

Evaluation of Communities In Schools (CIS) of Texas



Executive Summary and
Final Technical Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF TEXAS

Prepared for Texas Education Agency

“Communities In Schools (CIS) is seen as a bridge between the schools, families, students and community it serves. It is described as a support not only for students but also for families. In particular, CIS is seen as the program that removes barriers and obstacles to success in school for students and helps keep students in school.”

– *Technical Report*

For over thirty years, Communities In Schools (CIS) of Texas has worked to address the needs of at-risk children and youth. Beginning in 1979 with one site in Houston, TX, to its current configuration of 28 affiliates located in 55 counties throughout the state, CIS of Texas has partnered with communities, schools, students, parents and local organizations to change the lives of children and families. Moreover, through its unique partnership with the State of Texas managed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), investment in the work of CIS of Texas has grown from \$840,000 annually in 1987 to a current investment of more than \$20,000,000 annually in this dropout prevention program.¹

CIS of Texas provides both an infrastructure through which schools and communities can be mobilized to address the critical needs faced by at-risk students and their families and, more importantly, CIS of Texas provides the approach—the CIS model. The CIS model provides solutions to keeping at-risk students in school and ultimately reducing the incidence of dropping out of school. As CIS of Texas takes measures to solve the problems of at-risk children and youth, they acknowledge that dropping out is not just a school problem, but also a community problem. Therefore CIS believes that coordination of community services is essential to meeting the needs of at-risk youth—youth not only at risk of dropping out of school, but also other adverse social issues including substance abuse, teen pregnancy, negative interactions with the justice system and other negative social outcomes.

The TEA, responding to a request from the Texas State Legislature, commissioned ICF International to conduct an evaluation of CIS of Texas and its 28 affiliates located in 55 counties throughout the state. The evaluation undertaken from January through August 2008, focused on three overarching questions:

- **Implementation of CIS:** What are barriers and facilitators to successful implementation of a CIS program at a campus?
- **Services Delivered:** To what degree has the CIS program provided services that are needed to the students it serves?
- **Impact of CIS:** What is the impact of the CIS program on at-risk students?

¹ In 1984, an independent study conducted by Intercultural Development Research Association found that 27% of white students, 34% of African American students, and 45% of Hispanic students dropped out of school before graduation. This prompted a call for action from the Texas State Legislature. The governor at the time, Mark White, in an effort to overhaul public education and address the high incidence of high school drop outs in Texas, identified exemplary youth dropout prevention programs operating in Texas—CIS of Texas was one of the programs designated as an exemplary youth program.

In addition, ICF also examined the program’s data collection and management system—Communities In Schools Tracking Management System (CISTMS). Administrators of CIS of Texas emphasized the importance of data in assisting CIS staff to better implement, monitor, and adjust program needs and resources. With this in mind, the CISTMS data management system was reviewed as a part of the evaluation process. A summary of recommendations is provided in this overview of findings and detailed recommendations can be found in Chapter VII in the Technical Report that provides detailed data and description of all aspects of the evaluation.

Purpose of the Report

The evaluation is intended to determine if CIS is an effective approach to serving the growing at-risk population in Texas, specifically those students at risk of dropping out of school. Although CIS is considered the largest dropout prevention program in Texas, the number of students the program currently has the capacity to serve represents only a fraction of the two million children that the TEA estimates are at risk in the state. In order to assess the advisability of increasing the capacity of CIS of Texas to serve more students, it is important to examine its effectiveness in preventing students from dropping out and keeping students in school. Evidence will be presented in three areas— implementation, service delivery, and impact.

Organization of the Report

This evaluation report is organized into three major volumes: (1) an Executive Summary of Findings, (2) a detailed Technical Report, and (3) an extensive complement of Technical Appendices. The Executive Summary of Findings provides top level information on key evaluation findings. The Technical Report provides data and information including full explanations of analysis undertaken and results including models with predictors as to who benefits and how CIS impacts the students it serves. The Technical Appendices provide important data supporting the findings of the Technical Report.

Evaluation Methods

In order to fully understand the complexity and issues surrounding implementation, service delivery and impact of the CIS of Texas model, the evaluation used a comprehensive multi-level and mixed methods approach. The study was conducted at three levels—affiliate, school, and student levels—providing an understanding of where and how implementation and impact occur in the CIS of Texas approach. Data collection and analysis were undertaken using both primary and secondary data sources (see Table 1 and Chapter 2 of the Technical Report for detailed descriptions of data sources). In addition, five CIS affiliates² identified by CIS of Texas to TEA were visited by the ICF evaluation team to obtain “first hand” information on the implementation of the CIS approach by gathering perspectives from CIS staff, school personnel, community partners, students, and parents about the program and services delivered.

It is important to note that the evaluation design and analysis encountered several barriers to full design implementation due to limitations surrounding data availability, specifically missing and incomplete data in the CISTMS and Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) databases. These instances are noted in the technical report when they occur as well as steps and analyses undertaken to address these limitations.

² The five sites visited were: CIS of Big Country (Abilene), CIS of El Paso (El Paso), CIS of Houston (Houston), CIS of North Texas (Lewisville), and CIS of Northeast Texas (Mount Pleasant). Each site varied in geographic location, population size, ethnicity, urbanicity, age of inception and staff characteristics.

SUMMARY OF KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

This volume of the evaluation report begins with a section on findings relevant to the CIS management structure and the reach of CIS with regard to mission, program model, and target population. Following this section, findings relevant to overarching evaluation questions will be provided focusing on implementation, service delivery and impact. Recommendations regarding CISTMS are provided after this section. The volume ends with a summary of major findings outlining both the impact and promise of CIS of Texas.

Mission, Model and Target Population

CIS of Texas is part of a national organization operating in more than 30 states throughout the United States. Each state program operates as an independent state federation with a central office providing oversight to local affiliates. Each local affiliate is incorporated as a 501c3 organization with a locally designated Board of Directors. Local affiliates contract (both formally and informally) with schools in their community to operate CIS programs on their school campuses. Unlike other state CIS programs, the CIS program in Texas is managed statewide through a state education agency—the TEA. TEA is the conduit through which funding from the Texas State Legislature is dispersed to local affiliates.³ The CIS State Office is housed in TEA and provides programmatic and technical guidance and oversight to the independently operating local affiliates.⁴

The central means by which CIS seeks to impact the lives of children, youth, and their families is through implementation of the “CIS approach”—a comprehensive asset-based approach focused on strengthening youth through the five basic principles of CIS⁵ and incorporating the six components of the CIS of Texas framework. The CIS of Texas approach includes:⁶

- A structured organizational model;
- A set of core values and beliefs that guide the implementation of this model; and
- Six Program Components specific to CIS of Texas that identify the framework of services provided at each affiliate campus (see box).

Six Components of CIS of Texas

- Supportive Guidance and Counseling
- Health and Human Services
- Parental and Family Involvement
- Career Awareness and Employment
- Enrichment
- Educational Enhancement

This framework is the conceptual model for implementing case-managed services to at-risk children and youth. As such, it is the focus of the evaluation of the implementation of CIS of Texas examined in this evaluation study.

³ CIS of Texas is one of two state programs in the national CIS federation that receives direct funding from a state legislature. This support enables CIS of Texas to have broad reach across the state and provides the capacity to serve more communities and impact large number of students.

⁴ State office roles and responsibilities are described in the CIS of Texas website as: directs programs, sets standards, establishes performance goals, monitors key benchmarks, develops statewide partnerships, and works to expand the CIS program statewide.

⁵ The CIS Five Basics are: 1) A Personal Relationship with a Caring Adult (e.g., mentors, tutors, parental involvement programs); 2) A Safe Place (e.g., after school and extended hours programs); 3) A Healthy Start (e.g., mental health counseling, family strengthening initiatives, drug and alcohol education, physical and dental exams, eye care and immunizations, help for teen parents); 4) A Marketable Skill (e.g., technology training for the future, career counseling and employment skills, college preparation and scholarship opportunities); and 5) A Chance to Give Back (e.g., community service opportunities, Junior ROTC). See www.cisnet.org.

⁶ The mission statement is: “Communities In Schools helps young Texans stay in school, successfully learn, and prepare for life by coordinating community resources in local schools.”

SUMMARY OF KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS	
AREA	FINDING
Overarching Finding(s)	<p>Finding 1: The CIS of Texas State Office (TEA) provides significant management and technical support to local affiliates. This support is credited with the implementation of a statewide CIS program that is well managed and of high quality.</p> <p>Finding 2: The CIS model is being implemented with fidelity throughout all 28 CIS of Texas affiliates.</p> <p>Finding 3: CIS of Texas is engaging and serving children and youth identified as at risk of dropping out of school.</p>
Implementation	<p>Finding 4: The amount and type of case-managed services students received positively influence the likelihood of a student staying in school.</p> <p>Finding 5: Large caseloads and limited access to students during the school day restrict the capacity of CIS campus managers to deliver effectively large doses of services to CIS students.</p>
Service Delivery	<p>Finding 6: Through both direct and brokered services, CIS provides the necessary services to address risk factors for school dropout.</p> <p>Finding 7: CIS students who had a mentor reported more positive outcomes relative to CIS students who did not.</p>
Impact	<p>Finding 8: General supportive guidance (i.e., having an “adult advocate”--the core of the CIS model) is positively linked to several outcomes (e.g., stay in school).</p> <p>Finding 9: Providing enrichment services resulted in a number of positive benefits to CIS students.</p> <p>Finding 10: CIS has been successful in engaging parents, which is a necessary ingredient to a child’s success.</p> <p>Finding 11: LEP (Limited English Proficient) and at-risk students (i.e., those identified by TEA at-risk categories) demonstrate increased occurrence of dropping out of school, reduced graduation rates and poorer performance in academics compared to other CIS case-managed students.</p> <p>Finding 12: Transitions from one school level to the next are a special challenge for CIS case-managed students. It took longer for these CIS students to get back on track during a transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school.</p> <p>Finding 13: CIS is helping case-managed students stay on track with their classmates.</p> <p>Finding 14: Parents of CIS students report positive changes in their child as a result of participation in CIS activities.</p> <p>Finding 15: Students participating in CIS report that CIS provides needed support for success in school.</p>

Finding 1: The CIS of Texas State Office (TEA) provides significant management and technical support to local affiliates. This support is credited with the implementation of a statewide CIS program that is well managed and of high quality.

Information gathered through both case study site visits and a statewide survey of key CIS stakeholders indicates that the CIS State Office is viewed by local affiliates as a valuable resource in carrying out their individual mission (see Section VII of the Technical Report for detailed information on the case studies and stakeholder survey). The State Office provides oversight, training and a means by which local affiliates can be connected to one another, share strategies, and collectively address the development of resources needed to carry out program functions. The State Office is responsible for monitoring the quality of the state network and in this role is viewed as a support and resource for assuring program quality at the local level.

Finding 2: The CIS model is being implemented with fidelity throughout all 28 CIS of Texas affiliates.

The CIS campus manager is the primary vehicle through which CIS services are coordinated and delivered. Services include both campus-wide and whole-school services (i.e., programs and support provided across the board to all students and families in the school) and targeted case management services (specific services for students identified as most at risk). Based on a survey of key staff from all CIS affiliates, it was reported that case managers, on average, spend about 25 percent of their time on whole-school activities and about 51 percent or more time delivering case-managed services. The study also found that the underlying processes of the CIS model are consistent across all affiliates, including: (1) use of formal and informal needs assessments, (2) coordinating and prioritizing services with input from school personnel, and (3) preparation and use of an annual campus plan with clearly defined objectives and measures of progress. Local affiliates monitor the progress toward goals for both program and individual student progress using the CISTMS database. Indications are that there is strong leadership of local affiliates as evidenced by experienced and committed executive directors and well qualified program staff.

Finding 3: CIS of Texas is engaging and serving children and youth identified as at risk of dropping out of school.

In 2006-07—the most recent school year for which CISTMS data was provided—2,233,719 recorded hours of service were provided to 86,836 case-managed students for an average of 26.55 hours of service per student per school year. These students were identified as at-risk through several assessment processes, principally through a referral process (see box) and an assessment to determine targeted issues. The three top issues for which students were referred for CIS case management in 2006-07 were behavior problems, academic issues and for needed social services. Before CIS typically delivers or coordinates services, a needs assessment⁷ is conducted to determine which issues should be targeted. Table 1 provides a summary of both referral and targeted issues for case-managed students during the 2006-07 school year. As shown in Table 1, while less than half (42.3%) of the case-managed students for whom data were available in 2006-07 were referred

<u>2006-07 Service Referral by Source</u> (n=66,725)	
Teacher	28.5%
Parent	26.0%
CIS Staff	15.2%
School Counselor	8.3%
Self referral	7.9%
Data Source: 2006-07 CISTMS	

⁷ Students may be referred to CIS for case-managed services in four areas: academics, attendance, behavior or social services. Each referred student is assessed in these four areas and a service plan is developed to address both the referred issue and any other targeted issues that are indicated from the needs assessment. The service plan is monitored by the CIS case manager tracking student progress toward redressing targeted issues.

for behavior issues, a detailed assessment with each student resulted in a greater percentage (69.9%) of students being targeted for behavior issues. This suggests that many problems experienced by students may not be evident until after a detailed needs assessment and targeting process is completed, which is the hallmark of the CIS model.

Issue	% of Students Referred for Each Issue (n=42,348)	% of Students Targeted for Each Issue (n=78,388)
Behavior	42.3%	69.9%
Academics	34.7%	56.0%
Social Services	14.8%	35.4%

Data Source: 2006-07 CISTMS

As shown in Table 2, the CIS program, statewide, serves a diverse range of students; however, the majority of those served are Hispanic. The average annual household income for families of CIS case-managed students is less than \$25,000. Additional demographic information can be found in the Technical Report, Chapter 3.

	Percentage/Value	N
Ethnicity		86,836
• White, not of Hispanic Origin	15.1%	
• African American	21.7%	
• Hispanic	62.0%	
• Native American	0.3%	
• Asian/Pacific Islander	0.8%	
ESL/LEP	19.7%	82,742
Special Education	9.0%	82,742
Average Household Income	\$21,813	53,186

Data Source: 2006-07 CISTMS

Findings—Implementation, Services, and Impact

Major findings reported in this section are drawn from the student-level and school-level studies undertaken as part of the evaluation. There are two parts to the student-level study, both intended to demonstrate the impact of CIS on at-risk students.

- The first part involves the examination of outcomes for CIS case-managed students over time. It also examines the relationship between service type, dosage, and outcomes.
- The second part of the student level study uses a quasi-experimental design to compare CIS case-managed students with similar students from the same school that are not receiving case-managed services from CIS.

A school level study examines the overall differences between schools that implemented the CIS model and schools that did not but were comparable to CIS schools on a range of characteristics.⁹

⁸ In Table 1, the difference in sample size for referral issue and targeted issues is a result of missing data. That is, data on referral issue(s) was only available for 42,348 students whereas data on targeted issue(s) was available for 78,388 students.

⁹ CIS schools were matched with non-CIS schools using a statistical method called propensity score analysis. Characteristics for matching included ethnicity, urbanicity, and socio-economic demographics of the school along with other school indicators including language proficiency. Details on the matching process can be found in the Technical Volume, Appendix B.

While the technical report provides extensive details on findings from both the student- and school-level, key findings are presented in this summary.

Implementation

Successfully implementing the CIS model is hypothesized to result in positive outcomes for at-risk students, keeping them in school and on a path to graduation from high school. In this evaluation, the necessary ingredients for successful implementation of the CIS model were examined. Perspectives of primary stakeholders on the quality and effectiveness of services were gathered and combined with other school level data. The dosage of services (how many hours over what period of time), the point at which students first encounter CIS, and the impact of location (urban, suburban, rural) were all examined to determine what facilitates successful implementation and what hinders it.

Finding 4: The amount and type of case-managed services students received positively influence the likelihood of a student staying in school.

In the 2005-06 school year, case-managed students who received more hours of supportive guidance and enrichment were less likely to drop out of school (and conversely more likely to stay in school) than case-managed students who either did not receive these services or received lower dosages of these types of services. To draw upon the best practices identified by the Institute of Education Sciences¹⁰, supportive guidance and enrichment can encompass several of these lessons learned (e.g., through personalizing the learning environment, improving behavior, providing the presence of a caring adult, and improving academic performance—see Finding 6 below).

Finding 5: Large caseloads and limited access to students during the school day restrict the capacity of CIS campus managers to effectively deliver large doses of services to CIS students.

Considering that CIS campus managers typically work with the highest-need students within the school, an average dosage of 24.6 hours of service per school year in 2005-06 and 26.6 hours of service per school year in 2006-07 may not be sufficient to elicit change on a large scale. A CIS campus manager's caseload is typically between 100 and 125 students, and given that in the era of high-stakes testing it is difficult to pull students from class to address social problems, there may simply be too many students and too little time for a campus manager to give every student the attention he/she needs.

Services Delivered

The evaluation team sought to understand the capacity that CIS brings to this population of students and their families and the degree to which case-managed students' needs are being served and met. An integral part of the CIS service delivery process involves providing services both directly through CIS staff and indirectly through a "brokering" process by which CIS staff identify and coordinate the delivery of needed services to students from providers in the surrounding community. Table 3 provides detail on the total hours of service provided across the Six Components of CIS, as well as year-to-year trends in service dosage.

¹⁰ Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J. (2008, September). IES Practice Guide: Dropout Prevention. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (NCEE-2008-4025).

Program Component	Total Hours of Services Provided 2005-06 (n=83,713)	Total Hours of Services Provided 2006-07 (n=84,129)	% Increase Total Service Hours 2005-06 to 2006-07
Supportive Guidance and Counseling	528,966	565,923	+6.9%
Health and Human Services	177,885	208,851	+17.4%
Parental and Family Involvement	141,319	169,911	+20.2%
Career Awareness and Employment	69,965	99,506	+42.2%
Enrichment	558,719	579,333	+3.6%
Education	579,313	610,195	+5.3%
Total	2,056,167	2,233,719	+8.6%

Data Source: 2005-06 – 2006-07 CISTMS

Finding 6: Through both direct and brokered services, CIS provides the necessary services to address risk factors for school dropout.

CIS of Texas has long employed a strategy involving the provision of services both directly by the CIS program and through brokering of services to outside partners. Services are centered on the Six Components of CIS, many of which have been recently validated by the U.S. Department of Education.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences recently convened a group of practitioners and researchers who were a veritable “who’s who” in dropout prevention. This group of experts was charged with identifying specific practices that were proven or at least well-known to reduce dropout rates. Their recommendations were¹¹:

1. *Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out.* Through the CISTMS and needs assessment processes, CIS has helped schools identify students most at risk of dropping out and has worked to engage the students most at-risk within the school.
2. *Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out.* Supportive guidance from a caring adult is one of the cornerstones of the CIS model. Providing an adult role model can help students work through their problems, especially if that support is not provided at home.
3. *Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance.* Educational enhancement and enrichment comprise two of the Six Components of CIS. By providing services that help students concentrate on learning – and by helping teachers concentrate on teaching – CIS has the potential to improve the academic environment within a school.

¹¹ Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J. (2008, September). IES Practice Guide: Dropout Prevention. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (NCEE-2008-4025).

4. *Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills.* As shown in Table 1, behavior was the most commonly targeted issue by CIS programs in Texas.
5. *Personalize the learning environment and instructional process (schoolwide intervention).* CIS provides the school with a staff member who can offer one-on-one time with students that they would not normally receive in a classroom environment. The CIS office is often a “sanctuary” for some students, in that it is viewed as a personalized and safe environment in which they can discuss their problems.
6. *Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school.* While not all CIS programs provide career awareness and employment services, in those that do, the amount of these services has increased 42 percent between the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years.

Given that CIS is implementing all of the above recommendations that are within the program's locus of control, it is evident that CIS is “doing the right things” with regard to dropout prevention (See Section I of the Technical Report for corroborating research on dropout prevention).

Finding 7: CIS students who had a mentor reported more positive outcomes relative to CIS students who did not.

Bill Milliken, the founder of CIS, outlined “five basics” that every child needs to learn and grow. The first – and arguably the most important – of the five basics is “a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult”. When family relationships break down or are nonexistent in the first place, CIS provides an adult role model for students, either through a case manager (internal to the program) or a mentor (external to the program). Given that mentoring is a central component of the CIS model, denoted as one of the five CIS basics as “a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult” and as one of CIS of Texas' Six Components as “supportive guidance and counseling”, a separate analysis on the value-added of mentoring services was conducted.

The evaluation team found that mentored students had more positive outcomes on TAKS math scores, TAKS reading scores, and attendance than their non-mentored counterparts. Non-mentored students, however, reported fewer suspensions (and the difference on in-school suspensions was statistically significant). This may indicate that mentoring is accruing benefits to students in terms of academics and motivation/engagement, but did not result in measurably better student behavior.

Impact

The impact of the CIS model on graduation, dropout, promotion and completion was also examined. In order to determine how CIS affects students, data on academic performance using TAKS and TAAS scores and a variety of behavioral outcomes (e.g., attendance and discipline) from CISTMS and PEIMS databases were used. Course grades were not available to determine academic performance of CIS students.¹² CIS case-managed students were the focus of impact analyses and where appropriate, comparisons between CIS case-managed and CIS non-case-managed students were undertaken. The Technical Report provides a wide

¹² Specific data on individual student grade performance was not available for analysis for this evaluation report. CISTMS collects grade data as either pass/ fail or recorded only as a progress measure rather than a numerical grade. Further, course descriptions vary prohibiting alignment of courses across schools and school districts. The PEIMS database does not include data on student grades.

range of information on the impact of the CIS model on case-managed students. Key findings include the following.

Finding 8: General supportive guidance (i.e., having an “adult advocate”—the core of the CIS model) is positively linked to several outcomes (e.g., stay in school).

Providing more hours of general supportive guidance is associated with lower odds of dropping out of school, greater odds of being promoted to the next grade level, and greater odds of staying in school¹³. Moreover, the amount of general supportive guidance was positively associated with better attendance rates, indicating that providing an extra degree of supervision and guidance can move students’ lives in the right direction.

Finding 9: Providing enrichment services was associated with a number of positive benefits to CIS students.

Providing more hours of enrichment services was linked to lower odds of dropping out and greater odds of being promoted. The most profound findings with regard to enrichment services involve their relationship to improved behavioral outcomes.

Finding 10: CIS has been successful in engaging parents, which is a necessary ingredient to a child’s success.

Although the evaluation team observed that increased parental involvement was related to increased disciplinary actions, our findings also suggest that CIS is able to obtain parental involvement among students who are having behavioral problems. This is a critical first step in getting students back on track to success in both academic and social aspects of their lives.

Finding 11: LEP and at-risk students (i.e., those identified by TEA at-risk categories) demonstrate increased occurrence of dropping out of school, reduced graduation rates and poorer performance in academics compared to other CIS case-managed students.

LEP students and students classified as at-risk¹⁴ improved the least—especially in the first year of CIS enrollment. Given that CIS targets the toughest cases—and repositions their caseload each year to address the students with the most needs—these difficulties are understandable and may be avoidable with more CIS staff in place at each school.

¹³ DEFINING DROP OUT: In 2003, the Texas Legislature amended the Texas Education Code to define dropouts for state accountability according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NECS) definition. Specifically, state statute states that the Academic Excellence Indications (TEC39.051) include: (b)(2) drop out rates, including drop out rates and district completion rates for grade levels 9 through 12, computed in accordance with standards and definitions adopted by the National Center for Education Statistics of the United States Department of Education. Students who dropped out during the 2005-06 school year were the first to be reported according to this definition. DEFINING “STAY IN SCHOOL”: CIS of Texas uses the variable “stay in school” as the foundation of its mission. It is defined according to 6 specific student status indicators (e.g., enrolled in school within Texas, promoted to the next grade, graduated, student completed GED certificate, student retaining, failed TAKS (senior only)). In addition, CIS of Texas uses 12 indicators of leave reasons that also are credited with the concept of “stay in school”. These leave reasons are: administrative withdrawal; college pursuing degree; deceased; enrolled in school outside Texas; enrolled in Texas private school; expelled and cannot return; graduated; graduated outside Texas, returned and left again; home schooling; received GED outside of Texas; removed by Child Protective Services; and returned to home country.

¹⁴ At-risk categories used in the analysis for this evaluation were taken from the PEIMS dictionary where there are more than 13 categories defined by TEA as at-risk indicators.

Finding 12: Transitions from one school level to the next are a special challenge for CIS case-managed students. It took longer for these CIS students to get back on track during a transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school.

The general trajectory of most outcomes in our student-level analysis was that students did worse in their first year of enrollment in CIS (2004-05 school year for the student-level cohort studied). This was likely due to the fact that students are typically referred to CIS after their problems become evident. In the year following referral (2005-06 school year), however, outcomes generally improved, which is a testament to the ability of the CIS program to turn around students' lives. However, by the third year (2006-07 school year), which also coincided with a transition to a new school for elementary and middle school students, outcomes were mixed. From these trends, and from anecdotal evidence, it is apparent that CIS students are having a harder time making adjustments. Further evidence for this hypothesis can be found in the years following transition to the TAKS from the TAAS. CIS schools were generally improving on TAAS scores over time, but declined more than their comparison group after the implementation of the TAKS. Anecdotal evidence on this finding corroborates the hypothesis that CIS students had more difficulties making adjustments.

Finding 13: CIS is helping case-managed students stay on track with their classmates.

The trends for TAKS reading, (see Technical Report Figure 19) over the course of time, CIS case-managed students performed similarly to non-case-managed students. This suggests that CIS is helping case-managed students stay on track with their classmates. Further, the percentage of CIS case-managed high school students passing English/Language Arts (ELA) courses (see Technical Report, Figure 20) increased significantly between 2005-06 and 2006-07. This increase helped bring case-managed students up to the same level of performance as non case-managed students. This may suggest that CIS was able to help students through case-managed services regain ground over time.

Finding 14: Parents of CIS students report positive changes in their child as a result of participation in CIS activities.

Parents across all grade levels and communities reported positive changes in their children's attitudes toward school, their attitudes and behavior toward their parents, teachers, and authority figures in general, and their outlook on life. Parents also noted improvement in work habits (e.g., completing homework assignments, getting work done in class) and in course grades. It was not just the students, however, that benefited from CIS. Parents also gave testimony to how CIS had helped them personally with difficult situations from having their electricity turned off, being evicted from their homes, needing help getting medical insurance, or going through a divorce. According to parents, the CIS campus/case managers were known for going beyond "the call of duty" to help not only the students but the families.

Finding 15: Students participating in CIS report that CIS provides needed support for success in school.

Elementary students gave examples of their time spent with their campus/case manager and/or their mentors as the most important aspect of CIS for them. Spending time with another caring adult in their lives was critical. Additionally, elementary school students recognized the importance and benefit of CIS in helping them get assistance with health matters, such as poor vision or dental problems. They also were thankful to CIS for providing them with school supplies, uniforms, and, on occasion, food for themselves and their families.

For middle and high school students, CIS was clearly making a difference. It was common to hear students express how CIS had helped them with their attitudes and behaviors both within and outside of school. As a result of CIS, students indicated they were fighting less with parents and peers, making better decisions, taking more responsibility for their actions and accepting the consequences of their actions, doing better in school on homework, grades, and even tests, and that they understood why going to school was important. They also noted that CIS gave them a safe place to go after school and provided them with someone who would listen to them without judgment. Again, this reflects the importance of the one-on-one relationship with a caring adult for these students. Most striking, perhaps, was the unanimous response across students in high school and many in middle school who stated that they would have dropped out of school if it were not for CIS or their campus/case manager. Almost every student indicated they wanted to continue in CIS and would (and for many already had) recommend CIS to friends and siblings.

Data Management: Recommendations for CISTMS

The CISTMS system is a comprehensive student level data collection system. As such, the system collects a wealth of information on individual students including referral type, targeted issues, services provided, dosage of services, community collaboration and student progress. The strength of the system is the amount of detail gathered on CIS students, their issues and their progress. The system has the capacity to produce meaningful data for program improvement and evaluation purposes.

A review of the utility of the CISTMS systems was undertaken with the goal of providing CIS of Texas with suggestions for areas in which the system can be improved. Although CISTMS provides a wealth of student level data, the overall quality of the data is dependent upon the completeness and accuracy of data entry by program managers at each site. There is limited capacity at the school level to enter data, which generally is the responsibility of the campus manager. Each school typically has one campus manager with a caseload of 100-125 students. These managers face significant burdens in balancing providing services to students with administrative functions like data entry. TEA may want to consider the following options to ensure that the burden of data entry is kept to a minimum at the school level:

1. **Reduce redundancy in data collection:** Program managers have to locate data currently available in PEIMS and reenter it into CISTMS. TEA should consider either providing a direct download of student data from PEIMS into CISTMS, or providing CIS programs with merged CISTMS/PEIMS data for their own use.
2. **Provide CIS programs with an abbreviated list of service codes, and strong guidance on definitions of each:** Currently, there are 273 CISTMS service codes. Although it is nearly impossible to simplify student services into a few discrete categories, TEA should consider culling out service codes that are not often used. Achieving simplicity in service reporting will also result in greater assurance in the accuracy of the data entry.
3. **Capture mentoring services with greater precision:** Mentoring services appear to be underreported in CISTMS. Given that mentoring is such a core component of the CIS strategy in Texas, further efforts are needed to ensure that the mentor/mentee relationship is being captured accurately in the CISTMS system.

4. **Ensure that services are not being under-reported:** CISTMS may underreport service dosage because (a) informal contact is not being reported, (b) there is limited staff time to enter data, and (c) CISTMS is not available. TEA may wish to consider either encouraging the recording of informal contact, or enter a streamlined service code for informal contact. TEA should also consider streamlining reporting requirements, offering funding for data entry, and ensuring that the CISTMS database is up and running as soon as possible after the beginning of the school year. This will ensure both the completeness and the quality of the data.
5. **Create quality checks on linkages between files:** TEA should consider quality checks on the data to ensure that all relational databases have linkages, and if there is incomplete data, reports should be sent back to CIS programs to ensure full data reporting.
6. **Consider the collection of additional intermediate outcomes:** It was evident from our case study site visits that CIS is accruing benefits to students far beyond improved grades or TAKS scores. Additional consideration should be given to including more intermediate outcomes, such as relationships with family/friends, school engagement, and parental involvement.

Limitations and Caveats

As with any study, this evaluation is subject to several limitations. Most notably:

- 1) **Some components of the CIS model are likely to be present in non-CIS schools that are part of the comparison group.** Given that Texas has a long history of addressing the dropout problem, it is likely that most comparison schools have well-established dropout prevention programs in place, especially considering that they are (like CIS) located in areas of high need. When interpreting these findings, the question becomes whether CIS is a more effective strategy than what is already in place at the comparison schools. It is not a “CIS versus no program at all” type comparison.
- 2) **There are multiple levels of service provided by CIS, which affects the intervention dosage for individual students across and within school sites.** Because CIS programs are typically limited by their ability to serve a maximum of 100-125 case-managed students per year on a campus, they have limited ability to produce change at the school-level.
- 3) **Many student outcomes are expected to occur over an extended period of time.** Primary outcomes measured in this evaluation are considered “long-term” outcomes by researchers (e.g., graduation, dropout, and even academic improvement). There was anecdotal evidence that CIS is having a large impact on intermediate outcomes (e.g., better relationships with teachers, more fun learning) that eventually lead to improved academics, and dropout and graduation rates. Since we cannot measure all the areas where CIS is having an impact, the data presented in this report represent a conservative estimation of the total program effects.

Conclusions

“In schools where CIS is serving 25%¹⁵ or more of the student population with case-managed students, greater impact occurs—in essence, CIS has a larger footprint within the school. As a result, it is assumed that a greater return on investment results as CIS expands deeper in a school by providing more services to a larger number of at-risk students.” – Technical Report, Volume II

From first-hand observations on-site, there is qualitative evidence that CIS is having a large impact on students (see Technical Report, Appendix J), especially on intermediate outcomes, such as attitudes toward school, peer associations, relationships with others, etc. which were not able to be examined in this study due to the lack of available data on these measures. Further research is needed to determine the full range of impacts that CIS is having on students, families, and communities. That said, the more rigorous results that were found suggest improvement in more distal outcomes (e.g., test scores) over time, helping get students on track and preventing them from losing ground while within the influence of CIS. Once they transition or are no longer receiving services, however, we see a decline in these outcomes. If CIS can serve more students within a school for a longer period of time, the impacts (both immediate and long-term) are expected to be greater. With limited resources, local CIS affiliates may want to consider placing additional campus/case managers in the schools they are already serving in order to serve more students and/or serve students longer rather than entering new schools. The present study shows that serving more than 25 percent of the student population results in significantly greater improvements in graduation, dropout, promotion, academic achievement, and attendance than when CIS serves less than 25 percent of the students in a school. While the case for behavior issues was not as promising, this may suggest that serving more students results in better detection of behavioral problems when they arise (i.e., greater supervision).

Based on the results of the evaluation, CIS has many of the ingredients recommended in the literature for a successful dropout prevention initiative. Specifically, CIS:

- Has a process in place for identifying the right students at risk for dropout;
- Addresses multiple risk factors (high risk attitudes, values, and behaviors, poor school performance, disengagement in school, family dynamics, parental attitudes and beliefs about education, and parental behavior related to education) for dropout with multiple strategies (the Six Components of CIS of Texas) tailored to the specific needs (behavior, academics, social services) of the students it serves;
- Is assigning adult advocates, in this case campus/case managers and/or mentors to students at risk of dropping out;
- Provides academic support and enrichment services to help improve academic performance;
- Provides case-managed services that assist students with classroom behavior and social skills;

¹⁵ Analysis of this data provided a natural “break” at the 25% point. This break point serves as a natural demarcation for reporting on the “footprint” of CIS in CIS schools.

- Provides case-managed services that help students graduate and provide them the skills needed after they leave high school; and
- Is working to mitigate the influence of out-of-school risk factors on students and thus is helping to remove some of the barriers that make it difficult for at-risk students to stay in school.

Continued evaluation of CIS, in particular regarding the impact on more direct or proximal outcomes and following students over longer periods of time will be important as CIS moves forward and continues to serve students at risk for dropping out.

Full report is available at:

http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/DropoutPrevention/CIS_of_Texas_Final_Evaluation_2008.pdf