Student and Mentor Perspectives on Student Success in Check & Connect

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Outline of Presentation

- Overview of Check & Connect study in San Jose, CA

- Background on mentor/mentee relationships

- Design of study

- Findings

- Conclusions

- Implications

Funders and Partners

- Partners:

- SRI International
  - University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration: training, technical assistance
  - Local School District: San Jose Unified School District

- Funders
  - Department of Education, IES, NCSER (Goal 3 RCT)

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Research Questions

- By the end of the intervention, do students who received the Check & Connect mentoring program experience better outcomes than students in the comparison group?
  - Student engagement outcomes
  - Student prosocial behavior, problem behavior
  - Credits, GPA, absences, suspensions

School Participation

- Selected **5 high schools** in SJUSD
- Each school had at least *almost* 1.0 FTE mentor
- Each participating school received:
  - **Resources** and **support** to implement C&C
  - Yearly **stipends** ($1,000 per school)
  - Local **Resource Guide** for dropout prevention and mental health services

Project Staff

- Full-time mentors served an average of 40 students (4 schools); part-time mentors served an average of 25 students (1 school)
  - SRI employees, not district personnel
- One C&C coordinator (part time) supervised all 6 mentors
- Mentors, coordinator, and project staff trained by the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (ICI) on the *Check & Connect* model; ongoing guidance from ICI

Screening and Recruitment Process

- **Eligibility Criteria –** Guided by the National High School Center Early Warning Signs
  - Reviewed 8th grade transcripts of incoming 9th grade students.
    - 3 or more absences in a month and D or F in a major course (e.g., English, Math, etc.)
    - Behavior referrals
    - Special education for EBD or LD with behavior goals
- **Randomization (after consent and assent)** to:
  - C&C group or
  - *Business-as-usual* comparison group
    - Both received Local Resource Guide

Study Participants

Assessed for eligibility = 1,705

Found eligible = 644

(38%)

Randomized

389 (60%)

C&C = 198
BAU = 191
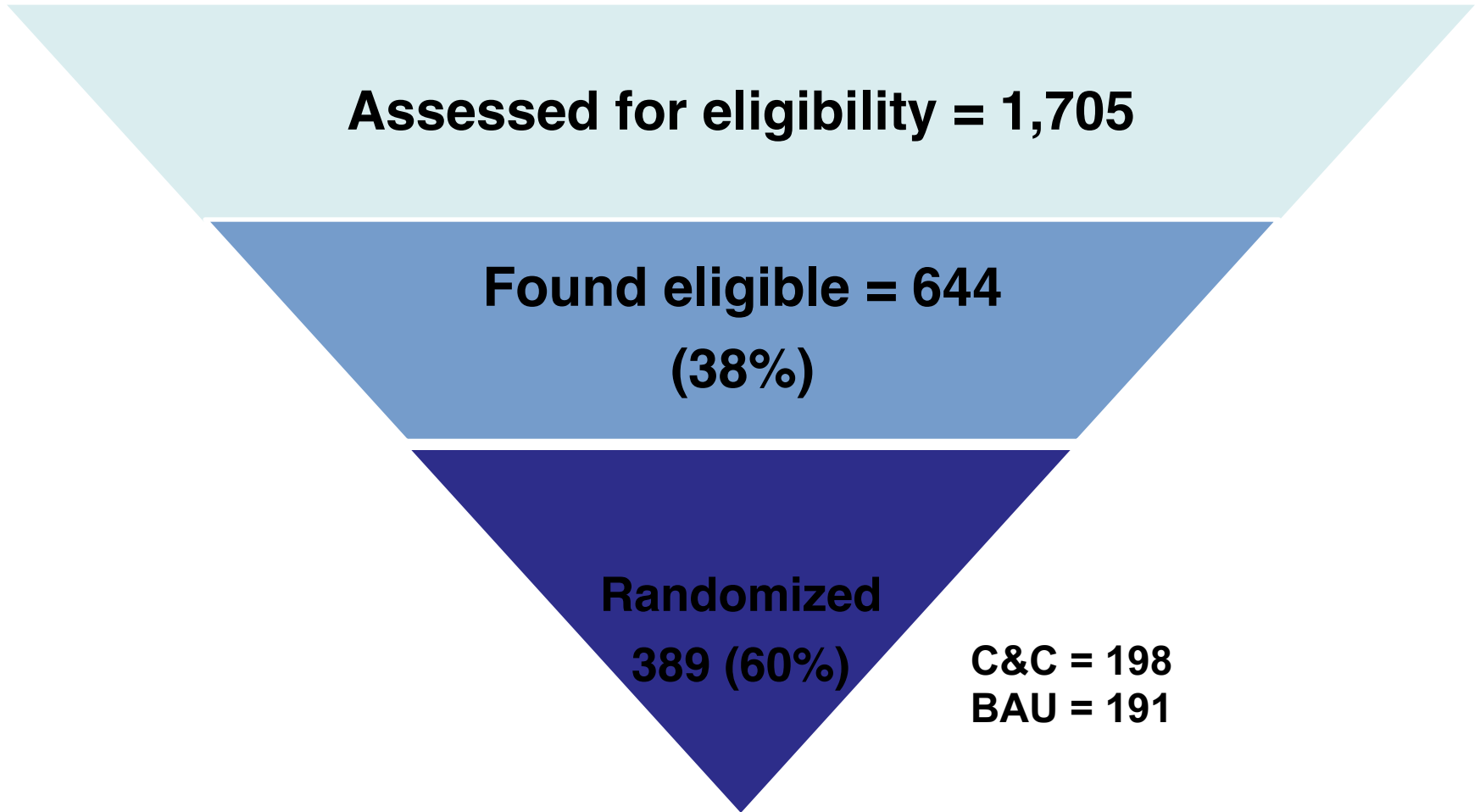
SEI: Student Engagement Instrument

- A 35-item student survey measuring students' cognitive (e.g., perceived relevance of school) and affective engagement (e.g., affiliation with school).
- Responses are provided on a 4-point scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with higher scores indicating greater engagement.
- Items are organized into the following six subscales:
  - Control and relevance of school work
  - Future goals and aspirations
  - Extrinsic motivation
  - Teacher-student relationships
  - Peer support for learning
  - Family support for learning

Summary of Findings from Study

- Main effect analysis: No significant outcomes
- Post-hoc analysis: Significant treatment effects for C&C students in PBIS school (effect sizes .50 to .60)
  - Student engagement
  - Student rated social skills and problem behaviors
  - GPA
- Ruled out mentor effect

Limitations to the Main Study

- Descriptive findings
  - Small number of schools precludes us from using hypothesis testing to see if treatment effects at PBIS school significantly greater
- PBIS fidelity measures
  - Data from School 1 not collected "independently"
  - No objective fidelity measures from other 4 schools
- Post-hoc analyses: study not designed for this purpose
- Only one school implementing PBIS
  - Other factors could be affecting outcomes (e.g., other school-based programs)

Interview Study of Student and Mentor Perceptions of *Check & Connect*

Background

- Dearth of evidence about what factors contribute to a successful C&C implementation (Hartwig & Maynard, 2015);

- Lack of student perspectives in C&C and mentoring literature more generally (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006);

- Frels et al., (2013) lack of literature on how mentor/mentee relationship contributes to successful/unsuccessful school-related relationships and subsequent academic and behavioral outcomes.

Purpose and Research Question

Understand:

Students' perceptions of how C&C participation may or may not have contributed to their school progression and what about C&C was helpful.

Mentor and student perceptions about what contributed to or inhibited student success

Research Question:

What was the experience of students and mentors with the C&C intervention?

Methods

- Stratified sampling used to select students identified as "high" or "low" achieving at end of C&C intervention
  - Rank ordered based on GPA, credits earned towards graduation, scores on Student Engagement Instrument (SEI)
  - Randomly selected from top and bottom 20 rankings
  - Final sample had 9 low achieving (5 males, 4 females); 8 high achieving (4 males, 4 females)

6 mentors total, 5 were interviewed. Responses reflect working with about 170 students

Two, 1 hour semi-structured interview protocols on similar topics. Students were interviewed spring of their senior year—one year after intervention's conclusion. Mentors were interviewed two months later

Analysis

- Provisional list of codes derived from C&C theoretical framework.

- Hand-coded and checked for interrater reliability

- Grouped by category with sub codes as appropriate

- Three major areas:
  1. Mentor strategies
  2. Processes and interactions for protective factors
  3. Student characteristics

Four Themes

1. How mentors and students perceived success and progress;

2. How student characteristics, including attitudes and life circumstances, either supported or impeded their success;

3. How relationships served as protective factors in students' lives; and

4. Strategies C&C mentors used.

FINDINGS

Theme: Perceptions of Success

Mentors:

- Improving grades;
- Reaching average grade benchmark;
- Acceptance or anticipated acceptance into college;
- Increased involvement in school or extracurricular activities; and
- Being happy, gaining confidence

Theme: Perceptions of Success Cont'd

High-Achieving Students:

- Improvements in grades;
- Commitment to high school graduation; and
- Plans to attend college

It's gone a lot better (relative to) how I started off my freshman year. Freshman year I started out really bad and didn't make the wisest choices about grades and didn't follow myself in doing better in school. Over the next couple of years, I've gotten better in grades and doing better in school and planning for the future.

Theme: Perceptions of Success Cont'd

Low-Achieving Students:

- "Bumpy;"
- "Like a roller coaster;" with
- Good and bad years.

- *I think I've gotten lazier over the years.*

- *High school was pretty much like a roller coaster. There were good years and bad years. There was a year that I moved to WA state and my credits weren't transferred. I was behind and it was bad. Good years. Times when I was just hustling and I was on it and getting As and Bs.*

Theme: Student Characteristics

Three Areas:

- Student motivation;
- Outside barriers; and
- School context.

Theme: Student Characteristics, Motivation

External pressures (12 students), i.e., <u>extrinsic motivation</u>—driven by possibility of instrumental gains or losses

LA If I don't graduate, I will end up doing nothing. . . . My teacher told me if I don't graduate, it will be bad and I'll have to come back for another year and can't go to college.

Internal factors (9 students), i.e., <u>interests and values</u>—pursued for its own sake

I fell in love with literature. I started reading a book and took away what the protagonist learned in the book—what the problem was with society. I didn't used to think about life deeply.

Theme: Student Characteristics, Motivation Cont'd

- High-achieving students were more likely than low-achieving to name internal or extrinsic motivators. Most mentions came from these students.

- Conversely, low-achieving students were more likely to name external motivators.

Theme: Student Characteristics, Motivation Cont'd

Mentors descriptions of students echoed this finding:

"High" students were "driven" and "possessed a sense of urgency"

One student had very low aspirations (at the start of the intervention), and no one in her family had graduated. But . . . she really ended up accepting her identity as a student and went on to graduate.

Theme: Student Characteristics, Outside Barriers

- Mentors noted multiple risks students faced:

A mentor could only do so much. Students benefited from having a mentor, but having one was not enough. . . . Even when we tried to involve other professionals and the school to address these issues, a lot of these problems seemed beyond my control.

Theme: Student Characteristics, Outside Barriers Cont'd

- More low-achieving students than high named outside barriers that impeded their success, 7 low/4 high

- Personal difficulties: family problems, death of a loved one, relationship issues

- Health/mental health

- Learning difficulties

- Having to work before or after school

Theme: Student Characteristics, Outside Barriers Cont'd

Reading has been impossible to overcome. Not really much help was offered with reading. . . . It was hard to focus and understand. Nobody really helped me. There was no tutoring at a time that worked for me. My mentor told me but I didn't go. Tutoring was after school and I had a job. I had to work. I've had to work since the end of sophomore year.

Theme: Student Characteristics, School Context and Accommodation

- Seven out of 9 low-achieving students described at leas one episode when their school failed to accommodate their needs or lacked resources they believed would have helped them succeed

- Four LA students noted instances when schools did try to accommodate their needs, but they still found them lacking.

If I had started credit recovery earlier, like sophomore year, that would have been helpful. I came late one day to my summer credit recovery program so I was kicked out.

Theme: Student Characteristics, School Context and Accommodation

- Students in both groups reported combatting negative perceptions

I was expelled from two middle schools, and it made a big impact in how people saw me. It put a limit on what I could do. . . . I had a 4.0, but I was still seen as a drug trafficker. . . Systematically, I've been blocked from moving forward.

Theme: Student Characteristics, School Context and Accommodation Cont'd

- Mentors also expressed frustration with schools:

You didn't get a lot of support from staff, and I understand where they're coming from. Teachers want to teach, and they didn't want to let students come out of class (to go see a mentor).

Theme: Student Characteristics, School Context and Accommodation Cont'd

- Nearly all students reported that their mentor and teachers talked, indicating that mentors worked with staff;
- 19 mentions of mentor talking to teacher
- 15 mentions of mentor advising student to talk to teacher.

Theme: Student Characteristics, School Context and Accommodation Cont'd

- Mentors and students went together to talk to teachers

I went with her together to talk to teacher. . . . (It was) helpful to watch her interacting with teachers and how to ask a teacher. She told me how to approach teachers—breathe it out—patiently wait for my turn. Wait a bit before asking the teacher again. Then go back and ask again. I found that it works.

Relationships as Protective Factors, Parent Involvement

- 12 students, evenly divided between groups, reported parents' involvement
  - Most (8) reported mentors talked to parents
  - Two reported that mentors engaged parents actively, checking grades, etc.

  Mentors supported these findings

Relationships as Protective Factors, Parent Involvement

- Five students said engagement between parents and mentors was ineffective

- Mentors supported this, "parents would say all the right things" but would fail to follow up.

- Barriers included parents' work schedules, lack of interest, linguistic or cultural barriers.

Relationships as Protective Factors, Supportive Adults

- In addition to mentors, 6 LA and 6 HA reported having at least one other caring adult in their lives
    - Parents (5)
    - Family members (3)
    - Community mentors (3)
    - Teachers (3)
    - School counselors (3)
    - Administrators, coaches (2)

Relationships as Protective Factors, Supportive Adults

- Mentors believed supportive adults were critical to student success

It wasn't an easy fight for any of them. . . . It was having someone in their corner, a family member, teacher. I'd like to think it was me, but I can't say that for sure.

- Adults must work to actively promote protective factors

She was going through a lot of issues, including physical abuse, depression, anxiety. . . . I know that what helped her was the coordination I was able to do. . . By including her mom. There was a holistic approach to her care.

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Theme: Mentor Strategies

Several Strategies were identified:

- – Directives and advice giving (e.g., how to set up study schedule, give up smoking weed)
- – Checking progress and providing feedback (Mentor checks students' grades)
- – Taking to students' teachers
- – Modeling (mentor related how she would solve a problem)
- – C&C problem solving

Theme: Mentor Strategies Cont'd

Discrepancy in strategies that mentors and students reported:

- Students described their mentor as providing advice or directives and checking progress

- Only 3 of 5 mentors described using directive behaviors or providing advice. Mentors described themselves as following C&C problem solving methods. All 5 mentors articulated the process and steps – "standard C&C protocol."

- Fewer than 1 in 3 students described their mentor as using problem solving.

I feel like my mentor had a way of thinking about problems, but I can't remember specifically what she said."

Theme: Mentor Strategies Cont'd

Mentors walk a fine line in deciding what approach to use in a given situation:

I had to balance lecturing them with actually getting them to get to the point of the problem. There were other times when identifying the problem was easy.

Theme: Mentor Strategies Cont'd

Mentor self-disclosure

- 11 students, split almost evenly between LA and HA, mentioned that their mentor shared personal information.

- Self-disclosure helped signal student that it was safe to tell mentors their own stories

LA Female: *My mentor opened up to me about his family, and I would tell him things about my family.*

I got to know what kind of guy he was, and I knew I could trust and talk to him.

Theme: Mentor Strategies Cont'd

Mentors as role models

– Mentors discussed how they had overcome challenges in their lives—normalize failure and show value of persistence

We just started searching online for all these different resources, because that's what I've had to do for classes. . . I would talk about what I needed to do to get things done. It's kind of like an apprenticeship— this is how I do it, this is how I solve this problem

CONCLUSIONS

Conceptions of Success

- Mentors and students perceptions of success converged on academics (less likely to mention engagement or personal growth;

- Factors associated with success included: intrinsic motivation, relationships with supportive adults, adults working together to support students, mentors sharing information about themselves;

Conceptions of Success

- Factors that inhibited success included outside barriers and lack of school accommodations

- <u>Limit to how many barriers students can face</u>

Multiple risk model (Garmezy, Masten, Tellegen, 1984)

- Masten (2014) posits "risk gradient" average level of problems increases as a function of higher risk level or exposure to trauma or adversities. She cautions, however, that there are assets and variability among children. (We must account for) "more of the story than risk and outcome variables alone can offer."

- C&C is predicated on the belief that interventions can be designed to weaken the link between risk and outcomes while fostering protective factors.

Conceptions of Success Cont'd
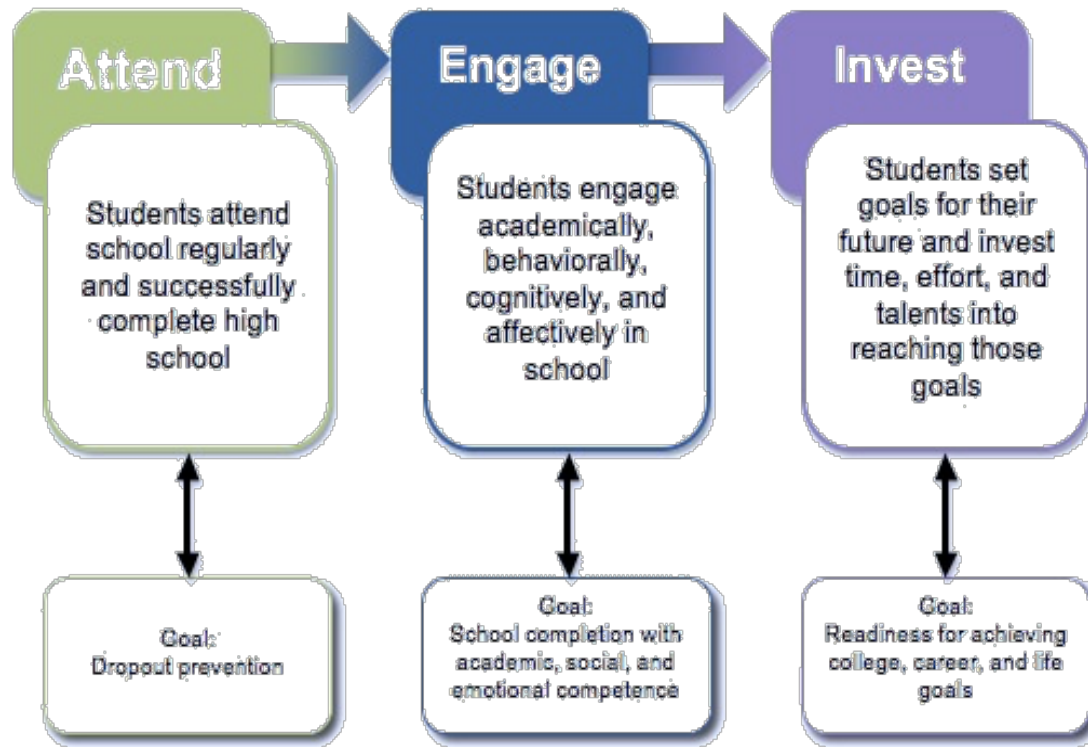
School accommodations

- All low-achieving students described at least one episode when their school failed to accommodate their needs, others mentioned resources and accommodation as inadequate

- Several student mentioned negative stereotypes and low teacher expectations

- "Turnaround teachers" (Bernard, as cited in Masten, 2014), promote resilience through caring and support, high expectations, and opportunities for participation and contribution. Some students mentioned that teachers were catalysts for increased engagement in learning.

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IMPLICATIONS

Three Implications

1. Using a larger sample collect data on students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to begin to examine the causal direction between the two constructs. Perhaps intrinsic motivation can be strengthened over the course of the intervention;

2. Greater mentor self-disclosure could promote student success via improved relationship quality. Future research should text this conjecture.

3. Discrepancy between mentor and student reports of mentor strategies, specifically cognitive problem solving should be examined. Is the difference about dosage?

Continuum Review

Attend	Engage	Invest
Students attend school regularly and successfully complete high school	Students engage academically, behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively in school	Students set goals for their future and invest time, effort, and talents into reaching those goals
Goal: Dropout prevention	Goal: School completion with academic, social, and emotional competence	Goal: Readiness for achieving college, career, and life goals

To make these leaps, students need support in solving their own problems and developing intrinsic motivation, so they can invest in their futures

Questions?

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