

ENGAGING AND RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Engaging and relevant educational experiences are the daily interactions and experiences that **inspire and motivate students**, provide them with the skills and knowledge to **understand and relate to the world**, as well as spark a **life-long curiosity and joy for learning**.

Thriving schools make engaging and relevant educational experiences the norm. These types of experiences appear when students are doing **work that feels meaningful, memorable, and connected to their interests, identities, and real-world questions**. Every adult in the building has a hand in creating these experiences and ensuring they reach and positively impact all students. Teachers design the daily experiences that **invite students in, encourage them to take risks, and celebrate their growth** and achievement. Leaders set the expectation that student engagement is a non-negotiable part of the school's everyday learning model and **equip teachers with the materials and support** to make it happen.

"In our PreK classrooms, we may be learning about trees, buildings, music — and all of these things are kind of embedded into play-based learning that is geared towards students' interests."
- MNPS educator

In MNPS schools, this looks like a math teacher building lesson materials that include students' names, cultures and interests, and providing concrete examples a ten-year-old can picture — **everyday actions that improve engagement while keeping the rigor fully intact**. It also looks like schools celebrating learning itself through student performances and exhibitions of student work. In the earliest grades, pre-K classrooms may **explore themes and learning objectives through play**, with math and literacy embedded throughout. Thriving schools **keep that learning spark alive** as students grow, through project-based learning and real-world work experiences that **connect learning to the futures students imagine for themselves**.

"It is important to adapt instruction so students can see themselves in it and understand it through more concrete, real-world examples."
- MNPS educator

Educator perspective:

What does this condition look like in practice?

- High-quality instruction that is **relevant to students' daily lives** and helps them understand and relate to the world
- Opportunities that **encourage students to dream big** about their futures
- Learning connected to **real-world problems and solutions**
- Project-based learning and hands-on experiences that **spark curiosity and imagination**
- Opportunities to explore careers and **apply skills beyond the classroom**
- Lessons, activities, and instructional materials that **reflect, affirm, and value** students' identities, cultures, and backgrounds
- Student work that is **visibly displayed and celebrated** across the building
- Students and adults able to name the **goals they are working toward** and what progress looks like



How do other Thriving Schools conditions intersect with Engaging and Relevant Educational Experiences?

Engagement and rigor work together, and the strongest examples pair memorable experiences with **Ambitious Instruction**, from arts-rich field trips tied directly to academics to an eighth-grade class selected to pilot a new AI storytelling program designed to enhance literacy skills. **Effective leaders** make this possible through **Resource Alignment**, by directing budgets and resources toward what makes learning engaging, and by building their teachers' capacity to design learning experiences where students take an active role: making choices, asking their own questions, and driving their own learning. Engagement is also inseparable from an **Inclusive and Supportive School Culture**. Some of the most meaningful celebration of student diversity happens through the learning itself. This can look like teaching books written by authors from diverse backgrounds, designing experiences where students see themselves and their communities reflected in what they're learning, and creating opportunities for students to share their backgrounds with the school community through special events, performances, and student work displayed across the building.

How do outside-of-school factors play a role?

Some of the most engaging learning experiences make direct connections between **what students are learning and the real world beyond the school walls**. Making those connections takes both resource alignment and collaboration: thriving schools partner with families and community organizations to **connect learning to the world students know** and **expand the world they can imagine**. In high school, these connections become even more concrete: schools partner with colleges, employers, and workforce organizations to give students access to college coursework, career-connected learning, and work-based experiences like internships, letting students try on possible futures while they're still supported by their school community.

Measurement and evaluation:
How do schools know what's working?

- **School culture and climate survey data** provides the most direct window into this condition, as data can show whether students themselves signal if learning feels engaging, relevant, and affirming.
- **Student enrollment and attendance trends** can indicate engaging and relevant educational experiences are consistently present, since students come to, and stay at, schools where they want to be. Examining attendance for historically marginalized groups, such as Multilingual Learners and students with disabilities, ensures schoolwide averages don't mask which students aren't experiencing school as engaging.
- **ELA and math proficiency and TVAAS growth**, which measure student achievement and academic progress over time, can help provide evidence that engagement is working in service of learning.
- **Ready Graduate rates** help indicate whether students are leaving school prepared for what comes next, a signal that learning is relevant to their futures.

Explore other Thriving Schools Conditions:

[CULTURE OF COLLABORATION](#) | [RESOURCE ALIGNMENT](#) | [EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP](#)
[AMBITION INSTRUCTION](#) | [INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE](#) | [THRIVING SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK](#)