

Effective Site Coordinator Development and Retention



Amy Hagen, 2012 Communities In Schools Robert H. B. Baldwin Fellow

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many students that Communities In Schools works with face challenges both inside and outside the classroom. Through the work of the site coordinator, CIS strategically aligns and delivers needed resources so students can focus on learning. The site coordinator evaluates student risk factors and needs and develops relationships with local service agencies, businesses, health care providers and parent and volunteer organizations that can meet those needs. Appropriate services are then integrated into the schools where children spend their days.

Site coordinators are the backbone of any local CIS affiliate. They support the CIS mission on a daily basis, and serve as the public face of the organization. A successful CIS program requires well-supported, experienced site coordinators who will maintain and extend relationships on and off campus. The importance of the site coordinator's role is highlighted in the CIS 2010 annual report, which defines the work of CIS and the site coordinator:

“Communities In Schools strategically aligns and delivers needed resources by placing a dedicated staff member—a site coordinator—inside partner schools to identify students at risk of not graduating.”¹

¹ Communities In Schools, 2010 Annual Report: Success is the Only Option.

STRATEGIES TO KEEP AND REWARD SITE COORDINATORS

Keeping trained and experienced site coordinators creates program continuity. When new staff is hired, precious resources are spent recruiting, training and developing these individuals. Programs can lag during this transition time. While some turnover is inevitable, CIS must focus on creating strategies that support its experienced staff and reward them for their tenure. A reduction in site coordinator turnover will positively impact both the school program site and relationships off campus.

The focus of this project was to gain insight into the reasons why site coordinators leave and identify best practices to retain them and provide them with opportunities for professional growth. Research strategies for this project included:

- Surveys of site coordinators and their supervisors
- Interviews with site coordinators and CIS staff at all levels of the organization
- Site visits to 9 sites
- A review of current research and literature on issues related to staff retention

The research yielded professional development strategies that are successful in increasing the tenure of site coordinators and identifying site coordinator appreciation recommendations to combat burnout. Additionally, the

research provided best practices for affiliates and state offices to use to support site coordinators.

This project produced findings in three key areas:

1. RETENTION IS ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS. From the moment a site coordinator is hired, connections are a critical factor in building his or her foundation within the CIS organization. The site coordinator, in turn, builds relationships with students, families, schools, partners and the community, which is the essence of CIS.

2. INVESTING IN SITE COORDINATORS IS IMPORTANT. Most CIS affiliates struggle with paying site coordinators adequate salaries and providing them with a career path. Creative options to address these factors emerged from discussions with site coordinators and their supervisors, the survey of site coordinators and suggestions from CIS leadership. Many of these options are validated in the literature and research and are described in this paper.

3. THERE IS GREAT WORK GOING ON AND THIS NEEDS TO BE SHARED. Site coordinators across the country are making things happen with limited resources and little acknowledgement. As resources diminish and challenges increase, site coordinators find creative ways to provide supports that lead to student success. This resourcefulness, creativity and passion for their mission lead to new ways to work in a limited environment. Bringing site coordinators out of isolation and into the spotlight offers a multitude of ideas and actions that can be utilized across the CIS network.

Based on these three key findings, a resource toolkit has been developed to help site coordinators do their jobs better, a critical step in supporting them in the important role they play with CIS. Helping site coordinators build relationships and know that they are valued and acknowledging their skills and good work will aid in the retention and professional growth of these key CIS staff.

ABOUT COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS ROBERT H. B. BALDWIN FELLOW AMY HAGEN

Amy is the Co-Director of Elementary School Services at Communities In Schools of Central Texas in Austin Texas. Amy has been a part of the Communities In Schools network “family” for over nine years. Prior to joining CIS-CT, Amy worked in several social services agencies, including Child Support Enforcement, Missouri Department of Family Services and Head Start. She developed an interest in education and Social Work after overcoming her own challenges in high school and experiencing how positive role models could be supportive in achieving lifelong goals. Amy holds a Masters degree in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin and a Bachelors degree in Social Work from the University of Missouri at St. Louis. She earned her LMSW license in 2001 after passing the Social Work board examinations. In her spare time, Amy, enjoys spending time with her husband as they run after their very active son.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS ROBERT H.B. BALDWIN FELLOWS PROGRAM:

Named after Communities In Schools’ founding board chairman, the Robert H.B. Baldwin Fellows Program aims to promote and sustain Communities In Schools leadership by bringing together the best ideas from the network’s past and present leaders. The program, made possible through a generous grant from MetLife Foundation, addresses the issues surrounding leadership retention, development and transition in the nonprofit sector.

WITH SUPPORT FROM:

MetLife Foundation