

INNOVATION BRIEF

Alumni Network Engagement Strategies



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“You will always be our kids and a part of the Communities In Schools family. Just because you graduate doesn't mean you're off the radar.”

– Lloyd Hopkins, CIS of Greater Phoenix

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Introduction

For 40 years, Communities In Schools has been making sure that kids stay in school and graduate. Countless thousands of students who were heading toward dropout instead have finished their high school education and have gone on to success in further education, careers, and life.

CIS graduates spend a lifetime building on their CIS experience and they carry that identity with them wherever they go. Many have become active contributors to their communities through their commitment to help others as they were helped. Communities In Schools alumni are potentially a tremendous resource for communities, for advancing the CIS mission, and for our graduates to form a cohesive network of mutual support throughout their lifetimes. The purpose of this brief is to list effective strategies for affiliates to engage their alumni after they have graduated from high school.

Throughout our conversations with the network via webinars, interviews with alumni, on-site visits, incentivizing participation

was mentioned as a priority to drive the alumni effort forward. From this realization four different priorities shaped the vision for the Alumni Network: Social Media, Post-Secondary Support, Community Service, and Leadership Development for the alumni.

Social Media

The Communities In Schools alumni development initiative has a strong component of social media connection that transcends geography and builds an interactive CIS alumni community nationwide. Our goal is to create a growing network of young people committed to a better life for themselves, each other, and their



communities. We have taken initial steps to establish the CIS Alumni Network on LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, Ning, and Twitter whereas the Facebook page will be the primary medium of recruitment and engagement. The theme of the CIS alumni online community is centered on celebrating accomplishments, encouraging open dialogue, and highlighting acts of service and leadership after high school.

The Facebook page can be found by typing “Communities In Schools Alumni Network” in the Facebook search bar at www.facebook.com.

Essential Practices for Recruitment

- Student to champion Facebook drive
- Staff engagement and communication
- Incentivize participation

Board Engagement

Having your board involved in building a local alumni program with a student championing the effort has been a proven practice when building a local alumni chapter. Having two students serve as an ad hoc non-voting alumni committee for a 2-year rotating term is one way to add structure and leadership behind this effort. One high school senior and one college freshman would ensure continuity and foster a team mentality.

The students would update the board on the growth of the network, alumni success stories,

and how they are giving back to the community through service projects. We’ve found that board members take pleasure in serving as a mentor to these promising students, they also enjoy seeing how alumni “pay it forward”. The alumni themselves see participation as an opportunity to gain an invaluable leadership experience.

Community Service

Community service projects have proven to gain the most support from both alumni and high school seniors who feel compelled to pay-it-forward in a way that impacts their community. Events such as a campus clean-up, reading to elementary school students, outreach to the community on health and wellness education, or volunteering at a food kitchen have proven to be successful strategies to engage alumni throughout the year.



University Partnerships

As CIS students graduate from high school and become college freshmen, they will continue to be faced with many challenges while on campus. Several alumni around the country, mainly in Texas and North Carolina, have recruited other alumni and formed support groups on their perspective community college campuses. These support groups meet on a regular basis to mentor each other, invite guest speakers, and hold each other accountable for graduating from college.

Written partnerships with a college or university that address funding, staffing, and duration of services could both help build a pipeline to college for CIS students and add value to services already offered.

Conclusion

Launching a CIS Alumni Chapter can be a rewarding accomplishment but must involve buy-in from staff, students, and particularly someone to champion the effort. Guidance from the CIS National Office on best practices, success stories from alumni, and continued engagement throughout the year with your alumni will ensure a successful takeoff.

