



# Communities In Schools: Solving the Nation's Dropout Problem

A Profile of Local Affiliates in the Communities In Schools Network | 2008



# Communities In Schools: Solving the Nation's Dropout Problem

America is facing a major dropout problem. One out of every three students in the United States does not graduate high school on time, and among ethnic minorities, the dropout rate is almost 50 percent. Research shows that multiple risk factors, both academic and social, increase the likelihood that youth will drop out. In many cases, the final act of leaving school is the result of a long process of disengagement.



**Communities In Schools is the nation's largest dropout prevention organization.**

**Communities In Schools (CIS) offers a solution to the nation's dropout problem.**

CIS understands the complexity of the dropout problem, positioning itself as a nonprofit partner to many of America's most challenged schools.

As the nation's largest dropout prevention organization, Communities In Schools:

- **Serves 1.2 million students in 3,200 K–12 public schools annually**
- **Operates through nearly 200 local affiliates in 27 states and the District of Columbia**
- **Brings coordinated, integrated student services into public schools to meet the needs of youth most at risk of dropping out**

CIS is committed to results for students and communities. Initial results from a five-year, independent national evaluation of CIS services show that among dropout prevention programs using scientifically based evidence, the CIS Model is one of a very few in the United States proven to keep students in school and is the *only* dropout prevention program in the nation with scientifically based evidence to prove that it increases graduation rates. In addition, effective use of the CIS Model in partnering districts has assisted schools in meeting the Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act. Specifically, CIS has demonstrated support in AYP indicators such as academic performance, attendance and graduation rates.

These results are the outcome of a proven model that guides the work of state and local CIS affiliate offices in communities throughout the nation.

## How the CIS Model Works

In countless communities, support services are highly fragmented across government agencies, nonprofits and faith-based organizations. Often, providers wait for clients to arrive at their doors and then offer a specific program or service in isolation. Within the schools, staff are often overwhelmed by all of the emotional, social and health issues of students, and are not sure where to turn. where to turn.

**Site coordinators facilitate community-based, integrated student services**—interventions that improve student achievement by connecting community resources with both academic and social service needs of students.

Enter Communities In Schools and its community-based, integrated student services model. Communities In Schools was founded on the concept that students can and will achieve academically when resources to address their academic and social service needs are tailored, coordinated and accessible. That premise has evolved into what we now call community-based, integrated student services. These services are interventions that improve student achievement by connecting community resources with both the academic and social service needs of students. Such interventions focus programmatic energy, resources and time on shared school and student goals, and can occur at the school or elsewhere in the community. Through the efforts of a single point of contact—the CIS site coordinator—individual student needs are assessed and research-based connections are made between students and targeted community resources.



The cornerstone of the CIS Model is the provision of two unique types of services: (1) widely accessible and (2) targeted and sustained. Widely accessible prevention services and resources are made available to entire school populations. Targeted and sustained prevention and intervention services and resources are provided to the students most at risk of dropping out of school. Together, this combined prevention and integration strategy is based on and validated by the widely accepted model of public health intervention, and has been at the core of the CIS theory of change for many years. CIS has a documented 30-year history of producing positive outcomes at both the school and student level.

CIS places a trained site coordinator into a public school, where he or she serves as the critical point of contact linking students, teachers, principal and the larger community. The site coordinator specifically targets the 5–10 percent of students who teachers and family members believe are most vulnerable to low achievement or dropping out and provides them with intensive case management while also working to improve the resources available to the overall student community.

### Key Components of the CIS Model

Site Coordinator

Community, School and Student Assessments

Service Plan

Effective Prevention and Intervention Strategies

Evaluation and Refinement

Through an annual assessment, the site coordinator determines what students need most and develops a plan to connect the school and individual students with the right community partners. The resulting services include mentoring, tutoring, health care, career development, summer and afterschool programs, alternative education models and service learning. All services—whether aimed at elementary, middle or high school students—are designed to keep students on track for grade promotion and graduation and to prepare them for the workplace or postsecondary education.

Throughout the year, the CIS site team monitors and adjusts the services and reports on progress to the school and CIS leadership. In recent years, CIS has also launched innovative programs to demonstrate the impact that prevention and intervention can have on comprehensive school reform efforts. Communities In Schools of Georgia has received national attention for its Performance Learning

Centers© (PLCs), which are small, nontraditional high schools geared toward students who are not succeeding in a traditional school setting— students who typically experience poor academic achievement, are chronically late to school or absent, and who have other risk

factors that predispose them to dropping out of school. PLCs are being adopted by CIS affiliates in five other states with widespread interest from others throughout the CIS network PLC expansion efforts are due to generous funding to the CIS national office from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. PLCs build directly on the philosophy and partnerships that are at the core of the CIS Model, and demonstrate the powerful role that CIS can play in supporting larger school redesign efforts.

## A National Network of CIS Services

While the site coordinator is the face of CIS within an individual school, he or she is also part of a CIS local affiliate. Each of the nearly 200 local affiliates is a separate nonprofit organization whose core purpose is to build relationships within and among the school system, local government officials, business executives, the faith community and nonprofit agencies—often in communities where there is little to no history of working together. To create this collaboration, the affiliate builds a local board of directors comprising a cross-section of leaders and potential partners.

Together, the affiliate leadership team and the board identify and mobilize needed resources. The local affiliate also hires and trains site coordinators, places them within the public schools, supports them in ensuring that the right services are made available, and assists in recruiting and training local volunteers. Finally, the local affiliate is responsible for ensuring that the CIS Model of providing prevention and intervention services is implemented with fidelity at every site.



While local affiliates have the responsibility for implementing the CIS Model in their communities, since 1991 CIS state offices have emerged to build statewide relationships and partnerships for CIS, manage affiliate replication and expansion, and monitor the quality of local affiliates. These state organizations have proven to be critical contributors to the growth and strength of the CIS network.

At the center of the CIS network of state and local affiliates is the national office, headquartered in the nation's capital area. The national office ensures that the impact of the network far exceeds the sum of its individual parts, balancing respect for local autonomy and innovation with a commitment to high quality standards, effective use of resources and nationwide impact on the dropout crisis. It also serves as the primary steward of the CIS Model, encouraging policymakers to include community-based integrated student services into legislation, coordinating marketing and PR campaigns to increase public awareness about community-based solutions and investing resources in evaluation to measure and track results.

The following pages highlight the work of just four local affiliates, including two located in America's urban centers—Charlotte, N.C., and Philadelphia, P.A.—and two located in non-urban communities—Bell and Coryell Counties, T.X., and Wayne County, I.N. While these affiliates serve students with a range of needs in their respective communities, they are similar in that they implement with fidelity the comprehensive CIS Model of prevention and intervention services that is driven by the site coordinator. Ultimately, the affiliates display strong partnerships with their local school districts and a powerful presence in individual schools.

# Communities In Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina



“At the end of the day, I want staff at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to say that they couldn’t make it without the help of Communities In Schools.” So says Bill Anderson, executive director of Communities In Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg in North Carolina, who envisions his local affiliate as a resource to principals and teachers in the city of Charlotte, an organization that the schools rely on to help raise graduation rates.

CIS of Charlotte-Mecklenburg employs 62 full-time staff who continuously use data to guide their prevention and intervention services. The affiliate has focused its efforts on the intervention services within the CIS Model, led by strong site coordinators who provide intensive case

management services to students. Site coordinators also meet student and family needs by facilitating school-wide services such as voter registration drives, college fairs, parent nights, and vision and dental screenings.

## Key Components of the CIS Model in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

- **Site Coordinators:** A full-time staff of 62 provides targeted case management services to 4,900 students.
- **Community, School and Student Assessments:** Site coordinators closely monitor student performance and attendance in order to catch the beginnings of potential problems that could lead a student to drop out of school.
- **Service Plan:** Plans link students, for example, with academic, nutritional and transportation needs to keep them in school and help them succeed.
- **Effective Prevention and Intervention Strategies:** Site coordinators effectively manage their time across 33 schools to provide intensive case management services to students.
- **Evaluation and Refinement:** Service plans are adjusted based on student- and school-level data, such as through the plan CIS created to better serve high school students by separating 9th–10th grades from 11th–12th grades.

# Organizing Services by the CIS Model

**“I have been able to empower students to have a voice at school and within their own communities ... I see my work as a way to prepare the future generation with a stronger and well-educated work force.”**

**Marianella Echevarria, Site Coordinator, CIS of Charlotte-Mecklenburg**

CIS of Charlotte-Mecklenburg began in 1985, serving one school site with 80 students. Today, the organization employs 45 site coordinators who work in 33 of Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s 161 schools. Some high schools have more than one coordinator due to two separate programs: one for 9th–10th grade students, and another for 11th–12th grade students. Anderson joined the CIS team after spending 31 years in this public school system, including serving as the assistant superintendent for high school curriculum and instruction.

Site coordinators are facilitating services to make case management work in Charlotte. In the 2006–2007 school year, 97 percent of students who were case managed by CIS and tracked as potential dropouts remained in school. And 94 percent of CIS students tracked for attendance problems showed improvement in this area. More students who were tracked for risk of not being promoted were promoted, and more eligible seniors graduated as a result of CIS. Success in the 33 schools can be largely attributed to the presence of strong site coordinators located there. “The organizational level of the site coordinators makes the difference,” says Anderson. “They understand the importance of managing their time.”

Eastway Middle School is ranked as one of CIS of Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s “High Implementer” middle school sites incorporating all aspects of the CIS Model to a moderate or high degree. Here, site coordinator Marianella Echevarria maintains a strong relationship with school staff. She participates in student intervention team meetings at Eastway, where many referrals to CIS occur. Then, true to her title, she coordinates the community-based services so that each student served by CIS has customized, tailored support to keep them in school through graduation. It is this trusted connection between school and CIS staff and the site coordinator’s ability to facilitate targeted and sustained services that make CIS a success in this building and the community.

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

# Communities In Schools of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Communities In Schools of Philadelphia serves approximately 2,000 students daily in the city's public schools. Its success can be attributed to its roots within the School District of Philadelphia CIS began here as a program in 1983 and was incorporated in 1986. The CIS office resided within a school district building until 2006. Martin Nock, president of CIS of Philadelphia, has been with the team for 14 years.

CIS of Philadelphia implements the CIS Model by providing effective prevention and intervention strategies to the general student body and to individual students. With its connections to the local school district, CIS of

Philadelphia serves as an extension of it, offering services through a web of programs and partnerships to provide programming that is not usually offered during school hours.

## Key Components of the CIS Model in Philadelphia

- **Site Coordinators:** A full-time staff of more than 170 provides targeted case management services to approximately 2,000 students.
- **Community, School and Student Assessments:** Staff works as an integral partner with the School District of Philadelphia to understand community needs.
- **Service Plan:** Services are planned and organized around four key areas: after-school learning, services to support family and student self-sufficiency, graduation and career support services, and targeted initiatives with the school district.
- **Effective Prevention and Intervention Strategies:** Students have access to 25 distinct programs designed to help them graduate, including the Philadelphia Freedom Schools that help students explore cultural heritage through academic learning and leadership.
- **Evaluation and Refinement:** Services are adjusted based on data. For example, CIS staff saw that its effective program helping teen parents to stay in school was most beneficial to young women; staff created a new program to better support young men, too.

# Organizing Services by the CIS Model

Most of the Philadelphia students served by CIS experience the organization through targeted and sustained school-wide services via 25 distinct programs, all of which are supported by grant funding and offered through a contracted relationship with the district. CIS staff coordinate these numerous services to get students what they need to succeed. It's a strong example of the integrated student services CIS brings to schools through the work of site coordinators. The CIS of Philadelphia office and staff are structured into four divisions to best create service plans that target services to its sizable student population:



## CIS site coordinators strategically connect and align resources in

- Health services
- Enrichment opportunities
- Recreation
- Mentors/tutors
- Human services
- Employment services
- Business partners

The results are improved student outcomes in attendance, behavior and academic performance—all of which help students stay in school

**Philly After Three:** Students in grades 1 through 8 participate in an array of comprehensive and integrated afterschool activities that promote social, cultural, academic and emotional development. The work is a result of a partnership between CIS, the state's Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare, Philadelphia's Department of Human Services and the School District of Philadelphia.

**Education Leading to Employment and Career Training:** ELECT is a statewide initiative through a partnership between the School District of Philadelphia and CIS to strengthen families and promote self-sufficiency. Programs assist teen parents in completing their high school education and making successful transitions from school to work.

**School Operations Support:** SOS helps prepare high school students for graduation and postsecondary educations and/or careers by assisting schools to provide career academics, dropout retrieval and work readiness programs, among other supports. SOS partners with the National Academy Foundation and alternative classroom programs to provide career-based learning opportunities. Students also have access to paid work experiences and programming for students with disabilities.

**External Initiatives:** These programs are the result of partnerships with the School District of Philadelphia. Initiatives include improving students' technology preparedness for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, increasing family engagement and encouraging cultural self-exploration through academic learning and leadership development.

These four divisions reflect the strong alliance between the School District of Philadelphia and CIS. Each division has a vice president who oversees the program managers who lead and monitor each initiative, ensuring results. An example of the impact was seen in summer 2007, when students in CIS' Philadelphia Freedom Schools—an afterschool math and summer program using an African American- and Latino-centered K-8 math and literacy curriculum to improve academic performance—reported high academic and reading self-efficacy in comparison with a control group.

In Philadelphia, students are connected to services through a variety of paths, including school staff referrals or self-expressed interest. By coordinating services according to the CIS Model, all students receiving services—no matter how they came to CIS—benefit from the wealth of the community-based, integrated services made available to them.

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

# Communities In Schools of Bell and Coryell Counties, Texas



CIS of Bell and Coryell Counties began in 1993 when civic leaders realized they needed to do more to help their students succeed, in and graduate from, school. At first, CIS was brought into two school districts in the community; however, it quickly grew to serve students in five districts and has emerged as a partner for student success.

This affiliate serves a unique community—children and families of United States military troops stationed at Fort Hood, the only Army installation in the nation that is home to two military divisions. Since the war in Iraq began in 2003, these divisions have continuously alternated deployments. With a budget of about

\$2.5 million, CIS of Bell-Coryell attributes its success to its strict adherence to the CIS Model’s focus on strong site coordination, needs assessments, individual service plans, and effective prevention and intervention strategies.

## Key Components of the CIS Model in Bell and Coryell Counties

- **Site Coordinators:** A full-time staff of 64 provides targeted case management services to approximately 8,000 students.
- **Community, School and Student Assessments:** Staff uses state- and school-level data to design customized services. Schools and public service agencies refer students to CIS for evaluation.
- **Service Plan:** Unique student service plans use as much information as possible about each student to guide CIS services.
- **Effective Prevention and Intervention Strategies:** Targeted case management services address comprehensive needs, including those related to behavior, academic performance, attendance, family composition, welfare and nutrition benefits received, and living conditions.
- **Evaluation and Refinement:** Site coordinators monitor each child to make sure service plans are implemented and effectively addresses the student’s needs. Staff carefully document CIS services in order to evaluate and refine services.

# Organizing Services by the CIS Model

**“Research indicates that kids drop out of school because no one really cares. We give them a responsible adult who not only cares but has made it his or her mission to guarantee a child’s success.”**

**Mary Barr, Executive Director, CIS of Bell and Coryell Counties**

The heart and soul of this local affiliate is its ability to implement strategies in accordance with the CIS Model for targeted and sustained individual case management services. CIS of Bell-Coryell case managed more than 8,000 students in 72 sites in the 2007–2008 school year, of which 3,000 were military-related. These individual student services are complemented by a variety of school-wide services, including student and parent support groups that help participants connect with others facing similar challenges, such as having a deployed family member or experiences with divorce and death. There are also individual support sessions to help teach students coping and emotional management skills they might need to persevere through challenging situations.

Military-related students received 120,376 services totaling 82,208 hours of support. “The communities served have many families struggling for a variety of reasons, one of which is the war in Iraq,” said Executive Director Mary Barr, who has led the affiliate for 10 years. “I have observed an influx of young service men and women into the Army, which sometimes creates difficulties when they are expected to make mature decisions in regards to themselves or their families. Some are not prepared for the harsh reality of deployment and their families are left in need of support.”

The combination of emotional and academic support has benefited students served by CIS. In 2006-2007, 81 percent of students tracked for academic performance showed improvement, and 77 percent of the students tracked for promotion risk were promoted to the next grade.

To get to these results, the staff of CIS of Bell-Coryell works on a referral basis to identify students in need of CIS services. CIS then reviews data from both the Texas Education Agency and the students’ school when designing a case management approach to meet an individual student’s needs. CIS needs to know as much information as possible about each

## Putting Strategies Into Practice

CIS of Bell and Coryell Counties board member Cyd West shared how CIS site coordinators affect the lives of students and families and result in social and academic success:

“I know a teacher who the previous year had a child in her sixth grade reading lab who was a happy, engaged young man. This year, she had the same child in a seventh grade Texas history class and noticed that he was sleeping and missing school, his clothes were unkempt and he demonstrated a lack of interest in school.

“After a tearful talk with him, she found that he and his uncle with whom he lived had been evicted from their home and were sleeping at various places with anyone who would let them sleep on the couch or the floor. On the nights that they stayed across town, the child had no transportation to school. To add to the student’s overwhelming shame of the eviction, he had the additional hardships of having no place to do laundry or cook a meal. The teacher took him to speak with the CIS site coordinator who, within two weeks, had helped connect the uncle with social services so that he could be provided shelter on a bus route to the school, groceries from the local food bank and vouchers from a nearby laundry. The child’s attitude and grades immediately improved and with some tutoring help he was able to get his year back on track.”

student—including behavior, academic performance, attendance, family composition, welfare and nutrition benefits received, and living conditions. CIS of Bell-Coryell has been granted access to the database of the largest school district it serves, a sign of a strong partnership and belief in the impact of CIS services.

After considering the data, CIS staff creates a unique Student Service Plan. The staff monitors each child throughout the school year to make sure the plan is implemented and effectively addresses the student’s needs. Each site coordinator manages a caseload of about 100 children per academic year. As part of the effort to evaluate and refine services the staff is committed to carefully documenting its services.

Barr does not see much of her site coordinators because they are heavily immersed in the school sites. Her staff reports to their respective campuses each morning, works the same hours as teachers and provides extensive services to their students. Staff members are viewed as part of the school team, as evidenced in Ellison High School, a High Implementer site of the CIS Model that incorporates all aspects of the Model to a moderate or high degree. Here, the court system orders students with truancy issues to connect with CIS. At another High Implementing site, Belton Junior High School, collaboration with the school district resulted in CIS being part of the district’s operational plan. The results of case management and site coordinators’ efforts are evident, data show that CIS students in Bell and Coryell Counties are succeeding at higher rates in the areas of graduation rates, attendance, academic performance and positive behavior than students in similar situations who are not receiving CIS services.

[www.cis-bell-coryell.org](http://www.cis-bell-coryell.org)



## Communities In Schools of Wayne County, Indiana



In 2001, leaders in Wayne County, Indiana, saw that a program to interest students in attending college—despite the offer of tuition payments—wasn't having an impact. At the same time, the Wayne County Foundation was funded to provide a planning grant to examine educational challenges in the community. Community conversations were emerging about how the community could work collaboratively to improve education. The time was ripe for a leader to emerge and coordinate available resources into targeted interventions in this fairly rural community.

CIS of Wayne County emerged as this community leader, where it has established itself as an anchor. Today, it is building its cadre of site coordinators to bring more services into schools to help students graduate.

### Key Components of the CIS Model in Wayne County

- **Site Coordinators:** Fourteen full-time and 10 part-time staff provide targeted case management services to 525 students.
- **Community, School and Student Assessments:** CIS uses local School Improvement Plans and school community interviews to identify school-wide needs for each school site.
- **Service Plan:** Service plans are targeted for individual students who have problems with attendance and behavior, are behind academically based on standardized test scores in math or literacy, or who have been identified with family management issues. CIS offers case management services to provide long-term sustained interventions leading to success.
- **Effective Prevention and Intervention Strategies:** CIS coordinates mental health services, social skills support, substance abuse education and interventions, and afterschool activities, as well as provides case management services.
- **Evaluation and Refinement:** CIS staff tracked student data and found that CIS services kept students in school who were at risk of dropping out, reduced suspensions and improved behavior. CIS added more site coordinators to help more students achieve these results.

# Organizing Services by the CIS Model

**The CIS site coordinator brings together disconnected community resources to best meet individual students' assessed needs. "It is my job to ensure that the coordinators serving the schools in Wayne County are well received in the schools, and have clear and measurable goals."**

**Vivian Ashmawi,  
Executive Director,  
CIS of Wayne County**

CIS of Wayne County recognizes where it has come from and where it's going. Through its targeted and sustained school-wide services, CIS has offered effective prevention and intervention strategies that include a peer-tutoring program, a tobacco use prevention program and work with the local Boys and Girls Club to create an alternative program to school suspension. The affiliate has focused on increasing community support in the schools, particularly by getting parents involved with students' learning.

In an effort to expand its targeted and sustained individual services, or case management, the affiliate began growing in fall 2008 from one full-time staff member and 17 part-time staff to three full-time program administrators, 14 full-time site coordinators and 10 part-time site coordinators. This expansion is due to Richmond Community Schools' receipt of a \$1.5 million federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative from a partnership between the U.S. Departments of Education; Health and Human Services; and Justice, the application for which CIS of Wayne County helped to develop. The grant, of which CIS of Wayne County will receive \$300,000, significantly increases CIS site coordinators' hours in the schools and other services that CIS will coordinate. As a result, case management services and the presence of strong site coordinators will be bolstered.

Executive Director Vivian Ashmawi recognizes that the CIS Model is at the core of changing the dropout problem in her community. "Our early success was due to being able to meet the individual needs of schools across multiple districts by focusing on the area that each school saw as a priority. We've built good working relationships with the schools—they trust us. With the CIS National Evaluation\* behind us, we can now move toward case management services that provide more students with long-term sustained interventions—leading to more students staying in school and graduating high school on time."

The outcomes that CIS of Wayne County has helped produce include keeping in school 83 percent of students tracked for leaving school. Other outcomes include reduced suspensions and improved behavior. Not only did Wayne County keep kids in school, but it also helped graduate 83 percent of eligible seniors—no small task for an affiliate less than 10 years old. It is clear that CIS of Wayne County holds at its core the commitment to the CIS Model. The dedication to expanding services based on the Model will help students continue to succeed in this community.

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

\*CIS is engaged in a five-year external evaluation of its effectiveness. The study, which is being conducted by ICF International, is now at its mid-point, and shows promising initial outcomes. For more information go to [www.cisnet.org/about/NationalEvaluation/Normal.asp](http://www.cisnet.org/about/NationalEvaluation/Normal.asp).



Communities In Schools National Office  
277 South Washington Street • Suite 210  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
703-519-8999  
[www.cisnet.org](http://www.cisnet.org)