

Check & Connect

Tiers 2 & 3

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Check & Connect is a research-based program intended to reduce the frequency of disruptive behavior in the classroom and increase pro-social behaviors (Campbell & Anderson, 2008). Students who require more frequent adult support, who are disorganized, or who have begun to show signs of social, behavioral or academic problems may be good candidates for Check & Connect. (Swoszowski, Patterson, & Crosby, 2011). One of its primary goals has been to re-engage at-risk youth and prevent them from dropping out of school. See the Behavior Monitoring Strategy Brief for related strategies, and the Check In/Check Out Program Description for a closely related program synopsis.



What is Check & Connect?

“Check & Connect is an intervention model designed to promote student engagement with the school through relationship building, problem solving, and persistence” (Anderson et al., Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004 p. 97). Student engagement in school is often described as paying attention, participating in class, high attendance rates, and is a key preventative factor in reducing school dropout (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004). Check & Connect is a dropout prevention strategy that is delivered to each student by a monitor who serves to advocate for the student, mentor the student, track the student’s progress, and connect the student with relevant resources (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The core components of Check & Connect are a) consistent monitoring (i.e., “checking”) of student outcomes through specific indicators and b) delivering attention to individual students and partnering with families, school staff, and agencies in the community. It is also critical for the interventionist/monitor to deliver clear feedback to the student that emphasizes the importance of education. Specific outcomes targeted by Check & Connect include attendance, academic, and behavioral goals. For example, many monitors track student suspensions, credits, and course grades (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Check & Connect was developed through The Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. The Institute aims to create partnerships between researchers, practitioners, parents, and school personnel. The Check & Connect intervention model has been used extensively in Minneapolis school districts to improve engagement and decrease truancy for students with learning, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In the past decade, the intervention has been implemented in 27 states, as well as internationally (University of Minnesota, 2012).

Target Students for Check & Connect Intervention

The Check & Connect intervention may be appropriate for a wide variety of students who are at risk of behavior and/or with academic difficulties. While the intervention has been primarily used as a dropout prevention tool for secondary aged students, it can potentially be individualized for providing adult relationships, social skills instruction, academic support, and behavioral/emotional support for a wide range of students at all ages.

The Role of the Intervention Monitor

Check & Connect monitors are not expected or paid to be “best friends” with students. They are, however, encouraged to develop supportive relationships with students that are based on collaborative goals, namely improving the student’s behavior and attachment to school (Anderson et al., 2004). Interventionists should also communicate regularly with the child’s parents in-person, on the phone, or through home-school notes, which can be attached to daily point sheets (Anderson et al., 2004). Students should not be punished for low grades or poor behaviors. Instead, a strengths-based discussion should occur that focuses on specific behaviors that the student needs to display in order to progress (Swoszowski et al., 2011).

Check & Connect monitors meet with students on their caseload once per week while students are in elementary and middle school. Check & Connect monitors are required to meet twice per month with high school students. In secondary schools, students are usually assigned a monitor in ninth grade that remains with them throughout high school (Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, 2012).

Comparing to Check-in/Check-out

Unlike the more general Check in/Check out strategy which employs multiple daily checks

with an assigned facilitator, Check & Connect capitalizes on more intensive and directed, but less frequent monitoring. While Check-in/Check-out facilitators are generally school staff members, monitors for Check & Connect are usually hired full time specifically to implement this intervention, and are not part of a particular school staff. Both programs attempt to build strong, supportive relationships between adults and at-risk students in order to foster resilience, student motivation, achievement, and feelings of belonging in school (Anderson et al., 2004).

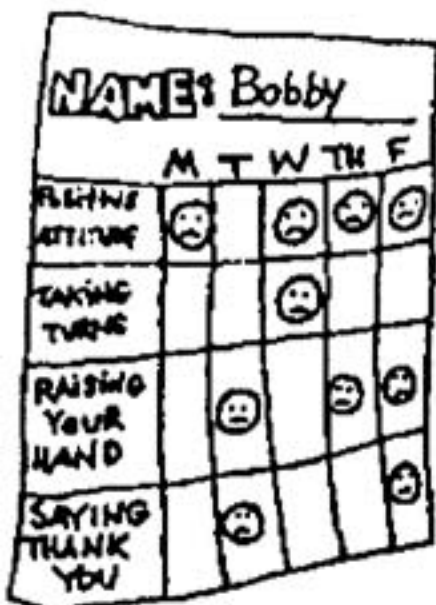
Implementing Check & Connect

Check & Connect monitors are typically full time positions and work in three-four school sites per year as opposed to being a staff member of the school, as is the case with Check in/Check out. Monitors will typically oversee approximately 40 students at a time and must commit to two year periods working with each student they are assigned. Each student is delivered basic intervention, while some students receive more frequent and individualized intervention, if necessary. More intensive interventions usually focus on problem solving (e.g., mediation and social skills), academic assistance (e.g. tutoring, help with scheduling), and recreational and community involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Monitors do



not have a specific script to utilize during their interactions with students, but all meetings should focus on the importance of education and succeeding in school (Anderson et al., 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Potential topics for conversation may include behaviors to avoid such as substance use, sexual promiscuity, or criminal activity (Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, 2012). Since monitors are not staff members of a particular building, their role is more flexible than that of a CICO monitor. For example, Check & Connect monitors may transport students to school, attend school events (e.g., science fairs, pep rallies, parent-teacher conferences), and may continue to communicate with students during the summer.

Moreover, since interventionists are not meeting with students on a daily basis, they monitor more broad outcomes, such as attendance, academic progress, and behavior referrals, rather than daily behavioral goals (Anderson et al., 2004). Data regarding each outcome is collected by interventionists and summarized in monthly reports. Logging specific conversations or details reported by students that are relevant to each outcome indicator is encouraged. According to Anderson et al. (2004), the



NAME: Bobby		M	T	W	TH	F
RAISING ATTITUDE	☹		☹	☹	☹	
TAKING TURNS			☹			
RAISING YOUR HAND		☹		☹	☹	
SAYING THANK YOU		☹				☹

monitor’s method of interaction should include “persistence with students and families, continuity over time, and consistency” (p. 99). Additionally, Check & Connect is a manualized intervention (i.e., implemented consistently and systematically according to a detailed plan) for students who may display problematic behaviors that interfere with academic instruction. Check & Connect is intended to supplement universal tier 1 SWPBS interventions already in place in the school setting (Campbell & Anderson, 2008; Campbell & Anderson, 2011).

What Do We Know About Check & Connect?

According to the University of Minnesota (2012), the implementation of Check & Connect has been linked to decreases in truancy rates, tardies, behavioral referrals, and eventual dropouts. The program website also maintains that Check & Connect has demonstrated an impact on literacy development, persistence in school, credits accumulated, and school completion. Check & Connect has also been included in several Model Programs and Dropout Prevention databases.

Similarly, the Coalition for Evidence Based Policy (2012) reports that the implementation of the Check & Connect intervention with a sample of ninth-graders led to a 42% increase in the percentage of students who completed high school with a diploma or GED after four years. The intervention also led to a 37% increase in persistent attendance (i.e., consistent attendance, no long periods of absences). Both of these effects were significant compared to a control group of students who did not receive the intervention. Furthermore, a study conducted by Anderson et al. (2004) found that student and interventionist perceptions of closeness and quality of relationship were found to be related to improved student engagement. Engagement was specifically improved in the form of increased attendance and academic engagement as rated by the student’s teacher in a sample of 80 elementary and middle school students referred to the Check & Connect program.

Additionally, in 2006, the U.S. Department of Education produced a What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report on the effectiveness of Check & Connect. The WWC reported that the findings of two studies conducted in Minneapolis high schools suggested that Check & Connect had a positive effect on staying in school and a potentially positive effect on progressing in school. The investigation found that the program had no significant effects on students' ability to finish high school within four years (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education followed up their initial statement with a What Works Clearinghouse report on the success of the Check & Connect intervention, specifically for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The WWC pinpointed 25 studies of Check & Connect for students with emotional and behavioral disorders published between 1989 and 2011. However, the WWC reported that based on these studies, they could not reach a conclusion on the effectiveness of Check & Connect. This was largely due to the rigorous standards set by the WWC. In their report, the WWC noted that in many Check & Connect effectiveness reports, 1) many control and intervention groups were not equivalent, 2) that the improvements cited in many of the studies could not be linked solely to the intervention, and 3) several studies were secondary analyses of already existing data (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Thus, although many initial studies of Check & Connect have demonstrated promising results, more rigorous studies that are completed at the elementary, middle, and high school levels by independent researchers are warranted. Although additional research may be warranted for specific age and subgroups, check & connect is generally accepted as a promising practice based on existing studies.



Considerations for Implementing Check & Connect in your School

- **Assign responsibility.** Potential tasks that adults need to coordinate include: calling parents to explain the Check & Connect system and collecting data regarding the settings where problematic behaviors were exhibited by students. Tasks need to be delegated and schools would likely benefit from weekly meetings to assign weekly tasks and obtain progress updates.
- **Have a plan in place for self-selectors.** Some students who may show very mild aggressive behaviors that may not qualify for inclusion in Check & Connect may still express interest in participating in Check & Connect. Once students express interest in the program, their names can be brought up at a weekly Check & Connect meeting (Myers & Briere, 2010).
- **Have a plan for Non-Responders.** Schools should have alternatives in place, such as social skills instruction interventions or tier 3 supports, for students who refuse to participate in the Check & Connect intervention (Myers & Briere, 2010).
- **Intervene at the first sign of Participant Dropout.** Provide monthly booster trainings to remind students of the goals and steps

of the Check & Connect program. Monthly booster meetings could also be an arena for recognizing student achievements, particularly students who have demonstrated significant progress.

Costs of Implementation

The University of Minnesota (2012) notes that an overview of Check & Connect can be delivered in a one-hour webinar. The cost for each participant is \$30. For those schools that are serious about implementing Check & Connect, two day trainings are available in Minneapolis at a cost of \$545 for each participant. Training for mentors consists of another two day event in Minneapolis for \$730. Mentors or school staff can also choose to attend a one day refresher workshop. The cost of the workshop is dependent upon the needs of the school.

Intervention monitor positions are often filled by graduate students or employees with Bachelors' degrees in human service related fields. The Check and Connect program coordinators who serve to organize and supervise monitors

are frequently school psychologists or special education coordinators. According to information obtained from the creators of Check & Connect, the program costs approximately \$1,400-\$1700 per student each year at the secondary level (Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Conclusion

Check & Connect is intended to reduce the frequency of disruptive behavior in the classroom and increase pro-social behaviors by pairing at-risk students with intervention monitors who may also serve as a mentor. The Check & Connect monitor collects data on outcomes, such as student suspensions, credits, and course grades and provides feedback to the student and his or her parents. He or she may also assist in coordinating community activities and services for the student. Preliminary research indicates that the program may be successful in increasing the likelihood students will stay in school and become engaged with school.



Recommended Reference:

Strawhun, J. & Peterson, R. L. (2013, October). *Check & connect. Program Description*. Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education. <http://k12engagement.unl.edu/project-check-and-connect>

Note: A related Program Description, *Check-in/Check-out*, and a Strategy Brief on *Student Behavior Monitoring* are also available from the Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 202 Barkley Center. <http://k12engagement.unl.edu>

Resources:

- Check & Connect at the University of Minnesota: www.checkandconnect.org
- Social Programs that Work: Check & Connect: <http://evidencebasedprograms.org/wordpress/1366/check-and-connect/>
- What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report (2006): http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/intervention_reports/WWC_Check_Connect_092106.pdf
- What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report (2011): http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/intervention_reports/wwc_checkconnect_102511.pdf

Check & Connect References

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