

The Impact of City Connects

Progress Report 2012



BOSTON COLLEGE CENTER FOR
OPTIMIZED STUDENT SUPPORT





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Introduction

It has long been recognized that in high-poverty urban school districts, children face challenges outside of school that impede academic success. In the 1960s, the Coleman Report concluded that students' socioeconomic and home background are significant factors affecting academic achievement.¹ Current research confirms that larger social structures and contexts beyond the school are critical, accounting for up to two-thirds of the variance in student achievement.² Schools cannot close the achievement gap without a systemic approach to addressing out-of-school factors.³ While the challenge of poverty may be society's to solve, and while some non-academic barriers to learning cannot be addressed by schools, in the absence of a large-scale societal solution, schools can provide supports that mitigate some of the impact of poverty.

To address these out-of-school factors that impede learning, we designed City Connects (CCNX). The mission of CCNX is have children engage and learn in school by connecting each child with the tailored set of prevention, intervention, and enrichment services he or she needs to thrive. To accomplish this mission, CCNX relies on the rich services and enrichments provided by district programs and community agencies. To link schools and community agencies, CCNX has developed a school-based infrastructure that coordinates comprehensive supports for learning and healthy development. The intervention identifies each student's strengths and needs in academic, social-emotional, physical, and family domains and works with community agencies to deliver a tailored set of services to every child. This infrastructure transforms existing school structures and is aligned with conceptual consensus regarding optimal practice. The intervention described in this report is designed for elementary school students. The CCNX Implementation Team is currently adapting the model for early childhood and for middle and high school students. The Evaluation Team is following the elementary school students once they leave the intervention and enter middle school and then high school.

In the academic year 2001-02, CCNX was initially implemented in six schools located in one geographic neighborhood; CCNX was replicated in another Boston Public Schools (BPS) cluster in 2007. At that time, seven schools from other BPS clusters were randomly chosen to serve as comparison schools. In September of 2010-11, at the invitation of the

1 Harrington, 1962; Coleman, et al., 1966; Blow, 2011

2 Rothstein, 2010; Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Crane, 1998

3 Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010

district, CCNX expanded to six “turnaround” schools—that is, schools officially designated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards as in the category of “Restructuring.” Most recently, in September of 2011-12, CCNX expanded to its first site outside Boston and is currently implemented in five Springfield, MA, elementary and K-8 schools.

This report summarizes the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of the CCNX ongoing evaluation in Boston.⁴ Previous findings demonstrated the significant impact of the CCNX intervention, across K-5 grade levels, on academic achievement and measures of student thriving. These findings are particularly pronounced for English Language Learners. See previous reports at www.cityconnects.org. Our appendices for 2011-12 and past years present more detailed information about the City Connects intervention, its phased rollout in BPS, and the demographic context of its implementation. The data sources and methodologies employed and the full results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of those data are described more fully in the appendices.

In this report, we present selected new analyses drawing on the new data available to us in 2010-11. Quantitative analyses drew on a rich variety of sources, including report card scores, state test scores, student and teacher surveys, and publicly available demographic data. Because quantitative data from the BPS and the state do not become available until fall of the following year (in this case, Fall 2011), some of the new quantitative analyses are based on data obtained earlier. In order to supplement and illuminate the quantitative data, CCNX also rigorously analyzed qualitative data from key participants at the heart of the intervention: teachers, principals, and CCNX staff. Qualitative data were gathered and analyzed in academic year 2010-2011.

We begin with a short description of the context in which CCNX works. Then we briefly describe how urban poverty creates out-of-school factors that impact student development and learning. Next, we describe current approaches to student support and how they compare with “best practices.” Then we briefly outline the CCNX intervention. Next, we present selected new and previously established quantitative findings on the impact of CCNX on academic achievement and on factors related to thriving, school success, and life chances. Finally, we present data on the impact of CCNX on principals, teachers, and community agencies.

4 Next year's report will present findings from our first year of implementation in Springfield.

Context

City of Boston context

Characteristics of the City of Boston, its public schools, and the City Connects (CCNX) schools are important to interpreting and understanding the challenges CCNX students face and the impact of the intervention. Our 2010 report presents a detailed overview of the social and economic disadvantages faced by many Boston residents. As in previous years, characteristics of students enrolled in BPS present crucial data on the context of the CCNX intervention.

CCNX was implemented in sixteen Boston Public Schools in 2010-11. Table 1 presents a summary of elementary school (grades K to 5) student characteristics for BPS, CCNX schools, and our comparison schools during school year 2010-11.

Table 1. Boston, City Connects, and comparison elementary school characteristics, 2010-11.

	Boston Public Schools	Pilot Schools	Charter Schools	Comparison Schools	City Connects
% Female	48.2	47.5	52.3	48.6	49.1
% Race/ Ethnicity					
Black	33.0	36.2	61.3	34.1	33.0
White	12.0	16.3	8.8	11.4	6.1
Asian	7.2	3.0	2.0	10.0	13.1
Hispanic	45.1	41.6	25.1	41.3	45.7
Multi-Race Non-Hispanic/ Other	2.6	3.0	2.7	3.2	2.1
% First Language Not English	45.2	35.0	17.0	45.1	50.9
% Limited English Proficiency	35.3	26.5	5.1	17.5	20.9
Poverty: Eligible for Lunch Subsidy					
Reduced School Lunch	7.0	5.7	14.5	7.0	6.6
Free School Lunch	71.7	62.5	59.8	77.9	78.5
% Special Education	18.2	20.1	10.9	19.4	20.3
Mobility: % Attending Same School	85.6	89.2	96.1	87.4	85.1
Average Number of School Absences	10.1	10.3	7.3	8.7	9.8

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education enrollment data; Boston Public Schools student data for 2010-2011.

Table 1 shows that CCNX and comparison school students are similar across several characteristics, including gender, special education status, and poverty. However, CCNX students are more likely to be Asian than

both BPS and comparison students, and less likely to be White. (One of the CCNX elementary schools is located in a neighborhood with a high proportion of Cantonese-speaking residents and enrolls a high percentage of Asian students). CCNX has more students for whom English is not the first language relative to comparison school and BPS students. Similarly, more CCNX than comparison students are designated as being limited in English proficiency. Both CCNX and comparison schools have a higher proportion of students experiencing poverty, as measured by free lunch eligibility, than Boston Public Schools as a whole.

As noted in the 2010-11 annual report, nearly all CCNX and comparison students live in neighborhoods and attend school in locations where all categories of crime are much more common than in typical U.S. neighborhoods.

- High risk for personal crime is especially notable in the CCNX and comparison school student contexts, with a **maximum value in one neighborhood equivalent to nearly five times the national rate of personal crimes.**
- CCNX and comparison school students are similar in the personal crime for their home neighborhood context, but CCNX schools are located in areas with higher rates of personal crime than comparison school students.
- Comparison school students' home and school neighborhoods present higher rates of property crime than CCNX.

The Impact of Urban Poverty on Children's Development and Learning

The pervasive effects of poverty on academic achievement underscore the importance of addressing out-of-school factors in *any education reform effort*.⁵ Poverty impacts children's achievement and growth in at least three noteworthy ways: 1) **limits investment**—a family's ability to invest money, time, and energy in fostering children's growth (e.g., less time to read and talk with their children); 2) **creates pervasive stress** within families and their neighborhoods—this undermines children's sense of well-being and safety (e.g., inconsistent parenting behavior or increased exposure to community

5 See Walsh & Murphy, 2003; Berliner, 2009; and Rothstein, 2010.

violence that may undermine children’s self-regulation and social-emotional stability); 3) **contributes to chaotic life**—unpredictable support systems (e.g., less-reliable transportation, municipal services, and businesses).

For children living in poverty, the impact of out-of-school factors is clearly evident in their ability to succeed in school. Limited resources, stress, and the chaos of poverty result in poor attendance, high mobility, social-emotional dysfunction, a lack of readiness for school, and limited cultural capital to understand schools as institutions.⁶ Rothstein describes the impact on achievement of out-of-school factors relative to in-school factors:

“Decades of social science research have demonstrated that differences in the quality of schools can explain about one-third of the variation in student achievement. *But the other two-thirds is attributable to non-school factors*” (emphasis added).⁷

Figure 1 illustrates that academic success is predicated on children’s readiness to engage and thrive in school. It also shows the overlapping impact of the various domains of development on children’s readiness to learn and thrive.

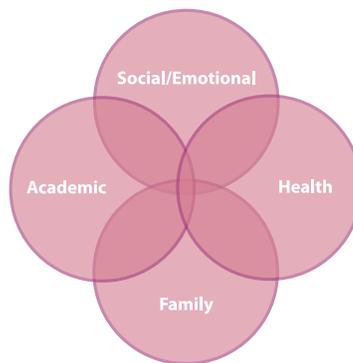


Figure 1. Academic success is predicated on students’ readiness to engage and thrive in school

Current Models of Student Support

Many schools presently are unable to respond to the pressing challenges facing students’ out-of-school lives. Student support structures are the product of an earlier time, a different set of needs, and a less diverse demographic. The typical approach to student support in most schools: 1) is fragmented and idiosyncratic, serving a small number of high-need students; 2) does not address the full range of needs, focusing mainly on risk; 3) does not collect data on the effectiveness of the supports offered students; and 4) in practice, does not operate as a core function of the school, and as a result, seeks minimal teacher engagement.⁸

6 Dearing, 2008.

7 Rothstein, 2010, p. 1.

8 Walsh & DePaul, 2008.

Best Practices in Student Support

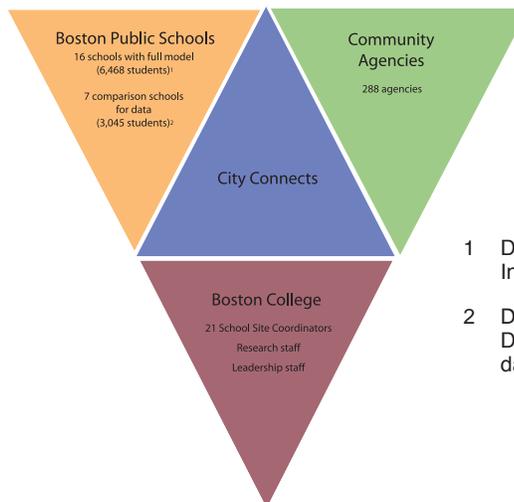
Grounded in research on child development and the need that it be implemented as a core function of schools, optimized student support has six identifying characteristics. It is: 1) *customized* to the unique strengths, needs, and interests of each student; 2) *comprehensive*, serving the academic, social/emotional, health, and family needs of all students from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds; 3) *coordinated* among families, schools, and community agencies; 4) *cost-effective to schools* by leveraging the resources provided by community agencies; 5) *continuously monitored for effectiveness* through collecting and analyzing data to evaluate and improve service delivery and student outcomes; and 6) *implemented* in all sites with fidelity and oversight.

The City Connects Model

Partners

Built on the best practices described above, City Connects is a partnership delivering optimized student support. Figure 2 shows the three partners - the Boston Public Schools, a wide range of community agencies, and Boston College. Boston College is the nerve center of City Connects. The Center for Optimized Student Support at Boston College developed and delivers the CCNX intervention and is the home of the Leadership and Implementation Teams. The Boston College Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Education Policy is the home of the Evaluation Team.

Figure 2. The CCNX partnership

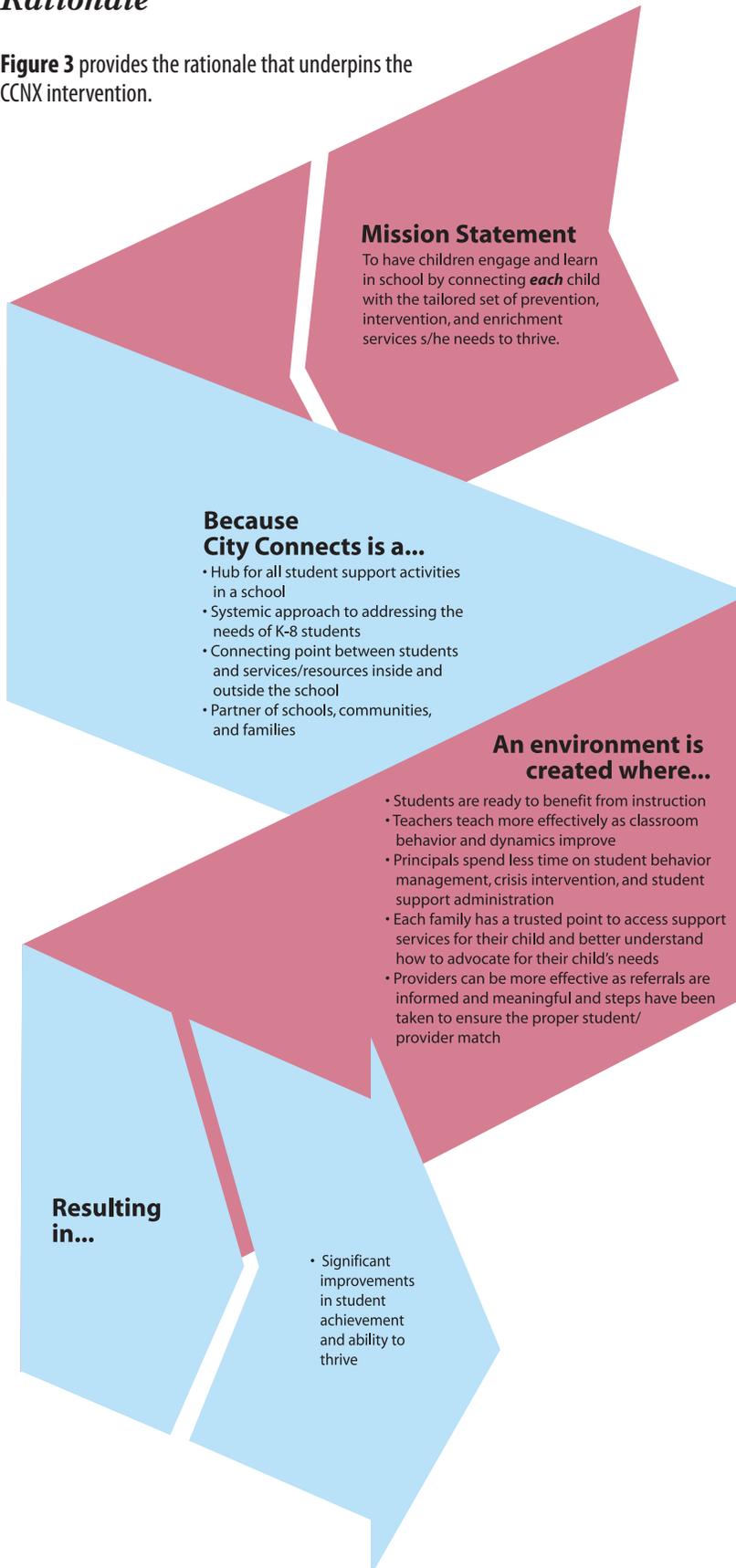


1 Data source: CCNX Student Support Information System database, 2010-11.

2 Data source: Massachusetts Department of Education enrollment data, 2009-10.

Rationale

Figure 3 provides the rationale that underpins the CCNX intervention.



History of the City Connects intervention

In the academic year 2001-02, CCNX was initially implemented in six schools located in one geographic neighborhood (BPS Cluster 5, which includes the Allston, Brighton, and Mission Hill sections of the city). An external funder who provided a planning grant in 1999 stipulated that development and design of CCNX take place in Cluster 5. In 2007, the District stipulated that expansion of CCNX occur in BPS Cluster 2 (the North End, South End, and Lower Roxbury), adding five new schools. At that time, seven schools from other BPS clusters were randomly chosen to serve as comparison schools. CCNX and comparison schools are our “legacy schools.”⁹ By this we mean that the students from these schools are being followed longitudinally from kindergarten through high school to assess the long term impact of the CCNX intervention. In September of 2010-11, at the invitation of the district, CCNX expanded to six “turnaround” schools—that is, schools officially designated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards as in the category of “Restructuring.” Most recently, in September of 2011-12, CCNX expanded to its first site outside Boston, and is currently implemented in five elementary and K-8 schools in Springfield, MA.¹⁰

Description of the City Connects intervention

CCNX connects students with the individually tailored set of prevention, intervention, and enrichment services that they need to succeed in school.

There are six key components of the model:

School Site Coordinator. At the core of the intervention is a full-time School Site Coordinator (SSC) in each school, trained as a school counselor or school social worker, who connects students to a customized set of services through collaboration with families, teachers, school staff, and community agencies. The ratio of SSC to student population is 1:400. The SSC follows standardized practices codified in the CCNX Practice Manual, schematized in Figure 4 and detailed in the components below.

9 It is important to note that during the history of CCNX implementation, there have been several school closings and mergers, which is a common fact of life in any urban school district.

10 Springfield is the third-largest city in Massachusetts.

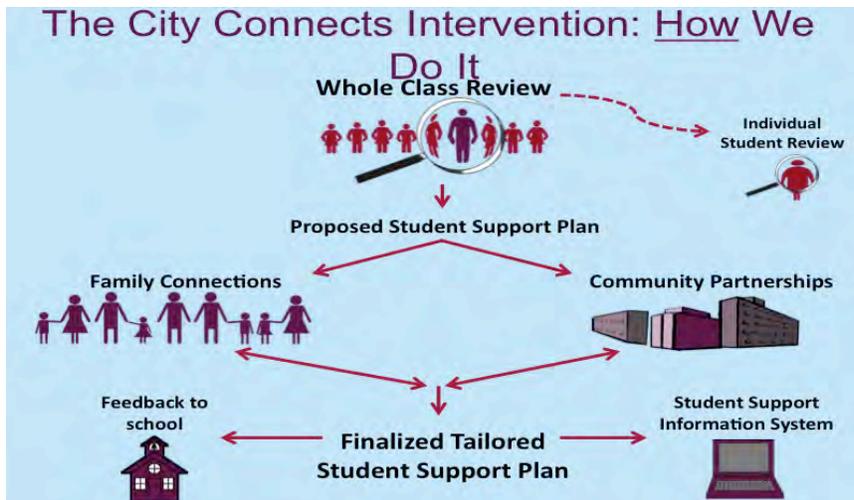


Figure 4. City Connects student support process.

Whole Class Review. The SSC works with each classroom teacher to review every student in the class and develop customized support plans that addresses their individual strengths and needs. There are five aspects of the Whole Class Review (WCR): 1) identifying the strengths and needs of each student across four domains (academic, social/emotional/behavioral, health, and family); 2) identifying and locating appropriate school- and/or community-based services and enrichments; 3) establishing the connection between these service providers and individual children and their families; 4) documenting and tracking the delivery of the service, and 5) following up to ensure appropriateness of fit.

As they conduct the WCR, at the most general level, the teacher and SSC group the students in a class into three tiers: strengths and minimal risk (Tier 1); strengths and mild to moderate risk (Tier 2); or strengths and severe risk (Tier 3). Tier 2 is divided into two levels: 2a (mild risk) and 2b (moderate risk). In the 2010-11 school year, 97% of students received a WCR. The number of students in each Tier is illustrated in Figure 5.¹¹

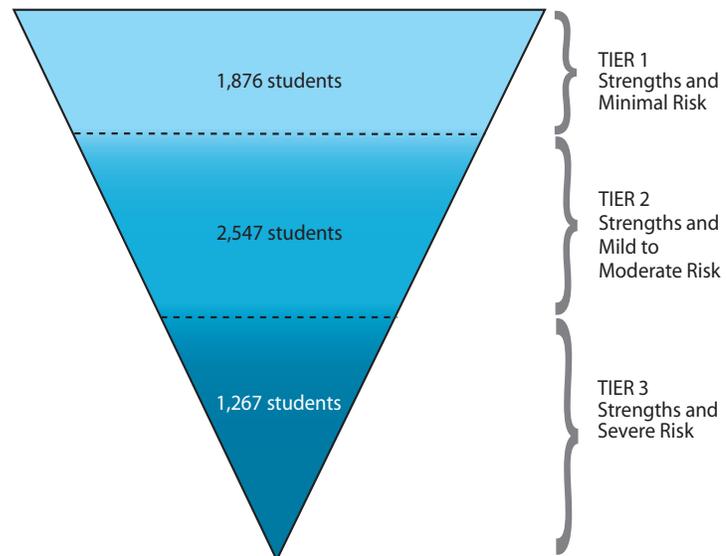


Figure 5. Tiers in the CCNX triangle, with number of students placed in each tier

¹¹ In the past, CCNX has presented data presented in three tiers. To maintain some comparability with past reports that discussed the number and types of services delivery to students in the 3 different tiers, the 4 tiers from the 2010-11 school year needed to be collapsed into 3 tiers. We accomplished this with a statistical model documented in our appendices. Note that the total N in this figure is smaller than the total reported above, because not all students' records included the background variables needed for statistical modeling of tier.

Individual Student Review. Students identified as having intensive needs, *at any point during the school year*, receive an Individual Student Review (ISR). This review is independent and distinct from a Special Education referral. A wider team of professionals discuss and develop specific measurable goals and strategies for the student. The ISR is conducted by the Student Support Team—an existing school structure that can include school psychologists, teachers, principals, nurses, and occasional community agency staff members and that is typically led by the SSC. The School Site Coordinator communicates with the family before and after the ISR. The number of ISRs in 2010-11 was 376.

Community agency partnerships. A critical aspect of the role of the SSC is developing and maintaining partnerships with community agencies and institutions. These relationships are formalized through a CCNX Community Resource Advisory Board, comprised of selected citywide agency leaders, and a CCNX Resource Advisory Council, which includes selected agency representatives working at the local neighborhood level. In 2010-11, City Connects worked with 288 community partners.

Connecting students to services, tracking, and following up. During and after the conversations with teachers, school staff and leaders, and community agency representatives, CCNX School Site Coordinators connect each student to the particular enrichment and service programs that best meet his or her strengths and needs. School Site Coordinators work closely with families as students are referred and connected to particular enrichments and services. To aid with the process, and to permit streamlined tracking and follow-up, CCNX has developed a proprietary Web-based database, Student Support Information System (SSIS). SSIS allows for secure collection of data on student reviews, individual student plans, service referrals, and providers (both school-based and community agencies) who deliver services. SSIS data are used for three purposes: 1) record-keeping at the individual and school level; 2) monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the intervention throughout the school year; and 3) conducting research on the effectiveness of the intervention.

The tailoring of services is accomplished through different combinations of quantity and type of services from Figure 6, resulting in a unique set of services for each student.

Figure 6. Total number of services delivered to students, by service category

		Service N	Category %	Total %
CATEGORY 1 (Prevention and Enrichment)	Before School Program	167	1%	0%
	Enrichment: Arts	3330	26%	9%
	Sports/Physical Activity	4094	31%	11%
	Enrichment: Youth Development	1190	9%	3%
	Enrichment: Academic	1561	12%	4%
	Violence Prevention	483	4%	1%
	New Balance Health & Wellness Curricula	2216	17%	6%
	Category Total	13041	100%	36%
CATEGORY 1.5	After School Program	1769	68%	5%
	Summer Program	586	23%	2%
	Vacation Program	236	9%	1%
	Category Total	2591	100%	7%
CATEGORY 2 (Early Intervention)	Behavior Plan/Special Observation	397	3%	1%
	Classroom-based Social Skills Intervention	2358	19%	7%
	Adult Mentoring	866	7%	2%
	Psycho-Social Group	655	5%	2%
	Academic Support	3665	30%	10%
	ESL	6	0%	0%
	Classroom-Based Health Intervention	4171	34%	12%
Category Total	12118	100%	33%	
CATEGORY 2.5	Family Outreach	381	7%	1%
	Supplemental Educational Services	380	7%	1%
	Tutoring	1054	19%	3%
	Family Support	2999	54%	8%
	Family Assistance	745	13%	2%
	Category Total	5559	100%	15%
CATEGORY 3 (Intensive / Crisis Intervention)	Check-in with CCNX Site Coordinator	249	9%	1%
	Mental Health Counseling	655	23%	2%
	Informal Screening/Diagnostic	91	3%	0%
	Health/Medical	1434	49%	4%
	SPED Evaluation/Screening	92	3%	0%
	Crisis Intervention	124	4%	0%
	Attendance Support	179	6%	0%
	Family Counseling	68	2%	0%
	Violence Intervention	14	0%	0%
	Category Total	2906	100%	8%
Grand Total	36215			

SOURCE: CCNX Student Support Information System database, 2010-11. School Site Coordinators noted an additional 4,660 health screenings that were delivered by school nurses.

For any single student, regardless of tier, the tailored set might include a combination of prevention and enrichment, early intervention, and/or intensive services.

Table 2 and Figure 7 present the distribution by tier of students receiving different numbers of services.

				1-2 Services		3-4 Services		5+ Services		Total Student N Receiving Services	Total Student % Receiving Services
	Student N	Mean # of Services	Standard Deviation	Student N	Row %	Student N	Row %	Student N	Row %		
Tier 1	1876	4.50	3.04	371	20%	555	30%	843	45%	1769	94%
Tier 2	2547	5.34	3.61	388	15%	702	28%	1351	53%	2441	96%
Tier 3	1267	5.90	4.06	161	13%	312	25%	747	59%	1220	96%
Total	5690	5.19	3.58	920	16%	1569	28%	2941	52%	5430	95%

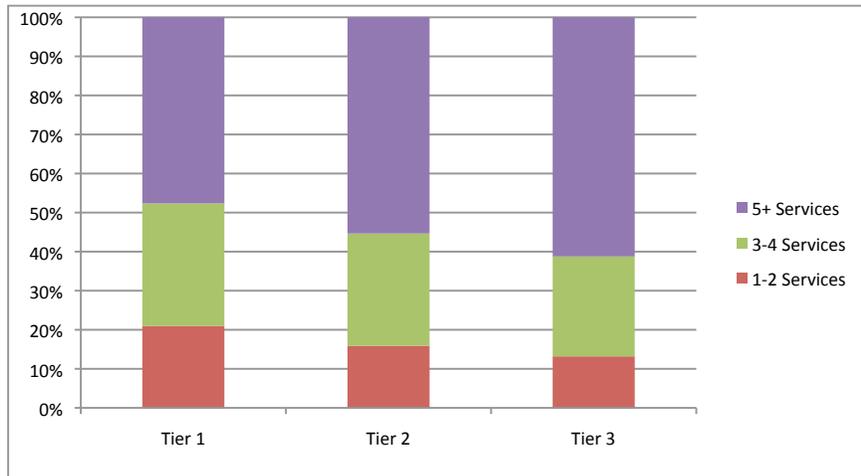
Table 2. Proportion of students in each tier receiving different numbers of services, grades K-5

SOURCE: CCNX Student Support Information System database, 2010-11.

Table 2 shows first that the mean number of services per student is smallest at Tier 1 and largest at Tier 3. Second, as shown in both Table 2 and Figure 7, the proportion of students receiving 1-2 services is highest for Tier 1 students and lowest for Tier 3. Third, the corresponding proportions for 5 or more services are the mirror image: the proportion of students receiving 5 or more services is smallest for Tier 1 and largest for Tier 3.¹²

Figure 7. Proportion of students in each tier receiving 1-2, 3-4, or 5 or more services

SOURCE: CCNX Student Support Information System database, 2010-11.



12 The total N for Table 2 is smaller than the total number of students in CCNX schools because the table does not include (i) students who entered CCNX schools after the Whole Class Review had been completed, and (ii) some students whose data lacked sufficient information to include them in the collapsing of Tiers 2a and 2b.

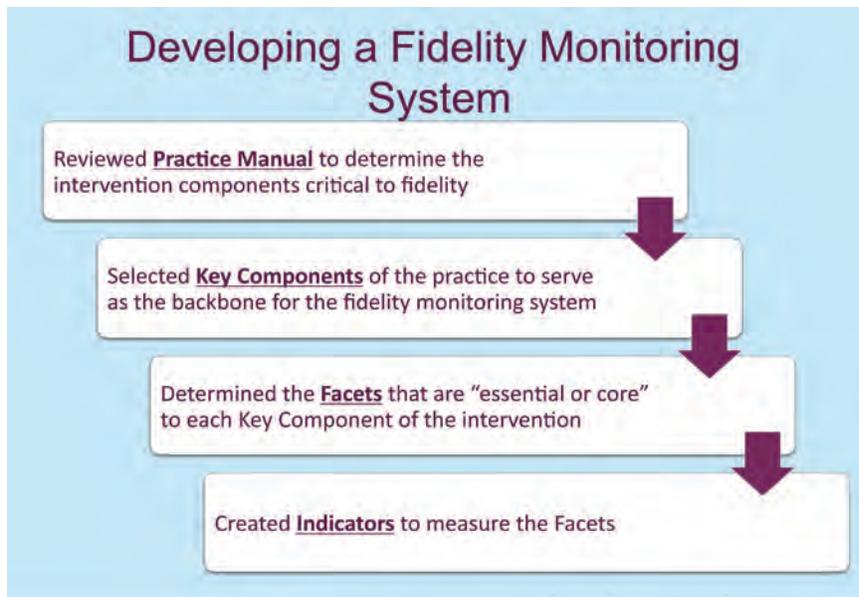
Providing specific services within the school. In response to specific needs, School Site Coordinators provide the following services within the school and classrooms: 1) leading small social skills groups on a time-limited basis that address focused topics such as making friends, bullying, and healthy eating; 2) crisis intervention for individual or small groups of children; 3) family outreach and support addressing specific family needs that are impacting the child’s performance in school. Activity reports submitted by each School Site Coordinator on a weekly basis showed that nearly every School Site Coordinator provided behavior interventions at some point during the school year.

Fidelity of implementation

Building on earlier pilot efforts, in 2010-11 CCNX developed a comprehensive Fidelity Monitoring System (FMS). The process was grounded in recommended practices in the professional literature on the development of systems to monitor fidelity of implementation.¹³

Figure 8 schematizes the process CCNX followed to develop the structure of the FMS.

Figure 8. CCNX process for developing Fidelity Monitoring System.



13 See in particular Mowbray, Holterm, Teague, & Bybee, 2003; Cordray, Hulleman, & Lesnick, 2008; and Cordray & Hulleman, 2009.

The first step shown in Figure 8 led CCNX to identify seven **components**, or critical pieces of the intervention, which correspond to chapters in the CCNX practice manual. For each of these seven components, the team identified the features that must be realized in order to implement CCNX faithfully. Next, as shown in the third box, CCNX identified what was “essential or core” to each key component. These “core parts” are represented in the model as a set of **facets** for each component. Finally, considering each facet one by one, the team selected **indicators** for each—the concrete, observable actions that a CCNX staff member would take to carry out the feature of CCNX listed in the corresponding facet.

Figure 9 shows the seven key components of the CCNX FMS and the number of facets associated with each.

Figure 9. CCNX Fidelity Monitoring System: Key components

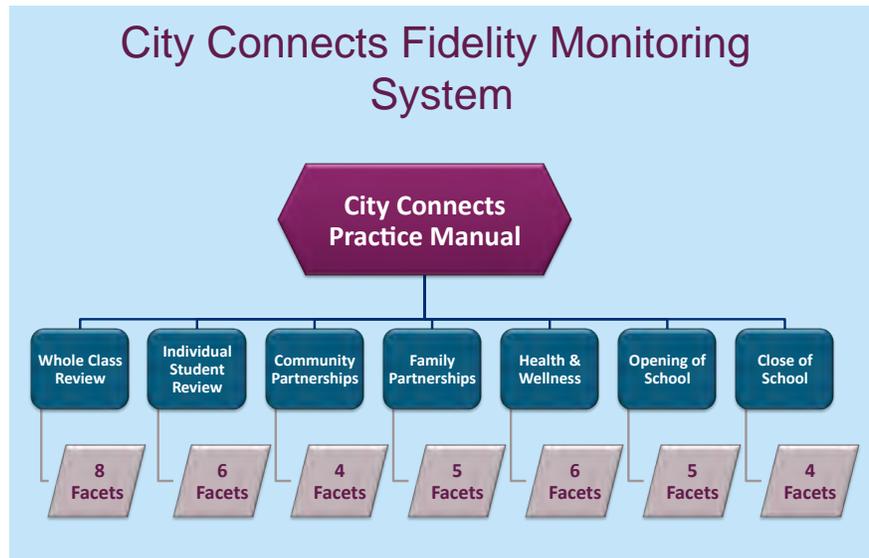
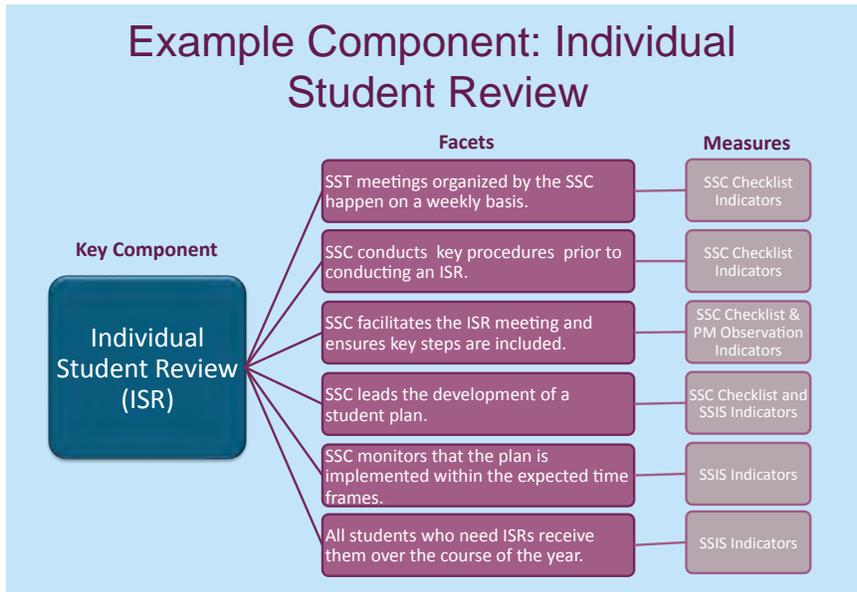


Figure 9 shows that facets range in number from 4 to 8. To illustrate the connection between components and facets, and between facets and concrete indicators, Figure 10 presents detail for one of the seven components, Individual Student Review.

Figure 10. Example component of the CCNX Fidelity Monitoring System: Individual Student Review



As reflected in Figure 10, data for the FMS **indicators** will be drawn from several types of measures. Examples include the Student Support Information System (SSIS) database, SSC self-report checklists (electronically-administered tools that include questions on whether specific steps in the practice have been completed), and supervisor observation tools. Although these tools were developed primarily for, and continue to serve, programmatic purposes, they are indicators of the degree to which the intervention is being implemented in each school setting and can be used in the FMS. For triangulation purposes, new questions on the annual teacher, principal, community partner, and SSC surveys will also be used as indicators.

In the first years of use, the Fidelity Monitoring System will measure pure fidelity to the model; i.e., adherence, compliance, and exposure.¹⁴ In subsequent years, complementary quality indicators will be developed and tested to increase the complexity of the system.

To test the robustness of the new system, the team compiled the relevant SSIS and SSC cWhecklist data from 2010-11. These preliminary results strongly support that the CCNX model is being implemented with fidelity in its Boston partner schools. Highlights include:

14 Cordray et al., 2008.

Figure 11. Sample fidelity data from 2010-11, across components.

2010-11 Fidelity Data Across Key Components		
Key Components	Example Facet	Fidelity Scores Across Schools
Whole Class Review	A pattern of strengths & needs across the four domains of academics, behavior/social emotional, health and family are identified for ALL students.	92%
Individual Student Review	All students that need Individual Student Reviews receive them over the course of the year.	80%
Community Partnerships	SSC is the main contact for Community-Based Organizations in the school.	98%
Family Partnerships	SSC helps families access services (e.g., family counseling, family assistance).	80%
Health & Wellness	SSC engages community agencies and resources in the delivery of the school's health and wellness program.	100%
Opening of School	SSC addresses students with immediate concerns: Students with intensive needs from the previous year.	88%
Close of School	The SSC puts plans in place for appropriate students that support them from the end of one year, through the summer, and into the next year.	95%

In Figure 11, the seven components of the CCNX FMS appear in the leftmost column. The center column presents one example facet for each component. The rightmost column shows, for each component, how close the implementation across schools came to meeting the fidelity benchmark. For example, the highlighted row shows that across schools, the CCNX practice achieved 80% of the benchmark for completing ISRs.

The preliminary results in Figure 11 strongly suggest that CCNX is being implemented with fidelity in its Boston schools. It is notable that the percentages in this figure include the Turnaround schools in their first year of implementation of CCNX.

Impact on Students

Earlier reports have documented the beneficial effects of City Connects on student achievement and thriving, as summarized in the preface to this report. Here, we reprint an example of these earlier outcomes—the beneficial effect of CCNX on students’ achievement of proficiency on the Massachusetts statewide test. Next, we present new findings demonstrating the long-term positive effect of CCNX: improved report card scores in middle school, lower rates of chronic absenteeism, and lower drop-out rates. It is notable that all of these newly documented effects document long-term improvements in indicators of academic achievement and life chances, showing that students enrolled in CCNX schools benefit long after they have left the intervention itself.

Improving standardized test scores (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, MCAS)

As reported in the 2010 City Connects Annual Report, the analysis of MCAS mean scores relative to comparison schools yields encouraging results that show positive effects of CCNX. Analysis of scores by **results category** provides corroborating positive evidence. Students' MCAS scores are classified into four categories: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Warning/Failing. An analysis comparing the percentage of CCNX students scoring proficient or above in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math yields the results shown in Figures 12 and 13. Figure 14 shows the percentage of English Language Learner (ELL) students in CCNX and comparison schools scoring proficient or above on the ELA test, relative to overall statewide scores. Here and elsewhere in this report, the vertical dotted line represents the point at which students leave CCNX and move on to middle school.

Figure 12. Percentage of students scoring proficient or above, MCAS English Language Arts

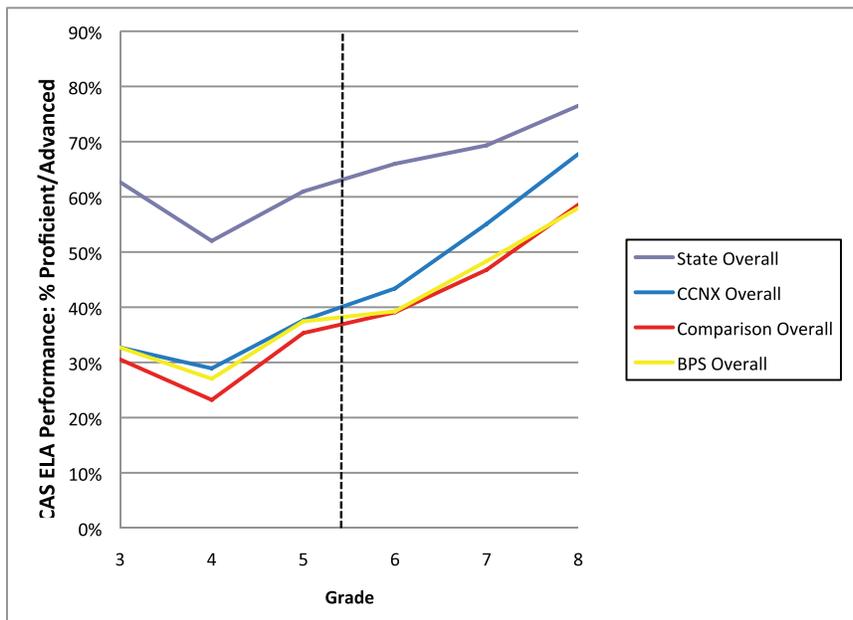


Figure 13. Percentage of students scoring proficient or above, MCAS Math

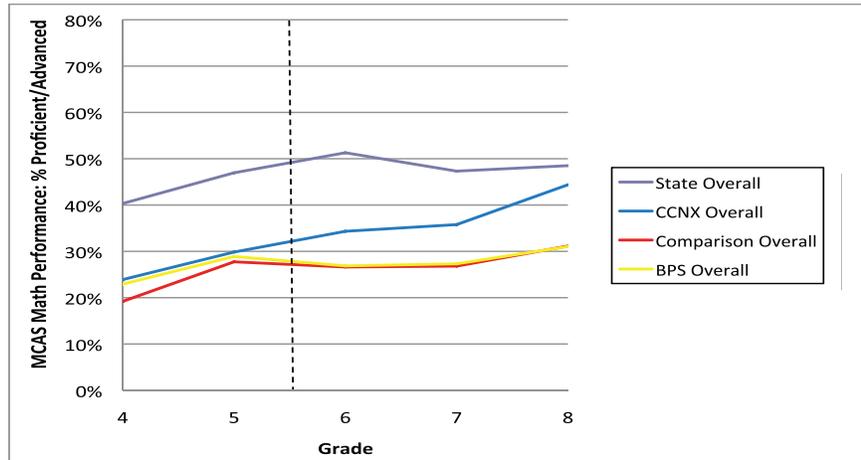
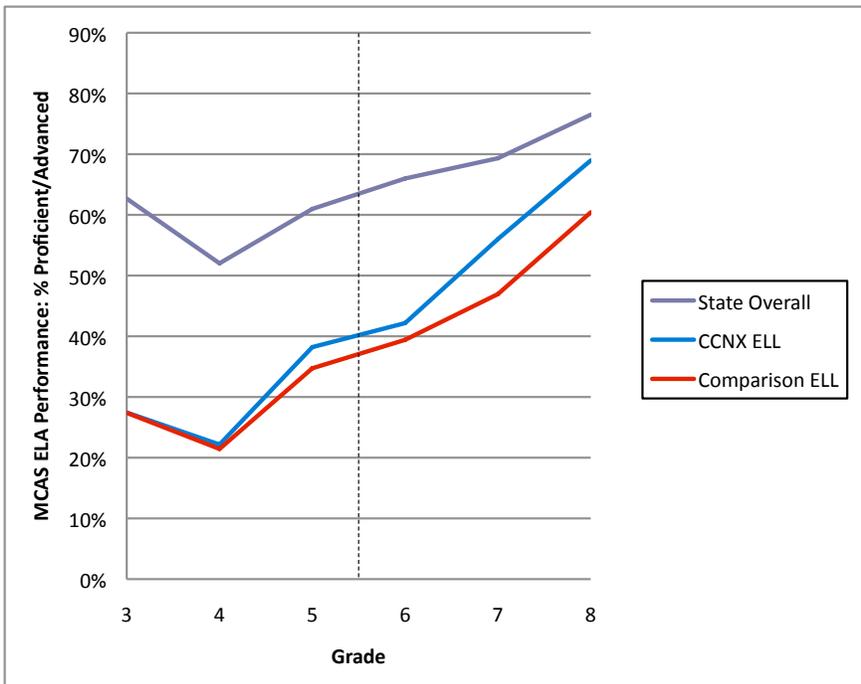


Figure 14. Percentage scoring proficient or above, MCAS English Language Arts: CCNX ELL students, comparison ELL students, and all students statewide



- Figures 12 and 13 show that CCNX students outperform both students from the comparison schools and their Boston peers in middle school **and achieve close to state proficiency levels on both ELA and Math** on MCAS.

- Figure 14 shows that ELL students in CCNX achieve gains that move them close to statewide levels of proficiency in the MCAS ELA test by grade 8. **The positive impact of CCNX is seen for students particularly at risk for literacy outcomes.**

Improving middle school report card scores

In past years, CCNX has documented a significant positive effect on report card scores in elementary schools. A new analysis demonstrates similar results for middle school report card scores, after the students have left CCNX.

The analysis compared CCNX and comparison student middle school grade point averages (GPAs). GPAs were based on student report card grades and an overall GPA was calculated for all courses completed by students (e.g., English/Language Arts, Mathematics, science courses, history, and social studies courses). GPAs were also calculated for all English Language Arts (ELA GPA) or Mathematics courses (Math GPA) completed in a given grade.

Multiple regression analyses controlled for student background characteristics. Propensity score weights were also used to minimize any baseline differences between CCNX and comparison students. Table 3 presents estimated mean GPAs for CCNX and comparison school students.

Table 3: Overall, ELA, and Math Mean Grade Point Averages (GPA): CCNX vs. Comparison Students

	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	CCNX (N=772)	Comparison (N=1206)	CCNX (N=368)	Comparison (N=781)	CCNX (N=167)	Comparison (N=307)
Overall GPA Mean (SE)	2.92 (0.59)	2.71* (0.52)	2.62 (0.50)	2.43* (0.44)	2.62 (0.59)	2.43* (0.61)
ELA GPA Mean (SE)	2.45 (0.49)	2.38* (0.46)	2.31 (0.56)	2.14* (0.53)	2.40 (0.63)	2.25 (0.61)
Math GPA Mean (SE)	2.26 (0.49)	2.14* (0.42)	2.26 (0.67)	2.21* (0.62)	2.38 (0.71)	2.22* (0.75)

SOURCE: Boston Public Schools report card data, 2000-2009.

Standard errors presented in parentheses. Means are adjusted for all covariates included in propensity weighting and for current student characteristics. Report card grades are weighted for course level (i.e., Standard, Honors, or Advanced Placement).

* Regression coefficient for maximum or average number of years in CCNX significant in propensity-weighted and standard error-adjusted model, $p < .05$

Across all grades, in all middle school GPA calculations, students formerly in CCNX demonstrated higher mean GPAs than those from comparison schools. These differences were statistically significant in most cases:

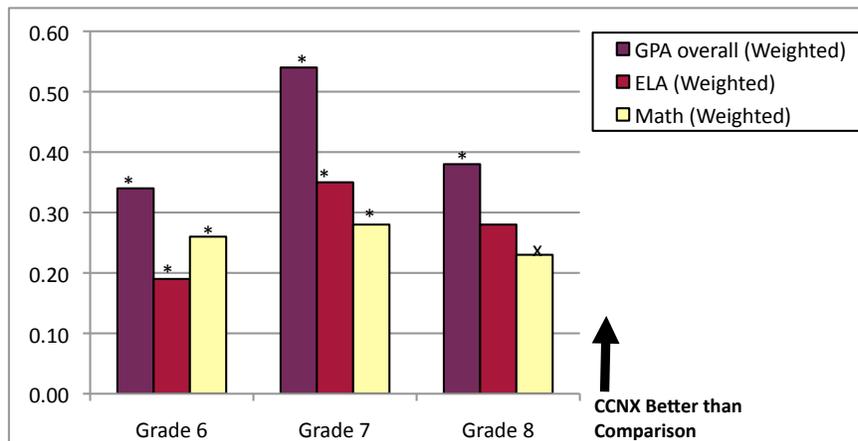
- Students enrolled in CCNX in elementary school demonstrated significantly higher GPAs overall and in Mathematics in grades 6, 7, and 8.
- Similarly, students enrolled in CCNX in elementary school demonstrated significantly higher GPAs in English Language Arts in grades 6 and 7.
- Each additional year in CCNX was associated with an incremental gain in GPA in most of these subjects across grades 6 to 8 (exceptions were grades 6 and 8 ELA).¹⁵

Next, we turn to a comparison between CCNX and comparison student GPAs in terms of effect sizes. Once again, the analysis included overall GPA calculations for all courses completed by students as well as GPAs calculated for all English Language Arts (ELA GPA) or Mathematics courses (Math GPA) completed in a given grade. Figure 15 presents the difference between CCNX and comparison students across these GPA calculations. The bars represent standardized effect size units based on adjusted means¹⁶ for students in CCNX schools since kindergarten.

¹⁵ See the appendices for details on this analysis.

¹⁶ Calculated as the difference between CCNX and Comparison group adjusted mean score for cases at the average level of model covariates, divided by the unadjusted pooled standard deviation for the total sample, per WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook Version 2.0: Appendix B - Effect Size Computations, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/references/docviewer/Doc.aspx?docId=19&toCId=8>

Figure 15. Positive CCNX effect sizes for overall, ELA, and Mathematics GPA



**p<.05, maximum or average # years in CCNX in propensity-score-weighted regression models
X Regression coefficient for maximum number of years in CCNX significant, p<.10*

As shown in these figures, the positive effect of CCNX on middle school report card scores is not only statistically significant, but is also of practical significance.

Preventing chronic absenteeism

High rates of absence from school are an important predictor of academic risk and drop-out. A new analysis demonstrates that students who attended City Connects schools in elementary school are significantly less likely to be chronically absent (defined as being absent for 10% or more of the days within the school year) than students who never attended CCNX schools. In this section, we provide details on the analysis and findings.

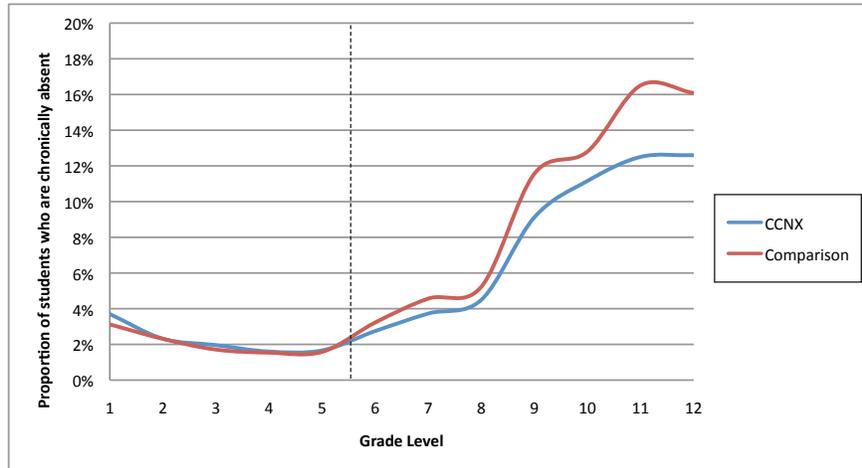
Students included in the analysis and analytic techniques. The analysis drew on students' longitudinal data record (i.e., records of the student's absences within and across years). A given student's data may be represented at more than one grade level.

Descriptive analyses, including *t*-tests, were used to examine the present and absent days in grades 1-12, overall and by treatment group. Next, hierarchical linear models were estimated to examine longitudinal changes in student absenteeism across grade levels.

Results

Figure 16 presents the longitudinal change (or estimated probabilities) in chronic absenteeism for the CCNX and comparison groups.

Figure 16. Proportion of students who were chronically absent, CCNX vs. comparison students



SOURCE: Boston Public Schools school absence data, 2001-2009.

- Although CCNX students start out with higher rates of chronic absenteeism in grade 1, rates of chronic absenteeism were significantly lower than comparison students in all middle and high school grades 6-12, except for grade 10.
- Beyond chronic absenteeism, CCNX students were found to have a significantly fewer total number of days absent than students from the comparison group in grades 4 to 12.

Preventing school drop-out

Students who attended City Connects schools in elementary school are significantly less likely to drop out of school. CCNX has previously documented a beneficial impact on rates of retention in grade, a significant predictor of dropping out. The direct analysis of student drop-out is consistent with the retention-in-grade findings.

School-level proxies for drop-out (i.e., cohort size difference at 9th and 12th grade) that have typically been used in education program evaluations have been criticized as misrepresenting true drop-out rates. In contrast to these measures, we directly examined student-level district records of withdrawal from school; our variable is thus a more precise measure than

school-level proxies of drop out. Before presenting the findings, we explain which students are included in the analysis sample and provide some background on how students were classified as drop-outs or non-drop-outs.

Students included in the analysis. For a student's data to be used in the analysis, several conditions needed to be met:

- The student's longitudinal Boston Public Schools (BPS) data record extended at least through grade 8.
- The student was at least 16 years of age (the age in Massachusetts at which students may legally choose to withdraw from school).
- The student was not enrolled in a substantially separate special education classroom at the end point of the longitudinal BPS record.
- The student's longitudinal record included data on all control variables.¹⁷

Students whose records met these conditions were included in either the CCNX group (all students ever enrolled in a CCNX school) or the comparison group (all who had never attended a CCNX school).

How students were classified as drop-outs or non-drop-outs. The analysis drew on this information to create a dichotomous "drop-out" variable at the repeated measures level for each student reflecting whether a student did or did not drop out at a given time during his or her BPS longitudinal record.

Students classified as non-drop-out: Some students leave BPS for reasons other than drop-out, such as graduation or transfer to another district. These students are included in the non-drop-out group. It is important to note that if a student does not depart BPS, but his/her longitudinal record does not reach grade 12 simply because the student is not old enough to have completed high school, no withdrawal information appears in the record. These students are included in the non-drop-out group.

Students classified as drop-out: To be classified in the drop-out group, a student must 1) withdraw from BPS entirely, 2) never return to BPS, and 3) have a record that clearly indicates non-graduation (such as drop out, pregnant, expelled, or incarcerated).¹⁸

17 Control variables include race, gender, ever eligible for free/reduced priced lunch, ever classified as an English language learner, ever eligible for special education services, total number of school transfers experienced since kindergarten, and grade level at end of longitudinal BPS record.

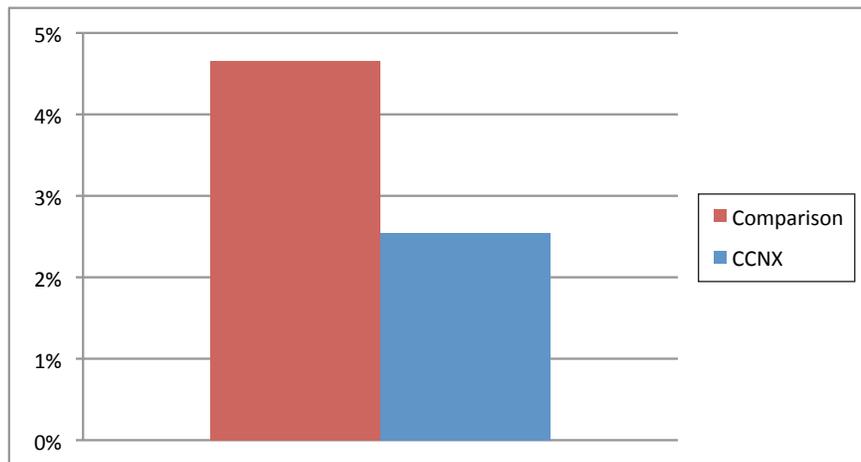
18 Full description of the information in district school withdrawal records is provided in the appendices.

The CCNX effect on drop-out is modeled using discrete event history analysis: repeated measures are nested within students using hierarchical logistic regression, where repeated measures and student-level characteristics serve as controls.

Results

This analysis finds that comparison students (those who never attended a CCNX school) are more likely to drop out than students who had attended CCNX schools in elementary school; see Figure 17.

Figure 17: Proportion of students who drop out from school, comparison vs. CCNX students



*Proportions adjusted for all current student characteristics.
SOURCE: Boston Public Schools withdrawal code data, 2004-2009.
Comparison N= 12,855; CCNX N=1,207*

- As shown in Figure 17, the adjusted drop-out rate for students who attended comparison schools was 4.7%, compared with 2.6% for students who attended CCNX schools in elementary school.
- This difference translates to 46% lower odds of dropping out between grades 8 and 12 for students who attended CCNX schools in elementary school than for comparison students.¹⁹ This difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.
- Had the remainder of the district experienced drop-out at a rate similar to CCNX students, there would have been approximately 314 fewer students dropping out between 2004 and 2009 in BPS.

19 For the logistic regression results table, see appendices.

Impact on Schools

Principal satisfaction

In Spring of 2011, City Connects surveyed principals about their satisfaction with the program.²⁰ Of those who completed the survey, all but one (93%) reported they are satisfied with CCNX as a whole, and with School Site Coordinator (SSC) work in five key areas: support for students, teachers, principals, and community partnerships.²¹ Another strong indicator of principal satisfaction was that 93% of principals would recommend CCNX to a principal in another school. Notably, 100% of principals were satisfied with the supports SSCs provide to families and to the school as a whole.

In addition to being satisfied with the SSCs' work with members of the school community, principals report that CCNX has improved student support at their school and has a positive impact on students and teachers. The majority of principals, 86%, indicated that student support has improved at their school as a result of CCNX. All principals indicated that they believe the Whole Class Review process is beneficial for students and teachers. Furthermore, 86% of principals believe that Individual Student Reviews lead to effective support plans for high-risk students.

The 2011 survey asked principals via open-response, "*What was the most valuable thing about having City Connects in your school this year?*" A third of principals who responded to the question indicated that **an enhanced connection with families and the community** was the most valuable. One of these principals wrote that "*feeling sure that families were supported*" was valuable. A quarter of principals indicated that **enhanced support and services for their students** were the most valuable aspects of CCNX. Additional responses mentioned the **increased programming and resources** that SSCs bring into the school. The remaining comments addressed the SSC characteristics that principals value. Principals describe CCNX staff as "*committed*", "*enthusiastic*", and having "*expert eyes, ears and instincts.*"

20 Seventeen principals received the survey, and 14 completed it.

21 It is worth noting that the one principal who reported not being satisfied reported that he or she was a principal at a Turnaround school, and therefore had been with CCNX for less than one year.

Teacher satisfaction and impact on teaching

In the 2010-11 anonymous survey of teachers at CCNX schools, 92% percent of the responding teachers answered “yes” to the question “Are you satisfied with City Connects?”²² Additionally, 93% of the respondents would recommend City Connects to a teacher in another school.

One of the most important components of SSCs’ work with teachers is the Whole Class Review (WCR) process. This process gives SSCs the information they need to tailor services for students. CCNX has learned that the WCR process enhances most teachers’ non-academic knowledge of their students, which in turn informs their work in the classroom. In 2010-11, the majority of teachers agreed that the WCR process enhanced their awareness of their class as a whole and students as individuals; see Table 4.

Table 4. Percentage of teachers who agree with each statement about the Whole Class Review process, 2010-11

	% strongly agree or somewhat agree	N (total 147)*
The student review process enhanced my awareness of the dynamics of my class as a whole.	91%	133
The student review process enhanced my awareness of my students as individuals.	88%	129
The student review process added to my knowledge of the non-academic aspects of my students’ lives (e.g., neighborhood and family context).	85%	125

*Twenty-nine teachers did not respond to this question set.

The 2010-11 survey included a set of questions on the specific ways that teacher attitudes and practices change as a result of knowing more about their students. One hundred and twenty seven teachers replied to the question sets on: 1) changes to instructional practices, 2) changes to behavior management and 3) changes to family relationships. Table 5 shows the specific items within the first two of these broad areas for which the majority of teachers agreed their practice had changed as a result of knowing more about their students.²³

22 All 342 teachers in the 17 City Connects schools were invited to participate in the survey. The response rate was encouraging: of those who received the survey, 176 completed it. Not every teacher responded to every question.

23 Respondents signaled agreement by checking off all items on the list that applied to them.

Table 5. Percentage of teachers who reported that their practice had changed in each specific way

Please indicate whether or not your instructional practice and behavior management techniques have changed in any of the following ways as a result of knowing more about the non-academic aspects of your student's lives (check all that apply):	% of 127 who selected
I think about the factors influencing student behavior before I react to the behavior.	80%
I provide more breaks for certain students (e.g., movement, gross motor activities).	71%
I am more patient with students because I better understand the non-academic issues that contribute to their struggles in the classroom.	69%
I provide more differentiated instruction to meet the various learning styles of my students (e.g., small group work, visuals, movement).	63%
I use reward systems.	61%

Measuring the way in which an intervention impacts teachers is a complex task. Results from this section of the survey begin to shed light on the complexity, showing that the majority of teachers are providing more differentiated instruction, breaks and rewards systems because they know more about their students. These findings also show that the majority of teachers are more thoughtful and patient as a result of knowing more about their students.

Table 6 presents findings from a similar set of questions related to teachers' work with families.

Table 6. Percentage of teachers who reported that their relationships with families had changed in each specific way

Please indicate whether or not your relationships with families have changed in any of the following ways as a result of knowing more about the non-academic aspects of your students' lives (check all that apply):	% of 127 who selected
I am better able to reach out to families for support regarding students' needs and progress.	69%
Communication with families has increased.	64%
My empathy for families has increased.	61%

The shift in thoughtfulness extends to teachers' work with families, as reflected in reported increases in empathy with families, increased communication, and improved outreach.

Thus, increases in thoughtfulness, patience, and empathy appear to be influencing the practice of a majority of the teachers in City Connects schools who responded to the survey. The complexity of the intervention's effects on a teacher's practice is unpacked to some degree in these teachers' reports that they find they are changing their behavior

management strategies, offering more differentiated instruction, and strengthening their collaboration with families.

Above and beyond the benefits to teachers of the student review process, teachers report that CCNX supports their work in a wide variety of domains. Table 7 presents the percentage of teachers who indicated that CCNX supports each of several areas of their work.

Table 7. Percentage of teachers reporting City Connects support in different areas of their work

Teacher Support Questions (Check all that Apply)	% of 164 who selected*
a. By obtaining services for students	82%
b. By serving as a source of knowledge about student support in and out of the school	77%
c. By being someone teachers can talk about their students with	70%
d. By being someone teachers can problem solve about their students with	70%
e. By supporting work with families	66%
f. By helping to deal with challenging student behavior	59%
g. By helping to deal with classroom crises	47%

*Twelve teachers did not respond to this question set.

While the highest percentages of teachers report that CCNX supports accessibility of, and knowledge about, enrichments and services, well over the majority report support in talking through student issues and problem-solving.

The majority of respondents to the 2010-11 survey, 80%, also reported that City Connects increased their effectiveness as teachers. Taken together, these findings shed light on the nature of this increase in effectiveness. They strongly suggest that CCNX helps teachers take the perspective of another person—a fundamental ability underlying the most effective instruction. They suggest that CCNX helps inform teachers’ strategies for reaching individual students—with their individual strengths and needs—in a way that enhances the classroom and schoolwide experience for everyone.

Impact on Community Agencies

Number of 2010-11 partnerships

City Connects collaborated with 288 community partners during the 2010-11 academic year. Services to students and to schools were provided by community agencies, community institutions and businesses, and universities. Table 8 displays the number of each type of community partner by year from 2007-08 to 2010-11.

Table 8. Number of CCNX community partners, by year and by partner type

Community Partner Type	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
# of CCNX Schools Included in Count	11	12	13	17
Community Agency	91	103	109	154
Community Institution/Business	34	38	56	81
University Partner	31	32	43	41
Total # across Partner Types	159	181	208	288

Note: For several of these years, a few additional partners could not be classified into these categories (three in 2007-8, eight in 2008-09, and 12 in 2010-11).

As Table 8 shows, not only was the largest partnership type across years community agencies; the largest increase from 2009-10 to 2010-11 was also in community agencies, which increased by 45 partners. The jump in community agency partnerships maybe related to the fact that CCNX partnered with schools in new neighborhoods in 2010-11. Another explanation might be that CCNX was in six Turnaround schools last year, and the students in those schools may have needed different types of services than students in the CCNX legacy schools do.

Community partner satisfaction

Thirty-four of the 2010-11 City Connects community partners responded to an online survey.²⁴ Almost all survey respondents, 97%, indicated (via Yes/No response) that they are satisfied with their partnership with CCNX. All respondents indicated that CCNX is effective at identifying students' needs and would recommend CCNX to another agency. Additionally, 85% reported that CCNX is effective at matching students to their services.

Partners were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction when working with City Connects schools and non-City Connects schools; they rated their satisfaction overall and along several dimensions of partnership.²⁵ An important difference that emerged across CCNX and non-CCNX school for 2010-11 was the degree of satisfaction, with higher percentages of partners indicating they are "very satisfied" with CCNX school partnerships than non-CCNX school partnerships; see Table 9.

24 Though City Connects works with many more community agencies than responded to the survey, the number of respondents reflects the fact that this particular survey was most appropriate for those involved in the closest and most in-depth partnerships.

25 These dimensions of partnership included communication, referrals, follow-up, meeting goals, tailoring services, providing student support, and cultural sensitivity. Participants were asked to use a four-point scale to denote level of satisfaction: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. Not applicable was also listed as an answer choice.

Table 9. Percentage of community partners who are very or somewhat satisfied with dimensions of partnership with CCNX vs. non-CCNX schools

Indicators	City Connects Schools		Non City Connects Schools	
	N	% Very Satisfied	N	% Very Satisfied
Communication with primary contact	33	66%	24	38%
Referral process (e.g., identifying students that would benefit from your services)	26	58%	19	21%
The effectiveness of City Connects in tailoring services to the unique needs of students	26	54%	11	55%
Follow-up on service delivery (e.g., checking to ensure the student(s) received the service)	31	68%	21	10%
Effectiveness of your partnership in reaching goals	33	61%	23	22%
Providing you with feedback that would improve service delivery, when appropriate	31	58%	22	18%
Providing opportunities for you to provide feedback to the school	28	36%	21	14%
The cultural competence of your primary contact in the school	29	76%	21	57%

Table 9 reveals several dimensions of good collaboration for which respondents are more often “very satisfied” with CCNX schools than with non-CCNX schools. **The majority of respondents, 68%, were “very satisfied” with service delivery at CCNX schools, in comparison with only 10% who were “very satisfied” at non-CCNX schools.** Over half of the respondents, 61%, indicated they were “very satisfied” in partnership goals being met at CCNX schools compared to 22% “very satisfied” in non-CCNX schools. Lastly, more partners were “very satisfied” in the feedback provided to improve service delivery by CCNX schools (58%) than non-CCNX schools (18%).

Conclusions

City Connects has shown that optimized student support can be delivered in a high-impact, cost-effective way. By making use of existing structures in the public schools, and by leveraging the rich resources of the city’s community agencies, City Connects is able to link students to the services and enrichments that match their individual strengths and needs.

Students enrolled in CCNX elementary schools benefit long after they have left the intervention itself and move into middle school and high school. As shown in this report, students enrolled in CCNX schools outperform their non-CCNX peers on measures of academic achievement and life chances, such as middle school report card scores, statewide test scores, chronic absenteeism, and rates of school drop-out. Careful attention to the unique skills, talents, and needs of each student makes a difference.

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