

Project turns mobile devices into lifelines for teens at risk for dropping out

December 5 2012

(Phys.org)—For high school students with emotional and behavioral problems, the stakes couldn't be much higher: With dropout rates higher than 50 percent, members of this group who leave school before graduation often endure lives fraught with poverty, unemployment, high rates of incarceration and substance abuse.

Now, a [pilot program](#) called I-Connect, designed by a researcher at the University of Kansas' Juniper Gardens Children's Project, offers teens with emotional and behavioral problems a lifeline to enable them to succeed in school until graduation.

By providing [students](#) with an Android-based [smartphone](#) or tablet with custom software, I-Connect focuses on two aspects of a student's life: self-management and mentoring.

"Consider the extensive need of people with diabetes to monitor their [insulin levels](#)," said Howard Wills, associate research professor with KU's Life Span Institute, who leads the I-Connect project. "For these students, I see just as critical a need for self-management and monitoring. Among key things that will keep them in school are showing up to class, making some effort to keep up with the assignments and attachment to a [mentor](#)."

Working with an individual mentor in their school, students in the I-Connect program set goals for their own [academic performance](#) and behavior, then use their smartphone or tablet to self-monitor their

performance.

"When they arrive in class, the students monitor two things that we see are essential," Wills said. "First, did you show up on time? Five minutes late? Ten minutes late? The second thing is how much homework did you turn in? Did you turn in all of your homework? Most of your homework? Some of your homework? None of your [homework](#)?"

Then, I-Connect texts this information to the student's mentor without the need for the student to have the mentor's personal phone number, something many teachers, counselors and administrators are reluctant to share with students.

"The minute they touch that button to respond to those items on their tablet or phone, that sends a message to their mentor," said Wills. "It also graphs it for them and for their mentor. Their mentor can then send them a text reply back letting them know, 'Hey, good job today—way to go! I'm glad you're in class.' Or, 'Where are you today? I haven't seen you.'"

In addition to monitoring these academic goals, I-Connect encourages "citizenship behavior" in students who may have one of a range of emotional/behavioral disorders such as depression, autistic spectrum disorders or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

"At five, ten or 15-minute intervals, the phone or the tablet will vibrate," said the KU researcher. "The message will come up, and the student will respond to questions such as 'Am I being appropriate?' Or, 'Am I on task currently? If I'm not on task, do I have a question, or do I need to search for assistance and get that help?' So these are prompts and reminders to the students as well as a way to monitor those vitals. It's taking a rather big chunk of things that need to get done to graduate high school and breaking them into their smallest components."

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: Project turns mobile devices into lifelines for teens at risk for dropping out (2012, December 5) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-12-mobile-devices-lifelines-teens.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.