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Message from our Executive Director

This school year, the Memphis affiliate aligned its efforts with the accountability standards designed to reduce chronic absenteeism, outlined in the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). With a goal to reduce chronic absenteeism by 23 percent, Memphis site coordinators worked to provide students with basic-needs resources, as well as inform them of the importance of coming to school every day prepared to learn.

These efforts were incredibly successful; by the end of the year, 877 students received case-managed services, and 8,631 students benefitted from whole-school initiatives. While these numbers speak for themselves, the data and stories in this report show the tremendous impact of one-on-one relationships, community support, and hard work from our entire staff. Because of these interventions, we exceeded our goal and reduced chronic absenteeism by 24 percent.

As the 2017-2018 school year begins, we are committed to being All in for Kids, ensuring that students have everything they need to attend school and succeed.

Sonji Branch
Executive Director
We Are All In For Students

Remember when you were a teenager? What sorts of things kept you from going to school? For many of us, illness and family emergencies were the primary barriers. But for millions of students today, the barriers include not having appropriate shoes or clothes, having to stay home to watch younger siblings, or experiencing trauma made worse by lack of mental health services.

This is the harsh reality for far too many kids in Tennessee, as nearly one-quarter of the state’s children live in poverty. In fact, students attending low-income schools are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers in higher-income schools. Young children living in poverty are three times more likely to repeat a grade, and students from low-income families are two times more likely to drop out than their higher-income peers.

These low-income students, along with students with disabilities, English language learners and students of color, all continue to graduate at much lower rates than their peers – further increasing the wealth gap.

Students in the low-income communities CISTN serves are:
- More likely to be chronically absent from school
- Three times more likely to repeat a grade
- Two times more likely to drop out

It sounds like an overwhelming issue, but the solution is simple: young people of all backgrounds and abilities thrive when they have a positive, one-on-one relationship with a caring adult.

That’s exactly what Communities In Schools of Tennessee (CISTN) provides in schools, every day. We harness available resources in communities and match them with each student’s needs to help them overcome the academic and non-academic barriers to achievement.

Our unique model of Integrated Student Supports has helped make a difference in the lives of thousands of Tennessee’s children every year. But we cannot do this work alone – and there’s much more to be done. Together, we must continue to partner with superintendents, principals, teachers, state and local policymakers, and community and faith-based organizations to break the cycle of poverty and empower students to create better lives, better communities, and a better world.

Together, we must be All in for Kids and ensure that every student in Tennessee has the same opportunity to succeed in school and achieve in life.
Creating Confidence

For fifth grader Diamond, attending school was not fun. She was quiet and shy, needed assistance with her academics and obtaining personal hygiene items, and her classmates often bullied her. Soon, she was getting in more and more trouble and missing more and more days of school. She needed a personal relationship with a caring adult, and Candice, the CISTN site coordinator at her school, was more than willing to help.

After meeting with Diamond on a weekly basis to work on her behavior and attendance, Candice strategically chose her to take part in a Black History Dance. Diamond performed so well that she went on to dance for the talent show and carnival, and she ultimately won the school’s dance contest based on the rousing ovation she received from her teachers and peers. From then on, school was not such a scary place for Diamond.

With the help of her site coordinator, she received hygiene kits from community partners on a regular basis, improved her schoolwork, and learned how to respond to her bullies in an appropriate manner. She gained the confidence to excel in her school environment and learned the importance of coming to school. When she began working with Candice they set her Average Daily Attendance (ADA) goal at 91 percent. By the end of the year, she had only missed seven days, making her ADA 96 percent. Not only did this exceed her goal, but her attendance greatly improved from the previous year, when she missed 21 days of school.

When asked about the impact of her site coordinator, Diamond said, “Communities In Schools helped me come out of my shell a lot and helped me with my attendance. I understand better why I need to be at school every day.” Because of her hard work and the caring presence of her site coordinator, Diamond’s confidence soared.
Student Barriers to Learning

We Help Mitigate the Effects of Poverty

In a recent Communities In Schools (CIS) study, teachers, principals, and superintendents reported that poverty was the number one barrier to success in their schools. Other barriers included students coming to school unprepared to learn, chronic absenteeism, and a reported lack of parental involvement. All of these barriers are symptomatic of the larger problems some children face at home, including trauma; limited access to medical, dental, or mental health care; and the lack of a caring adult in their lives. CIS helps diagnose the problems and treat the chronic symptoms of poverty that show up in the classroom.

CIS National School and District Support Study: Perceived Barriers to Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprepared to learn</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental involvement</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic absenteeism</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student apathy</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since people of color are more than twice as likely as Caucasians to live in poverty in the U.S., more children of color struggle with non-academic barriers to success. The vast majority of the students that CISTN served in 2016-2017 were children of color, as well as other populations including students identified as homeless, English language learners, or living in foster care or group homes. Below is a breakdown of demographics for students we serve across the state.

Figure 1: Student Demographics by Race/Ethnicity*

- Black/African American: 92%
- White: 3%
- Hispanic: 2%
- Multi-Racial: 1%
- Other: 1%
- Unknown: 1%

Figure 2: Student Demographics by Gender*

- Female: 57%
- Male: 43%

* Figure 1 does not include students whose race/ethnicity was unknown (N=4466).
* Figure 2 does not include students whose gender was unknown (N=3885).
* Data in Figures 1 & 2 apply to CISTN case-managed students.
Breaking Language Barriers in a New Country

In the middle of her third grade year, nine-year-old Lea moved with her family to the U.S. from Tanzania. When Lea began fourth grade she was fluent in several African dialects but spoke no English. Hoping to provide Lea with additional support and opportunities, her teacher recommended her to CISTN. Lea’s CISTN site coordinator, Sara, helped her improve her literacy by connecting her with a reading tutor and exposing her to extracurricular activities.

During the school’s weekly reading clinic, Lea strived in her one-on-one tutoring sessions to improve her reading level. Although she was an English language learner, Lea’s reading tutor challenged her to read books that were above and beyond her level, a challenge that Lea embraced. In addition to weekly tutoring, Lea also participated in additional opportunities sponsored by CISTN such as the chess club, a weekly girls-only luncheon (designed to feature topics that impact adolescents and prepare them for middle school), and a field trip to tour her future middle school.

Lea’s teacher chose her to participate on CISTN’s “Literary Magazine” staff where she assisted in choosing and editing student art and writing submissions that were published and distributed to the entire student body. By the end of the school year Lea had also made tremendous literacy gains. She participated in, and won, the “Read-Me-Week” reading log challenge, as well as the winter holiday reading contest. “Lea began her time at our school reading on a ‘Pre-A’ level,” said Sara, “and left us being able to read and write on a ‘K’, or second grade level.”

Thanks to the individualized reading instruction from a trained volunteer and creative programming provided by CISTN, Lea will continue to excel as she moves on to middle school and a very bright future.
Our Community-Based Approach

We Offer Inclusive Support
Our affiliates bring CIS’ unique model into communities by positioning site coordinators inside schools and partnering with local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, and volunteers. These are the relationships that make a meaningful difference in children’s lives, and help get them the exact services that they need. In 2016-2017, CISTN provided over 1,800 school-wide services to the students we served in 26 schools. Combined, these services totaled over 9,400 service hours with over 3,000 service hours provided by community partners and almost 300 service hours provided by volunteers. Additionally, affiliates collaborated with 65 different community partners to bring needed supports and services to schools, students, and families.

Our Model

Statewide value CISTN brought inside our partner schools in school year 2016-2017

- Transportation
- Family Crisis Support
- Community Service/Service Learning
- Family Engagement
- Holiday/ Other Assistance
- Academic Assistance
- Hygiene Kits
- School Supplies
- College/Career Preparation
- Clothing
- Enrichment/Motivation
- Food

Total Donation Value: $230,410
Promoting Attendance by Celebrating Strides and Involving The Community

Though new to CISTN as a site coordinator this year, Tamika was no stranger to working to improve the lives of students. In fact, she dedicated her previous career—spanning 14 years at Girls Inc.—to work similar to that of CISTN. Because of this, she transitioned seamlessly into her role as a site coordinator, ready to tackle chronic absenteeism by creating initiatives to not only educate students, but also celebrate them.

One such initiative, Woo-Hoo Wagon Wednesday, became a much-anticipated staple for the whole student body. Every 20 days, Tamika would recognize the students with perfect attendance and those with improvement on their attendance by wheeling a wagon through the halls with school supplies, snacks, school shirts, toys, and gadgets for them to choose. After everyone received their prize, all teachers and students would yell, “woo-hoo!” to recognize and celebrate the progress that had been made. This was not just a fun break in the middle of the school day; statistics show that the Woo-Hoo Wagon made real results in the work against chronic absenteeism.

During the second 20-day period, the school saw a decrease in chronic absenteeism by five percent. Additionally, Tamika engaged community partners in this initiative. The Omega Psi Phi-Phi Epsilon Chapter donated incentives for the wagon and members of S.Y.R.U.P Outreach volunteered their time to set up.

When reflecting on the purpose of the Woo-Hoo Wagon, Tamika said, “A lot of our students weren’t really excited about attendance. The ones who had perfect attendance had been recognized, but not the students making improvements. These students were recognized by the Woo-Hoo Wagon.” By including those making strides toward improved attendance, 450 students participated in this initiative. Through collaboration with community partners, keeping up with attendance data, and a little creativity, Tamika made an impact on her students by making it fun and exciting to come to school and learn.
The Results of Our Work

**We Work Directly In Schools**

Our trained site coordinators work inside K-12 public schools to identify and address the immediate needs of our students, from basic needs such as food and clothing, to more complex needs like counseling and mentoring. We’re inside schools and in students’ lives, because when students have caring adults supporting them, they see new possibilities. We surround students with a support system that fosters health, builds confidence, and empowers students to succeed.

Because CISTN site coordinators are consistently there, they have access to the school and students in ways others don’t. On the frontlines they can build trusting, long-term relationships with students, parents, teachers, and the administration. Instead of looking to make new programs, further burdening the system, CISTN staff find existing community resources and bring them inside the school to provide targeted and coordinated services. We know that when students can focus on being students, they can thrive both inside and outside of the classroom.

Last year, CISTN served students in grades K-12 in urban, suburban, and rural areas. The charts below show our work at all academic levels, including elementary schools, as early intervention helps keep kids on track to graduation. All of our site coordinators work in public schools, including charter schools.

**2016-2017 School Year: Statewide Results**

*Results based on the percentage of case-managed students statewide that made progress toward/achieved their individualized goal(s).*

- **96%** stayed in school
- **83%** improved their attendance
- **93%** made academic gains
- **90%** improved their behavior
Penny’s G.E.M.S.

When middle school Site Coordinator Penny noticed high suspension and detention rates among female students at her school, she created G.E.M.S. (Girls, Empowered, Motivated, and Succeeding), an afterschool program focused on mentoring, combating chronic absenteeism, social emotional learning, encouraging active lifestyles, and conflict management. At CISTN we know that social and emotional development plays important roles in ensuring that students succeed academically; students who believe in themselves are more likely to persist through challenging situations.

Penny selected 15 females – ranging from fifth through eighth grade – who lived in low-income neighborhoods without access to transportation, had high suspension and detention rates, and needed support to improve in their academics. From October 2016 to April 2017, her students received weekly services including academic assistance, behavior interventions, and health education and activities such as developing a fitness regimen, attending college tours, and family engagement events. Lastly, the girls performed at their schoolwide Leadership Pep Rally to showcase their positive gains.

As a result of Penny’s program, chronic absenteeism and suspensions decreased by at least 5 percent among female students and 80 percent of the girls who participated increased overall in their core subjects and improved their quarterly school attendance. Over two decades of data show the positive effects of afterschool programs on student achievement, attendance and graduation rates – and parents and families agree that afterschool programs are important. “Without the programs that Penny provides for my girls, they would just be in the house. It is too dangerous for children to go out in the neighborhood. My children love Penny [and] I’m thankful for her help,” said parent Christie.

As these 15 students continue to work towards graduation, we hope that the knowledge and support G.E.M.S. provided will help them better navigate through the difficult situations they face in their lives.
2016-2017 School Year: Affiliate Results

Memphis

Total Schools Served: 19
- 11 in Achievement School District, 8 in Shelby County Schools
Total School Enrollment: 8,640
Number of Case Managed Students: 874

95% stayed in school
83% improved their attendance
89% made academic gains
81% improved their behavior

Memphis: Value of Brokered Services

- Volunteer: $77,232
- School Staff/Volunteers: $37,030
- Community Partner: $12,432
- Community Partner/Volunteers: $62,522
- CIS Staff/Volunteers: $379

Total Value of Service: $189,595

Memphis: Value of Donations

- Transportation: $34,012
- Family Crisis Support: $23,145
- Holiday/ Other Assistance: $19,883
- Literacy: $13,015
- Food: $8,739
- Hygiene Kits: $5,407
- School Supplies: $3,400
- Clothing: $1,508
- College Preparation: $305
- Enrichment/Motivation: $202

Total Donation Value: $109,615

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Nashville

Total Schools Served: 6 within Metro Nashville Public Schools
Total School Enrollment: 1,911
Number of Case Managed Students: 191

100% stayed in school
95% improved their attendance
95% made academic gains
98% improved their behavior

Nashville: Value of Brokered Services

- CIS Staff/Volunteers
- Community Partner
- Community Partner/Volunteers
- School Staff/Volunteers
- Volunteer

Total Value of Service: $288,256

Nashville: Value of Donations

- Academic Assistance
- Clothing
- Food
- Holiday/Other Assistance
- School Supplies
- Community Service/Service Learning
- Enrichment/Motivation
- Family Engagement

Total Donation Value: $120,795
Our Priorities for the Future

**We Advocate on Behalf of Our Students**
With more high-poverty schools than ever before, institutionalizing Integrated Student Supports is increasingly urgent.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal government highlighted the need for school-wide and targeted approaches. In fact, there is specific language in ESSA recommending that local education officials consider Integrated Student Supports as an evidence-based program to address student needs.

ESSA is the first major restructuring of federal education law in almost 15 years. CIS made a strong case to Congress to explicitly state that Integrated Student Supports is an allowable use of funds under Title I. Now, the work of implementing the legislation turns to states, school districts and schools. As such, CIS’ focus turns from federal to state.

In 2018, CISTN’s priorities will be to:

- Build upon our partnerships with the Achievement School District, Shelby Country Schools, and Metro Nashville Public Schools to more closely integrate into the districts’ strategic initiatives to decrease chronic absenteeism;
- Ensure that our programs continue to reflect the latest research on decreasing the chronic absenteeism rate and that the organization makes quick adjustments based on the data;
- Continue to develop a sustainable, braided funding stream in order to meet the needs of students; and
- Increase awareness of CISTN in Memphis, Nashville, and across Tennessee as a key partner for reducing chronic absenteeism rates—especially with chronic absenteeism being a new factor in the State’s accountability system.
“All students, regardless of where they live, where they come from, their race or ethnicity, should have an opportunity to be successful in school and in life. That starts with making sure they’re all on the same level playing field. CIS allows students to have that opportunity.”

Rick Martin, CISTN Board of Directors
Director of Compassion Forward - Asurion Philanthropy at Asurion
## 2017-2018 Partner Schools

### Memphis
- Aspire Coleman Elementary School
- Aspire Hanley Elementary School
- Memphis Scholars Caldwell-Guthrie Elementary School
- Cornerstone Prep Academy
- Cornerstone Prep Denver
- GRAD Academy High School
- Grandview Heights Middle School
- Hamilton High School
- Humes Preparatory Academy Middle School
- Kirby Middle School
- Lester Prep Middle School
- Libertas Elementary School
- Manassas High School
- Melrose High School
- Power Center Academy Elementary School
- Power Center Academy High School
- Power Center Academy Middle School
- Promise Academy Elementary
- Riverview K-8 School
- Sherwood Middle School
- Wooddale Middle School

### Nashville
- Bellevue Middle Prep
- Caldwell Enhanced Option Elementary
- DuPont Tyler Middle Prep
- John Trotwood Moore Middle Prep
- KIPP Academy Nashville
- KIPP Nashville Collegiate High School
State Board of Directors

We are privileged to have an active and dedicated Board of Directors.

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