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Addressing Poverty through Integrated Student Supports

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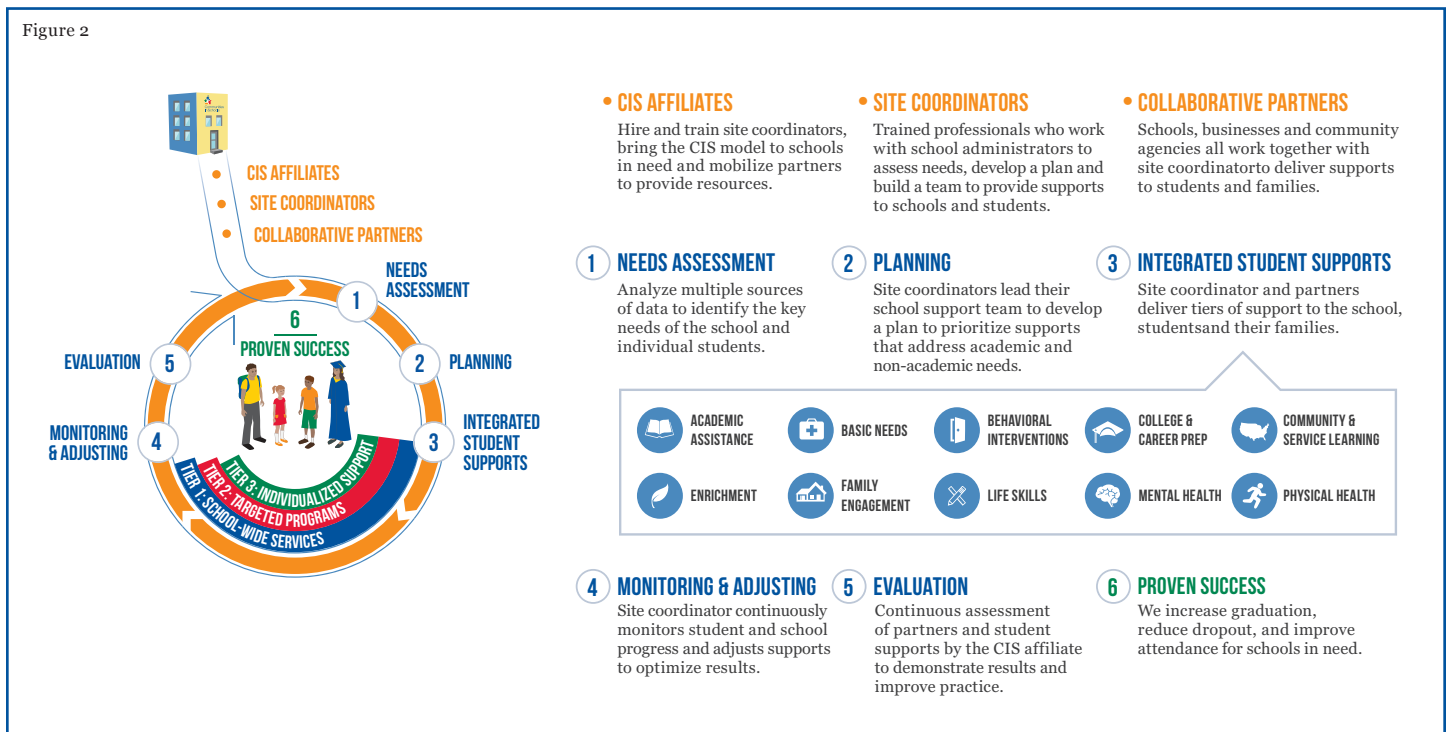
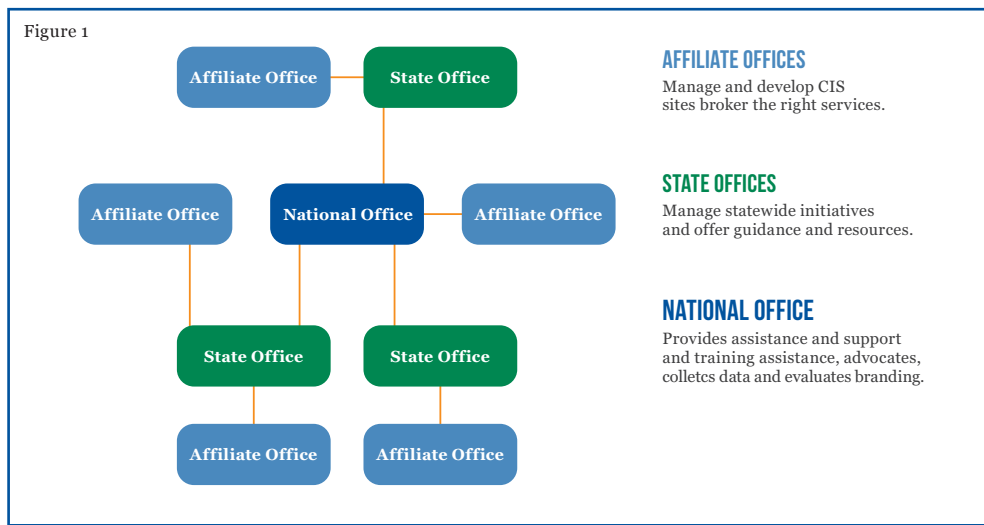


Communities
In Schools

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS AND INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS

As the nation’s largest and most effective dropout prevention organization, Communities In Schools serves 1.5 million students in grades K-12. As shown in Figure 1, Communities In Schools operates as a national federation of independent 501(c)(3) organizations, consisting of a national office, state and managing offices, and over 160 local affiliates. These organizations collaborate to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. In schools, site coordinators and other local affiliate-level staff are deployed to serve and connect at-risk students and families with resources via a unique model of Integrated Student Supports (ISS - see Figure 2). Integrated Student Supports are defined by Child

Trends as “a school-based approach to promoting students’ academic success by coordinating a seamless system of wraparound supports for the child, the family, and schools, to target students’ academic and non-academic barriers to learning” (Moore K. A., 2014). Each year, Communities In Schools site coordinators conduct a comprehensive assessment in order to identify and prioritize risk factors, such as chronic absenteeism, teen pregnancy, trauma and violence, and poverty. Based on the results of the needs assessment and as shown in Figure 2, Communities In Schools focuses on 10 categories of support to best serve disadvantaged students across the United States.



INTRODUCTION TO POVERTY IN THE U.S.

A little more than fifty years ago, President Johnson’s administration implemented several programs aimed to eradicate poverty. The initiatives, informally known as the War on Poverty, included programs that many students and families access today. For example, children benefit from Head Start, a program that offers pre-kindergarten educational opportunities to low-income families. The War on Poverty also created Title I funding, which provides resources to schools serving families in poverty (Sparks S. D., 2014). The 50-year anniversary offers educators and service providers the opportunity to reflect on the successes and challenges of addressing the needs of America’s children in poverty. This brief takes a look at current trends in poverty, discusses the importance of understanding poverty’s impact on students, and explains how youth-serving organizations like Communities In Schools can work to remove the vast barriers of poverty.

Poverty in the United States has been increasing by multiple measures. The percentage of Americans living in poverty has increased from about 12% to 14.8% from 2000-2014, translating to 46.7 million people living in poverty in 2014 (US Census Bureau, 2015). This increase in poverty is partly due to the 2008 recession, but the number of people in poverty has increased since before 2008 (Southern Education Foundation, 2013). This trend impacts children across the United States: in 2014, 21.1% of children under the age of 18 lived in poverty (De-Navas-Walt & Proctor, 2015). Additionally, 39% of children in America were poor for at least one year before their 18th birthday, and one in ten children (10.5%) are persistently poor, having lived below the poverty level for more than half of their lives (Ratcliffe, 2015)¹. The next section of this brief focuses on why it is crucial for youth-serving organizations and practitioners to understand this all-pervasive issue.

Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Lunches

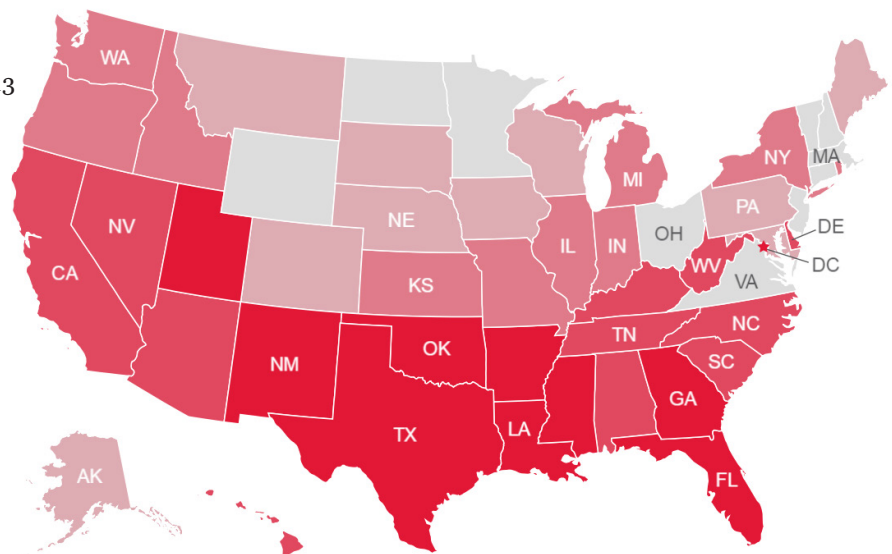
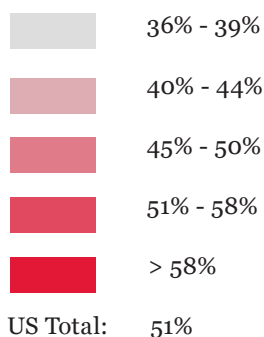
Eligibility for FRPL serves as a proxy in education for whether a student lives in or near poverty. Students eligible for free meals have family annual incomes that fall below 130% of the poverty level. Students can receive reduced-price meals, which can cost no more than 40 cents, if their family income falls between 130 and 185% of the poverty level. For most US states, the federal poverty level for the 2016-2017 for a family of four is an annual income of \$24,300. In numbers, students with annual family incomes of less than \$31,590 qualify for free meals, and those with annual family incomes of less than \$44,955 qualify for reduced-price meals (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016).

POVERTY’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

In 2013, the majority (51%) of students enrolled in America’s public schools were low-income, a determination made based on student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches (FRPL) through the National School Lunch Program. Additionally, children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches comprised over 40% of all students in 40 out of 50 states (Southern Education Foundation, 2015). Many of these students are served by organizations like Communities In Schools, the Boys and Girls Club, YMCAs, and Big Brothers Big Sisters. In fact, 59% of youth served by the Boys and Girls Club of America in 2015 qualified for free or reduced-price school lunches (Boys and Girls Club of America, 2016).

Poverty affects a student’s capacity to succeed in school and in life. It affects students’ health; extreme poverty has an impact on a child’s physical development. In fact, poverty “can actually alter the fundamental architecture of the brain” (Murphey & Redd, 2014). One of the key areas of the brain – grey

Figure 3 - Percentage of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch in 2013



States with a Communities In Schools presence include the State Abbreviation

Data Source: The Southern Education Foundation

¹ In fact, families in our network may be worse off than statistics indicate because the official poverty thresholds, developed four decades (two generations) ago, are outdated and do not account for important cost-of-living calculations (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013).

matter – affects a person’s ability to process information. When compared to children of higher socioeconomic status, children living in poverty were found to have lower average gray matter volumes. As an extension, poverty affects a child’s ability to succeed in adulthood. Keys to success in life, such as working memory and executive function, are impaired in individuals exposed to poverty in childhood (Hanson et al., 2013).

Given poverty’s effects on the brain, it follows that poverty has a negative impact on student achievement. Impoverished students start to fall behind their peers in school at a young age (Murphey & Redd, 2014). The school achievement gap by income has worsened over the past 30 years (National Public Radio, 2013). According to a report published by the Urban Institute, children who have been poor for more than half of their lives are 43% less likely to complete college and 36% less likely to be consistently employed at age 25 in comparison to their counterparts who were only poor for one year (Ratcliffe, 2015). U.S. high schools with a significant percentage of students living in poverty sent slightly more than half of their students to college, whereas schools with higher-income families were able to send 70% of their students to college (Sparks & Adams, 2013). According to the results of an international assessment, U.S. schools with fewer students in poverty outrank other countries, but when the scores of students in poverty are taken into consideration, the U.S. falls to a more average ranking among industrialized nations (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Clearly, poverty creates serious barriers that prevent students from staying in school and becoming productive adults.

THE ROLE OF INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS IN HELPING TO ADDRESS POVERTY

To combat problems caused by poverty, educators and advocates are calling for Integrated Student Supports, which builds on “a ‘whole-child’ perspective that recognizes the importance of a child’s health and safety, socio-emotional development, behavior, and relationships to his or her educational success” (Moore & Emig, 2014). In February 2014, Child Trends published emerging evidence that Integrated Student Supports can reduce dropout rates, increase attendance, and improve academic achievement as measured by math, reading, and ELA scores as well as overall GPA (Moore & Emig, 2014). Turnaround for Children, an organization that seeks to reduce the impacts of poverty on child development by working in schools, calls on schools to build capacity to support teachers in serving students in poverty (Turnaround for Children, 2013). In a report written by Turnaround for Children, Cami Anderson from the Newark Public School District says, “It is critical that schools utilize creative and effective ways to recruit adults outside of the school who can serve as essential supports for a student...this adult can play a key role in academic and social-emotional learning of a student” (Turnaround for

Children, 2013). Mentors, tutors, teachers, and youth-serving organizations like Communities In Schools provide a crucial relationship of advocacy, support, and care for many students in poverty across the country.

The federal government has also begun to recognize Integrated Student Supports as a solution to addressing the barriers to poverty. With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the United States Department of Education highlighted the need for school-wide and targeted approaches like Integrated Student Supports. Language in the Every Student Succeeds Act recommends that local education officials consider Integrated Student Supports as an evidence-based program to address student needs.

A Call for Integrated Student Supports

A report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development states: “While disadvantaged students may have fewer resources at home through which they can benefit from their motivation to learn, there are established strategies to aid disadvantaged students at school, including...building strong partnerships among families, teachers and local communities to ensure that socio-economic disadvantage does not prevent these students from flourishing” (OECD, 2013).

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS IN ACTION: MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY BY LEVERAGING THE COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS MODEL

Communities In Schools is the largest provider of ISS in the country, and many of the students and families that Communities In Schools serves are economically-disadvantaged. In interviews conducted with Communities In Schools stakeholders during site visits between 2011 and 2013, as well as subsequent surveys of the teachers, principals, and superintendents with whom Communities In Schools partners, revealed that poverty is the most significant problem for their students, parents, and families. In the 2014-2015 academic year, 93.7% of the students case-managed by a Communities In Schools site coordinator were eligible for free and reduced-price lunches (Communities In Schools, 2016).

The Communities In Schools site coordinator is the primary link between the school, community services, and students in need. The Communities In Schools site coordinator uses results from a needs assessment to align Integrated Student Supports to the needs of the students and schools.

The Communities In School Model (see Figure 2) offers enormous potential to address the issue of poverty. The driving force behind the Communities In School model, the site coordinator, starts by conducting school needs assessments and

student intake assessments. These assessments indicate what challenges the school and students are facing, and allow the site coordinator to deliver or broker services accordingly. The site coordinator collaborates with community members, school staff, and administrators to develop a site plan of providing Integrated Student Supports. Furthermore, the Communities In Schools model of Integrated Student Supports involves evidence-based interventions in the form of Tier 1 or school-wide services, Tier 2 or targeted interventions, or Tier 3 services for individual students. Communities In Schools site coordinators revisit and alter the supports and services depending on the changing needs of students and schools. If a site coordinator sees that poverty is impacting an individual or student body, he or she can provide or broker supplementary services that the school may not be able to offer, thus addressing the need that poverty has created. As noted before, students whose lives are touched by poverty can suffer from physical problems as well. The Communities in Schools site coordinator can broker relationships with local health organizations, work with families to secure appropriate healthcare, and leverage school resources to ensure student access to quality nutrition. The site coordinator plays a role in mitigating the impacts of poverty by providing the capacity, flexibility, and services that school systems often cannot provide

CONCLUSION

Now is a crucial time for youth-serving organizations, schools, and the educational community at large. Over fifty years after the War on Poverty, education professionals are reflecting on the impact of poverty on the collective educational and personal achievements of the students around the country. A wrap-around approach like Integrated Student Supports can address poverty in our communities and schools. With an evidence-based model, dedicated professionals, and targeted services, providers of Integrated Student Supports like Communities In Schools are helping communities across the country overcome the obstacles associated with poverty by surrounding students with communities of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- **Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates:** This website has a wealth of information on poverty in the United States. Data is split up by school district, county, and state.
- **Civil Rights Data Collection:** This Department of Education website contains yearly data including FRPL eligibility, enrollment, absentee rates, SAT scores, race statistics, and more on the students and teachers in the United States public schools. The website also contains tools for data analysis, search options by school or district, and user-friendly guides.

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