

Engaging Students with School: The Essential Dimension of Dropout Prevention Programs

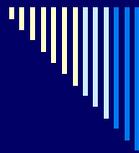
National Dropout Prevention Center
for Students with Disabilities

January 22, 2008



School Dropouts

- Aware of the status characteristics:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Ethnicity
 - Gender
 - SES
 - Metro status and region
- May be less aware that an F for each course increases the probability of dropout by 15%. *(Levin & Belfield, 2007)*



What is the purpose of schooling?

- Adopting a student engagement frame:
 - Belief in developing youth
 - Context matters
 - Want students to make a personal investment in their learning/development
 - Want to attain a good person-environment fit
 - Student responsibility is included
 - Recognition that students need varying amount of support

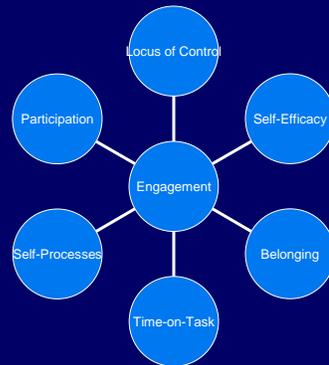


Goals for the Presentation

- Background information on student engagement
- Overview of interventions
 - Universal
 - Individualized
- Check & Connect
 - Example of evidence-based practice
 - Future – enhance engagement

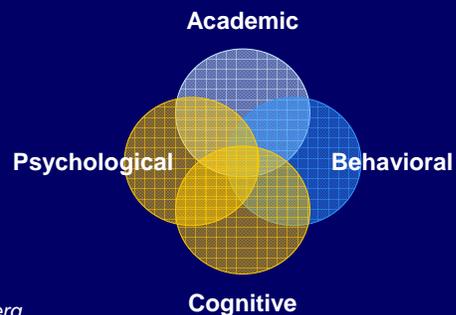
The Concept of Engagement

- A 'meta-construct'
 - Brings together many separate lines of research (e.g., belonging, behavioral participation, motivation)
- (Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004)



The Engagement Concept

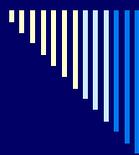
- Composed of 4 subtypes
- Antidote to conditions noted by many educators...
 - Students are characterized as *bored, unmotivated, and uninvolved*
- "Energy in action, the connection between person and activity"
(Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005)





Student engagement:

- Is malleable.
- Is the bottom line in interventions to promote school completion.
- Has become the cornerstone of high school reform initiatives.
- Emphasizes both academic and social aspects of school life that are integral for student success.

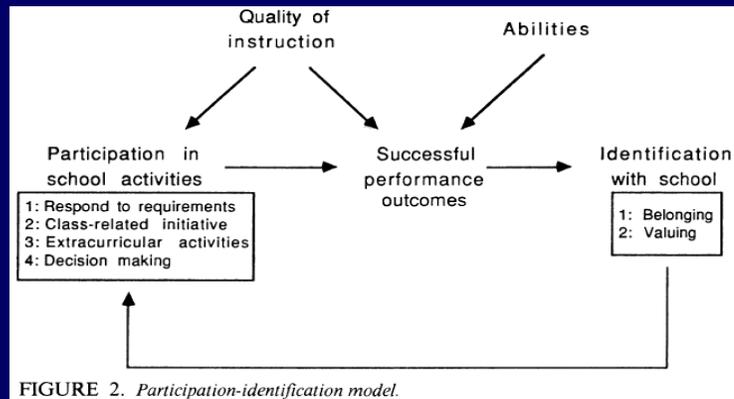


Relevant for ALL Students “who Cross our School Doors”

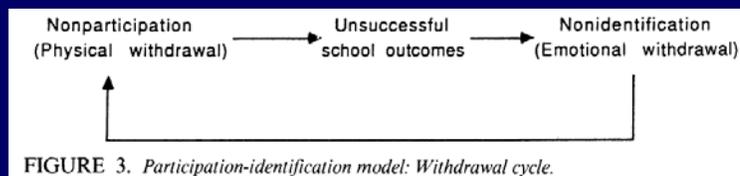
- Less engaged across schools years if:
 - Male
 - Ethnicity other than White or Asian
 - Lower SES
 - In special education rather than general, vocational, or advanced placement
- 72% reported being engaged in school
 - All schools have students who are apathetic or discouraged learners – even those schools without the typical demographic risk factors

(Yazzie-Mintz, 2007)

Finn's (1989) Participation-Identification Model



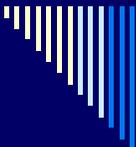
Dropping out – a process of disengaging





Research on Engagement

- Association among engagement, achievement and school behavior
 - Engaged students tend to earn higher grades, perform better on tests, report a sense of belonging, can set or respond to personal goals, persist on tasks
 - Engaged students perceive more support from teachers and peers, which leads to increased levels of engagement and adult support (Furrer et al., 2006)

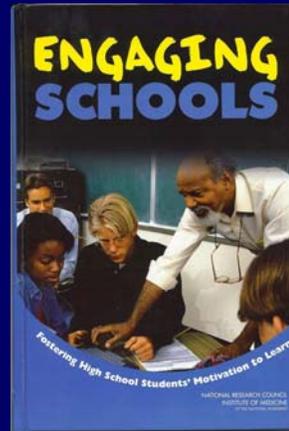


The Engagement Concept

A common theme among effective practices is that they have a positive effect on the motivation of individual students because *they address underlying psychological variables such as competence, control, beliefs about the value of education, and a sense of belonging.* (NRC, 2004, p. 212)

The Engagement Concept

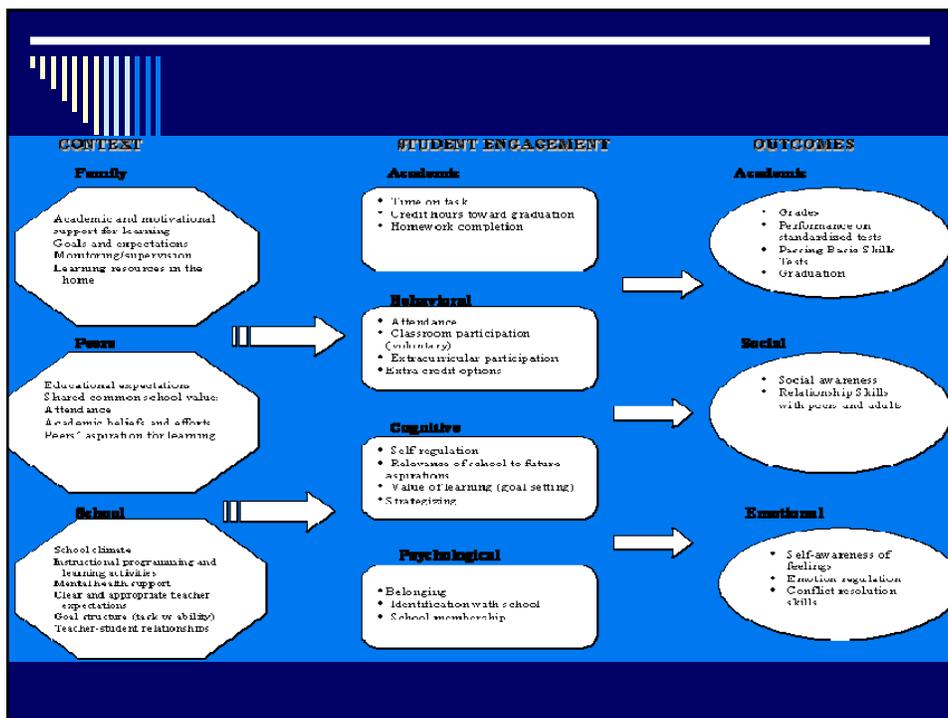
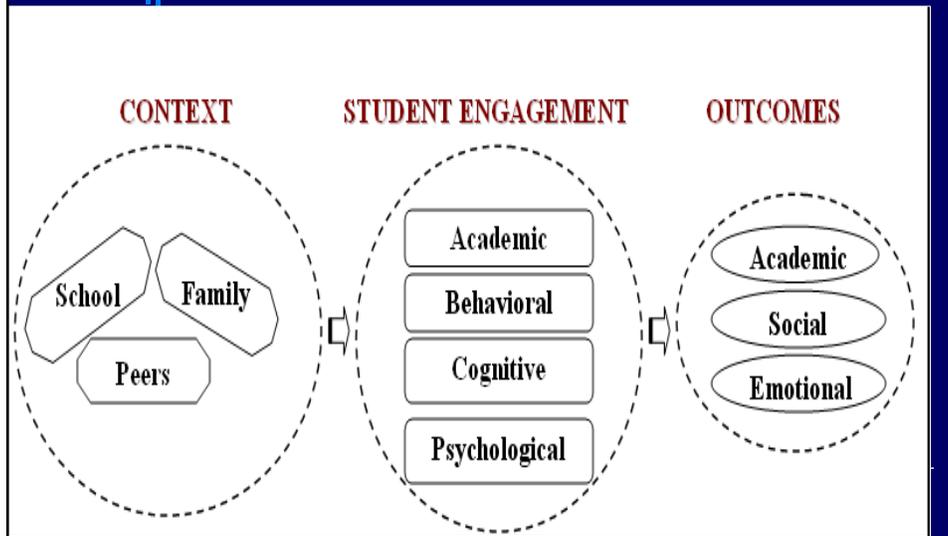
- NRC publication
 - I can, I want to, I belong
 - Competence, Autonomy, Belonging
 - The other “ABCs”

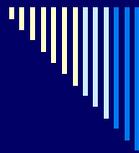


Student Engagement Model



Student Engagement Model

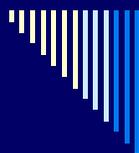




David Brooks, Star Tribune, July 2, 2006

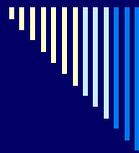
The dropout rates are astronomical because humans are not machines into which you can input data. They require emotion to process information. You take kids who didn't benefit from stable, nurturing parental care and who have not learned how to form human attachments, and you stick them in a school that functions like a factory for information transmission, and the results are going to be terrible.

Relationships, Relevance, Rigor



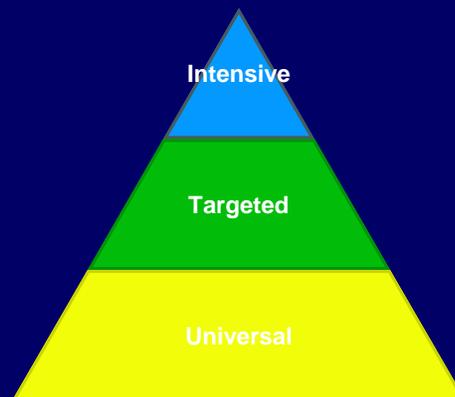
The Check & Connect Response is:

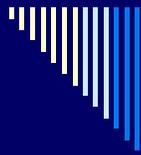
- Engaging students only academically (time on task, work completion) and behaviorally (attendance) is not enough
 - Must consider students' level of personal investment in learning (I can, I want to) and degree of social connectedness (I belong, peer and teacher support)
 - Socializing the learner – or fostering an identity as a learner – becomes critical
-



Four Subtypes of Engagement: Implications for Intervention

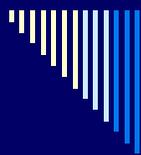
- Heuristic for understanding students' experiences and performance in school and creating a data-based connection to interventions
 - Comprehensive literature review
 - Listened to our Check & Connect students
- Generated guidelines for universal and individualized intervention service delivery
- Nothing totally new – *organizing framework and understanding student perspective* are seminal to engaging students





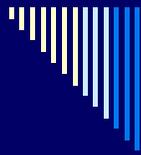
Academic Engagement

- Most visible engagement subtype within the classroom
 - Credits earned, homework completion, time on task
- Frequently tracked by school personnel
 - High rates of academic learning time are a positive correlate of academic achievement



Academic Engagement

- Three broad categories:
 - Instructional quality and delivery
 - Supplemental support
 - Classroom structures to enhance students' substantive interaction



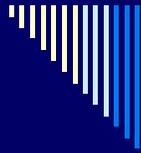
Academic Engagement – Universal Strategies

- Ensure the instructional match is appropriate for the students and clear directions of what is expected are provided
- Use mastery learning principles to guide instructional planning and delivery
- Use principles of effective instruction (e.g., direct instruction, scaffolding, guided practice; informed feedback; pacing of lessons)
- Ensure that there is both academic press (high expectations, well structured learning environment) and support for learning (caring environment)



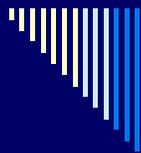
Universal, continued:

- Maximize instructional relevance (e.g., clearly stated purpose, graph progress toward goals)
- Attend to the effect of the organization/structure of the school on learning (e.g., smaller learning communities, Academies)
- Allow students to have choices within course selection and assignments (Skinner et al., 2005).



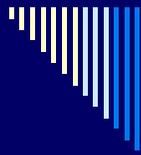
Universal, continued

- Increase time on task and substantive interaction through cooperative learning, whole class or group instruction (Greenwood et al., 2002) and peer assisted learning strategies (Boudah, Schumacher, & Deshler, 1997; Lee & Smith, 1993)
- Provide home support for learning strategies to fit content area
- Enhance critical thinking through project work and ungraded writing assignments



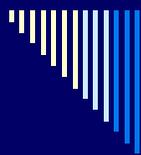
Universal, continued:

- Use a supplemental program within school, i.e., Academic Coaching Team (Hansen, Cumming, & Christenson, 2006)
- Increase opportunities for success in schoolwork
- Encourage parents to volunteer in the classroom (Lee & Smith, 1993)
- Enhance teacher-student relationships and/or teacher-student support (Hughes & Kwok, 2006)



Universal, continued:

- ❑ Reinforce students frequently and base it on the amount of work completed (Skinner et al., 2005).
- ❑ Utilize a variety of interesting texts and resources (Asselin, 2004; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000)
- ❑ Incorporate projects that take place in the community (Lewis, 2004)



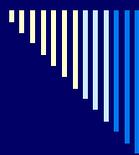
Academic Engagement: Individualized Strategies

- ❑ Utilize after school programs (tutoring, homework help)
- ❑ Increase home support for learning – such as home-school notes, assignment notebooks, and academic enrichment activities
- ❑ Implement self-monitoring interventions
- ❑ Ensure adequacy of educational resources in the home



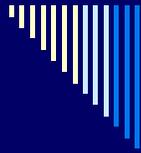
Individualized, continued:

- Help parents to understand and set expectations (Klem & Connell, 2004)
- Foster positive teacher-student relationship for marginalized students
- Utilize Behavior Education Programs: Have students check in with the teacher each hour to ensure they have pens, notebooks, etc. Check in with teacher each hour, check-out at the end of the school day (Hawken & Horner, 2003).
- Seek out and utilize college outreach programs and tutors for students (Rodriquez et al., 2004)



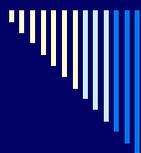
Behavioral Engagement

- Indicators include attendance, classroom and extracurricular participation, and discipline referrals
- Associated with achievement, high school completion, and physical and emotional well being (less high risk behavior).



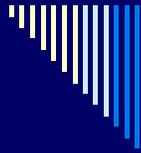
Behavioral Engagement

- Attendance and Discipline Problems
 - Three domains: school, home, and student
 - No evidence for targeting one domain (social skills, tangible rewards, mental health)
(Goldstein, Little, & Akin-Little, 2003)
- Participation
 - Classroom
 - Extracurricular Participation
 - Positive connections
 - Opportunities to interact with competent adults
 - Developing individual interests and strengths (Gilman, Meyers, & Perez, 2004)
 - Increasing social capital
 - Reduced opportunities to participate in undesirable behaviors



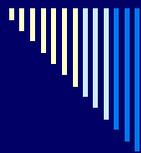
Behavioral Engagement - Universal Strategies

- Examine suspension policies; strive to eliminate out-of-school suspension
- Examine discipline policies; ensure they are considered fair, nonpunitive and understood by students. End reliance on negative consequences as a means of managing student behavior.
- Encourage social interactions and planning for the future through smaller learning communities that target vocational interests (e.g., Academies)



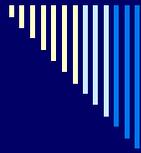
Universal, continued:

- ❑ Offer developmentally appropriate social skills training to all students as part of the curriculum
- ❑ Implement school-wide positive behavioral support systems that include positive reinforcement and group contingencies
- ❑ Use coordinated, collaborative home-school interventions to address attendance
- ❑ Involve students in hands-on-learning that is directly related to future career paths or interests



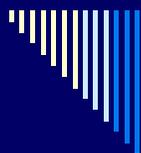
Universal, continued:

- ❑ Create an orderly routine environment that promotes consistency
- ❑ Offer professional development on classroom management strategies
- ❑ Gather student input about classroom rules, school climate and evaluation of coursework/assignments; use feedback to make appropriate changes
- ❑ Encourage participation in and provide extracurricular activities; actively seek to involve uninvolved students



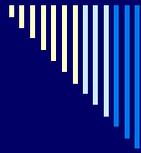
Universal, continued:

- Consider ways of having multi-level sports teams
- Ensure that the school climate, school culture is respectful to all students
- Systematically monitor student population on key variables (attendance, academics, behavior) for signs of disengagement from school and follow up with students showing signs of withdrawal.



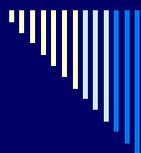
Behavioral Engagement – Individualized Strategies

- Provide additional, supplemental supports for students not responding to positive behavioral support systems implemented school-wide
- Devise an individualized approach to addressing attendance or participation issues at school; strive to understand student perspective and unique family circumstances
- Implement programs that work to build specific skills such as problem solving, anger management or interpersonal communication



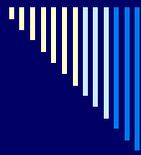
Individualized, continued:

- Provide an adult mentor who works with students and families on a long term basis to foster engagement in school and deliver the message that school is important (i.e., Check & Connect)
- Develop specific behavior plans or contracts to address individual needs
- Provide intensive wrap-around services
- Provide alternative programs for students who have not completed school



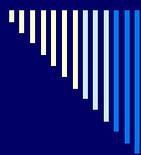
Individualized, continued:

- Encourage parents to monitor and supervise student behavior
- Implement student advisory programs that monitor academic and social development of secondary students (middle or high)
- Implement school-to-work programs that foster success in school and relevant educational opportunities



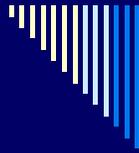
Cognitive Engagement

- Indicators include relevance of school work to future aspirations, strategy use, and self regulation toward personal goals
- Learning goals, perceived ability, self-regulation, and strategy use are significantly and positively related to measures of academic achievement
- Intervention targets : Goal structure, Type of tasks completed, and Linking school/tasks to future endeavors or goals



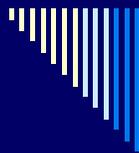
Cognitive Engagement – Universal Strategies

- Guide students in setting personal goals in courses and monitoring their progress
- Provide student with choices when completing assignments
- Enhance or explicitly identify relevance of schoolwork to future goals (see six year plan for St. Paul Public schools ninth graders at <http://studentresources.spps.org>.)
- Focus on necessary steps to reach/pursue personal goals and career aspirations



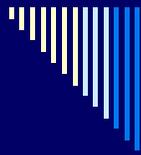
Universal, continued:

- Set learning/mastery goals over performance goals – ensure mastery goals permeate the philosophy of the classroom/school culture
- Provide students with challenging and motivating assignments that relate to life outside of school
- Model learning strategies when teaching specific concepts
- Provide feedback that emphasizes self control and the link between effort/practice and improvement



Universal, continued:

- Provide professional development training to teachers (e.g., goal setting and self-regulation combined with informed feedback that focuses on improvement and enhancing intrinsic motivation)
- Encourage students who are “on the cusp” to put forth effort to earn credits by calculating a graduation achievement rate (e.g., number of credits earned divided by number of credits possible, compared with % needed to graduate) (Hansen et al., 2006)
 - Completion and accuracy
- Encourage parents to deliver messages related to motivational support for learning (high expectations, talk to students about school and schoolwork)



Cognitive Engagement – Individualized Strategies

- Enhance student's personal belief in self through repeated contacts, goal setting, problem solving and relationship (e.g., Check & Connect)
- Implement self monitoring interventions (e.g., graph progress toward goals)
- Explicitly teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies (e.g., mnemonic strategies) and teach effective note-taking and study skills
- Discuss the link between student's effort and the outcome/behavior/success achieved to increase the student's perceived self control, self-efficacy, and self-determination
- Design tasks that have the characteristics of open tasks (e.g., student interests, autonomy, collaboration with peers) (Turner, 1995).



Psychological Engagement

- Numerous terms.....
affective/emotional engagement, school bonding, identification with school, belonging, school connectedness, relatedness with school, social support for school, school supportiveness, perceived school warmth

Used to convey:

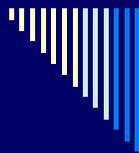
- 1) connection to and affinity for school,
- 2) valuing of school and school-related activities,
- 3) a guiding bond with school.



Psychological Engagement

Associated, as expected with wide-range of variables:

- ❑ Problem behaviors and delinquency,
 - ❑ Premature/risky sexual behavior,
 - ❑ Academic performance
 - ❑ Educational adjustment,
 - ❑ Level of educational attainment,
 - ❑ Social competency,
 - ❑ Attendance,
 - ❑ Accrual of credits,
 - ❑ Persistence with school, and
 - ❑ Student perceptions of future opportunities open to them.
- (Christenson et al., in press)



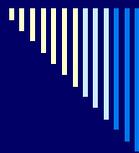
Psychological Engagement – Universal Strategies

- ❑ Systematically build relationships/connections for all students - Educators identify students who may not have a connection with a staff member (i.e., list all students names at grade levels and determine who knows the student) and match staff members and alienated students for future regular “mentor like” contact
- ❑ Address size through implementation of smaller learning communities
- ❑ Enhance peer connections through peer assisted learning strategies
- ❑ Implement a mentoring program (use of college age students)



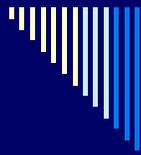
Universal, continued:

- Increase participation in extracurricular activities
- Combine social support for students (from teachers, peers, parents, and community) with high levels of academic press (i.e., teacher belief that they are challenging students and student perception that they are being challenged (Lee & Smith, 1999).
- Create a caring and supportive environment (ethos) (Baker, 2001)



Psychological Engagement – Individualized Strategies

- Build personal relationship with marginalized students – enhance relationship with one caring adult
- Personalize education (e.g., alter assignments to match personal interests and goals)
- Assist students with personal problems
- Provide extra support for students in a timely fashion
- To improve generalizability, intervene across peer, family, and community contexts when possible



Highlights from Student Engagement Interventions

- Four types of engagement are best understood as interrelated subtypes
 - Students' feelings of belonging may promote greater effort and participation or teaching practices that promote self-regulation may facilitate greater task or homework completion.
 - Students' expectations for success develop from beliefs about personal skills and availability of social resources to succeed; this aligns with notion of importance of contextual supports
- Engagement as an organizing framework



Explicit Programming for Motivation and Engagement:

- Close adult-student relationships
- Structured educational experiences with clear, meaningful purposes; a challenging, supportive curriculum; academic press
- Multiple pathways to competence; e.g., autonomy supportive environments
- Opportunities to interact with peers
- Develop career pathways
- Links to the communities and families
- Organizational structures that assist with personal problems



McPartland (1994) noted:

- Provide opportunities for success in schoolwork
- Communicating the relevance of education to future endeavors
- Creating a caring and supportive environment:
 - Student role
 - Teacher role
- Help students with personal problems



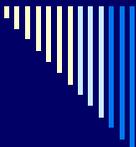
Dropping Out of School is Not an Instantaneous Decision

- Dropping out is a process – not an event – with factors building and compounding over time.
 - Preceded by less severe warning signs of withdrawal – attendance, poor grades, suspensions, behavior
 - Participation leads to successful learning experiences to valuing of school and a sense of belonging



What is Check & Connect?

- A model designed to promote student engagement, which is a multi-dimensional.
 - Academic, behavioral, cognitive, and affective
- Evidence-based, 11 month intervention
- Secondary prevention or risk reduction
- Comprised of four main components



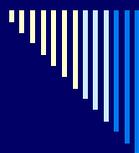
Check & Connect Components

- **Check** - systematic monitoring of students' connection to school using alterable indicators:
 - Attendance, Behavior, Academics
- **Connect** – responding to students' educational needs according to their type and level of risk for disengagement.
 - All targeted students receive *basic* interventions
 - Students showing high risk behaviors receive additional *intensive* interventions



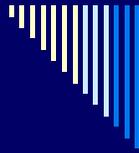
The Mentor – the Third Component

- Person in student's life who keeps education salient and does what is needed to keep the student from slipping thru the cracks
- Relationship is built over time, based on trust and familiarity:
 - ongoing efforts (e.g., checking grades and attendance)
 - informal connections (e.g., checking in with the student)



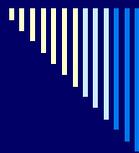
Component 4: Connect with Families

- Call parents on a regular basis, not just when there are problems
- Write notes to parents to let them know what is going on in school (make language simple and in family's first language)
- Make home visits regarding educational progress
- Make home visits at least once a year for a positive reason
- Find out whether parents need suggestions, resources, or support to help with student at home.
- Directly invite parents to be partners
- Work with school staff and community supports to offer parent education classes or workshops that families identify as being interesting or important



In a nutshell:

The intervention is comprised of systematic monitoring of student performance, timely intervention coordinated with teachers and parents, and relationship building with the mentor who provides the persistent support and avenue for problem solving with the student. These aspects allow the mentor to design in collaboration with others an **individualized** approach to service delivery for students showing early signs of withdrawal.



Role of the Mentor

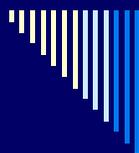
Monitoring is essential for students at-risk of disengaging as a learner for two reasons . . .

- Provides a systematic and efficient way to connect students with immediate interventions
- Provides an essential link to students' educational progress and performance



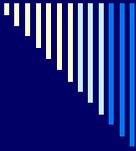
Students must be empowered to take control of their behavior.

- We use a five-step cognitive behavioral problem solving strategy:
 - Stop. Think about the problem.
 - What are some choices?
 - Choose one.
 - Do it.
 - How did it work? (Braswell & Bloomquist, 1991)
- Help students integrate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to meet schooling demands:
 - Coming to class on time
 - Attending classes regularly
 - Working hard in class
 - Completing assignments
 - Getting passing grades



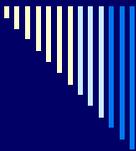
Persistence Plus:

- **Persistence:** There is someone who is not going to give up on the student or allow the student to be distracted from the importance of school.
- **Continuity:** There is someone who knows the student's needs and desires and is available across school years.
- **Consistency:** The message is the same from all concerned adults.



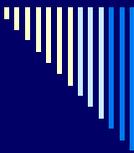
Check & Connect: The Future

- Affective – **I belong** (e.g., belonging, school identification)
 - Enhance relationship with one adult, alter assignments to match personal interests and goals, assist with peer relationships
- Cognitive – **I can, I want to** (e.g., value of learning, relevance, self regulation, goal setting)
 - Graph progress toward goals, teach learning strategies and study skills, use effort attributions with self monitoring



Personal Goal Setting

- Mentors and the student identify the demands of the school environment and the expectations for students' success in each course.
 - Request teacher input: What does the student have to do to be successful in this course? Consider task completion, quality of work, and classroom behaviors.
- Mentors use teacher input to create scenarios relevant for problem solving practice (i.e., use of the five step plan) with students on a regular, consistent basis.
- Meet with the student to set personal goals for the class where enhanced academic or behavioral improvement is desired.



Future Planning

- Meet with the student to set future goals – two years post expected high school graduation date (what they want to do or be in the future).
- Mentors and students identify necessary steps to pursue personal goals and attain career aspirations.
- Mentors monitor ongoing student performance with the use of Goal Attainment Scaling. Problem solving discussions continue with a focus on choosing goals based on the student's understanding of interests, skills, and limits as well as adjustment of the goal and plan of action.



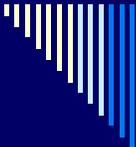
Refine Parent Connect Interventions

- Developing motivational home support for learning strategies
 - *Initial Role in Motivating Children* (Teachable moments; Conveying expectations and values; Psychological support, monitoring, and supervision)
 - *Motivational Support through Struggles* (Persistence; Acceptance, respect, and encouragement; and Problem solving and socio-emotional learning)



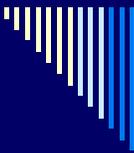
In closing . . .

- We have hypothesized that ***the unique feature of Check & Connect*** is not the specific interventions per se, but the fact that interventions are facilitated by a person, the mentor, who is trusted and known by the student and who has demonstrated his or her concern for the school performance of the youth persistently and consistently over time.
- Persistent support to meet standards



Dropout Prevention or School Completion?

Increasing the successful completion of school is much more than simply staying in school, and thus, much more than the dropout problem – it involves meeting the defined academic standards of the school, as well as underlying social and behavioral standards.



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Contact Information

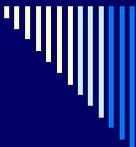
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Thank you!



Check & Connect Information

- <http://www.ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/>
- Check & Connect has recently met the evidence standards of the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC, 2006; www.whatworks.ed.gov).
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