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Exploring the Dynamics of Academic Reconnections: A Case Study of Middle School Teachers' Efforts and Students' Responses

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ABSTRACT

This study chronicles the responses of middle school students to their teachers' efforts to re-engage them in school. Working with two teachers and their team of 42 eighth graders selected as at-risk of failure, researchers interviewed participants, observed interactions, and gathered data from students' first semester of high school. Teachers established a sense of community and co-constructed experiential learning experiences with students. During their eighth grade year, thirty-five students (83%) developed stronger academic momentum, consistently demonstrating three patterns of behavior: cooperating with class mates and teachers, engaging with academic tasks, and expressing a sense of progress. After a semester of high school, some students continued to demonstrate academic momentum while others experienced difficulty. Results indicate that three types of connections encouraged academic momentum: individual support from teachers, personal academic interests, and stronger work habits. The variation of student responses suggested that students will need strong support from their high school teachers to maintain momentum.