



The History of Communities In Schools

In the 1960s, on the streets of New York City, youth worker Bill Milliken and his colleagues launched a series of nontraditional “street academies,” with backing from major corporations like Union Carbide and American Express. Young people who had already dropped out of school were able to return, complete their education and in most cases go on to college.

The Early Years

In 1977, Milliken and his colleagues decided to work inside the school system, and Communities In Schools (then called Cities In Schools) was born. The idea was to develop a safety net so underserved youth could get the assistance they needed *before* they left school. The CIS founders realized that troubled young people and their families had difficulty negotiating their way through a maze of public and private services, all located in different places and following different rules. They decided to bring these community resources *inside* a public school building, where they are accessible, coordinated and accountable.

The fledgling organization started out strong, as newly elected President Jimmy Carter, a supporter of the CIS prototype during his term as Georgia governor, identified federal funds to support CIS’s expansion. Soon CIS was serving nearly 3,000 students in three cities: Atlanta, Indianapolis and New York.

Changes Along the Way

Between 1977 and 1983, local CIS efforts were funded by the CIS national organization. As the CIS movement continued to expand, it became clear that true community-building required local ownership and funding sources. Each community needed to assess its own problems and strengths and craft individual solutions. Thus, from then on, every CIS affiliate would be independently incorporated, with the CIS national office providing the basic model, training and support.

CIS’s results have remained solid over the years. Students in increasing numbers have turned their lives around and chosen to stay in school and graduate. CIS’s cost-effective method of rallying the community to deliver already existing services at the school site became a model for school-community collaboration. Every presidential administration since the Carter administration in 1977 has provided support to CIS – including the innovative, 10-year “Partnership Plan” among the departments of Justice, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education.

As the CIS organization continued to grow, the role of state-level CIS offices became more and more significant. Robust state CIS organizations in Texas, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Florida proved to be a steady and reliable engine for replicating and supporting the CIS model. Today there are 14 state CIS offices.

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Communities In Schools National Office

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Coming of Age

By the mid-1990s, it was clear that the CIS methods were adaptable and successful wherever there were schools and students in need. To reflect this reality, and to acknowledge that at its core the organization is devoted to creating community, Cities In Schools changed its name to Communities In Schools in 1996.

The new century has seen a growing nationwide appreciation for CIS and founder Bill Milliken, who marked the 40th anniversary of his commitment to children in 2000. Today CIS is widely known as the pioneer of the “community school” concept – a vision of schools as vital centers for the entire community, and a delivery point for services and resources that would otherwise be scattered far and wide, uncoordinated and unaccountable. CIS has grown to become the nation’s leading stay-in-school network, the largest and most effective coordinated response to the burgeoning dropout crisis. *Worth* magazine named CIS one of the “100 charities that will save the world” in both 2001 and 2002. *Worth’s* criteria for selection (out of a field of 819,000 registered U.S. charities) were “skill, innovation, effectiveness and strategic insight.”

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