



BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education and Human Development

MARY E. WALSH CENTER FOR THRIVING CHILDREN

May 31, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Eric Dearing. I am a Professor at the Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development, and a Director of the Center for Thriving Children, which developed and houses City Connects.

On behalf of myself and my colleagues, I am here to ask for your support and to build upon a pilot program that was passed in the House version of the budget. This pilot will provide start-up funds that would enable Ohio schools to implement City Connects, an evidence-based approach to integrated student support that efficiently and effectively leverages existing school and community resources to improve student learning and lifelong outcomes.

City Connects History and Approach

Developed 23 years ago through a partnership between Boston College and Boston Public Schools, City Connects 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 in the Fall, 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 agency and school resources: health care, after school programs, a sports team, 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.

Presently, City Connects is in 203 schools across five states and the nation of Ireland. In the 2021-2022 school year, City Connects connected 36,522 students across 122 schools to over 290,900 services.

Outcomes of City Connects

City Connects improves student outcomes by more efficiently and effectively using existing school and community resources—many of which you and your colleagues support through the state budget each year across education, social services, health, mental health, and youth development line items.

Peer-reviewed studies show that City Connects in elementary schools leads to:

- Improved academic achievement
- Reduced chronic absenteeism
- Reduced high school drop out rates
- A greater likelihood that students who received City Connects in elementary school will enroll in and complete post-secondary programs

More detailed information about these and other findings is in the appendixes submitted with our written testimony.

Other states are advancing evidence-based approaches like City Connects

As you consider the proposed City Connects pilot, it may interest you to know that a number of states are taking hold of the research on evidence-based approaches to integrated student support and investing in specific models with aligned professional development, coaching, and technology. These include the states of Texas, Georgia, and West Virginia, as well as Virginia and Minnesota through pending legislation. City Connects is the nation's most rigorously evaluated and effective approach to integrated support, which brought City Connects to the attention of the State of Indiana and our partners at the City Connects Midwest Technical Assistance Center at Marian University, from whom you will hear in a moment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of the proposed City Connects pilot and to share additional information about the program and its results.

Sincerely,



Eric Dearing, Ph.D.

Professor and Director

Boston College Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children

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