



FALL 2018 NEWSLETTER

BACK TO THE BASICS

As we start a new school year, we're remembering that sometimes it's good to get back to the basics. Mastering the basics means that we can grow and progress, moving into more complex ideas and themes. It would be hard to successfully learn algebra if we don't have a firm foundation in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

At CIS, we have Five Basics that we're revisiting in this expanded, back-to-school edition of CIS Connections. The Five Basics are a set of essentials that every child needs and deserves. When basic needs are met, students improve their overall readiness to learn. Imagine, if every child had these basics, what more could they achieve?

1

A one-on-one relationship with a caring adult. Knowing that programs don't change kids and that relationships do, we connect students to caring adults who offer encouragement, new experiences and expert knowledge, academic support, and hope.

2

A safe place to learn and grow. Creating safe, nurturing spaces through after school programs and summer experiences extends students' learning and helps them achieve their potential.

3

A healthy start and a healthy future. Linking students to vision care, health services and dental exams, social/emotional supports, and other basics are pre-requisites to growing healthy people and limiting more costly health problems later on.

4

A marketable skill to use upon graduation. Offering literacy programs, career and post-secondary education exploration helps prepare students for today's labor force.

5

A chance to give back to peers and community. Providing students opportunities to share strengths, talents, and time with others, by volunteering, tutoring younger students, and other ways, helps young people feel connected to their community.



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PEOPLE POWER

This past school year, more than 800 individuals volunteered through CIS! These volunteers tutored, helped with homework, distributed clothing from the CIS Kids' Closet, delivered Friday Food Packs, mentored students, and more. Most of our volunteers work one-on-one or with small groups of students, serving as another caring adult in kids' lives.

To strengthen and support these tremendous volunteer efforts, a Volunteer Leadership Advisory Council (VLAC)

has been established. The VLAC meets monthly and shares input to help CIS be effective in our volunteer services and provides support to new and emerging volunteers. Members include CIS volunteers ranging from college students to retirees. Volunteer Coordinator Nicky Aiello says, "Each of the members is really committed. Also, they've each signed on as volunteer mentors, supporting new volunteers coming into the organization." Volunteer Leadership Advisory Council, thank you for going above and beyond for kids!



(Left to right) Pam Dalitz, Richard Phillips, Jeme Baker, Marti Terpstra, Howard Teichma, and Jashaun Bottoms. Not pictured: Chris Werme, Moises Hernandez, Theresa Hazard, and Dedrenna Hoskins.

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DANYELLE BROWN: HELPING KIDS REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

This summer, Danyelle worked with rising fourth graders in CIS Think Summer. A youth development worker for CIS during the school year at Northglade Montessori Magnet School, Danyelle hails from Detroit and studies early childhood education at Western Michigan University.

“It’s so true,” Danyelle says, “that kids need the basics. They need love and they need a home away from home. When a kid can trust you with their potential and you help them reach that potential, they will go far.”

“We—and our kids—are fortunate to have youth development workers like Danyelle,” says CIS Human Resources Coordinator Colleen Loc. “She is passionate about helping kids stay in school and succeed in life. We’re looking to hire 20 additional youth development staff to join our team this school year, individuals who, like Danyelle, will serve as positive role models, support the college-going culture, and assist youth in attaining and excelling in areas of academics, attendance, and behavior.”

In reflecting on her experience thus far, Danyelle says, “It’s amazing to get my feet wet with CIS and get the opportunity to do what I’m going to be doing for the rest of my life!” She encourages others to “absolutely consider” applying to become a youth development worker. “And if you are planning on being an educator of some sort, this is a great foundation and you will find there are connections throughout CIS and people who will help you grow in this field. The environment is warm and friendly and it’s a cool organization. It’s just cool working for CIS!”

Our kids need more Youth Development Workers, enthusiastic individuals like Danyelle, to step up and serve after school (Monday through Thursday). If you or someone you know might be right for the job, go to CISKalamazoo.org and apply today!



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WE KEPT THE LIGHTS ON! (FOR NOW.)



Thank you for speaking up for the hundreds of students who benefit from approximately 440 extra hours of learning support per year. The considerable advocacy here and across the country for after school programs was effective for the 2018 year and funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers was included in the budget bill passed by Congress, despite the recommendation to eliminate all funding for that purpose. CIS After School and CIS Think Summer! are available thanks to the support of these federal dollars that are awarded through the Michigan Department of Education. Since this budget bill covers only through 2018, we will need to continue to advocate for keeping the lights on for after school in 2019 and beyond.

GROUND-BREAKING NEWS: A NEW HOME FOR CIS

On August 9, ground was broken for a new mixed-use development in downtown Kalamazoo at the corner of Water and North Edwards Streets. It will be the new home for several organizations, including The Kalamazoo Promise, Southwest Michigan First, Warner Norcross and Judd, LLP and Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo!

Because of the exceptional generosity of Kalamazoo's business community, we have benefited from in-kind contributions of office space and office equipment that has allowed us to direct financial resources exclusively for the direct benefit of students. Our new space, ready for occupancy in Summer 2020, will maintain that arrangement – the generous donations and grants given to CIS can continue to be directed to sustaining resources that support students and schools – CIS site

coordinators, recruiting and training volunteers, coordinating health and dental care, addressing basic needs, and more.

We are excited and honored to have a new space that enhances our vision of an engaged community where every child fulfills his or her promise. We look forward to contributing to a visible and central place for collaboration and community engagement that will positively impact the lives of students we serve and their families.

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LITERACY AND LEADERSHIP

If you were at Parkwood-Upjohn Elementary on a Tuesday or a Thursday this spring, you would have found nearly 40 high school students and elementary school students huddled together over books, eating dinner with each other, or working on homework together. With the generous support of State Farm, the CIS Literacy Buddies after school program was again able to be offered last school year.

Pairing a high school Big Buddy from Kalamazoo Central High School or Loy Norrix High School with two elementary school Little Buddies from Parkwood-Upjohn Elementary, the program provided

students with opportunities to practice literacy skills. Additionally, the program gave high school students the chance to both give back and gain leadership skills. One Big Buddy said, “The best thing about Literacy Buddies is that we get to read with kids that need a little help to push them over the hump.”

Program Coordinator, Dalanna Hoskins, said “One of the best things about Literacy Buddies was seeing the relationships develop between the Big Buddies and the Little Buddies and to see the sense of accomplishment that all of the students felt at the end of the program, especially the Big Buddies.”





CIS STAFF RECOGNIZED LOCALLY AND TAPPED NATIONALLY

In 2017, The Kalamazoo Promise initiated its “You Make a Difference” Award. Each school throughout Kalamazoo Public Schools selects the award winner for their school—one person who they believe makes a significant difference for their school. This year, two schools chose a CIS member of their team: Site Coordinator Jen DeWaele was chosen by Woodward School for Technology and Research and After School Coordinator Stacy Jackson was chosen by Edison Environmental Science Academy.

Congratulations, Jen and Stacy! To be recognized by your own school community in making a difference for kids is truly an honor.

On the national front, many of you know Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo (CIS) is one of almost 200 CIS affiliates working throughout the country to overcome the barriers that derail kids, giving them hope and the

belief that they can succeed in school, graduate and be prepared for life.

The national office has selected Senior Director of Community Engagement & Student Investment Artrella Cohn to serve as a member of the National CIS DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Planning Team. Along with National leadership staff and consultants, the team will work to ensure that CIS is serving students/student families/schools through the DEI lens. Artrella serves on this planning team which currently includes ten other affiliate members across the country and several national leadership staff and consultants hired to lead and facilitate this important work. By helping the entire national CIS network focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion—particularly around leveraging differences related to race and poverty—students of every background will have an equal shot in life.



(Left to right) Jen DeWaele, Stacy Jackson, Artrella Cohn

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MS. ANNIE BROWN: “YOU CAN’T FAKE LOVE”

“I’m an organizer and I love to organize things!” says CIS volunteer Ms. Annie Brown. For the past three years, the students and families at Woodward School for Technology & Research have benefitted from her organizational skills and passion for helping others. Whether it’s helping sort and organize clothing items for Kids’ Closet, food items in the on-site Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry, working one-on-one with students, or “doing whatever Ms. Jen needs me to do,” Ms. Brown has become an important member of the CIS team.

“She has a way about herself,” says CIS Site Coordinator Jen DeWaele, “that immediately puts students and families at ease. She’s an all-around great support.” Principal Frank Rocco says, “We are so grateful for Ms. Brown’s time at Woodward. She understands that students need to have all their needs met in order to succeed in the classroom. She comes into the school with care and heart, and is so supportive in many ways.”

Sometimes, it’s the interruptions of life that tell the real story. In the middle of meeting with Ms. Brown for this

article, a young student entered Woodward’s CIS room. “I’m here for my new backpack,” he said. Ms. Brown immediately rose from her chair and, calling the student by name, went over to assist him. “Well, let’s see if we can’t find you just the right one,” she said cheerfully. After a minute, the student was sporting two things he didn’t arrive with: a backpack and a huge smile. As he headed to the door, she gently reminded him, “What do you say?” “Oh... Thank you!” he replied.

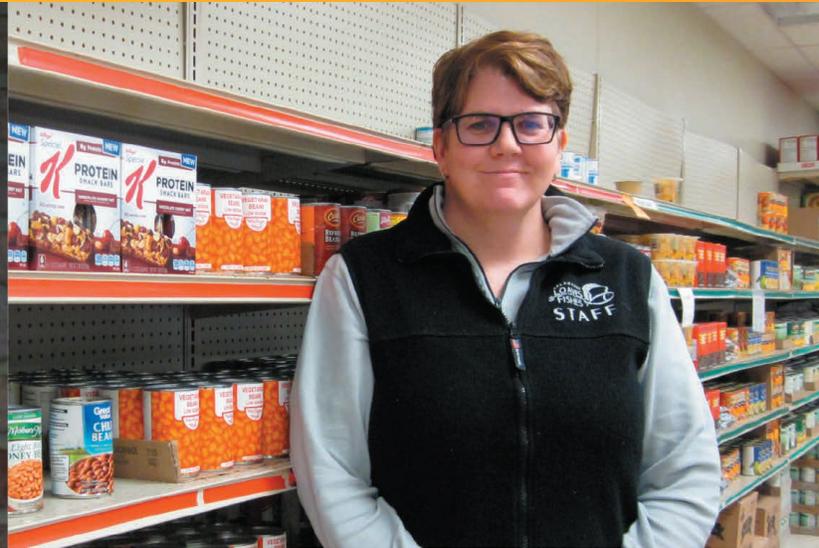
There were several more interruptions and each time, Ms. Brown greeted the children respectfully. Clearly, for her, kids do come first. Her warm presence seems to call forth the best in students. “You have to love what you’re doing,” she says. “And I do! If you don’t love it, you’re not going to do your best. You can’t fake love.”

In April 2018, we featured “Ms. Annie Brown: A Tree With Many Branches” on the CIS blog, Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids. If you would like to learn more about her, how she credits her granddaughter and Principal Rocco with getting her involved in CIS, you can find the post at <http://ciskalamazoo.org/blog>.



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(Left to right) John Curran, Jennifer Johnson. Two key partners working with CIS to provide basics such as shoes and food support to students in KPS.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

We asked First Day Shoe Fund's Executive Director, John Curran, what, from his perspective, is the relationship between shoes and school success?

John: "First Day Shoe Fund is doing everything we can do so students are ready to learn when they enter the classroom. When they have comfortable, correct fitting shoes, they are one step closer to that opportunity to be successful."

We also believe shoes are important to a child's self-esteem, feeling a sense of belonging and self-worth. Having the appropriate shoes leads to a healthy and active lifestyle. Students can participate in activities both inside and outside of school, they can be part of gym class, a school or community sport, and feel like they belong.

A pair of shoes puts the young person on equal footing with their peers, providing them the same opportunity to walk into their classroom, feeling comfortable and good about themselves, ready to learn."

At the K-12 level, studies have found a link between food insecurity and absenteeism and suspensions. We asked Executive Director of Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes, Jennifer Johnson, from her perspective, what is the relationship between food insecurity and behavioral issues, such as poor attendance?

Jennifer: "It means everything! It's hard to imagine but let's think about it. As an adult you miss lunch, maybe you even miss lunch a few times that week, so then you eat a large dinner. For others, missed meals are a regular part of their lives; it's a normal occurrence. Hungry children rely on breakfast, lunch and after school programs to help fill the holes."

The more holes or gaps there are in a child's life, the more risk they have for not learning the same as their peers. In addition, behavioral issues pop up as do health issues... You know, we talk about obesity in this country. I'm talking malnutrition; malnutrition right here in Kalamazoo county. We attach the problem to places far away, in Africa, or destitute areas of the world. The reality is that hunger is right here, where we are. Hunger is in every block, street, and school.

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GLASSES ARE AWESOME

Approximately 20 – 25% of school-age children in the United States have a vision problem. Left untreated, vision problems can impact success in school since about 80% of what a child learns there is presented visually.

As part of our efforts to remove barriers that derail kids from success, we work with our community partners, like Rx Optical, August Optical, and Hiemstra Optical, to make sure kids get the vision exams and eyeglasses they need.

State law requires that all students are screened at regular intervals for vision. Parents are notified if the screening indicates the student needs a follow-up vision exam by an eye care professional. While some families may have health insurance, they don't have vision insurance so they pay out-of-pocket for vision care. For families with Medicaid, they may need assistance finding a provider who will accept their plan. In many instances, students lose or break their

eyeglasses and their plan doesn't cover another pair until the next year.

To help navigate these challenges, CIS staff reach out to parents and caregivers to offer help – whether it's finding a vision care provider who accepts their insurance or providing financial assistance.

If financial assistance is needed, generous donors to the Bernard Palchick Vision Fund, like Chemical Bank, make it possible for CIS to pay for exams and glasses when no other funding is available. Our vision care providers have also stepped in to help the Vision Fund go further.

Addressing this basic health need for students makes a difference in their academic achievement.

"I just found out that the student who received the first pair of glasses this fall has improved five independent reading levels this year! Wahoo! Glasses are awesome." – CIS Site Coordinator



A SAFE PLACE TO LEARN AND GROW

Catamarans made with plastic bottles. A hands-on experience with supply chain activities. Mindfulness practice. Learning about careers in media and design, as well as the skilled trades. Performing for our community. Sounds like fun, right?

More than 300 students spent six weeks with us during CIS Think Summer! which is supported by 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants from the Michigan

Department of Education. This is the ninth summer that CIS has offered a six-week summer program to reduce the risk of “summer slide” –students losing the gains they’ve made during the school year. In addition, CIS continued to support more than a dozen 10th – 12th grade students that we worked with during the school year, providing them with college and career exploration opportunities. Here’s a peek at what summer with CIS looked like.



“I LIKE THAT WE GET TO DO ARTS AND CRAFTS. DID YOU KNOW YOU CAN MAKE A STICK PERSON OF YOURSELF? WE DID, AND I WANT TO BE AN ARTIST WHEN I GROW UP.”

— Zahra Faustine, Arcadia Elementary School

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“ONE THING I LEARNED THIS SUMMER IS ABOUT HOMEWORK. IF YOU DON'T DO YOUR HOMEWORK IT JUST MAKES THINGS HARDER. IF YOU TURN IT IN, IT'S EASIER. MS. SMOKA TOLD ME THAT AND SHE IS RIGHT.”

— Natalia Burgess-Hamilton, Lincoln International Studies School



Photo courtesy of Sharon Soltesz/Pfizer



Photo courtesy of Sharon Soltesz/Pfizer

“WHEN YOU DO HOMEWORK IT MAKES YOU SMARTER AND THEN WHEN YOU GO TO COLLEGE YOU'LL DO EVEN BETTER.”

— Alanoud Almandeel, Arcadia Elementary School



“I HAVE ENJOYED FREE TIME. WE PLAYED GAMES, ACTIVITIES, WE CAN COLOR. I MOSTLY LIKE TO PLAY WITH PLAY-DOH. I WANT TO BE AN ARTIST AND INVENTOR. I’VE INVENTED STUFF WITH PIPE CLEANERS. IT IS A STRING AND ALSO A PET SNAKE. YOU CAN MAKE IT DO ANYTHING.”

— Marisa Ramirez, Lincoln International Studies School



“I LEARNED HOW TO WRITE A THANK YOU LETTER!”

— Grant Harrison, Parkwood Upjohn Elementary School



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CIS Think Summer! Site Director Stacy Jackson with Natalia Burgess-Hamilton, Shamar Reynolds, Alanoud Almandeel, Marisa Ramirez, and Zahra Faustine.

LISTENING IN ON 3RD GRADERS

In addition to preventing the “summer slide” and assuring a safe summer filled with fun and learning, CIS Think Summer! also works to extend KPS’ college-going culture into the summer months.

Some soon-to-be third graders who participated in CIS Think Summer! had a vigorous discussion about college. What makes them excited when they think about college?

What makes me excited when thinking of college is...

“My reading levels will go up. I will become an even better reader!”

“I will get to read lots of books.”

“I will be able to see my parents when I get out of college. I’m going to miss them!”

“I will be able to come home, stay with my baby brother, and help him with his homework.”

“I will learn more about arts and crafts.”



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15 YEARS

In June, CIS celebrated our 15-year anniversary. When we look at the collective impact of our work in schools to remove the barriers that derail kids from success, we are encouraged by the rising graduation rates in the Kalamazoo Public Schools.

Since The Kalamazoo Promise was announced 13 years ago in June 2005, there has been a 52% increase in the number of graduates in the Kalamazoo Public Schools. A 24% rise in enrollment accounts for some of this increase, but not all.

The four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2017 was 72.9%, the highest since the uniform federal graduation

rate formula began in 2008. This achievement is especially notable as the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in the district has remained around 70%, compared to the state average of around 48%.

This progress reflects what is possible when we surround students with a community of support. Your investment in kids is making an impact. Still, much work remains. Working together we will help all students succeed in school, graduate from high school, and be prepared for life.



DEAR EGO: A POEM

Dear Ego,
You don't always need to fill the room.
There is such a thing as an ego that is too big.
A little humility is good for you once in a while.
You can empower us, though.
A well-balanced ego can help us go far.
You are good to have,
just don't grow to be arrogant.

— Samantha Shaffer

Loy Norrix student Samantha Shaffer was one of more than 70 Kalamazoo Public Schools students who participated in "Courage to Create" poetry workshops held at Western Michigan University as part of Kalamazoo's annual MLK Day Celebration. We like how Samantha infused humor into her piece.



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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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THANK YOU

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.

The work of Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo is supported by the Kalamazoo Public Schools, the City of Kalamazoo, the Michigan Department of Education (21st Century Community Learning Centers), local foundations, and donors like you.

Photos in this newsletter were taken by contributing CIS Staff, unless otherwise noted.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this newsletter or would like to sign up for the e-newsletter, contact Emily Kobza at ekobza@ciskalamazoo.org or call (269) 337-1601.

