

An Evidence-Based Approach to Student Support and Wellness

City Connects is an evidence-based approach to student support that meets federal ESSA and Ohio requirements. Across America, children in high-poverty urban schools face out-of-school challenges that impede their success in the classroom and in life. Trauma, deprivation, and toxic stress threaten healthy development and achievement in school. City Connects offers a systemic approach to addressing the out-of-school factors that can impede a student's ability to succeed and thrive in school. It is an innovative school-based system that leverages existing community-based and in-school resources. This approach leads to an individualized plan of support services that addresses the strengths and needs of every student in the school.

At its core, the City Connects approach recognizes that a child's course of development can be altered when risks are addressed with the right supports and opportunities are designed to cultivate strengths, enhancing resilience. All children deserve quality supports and are capable of learning and thriving with careful attention to their unique strengths, needs, and interests.

The City Connects model

Every student, every teacher, every year



Based on rigorous evidence, City Connects is a system that takes advantage of resources and structures already present in schools and in communities.

At the core of the practice is a City Connects Coordinator. They are school counselors, social workers, or mental health professionals who implement the City Connects practice. This staff member can be a retrained member of existing staff, or a new staff hire.

They discuss each child's strengths and needs in the areas of academics, social/emotional/behavioral growth, health, and family. Each student is then linked to a

tailored set of services and enrichment opportunities in the school and/or community that address his or her unique strengths and needs.

As a hub of student support in schools, a Coordinator cultivates partnerships with community agencies, serving as a point of contact for the school. Coordinators collaborate closely with families and facilitate access to supports and enrichments. They use proprietary software to document, track, and report on service referrals, follow up to assure service delivery, and assess effectiveness. This systematic practice leads to measurable student outcomes.

The impact of City Connects on students

Academic achievement

A consistent set of findings demonstrates that *being in a City Connects school makes a difference*. Beginning in elementary school, and after leaving the City Connects and moving on to middle schools, City Connects students outperform comparison peers on measures of academic achievement:

- City Connects students outperform their peers on measures of academic achievement (e.g., higher statewide test scores)¹ and life chances (e.g., lower rate of high school dropout).²
- Results have been confirmed across different cities and states, across different samples within cities, and using different statistical methodologies.³
- In Ohio, students enrolled in City Connects elementary schools tend to show greater year-to-year score gains in standardized test scores (Iowa Tests of Basic Skills) than students in matched comparison schools.
- Also in Ohio, students in City Connects high schools outperform students in comparison schools with similar voucher (EdChoice) enrollment on the ACT examination.

The consistency of findings across methods, samples, and sites argues that City Connects is not merely associated with, but causes, these benefits for students.

Beyond academic achievement: City Connects improves educational success and life chances



Effort

Significantly higher scores on academic effort

Attendance

Significantly fewer days absent from school

Chronic absenteeism

Significantly lower rates of being absent 10% or more days

Retention in grade

Lower rates of retention (being held back in grade) than peers never in City Connects

High school dropout

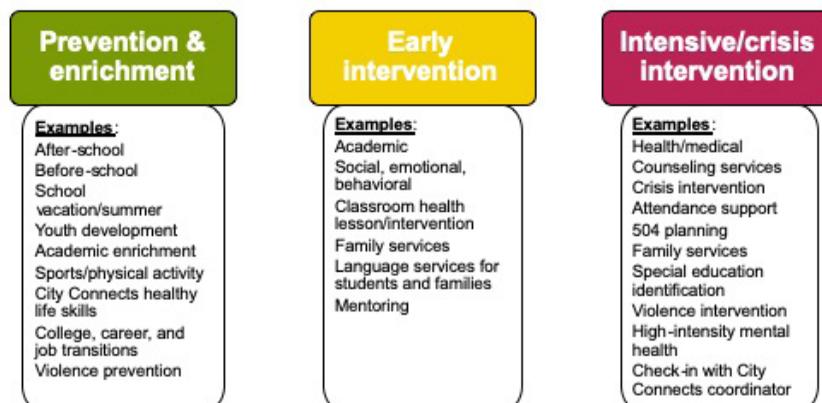
Significantly lower rates of dropout than peers never in City Connects

Postsecondary Enrollment

Significantly more likely to enter and complete 2- or 4-year postsecondary programs

Reviews, services, and partnerships at a glance

City Connects is implemented in public, private, and charter schools, serving students from preschool through high school. A large majority of the students served are low-income. Examples of the services that students receive vary in intensity and are shown below:



Why City Connects Works...

For principals:

- Gives principals a systemic approach to student support that has been fully vetted, codified, and evaluated
- Provides qualified school staff all of the induction, professional development, and coaching they need to be able to implement City Connects with fidelity
- Offers a process for reviewing each and every student's strengths and needs, so that no student falls through the cracks
- Connects each student to enrichment opportunities, prevention services, early intervention services, and/or intensive interventions that are the right match for the student
- Works closely with families to seek family input and support connection of students to services
- Has a system for engaging community partners who will provide services to the right child at the right time; organizes community partners in a way that allows easy access for constant communication; stewards community partnerships; and provides follow-up
- Offers a database (MyConnects) that provides schools with a student support record for each and every student; produces reports so that principals can see students' areas of strength and need and what services they're receiving; and provides continuous information and improvement
- Brings accountability, because we can monitor whether the practice is being followed with fidelity

For superintendents:

- Provides an approach to student support that is consistent across the district. In districts with high mobility rates, students' support records follows them
- Offers district-level accountability through a practice that allows clear setting of expectations
- Provides multiple reports per year demonstrating what has been achieved in the area of student support (e.g., number of students reviewed for strengths and needs, levels of educational risk, number and types of services delivered, community agency partnerships)

The economic benefits of City Connects outweigh the costs

Research shows that the benefits of City Connects outweigh the costs. An economic analysis by the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education at Columbia University found that **City Connects yielded a benefit of \$11 for every \$1 invested**. Even when the costs of community partner services were also included in the analysis, the study showed a return of \$3 for every \$1 invested.⁵

"If City Connects were a company, Warren Buffett would snatch it up."

—David Kirp, New York Times, August 7, 2016.⁴

¹ Walsh, M., Madaus, G., Raczek, A., Dearing, E., Foley, C., An, C., Lee-St. John, T., & Beaton, A. (2014). A new model for student-support in high-poverty urban elementary schools: Effects of elementary and middle school academic outcomes. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(4), 704-737.

² Lee-St. John, T. J., Walsh, M. E., Raczek, A. E., Vuilleumier, C. E., Foley, C., Heberle, A., Sibley, S., & Dearing, E. (2018). The long-term impact of systemic student support in elementary school: Reducing high school dropout. *AERA Open*, 4(4).

³ Dearing, E., Walsh, M. E., Sibley, E., Lee-St. John, T., Foley, C., & Raczek, A. E. (2016). Can community and school-based supports improve the achievement of first-generation immigrant children attending high-poverty schools? *Child Development*, 87(3), 883-897.

⁴ Kirp, D. (2016, August 7). "To teach a child to read, first give him glasses." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com>.

⁵ Bowden, A.B., Belfield, C.R., Levin, H.M., Shand, R., Wang, A. & Morales, M. (2015). A benefit-cost analysis of City Connects. Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. Available: cbcse.org

Stakeholder satisfaction: Principals, teachers, and community partners respond to City Connects

94% of
principals

95% of
community
partners

90% of
teachers

would recommend City Connects to a colleague

Based on 2016 and 2017 anonymous surveys. Principal N=83; community partner N=162; teacher N=847

In their own words: Testimonials

Principal - "I have been in schools for close to 40 years and I have never had a support system like City Connects. That support is provided to the entire school community: students, parents, teachers, and staff. They are my 'go to' people. They are also so generous with their time and creative with the opportunities they afford our students."

Teacher - "[The] City Connects Whole Class Review allowed me to take time to focus on each child individually and determine strengths, areas of weakness, at-risk level, and most importantly, what steps could be taken to make each child have a successful year. [Coordinator] facilitated the process efficiently and is an incredible asset to our school!"

Community Agency Partner - "I always sing the praises of City Connects. I truly wish that every school that we partner with had City Connects. The City Connects Coordinators that we work with are strong communicators, great with details and logistics, and are always thinking about the student as a whole. They are responsive and seem to handle many partnerships and cases with organization and care. We can count on them for honest feedback and suggestions that strengthen our program.

They always do their best to ensure that our required paperwork is completed by families even when it's difficult to achieve. We see them as role models for what our ideal partnership looks like."



City Connects has been implemented in public, charter, and private schools in Massachusetts, Ohio, New York, Connecticut, Minnesota, Tennessee and Indiana.

 **cityconnects**
OPTIMIZED STUDENT SUPPORT
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Be In Touch!

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