

# Research Brief

## THE IMPACT OF CITY CONNECTS ON TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

### THE MARY E. WALSH CENTER FOR THRIVING CHILDREN

Integrated student support is an evidence-based approach for schools to provide student support by intentionally and systematically leveraging and coordinating the resources and relationships available in the school and in the surrounding community to address the comprehensive strengths and needs of each and every student in a school to help promote healthy child development and learning.<sup>1</sup> Evidence demonstrates that the City Connects model of integrated student support is associated with positive impacts on teachers and overall school engagement.<sup>2</sup>

#### Positive impacts on teachers

**Expanded understanding of students:** In an annual survey of teachers who worked in City Connects schools, teachers reported that the City Connects model expanded their understanding of their student's lives outside of school. More than 94% of teachers reported that they were more patient with their students because they better understood the non-academic issues that contributed to their students' struggles in the classroom, and thought about the factors influencing student behavior before reacting to the behavior.<sup>3</sup>

**Feeling more supported in their jobs:** Overall, teachers in City Connects schools reported that participating in the model deepened their understanding of the barriers their students faced, and that they felt more supported in their professional school roles.<sup>4</sup>

**Stronger relationships with students and families:** Implementation of integrated student support and its increase in teachers' understanding of the "whole child" enables teachers to build stronger relationships with students and their families.<sup>5</sup>

**Modify classroom approaches:** In City Connects schools, teachers reported that they provide more differentiated instruction to meet students' academic needs and increase engagement by incorporating students' backgrounds/interests. For example, City Connects teachers said that they chose to provide accommodations (e.g., deadline extensions), offer additional interventions (e.g., extra help after school), and alter instructional approach (e.g., utilized more inclusive language).<sup>6</sup>



**More likely to stay in their jobs:** Preliminary research reveals that teachers are significantly more likely to choose to stay in a school with a system of integrated student support in place, such as City Connects.<sup>7</sup>

**Increased work satisfaction for all staff:** In City Connects schools, principals reported increased positivity and support within their school environment and overall higher work satisfaction for all staff.<sup>8</sup>



## Benefits to schools

**Overall more positive school climate:** 93% of principals rated City Connects as somewhat or very helpful at impacting school climate.<sup>9</sup>

**Narrowed academic gaps:** City Connects helped low-performing schools in high-poverty urban communities close student educational achievement gaps in math and English.<sup>10</sup>

**Helped schools exit “Turnaround” status more quickly:** After just one year of implementing City Connects in one large city, gaps in student performance between Turnaround schools (consistently low-performing) and comparison schools were narrowed to insignificant levels for Grade 3 English and Grade 3, 4, and

5 math.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in another large city, after three years of City Connects, gaps in student performance between Transformation schools (a reform model for consistently low-performing schools) and comparison schools narrowed to insignificant levels for statewide assessment scores in both English and math at Grades 3, 4, and 5.<sup>12</sup>

**Sustains positive effects of early education:** Preliminary research shows that City Connects sustains the positive effects of pre-school on elementary school math performance. These findings suggest that preschool and City Connects programs complement each other to support student performance in elementary school.<sup>13</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> Boston College Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children (2022). National Guidelines for Integrated Student Support. Retrieved from: [integratedstudentsupport.org](https://integratedstudentsupport.org).

<sup>2</sup> Heberle, A. E., Sheandín, Ú. N., Walsh, M. E., Hamilton, A. N., Chung, A. H., & Eells Lutas, V. L. (2021). Experiences of practitioners implementing comprehensive student support in high-poverty schools. *Improving Schools*, 24(1), 76–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480220943761>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> City Connects (2022). The Impact of City Connects. Progress report 2022. Chestnut Hill, MA: Center for Thriving Children,

Lynch School of Education, Boston College.

<sup>7</sup> Boston College Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children (2022). National Guidelines for Integrated Student Support. Retrieved from: [integratedstudentsupport.org](https://integratedstudentsupport.org).

<sup>8</sup> Sibley, E., Theodorakis, M., Walsh, M. E., Foley, C., Petrie, J., & Raczek, A. (2017). The impact of comprehensive student support on teachers: Knowledge of the whole child, classroom practice, and teacher support. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 65, 145–156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.02.012>

<sup>9</sup> City Connects (2020). City Connects Intervention and impact. Progress report 2020. Chestnut Hill, MA: Center for Thriving Children, Lynch School of Education, Boston College.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> City Connects (2022). The Impact of City Connects. Progress report 2022. Chestnut Hill, MA: Center for Thriving Children, Lynch School of Education, Boston College.

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