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What have we learned about fidget spinners being banned in schools? These fidget spinners are being labeled as distractions in classrooms without little inquiry as to why students are utilizing them in the first place. As we think back to events in history, there has always been a huge emphasis on keeping people engaged. During the days of the Roman Empire, soldiers were directed to construct coliseums along the border to help them hone their skills and stay focused during long periods of inactivity. Soldiers during World War II were regularly provided cigarettes and chocolate bars to keep them mentally alert between battles. So why isn't there the same time and effort being placed to mentally engage our students during classroom instruction?

Student engagement decreases at an alarming rate as students progress through the grades. According to a 2012 Gallop Poll of 500,000 students, it was determined that nearly eight in 10 elementary students who participated in the poll are engaged in school. By middle school that falls to about six in 10 students, and by high school, only four in 10 students qualify as engaged. Call it the educational cliff, but every nine seconds a student drops out of high school and cites boredom as the deciding factor for not graduating. Research has proven a strong correlation between dropout rates and incarceration as three-quarters of our state prisons have inmates who did not finish high school. In order to combat this societal and educational issue, students must be provided opportunities that promote active participation and cognitive engagement.

With the support of coaches, teachers need to understand the balance of providing an environment where students are actively, cognitively, and emotionally engaged. Coaches can provide teachers professional development and model instructional strategies that actively involve students in their learning process and as well as help teachers understand how to analyze assessment data for student learning.

Coaches and teachers can carefully craft lessons that incorporate students utilizing strategies that provide minute-by-minute assessment of their learning. Teachers need to incorporate a variety of strategies like student response cards, quick writes, and even a think-pair-share into their daily lessons across all content areas. These strategies and many others will not only increase student engagement but it will also provide an effective way to monitor student progress.

To support teachers with their instructional delivery of these instructional strategies, coaches can use data collection tools to document evidence of student engagement and effective implementation of these strategies. During the lesson debrief, coaches and teachers can have conversations that focus on if the goals were met and which strategies helped or hindered their students' learning, level of student engagement, and assessment outcomes.

So, what does this have to do with the fidget spinner? Having a place for them in school is debatable, but the utilization of effective instructional strategies that promote engagement is not! Students will find a way to occupy their time if not actively engaged in their learning environment regardless of the latest fad!