

# Community collaboration promotes student success | The Seattle Times

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By

[Communities In Schools of Washington](#)

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Alice, a middle school student in the town of Republic (population: 1,024), struggled with attendance due to her remote location in Eastern Washington and the limited transportation options available. Because of the remote location, and the lack of transportation options, chronic absenteeism is a challenge for many students in the area.

When the local Communities In Schools of Rural Eastern WA became aware of Alice's chronic absenteeism, they stepped in to offer support. Alice shared that her difficulties stemmed from both personal motivation issues and limited family engagement.

A CIS of Rural Eastern WA site coordinator worked closely with Alice's family and teachers to establish small, achievable attendance goals, providing wraparound support for both Alice and her family. This kind of support helps students, and their families, chart a new course.

In 1977, Communities In Schools, an American nonprofit, was launched by Bill Milliken, a New York City resident. Today, CIS serves over 2 million students across the nation, operating in 25 states and the District of Columbia. CIS places site coordinators in schools to provide wraparound support for at-risk students, addressing academic, mental health and basic needs. The CIS network across Washington operates in urban and rural areas through 10 affiliates, including a state office and three emerging

affiliates, serving 15 counties.

“As the family became more involved (with Alice and with school), Alice’s attendance improved significantly, leading to academic success and a renewed positive attitude toward school,” explains Erica Limón-Trefielo, associate director for CIS of Washington.

Leveraging the strengths and resources of the community helps schools fill in gaps in funding and personnel. Addressing the diverse academic, social and emotional needs of our youth requires collaboration. Building connections inside and outside the school system helps ensure young people have access to the necessary tools and assistance they need to reach their full potential.

## **Measuring student success**

Most statistics define success as completing high school, but for students to truly thrive, success goes beyond academic achievement, says Limón-Trefielo.

Take Lisa, a student at Harriet Rowley Elementary School in Mount Vernon. She struggled with social anxiety and felt a disconnect with her peers. A Site Coordinator at CIS of Whatcom-Skagit noticed this and teamed up with the school’s Parent Teacher Organization to organize a special event: the Let’s Glow family dance. Both organizations thought this special event would not only benefit Lisa, but many other families in the school, as well.

Community partners stepped up to support the event by donating snacks and water, a parent who is a professional photographer, and a local DJ volunteered his time. The PTO aimed for 20 families to attend, but far exceeded expectations with an impressive turnout of 100 families joining in on the fun.

“By encouraging Lisa to participate in the dance, CIS of Whatcom-Skagit

created a supportive environment for her to build relationships and bond with other students," says Limón-Trefielo. "This helped boost her confidence, fostered stronger connections with her classmates and positively impacted her school experience."

## **Community success**

Student success encompasses much more than academic performance — it's a combination of personal growth, social-emotional well-being and readiness for life beyond the classroom, Limón-Trefielo says. Success also includes regular school attendance, positive relationships with peers and adults, and access to essentials like food, clothing and mental health support.

Yet young learners don't always flourish on their own. It takes a community. At CIS, forming strong community partnerships is key to empowering students and removing barriers to success. They seek partners who share their commitment to empowering students and removing barriers blocking their success.

"We prioritize partners who can provide a range of resources — whether that is academic support, mentorship, mental health services, basic needs or even extracurricular opportunities that enrich students' lives," says Limón-Trefielo. "We believe in long-term, sustainable relationships that benefit both the students, schools and communities we serve.

By collaborating with community partners and schools, CIS can create a network of support around each student, ensuring that they have access to the tools and opportunities needed to flourish.

"We believe in the power of communities to create positive change and in the potential of every student to succeed," she adds.

[\*Communities In Schools of Washington\*](#) empowers students to stay in school

*and thrive by surrounding them with a community of support, addressing both academic and nonacademic needs to ensure every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential.*

*Communities In Schools of Washington.*