

Building Systems of Integrated Student Support

A Policy Brief for Local and State Leaders

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.

Introduction

State and local leaders help to fund and govern schools, social services agencies, youth development programs, health, and mental health providers that serve children, youth, and families. When leaders examine the existing tangle of programs, services, agencies, and funding streams in the context of deep needs among children and persistent academic achievement and opportunity gaps, impactful ways to transform chaotic service delivery systems are often hard to identify and harder to realize. Over the last fifteen years, however, insights from the sciences of child and youth development, experimentation in communities, and mounting outcomes data point to an approach that is producing results: integrated student support.

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 promote improved student outcomes.¹ Well implemented integrated student support has the power to boost academic and life outcomes by efficiently directing existing services and resources towards the well-being of students.

This brief distills insights from the sciences and lessons learned from practitioners to provide leaders at the municipal and state levels with policy recommendations and guidance to advance effective systems of integrated student support that transform disjointed and siloed resources for children, youth, and families into a coherent and potent system of opportunity. Together, the Boston College Center for Optimized Student Support and the Center for Promise seek to provide state and community leaders with promising practices and ideas for progress.

Needs among our children are acute and intensifying. Across the country, more than half of public school students live in low-income households, with 52 percent of children now eligible for free or reduced price lunches.² About 13 percent of all adolescents ages 12 to 18 have a “major depressive episode,” and 60 percent of them go without treatment, according to the National Institutes of Mental Health.³ Close to half of all children are exposed to potentially traumatic events such as domestic or neighborhood violence, household mental illness, abuse, or neglect.⁴

These experiences are strongly related to poor academic engagement and performance, and negative health and behavioral outcomes later in life, such as heart disease, depression, obesity, cancer, substance abuse, and lowered economic productivity.⁵

Effectively serving children and families is a challenge to states and the communities within them. Annual budget allocations, specialized agencies and nonprofits, dedicated and compassionate service providers, and committed leadership have not yet lived up to their potential to be powerful enough engines of opportunity for the next generation. There is now clear evidence that earlier interventions and comprehensive approaches will make a significant difference for students who are facing complex learning and life challenges.⁶ More recent research, and insights from schools and communities serving children and families, give us a road map to help disrupt the relationship between adversity and lowered life chances—and to create systems of opportunity to help all children develop, learn, and thrive.

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT IN ACTION

Fifth grader, Maya C.* walked into school crying. She was being bullied on the bus because she was picked up outside a homeless shelter, she explained to Mr. Williams,* a school staff member.

In some schools the conversation would stop there: bullies admonished, tears dried, and into the classroom, just another child who is part of a mounting wave of students experiencing homelessness.⁷

But in a growing number of places, Maya's tears activate a web of support. The staff person turns to an on-site coordinator who does daily check ins with Maya, helps her to talk with her teachers, reaches out to her family, and discovers that Maya and her three siblings lost everything and are in need of clothing, shoes, and basic school supplies. The coordinator also learned that the mother not only needs to find stable housing, but is now in an unfamiliar neighborhood and needs to know where to find food, a church, and transportation to her job.

The coordinator, who is the hub of a system of integrated support for children like Maya, will bring together the resources of the school and the resources of agencies and nonprofits across the city to help Maya's family, and keep Maya on track to succeed in school.

The coordinator will do this for each and every child in the school, year-in and year-out, because Maya and her siblings are not alone.

*Names have been changed for this report.

The Science: In Brief

Over the last few decades, practitioners and policymakers 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.⁸ Researchers in developmental psychology and cognitive science have illuminated how various contexts and risk factors can impact how children develop and learn.⁹ This leads to a deepened appreciation of the importance of simultaneously supporting development across the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language domains.¹⁰

The link between socioeconomic challenges and the inequality of educational and life outcomes is also becoming increasingly understood. Research finds that a student's low academic performance is connected to having less access to developmentally stimulating resources, opportunities, and relationships in the home or in the community. Low academic performance is also connected to exposure to high-stress situations such as abuse or witnessing violence which may interfere with skill development.¹¹ The impacts of poverty and adversities like trauma can produce "toxic stress," which impairs working memory, the ability to organize information, regulate behavior, and form positive adult and peer relationships.¹² The science makes clear that academic performance and student experiences related to health, social-emotional wellbeing, family, and community are deeply intertwined. These seemingly "nonacademic" factors account for approximately two thirds of the variance in student achievement.¹³

Although many children and youth encounter risks like persistent hunger or cold, pain due to untreated medical or dental needs, or traumatic stresses tied to abuse or domestic or neighborhood violence, these adversities can be surmounted.¹⁴ As children grow up, they experience interacting risk and protective factors that support or challenge healthy development. Protective factors like positive adult and peer relationships, opportunities to build skills and self-confidence, access to adequate food, clothing, social services, education, internships and networks that build social connections, can all help children and youth to grow amidst challenges.

The exact mix of risk and protective factors varies from child to child and changes over time.¹⁵ The same bad experience, such as the incarceration of a parent, can have vastly different impacts. For one child, with a quick smile, strong friendships, and an engaged family, it might constitute a difficult bump in the road. For another who is more introverted and living in already chaotic circumstances, it might be overwhelming. But the sciences also tell us that intervention is possible, and that children and youth facing challenges can, if connected to the right systems of support, learn and thrive.¹⁶

The science is clear: intervening in a child's developmental trajectory can have profound positive consequences.

Insights from the sciences give us a road map to help tip the scales in favor of healthy development, learning, and opportunity.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATION

A key to making a difference in student outcomes seems to be in how schools design the integration of comprehensive services to address out-of-school factors. Co-locating services or offering wraparound services with outside providers in a modular "add-on" fashion may not be enough to help low-income students succeed. Integrated student support models show us that schools can be inexpensively designed—with a school counselor who serves as a coordinator or via a teacher team—to enable a system of support that is integrated into the functioning of the school and provides for the integration of resources, services, and relationships at the level of each student.¹⁷

Impact of Integrated Student Support

Evidence demonstrates that integrated student support approaches can contribute to academic progress.¹⁸ Mounting evidence shows that students who receive effective integrated student support demonstrate:

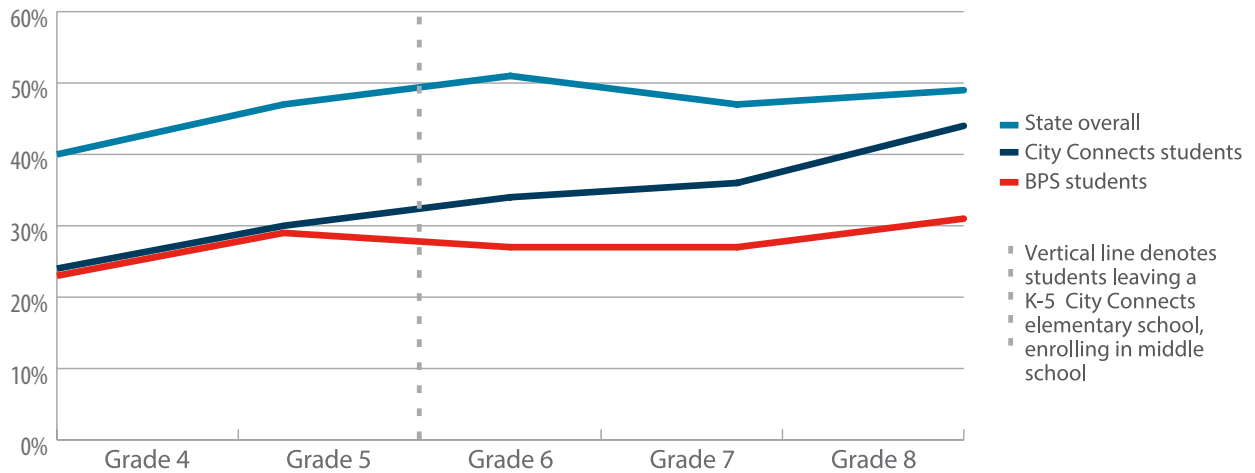
- improved attendance, effort, and engagement;¹⁹
- higher academic achievement;²⁰
- reduced high school dropout rates;²¹ and
- better social and emotional outcomes.²²

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.²³ Findings from a subset of these programs show that implementation of scientifically-based effective practices significantly improve student outcomes.²⁴ 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.²⁵ Most commonly implemented at the ninth grade level, BARR is beginning to be introduced in middle school and continued throughout 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 40 percent in large urban schools and 29 percent in smaller rural schools.²⁶ 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.²⁷

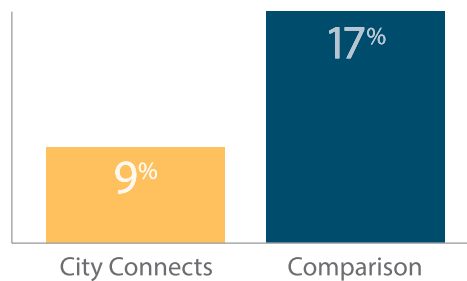
City Connects is an intervention that creates a personalized network of resources and opportunities for each student in a school by coordinating student supports drawn from existing school- and community-based services. In 2016-17, City Connects worked in 33 schools in Boston, serving 11,311 children in Pre-K through 8th 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 92,799 services from over 275 unique 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 significantly narrow achievement gaps and were half as likely to drop out during high school.^{28,29} Several of these findings hold for important subgroups including African-American and Latino boys, immigrant students, and students learning English.³⁰

Percentage of students scoring at proficient or above, Massachusetts State Test (MCAS) Math



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Dropout rates



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Additional research shows that benefits of integrated student support also redound to:

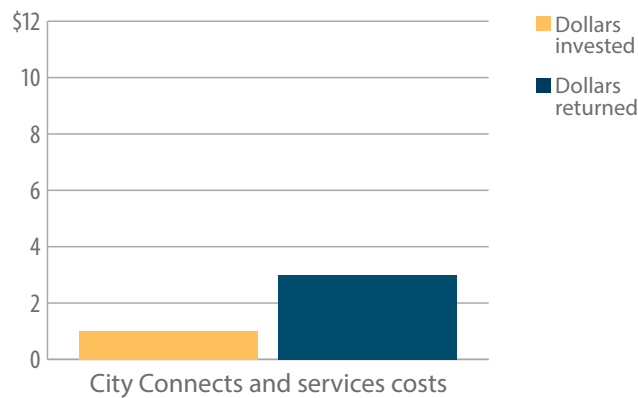
- teachers, who say they are more available to focus on instruction and have more empathy for their students;³¹
- schools, which show improving climate and culture;³²
- society, which could triple the beneficial impacts of resources we already spend on children and families across the sectors of education, social services, youth development, health and mental health.³³

The Business Case for Integrated Student Support

With competing priorities and limited resources, local and state 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.³⁴ 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 what schools typically spend on student support without 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. While implementing an effective integrated student support model would be slightly more expensive than current costs, for every additional dollar invested the estimated benefit increases to \$24 returned.³⁵

Cost compared to benefit



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Leading for Change at the Local Level

The current landscape

Across the nation, a wide range of activities to address the complex and changing needs of children, youth, and families, including integrated student support, are already underway. Some of the terms used to describe efforts that have taken root are “wraparound,” “collective impact,” “community schools,” “comprehensive services,” “Promise Neighborhoods,” “Full-Service Schools,” or “integrated student support.” These efforts are taking place in hundreds of schools and communities including Cincinnati, Tulsa, Jennings, Missouri, New York, and Hartford. National networks like Strive Together and the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, and interventions like City Connects, Communities In Schools, Say Yes to Education, and Bright Futures are responding, in widely varying ways, to a rising tide of need among children and families.³⁶

As local and state leaders become acquainted with evidence-based models that significantly improve outcomes and resource efficiency, they are increasingly looking to support the most effective implementation strategies. Below are recommendations for local leaders to consider in order to advance evidence-based approaches to integrated student support. The following section for state policymakers highlights the ways in which they can create the conditions for successful implementation at the local level, and realize long-term benefits to children, families, and taxpayers.

HOW ARE COMMUNITIES IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES?

In a recent survey, we found that communities and programs generally used one or more of the following strategies to improve access to a range of services—like after school and arts programs, health and dental care, food, clothing, mentors—that can influence a child’s development and readiness to learn and engage in school.³⁷

Resource alignment. These strategies focus on the macro-level coordination of institutions, programs, and service providers to improve conditions for children and families. Efforts frequently emphasize bringing together multiple stakeholders, aligning systems and offerings, and identifying shared indicators of success. Organizations using this approach include Alignment Nashville in Tennessee, By All Means, a Harvard University initiative working with six cities, Strive Together, working in approximately 70 communities, and the Magnolia Community Initiative serving a section of Los Angeles. Approaches typically use some, but not all, components of “collective impact” strategies.

Resource concentration. These approaches concentrate cross-sector resources in a central location—like a school, community center, or neighborhood—to improve access to services and supports. Programs employing this strategy include Community Schools such as those in Cincinnati, Ohio, and New York City, which co-locate service providers in schools; Family-Community Resource Centers in Vancouver, Washington, which locate cross-sector services in a community-based organization; and the Harlem Children’s Zone, which concentrates an array of resources in a defined neighborhood.

Resource coordination. These approaches engage a child or family with a coordinator, case manager, or team that helps to assess which supports and services are needed, and facilitates connection to those services. Interventions such as Communities In Schools in 25 states, City Connects in Northeastern and Midwestern cities, Durham Connects in North Carolina, and Bright Futures in small cities and rural towns across Missouri and Arkansas emphasize resource coordination strategies.

“The integrated focus on academics, social services and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Teachers can focus on teaching, knowing that their students’ other needs are being met.”

Superintendent Paul Cruz, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas¹

RECOMMENDATIONS for Local Leaders

The following are recommendations that local leaders can use to guide implementation of community-wide systems that support healthy child development, learning, and thriving.

Adopt a whole community, whole child approach

Articulate a vision. Talking about the potential impact of integrating comprehensive supports, including the importance of early intervention and “whole child” approaches, with community members and school leaders is an important first step. Explain your vision for children and families, and the potential benefits of an integrated student support approach, in order to build widespread support.

Convene stakeholders. Share information and convene stakeholders around a vision for meeting the comprehensive needs of children and youth in order to reinvigorate opportunity. Leverage existing municipal structures, or create a new one, to generate momentum, gain support for funding, and create opportunities for collaboration.

Ensure a close working relationship between municipal and education leaders. Because the integration of resources at the level of the child is a key to impacting outcomes, a close working relationship between municipal and education leaders is necessary. This may include engaging education leaders, staff, students, and community members in a conversation about perceived needs and strengths, seeking input on a proposed strategy, working closely with educators to ensure alignment with district priorities and school goals, and a willingness to use the power of municipal government to convene, fund, and lead in response to the comprehensive needs of children and families served by the school department.

Create systems for success

Local leaders can enable effective integrated student support by helping to create the context and structures that make it feasible. This may include:

Support school-based coordinators. Common across approaches to integrating school and community resources, school-based coordinators serve as the hub for information exchange, outreach, and coordination.³⁸ Many of the most effective models rely on coordinators who are licensed school counselors or social workers; work full-time in a school; are integral members of the school staff, able to get to know each child, communicate with teachers, staff, families, and respond to changing circumstances; and are supported by professional development and coaching aligned with effective practices.

Communities have used a range of strategies to establish coordinators in schools, including:

- inviting existing staff to apply to redefined positions;
- hiring new staff;
- hiring new staff on a contract basis;
- partnering with a social service agency or program to dedicate staff to serve as school-based coordinators.

Similarly, districts and communities can draw upon various sources of funding for school coordinators and implementation of a system of integrated student support. These include:

- Every Student Succeeds Act, Title I;
- Every Student Succeeds Act, Title IVA;
- Federal Social Services and Community Development Block Grants;
- Medicaid Community Benefit dollars;
- state education, school safety, and public health funds; and
- philanthropic support.³⁹

Build low-cost municipal-wide infrastructure to facilitate resource coordination. As information from research and practice grows, 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.

Communities could also elect to create a new structure to assist with resource coordination, management, or decision making. For example, Multnomah County, Nevada acts as a managing partner for 86 community schools. Nonprofits are contracted to manage and support full-time school coordinators. These school

A CITY SUPERINTENDENT TAKES THE LEAD

The Superintendent of a 60-school district, where 92 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, sought to meet students' comprehensive needs so that they would be ready to learn and engage in school. He looked to a larger district that had begun implementing an integrated student support practice showing significant improvement in student outcomes, and with help from a state grant, invited the same integrated student support provider to begin in five of the city's lowest performing schools. At first, the school coordinators were grant-funded contract positions, and the district saw significant turnover. When grant funding ran out, the Superintendent worked with the School Committee and City Council to include unionized coordinator positions in the school budget, enabling the district to attract and retain higher-quality staff. As positive results mounted—including improved student academic performance and school ratings—the district expanded the number of positions to cover 15 of its elementary schools, and recently received \$1M in corporate philanthropy to help expand the number of students receiving integrated student support.

“If we bring in other community partners, whether it is our community health agencies or our after-school providers, we begin to see a much more robust system of education that doesn’t rely on just one aspect to deliver and be all things to all people but rather we are actually much more successfully delivering a continuum or spectrum of support to the student, his or her family, and to the community.”

Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos,
Washington Stateⁱⁱ

coordinators connect children to resources, assist with after school programming, and foster the school’s health and wellness goals. Multnomah County is expanding this model to include early education.⁴⁰

MORE DETAILS

For more on how to implement effective approaches to integrated student support, visit the Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development, Center for Optimized Student Support at www.bc.edu/coss.

Engage data

Create individualized plans for every child and family. Support schools, via school-based coordinators if possible, to create individualized plans for every student and his or her family. Plans should be:

- comprehensive and address all domains of development;
- designed to cultivate student strengths as well as address needs;
- account for the intensity of need or risk that the student may be experiencing in any domain.

In a manner consistent with district privacy policies and state and federal law, school-based coordinators can develop a more complete understanding of each student by combining quantitative and qualitative data. Information already collected by the school with knowledge and insights that teachers, families, and others may have.

In the field today, tools used by school-based coordinators to create individualized plans may:

- allow for access to relevant child-level data already collected such as academic performance and attendance;
- provide a template for the creation of individualized plans;
- rapidly identify school-, community-, and web-based resources relevant to student and family needs;
- track service availability and utilization;
- provide for ongoing review to ensure that services are delivered and that plans change in response to students’ needs over time; and
- offer aggregate data to inform school-based and municipal decision-making.

Use data generated to respond to demand and evaluate impacts.

In the aggregate, information about student strengths, needs, and services delivered or not delivered can be valuable to local leaders.

As a real-time source of information about constituents, it can be used to identify trends, resource gaps, and the distribution of resources and services in a manner that improves alignment with demand.⁴¹ For example, school coordinators may notice an increase in homelessness in a section of the city, and that can spur local leaders to convene agencies serving homeless and housing-insecure families to respond. In Salem, Massachusetts, the mayor and her team are beginning to engage the data generated by citywide implementation of City Connects to identify service gaps and inform budgeting.⁴²

Data also should be used to guide implementation and evaluate impacts. Process benchmarks are designed to assess the quality of implementation and allow for continuous progress and improvement. Examples of process benchmarks include:

- percentage of individual students reviewed
- percentage of students with a personalized plan
- number of services referred and delivered
- number of services provided
- number of agency partners
- number of agency partners delivering individualized services
- satisfaction surveys⁴³

As noted above, effective implementation of systems of integrated student support yields significant results on metrics such as state test scores, grade retention rates, drop out rates, rates of chronic absenteeism, and school climate.^{44 45} Data may be used to review outcome benchmarks. These benchmarks are designed to determine expected long-term changes across all domains of student and school development. Examples of outcome benchmarks include:

- attendance
- report card grades
- teacher rating of effort
- social emotional development metrics
- statewide test scores on reading and math
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey
- school climate survey
- percent retained in grade
- dropout rates
- number and type of disciplinary incidents.⁴⁶

These data can assist local leaders in understanding opportunities to improve implementation of an approach to integrated student support, respond to current and changing constituent needs, more closely align decision-making with demand, and track outcomes for children, youth, and families over time.

“With this effort, government, schools, citizens and the business community are joining forces to provide all of our city’s children with, not only a world-class academic education, but other services that support the whole child—from social, emotional, and health services to financial, legal and mentoring services.”

Mayor Greg Fischer,
Louisville, Kentuckyⁱⁱⁱ

“In order to do this work well and think about integrated student supports for children...we need to understand that schools cannot do it alone. It’s pivotal to have the support and the engagement and the commitment from the key leaders in the city that have power to effect a good change on behalf of youth in the city.”

Margarita Ruiz, Superintendent of Salem Public Schools, Salem, MA^{iv}

A CITY THAT EMBRACES ‘WHOLE COMMUNITY, WHOLE CHILD’—SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

In Salem, one of the cities participating in an initiative called By All Means led by the Education Redesign Lab at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Mayor Kim Driscoll worked closely with Superintendent Margarita Ruiz, members of the School Committee, and City Council to do the following:

- Create a “Children’s Cabinet” that brings local leaders together and provides a platform for collaboration.
- Develop individualized plans for all students. Children in all of the city’s K-8 schools received a customized plan of opportunities and supports that meet their needs. The plans focus on each student’s strengths and needs in all developmental domains: academic, social-emotional-behavioral, physical health and wellbeing, and family. They are created by existing school staff supported by an evidence-based integrated student support provider, City Connects. In the first year of implementation, 3,091 students received 27, 258 services from 110 community-based providers.⁴⁷
- Use the individualized student plans to guide connections between students and their families to services they need. These connections are facilitated by an online guide to youth-focused programs and organizations. Data from individual student plans also provide school leaders with insights to shape student support programming. Increasingly, they provide municipal leaders with insights to guide decision-making and resource allocation.
- Mobilize the community by “training leaders in youth-servicing organizations on building strong adult-child relationships, so that they can better address children’s social and emotional needs. Those individuals will then train other local professionals across sectors.” Salem hopes this will allow more places in the community to offer internships and volunteer opportunities.⁴⁸

MORE DETAILS

To access their research on creating individual plans, visit the [Education Redesign Lab](#).

SUMMARY

for Local Leaders

Effective integrated student support is not a new program or service; rather it is a way of deliberately connecting each child and family with school- and community-based services and opportunities tailored to the needs of each student and family. Integrated student support should be consistent with the principles of effective practice: customized, comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous. Local leaders should consider the following when proceeding with this approach:

- There are no silver bullets. A constellation of resources and relationships provided to each child at the right time over time supports healthy child development, learning, and opportunity.
- Schools are the preferred hub for this work because that is where children are, and the context is sufficiently powerful and consistent to shape and respond to the developmental and learning needs of children and youth.
- School-based coordinators can leverage programs and services available across a community, making more effective and cost-efficient use of existing resources. School and local leaders can use aggregate data to understand the real-time needs of children and families in the community, allowing for more rapid and efficient responses.
- Effective integrated student support can triple the beneficial impacts of existing public and private resources invested in children and families across all sectors—including education, health care, mental health care, youth development, and social services.
- Local leaders can:
 - adopt a whole community, whole child approach including articulating a vision, convening stakeholders, and including a close working relationship between municipal and education leaders;
 - create systems for success by supporting school-based coordinators and building a low-cost municipal-wide infrastructure to facilitate resource coordination;
 - engage data by creating an individualized plan for every child and family, and using data generated to respond to demand and evaluate impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS for State Leaders

State policymakers are increasingly recognizing the importance of non-instructional factors that can contribute to student success, including positive school climate, social and emotional skill development, mental health counseling, school safety measures, and the integration of comprehensive student supports.⁴⁹ State efforts can build upon federal programs like Full-Service Community Schools Grants, and wraparound components included in 21st Century Community Learning Centers which are guided by an understanding that interconnected challenges require interconnected solutions. With the 2015 passage of ESSA, integrated student support became available in every state and is an allowable use of the Title I and Title IV funds.⁵⁰ Now, states across the country are implementing, supporting, and disseminating effective evidence-based strategies for school improvement, including building systems of integrated student support to help address the out-of-school factors that can interfere with learning and healthy child development.

Below are examples and recommendations for state policymakers to consider to promote and scale systems of integrated student support in schools and communities.

Advance integrated student support policy

As of this writing, legislation advancing evidence-based integrated student support has been filed in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and California, and passed in Nevada and Washington State.

In **Michigan**, House Bill 5912 would establish standards for integrated student support including to “improve the coordination, availability, delivery, and effectiveness of integrated supports and comprehensive supports for pupils and families, including enhancing learning outcomes for pupils.”⁵¹

In **Pennsylvania**, House Bill 2427 would “establish the Integrated Students Supports Program and the Pennsylvania student supports fund” in order to “remove academic and nonacademic barriers to learning as a means to enhance student academic success, decrease dropout rates and increase graduation rates in public elementary and secondary schools.” The funds would be distributed on a competitive basis to districts engaging a third-party provider of integrated student supports.⁵²

Legislation in **California** would direct districts contracting with integrated student support providers to select those that meet certain criteria, including to “improve the coordination, availability, delivery, and effectiveness of supports and comprehensive supports for pupil families, including enhancing learning outcomes for pupils.”⁵³

Support adoption of evidence-based models

States such as **Indiana** are supporting and advancing evidence-based models for implementing systems of integrated student support through their budgets and state plans. Indiana’s ESSA state-level plan delineates state- and district-level roles and responsibilities for implementing comprehensive and targeted supports for school improvement that range from needs assessments to planning to the strategic selection of interventions and support services. The FY19-20 Indiana State Budget established a grant program to support this work. Representative Robert Behning, Chair of the House Education Committee in Indiana, described the state’s approach to evidence-based programs: “We do a grant process where the grants come from our family social service administration to the local schools and they have to provide...evidence and a rubric in terms of what kind of impact they’re going to have and then they work with local agencies to make sure that those students—all students have access to services.”⁵⁴

In addition, the state of **Michigan** is considering legislation that sets standards for integrated student support by calling for use of an “evidence-based model of integrated student supports that is proven to increase pupil achievement.”⁵⁵ Additionally, the state of **Pennsylvania** is considering legislation in support of evidence-based integrated student support programs.⁵⁶

Develop tools to support improved practice at scale

Establish a research-based protocol or framework. Effective practices are increasingly recognized as a key to improving outcomes at scale.⁵⁷ By connecting local implementation strategies to current knowledge about effective practices, approaches are more likely to generate measurable positive results.

Policymakers in [Washington](#) and [Massachusetts](#) have created integrated student support protocols and frameworks to guide high-quality implementation in schools and districts across each state.

The [Washington](#) Integrated Support Protocol, established under House Bill 4SHB 1541, provides a framework for districts to implement the following key components of integrated student support: needs assessments, community partnerships, coordination of supports, integration within the school, and a data-driven approach.⁵⁸

[Massachusetts](#) included integrated student support in its FY18 state budget and directed the existing Safe and Supportive Schools Commission to incorporate “principles of effective practice for integrating student supports” into a framework and self-assessment tool for districts. These principles of effective practice were formally presented to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2018.

[Nevada](#) passed legislation in favor of integrated student support in 2017 with a provision that requires the Department of Education to establish a protocol “to provide and coordinate integrated student supports.”⁵⁹ This protocol is forthcoming.

Support local implementation with professional development, coaching, and technical assistance. In addition to disseminating knowledge about effective practices, states can further aid local implementation by offering professional development, coaching, and technical assistance to districts and schools interested in establishing systems of integrated student support. For example, in December 2018, the [Massachusetts](#) Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in partnership with the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy and the Boston College Center for Optimized Student Support, launched the Systemic Student Support (S3) Academy to work with nine school districts, serving over 47,200 students, to build on existing school practices, programs, and resources to create systems of integrated student support.⁶⁰

States can also offer professional development for school-level personnel. Part of [Nevada](#)’s ESSA plan, for example, outlines training for social workers and mental health professionals on how to “divert students from the discipline process into a support process” and how to utilize trauma informed practices and build a positive school climate.⁶¹

Provide financial resources for local integration of student supports. Governors in [Texas](#),⁶² [Massachusetts](#),⁶³ [Virginia](#),⁶⁴ and others have made several proposals to increase the number of school counselors and mental health workers in schools. Some have also specified how these personnel may function, including to engage in school-based resource coordination. As states encourage adoption of evidence-based integrated student support strategies, consider (a) incentivizing the repurposing of existing staff such as school counselors, social workers, or adjustment counselors to assume a coordinator function as part of their role; and (b) supporting districts and schools to hire new, qualified school coordinators.

States like [Indiana](#), as described above, and [Massachusetts](#) are helping to fund the local integration of student supports. The FY18 and FY19 [Massachusetts](#) budgets provide funding for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to issue grants to local educational agencies in support of activities related to “safe and supportive school” environments, including the integration of comprehensive student supports. The [Massachusetts](#) Department of Elementary and Secondary Education annually awards competitive grants to school districts to aid in the coordination, alignment, and sustainability of student supports.⁶⁵

Where effective and efficient systems of integrated student support can redound in significant benefits to taxpayers, states may be able to justify small additional costs in order to generate significant savings over the long term.

“If we don’t do a better job of identifying these problems earlier then students will struggle, dropout, likely be on government subsistence assistance for the majority of their lives. So it’s really an investment I think that we need to make to improve the lives of children and their parents as well and which have a long-term impact on our country and our communities.”

Representative Bob Behning, Indiana^v

Support development of a technology infrastructure. Technology can play a valuable role in facilitating effective and efficient integrated student support practices. States may employ a range of strategies to enable localities to develop or access a technology infrastructure. Here, discussion is limited to outlining components of a robust system and recommending a high-leverage, pragmatic starting point in the absence of a more ambitious technology infrastructure.

The emerging marketplace of integrated student support providers is demonstrating the core components of field-tested technology systems. These indicate the desirability of technology systems for school-based coordinators that would:

- allow for access to relevant child-level data already collected such as academic performance and attendance;
- provide a template for the creation of individualized plans;
- rapidly identify school-, community-, and web-based resources relevant to student and family needs;
- track service availability and utilization;
- provide for ongoing review to ensure that services are delivered and that plans change in response to students’ needs over time;
- and offer aggregate data to inform school-based, municipal-, and state-level decision-making.

Advanced systems would articulate with existing district or state technology to track both process and outcome data. Process benchmarks are designed to assess the quality of implementation and allow for continuous progress and improvement. Examples of process benchmarks include:

- percentage of individual students reviewed
- percentage of students with a personalized plan
- number of services referred and delivered
- number of services provided
- number of agency partners
- number of agency partners delivering individualized services
- satisfaction surveys⁶⁶

As noted above, effective implementation of systems of integrated student support yields significant results on metrics such as state test scores, grade retention rates, drop out rates, rates of chronic absenteeism, and school climate.^{67 68} Data may be used to review outcome benchmarks. These benchmarks are designed to determine expected long-term changes across all domains of student and school development. Examples of outcome benchmarks include:

- attendance
- report card grades

- teacher rating of effort
- social emotional development metrics
- statewide test scores in reading and math
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey
- school climate survey
- percent retained in grade
- dropout rates
- number of and types of disciplinary incidents⁶⁹

These data can assist state leaders in identifying opportunities to target support for effective implementation of integrated student support, respond to current and changing constituent needs, more closely align budget decision-making with demand, and track outcomes for children, youth, and families over time.

However, if development and utilization of a complete technology infrastructure is not possible in the near term, state leaders may choose to begin with a pragmatic and high-value target for change. Contributing to the disconnect between children in need and resources and programs available, many schools lack easy access to relevant, updated information about community-based programs and services. In some cases, communities are creating local documents or databases for general use.

States or statewide nonprofits are exploring the ways they can build upon existing databases like 211 to design tools that would allow schools across the state to efficiently develop customized resource databases. These tools can enable schools and school-based coordinators to better capitalize on existing resources and identify areas where there may be gaps. This can also ensure that schools in rural areas with less access to comprehensive supports have identified and are connected with all possible resources and services.

Although each locality has a distinct technology ecosystem, and local knowledge is of vital import, states can influence the technology tools available. To facilitate local districts' access to the technology tools needed, states may consider:

- vendor protocols;
- open standards;
- grants;
- or systems redesign

According to the State Educational Technology Directors Association, “Georgia is leveraging open standards that promote the use of learning technologies that can then be used to embrace the whole child as outlined within the state’s ESSA plan. Delaware is in the process of redesigning data systems and applications to support districts that are focusing on using data for personalized learning.”⁷⁰

“By transforming local schools into community institutions, we can better serve the needs of our neighborhoods and help foster the next generation of New York leaders.”

Governor Andrew Cuomo, New York^{vi}

States can exert similar leadership to ensure the basic—or more ambitious—technology infrastructure is available to schools and districts as they seek to implement effective and efficient systems of integrated student support.

Reduce barriers to resource integration. The premise of integrated student support is that students are ready to learn and succeed when the needs of the “whole child” are addressed. The ability to meet the full complement of need is predicated on the availability of services and supports. In many communities, this can be accomplished within existing resource and bureaucratic constraints. However, areas of the law are ripe for alignment and simplification in order to ease the cost burden on schools and ensure that continued and strategic expanded investments in children and families contribute to closing gaps and improving educational opportunity.

Several states are exploring ways to diminish the bureaucratic complexities of the Children’s Health Insurance Program/Medicaid to make it easier for schools to integrate screening, information and referral, and health services. For example, Massachusetts sought and received permission from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services, to expand Medicaid coverage in schools. Beginning July 1, 2019, schools will be able to seek reimbursement for health, mental health, and dental care services for all students in need, not only those with an Individualized Education Plan or 504 Plan for special learning needs.⁷¹

The availability of needed services can also be a barrier. For example, the accessibility of early childhood education and afterschool programs varies widely from state to state and community to community. As the federal government expands its investment in these programs via enhanced support for the Child Care Development Block Grant to states, state governments can build upon these investments to ensure continued and expanded access to these, and other, needed services for children, youth, and families.

SUMMARY

for State Leaders

Effective integrated student support is not a new program or service; rather it is a way of deliberately connecting each child and family with school- and community-based resources tailored to the needs of each student and family. Integrated student support should be consistent with the principles of effective practice: customized, comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous. State leaders should consider the following when proceeding with this approach:

- There are no silver bullets. A constellation of resources and relationships provided to each child at the right time over time supports healthy child development, learning, and opportunity.
- Schools are the preferred hub for this work because that is where children are, and the context is sufficiently powerful to shape and respond to the needs of children and youth.
- School-based coordinators can leverage programs and services available across a community, making more effective and cost-efficient use of existing resources. School, municipal, and state leaders can use aggregate data to understand the real-time needs of children and families in the community, allowing for more rapid and efficient responses.
- Effective integrated student support can triple the beneficial impacts of existing public and private resources invested in children and families across all sectors—including education, health care, mental health care, youth development, and social services.
- State leaders can:
 - advance integrated student support policy;
 - support adoption of evidence-based models;
 - develop tools to support improved practice at scale including: establishing a research-based protocol or framework; supporting local implementation with professional development, coaching, and technical assistance; providing financial resources for local integration of student supports; supporting development of a technology infrastructure; and
 - reduce barriers to resource integration.

Conclusion

The policy options outlined in this brief illuminate opportunities for action right now. New insights from science and implementation give state and local leaders a roadmap for impact.

Integrated student support demonstrates how and why to transform the existing tangle of programs, services, and funding streams across the sectors of education, social services, youth development, health, and mental health services. Evidence shows that integrated approaches to student support, when implemented with adherence to principles of effective practice, can improve healthy child development, learning, and thriving for the next generation. It can do so in a manner that more efficiently uses existing investments in children, youth, and families, harnessing resources to improve outcomes and benefit society.

By advancing these policy recommendations, local and state leaders can take pragmatic steps to ensure effective, feasible, cost-efficient approaches to transforming the existing resources of schools and communities into a powerful engine of opportunity for all.

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