Communities In Schools Kalamazoo

Connections

Graduation:
Beginning with the End in Mind

1.2 million students drop out of school every year. These students will cost taxpayers roughly $292,000 each, as they're more likely to need community assistance.

-Communities In Schools 2016 National Impact Report

Keeping students in school and on track for graduation is serious business. Researchers Katherine Larson and Russell Rumberger have found that for students who are struggling and at risk of dropping out "interventions must be intensive, comprehensive, coordinated, and sustained. Anything less is naïve and will sow only marginal results."

With your support, Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo surrounds students in 20 Kalamazoo Public Schools with whatever it takes so they can start strong and keep moving forward. In Kalamazoo Public Schools, things are moving in the right direction. The four-year district-wide graduation rate for 2015 was 71%. It was 69% in 2014 and 65% in 2013. For the four years ending in 2015, the dropout rate was 12.7%, the lowest rate since 2008. We still have work to do and with your continued support, CIS will overcome the barriers that derail kids, giving them hope and the belief they can succeed in school, graduate and be prepared for life.

So as we embark on a new school year, let's take to heart the words of Dr. Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and "begin with the end in mind."



Twelve 5th graders celebrate their Arcadia Elementary School graduation in CIS-style. They wore CIS sashes and caps, and received certificates for their successful involvement in CIS. They also received a CIS bag with school supplies to use during the summer as well as the book, The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook: Middle School by David Borgenicht, Ben Winters, and Robin Epstein. The book has some great tips for helping with the transition to middle school, such as how to survive the first day as well as navigating homework overload and handling bullies and cliques.

Finding His Voice



Cindy, America Reads Tutor, with Gulnar Husain and Lenny.

Lenny Williams has always been soft spoken. "He's wasn't disruptive," Gulnar Husain explains. "In fact, he was quite the opposite. Quiet and introverted, he had a habit of shutting down and being off-task. He didn't listen or follow directions. His academics suffered because he just wasn't applying himself. He is a very sweet boy but he just wasn't living up to his potential."

So when Lenny's then kindergarten teacher, Michelle Hiller, referred him to CIS, one of the first things Gulnar Husain did was connect him with a tutor.

Lenny believes tutoring as well as a number of other supports have helped him move in a positive direction during his time at Arcadia Elementary School. "Ms. Gulnar gives me things that have helped me be better in school, things I need, like foodpacks, coats, shoes, boots, and gloves." It's these basic supports, along with tutoring, that have allowed Lenny to be ready to learn every day from the dedicated teachers he's had throughout his elementary years.

Ask Lenny who his favorite teacher is and he can't pick just one. He'll tick them off one by one, from kindergarten to fifth grade, but try and nail him down to one or two and he can't do it. "Arcadia just has really good teachers," he explains.

A loving family and great teachers, along with community support funneled through CIS is helping Lenny realize his potential. "He's really blossomed and he has confidence now," says Cindy Kesterke, Lenny's former America Reads tutor. "It's great to see and I'm excited for his future."

"You think I'm persistent?" Gulnar laughs. "Lenny is one of the most persistent people I know. That's because he's anxious to learn. Always polite with his requests, this persistence extends beyond himself. He'll even stop by the CIS office and advocate for his younger brothers to also receive CIS support. Because of the tremendous support he's received from the school and the community, Lenny came to the decision that he needed to turn things around. Once he decided he wanted to do better, things naturally began to fall into place."

Lenny describes it this way: "I just thought I should get better grades, so I started behaving myself. I used to always get referrals for not listening. I decided for myself to work hard and get good grades."

Lenny's looking forward to attending middle school and building on what he learned at Arcadia. "I'm going to do good and them I'm going to college," he says.

To find out Lenny's favorite word and what he wants to be when he grows up, check out the "Pop Quiz" we gave him. You can find it our blog, Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids.

Capitalizing on Your Investment

Five graduating seniors, Quinntonia, Zion, Arrion, LaStarra, and Dorian participated in a panel discussion at the CIS Board Meeting in June. All five Kalamazoo Public School students are headed to college. Here are a few insights and hard-earned wisdom they shared.



KPS seniors and CIS staff after the CIS Board panel discussion.

"What am I most proud of? Accepting help. I like to be independent, and I couldn't be because of my situation. I'm proud I could accept help from CIS."

"I liked being able to run down to [CIS Site Coordinator] Ms. Yarbrough. She always let me know where I was and what I needed to do to stay on track. Working with CIS and all my teachers, I was able to turn myself around."

"Without CIS, school would have been way, way harder. All the support you receive makes you feel good and want to graduate and be something in life."

"I'm looking forward to college and putting to use what [CIS Site Coordinator] Mr. Baker and [CIS Success Coach] Mr. Ollie taught me—and making my own success plan."

What would be your advice to help students succeed in school and use the Kalamazoo Promise?

"Find a support system and keep believing in yourself."

"Talk more about possible futures and careers. By having a better understanding of what the future could look like, it helps students set their goals."

What barriers did you encounter to attending school and performing academically?

"I'm a last-minute kind of person... and I'd forget to turn stuff in. CIS helped get me organized."

"I talked too much and got distracted. I was terrible my first year. Mr. Ollie helped me get it together."

Students shared how the decision to focus in on school impacted friendships.

"I lost friends. But you only need a few good friends, even just one friend who strives for the same success."

"When you get serious about school, you can end up bringing your friends along. They start thinking, 'Maybe I should start getting serious, too' and you can get on track together and get your diploma."

"I lost friends too, but I gained new friends and we helped each other in class. Also, losing a friendship doesn't mean you can't gain it back."

How can CIS be better?

"Help more students who are struggling." **–Resounding response from all panel members.**

Making Sure Ki



The Loy Norrix CIS team of O'Neal Ollie, CIS Success Coach (left), and Montrell Baker, CIS Site Coordinator (right).

CIS Senior Site Coordinator Montrell Baker and CIS Success Coach O'Neal Ollie sat down with us to reflect on the work they do at Loy Norrix High School to help students stay in school and achieve in life.

What obstacles most threaten a student's path to graduating on-time or at all?

Montrell: A lack of support systems. If they don't have support at home, haven't identified an adult that can guide them, it's hard to be successful. They need support, an outlet. That's what we are for those kids, and not just for school work. They also come to us about their home and life situations. We guide them in their decision-making process. We are there for them.

O'Neal: I'd agree. Students need a support system that allows them to be a student. This makes me think of a student we wanted to connect to after school supports but every time we pursued it, she refused. "I just can't," she said. Eventually, she told us, "I have to get home after school and open the door for my little brother and sister. I have to make sure they do their homework and cook them dinner." Coming from a single-parent household, the student has significant responsibilities as her mom works long hours and doesn't get home until evening.

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So you've identified resources to support this young lady and yet, she's busy being a support system for her younger siblings. How do you go about helping a student in this type of situation?

O'Neal: We come up with another game plan. We work around the student's reality and put other supports in place. I'd also say that another barrier to graduation is normal stuff, like peer pressure. Students from both Norrix and Central spoke quite eloquently about this to our CIS board back in June.

Montrell: Yes, and sometimes it's the lack of basic needs, like pencils and backpacks. Students will come down to CIS and say, "My teacher sent me here because I don't have a notebook."

ds Finish Strong

O'Neal: Or clothing. Some kids will tell you, "I need a shirt." But other students—you know they have a need—but we can't always come right out and say, "Hey, I know you need clean clothes."

So how do you handle those situations?

Montrell: I usually start with conversation. [O'Neal nods.] Let them know all we have to offer. Towards the end of our conversation, I'll say something like, "So then, you got everything you need?" It opens the door for them and often the student will say, "You got clothes, right? Can I get a sweatshirt, because I'm cold coming to school in the morning?" After that, they feel more open to coming for assistance.

O'Neal: It's all about developing those relationships.

In your experience, how do CIS and the school work together to help students get and stay on track to graduation?

O'Neal: CIS connects the services, and in some cases the actual materials, that allow students to focus on being a student and learn from their teachers. My job description is to remove the barriers to graduation.

Montrell: That is a lot of it. Touching on what we just discussed—about the basics—teachers should not be expected to, nor do they have the budgets to, provide everything students need. They don't have an abundance of notebooks and other class supplies lying around. With CIS in the school, when they see a student with a need, whatever it is, they can say, "Go to CIS." Teachers are great at referring. Who better to know that a student is struggling in reading or doing poorly in class because they can't see? Teachers know when students need glasses and that we have a vision fund. They reach out to us all the time for a wide range of needs. I tell them to send the student to me. Then, I explain the process to the student and get them glasses, a tutor, or help meet whatever needs he or she has.

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O'Neal: Administration also plays an important role. Our Principal, Mr. Rodney Prewitt, is well aware of CIS and that we can connect students to what they need, whether it's dental support, glasses, clothes, tutors, you name it. Assistant Principal Kelly Hinga provides great support as well. She is knowledgeable about CIS, a terrific advocate, and supports us so we can be successful for kids.

All of the great work you've been reading about is made possible by people like you who volunteer with or donate to CIS.

Make a gift to CIS today.

Reflections on Crossing the Finish Line



Doreisha Reed, CIS graduate, reading her letter at the 2016 Champs Celebration.

Doreisha Reed has headed off to college, but not before reflecting upon her CIS experience at the 2016 CIS Champs Celebration held this past May. We share her remarks here.

Hello Everyone. My name is Doreisha Reed. I've been involved with Communities In Schools since I first started attending Kalamazoo Public Schools in the second grade at Lincoln.

I can still remember getting the Friday foodpacks every week. My mother use to tell us not to open them until we got home. All we wanted to do was trade the fruit snack, Slim Jims, and juice boxes. We wanted to pitch the rest, but Mom used those other items to prepare meals. I also recall going to the Communities In Schools office for tennis shoes. For some reason, every year in elementary school, I needed a new pair of gym shoes, faithfully. Now, I would get a new pair from mom every year, but they would end up stolen, thrown on the roof or up in a tree, or lost in the sand box. They'd just come up missing. So, my teachers would send me to the CIS office. This was common among others in my class. When a student needed a basic item to help them comfortably get to and from school, stay in school, or focus in class, everyone knew they could go to the CIS office. For shoes, hats, school supplies, hygiene products, scarves, gloves, pants, shirts. You name it. CIS had it.

In middle school, I participated in the CIS After School program [funded by the Michigan Department of Education (21st Century Community Learning Centers.)] It was a lot of fun. In middle school I almost always got my homework done because of the tutors in the program. I also loved the *CIS Think Summer! program*. We did a play and went to Michigan Adventures! In high school, Communities In Schools gave me lots of opportunities to get involved and stay connected. I was a Literacy Buddy my sophomore and junior year. I went to the AT&T Career Trip, like three times. I traveled to Chicago on our trip to see the Shedd Aquarium. I also participated in the Transformative Leadership Summit where I talked to middle school girls about high school.

I especially appreciate the encouragement I received from my CIS Site Coordinator at Kalamazoo Central, Mrs. Yarbrough. She reminded me of why I'm in school; to do something with my life. I plan to take advantage of the Kalamazoo Promise.

I've been through a lot of rough days, and it was nice to just sit down and have somebody like Mrs. Yarbrough to talk to. Communities In Schools eliminates many of the unnecessary barriers and distractions that students face on their education journey. I can't imagine a school not having a CIS office. I believe that it's necessary for the success in many of our students' lives. I know it was in mine. Simply put: we need you, and we appreciate you.

Advice from Alex

Alex-Saundra Hudson spent her summer working as a youth development worker in the *CIS Think Summer! program*. As a 2015 graduate of Kalamazoo Central High School, she is a Promise Scholar embarking on her sophomore year at Michigan State University. Her advice to those following in her footsteps:

- Always try your best and use the Kalamazoo Promise!
- Pick out adults or people you trust who will push you and check up on you your freshman year of college.
- Know that college will be an adjustment your freshman year. Don't be discouraged.
- If you find yourself becoming discouraged, do some self-check thinking. Ask yourself, "Am I doing all I can do?" Check into resources at your higher learning institution. Take advantage of their tutoring support. Find out the office hours of your professors and reach out to them. Know you have the next semester ahead of you to improve and set goals for that next semester.

To learn more about Alex-Saundra, read her interview on the CIS blog, Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids,.



Alex-Saundra Hudson, CIS Youth Development Worker, working with a student during the CIS Think Summer! program.

If you believe in our efforts to ensure that ALL kids stay in school and achieve in life, please visit www.ciskalamazoo.org or call 269.337.1601 for more details on getting involved with CIS. On our website you will find ways to support local youth through volunteer opportunities, ways to make a gift, event information, and our Kids' Closet Wish List.

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Photos in this newsletter were taken by contributing CIS Staff.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this newsletter or would like to sign up for the e-newsletter, contact Jessy Wilson (CIS Marketing & Community Engagement Manager) at jwilson@ciskalamazoo.org or call 269.337.1601 extension 217.

Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo
125 West Exchange Place
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

www.ciskalamazoo.org
Ph: 269.337.1601
Fx: 269.385.5806

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Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo overcomes the barriers that derail kids, giving them hope and the belief that they can succeed in school, graduate and be prepared for life.



Graduation

" Your race, color, or past doesn't determine what kind of capability you have within yourself. Any put downs or mistakes made should be seen as an opportunity to grow and learn. But the motivation has to grow in one's self and not wait for others to tell you what needs to be done. CIS has been there to help me and other students to continue and finish strong thanks to Mrs. Yarbrough."

-Lisbeth Morales