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# Communities In Schools Of Central Texas

COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF CAMPUS-  
BASED OPERATIONS 08-09

RH2 Consulting, Inc.



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*Comprehensive evaluation of campus-based operations 08-09*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities In Schools of Central Texas (CIS) is a dropout prevention program founded in 1985. CIS is based on the concept that children cannot learn when they are in crisis or face significant non-academic needs.

CIS has staff at 56 schools with high needs for dropout prevention in Travis, Williamson, Hays, Bastrop and Caldwell Counties. CIS staff provides direct assistance to children or recruits other community resources, such as university student interns, outside organizations, or volunteers to help.

CIS engaged RH2 Consulting Inc. (RH2) to perform a general evaluation of its program. The goals of the evaluation were to identify additional CIS student service hours needed to enable each child to show measureable improvement in areas such as academics, behavior or attendance, provide information on staff options for increasing service hours, complete a cost-benefit analysis of increasing service hours to achieve positive student outcomes, and to provide general recommendations for improving CIS operations.

The evaluation team found a well-run organization with a clear mission and uniform commitment to the organization's purpose at all levels of operations. The evaluators also identified opportunities to strengthen CIS student outcomes and enhance campus-based practices. A select list of commendations, findings and recommendations are presented in this executive summary. A more complete list is presented at the end of the report.

### Commendations

- **CIS is to be commended for improving the quality of their campus level data over the past school year (2008-2009).**
- **CIS is to be commended for developing a set of professional, branded materials for the 2009-2010 school year.**
- **CIS is to be commended for the willingness of staff at all levels of the organization to examine ways to improve operations and enhance student services.**

### Key Findings

RH2 found students served during the 2007-2008 school year started showing measurable improvement at statistically significant level in some outcomes at 16 hours of services. However, 73 percent of children who received at least 26 hours of service that year saw improvement in the issue for which they were receiving services; that is, academic performance, behavior or attendance. If CIS had provided every child served during the 2008-2009 school year 26 hours of service, 3,509 CIS case managed students would have needed an additional 40,605 more hours to achieve this level.

In order to achieve this level of service hours CIS will need to add staff and make better use of outside organizations. In campus visits, middle school and high school Program Managers

(PMs) indicated their highest staffing needs were for mental health professionals and male staff or XY-Zone coordinators. Elementary school PMs said that their greatest staff needs were for more people who could work with special needs children, tutors, and bilingual staff.

Efficient expansion of service hours will require placing greater emphasis on PMs' management skills than is currently being done. Training in the use of outside organizations and volunteers may be necessary for CIS to ensure appropriate, effective deployment of these resources.

The time needed for university interns and AmeriCorps members to become fully functional in their jobs could be shortened with a uniform set of orientation materials about every campus. Interns and other campus staff could benefit from a formal process for conveying information from Director Level meetings to these staff.

Faculty and administration support is a key ingredient in CIS programs' success. However, not every campus is equally successful. Some standardized guidelines for garnering campus support may help CIS gain access to the children they serve during the school day and facilitate negotiations on space and other related matters.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides little support for the TEA CIS database. This limits the ability of CIS on a daily basis and RH2 in this evaluation to use all of the data that CIS staff enters into this database. For example, TEA's not providing a data dictionary to define the often confusing database variables or to support CIS in developing database queries presents an on-going problem.

Select recommendations follow below. Additional recommendations with more information can be found in Section 7.

### **Staff Recommendations**

- **CIS should seek to ensure that every case managed child receive no fewer than 16 hours of service and ideally at least 26 hours per year.**
- **CIS should place greater emphasis on management skills for campus PMs so that they can effectively juggle staff, volunteers and outside organizations necessary to increase service hours to students.**
- **CIS should expand the use of external organizations and volunteers to deepen campus CIS services through increased hours of service or number of kids served.**

### **Training Recommendations**

- **CIS should conduct a workshop each year in the spring as part of annual training on managing and maximizing the use of volunteers and outside organizations.**
- **Every campus should have a set of basic, uniform campus level information for new staff such as Interns and AmeriCorps members.**

### Communications Recommendations

- **CIS should develop guidelines for PMs to follow at the beginning and throughout the school year to ensure all faculty and staff, including ones hired in the middle of a school year, are aware of and know what CIS does on their campuses.**
- **CIS should negotiate adequate space when considering new and existing schools.**

### Data Recommendations

- **CIS should work with TEA to gain supporting documentation and other assistance that would allow CIS to make better use of TEA collected data.**
- **CIS should explore developing a users group or other collaborative with other large Texas CIS programs to share information on queries and uses of the database.**
- **CIS should develop data queries and other tools to enable its own staff to make better use of the data CIS collects and reports.**

The report that follows:

- States the goals of the comprehensive evaluation of campus-based services provided by Communities In Schools of Central Texas (CIS) performed by RH2;
- Provides an agency overview with brief descriptions of the programs included in the evaluation, types of staff, and the contribution each type of staff can make to the delivery of direct services;
- Describes the methodology used for the evaluation and summarizes key activities undertaken by the evaluation team;
- Summarizes staffing hours by program, service hours received by case managed students, and brokered services by campus;
- Reports calculations showing stakeholders the benefit of additional staff or how increased resources can improve program outcomes; and
- Offers a set of commendations, findings and recommendations based on the research completed.