



Big IDEAs

Dropout Prevention Strategies

Check and Connect

Purpose

Check & Connect is a model of sustained intervention for promoting students' engagement at school and with learning.

Demonstrated outcomes include:

- decrease in truancy,
- decrease in dropout rates,
- increase in accrual of credits,
- increase in school completion, and
- impact on literacy.

Check & Connect is data-driven and grounded in research on resiliency and home-school collaboration. Student referral criteria include alterable warning signs of school withdrawal – primarily attendance indices, in the context of academic performance, and emotional or behavioral problems.

Target Population

The model was first developed for urban middle school students with learning and behavioral disabilities in Minneapolis. It has been replicated for all students in grades K-12.

Major Components

Check and Connect promotes a student's engagement with school using seven components:

1. Relationship Building
2. Routine Monitoring and Alterable Indicators
3. Individualized and Timely Intervention
4. Long-Term Commitment
5. Persistence Plus
6. Problem-Solving
7. Affiliation with School and Learning

A key factor in the Check and Connect model is the "monitor"—one individual who is responsible for ensuring a student "connects" with school and learning. An effective monitor must

- believe that all children have abilities
- be willing to work closely with families using a "non-blaming approach"
- advocate for the student
- commit to documenting the intervention
- able to work well in different settings
- persistent

The monitor must establish trust with the students and their families, sometimes becoming their lifeline and navigator through the school system. The check component of the model includes regularly checking on indicators of student engagement such as attendance, and academic and social/behavioral performance by the monitor. The connect component focuses on basic and intensive interventions that maximize resources. Family and school communication and collaboration are encouraged.

Student levels of engagement are systematically monitored monthly and documented using a monitoring sheet. Engagement at school and with learning is measured according to several indicators that are alterable, important because these are factors within the power of educators and parents to change. The alterable indicators include social/behavior performance, and academic performance.

The connect component includes two levels of student-focused interventions developed to maximize the use of finite resources: *basic intervention*, which is the same for all students, and *intensive interventions*, which

are more frequent and individualized. All students receive basic interventions (even if receiving intensive interventions), whereas indicators of student engagement are used to guide who receives the delivery of more intensive interventions. Individual needs of the student dictate what specific intervention strategy is used. The two levels of intervention help the monitors to manage their time and resources with efficiency and responsiveness.

Basic Intervention. As a sustained preventive measure, basic intervention is administered to all targeted students. Basic intervention uses minimal resources in an effort to keep education a salient issue, especially after a working relationship has been established between the monitor, student, parents, and school staff. Basic interventions begin with introductions, sharing general information about the monitor's role and the Check & Connect model with the student and his or her family. Monitors routinely interact with students when on site at the school building, at least weekly at the secondary level and up to a daily at the elementary level. However, the substance of basic intervention is a deliberate conversation with each student—at least monthly for secondary students and weekly for elementary students. The conversation covers the student's progress in school, the relationship between school completion and the check indicators of engagement, the importance of staying in school, and a review of problem-solving steps used to resolve conflict and cope with life's challenges. For problem solving, students are guided through real and/or hypothetical problems using a five step cognitive-behavioral problem-solving strategy:

1. "Stop. Think about the problem."
2. "What are the choices?"
3. "Choose one."
4. "Do it."
5. "How did it work?"

The repeated conversations provide an opportunity for monitors to routinely share information and reinforce skills that students need to actively promote their own connection with school.

Intensive Intervention. Intensive interventions are administered for students showing high risk in relation to any of the early warning signs of withdrawal. Typically, about two-thirds to three-quarters of the students receive intensive intervention at any given time. Connection strategies correspond to key indicators of student engagement and are developmentally appropriate to grade levels. Existing services are used as much as possible, rather than developing a separate set of duplicative services.

Evidence of effectiveness

Christenson, Evelo, and Hurley (Dropout Prevention for Youth with Disabilities: Efficacy of a sustained school engagement procedure. *Exceptional Children*, 1998, 65(1)) found significant evidence of treatment effects for students with disabilities. Students who participated in Check and Connect in middle school through grade nine dropped out at a rate of 9% compared to 30% of students who received treatment in only the seventh and eighth grades. Furthermore, those students who participated in Check and Connect in middle school and through the first year of high school were more likely to be enrolled in school and on track to graduate than similar students in a comparison group. Check and Connect has proven effective with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities in grades 9 to 12. Participating students were more likely to remain in school and graduate.

Check & Connect has also been used in grades K through 6. Participants included students with and without disabilities and their families. After two years, participants showed dramatic decreases in tardiness and truancy. A study of students ages 11 to 17 found a reduction in absenteeism and a school attendance rate of 95% after two years in the program.

Cost

Approximately \$1,100 per student

<http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/>

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