

Enhancing School Attendance through Structured Mentoring Programs

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Time Frame 210 minutes

Essential Question(s)

How can all stakeholders contribute to success of the Check & Connect® program?

Summary

This professional learning session focuses on insights into the roles of all stakeholders involved in the Check & Connect® program. Participants will examine the factors that can influence a student's decision to remain in school, the positive impact that the Check & Connect® program can have on student success, and the powerful role that the whole school community can play in supporting Check & Connect® students and mentors.

Learning Goals

- Examine the role and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the Check & Connect® program.
- Explore the data and types of support necessary for Check & Connect® mentors to implement the program effectively.
- Determine personal readiness and commitment to support the implementation of the Check & Connect® program.

Attachments

- Card Sort_ Static or Dynamic—Enhancing School Attendance Through Mentoring .docx
- Card Sort_ Static or Dynamic—Enhancing School Attendance Through Mentoring .pdf
- Four Corners—Enhancing School Attendance Through Mentoring.docx
- Four Corners—Enhancing School Attendance Through Mentoring.pdf
- Presentation Slides—Enhancing School Attendance through Structured Mentoring Programs.pptx
- Sample Student Data—Enhancing School Attendance through Structured Mentoring Programs.docx
- Sample Student Data—Enhancing School Attendance through Structured Mentoring Programs.pdf

Materials

- Presentation Slides (attached)
- Card Sort: Static or Dynamic (attached; one per group of 4-6)
- (Optional) Sample Student Data handout (attached; one per group of 4-6)
- Four Corners (attached; one set)
- Chart Paper (at least 4 sheets)
- Markers (8-12)
- (Optional) Internet capable devices

30 minutes

Engage

Prior to beginning the presentation, hang chart paper in each corner of the room for the first activity.

Use the attached **Presentation Slides** to guide the session. Begin by displaying the title slide, then continue to **slide 3** and ask participants, "How would you describe an engaged student?" Direct participants to respond by adding a short description to each of the posters for what an engaged student Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like. Advise them that they are free to start on any poster but suggest they try to spread out.

Let participants know this activity is meant to be done in silence and their response can be written in text or drawn. The silent Chalk Talk format of completing the Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like strategy should encourage thoughtful reflection from all participants.

Once the participants have completed their posters, review the Essential Question on **slide 4** and the Session Objectives on **slide 5.** If time permits, have a few participants share what they added or read a few responses from each poster.

35 minutes

Explore

Transition to **slide 6** and ask participants to share factors that may lead a student to ultimately drop out of school. As participants verbally share their Collective Brain Dump, write their responses on a sheet of chart paper. When participants can think of no more responses, hang the chart paper in a place where all can view it. Display **slide 7** and review the Top 10 Reasons students report they left high school.

Optional Tech Integration

As an alternative to writing the Collective Brain Dump responses on chart paper, consider using a digital option. We recommend using a tool with a Collaborative Word Cloud feature such as Mentimter, EdWordle, Simple Word Cloud, and Free Word Cloud Generator.

Facilitator's Note: Possible Responses

If participants struggle to come up with responses, offer your own responses based on the following list: (a) academic failure, (b) boredom/lack of engagement, (c) low education expectations, (d) need to work to support family, (e) belief that no one cares about their attendance, (f) substance abuse, (g) pregnancy or parenthood, (h) negative peer influences, (i) physical or medical issues, (j) chronic absenteeism, (k) lack of reliable transportation, (l) inability to keep up with schoolwork, (m) feel school is unsafe, (n) feelings of isolation, (o) lack of family support, (p) poor relationships with teachers or staff, (q) poor relationships with peers, or (r) belief that getting a GED is easier than completing four years of high school.

Display **slide 8** and review the difference between static and dynamic factors. For example, family structure is static. Students cannot change whether they are in a single-parent home. However, poor grades is a dynamic factor and can be changed. Pass out the **Static or Dynamic?** cards, one set to each table, or break participants up into small groups of 4-6. Once the individual groups have sorted the cards, ask them to add other factors on the blank cards that may reflect on student performance.

Invite each group to share what they have determined is static and what they have determined is dynamic. Have them discuss the two categories and include a discussion of how what may seem static can be turned into a dynamic factor. Use this time to discuss strategies for creating an active learning environment where every student is valued and supported.

35 minutes

Explain

Transition to **slide 9** and introduce the Check & Connect® program by playing the Gear Up Check and Connect Testimonial video. When the video has concluded, move through **slides 10-11** to briefly review the "Check" and "Connect" in the Check & Connect® program.

Move to **slide 12** to display the sample student data. Optionally, pass out the attached **Sample Student Data** handout, one per small group.

Ask participants to discuss the I Notice, I Wonder questions on **slide 13** with their small group. Each participant should consider these questions in regard to their own role at the school (teacher, counselor, librarian, coach, etc.). Provide at least 10 minutes for groups to review the data and discuss their responses. Ask 2-3 small groups to share what they discussed with the whole group.

Display **slide 14** to illustrate how a Check & Connect® mentor spends their time with one student in a given week. Let participants know this is a simplified overview. Each task or time could vary depending on the needs of each student.

Move to **slide 15** and introduce a modified version of the Four Corners strategy. Let participants know they will need to stand up and move to one of the four corners (students, families, mentors, staff) of the room based on their response to the prompt: *Who do you think has the most important role in supporting the success of Check & Connect®?*

Tell participants to stay with their Four Corners poster group for the next activity, or you may have them return to their seats. Transition to **slide 16** and ask participants to identify *how* the four groups of stakeholders can support the Check & Connect® program.

Facilitator's Note: Session Preparation

Prior to the session, print one copy of the Four Corners posters. Be prepared to place these in the four corners of your space, or far enough apart for small groups to gather and discuss their selection.

35 minutes

Extend

Transition to **slide 17** and pass out blank sheets of paper, several sheets per small group.

Advise the participants they are now going to use the List of 8 strategy to discuss the role of a mentor and other stakeholders. After each group has their blank paper, ask them to select a scribe who will also be their spokesperson at the conclusion of each round of this activity.

The List of 8 strategy is essentially a race between the groups to see who can respond to each prompt the quickest. Teams are given a prompt which asks them to "list eight examples of..." at the start of each round. Each group decides on a predetermined order (clockwise or any other order) for team members to respond. Each team member contributes a response, but they can say "pass" so that the next person in order then responds. The scribe writes down each response. When a group completes a list of 8 responses, they raise their hands; then, the scribe shares their list. The fastest group wins the round, but they earn a point for each incorrect list item. The team with the lowest score at the end of all rounds wins.

If needed, model a practice round for the participants. For example, if the prompt was "list eight examples of fruit," the first team member would say "apple," the second might say "banana," and so on until the team has created a list of eight examples of fruit.

After participants are clear on how the strategy works, provide them the following prompts for each round. Give them two minutes to answer round one, but only one minute to answer in subsequent rounds. Transition to **slide 18** and use each of the following prompts for six rounds.

- List eight characteristics or skills of a good mentor.
- List eight resources a mentor may need to support a student.
- List eight ways a family can help a student remain in school.
- List eight things a student can do to remain in school.
- List eight things school staff can do to help a student remain in school.

At the end of each round, ask the "winning" group to share their list. If time permits, have the other groups share anything on their lists that has not already been shared. Briefly discuss any list items that may not fit the prompt. To wrap up this activity, display **slide 19** to discuss with participants what a mentor is not. Draw attention to the quote and remind participants it's all about persistence and perseverance— and that is why mentors need to think about what they *are not* just as much as they need to think about what they *are* to a student.

> "The first 3-4 months I was thinking: When are you going to leave? The 5th & 6th month I'm thinking: You're showing pity. You pity me. You don't care about me. By the 18th month, I'm like: This person loves me, because I have nothing to offer, and they are showing that they are not trying to use me. So stick in their lives, through thick and thin."
>
> *—James Andersen, 2014 National Mentoring Summit*

Facilitator's Note: Possible Responses

- **Characteristics or skills of a good mentor:** good listener, empathetic, willing, flexible, have case management skills, nonjudgemental, dependable, consistent, supportive, great communication skills, believe students can make progress, has advocacy skills, encouraging, etc.
- **Roles a mentor plays:** liaison, advocate, problem-solver, coach, connector, monitor, encourager, trusted adult, cheerleader, role model, steward, observer, guide, etc.
- **Resources a mentor needs:** attendance records, grades, behavior reports, parent/teacher conference notes, parent/guardian contact information, IEPs or 504s, credit recover options, time, language translation, list of assistance programs, information about extracurricular activities, etc.
- **Things students can do:** attend school regularly, talk to someone when they are struggling, turn in assignments, problem-solve, get involved in school activities, ask about credit recovery, make a connection with a trusted adult, set goals, connect school with their future, check grades, develop study skills, etc.
- **Things school staff can do:** build relationships with students, monitor attendance, update grade reports weekly, reach out to the Check & Connect® mentor, offer multiple pathways for success, encourage struggling students, provide clear expectations, maintain consistent standards, celebrate student success, provide timely feedback, etc.
- **Ways families can help:** foster good habits, communicate with school staff, encourage participation in school activities, monitor grades and attendance, model a positive attitude toward school, prioritize attendance, attend school activities, provide a quiet space for homework and studying, encourage students to set goals, work with the school to mitigate family responsibilities, seek intervention when challenges arise, etc.

30 minutes

Evaluate

To begin wrapping up this introduction to Check & Connect®, move to **slide 20** and play the short (39 second) video, 'If You Mentor Me . . . '

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=gcnX-wvp98Q?si=4wM_x_3uF8ZezIxP

Display **slide 21** to introduce the How Am I Feeling? What Am I Thinking? strategy. Ask participants how they are feeling about the Check & Connect® program? What are they thinking about supporting the Check & Connect® program?

Research Rationale

The research article by Guryan, J., 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.

Resources

- Guryan, J., Christenson, S., Cureton, A., & Lai, I. (2020). The effect of mentoring on school attendance and academic outcomes: A randomized evaluation of Check & Connect® program. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. 40(3) DOI:10.1002/pam.22264
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