



Communities In Schools and The Model of Integrated Student Services:

A Proven Solution to America's
Dropout Epidemic



Communities In Schools
HELPING KIDS STAY IN SCHOOL AND PREPARE FOR LIFE

Communities In Schools, Inc. (CIS) is the nation's largest dropout prevention organization. Founded in 1977, CIS operates in 27 states and the District of Columbia, serving 1.2 million elementary and secondary students in 3,400 schools. CIS provides services for students inside schools, with resources that most often already exist within a community. A CIS site coordinator brings in, and sometimes provides, resources requested by schools and parents. Whether a student needs eyeglasses, help with homework, a nutritious meal, assistance with college applications, or just a safe place to be, CIS finds the resources and delivers them inside schools, where students spend their days.

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**, which 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. Through the efforts of a single point of contact, individual student needs are assessed, and research-based connections are made between students and targeted community resources.*

A National Educational Imperative: Support for Community-Based, Integrated Student Services in the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

In January 2007, CIS published a document by this title that identified the following key facts relevant to federal and state education policy initiatives designed to address student dropout and achievement issues:

1. The dropout “epidemic” and the pervasive achievement gap, both of which disproportionately affect low-income and minority students, are the central, unmet challenges facing public education in America.
2. The failure to comprehensively address the dropout epidemic and the corresponding achievement gaps among students will result in continuation of the status quo—with adverse consequences affecting America’s economic prosperity and national security interests.
3. The American public has identified the need to improve schools and student performance as a national priority.
4. Efforts to eliminate the epidemic of students dropping out of school and the pervasive achievement gaps among students will succeed only if they are comprehensive and student-centered. In addition to classroom-based reforms, schools must ensure that a definable range of community-based, integrated student services are provided.
5. Community-based, integrated student services, which provide vital support in mitigating the risk that students will drop out of school and in improving student achievement, permit school and district officials to focus their energies on issues central to classroom learning.
6. Well-designed and implemented community-based programs effectively leverage non-public resources and are cost effective.

See the entire document at <http://www.cisnet.org/media/pubs.asp>.

An Established Model

The cornerstone of the CIS Model is the provision of widely accessible prevention services and resources that are available to entire school populations (“school-wide prevention services”), which are paired with the coordinated, targeted and sustained intervention services and resources for that subset of students who are most at risk of dropping out of school (“targeted and sustained student intervention services”). This blended prevention and intervention model is validated by and based on a widely accepted public health model, and it has been at the core of CIS’ work for three decades.¹ Indeed, CIS has a documented, 30-year history of producing positive educational outcomes at both the student level and school level.²



This model of integrated student services is being recognized as a critical component of comprehensive school reform by leaders in the education and public policy sectors. For example, the Keeping Parents and Communities Engaged Act (Keeping PACE Act, introduced in the United States Senate in 2007) recognizes that “[i]ntegrated services and comprehensive supports... are necessary components of effective, school-based efforts to dramatically affect dropout prevention rates, increase graduation rates, and improve student achievement.”³ In addition, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine have recognized the importance of access to and coordination of community-based student services that contribute in vital ways to student growth and success.⁴

The CIS National Evaluation

Initial Results

The first results from the Communities In Schools National Evaluation (an independent, third-party evaluation) are based on an in-depth analysis of 1,766 CIS schools and comparative analysis of outcomes for more than 1,200 CIS and non-CIS comparison schools over a three-year period. The CIS National Evaluation concludes 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.
- When implemented with high fidelity, the CIS Model results in a higher percentage of students reaching proficiency in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math.
- Effective implementation of the CIS Model correlates more strongly with positive school-level outcomes (i.e., dropout and graduation rates, achievement, etc.) than does the uncoordinated provision of service alone, resulting in notable improvements of school-level outcomes in the context of the CIS Model.

The CIS National Evaluation is being conducted by ICF International, known for its high standards of rigor and comprehensive research designs. ICF has completed the second phase of a three-part evaluation of CIS, designed to provide conclusive evidence regarding the effectiveness of the CIS Model in affecting student achievement and related school outcomes.

This report of the CIS National Evaluation documents the linkage between well-designed and implemented community-based programs and significant improvements in student and school performance.

The CIS National Evaluation’s *school-level analysis* features several studies, including a comparison study of CIS and non-CIS schools on relevant outcomes such as dropout and graduation rates, and reading and math proficiency. This comparative analysis is supported by surveys that detail how the CIS model is implemented at the school level. The school-level studies meet the highest levels of rigor and, therefore, credibility. By identifying highly comparable matching sites, there is great confidence that any difference in outcomes after CIS implementation is due to the positive impact of the CIS Model.

Strong, Positive School-Level Results

Results from the student-level studies of the CIS National Evaluation provide external, empirical affirmation of the strong positive relationship between the CIS Model of integrated student services and school-wide outcomes. Further, results show that it is the CIS Model of services delivery that yields the strongest, most positive educational outcomes.

Three Student-Level Studies. These results are based upon three distinct but complementary studies.

Conducted during phase one, the first study involved a survey of more than 1,500 CIS schools to determine the level of CIS implementation taking place at each school. Based on the survey results, the schools were given a score from 1-100, based on their degree of fidelity to core components of the CIS Model. When scores were correlated with school-level outcomes, the cohort of sites scoring 70 or higher showed the most positive outcomes.



This established the relationship between outcomes and the level of implementation of the CIS Model. The group, referred to as “high implementing schools,” represents 47 percent (710) of total sample sites. The remaining 808 sites, referred to as “partial implementing schools,” implemented the CIS Model to a lesser degree.

In the second study, ICF sought to determine the extent to which positive student outcomes could be attributed to implementation of the CIS Model. In that study, ICF conducted a quasi-experimental evaluation, matching 602 CIS schools against 602 comparison schools.⁵ For the comparative analysis, the baseline was set one year before CIS became active in a school, allowing the CIS site and the comparison site to have the same starting point for the evaluation of CIS impact over the course of three years.

In the third study, 368 CIS schools identified by the quasi-experimental study as having the strongest outcomes were studied more intentionally for promising practices.

Interpreting the Magnitude of the Results. The study results can be best interpreted in the context of two nationally recognized measures—“effect size” and “improvement index.” These two indicators help provide a context for interpreting the strength of percentage improvements reflected in the school-level results reported by ICF.

- ***Effect size.*** To determine the relative effectiveness of different educational initiatives, the U.S. Department of Education uses a measure called “effect size” to compare the strength and magnitude of outcomes for various programs on a common scale. By using “effect size,” outcomes from multiple studies can be compared, even if the measurement methodologies are different. According to Department of Education standards, an effect size of .25 or higher represents a very positive outcome.⁶
- ***Improvement index.*** The improvement index is a U.S. Department of Education indicator that can be used to project the relative improvement in a student’s

The CIS National Evaluation: An Overview of the Five-Year Study

Phase One: Implementation Study. The first year of the CIS National Evaluation focused on collecting detailed information on the work of CIS in schools, providing a comprehensive picture of how the CIS Model is implemented in thousands of schools across the country.

Phase Two: School-Level Results Studies. The second and third years of the CIS National Evaluation have focused on determining the difference CIS makes at the school level—allowing for conclusions to be formed with respect to the correlation between effective implementation of the CIS Model and school level results.

Phase Three: Student-Level Results Studies. The fourth and fifth years of the CIS National Evaluation consist of randomized control trials, comparing CIS and non-CIS students in the same schools. This is the “gold standard” of scientifically-based research and will provide further evidence of the extent to which CIS improves student achievement, keeps students in school, and helps them graduate on time with a regular diploma. This phase will include three years of student level data.

school-wide outcome rankings and, by extension, the improvement in a school’s statewide ranking on relevant outcomes. The improvement index, therefore, provides a means of using findings from the CIS National Evaluation to predict the extent to which CIS’s presence in a school can improve that school’s statewide ranking (compared to other schools) on important outcomes, such as graduation rates.⁷

1

Among similar research-based dropout prevention organizations, 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 proven to increase graduation rates.

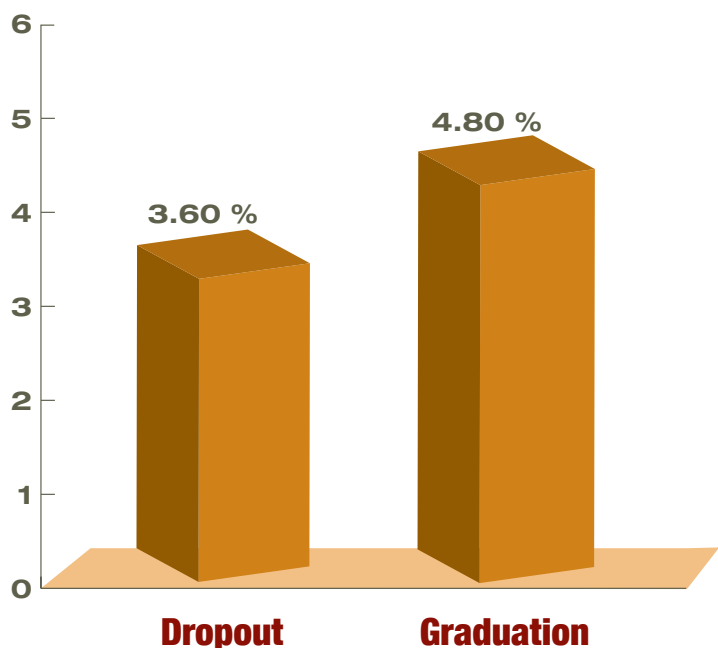
The CIS National Evaluation establishes that high implementing CIS schools consistently outperform their comparison (non-CIS) schools. Specifically, and as reflected in the graph below:

- For every 1,000 high school students, 36 more students at high implementing CIS schools remain in school.
- For every 1,000 high school students, 48 more students at high implementer CIS schools graduate on time with a regular diploma.⁸

In addition, the effect size of these outcomes exceeds the U.S. Department of Education .25 threshold regarding positive outcomes with respect to dropout (.36) and graduation (.31) rates. In fact, in comparison with dropout prevention programs whose research results have been reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, ICF has concluded that CIS is *one of only a few programs* to satisfy the Department of Education's threshold with respect to dropout rates, and the CIS Model is *the only* dropout prevention program proven to *increase graduation rates* (students graduating on time with a regular diploma).⁹

In a similar vein, findings of the CIS National Evaluation indicate that CIS' presence in a school has the potential to improve that school's statewide ranking in dropout and graduation rates, as measured by the U.S. Department of Education's "improvement index." For example, among high implementing CIS schools, the improvement index would reflect an increase in a school's ranking by 13 and 11 percentage points, respectively, for dropout rates and graduation rates.

Dropout and Graduation Rates: Difference Between High Implementing Schools and Comparison Schools



2

When implemented with high fidelity, the CIS Model results in a higher percentage of students reaching proficiency in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math.

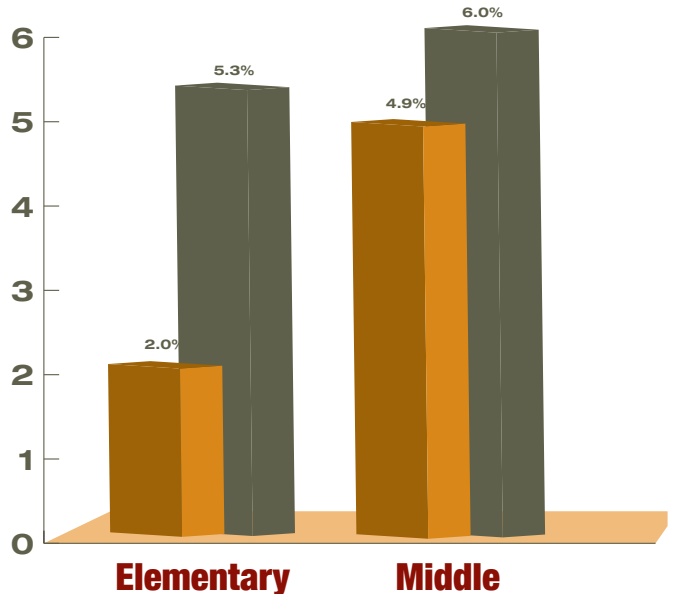
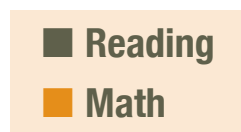
The CIS National Evaluation also establishes that the CIS Model results in a higher percentage of elementary and middle school students attaining proficiency in math and reading. (Proficiency is determined by the percentage of students who pass state math and reading achievement tests, according to standards set by each individual state.)

With respect to math and reading proficiency, high implementing CIS schools consistently outperform their comparison (non-CIS) schools:

- For every 1,000 elementary school students, 53 more achieve proficiency in math and 20 more achieve proficiency in reading.
- For every 1,000 middle school students, 60 more achieve proficiency in math and 49 more achieve proficiency in reading.

Reading and Math Proficiency for High Implementing CIS School vs. Comparison Schools

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In addition, the effect size of these outcomes exceeds the U.S. Department of Education .25 threshold regarding positive outcomes with respect to eighth-grade reading (.36) and eighth-grade math (.53).

Further, findings of the CIS National Evaluation indicate that CIS' presence in a school has the potential to improve that school's statewide ranking in reading and math achievement, as measured by the U.S. Department of Education's "improvement index." For example, among schools with high CIS implementation, the improvement index would likely show an increase in a school's ranking by 20 and 14 percentage points, respectively, for eighth-grade reading and math.

3

When the CIS' Model of integrated student services is effectively implemented, there is a strong correlation with school-level outcomes like dropout and graduation rates. This correlation is much stronger than when services are provided in an uncoordinated fashion.



Finally, the results of the CIS National Evaluation confirm that the success of the CIS Model lies in the implementation of a precise, defined set of strategies designed to provide the most appropriate and effective prevention and intervention services to schools and the students they serve. In particular, this coordinated, integrated delivery system includes the following core elements:


- The presence of a CIS school-based, on-site coordinator;
- A comprehensive school- and student-level needs assessment;
- A community asset assessment and identification of potential partners;
- Annual plans for school-level prevention and individual intervention strategies;

- The delivery of appropriate combinations of widely accessible prevention services and resources for the entire school population, coupled with coordinated, targeted and sustained intervention services and resources for individual students with significant risk factors; and
- Data collection and evaluation over time, with monitoring and modifications of services offered to individual students and/or the entire school population, as appropriate.

The CIS National Evaluation confirms the strong, statistically significant relationship between fidelity to the CIS model and the positive, school-level outcomes described in this report.

Endnotes

1. Dr. Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University translates the public health model to education by predicting that risk factors in about 65-75 percent of students can be successfully mitigated with access to school-wide prevention activities, such as attendance monitoring. Another 15-25 percent may need additional episodic or low-level interventions. The remaining students will benefit from school-wide services but, because of multiple risk factors, these students also require a case management approach to integrated, sustained interventions.
2. See *2005-2006 Results From the CIS Network* (May 2007).
3. See S. 1302, "Keeping Parents and Communities Engaged Act" (May 3, 2007).
4. See National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (National Academy of Sciences).
5. For this quasi-experimental evaluation, each CIS school was matched with a non-CIS school based on eight characteristics of the schools: student attendance rates; percent of students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch; percent of students with special needs; school size; percentage of students designated as proficient in math; percentage of students designated as proficient in English/language arts; the racial and ethnic composition of the schools; and the "promoting power" of the schools (a proxy for "dropout rate").
6. See Technical Working Papers, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/twp.asp>
7. See http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/improvement_index.pdf.
8. In this analysis, promoting power is used as a proxy for "dropout rate." It is the ratio of the number of students entering ninth grade compared to the number of students in twelfth grade four years later. Also, in this chart, the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) is used as a proxy for graduation rates. CPI is the ratio of *graduates* compared to their ninth grade cohort four years later. See "Who Graduates? Who Doesn't? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001, Urban Institute, Christopher B. Swanson.
9. The What Works Clearinghouse [WWC] was established by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to "provide educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public with a central and trusted source of scientific information about what works in education." ICF International is a subcontractor to the WWC. See generally <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.



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