

# State Approaches to Integrated Student Support

Policymakers are being asked to do more with less: navigating persistent and complex student needs related to attendance, academic performance, and mental health alongside uncertainties about funding for education, basic needs services, health and mental health care, afterschool programs, and the organizations that serve children and families.

Many are turning to evidence-based integrated student support as a way to more efficiently and effectively use available resources to promote student well-being and help to significantly improve academic outcomes.

At least 26 states are at some stage of policymaking to advance integrated student support. Integrated student support is an evidence-based approach for schools to intentionally and systematically coordinate the resources and relationships available in the school and in the surrounding community to address the comprehensive strengths, needs and interests of each student to help promote healthy child development and learning. In short, it personalizes student support.<sup>1</sup>



Effective approaches to integrated student support are associated with benefits to students, teachers, schools, and taxpayers, including:

- Increased attendance and reduced dropout rates.<sup>2</sup>
- Improved academic achievement.<sup>3</sup>
- Increased teacher retention and satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>
- Improved cost-effectiveness by using school and community resources more efficiently and effectively in support of student wellbeing and readiness to learn.<sup>5</sup>

## Select states are promoting frameworks and best practices

States that took action prior to 2018, primarily opted to advance best practices through legislation, frameworks, protocols, and professional development. For example, in 2016 the **Washington State** Legislature directed the education department to develop the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol within the state's Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports Framework. Starting in Fall 2025, districts receiving certain state funds will be required to implement a system of integrated student support consistent with the state protocol.

## Select states are promoting evidence-based models

Policymaking shifted as recognition of the complexity of student needs grew, and evidence accumulated for specific models of integrated student support. These models typically have aligned professional development, coaching, technology, data-informed decisionmaking and accountability for outcomes. Although states apply different standards when selecting “evidence-based” approaches, policymakers recognize that there are effective ways to integrate school- and community-based resources for students. For example:

- **California** committed \$4 billion over seven years to the California Community Schools Partnership Program to establish new, or expand existing, community schools. In California, community schools include integrated student support.

- **Florida** permitted school districts to contract with a nonprofit to implement an integrated student support model that provides students and families with access to services such as food, clothing, and afterschool programs.

- **Indiana** provided a combination of state and federal funds to create a City Connects technical assistance center at Marian University in Indianapolis, and supported scaled implementation in local schools and districts. The Boston College Center for Thriving Children, which houses City Connects, partnered with Marian University to build local capacity to support the implementation of City Connects across the school choice landscape.

- **Minnesota** dedicated \$5 million to allow 18 geographically distributed schools to implement the Building Assets Reducing Risks (BARR) program over three years.

- **Ohio** invested more than \$2 billion in Student Wellness and Success and named City Connects and Communities In Schools as allowable uses of funds. The Ohio Department of Education also created an Office of Integrated Student Support within the agency.

- **Texas** allocated both state and federal funds to help support the implementation of Communities In Schools.

- **West Virginia** committed state funds to spread Communities In Schools to every county in the state.



## Some states are taking a hybrid approach

A few states are both promoting best practices and catalyzing implementation of evidence-based approaches to integrated student support in local schools and districts. In **Massachusetts**, for example, integrated student support best practices are reflected in the state’s Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and the education department sponsors a school and district learning academy tied to the National Guidelines for Integrated Student Support. At the same time, state education formula funding and grants are

available to support comprehensive approaches to student support. More than 80 Massachusetts schools implement City Connects, and at least eight implemented BARR, both of which are evidence-based models of integrated student support. In **Nevada**, legislation calls for a statewide framework for integrated student support and state funding supports implementation of the Communities In Schools approach to integrated student support.

## Conclusion

Policymakers are increasingly investing in evidence-based approaches to integrated student support as a way to help schools and communities create conditions for students to learn and succeed, and to ensure that limited resources across education, social services, health and mental health, and afterschool programs are maximized. Some states are advancing best practices, while others are helping to scale evidence-based models with aligned professional development, coaching, and technology.

For guidance drafting research-informed legislation and frameworks, please see the Integrated Student Support State Policy Tool Kit, 2nd Edition.

## References

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