

City Connects and the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted education in myriad ways. Starting in spring of 2020, when schools closed their doors, and continuing through the 2020-21 school year and beyond, regular routines for children and families have been disrupted and changed. These conditions exacerbated existing challenges, such as food insecurity, child care, medical care, and other needs. During times of remote learning, students' homes became classrooms, but without the supports and structures of the school itself and the surrounding community. For those living in poverty, the impact of the pandemic \UgVYb YgdYU`nXUa UjWh YgyWa a i b]H\g\Uj YY dY]YbWXh YWa dci bX]b[Y Wg'cZvch`h YdUbXa]WbX` ongoing racial and economic injustice.

Throughout the time of the pandemic, the value of a systemic approach to supporting the strengths and needs of students and families has been made clear. At the initial shutdown, students in schools implementing City Connects – an evidence-based approach to integrated student support –already had customized student support plans in place, documented and accessible in a secure online platform. These plans included details on individual students' strengths and areas of need, as well as information on the supports and enrich5t 14 BDC rengthsupporwormrecevidn povfromchool itselfntinuiy. For agTjs b.TEMC

City Connects during the first months of the pandemic

When schools closed their doors in the spring of 2020, there was no playbook to follow. In schools implementing City Connects, however, there was an intervention already in place to respond to the needs of children and families. Between March and June of 2020, City Connects Coordinators were able to systematically identify many academic and social-emotional needs. City Connects' intervention was able to leverage its existing practice, service delivery, and community partnerships to meet Covid-19-related needs (Pollack, Theodorakakis, & Walsh, 2021).

To understand how City Connects responded, through an analysis of several data sets. These included:

1. Coordinators' weekly open-ended survey responses, collected over 13 weeks, from March through June 2020. These surveys asked about Coordinators' work with students and families; their work with teachers, school leaders, and community partners.
2. Records of services delivered to students, organized by categories, and maintained in the proprietary MyConnects database for every student in the school.
3. Estimates by Program Managers, who supervise Coordinators, of the percentage of students/families experiencing each of three prevalent pandemic-related challenges: unreachable students/families, food insecurity, and lack of access to technology.

Needs

Analyses showed widespread, persistent needs, many of which predated the Covid-19 pandemic. Responses from Coordinators suggested that school closures exacerbated some needs, such as food insecurity, while also creating new needs, such as Chromebook distribution. At the

- also emerged at the individual student level. Students and families needed help establishing and maintaining their at-home learning routines, including assistance accessing and navigating online learning platforms and tools, such as Google Classroom or ClassDoJo. Teachers also experienced challenges, and maintaining student engagement was an area of need.
- “overwhelmed” were common following the initial school closure and transition to online learning. Children, bYXXg ddcfhZf ZY]b[gCZUbl]YmLbXi bWfH]blm5gha YdUggYzh]gbYXY c] YX Ughi XblgbYXXg ddcfhZf ZY]b[gCZ]g`U]cb"7UFY] j YfgUbXgWcc`gU k YFYI dY]YbVb] Vi fbcI h'

Response

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- The City Connects model itself proved highly adaptable to the new context of the pandemic. City Connects Coordinators were able to throughout the spring of 2020 to continue supporting students. Coordinators and teachers worked together to conduct Whole Class Reviews and the re-tiering process for their students. In spring 2020, this process included the impact of Covid-19 on students' U]]mIc`YUfb UbXh.f]j Y`7ccfX]bUrcfgUbXgWcc`gU Ugc`WbXi WmX=bXj]Xi U`Gi XbhFYj]Yk gZf`gi Xblg' with more intensive needs. Using MyConnects, Coordinators could continue their work of facilitating service delivery and following up. Coordinators were also able to adapt their established practices to better support 7cj]X% fYgdcbgYfl["zVnLHmX]b[j]fhi U`dfcYgg]cbU`Xj Ycda Ybhc Yf]b]g'
- Coordinators worked with their colleagues to continue

City Connects in the pandemic context of fall 2020

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▼ Coordinator estimates of how challenging pandemic-related concerns were for students and families

Notably, more than half of responding Coordinators (52%) estimated that a fear of getting Covid-19 was extremely or

City Connects in the ongoing pandemic during 2020-21:

In the words of a Minnesota teacher,

“City Connects helped families to eat and pay rent during the worst of the Covid crisis, by connecting them with services. It is literally a life-saving program. City Connects also helped students to get computers so that they could stay connected to school and peers.”

A teacher in Boston commented,

“The City Connects Coordinator at my school acted as a constant resource for both my students and my families, with any needs that arose. Particularly the Coordinator was helpful in developing very creative and flexible interventions for students in need.”

Community partners also responded to City Connects’ impact on their work during the pandemic. Overall, 71% of partners felt that the City Connects practice helped them in their work during the crisis.¹ When asked to specify ways in which City Connects helped them, the most common responses were helping connect students and families to services, maintaining a consistent line of knowledge or communication, and City Connects’ support of in-person or virtual services. In the words of a Minnesota community partner,

“When our providers struggled to connect with students, [City Connects Coordinators] were able to contact families at home when distance learning as they already had relationships with the students/families.”



¹ Data source: City Connects 2021 community partner survey

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