



IPEI-Funded Programs Increase Student Engagement

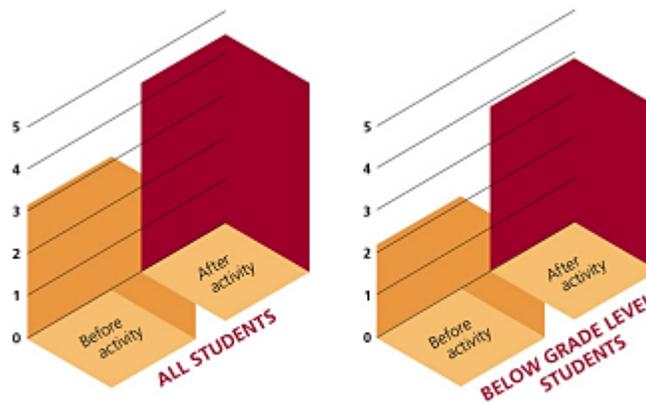
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The Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) now has research-based evidence for what it has always believed: the programs and activities that it funds through grants to teachers and schools are effective at increasing student engagement.

Data from reports submitted by teachers who were awarded grants during the 2012-13 school year show that Ithaca City School District (ICSD) students' engagement rose by an average of nearly 50 percent following an IPEI grant-funded activity.

For students identified as "performing below grade level," the average increase in engagement was even higher, almost doubling after participation in IPEI-funded programs, as measured by classroom teachers.



Student Engagement Before and After IPEI Grant-Funded Activities

IPEI Grants Committee Chair Pat Tempesta stated, "The research is clear: active student engagement is an important indicator for learning. As an organization, IPEI is pleased to see that our grants are a successful tool for teachers as they continue their work with our students."

"Engaging our students in learning when they are young will open up so many opportunities for them throughout their lives," said Christine Sanchirico, IPEI's executive director. "They will be more inclined to become self-motivated by personal interest in their studies and ultimately in their careers."

Terry Byrnes, president of IPEI's board of directors, expressed that "IPEI grants engage students' creative energies and awaken their imaginations, all of which makes a positive difference in student learning. Teachers have told us this for years—but now we have more concrete evidence. With continued community support, we will make many more IPEI grants in the future."

Last year, IPEI allocated more than \$230,000 as Teacher Grants, Red and Gold Grants, and Community Collaboration Grants; for its two affiliate organizations; and as awards from its special funds. IPEI also

enabled all 2,900 elementary school students to visit the eight Discovery Trail sites through the Kids Discover the Trail! program.

Thanks to funding from the Park Foundation, retired Caroline Elementary School teacher Janie Moon Clark was hired to analyze what IPEI could evaluate to determine the impact of IPEI grants. Then she worked with Tempesta to develop a new grant report form to gather the relevant data.

"Student engagement" was selected as a way to measure the impact of IPEI's grants after considerable consultation with teachers and other experts. Research has shown that engaged students learn at higher levels, retain what they learn, have a profound grasp of what they learn and can transfer it to new contexts.

For this reason, programs and activities funded with IPEI grants were evaluated using five measurements of student engagement as reported by teachers: body language, verbal participation, physical participation, independence and excitement. Students were ranked on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the greatest level of engagement, both before and after the activity.

With 76% of the grant reports for the 2012-13 school year completed, the average "engagement score" for all ICSD students increased to approximately 4.5 following an IPEI-funded activity, while the score for students performing below grade level expectations rose to nearly 4.

"Hunches, praise, and anecdotal confirmation can be valuable pats-on-the-back for a job well done," remarked Clark, "but the new IPEI grant evaluation tool extends beyond casual affirmations."

"The value of the recently-instituted formal IPEI grant evaluation is that it is standardized, repeatable, and it sampled all constituents who received grants," she said. "As a result, the conclusions are more robust, and they offer stronger evidence of the ways in which IPEI grants have positively influenced student engagement."

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