



Communities
In Schools

Kalamazoo



CIS QUARTERLY - 11/2021

Challenging Herself Even in Challenging Times

Last year, we introduced you to Hykea. She's in fourth grade now at Milwood Elementary School. As Hykea and her classmates have shifted from virtual to in-person learning this year, we wanted to connect once again to find out how she was adjusting to the change. To see Hykea's previous article, visit our blog: <https://ciskalamazoo.org/hykea-future-veterinarian/>

In March 2020, when the world had hunkered down because of the pandemic and Kalamazoo Public Schools moved to virtual learning, Hykea, like many students throughout the country, struggled with the transition. "I'd write and draw and go outside, but I missed my friends," Hykea said. Her grades slipped and she missed connecting with all the people school placed in her path.

Nikkea, Hykea's mother, is a strong advocate for her daughter. Working closely with CIS Site Coordinator Samantha Darby—whom Nikkea considers part of her daughter's inner circle of support—they put together a support plan. "CIS is a huge part of our team." Nikkea says, "They are fertilizing my flower."

With her positive, can-do approach, Hykea rocked the plan! She embraced the CIS support, participating in regular virtual check-ins with her CIS site coordinator. And when Ms. Sam coordinated virtual tutoring sessions with CIS volunteer Marti Terpstra, Hykea took advantage of that as well. This support helped her tackle homework assignments and get extra practice in reading and math.

Encouraged by the connection and conversations, her academics started improving.

And this year, now that Hykea is physically back in the school? "School is going good!" she says. "I get to see my friends!"

Thrilled to have shrugged off the virtual world and return to Milwood Elementary, Hykea continues to move in a positive direction. She is excited that she is learning from her teachers who are "helping me learn new things this year." She enjoys developing her violin skills during her weekly orchestra class at school and looks forward to visits from Janet Bremer, a CIS volunteer. Ms. Sam connected Hykea to for tutoring. They meet once a week in person to, Hykea explains, "read and talk and stuff."

And of course, not one to slouch, Hykea selected a hard book for them to read together, book 14 of the *Wings of Fire* series. Hykea says, "I need to get this book, I told my mom ... Well, I got it and opened it up and I'm like, *What? I got book 14?! I still needed book one, two, three, four, five ... I was going to read book one first but now I'm on page 29 or maybe page 23 of Wings of Fire.*"

Hykea has noticed that her hard work, combined with just the right support, is making a difference. "I'm more confident in reading, writing, and doing math," she says.

CIS Site Coordinator Samantha Darby—Miss Sam to Hykea—agrees with the fourth grader's assessment. "Whatever obstacles are in front of her, she overcomes them. She doesn't take the easy way out, but rather, challenges herself." For example, one of Hykea's goals this school year is to be even better at math and reading. She's already on the right track. As Miss Sam points out, "She chooses books that are challenging her as a reader. Whether it's reading or something else, she is always looking for that next challenge!"

"I am more confident in reading, writing, and doing math."

While her progress may appear effortless, Hykea puts in the hard work necessary to learn and grow as a person and student. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that her favorite phrase is: *Work hard, play later.*

Right now, she's working hard to become even better at math and reading. She plans to graduate from high school and attend veterinary school, or "zoo school" as she calls it. "I work hard," she says. "And I'm going to keep working hard this year."

Read more about Hykea on the CIS blog, *Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids.*



CIS Site Coordinator Samantha Darby (left) and Hykea (right)

Student Spotlight



ABDUL KAMARA

4th grader – Northglade Montessori Magnet School

1. **What is your favorite part of school?** Math. I am really good at it.
2. **How has CIS helped you?** I meet with Mr. Steve (CIS site coordinator) and do afterschool. Mr. Steve has helped me with math sometimes and we talk about the states.
3. **How would you describe your site coordinator in one word?** Nice.
4. **What are you most excited about this coming fall and going back to school?** To see my teacher and principal and to get harder math. I finally get a locker; I'm excited about that.



ELIZABETH RAMOS

6th grader - Milwood Magnet Middle School

1. **What is your favorite part of school?** Getting to know more about my teachers and friends.
2. **How has CIS helped you?** My homework and we do lots of activities after school. I have also received school supplies during the beginning of the school year.
3. **How would you describe your after school coordinator in one word?** Caring.
4. **What are you most excited about this coming fall and going back to school?** Getting to meet more people.

In for Kids... In a deeper way

This June, the Stryker Johnston Foundation, a private family foundation based in Kalamazoo, graciously awarded CIS multi-year funding to expand the services we provide to elementary students through our Integrated Student Supports (ISS) service model. The expansion will focus on depth rather than breadth—allowing us to improve and deepen services at the 14 KPS elementary schools with CIS presence.

Some of these expanded supports include:

- increasing the remaining CIS supported schools from part-time to full-time site coordinator service levels,
- increase staff support across the 14 elementary schools to grow our capacity of case-managed supports for more students,
- adding a mobile site coordinator to provide at home community-based services,
- increasing capacity to provide student supports like mental health services and academic assistance.

The Stryker Johnston Foundation funding will also help us become a more impactful organization by allowing us to improve our data management and evaluation processes. These improvements will enhance service delivery and quality of our practices and professional development for important topics like diversity, equity, and inclusion, and improving staff skills and knowledge.

CIS is extremely grateful for the support provided by the Stryker Johnston Foundation and we look forward to our shared partnership in supporting KPS students and empowering them to thrive.

PARTNER SUPPORT

Brandan Mitchell, LMSW
Ubuntu Therapy: Healing Through
Community Inclusion, LLC.

CIS works to bring mental and emotional health resources to our students through community partnerships. Currently, CIS currently partners with individual therapists, counseling agencies, and Hospice of SW Michigan to provide individual and group therapy, including grief and loss groups.

One of the highly skilled therapists we are grateful to partner with is Brandan Mitchell.

For the past 20 years, Brandan and his wife have lived in Kalamazoo. For the last 17 of those years, they have been raising their children. Brandan says, "Kalamazoo is home to us and we love being a part of this community!"

Amazing students are why Brandan partners with CIS. His therapeutic approach looks at the person as a whole ... mind, body, and spirit. When working through intense emotions, he reminds students, "calm body equals a calm mind."

To learn more about our partner Brandon Mitchell, visit our CIS blog, *Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids* in the near future!



A conversation with Dr. Rita Raichoudhuri

As both Superintendent of Kalamazoo Public Schools and as a board member of Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo, Dr. Rita Raichoudhuri helps CIS align our community resources within the schools to increase our collective impact on children. This school year, CIS and our partners are working harder than ever with KPS to engage and re-engage students in their educational experiences. At the start of the school year, we sat down with Dr. Raichoudhuri to talk about engagement.

At CIS, we are often looking for ways to provide students opportunities to become enwrapped and engrossed in their own education and to accept responsibility for their learning. That is an important part of helping to engage and empower students. When you think about engaging and reengaging students, what comes to mind for you?

Active engagement only comes when the learning and the outcome of the learning seems relevant. That's true for adults and that's true for young people. A great way to do that is through project-based learning because you actually are producing something that's functional as result of your learning process ... for example, it's one thing to memorize a multiplication table, but it's another thing to utilize the concept of multiplication to build a bridge out of popsicle sticks.

... Engagement starts with what we call in education terms, a self-to-world connection, when you are producing something tangible like creating a poster, building a bridge, or giving a presentation facilitated by the learning.

While a number of factors go into supporting student engagement, can you tease out just one strategy that is important in engaging students in their learning process?

So there is academic engagement which we just talked about, and then there is the intrinsic motivation piece which is SEL [Social, Emotional Learning] engagement. And engagement needs to start with that.

As a teacher, you don't jump into curriculum on the first or even the second day. You are doing circle time, building relationships, building classroom norms, you're structuring activities and games so that students are building bonds with each other because you are becoming a community that will be together for the entire year, a community that is learning together and pushing each other in productive ways. So good teachers take a lot of time up front doing that, and that's where those intrinsic engagement strategies are implemented.



Photo: provided by KPS for use in this newsletter

ENGAGEMENT

Getting students involved in their education programs is more than having them participate; it is connecting students with their education, enabling them to influence and affect the program and, indeed, enabling them to become enwrapped and engrossed in their educational experiences.

-Wehmeyer & Sands

Then when you are doing teamwork, you actually like the people in your group. And if you like the people you are with, you're invested in their success and you're invested in your own success.

The intrinsic motivation is to not let your teammates down, to not disappoint your teacher, and also push yourself to see what you are capable of, to be the best version of yourself. An adult has ingrained in you that hopefulness, that it's possible.

I think hope is very important. Hoping that a better future is possible, that your skill set isn't static, that your effort will equal improvement. And if you believe that, you're automatically intrinsically motivated to put in the effort and the time. So it starts with that. And then the academics need to be engaging or else you can become bored.

[Due to space constraints, you can find more of our conversation with Dr. Raichoudhuri on the CIS blog, [Ask Me About My 12,000 Kids.](#)]

Walking With Purpose

presented by



Last month we launched a new initiative called Walking With Purpose. Walking With Purpose was built on the belief that, working together, our community – including our students – can achieve anything. That is why we set the ambitious goal of 12,000 miles, which is symbolic of the number of students in the schools CIS supports. Over 200 people in our community and beyond stepped up to the challenge and WALKED WITH PURPOSE! Special thank you to all who participated, especially our 25 team captains who lead us to success.

Thank you to this year's sponsors, Ascension Borgess, CWS Financial Advisors, Old National Bank, and OnStaff USA.

News and CIS of Kalamazoo Updates

- Stop by and vote for your favorite ugly sweater as part of the Ugly Sweater Exhibit. Visit our website for more details.
- Save the date for the 2021 Ugly Sweater Party: Wednesday, December 8th. Tickets are on sale now!
- Check out our Facebook page on #GivingTuesday (11/30). Here at CIS we #GiveBack on #GivingTuesday!
- The Community Feast is back for 2021! In partnership with the Hands Up Project, hundreds of families are provided with Thanksgiving meals.

From our executive director

Near the end of the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy closes her eyes, clicks her heels, and proclaims that “there’s no place like home” to magically return to her family’s farm to see all of the people that meant so much to her.

While we didn’t click our heels to get here, at Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo (CIS) we can truly say “there’s no place like school!” Despite all of the challenges that we and our students have faced to start this school year, we are still thrilled to be back in our schools and to see in-person the students, families, school staff, volunteers, and partners that mean so much to us.

It is true that we were able to connect with many via video conference and porch visits, but those encounters cannot fully replace the engagement that we have within the schools. Services that were interrupted for more than year are already making rounds and once again having a positive impact on the health of our children. Volunteers are once again able to see the sparkle or the uncertainty in their students’ eyes and to find the right encouraging words that will help them power through the tough reading passage or math problem they’re assisting them with. Interns are back in the buildings applying the knowledge they too are learning and creating lasting bonds with children in our community. Therapists are providing individual and group counseling to students that may have not been able to find a private place during home learning. Site coordinators are able to instantly assure, support or provide needed items to children at any time throughout the day. Afterschool program staff are providing homework help, afternoon meals, and engaging programming in safe environments for kids throughout the city.

There’s no place like school!



James Devers, Executive Director

VOLUNTEER

Change a child’s life,
and yours as well!

DONATE

Invest in the future of our community.
\$1,500 supports a student for a year.

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.

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.

