0.1 Students who are behind

First, it's a good idea to know what you do for them and what you can't. You can do a lot for these students in office hours, but it's not realistic to be able to spend more than (or even as much as) half an hour a week outside of class with any one student. So if they need help on a regular basis, suggest that they arrange for tutoring. You should find out before the semester wht such resources are available. If they're doing passing work, but still underconfident, point out to them that if they continue to work at this level, they'll pass the class. Don't however make promises you can't keep about their grades; it's best not to prognosticate before they've taken an exam.

All that being said, you have to make sure they get the most out of their group work and don't drag down the group (they are as much afraid of this as you are). Here are some ways to build their confidence and make them more likely to participate to advantage. Spend some time around their group and be ready to pounce on those times when the lagging student, "Lenny", comes up with a good idea. Assign credit: if Jocelyn figures out how to do something with Lenny's idea, then it's "Lenny & Jocelyn's method". Try to give them constructive comments on their homework (I try to do this for everyone, but when time does not permit this, concentrate on students who need it). Making sure they are keeping up with their group is delicate - asking them to explain to you where there group is will help if they're not too far lost. Once they are far behind, consider placing them next time with a group of students that talk a lot, don't go all that fast, and are as kind as possible. At worst, you may have to settle for Lenny participating minimally during class and trying to catch up on his own at home.

Select Lenny to give a presentation, either solo or on behalf of his group. On a one-time basis you can invest a little extra time to help him with this to make sure it goes over well (have him practice it on you till he's confident enough to field questions).

Avoid asking Lenny really easy questions. This will make him feel like he must be dumb. These questions are scary in general since the reward for a correct answer is almost zero

and the penalty for an incorrect answer is large. At your discretion, you might chose Lenny to answer questions that are not black and white, asked of the class at large: which of these problems was the hardest?, what kinds of thinking did you think were necessary on this problem?, and so on. This does not in itself teach Lenny the material, but it keeps him from feeling like a ghost and reminds him that his opinion matters.