

# Building Systems of Integrated Student Support

A B F L

**Integrated student support is a strategy for “promoting students’ academic success by securing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement” in order to improve student outcomes.**



The tidal wave of need that regularly lights up the phone lines, inboxes, and calendars of federal leaders is a relentless feature of the COVID-19 pandemic. From health suburbs to poor inner cities and rural areas, businesses are struggling and food lines are long. The funds flowing through the stimulus packages seem big on paper in Washington and paltry on the ground, in district.

When leaders turn to the regular federal budget and search the existing labyrinth of programs, services, agencies, and funding streams designed to reach children, youth, and families across education, social services, agriculture, youth development, health and mental health services there are significant investments. But when understood in the context of historic and pandemic-driven increases in child poverty, hunger, trauma, academic learning loss, and limited opportunities, to ensure those services are delivered effectively and efficiently to our youngest Americans seem both urgent and hard to identify.

They are urgent because the impacts of poverty or a pandemic are understood to have negative impacts on health, child development, learning, and life-long opportunity. Research building on the theories of Nobel Prize-winning economist [Gary Becker](#) finds that children growing up in poverty, or during COVID-19, have less access to the type of resources and experiences that promote learning, and are more likely to experience prolonged periods of [toxic stress](#) that can disrupt health, brain development and readiness to gain academic and social-emotional skills. For many Black and Latino families, the compounding effects of systemic racism add to the stresses and deprivations of poverty and the pandemic.

Over the last fifteen years, however, effective and cost-efficient systems of support for children and families have been honed by insights from the sciences of learning and child development, and experimentation in communities, to point towards an effective strategy suited to the challenges of the pandemic and the longer-term integrated student support.

This brief is a companion piece to one published for [local and state leaders](#) in partnership with the Center for Promise and America's Promise Alliance in 2019. It reproduces and expands on this previously published content.

Integrated student support is a whole child approach that addresses students' strengths and needs across all



Over the last few decades, practitioners and policy makers have learned a great deal from scientific research about what all children need to be successful in school and in life. Neuroscientists can show **dramatic differences in brain structure** between children who grow up with the supports and basic resources that all children need, and those who do not. Researchers in developmental psychology and cognitive science have illuminated how various contexts and risk factors can impact how children develop and learn. This leads to a deepened appreciation of the importance of simultaneously supporting development across the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language domains.

The link between socioeconomic challenges and the inequality of educational and life outcomes is also becoming

## Integrated Student Support

Evidence demonstrates that **integrated student support** approaches can contribute to academic progress. Mounting evidence shows that students who receive effective integrated student support demonstrate

- § Improved attendance, effort, and engagement
- § Higher academic achievement
- § Reduced high school dropout rates and
- § Better social and emotional outcomes.

For example, two national research reviews by Child Trends and a separate evaluation by American Institutes for Research (AIR) examined the evidence base emerging from interventions such as the City Connects, Communities In Schools in Chicago, and Diplomas Now, and the BARR model, respectively. Findings from a subset of these programs show that implementation of scientifically-based effective practices significantly improve student outcomes. They are described below.

The **Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR)** model provides schools with a comprehensive approach to meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students. The BARR model relies on eight interconnected strategies to bolster students' strengths and address their needs through a holistic approach to child development that includes restructuring high school schedules, creating cohorts of students served by teacher teams, providing professional development, conducting regular risk reviews, fostering social and emotional learning through **BARR's I-Time curriculum**, and engaging families and administrators in student learning. Most commonly implemented at the ninth grade level, BARR is beginning to be introduced in middle school and continued through high school. Research shows that over the course of three years, the BARR model is effective in reducing course failure rates by an average of 7 percent in large urban schools and 10 percent in smaller rural schools. Additional research shows that the **BARR model** has a positive, statistically significant impact on math and reading scores while improving student experience and teacher satisfaction.

**City Connects** is an intervention that creates a personalized network of resources and opportunities for each student in a school by coordinating student supports drawn from existing school- and community-based services. In 2011-12, **City Connects** worked in schools in five states serving 7,000 children in Pre-K through 12th grade. School coordinators developed an individualized plan of support and opportunity for each student in consultation with teachers, staff, and families. They fulfilled these plans by connecting students to more than 7,000 services from over 1,000 community-based organizations. Grounded in the science of child development and integrated into 100 schools, multiple peer-reviewed studies show that students who received these tailored integrated supports during elementary school demonstrated better effort, grades, and attendance, and went on to significant-



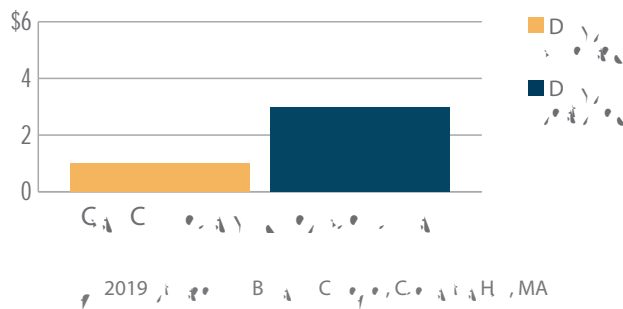
## Cost-Effectiveness of Integrated Student Support

With competing priorities and limited resources, federal, state, and local leaders seek to invest in programs and approaches that have a strong return on investment. Columbia University economists assessed the costs and benefits of the City Connects model of integrated student support. Including the cost of implementing City Connects and the costs of the comprehensive services to which children and families get connected—such as food, clothing, after-school programs, medical care, mental health counseling, and family services—researchers found that it produces 3 in benefits for every 1 invested across all sectors. If effective systems of integrated student support were widely implemented, existing investments in children and families could be producing triple the benefits. Moreover, taking into account that schools typically spend on student support with a resource-coordination model, researchers find that costs of business as usual student support are not much less than a more effective integrated student support approach.

The researchers note in *Prevention Science*, that effective approaches to integrated student support, like City Connects, are a sound investment and should be considered an option to address the needs of students and to prevent future crises from disrupting their learning. This builds on earlier *cost-effectiveness* research which found that for every dollar invested in programs and services for children and their families, effective coordination resulted in a societal return of 3 for every 1 spent.

In other words, a small investment to enable schools to effectively coordinate comprehensive services for students can produce both short- and long-term efficiencies as well as better outcomes, tripling the beneficial impacts of dollars across numerous segments of the federal (state, and local) budget.

## Cost-Effectiveness of Integrated Student Support



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**Support states and municipalities to develop low-cost infrastructure to facilitate resource coordination.** As information from research and practice groups, and evidence-based practices are identified, schools and districts may need support to identify their current needs and assets, and implement effective practices. While the precise constellation of assets and needs varies from school to school and community to community, there are common needs across sites implementing integrated student support strategies. Many of these needs can be efficiently addressed via the creation of a shared infrastructure. This may include decisions to

- § Develop policies and funding streams that facilitate local capacity to deliver effective integrated student support.
- § Provide professional development and coaching to support implementation aligned with best practices.
- § Connect technology to allow for school-based coordinators to see certain child-level data, create individualized plans, and rapidly understand the resources available in the school and community.
- § Create a management structure, ideally within the school district, that allows for management, alignment with district priorities, joint problem solving, and oversight.

The impacts of the pandemic heighten the need for continued investment in federal programs that provide comprehensive student and family supports.

**Improve students' access to food.** Repeal the reduced-price category for school meals and expand the eligibility threshold for free school meals to 180 percent of poverty. Mandate breakfast after the bell in all high-poverty schools (where at least 75% of all students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals).





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## CITATION

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