



U Connect Tennessee – Summary of Years 1 and 2

In 2015 and 2016, two cohorts of youth participated in the *U Connect* program from multiple community partner sites in Tennessee. Programming included: Check & Connect, STEM, nutrition education, and parent engagement. The foundation program, *Check & Connect*, is an evidence-based student engagement intervention that promotes young people’s self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and persistence. This intervention supports positive youth development by promoting relationships with caring adults and peers, skill building within a safe environment, and cognitive engagement with school and learning.

Method

At the beginning and end of each academic year, youth completed a survey to allow us to better understand their needs and experiences with *U Connect*.

- Year 1 (2015)
 - In June/July, the pre-survey was completed by 9 students.
 - No post-survey data are available.
- Year 2 (2015-2016)
 - In November, the pre-survey was completed by 18 students.
 - In June 2016, 23 students completed the post-survey.

The results reflect general attitudes and beliefs about each group of youth at the time points.

Youth Participants

Demographics	Year 1		Year 2	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Number of participants	9	0	18	23
About how many hours per week do you participate in this club or activity?	1 hour	NA	1 hour	1.5 hours

Perception of Adult and Peer Behaviors in the Program

Youth reported on their perception of the behaviors of adults and peers in the program using a five point scale ranging from “Never” to “Always”. Youth reported an increase in positive adult behaviors from the pre- to post-survey in year 2. By the end of year 2, nearly all youth reported adults make sure the rules are followed and adults are eager to help youth; approximately a third of the youth reported that youth are willing to protect each other from bullies and try to stop young people from getting picked on.

	Year 1		Year 2	
	Pre (n=9)	Post (n=0)	Pre (n=18)	Post (n=23)
Adult and Peer Behaviors	"A lot" or "Always"		"A lot" or "Always"	
Adults make sure the rules are being followed	77.8%	NA	70.5%	86.9%
Adults are eager to help young people	66.7%	NA	47.1%	86.9%
Young people are willing to help each other	33.3%	NA	52.9%	47.8%
Young people protect each other from bullies	25%	NA	44.5%	34.8%
If someone is being picked on, young people try to stop it	11.1%	NA	27.8%	34.7%

What Students are Learning about Interacting with Others

Youth reported on the frequency of learning how to interact with others and make good decisions on a five point scale from "Never" to "Always." By the end of year 2, more than half the youth reported frequently learning about getting along with others, learning how to treat others with respect, and learning how to make good decisions.

	Year 1		Year 2	
	Pre (n=9)	Post (n=0)	Pre (n=18)	Post (n=23)
Skills	"A lot" or "Always"		"A lot" or "Always"	
Young people learn about getting along with others	66.7%	NA	72.2%	56.5%
Young people learn about treating others with respect	66.7%	NA	55.5%	65.2%
Young people learn about different cultures	77.8%	NA	50%	47.8%
Young people learn how to make good decisions	88.9%	NA	50%	63.7%

Learning about Nutrition

Lessons on nutrition education are an integral part of *U Connect*. Youth reported how hard it would be to choose healthy food options over unhealthy options on a three point scale from "Not hard at all" to "Very Hard." In the post-survey, youth reported higher levels of eating fruits for an after school snack and eating smaller portions of high fat foods.

	Year 1		Year 2	
	Pre (n=9)	Post (n=0)	Pre (n=18)	Post (n=23)
Nutrition	"Not hard at all"		"Not hard at all"	
Eat fruit for an after school snack	88.9%	NA	55.6%	59.1%
Eat vegetables for a snack	55.6%	NA	38.9%	27.3%
Choose water instead of soda pop or Kool-Aid when thirsty	44.4%	NA	50%	36.4%
Drink 1% or skim milk instead of 2% or whole milk	44.4%	NA	55.6%	31.8%
Eat smaller servings of high fat foods (e.g. french fries, chips, cookies)	33.3%	NA	35.3%	45.5%
Eat a low fat snack like pretzels instead of chips	66.7%	NA	50%	40.9%

Future Goals and Family

Youth also responded to a series of questions about their future goals and family engagement in school. They responded on a four point scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. Overall, in both years, close to 100% of the youth agreed or strongly agreed that they plan to continue their education beyond high school and believed their education would provide many opportunities. Youth also reported high levels of family support for school success during both years.

	Year 1		Year 2	
	Pre (n=9)	Post (n=0)	Pre (n=18)	Post (n=23)
Future Goals and Family	“Agree” or “Strongly Agree”		“Agree” or “Strongly Agree”	
I plan to continue my education following high school	100%	NA	72.2%	85.7%
My education will create many future opportunities for me	100%	NA	72.2%	95.3%
I am hopeful about my future	100%	NA	88.9%	90.5%
My family/guardian are there for me when I need them	87.5%	NA	100%	86.4%
When I have problems at school my family/guardian are willing to help me	100%	NA	88.9%	86.3%
When something good happens at school, my family/guardian want to know about it	100%	NA	100%	95.4%
My family/guardian want me to keep trying when things are tough at school	100%	NA	94.5%	95.4%

Beliefs Students Hold

Youth also responded to a series of questions about some of the beliefs they hold about fairness and honesty. They responded how important each of the beliefs were to them on a four point scale from “Not Important” to “Extremely Important”. Overall, in both years, youth overwhelmingly held strong beliefs about conducting themselves with honesty and fairness.

	Year 1		Year 2	
	Pre (n=9)	Post (n=0)	Pre (n=18)	Post (n=23)
Student Beliefs	“Important” or “Extremely Important”		“Important” or “Extremely Important”	
Helping to make sure all people are treated fairly	77.8%	NA	100%	90.9%
Doing what I believe is right, even if my friends make fun of me	77.7%	NA	77.8%	86.3%
Telling the truth, even when it’s not easy	77.7%	NA	83.3%	90.9%
Accepting responsibility for my actions when I make a mistake or get in trouble	77.8%	NA	94.5%	95.5%
Doing my best, even when I have a job I don’t like	88.9%	NA	83.3%	81.8%

Decision making

Youth also reported how frequently they engaged in a number of steps associated with decision making on a four point scale ranging from “Never” to “Always”. Overall, in both years, students reported frequently using a number of steps in decision making. In year 2, post-survey revealed an overall decrease in the number of youth who engaged in the steps related to decision making.

	Year 1		Year 2	
	Pre (n=9)	Post (n=0)	Pre (n=18)	Post (n=23)
Decision Making Steps	“Usually” or “Always”		“Usually” or “Always”	
Look for information to help me understand the problem	88.9%	NA	94.1%	72.8%
Consider the risks of a choice before making a decision	66.6%	NA	76.4%	68.2%
Think about all the information I have about different choices	88.9%	NA	64.7%	81.9%
Keep my mind open to different ideas when planning to make decisions	66.6%	NA	83.4%	59.1%
Usually have more than one source of information before making a decision	77.8%	NA	91.4%	68.2%

Conclusion

Through *U Connect*, youth report receiving useful skills and knowledge while spending quality time in a safe and nurturing environment; youth reported relatively low rates of making healthy food choices. Youth report high levels of hope for their future along with a strong belief in the value of education beyond high school. They also report a highly supportive family environment encouraging academic success. This report summarizes the first two years of the *U Connect* program (year 1 was a pilot). *U Connect* will continue until August 2019.