



City Connects

*The lasting impact of
optimized student support*



In high-poverty urban school districts, the barriers to success for many students are pervasive and severe.

A stay in a homeless shelter. A problem with obesity. A lingering physical ailment. Lack of access to enriching opportunities in the arts and sports. These and any number of other threats to well-being impact the classroom and the students who occupy it.

For these students, we developed City Connects.

City Connects offers optimized student support in urban schools

City Connects is an innovative school-based system that addresses poverty's impact on education by leveraging the services and resources of city community agencies. Rich as these services are, they are most effective only when they are tailored to the individual needs of every student. In each school, a full-time student support professional called a School Site Coordinator:

- works with teachers and others to assess strengths and needs of every student in key areas of development;
- identifies a unique support plan for each student and connects the student to a tailored set of support services and enrichment opportunities;
- develops and maintains partnerships with community agencies;
- tracks the support plan electronically for each student; and
- follows up to assure service delivery and effectiveness.

Developed as a collaboration among Boston College, Boston Public Schools, and community agencies, City Connects is implemented in 56 public and private schools. The system is scalable and easy to deploy.

The beneficial effects of City Connects on academic achievement are significant and lasting

After leaving a City Connects school at the end of grade 5, students outperform their Boston peers in middle school and achieve close to state average proficiency levels on both English and math on the Massachusetts Statewide Test (MCAS). In Figure 1, the blue line shows this trend for math. The significant long-term improvement persists into high school through grade 10.

City Connects students also experience improvements on report card scores. The beneficial effects are comparable in size to the harmful effects of poverty on achievement.

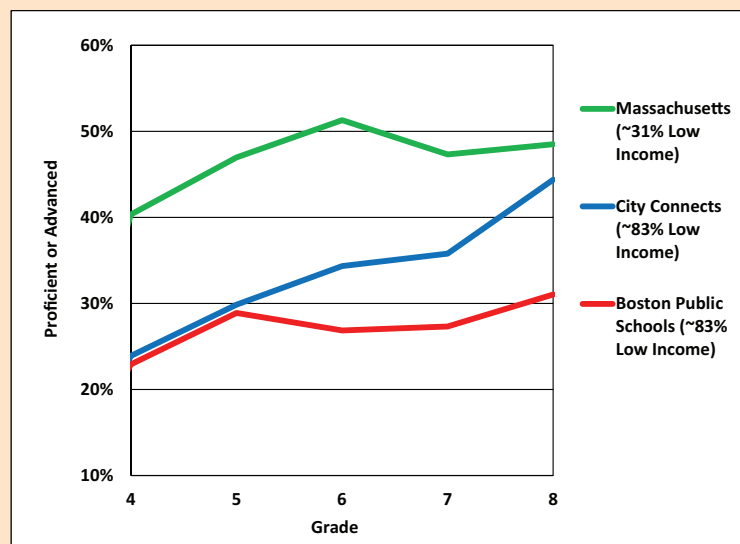


Figure 1. Massachusetts Statewide Test (MCAS) math scores, percentage of students at Proficient or above.

The benefits of City Connects extend beyond academic achievement

Students who attend City Connects schools experience benefits that reach beyond academic achievement and extend into high school, ultimately improving their life chances.

Across all grades, students in City Connects schools are less likely to be held back in a grade or be chronically absent. In addition, City Connects students in grades 4 through 12 have significantly fewer total number of days absent than comparison students. These findings are especially important given that being held back in a grade and high rates of absence from school are predictors of academic risk and dropout.

City Connects has a direct positive impact on school dropout. In grades 9 through 12, students who attended City Connects

elementary schools beginning in kindergarten are significantly less likely to drop out of high school than students never in City Connects (see Figure 2 below).

This difference translates to about 50% lower odds of dropping out of high school for students who attended City Connects schools than for comparison students.

High school graduation is widely argued to yield public economic benefits, including higher tax revenue and lower spending on the justice system, healthcare, and public assistance programs. A conservative estimate of the benefit is \$127,000 per graduate. Assuming this estimate, if a district with a cohort of 5,000 had experienced dropout at a rate similar to City Connects students, the public benefit would have exceeded \$45 million.

City Connects tailors services and enrichment opportunities for all students

Through its conversations with teachers and others in a school, City Connects uncovers the specific strengths and needs of each student. This leads to a customized plan for every student.

Some students benefit best from enrichment opportunities, such as arts, sports, or leadership programs. For other students, targeted early intervention services—such as after-school programs, basic health education, and tutoring—address potential risk factors before they become long-term barriers.

For example, an elementary school student who has struggled with obesity, has challenges with reading, and loves music may be connected to a healthy cooking club, an after-school program with a focus on literacy tutoring, and a summer music program.

Students dealing with urgent physical or emotional trauma receive intensive intervention, which may include referrals to medical and family services or counseling.

- Across all City Connects schools, in 2012-13, 15,100 students were linked to more than 57,300 services and enrichment opportunities.
- Students demonstrating the most significant barriers to learning receive the largest number of services per student.

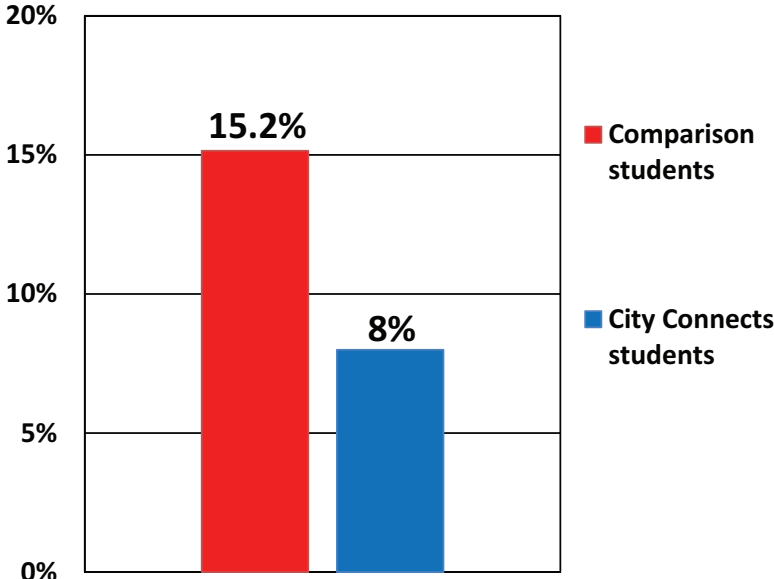


Figure 2. Cumulative percentage of students who **drop out** of high school, comparison versus City Connects students.

How does City Connects impact teachers and administrators?

City Connects has a substantial impact on overall school climate and the day-to-day life of professionals within a school.

For teachers:

- Among Boston Public School teachers anonymously surveyed in 2013, 98% report overall satisfaction with City Connects and 97% would recommend City Connects to a teacher in another school.
- Teachers report that City Connects allows them to spend more time on instruction and

“There’s that saying, ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ City Connects helps create that village for every single one of the students in our building. There’s direct personal relationship-building that they do at the school.”

—Principal

helps improve communication with families.

- Teachers also report that they are able to deliver more effective instruction—an improvement that many of them attribute to the deeper knowledge they have of students’ needs, background, and family life.
- In addition to reporting improvements in instruction, teachers noted that City Connects helps with behavior management techniques. Some teachers reported that their patience and empathy increased.

For principals:

- In our 2013 anonymous principal survey, 100% report satisfaction with City Connects, and 100% would recommend City Connects to a principal in

another school.

- Principals report that City Connects has enhanced their school’s relationships with community agencies.
- Principals are highly satisfied with the supports the Site Coordinator provides, citing outreach to families, following up with families, and assisting with parent meetings. They also value the work Site Coordinators do to reach out to, and maintain contact with, community agency partners.

“Our school has gained a watchful eye toward the emotional and academic needs of all students, and also an experienced [professional] who can function between the worlds of school counselor and teacher.”

—Teacher

The mission of City Connects matters

City Connects has shown that optimized student support can be delivered in schools in a high-impact, cost-effective way.

By making use of existing structures in schools, and by leveraging the rich resources of the city’s community agencies, City Connects is able to link students to the services and enrichment opportunities that match their individual strengths and needs.

Careful attention to the unique skills, talents, and needs of each student makes a difference.

The mission of City Connects is to ensure that children engage and learn in school by connecting each child with the tailored set of prevention, intervention, and enrichment services he or she needs to thrive.

City Connects is based at the Center for Optimized Student Support in Boston College’s Lynch School of Education.

Executive Director:

Mary E. Walsh, Ph.D.
*Kearns Professor of Urban Education & Innovative Leadership
Lynch School of Education
Boston College*

On the web:

www.CityConnects.org



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