Ideas to Rev students engine level

Movement and intensity can help students with low arousal/poor registration patterns.  Intensity can be supplied in many different ways, through each one of the senses. Ideas to “rev” up your engine include:

* To change arousal through the mouth:  Most children love all of those “over the top” sour candies because they are so arousing.  Warheads, Cry Babies, Tear Jerkers, Sour Straws, Skittles, Starburst, Pop Rocks and Lemonheads are high arousal therapy tools (check dietary restrictions first).
* Anything crunchy, that explodes with sound when you bite into it, is alerting.  Carrots, apples, popcorn, pretzels, and chips are good examples.  Something strong tasting, like salsa or vinaigrette, to dip them into, is even better.  Popsicles, frozen fruit (grapes) and frozen vegetables (peas) are alerting.  Cold fizzy drinks are alerting: try mixing plain seltzer with some cranberry or orange juice, or a squirt of lime.
* Check your student’s lunch:   Lean proteins and complex carbohydrates like whole grains, fruits and vegetables are the best choices to help a child make it through the day. Salty foods can be dehydrating, which can make it hard to stay alert in the afternoon.  Remind your student to drink plenty of water at lunch.
* Chronic shallow breathing deprives the brain of oxygen and can contribute to a low arousal/poor registration level. The best way to improve this is to encourage the child to engage in activities that require prolonged, sustained exhalations.  A long exhale will cause the next inhale to be reflexively bigger and fuller.  This will help the child's body learn to breathe more deeply. Blow toys with a visual component such as a moving part powered by the breath, or bubbles that slowly form at the end of the pipe can increase arousal level.  The visual component is strengthening to the eyes because it encourages them to pull in close to watch. Have available whistles, bubble pipes, or blow toys, blow darts, blow pens, balloons, kazoos, and party noisemakers.
* Many children are in a low state of arousal because their vestibular system, which regulates their levels of awareness based on the amount of movement they sense, has a very high threshold before it will activate. Movement activates the part of the brain responsible for arousal.  Some quick ideas to change arousal through the vestibular system:  spin in an office chair, do jumping jacks or somersaults, play a handclapping game, sing "Head Shoulders Knees and Toes" doing all the movements and making sure to bend all the way over,  or jump on a mini trampoline.  Sitting on a therapy ball while completing classroom work can be very helpful for some children if the ball does not become a source of distraction.  Sitting on an inflatable cushion like Move N Sit during class can help.  Inflatable cushions allow the child to wiggle enough to stay activated while staying seated.
* Heavy work activities (i.e., proprioceptive input) are used for children with sensory processing difficulties to help increase attention, decrease defensiveness, and modulate arousal. If the child has a certain time of day that he really cannot manage, the teacher can send him on an errand during that time.  Carrying a heavy box of books to the office is a good choice, (with a stop at the water fountain while he's at it). See attached handout: Heavy Work Activities List for Teachers. If your child is doing homework and having an impossible time focusing, try getting up and doing one of these activities for 30 seconds or more.
* To change arousal through the visual sense: Light, or lack of it, can have a tremendous impact on arousal states.  Be sure student is completing classroom work in an area with plenty of natural light.
* To change arousal through hearing:  Music is a great way to rev up your engine.  Put on some high energy music {like "Thriller"} and dance around for a few minutes.  Allow your student to listen to high energy music via headphones at strategic times during the day.
* To change arousal through touch:  messy play, such as touching shaving cream, can be very alerting.  So can the simple act of running your hands along your legs while you are seated, rubbing Velcro attached to the underside of the desk or completing palm presses or ear pulls.
* To change arousal through smell:  strong scents, like peppermint, can be alerting. Place a few drops of peppermint extract on a sports wrist band that your student can wear at strategic times during the day.