



BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education and Human Development

MARY E. WALSH CENTER FOR THRIVING CHILDREN

October 24, 2023

Dear Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for your leadership on SB162 and the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Boston College Center for Thriving Children. The Center is expert in whole child interventions that succeed in improving student academic performance. This includes the development and implementation of City Connects, an evidence-based approach to addressing the out-of-school factors that inhibit student readiness to learn and attain academic proficiency on statewide tests..

A recent [article](#) on the schools run by the U.S. Department of Defense shows that students of all backgrounds out-perform their peers in every state in the nation. Some of the success of these students is attributable to high quality instruction and school management, and some to the fact that enrolled children have access to food, healthcare, and housing, and a parent with consistent employment through the military.

In short, academic performance is closely tied to the conditions that enable students to be ready to learn and succeed.

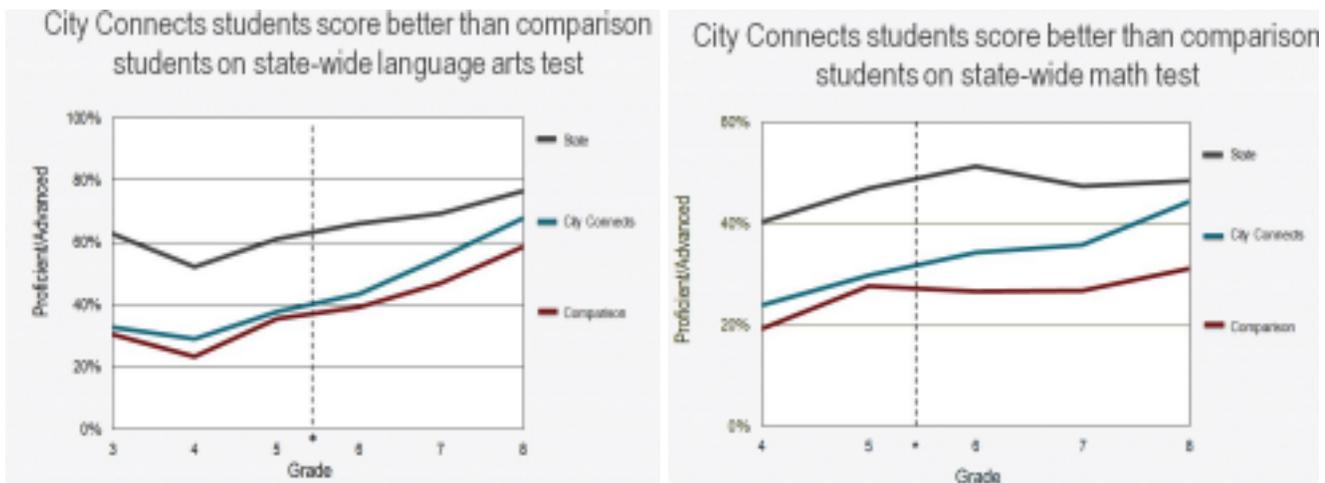
Research finds that a student's low academic performance is connected to having less access to developmentally stimulating resources, opportunities, and relationships in the home or in the community. Low academic performance is also connected to experiencing persistent "toxic stress" which impairs working memory, the ability to organize information, regulate behavior, and form positive adult and peer relationships – the very skills needed to succeed academically. These out-of-school factors account for approximately two thirds of the variance in student achievement.

The pandemic has intensified the need for Ohio students to receive effective support in order to attain proficiency on Ohio's statewide test. 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 every student in a school to help promote healthy child development and learning.

City Connects is an evidence-based approach to integrated student support that results in every child receiving a tailored set of prevention, intervention, and enrichment supports. A full-time City Connects coordinator—a school-based, Master’s-level school counselor or social worker—is a member of a school’s student-support team. Once a year, Coordinators meet with each teacher to review the strengths and needs of each and every student. Coordinators create an individualized plan for each child in close consultation with families, students, and others in the school. Tailored services for each child are secured from existing community agencies and school resources: health care, tutoring, after school programs, sports teams, access to food. By systematically leveraging school and community resources, Coordinators ensure that the right resources get to the right child at the right time, over time.

City Connects improves student outcomes by more efficiently and effectively using existing school and community resources—across education, social services, health, mental health, and youth development.

Peer-reviewed studies show that City Connects in elementary schools leads to reduced chronic absenteeism and higher statewide test scores, among other positive outcomes. The graphs below show City Connects’ impacts on student academic performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) statewide test. The graph on the left shows the impact on students’ English Language Arts performance while the graph on the right shows effects on students’ Math performance. These results are based on a sample of over 7900 students in a district that is 86% low income.



In working with the Marian University-based City Connects Technical Assistance Center to implement City Connects in 78 schools in Indiana, preliminary analysis of student data from the first year of implementation showed that students made greater gains on the Indiana statewide test than their peers who did not receive City Connects.

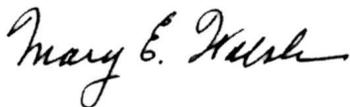
In addition, evidence of City Connects' impacts includes reduced high school drop out rates, chronic absenteeism, grades, and student effort. A new study demonstrates that students who receive City Connects in elementary school are more likely to enroll in and complete post-secondary programs.

The objectives of SB162 are to ensure that any public school student who demonstrates a limited level of skill on state assessments in Math or English Language Arts receive academic intervention services at no cost to the student, so that the student can attain the skills necessary for success in Ohio.

We respectfully submit that many students are performing poorly on state assessments for reasons other than the quality or intensity of instruction. To address the root cause of students' challenges, we recommend that you add language that would require school districts to consider investments in evidence-based integrated student support interventions demonstrated to improve student academic performance on statewide tests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of the proposed bill and to share ways that academic interventions can be more effective when students receive evidence-based integrated support. We share your commitment to helping all of Ohio students succeed. Please contact us if we can be a resource to you or your colleagues in any way.

Sincerely,



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