



## Communities In Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg

The mission of Communities In Schools is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

### Communities In Schools believes all students deserve five basic resources:

- 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

### SAVE THE DATES



**September 26**

Lowcountry on the Geen

**October 22**

CIS Volunteer Orientation

**December 1**

Giving Tuesday

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educate  
collaborate  
graduate

Newsletter for Friends of CIS | Fall 2015

## #CLASS OF CHANGE15: PROUD of Our Students!

It's always a wonderful way to start the summer: watching with pride as our students walk across the graduation stage, filled with excitement to begin the next chapter in their lives... Or handing out certificates of achievement to our younger students who are moving up to the next grade. Every year, CIS has so many students with powerful stories to tell, and this year was no exception - our staff worked with some pretty amazing young people this past school year!



A hint of fall is in the air now and a new school year has begun, but let's take a moment to celebrate the accomplishments of our students, especially the 500 CIS seniors who graduated in June and are moving on to new endeavors. Read on to meet just a few of the amazing young people CIS has been proud to support, mentor and encourage this year.

### ZACK MORLA | Vance High School

For Zack Morla, the loss of his mother last year to cancer was devastating, but with support from his teammates and CIS family, Zack stayed focused and graduated.

Zack's mother was from the Dominican Republic but moved to the U.S. 18 years ago when she was pregnant with Zack. His father still lives in the Dominican Republic and Zack has never met him. Zack was living with his mother and sister in Providence, Rhode Island, when, as a sophomore in high school, he convinced his mother to allow him to move to Charlotte and live with his aunt so he could escape the tough neighborhood where they lived and go to a better school, and also improve his chances of being recruited for a college baseball team. His mother had been diagnosed with breast cancer two years earlier, but had undergone treatment and was in remission when Zack made the move to Charlotte in 2013. *continued on page 3*



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE

## *Celebrating Milestones*

Everyone has important “milestones” they’ve reached in life or are working toward... Moving into your first apartment or buying your first home. Sending your first child off to Kindergarten. Graduating from high school, or college. Recently we’ve been talking a lot about milestones here at CIS. This December will mark CIS-Charlotte’s 30th anniversary – thirty years of supporting kids, parents, and schools to ensure every child in our community has the opportunity, tools and resources they need to succeed in school and achieve in life.

This year, especially in light of our 30th anniversary, the CIS Board of Directors wants to celebrate the important milestones our organization has accomplished, including the “tenure milestones” of CIS-Charlotte’s greatest asset – our employees.

In August, at our first all-staff meeting of the new school year, we recognized 14 employees who received our “Above & Beyond” award for the 2014-15 year – these team members went above and beyond to ensure the best for our students and our entire organization. At our August meeting we also lifted up CIS employees who are celebrating a “milestone anniversary” this year of 5, 10, 15, or 20+ years with the organization. One staff member, Site Coordinator Gwen Thompson, is marking her 25th anniversary as a CIS Site Coordinator – an amazing milestone! (see article about Gwen on page 5.)

Our CIS team members work every day on behalf of more than 6,000 CIS students. It’s not easy work, but I believe our team would also tell you it’s rewarding. Every CIS Team Member puts our students’ needs above all else, and celebrates with them when they reach their own milestones. Our Board and I are grateful for the team’s selfless dedication, and we are proud to recognize them for their important contributions to our organization, our schools, and ultimately, the very fabric of our society – our children.



*Molly Shaw, CIS Executive Director*

## Welcome New CIS BOARD MEMBERS



*Kelli Knoble  
President, CIS Board of Directors*

**Kelli Knoble with Grant Thornton** will serve as President of the CIS Board of Directors during 2015-16. She joined the Board in 2010 and has served as Chair of the Finance and Executive committees. Kelli has worked in public accounting for 23 years, first with Arthur Andersen and currently with Grant Thornton. She is the MidSouth Tax Practice Leader and East Region Tax Services Leader for Grant Thornton and sits on the Grant

Thornton International Tax Advisory Council. Kelli and her husband David have two teen-age boys who attend CMS public schools.

Kelli believes that public education can be a means of breaking poverty cycles and improving communities. “Education is the great equalizer in our country, society and economy, providing greater intellectual capital not just for the individual but for the community in which they reside,” said Kelli. “Anyone can be anything and we have a responsibility to ensure we create paths of opportunity and accountability for everyone.”

CIS is also very pleased to welcome these four new members to the Board, who will serve a three-year-term beginning July 2015:

**Natalie Alston**, Civic Leader

**Tonia Bendickson**, Elevation Church

**Dr. Robert “Bo” Boylan**, Ravenwood Consulting Group

**Jon Davis**, The Center for Intentional Leadership

# Proud of Our Students: #CLASS OF CHANGE15

*(continued from page 1)*

## **ZACK MORLA**, *continued*

At Vance High School in Charlotte, Zack soon met Rodney Carr, CIS Site Coordinator at Vance and also the baseball coach. As Carr got to know Zack and his family situation and realized they shared a passion for baseball, Carr took him under his wing. Carr's son, Jirod, also played on the baseball team. The three bonded over their love of the sport, and Carr, in his roles as a CIS Site Coordinator and a baseball coach, began to mentor Zack both on and off the field.

"Coach Carr is like a father to me," said Morla. "I talk to him at his office every morning. I speak to him at lunch time. He tells me steps I need to take to get into college."

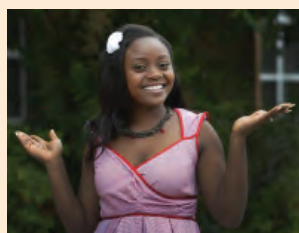
Then one spring afternoon in 2014, while playing at a Vance away game, Zack took a call from his mother: her cancer was back. He traveled to Rhode Island over spring break to see her, and she passed away during his visit.

Zack says his teammates rallied around him and gave him the comfort and encouragement he needed. "When I came back to Charlotte, it was important for me to play baseball and be with my teammates," said Zack. "They supported me through that time."

And with Carr's continued guidance, Zack thrived on the baseball field and off. Zack improved his GPA from a 2.2 his first semester at Vance, to a 2.9 as he approached graduation. Carr helped him complete college applications, and this fall he will attend North Carolina Central.

Zack said he wants to keep on proving himself and go after his dreams, because he knows his mother is watching him. And he credits Carr with helping him pursue those dreams. "He's been very important to me, because he's been a male role model in my life, one I never really had."

## **CHRISTIAN BRISTER** | Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology



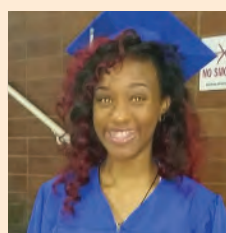
With her delightful personality and beautiful smile, you'd never know what Christian Brister has been through in her short eighteen years. Brister was born in New Orleans but fled the city in 2005 during Hurricane Katrina, landing in Char-

lotte, where her mother struggled to hold multiple jobs to support Christian and two younger siblings. By 2009, the family was living in the Salvation Army Center of Hope. For the next five years, they bounced from various homes to shelters, to a motel and back again.

Christian says school became her "sanctuary." At J.T. Williams Middle School, she participated in Communities In Schools. That's also where she met Jamall Kinard, a teacher at Sedgefield, but who later joined CIS as a Site Coordinator at Phillip O. Berry Academy.

Christian ended up at Berry Academy for high school, where she re-connected with Mr. Kinard. He has been a mentor to Christian and has helped the family in multiple ways. She says Mr. Kinard is a "father figure" for her, and credits him with keeping her focused on her education and future. CIS helped Christian land an internship last summer in a doctor's office, where her interest in medicine grew. Christian maintained excellent grades in high school and won a full scholarship to UNC-Chapel Hill, where she plans to study nursing or pre-med. The future is looking very bright for this new Tarheel!

## **GEORGINA SMITH** | Garinger High School



Georgina Smith knew she couldn't give up, even when the going got really tough at home - when the electricity would be turned off for weeks at a time and there was no hot running water. Her grandmother was doing the best she could, raising Georgina and her younger brother on

very limited income. But Georgina has excelled in school despite extreme hardship at home. She said her grandmother's positive reinforcement and the need to set an example for her younger brother have been her greatest motivators - and that Communities In Schools has been one of her biggest assets.

"No matter what you're going through, you can always just go talk to them [CIS Site Coordinators] and they always make sure you have what you need," said Georgina.

Jeannette Jackson, Georgina's Site Coordinator at Garinger High School, remembers a time when Georgina was boiling water on the stove so she and her little brother could bathe. "She still managed to keep a 3.3 GPA and apply to elite colleges and for scholarships," said Jackson.

In April, from among 500+ CIS seniors, CIS bestowed Georgina with its top Senior Award, the CIS Leadership Award. She also received a \$10,000 scholarship to attend Hampton University in Virginia. We're certain grandmother and little brother are proud!



# MORE GRADUATION NEWS

## SAFE JOURNEY/APP GRADUATION

Our Safe Journey and Adolescent Parenting Program (APP) held its graduation celebration on May 28 at Covenant Presbyterian Church. Thirty young women (teen mothers) out of 30 seniors in the program, graduated! Many of them are planning to attend community college, and four graduates received scholarships to attend 4-year institutions - including Rehana Ward-Cooper, a West Mecklenburg graduate, who received the Highest GPA Award (4.24 GPA!) from Safe Journey. Rehana received a full scholarship to attend UNC-Chapel Hill this fall. Congratulations to all!



*Rehana Ward-Cooper received the Highest GPA Award from Safe Journey.*



*Safe Journey Graduates ~ 2015*

## RE-ENTRY PROGRAM GRADUATION

It was definitely a special evening on June 3 at First Baptist Church West, where CIS, CMS' Turning Point Academy, and the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office held a graduation ceremony for 17 youthful offenders. Proud parents, grandparents, teachers, staff, and counselors, along with smiles, laughter, and a few tears... all were present that evening as the graduates were recognized for persevering against very difficult circumstances and past mistakes. CIS is especially proud and excited for graduate LaRon Adams, who landed a job with Elisa Chinn-Gary, Mecklenburg County's Clerk of Superior Court!



*LaRon Adams*



*Re-Entry Program graduates DeCarlo Mackey and Quiana Sadler-McCullum with CIS staff George Metz, (left), LaDonte Lee (right), and CMS Superintendent Ann Clark (center).*

## PROUD of These Students, Too!

### Peter Guest - 5th grader at Druid Hills Academy

Peter is the 2015 winner of our Project LIFT Team's "This Kid Rocks" Award. He was selected for this top student award out of all the 5th and 8th grade students in CIS in the eight elementary and PK-8 schools CIS serves in CMS' Project LIFT zone. Despite family instability due to housing challenges, Peter greatly improved his attendance over the previous year and is doing well in school. Peter loves to read, and his CIS Site Coordinator, Travis Rivens, took him to the public library and helped him get his own library card. When Peter learned how close the library is to where he's currently living, he started walking there himself several times a week to check out books! You *ROCK*, Peter!



*This Kid Rocks! 2015 winner Peter Guest with (L-R) his mother, CIS Site Coordinator Travis Rivens, and Druid Hills teacher Ms. Webster.*

### Kara Adams - 8th grader at Ashley Park School

"Kara Adams is an all-around awesome student!" says CIS Site Coordinator Jessica Williams. Nominated by Ms. Williams, Kara was voted on by school staff and featured on BOUNCE TV (WBTV affiliate station) this past May as the Project LIFT "Scholar of the Week." Kara made straight A's this past year, played on the basketball and soccer teams, was very active in CIS and Right Moves For Youth, and was part of the student team who made morning announcements at the school. On top of all that, Jessica says Kara is constantly doing good deeds around the school and is always willing to help others, noting that her "positive attitude and nice smile brightens every situation." Go, Kara!



*Kara Adams, left, with her CIS Site Coordinator Jessica Williams*

# CIS Says: “LEARNING = F-U-N!”

A lot of emphasis is placed on academics in school (as it should be) - but who says it has to be BORING?! If you can get kids engaged and excited about learning, that's half the battle, right? This past year CIS Site Coordinators have made extra effort to support teachers at their schools and find ways to reinforce what kids are learning in class. CIS program staff initiated **Scrabble Clubs** in our elementary sites, and **Math 24 Tournaments** in our middle school sites. Both initiatives have experienced enthusiastic participation from students.

“Many of our students were not familiar with Scrabble,” said Federico Rios, CIS Program Director of Elementary Schools. “It’s a great way to build vocabulary, use math skills for scoring, and though it’s harder to measure, playing Scrabble really helps develop critical thinking skills, which is so important for this age group. We’ve found that they really love the team competition, too.”

If you aren’t familiar with “Math 24” competitions, our middle school students would love to give you a demonstration! It’s a fun but competitive math game where players are given a set of four numbers and without using pencil, paper or calculators - must try to be the first to show how the numbers can be manipulated (add, subtract, multiply, divide) to result in the number “24.” Students and Site Coordinators have to do a LOT of practicing to prepare for the tournaments - but it’s pretty impressive when you see the students in action!

**We need volunteers to help with both programs this school year.**

If interested, contact Volunteer Coordinator Courtney Peterson at [cpeterson@cischarlotte.org](mailto:cpeterson@cischarlotte.org).



*There's more research and advance planning for our Scrabble Clubs than one might think! CIS program staff worked with two students in the College of Education at UNC-Charlotte to develop specific academic goals and a measurement plan that all of our Site Coordinators are using to implement the program consistently at each school.*



*Math 24 competition (left) and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners (L-R) last spring from Walter G. Byers, Ashley Park, and Reid Park K-8 schools.*

## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS and Counting!



*Gwen Thompson with her 25th CIS Anniversary certificate.*

Site Coordinator Gwen Thompson is celebrating a big milestone this year - 25 years with CIS! Gwen joined CIS in 1988, first as an administrative assistant, but soon transitioned into a Site Coordinator position at Cochrane Middle School. She remained at Cochrane for 10 years before moving in 1996 to the newly opened Nathaniel Alexander Elementary, where she has been for the past 19 years.

“My job of providing services for students and families has been an amazing journey,” said Gwen. “I love what I do, and seeing my students grow and mature in so many ways has been my inspiration. I encourage my students to work hard, strive for the best, and always come to me if they need my help or assistance in any way.”

Gwen has watched CIS grow from serving four schools in 1988, to 41 schools and 6,000+ students today - but says CIS has never veered from its mission to surround kids with caring support and services that remove obstacles to learning and help them graduate high school. And Gwen has seen her share of former students graduate! Just this year, Gwen watched as one of her former students, Vy Ho, whom she met as a Kindergarten student, graduate from high school and receive several college scholarships through CIS.

Gwen admits that 25 years may be a long time to stay in the same job, but says her “drive and desire to help children has not lessened.” Congratulations, Gwen! Your students are lucky to have you!



*A 2005 photo of Gwen presenting a certificate to Vy Ho, a CIS student who graduated in June 2015.*



# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

## George Bohmfalk

### Montclair Elementary

If you look up “Renaissance Man” in the dictionary, we’re pretty sure you’ll find George Bohmfalk’s name right next to it. A retired neurosurgeon who moved to Charlotte from Texas in 2008, George has also owned and was the chef of a fine-dining restaurant, he played the organ for a church in Texas, and he’s fluent in Spanish. But here in Charlotte, CIS thinks (selfishly!) that he has found his true calling: volunteering with CIS students at Montclair Elementary!

Walking the halls at Montclair on any Monday or Tuesday, you are likely to run into George. On Monday mornings, George coaches a CIS Scrabble Club; on Tuesday mornings, he works with new-arrival Spanish-speaking Kindergartners; and later on Tuesdays, you can find him in the CIS office at Montclair, having lunch with and then leading a 5th Grade Book Club. On a recent Tuesday, they were discussing *James and the Giant Peach* and also preparing for the upcoming “Battle of the Books” competition. And George was also right there with his Scrabble Club team at the final Scrabble Club Tournament CIS held in June for all of our elementary sites. Talk about dedicated!

About 18 months ago, George says he was looking for an opportunity to volunteer, and happened to see information about Communities In Schools in *The Charlotte Observer’s* annual “Giving Guide.” He was interested in working with kids, especially at-risk or economically disadvantaged students. In addition to CIS, George volunteers with CRRRA (Carolina Refugee Settlement Agency). “I believe that most privileged people who have time on their hands should do volunteer



work, for their own benefit as much as the recipients,” said George. “Getting an insight into the difficult lives of innocent children and refugees forces one to examine attitudes about refugees, safety nets, health care, immigration, poverty, education, and many other pressing social problems. While I feel that many social issues can best be handled through government programs, volunteering will always play a critical role in helping those less fortunate than ourselves.”

George says the teachers and staff at Montclair seem to really love the school and all of the kids. “There’s lots of caring, concern, and affection,” said George. “I’m especially impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the CIS staff, especially the Site Coordinators,” he added.

WE are impressed with George’s commitment to our students and the way he is giving back and sharing his many talents. Thanks for all you do, George!

*To learn how you can support a child, contact Courtney Peterson at [cpeterson@cischarlotte.org](mailto:cpeterson@cischarlotte.org).*

## Congrats to CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Congratulations are in order for CIS volunteers from Christ Church for receiving a N.C. Governor’s Award for their service and dedication to Rama Road Elementary School! Christ Church is a strong partner with CIS and sponsors the CIS program at Rama Road.

Deanna Chillemi, CIS Site Coordinator at Rama Road, says the church has 100 volunteers who come to the school on a regular basis. They have undertaken a wide range of projects, from school beautification and landscaping projects, to providing teacher/staff appreciation events, initiating a very popular Girl Scout troop led by church members, and more. Many of the volunteers work one-on-one or in small groups with students as reading or math tutors. “Not a day goes by when there’s not at least one volunteer from Christ Church at the school,” says Deanna. “They’re amazing!”



*Christ Church members accepted the NC Governor’s Award at a reception hosted by United Way of Central Carolinas in May.*

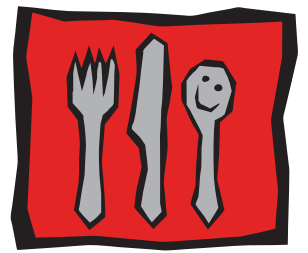
# THANK YOU FOR DINING OUT! June 16, 2015

Thanks to all for dining out on June 16, 2015! Your support - along with our generous corporate sponsors and more than 80 participating restaurants - made our 16th annual Dine Out For Kids® a great success. Visit our Facebook page to see lots more photos!

## MANY THANKS TO OUR CORPORATE SPONSORS:



Greater Charlotte  
HOSPITALITY & TOURISM  
ALLIANCE (HTA)



Dine Out For Kids®



## MANY THANKS TO OUR PARTICIPATING RESTAURANTS

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Burger 21  
California Pizza Kitchen

Charlotte Knights Baseball  
Chuy's Tex-Mex  
City Smoke  
Crepe Cellar  
Dilworth Neighborhood Grille  
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Mert's Heart & Soul  
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Mimosa Grill  
Nothing but Noodles  
The Pizza Peel  
Paco's Tacos & Tequila  
Showmars

Sonny's Real Pit Bar-B-Q  
TRUE Crafted Pizza  
Upstream  
Village Tavern

## LET'S GET JAZZY With It!

Last fall, CIS Site Coordinator Stuart Barrett (Vance High School) had a new student who was disengaged from school and showed little interest in completing his assignments. After learning from the student's mother that he had an interest in drums, Mr. Barrett, a trained musician (drums and percussion), invited him to bring his drum sticks the next day so they could play together. Playing drums turned into long conversations about school and home. Other students heard them playing and wanted to join in. Mr. Barrett soon saw the potential a band could have for building rapport with students and using it as motivation for succeeding in school. Within a couple of weeks, *Momentum* was born!

The band has been a source of great camaraderie and support among the students through their mutual love of music. But Mr. Barrett has stressed that in order to continue the band, all the students must take school seriously - keeping up their grades, completing all assignments and attending school each day is a requirement for all band members.

The band's repertoire includes jazz standards, such as Bill Withers' *Lovely Day*, which has become their "signature song." They're introducing a new generation to classic jazz and have quite the fan base among Vance students. They've had a few gigs in the community, too... looks like *Momentum* is on its way!



"Momentum" - CIS student jazz band at Vance High School

## Board of Directors

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Grant Thornton

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Communities  
In Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg

601 E. Fifth Street, Suite 300  
Charlotte, NC 28202



CHARLOTTE  
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Communities  
In Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg



## YOU'RE INVITED! Sat., Sept. 26

Time to "get your lowcountry on!" Please join CIS and friends on Saturday, September 26 for our 7th annual Lowcountry on the Green "back to school" lawn party! A live band, dancing, silent auction, and THE best lowcountry cuisine you've ever tasted awaits you... **Order tickets today** at [www.cischarlotte.org](http://www.cischarlotte.org) and help CIS students and staff have a great start to the school year!

## CIS SCHOOL SITES, 2015-16

### Elementary Schools

Albemarle Road  
Allenbrook  
Billingsville  
Hidden Valley  
Highland Renaissance  
Merry Oaks  
Montclair  
Nathaniel Alexander  
Rama Road  
Shamrock Gardens  
Statesville Road  
Winterfield

### PK - 8 Schools

Ashley Park  
Berryhill  
Bruns  
Druid Hills  
Reid Park  
Walter G. Byers  
Westerly Hills

### Middle Schools

Albemarle Road  
Cochrane  
Coulwood  
Eastway  
James Martin  
Martin Luther King, Jr.  
McClintock  
Sedgefield  
Whitewater

### High Schools

East Mecklenburg  
Garinger  
Harding University  
Hawthorne  
Independence  
Myers Park  
Performance Learning Center®  
Phillip O. Berry  
South Mecklenburg  
Vance  
West Charlotte  
West Mecklenburg

Jail North/Central – CIS also provides services to youthful offenders housed at Jail North and Jail Central

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