Global Accountability: Have students blog or vlog about what they’re reading. SeeSaw is a fantastic tool for this, as are Blogger, a class YouTube channel, Google Sites, Google Slides, and iMovie. Share their book journals with the wider world and let your students’ voices be heard.

4. Interactive Reading Journal: Have students annotate the text with sticky notes and then use their notes to create a running interactive reading journal. Give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding through a variety of writings, drawings, annotations, and other informal responses as they read.

**100% GRADUATION**

In every grade level, and in every subject area, our goal is to reach 100% graduation for our students. What you do with your students every day should help to make sure your students are on track to graduate on time.