

**COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS SPRING 2014 REPORT**

# **CHANGING THE PICTURE OF EDUCATION IN CENTRAL TEXAS**

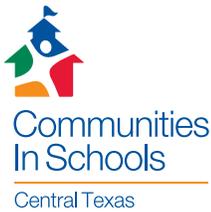




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**CHANGING THE PICTURE OF EDUCATION  
IN CENTRAL TEXAS**

“Have you ever noticed that when you are under the weather or have received bad news about a family member you aren’t your best at work the next day? Imagine being a child who has witnessed family violence or moved to four different apartments in one semester or has had a parent deported or in jail. How will their day go at school? Communities In Schools’ expertise lies in helping kids living under significant stress to cope and gain skills to do their best in school. We do this by having a full-time professional social worker or counselor who brings together community resources to form a well-resourced team on every campus we serve to surround students with needed support.”

—**SUKI STEINHAUSER**, CEO, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF CENTRAL TEXAS



**Communities In Schools** is a nationwide network of passionate professionals working in public schools to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. For the last 29 years, Communities In Schools has served 569,623 students in Central Texas since we began here. This year, Communities In Schools of Central Texas is serving more than 41,000 students in 60 schools, helping to break the cycle of poverty, school failure and underemployment.

**This report outlines** the accomplishments of Communities In Schools of Central Texas during the 2012 – 2013 school year. It includes data on the percentage of students who were promoted from one grade to another, graduated from high school, or otherwise improved their performance as a result of their involvement with Communities In Schools; and describes how this success was achieved.

“Children in poverty come to school every day with tremendous burdens that hinder their ability to learn. It’s hard to focus on math or reading when you’re hungry or sick or worried about where you’re going to sleep at night. In those conditions, it can seem like the ‘escape valve’ has been welded shut from the outside.”

—**DANIEL CARDINALI**, PRESIDENT, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

# ABOUT COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF CENTRAL TEXAS

COMMUNITIES  
IN SCHOOLS  
SPRING 2014  
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“Our students are successful because we are matching the supports they need to the struggles they have – not putting them through a cookie-cutter curriculum or one-size-fits-all program.”

—**SUKI STEINHAUSER**, CEO, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF CENTRAL TEXAS

Communities In Schools is the only dropout prevention organization proven to both lower dropout rates and increase graduation rates. What sets Communities In Schools apart is the organization’s holistic approach to addressing both the academic and nonacademic needs of students. Working with school staff, Communities In Schools site coordinators — who are positioned in schools — identify students in danger of dropping out, assess what resources they need, and then provide those resources through the appropriate community partnerships. These resources include food, clothing, transportation, housing, medical care, mentoring and much more.



## THE PROGRAM MANAGER

When a child is reeling from the fallout of “real life,” Communities In Schools can be a lifeline. Fortunately, “I love triage,” says **ERICA GALLARDO**, program manager at Lockhart Junior High in Austin. Her Communities In Schools team of trained social workers creates a “safe place” for young people dealing with family conflict and divorce, substance abuse, incarcerated parents, homelessness and depression. “For many students, we are the one constant in their lives,” Gallardo says. “Without fail, we’re going to be there every day, and we care.” Communities In Schools makes school-based counseling available when a crisis is happening and provides innovative programming that supports a child’s emotional health and success in school. As a first-generation American whose first language is Spanish, Gallardo uses her bilingual skills to help Spanish-speaking parents communicate with the school staff. The impact of CIS counseling and other innovative programming is evident in students’ higher grades, improved peer relationships and greater self-confidence. Joel is a prime example. “He had reason to be angry,” Gallardo says — Joel had a history of substance abuse and gang involvement, his dad was incarcerated, and he became a father at 16. With Communities In Schools support to help him manage his anger and turn his life around, Joel graduated from high school early, is a hands-on parent to his daughter and today takes pride in his job as a prison guard when he says he could have been on the other side of the bars.



PHOTO BY THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN/CHRISTINA MURRAY

### THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

In his first three years as principal at Oak Springs Elementary in northeast Austin, **GILBERT HICKS** says the school struggled to meet the complex needs of students and their families. That changed when a local foundation helped underwrite Communities In Schools programs in Austin’s high poverty, minority neighborhoods — including Oak Springs. It made possible a “productive partnership that removes obstacles to student success,” Hicks says. Communities In Schools social workers provide students with counseling and emotional support, connect families with needed services, conduct home visits and “pitch in wherever needed.” That experience informed Hicks’ decision to take the principal’s post at Overton Elementary in 2007, where the challenges never seemed greater: nearly 99% of the children were on free and reduced lunch, and too many were falling far behind academically. The surrounding neighborhood lacked transportation, churches, a grocery store and other essential services. Hicks felt so strongly about the need for a Communities In Schools program at Overton, that he addressed the Austin City Council alongside Communities In Schools leaders, convincing them to provide the funding. In 2012, Overton Elementary became a Texas Education Agency “recognized school” for achievement gains in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Now Associate Superintendent for Schools in the Austin school district, Hicks remains a champion of Communities In Schools — coaching schools serving large concentrations of low-income children in creative ways to help fund a Communities In Schools program on their campuses. Why? “Communities In Schools has been a lifeboat for kids,” says Hicks.

### Communities In Schools recognizes that if basic needs are not met, children are unable to learn.

Working with each school’s administration, Communities In Schools identifies students who lack basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, and utilizes community resources to assist with meeting these needs. Other whole-school offerings include parenting programs, grief and loss counseling, and bullying prevention programs.



### THE CIS VOLUNTEER

For 18 years, **J.P. RODRIGUEZ** has driven every week to an Austin elementary, middle or high school to mentor a young male student as part of Communities In Schools’ on-campus program for at-risk youth. Rodriguez views himself as “a grunt . . . a soldier,” making good on his commitment to meet with the same child for a year or more to teach “the basics” — the importance of “showing up, showing respect, and mastering discipline and commitment.” The rest — how to master the traits of responsible manhood — are best learned by watching strong male role models that, unfortunately, Rodriguez says, are in short supply. One of the biggest challenges facing the students

he has mentored is “absentee parents” — and unfortunately, too few men volunteer to mentor at-risk youth. Rodriguez, a married father of a nine-year-old son and a self-employed real estate broker and investor, schedules his work hours “around his mentoring.” He and his mentee spend time in the school gym, doing school work or just talking if and when the student wants to talk, and not before. The first in his family to graduate from college, Rodriguez paid his own way with scholarships and part-time jobs. He tells his Communities In Schools kids, “In this country, if you want to do something, you can do it.”

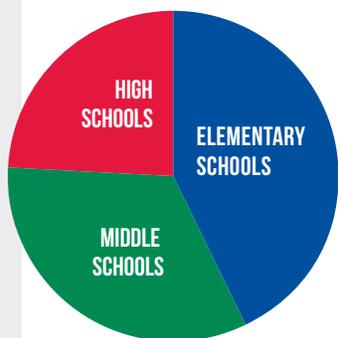
### All of Communities In Schools’ work is guided by the “Five Basics” — a set of essentials that every child needs and deserves:



- A one-on-one relationship with a caring adult
- A safe place to learn and grow
- A healthy start and a healthy future
- A marketable skill to use upon graduation
- A chance to give back to peers and community

### Communities In Schools of Central Texas

## 2012 – 2013 School Year Highlights



- › 23 elementary schools, 18 middle schools and 15 high schools were served.
- › Approximately 45,155 students received integrated student supports from Communities In Schools of Central Texas.

### CENTRAL TEXAS SCHOOLS SERVED BY COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

- › **94% of seniors receiving targeted and sustained services (and for whom data were available) graduated.**
- › **96% of the students in grades K – 11 who received targeted and sustained services (and for whom data were available) were promoted to the next grade.**

› **89%** of the students in grades K-12 who received targeted and sustained services with a behavioral goal met their goal. This relates to school behavior and can include: improving classroom conduct and reducing disciplinary referrals for fighting or disruptive behavior.

› **87%** of the students in grades K-12 who received targeted and sustained services met at least one attendance, academic or behavioral goal. These goals, which are tailored to each student, may have included improving classroom grades, reducing absences, improving classroom participation, improving social skills, or reducing risk-taking behaviors.

**“Communities In Schools has been a lifeboat for kids.”**

**—GILBERT HICKS, ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT FOR SCHOOLS, AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

\*Level One services, also known as whole-school preventative services, are provided to all students, regardless of their risk for developing serious problems. Examples of these services include short-term crisis counseling, mediation, health fairs, attendance initiatives, anti-bullying campaigns, parent engagement activities/events.

\*\*Level Two services are targeted and sustained interventions provided for specific students over an extended period of time. These services are provided based on individual student needs and include services such as one-on-one and group counseling, academic tutoring, mentoring, coordination of resources, and enrichment activities.