

Connect 2 Kids™ Delivers Impressive Results

Juvenile Protective Association's Innovative Mental Health Program Helps Teachers and Students



Connect 2 Kids™ dramatically increases teacher satisfaction and efficacy while improving children's social and emotional well-being.

And it accomplishes this in communities where such progress is desperately needed and difficult to attain.

By helping teachers form stronger, more positive relationships with students, C2K™ delivers significant growth toward mental health and classroom goals — for both teachers and students.

The C2K™ results obtained in a three-year pilot program were so striking that they should make all stakeholders take notice, especially mental health and education professionals:

- 60% of children with challenging behaviors whose teachers received C2K™ consultation tailored to meet the child's needs showed improvements to their social-emotional functioning *at the same rate as children in individual therapy.*
- 95% of teachers reported *more positive relationships* with students who were the focus of consultation

Whether through the beneficial impact on the lives of the most vulnerable children or the reduction of teacher burnout and turnover, the ramifications of these findings are wide-ranging and encouraging.

The Juvenile Protective Association's Connect 2 Kindergarten pilot, which was generously supported by the Saul Zaentz Foundation, paired mental health professionals with kindergarten teachers to provide practical, on-the-ground consultation. The program helped teachers understand the social and emotional needs of their students and develop relational and trauma-informed practices to use in daily classroom activities. C2K™ quickly expanded after the pilot program, evolving from Connect 2 Kindergarten into

Connect 2 Kids™ supporting teachers in grades Pre-K through 8.

It is important to note that C2K™ delivered clear, measurable results in low-income, underserved communities where students are experiencing considerable trauma and toxic stress because of violence and poverty. In turn, teachers serving these communities face stress and burnout due to the trauma of their students and the children's resulting emotional problems. While dealing with large class sizes and insufficient resources, they are also pressured to have students meet behavioral and academic expectations that are not always developmentally appropriate.

C2K™ helps teachers navigate this difficult educational and social terrain by providing them with practical tools and the ongoing support needed to learn how to use them. This innovative program shows great potential for all grade levels, from preschool through high school. It also would be an invaluable addition for education degree programs to better prepare teachers and educators before they step foot in a school.

Why it Works: Best Practices, Informed by Research, with Measurable Results

Connect 2 Kids™' relational approach works because it is designed by mental-health professionals and goes beyond the basics of most Social and Emotional Learning programs. C2K™ uses a model of clinical consultation and support developed specifically for the situations commonly found in low-income, underserved school districts. Given that understanding, C2K™ responds to the needs of the teachers and schools it partners with and is an effective tool to counter generations of racial inequity.

C2K™ has a powerful impact because it is a children's mental health program designed specifically for educational systems. Teachers are usually the adults with whom children have the most contact with outside their family. Their importance cannot be overstated. Ground-breaking research by University of Virginia's Robert Pianta and colleagues showed that the relationship between a teacher and child in kindergarten is foundational. This is a predictor of



social, emotional, and academic success throughout elementary school. The most important factors to a young child's success in school is feeling safe and having a caring adult to turn to for support. All else, including learning, flows from these basic needs. C2K™ gives all involved the tools needed to create this supportive environment

How it Works: Collaboration, Sustained Support, and Expert Guidance

The program provides ongoing support, guidance, and feedback to teachers. By investing in teachers' capacity to deal with the complexities of trauma and its impact on young children, school districts improve both teacher job satisfaction and student outcomes. Many of the existing Social and Emotional Learning programs focus on navigating social situations, classroom management, and behavior management. These are important skills to learn, but they only go so far, and they are rarely informed by a mental health perspective that fully recognizes the central role of student-teacher relationships in promoting meaningful social emotional growth. C2K™ is this informed approach.

C2K™ consultants bring a fresh, non-threatening perspective and an expertise that is complementary to the teacher's own. As a result, the program's benefits increased through the school year as the consultant-teacher relationship strengthened.

Teachers were initially skeptical of C2K™. However, their post-program assessments speak to how their C2K™ consultants won them over with their practical, sustained assistance:

- “C2K™ has been an amazing addition to my classroom. My consultant is irreplaceable!”
- “Consultation is tailored to what we need and want to learn. We feel so validated and appreciated.”
- Compared to other professional development opportunities, C2K™ “is much more constructive, collaborative, and relative to my day-to-day practice.”

Key Findings For Teachers

8 IN 10 teachers involved in the C2K™ pilot said the program helped them understand and respond to challenging behaviors and feel more confident in responding to those behaviors.

9 IN 10 teachers said C2K™ helped them better understand and respond to the social-emotional needs of their students.

9 IN 10 teachers said C2K™ improved their classroom environment

92% of teachers reported thinking more positively about students with challenging behaviors as a result of a C2K™ consultation

95% of teachers reported improved relationships with students targeted for consultation

7 IN 10 teachers reported a decrease in job-related stress and an increase in job satisfaction because of C2K™

6 IN 10 teachers said that C2K™ had a positive impact on their interactions with parents

Teachers' engagement in the program increased across the board as they experienced the benefits firsthand

Key Findings For Children

60% of children who were the focus of consultation demonstrated substantial improvements in their overall social emotional functioning, including statistically significant improvements in:

- **Interactions with teachers**
- **Involvement in classroom activities**
- **Age appropriate social skills**
- **Capacity to focus on teacher led activities**
- **Behavior problems**
- **Mood related symptoms**



COVID-19 Pandemic: Classroom Support for Teachers, Students Proves Even More Vital

The pandemic has disrupted our education system in many ways - isolating students, short-circuiting learning plans, and interrupting the comfort of students' daily routines. JPA began planning in early March to develop the protocols, upgrade technology, and provide training as schools switched to e-learning.

The need for social and emotional support increased dramatically with remote learning; even experienced teachers scrambled to adjust to video conferencing classrooms. In these difficult circumstances, C2K™ consultants adapted to help teachers manage these new challenges, while still providing the collaborative support they expect. C2K™ consultants help monitor which students are struggling and develop age-appropriate strategies for teachers and students coping with a day of exhausting virtual classes.

What's Next?

C2K™ provides the right mix of training, practical tools, and sustained support to teachers – some of the most influential adults in the lives of vulnerable children. C2K's™ clinical-based, best-practices approach makes it attractive to school districts and classrooms that have been seeking, with limited success, a program that delivers measurable results at the confluence of early childhood education and mental health. Currently, we partner with schools in underserved and hard-hit neighborhoods on Chicago's South and West Sides.

Expanding C2K™ will maximize its reach and positive impact on the lives of more students and teachers.

One of the ways we are working to expand C2K™ is through a collaboration with colleges and universities to provide this crucial mental health perspective to more educators. Research shows that teacher self-efficacy can influence behavioral patterns that affect student achievement and that the teacher-student relationship can have a positive impact on academic success.

To reach even more educators, this summer we were delighted to partner with the School of Education & Social Policy at Northwestern University to offer a virtual C2K™ Summer Institute to teachers at all levels. As word spreads about the benefits of C2K™, we look forward to many more collaborations and partnerships that advance the well-being and functioning of vulnerable children.

One C2K™-trained teacher can change the lives of 1,000 or more children over the course of her career. Imagine what a school district of C2K™-trained teachers can do.

**For more information about C2K™, please contact
Rameya Shanmugavelayutham, MSW, LCSW, at
Rameyas@jpachicago.org**

