RESEARCH BRIEF

School and District Support Study 2016: Key Findings

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INTRODUCTION
Purpose of the study

Communities In Schools (CIS) plays an important role in supporting students and families in approximately 2,300 schools across the United States. However, CIS employees also support the teachers, principals, and school leadership in the schools and districts they serve. Additionally, with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal government highlighted the need for Integrated Student Supports (ISS) – the type of evidence-based program that CIS provides – and encouraged local education officials to consider using ISS when addressing student needs.

With all this in mind, members of the Research, Learning, and Accreditation (RLA) team at the CIS national office conducted a School and District Support Study (SDSS) in order to obtain a baseline understanding of the perceived impact of CIS on the schools and districts we work with nationwide prior to any changes brought about by ESSA. During the first and second quarters of 2016, RLA team members partnered with local affiliate and site staff to survey teachers, principals, superintendents, and other key administrative personnel at the schools that local CIS affiliates serve.

This study aimed to explore the following points:

1. A recent national survey from CIS and Public Opinion Strategies revealed that teachers viewed poverty as a barrier to learning. How is CIS helping teachers and principals to tackle poverty in the schools and communities it serves?

2. In the eyes of school stakeholders, to what extent is CIS impacting social-emotional learning, behavior, chronic absenteeism, student health, and other non-cognitive measures of "success"?

3. What is the value-add or benefit of having a CIS employee on a school campus? Are there impacts that CIS is not currently measuring or talking about that can be explored more?

4. How are districts and schools currently funding Integrated Student Supports (ISS)? Are there any potential barriers to implementing ESSA, particularly any barriers that might make using Title I and other designated funding sources for the support of ISS difficult?

This research brief will answer the questions above by looking at survey responses from district and school personnel from across the CIS network.

Methodology

RLA team members created three surveys for the SDSS: one each for teachers, principals, and superintendents (or other district-level leadership with knowledge of CIS). Each survey had approximately 15-19 questions, some of which were based on previous surveys, including a survey conducted in May 2015 by Public Opinion Strategies, which sought teacher input on various barriers to educational achievement, and a survey conducted in 2009 by ICF International, which asked similar questions of teachers.

1. Though the questions in the SDSS varied based on what role a person played, most of them asked about:

2. Respondent demographics (how long a person had been in his/her position, professional memberships, etc.) and school finance information

3. The extent to which various problems were present in the respondent's school, and the extent to which CIS helped address those problems

4. How much time respondents spend helping students with problems they face outside the classroom

5. Respondents' knowledge of CIS

6. The impact of CIS on the school/district and characteristics of CIS staff members

Respondents by State			
State	Teacher	Principal	Superintendent
DC	0	1	2
FL	0	5	2
GA	7	9	0
IN	0	3	3
KS	15	8	3
MI	53	2	1
NC	41	18	2
NV	34	12	3
OK	15	6	0
SC	20	8	1
TN	0	6	1
TX	158	19	3
VA	1	0	0
WV	17	3	2
Total	361	100	23

Although the survey was open to all CIS affiliates, a total of 32 affiliates chose to participate, including affiliates located in the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, North Carolina, Nevada, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. During March and April 2016, RLA staff members worked with affiliate contacts to collect email addresses for teachers, principals, and superintendents or other district-level leadership in the schools and districts they serve. The survey was administered in early April; each affiliate had three survey links (one for teachers, one for principals, and one for superintendents) if they chose

to have all three respondent groups participate. RLA team members sent links to 2,326 emails[1] and incentivized responses; a separate survey link led the respondent to a form that gave them a chance to win a gift card if the respondent's local regulations allowed him or her to participate in such a drawing.

After several weeks of data collection, RLA team members closed the survey. A total of 361 teachers, 100 principals, and 23 superintendents responded. In May, June, and early July 2016, team members conducted several analyses of the data. First, they considered a quantitative analysis of individual questions. Next, they conducted a qualitative analysis, particularly of a final open-ended question. They also conducted a state-level analysis, and an analysis by school level (elementary, middle, or high).

FINDINGS
Barriers to Learning

According to the survey, poverty was the most important issue facing the schools and districts that CIS serves. Respondents from all three groups indicated poverty as the most pressing issue when asked the extent to which a list of issues were prevalent in their school. The other pressing issues are also related to poverty – students coming to school unprepared to learn and a lack of parental involvement – and were both in the top three problems for all respondent groups.

Notably, the barriers selected by respondents to the survey are similar to the significant barriers mentioned in previous surveys. The ICF survey conducted seven years ago found that poverty (88%), students coming unprepared to learn (87%), and

To what extent is each of the following a serious-moderate problem in this school/district? _(Serious + Moderate)_				
Answer choices: Serious problem, Moderate problem, Minor problem, not a problem				
	Teachers	**Principals**	**Superintendents**	**Average**
Student pregnancy	17%	17%	35%	23%
Students dropping out	26%	25%	80%	44%
Student apathy	70%	70%	80%	73%
Lack of parental involvement	84%	81%	90%	85%
Poverty	90%	94%	95%	93%
Students come unprepared to learn	86%	86%	85%	86%
Chronic absenteeism	73%	72%	70%	72%
Disruptive student behavior in school	69%	62%	40%	57%
Drug use	34%	29%	45%	36%
Violence	26%	18%	30%	25%
Poor student health (including diet)	53%	42%	50%	48%

To what extent does CIS help to address the following problems? _(Extensively + Moderately)_				
Answer choices: Extensively, Moderately, Minimally, CIS does not address this problem in our school.				
	Teachers	**Principals**	**Superintendents**	**Average**
Student pregnancy	33%	20%	45%	33%
Students dropping out	54%	44%	80%	59%
Student apathy	81%	73%	75%	76%
Lack of parental involvement	83%	74%	80%	79%
Poverty	89%	80%	95%	88%
Students come unprepared to learn	90%	78%	65%	78%
Chronic absenteeism	80%	68%	80%	76%
Disruptive student behavior in school	73%	67%	65%	68%
Drug use	40%	26%	45%	37%
Violence	50%	34%	40%	41%
Poor student health (including diet)	76%	64%	65%	68%

[1] Of the 2,326 emails sent out, approximately 270 bounce-back emails were received. Though RLA team members tried to work with affiliate staff members to correct those errors, it became clear that there were firewalls preventing respondents from receiving the emails with the survey links. Several potential respondents also emailed RLA team members saying that they had trouble accessing the survey, suggesting that further firewalls at their schools prevented them from using SurveyMonkey even if they received an email with a survey link. Thus, we estimate that the response rate was higher than (361+100+23)/2,326 = 20.8%.

"I am able to be a more effective teacher because CIS has helped…"	
Answer choices: Strongly agree, Agree, Unsure, Disagree, Strongly disagree	
improve student attendance.	72%
improve student self-confidence in their ability to succeed.	87%
improve student behavior.	76%
improve student attitudes toward learning.	83%
improve student health.	74%
improve student ability to regulate emotions.	76%
improvement student engagement in school.	84%
improve student readiness to learn.	83%
improve student ability to connect with a caring adult.	89%
improve engagement of parents/families in their children's education.	78%
decrease student tardiness	61%
provide for student basic needs, such as school supplies, food, clothing, access to health care, etc.	91%

a lack of parental involvement (87%) were all the most pressing issues in schools. The Public Opinion Strategies survey found that lack of parental involvement (92%), student apathy (92%), and disruptive behavior (92%) were the most pressing issue in schools, with chronic absenteeism (89%) and poverty level (88%) completing the top five problems.

How CIS addresses Barriers to Learning

When asked the extent to which CIS helped address the barriers that schools face, respondents indicated that CIS helped address poverty more than all of the other barriers (88% of teachers, principals, and superintendents indicated that CIS helped with this problem either extensively or moderately). Teachers said that CIS helped address students coming unprepared to learn (90%), poverty (89%), and lack of parental involvement (83%), while principals had the same top three in a different order – poverty (80%), students coming unprepared to learn (78%), and lack of parental involvement (74%). Superintendents focused on poverty (95%), as well as students dropping out (80%), a lack of parental involvement (80%), and chronic absenteeism (80%).

Teachers also had the opportunity to respond to the question, "I am able to be a more effective teacher because CIS has helped…" When responding to this question, teachers focused on the fact that CIS provides for basic needs, gives students the opportunity to connect with a caring adult, and improves student self-confidence in their ability to succeed.

When asked to state the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about the impact of CIS services on the ability to improve student achievement, school climate, and other student- and school-level outcomes, teachers focused on the fact that CIS helps "increase the ability of our school to give one-on-one attention to students in need" (89% strongly agree + agree), that the respondent was "better able to improve student academic achievement because of the types of support provided by CIS" (88%); and that "more community resources are being brought into my school" (87%). When asked a similar question, principals also focused on the "one-on-one attention" that CIS helps provide for students (88%) and the fact that "more community resources are being brought into the school", and 85% of principals agreed that "My job would be more

Please respond to the following statements using the five-point scale provided. "CIS staff members…"				
Answer choices: Strongly agree, Agree, Unsure, Disagree, Strongly disagree				
	Teachers	**Principals**	**Superintendents**	**Average**
are approachable.	99%	96%	100%	98%
are knowledgeable resources.	95%	95%	89%	93%
are willing to collaborate with school staff.	97%	94%	100%	97%
help facilitate communication with other staff members.	89%	87%	89%	88%
help facilitate communication with community partners.	90%	93%	89%	91%
help facilitate communication with parents/families.	89%	91%	89%	90%

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Qualitative response: "If you have any specific comments/examples of how CIS supports teachers in your school, please tell us about them in the text box below."		
Top Services Provided to Students & Families		
Teachers	**Principals**	**Superintendents**
• Caring, one-on-one relationship • Family involvement • Academic support • Basic needs • Social-emotional support • Behavioral intervention and support	• Family engagement • Emotional, physical, and mental health support • Student engagement • Tutoring • Working in partnership with school staff	• Collaborative work with leadership to provide different services • Student engagement and motivation • Relationship building with families • Basic needs

difficult without the presence of CIS in my school." Superintendents indicated that CIS helped address the needs of students in the district (100% extensively + moderately), address the needs of families in the district (79%), and align with the goals set out for the district (100%).

Teachers, principals, and superintendents gave both quantitative and qualitative feedback on the services that CIS provides and key characteristics of CIS staff members. When asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about these concepts, on average, teachers, principals, and superintendents focused heavily on the approachability of CIS staff members, their willingness to collaborate with school staff, and their role as knowledgeable resources.

Many respondents answered the qualitative question, "If you have any specific comments/examples of how CIS supports teachers in your school, please tell us about them in the text box below." All three types of respondent focused on family involvement and the collaborative way in which CIS employees work with school staff. As one teacher put it, "I love that [she] will help me problem-solve with a family."

Principals and teachers mentioned the social-emotional support that CIS staff members provide students. One principal wrote, "[Our CIS site coordinator] provides direct support to meet the needs of students in terms of their mental, emotional, and physical needs that we as [a] school cannot." Additionally, principals and teachers mentioned the fact that CIS staff members frequently bring in tutoring or academic supports. As one teacher wrote, "CIS also works with students who are lower academically to boost their self-confidence and literacy skills." Finally, teachers and principals saw CIS staff members as valuable resources in the school. One teacher stated, "I have found our CIS staff to be one of the most valuable assets our school has."

"Our CIS support team is an amazing resource and one of the major reasons many of our students are able to overcome hardships and complete their education..."
- A teacher at a CIS school

Teachers especially appreciated the fact that CIS site staff helped to build capacity and support for school staff members. One teacher wrote, "[She] has been a life saver!! When we did not have her at our school it was a nightmare in trying to meet the [kids'] needs. She is wonderful!" Another stated, "I would have never made it through my first year of teaching without the CIS counselors."

CONCLUSION

Teachers, principals, and superintendents reported that poverty, students coming to class unprepared to learn, and a lack of parental involvement were significant barriers at their schools. However, CIS plays an integral role in helping school staff members to address these barriers. CIS site coordinators add value to schools by giving one-on-one attention to students, bringing community resources into the school, addressing the needs of students and families, and aligning with school and district goals. Additionally, site coordinators are approachable, willing to collaborate with school staff, and serve as valuable resources to the school. They provide social-emotional and academic supports, build bridges between schools and families, and build the capacity of teachers to address student needs. In short, CIS is playing an integral role in providing Integrated Student Supports (ISS), aligning with current trends in federal policy, and ensuring that students are surrounded by a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

APPENDICES
Appendices are available upon request

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
Do you have quick comments or questions on this brief? Click **here** and let us know.