



# New Hampshire Charter School Office

## Best Practice Submission Form

<b>School Name:</b>	Academy for Science and Design
<b>Best Practice Title:</b>	Building Positive Connections
<b>Applicable Categories:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Accountability and Performance Monitoring</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Business Operations</li><li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community/Student Engagement</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum Design</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Leadership &amp; Governance</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Recruitment and Retention (Staff or Student)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> School Culture</li><li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <u>Student Wellness</u></li></ul>
<b>School Mission:</b>	Through our innovative STEM-focused program, the Academy for Science and Design fosters an environment that inspires, nurtures, and challenges every student cultivating their individual abilities to lead advancements in science and technology, as well as to become thoughtful, compassionate, and engaged citizens.
<b>Purpose:</b>	The 2021-2022 academic year marked the introduction of the +Connections (Positive Connections) initiative at ASD, which was further developed during the 2022-2023 academic year. +Connections was established as a safe haven within our school. Its primary purpose is to offer students additional support, access to counseling and resources, particularly those from challenging backgrounds or circumstances. Currently, approximately 10% of our student population, translating to over 50 students, are actively utilizing the resources available through this initiative.
<b>Summary:</b>	<p><b>Facilities and Resources:</b> The designated space for +Connections is designed to foster a sense of comfort and security. It is equipped with dim lighting, comfortable seating arrangements, and a range of materials, from educational aids to art supplies. Despite the evident value of this initiative, our current budget does not accommodate any further enhancements for the upcoming academic year. Therefore, additional funding channels are being explored.</p> <p><b>Program Impact:</b> A significant portion of the students accessing +Connections face challenges such as depression, anxiety, autism, and ADHD. Preliminary feedback indicates that the initiative is having a positive impact. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the space is not only benefiting the students emotionally but also academically. Notably, several students, previously identified as</p>



# New Hampshire Charter School Office

## Best Practice Submission Form

frequently absent, have shown marked improvement in attendance after engaging with the with +Connections program.

### Future Endeavors:

Looking forward, our aim is to enhance the resources available in the +Connections space. Furthermore, we are keen to introduce an external Social an Emotional Learning (SEL) Challenge Day. This proposed workshop aims to further enrich our students' understanding of connectivity and inclusivity within the community.

### Community Engagement:

Community engagement is a core tenet of ASD's approach to promoting student success. We've engaged in partnerships with the Nashua Children's Home and have also been active in various charitable ventures. Additionally, we have strong relationships with local entities such as the Chamber of Commerce. Such collaborations underline our commitment to both learning from and contributing to the wider community.

### Team and Support:

The +Connections initiative is overseen by a devoted staff member, complemented by the support of two guidance counselors and the Dean of Students. With the appropriate funding, we are poised to expand and improve the resources available to our students under this program.

### Conclusion:

In summary, the +Connections initiative at ASD is showing promise in its early stages. The program, with its focus on support and inclusivity, has the potential to be a cornerstone of our holistic educational approach. We look forward to collaborative opportunities with fellow educators and departments to enhance and expand this initiative, ensuring the continued well-being and development of our students, and believe sharing our Best Practices in this area could help to promote and foster that collaboration.

**Partner(s) in Development:**

ASD Administration, Counseling Department, Dean of Students

**Contact Person:**

Jennifer Cava



# New Hampshire Charter School Office

## Best Practice Submission Form

Resources or Documentation:

## +Connections

+Connections (+Conn) is a trauma-informed space for students who require additional support and access to counseling and resources. The goal of this program is to remove barriers for students from underserved communities and/or difficult home situations and provide interventions based on the students' individual needs (academic, social and emotional health).

- Primarily serves grades 7-11
- 16% of the school population routinely uses this space

### Trauma-Informed

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic experiences that occur in childhood. Trauma can negatively impact student learning, performance, and behavior. Without support children growing up in traumatic environments struggle to learn and complete school. The higher the amount of ACEs a child experiences, the higher their risk for negative health outcomes.



- 39% of +Conn Students have known ACEs
- 47% of +Conn Students have an anxiety or depressive disorder

### Coping Skills

Trauma has a devastating impact on a student's ability to regulate their emotions. Emotional regulation is a crucial indicator of a student's potential for academic and social success. +Connections provides a space for students to learn and practice healthy coping skills during the school day.

What Are Students in +Conn Coping With?



**"I have used +Conn as a coping mechanism for stress and it has helped me by giving me suggestions and it's generally a safe space for me when my anxiety gets bad."** 11th Grade Student

### Academic Support

+Connections provides an alternative setting for students to tackle schoolwork. The trauma-informed design benefits students' ability to focus. Additionally, students receive support like peer-tutoring as well as executive functioning support.

- 85% Students use this space to be more productive with schoolwork
- 31% students receive support with organizing and prioritizing tasks
- 42% of students using +Conn have ADHD/Autism or Sensory needs that impact their learning.

**"[+Conn] has always been a space where I feel welcome and cared for. Being there during my study halls helps me be more productive, but also helps soothe the anxiety that comes with my school work. I know if I even am having trouble, there will be someone in there to help me."** 8th Grade Student

### Social Skills

Social connection and support from positive adults is an effective strategy in helping kids manage trauma. +Connection allows students to positively impact with peers and provides space for them to practice developing social skills. Teaching students how to become community members is an essential element in a trauma-informed school.



**"+Connections is a space where I feel safe and comfortable to talk to teachers and friends about things I'm having trouble with."** 11th Grade Student

- 51% Students in +Conn received support about a social issue
- 25% students reported concerns about another students' safety/well-being

**"It's helped me learn how to advocate for and express myself, my thoughts and my feelings better."** 10th Grade Student