

MARIAN UNIVERSITY

Center for Vibrant Schools



Bob Behning

Re: City Connects Pilot Program

May 9, 2023

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

Thank you for taking the time to learn about the City Connects practice and the positive ways we can impact students' lives. My name is Bob Behning. I am an assistant vice president of Marian University and the director of the Center for Vibrant Schools. I also serve in the Indiana House of Representative as the chair of the House Education Committee.

I'm here today to request support for and the expansion of the existing \$1 million commitment for City Connects in the state budget made by the Ohio House of Representatives. The City Connects pilot program contained in the House-approved budget is designed to expand the City Connects practice from seven to at least 32 K-12 schools in Ohio. In order to fully meet the vision of this program, we are seeking an additional \$9 million to fulfill our initial \$10 million request.

As an Indiana lawmaker, I know there is a large number of requests you have to consider each legislative session, especially when crafting your state budget. There are countless programs vying for state funding—especially when it comes to supporting students and schools. In a post-pandemic world, it seems everyone has a miracle product that will address student needs overnight.

But that is not what City Connects is.

City Connects is a comprehensive student support practice that takes a systematic approach to addressing student needs. This practice comes with decades of evidence to warrant investments made by schools, community partners, and the state of Ohio. As a legislator, when I support dedicating state funding for programs, I want to know that taxpayer dollars are invested wisely, and not wasted on programs that will not yield results.

An investment by the state of Ohio will make a substantial impact on students and their communities for years to come. I can say that confidently because I have seen firsthand the positive impact City Connects has had in my own state. In 2021, the Marian University Center for Vibrant Schools received a state grant to implement City Connects in more than 30 schools in areas of poverty. The Center now works with more than 70 schools implementing the practice. In less than two years, Indiana City Connects schools have experienced a 4 percent growth above the statewide average in English Language Arts and mathematics. These results are incredibly encouraging—especially because we do not typically see significant improvements until at least the third year of implementation.

With continued implementation, City Connects has proven to decrease chronic absenteeism, improve academic performance, reduce the number of high school dropouts, encourage more students to complete post-secondary education, and much more.

This is what I mean when I say City Connects is not a quick fix. It takes years of dedication from schools and the community along with funding to ensure the practice is implemented with fidelity and will yield measurable results.

The good news is City Connects is an allowable use of the Student Wellness and Success Funds. Once the pilot program ends, City Connects can be sustained through the use of already dedicated state dollars along with federal Title 1 and Title 4 funds.

Thank you for your time and consideration for this request. This is a worthwhile investment for the state of Ohio and will ensure students can shine inside and outside the classroom for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Behning", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bob Behning
Assistant Vice President
Director, Center for Vibrant Schools
Marian University