



# Supporting Students to Be Resilient, Successful, and Ready to Learn

## An Early Assessment of the Prince George's County TNI@School Initiative

*Sarah Gillespie, Jasmine Simington, and Megan Gallagher*

*June 2018*

In 2012, Prince George's County, Maryland, launched the Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative (TNI) to achieve the vision of County Executive Rushern L. Baker III for a thriving economy, great schools, safe neighborhoods, and high-quality health care by targeting cross-governmental resources to neighborhoods that have significant needs. Prince George's County is the nation's most affluent jurisdiction with an African American majority. With 908,049 residents (2016 Census), Prince George's is the second-most-populous county in Maryland. It is also among Maryland's most diverse counties; African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians made up 65 percent, 18 percent, and 13 percent of the population in 2016, respectively. Prince George's County is home to the University of Maryland, College Park; NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center; Joint Base Andrews (previously Andrews Air Force Base); and the US Department of Agriculture's Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. It is bordered by Washington, DC, and Montgomery, Howard, Anne Arundel, Calvert, and Charles counties in Maryland. Prince George's County Public Schools serves 132,000 students in prekindergarten through grade 12 with diversity of its student population reflecting that of the County. To support the County Executive's vision for public education, TNI@School: Prince George's Community Schools Network emerged in 2013 as a collaboration between the County government and Prince George's County Public Schools. Led by the Office of the County Executive and implemented by the Department of Social Services, TNI@School was designed to support students in identified neighborhoods by offering wraparound supports to improve learning. Since then, TNI@School has worked to reach more students and is currently providing services in 40 schools across all grade levels.

The goal of TNI@School is to ensure that all students are resilient, successful, and ready to learn. Its long-term success will be measured by improved attendance, student behavior, family stability, and graduation rates across all schools in the initiative. Using the community schools framework, TNI@School established a network of both school-based partners and community-based organizations to help achieve its goals. This brief focuses on the activities of TNI@School's core partners for grades K–

12 from 2015 to 2017 and examines interim measures of progress in connecting students to four categories of services. As detailed in figure 1, these services are designed to provide evidence-based interventions to help remove barriers to success and improve student and family outcomes. The core partners provide resources, including but not limited to behavioral health services, case management, college and career readiness, and resource coordination and referral.

Before 2015, the initiative and its current data collection and reporting processes were still in development. Though the same level of analysis cannot be done on the first two years of the initiative, TNI@School reports that around 3,400 service connections were made during 2013–15. Current programs and processes evolved out of the challenges experienced, lessons learned, and improvements made during those initial years. During 2015–17, TNI@School made great strides in setting up a robust initiative and serving over 2,180 students. The program was also able to expand full-day prekindergarten in elementary schools. The initiative has established a solid foundation for connecting students and families to resources designed to remove barriers to academic success, improve academic outcomes, and stabilize families.

## Serving TNI@School Students

Although each of the schools in the TNI@School network has unique strengths and assets, all were strategically identified based on the needs of the schools, students, and families as presenting barriers to academic success. All but 11 of the 40 schools are Title I schools, which attests to the high share of students from low-income families. In all but 4 schools, over 70 percent of students are eligible to receive free and reduced-price school meals, another indicator that their families likely struggle to make ends meet. The majority of students in the TNI@School network are black or Hispanic. Schools within Langley Park and East Riverdale/Bladensburg, two neighborhoods with large Hispanic populations, serve a large share of Hispanic students.

TNI@School works to connect students to resources and address barriers to academic performance through the five basic steps outlined here and shown in figure 2. Students are referred to TNI@School by school staff, TNI@School partners, or by themselves or their families. The referrer indicates one or several reasons for the referral, such as academic concerns, behavioral challenges, or basic needs. After a student is referred to the initiative, the TNI@School community resource advocates (CRAs) embedded in each target school complete a needs assessment to further identify that student's specific needs. Based on identified needs, CRAs then refer the student to TNI@School partners working in each target school and other community-based organizations. TNI@School partners are charged with engaging referred students in services and regularly reporting to TNI@School on service provision and some student outcomes. These data, which are reported in the TNI@School Efforts to Outcomes database, were used to generate this brief. At the end of the 2016–17 school year, CRAs began working to complete follow-up needs assessments with students to understand whether student needs improved or changed after services. Because this process is relatively new, follow-up needs assessment information is not included here.

FIGURE 1  
TNI@School Framework

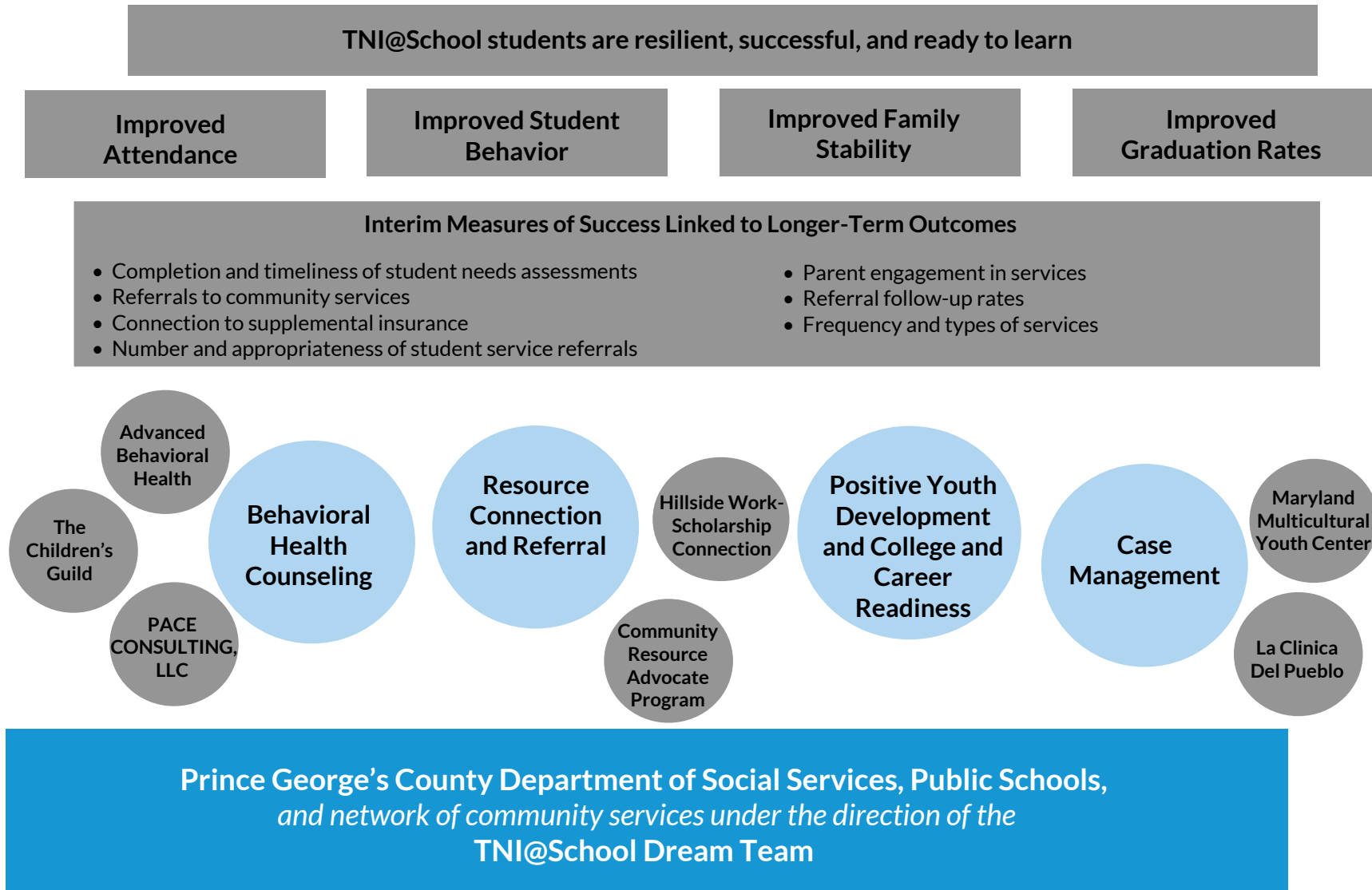
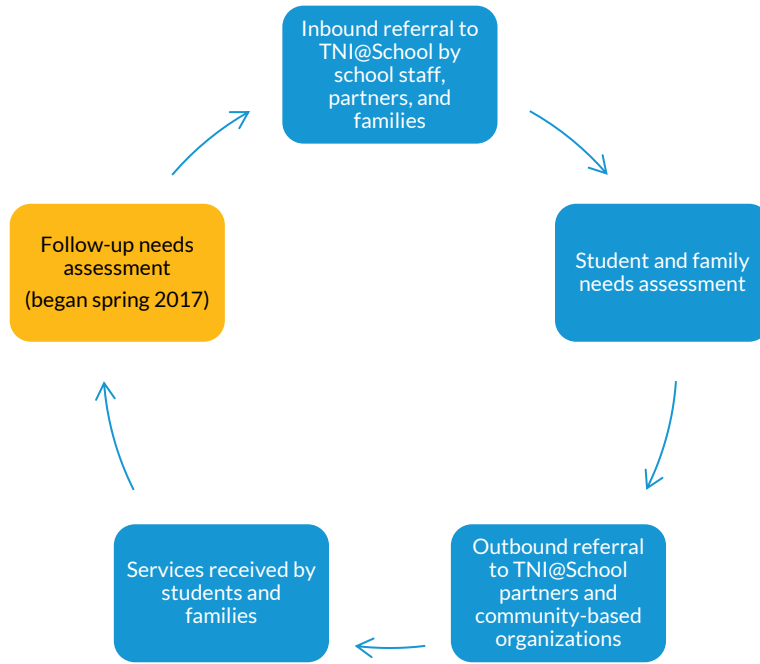


FIGURE 2

Five-Step TNI@School Resource Connection Cycle



## Progress So Far

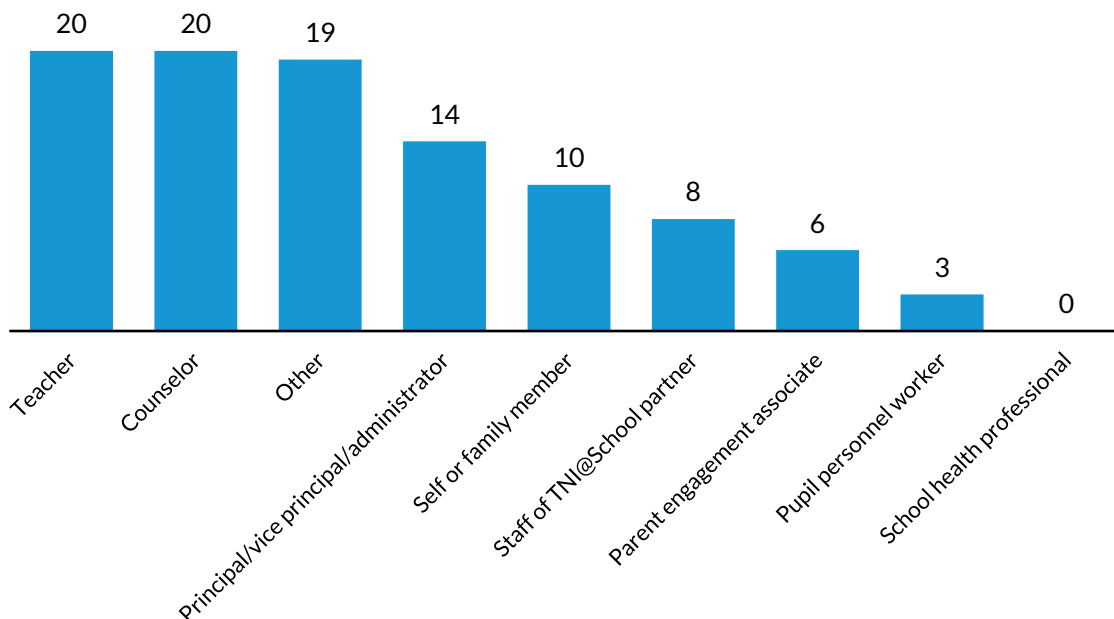
### Referrals

TNI@School strives to connect students and families to resources, and resource connection begins with the referral process. From August 2015 to January 2017, school staff, partners, and families referred 3,026 individual students to TNI@School. Referrals were spread across all school levels, including 32 percent in elementary schools, 27 percent in middle schools, 32 percent in high schools, and 9 percent in the three kindergarten–grade 8 academies. Primary referrers to TNI@School included teachers (20 percent), counselors (20 percent), principals or vice principals (14 percent), and self or family members (10 percent).

Although most students were referred for multiple reasons, the most common referral reasons (either alone or in various combinations) among all students included behavioral concerns (29 percent), academic concerns (21 percent), and anger or aggression (19 percent) (figure 3). These referral reasons align with TNI@School’s long-term goals of improving student behavior and academic performance, and they suggest the initiative is reaching students who can benefit from its resources.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Reasons for Student Referrals**

Share of students (percent)



Source: TNI@School intake/inbound files, 2015–17.

Note:  $n = 3,026$  students.

### Needs Assessments

Of those students referred by January 2017, CRAs embedded in each school completed in-depth needs assessments for 2,157 students by June 2017. During the 2015–16 school year, CRAs used the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Comprehensive Assessment; in the following school year (2016–17), CRAs used a different general needs assessment informed by the comprehensive assessment. Based on data from the general needs assessment, TNI@School is engaging students with various needs, including students who self-report as new to the country, who are in unstable housing situations, and whose families worry about food security.

### Resource Connections

Based on identified student needs, CRAs worked to make resource connections to six TNI@School partners and over 60 community-based resources that work to address a variety of challenges, from housing to adult mental health to financial stability. Of those students referred by January 2017, CRAs made resource connections for 91 percent (2,751 students) by June 2017. CRAs worked to ensure resource connections were made in a timely manner. Data on students who were assessed by January 2017 ( $n = 1,327$ ) show that most students began TNI@School program participation about 19 days after completing the needs assessment. Many students began program participation much sooner, with about

36 percent of students beginning program participation the same day as their needs assessment. CRAs seek to make appropriate resource connections based on referral reasons and needs assessment findings. Of the 1,248 students for whom CRAs made referrals to at least one TNI@School partner by January 2017, 89 percent (1,110 students) were connected to appropriate partners. Table 1 shows the total number of schools and students served by each of the core TNI@School partners through January 2017. Most students (1,491, or 68 percent of all TNI@School students during this time period) were served by both the CRA program and another core partner.

**TABLE 1**

**Schools and Students Served by TNI@School Partners through January 2017**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Schools served (n)</b>	<b>Students served (n)</b>
Community resource advocates program	39	1,816
Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection	9	1,048
The Children's Guild	13	485
Advanced Behavioral Health	9	104
Maryland Multicultural Youth Center	3	96
La Clinica del Pueblo	1	87
PACE Consulting LLC	6	46

Source: TNI@School outbound file (community resource advocates program) and partner data, 2015–17.

## Next Steps

Early in its implementation, TNI@School established a rigorous performance measurement process designed to track service delivery and assess student, family, and school outcomes. In the last school year (2016–17), TNI@School made many intentional changes to its processes and procedures designed to better connect students to resources. Implementation is an iterative process, and the tasks ahead for TNI@School will focus on continuing to improve processes and services based on the data collected in the first year and a half of implementation. TNI@School also has an exciting opportunity to look at the longer-term student and family outcomes the initiative aims to improve, including attendance, behavior, family stability, and graduation rates. Going forward, outcome data from TNI@School partners and the schools themselves will provide important insights on how the initiative is supporting Prince George’s County students to be resilient, successful, and ready to learn.

## About the Authors



**Sarah Gillespie** is a senior research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Her research focuses on housing and homelessness, place-based initiatives, and performance measurement.



**Jasmine Simington** is a research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. Her research focuses on place-based initiatives and the intersection of housing and education.



**Megan Gallagher** is a senior research associate at the Urban Institute. Her research focuses on efforts to improve housing and educational opportunities for children in low-income families.

## Acknowledgments

This brief was funded by a collaboration between Prince George's County government, Prince George's County Public Schools, and the Prince George's County Department of Social Services. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at [www.urban.org/aboutus/our-funding/funding-principles](http://www.urban.org/aboutus/our-funding/funding-principles).

The authors thank the whole TNI@School team, including Gloria Brown-Burnett, Whitney Rhodes, Tre Jerdon-Cabrera, Tiarra Medley, and Kai Boggess-de Bruin, for their partnership and significant contributions to this brief.



2100 M Street NW  
Washington, DC 20037

[www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

### ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.

Copyright © March 2018. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.