

First national guidelines established for integrated student support programs in K-12 schools

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The first national guidelines to help K-12 schools create successful, cost-effective approaches to deliver integrated student supports that address

both in- and out-of-school barriers to learning—from hunger, to mental health, to basic needs—have been released by a national working group convened by Boston College.

With integrated student support programs and policies in place or advancing in 24 states, experts and educators in the field developed the first step-by-step blueprint for [school districts](#) to implement their own initiatives. The guidelines share best practices based on two decades of research, program implementation, and success at the scale required to uplift [student achievement](#) and well-being, particularly in under-resourced schools.

The integrated student support model has emerged as an essential option for schools and communities placing a renewed emphasis on student [mental health](#) and well-being in the wake of three academic years overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the stress imposed on students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

"New insights from developmental science, research and evaluation, and implementation in schools throughout the U.S. make this an opportune time to share what is being learned about [best practices](#) so that more schools can provide even more effective student support," said Boston College Kearns Professor Mary E. Walsh, a convener of the working group and the founder of City Connects, an integrated student support program, which serves 45,000 students in 139 public, charter, and Catholic schools in Massachusetts and four other states, as well as 10 schools in Dublin, Ireland.

"Evidence tells us that we need to both address students' needs and cultivate their strengths and interests," Walsh added. "Done well, it can transform students' learning outcomes and lifelong opportunities."

Integrated student support, a term first used in the 2015 federal Every

Student Succeeds Act, is defined as "an evidence-based approach for schools to provide student support by intentionally and systematically leveraging and coordinating the resources and relationships available in the [school](#) and in the surrounding community to address the comprehensive strengths and needs of each and every student in a school in order to help promote healthy child development and learning."

Studies by a number of researchers, including those at the Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children at Boston College's Lynch School of Education and Human Development, have shown that students who received integrated student support during elementary school demonstrate:

- Higher academic achievement
- Improved attendance, effort, and engagement in school
- Reduced dropout rates later on in high school
- Better social emotional outcomes

In addition to City Connects, additional pioneering programs that have shown integrated student support initiatives can be implemented at scale include: Building Assets Reducing Risks (BARR), launched in 1999, has served more than 200,000 students and 33,000 educators in more than 200 schools; Communities In Schools, launched in 1977, served 1.6 million students in 2,900 schools this year. This fall, New York City's Department of Education will implement integrated student support as part of its Community Schools program in more than 400 schools.

The guidelines aim to help schools develop their own approaches to "get the right resources to the right student and the right time." They focus on the six core components of resource allocation and budgeting, staffing structure, community and consensus building, data collection and management, and integrating student support across daily school operations.

"These guidelines bring together what schools are already doing in a systematized and organized way," said Abe Fernández, director of the National Center for Community Schools. "They describe how schools can better leverage their resources, and the resources of the community, to provide comprehensive supports and opportunities to children and families."

Using existing resources to promote student success is integral to the guidelines.

"We can help established programs and schools looking to take a more intentional approach to addressing students' comprehensive strengths and needs to be more effective," said A. Brooks Bowden, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "If we are spending money on education, [social services](#), health, mental health, and youth development programs, these guidelines show how those resources can be used more efficiently and effectively."

Increasingly, states are investing in student support programs. The states of Texas and West Virginia are investing to spread Communities In Schools. Indiana and Massachusetts are supporting the implementation of City Connects. The state of California recently passed a ballot measure to direct \$2.8 billion to community schools.

"Community partnerships are critical to student success," said Michael Huang, a vice president at Communities In Schools. "Our challenge and opportunity moving forward is to coordinate and integrate community resources to ensure they work as one cohesive system of support in service of students and schools."

The Biden administration is also seeking to expand funding for the federal Full Service Community Schools program, which includes integrated student support.

"There is a growing recognition of the need for community resources to interlock with school systems," said Angela Jerabek, founder and executive director of the BARR Center. "These national guidelines provide a roadmap for these strong partnerships. We realize that guidelines based on evidence are needed to foster ... a personalized culture of support and success of every student, both inside and outside of the classroom."

More information: To learn more about the National Guidelines for Integrated Student Support, go to www.integratedstudentsupport.org.

Provided by Boston College

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