Study Description: Parent-child engagement at both home and school during the middle school years is positively associated with a wide range of behavioral and academic outcomes (e.g., attendance, grades, and test scores). Due to structural changes in school environments and the increasing autonomy of teenagers, parental-child engagement often declines during the formative middle school years. Parents face unique challenges in their ability to both guide their middle school child’s academic progress and to be engaged in their child’s life.

This study seeks to promote parent-child academic engagement by sending weekly text messages to middle school parents. The text messages include facts and tips on:

- How to best support and guide their child’s academic trajectory as they transition from middle school to high school;
- How to best support their child’s social and emotional learning (SEL) skills; and
- How knowledge, skills, and abilities of their child are growable.

Parent Enrollment: Our research team works closely with each school district to find out the best way to enroll parents. During the enrollment stage parents are asked to opt in (say yes) to receive the texting curriculum. Parents can opt out of the study at any time by replying “Stop” to any text message. Parents who choose to receive the text messages will start receiving texts in October through the end of the school year.

Texting Languages: Parents have the option of choosing either English or Spanish.

Program Cost: The texting program is provided at no cost to all participating school districts and parents.

Program Assessment: To assess the effects of the middle school texting curriculum, we use a series of random control trials to compare child outcomes (e.g., test scores, attendance, etc.) whose parents were in one texting group to those whose parents were in another texting group. We randomly assign parents who agree to participate to one of several conditions. Participants in most intervention conditions receive three texts each week addressing a specific SEL skill and/or parenting practice. Parents in the control condition receive one text every two weeks related to calendar events at the school or requirements for school.

The study relies on data on parents (beliefs/knowledge, practices, and engagement in school) and their child’s school records (grades, classes taken, attendance (or absences), disciplinary actions, and test scores), some of which are available to us through administrative data already collected by our district partners and others through our own data collection efforts (e.g., a survey of parents).

Text Messages: INSPIRE-EXCEL-BOND

The INSPIRE texts are sent on Mondays. These texts are designed to motivate parents on a weekly academic topic related to their middle school child (e.g., asking questions in class, learning from mistakes, talking about report cards, sharing school work in progress, talking to teachers, etc.).

The EXCEL texts are sent on Wednesdays. These texts address the academic topic of the week and aim to: (1) develop specific SEL skills for the child (i.e., growth mindset, self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness, responsible decision-making, or self-awareness); (2) promote children’s school engagement (i.e., behavioral or cognitive); (3) encourage a parenting practice (i.e., autonomy support, monitoring, or warmth); and/or (4) foster a type of parental involvement (i.e., home-based, school-based, or academic socialization).

The BOND texts are sent on Fridays. These texts are also related to the academic topic of the week and typically reinforce the week’s aim from the EXCEL text by fostering positive parent-child interactions (e.g., affective interactions).

Benefits to Districts: The results from the study will provide each participating school district with crucial details on how information regarding parent-child engagement affects students’ outcomes and on how the district can support parents in their child’s educational trajectory from middle school to high school. After the completion of each academic year, we will:

- Provide districts with an annual brief of the previous year’s study findings;
- Present the findings to districts; and
- Provide districts with recommendations for policy and practice in parental engagement.

At the conclusion of the study, we will hand over the full middle school texting curriculum to each participating district.

For more information, please contact:
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What Are Parents Saying About Texts4Teens?

Parents' Quotes About Texts4Teens:

“A very good way to talk to our kids.”

“I think it's great how it is. It's been very helpful for my family.”

“En particular a mi me han gustado mucho todos!!!”

“It’s always good to learn, retract and practice what we’ve read thks”

“Es perfecto!! Me es genial! Y motivador.”

“It is as good as it can be. I get enough not a lot to where it's annoying. I like reading them implementing them.”