



School Completion Strategies that Work in Rural Schools



School Completion Strategies that Work in Rural Schools

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Failing to graduate is an epidemic impacting students with and without disabilities. The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2013 that young adults ages 25-34 who dropped out made \$23,900 a year compared to high school graduates who make \$30,000. The economic implications include increased spending in healthcare, public assistance, subsidized housing, and food assistance (Jordan, Kostandini, Mykerezi, 2012). In fact, it has been estimated that the average amount the government will spend over a lifetime in services for a dropout is \$306,906 (Northeastern University, Center for Labor Market Studies, 2012). Reasons students drop out include: tardiness, poor attendance, lack of interest, behavior problems, poor relationships with both peers and adults, academic failure, movement from school to school, and personal life events (Balfanz, Wang, & Byrnes, 2010; Mac Iver, 2010).

Jordan and colleagues (2012) examined differences between rural and urban dropout rates, and found similarities between the two. They found family characteristics, peer related characteristics, and gender are more predictive of dropping out than geographic location. However, far more predictive than family characteristics are early warning indicators (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011). Early warning indicators (e.g. chronic absenteeism, multiple discipline referrals, failing an academic course) are easily identified by school personnel; and evidence-based interventions can effectively prevent students from dropping out.

The implications of dropping out are our high for students, families, communities, and society as a whole, therefore it is pivotal that we bridge the gaps for students at-risk of dropping out by utilizing effective interventions and identifying students early (Wilkins & Bost, 2015).

School Completion Strategies

With the increasing attention to preventing students from dropping out of high school it is essential to know about effective strategies. Students with and without disabilities benefit from individual and schoolwide supports. It is important to use data when determining which strategies are appropriate to use for students at-risk. In order to pull accurate data it is important to have an early warning system in place, and know criteria that determines a student is at-risk of dropping out.

Early Warning Systems (EWS) are an important strategy to monitor students who may be at-risk for dropping out. Early warning systems are based on established indicators that predict whether a student is off-track for graduation (e.g. attendance, behavior, course completion). Students who are falling into one or more of the risk categories can be flagged so schools can appropriately intervene. It is important to have an EWS in place because it allows school personnel to track students to determine who is off-track for graduation (Therriault, Heppen, O’Cummings, Fryer, & Johnson, 2010). It can be considered a strategy to screen and then monitor students who exhibit one or more of the indicators associated with dropping out. The ABC indicators are described next.

The ABC’s of Dropout Prevention

The predictors that make up early warning systems are often called the ABC’s: attendance, behavior, course completion. The ABC’s have been shown to be more predictive of dropping out than family or student demographics and test scores (Bruce, et al., 2011). Balfanz, Wang, & Byrnes (2010) found that ABC indicators were as predictive of dropping out for rural schools as for urban schools. Table 1 details the ABC’s and at-risk indicators, Table 2 provides additional at-risk indicators and the associated thresholds.

Table 1. ABC’s of Dropout Prevention



Missing 20 days of school or 10% or more of instructional time



Two or more behavior infractions



Failing one or more courses, GPA 2.0 or below

Adapted from Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz (2011). *On Track for Success: The Use of Early Warning Indicator and Intervention Systems to Build a Grad Nation*. Baltimore, MD: The Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

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A familiar saying among school personnel is “I can teach them if they will only come to school” (Bruce, et al., 2011, p. 13). When a student misses 20 days of school, or 10% of their instructional time, they are considered chronically absent. This is an important at-risk indicator of dropping out. Chronic absenteeism includes missing school for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences, suspensions, expulsions, in-school-suspensions, and time out of the classroom. In rural schools, it is estimated that 1 in 4 students miss a month’s worth of school in one academic year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). This means that even though schools calculate absences based on the variable total number of school days, the 10% marker is a solid predictor of chronic absenteeism. If a student has missed 3 days of school out of a 30 day period of time, then that student is also considered at-risk for dropping out.



If students act out, and get sent from class, they miss instructional time. In general, if a student has two or more behavior infractions (e.g. office discipline referrals) they are at-risk of dropping out. Byrnes and colleagues (2012), found 32% of firsttime 9th grade students from both urban and rural schools receiving one out-of-school suspension dropped out. What constitutes a behavior infraction is important for schools to determine because it can vary by teacher.



Course completion is a core component of finishing high school. Research has identified several academic indicators that range across different grades and impact both urban and rural schools:

- Reading below grade level by the end of 3rd grade
- Failing English or math in grades 6-9
- GPA below 2.0
- 2 or more course failures in 9th grade
- Failure to be promoted to 10th grade on time (Bruce Bridgeland, Fox, Balfanz, 2011)

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Table 2. Check & Connect Risk Indicator Table

Indicator of Risk	Definition	High Risk
Tardiness	Arriving late either for school or for class.	Five or more incidents per month or greater than or equal to 15% incidents per month
Skipping	Missing selected class periods within a day without an excused reason.	Three or more incidents per month or greater than or equal to 15% incidents per month (e.g., # classes skipped/# classes times days enrolled)
Absenteeism	Full day's absence for excuses or unexcused reasons. Days when the student is absent for out-of-school suspensions should be included here.	Three or more incidence per month or greater than or equal to 15% days per month (e.g., # days absent/# days enrolled)
Behavior referrals	Being sent to administrative or resource staff for inappropriate behavior.	Three or more referrals per month
Detention	A consequence for inappropriate behavior for which the student "owes" time either before or after school. (The student is often required to perform some custodial function on the school grounds, to complete school work, or at least to sit quietly.)	Four or more incidents per month
In-school suspension	A consequence for inappropriate behavior for which the student spends the school day(s) in a separate area or classroom of the school building. (The student is typically supervised and required to participate in a structured activity, such as completing homework, participating in school maintenance projects, or sitting quietly.)	Two or more incidents per month
Out-of-school suspension	A consequence for inappropriate behavior for which the student spends a defined number of school days at home. (The student is not allowed on school property for this suspension period.)	Two or more days suspended per month
Failing classes	Receiving a grade of D or F in any class.	Two or more D's per grading period and/or one or more F
Behind in credits	Earning too few credits to be on track to graduate in four years.	Earning less than 80% of the possible credit hours per grading period
Unsatisfactory academic performance	While in elementary school, number of Unsatisfactory grades earned.	Two or more Unsatisfactory grades per grading period
Not meeting standards in reading and/or math	Not meeting reading or math standards on the state standardized tests or standardized benchmark tests; below class average in reading or math.	Standardized test scores of not meeting or partially meeting standards; teacher reporting of students in bottom quartile; below class average in reading or math; or not proficient in reading by third grade

Note. From "Check & Connect: A comprehensive student engagement intervention manual: Implementing with fidelity" by S. Christenson, K. Stout, A. Pohl, 2012, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, pg. 30.

Rural Reflection

Early Warning System

West Virginia partnered with the National Dropout Prevention Center for Student with Disabilities (<http://www.ndpc-sd.org/>) and created an Early Warning System to fit within the existing state longitudinal data system. This tracking measure allows school personnel to filter students by attendance, behavior/discipline, and course failure data to track their risk. A student is flagged as at-risk according to any one of the indicators (attendance, behavior, course completion) using a color coding system reflecting the level of risk: yellow=low risk, orange=moderate risk, red=high risk (Wilkins, et al., 2014). Data from West Virginia's EWS can then be examined by: student, grade, and school. In this way the West Virginia EWS creates lists of students who need immediate attention to get back on-track. Once you know which students are flagged, you can identify strategies to intervene.

Figure 1. West Virginia's Early Warning system



Deciding On School Completion Strategies

Once you identify which students are at-risk for dropping out, the next step is to select strategies that will meet their needs. If students are flagged for attendance, it would be important to identify interventions or strategies to support them to attend school. First off, develop a list of all possible supports your school currently provides to help teachers' access specific supports and strategies.



Frazelle and Nagel (2015) recommend using an indicator-intervention map. This creates an easy to use chart for teachers and school personnel to identify an intervention that addresses the student's specific needs.

Table 3. Sample Intervention-Indicator Mapping

Intervention	Notes	Focus of intervention (ABCs)		
		A attendance	B behavior	C course completion
Afterschool tutoring	Available only for math			X
Peer mediators	Accommodates 15 students per grade		X	
Individual coaching	We have four coaches who can each manage 10 students	X	X	X
First period check-in		X		
Policy to talk to parents after two unexcused absences	Do we have staff available to personally talk to every parent?	X		

Note. From "A practitioner's guide to implementing early warning systems" by S. Frazelle, & A. Nagel, 2015, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest, pg. 12.

Rural Reflection

Organizing Your School's Supports

When a middle school in Kansas began gathering information for their early warning system they created an intervention grid to help organize available supports in their school. The school's early warning system team worked together to create Figure 2. The middle school's grid shows which supports are available as well as which tier each support targets. The grid was used to help identify interventions for students at-risk. Once the middle school identified an appropriate intervention they used the entry and exit criteria in the grid to monitor the success of the intervention and determine when it was appropriate for the student to exit the intervention (Lane, Oakes, Ennis, & Hirsch, 2014). If the intervention was unsuccessful the team was able to go back to the grid and determine a different intervention.

Figure 2. Jardine Intervention Grid

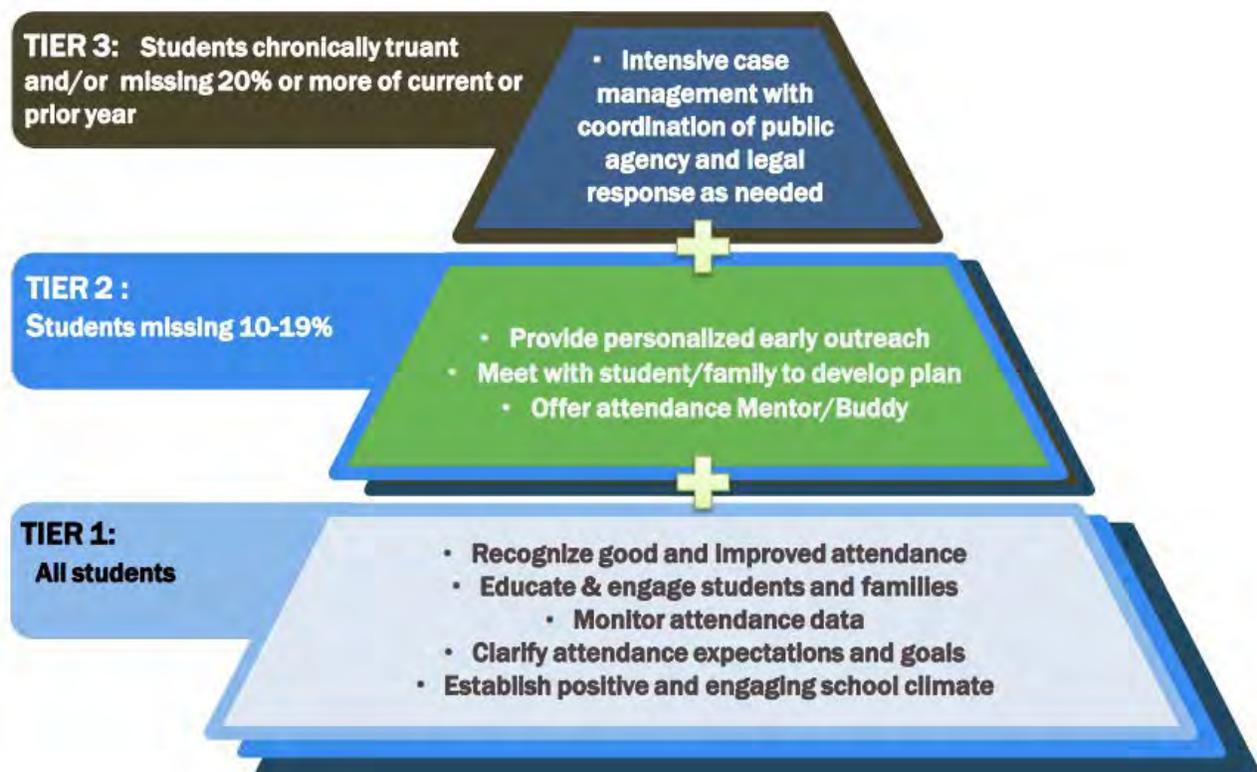
Jardine Middle School		PBIS		2014-2015	
Intervention	Coordinator	Entry Criteria	Exit Criteria	Purpose	
Tier 2					
Behavior					
Check & Connect	Mental Health Team	See Entry/Exit Criteria Grid		Relationships/ Decrease at-risk behavior	
Diversity Mentoring Group	Shannon/Nikki	Referral based on student needing diverse mentors	No longer demonstrating need/decrease in at-risk behaviors	Relationships/ Decrease at-risk behavior	
Falk's Fellows	Kevin Falk	Referral based on student needing help developing friendships or social skills	No longer demonstrating need with developing friendship or social skills	Friendship/ Social Skills	
Mindful Mornings	Jenny Ikenberry	Referral based on student needing help with stress/ anxiety/ inattention	No longer needing help with stress/ anxiety/ or inattention	Developing skills in mindfulness to decrease stress & anxiety, increase attentiveness, and improve academic outcome	
Fairbanks' Lunch Bunch	Mikel Fairbank	Referral based on student needing help developing friendships or social skills	No longer demonstrating need with developing friendship or social skills	Friendship/ Social Skills	
Keil's Mentoring Group	Officer Keil	Referral based on student needing male mentors	No longer demonstrating need/decrease in at-risk behaviors	Relationships with positive male & law enforcement/ Decrease at-risk behavior	
Academic (F in Reading or Math highly predictive of drop out) &/Or 10-24th percentile					

ABC's + 3 Tiers

The ABC's of school completion are implemented at different levels of intensity. Often referred to as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), for dropout prevention, it is important to ensure that all students are supported to be successful in the A, B, C's. Then as certain students need more support in a particular area (e.g. attendance) you will be increasing the intensity of the intervention. Tier 1 targets interventions for all students, these supports are provided schoolwide. Tier 2 supports are provided to 10-15% of the students when Tier 1 is not sufficient support. Tier 3 supports are for very few students, 3-5%, who need the most intensive supports.

Examples of school-wide attendance interventions and strategies focusing on a multi-tiered system of support is illustrated in Figure 1.3. One example of a Tier 1 support is holding a school-wide assembly at the beginning of the school year to educate all students on attendance expectations, and explain the incentives for students who attend school.

Figure 3. Multi-Tiered System of Support for Attendance Interventions



Retrieved from Attendance Works, 4/6/2015,
www.attendanceworks.org/tools/schools/principals/

Resources ✓

There are many strategies to support students with low attendance, behavior difficulties, and course failures. We have included several strategies and resources that are effective dropout prevention interventions with specific applications to rural schools.



You will notice an , , and , next to each strategy/intervention. The symbol represents which indicator the intervention targets (attendance, behavior, and course completion). Some interventions target multiple indicators.

Attendance Works

Attendance Works (<http://www.attendanceworks.org/>) is a website providing information regarding boosting attendance. This resource provides handouts, presentations, webinars, videos ready-to-use templates to share with families on the importance of attendance. There are toolkits for teachers and principals to help teach the value of attendance and school-wide incentives to improve attendance. You can see what other states are doing with the examples on improving attendance. Resources are provided in both English and Spanish.

Strategies to Increase Attendance (Retrieved from Attendance Works):

- **Recognize good and improved attendance:** The focus is not on every student having perfect attendance. It is important to acknowledge students and provide rewards to students with good or improved attendance. Welcoming students to class every day is a way to show students it is important they attend school.
- **Engage students and parents:** Teaching both students and parents about the importance of attendance. Parents may not realize that excused absences can negatively impact their child's success; it is important to educate everyone. One way to get information out to parents is at "Welcome night" for parents and students at the beginning of the school year.
- **Monitor attendance data and practice:** Most schools already collect attendance data that can be used to identify students at-risk of chronic absenteeism. Looking at the data and determining which students are missing 10% is one part of the Early Warning System process. If there is a technology department for your district, contact them to see if it's possible for your student information system to calculate this data.
- **Provide personalized early outreach:** Outreach is essential to determining the barriers preventing students from coming to school. It is important the individual providing outreach has a relationship with the family.
- **Develop pragmatic response to barriers:** Identify students who are chronically absent and determine if there is a systemic issue that needs to be addressed schoolwide, for example the bus does not go in a certain area and multiple students from that neighborhood frequently miss school.

Rural Reflection

Monitoring Attendance

Attendance data is usually collected each day using the district or school student information system (e.g., PowerSchool). Even without an EWS system, attendance data can be tracked and monitored using the existing student information system. Some schools may choose to set up alerts to notify the attendance office when a student has missed a certain number of days. In rural Neosho, Missouri, school personnel tracked student attendance and notified parents when their child had 4, 7, and 10 absences. Cleveland County in West Virginia chose to monitor students with 3 or more absences using a shared Google-drive so all staff had access to the information. Monitoring student attendance and identifying students who have missed a certain amount of

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days allows school personnel to intervene with appropriate Tier 2 strategies or interventions given that the schoolwide strategies did not provide enough support. Discussing the importance of attendance engages parents and shows them the value of their kids coming to school. Rural Potter County, in West Virginia increased high school attendance by providing a free ticket to the Friday night football game to students who attended the entire week of school.

Your Reflection

Your Reflection

- How does your school collect attendance data?
- Are there ways to identify students who have missed a certain amount of school days?
- Who can you talk to, to set this up in your student information system?
- What are some ways you can engage parents and families in your school?
- What are some community resources you have at the school to connect with families?

Summary: Attendance Tips used in Rural Schools:

- Students who attend school all week receive a free ticket to the school's Friday night football game
- Set up alerts through student information system to notify staff when students missed a certain number of days and notify parents
- Set up a shared drive so that all personnel has access to the same information
- Create a "Welcome Night" for parents & students to attend to learn about the school and the importance of attendance
- Recognize improved attendance not perfect attendance

Resources ✓

Get Schooled (<https://getschooled.com/dashboard>) is a website designed to engage students in attending school. Students can watch videos of celebrities discussing the importance of going to school and many more relevant topics for teens. Students can participate through several different avenues including: videos, quizzes, articles, scavenger hunts, surveys, and much more! Schools can participate in an attendance challenge and opportunity to win several big prizes including \$2500 and a celebrity principal for the day!

Family Engagement



Family Engagement is a comprehensive strategy targeting all ABC's: attendance, behavior, and course completion. Research supports family involvement has a positive impact on academic achievement (Wilder, 2014; Bieschke, 2013; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007), attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), and behavior. A partnership between families and schools is reciprocal; when families feel comfortable and feel a part of their child's education plan they are more likely to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005).

Strategies from *The Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit* (www.hfrp.org):

- Welcome parents at the beginning of the school year with a back to school night where information can be distributed
- Have volunteers call, email, and distribute flyers about Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Provide incentives to parents who attend Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Communicate with parents – This includes positive information about the student
- Redesign freshman orientation so students and parents can meet with the teachers, learn about high school expectations, tour the school and connect with community resources
- Utilize parent liaisons to train educational staff, build relationships with families, and teach families how to use online student tracking systems

Activity: Hopes and Dreams - Ask parents to write down their hopes and dreams for their child and post them around the school. This allows school personnel and students to see **all** parents have hopes and dreams for their child, this is also empowering for students to know parent's hopes and dreams.

Rural Reflection

Stone County Increasing Family Engagement

Two high schools in West Virginia chose to focus on student and family engagement by training their staff on how to make parents feel welcome in the school, such as ensuring parents received invitations to school events. Teachers and staff distributed information at various school events. They used flyers and brochures to educate parents about dropout prevention and the importance of attendance. The parents were offered incentives for attending school events, meetings, and conferences. Parents were invited to attend a mock graduation ceremony for all 9th graders to reinforce the importance of graduation to both students and parents. Students walked across the high school stage and signed a "commitment to graduate". In addition, the high schools hired a Truancy Officer to reduce truancy court referrals. The officer worked with families to determine the barriers to missing school. High school attendance increased 3% once they hired a Truancy Officer (Wilkins et al, 2014).

Your Reflection

- What are some of your school's family engagement activities?
- Do you offer incentives to parent(s)/guardian(s) who attend student conferences?
- Do you notify parents with positive information about their child and not solely when a problem occurs?
- Who currently provides outreach to parents in your school?

Resources ✓

The **Harvard Family Research Project** (<http://www.hfrp.org/>) developed *The Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit* which provides strategies for engaging families, lessons learned from pilot schools, and how to address both dropout prevention and family involvement. It is a step-by-step guide to build and strengthen family engagement in high schools. The toolkit provides case examples and ideas from schools implementing family engagement strategies.

The National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools
(<https://www.sedl.org/connections/>)

Washington State Family Community Engagement Trust
(<http://www.wafamilyengagement.org/>)

National Council of La Raza
(<http://www.nclr.org/>)

Check & Connect



Check & Connect (<http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/>) is a comprehensive evidenced-based intervention used for at-risk students needing more intensive supports (Tier 2 & Tier 3). Evidence has shown Check & Connect increases student attendance, credit accrual, and improves behavior. The focus is student engagement to keep students in school. Using mentors who work with students for up to two years. Check & Connect is an individualized process to develop positive relationships, monitor student progress, and connect students with school personnel, family, and community supports.

Check & Connect Implementation Steps:

1. Determine indicators of student disengagement – What are some reasons students disengage? Why do students drop out of school?
2. Identify students at risk of disengagement – Based on the ABC's (attendance, behavior, course completion) and school's data determine who is at-risk of disengagement. Check & Connect has developed guidelines and criteria for students at a high risk of dropping out. (See Table 2)
3. Select or hire mentors – Determine if paraprofessionals or other school personnel will take on the role of mentors or if there are additional funds to hire mentors.
4. Organize existing resources for intervention – What programs and interventions already exist in the school? Check & Connect mentors tap in to already existing supports if they are available. A good exercise to identify existing supports in the school is intervention-indicator mapping an example is provided in Table 3.
5. Get to know students, teachers, and parents – Mentors work to build a relationship with the student, teachers, and parent(s)/guardian(s). Mentors should invite parents and teachers to meet with them and explain the Check & Connect intervention and process.
6. Use “check” procedures and the monitoring form – Monitor student’s progress weekly using a monitoring form to track student’s absences, tardies, behavior, progress in class, etc. An example monitoring form can be found on Check & Connect’s website (<http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/>).
7. Implement “connect” interventions – By using the monitoring form mentors are able to determine appropriate interventions to support the student. An example is to go over the monitoring form with the student and discuss the student’s progress and where they would like to see improvements, and develop a plan to achieve the student’s goal.
8. Strengthen the family-school relationship – Mentors act as a liaison between parents and the school. Several family engagement strategies are discussed in the family engagement section of this manual.

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9. Monitor the person-environment fit – Maximize the student’s success by ensuring the student’s environment is working to support the student to the fullest potential. There may be additional strategies to improve student engagement in the classroom.
10. Provide mentor support and supervision – The Check & Connect coordinator should provide regular supervision to the mentors so they can ask questions to ensure Check & Connect is implemented with fidelity.
11. Evaluation program implementation – Evaluate the program, are student outcomes improving? Where can improvements or changes be made to increase success?

Rural Reflection

Collaborating & Check & Connect

In Colorado, five rural counties implemented Check & Connect in collaboration with the regional substance abuse prevention partners and the school districts with state funding to improve interagency collaboration (Regional Substance Abuse Prevention Partners, 2011). Check & Connect was piloted in 2009 in one high school. Due to its success, it was expanded to every school district across five counties. In 2010:

- 77% of middle and high school students increased attendance by 25%
- 88% of students at a middle school reduced their F’s in English
- 66% reduction in discipline referrals at a middle & high school (Regional Substance Abuse Prevention Partners, 2011. Retrieved from <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs090/1104220830175/archive/1108721328277.html>)

Resources ✓

How can I get Check & Connect?

There are several training options, visit checkandconnect.umn.edu to see which option best fits your school.

Service Learning



Service Learning links meaningful community service experiences with academic content and learning (National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2015). For example, students in high school science class may collect water samples, analyze the samples, and present their findings to a local agency to improve water pollution (National Youth Leadership Council, 2015). Since one of the most common reasons students report they dropout is boredom (Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore & Friant, 2010) making content relevant and applicable to students' futures through service learning can increase student engagement which is linked to higher rates of attendance, grades, and school completion (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Wulsin, 2008).

Service Learning Objectives:

- Allows students to problem-solve outside of the classroom
- Strengthen relationship with teachers
- Engage in a hands-on approach to learning
- Students have input in a project they find meaningful and impactful in their community

80% of at-risk students said they would have more positive feelings towards high school if they were involved in service learning opportunities.

(Bridgeland, Dilulio, Wulsin, & Stuart, 2008)

Rural Reflection

Recycling in a Rural Area

As part of a high school science class at a school in rural Oregon students refurbish computer equipment for use in classrooms and computer labs. Students not only engage in a hands on approach to learn about computer technology, they work together to critically think and problem solve. Students provide follow up service to ensure the computer is accurately working. Through this type of learning experience students learn a variety of skills, stay engaged, and are exposed to potential employment opportunities. (From the Environmental Protection Agency, www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-04/documents/servicelearning.pdf)

Your Reflection

- What projects could you students get involved with in the community?
Poll you students to find out what they're interested in!

Resources ✓

National Service Learning Clearinghouse (gsn.nylc.org/clearinghouse) For additional ideas on service learning projects and to collaborate with other educators, visit the National Service Learning Clearinghouse website. This website is a free resource that provides professional development for educators regarding service learning including: webinars, articles, online forums and more. Topics include 21st century skills, creating service-learning model units, service learning and the common core state standards are just a few!

The **Environmental Protection Agency** has a document about service learning including several case studies, which may help students and schools identify needs in their communities, and ideas for service learning projects: www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-04/documents/servicelearning.pdf. Poll your students to see what topics they are interested in!

Project-based learning – The Buck Institute for Education (bie.org) provides webinars, handouts, articles, websites, community chats and many more resources about project-based learning and its benefits. Project-based learning allows for meaningful work that students remember and learn from. Project-based learning promotes student engagement and teachers to work more closely with their students.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports



Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (www.pbis.org) is the technical assistance center website for PBIS. There are resources and examples for both elementary and secondary as well as Tier 1, 2, and 3 (e.g. primary, secondary, tertiary) supports. There are videos, presentations, short briefs, and training manuals/tutorials. Topics covered include: behavior contracts, reinforcements, functional behavior assessments, and positive school climate. School climate in rural schools has been found to be more influential in student’s decisions to stay in school (Wilcox, Angelis, Baker & Lawson, 2014).

Table 4. PBIS Strategies:

Tier 1	Tier 2 & 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching behavioral and social expectations similar to academic content • School-wide reinforcement system • All school personnel participates: teachers, staff, principal, bus drivers, and cafeteria staff, substitute teachers, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check In/Check out • Check & Connect • Social Skills Instruction/Group • Self-Monitoring • Behavior Contracts • Functional Behavior Assessment • Behavior Intervention Plan

Rural Reflection

Implementing PBIS in a Rural School

A three-year study was completed in a rural high school that monitored the effects of implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. There have been very few studies that focus on PBIS at a rural school and specifically students with disabilities. Specific data from the school was analyzed before, during and after implementing PBIS including: office discipline referrals (ODRs), attendance, and expulsions/suspensions. As part of Tier 1 PBIS, the school chose tickets as their method of reinforcement and called them Mo-Bucks. Mo-Bucks were to be given to students by any school personnel when he/she observed a student displaying positive behavior and meeting school-wide expectations. Mo-Bucks were tallied to track behavior and progress of the intervention by a personal computing class and entered into an excel spreadsheet. Over the course of three years they found an increased use of Mo-Bucks reduced office discipline referrals. They also found they had an

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increase in student attendance and a decrease in school expulsions. This study found an important factor of success was ensuring teachers were delivering the reinforcers consistently throughout each school quarter. It was also important to collectively identify specific behaviors to target (attendance, suspensions, ODRs). (Blevins, 2007).

Your Reflection

- Does your school collect Office Discipline Referrals? What do you do with the data?
- What type of reinforcer do you use (e.g. tickets, marbles, etc.)? Is this used school-wide?
- What are ways you can involve courses into PBIS?
For example, in the rural reflection the PBIS team involved the personal computing class to count the tickets, track them in excel, and monitor the data over time.

Resources ✓

PBIS World: (www.pbisworld.com) is another free website that focuses on behavior. The website provides a guided process to select an appropriate intervention to use to improve a student's behavior. First, the user picks a behavior they want to target, next a list of examples of the behavior are displayed, the user identifies if these behaviors describe the student. If the list describes the student the website provides a comprehensive list of Tier 1 interventions to start using with the student along with downloadable tracking forms. If the interventions have already been tried, there is an option to go to Tier 2 interventions. Each behavior listed on the website has Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions to use to improve the student's behavior. All of the templates are free downloads to assist with tracking data to ensure data based decision making.

Figure 4. PBIS World Behavior List



Check In/Check Out



Check In/Check Out (CICO) (www.swpbs.org/in-service/files/check-in-out-module.pdf) is a Tier 2 intervention that targets student behavior. The number of studies indicate CICO is gaining recognition as an evidence based intervention (Ross & Sabey, 2015). This intervention focuses on building rapport with the student and providing positive reinforcement to the student throughout the school day. This intervention is most successful with students who seek adult attention (Ross & Sabey, 2015). The student checks in with the same adult before and after school, as well as receives individual feedback from each teacher after each class on the daily progress report (DPR) sheet. The DPR tracks points accumulated throughout the day to measure student progress based on individual student goals (Ross & Sabey, 2015). The DPR is sent home to the parents which provides additional communication between the school and the parents. The CICO coordinator at the secondary level provides the student with additional supports such as time management, problem-solving skills, and case management throughout the check in/check out process (Goss & Andren, 2014).

Check In/Check Out Key Components:

- Reinforce positive behavior by adults – Increased amount of adult attention, through CICO with an adult twice a day
- Daily monitoring of students by an adult – Student checks in and out with an adult every morning and afternoon as well as daily feedback from each teacher on the daily progress report.
- Communicate with student’s family/guardian for additional feedback – The daily progress report is sent home for family/guardian to check student’s progress as well as reinforce positive behavior.
- Evaluate data to determine when the student can exit the intervention – When the student is consistently meeting the daily progress report point goal, it is time to reevaluate (with the student, parents, and behavior team) next steps, and determine if the intervention is still needed.

Rural Reflection

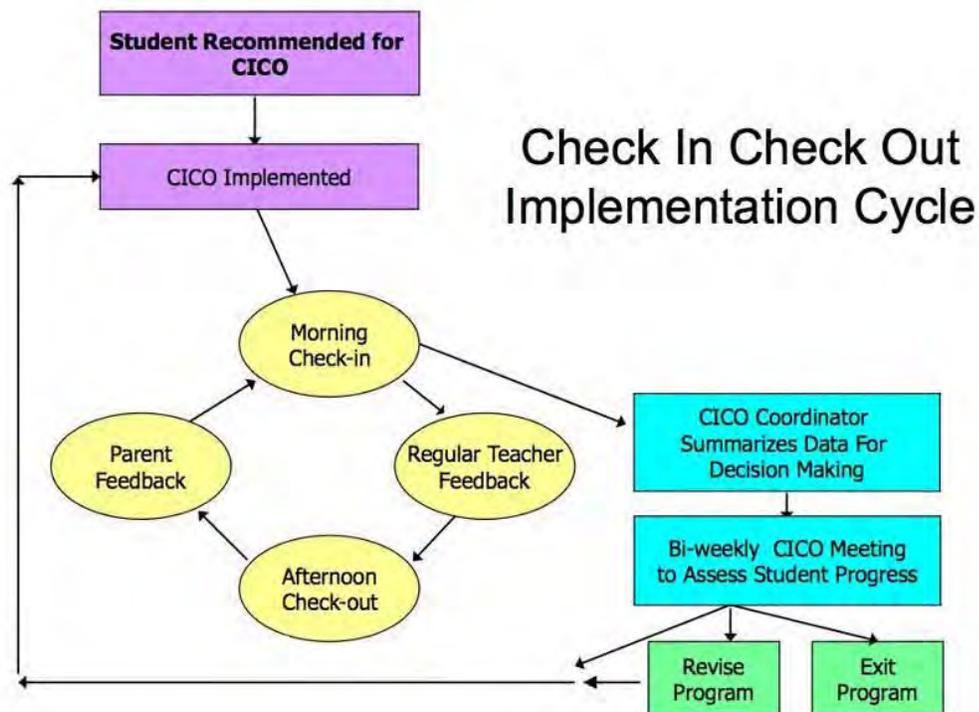
Implementing CICO in a Rural Middle School

In the Pacific Northwest 10 students met the criteria to receive the check in/check out intervention. The students were selected because each had received 5 discipline referrals and were nominated by school staff. The participating students exhibited behaviors such as, talking out, inappropriate comments, incomplete work, and unprepared for class. None of the students exhibited severe behavior such as physical aggression or self-injurious behavior. The CICO coordinator in this case was a paraprofessional who checked in with each student in the morning and again at the end of the school day. The student took their daily progress report to each class period and had the teacher mark one of the following: 0-the student did not meet the class’s expectations, 1-somewhat met expectations, or 2-met expectations. At the end of the day the coordinator and student total the scores to ensure each student met their daily point’s goal. A copy of their report went home to the parents. The coordinator and behavior team met weekly to determine if the intervention was working, if it needed to

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be adjusted, or if it was time for the student to exit the program. Data was taken for each student 8 weeks prior to and after implementation of Check in/Check out. Overall, the majority of the students had a reduction in problem behaviors, based on the number of office discipline referrals. (Hess, R., 2006).

Figure 5. Check In Check Out Implementation Cycle



Your Reflection

- Is there someone in your school who can coordinate check in/check out?
- Are there students in your school who can benefit from this intervention?
- Which staff members are available to check in and out with students each day?

Afterschool Programs



Afterschool Programs have several benefits to at-risk students, they can help improve academic skills, become more engaged in school, increase attendance, and engage in less risky behaviors (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Several Tier 2 supports involve homework club or study groups, and often these types of supports can take place in an afterschool program.

Characteristics of a Quality Afterschool Program from the Afterschool Alliance:

1. Prepare Staff-Committed staff that receive specific training or professional development in youth development creates a positive climate where students feel emotionally comfortable and staff serve as additional mentors for students.
2. Structure Program-Identify the targeted goals and objectives for the Afterschool Program, for example: social skill development.
3. Enrichment Opportunities-Students participating in art, physical activities, and music allow youth to grow in other areas, not just academically.
4. Community Partners-Involving the community can provide a wealth of resources and opportunities for students they may not otherwise have access to.
5. Overall Health & Wellness-Provide nutritious snacks and an appropriate space with supervision for the program to take place.
6. Evaluate-Assess and evaluate the program and students, continue to make improvements and adjust activities as necessary to continue to see success.

*“In a study of 68 afterschool programs quality programs found student’s academic performance increased as problem behaviors decreased”
(Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010).*

Rural Reflection

Afterschool in Cleveland County

Cleveland County is a rural school district located in West Virginia. In an effort to improve course completion they started an after school program. The after school program provided additional academic tutoring and support for students to improve academic coursework. The program also provided dinner for the students as well as transportation home. This was one initiative that helped increase Cleveland County's graduation rates by 30% for students with disabilities over a 4 year span (2008-2012). (Wilkins et al, 2014).

Your Reflection

- Does your school offer an Afterschool Program?
- What types of activities do you provide?
- What are some additional activities you could provide?

Resources ✓

Afterschool Alliance (<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/>) is one resource that provides information on what types of activities to include in an Afterschool program depending on the age group, as well as resources to develop an afterschool program in your community.

Beyond the Bell (<http://www.beyondthebell.org/>) is a professional development resource for educators to access to assist with implementation of an afterschool program.

Student Engagement Project



Student Engagement Project (k12engagement.unl.edu/) is out of Nebraska and provides several strategy briefs ranging from academics, alternative schooling, wraparound services, dropout recovery, social skills, and more. Each brief is practitioner friendly and provides resources on that specific topic educators can take back to their school. The project focuses on dropout & graduation, behavior & discipline, and using data to make decisions. The below list includes many of their strategy topics as well as which Tier the strategy is appropriate for, visit the website for a complete list of strategies.

Figure 6. Student Engagement Strategy Briefs

Student Engagement Project Materials							
Available Strategy Briefs	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Available Strategy Briefs	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Academic Supports & Tutoring		✓	✓	Parent & Family Involvement	✓	✓	✓
Alternative Schooling			✓	Peer Mediation	✓	✓	✓
Anger Management		✓	✓	Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports	✓	✓	✓
Before and After School Programs	✓	✓	✓	Postsecondary Transition Planning	✓	✓	✓
Behavior Contracting		✓	✓	Punishment**	✓	✓	✓
Behavior Monitoring		✓	✓	Pyramid Model Early Childhood Education			
Bullying Intervention for Bullying Behavior		✓	✓	Reinforcement	✓	✓	✓
Bullying Prevention & Intervention	✓	✓	✓	Restitution		✓	✓
Character Education	✓			Restorative Practices		✓	✓
Classroom Management				Saturday School		✓	
Conflict De-escalation	✓	✓	✓	School Climate & Culture			
Corporal Punishment*		✓	✓	School Values & Expectations	✓		
Counseling Intervention				School Wide Behavior/Discipline Programs			
Detention		✓		School-Community Collaboration			
Discipline Recovery			✓	Service Learning & Community Service	✓	✓	✓
Dropout Recovery			✓	Sleep and School	✓	✓	✓
Expulsion*				Social Skills Instruction	✓	✓	✓
Family Group Conferencing			✓	Staff-Student Relationships	✓	✓	✓
Grade Retention & Demotion*		✓	✓	Student Engagement	✓	✓	✓
Individual Behavior Plans & FBA		✓	✓	Suicide Prevention			
In-School Suspension**		✓		Suspension**		✓	✓
Involuntary Transfer*		✓	✓	Threat Assessment			
Lowering Course Grades*		✓	✓	Truancy Reduction		✓	✓
Mentoring		✓		Wraparound			✓
Middle to HS Transition Planning	✓	✓	✓	Youth Courts			✓
Mini Courses on Discipline Topics				Zero Tolerance*		✓	✓
Motivation	✓	✓	✓				

For more **FREE** materials from the Student Engagement Project, please visit <http://k12engagement.unl.edu>.



Rural Reflection

Increasing Student Engagement

Six rural schools were interviewed to determine qualities of rural high schools with higher graduation rates (Wilcox et al, 2014). Several key factors regarding the success of the high schools with above average graduation rates were found:

- High expectations for all students including students with disabilities. All students are expected to pass mandated assessments.
- Importance of looking at the future beyond high school, planning for students after graduation including postsecondary education or career opportunities
- Allowing students to take courses at local/nearby college or university to build confidence in students and expose them to post-high school opportunities
- Teachers have regular outreach to student's families including notes and phone calls home with positive information. One school assigned a district employee as the family liaison.
- Evidence of differentiating instruction and monitoring student's progress
- Utilizing databases to monitor student performance (attendance, behavior, course completion) that all staff can access and support at-risk students
- Extra instructional supports for students including before and after school tutoring

Your Reflection

- What expectations do you have for all students?
- Are multiple post high school opportunities discussed with all students?

Social Emotional Learning



What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)? The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2015) defines social emotional learning (SEL) as:

“The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker, and many risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out) can be prevented or reduced when multiyear, integrated efforts are used to develop students’ social and emotional skills.”

Several studies have linked students with poor social skills and low acceptance among peers with outcomes such as dropping out, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and aggression (Parker & Asher, 1987; Otten & Tuttle, 2011). A magnitude of research supports SEL promotes academic achievement, pro social behavior as well as decreases emotional and behavior problems at all levels (elementary and secondary) as well as geographic locations (urban, suburban and rural), (CASEL, 2015; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative social emotional learning be embedded into the academic school day.

Strategies:

- When introducing the skill explain when it is appropriate to use the skill and when it is inappropriate;
- Model the skill;
- Provide time to practice the skill using fun activities (e.g. games);
- Associate a term with a skill that can be used universally throughout the school by all staff. For example: Teach the students self-calming techniques such as breathing, counting to 10, and associate these skills with the words “Keep Calm”. Keep Calm can then be used as a prompt for the children to use the self-calming/self-regulating skills before a test or presentation;
- Provide take home activities for students to continue to use the skills at home
- (Elias, 2012).

A review of several social skill curricula (character education programs) can be found on the Student Engagement Project website (<http://k12engagement.unl.edu/>) in the *Resources for Social Skills Curricula*, strategy brief.

Rural Reflection

SEL in Anchorage, Alaska

Anchorage School District has been implementing social emotional learning practices since 2011. They have infused SEL throughout their school day, not just a block of time to practice one skill. Anchorage currently uses

School Completion Strategies that Work in Rural Schools

several different instruction programs throughout their district: *Connected & Respected*, *Kelso's Choices*, *Aggressors Victims and Bystanders*, *PACE: Peer Academic Career Excellence*, and *IMPACT: Individuals Making Positive Actions Choices*. The superintendent believes developing SEL skills is necessary for career readiness, understanding cultural issues and differences, as well as working independently and in groups. Teachers are provided consistent professional development (PD) around SEL. A PD team exists to provide teachers with additional information on SEL practices and how to incorporate them in to the classroom. Retrieved from: <https://www.asdk12.org/pld/sel/students/>

Your Reflection

- Do you incorporate SEL practices into your instruction?
- What are some additional practices you can embed in your daily instruction?

Resources ✓

What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/findwhatworks.aspx>) is a searchable database for evidence-based interventions to teach character development and social skills. There is a range of curricula to choose from based on what is needed in your school. For example, you may want to focus on skill development, and if your school has increased levels of school violence you may want to select a character building curricula that targets school violence such as *Too Good for Violence*.

2015 CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs - Middle and High School Edition (<http://www.casel.org/middle-and-high-school-edition-casel-guide/>) The CASEL guide is a free resource that provides an introduction and core components of effective SEL programs. CASEL reviewed SEL programs for effectiveness as well as which areas targeted:

- Improved academic performance
- Improved pro social behavior
- Reduce problem behaviors
- Reduce emotional distress
- Improve SEL skills and attitudes
- Improved teaching practices.

Examples from school districts implementing SEL are also available.

Mentoring



Mentoring has gained notoriety as an intervention due to increased success across multiple domains including: academic, behavior, and social (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Mentoring programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters have been around for over 100 years (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2015). Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship with a caring individual that provides additional support both academically and emotionally (National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2015). In a review of dropout prevention interventions Wilkins and Huckabee (2014) found that mentoring was one of three characteristics of a successful dropout prevention intervention.

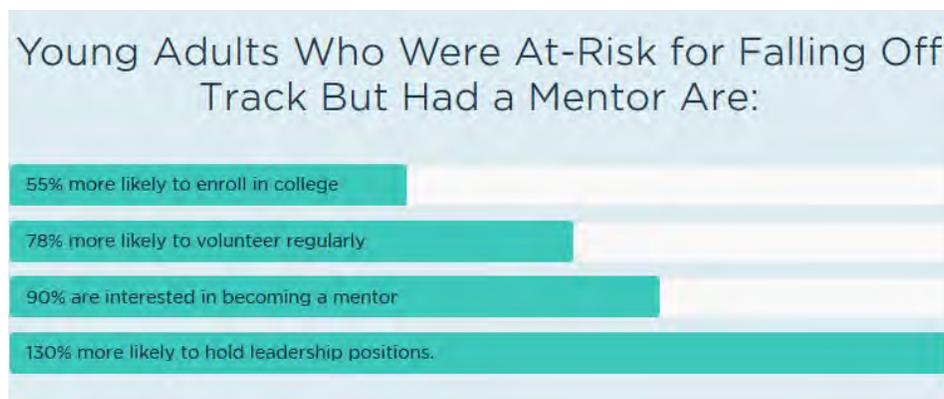
What makes for a successful mentoring program?

1. Clear program goals and intentions
2. Recruitment plan to select quality mentors
3. Provide training to mentors
4. Consistent evaluation and feedback on the program and process (NDPC, 2015)

What makes a successful mentor?

1. Decide with mentee how they want to spend their time
2. Commitment to consistency and reliability
3. Persistency to maintain the relationships
4. Respect mentee
5. Consult with supervisor or program staff when unsure of what to do (Goss & Andren, 2014)

Figure 7.



Retrieved from <http://www.mentoring.org/why-mentoring/mentoring-impact/> on 2/9/2016

Rural Reflection

Neosho, Missouri implemented several dropout prevention strategies throughout their district. One of the initiatives was creating Link Crew, a high school mentoring program that supports freshmen and gets them comfortable in their first year of high school. Freshmen are “Linked” with a junior or senior who acts as a mentor. If freshmen have a positive first year of high school they are more likely to succeed (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). Mentoring programs provide additional peer supports to facilitate a positive first year experience as well as establish a meaningful relationship to help with both academic and social aspects of high school.

Your Reflection

- Does your school have a mentoring program?
- What are some ways you can incorporate mentoring into your school?

Resources ✓

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership (<http://www.mentoring.org/>). Mentor has been around for 25 years and continues to be one of the leaders in quality youth mentoring relationships. Their website has resources ranging from guides to start a mentoring program, current research in the field, and webinars.

Academic Screening



Academic Screening is an important component of tracking which students are academically at-risk and need additional instruction. Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) is one type of tool used to measure students skill mastery (Deno, 1985). Originally the tool was developed for special education teachers to evaluate their instructional methods (Deno, 2003). Since its inception it has been used in a variety of settings including universal screening to help identify students at-risk for academic failure. There is a wide variety of tools available based on your school's needs.

A Few Questions to Consider when Selecting a Screening Tool:

- What grades do we need a tool for?
- What skills are we assessing?
- How do we want to administer the tool? Individually? In groups? For a specific group of students?
- How much time does it take to administer?
- What training will be needed for staff to administer the tool?
- How is the tool scored? (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

Resources ✓

The National Center on Response to Intervention has reviewed multiple screening tools and determined their reliability, validity and efficiency for each tool. They have created an easy-to-use chart that provides an overview of each screening tool, area the tool targets (reading, math, etc.), time it takes to administer, if it is administered individually or in a group, cost, and more. The chart can be found here, <http://www.rti4success.org/resources/tools-charts/screening-tools-chart>.

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