

## Abstract

### Skills for Success Partnership

*Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII): Skills for Success Program CFDA Number 84.215H*

The North St. Paul School District (NSPSD), officially known as the “North St. Paul Maplewood Oakdale Independent School District (ISD 622)” and the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Community Integration (ICI) have joined in a collaborative effort to submit an application for funding under the Skills for Success Program (CFDA 84.215H) administered through the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) of the U. S. Department of Education. Our project, “Skills for Success Partnership” (SSP), will represent a three-year effort in which staff of the NSPSD and ICI will use a quasi-experimental design that meets *Evidence Standards With Reservations* criteria established by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC).

The goal of this project is to implement, evaluate, and refine tools and approaches for developing the noncognitive skills of ISD 622 sixth grade middle school students to increase student success. This goal will be accomplished through the application of *Check & Connect*, a proven student engagement and dropout prevention program. *Check & Connect* is ideally suited for this proposal since it has already met the WWC’s *Evidence Standards Without Reservations* and is rooted in a resilience and intrinsic motivation framework. Additionally, *Check & Connect* fits into the district’s current initiatives as a tier-two and/or tier-three intervention to enhance overall student success throughout the school. Hence, we strongly believe that using *Check & Connect*, enhanced with strategies and activities that incorporate the development of noncognitive skills, represents evidence of practice which is based on Strong Theory from which to spur innovation. Our evidence of Strong Theory is reflected in the Project Logic Model.

The “Skills for Success Partnership” (SSP) will involve the application of a quasi-experimental design that will include an experimental group and a comparison group of high need sixth grade students. In order to minimize systematic differences in baseline and outcome measures between the two groups, we will equate the key characteristics of the two groups on control variables by including them as covariate-percentages of students qualified for: (1) free and reduced lunch, (2) ethnicity, (3) special education status, and (4) English Language Learner (ELL) status. These variables are required by WWC’s *Review Protocol for Dropout Intervention and Character Education* (2015).

We will select 160 sixth-grade students (80 experimental group and 80 control group) attending three ISD 622 middle schools in which there is a large proportion of high needs of students. Eligibility will be determined based on risk criteria established Minnesota Early Indicator and Response System (MEIRS). Over the three-year project period we will collect and analyze data to evaluate the effects of SSP which incorporates an array of non-cognitive strategies along with *Check & Connect* activities. The non-cognitive strategies will be embedded in training activities for *Check & Connect* mentors who provide individualized services to students. An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) will be used to examine whether students who receive different levels of intervention (high, medium, and low) benefit differently from those in the comparison group. Stated as an alternative hypothesis, we hypothesize that students in the treatment group will demonstrate a higher level of academic and behavioral functioning as a result of integrating noncognitive skill development strategies into *Check & Connect* interventions.

Various types of pre- and post-measures will be administered to both groups of students to assess academic motivation, student engagement, and behavioral functioning. Also, progress monitoring will occur through *Check & Connect Middle School Monitoring Form*, a form which continuously tracks such behavioral data as attendance, tardiness, unexcused absences, behavioral and bus referrals, detention, and suspension/expulsion. In addition, curriculum-based data obtained from the *Fastbridge* tracking system will provide project staff with ongoing information of students’ academic performance in the basic skill areas of reading and mathematics.

To ensure the fidelity of implementation of the Skills for Success Partnership, we will conduct a rigorous program evaluation that will provide formative and summative information regarding the effectiveness of project implementation, the extent to which project activities are suitable for replication, progress toward achieving intended outcomes and the project goal, and the extent to which the Skills for Success Partnership have met WWC’s *Evidence Standards with Reservations*. These results will be disseminated widely to educators across the nation who are looking to incorporate the acquisition of noncognitive skills for their high need middle school students through published articles, conference presentations, and a project website aimed at reaching national audiences.