

Megan Bettelon

Regarding City Connects Pilot Program

May 31, 2023

Dear Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Megan Bettelon and I am a Program Manager with City Connects Midwest. I have worked with the City Connects program since 2015, first as a Site Coordinator in Our Lady of the Rosary School in Dayton, and then transitioning to Program Manager for all the Ohio network's primary schools in summer of last year. I am submitting this testimony to petition the committee to fund the pilot project which would launch City Connects in K-12 schools across Ohio.

During my time working with the program, I have seen the tremendous benefit City Connects brings to students and families. Starting in the fall of each school year I would lead the school in a holistic discussion of each and every student in each and every classroom. Through this unique approach, we ensured that no student was overlooked and that every student received the services they needed to thrive. As the year progressed, I would use the information I learned through the initial student review to research and establish new community partnerships, implement programming for the student, classroom, and entire school, and guide individualized interventions for our students.

Through the structure of City Connects, which provides ongoing assessment and follow-up, I would continuously learn of difficulties being experienced by either students or their families that negatively impacted the student's well-being. One year I was called to support a student whose custodial parent changed. This student was experiencing feelings of grief and loss from no longer being able to see one of their parents. Additionally, the student suffered from a chronic health issue that impacted physical stamina and ability to make it through a regular school day. Working with an inter-disciplinary team of the teacher, school nurse and counselor, we created an individualized plan for this student that addressed these complex needs. Informed by their pediatrician, we put a school health plan in place that allowed the student the breaks needed through the day. The student received counseling on-site during the school day that helped them process the impact the custody change had to their mental health. Through a partnership I had worked to establish with a mentoring foundation, the student was linked to a mentor to meet with weekly, providing an ongoing positive adult relationship. Additionally, I worked with the new custodial parent to help address the transition they were experiencing in now having full custody. I helped connect the parent to public health benefits and food resources. When schools reopened after the pandemic, but the student was unable to return immediately due to their compromised health status, I linked the family with internet services and helped support the student's at home learning. City Connects gave our school the structure it needed to work quickly to address the student's needs so their education could continue and the student could once again thrive in the classroom.

Last year I transitioned from the role of Site Coordinator to Program Manager for the Ohio primary schools. In this new role I have seen success stories like the one above replicated time and time. In one private school, the Coordinator fostered a new partnership with a community agency so she could provide culturally competent support to newly immigrated families from eastern Africa. A

Coordinator working in a charter school facilitated care for a kindergarten student experiencing a sensory disorder, ensuring that the student had the accommodations she needed to focus during the day and making sure the parents had the resources they needed at home to engage with their child. A public-school employed Coordinator worked with community agencies to develop and implement a comprehensive after-school program focusing on the needs of elementary boys, after hearing directly from the students that they wished they had something to do that was just “for them.” City Connects gives Social Workers and Counselors the tools and structure needed to ensure that each student in the school has access to the types of services I have listed – and innumerable more!

As a Student Support Coordinator and Program Manager, I have witnessed firsthand the impact that City Connects has on students, families, teachers, and the entire school community. I know that expanding the program throughout Ohio will benefit countless more students and families, ensuring that they too have the supports they need to truly thrive. Thank you for your consideration of this program and the care and service you are showing Ohio youth by meeting on this topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Bettelon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Megan Bettelon, MSW, LSW
Program Manager – City Connects Midwest
Center for Vibrant Schools
Marian University