RESEARCH BRIEF

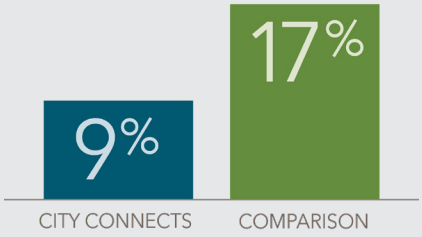
# The Long-Term Impact of Systemic Student Support in Elementary School: Reducing High School Dropout

## OVERVIEW

**In October 2018, AERA Open released a manuscript entitled "The Long-Term Impact of Systemic Student Support in Elementary School: Reducing High School Dropout." In this paper, researchers from the Boston College Lynch School of Education's Center for Optimized Student Support demonstrate that systemic student support in elementary school can lead to significantly lower dropout rates in high school.**

## KEY FINDING

The probability of high school dropout was significantly lower for students formerly in City Connects, 9.2%, than for students who never experienced the intervention, 16.6%.




## INTERVENTION STUDIED

Grounded in the developmental sciences, 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. Every City Connects school has a Master's-trained Coordinator who meets with each classroom teacher every year to discuss the strengths and needs of every student across academic, social-emotional/behavioral, health, and family domains. Through the use of a secure database, students are linked to a customized network of school- and community-based services and enrichment opportunities that address their unique strengths and needs. Coordinators then monitor student progress throughout the year as they develop community partnerships and engage with families.

## RATIONALE

There are many pathways to school dropout. Risk factors often influence student trajectories long before they reach high school. A comprehensive and coordinate intervention in elementary school has the potential to disrupt these pathways, supporting individual students' strengths and addressing challenges. The study investigated whether such an intervention would lead to lower odds of dropout.

## METHODOLOGY

The students in the study entered kindergarten in the Boston Public Schools in 2001-02 through 2004-05, and were followed through 2013-14. The study drew on anonymized records for students enrolled in City Connects schools in grades K-5 (N=894) and comparison students who never experienced City Connects (N=10,200). Researchers determined student dropout status by using a withdrawal code that the district assigns to each student. Probability of dropout was modeled using Discrete Event History Analysis. Propensity-score weights were used to reduce selection bias due to variables correlated with dropout (e.g., baseline attendance, gender, race, English Language Learner status, and eligibility for free/reduced-price lunch).

## CONCLUSION

Dropout is the result of complex factors that emerge long before high school. The study demonstrates that a systematic, comprehensive, and coordinated approach to addressing these factors in elementary school can lead to significantly lower high school dropout.

## ABOUT OUR CENTER

All children rely on relationships and systems of support to develop, learn, and thrive. The Center uses research and data to identify and evaluate strategies that successfully transform schools and communities into systems of opportunity for all students. By engaging in research and convening educators, policy makers, and community leaders, the Center is a catalyst for developing and implementing programs that are effective, systemic, and scalable.

**CITATION:**
Lee-St. John, T.J., Walsh, M.E., Raczek,A.E., Vuilleumier, C.E., Foley, C., Heberle, A.,…Dearing, E. (2018). *The long-term impact of systemic student support in elementary school: Reducing high school dropout.* AERA Open, 4(4), 1-16.

CENTER FOR OPTIMIZED STUDENT SUPPORT

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