

Being Present Matters

A Key Component of Student Success

Academics, attendance, and behavior are three key areas of progress that we track and monitor at CIS of Kalamazoo. Each is a key indicator of student success. Regarding regular attendance, students have the opportunity to succeed in the classroom (and beyond) when they are present in school, ready to learn, and engaged.

However, the spike of chronic absenteeism that began in the wake of the COVID pandemic is affecting our students' performance. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 14.7 million U.S. students—more than one in four—were chronically absent in 2021-22. That means they missed 10% or more of the school year, almost a full month of classes.

CIS' model of Integrated School-Supports (ISS) improves attendance by identifying both the academic and non-academic barriers that keep students from school, and then engaging students' families and the community to address those barriers. From the first day of school, CIS site coordinators promote the importance of attendance to students and their caregivers. Last school year, 68% of CIS case managed students met or made progress towards one of their attendance goals, 94% remained in school through the end of the 2023-24 school year, and 96% of kindergarten through 11th grade students were promoted to the next grade level.

We know that chronic absenteeism is a symptom of larger challenges in our community. That's why our work infuses the community's resources into schools—improving school-wide outcomes at 23 local Kalamazoo schools with CIS' presence.

CIS Site Coordinator Perla Medina Cano from El Sol Elementary School explained that she creates a unique plan for each student on her caseload struggling with attendance. Ethan, a 4th grader, receives academic support from Ms. Perla, specifically in reading. He joins a lunch buddies book club with two of his friends where they eat lunch and take turns reading some of their favorite books. This year, they are reading the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. His reading proficiency was increasing and his test scores were going up, but not as much as expected. This is when Ms. Perla decided that Ethan needed more than just academic support. Ethan was frequently missing school, which means he was missing out on the opportunity to learn.

During their next check-in, Ms. Perla and Ethan created a plan designed to inspire him to come to school. Ethan came up with the idea that if he is at school every day for a month, then he would get a small prize. This month, it is lunch from Steak 'N Shake. But it doesn't stop there. He found out that his friends hadn't been to this restaurant, so he asked, "If I get it, can they too?" Peer pressure can be a powerful tool, especially if used in a positive way, so Ms. Perla said, "Yes!"



Ethan (left) with his friends from their lunch buddies book club.

Since the plan was established, Ethan and Ms. Perla meet two times a week to discuss his attendance, among other goals. They talk about the benefits of attending school and how Ethan can be prepared and ready to learn—like going to bed on time, setting an alarm clock, and preparing his school bag the night before. Ethan has not missed school this month and is on track to receive his special award for both himself and his friends, but most importantly, he is in school learning or, in his words, "I go to school to learn and improve."

CIS Site Coordinator Joseph Burrel from Lincoln International Studies School explained his philosophy on the importance of attending school and what they are doing to improve student attendance at his school.

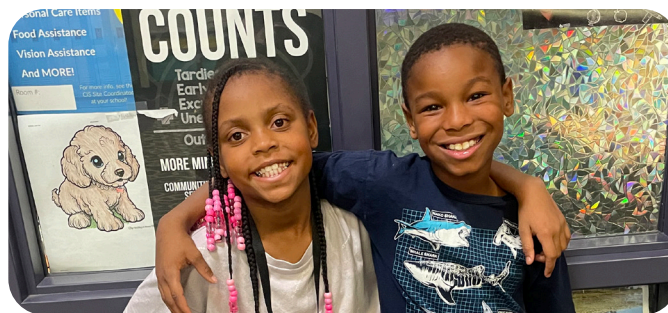
"When students don't come to school, it's hard to identify the barriers that hinder them from learning." That is why Joseph Burrel develops attendance goals with each of the students that he works with one-on-one throughout the year. In addition to the school-wide attendance initiative called *Attendance Heroes*—where Joseph serves as a school committee member—he runs his own attendance program, which funnels into *Attendance Heroes*. Mr. Burrel's program incentivizes students to be at school every day. When they hit their short-term goals, they receive a special lunch with him or the opportunity to pick from his box of prizes.

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Incentives are not the only way that Mr. Burrel supports student attendance. He mentioned one student who missed almost 40% of school days last year. This student would help a younger sibling get to school, then turn around and walk back home—all while the parent was at work thinking their child was at school. When at school, this student was not confident in their appearance and did not want to be at school. The student visited Mr. Burrel's office regularly to talk and receive the confidence boost they needed to be present in school that day. With this support, in combination with the attendance program and parent intervention, the student has missed only four days this school year. Mr. Burrel says, "This is a great start to the new year, by providing the positive momentum the student needs to continue being at school."

CIS Site Coordinator Khalimah Williams from Prairie Ridge Elementary School recognizes the importance of encouraging students to be present at school. She expressed, "If we make it exciting for the kids to come to school, then they are advocating for themselves at home to be here." Ms. Williams facilitates an attendance punch card incentive program both with her caseload students

and any chronic absent student identified by school leadership. Every day the student is in attendance, they add a sticker to their card. Once the card is completed, the student will receive a prize from the treasure chest and start again.



Cereniti and Sa'Veon have not missed a day of school this year!

Ms. Williams' program is providing the opportunity to discuss coming to school every day. It is encouragement for students to be accountable (especially the upper elementary students), and the push they need to ensure they are prepared for school. "Sometimes it is as simple as providing them with an alarm clock, so they wake up in time to get on the bus," says Ms. Williams. She is finding the program impactful; a family of students went from 40 absent days last year to around 10 this year, and one of her students has not missed one day this school year!

We are delighted to share these examples to highlight the importance of being present at school. Our *Being Present Matters* campaign underscores the critical importance of attendance for student success and how the presence of our site coordinators can support students on their path to graduation.



Attendance punch cards at Prairie Ridge Elementary School.



Ar'Rielle, "Ari", 5th grader at Northeastern Elementary with CIS Site Coordinator Shakyia Evans.



Ian, 7th grader at Linden Grove Middle School with CIS Site Coordinator Lori Washburn.

Student Spotlight

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF SCHOOL?

Ari: "Math, because my favorite teacher teaches it so it's my favorite subject. I love to learn about standard algorithms."

Ian: "Hanging with friends."

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE PRESENT AT SCHOOL EVERY DAY?

Ari: "Because if you don't come to school, you will fall behind. And missing too much school means you will miss out on fun and important things."

Ian: "So I don't miss out on teaching and I stay caught up on work."

HOW HAS CIS HELPED YOU?

Ari: "Emotional support, because Ms. Evans makes me happy."

Ian: "A quiet place to reset when needed."

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SITE COORDINATOR IN ONE WORD?

Ari: "Beautiful."

Ian: "Always nice."

Partner Spotlight: Kalamazoo Valley Community College

Our longtime partnership with Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) has become more intentional with the development of targeted student-serving programs and initiatives. As a member of *Collaboration Kalamazoo*—which includes CIS, Read and Write Kalamazoo, The Kalamazoo Promise, Charlie's PLACE and YMCA of Greater Kalamazoo—KVCC supports school readiness with a Beyond the Backpack event in the summer. Additionally, KVCC last year partnered with CIS for two Youth Transformative Leadership Summits for middle school students. The Summits allowed students to experience breakout sessions which included topics such as empowerment through positivity and utilizing your gifts and strengths, along with team building activities, meeting with college students, and a concluding ceremony to celebrate the accomplishments of participating students.

CIS is grateful for this partnership and especially to Nkenge Bergan and Louis Thomas for advocating for and supporting enhancements to the partnership between our organizations. We are excited to continue to work closely with KVCC, as we recognize that it is a destination location for many of the students we serve.



One of the Youth Transformative Leadership Summit breakout sessions with middle school students.

Always In For Kids: Meet Our New Ambassador

Meet Makayla, a 5th grade student at Woodward Elementary, who is taking her role as our new student ambassador to heart. Known for her fun personality and kindness, Makayla has always loved school, and now, as a leader among her peers, she's determined to make Woodward a better place for everyone.

Supporting students from kindergarten through high school graduation is how our site coordinators are *being present* for Kalamazoo students. We invite our community to be consistently present for students by joining our monthly giving program, Always In For Kids. Always In For Kids ensures that the support we provide to students is backed by steady funding. Your participation will unlock exclusive opportunities to see our work in action as well as hear inspiring messages from our student ambassador, Makayla.



Makayla, Always In For Kids Student Ambassador

Learn more by visiting: ciskalamazoo.org or scanning the QR code below.

CIS News and Updates

#GIVINGTUESDAY AT CIS

December 3, 2024

On #GivingTuesday, our team surprises an individual at each CIS supported school with a special gift for going above and beyond for kids. Follow us on social media to see everybody recognized.

COMMUNITY FEAST IS BACK!

Hundreds of local families will be provided with Thanksgiving meals this season. Thank you to our partners, donors, and volunteers for making this possible.

UGLY SWEATER PARTY

December 10, 2024

Tickets are on sale now to join our annual ugly sweater party!

Purchase your tickets today!



Visit our website or follow us on social media for more news and updates!

Always In For Kids

STUDENT SUCCESS LASTS A LIFETIME

Join our recurring giving program and know your support will always be there for kids in Kalamazoo.

Scan to learn more today!





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VOLUNTEER

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



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

From our Executive Director

Perfect Attendance awards have been celebrated for many years. The fanfare of whole-school assemblies, award certificates, and the smiling faces of kids and adults make for exciting times. I earned a few of those certificates as a KPS student years ago. As a kid, the prize of a free McDonald's meal that accompanied the award was more cherished than the certificate. As an adult with perspective, I have learned that the biggest prize was not the free food, but the education I received on the days I was present in school.

Today, chronic absenteeism and the resulting loss of access to instructional time and school-based services are a major concern locally and nationwide. There are many reasons that students don't regularly attend school. Some students face challenges with safety, transportation, mental or physical health, access to clean clothes, and food insecurity, or have household responsibilities such as childcare or needing to work. Students of color and students from low-income communities are most impacted by such challenges.

CIS is uniquely positioned to support attendance improvement efforts through site coordinators who connect students and families to services that promote their presence and engagement in school. CIS' model of Integrated School-Supports (ISS) improves attendance by identifying and addressing the specific barriers that keep students from school. CIS works in collaboration with school staff and is intimately involved in our schools' attendance improvement efforts, e.g., calling parents, arranging barrier reducing services/supports, and coordinating attendance incentive efforts.

CIS brings resources and caring people from our community into schools – volunteers, partner services and essential needs (food, clothing, school supplies) – all for the purpose of motivating and empowering students to stay in school and on their path to success. Together, we can help more kids earn *Perfect Attendance* and *Improved Attendance* awards and win the prizes of graduation and achievement in life beyond high school.

James Devers, Executive Director

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), Paramount Charter Academy, local foundations, and donors like you.

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

**BEING
PRESENT
MATTERS**