The Check & Connect Model of Student Engagement

Kimberly Swan, M.Ed.
State Personnel Development Grant
Check & Connect Project Facilitator
Check & Connect Overview

Check & Connect is a structured mentoring intervention to promote student engagement
• at school
• with learning
  through
• relationship building
• systematic use of data.

This photograph and the remaining stock photos were used with permission from Microsoft.
Initial Development

1990: OSEP 5 year development grant

Collaboration between University of Minnesota and Minneapolis Public Schools

2015: 25 year anniversary
Check & Connect emphasizes school completion rather than dropout prevention

- School completion = high school graduation with academic and social competence
- Merely keeping students in school until graduation is not sufficient
Fit With Existing Initiatives

- Universal: 80%
- Targeted: 15%
- Intensive: 5%
Core Components of C&C

Mentor
- Relationship building
- Long-term commitment
- Persistence-Plus

Check
- Systematic monitoring
- Focus on alterable variables

Connect
- Problem solving
- Capacity building
- Personalized, data-based intervention
- Promoting participation/affiliation with school

Engagement with Families
- Connect, partner, and engage with parents/families
Research

• C&C has been implemented with K-12 students with and without disabilities in the U.S. and abroad, addressing:
  – Attendance/truancy
  – Behavior
  – Literacy
  – Student engagement
Research Findings

- Increased credit accrual
- Increased persistence rates
- Increased graduation rates
- Perceived increase in parent participation
- Reduced absences
- Reduced tardiness to school/class
- Decreased dropout rates
- Reduced behavior referrals

(Sinclair et al., 1998; 2005)
Of the dropout interventions reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse to date, Check & Connect is the only intervention found to have strong evidence of positive effects for staying in school.

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/
Foundational Theories

Resilience
- Build protective factors, reduce risk factors

Systems theory
- Consider home, school, and community

Cognitive-behavioral theory
- Empower students to take control of their learning

Intrinsic motivation
- I can, I want to, I belong
Student Engagement

Identification & Belonging at School

Commitment & Investment in Learning

www.flikr.com/thekevinchang  Amigos

www.flikr.com/photos/mimax/  I am still learning
Student Engagement

Observable Engagement

Academic
Behavioral

Internal Engagement

Cognitive
Affective
Student Engagement

Participation-Identification Model (Finn, 1989)

Quality of Instruction

Participation in school activities
1. Respond to requirements
2. Class-related initiative
3. Extracurricular activities
4. Decision making

Successful performance outcomes

Abilities

Identification with school
1. Belonging
2. Valuing
Student Engagement

Participation-Identification Model: Withdrawal Cycle (Finn, 1989)

Nonparticipation (Physical Withdrawal) → Unsuccessful School Outcomes → Nonidentification (Emotional Withdrawal)
Mentors Interrupt the Process of Disengagement

- Disengagement is a process that occurs over time
- Check & Connect mentors can "interrupt" that process and help to re-engage students
IMPLEMENTING CHECK & CONNECT
Multiple Systems

Student

Home

Community

School
11 Implementation Steps

1. Determine indicators of student disengagement
2. Identify students at risk of disengagement or dropout
3. Select or hire mentors
4. Organize existing resources for intervention
5. Get to know students, teachers, and parents
6. Use “check” procedures and the monitoring form
7. Implement “connect” interventions
8. Strengthen the family-school relationship
9. Monitor the person-environment fit
10. Provide mentor support and supervision
11. Evaluate program implementation
Early Warning Signs

- **Attendance**
  - Absent 10% or more of school days

- **Behavior**
  - Two or more mild or more serious behavior infractions

- **Course performance**
  - An inability to read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade;
  - A failure in English or math in 6th through 9th grades;
  - A GPA of less than 2.0;
  - Two or more failures in 9th grade; and
  - Failure to earn on-time promotion to 10th grade.
  
  *(Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, Fox, 2012)*

Systematic Monitoring

• “Check” = systematically monitoring target students’ level of engagement and educational progress
  – Core component that is non-negotiable
  – Essential for students at risk of disengagement or dropout
Systematic Monitoring (cont.)

• What is checked? “Check” data are selected indicators of alterable risk for disengagement:
  – Absences
  – Tardiness
  – Behavior referrals
  – Suspensions
  – Missing assignments
  – Grades
CONNECT
The single most important thing that children need to grow into healthy adults is the presence of one person who is irrationally attached to them.” (Darling, 2005, p. 185)
Essential Elements

- Mutual trust
- Open communication
- Long term commitment

Relationships

- Cognitive-behavioral approach
- Diminish dependency on mentor

Problem solving and capacity building

- Continuity
- Consistency

Persistence Plus
Attend-Engage-Invest Continuum

**Attend**

Students attend school regularly and successfully complete high school

Goal: Dropout prevention

**Engage**

Students engage academically, behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively in school

Goal: School completion with academic, social, and emotional competence

**Invest**

Students set goals for their future and invest time, effort, and talents into reaching those goals

Goal: Readiness for achieving college, career, and life goals
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
What is Family Engagement?

“Cooperation, coordination, and collaboration between the mentor and family to enhance students’ learning opportunities, educational progress, and school success.”

Christenson & Sheridan, 2001
Engaging with Families

• Mentors strengthen the family-school relationship through:
  – Acting as liaisons
  – Following students and families
  – Connecting with families through the student
  – Keeping the focus of family-school connections on the student’s educational performance
  – Enhancing communication with families
  – Creating opportunities for dialogue
SYSTEMS CHANGE

Successful Graduates

Florida State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)
Successful Graduates

This 5-year SPDG project was designed to increase school completion rates of secondary-aged students with disabilities through the provision of professional development for the support and scale-up of Check & Connect. The SPDG supported, “big ideas” or strategies that included high quality professional development, a cadre of certified trainers, district and school team coaches/mentors, virtual support and training, and family outreach for students with disabilities.
Big Ideas for Systems Change: A Synchronized Process

- Increased School Completion Rates
  - Successful Graduates
- High Quality Professional Development
- Cadre of Certified Trainers
- Research & Evidence-Based Interventions
- Outreach to Families
- School Teams
- Virtual Support
- Coaching/Mentoring

*University of Minnesota*
Florida SPDG and Check & Connect Contacts

Peg Sullivan, Director of Florida’s SPDG
- Phone: 239-590-7748
- E-mail: spdg@fgcu.edu

Lael Engstrom, C&C Project Director
- Phone: 918-406-7302
- E-mail: lengstrom@mail.usf.edu

Greg Gillman, Project Facilitator
- Phone: 352-318-5290
- E-mail: gillman@mail.usf.edu

Kimberly Swan, Project Facilitator
- Phone: 857-636-2642
- E-mail: kimberlyswan@mail.usf.edu
Check & Connect Resources

- Information about Florida Check & Connect
  www.project10.info

- Check & Connect UMN website:
  http://checkandconnect.umn.edu
QUESTIONS & REFLECTIONS