

BC's LYNCH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCES \$9.2 MILLION EXPANSION OF BOSTONCONNECTS TO FIVE MORE BOSTON SCHOOLS

\$4.6 Million New Balance Foundation Grant; \$2 Million Award from Strategic Grant Partners Support Partnership to Combat Obesity and Improve Learning

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (January 2008) – Boston College will expand BostonConnects, an education reform program that coordinates services – from health care and counseling to mentoring and family services – for students in 14 Boston schools through a new \$9.2 million initiative funded by the New Balance Foundation, Strategic Grant Partners, and other support, Lynch School of Education Dean Rev. Joseph O'Keefe, S.J., has announced.

The \$4.6 million grant from the charitable arm of New Balance Athletic Shoe Inc., a \$2 million award from Strategic Grant Partners, \$1 million from the Charles Hayden Foundation and other foundation, university and government support will fund BostonConnects in nine current and five new schools. With the new schools, the seven-year-old program will help provide a comprehensive array of supports – such as health care, mentoring, counseling, after-school care and family services – to 14 Boston Public Schools serving 4,000 students.

"This kind of collaboration with the Boston Public Schools, our foundation partners, and community-based organizations is critical to improving the lives and education of children, particularly those living in poverty," O'Keefe said. "The Lynch School of Education and Boston College are proud to expand a success story like BostonConnects, which brings best-practices to bear on resolving societal problems in our city and provides a model for urban school reform nationally."



Mary Walsh

New Balance Foundation has contributed more than \$6.3 million to support a cornerstone of BostonConnects, the New Balance Foundation Health Curriculum, designed to help students make smart choices around nutrition and overall health.

"We see this as an opportunity to support health and physical education in Boston with a particular interest in positively affecting the issue of childhood obesity," said Anne Davis, managing trustee of the New Balance Foundation. "Funding the health education curriculum within BostonConnects offers a critical component in the healthy development of children and families. We are delighted to support the BostonConnects program for another three years."

By leveraging resources of schools, service providers, community groups and the university, BostonConnects addresses "non-academic barriers" to success, said Boston College Professor Mary Walsh, the lead researcher.

Teachers report that expanded support services have allowed them to increase the number of students they can screen to determine if they need additional help. The number of external agencies assisting schools grew from 18 in 1999 to 62 in 2006. Students say they have higher levels of self-confidence, pay closer attention to the foods they eat, consume more fruits and vegetables, and drink less soda.

Initial findings show students who were recommended for extra services made academic improvement at approximately the same rate as peers who were not found in need of additional supports. The new grant funding will deepen the research into raising student achievement among different student groups, the program's effects on academic achievement, and the impact on obesity rates, social skills and classroom behavior.

Through its \$2 million grant, Strategic Grant Partners, a coalition of family foundations working to affect systemic change in education and family services in Massachusetts, played a crucial role in the expansion of BostonConnects.

"The BostonConnects model efficiently provides professional coordination of already existing services," said Joanna Jacobson, managing director of Strategic Grant Partners. "The program has provided the mechanism to connect students to the wide range of services and opportunities around them. We think measuring the impact on student success can not only inform the BPS and researchers, but school districts across the country."

BostonConnects currently serves the Farragut Elementary (Mission Hill), Gardner Extended Services School (Allston), Garfield Elementary (Brighton), Hamilton Elementary (Brighton), Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Allston), Jackson/Mann K-8 (Brighton), Mission Hill K-8 School, Tobin K-8 (Roxbury), and Winship Elementary (Brighton). The program will expand to the Blackstone (South End), Eliot (North End), Emerson (Roxbury), Mason (Roxbury) and Quincy (Chinatown) elementary schools.

"BostonConnects is a unique and powerful strategy that properly identifies the needs of students and directs them and their families to the services available across the city," said Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol R. Johnson. "We recognize that in order for all students to exceed expectations and perform at ever higher levels, they must be properly supported before, during and after the school day."

The success of the initiative has led to its citation in two leading management journals – *MIT Sloan Management Review* and *Organizational Dynamics* – as a model for business-community engagement.

"Addressing the achievement gap and academic achievement with schoolchildren requires an intensive focus on teaching and learning," said Prof. Walsh, who holds the university's Daniel E. Kearns Chair. "Closing the gap also requires a focus on supports and services that will enable every child to achieve at a high level. That requires collaboration between schools, families, community agencies, universities and businesses in partnership."

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