



Check & Connect

Increasing student engagement and persistence in school

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



increased attendance, persistence in school, accrual of credits, and school completion rates; and

decreased truancy, tardies, behavioral referrals, and dropout rates.

The Check & Connect model originated from a partnership of researchers, practitioners, parents, and students led by the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

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 (absences, tardies, skipping class)—in the context of academic performance and emotional or behavioral problems.

Check & Connect is implemented by a person referred to as a mentor—a cross between a mentor, an advocate, and a service coordinator whose primary goal is to keep education a salient issue for disengaged students and their families.

Check & Connect is structured to maximize personal contact and opportunities to build trusting relationships. Student levels of engagement (as reflected in their attendance, grades, and behavior) are “checked” regularly by mentors and used to guide their efforts to increase and maintain students’ “connection” with school.

According to the [What Works Clearinghouse](#), **Check & Connect is the only dropout prevention intervention found to have positive effects on staying in school.**

Check & Connect Core Elements

- 1. Relationships** based on mutual trust and open communication in which the mentor:
 - a. monitors or “checks” a student’s attendance, grades, behavior, etc.;
 - b. “connects” a student to personalized, data-based interventions;
 - c. mentors students for a minimum of two years; and
 - d. facilitates student access to and participation in school.
- 2. Problem solving and capacity building** to help students overcome obstacles.
- 3. Persistence Plus**, a persistent source of motivation, familiarity with the youth and his/her family, and a consistent message that “education is important for your future.”

Check & Connect 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

Check & Connect Implementation Manual



*Check & Connect:
A Comprehensive Student
Engagement Intervention*
**Implementing with
Fidelity** (2012)

By Sandra L. Christenson,
Karen Stout, & Angie Pohl

The 2012 edition of the Check & Connect implementation manual builds on the experience and continuing research of the past 21 years to offer users an expanded guide that incorporates new findings about the model. It walks readers through the Check & Connect implementation process, outlining the key components, describing the steps of implementation, and presenting the underlying theory and research, including the four types of student engagement (academic, behavioral, cognitive, and affective) and the importance of intervening both directly with students and indirectly through enhancing students' home and school contexts. Additionally, the 2012 manual provides guidance on options for implementing Check & Connect with fidelity to its principles and strategies while also responding to local school and community contexts.

Cost: \$50 each, \$45 each for 20 or more copies in a single order. For more information and to order, go to checkandconnect.umn.edu/manual.

Check & Connect Training and Consultation

Check & Connect staff at the University of Minnesota offer several standard and contracted training options to schools, districts, and community agencies seeking to start a new student engagement program, enhance an existing truancy prevention program, or use Check & Connect with related initiatives:

1. **Preparation and Implementation Training** to train administrators and decision-makers in planning for Check & Connect implementation.
2. **Mentor Training** to train new and existing Check & Connect mentors for their role.
3. **Comprehensive Implementation Training** to train administrators, decision-makers, *and* new and existing Check & Connect mentors in implementing Check & Connect (*a hybrid of above two trainings*).
4. **Fidelity of Implementation Follow-Up Workshop** to support administrators and Check & Connect mentors in ensuring ongoing fidelity of implementation.

Training participants receive the manual, resource materials, and electronic forms. Site coordinators at contracted sites receive follow-up assistance to support implementation fidelity. In addition, staff are available to assist with writing Check & Connect into grant proposals. Contact us for more information!

**Check &
Connect**



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Implementation Options

Check & Connect (C&C) can be implemented in an educational or community setting in a variety of ways. While our evidence for C&C was obtained through research studies using **dedicated mentors**, sites around the United States are piloting several different implementation options, as outlined below:

	Dedicated Mentors	School Staff as Mentors	Community Volunteers as Mentors
DETAILS	<p>Individuals hired part-time or full-time can serve as C&C mentors (including AmeriCorps volunteers).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseloads of 20-25 students for 50% FTE and 40-50 for 100% FTE • May be hired by districts, agencies, community-based organizations, or county or state governments • May be assigned at the building, district, or region level • May or may not follow mobile students from school to school 	<p>Teachers, school social workers, school psychologists, counselors, paraprofessionals, and other school personnel can serve as C&C mentors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseloads of 1-5 students each • Staff may be released from other assigned duties (e.g., lunch duty, bus duty, one class period) and/or paid a small stipend (<i>see backside for tips</i>) 	<p>Volunteers from the community, undergraduate or graduate education programs, civic organizations, or businesses can serve as C&C mentors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseloads vary by mentor availability • Volunteers are typically assigned to students in one school
PROS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sole focus is their C&C mentor role • More likely to make the recommended two-year commitment (except AmeriCorps volunteers) • Have more time for professional development • Have more time for family engagement • Low-cost if using AmeriCorps volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs less than using dedicated mentors • Staff may already have positive relationships with students • Staff know the school policies, environment, personnel, and available resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free or low-cost • Are probably willing and eager to be a mentor • May come from the same community as the students and may have backgrounds similar to the students
CONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be paid a salary; the nature of the funding used to pay their salary (e.g., grant funds) could limit the duration of their employment • May be new to the school • May encounter difficulty with obtaining access to school data unless the mentor is considered a district employee • May be the only C&C mentor at a particular school and thus may lack colleagues with whom to collaborate and problem-solve • If using AmeriCorps volunteers: limited availability, one-year commitment, and application process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking on an additional duty may be difficult • May experience role confusion between their “real” job and their C&C mentor role; e.g., they may be responsible for grading or disciplining students (not part of the C&C mentor role) • May vary in their willingness, commitment, and follow-through as mentors • Scheduling C&C-related professional development may be difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment and follow-through regarding their C&C mentor role may vary • Confidentiality issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ May not have access to school data or other information ○ May be issues related to family privacy and the information that can or cannot be shared with them • May lack experience with youth, families, or the school system • Scheduling C&C-related professional development may be difficult

~ See backside for funding tips ~

Tips for Funding Dedicated Mentors or Using Existing School Staff as Mentors

The primary expense for implementing Check & Connect (C&C) is staffing for mentors, whether hiring dedicated mentors or using existing staff (e.g., school counselor, school psychologist, social worker, teacher, etc.) to serve in this role.

Writing a Grant to Hire Dedicated C&C Mentors

Finding a Grant

- Look for funding in your community through local educational or philanthropic foundations that award grants.
- Keep apprised of your state department of education's (SEA's) statewide dropout prevention initiatives (sometimes SEAs make funding available to districts to implement programs like C&C).
- Consider federal education funding sources (some C&C sites have received funding from the U.S. Department of Education).
- Read the grant requirements carefully. What is the geographic area and content the funder is focused on? Look for content keywords like dropout prevention, school completion, student engagement, mentoring, character education, and/or youth development and determine if the grant requirements apply to your need.

Funding Websites

- Foundation Center Grants Database - searchable (foundationcenter.org)
- View current U.S. Department of Education Grant Competitions (ed.gov/grantapps) or specific initiatives:
 - High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI) grants (ed.gov/programs/dropout/awards.html)
 - Investing in Innovation (i3) grants (ed.gov/programs/innovation)
 - Safe and Supportive Schools grants (safesupportiveschools.ed.gov)
- Learn about AmeriCorps and how organizations can apply for an AmeriCorps grant at nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/

Using Existing School Staff as C&C Mentors

Schools or districts can:

- Redefine the positions of current staff, provide training, and adjust typical caseloads. Many different people can serve as Check & Connect mentors, including teachers, counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and educational assistants.
- Provide a small stipend to school personnel who take on a larger caseload (e.g., 5 or more students).
- Relieve school personnel serving as mentors of other service duties (e.g., bus or lunch duty). Many secondary schools employ 100-150 staff. Clearly, many students could be served if each staff member was a Check & Connect mentor for one student!

(Excerpted from *Check & Connect: A Comprehensive Student Engagement Intervention: Implementing with Fidelity*, 2012, p. 33.)

Check & Connect High School Monitoring Form



Student: _____ ID #: _____ Grade: _____
 School: _____ Mentor: _____ Month: _____

CHECK

Academic data	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	High Risk		
Number of Ds or Fs								
Number of missing assignments								
Cumulative grades	1st quarter grades ___ Ds ___ Fs		2nd quarter grades ___ Ds ___ Fs		3rd quarter grades ___ Ds ___ Fs		4th quarter grades ___ Ds ___ Fs	
Credit accrual	Credits earned out of _____ total possible					GPA _____		
Met state acad. standards (proficient)	Math: ___ Yes ___ No		Reading: ___ Yes ___ No		Writing: ___ Yes ___ No			
Behavior Data	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	High Risk		
Tardy								
Skipping classes								
Unexcused/unverified absence								
Excused absence								
Behavior referral/infraction								
Detention								
Suspension (in/out-of-school)								

CONNECT

Communication	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	M TU W TH F	
With student	Formal					
	Informal					
With family	Attempt/not reached					
	Left message					
	Note home					
	Phone conversation					
	Meeting					
Home visit						
Communication with school staff						
Communication with outside agency						

Basic intervention	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F					
Share "check" data																														
Provide regular feedback																														
Discuss staying in school																														
Problem solve about risk																														
Intensive intervention	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F	M	TU	W	TH	F					
Facilitate goal setting																														
Discuss academic progress and supports																														
Discuss behavior and supports																														
Discuss how current choices impact likelihood of graduating from high school																														
Intensive problem solving																														
Intensive problem solving with parent																														
Intensive problem solving with school personnel																														
Facilitate participation in community service																														
Facilitate participation in school or community sponsored activities																														
Facilitate tutoring																														
Facilitate participation in small-group instruction for passing exit exam																														
Teach problem solving skills																														
Teach organization and study skills																														
Arrange an alternative to suspension																														
Other: _____																														

Monthly summary of case notes

Date:		Notes:	
Goal:	Attendance		
	Engagement		
	Investment in future		
Date:		Notes:	
Goal:	Attendance		
	Engagement		
	Investment in future		
Date:		Notes:	
Goal:	Attendance		
	Engagement		
	Investment in future		
Date:		Notes:	
Goal:	Attendance		
	Engagement		
	Investment in future		
Date:		Notes:	
Goal:	Attendance		
	Engagement		
	Investment in future		
Date:		Notes:	
Goal:	Attendance		
	Engagement		
	Investment in future		

Check & Connect is a comprehensive student engagement intervention developed at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, and implemented by schools nationwide. For more information, visit checkandconnect.umn.edu.

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My Goals for this Grading Period

Name: _____

Date: _____

Long-Term Academic Goal for this Grading Period

What is one **long-term academic goal** you'd like to reach by the end of this grading period?

Is it a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely) goal? Yes No

Why is this goal important to you? _____

Supporting Short-Term Goals for this Month

*These are goals to help you achieve your long-term academic goal identified above. Write **2 short-term goals** that you can accomplish this month and that will **help you reach your long-term goal** below.*

1. **Short-term goal #1:** _____

i. Is it a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely) goal? Yes No

ii. How important is it for you to meet this goal (on a scale from 1 to 10)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not At All Important							Very Important		

iii. List the most important reason(s) for meeting this goal:

iv. How confident are you that you will meet this goal (on a scale from 1 to 10)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not At All Confident							Very Confident		

v. List some reasons that you're confident you'll meet this goal (or explain what would need to happen for you to become more confident):

vi. When do you want to achieve this goal by?

vii. What steps will you take to reach this goal?

viii. Who can help you reach this goal?

2. Short-term goal #2: _____

i. Is it a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely) goal? Yes No

ii. How important is it for you to meet this goal (on a scale from 1 to 10)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not At All Important					Very Important				

iii. List the most important reason(s) for meeting this goal:

iv. How confident are you that you will meet this goal (on a scale from 1 to 10)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not At All Confident					Very Confident				

v. List some reasons that you're confident you'll meet this goal (or explain what would need to happen for you to become more confident):

vi. When do you want to achieve this goal by?

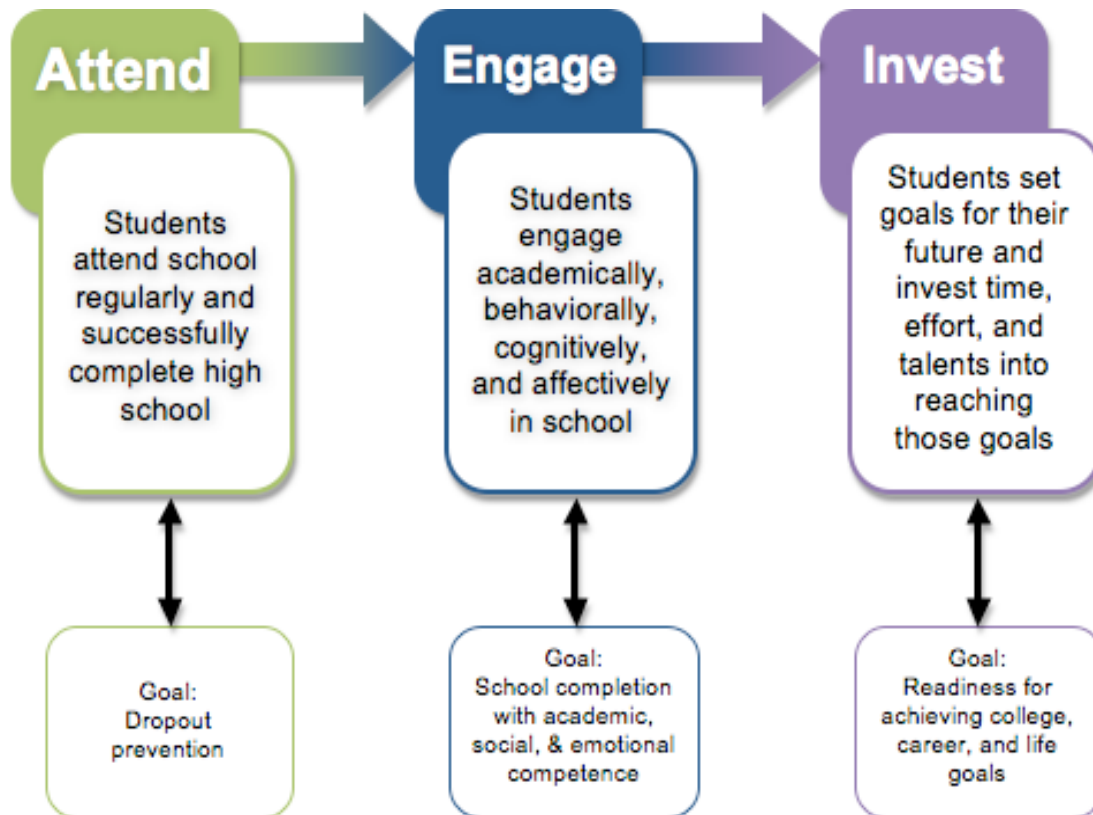
vii. What steps will you take to reach this goal?

viii. Who can help you reach this goal?

Beyond Dropout Prevention: Attend-Engage-Invest

Check & Connect goes beyond preventing dropout and promotes school completion, defined as graduation from high school with sufficient academic and social skills to partake in postsecondary options and/or the world of work. We offer a conceptual framework for moving students toward successful school completion along the continuum of Attend, Engage, and Invest.

Disengaged students are at very different places along the continuum. Interventionists must set different goals for intervention based on where the student is along the continuum. The goals of each intervention are included in the diagram below.



Intervention Examples

ATTEND - Pick up student for school, provide an alarm clock, problem solve about how to get to school, problem solve with student and parents about attendance, establish a between-classes routine for getting to class on time, etc.

ENGAGE - Set goals, self-monitor progress, self-reflect on progress, students select rewards and consequences for achieving/not achieving their goals, help students get involved in extracurricular activities, teach self-regulated learning strategies and strategies to persist, discuss attributions for success and failure, etc.

INVEST - Set long-term goals, create a plan for reaching long-term goals, discuss the connection between school work and meeting long-term goals, foster lifelong learning by helping students enjoy learning, discuss habits, knowledge, and skills needed for college, engage in career planning, etc.

Attend Intervention Example

Goal: Student will understand the consequences of missing school/class and will improve attendance.

Intervention:

1. Brainstorm
 - a. Mentor divides a piece of paper into three columns and labels the columns “reasons/excuses”, “consequences for self” and “consequences for others”.
 - b. Mentor and student brainstorm together reasons/excuses for missing school, then possible consequences for the person missing school, and then possible consequences for others (how does a student missing school affect other people?).
2. Share
 - a. Inform the student about the consequences at your school and in your city and state of not attending school.
3. Discuss
 - a. Which excuses are acceptable for missing school? How do you know if the reason is acceptable?
 - a. How do the consequences differ based on reason/excuse?
 - b. What should you do if you need to miss school for an "acceptable" reason?
 - b. How can you prevent negative consequences from occurring?
 - c. What are the positive consequences of attending school? For you? For others?
4. Problem Solve
 - a. What is keeping you from attending school on a regular basis?
 - b. What are some ideas you have that will help you get to school regularly?
5. Plan
 - a. Develop a plan with the student for improving his/her attendance.
 - b. List the valid reasons he/she may have to miss school.
 - c. List the negative consequences he/she will face if missing school for invalid reasons.
 - d. Set a goal for attendance together.
 - e. Establish an incentive/positive consequence for meeting the attendance goal.
 - f. Discuss progress monitoring:
 - i. Student Self-Monitoring
 1. Give the student the calendar page/monitoring sheet
 2. Instruct the student to keep the sheet somewhere where it won't be lost and is readily accessible (e.g., front of notebook or folder, hanging in locker, certain pocket of book bag, or in assignment book/agenda)
 3. Direct the student to place a star or check on days he/she attends school
 - ii. Mentor Monitoring
 1. Check student attendance at least weekly
 - a. Check student's monitoring sheet/calendar
 - b. Check online attendance/student information system

Engage Intervention Example

Goal: Student will improve academic achievement by a specific amount during short-term intervals, based on goals he/she sets with his/her mentor.

Intervention:

1. The mentor will work with the student to graph his/her own progress toward meeting an achievement goal. The student and mentor work together to decide on a long-term goal based on grade-level benchmarks. They then determine the level of progress that should be made at a given short-term interval (e.g., weekly) in order to meet the long-term goal.
2. Short-term goals will be stated in specific, measurable terms: for example, “(Student) will increase her oral reading fluency by 3 words per minute each week until the end of the school year.” At each session, the teacher or mentor will provide the student with the data (e.g., oral reading fluency score) and the student will graph it. The mentor will then discuss the results with the student, including her progress relative to the last session and whether she is on track to meeting the long-term goal.
3. Student should be trained how to use a graph; either paper-and-pencil or computerized graphing can be used, depending on teacher or student preference and availability of technology. Bar graphs or line graphs may be used with either method.
4. Mentor and student reflect on progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies employed to achieve the short-term goals. Problem solve to choose new strategies if needed.

Invest Intervention Example

Goal: Student will plot a timeline of his/her past, present, and future and define his/her dreams.

Intervention:

1. The mentor and student work together to create a timeline for the student's past, present, and future.
2. Draw a line vertically down a piece of paper and label the line with ages from 0-100. Instruct the student to begin with the past events on the left side of the timeline and fill in important events or events that impacted his/her life somehow. Then the student moves on to the present events and adds these to the left side of the timeline as well.
 - a. If the student struggles, the mentor should prompt student thinking through questions or through providing personal examples of what they would write.
3. When the student completes the past and present events, he/she should write future events, or things he/she wants to happen in the future, on the right side of the timeline. The student may get stuck, so provide personal examples or prompt thinking using questions such as:
 - a. *What do you enjoy doing? What don't you enjoy doing?*
 - b. *What are your talents and skills?*
 - c. *What do you daydream about most often?*
 - d. *Describe three people you admire. What do they do that you think is great? What makes them special?*
 - e. *What matters to you more than anything else?*
 - f. *If you could be anything, what would it be? Why?*
4. After the "Future Events" are completed, instruct students to circle three future events that are most important to them now and then set long-term goals for those dreams.