

City Connects in the Community College Setting

The Sinclair Community College Pilot

Spring 2022



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LYNCH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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BOSTON COLLEGE

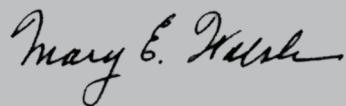
Introduction from the Executive Director

City Connects is pleased to release this publication, which describes a unique collaboration of City Connects, the Mathile Family Foundation, and Sinclair Community College. Sinclair Community College recognized that the core components of the City Connects strategy for supporting the whole child could apply beyond elementary and secondary schools. Sinclair Community College knew from years of experience that a student-centered, whole-person approach would benefit not only young learners, but also students pursuing post-secondary education.

Recognizing this unique opportunity, Sinclair Community College (30,000 students) invited City Connects to develop a model of advising for their students that would embrace the whole person. City Connects was well-established in several Dayton and Springfield, Ohio elementary and secondary schools. Our local, longtime funder and partner, the Mathile Family Foundation, had foreseen an opportunity to unite City Connects with Sinclair Community College to design and implement the program - together - to serve even more students in the local community.

When this partnership was born, City Connects was delighted to engage in this collaboration with partners who saw the potential for the City Connects model to provide essential, non-academic supports to community college students. Our work with these thoughtful, dedicated, and collaborative partners resulted in the latest iteration of the City Connects model of student support, now serving hundreds of community college students each year.

With gratitude,



City Connects in the community college setting

Community colleges provide powerful opportunities for students to pursue their educational goals and attain important experience and credentials. However, completing an associate's degree or certificate can be challenging; less than 40% of students who enroll in a public two-year postsecondary institution attain an associate's degree or certificate within six years (Radford et al., 2010). Research has explored ways to enhance students' opportunities for success at community colleges (Bailey et al., 2015) and has demonstrated that advising can support student success in college (Metzner, 1989; Bahr, 2008). Advisors contribute to students' engagement and academic integration with the college, key factors for persistence (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Researchers and practitioners have long argued that advising is more effective when it extends beyond the traditional academic focus, relating to the whole student and his/her development. For nontraditional, first-generation students served by community colleges, advising can play a particularly important role (Crookston, 1972; McDonnell, Soricone, & Sheen, 2014). While research demonstrates the importance and effectiveness of holistic advising at the community college level, scaling up programs can be costly and difficult to implement.

Why City Connects?

The work of adapting the City Connects model for the community college setting was a multi-year, collaborative process. City Connects – which emerged in response to the need for a systematic way to address the out-of-school factors that can impact student success and thriving – was an established practice in several Dayton and Springfield, Ohio elementary and secondary schools when the community college pilot began. City Connects' work in Ohio is made possible through the support of the Mathile Family Foundation, and the Foundation served as a partner with City Connects in collaborating with Sinclair Community College to adapt the evidence-based City Connects model to the community college setting. The collaboration aimed to:

- Adapt City Connects for the community college context and develop documentation to ensure consistent implementation
- Identify students' academic, personal, financial, and career strengths as well as barriers to learning, thriving, and college completion
- Assist students in utilizing college and community services and resources to address barriers to learning and college completion
- Improve and sustain student academic achievement and persistence of students and estimate the magnitude of intervention effects

The resulting practice, **Sinclair-City Connects**, is a comprehensive and coordinated system that fosters the development of relationships among students, advisors, faculty, and staff. It helps build a supportive learning environment that is attentive to student strengths and needs and tailors processes to help students meet academic goals and postsecondary success. This holistic advising practice is codified and evaluated to demonstrate effectiveness.

Developing and implementing the Sinclair-City Connects model

The Sinclair-City Connects model built upon, strengthened, and enhanced the structures and processes already in place at Sinclair and focused on an advising framework, considering all facets of the student experience.

Following its development and design, a pilot of the holistic advising process was launched in the Liberal Arts & Social Sciences career community at Sinclair Community College. Initial recruitment during the pre-registration process began in April 2016 for the fall 2016 term. Participants included first-time-in-college, degree-seeking students who had graduated from high school and had not transferred from another college. Students were added to the pilot cohort in fall 2016, yielding an initial cohort of about 100 students. Each semester, students were added to the pilot and tracked as cohorts. In spring 2017, the pilot expanded into three additional career communities: (1) Science Technology Engineering Mathematics, (2) Health Sciences, and (3) Business & IT and Law & Public Safety.

The adaption of City Connects to the community college context has included the development of practice materials such as The Holistic Student Support Practice Manual, a timeline for practice elements, and documented tasks and benchmarks, which have been refined, adjusted, and updated over time. Moreover, the partners co-designing the implementation model also collaborated to develop a new technology tool, which can be used to review data on enrollment, retention, distribution of students across programs, academic standing, and academic outcomes, and to generate reports.

Select findings from the evaluation of the Pilot

Several core questions guided the plan for evaluating the Sinclair-City Connects pilot:

- How is Sinclair-City Connects Holistic Advising implemented?
- What is the impact of Sinclair-City Connects Holistic Advising on predictors of academic achievement?
- What is the impact of Sinclair-City Connects Holistic Advising on academic achievement?

Process of implementation findings

To learn how Sinclair-City Connects Holistic Advising was implemented, information about pilot activities was collected and studied, such as advisors' reports of the college- and community-based resource connections they provided to students based on their unique needs. Over time, the network of active support partners grew to more than 30 active community partners and more than 50 Sinclair-based providers.

City Connects researchers also interviewed advisors. During the interviews, advisors shared their perspectives on how the practice was implemented, what they saw to be some of the benefits and challenges of the model, and what they saw as the impact on students.

In the words of an advisor,

"You're giving [students] the basic information, and [also] talking to them about City Connects... when you talk to students about the holistic piece, you're trying to explain...that if you have concerns or other issues, even if they're not related to academics, I'm here for you as an advisor. And I think that's where they start to feel a connection to you because you're sharing with them that you realize that they are more than just a student...we're here for you for more than just helping you determine what classes you need and how to register."

Outcomes findings

Multiple multivariate outcomes models were designed to estimate the impact of the Sinclair-City Connects practice. Findings across all years of the pilot include:

Participation in the Sinclair-City Connects pilot had a significant positive impact for students on several indicators known to be associated with eventual academic achievement in community colleges.

- Sinclair-City Connects pilot students in the career communities of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences and Business were significantly more likely to participate in Orientation, and had more interaction with campus Support Services groups. Research indicates that participation in campus activities and culture leads to student experiences of “belonging” and to higher academic achievement.
- Sinclair-City Connects pilot students in all programs were more likely to have a completed a plan for completing their program of studies, called a “MAP” (My Academic Plan) at Sinclair Community College.
- While pilot students in Liberal Arts & Social Sciences and Business were more likely to complete college-level mathematics, they were significantly less likely to complete college English courses than comparison students (based on definitions tailored to each major).

Sinclair-City Connects did not seem to have a direct effect on academic outcomes with the exception of credit completion for one career community.

- Sinclair-City Connects pilot students in general, across all majors, did not differ from comparison students in total credits completed.
- Business pilot students were significantly more likely to have achieved 24 credits than comparable students in the same major.
- Liberal Arts & Social Sciences (but not other majors) were significantly less likely to meet key credit-earning thresholds of 6 and 12 credits.
- Sinclair-City Connects pilot and non-City Connects comparison students in each career community had comparable cumulative GPAs and likelihood of achieving a GPA greater than 2.25 (not significantly different).

Participation in the Sinclair-City Connects pilot had a significant positive impact for students on additional college outcomes.

- Sinclair-City Connects students in the career communities of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences; Health Sciences; and Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math were significantly more likely to be retained, or re-enroll in the next semester and/or later after starting at Sinclair
- Sinclair-City Connects Business students were significantly more likely to have earned at least one credential compared to other Business students

To further study the impact of Sinclair-City Connects on academic achievement, the performance of Sinclair-City Connects Liberal Arts & Social Sciences pilot students and comparable students was compared across several “milestones” or indicators of student progress (as defined by the Sinclair Advising Office).

The table that follows compares these groups across indicators, as well as their progress toward completing all milestones. Data is from the most recent year available, 2019-20.

TABLE 1. Comparison of all Sinclair students, all Liberal Arts & Social Sciences students, and Sinclair-City Connects participants: Advising indicators for 2019-20

Milestone	All Sinclair Students	Sinclair Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Students	Sinclair-City Connects Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Students
Completed "My Academic Plan"*	85%	81%	86%
Completed college-level English and Math courses	21%	22%	29%
Completed 30 credits (Degree program only)	15%	18%	24%
Completed 9 credits	57%	66%	66%
Completed all milestones (Degree program only)	10%	10%	11%

* Note that some students were added after pre-registration, when "My Academic Plan" is typically completed

On several advising indicators, Sinclair-City Connects students outperformed the broader Liberal Arts & Social Sciences career community group and Sinclair as a whole. Positive findings include:

- More Sinclair-City Connects students completed programs of studies than others in the same (Liberal Arts & Social Sciences) community.
- More Sinclair-City Connects students completed both Gateway college-level courses and met the 30 credit milestones than others in the same (Liberal Arts & Social Sciences) community and the college overall.
- More Sinclair-City Connects students had completed 30 credits (for students enrolled in degree-earning programs, noted as "degree program only" above) than in the Liberal Arts & Social Sciences community and the larger college community.

Conclusion

The Sinclair-City Connects Holistic Advising practice was launched with typical college students in a real-world setting, with no additional incentives offered to participants. The implementation succeeded in identifying community-based and college-based services, and advisors reported benefits to implementing a systematic and holistic approach to supporting students. There were several significant, positive impacts of the program on pre-academic measures and student retention. The model continues to be refined and improved, and the pilot of holistic advising demonstrates great promise for community college students.

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