



COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS NATIONAL REPORT

# *COMMUNITY MATTERS*

FOCUS ON COVID-19,  
INEQUITIES, AND  
REENGAGING STUDENTS  
IN LEARNING



# MORE THAN 50 MILLION STUDENTS EXPERIENCED A DISRUPTION IN LEARNING\*



\*Council of Chief State School Officers, CCSSO. COVID-19 Response, Phase 2 Restart & Recovery

Photo: Getty Images  
Cover photo: Communities In Schools of Glynn County student Amber



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Since last March, due to COVID-19, millions of students and their families experienced levels of instability, disruption, and stress beyond what any of us could have imagined when the prior school year began.

More than 50 million K-12 students abruptly lost access to their schools, teachers, and classmates. Remote learning via Zoom sessions became standard educational practice. Unemployment reached a level not seen since data collection started in 1948.<sup>1</sup> Local businesses that were fixtures in the community for years were forced to close. Mental health care ER visits by young people increased 25 percent as levels of anxiety, stress, and loneliness grew.<sup>2</sup>

This report presents a summary of a truly extraordinary year of challenge and response. The pandemic thrust educators, students, families, and communities into a set of unprecedented circumstances. Many responded with exceptional dedication, creativity, and perseverance. But existing systemic inequities in K-12 public education meant that Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and students living in poverty were disproportionately impacted. Research suggests these students are now six to twelve months behind in learning compared with four to eight months for white students.<sup>3</sup>

For Communities In Schools (CIS™), our response in 2,900 schools and communities across the country also featured moments of exceptional creativity, skill, and dedication. But every moment was firmly rooted in the approach we've taken for more than 40 years — surround students with support from a community of caring adults.

COVID-19 reminded us of the critical role the K-12 public school system plays in our lives. And it showed us more clearly than ever before, that an evidence-based model of integrated student supports (ISS) is essential to that role. **#AllinforKids**

**Rey Saldaña**  
President & CEO

<sup>1</sup> Unemployment Rates during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Congressional Research Service, January 12, 2021

<sup>2</sup> CDC - Mental Health-Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January 1–October 17, 2020  
November 13, 2020

<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 and Learning Loss - Disparities grow and students need help. McKinsey, December 8, 2020

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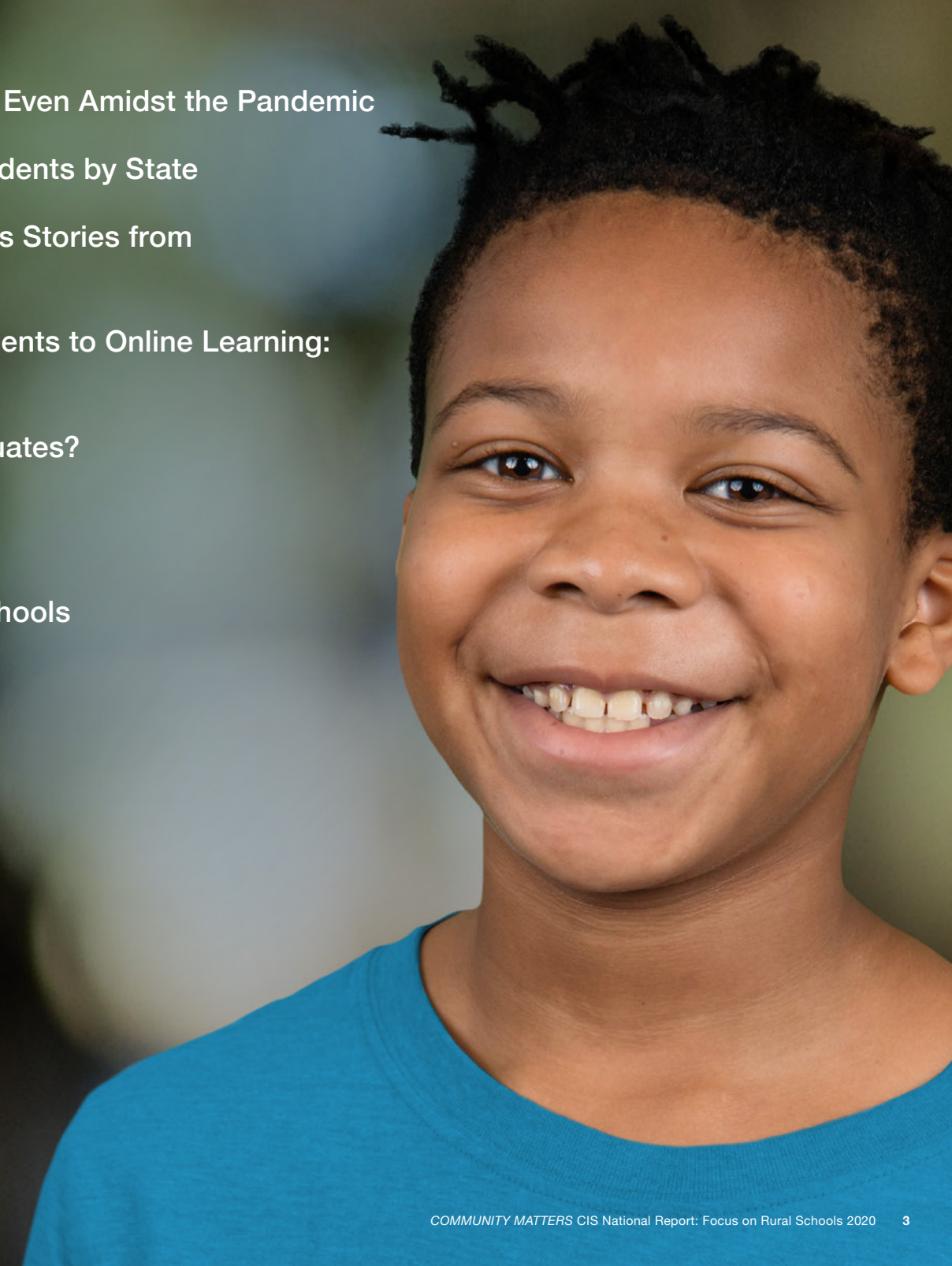
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# ISSUE OVERVIEW

## UNPRECEDENTED DISRUPTION. INEQUITABLE IMPACT.

“... we quickly had to become an internet service provider ... partner with our local public health authority for guidance, and learn what kind of air filters our school buildings needed and what they have installed.”<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Danna Diaz, Superintendent, Reynolds School District, Oregon

<sup>4</sup>What has COVID-19 taught us about the digital and opportunity divides in America's schools? Brookings Institute, November 9, 2020

In Spring 2020, COVID-19 completely changed what “a day at school” meant for more than 50 million students and their teachers, parents, and communities. Educators were faced with the seemingly impossible task of providing effective environments for learning while managing health risks and shifting to remote learning—with little to no reliable guidance on either.

While all students experienced extraordinary disruption, the negative impacts were more severe for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and students living in poverty. COVID-19 quickly exposed existing inequities in our education system and compounded their effects.

### Lack of Viable Options

For many families of lower income and of color, schools serve an essential, holistic role, and are often the only source for supports such as meals, mental health counseling, and childcare. As schools were disrupted by COVID-19, these families lacked the options available to their more affluent peers, including home schooling, learning pods, private tutors, and private school enrollment.

### Less Online Access

Broadband is the most inequitable infrastructure in the US.<sup>5</sup> Research consistently shows those least likely to have broadband in America are communities of color and low-income.<sup>6</sup> When schools shifted to remote learning, many of these students were effectively shut out — forced to find internet access at places such as local fast food outlets or school parking lots to do their schoolwork.

### Race and Broadband Access



### Poverty Rate and Broadband Access

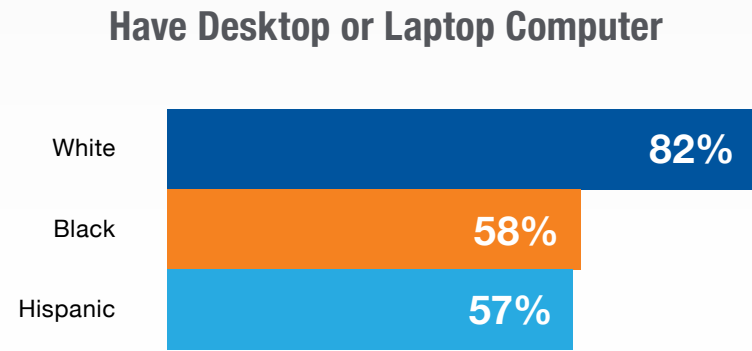


<sup>5</sup>Digital Prosperity. How broadband can deliver health and equity to all communities. Brookings Institute, February 27, 2020

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

### Fewer Devices Owned

White families are 41 percent more likely to own a desktop or laptop computer than their Black or Hispanic peers. Approximately 25 percent of Hispanic and Black families are “smartphone only” internet users (no home broadband service but own a smartphone) versus 12 percent of White families.<sup>7</sup>

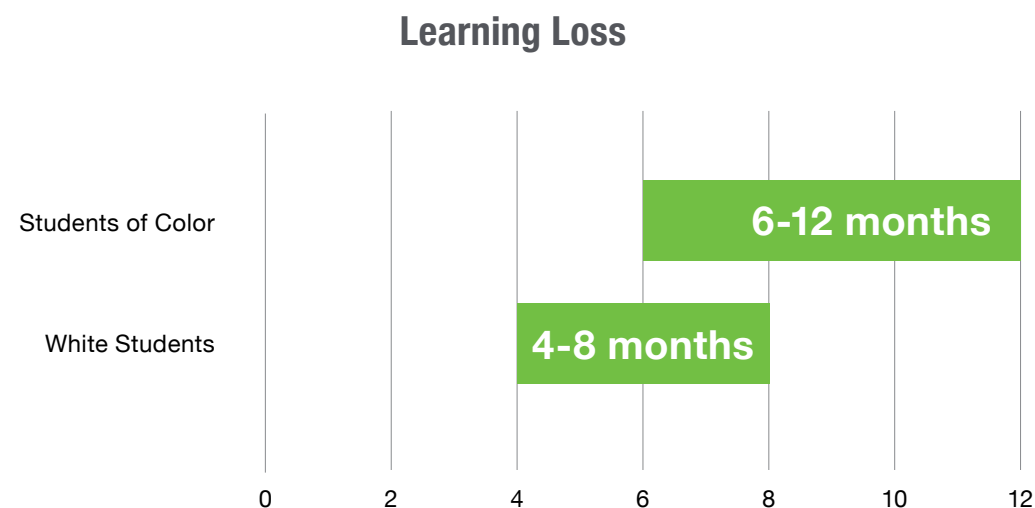


### Higher Truancy, Lower Quality of Learning

Access to the internet and devices is essential, but not enough. Students must be physically and emotionally able to learn. Here again, students from low income communities fared worse than their peers. Nearly 33 percent of students from districts that serve low income students were not participating in remote learning—essentially truant—compared with 12 percent in more affluent districts.<sup>8</sup>

### Learning Loss: Further Behind

Students who came into the pandemic with the fewest academic opportunities are projected to suffer the greatest learning loss. One study’s findings suggest that by the end of June 2021, students of color could be six to 12 months behind, compared with four to eight months for white students.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>7</sup>Pew Research: Smartphones help Blacks, Hispanics bridge some not all digital gap with whites, August 2019  
<sup>8</sup>10 Key Findings: Impact of Coronavirus on Schools, Education Week, April 2020  
<sup>9</sup>COVID-19 and Learning Loss - Disparities grow and students need help. McKinsey, December 8, 2020

## A Critical Moment to Confront Systemic Inequities and Reengage All Students

For a brief moment in the early days of the pandemic’s disruption of schools, every parent in the US was in the same situation—urgently seeking a safe, effective way to educate their children, and forced to choose from a set of insufficient options that conflicted with work and daily life and were inadequate and unreliable. For many, this was a new and sudden reality. But for Black, Brown, and Indigenous parents and parents who live in poverty, this was neither new nor sudden.

That moment of genuine, common experience did not last. More affluent families soon had access to more and better learning options, like learning pods, home schooling, and private schools, while less affluent families and many families of color were often confronted with impossible choices of continuing to work and risk their health to pay the bills while their children were left at home to navigate remote learning alone or stay home and struggle to meet their families’ basic needs. At Communities In Schools, we believe we have an obligation to call out these disparities and use this as a turning point in our work to confront long-standing systemic inequities in our schools and establish a new framework for ensuring equitable learning conditions for all students.

“COVID-19 has resulted in at least one positive thing: a much greater appreciation for the importance of public schools. It is hard to imagine there will be another moment in history when the central role of education in the economic, social, and political prosperity and stability of nations is so obvious and well understood by the general population.”<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup>Beyond Re-opening Schools: How education can re-emerge stronger than before COVID-19: Brookings Institute: Sept. 8, 2020

Photo: Communities In Schools of North Carolina students Jacklyn, Nazir, Isiah, and Ledarius

## Inequities Remain

Reengaging with the most vulnerable students must address the reality of ineffective learning environments.

Black and Hispanic students are **40 percent more likely** to be learning remotely than white students.<sup>11</sup>

Black and Hispanic households are **three to four percentage points less likely** than white households to have reliable access to devices and three to six percentage points less likely to have reliable access to the internet.<sup>12</sup>

## A Framework: Equitable Conditions for Learning

Ensuring equitable conditions for learning requires placing students at the center and surrounding them with a caring community that provides the support each individual student needs to overcome their particular academic and non-academic obstacles and empowers them to achieve their own success.

This framework must account for and effectively address the adverse impacts of poverty on learning and the systemic inequities for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students in education. In addition, establishing and maintaining conditions for equitable learning requires new thinking and approaches in areas including providing sufficient funding, identifying and securing a wider range of student supports focused on the whole child, and coordinating programs and practices to deliver those supports. It also requires commitment from school leaders and meaningful opportunities for community and family engagement in the education process.

### Factors Influencing Equitable Learning Conditions

- 1 Social-Emotional Well-Being**  
Student, family, and school staff social-emotional needs and well-being are met.
- 2 Learning Environment**  
School environment (physical or virtual) is engaging and conducive to learning.
- 3 Individualized Support**  
Barriers to academic success for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and students living in poverty are addressed.

### ← Success Criteria →

<b>Leadership</b> Commitment to active and transparent school climate initiatives.	<b>Curriculum &amp; Instruction</b> Infusion of culturally responsive learning and social-emotional competency development.	<b>Whole-Child Supports</b> Non-academic needs of students and families are addressed.	<b>Community &amp; Family Engagement</b> Integration of community and family voice and supports in school and environment.
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At Communities In Schools, we are committed to working with educators to do our part in creating more equitable learning conditions for all students, recognizing that without this change, reengagement in learning, especially for our Black, Brown, Indigenous, and students living in poverty will remain a challenge.

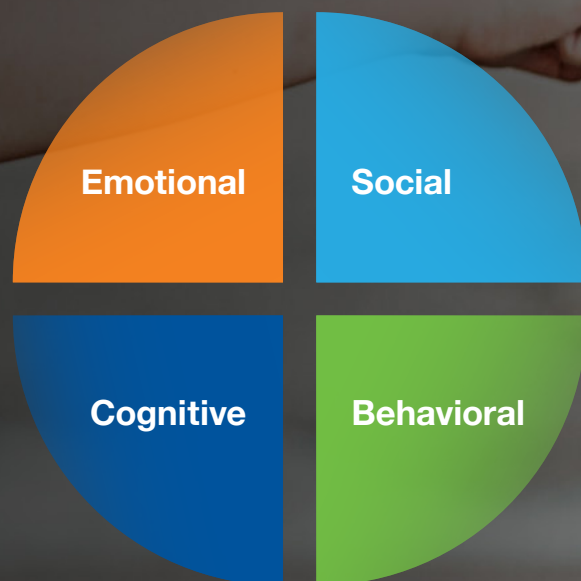
<sup>11</sup> COVID-19 and Learning Loss - Disparities grow and students need help. McKinsey, December 8, 2020  
<sup>12</sup> COVID-19 and Learning Loss - Disparities grow and students need help. McKinsey, December 8, 2020

# COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

## ALL IN FOR REENGAGING STUDENTS IN LEARNING

While the country is focused on how to safely reopen school buildings, we cannot underestimate the impact of the past year on students' learning. Learning is affected by students' own unique combinations of motivation, skills, needs, and life and learning situations, as well as by the supports they receive from their family, community, and school. For these reasons, getting students in the building is a necessary but not sufficient step to reengagement. If students are not socially, emotionally, and cognitively engaged, learning will not happen. And at a time when we are concerned about the learning gap exacerbated by the pandemic, we also must focus on addressing the engagement gap. This includes understanding barriers to engagement and working to remove those now, while also recognizing that if conditions for learning are not experienced as equitable for all students, our successes in engagement will be short lived. This moment requires rigorous attention to breaking down barriers to equitable learning that existed before—and have been exacerbated by—the pandemic. Equitable conditions for learning must place students at the center of a network of caring, trained adults inside schools and at home. CIS is working at the forefront of these efforts.

### Dimensions of Engagement



Positive and negative feelings about school and learning

**Emotional**

**Social**

Relationships with teachers, other adults in the school, and peers; school belonging or connectedness

Self-regulated learning, perceived relevance of schoolwork, use of deep learning strategies, motivation, and exerting cognitive strategies for the comprehension of complex ideas

**Cognitive**

**Behavioral**

School-related conduct, involvement in learning, attendance, participation in school-related activities

## Our Community-Based Approach

### Helping Reengage Students and Creating Equitable Learning Conditions for All

As the nation's leading provider of integrated student supports, Communities In Schools is uniquely positioned to assist in reengaging students in their learning while also working with school leaders and personnel to create equitable learning environments for all students. This is possible because of our evidence-based model driven by a local needs assessment, school-wide planning, individualized case management, and the delivery of tiered supports focused on the whole child. By remaining flexible to the different learning environments, we have been able to stay connected to students and families and help them gain access to the supports they need to begin recovering from the pandemic and reengage in learning.



- CIS AFFILIATES
- SITE COORDINATORS
- COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS



## Starting with the Basics

In the immediate wake of school building closures and community response to the mounting pandemic, CIS affiliates understood the most critical needs in their communities centered around basic needs for food, shelter, and safety. And because schools were often the source of support for many of these needs for families and students, the disruption also brought with it emotional distress and frustration. Over time, many students and families also experienced grief from the loss of loved ones, or varying levels of anxiety and trauma due to economic hardship, racial injustice, protests, and other factors. In short, many of the adults and youth who have lived through these experiences are returning to school still in need of basic needs and more.

In CIS of Central Texas, the local affiliate saw spending upwards of \$1M or 15X the pre-pandemic expenses allocated for basic needs. This came in the form of more direct supports to families with groceries, utilities, transportation, purchases of laptops and wifi hot spot devices, and additional supports during the summer months. Case management of students quickly expanded to case management of families, as evident by a 32 percent increase in family supports across the CIS network.

While recovery is a top priority for our communities and the CIS network, the COVID-19 crisis has emphasized the need to go beyond the basics to address additional problems that families encounter. For example, when a parent is too sick to work and the other parent is focused on working to bring in income and taking care of the sick parent, that situation will affect the child's ability to be successful in school. When a single parent is too sick to work, it can lead to the loss of a job and income and render them unable to care for their children. When financial hardship results in a family's losing their home, staying with relatives, or worst of all, becoming homeless, it will affect the child's ability to have private space to focus on their schoolwork. This is why getting students reengaged with learning is about more than just getting them to show up in person or log in to a computer. We need to address their fundamental needs and those of their families before we can get to math and science—we must “Maslow before we can Bloom.”

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Need**

- Self-actualization**  
desire to become the most that one can be
- Esteem**  
respect, self-esteem, recognition, strength, freedom
- Love and Belonging**  
friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection
- Safety Needs**  
personal security, employment, resources, health, property
- Physiological Needs**  
air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction

Photo: Communities In Schools of North Carolina student Isiah

## Partnering with the CIS Network to Reengage Students and Families

### Approach to Reengagement

For CIS, reengagement involves a set of activities and initiatives to increase students' and families' interests, passions, and relationships in the service of promoting equitable learning conditions both inside and outside of school. The focus of these activities is reconnecting with students, supporting student and family recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and school building closures, and addressing long-standing, and now exacerbated, inequities in our education system that impact a student's opportunity for academic success and achievement. CIS affiliates are continuing to do what we do best while expanding and deepening our work to support equitable learning conditions in schools. For the 2020-2021 school year, CIS national is partnering with 12 affiliates to highlight and support intentional and sustainable transformation within our schools through reengagement activities and initiatives.

Reconnect with Students and Families	Support Recovery	Reengage with the Learning Environment
Check-in with students	Assess student AND family needs	Support school staff well-being
Understand, recognize and empathize with recent experience	Coordinate and deploy basic needs resources	Coordinate school climate initiatives
Build strong, trusting relationships	Address urgent mental health and well-being needs	Monitor and address the social and emotional well-being of students
Monitor Reengagement		
Include student and family voice in reengagement activities	Collect relevant reengagement data	Assess engagement levels over time

Prioritizing student engagement will become the critical driver of cultivating more equitable school climates this school year and beyond. We know that with children and youth, as with people of all ages, one approach does not work for all; we cannot assume to know how students are returning to school and whether they have had positive or negative experiences during the past year or more. As school systems try to maximize learning during and after the pandemic and to reengage the school community, understanding and accommodating the individualities of the youth they serve will be even more essential than before the pandemic.

CIS launched the Reengagement Initiative to demonstrate how we can change the way education happens inside of the school and how creating equitable conditions for learning can lead to systemic change and foster sustained student engagement. We will support and exhibit where and how CIS and integrated student supports plays an essential role in this process. This partnership is intended to capture the work of local CIS affiliates to highlight the importance of integrated student supports in creating equitable conditions for learning for all students.





Photo: Communities In Schools of San Antonio Site Coordinator Anissa Cortez

### Getting to Equitable Conditions for Learning and Sustained Engagement

The CIS reengagement efforts center on continuing to deliver the CIS model of integrated student supports while enhancing our approaches in schools and communities to affect system change within a given school and/or district. This requires us to move from integrated student supports as a program within a school to being part of how education and learning happens. This system-level approach is necessary to create equitable conditions for learning so that all students have access to the resources and supports they need to achieve academically and to help create school climates and cultures in which students feel safe, regardless of race, zip code or historical marginalization, and students can learn within an equitable school climate.

Equitable conditions for learning must place students at the center of a network of caring, trained adults inside schools and at home. The nation’s state education chiefs have released guidance that focuses on this as a core principle of reopening schools: “Organize people, time, and technology to include increased support in the areas of learning recovery, relationships, and social-emotional support.”<sup>13</sup> Physiological needs must be met, AND we must attend to safety needs related to the coronavirus and fears of infection, AND schools must have the people, policies, and practices needed to instill a sense of belonging. Only in this way will schools reengage with students and keep them on track academically.

The goal must be to ensure equitable conditions for learning in all schools. This work must consider the adverse impacts of poverty on learning, confront historical inequities for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students, and meet the purpose of establishing long-term conditions for equitable learning. An equitable learning environment operates within a school climate model that integrates the ways in which parents and families, teachers, community partners, and non-instruction staff work together to support students.

The coming together of leadership, curriculum and instruction, whole child supports, and community and family engagement integrates supports and services including academic instruction, social emotional learning and caring relationships, mental health and trauma-informed care, and engagement and inclusion in service of the needs of all students. In turn, these supports will foster equitable conditions for learning that must be part of a positive school climate. Communities In Schools is playing a role in these critical areas.

### Family and Community Engagement

Outside of the school building itself, many parents, guardians, and caretakers struggle to maintain active engagement in their child’s education while navigating the economic and health challenges resulting from the pandemic. Parent and family engagement is critical to both ensuring a positive school climate and addressing the wide-ranging sets of needs our students have when re-entering school. Supports for students, especially in the wake of the pandemic, must also extend into the home with structured and intentional family supports. This includes equipping parents, guardians, and caretakers with the necessary information to make decisions for their child in support of their learning and academic success. Additionally, creating space within the school environment where parents and families have opportunity to express concerns, support student engagement and lift their voices will be critical to ensuring a coordinated, community-wide effort to tackle the many challenges within the education arena, from learning access to equitable student outcomes.

<sup>13</sup>Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching & Learning Overview, CCSSO

### ★ Affiliate Spotlight: CIS of the Midlands, South Carolina

CIS of the Midlands in Columbia, South Carolina has introduced the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) for Middle School families to decrease emotional and social challenges in children and teens. The Triple P is an evidence-based program used by Site Coordinators to increase engagement with parents across the CIS Midlands Network. Site Coordinators are trained in Triple P and earn certification as Triple P Certified Facilitators. The program aims to prevent problems in the family, school, and community before they arise and to create family environments that encourage children to realize their potential. A total of 30 parents at Pine Ridge Middle School will participate in the program over a period of eight weeks. Parenting workshops are held both virtually and in-person, and draw on social learning, cognitive behavioral and developmental theory, as well as research into risk factors associated with the development of social and behavioral problems in children. It aims to equip parents with the skills and confidence they need to be self-sufficient and manage family issues without ongoing support.



Photo: Communities In Schools of the Midlands Site Coordinator Beth Strickland

### ★ Affiliate Spotlight: CIS of Houston

CIS of Houston is addressing barriers to engagement among “newcomers” in the Spring Branch Independent School District (ISD). The newcomer’s cohort is made up of students and families who have recently come to the US and need integrated support services. Through partnership with Spring Branch ISD, CIS of Houston’s Newcomer Mental Health Specialist is available to work across campuses to address the varied and complex needs of Newcomer students and/or their families. CIS staff work in conjunction with district staff, and teachers to foster multiple strong relationships with students and families, and enhance their sense of belonging and community. CIS provides opportunities for Newcomer students and their families to understand the processes and protocols of the American education system and norms of American culture. Supportive counseling (both grief and trauma-informed) provides an avenue to address multiple complex issues that often impact mental health and well-being of Newcomer students, while home visits and regular primary guardian-teacher-student conferences serve to strengthen connections between home and campus community.



Photo: Communities In Schools of San Antonio Site Coordinator Roxanna Perez

### Supporting the Whole Child

Throughout the CIS network, site coordinators have adapted and responded to living under various health restrictions with a renewed focus on building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships with students and families. While still relying on evidence-based practices, local affiliates have adapted delivery methods and applied the same personalized care and “whatever it takes” approach to integrating resources into school and family life. Using digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, and Facebook, site coordinators established critical “check-ins” to ensure students are healthy and safe. CIS was also able to support teachers during virtual instruction to identify disengaged students and conduct follow-up on a one-on-one basis to identify any engagement barriers.

The components of reengagement require integration among all the stakeholders and actors who surround and support students. Whether in-person, online, or through a hybrid form of blended learning, CIS has the experience to broker services and supports in school and at home that address the needs of the whole child.

### ★ Affiliate Spotlight: CIS of Ohio

CIS of Ohio uses the Hope for the Wounded program to bring relevant and timely information to affiliate staff, and to identify ways to bring that understanding to students and partner schools. CIS of Ohio provides regular and sustained support of a master’s level social worker as a trainer and available resource to all staff navigating how to process student concerns and trauma that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the increased awareness of racial tension and existing inequities in our education system. Individuals are readily available to connect with teachers and school leadership seeking information and expertise in the areas of trauma, equity and inclusion, and COVID-related challenges and the impact on mental health.

The goal of this effort is to provide a catalyst for increasing the social-emotional knowledge and capacity of affiliate staff by providing an accessible resource to support their mental health and well-being, allowing them to then be able to carry that forward to their schools and students in order to see increased mental health supports and social-emotional awareness begin to bring about systemic change in our schools and district partnerships.

### Working with School and District Leadership to Affect System Change

The CIS model of integrated student supports is an important tool for district and school leaders concerned with achievement gaps, attendance, behavior, and overall student well-being. Indeed, the model remains applicable—perhaps even more so—in the current situation. With enhancements tailored to the specific needs of a disengaged population of students returning to disrupted school environments, the work of CIS is proving even more valuable to schools and districts seeking the best possible outcomes for all students. As demonstrated during the recent period of school building closures, integrated student supports can be adapted to in-person, online, and hybrid education models. As schools focus on mitigating infection, accelerating academic gains, and addressing new levels of anxiety and trauma, relationships and social-emotional competencies will remain key ingredients in the overall conditions for student success.

### ★ Affiliate Spotlight: CIS of Eastern Pennsylvania

CIS of Eastern Pennsylvania delivers Restorative Practices (RP) trainings to Allentown School District (ASD) through the Communities In Schools integrated student supports model. The model serves as a framework for delivering and modeling the practices as it serves students and families. Out-of-school leadership staff have the responsibility for training leaders at the school district and leading RP implementation efforts in each school site. The CIS in-school staff serving in the ASD have received eight hours of basic and advanced training in RP including Circles Training. The purpose of this training is to address disparities in discipline through the creation of a positive school climate and culture through justice and equity. CIS is overseeing the district-wide implementation of RP which includes 22 school sites and 17,000 students. For the 2021-22 school year, CIS of Eastern Pennsylvania hopes to expand the training to community leaders and parents to deliver RP.

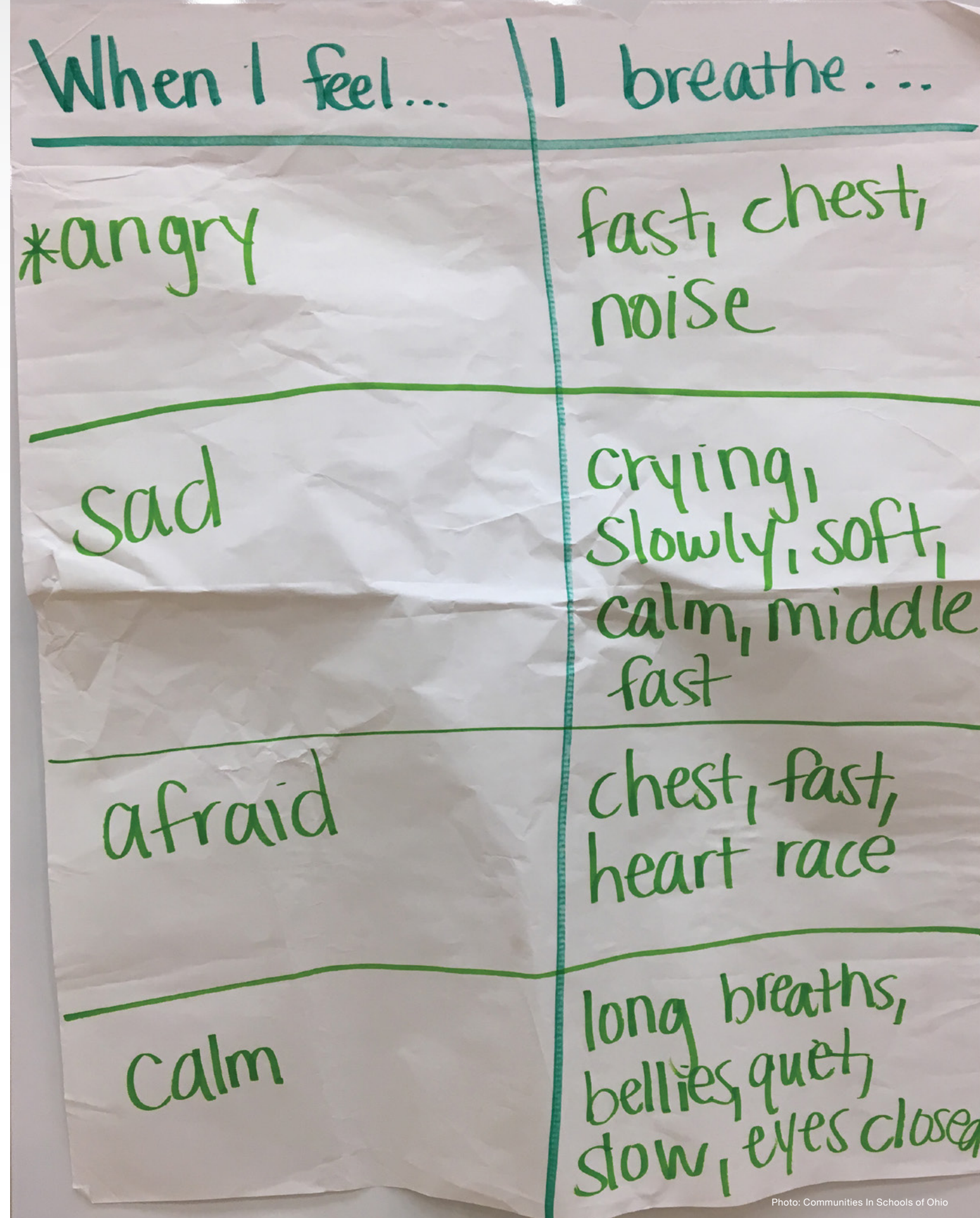


Photo: Communities In Schools of Ohio

## Grounding Our Actions in Research

To help us better understand the impact of the pandemic on schools and on the engagement of students in their learning, Communities In Schools asked our friend David Osher, Vice President and Institute Fellow at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to share his perspective and experiences.



**David Osher**, Vice President and Institute Fellow at AIR

**Q As a researcher, what are your observations regarding what is happening in our schools since the pandemic?**

**A** When we think about schools, there are three components: the institution, the staff and the students and families. All three have been profoundly affected.

At the Institutional level, there are pressures to meet the needs of adults and students who are at an extraordinary level of need

and risk. These individuals may not be physically present, and if they are, there is a new array of issues, including physical safety from health risks and dealing with the psychological effects of having to be in a place that may not be safe.

For the staff members interacting with students, the challenges in meeting the emotional and cognitive needs of students, which have always been great, are now exacerbated in two ways. First, the level of need is greater. Second, the pressures these educators face as human beings, in their own lives, are also affecting them in new ways. For example, a teacher working out of her kitchen, while surrounded by her own kids and family, is also trying to reach out and engage her students, as well as be responsive to parents. And those parents are trying to give their support but have to do it at times that work for them. The boundaries that teachers used to be able to somewhat sustain have become more porous, which is highly stressful and affects behavior.

The students are just in a different place; in terms of their capacity, their readiness to learn and participate. This is due to their physical location — where they are and what that place means for how they interact. Some places are giving students at least the opportunity for an interaction; other places are just posting assignments for students. Students are also in a different place regarding emotional needs. Their needs and the needs of the people surrounding them are much greater and more profound.

**Q How are students of color and students living in poverty being impacted and why?**

**A** People living at poverty levels have been powerfully impacted across their entire lives. Start with the fact that people living in poverty are more vulnerable. When living in poverty, you're dealing with more than the stresses of survival; you're also dealing with stresses of racism and ethnocentrism. It's your lived experience, moment by moment, and that takes a physical toll which makes you more vulnerable — before any pandemic.

Then, let's look at where people live. We know that living in certain places puts you at greater risk and limits access to the things you need to be safe and healthy.

Now, consider both of these in terms of what family members have had to do to survive economically during the pandemic. To remain employed, they may not have the option to work from home. Instead, they go into work every day in places where employers may not be as sensitive to health risks. So, these families, who came into this pandemic already more vulnerable, now have to face a disease that is transmitted socially. This has resulted in disproportionate impacts in mortality and morbidity, but also in the grieving and emotional impacts of the pandemic.

Also, having a political consciousness that is racial or ethnic-related can be supportive. But it can also be very painful for many people, in that they saw it coming and it's still coming. That creates additional levels of stress.

**Q What about the impact on the schools that are trying to meet the needs of those students and families living in poverty?**

**A** The young people who came into this pandemic with a greater level of need are the same young people more likely to be attending schools that are not resourced sufficiently to meet a greater level of need, physically or emotionally. These schools have devoted a disproportionate amount of resources toward control — things related to managing students' behavior. Resources have not gone toward academic or social and emotional support. This did not put these schools in a strong position when the pandemic arrived.

The schools that worked beforehand to meet the needs of the whole child and were already reaching out to students and families have been able to use the same resources to stay connected during the pandemic. But, most still don't have the funds or resources needed to really do this well. At best, they bootstrapped what they have. That's better, but not sufficient — and that's one of the reasons why CIS is important. It is an additive support to these schools.

**Q You and your colleagues at AIR have been working with CIS since last summer to develop tools and resources in response to the pandemic and the disruption in learning. This work focuses on student engagement. Why engagement? Why is that the critical thing to focus on now?**

**A** We know that people learn in ways that are affected by their motivation and by their emotions. That was the case prior to COVID-19 and it's even more so now. Engagement is key because it's one of the ways emotion and motivation translate into learning. At the same time, being engaged affects one's emotions and motivation. For students, that plays out in positive impacts both in school and in their life following school.

**“In the long term, when one builds on the impacts of engagement, it becomes an enabler, accelerator, and sustainer.”**

CIS was wise in focusing on reengaging students in their learning. It's the right investment of effort because when young people are engaged it helps them learn. We can also learn what's necessary to help them learn more in the future. A student may learn more around the areas they're already engaged in and our research will help us better understand that. For example, let's suppose a student, “Megan” is struggling in some of her work, but is passionate about her music. Knowing this about Megan can help educators see her as more than a rudderless child and provides insights into how best to engage her in other areas, perhaps engaging her in literature through music. It's finding what the late Peter Benson called “the spark.” Finding those vectors is important, and if they're not yet present, we can find ways to ignite them.

In the short term, engagement is both a protector and enabler. In the long term, when one builds on the impacts of engagement, it becomes an enabler, accelerator, and sustainer. To make that more concrete, we need our schools to support the learning and well-being of young people in the short term. But schools also serve a long-term function in our society—to help prepare young people for success over their life course. Schools are not the only ones that do this, but they play a disproportionate role and are one of the only places organized by law to do it for all young people.

**Q As more students are going back into school buildings, what can school districts and organizations like CIS do now and this summer to address the expected learning gaps for so many?**

**A** Back in my high school years, I ran track. One day, I had an opportunity to watch a really good runner. He was running the last mile of a relay race where he was one lap behind. Yet, he was still able to run a brilliant leg to win the race. He didn't try to make up the gap on his first lap. Instead he gradually gained ground over time and won the race.

It's a good metaphor for the gaps students now face. We are in the first lap. We need to reengage students and should not try to force learning when students are not cognitively or emotionally ready. Families have lost more than a year to this calamity. Their children have been profoundly lonely and anxious. We should recognize this as a moment when students need time. If we say now is the time to do “drill and kill” work, we will overlook their social and emotional needs. We need this time to reengage in learning, to start to catch up. We're in the first lap and have more laps to run.

**Q What insights have we gained from the pandemic that can help us improve our education system moving forward? What do we need to change?**

**A** We know that every young person experiences learning and life differently — and the pandemic amplified that. So, we need to be more attentive to the individuality of learning—and that means finding ways to help schools be attentive to that individuality. It goes back to the CIS model — the types of schools that receive Title I funds typically do not have the capacity to individualize. It happens only in a remediating way, not in an intentional way that helps engage students socially, emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally in learning. What might come out of the work CIS is doing during the pandemic is to find more ways to help people learn that are supportive and affirming.

## Policy Recommendations: Beyond Restoring Continuity

COVID-19 disrupted the fundamental, daily processes of learning for all students. Communities In Schools supports policy efforts to return students to a safe environment and restore educational continuity and address learning loss.

For Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and students living in poverty, COVID-19 also caused or exacerbated a range of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) including hunger, economic uncertainty, violence at home, and more. Evidence to date suggests COVID-19 will increase both the number of children affected by ACEs and the number of ACEs experienced by students already exposed to them.

Policy must go beyond restoring effective daily processes; it must also prioritize funding and resources for trauma-informed care, social and emotional learning, and technology needs. These resources are essential for the most vulnerable students to have the support they need to create their own pathway back to an effective, daily process of learning.

In March 2021, Congress moved in the right direction by passing the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP). This historic legislation included \$123 billion for K-12 education, including \$800 million in grants to provide homeless children and youth with wraparound services considering the challenges of the pandemic. States are required to set-aside funds from their grants: five percent to address learning loss; one percent for evidence-based, comprehensive afterschool programs; and one percent for evidence-based summer enrichment. At least 90 percent of funds must go to school districts. In addition, at least 20 percent of funds must be used to address learning loss through evidence-based interventions that respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

The ARP presents great opportunity for evidence-based models, such as CIS' model of integrated student supports, to play a critical role in reengaging students in learning. As states, school districts, and schools think through the most impactful way to support students in their learning reengagement and recovery, they should consider using ARP funds to hire reengagement coordinators, or to provide social emotional and other wraparound supports.

Schools alone cannot shoulder the enormous responsibility of addressing the educational and emotional disruptions caused by the pandemic. With ARP funds, schools can partner with community-based nonprofit organizations to reach all students, build back their resiliency, and ensure they are on a path to the future they want.

However, policy cannot end with the ARP. It will take comprehensive federal, state, and school district policy to ensure that the children impacted the most by the pandemic are on a path to recovery.

### Federal

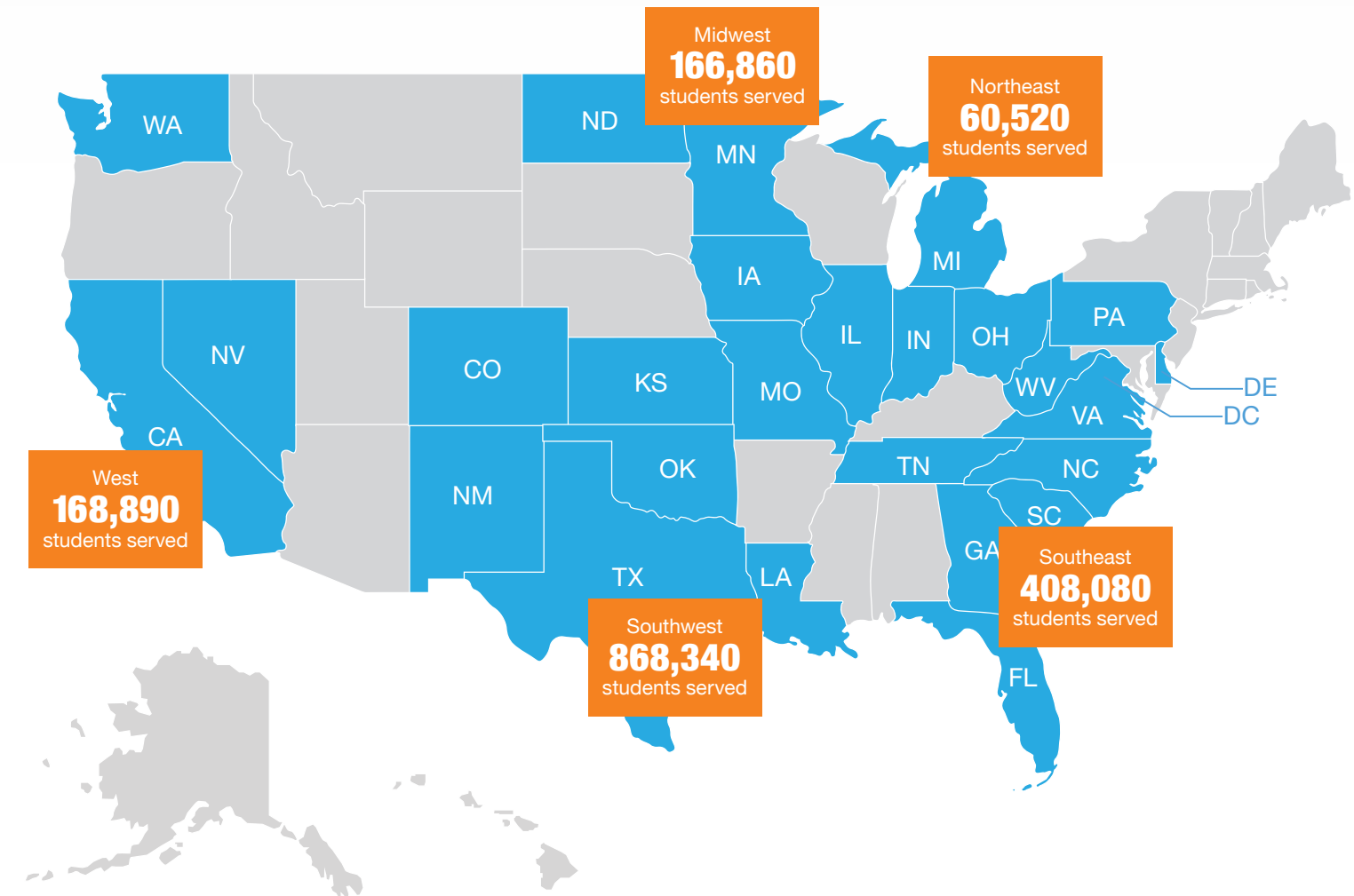
- Pass comprehensive federal wraparound services legislation that funds an on-site coordinator in Title I schools.
- Pass the Full-Service Community Schools Expansion Act.
- Include and fund Section 101 of the bipartisan Resilience Investment, Support, and Expansion (RISE) from Trauma Act (S. 1770/ H.R. 3180).
- Expand connectivity infrastructure and access to high-quality technology, education tools, and opportunities.
  - Increase funding of K-12 school connectivity (e.g. E-Rate Program).

### State and District

- Use federal funds available in both Title II-A and Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to fund trauma-informed care and social-emotional learning professional development for all teachers.
- Leverage Title I of ESSA to fund evidence-based integrated student support models, wrap-around services, and trauma-informed care training.
- Implement a comprehensive needs assessment of emotional and academic levels.

## Our Community Footprint

In 2019-20, Communities In Schools operated in 26 states and the District of Columbia. CIS reached 1.7 million students in 2,900 schools and communities across the country. There are 121 organizations in the CIS Network, including state offices and licensed partners. More than 30,000 volunteers contribute their time, energy, and skills to help provide CIS supports and resources to students and their families. With the devastating impact of COVID-19, CIS experienced a 12 percent increase in the number of students receiving intensive, case-managed supports and a 32 percent increase in the number of families receiving assistance as compared to the previous year.



# OUTCOMES

## OUR STUDENTS CONTINUE TO SUCCEED EVEN AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

In school year 2019-20, the work of CIS site coordinators started off as usual. The work began by identifying and prioritizing the needs of the schools where they were assigned and creating comprehensive plans for addressing those needs that included a combination of tiered supports — whole school, targeted group, and intensive, individualized services. Students were referred to CIS throughout the year and the process of understanding what was interfering with their ability to engage in their learning was underway. Building on student strengths and interests, the site coordinators created support plans for the 165,900 case-managed students and worked with the students to set individualized goals. Monitoring progress and adjusting supports occurred throughout the first half of the school year and then the pandemic hit and school buildings abruptly closed. While the goals for these students didn't change, their priorities and need for supports and how site coordinators would remain connected to and continue to support students did. Through creativity, the adoption of Zoom and Google meets and sharing of online social and emotional well-being resources, students persisted. Across the CIS network, goal achievement was similar or better than in previous years. And despite the disruption, site coordinators were able to keep 96 percent of their case-managed seniors motivated with incentives and encouragement that helped get them a diploma or a GED.

**81%** of Communities In Schools case-managed students met or made progress toward their attendance goals even during a pandemic.

**85%**  
met/made progress toward behavior goal

**88%**  
met/made progress toward academic goal

**88%**  
met/made progress toward social emotional goal

**96%**  
of seniors graduated or obtained a GED

## Our Results for Case-Managed Students by State

Across our network, the closure of school buildings did not stop our site coordinators from supporting students and ensuring they continued to make progress toward their individualized goals. This included making sure our case-managed seniors graduated or obtained their GED. Here is a look at our outcomes across the country.

State	% Case-Managed Students Met/Made Progress Toward Individual Goal(s)			
	Attendance	Behavior	Academics	Graduated/GED
California	>99	>99	>99	96
Delaware	91	94	92	91
District of Columbia	72	96	89	100
Florida	85	96	86	98
Georgia	74	83	83	92
Illinois	77	97	86	69
Indiana	87	95	91	94
Iowa	64	91	74	N/A
Kansas	78	87	80	96
Louisiana	78	89	79	76
Michigan	72	84	84	95
Minnesota	96	95	84	96
Missouri	71	83	78	90
Nevada	76	79	79	90
New Mexico	73	96	68	85
North Carolina	87	92	88	98
Ohio	79	88	84	93
Oklahoma	68	89	83	95
Pennsylvania	68	84	83	93
South Carolina	92	95	91	100
Tennessee	81	91	91	96
Texas	83	83	89	97
Virginia	81	87	84	90
Washington	81	95	89	84
West Virginia	70	85	84	95

Data are not reported for CO and ND due to single school sample per state.

## The Power of Partnerships: Success Stories from the CIS Network

While it is too early to know what outcomes will look like for students this school year, we do know of early successes that give us hope for what is ahead.

### Reengaging Disconnected Students with Learning: Deploying Reengagement Coordinators in the Community

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, North East Independent School District (ISD) in San Antonio, Texas had 3,000 students missing from their enrollment/re-enrollment. On top of the drop in enrollment, the results of the first grading period were concerning with two-thirds of students failing at least two subjects. Barriers to attendance and engagement in learning included: lack of access to technology and understanding of remote work and expectations along with increases in basic needs and social, emotional, and mental well-being concerns; all impacting student motivation. Working as a close partner with the school district and schools in the Theodore Roosevelt High School feeder pattern, Communities In Schools of San Antonio was challenged to find new ways to connect with students, in particular those high school students at greatest risk of not graduating. Site coordinators working in the schools were managing their existing caseloads and addressing the increased requests from families for basic needs support, while trying to find new solutions for reengaging students in virtual learning.

CIS local leadership brought a plan to the district where CIS would hire two Reengagement Coordinators to support the feeder pattern of schools and work in the community doing direct outreach and home visits to students and families. A referral system was created that allowed school personnel to make direct referrals to the Reengagement Coordinators. Each school assigned a point of contact to ensure timely communication and information sharing.

The initiative began in November with a goal of 110 students to be case managed by the Reengagement Coordinators, in addition to the students being case managed at the schools by the existing CIS site coordinators. To date, 166 students have been referred. Of those, 14 percent were located and their files able to be closed due to moving out of the district or other valid reasons. Only 12 percent of students/families declined to receive support. Currently 50 students are being actively case managed by the Reengagement Coordinators with the remaining students pending and ongoing attempts at connection still underway. Improvements in attendance and engagement in learning have been realized by 71 percent of the active cases.

The work of the Reengagement Coordinators has included consistent telephone and text outreach, as well as home visits. Ongoing recognition and celebrations occur, and, for seniors, cards and signs to keep them motivated toward graduation are delivered and gift cards and other incentives are offered when students show progress and improvement. The primary focus is on building and maintaining trusting relationships with the student and families. This has resulted in families opening up about their basic needs related to food insecurity, housing, and utilities. CIS of San Antonio has been able to connect families with gift cards for groceries and basic needs and offer rent and utility assistance. Other notable benefits for families have been shown through expressions of gratitude at having someone consistently checking in, providing updates from the school, and helping families navigate the current remote learning environment. Additionally, as a result of the ongoing check-ins and reporting on student progress, parents/guardians are proactively informing the Reengagement Coordinators when students will absent because of doctor appointments or other reasons. These positive, caring relationships have translated into new levels of accountability that encourage and motivate parents and students to improve attendance and academic performance.



Photo: Communities In Schools of San Antonio  
Re-Engagement Coordinators Emily Martinez and Donna Dennis

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## Moments to Celebrate During the Pandemic

A student at a high school in Kansas was placed in a tutoring program for credit recovery. The student lacked motivation and felt there was not much hope for him to catch up to his peers. With one-to-one support from the site coordinator, this student is now making significant progress with his schoolwork, and his attitude has moved from hopeless to confident he can succeed.

A case-managed student in Atlanta reengaged in high school after dropping out of school during the first semester. With constant encouragement and consistent and frequent communication through persistent check-ins, the site coordinator was able to convince the student not to make a life-changing, permanent decision based on a temporary difficulty. Teaching resilience was key.

An eighth grader at a middle school in Pittsburgh, PA was not engaged in school in the fall. The site coordinator discovered that his mom worked all day and that he was at home alone. Additionally, he had just moved to the area to escape increasing violence at his previous school. After participating in small group sessions run by his site coordinator, he has shown progress in his social-emotional learning, commitment and interest in his academics, and improvement in communication with his peers, teachers, and family.

A site coordinator in Los Angeles helped lift up a student's voice and empowered her to tell her story on the local news. In speaking her truth, she offered the community a powerful and timely testimony to the pressures placed on many high school students during the pandemic. Specifically, she shared her experiences with the tension between working and helping to support her family and the pressures to keep up with school. Her insights provide an important cautionary tale for how a hasty push to reopen schools might actually push more students to disengage if there are not alternatives or accommodations in place.

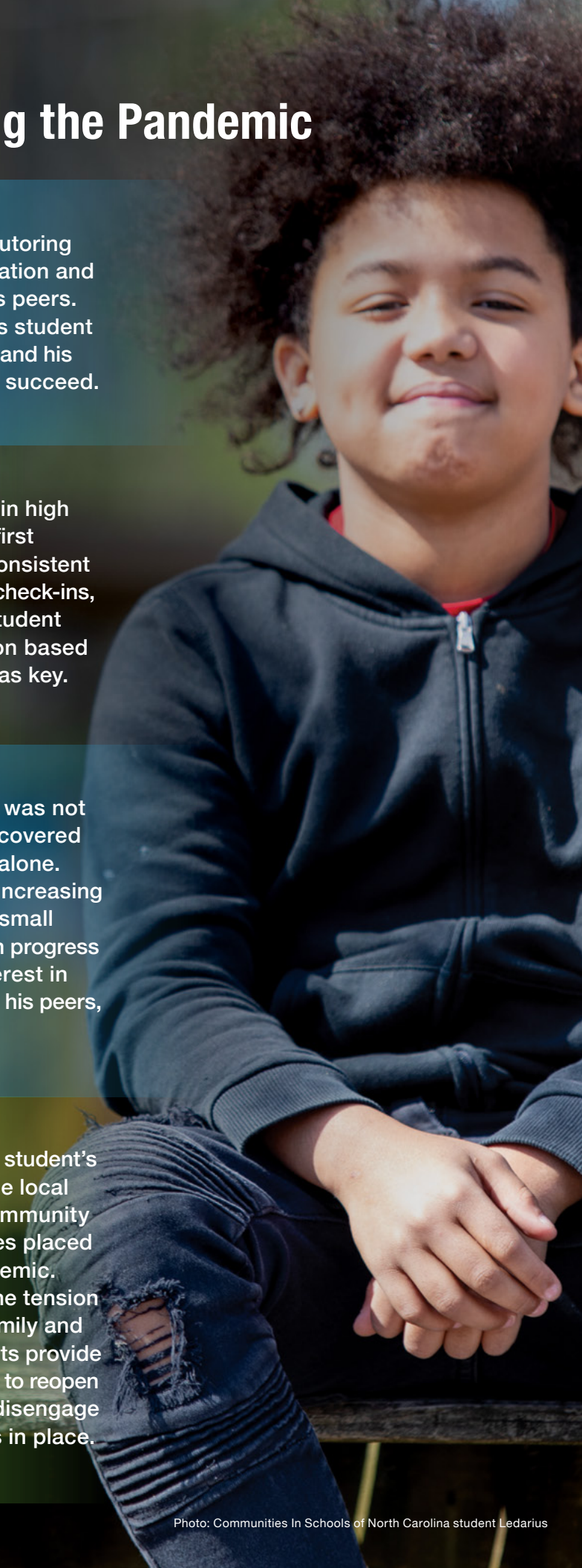


Photo: Communities In Schools of North Carolina student Ledarius

## Connecting 100% of Nevada’s Students to Online Learning: A Collective Effort

Ask Tami Hance-Lehr how it’s possible to create a Family Support Center that will operate 12 hours a day, with four shifts a day, six days a week; receive more than 45,000 calls from families needing information, resources, and, at times, just someone to listen; help coordinate more than 230 different community partners to provide critical resources; staff it with 150 people who’ve never worked in a call support center before; ensure every action integrates with school software systems used across 18 districts of public and charter schools; meet every federal and state legal requirement for privacy and child safety; do it all during a pandemic; have it fully operational with only a two week notice—and she will give you a simple answer.

“Ultimately, this is just what Communities In Schools does. We eliminate barriers. We get students and families what they need,” says Hance-Lehr, in a voice that’s a mix of high energy, strong conviction, and matter-of-fact calmness.

Tami Hance-Lehr is the CEO & State Director of Communities In Schools of Nevada, and the Family Support Center was a central part of “Connecting Kids”, a remarkably successful initiative to ensure 100% of Nevada’s students had the online access and devices needed to participate in remote learning.

### A Shift to Remote Learning. An Urgent Need to Respond.

In the summer of 2020, amidst the disruption and uncertainty of COVID-19, Nevada school leaders announced that all students would begin the academic year with online learning.

However, they could not confirm online access for more than 120,000 of Nevada’s 500,000 public school students. Broadband access is notoriously inequitable across the US, typically excluding communities of color and low-income communities. These 120,000 “missing students” needed to be found and connected.

“Nevada’s digital divide was exacerbating existing inequities. We needed to address students’ needs and we did not have a moment to waste,” said Elaine Wynn, National Board Chair of Communities In Schools and former President of Nevada’s State Board of Education. Wynn and Jim Murren, chairman of Nevada’s COVID-19 Response, Relief and Recovery Task Force responded quickly and boldly.

As part of Governor Steve Sisolak’s COVID-19 Task Force, they developed “Connecting Kids,” a statewide public-private partnership between public school districts, charter schools, the Nevada Department of Education, dozens of community groups, businesses, state agencies, local municipalities, non-profit organizations, education advocacy groups, Chambers of Commerce, food banks, and more to ensure 100 percent of Nevada’s students had online access and devices.

### The Hub for Solutions. One Family at a Time

The Family Support Center served as the essential hub for all efforts to connect with the missing students and their families, including receiving incoming calls, conducting outreach efforts, coordinating the critical resources being provided, and more.

To establish the center, Communities In Schools Nevada worked closely with the Elaine P. Wynn & Family Foundation and Punam Mathur, Executive Director, in particular. “This would not have happened without Punam,” says Hance-Lehr. “We needed a vessel to get in touch with families—the support center was the vessel.”

**“We could not have done this without everyone coming together ... pushing egos and obstacles aside ... not accepting reasons to stop ... and just saying, ‘We’re going to do this.’ I’m so pleased and honored to have been a part of this.”**

**Tami Hance,**  
Executive Director, Communities In Schools of Nevada

Communities across the state mobilized to get the word out about the center. Volunteers, food banks, and community organizations distributed 300,000 postcards with the center phone number door-to-door and through food distribution centers. Unions and faith-based organizations shared the information with members. Media companies donated advertising space. Field agents from the Clark County School District, Clark County, and the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas went door to door. The Department of Family Services coordinated key resources. Cox Communications provided broadband access.

Overall, 18,000 families received new, reliable access to the internet. In addition, families soon began calling for other needs as well. Center staff were fielding questions about SNAP benefits, social worker needs, and more. “We approached the work with a never-give-up attitude. We knew these families needed solutions. So that’s what we did; every day we were finding solutions for each family,” says Hance-Lehr.



Photo: Communities In Schools of Nevada Administrative Officer Rocío Martínez-Saucedo and AmeriCorps VISTA Members: Rebecca Dunne, Austin McKenzie, Jaret Reyes, and Daisy Villanueva

### Impact: 100% Students Connected to Learning

As a result of the extraordinary collaboration and partnership of Connecting Kids, every student participating in remote learning, in all 17 Nevada state school districts and state and district-sponsored charter schools, has confirmed at-home access to the internet and a computer.

**“Thanks to the unprecedented response of the Connecting Kids coalition, every single Nevada public school student – no matter where they live or go to school – now has the tools to connect to school from home.”**

**Jhone Ebert,**  
Nevada State Superintendent of Public Instruction

### Impact: When Connecting to Learning Requires More than Internet Access

One of the calls to the Family Support Center that involved more than internet access was from Michael\*, who needed help enrolling in high school. Punam Mathur received his call and listened as Michael explained that his dad worked long hours and hadn’t had the chance to register him. Punam acted

quickly to connect Michael to the CIS site coordinator at his zoned school, Richard Osorio. Twenty-four hours later, after multiple attempts, Richard reached Michael’s dad to obtain the necessary permission to register Michael. That’s when Richard learned more about Michael.

His father explained that a combination of homelessness, financial hardship, and challenges at school had led Michael to drop out. The family had since been able to move into an apartment and had consistent food and shelter. Michael was working to help pay the bills and recently had shown great interest in returning to his education

Over the next few days, Richard had a number of conversations with Michael and his father to learn more and build a relationship of trust. He learned Michael’s dad was hesitant about his son’s returning to school and that Michael had lost his job. Each time, Richard was able to help, whether it was obtaining subsidized internet, a laptop, and school supplies, connecting Michael to CIS partner, Workforce Connections in Nevada, to help with employment, or ensuring Michael’s dad that his son would have whatever he needed to be successful in school.

Ultimately, Michael’s dad gave permission for Richard and Michael to work together to register. Michael is now back in school. His path continues to be a challenging one and Richard continues to work with him to provide the supports Michael needs to achieve his own success.

\* To protect privacy, Michael is not his real name.

## What About Our High School Graduates?

When schools were forced to close their doors in the Spring of 2020 due to the pandemic, many students — in particular seniors within the class of 2020 — were disproportionately impacted. Adapting and adjusting, CIS of Atlanta continued to provide virtual and one-on-one assistance helping students with college access and post-secondary planning, in the now-familiar virtual world. From Microsoft Teams to Zoom, and in some cases Instagram Live, site coordinators worked one-on-one with students, or in groups to continue providing support with FAFSA completion, college application completion and submissions, and opportunities to attend virtual college fairs. Ongoing supports were provided with the common goal to set students up to achieve in life — the ultimate mission of CIS.

### ★Affiliate Spotlight: CIS of Atlanta and Cummins Inc. Partner to Provide Class of 2020 College-Bound Students with Supports

Being the first in your family to go to college, having limited finances, not knowing how your family will pay for those unexpected college extras, and leaving your family for the first time to further your education during the pandemic are only a few of the challenges students from Clayton County Public Schools faced during their senior year in high school. Partnering with Communities In Schools of Atlanta, the Stuff the Trunk initiative was supported by a grant received from Cummins, Inc. This grant was able to support 50 CIS case-managed, college-bound students from five local high schools. Cummins employees volunteered to stuff the trunks with items needed for transition to college. Items included bedding, linen, dorm room essentials, hygiene items, notebooks, pens, and much more to ensure that students were better prepared to transition to college. Together, Cummins staff contributed approximately 175 hours of volunteer service and over forty volunteers. In addition to the \$10,000 grant funds from Cummins, CIS expended an additional \$17,000 to support a College Trunk Stuff-A-Thon event. Thirty-five of the 50 students receiving support through this initiative are enrolled in two- or four-year institutions within the state of Georgia. The remaining 15 have only delayed their enrollment due to the pandemic but are still on track for fall 2021. Even during the pandemic, current college freshmen were able to maintain an average grade point of 2.6 and remain active in the CIS of Atlanta Alumni Association where they continue to receive support for tuition, housing, transportation, food, and learning devices.



Photo: Communities In Schools of Atlanta Site Coordinator Shonobe Morgan and Alumnus



Photo: Communities In Schools of Atlanta Alumna, Site Coordinator Shonobe Morgan, and Alumna



Photo: Communities In Schools of Atlanta Site Coordinator Emily Freshley and Alumna



Photo: Communities In Schools of Atlanta Site Coordinator Quintin Avery, Alumna, and Site Coordinator Emily Freshley

## LOOKING AHEAD

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

This past year, COVID-19 changed daily life for everyone. For many schools, students, and families, the disruptions, uncertainty, and turmoil were exacerbated by long-standing inequities. While there are hopeful signs that in the not too distant future, some of the daily impacts of COVID-19 will be behind us, for many schools, students, and families, there is still significant work to be done.

One of the ways CIS responded to COVID-19 was to re-assess our strategic plan: to examine our answers to fundamental questions and to identify opportunities for impact during the crisis. The questions included: How does CIS accomplish the most good? What are the barriers to success in school and in life? How can CIS remove them to help students thrive? The answers form the basis of our outlook for what's ahead. Below are highlights and the full Strategic Plan Refresh is available [here](#).

CIS will work to ensure successful reengagement for all students by building more equitable conditions for learning that must exist beyond the pandemic. This means our commitment to integrated student supports is stronger than ever. The pandemic made clear both the essential role of ISS in providing equitable conditions for learning and the urgent need to expand it to more schools and more students.

The focus of our time, energy, and resources will continue to be inside schools — partnering with local educators, families, and communities to implement our evidence-based model for student success. We'll also increase our emphasis on working outside the schools, at the system level, to help create more equity across K-12 education in the US. This will include increasing our support of alumni, amplifying student voices, engaging families and communities in these conversations, and developing partnerships to advance racial justice.

Learn more about our work at [CommunitiesInSchools.org](https://www.CommunitiesInSchools.org).





## A community of support for students, in schools and beyond.



Communities  
In Schools®

Across America, millions of kids are struggling in school, at home, and in their communities. At Communities In Schools, our trained staff work inside schools nationwide and go beyond the classroom to connect students to a community of support. Food. Healthcare. Learning technology. Mentoring. Social and Emotional Counseling. Thanks to the support of our partners last year, 99 percent of our students stayed in school and 97 percent of them were promoted to the next grade.\* Help us ensure that all students have the same opportunity to overcome barriers to their success.

**At school, at home, or in between, kids need you.**

Support them. | [CommunitiesInSchools.org](https://www.CommunitiesInSchools.org)

\*Outcomes refer to case-managed students.

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