

# How to Help Struggling Students Learn



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It is a new school year with lots of exciting learning opportunities for my students. After completing several weeks of assessing and observing my students' academic strengths and challenges, I have modified my teaching strategies based on best practices for children with English acquisition, behavior, and struggling reader needs. Listed below are successful strategies I am using to support some specific learning challenges.

### English Learners

English learners receive weekly academic tutoring support from staff in a school-wide pull-out program. Additionally, English learners are seated next to compassionate and supportive English-speaking classmates who can interpret and guide their English learner peers with various assignments. Creating a safe environment is critical for my non-native speakers. Sentence frames and charted models were essential for them to use before

they were willing to try on their own. Native speakers learn how to become effective tutors while guiding their English learner classmates. Additionally, to encourage organic speaking opportunities in the classroom, I moved to having student-teachers. After math tests were corrected, students who demonstrated understanding of a particular math problem from the test became the teacher for that problem. Even students who needed to work 1:1 with me during the test had an opportunity to articulate how to solve the problem to their peers. It was a natural way for them to reprocess their learning, raise their social status in the classroom, and build confidence.

## Overly Active and Aggressive Students

Students with an undiagnosed learning challenge that may also include hyperactive/ attention deficit disorder can be frustrated and disruptive in traditional classroom settings. Some benefit from using sensory fidget toys to relieve stress and anxiety. Other students benefit from sitting apart from their classmates. Finding the proper setting for individual students takes time and patience. I also have the students evaluate what strategies work best when separating them from their peers. After a meeting with the parent and student, together we develop a plan that involves modifying a targeted behavior, a monitoring system, and a reward chart. For example, one student is motivated to cooperate with class work by sitting alone and earning a beef jerky treat at the end of class while another works with his classmates to earn fruit clusters. Extrinsic motivation is key for these

high energy students.

## Fearful, Anxious, and High Functioning Autistic Learners

Some students are overwhelmed with specific assignments. When assessing their academic skills, I find that these students are capable but can become emotionally anxious or will not perform when asked to complete a rigorous academic assignment. When students are overwhelmed, I break down the assignment into smaller tasks for each student. These smaller tasks will eventually meet the requirements of a rigorous assignment. Frequent check-ins help encourage these students to move beyond their discomfort. Once many of these students get started, most are very successful and achieve beyond their anticipated abilities.

## Delayed Learners

Unfortunately, some of my students do not test well and are significantly behind their grade level abilities. They have not yet qualified for special education services, but still must complete their assignments in class. Once I have identified their academic needs, I use computer adaptive online assignments for reading and math assignments. When teaching reading and math, I use small group instruction to reinforce basic reading and math skill development. I also seat learning challenged students with classmates who can help them complete grade level assignments. This year I discovered the power of personal notes. Boosting a student's confidence in the area that you see growth helps them build self-

esteem and lets them know you see them. I would attach a handwritten note to important assignments letting them know how hard they tried, commenting on an area of strength, and then letting them know where they could grow. A delayed learner needs their teacher to be their biggest cheerleader because the struggle can be overwhelming.

## Overall Classroom Success that Supports Cooperation at Home

When I am responsive to the individual needs of each of student, they feel validated, respected, and work harder to achieve success. As a class, we set milestone achievement celebrations that might include a tech play day, pajama and cuddly critter day, and a pizza movie day. As a class, we evaluate our class performance each day and earn points towards participating in these larger classroom celebration days.

The strategies we use in class also work effectively at home for most students. Wishing you much success in supporting your child's learning this school year.