

**SUPPORTING  
CENTRAL TEXAS  
STUDENTS AND  
THEIR FAMILIES  
THROUGH A GLOBAL  
PANDEMIC**



June, 2020

# INTRODUCTION



Communities In Schools of Central Texas is a nonprofit provider embedded in public schools and focused on empowering students to stay in school, graduate, and go on to achieve success in life. Under normal circumstances, school-based Communities In Schools staff members provide case management for students directly on their campus. During campus closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CIS is providing virtual support, including helping students and their families navigate community systems of support to ensure that their immediate basic needs are being met. **In this time of crisis, CIS is filling in the gaps between the incredible, unprecedented need in Central Texas, and the available resources in our community by providing emergency financial assistance.** Between March 23 and June 1, 2020, we provided \$259,603 in direct assistance to families, and we continue to help with emergency requests.

**During this time of crisis, our organization is meeting the basic needs of families — needs that, when left unmet, impede children’s ability to learn.** Because of our long established relationships with families and schools, we have unique insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our community and the most vulnerable families. Our case management model offers a framework for mitigating the long-term social, emotional and economic consequences of this collective trauma on the next generation of Central Texans.

# ABOUT COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

Communities In Schools (CIS) is a national nonprofit recognized for its evidence-based model that ensures students have holistic support, removing academic and nonacademic barriers to their success in school. CIS Program Managers, caseworkers, coordinators, and AmeriCorps members work with individual students to keep them on track academically.

The support we offer is as varied as the students we serve, but can include mental health counseling, academic supports, enrichment activities like field trips and college visits, a clothing closet or a food pantry, providing school supplies, and helping families locate affordable housing, apply for health insurance, and navigate community resources.

Research tells us that when children have a solid relationship with a caring adult, they are significantly more likely to have positive academic, behavioral and social emotional outcomes, preparing them for productive adulthood.

This is why the centerpiece of the CIS model is our Program Managers who are trained professionals whose primary focus is the welfare of students. They fill the role of cheerleader, nurturer and trusted adult whom students can turn to for help with a wide range of personal challenges.

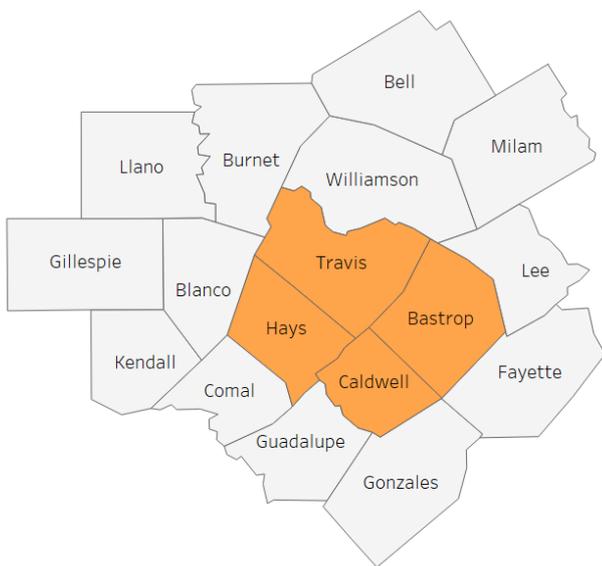
Within partner schools, Program Managers also work with the entire student body on issues such as improved attendance, character development and creating a positive school climate.

An independent evaluation of CIS showed this intensive case management approach has produced the strongest reduction in dropout rates of any existing fully-scaled dropout prevention program that has been evaluated, and that the CIS model is effective across states, school settings (urban, suburban, rural), grade levels and student ethnicities.

**Our mission is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.**

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

Before campuses closed to reduce the spread of COVID-19, our work was based almost entirely in the school building — it's where we made connections with our students, and where we determined what supports they needed in order to be successful. But when it became apparent campuses would remain closed for an extended period of time, we had to quickly reimagine the structure of our work. Students were still “in school,” even though the physical buildings were closed, and it is still our job to help them succeed, despite these new and shifting challenges.



## CIS Service Area

- **5,987 students supported**
- **87% Economically disadvantaged**
- **86 campuses**
- **7 school districts:** *Austin, Bastrop, Del Valle, Elgin, Hays, Lockhart, Manor*
- **Grade level: PK-12**

## Direct Assistance Provided by CIS includes:



**\$259,603** in gift cards, emergency housing, mattresses, and hygiene items provided between March and June, 2020



**\$3,200 in transportation assistance** (Lyft ride credits)



**605 devices with 12 months of internet access** (tablets for elementary, and Chromebooks for secondary students)

# OUR MISSION IN ACTION

## Supporting students during campus closures



"I post videos to Google Classroom with social-emotional lessons, I share examples of coping skills, and I remind students that I am here for them even when campus is closed. When we use Zoom to connect, my students get so excited to see my dog in the videos. The students are able to connect with me on another common factor we share, our love of animals." – **Pamela Lopez, Program Manager, Cedar Creek Elementary School**

"My favorite thing about our work has always been the connections and relationships we build and foster. During this new normal, I am grateful to still be able to speak with students and families, and to be reminded of how powerful that connection is - even through a screen." – **Sambavi Venkatesan, Program Manager, Gateway DAEP**

"My campus is closed, but I continue to support students and families. For students, I provide academic and social emotional support. I call and text with families and provide referrals to community resources. I host video group meetings with students to continue to provide support and offer an outlet for social connection." – **Maria Valencia, Program Manager, Elgin Elementary School**

"Families appreciate the time I spend helping them access their children's school work on school Chromebooks. Many families give up because the technology is unfamiliar and there is often a language barrier when navigating instructions. My CIS students are so excited and proud once they learn how to log on to connect with their classmates on Google Meet." – **Edie Cassell-Martinez, Program Manager, Red Rock Elementary School**

# FEEDBACK ON THE CIS COVID-19 RESPONSE

## Teachers & Administrator Survey Feedback

Teachers and administrators from the 86 campuses served by Communities In Schools of Central Texas were asked about the CIS COVID-19 Response



96%

said CIS was a partner during campus closures to address student needs



93%

said CIS helped develop resources and materials to support students during campus closures

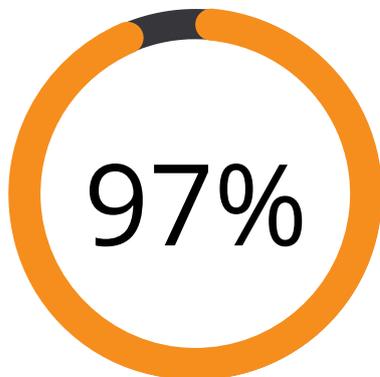
"CIS HAS GONE ABOVE AND BEYOND DURING SCHOOL CLOSURE HELPING US REACH STUDENTS AND PARENTS, AND ASSISTING WITH NOT ONLY COUNSELING SUPPORT BUT UTILITIES, FOOD, RENT ASSISTANCE AND BASIC NEEDS RESOURCES."

- Webb Middle School

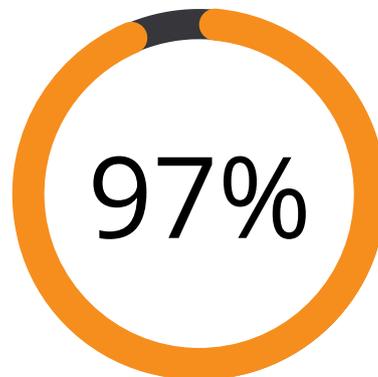
"CIS IS INVOLVED IN MAKING SURE THAT STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES HAVE RESOURCES TO CONTINUE LEARNING AT HOME. NOT ONLY THAT, I KNOW THEY'VE ALSO BEEN INVOLVED IN MAKING SURE THAT OUR FAMILIES HAVE THEIR BASIC NEEDS MET."

- Becker Elementary School

**Parent Feedback:** Parents and guardians said CIS helped them support their child's learning, and helped them stay connected during closures



97% of parents and guardians said that CIS helped them support their child's **learning** during campus closures



97% of parents and guardians said that CIS helped them **stay connected** to the child's school during campus closures

# WHAT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES ARE FACING

## Anxiety and Depression

The social, emotional and physical needs of students that our work aims to address did not go away when campuses closed due to the pandemic. Needs intensified as stay-at-home orders added to the economic stress and lack of services that already challenged the most vulnerable families in Central Texas. In particular, our students struggle with issues of mental health and general well being. The struggles of families persist, especially for communities of color.

## Financial Hardships

Over two million Texans have filed for unemployment since COVID-19 halted the economy. The majority of layoffs in Texas have occurred in low-wage positions (e.g., service, accommodation, and retail industries). Filing for unemployment does not guarantee immediate financial relief. Families must wait for their first payment, which is often delayed many weeks. At the beginning of each month, rent is due, without any unemployment relief. Families face the very real threat of losing their job, which, in some cases, could lead to homelessness. CIS has provided \$259,603 in immediate, direct assistance to families to fill in gaps and keep families fed, and in their homes.

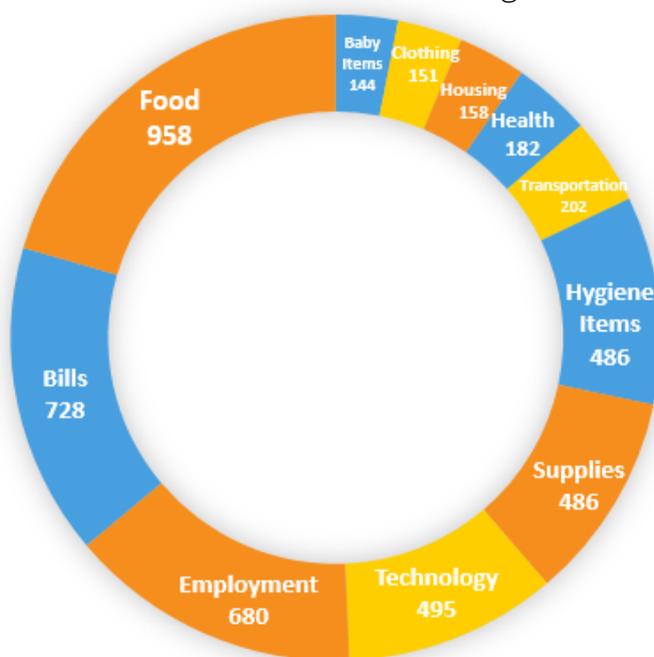
## Food Insecurity

Since March 23, CIS made 1,344 referrals to outside agencies for students and families in need of additional support. Food assistance comprised the majority of referrals. School districts and food pantries have done an incredible job of mobilizing to ensure that students and their families have food during the pandemic. CIS staff make sure families know locations and pickup dates. When families are unable to travel to pick up food, CIS provides gift cards to help meet immediate need.

## Lack of Technology

As our families negotiate these financial hardships, they have also been responsible for helping their children stay connected to remote education. They have expressed anxiety about their children falling behind in school and failing to graduate or go on to higher education. To address the digital divide, CIS has brokered new partnerships, ensuring that 605 students have devices and internet access to participate in education when school buildings are closed.

Most Reported Needs of Students and Families

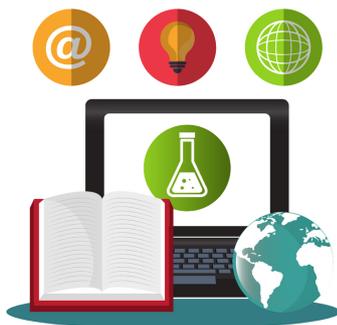
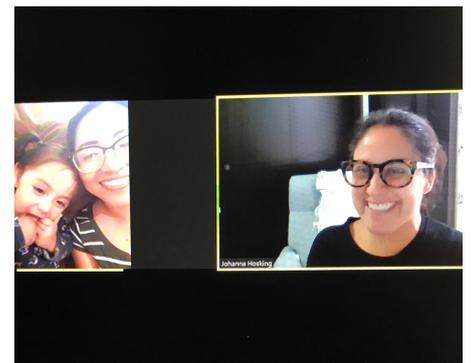


# OUR MISSION IN ACTION

## Supporting families in times of crisis

The Hartfield family had been experiencing homelessness for over a year, bouncing between the homes of friends and family and staying in motels when they had no other place to go. In April, just as the pandemic crisis hit our area, they finally moved into their own apartment, but then mom lost her job due to COVID-19 closures a few weeks later. She bounced back and found new work within a few days, but had spent all her savings on housing applications and a security deposit. Communities In Schools helped the family by providing beds, mattresses and linens, and gasoline gift cards for mom to use for transportation to and from work. The family is now focused on their future, and they love having their own, safe home once again.

One of our families has three little girls under eight years old. When COVID-19 hit Austin, the father began to lose hours at work, and he was eventually laid off. He was the sole provider for his family and unable to pay rent for two months. They do not have a car to access food from the school or a food bank. Communities In Schools provided weekly support and assistance, including \$300 in gift cards to help with food, Lyft ride credits and bus passes. Dad is now working again, and he has an agreement with their landlord to pay the overdue rent.



**"D. has been working on education games from PBS for an hour or longer now and I can put a timer on how much time he spends on YouTube Kids. This is exactly what he needed, he loves it, and his duck back pack!"**  
- Blackshear Elementary Parent



In June, 2020, we distributed 605 devices with 12 months of internet access to students who were most in need of technology at home and had the most barriers to remote learning.

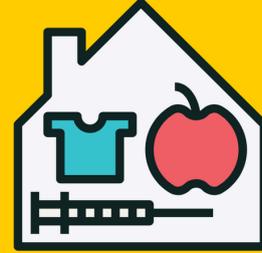
# ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

Supporting students in times of crisis

## Response

- Emergency Assistance
- Supporting the transition to online learning
- Family Engagement
- Social Emotional Support

MARCH-MAY 2020



JUNE-JULY 2020



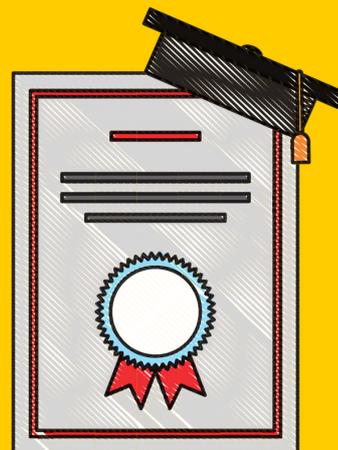
## Reengagement

- Technology distribution
- Behavioral Health Support
- Summer Camp & Extended Summer Camp
- Family Engagement
- Social Emotional Support

## Recovery

- Assist students to adapt to return to campus
- Academic support to address learning loss
- Advocating for equitable access to learning opportunities
- Family Engagement
- Social Emotional Support

AUGUST-MAY 2021



# SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

**187** individuals, foundations and corporations made gifts to the COVID-19 Fund, totaling more than **\$500,000** in support of our students and families. This allows us to provide for the immediate needs of families in crisis.

## Special thanks to the following Leadership Donors:

- St. David's Foundation
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- Garber Family Foundation
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