



COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS NATIONAL REPORT

# ***COMMUNITY MATTERS***

FOCUS ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM





***NEARLY 1 IN 7 U.S.  
STUDENTS MISS  
NEARLY A MONTH OF  
SCHOOL EACH YEAR.***







## Message from the President

If kids aren't in school, they can't learn. And unfortunately, that's the reality for millions of U.S. schoolchildren.

According to the most recent federal data, more than 7 million children in this country, or 1 in 7 students, miss 15 or more days every school year. These young people fare much worse academically than their peers and they are more likely to drop out.

Chronic absenteeism is a particular problem among low-income students. This plague of empty desks can have a negative impact on everyone — from absent students who lose valuable instruction time, to teachers who are forced to reteach the same material, to students who miss out on interactions.

When it comes to solutions, Community Matters! Schools and districts, teachers, parents, nonprofits and community leaders can partner to address this issue. And because of our presence inside schools, Communities In Schools has the unique opportunity to bring those members of the community together to put solutions in place. Alongside our partners, we work every day to make sure students have the support and encouragement they need to stay in the classroom through graduation.

This National Report presents the results of our work in more than 2300 schools in all corners of America. With a focus on chronic absenteeism, the information on these pages serves to highlight what it means to be #AllInForKids.

**Dale Erquiaga**

President & CEO



# COMMUNITY MATTERS

## Contents

### 1 MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

### 3 ISSUE OVERVIEW

Cause and Effect of Chronic Absenteeism  
Starting Them Early  
Research Matters: Getting to the Root of the Problem  
Policy Matters: States Take the Lead  
Our Community Footprint

### 9 COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

Our Community-Based Approach  
Partnerships Matter: Tailoring Programs for Every Student's Journey

### 15 OUTCOMES

Our Results for Case-Managed Students by State  
Relationships Matter: Customizing Solutions to Improve Attendance  
Lifting Up a Student In Need

### 20 LOOKING AHEAD

What's Next for Communities In Schools



# ISSUE OVERVIEW

## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AFFECTS

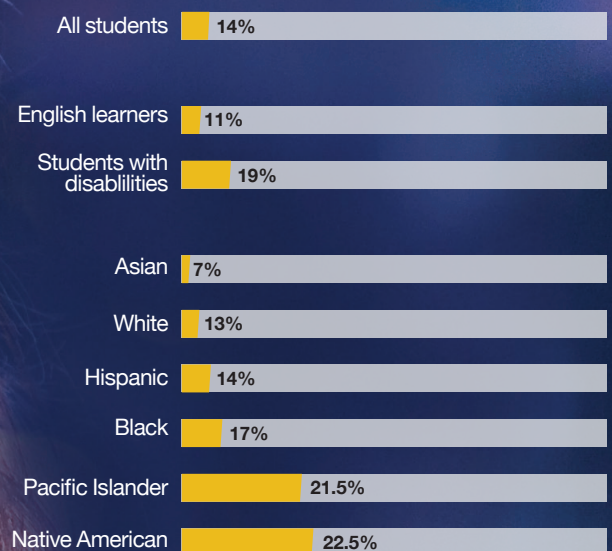
# 7 Million

## U.S. STUDENTS

Students missing 15 or more school days per year are considered chronically absent. And some students are more at risk. Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent. Other groups of students are also disproportionately affected. The problem is particularly acute for students who face the most significant barriers, including students from low-income families, students of color, and students with disabilities.

The prevalence of chronic absenteeism is a national crisis, and disparities among student groups underscore the need to better support all students to attend school.

### Percent of Students Chronically Absent by Subgroup in 2013-2014



Source: U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-2014



# Cause and Effect of Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism starts as early as pre-K but is most prevalent in high school. A student who is chronically absent every year from kindergarten through high school will miss more than six months of schooling. The reasons students miss school varies, and the effects of chronic absenteeism are profound and can lead to classroom disruption, poor grades, increased likelihood of dropping out, or failure to graduate.

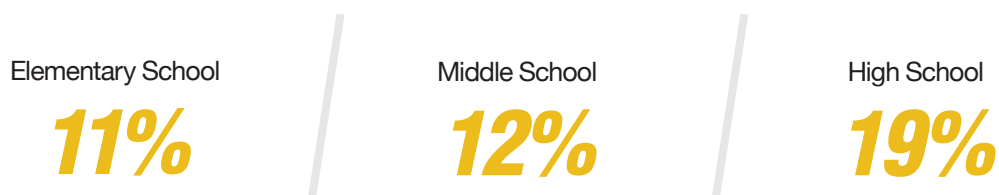
## Reasons Students Miss School

Every student's case is different. Some contributing factors include:

- Being bullied or made to feel isolated
- Struggling academically or being behind in credits
- Feeling disengaged from school
- Having to work or take care of younger children or sick relatives
- Facing chronic health issues
- Fear of walking to school in an unsafe neighborhood
- Experiencing homelessness
- Not having clean clothes or clothes that fit

## All Ages Affected

Percentage of students chronically absent by school type nationwide.





## STARTING THEM EARLY

COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS SITE COORDINATORS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN BOOSTING ATTENDANCE. HERE'S ONE OF THEIR STORIES.

Want to get kids to school? Make it a friendly competition.

That's the idea that struck Communities In Schools case manager Ronnie Jacobs after he noticed a pattern of absenteeism in the two pre-K classes at Mary Ford Elementary School in Charleston, South Carolina.

To break the pattern, every day before students went home, Jacobs had this exchange with each class:

**“In order to win, what do we have to tell our parents?”**

**“Bring me to school every day and on time—except Saturday and Sunday!”**

Jacobs followed up by calling the homes of students he couldn't account for when taking attendance. On the calls, he checked in on students and worked with parents to identify reasons for absences and find ways to address them. He reminded parents whose children were regularly tardy that the first two hours of school are the most important. And he used the time on the phone to tell parents about school events, convey messages from teachers and schedule conferences with parents when needed.

The strategy paid off. The two classes together achieved 30 perfect attendance days — with every child from both classes in school — during an entire 45-day grading period. One class even had 100 percent attendance for an entire week.

**“Consistency is key,” Jacobs says. “It drives the change we desire to see.”**



# Research Matters: Getting to the Root of the Problem

Dr. Heather Clawson, who leads the Communities In Schools' (CIS) research efforts, explains how research and data are helping us tackle chronic absenteeism.



Dr. Heather Clawson, Executive Vice President of Research for Communities In Schools

**A recent five-year evaluation of the Communities In Schools model of Integrated Student Supports conducted by MDRC and an earlier study conducted by ICF International found that elementary school students' attendance improved more in schools implementing the CIS model than it did in schools without CIS. Both studies also found that high schools implementing the CIS model increased their on-time graduation rates.**

**Q A recent study conducted by MDRC (2017)\*, found that in elementary schools using the Communities In Schools model, attendance rates improved more than they did in a group of comparison schools. What are the takeaways from that result?**

**A** The findings suggest that there are things happening in our work with elementary school students that are having notable results. Issues with attendance in elementary school are not intrinsic to students. It's health issues or not wanting to walk to school through an unsafe neighborhood. In some cases, parents often work multiple jobs or nightshifts, making it difficult to get students ready for school or to school on time. So the solutions for younger kids are geared around parents and parent engagement, something we focus on pretty significantly in elementary schools. Under our new research agenda, we are assessing the specific strategies and interventions we are implementing so we can scale what works throughout our network.

**Q What about dealing with chronic absenteeism in the older grades?**

**A** In middle school, the underlying issue might be suspensions, which lead to missing school and getting behind. Or students may be getting picked on and feeling isolated. Our focus at this stage is building their social and emotional competencies so they can appropriately deal with problems.

As students develop and move into high school, we start to see challenges with relationships, stress and even issues of depression. We start to see students disengaging from school and eventually dropping out. Homelessness is another challenge. And many older kids have family responsibilities, like taking care of younger siblings, that make it hard to get to school.

**Q What is Communities In Schools doing to get to the root of chronic absenteeism?**

**A** We look at school-level and individual student data to see not just is there an attendance problem, but how pervasive is it? What percentage of students are chronically absent? CIS site coordinators gather data that helps them understand the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism. Then they can figure out what services and strategies they can coordinate to address those root causes at the right level for each school or student. When it comes to making sure kids can be in school, no one-size solution fits all. Influencing attendance behavior early can have lasting impacts throughout a student's academic journey and ultimately lead to graduation success.

\*Somers, M.A & Haider, Z. (2017). Using Integrated Student Supports to Keep Kids in School: A Quasi-experimental Evaluation of Communities In Schools.



# Policy Matters: States Take the Lead

Education leaders across the country have long recognized the prevalence of chronic absenteeism and its impact on students living in poverty, students with disabilities, English learners and children of color. Now, a movement is underway to track chronic absenteeism and better support all students so they can attend school.

## **The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has helped to build momentum among states.**

The law requires states to create accountability systems that measure academic progress using multiple indicators of student and school success that go beyond test scores. Through those systems, states and local education leaders have the opportunity to reimagine the potential of our education system and make bold changes to ensure more young people are prepared for the workforce and on a path to success in life.

## **Thirty-eight states have included chronic absenteeism as an indicator in their state accountability systems.**

Now those states, school districts and schools will be monitoring their attendance rates more closely, particularly in places where attendance is low, and will be looking for evidence-based solutions to address the needs of students and their communities.

“Showing up is the first step toward student success in school,” says Tiffany Miller, Chief of Staff and Vice President of Policy for Communities In Schools. “Now that states are holding schools accountable for reducing rates of chronic absenteeism, I’m hopeful that we’ll see a robust coordinated effort to improve.”

## **Recommendations for state education agencies and school districts that are looking to reduce rates of chronic absenteeism in their communities:**

### **■ Partner with an Integrated Student Supports (ISS) provider, like CIS**

In schools that have a need for ISS, form public-private partnerships with evidence-based providers and implement a well-evaluated model. Such organizations can bring partnerships and resources into schools to address barriers to learning, like attendance, and help create more opportunities for teachers and school leaders to focus on their core mission.

### **■ Leverage a Title I schoolwide program**

In qualifying schools, schoolwide Title I can be used to enhance the entire education program in a school through a tiered system of supports, like Integrated Student Supports, that can target and raise the achievement of the lowest-performing students.

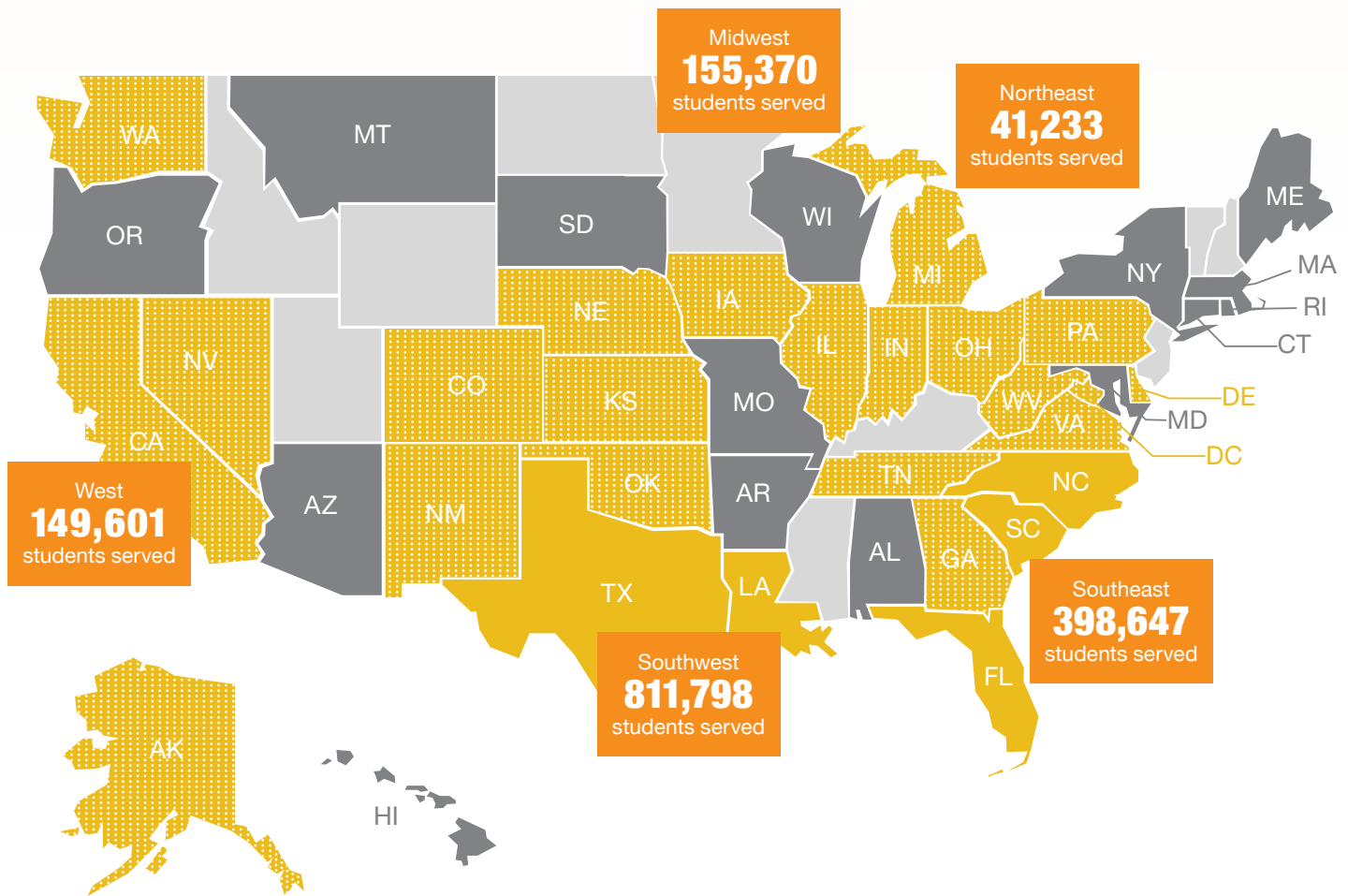
### **■ Leverage multiple public funding streams**

Federal and state budgets are tight, but schools and districts still will be required to meet the needs of vulnerable children. States, districts and schools should think about leveraging multiple public funding sources to pay for ISS as a strategy to reduce chronic absenteeism rates.



# Our Community Footprint

In 2016-2017, Communities In Schools operated in 25 states and the District of Columbia. In total, CIS served 1.56 million students working in 2,300 schools and 364 school districts across the country. Our network is comprised of 137 organizations including state offices and licensed partners.



- States with chronic absenteeism as indicator of success\*
- States with Communities In Schools presence during the 2016-17 school year
- Both

The majority of states where chronic absenteeism is a focus under ESSA have a ready-made solution available to them because of the presence of Communities In Schools. Yet, there are still more than a dozen states that could benefit from partnerships with CIS and other providers of Integrated Students Supports.

\*As of 2017-2018, Missouri has a CIS presence.





# *COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS*

**PARTNERING FOR**

# *Student*

***SUCCESS***

Chronic absenteeism is a multifaceted problem that requires a range of solutions. No one organization or intervention is the fix.

And certainly, schools can't tackle chronic absenteeism alone. Though they can identify when a student isn't attending and educate families about the importance of being in the classroom every day, they often don't have the resources to assist families that are dealing with deep challenges.

At Communities In Schools, we continue to work to build strong local partnerships with schools, school districts, families, and other community groups — from food pantries and mentoring organizations to faith groups and advocates for youth experiencing homelessness. We will keep brokering those relationships to boost attendance.

At the national level, we work alongside Attendance Works, an organization seeking to end chronic absenteeism across the country. Together, we plan to develop a training program that will ensure Communities In Schools site coordinators understand what leads to chronic absenteeism and know what they can do to address it.

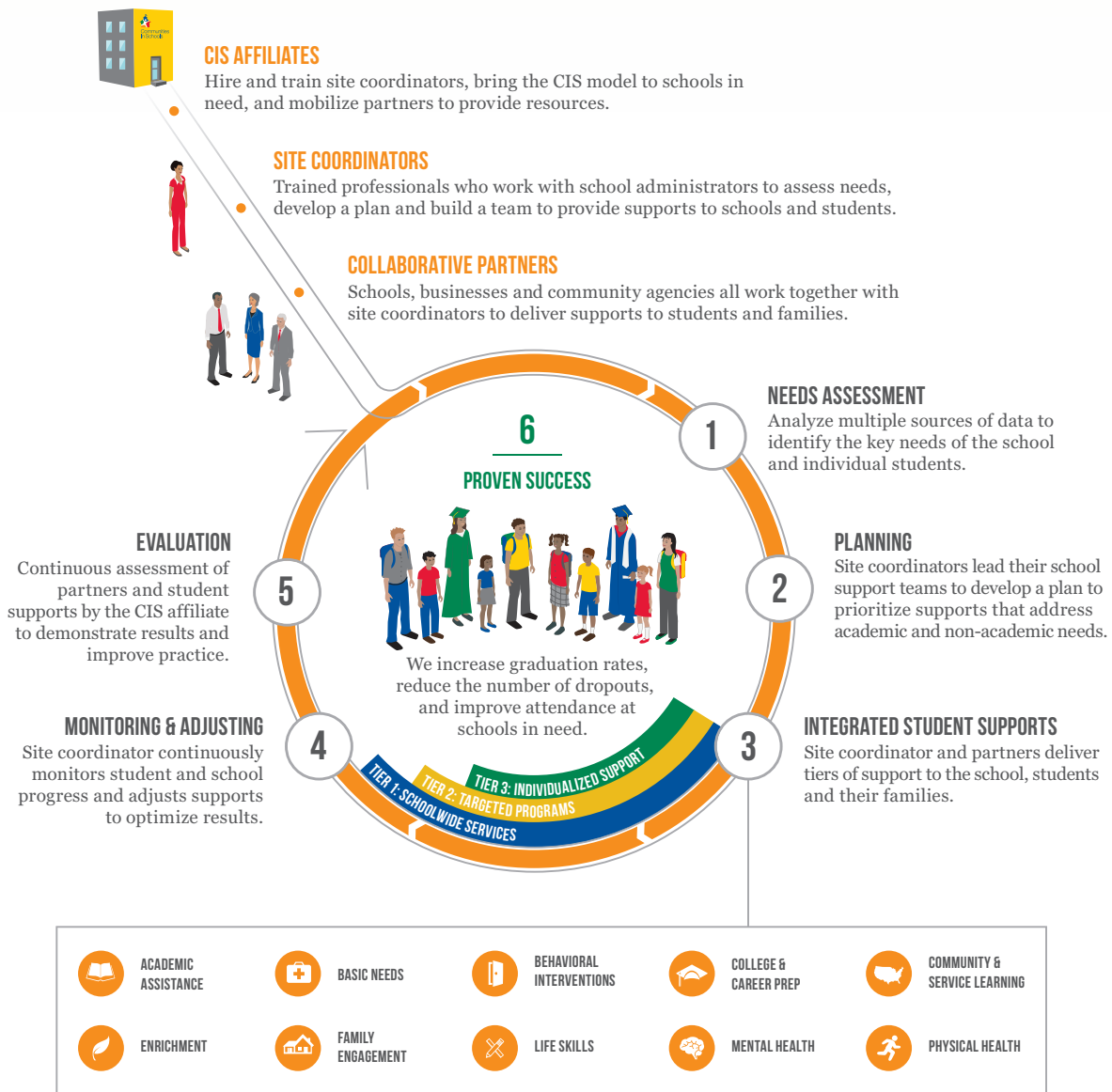
**Alongside our partners, we work every day to make sure students have the support and encouragement they need to be in the classroom — right where they belong.**



# Our Community-Based Approach

## How Integrated Student Supports Can Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

The model of Integrated Student Supports can improve attendance by helping school leaders identify both the academic and non-academic barriers that keep students away from school. Our trained site coordinators work directly inside K-12 public schools to identify and address the needs of our students, connecting them to the appropriate resources. From providing food and clothing to mentoring and career counseling, we do whatever it takes to ensure our students thrive in school and in life.





# Partnerships Matter: Tailoring Programs for Every Student’s Journey

We tailor solutions to chronic absenteeism to the school, the family and the individual needs of students. Here are some of the ways we work with partners to help keep students in school.

## Covering the Basics

ADDRESSING STUDENTS’ MOST BASIC NEEDS IS OFTEN A FIRST STEP TOWARD IMPROVING ATTENDANCE.

For many students, especially in elementary school, lack of food, health care, school supplies, clean and undamaged clothing, and even shampoo and soap can have a profound impact on their ability to attend school. A 2014 investigation of chronic absenteeism in California’s Sacramento City Unified School District, for example, found that 13 percent of chronically absent students had unfulfilled basic needs, in addition to other obstacles to going to school. For about half, their own or a caregivers’ health was a barrier.

School Outreach Coordinators at Communities In Schools of Federal Way, in Washington State, partner with Bridging A Gap, a local nonprofit that provides weekend meals to students who receive free and reduced school lunch. CIS Federal Way also gives students school supplies, offers their parents gas cards, referrals to housing resources, and support for college prep.

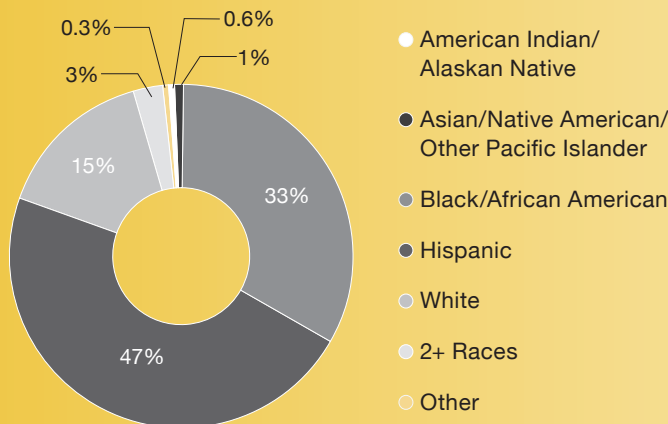
Staff members have seen such services enable children to meet attendance goals and maintain good grades.

“Providing for basic needs is the way to get our foot in the door with a student,” says Jessica Cox, Communities In Schools of Federal Way’s development and communications manager and a board member of Bridging A Gap. “Any student that comes in and requests an item, this is often our first step in determining if the student has other needs.”

## Our Students

Communities In Schools supports students who may be more likely to be disproportionately affected by chronic absenteeism.

Student Demographics by Race/Ethnicity



Student Demographics by Gender

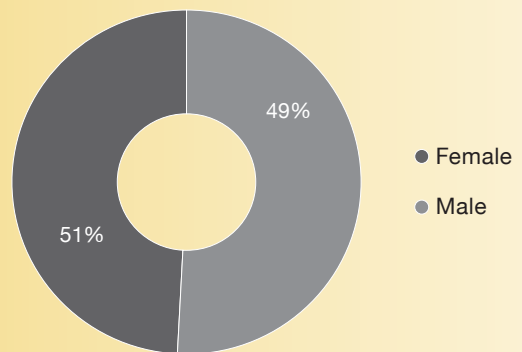






Photo: Communities In Schools of Northern Virginia site coordinator Amanda Gallardo and student Steffan

**I recently heard  
back from a  
mentor whose  
two mentees are  
getting As and Bs  
in college now.”**

### Connecting Students to Mentors

MENTORS KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE CONNECTED TO SCHOOL.

Being a reliable presence is a central role a mentor plays in a young person’s life. And several efforts to boost attendance and reduce dropout rates have found that a mentors’ presence and intervention can help keep students — especially those living in poverty or at risk of disengaging from school — connected to the classroom.

For example, four Communities In Schools affiliates use a rigorous approach to connecting and monitoring students, a model called Check & Connect. Developed by the University of Minnesota, the program assigns mentors to families for two years. Mentors monitor how students are doing in school, including how often they miss school or are late, and act as a liaison between home and school so that young people stay connected and interested in learning.

At Communities In Schools of Federal Way’s long-running mentoring program for sixth-through 12<sup>th</sup>-graders, some relationships blossom beyond students’ graduation from high school, says Program Manager Jennifer Youngblood.

“I recently heard back from a mentor whose two mentees are getting As and Bs in college now,” she says.



### Setting Attendance Goals

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS PUT THE ‘WOO-HOO’ INTO GOING TO SCHOOL.

Reducing chronic absenteeism is serious business, but students might not respond well to lectures. In concert with over-arching efforts to track chronic absenteeism and address its root causes, incentives can get students excited about meeting attendance goals.

At Communities In Schools of Tennessee at Memphis, site coordinator Tamika Williams acknowledges the progress and encourages improvement of attendance among her school’s Pre-K through eighth-grade students every 20 days on what she calls “Woo-Hoo Wagon Wednesdays.”

**Understanding that many of her students face multiple barriers to getting to school, she wanted to give them something to look forward to.**

Understanding that many of her students face multiple barriers to getting to school, she wanted to give them something to look forward to. So she wheels a little red wagon through the halls with school supplies, snacks, school shirts, toys, gadgets and other goodies students can choose. When a child is recognized, the class shouts, “Woo-hoo!”

Since her program began, Tamika’s school has experienced a 5 percent decrease in chronic absenteeism.

Rewards aren’t the only kind of incentive Tamika provides.

“Through steady, day-by-day encouragement, I show my students that I’m here for them,” she says.



Photo: Communities In Schools of Bay Area site coordinator Priscilla Munoz and student Kaylie

### Supporting Families

WHEN PARENTS HAVE THE HELP THEY NEED, STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE IN SCHOOL.

Communities In Schools works closely with parents to set school-related goals for their children and to find ways to overcome obstacles parents face, like hectic work schedules, poor transportation options and difficulty making ends meet. Student attendance improves when schools make parents aware of attendance policies and expectations, provide them with a contact person, and communicate with them often. Communities In Schools affiliates make sure families receive these messages.

Affiliates also provide a safety net for families with the deepest needs. Communities In Schools of the Charleston Area, in South Carolina, for example, recently joined Charleston County School District’s truancy intervention panel, which intervenes when families have a chronically absent child.

A recent case revealed a high school student’s troubled behavior resulted from his father’s passing and the loss of his family’s home, says Communities In Schools of the Charleston Area’s Aimee Lassar. The panel recommended he continue therapy and medication, and the school agreed he could do online coursework to supplement the classes he’d missed.

“We work together to identify the problem and solutions,” Lassar says.

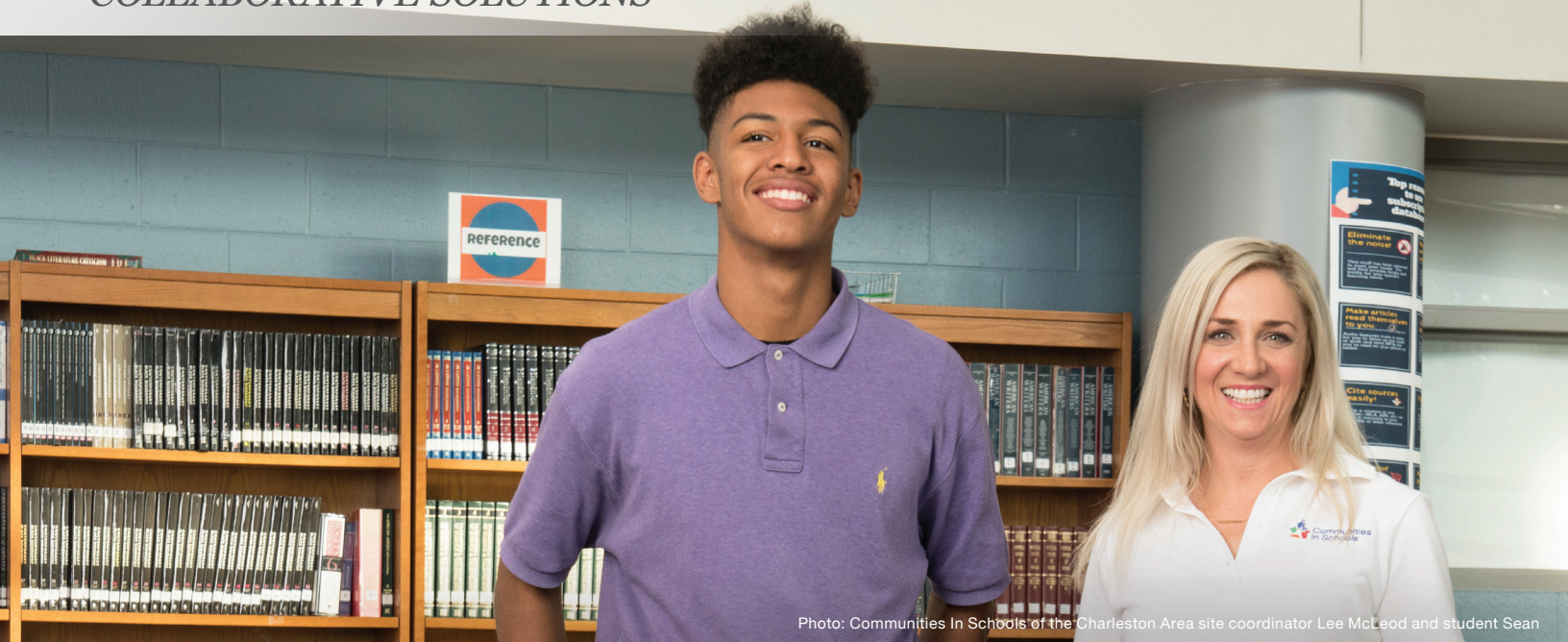
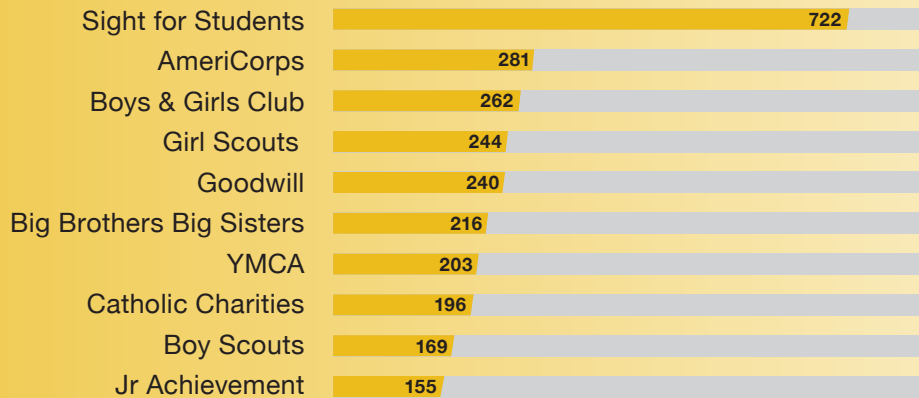


Photo: Communities In Schools of the Charleston Area site coordinator Lee McLeod and student Sean

## Our Community Program Partners

Helping students succeed takes strong local partnerships. Here are the top community program partners our affiliates worked with during the 2016-2017 school year.

### Top Program Partners



Number of Communities In Schools sites reporting partnerships with each program provider.

**8,700**  
partners

deliver programs and services  
to students in need.

**43,000**  
volunteers

donate their time to provide a range  
of services in schools each year.



# OUTCOMES

OUR STUDENTS ARE IMPROVING THEIR

# Attendance AND MUCH MORE

For many of the students Communities In Schools works with, attendance is not their only challenge. In fact, problems with attendance often manifest in other areas such as behavior and academic performance. Missing school can result in students falling behind in coursework, leading to frustration and ultimately acting out in the classroom and beyond. This is why CIS takes a holistic approach to supporting kids. Not only do we tackle the attendance problems, but we provide the supports necessary to ensure students come to school, stay in school, and ultimately, graduate with a plan for their future. Year over year, data consistently demonstrate that CIS is helping students along their pathway to success.

**78%** of Communities In Schools case-managed students met their attendance goals.

**90%** met their behavior goals

**88%** met their academic goals

**99%** remained in school through the end of the school year

**94%** of students in grades K-11 were promoted to the next grade level

**93%** of seniors graduated or received a GED

**77%** of graduates planned to attend some form of post-secondary education

Source: CIS National End of Year Data; School Year 2016-17.



# Our Results

## for Case-Managed Students by State

In every state, we're helping students improve their performance in school. Nationally, 78 percent of Communities In Schools case-managed students met their attendance goals. Here is a look at our outcomes across the country.

State	% Improved Attendance	% Improved Academics	% Promoted (K-11)	% Graduated (Including GED)
Alaska	NA	87%	100%	100%
California	48%	60%	97%	100%
Colorado	77%	94%	97%	36%
Delaware	79%	77%	68%	96%
District of Columbia	82%	99%	100%	100%
Florida	92%	96%	96%	96%
Georgia	70%	79%	86%	91%
Illinois	82%	88%	99%	100%
Indiana	75%	82%	97%	41%
Iowa	51%	61%	99%	NA
Kansas	80%	78%	94%	92%
Louisiana	82%	87%	88%	72%
Michigan	82%	91%	96%	96%
Nebraska	NA	NA	100%	97%
Nevada	75%	85%	97%	88%
New Mexico	76%	81%	91%	78%
North Carolina	87%	90%	96%	96%
Ohio	84%	85%	93%	91%
Oklahoma	88%	87%	92%	97%
Pennsylvania	74%	79%	79%	90%
South Carolina	86%	94%	96%	98%
Tennessee	83%	93%	90%	91%
Texas	76%	90%	94%	95%
Virginia	56%	76%	91%	90%
Washington	83%	86%	97%	78%
West Virginia	85%	84%	87%	100%



# Relationships Matter: Customizing Solutions to Improve Attendance

## Flipping the Script

A SCHOOL DISTRICT FLIPS THE ABSENTEEISM SCRIPT BY FOCUSING ON SCHOOLS THAT MOST NEED ASSISTANCE.

North East Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas, is a kaleidoscope of schools with varying needs. Given the economic and demographic differences among school populations, Superintendent Brian G. Gottardy says, “We have to ensure that we’re doing our best by the schools that don’t need as much help addressing chronic absenteeism while creating more intensive solutions for those that do.”

Set up in seven of the 11 schools in the Roosevelt attendance zone, Communities In Schools provides the resources, time and commitment to help the district promote better attendance “in ways we don’t always have the bandwidth to do,” he says.

One school in particular is leading the charge. At Roosevelt High School, CIS of San Antonio is helping connect students to a wide range of local resources that address everything from truancy to homelessness to the specific issues that immigrant students face.

“There’s such a strong correlation between failure and not coming to school,” says Principal Melvin Echard. “We consider chronic absenteeism a cry for help, so we don’t just want to identify it, we want to be prescriptive in how to fix it.”

## Achieving Success

AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL REFLECTS ON COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS’ INFLUENCE ON HER STUDENTS’ ATTENDANCE.

At Westerly Hills Academy, a pre-K through eighth grade public school in Charlotte, North Carolina, attendance and academic behavior receive focused attention from teachers, administrators and families alike. Eighty-five percent of the school’s students live below the poverty line, and 100 percent qualify for free and reduced lunches.



Photo: Communities In Schools of Bay Area students DaeShanay and Hoke

“Having two Communities In Schools coordinators has really helped us support so many of our students who are struggling,” says Principal Malacy Williams.

The coordinators monitor interventions to meet student needs, support parents at Westerly Hills and ensure wrap-around services are provided to help decrease absenteeism and increase academic success. They have also reached out to parents using programs like Donuts for Dads, inviting them to school to discuss the importance of attendance and how to support their children’s academic success.

Thanks to these efforts, chronic absence dropped among students case managed by Communities In Schools, from 19 percent to 11 percent between the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years.



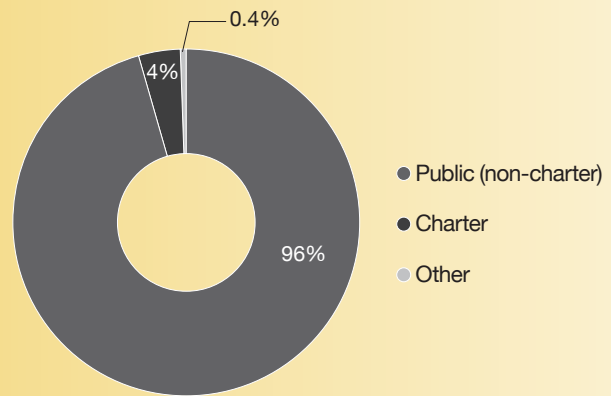
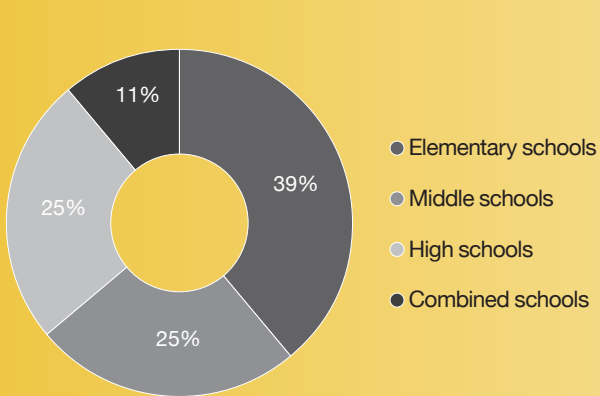
# OUTCOMES



Photo: Clear Creek Middle School students

## Our Schools

Schools are our biggest partners. They enabled us to serve 1.56 million students in 2,300 schools last year.





## LIFTING UP A STUDENT IN NEED

WHEN A STUDENT WAS STRUGGLING TO STAY ENGAGED AND GO TO SCHOOL, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS LET HER KNOW SHE WASN'T ALONE.

Seventh-grader DeeAndra was not her usual, vibrant self. Adopted at a young age by her grandparents, she had recently gone through instability at home and the death of a close relative. The experiences left her disinterested in school and feeling disconnected from the people around her. She was missing a lot of class and failing three out of four core courses.

*“She struck me as a very chill student who had this amazing personality, but you could just tell she was struggling,”* says Communities In Schools of San Antonio site coordinator Najee Jones, who first encountered DeeAndra in the school hallway. *“It was almost like she was just existing.”*

Jones met with DeeAndra almost every day to track her grades, set personal goals and improve her emotional well-being. By calling DeeAndra's family to offer assistance, Jones let DeeAndra know that she wasn't alone.

By eighth grade, DeeAndra was passing her classes with As and Bs, making it onto her school's honor roll. Her attendance rate went from 59 percent to 89 percent.

*“Miss Jones was there to make sure I was OK,”* says DeeAndra. *“That's what made me love her even more. I'm just very thankful for her.”*



*LOOKING AHEAD*

# *What's Next*

## *FOR COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS*

While we continue to work on boosting attendance in schools, there are three areas that we are focusing on in the near future: nurturing students' social, emotional, and academic development, fostering developmental relationships, and responding to behavioral issues with restorative justice, rather than punishment.

The overall goals: give students the ability to be in school and get the most out of it, while enabling teachers to put their energies into teaching.

To that end, we are going even deeper with the strategies and curricula that we make available across our network. Every community in which we work will have access to a foundational set of strategies they can apply across grade levels to address some of the underlying challenges and barriers affecting academic success.

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



**Across the country, we'll continue to be all in for kids. We want every child, in every corner of America, to have a shot at his or her best possible future."**

**– Dale Erquiaga, Communities In Schools President & CEO**



