



**Ohio Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid  
Am. Sub. H. B. No. 166, Biennial Operating Budget FY 2020-2021**

**Amy Gordon, LSW, Executive Director and CEO  
Communities In Schools of Central Ohio  
May 15, 2019**

Chair Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Substitute House Bill 166, the State Operating Budget. I am Amy Gordon, Executive Director of Communities In Schools of Central Ohio.

I am here to request your support of Communities In Schools of Central Ohio (CIS) which has proven effective in stopping kids from regularly skipping school, dropping out of school, failing academically and ultimately, continuing the cycle of poverty, illiteracy and reliance on welfare for generations. We provide integrated, tailored student support systems in schools, all day, every day for those students at highest risk. Communities In Schools addresses the multitude of factors that negatively impact a child's ability to succeed. We have implemented a national, evidence-based model in the state of Ohio with great success.

We have a budget amendment pending before your Committee that would provide \$300,000 in each fiscal year within Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' TANF Block Grant appropriation item, to bring this model to more students in need and increase overall academic success and improve graduation rates. With 164 letters of support flooding the Statehouse the past few weeks, we know many teachers, principals, parents and students want CIS in their schools.

Currently, Communities In Schools operates in 24 schools throughout central Ohio to serve students at-risk of chronic absenteeism and dropping out, and is planning to expand to other high-need school districts across the state. We target low-income schools with the highest drop-out rates in central Ohio. And it works.

In the 2017-2018 school year alone, CIS impacted over 11,000 students, including over 1,400 case-managed students, and had a **95% grade-promotion rate with 96% of CIS seniors graduating or receiving a GED**. Also in the 2017-2018 school year, out of the CIS students with a specific attendance goal, 85% met or made progress in their attendance goal area.

**Ohio's chronic absentee rate is currently 16.4%<sup>1</sup>, and the state has a four-year graduation rate of 60%<sup>2</sup>.**

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Chronic-Absenteeism/Ohio-s-Resource-Guide-to-Reduce-Chronic-Absenteeism.pdf.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Report-Card-Resources/Graduation-Rate-Component>

Clearly, the need is dire for programming like CIS to target the highest-risk and provide the tailored services needed to reverse these rates and secure a near 100% graduation or GED.

How does CIS achieve such a high success rate?

CIS focuses on the key indicators of academic failure, starting with chronic absenteeism, which is defined as an individual absence rate of 10% or more during an academic year. It is a leading contributing factor for dropping out of school.<sup>3</sup> By sixth grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school. Attendance is impacted by multiple issues; however, the problem is particularly acute for students who face the most significant barriers, including students from low-income families, students of color, and students with disabilities. Chronic absenteeism rates are closely linked to high drop-out rates. Nationally, 63.2% of high school dropouts are not currently in the workforce<sup>4</sup>, and the negative effects on families and communities are incalculable.

This CIS evidenced-based model employs an innovative, holistic approach to addressing both the academic and nonacademic needs of students, working with the highest-risk populations to help students succeed, which is closely aligned with your priorities here in the General Assembly.

In December 2016, the Ohio General Assembly passed House Bill 410 to encourage and support a preventative approach to excessive absences and truancy. Subsequently, the Ohio Department of Education produced a resource guide for school districts: *Ohio's Resource Guide to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism – Getting Ohio's Students to School Every Day*.<sup>5</sup> The Resource Guide points out that often, non-academic barriers keep students from attending school every day, therefore by systematically incorporating student supports into district and school improvement activities, many of these barriers can be addressed before they keep Ohio's students out of the classroom. Integrated student supports are defined as supports that focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement to improve student learning, increase student attendance, build stronger families, and develop healthier communities. Communities In Schools is referenced in this report as a resource for Ohio's educators.

The youth we serve with the CIS programs are all at-risk, TANF-eligible youth who need our help addressing challenges in their lives that prevent them from getting to school or from learning once they are there. Our CIS programs are agile and flexible to address the individual needs of youth and families and have proven results – as I mentioned resulting in **95% grade-promotion rate with 96% of CIS seniors graduating or receiving a GED.**

This is our first request of the state. We see it works and we see the need to implement this model in more schools. This investment will help diversify our funding sources, leverage private and community dollars, and allow for expansion to other high-need districts.

By ensuring the youth at highest risk of dropping out of school complete school, we are working effectively to end the cycle of poverty and dependence on welfare. Education is vital to securing a

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.attendanceworks.org/absences-add-up/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/figures/fig\\_24.asp?referrer=figures](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/figures/fig_24.asp?referrer=figures)

<sup>5</sup> <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Chronic-Absenteeism/Ohio-s-Resource-Guide-to-Reduce-Chronic-Absenteeism.pdf.aspx>

meaningful, quality job. Our program plays an integral role in connecting all the dots that shape educational success that in turn shapes job opportunity and career success.

With an investment by your Committee in our program, CIS will continue to provide our impactful programs to the at-risk youth who need our support, and to expand to other high-need schools and communities.

I am happy to address any questions you may have. Thank you for your consideration.

Amy Gordon, Executive Director and CEO  
Communities In Schools of Central Ohio  
6500 Busch Blvd. Suite 105  
Columbus, Ohio 43229  
614-268-2472  
[www.ciskids.org](http://www.ciskids.org)