



History of Communities In Schools

In the 1960s, on the streets of New York City, youth worker Bill Milliken and his colleagues launched a series of nontraditional “street academies,” with backing from major corporations like Union Carbide and American Express. Young people who had already dropped out of school were able to return, complete their education and, in most cases, go on to college.

The Early Years

In 1977, Milliken and his colleagues decided to work inside the school system, and Communities In Schools (then called Cities In Schools) was born. The idea was to develop a safety net so underserved youth could get the assistance they needed to stay in school. The CIS founders realized that troubled young people and their families had difficulty negotiating their way through a maze of public and private services, all located in different places and following different rules. They decided to bring these community resources *inside* a public school building, where they are accessible, coordinated and accountable.

The fledgling organization started out strong, as newly elected President Jimmy Carter, a supporter of the CIS prototype during his term as Georgia governor, identified federal funds to support CIS’ expansion. Soon CIS was serving nearly 3,000 students in three cities: Atlanta, Indianapolis and New York.

Changes Along the Way

Between 1977 and 1983, local CIS efforts were funded by the CIS national organization. As the CIS movement continued to expand, it became clear that true community-building required local ownership and funding sources. Each community needed to assess its own problems and strengths and craft individual solutions. Thus, from then on, it was determined that every CIS affiliate would be independently incorporated, with the CIS national office providing training, support and the basic model.

CIS’ results have remained solid over the years. Students in increasing numbers have turned their lives around and chosen to stay in school and graduate. CIS’ cost-effective method of rallying the community to deliver existing services at the school site became a model for school-community collaboration. Every presidential administration since the Carter administration in 1977 has provided support to CIS – including the innovative, 10-year “Partnership Plan” among the departments of Justice, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education that began in 1985.

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Communities In Schools National Office

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As the CIS organization continued to grow, the role of state-level CIS offices became more and more significant. Robust CIS state organizations in Texas, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Florida proved to be a steady and reliable engine for replicating and supporting the CIS model. Today there are 14 CIS state offices.

Coming of Age

By the mid-1990s, it was clear that the CIS methods were adaptable and successful wherever there were schools and students in need. To reflect this reality, and to acknowledge that at its core the organization is devoted to creating community, Cities In Schools changed its name to Communities In Schools in 1996.

Today CIS is widely known as the pioneer of the “community school” concept – a vision of schools as vital centers for the entire community, and a delivery point for services and resources that would otherwise be scattered far and wide, uncoordinated and unaccountable. CIS has grown to become the nation’s leading stay-in-school network, the largest and most effective coordinated response to the burgeoning dropout crisis. *Worth* magazine named CIS one of the “top 100 nonprofits most likely to save the world” in both 2001 and 2002. *Worth’s* criteria for selection (out of a field of 819,000 registered U.S. charities) were “skill, innovation, effectiveness and strategic insight.”

In 2004, CIS underwent an evolution in its executive leadership. After more than 25 years as operational leader of the organization, CIS founder Bill Milliken transitioned to a new role as vice chairman to the national board of directors, allowing him to focus full-time on developing individual donors. Daniel J. Cardinali assumed the position of national president, and is now responsible for leading the national organization.

In March 2005, CIS launched *Choose Success*, a three-year public awareness campaign designed to draw attention to the dropout crisis in America and to raise the visibility of Communities In Schools nationwide. The *Choose Success* campaign was the organization’s first national advertising initiative in nearly a decade.

In November 2007, CIS celebrated 30 years of serving children. During a national conference that featured a keynote address by First Lady Laura Bush, the entire CIS network came together in its birthplace, Atlanta, Ga., to commemorate this significant milestone.

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