



Muncie Community Schools

4301 S. Cowan Rd.
Muncie, IN 47302
Phone: (765) 747-5211
www.muncie.k12.in.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
September 7, 2021

MEDIA CONTACT: Andy Klotz (765) 747-5210 ofc.
(317) 372-1277 cell
andy.klotz@muncieschools.org

New MCS program takes aim at learning loss, achievement gap

Partnerships with City of Muncie, Marian University make program possible



MUNCIE



Muncie, Ind. – Better grades, higher achievement, improved attendance and lower dropout rates are just some of the proven benefits of [City Connects](#), a student-support program launching in Muncie Community Schools (MCS) this fall.

The program calls for a master’s-trained social worker, school counselor or mental health professional – called a “family navigator” at MCS – to collaborate with teachers by assessing each student to

determine if out-of-school factors are affecting that student’s ability to succeed. The family navigator, a full-time school staff member, then creates an individualized set of support services for students in need, and connects them with people and community agencies to meet those needs.

“City Connects has proven to work in other districts like ours, and we expect it will have the same impact of higher achievement and fewer dropouts in our schools,” MCS Director of Public

Education and CEO Lee Ann Kwiatkowski said. “The real beauty of this program is that it’s for all students, not just the ‘at risk’ ones, and we’re grateful to the City of Muncie and Marian University for partnering with us to make it possible here at Muncie Community Schools.”

Muncie Mayor Dan Ridenour has committed funds that have allowed MCS to hire four family navigators or “site coordinators.” Based at three of the district’s elementary schools – Grissom, South View and East Washington Academy – and at Southside Middle School, these professionals started the school year with extensive training from [The Center for Vibrant Schools at Marian University](#), the program’s Midwest Center. Marian will provide ongoing support through regular professional development sessions and multi-day retreats.



“It’s a little overwhelming, but I’m excited,” Morgan Roberts, the family navigator at Southside, said. “Everyone at school seems thankful that someone is focused on helping our students. I’ll connect any student with resources to help with academics, social and emotional issues, health concerns or larger family problems.”

Roberts, who recently received her master’s from IUPUI, is using the first weeks of school to build relationships

with teachers, students and community agencies. She plans to create an anonymous student survey that will provide insights into the issues they struggle with most.

“If we have the resources to help here in school, that’s great, but if not, then I’ll find others in the community that can help,” she said. “This is a one-stop shop for services that will help the student, and sometimes, an entire family.”

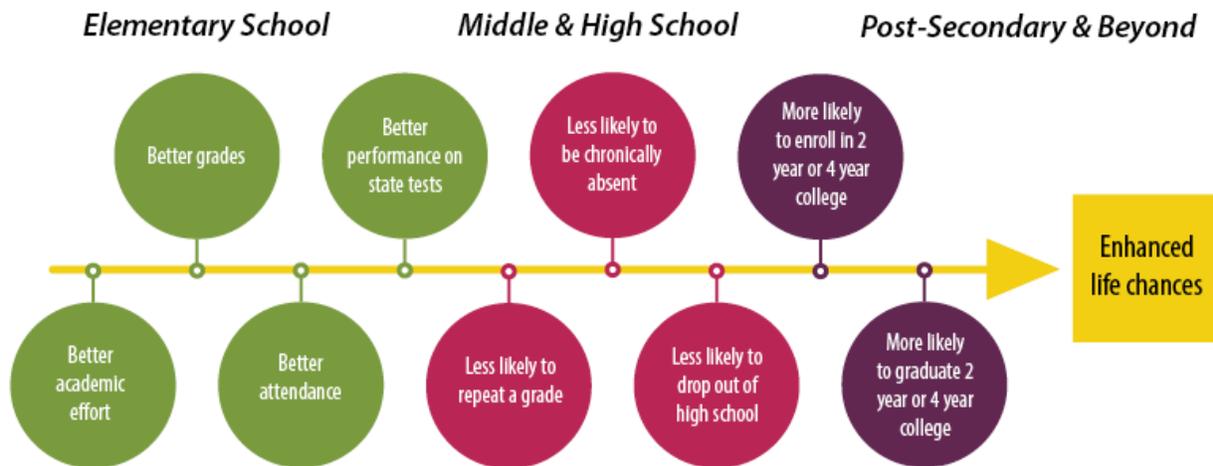
More help will soon be on the way. Ball State, which works in partnership with MCS in all aspects of education, is facilitating another arrangement that will provide one more family navigator for Longfellow Elementary later this year.

“This program is unique in how it connects students with the services they need to thrive in school,” Marian’s Executive Director of K-12 Outreach Jessica Morales Maust said. “The site coordinators will become an integral part of the school faculty, overseeing the follow-up of each student referral until the service has been provided and that need is filled.”

Created 20 years ago at The Center for Thriving Children at Boston College, City Connects boasts some impressive results from other schools around the country, including:

- High school dropout rates cut in half

- Better academic performance, eliminating two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading and half the gap in math
- Increased post-secondary program enrollment



In addition, a Columbia University study found a return of \$3 in social benefits for every \$1 spent to operate the program.

“There’s no question this is a worthwhile investment into our young people and our community,” Mayor Ridenour said. “It’s just one more way our public schools are meeting the needs of our residents, and we want to do everything we can to support that.”

About Muncie Community Schools

Serving the local community since 1855, Muncie Community Schools (MCS) educates more than 5,000 students at six elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school while also managing several other educational facilities. Through its unique partnership with Ball State University, MCS strives to maximize each student’s potential so he or she can be a positive, productive member of society. Find out more about MCS or Director of Public Education and CEO Lee Ann Kwiatkowski at muncieschools.org.

###