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Testimony Before the
Joint Committee on Education

By

Malissa Martin
President & Chief Executive Officer
Communities In Schools of Kansas

Mr. and Madam Chairs and members of the Joint Committee:

My name is Malissa Martin. I am the President & CEO for Communities In Schools of Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce the House and Senate Education Committees to Communities In Schools. As you explore solutions to critically important public policy involving public education, from improving academic performance in elementary schools to positively redirecting students in danger of dropping out of high school, we invite you to turn to Communities In Schools to be a valuable resource.

THE PROBLEM

Imagine you are responsible for a manufacturing operation. You learn that at the end of the production cycle, 15% of your product is not ready to be shipped. If faced with this, you would initiate action to reverse this failure rate. This hypothetical example is actually quite real. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the average freshman graduation rate in Kansas for the 2009-2010 school year was 84.5%, meaning 15% drifted away from schools and did not graduate with their peers. Failing to graduate from high school has massive implications for the student, and also for the state.

- The Kansas Workforce – today's employment marketplace in Kansas demands skilled workers, and the high school dropout lacks the skills to contribute to our workforce needs.

- The Kansas Economy – the average high school dropout earns around \$22,000 a year, an income that does not lead to a productive market place that our state economy needs.
- Kansas Government – low income means the high school dropout contributes little through state taxes, and is instead a major recipient of expensive state programs and services.
- Anti-social Activity – the combination of low employment opportunity, low personal achievement, and a high amount of idle time leads too often to anti-social behavior and criminal activity. A majority of the country’s prison population did not graduate from high school.

Why do students drop out? When you look at statistics, it becomes clear the dropout population is disproportionately young people who live in poverty and are minorities. These poor and minority students have hurdles to clear before our education system can effectively educate them so that they are prepared to graduate with their peers. Far too often, these hurdles become too high. Communities In Schools is a uniquely structured program that can effectively work with students and surrounds them with the community of support they need to clear the hurdles they face, and to achieve success in school and in life.

HOW COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS WORKS

Communities In Schools is an independent not-for-profit organization. When we are invited to work in a school, we hire a Site Coordinator, who works every school day to help students. The Site Coordinator, who cannot intervene with a student unless their parent/parents approve, serves as a bridge between the needs of students and all the resources that exists in their community. Those services include mentoring, tutoring, health care, after-school programs, family counseling, vocational learning, and much more.

For the Site Coordinator, their school year looks like this. They work with school administrators and teachers to identify students who need help with their academic performance, their school behavior,

their attendance, and other needs. The Site Coordinator then secures parental consent and involvement, works with the student to develop a plan of action to produce tangible results, does whatever it takes during the school year to produce positive results, and evaluates that success when the school year ends. In addition, the Site Coordinator works with the school's leadership to identify school wide issues and then rolls out programs, services and events throughout the school year to address these school needs. That might mean partnering with Harvesters to provide food for students in need, pairing high school volunteers with struggling middle school students to provide tutoring, forming an empowerment lunch group of girls to promote confidence and personal achievement, or partnering with Big Brothers and Big Sisters to provide mentors for students needing a positive role model. This framework provides great flexibility to respond to individual, school, and community needs, characteristics, and values.

CIS SITE COORDINATOR MODEL – AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO HELPING STUDENTS

Communities In Schools has a sophisticated reporting and evaluation processes, utilizing the latest in technology, to measure our success and identify any deficiencies.

The Communities In Schools Site Coordinator model of service that I just described was the subject of the most comprehensive evaluation of dropout prevention programs ever conducted. Performed by ICF International, the five-year comprehensive study, completed in 2011, determined the Communities In Schools model results in the strongest reduction in dropout rates of any dropout prevention program that had been evaluated. Additional findings include:

- Communities In Schools is unique in its ability to lower dropout rates and increase on-time graduation rates
- Communities In Schools helps students achieve proficiency in fourth and eighth grade reading and math

- Communities In Schools is effective at all grade levels, for all ethnicities of students, and in all regions of the country

In addition to these objective results, Communities In Schools wanted to measure our local economic impact. In 2012, EMSI, one of the nation's leading economic modeling firms, analyzed the economic impact produced when money is invested in the work of Communities In Schools. The significant findings of the EMSI study included:

- The average rate of return to society for investing in Communities In Schools is 18.4%
- The benefit/cost ratio is 11.6, which means that every dollar invested in Communities In Schools creates \$11.60 of economic benefit for the community
- High school graduates will be net contributors to their communities for an average of 44 years of their working life, using their increased income to purchase homes and cars, and paying taxes to support community needs

Communities In Schools also has a sophisticated electronic method of monitoring our work. Earlier I mentioned case management, when students who are struggling in school are enrolled in a process where they work with a site coordinator. Case management requires the student and site coordinator to develop a plan of action to address their specific scholastic problem. Most often, a case management Individual Student Plan (ISP) addresses academic issues, but also can involve improving the student's behavior in school, school attendance, or a combination of all three. When case management begins, a baseline is established documenting student performance before case management is underway. In the ISP, goals are established in order to measure the success of case management over the course of the school year. It is a Site Coordinator responsibility to record this information in the Communities In Schools management database, which allows for administrative review and analysis of our work in schools across Kansas.

Across our Communities In Schools of Kansas network, we provided case-management services to nearly 2,000 students during the 2011-2012 school year. Our year-end outcomes for these case-managed students were:

- 99% of case management students in Kansas stayed in school
- 98% were promoted to the next grade
- 81% achieved their goal for academic improvement
- 80% achieved their goal for improved school attendance
- 79% achieved their goal for improved school behavior
- 73% of high school seniors enrolled in case management graduated with their peers

Our recent five-year evaluation demonstrates important longitudinal data from a national perspective.

While Communities In Schools would like to track students after they are no longer involved in our programs and our mentoring, federal law prohibits such continuing tracking (FERPA). However, we have lots of anecdotal information about the success of our program for our students, as our site coordinators interface with these kids in future years, and are able to see the manner in which their lives were transformed from one of despair and frustration to one of hope and accomplishment. We are confident a review of our service model, the evidence of its effectiveness, and the actual results of our work shows Communities In Schools is the solution to turn to when your committees seek answers to improving student performance in public schools.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Today's Communities In Schools of Kansas network is in 50 Kansas schools, in Wichita , Derby, Haysville, Valley Center, Topeka, Kansas City, Garden City, Ulysses, Ottawa and Lawrence. Where we have programs today is a cobbling of funding opportunities we have been able to identify. For instance:

- Corporate financial support led us to introduce Communities In Schools at Garden City High School last school year and at Wyandotte High School in Kansas City this year
- A federal school improvement grant allowed us to become part of Highland Park High School in Topeka
- United Way of Greater Topeka identified Communities In Schools as the best way to address a community goal to improve reading scores of 4th grade students, and is funding our programs that at in their first full school year at Scott Magnet School and Ross Elementary

We honestly feel nearly every school in Kansas would benefit from a Communities In Schools program; however, economic realities require a more strategic deployment of our uniquely effective school improvement program. As a result, we respectfully suggest that Communities In Schools is a solution that should be strategically employed by the state of Kansas. We would welcome exploring with the Kansas House and Senate Education Committees how addressing the impediments to learning in struggling Kansas schools would greatly improve student academic performance.

To give you a better view of how Communities In Schools works, joining me today is a Site Coordinator who works at Kennedy Elementary School in Lawrence, a student who has benefitted from our program in Ottawa, an alumnus of our program in Wichita, and a Topeka area attorney and businessman. We hope our combined presentation will lead to each member of this Committee to see Communities In Schools as an effective tool to use in your development of plans and strategies to promote student success in our schools in Kansas.

Chairman Abrams and Chairperson Kelley, thank you for the opportunity to address the Joint Committee on Education. I would welcome answering any questions.