



Evidence in Action

A K20 Center Research Brief

The Effect of Mentoring on School Attendance and Academic Outcomes: A Randomized Evaluation of the Check & Connect Program

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Introduction

This intervention brief explores the impact of mentoring on school attendance and academic outcomes. The research article by Guryan et al. (2020) investigates the Check & Connect (C&C) program, a structured mentoring initiative aimed at improving student engagement and reducing absenteeism. The authors highlight the significance of addressing truancy as a precursor to high school dropout, emphasizing the need for interventions that build social capital through supportive adult relationships. The study is set against the backdrop of declining resources for truancy prevention in urban school districts, particularly Chicago, where the program was implemented.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study employed a large-scale randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the effectiveness of the C&C program. The intervention targeted students in grades 1 to 8 within the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

Sample:

Two cohorts of students were included in the study. Cohort 1 consisted of 487 students from 23 randomly selected elementary schools, while Cohort 2 included 348 students from nine of the original 23 schools. Students were eligible if they had between 10 and 35 absences in the previous school year.

Data Analysis:

The researchers used longitudinal administrative data from CPS to measure the program's impact on attendance, grades, and standardized test scores. The analysis focused on comparing outcomes between treatment and control groups, with additional tests for spillover effects within schools.



Results

The C&C program significantly reduced absences among middle school-aged students (grades 5 to 7) by 4.2 days per year, representing a 22.9% decrease. However, the program had no detectable effects on elementary school-aged students (grades 1 to 4). There were no significant impacts on academic outcomes such as test scores or GPA. The study suggests that the effectiveness of mentoring may increase with the duration of the intervention, as impacts were larger in the second year compared to the first.

Application into Practice

To replicate the C&C intervention, schools should:

1. **Identify Target Students:** Focus on students with high absenteeism rates (10-35 absences in the previous year).
2. **Assign Mentors:** Select and train in-school staff members to serve as mentors, ensuring they can provide personalized support and build relationships with students.
3. **Monitor and Intervene:** Implement regular check-ins and timely interventions to address barriers to attendance and engagement.
4. **Engage Families:** Foster strong connections between mentors and students' families to support student engagement from home.

By following these steps, schools can create a supportive environment that fosters middle school students' self-efficacy and prepares them for future college and career success.

Work Cited

Guryan, J., Christenson, S., Cureton, A., Lai, I., Ludwig, J., Schwarz, C., Shirey, E., & Turner, M. C. (2020). The effect of mentoring on school attendance and academic outcomes: A randomized evaluation of the Check & Connect program. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 40(3), 841-882. DOI: 10.1002/pam.22264