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Testimony Before the
Senate Committee on Education

By

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Mr. Chair and members of the Committee:

My name is Malissa Martin. I am the President and CEO for Communities In Schools of Mid-America. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about Communities In Schools. Also, permit me to say thank you for the decision by the 2013 Kansas Legislature to appropriate funds to Communities In Schools to introduce three new CIS programs in Kansas schools last year and to conduct a study of the effectiveness of our model of integrated student support services.

THE ISSUE

When students aren't doing well, it's often because of issues that are neither attributable to the public education system, nor solved by it. These students often face circumstances that compromise their development and well-being during childhood and adolescence and that we as adults would find daunting. These children and teens may be struggling with poverty, hunger, homelessness, a lack of needed medical care, or inadequate clothing for cold winter months. These children may be dealing with violence at home and in their neighborhoods, or experiencing abuse. Or perhaps things are okay enough at home, but at school, they are isolated or bullied or too depressed to adequately function. Or

perhaps they try to do well, but no one has ever noticed that they are legally blind or almost completely deaf.

Simultaneously, our state suffers when these children and teens suffer. The Kansas workforce demands skilled workers, and the high school students who graduate unprepared for their next steps or who drop out lack the skills to contribute to our workforce needs. The average high school dropout earns around \$22,000 a year, an income that does not adequately support the productive market place that our state economy needs. The students who are unable to take their place in our workforce contribute little through state taxes and are instead major recipients of expensive state programs and services.

THE COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS SOLUTION

Communities In Schools is the nation's largest and most effective dropout prevention organization because we do whatever it takes. Our unique model of integrated student supports positions site coordinators inside schools to assess the needs of students and to provide them resources that will help them stay in school and succeed in life. We partner with local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers and volunteers. Whether it's providing food, school supplies, health care, counseling, academic assistance or a positive role model, Communities In Schools is there to help.

Communities In Schools provides both "Level One" and "Level Two" services to students. Level One services are interventions that are accessible to all students within a school. Level One services can include clothing or school supplies, career fairs, field trips, health screenings and grief counseling. Level Two services are targeted interventions tailored to case-managed students. Services can range from counseling, mentoring, tutoring, homework help, free or low-cost health or dental care, finding the student a safe place to live, or ensuring the student has transportation to and from school.

The CIS staff team, which includes not only the site coordinator, but organizational program and management staff, forge community partnerships that bring programs and resources to the school in order to benefit students. This framework provides great flexibility to respond to individual, school, and community needs, characteristics, and values.

COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS' EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO HELPING STUDENTS

Nationally, Communities In Schools underwent a five-year comprehensive study, completed in 2011, which determined the Communities In Schools model results in the strongest reduction in dropout rates of any dropout prevention program that has been evaluated. Additional findings include:

- Communities In Schools is unique in its ability to lower dropout rates and increase on-time graduation rates
- Communities In Schools helps students achieve proficiency in fourth and eighth grade reading and math
- Communities In Schools is effective at all grade levels, for all ethnicities, and in all settings – rural, suburban, and urban

Here in Kansas, Communities In Schools provided case-management services to more than 2,000 students and Level One services to another 34,000 during the 2013-2014 school year. Among the case-managed students, 98% stayed in school. Three-quarters of the case-managed students improved their academics, school attendance, and behavior. Eighty-five percent of the case-managed students were promoted to the next grade level, and 81% of the eligible seniors graduated on time. And these were students statistically poised to experience school and personal failure or to drop out. And we provided all these services at \$106 per student for the entire year. This year, Communities In Schools works in 67 Kansas schools, in 25 Kansas communities, and we expect to provide case-managed services to approximately 4,000 students and Level One services to an additional 46,000.

To give you a better view of how Communities In Schools works, joining me today are two Site Coordinators and two Communities In Schools students. Each will share their perspective and experience.

Chairman Abrams, thank you for the opportunity to address the Senate Committee on Education. We would welcome answering any questions.