COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SAFETY

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Every young person needs and deserves a safe place to learn and grow. Our school-based co-ordinators bring the right community resources into schools to ensure that school environments that are safe and inclusive of all students. Working with teachers and school leaders, Communities In Schools site coordinators implement key initiatives that improve school climate, resolve conflicts and prevent violence, and help students cope with trauma. Key strategies include:

- Incorporating safe school strategies into school culture

- Fostering social-emotional skills and competencies

- Effective brokering of mental health services to reach the students who need them the most

- Playing a key role in a recovery from a major disaster or traumatic community event promoting awareness and understanding

Federal Policy Recommendations

School safety should be a top priority in the fiscal year 2019 (FY19) budget. Maintain critical funding that supports the efforts of schools and non-profit organizations to prevent, respond to, and cope with school violence. Specifically, the FY19 budget should maintain funding for the following programs:

- **Safe Schools and Citizen Education grant portfolio**, which supports school districts in their efforts to foster safe and healthy school environments.

- **Project Prevent Grants**, which fund violence prevention and mental health services in schools.

- **Promoting Student Resilience Grants**, which build capacity to address the comprehensive behavioral and mental health needs students in communities that have experienced significant civil unrest in the past two years.

- **Project School Emergency Response to Violence Grants**, which help students recover from a violent or traumatic event in which the learning environment has been disrupted.

- **Readiness and Emergency Management Technical Assistance Centers**, which help schools work with community partners to develop high-quality emergency management plans.

- **Centers for Disease Control and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, both of which house programs that emphasize youth violence prevention.

An Integrated Approach to School Safety

Promoting Awareness and Understanding

The CIS Model begins with an annual needs assessment that analyzes multiple sources of data to identify key needs of the school and individual students. We connect with students and parents to develop an understanding of school climate and pair that with knowledge from school safety surveys. We analyze school climate surveys to understand whether a spectrum of risk factors are present that hinder school success and contribute to unsafe environments. These factors include, but are not limited to, the presence of vandalism, gang activity, crimes, and bullying. With actionable data, our site coordinators work within a school support team to ensure effective school improvement planning.

Effective Brokering of Mental Health Services

CIS site coordinators broker services to students who need them the most and follow up to ensure that interventions are making a difference. CIS of the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, in partnership with Easton Area High School, provides a pointed example of how CIS can partner with a school to address mental health needs. In 2013, district leadership partnered with the Lehigh Valley affiliate to brainstorm a strategy that leveraged key components of the CIS Model. As a result, Easton Area High School had a comprehensive plan to identify students who needed additional support. CIS helps to triage referred students into three categories based on need, identify community services, and deploy them so that they can be most effective.

CIS can also provide support to teachers and other school staff as it relates to mental health. Communities In Schools of Central Texas created a trauma training video to mitigate the impact of trauma in classrooms. Most of the training is focused on a) helping educators deal with the highest-need students in their schools and b) demonstrating to educators how to teach these students to calm their internal state when they are emotionally escalated. Additionally, CIS site coordinators provide training around developing healthy and positive relationships. This training is not just for student to student interactions but is also targeted at adults in the school.

Incorporating safe school strategies into the school culture

Helping students develop socially and emotionally can improve overall school climate, helping to make the school a more safe and inclusive environment. Often times, CIS site coordinators play a lead role in a school's Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) initiatives. At a schoolwide level, CIS may promote awareness and understanding around mental health and help remove a stigma so students and families can access the support they need. For more targeted populations with specific needs, CIS might broker or conduct a range of support groups or interventions from meditation, anger management, anti-bullying, and LGBTQ to empower students to implement solutions. We also work directly with individual students in these efforts. CIS' early identification and intervention supports help students learn healthy strategies for coping with stress, trauma, build positive self-image, and self-control; all of which have been empirically linked to less violent behavior in schools.

Recovery

Communities In Schools is often called upon to play key roles in a school and community's efforts to recover from a range of traumatic events such as natural disasters or death of a member of a school community. Most recently, affiliates in Texas were relied upon after Hurricane Harvey to help restore a sense of safety and stability. Texas affiliates supported schools to reopen, provided long term support, helped family members access community recovery resources. CIS site coordinators have also provided trauma-informed care training support and brokered in trauma support resources for adults in schools.