



WWC Intervention Report

A summary of findings from a systematic review of the evidence



Dropout Prevention

May 2015

Reconnecting Youth

This intervention report presents findings from a systematic review of *Reconnecting Youth* conducted using the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, version 3.0, and the Dropout Prevention review protocol, version 3.0. No studies of *Reconnecting Youth* that fall within the scope of the Dropout Prevention review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) group design standards. Because no studies meet WWC group design standards at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of *Reconnecting Youth* on students who attend middle school, junior high school, or high school, are “at risk” of dropout, or who have dropped out of school. Research that meets WWC design standards is needed to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of this intervention.

Program Description¹

Reconnecting Youth is an elective, credit-bearing course for students at risk of dropping out of school due to frequent absenteeism, low grades, or a history of dropping out of school. The core program element, the *Personal Growth Class* (sometimes called the *Interpersonal Relations Class*) is one semester long. The course typically is delivered in a small class of up to 12 students. The curriculum includes 75 lessons on topics such as self-esteem, decision-making, personal control, and interpersonal communication. The curriculum is supplemented by advising, tutoring, and organized social and career-development activities. Schools offering the course also implement a crisis response plan for students at risk of dropping out of school.

Research²

The WWC identified four studies of *Reconnecting Youth* for students who attended middle school, junior high school, or high school, and were “at risk” of dropout or who have dropped out of school that were published or released between 1988 and 2014.

Three studies are within the scope of the Dropout Prevention review protocol but do not meet WWC group design standards.

- Two studies used a quasi-experimental design and did not establish that the intervention group was comparable to the comparison group prior to the start of the intervention.
- One study used a quasi-experimental design in which the intervention group was taught by a single teacher, which makes it inappropriate to attribute the effect solely to *Reconnecting Youth*.

One study is out of scope of the Dropout Prevention review protocol because it does not use an eligible design, it is a literature review or meta-analysis.

References

Studies that do not meet WWC group design standards

Castro-Villarreal, F., & Yetter, G. (2010). The effects of a school-based dropout prevention program on academic outcomes. *The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education*, 6(1). The study does not meet WWC group design standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention.

Additional source:

Castro-Villarreal, F. (2009). *The effects of a school-based intervention program on academic outcomes* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3498662)

Eggert, L. L., Herting, J. R., Thompson, E. A., Nicholas, L. J., & Dicker, B. (1992, November). *Preventing adolescent drug involvement, school dropout and emotional distress*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, Washington, DC. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED368992.pdf>. The study does not meet WWC group design standards because the equivalence of the analytic intervention and comparison groups is necessary and not demonstrated.

Eggert, L. L., Seyl, C. D., & Nicholas, L. J. (1990). Effects of a school-based prevention program for potential high school dropouts and drug abusers. *The International Journal of the Addictions*, 25(7), 773–801. The study does not meet WWC group design standards because the equivalence of the analytic intervention and comparison groups is necessary and not demonstrated.

Studies that do not meet WWC pilot single-case design standards

None.

Study that is ineligible for review using the Dropout Prevention Evidence Review Protocol

Eggert, L. L., Thompson, E. A., Herting, J. R., & Randell, B. P. (2001). Reconnecting youth to prevent drug abuse, school dropout and suicidal behaviors among high-risk youth. In E. Wagner & H. B. Waldron (Eds.), *Innovations in adolescent substance abuse interventions* (pp. 51–84). Oxford: Elsevier Science. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use an eligible design.

Endnotes

¹ The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly available source: the program's website (<http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/programs/reconnecting-youth/>, downloaded July 2014.). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. The program description was provided to the developers in July 2014; however, the WWC received no response. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review.

² The literature search reflects documents publicly available by April 2014. The studies in this report were reviewed using the Standards from the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 3.0), along with those described in the Dropout Prevention review protocol (version 3.0). The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

Recommended Citation

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Glossary of Terms

Attrition	Attrition occurs when an outcome variable is not available for all participants initially assigned to the intervention and comparison groups. The WWC considers the total attrition rate and the difference in attrition rates across groups within a study.
Clustering adjustment	If intervention assignment is made at a cluster level and the analysis is conducted at the student level, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for this mismatch, if necessary.
Confounding factor	A confounding factor is a component of a study that is completely aligned with one of the study conditions, making it impossible to separate how much of the observed effect was due to the intervention and how much was due to the factor.
Design	The design of a study is the method by which intervention and comparison groups were assigned.
Domain	A domain is a group of closely related outcomes.
Effect size	The effect size is a measure of the magnitude of an effect. The WWC uses a standardized measure to facilitate comparisons across studies and outcomes.
Eligibility	A study is eligible for review and inclusion in this report if it falls within the scope of the review protocol and uses either an experimental or matched comparison group design.
Equivalence	A demonstration that the analytic sample groups are similar on observed characteristics defined in the review area protocol.
Extent of evidence	An indication of how much evidence supports the findings. The criteria for the extent of evidence levels are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 3.0).
Improvement index	Along a percentile distribution of individuals, the improvement index represents the gain or loss of the average individual due to the intervention. As the average individual starts at the 50th percentile, the measure ranges from -50 to +50.
Intervention	An educational program, product, practice, or policy aimed at improving student outcomes.
Intervention report	A summary of the findings of the highest-quality research on a given program, product, practice, or policy in education. The WWC searches for all research studies on an intervention, reviews each against design standards, and summarizes the findings of those that meet WWC design standards.
Multiple comparison adjustment	When a study includes multiple outcomes or comparison groups, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for the multiple comparisons, if necessary.
Quasi-experimental design (QED)	A quasi-experimental design (QED) is a research design in which study participants are assigned to intervention and comparison groups through a process that is not random.
Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	A randomized controlled trial (RCT) is an experiment in which eligible study participants are randomly assigned to intervention and comparison groups.
Rating of effectiveness	The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in each domain based on the quality of the research design and the magnitude, statistical significance, and consistency in findings. The criteria for the ratings of effectiveness are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 3.0).
Single-case design	A research approach in which an outcome variable is measured repeatedly within and across different conditions that are defined by the presence or absence of an intervention.

Glossary of Terms

- Standard deviation** The standard deviation of a measure shows how much variation exists across observations in the sample. A low standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample tend to be very close to the mean; a high standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample tend to be spread out over a large range of values.
- Statistical significance** Statistical significance is the probability that the difference between groups is a result of chance rather than a real difference between the groups. The WWC labels a finding statistically significant if the likelihood that the difference is due to chance is less than 5% ($p < .05$).
- Substantively important** A substantively important finding is one that has an effect size of 0.25 or greater, regardless of statistical significance.
- Systematic review** A review of existing literature on a topic that is identified and reviewed using explicit methods. A WWC systematic review has five steps: 1) developing a review protocol; 2) searching the literature; 3) reviewing studies, including screening studies for eligibility, reviewing the methodological quality of each study, and reporting on high quality studies and their findings; 4) combining findings within and across studies; and, 5) summarizing the review.

Please see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 3.0) for additional details.



An **intervention report** summarizes the findings of high-quality research on a given program, practice, or policy in education. The WWC searches for all research studies on an intervention, reviews each against evidence standards, and summarizes the findings of those that meet standards.