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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

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

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.

Source: Massach11.

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.

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and comparison school student contexts, with a maximum

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.

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

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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 measureable 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 Du3it
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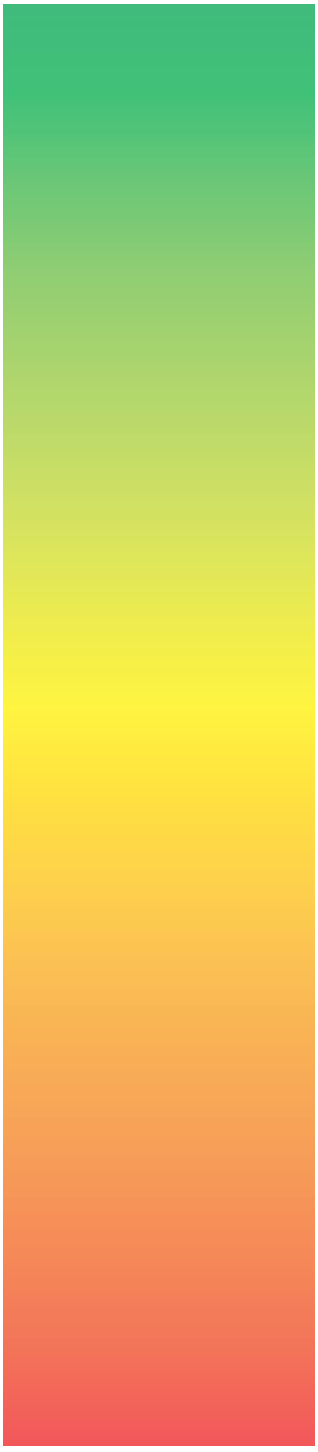
Figure 6. Total number of services delivered to students, by service category



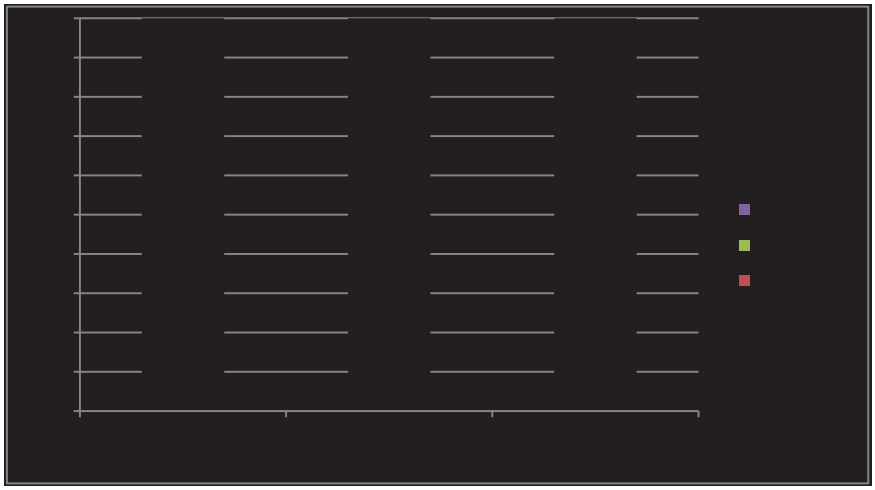
SOURCE: CCNX Student Support Information System database, 2010-11. School Site Coordinators noted an additional 4,660 health screenings that were delivered4,660 hetonal 4,660 health screX.3.-1.143 TD [(additional 4,660 health scr)6(eenings thatGes(or).ang (en)/MCID 4eliv)13

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.

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]



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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]

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

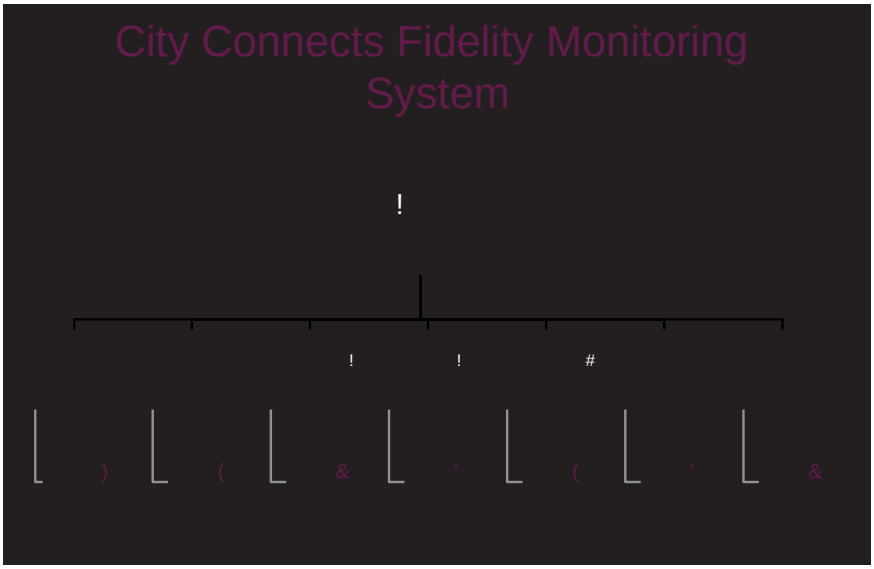

Figure 9 shows that facets range in number from 4 to 8. To illustrate the connection between components and facets, and between facets and concrete indicators, Figure 10 presents detail for one of the seven components, Individual Student Review.

Figure 10.

Figure 13.

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:

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

*p<.05, maximum or average # years in CCNX in propensity-score-weighted regression models
X Regression coe cient for maximum number of years in CCNX signi cant, 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. compari

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.
- # F Z PDO IS P OBJCDT F O U F $ $ J/T9NT U V E FXOFUSTG P V OU PB W F 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:

- 5 I T F U V E F M E O T H J U V # E J T O E P M C M 4 J D D I P P M 4 I T 4 E B U B record extended at least through grade 8.
- 5 I T F U V E F X H U B U M F B T Z F B S T B H F U I B H J F O B T T B D I V T F U U T 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.
- 5 I T F U V E F M E O T H J U V S E J O P S M E D M V E B F U E B O B M D M P O U S P M 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 asoe is important t 1 323.938 518.025 Tm <0001>Tjt1om18sD7( )2 >>165.844 518.0252f.is i h [(oCID le04 >highewere c,out wroldı

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

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

- "T I P X O O J H V S F U I B E K V T E U S F E Q S B U G P T S U V E F O U T who attended comparison schools was 4.7%, compared with 2.6% for students who attended CCNX schools in elementary school.
- 5 I J E T J G G F S U F S O B D D F T M J B P U F M T P X P S E P T G S P Q Q P J O U H 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.
-) B U E I F S F N B J O E G S E J T U S J C V U F S J F O D P F Q B S B U F similar to CCNX students, there would have been approximately 314 fewer students dropping out between 2004 and 2009 in BPS.

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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."

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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 C 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]

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them.

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

Please indicate whether or not your instructional practice and behavior management techniques have changed in any of the following ways as a results of knowing more about the non-academic aspects your student's lives (check all that apply):	% of 127 who selected
I think about the factors in uencing 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 di erentiated 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 speci c 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

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

Indicators	City Connects Schools		Non City Connects Schools	
	N	% Very Satis ed	N	% Very Satis ed
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 e ectiveness 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%
E ectiveness 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 meet 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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