



## COVID-19 Response UPDATE:

### Communities In Schools is Bridging the Gap for Virginia's Vulnerable Students

*The Communities In Schools of Virginia network serves more than 54,000 students in 96 schools in 14 school districts. 66 of our schools are Title I designated. Nearly 4,500 of our most vulnerable students receive one-on-one case management support.*

#### CIS In Action

Since our April update, the CIS network has not stopped providing wraparound supports that have become even more important once students were removed from the educational environment on which they rely for academic, basic needs and social/emotional support. In the first 45 days of school closure, data collected to date from 70 school sites shows our six affiliate organizations have provided **more than 5,628 supports to over 2,200 case-managed students (average of three supports per student)** -- our most vulnerable students with whom our site coordinators work individually. The **most frequently delivered** supports provided between March 16 - May 4 include:

- **1,556 students have received individual case management supports**, including contact with parent or caregiver, supportive guidance and counseling, referral to community resources, and/or student advocacy.
- **874 family engagement supports** where parents discussed their child's academic and virtual learning support with site coordinators or were referred to community and school resources.
- **465 students have received academic assistance**, including homework assistance, literacy support, and tutoring with **131 students receiving help with internet hot spots and/or computer access.**
- **229 students have participated in 472 social-emotional and mental wellness supports** through virtual mentoring and counseling sessions.

During this crisis, one thing is clear: schools cannot do their work alone. Our school district partners know that their students need more support, and they are turning to nonprofit partners such as CIS to meet the increased needs of their students and families.

#### Adapted Approach

While this health and economic crisis is putting a spotlight on the inequities in our education system, the disparities being exposed and deepened are not new. Our students experience the same barriers that made them vulnerable before, but now with limited access to school-based supports and increased risk for trauma induced by stressful circumstances. **Addressing these disparities are the reason CIS exists.**

The students we serve have multiple risk factors that make them exponentially more likely to disengage from school and drop out. The chances of this happening are exacerbated by the current crisis and we have a pertinent role to fill in ensuring these vulnerable students don't fall through the cracks and become another casualty of this pandemic.

Each of our 96 site coordinators is embedded within a school with a purpose of cultivating trusting, personal relationships with students in order to provide the right support at the right time to empower individual success. Those relationships continue to make a difference, every day. While method and format can vary based on the specifics of each school district, all CIS professionals are supplementing school resources by providing crucial family engagement for academic and non-academic needs::

- **Serving as critical connectors for vulnerable families.** Since the first days of the closure, our teams have been on the front lines helping meet basic needs, which provided immediate opportunity to reinforce trust and establish a plan for check-ins that ensure connection to other resources as needed. For many families, the CIS coordinator is the first and/or only school representative they have heard from directly.
- **Reducing learning gaps** by engaging families and caregivers as they navigate at-home education, keeping students connected to stimulating academic and social activity, monitoring student progress and serving as a resource for teachers and staff.
- **Tracking the evolving social and economic impact** of school and work closures by conducting regular needs assessments, staying alert for signs of trauma and unsafe domestic environments, and connecting families to critical community services as needed.

### **Anticipating Change**

As COVID-19 impacts our community, we are responding to immediate needs, but are also looking to the future to ensure our connection to vulnerable students is seamless and empowers them to succeed in school in any form. We anticipate significant mobility and displacement among families resulting from job loss and evictions, compounding the trauma for families already living in stressed and complex circumstances. Our priority is the ongoing adaptation of our support delivery and consistent student and family engagement to meet the needs that will continue once the acute crisis phase is over.

If a return to a traditional school setting is not possible or is disrupted in the next school year, the transition to online learning will come with higher expectations for compliance. CIS will be equipped to be an essential partner in this transition, both as a conduit for understanding technology barriers and deficits, as well as a resource for academic support and insight into non-technology barriers to at-home learning.

### **Pursuing a *Better Normal***

While the future remains vastly uncertain in many ways, a "return to normal" is unlikely. Even if students return to school buildings, dramatic shifts are bound to occur in the integration of technology and the pursuit of opportunities that exist -- when provided equitably to all -- by expanding learning beyond school walls. Ensuring educational equity will require an even bigger investment as we address long-standing disparities rooted in socio-economic and racial divides. With unique knowledge and evidence of academic and non-academic barriers to success, CIS is positioned to be a vital partner to the evolving landscape of public education in Virginia.

One common theme emerged as a top concern for superintendents and principals across the state -- **family engagement**. There is consensus that every scenario for returning to school creates a heavier need than ever for parents and caregivers to be connected, engaged and able to help support their students in an environment where at least some learning will take place outside of school walls. CIS's strong relationships and consistent contact with so many of our most vulnerable students have established critical trust that positions us well to contribute to innovation, information and long-term solutions in the area of family engagement. **In fact, since schools closed, family engagement is our CIS network's most frequently provided school-wide support, accounting for 41% of supports provided.** We are committed to building on the foundation of success we have demonstrated in family engagement by pursuing innovative partnerships and approaches to strengthen this essential component to student success, particularly in distance learning scenarios.