Communities In Schools National Evaluation

Five Year Executive Summary

Communities In Schools National Evaluation:
Five Year Executive Summary

Introduction to Communities In Schools

Begun in 1977, Communities In Schools (CIS) is a national federation organization with about 200 affiliates currently in 25 states and the District of Columbia. It annually serves nearly 1.3 million students in 3,400 schools[1]. At the heart of the organization is a mission to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to say in school and achieve in life.

Communities In Schools prepares students for the future by removing barriers to school success. The organization places a dedicated staff member inside partner schools to identify students at risk of dropping out. Communities In Schools engages community partners and volunteers to effectively and efficiently address both the academic and human service needs of students. The result is improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, retention rates and graduation rates. To understand Communities In Schools, it is necessary to describe the structure and functioning of the network and the Communities In Schools (CIS) model.

The CIS Network

Locally sustainable CIS affiliates, strong state offices and the CIS national office work in concert to promote success across the network with a focus on local impact. Each "level" of the network plays a critical role in promoting the success of Communities In Schools.

The national office is primarily responsible for: developing, enhancing and effectively communicating the CIS model across the network and to a national audience; identifying best practices and providing validation of the CIS model through research and evaluation; bringing together members of the network to foster collaboration, information sharing and a sense of belonging to a national organization; establishing national partnerships that translate into funding and resources that can benefit the state offices and local affiliates; expanding the reach of Communities In Schools to new states with quality; and advocating for national policy that includes integrated student services in education reform.

According to state and executive directors, the "ideal" role or purpose of the state offices supported by the national office is to communicate the direction of the national network and to inform the direction of the local affiliates in reaching the schools and students who need Communities In Schools the most. Essentially, the state office promotes the visibility of Communities In Schools across the state and operates in a customer service role to ensure the growth, sustainability and effectiveness of the local affiliates and their partner schools. State offices also maintain plans to expand to additional high need areas of their state with quality.

---

[1] See "Communities In Schools At a Glance" fact sheet at www.communitiesinschools.org for additional information on the CIS network.

The network is the backbone of this achievement. The successful delivery of the CIS model depends on the skill, initiative, and effectiveness of the dedicated state and local affiliates and on their strong relationships with community and educational leaders. Each affiliate is responsible for implementing the CIS model through a site coordinator. Site coordinators are assigned to partner schools and work with school staff to identify students at risk of dropping out, evaluate school and student needs, and provide resources to address those needs. The coordinator tailors services to the needs of individual students; they might encompass academic help, direct provision of health care, counseling, transportation, donated goods, mentoring, afterschool programs, and much more. In addition, affiliates are responsible for: developing community partnerships; resource development and fundraising; marketing and public relations; managing and developing CIS sites; ensuring the provision and/or brokering of quality youth programming and services; and data collection, evaluation and reporting.

The CIS Model

Not surprisingly, it is within schools where Communities In Schools ultimately has its greatest effect. Communities In Schools works inside school systems with superintendents, principals, educators, graduation coaches and other personnel, and forges community partnerships that bring resources into schools and help remove barriers to learning. Communities In Schools is able to bring about needed changes in schools and in the lives of students through the implementation of the CIS model. The CIS model is implemented throughout the school year by a CIS site team led by a trained site coordinator. The primary components and processes of the CIS model include an annual needs assessment; planning with school leadership; delivery of whole-school (Level One) and targeted, case-managed (Level Two), evidence-based services; regular monitoring and adjustment of plans; evaluation of effectiveness in achieving school and student goals; and reporting. The importance of implementing the CIS model as intended is illustrated by the National Evaluation.

Introduction to the National Evaluation

Understanding the impact of the work of the CIS network required an evaluation design that could look at both Communities In Schools as an organization and the work that Communities In Schools undertakes at the state, affiliate and school levels. The design is a multi-level and multi-method approach that examines the impact of Communities In Schools at three levels—the organizational level, the school level and the student level. Exhibit 1 provides a schematic portrayal of the evaluation design outlining the levels of the evaluation and the methods undertaken at each level.

The complexity of the CIS network structure and the size of its operation required the use of this type of "cutting edge" design. To date, no other youth serving organization with a structure and mission similar to Communities In Schools has endeavored to undertake such an in-depth and cross-cutting examination of its processes and outcomes.

Exhibit 1: National Evaluation

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation, depicted in Exhibit 1, was designed to answer a broad set of evaluation questions organized across three domains or areas of focus: strengthening the CIS network, key processes at the affiliate and site levels, and key outcomes for CIS students and schools. While each level and study component provides answers to specific questions and addresses specific domains, it is the synthesis of the results that provides a comprehensive assessment of Communities In Schools. Specifically, the findings from the evaluation provide clear answers to the most basic, yet important questions for understanding Communities In Schools as a solution to the dropout epidemic in our nation:

- Does Communities In Schools Work?
- How and Why Does Communities In Schools Work?
- In What Situations Does Communities In Schools Work?

In addition to highlighting what has been learned from the five-year evaluation, this summary includes insights into areas of further study that emerged from the evaluation.

Does Communities In Schools Work?

The evaluation examined the effectiveness of Communities In Schools on both school and student outcomes. The school-level study used a quasi-experimental design to determine the *effects* of implementing the CIS model on school outcomes. The student-level studies used randomized controlled trials (RCT) to determine the *impact* or value-added of CIS case-managed (Level Two) services on individual student outcomes.[2] The key findings from these studies are highlighted below.

Effectiveness of the CIS Model

Dropout and Graduation

CIS schools demonstrated positive effects on both dropout and graduation relative to their non-CIS comparison schools. Those CIS schools implementing the model with a high degree of fidelity (i.e., "high implementers"), however, had considerably greater effects on reducing dropout rates than other CIS schools (i.e., "partial implementers") and their non-CIS comparison schools, suggesting that the CIS model is working as intended. Among high implementers, effect sizes were .36 for dropout[3] and .31 for graduation[4], which is over the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse's[5] threshold for a "substantively important effect" (.25).

---

[2] The RCT in Austin, TX followed incoming 9th grade high school students through 10th grade. The RCT in Jacksonville, FL followed incoming 6th grade middle school students through 7th grade. Finally, the RCT in Wichita, KS followed 10th grade high school students through 11th grade.

[3] Because dropout is measured differently in different states, we used Promoting Power as a proxy for dropout rates. Promoting Power is defined as the number of seniors enrolled in a high school to the number of freshmen four years earlier (or three years earlier in a 10-12 high school).

[4] On-time graduation rates were measured using the Cumulative Promotion Index. This measure was developed by Chris Swanson to capture the proportion of a cohort that graduates with a regular high school diploma within four years.

[5] The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, is a central source of scientific evidence for what works in education that produces practice guides that address

Academics

CIS schools experienced small but consistent improvements in performance on state-mandated assessments for math compared to non-CIS schools. Results for reading/English language arts performance were mixed. Consistent with other findings, those that implemented the CIS model with fidelity experienced greater effects for both math and reading.

Attendance

CIS schools at all levels (i.e., elementary, middle and high school) reported consistently positive but small improvements in attendance. Improvements in attendance were not large because the attendance measure suffers from ceiling effects (i.e., it is difficult to demonstrate improvement because there is little room for growth). At baseline, the average attendance rate ranged from 92 percent for high schools to 95 percent for elementary schools.

Impact of CIS (Level Two) Case-Managed Services

Dropout and Retention

Fewer CIS case-managed students drop out of school during their 9th grade year than students in the control group (ES=.70). Additionally, these same CIS case-managed students also completed more credits during the 9th grade than control students (ES=.38; p<.05). Fewer CIS case-managed 6th grade students were retained than their comparison group (ES = .50). These findings suggest that providing high-risk students with case-managed services is contributing not only to keeping kids in school, but also progressing in school.

Academics

For 6th graders, CIS case management had a sizable and statistically significant impact on students' performance in reading (ES=.26; p<.05). For 9th graders, the greatest impact was found on overall grade point average (ES=.38; p<.05).

Attendance

Improvement in attendance was strongest for CIS case-managed students in 9th grade (ES=.45; p<.05). No differences were found between treatment and control groups for 6th graders.

Behavioral Problems/Discipline

Behavioral problems were measured using two metrics: (1) out-of-school suspensions and (2) disciplinary referrals. Middle school students showed positive findings regarding disciplinary referrals

---

instructional challenges with research-based recommendations; (b) assesses the rigor of research evidence on the effectiveness of interventions; (c) develops and implements standards for reviewing and synthesizing education research; and (d) provides a public registry of education evaluation researchers.

and out of school suspensions, both decreasing by the end of 6th grade.[6] Disciplinary referrals in both high school studies increased relative to the comparison group. It is unclear at this time whether Communities In Schools brought more scrutiny to some students' behavior, causing more disciplinary referrals, or whether these findings reflect a truly negative impact of the CIS program.

Compared to Other Dropout Prevention Initiatives

The National Evaluation team used outcomes reported by the WWC to benchmark Communities In Schools against other large-scale or well-known dropout prevention programs. Communities In Schools is unique in its ability to lower dropout rates and increase on-time graduation compared to other dropout prevention programs. In particular, Communities In Schools had the strongest effect on students' on-time graduation rates (ES=.36). It is the CIS model, including the delivery of whole-school (Level One) and targeted, case-managed (Level Two) services, as well as the focus on prevention and intervention from Pre-K through 12th grade that may explain this success. In relation to other dropout prevention initiatives, Communities In Schools is comparably as effective as the more cost-intensive Level Two-only service approaches of other programs in reducing dropout and in particular, in increased on-time graduation rates.

How and Why Does Communities In Schools Work?

Adherence to the CIS Model of Integrated Student Services

While CIS schools show noticeable improvement in school outcomes compared to non-CIS schools, it is the implementation of the CIS model with the greatest degree of fidelity that produces the strongest outcomes. That is, those schools designated as "high" implementers experienced greater change in dropout and graduation rates, attendance and academic achievement. It is the effective implementation of the CIS model by a trained school-based site coordinator that correlates more strongly with positive school-level outcomes compared to uncoordinated provision of services alone.

Intentionality of Service Provision

A key strength of the CIS model is the ability to implement it with intentionality. This begins with the decision of which schools to "enter" and how and what services will be provided. The RCT results for both Jacksonville and Austin demonstrate that intentionality and focus of providing case-managed services, especially during the transition years did pay off for students with noticeable improvement in credit completion, retention, attendance, reading and grade point average. And in Austin, the dropout rate was lower for CIS students than the control group.

Continuity and Sustainability of Service Provision

Students who received CIS services for two consecutive years had more favorable outcomes than students who received a single year of CIS service, including outcomes for grade point average, standardized tests in math and reading, attendance, credit completion and disciplinary referrals.

---

[6] Effect sizes are presented so positive effect sizes represent effects that favor the treatment group while negative effect sizes favor the control/comparison group.

Strong Business Practices, CIS Leadership, and School Support for Communities In Schools

Common themes from the Case Studies, External Comparison Study, Teacher Support Study, and the National and State Office Support Study were the importance of strong business practices and leadership across the CIS network and support from the schools for Communities In Schools. State directors and local affiliate executive directors acknowledged that the sound business practices defined by the CIS Total Quality System (TQS) for nonprofit organizations and reflected in the core functions of State and local affiliate offices are essential to the overall success of the CIS network. Additionally, the leadership from the national office, the state directors, and executive directors was echoed as an important contributing factor to the success of Communities In Schools. It is perhaps not surprising that the Natural Variation Study demonstrates that satisfaction with local affiliate leadership is associated with positive effects on dropout, graduation, and attendance.

The Natural Variation Study also shows that schools implementing the CIS model with fidelity are characterized by greater levels of support from school principals, teachers, local school boards, counselors, parents, partner organizations, and students compared to partial implementers. This support, especially from elementary principals and from teachers, translates into positive effects on attendance, math, and reading. Additionally, according to teachers, Communities In Schools improves students' preparation for and attitudes toward learning, thus allowing teachers to focus classroom time on teaching.

In What Situations Does Communities In Schools Work?

Grade Level, Geographic Setting, and Student Population

Overall, the results of the National Evaluation demonstrate that the focus of the CIS model on delivering integrated student services makes it a viable solution for achieving academic success across grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school), within a variety of settings (rural, urban, and suburban), and with various student populations (Hispanic, African American, and white). In short, Communities In Schools can work regardless of grade level, geography and student demographics.

What Remains to be Studied?

There is still much more to learn that can benefit the CIS network as well as other practitioners, policymakers and researchers working to understand the dropout epidemic in our country and searching for real world solutions to this problem. For the CIS network, this includes: assessment of TQS adoption, implementation fidelity and ongoing need for assistance; validation of implementation (typology) scores under TQS and assessing specific aspects of implementation that may be more sensitive to outcomes than others; identification and collection of standardized measures of state office and affiliate outcomes, thus allowing for the connection between TQS and the effectiveness of the network at all levels; and assessment of the growth of the network in conjunction with TQS compliance and the barriers and facilitators of such growth.

For the education field and beyond, this includes: 1) identifying an optimal balance of Level One (whole-school) and Level Two (targeted and sustained) services, including an examination of optimal "dosage"

of service necessary to achieve positive change in key academic outcomes for students with different risk profiles; 2) exploring Level One services and the impact on school climate; and 3) further understanding of the trajectories of student outcomes and the relationship between outcomes and sustained engagement in Communities In Schools or other initiatives, including an examination of "feeder patterns."

What Have We Learned?

Through establishing a link between the CIS model and positive outcomes (on dropout, graduation, attendance and academics), the National Evaluation team has been able to systematically investigate whether and how Communities In Schools can lead to successful students and schools. Specifically, the following conclusions can be drawn from the national evaluation:

- **The CIS model of integrated services, when implemented with fidelity yields substantive improvements in school and student level outcomes. Compared to non-CIS schools and students, the CIS model and case-managed services have a mix of significant impacts and substantively important positive effects on credit completion, academics and attendance, and is unique among other dropout prevention programs in both reducing dropout and increasing on-time graduation rates for high schools.**

- **Services and resources intentionally targeted to students to address specific school leadership priorities result in positive student impacts. For example, students targeted to receive case-managed services by a CIS site coordinator during the critical 6[h] and 9th grade transition years, successfully navigated this transition better than those who did not receive these services.**

- **Students' outcomes were significantly better after receiving two years of CIS case-managed services compared with just one year of service and school-level outcomes improved continuously over a three year period, proving the long term effects of sustained engagement and implementation of the CIS model.**

- **The implementation of sound business practices, the delivery of needed support across the CIS network (from national, state, and local affiliate offices), strong leadership within Communities In Schools, and the support of school leadership and teachers are necessary for stable and sustained implementation of the CIS model; which in turn results in greater outcomes for schools and students alike.**

After five years of data collection and across all of the studies undertaken as part of the National Evaluation, we have generated solid evidence that Communities In Schools works and it works best when it is implemented with fidelity to the CIS model and with intentionality. Additionally, the assistance needed to support effective implementation of the CIS model across the network and to maintain healthy operations at the state, affiliate, and site level is being provided. The next step is to use the results of the evaluation to help bring the CIS network to scale and ensure adherence to TQS; "high" implementation of the CIS model; consistency and sustainability of site coordinators; and the delivery of integrated student services within every school across the nation.