



# ***COMMUNITY MATTERS***

*Connecting Students & Transforming Public Schools*







Photo: Communities In Schools of Milledgeville/Baldwin County site coordinator and student  
Cover photo: Communities In Schools of Memphis site coordinator and student



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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

At Communities In Schools® (CIS®), we love public schools.

I am a product of public schools — a proud graduate of South San Antonio High School in Texas. The education I received, the people I met, and the opportunities I was given there empowered me to become the first person in my family to graduate college, and build a career dedicated to serving our nation's youth. Everyone at CIS believes deeply in the promise of public education to build both successful individuals and stronger communities.

However, current trends in public schools are deeply troubling: enrollment declines of more than one million students, chronic absenteeism levels of almost 15 million students, engagement levels at all-time lows, and more. The cumulative effect has begun to erode faith in public schools amongst some educators, civic leaders, and families.

But at CIS, these trends only strengthen our resolve.

We are not, and we will not be, resigned to the current state of public schools. We do not accept that schools and school systems do not meet the needs of all students. We're not blind to the data or the realities faced by Black, Brown, Indigenous students and students living in poverty. Nor do we underestimate the systemic challenges that can seem entrenched and irreversible.

In fact, we are quite realistic. We draw strength from our students and our proven impact — the impact the CIS model of integrated student supports (ISS) has on their ability to achieve success. The evidence is clear: with ISS, students improve their attendance, behavior, graduation rates, and college readiness.

And we draw strength from our communities — the impact that connecting schools to local resources has on schools and systems. These connections expand schools' capacity to meet all students' needs, engage families in more positive school environments, and ultimately, create school-wide and system-wide change.

This year's *Community Matters Report* dives into the state of our public schools. It also includes the impact our ISS model has on the 3,460 schools we are working with across the country — as a contrast and a call to action for everyone working to fulfill the promise of public education in America.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rey Saldaña'.

**Rey Saldaña**  
President and CEO  
CIS National

# ***ISSUE OVERVIEW: THE STATE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS***

At CIS, we see a moment of crisis.  
The evidence is clear and powerful.

But we also see a moment of possibility.

We believe we can meet this moment with an intentional,  
integrated effort that will transform public schools in America.

# WHAT'S HAPPENING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## ■ Absenteeism is growing

14.7 million students chronically absent<sup>1</sup>

Biggest increase in schools with high rates of students living in poverty<sup>1</sup>

## ■ Enrollment is declining

Down by more than one million students, large drops in early grades<sup>2</sup>

## ■ Disruptive behaviors are increasing

70% of educators say students are misbehaving more<sup>3</sup>

## ■ Engagement is lower than ever

Student motivation at a new low<sup>4</sup>

## ■ Academic achievement scores are grim<sup>2</sup>

Largest ever declines in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math scores<sup>5</sup>

## ■ College readiness is at 32-year low

American College Testing (ACT) scores are at lowest levels since 1991<sup>6</sup>

Biggest drops in college readiness amongst underserved students<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All Hands on Deck. Today's Chronic Absenteeism Requires a Comprehensive District Response and Strategy, Attendance Works, November 17, 2023

<sup>2</sup> Beyond test scores: Broader academic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on American students, Center for Reinventing Public Education, September 2023

<sup>3</sup> Education Week, April 20, 2023, Student Behavior Isn't Getting Any Better.

<sup>4</sup> Scaling the School Engagement Cliff, NCEE, August 31, 2022

<sup>5</sup> 2022 NAEP Mathematics Assessment

<sup>6</sup> ACT Scores show college readiness at 32 year low. The Hill. October 11, 2023

# WHAT'S POSSIBLE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- + Change at both school and system levels**  
Integrated efforts that expand capacity at the school level and create efficiency at the system level
- + Students and teachers feel a sense of belonging**  
School climate is prioritized to create a place where students and teachers thrive
- + More engaged students and families**  
Attendance rates rise and remain high, with families engaged in students' learning and development
- + Connecting schools and students to local resources**  
Community connections meet the needs of the whole child, and students are empowered to overcome obstacles
- + Students achieve success in school**  
Academic achievement improves  
Graduation rates are high  
Confidence and self-esteem grow
- + Students prepared to achieve success in life**  
College and career readiness is high



# STARK DECLINES ACROSS KEY MEASURES

Critical measures for public schools show consistent downward trends, intensifying negative impacts on students, teachers, and schools. These negative impacts are felt most by Title I\* schools and the students they serve: Black, Brown, Indigenous students and students living in poverty.

## Enrollment

Public school enrollment has declined considerably — by more than one million students in 2021.<sup>7</sup> Increases in homeschooling, charter, and private school enrollments suggest more families now look elsewhere for their child’s education. In addition, many states passed legislation that shifts funding to school choice vouchers and further drains resources from public schools.

## Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism reached unprecedented levels, with the largest increases in schools and districts serving students living in poverty.<sup>8</sup> In the 2020–21 school year, two thirds of enrolled students attended schools with high levels of chronic absenteeism. This translates to at least one in five students missing almost four weeks during the year.<sup>9</sup>

Levels this high create a cascade of negative consequences that sweep across students, teachers, and schools. Students who are chronically absent fall behind to almost insurmountable levels, while those who do attend class face continuous disruptions to learning. Teachers struggle to provide progression in learning day to day and year to year. And schools lack the staff and capacity to manage such high levels of chronically absent students and their related impacts.

## Engagement

Low levels of student engagement have not just persisted since the pandemic; they are now lower than ever.<sup>10</sup> Half of students surveyed said their motivation for school was lower than before the pandemic, while nine out of 10 teachers reported their students’ motivation had dropped.<sup>10</sup>

## Disruptive Behaviors

Student behavior is another downward trending indicator for public schools. In one recent survey, 70% of teachers, principals, and district leaders said their students are misbehaving more now compared with the fall of 2019.<sup>11</sup> In another study, 84% of public schools said students’ behavioral development had been negatively impacted since the pandemic and cited increases in classroom disruptions by 56%.<sup>12</sup>

\* Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) provides supplemental financial assistance to school districts for children from low-income families. Its purpose is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps by allocating federal funds for education programs and services. (Source: National Center for Education Statistics)

<sup>7</sup> Beyond test scores: Broader academic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on American students, Center for Reinventing Public Education, September 2023

<sup>8</sup> All Hands on Deck. Today’s Chronic Absenteeism Requires a Comprehensive District Response and Strategy, Attendance Works, November 17, 2023

<sup>9</sup> Rising Tide of Chronic Absence Challenges Schools, Attendance Works, October 12, 2023

<sup>10</sup> NCEE, Scaling the School Engagement Cliff, August 31, 2022

<sup>11</sup> Education Week, Student behavior isn’t getting any better, April 20, 2023

<sup>12</sup> National Center for Educational Statistics, July 6, 2022





## Mental Health Needs

Understanding the rising frequency and intensity of mental health issues is essential to addressing the declines in all indicators. However, schools often struggle to find ways to increase the availability of quality mental health services and provide for students' social and emotional learning (SEL) needs.<sup>13</sup> In fact, 79% of public schools surveyed said they needed more support for student and staff mental health and 70% cited more support for students' socio-emotional development.<sup>14</sup>

## Academic Achievement

The current state of academic achievement provides one more alarming signal. Academic well-being amongst students is grim.<sup>15</sup> Students in grades 4 and 8 showed the largest score declines in NAEP mathematics since the initial assessments in 1990.<sup>16</sup> Only one in five high school students in the class of 2023 graduated ready to succeed in core college introductory classes; their scores declined in all four core subjects — reading, English, math, and science.<sup>17</sup>

## College Readiness

Students are increasingly unprepared for college and careers. Average ACT scores have declined for six consecutive years, reaching their lowest point since 1991 — a 32-year low. In 2023, more than four in ten high school seniors were unable to meet any of the college readiness benchmarks.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> DOE, Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral and Mental Health Needs

<sup>14</sup> National Center for Educational Statistics, July 6, 2022

<sup>15</sup> CRPE, Beyond Test Scores, Broader Academic Consequences of pandemic on American students, September 2023

<sup>16</sup> 2022 NAEP Mathematics Assessment

<sup>17</sup> Education Week, Only 1 in 5 high school graduates in 2023, fully prepared for college, October 11, 2023

<sup>18</sup> ACT Scores show college readiness at 32 year low. The Hill. October 11, 2023



# ***THE CIS MODEL:***

## ***THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF CONNECTIONS***



Photo: Communities In Schools of NOVA site coordinator and students





## ***CONNECTING STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, AND SYSTEMS***

There is an urgent need to respond to the state of our schools. Such deep levels of decline across multiple measures make it clear that a comprehensive, integrated approach is required.

School must be able to connect students, families, and teachers to resources that meet the needs of all students. In particular, supports and resources are needed to serve students who face more challenging obstacles, such as trauma, violence, food and housing insecurity, and mental health needs. However, most schools simply do not have the staff and systems to connect these students and their families to the supports they need.

CIS makes those connections.

When schools implement the CIS model of integrated student supports (ISS), they connect to our network of close to 8,000 community organizations that provide the resources and capacity schools need to help students overcome obstacles and achieve success. Decades of data and research support the effectiveness of ISS in improving student attendance, behavior, academic achievement, and graduation rates.

But these connections do more than transform some students' lives; they transform entire schools and systems.

Because when schools implement the CIS model, they operate differently — integrating new and existing resources within the school, expanding capacity to deliver supports and developing new capabilities for many of the staff and teachers, and systematically collaborating on strategies to help more students achieve success. The result is school-wide impact that creates a more positive, productive, and supportive environment and improves outcomes for all students and teachers.



# ***TRANSFORMING POSSIBILITY INTO REALITY AT THE SYSTEM LEVEL***

It is no empty boast to say the CIS model of integrated student supports works for individual students. For nearly 50 years, CIS has produced positive results for students. But we believe that our success shows more than what's possible for an individual student.

It shows what's possible for all students in our public schools.

It provides clear, concrete evidence that public schools can meet both individual and systemic challenges with whole-school prevention and early intervention initiatives and case management.

And it provides real-world examples that show school leaders can listen, understand, and tailor a response that will address individual needs and surround students with the supports they need regardless of zip code, background, or socio-economic status.

## **Chronic Absenteeism**

With the CIS model of integrated student supports, schools can intervene early and intensively through case management. Integrated student supports improves attendance by helping school leaders identify and intentionally address both the academic and non-academic barriers that keep students from school.

- Students attending CIS schools during the 2021-22 school year were 13% less likely to be chronically absent compared to their peers attending schools without CIS.
- Although attendance rates have declined nationally in recent years, attending a CIS school is associated with lesser declines in attendance compared to non-CIS schools, both overall and for specific groups including Black and Latino/Hispanic students and students from economically under-resourced families.

## **Disruptive Behaviors**

- Targeted interventions and supports help schools understand the circumstances behind chronic issues like ongoing disruptive behaviors. Schools can be more effective in providing the specific supports that will benefit the individual student most.
- 86% of CIS students made progress on at least one of their behavior goals.
- CIS helps create safe, inclusive school environments based on trusting relationships.
- 86% of CIS schools made progress or met their school climate goals.

## **Academic Achievement**

- School engagement for CIS case-managed students increases over the school year. The impact of integrated student supports goes beyond basic needs. ISS improves students' social, emotional and cognitive engagement in both their school and their learning.
  - **Social engagement:** Increases students' feelings of connection and belonging.
  - **Emotional engagement:** Increases students' investment in their learning.
  - **Cognitive engagement:** Improves students' focus and attention to lessons.



***“The model of CIS is so effective because we bring a community of support directly inside the school building to help students succeed, removing barriers to access and opportunity.”***

***— Kathryn Medina, Director of Strategic Partnerships,  
CIS of Houston***



# STORIES OF SUCCESS

## Creating a Positive School Environment of Engagement, Accountability, and Commitment.

Like many school districts in rural communities, the Republic District in Eastern Washington had access to few resources to help address the deep challenges they faced, including a 30% chronic absenteeism rate. CIS worked across four schools in the district to prioritize attendance as part of its Tier 1 or school-wide support plan. Our focus on engaging students and building a positive culture of commitment and accountability delivered strong results, including a 90% or higher attendance rate achieved in all classes from first through sixth grade. CIS of Rural Eastern Washington helped the Republic district create a school environment that engages students and families and connects them to the resources they need.



*“The school received tons of positive feedback from parents. Students are excited to attend school so they can be in the attendance class of the month.”*

Shannon Young, Site Coordinator,  
CIS of Rural Eastern Washington



[Read the full story at \[cisnational.org/3AnU5zF\]\(https://cisnational.org/3AnU5zF\)](https://cisnational.org/3AnU5zF)



## Gaining the Skills and Confidence to Thrive.

Adjusting to fifth grade can be hard for any student. For Ashley, the adjustment also included starting a new life in the US after emigrating from El Salvador with her family. After initially struggling, she was connected with Clara Ortiz, site coordinator at CIS of Los Angeles. Clara encouraged Ashley to join “Estudiantiles de la 107<sup>th</sup>,” a health and wellness group organized by CIS that engages students in activities and discussions that teach responsible decision-making, foster self-awareness, and instill a hopeful attitude. Ashley is now thriving and on schedule to graduate from elementary school.

*“She was such a timid kid when I met her, and now she is able to distinguish which friends she should hang out with. She is finding out how to navigate the school playground.”*

Clara Ortiz, Site Coordinator, CIS of Los Angeles



***[Read the full story at cisnational.org/4fJP09V](https://cisnational.org/4fJP09V)***



# STORIES OF SUCCESS

## More Schools. More Connections.



In his first year as a site coordinator at Lebanon High School in Pennsylvania, Jeffrey Suarez saw a need to help students make plans for post-graduation. So, he did what CIS site coordinators do; he made the connections that meet students' needs. "I leveraged my connections in the community to reach out to local alumni and community mentors who represent the idea of success." Jeffrey launched a unique career day program that gave students the opportunity to have honest conversations with local business owners about their careers and living in the community. Lebanon High School's new connection to community resources is a direct result of CIS' ability to grow to new schools. Lebanon High School is one of four new expansion sites for CIS of Pennsylvania. These new sites were possible because of the CIS National Scaling for Success initiative, which aims to bring the CIS model to 1,000 new Title I schools across the country.

*"Having Mr. Suarez at the high school helped me feel like someone understood me and saw my vision and where I want to be in life."*

Gabriel, CIS Student



[Read the full story at \*\[cisnational.org/3M721lh\]\(https://cisnational.org/3M721lh\)\*](https://cisnational.org/3M721lh)

# Communities In Schools and Volunteers of America North Louisiana Celebrate Long-Standing Partnership.

Communities In Schools has established successful licensed partnerships with state education agencies, school districts, and community-based organizations across the country, enhancing support systems for students. One notable partnership is with Volunteers of America North Louisiana (VOANLA) in Shreveport, La., which dates back to 2013 and remains CIS' longest-standing licensed partnership.

*“This unique partnership with Communities In Schools allows us to increase our impact in our local community by removing barriers to learning and providing resources for all students to thrive in schools and succeed in life.”*

Jenesis Gibson, LPC-S, Vice President of Children and Family Services at VOANLA



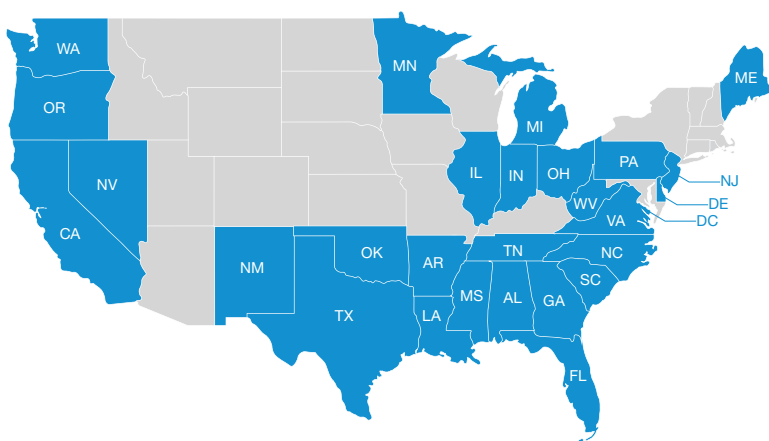
***[Read the full story at cisnational.org/4fJPRCD](https://cisnational.org/4fJPRCD)***





# LOOKING AHEAD: SCALING FOR SUCCESS

Looking ahead, CIS will continue to work at both the school and the system levels to help transform public education in America. We'll continue to expand by partnering with more schools and communities to bring the impact of our model of integrated student supports to more students. As always, CIS expansion includes commitment to research and data collection to further strengthen our evidence base and to offer transparency and accountability to our stakeholders.



**25 STATES + D.C.**  
geographic locations of CIS  
affiliates and licensed partners

Our expansion plan will soon reach an important milestone with the launch of the second of three planned cohorts of schools receiving investments from our Scaling for Success Initiative. The Scaling for Success Initiative is a critical step toward our goal of reaching all Title I schools in the country with integrated student supports. To date, the initiative's innovative re-granting model has played a key role in expanding our model of integrated student supports to more than 700 schools. It has also leveraged millions of dollars in philanthropic investments to unlock public funding as a pathway to sustainability and shared support and commitment to an effective approach to supporting students. To date, VOANLA supports 12 schools in Caddo Parish with the CIS evidence base model of integrated student supports. Five of these schools are benefiting from the Scaling for Success investment.

We'll also continue to strengthen the CIS network through opportunities for shared learning, training, and technical support to ensure we are prepared to effectively connect both new and existing schools and students to the resources they need and help reverse negative trends in chronic absenteeism, disruptive behaviors, academic achievement, and more. A key focus of our effort will remain to help schools address attendance and student engagement challenges, which can help students improve across a range of important indicators, including their sense of connection and belonging, level of persistence with coursework, and focus and attention given to preparing for their futures. Being present for students and fostering connections is an important part of our collective pathway forward.



Photo: Communities In Schools of Eastern Pennsylvania site coordinator and student





**CommunitiesInSchools.org**

**#AllinforKids**

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