



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



**Dec. 13**

CIS Holiday Cards Order Deadline

**Dec 20. - Jan. 3**

CMS Winter Break

**Jan. 18**

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

#### CONNECT WITH US



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Newsletter for Friends of CIS | Fall 2021

## THE 'SHADOW PANDEMIC': The devastating impact of COVID-19 on education



### The Shadow Pandemic

The devastating, long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education is being referred to as the "shadow pandemic." Nationally, an estimated three million kids have gone missing from classrooms due to school closures and remote learning, resulting in the loss of formal learning and critical social-emotional development opportunities. In Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), this figure is in the thousands. In addition, there is a growing number of students who are "present" now in our school buildings, yet disengaged.

High levels of absenteeism and disengagement are linked to poor academic, socio-economic levels, and professional growth. The ripple effect of this secondary pandemic will impact the entire community. CIS-Charlotte has made it our mission to utilize every resource to help bring these disengaged students back into the classroom and ensure they have the best possible chance at educational, social, and economic success.

"Engagement in school was a problem before the pandemic, so it has only been exacerbated over the past year and a half," said Anna Kennington, CIS-Charlotte's Director of Program Operations who is overseeing the agency's initial re-engagement strategies.

"There are various reasons that students disengage from school," said Kennington. "They are often *pushed out* due to disciplinary actions occurring as early as kindergarten, or by feelings of inadequacy due to lack of academic achievement or a negative school culture. They are *pulled out* due

(continued on page 3)

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT-CEO



*Men Tchaas Ari, President and CEO*

As the holiday season nears, I find myself reflecting on how fortunate I am. While the past 18 months have been challenging for me, my team, and the students that we serve, I am still very grateful for all that I have. I am thankful for my family, my health, and how completely aligned that I feel to a role that gives me satisfaction and purpose each day.

Serving as President and CEO of

CIS has also afforded me an opportunity to see many of the disparities inherent in our educational system and just how devastating the pandemic has been for many of the students that we serve. Certainly, everyone has been impacted by the pandemic, but it seems that low-income families and people of color have been hit the hardest. Chronic absenteeism rates rose significantly for African-American and Latinx students during the pandemic. Reading and Math proficiency scores also dropped for these students.

Historically, CIS serves the very students hit hardest by the pandemic, with nearly 90 percent being Black and Brown and 78% living in households earning less than \$35,000 annually. Here at CIS, we are reminded that the pandemic is hardly over and are keenly focused on doing all that we can to stop its lingering effects. For many students, remote learning was less than ideal and now they are woefully behind academically. Thousands more are disengaged and many did not show up for school last year at all. In response, we are doubling down on our efforts to get students reengaged and excited about learning.

CIS is committed to helping our students fully recover – we will not stop until they are back on track to succeeding in school and in life. This is a massive task and one that will require the support of the entire community. We are counting on your support. You will be hearing more from us in early 2022 about how you can help.

In the meantime, in this season of giving and gratitude, our entire CIS team and I are grateful for YOU. We are grateful for your empathy, your activism, and your financial support that enables us to provide much-needed services to children and families, especially now. To you, our donors, partners, and volunteers, we sincerely say, “Thank You.”

**Men Tchaas Ari**  
President and CEO

## MEET JON DAVIS, 2021-22 CIS Board Chair



*Jon Davis, CIS Board Chair*

CIS is pleased to announce Jon Davis as Board Chair for the 2021-22 year. Jon has served on the Board since 2015 and has chaired such committees as Branding/Marketing, Human Resources, Governance, and the Executive committee. He has volunteered as a Success Coach and participates in our DifferenceMakers® leadership program.

Jon says he is inspired by CIS

because “CIS reminds me of what we are capable of as a community when we unlock students’ individual potential, open up access to opportunities and build meaningful relationships.”

“My involvement has widened my heart and allowed me to be a better human being,” Jon added. “I am so grateful for the chance to work alongside incredible people working every day in schools to ensure that every student thrives.”

Jon is a Davidson College graduate where he played football for the Wildcats. Professionally, Jon is a consultant, facilitator, producer, and writer for organizations, people, and school systems. He is the co-founder and curator of Making Room, which is a creative platform inspiring people to see themselves in each other.

Jon loves to cook for friends, including making homemade pizza. He is also a lover of music, coffee shops and the outdoors along with his beloved pup Larry!

### WELCOME TO THESE NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are also pleased to welcome the following new CIS Board members, who began their three-year terms in August:

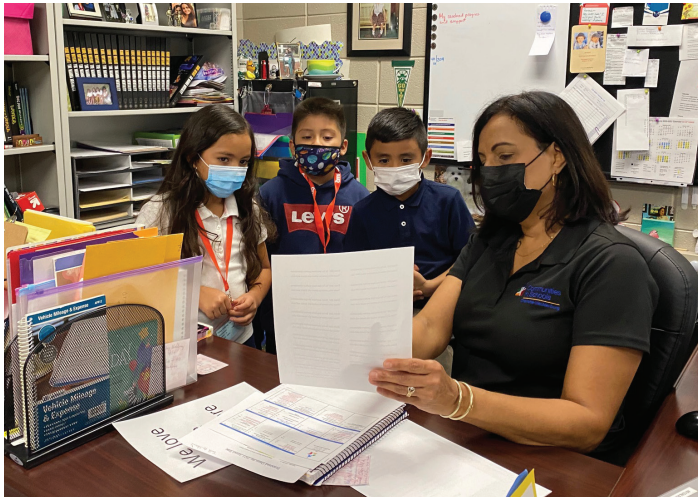
**Bradley Brown**  
Ally Financial Inc.

**Heath W. Campbell**  
Truist

**Tawanda Y. Chandler**  
AvidXchange

A complete list of Board members can be found on the back of this newsletter. CIS is grateful to all of our Board members for their time, expertise and commitment.

# SHADOW PANDEMIC, continued from page 1



to work, family responsibilities, or mental health issues, or there is a lack of activities on a consistent basis that will serve to *pull them in*. When students don't feel that sense of achievement, security and belonging, it is difficult for them to focus and engage in formal education."

Since 1985, CIS Charlotte has led the charge to provide wraparound services delivered inside schools (called "integrated student supports") so that children have what they need to be successful inside and outside of the classroom. However, school closures and remote learning caused by the pandemic have both illuminated and magnified the persistent disparities that already existed within our community, particularly around access to basic needs, mental health, and opportunities for socioeconomic mobility.

## Why It Matters

Learning loss due to chronic absenteeism and school disengagement has profound economic and social consequences. Research proves that disengaged students have a greater likelihood of dropping out of school. The ramifications are staggering:

- Dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed as opposed to college graduates. (*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*)
- Dropouts earn approximately \$8,000 less annually than those with a high school diploma and \$26,500 less annually than college graduates. (*Alliance for Excellent Education*)
- \$200 billion in lifetime earnings is lost nationwide with each year's class of dropouts. (*National Dropout Prevention Center*)

Given Charlotte and Mecklenburg County's ongoing efforts to improve economic mobility for its residents who are currently experiencing poverty, finding and reconnecting with these disengaged students is critical. Left unaddressed, inadequate supports, untreated trauma and

continued disengagement will result in even greater achievement and opportunity gaps for children. The anticipated size and scope of the need for targeted interventions and support is expected to be greater than anything CIS-Charlotte has experienced in its 37-year history.

## How CIS-Charlotte is Addressing It

The CIS team is laser-focused on locating and re-engaging as many students as possible who are missing from school rosters. A new team of Reengagement Coordinators, in partnership with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools staff, will be dedicated to finding, connecting with, and supporting students as they reengage and set goals for their future.

Once a disengaged student is identified, the CIS team will partner with students and their families to assess their needs and provide support to address the loss, trauma, and isolation they experienced during the pandemic. CIS will address their social-emotional needs and support them as they re-engage in their education and make plans for life after high school.



Anna Kennington

For Kennington and her team, the ultimate goal is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, personal connections and opportunities to be successful in high school and beyond.

"I take our name 'Communities In Schools' very literally," Kennington said. "We are in schools to help build community, to help students and families feel that sense of safety and belonging. We also have the

connections within the larger community to be the bridge that links families with the resources that they need in order to fully participate and benefit from all that our community has to offer."

## Make A Gift

If you would like to support our efforts to re-engage students in school and help them get back on track in their education, please consider a donation at: [www.cischarlotte.org/donate](http://www.cischarlotte.org/donate)



## For Parents and Caregivers

Parents/Caregivers who would like to know more about CIS and if your child is eligible to receive CIS services, visit our website and complete the Parent Inquiry Form at: [www.cischarlotte.org/programs/parent-inquiry-form](http://www.cischarlotte.org/programs/parent-inquiry-form)





# CELEBRATING Hispanic Heritage Month

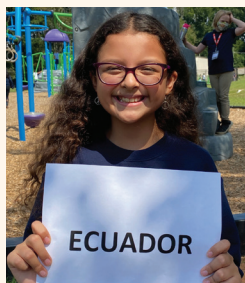
Nearly 30% of our students identify as Hispanic or Latinx. CIS is proud to recognize the diversity of our students, especially during Hispanic Heritage Month, which is celebrated each year from Sept. 15 - Oct. 15 in the U.S. CIS Site Coordinator Deianira Perez at Rama Road Elementary recently shared two of her students' stories in their own words with us and their pride in their family's heritage. Please meet Tessa and Jordan!

## Tessa - Ecuador

*I'm Tessa, a 5th grade student at Rama Road elementary. I was born in New York. My father is from California and my mother is from Ecuador.*

*I feel proud that I'm able to speak another language because I get to communicate with others in a different way. I feel blessed that in the past I was able to visit my mom's side of the family in Ecuador. Ecuador is in South America and has lots of nice places. I'm grateful that my parents could take me there. When I visited I spent time with my cousins, aunts, and uncles. We went to the beach, I love going swimming there. We also celebrated a holiday on July 3rd. It is sort of an Independence Day but only of the city my mother is from, which is Santo Domingo, Ecuador. That day they celebrate with a special family dinner.*

*Mrs. Perez has been helping me since I was in fourth grade. She has given me school supplies, uniforms, and books. She motivates me to be respectful towards adults and to think before I react and speak to others. Mrs. Perez has sent me cards in the mail and taken supplies to my house when we were out of school because of COVID.*



## Jordan - Columbia

*My name is Jordan and I am originally from Colombia. In 2018 my parents decided to move to Houston, Texas. Eventually we moved to Charlotte and I started second grade at Rama Road Elementary. I didn't know English, and I was very scared not knowing what I will face in a new country.*

*I have had many challenges with the language and culture but little by little I am learning and I'm grateful for new opportunities.*

*I'm very grateful to my tutors and teachers for their patience while teaching me. I'm very grateful for Mrs. Perez because since the first day I came to Rama Road she has helped me. She checks with me and checks with my teachers on my progress. She communicates any of my needs to my teachers and my parents. She has given me books so I can practice English and improve my vocabulary. I have received certificates and rewards for my efforts and that makes me very happy.*

*I'm very proud of being Hispanic because I get to speak a different language and someday be fully bilingual. That will help me in the future to have better opportunities to go to college and find a good job.*



# #AllinforKids

A • WEEK • OF • GIVING

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

*A special thank you to these companies for generously supporting our All In For Kids - A Week of Giving event, November 8-14, 2021.*

### Gold Level



### Silver Level



### Bronze Level



# Q & A WITH ALAINA WILLIAMS, ICM

*We recently sat down with Alaina Williams, an Intensive Case Manager (ICM) with CIS at Harding University High School, to hold a “Q & A” and hear first-hand what it’s like to be back in the schools and the challenges she is seeing. Our ICM staff carry a smaller caseload than our other Site Coordinators, typically 25-30 students/families. The ICM’s priority is to provide stabilization and holistic services for these students/families experiencing crisis and/or trauma.*

**Q.** It’s been a big change being back in the school building this fall after nearly a year of remote learning during the pandemic. What does it feel like to be back in-person? How would you describe the mood/atmosphere in the school, for students, teachers, everyone?

**A.** Students as well as staff are excited and happy to have a sense of “normalcy” return; however, there are many that are fearful. We are still dealing with the effects of COVID, with several students and staff having contracted it during the first few weeks of school. We are also experiencing fallout from events that occurred during remote learning last year and over the summer (fights, violence, staff shortage, combating instructional loss).

**Q.** For many of our students and families last year, food insecurity was the immediate crisis, since many students receive both breakfast and lunch at school. Then as job loss and loss of income occurred, we saw needs increase for housing/rent and other basic needs. Access to technology, navigating learning platforms and social-emotional trauma were issues as well. What are the greatest needs and challenges you are seeing so far this school year?

**A.** Food shortage is an ever-present barrier with some members of our student population, however, it does not appear to be as widespread as it was during the onset of COVID. The biggest barriers that my students and families are combating include mental health issues, effects of instructional loss, community violence, navigating the educational system with a positive COVID diagnosis, and childcare.

**Q.** As an Intensive Case Manager, what are your top priorities and goals in meeting the needs of your students and families?

My priority as an ICM is to maintain weekly communication with my families. With the population I serve, means of communication are frequently disrupted (i.e., telephone gets disconnected, internet is cut off, etc.). So I am taking full advantage of being on campus, where I can see my students in person. I am constantly assessing for need, though I do so informally, again, through constant communication. Next I focus on attendance and academics. Academic goals for my student population include accrual of at least 8 credits per year, to progress to the next grade.

**Q.** What does “success” look like for you and/or your students?

As an ICM, I measure success from a holistic perspective. I absolutely want for my students to be timely/present, and performing strong academically every day. However, I am also concerned with their



CIS Intensive Case Manager (ICM) Alaina Williams

physical and mental fitness, home life, social circles, and support systems. When all or most of these areas are performing successfully, leading my student/family to self-sufficiency, I consider it to be success.

**Q.** If you could share one message with those not involved in schools on a day-to-day basis, what would you want them to know or understand?

This is such a powerful question! My day to day is so fulfilling, yet positively draining, because I pour so much into these youth, by just allowing them to feel safe and be themselves, if only for that moment... Our students are so creative, industrious, resourceful, funny, talented, wise beyond their years. They are indeed the future, and the one thing that I love, is that they are all unique and individual, and beautiful, however they “present.” We know that this world, however, is not always beautiful, and that’s where we come in. When given the opportunity to engage with our students, please don’t look at them as an anecdote, data point, or statistic... Really engage with them in a genuine and authentic way, and you will be surprised at the gems that lie within.

# A 'SAFE JOURNEY' FOR KIERRA, Class of 2020

CIS recently caught up with CIS graduate Kierra Gregory, who offered to share her story of graduating during the pandemic and the support she received from CIS and our Safe Journey program during that difficult time.

Kierra says she was already behind in her classes before the pandemic. Then in the fall of her junior year in high school, she learned she was pregnant. That is when she was referred to the Safe Journey program for teen parents.

Safe Journey assists teen parents with completing their high school education while strengthening their connections with their children, families and community. The program provides individual case management and partners with Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools and area agencies to provide comprehensive, targeted services for both mother and baby. Smart Start of Mecklenburg County funds the program, while CIS hires the staff and operates the program.

Through Safe Journey, Kierra received childcare for her baby, so she could attend her classes in high school. Safe Journey also conducted developmental testing and secured speech therapy services for Kierra's son when that became a concern.

When the pandemic hit in March of her senior year, Kierra had to manage remote learning and caring for her son and three younger siblings while her mother worked. She says her Safe Journey counselor, Lisa Hollis, kept her motivated during this time and on track to graduate, which she did in June of 2020.

Today Kierra is employed with Federal Express, and in January plans to enroll in the NextGen program at CPCC (to which Safe Journey also referred her) to become a Certified Nursing Assistant.

"Kierra has been a great student and a model participant in Safe Journey," said Hollis. "I'm so proud of all that she has accomplished."



*Kierra in her cap and gown with her son, Aiden, in June of 2020.*

## CIS GRAD GIVES BACK: Kayla Witherspoon



*Kayla Witherspoon*

In 2008, CIS-Charlotte senior Kayla Witherspoon would never have dreamed that just a little over a decade later she would be providing academic scholarships to graduating high school seniors like herself.

As a senior in CIS at E. E. Waddell High School, Kayla received two college scholarships through CIS. Her CIS Site Coordinator

took her on several college visits and helped her narrow her choices and apply for scholarships. The opportunities that abounded from her participation in CIS were the result of the ongoing encouragement and support she received from her then-CIS Site Coordinator, Aisha Alexander, and Renee' Leak, who is currently a Director of Program Operations (Educational & Career Coach) with CIS-Charlotte.

Witherspoon went on to graduate from Winthrop University with a B.S. in Business Administration and a minor in marketing, and later

received an MBA from N.C. A&T University. In 2020 she launched her own successful real estate company, Property Maven Inc., in Charlotte.

After finishing her graduate studies, Witherspoon began to think about ways she could give back to the community that had helped her. She had continued to follow CIS-Charlotte's work, and because of her own positive experiences with CIS, she decided to pay it forward by providing a scholarship to a CIS student in the class of 2021.

"I'd heard stories about how COVID-19 had impacted so many students – being online and taking care of younger siblings because parents have to work – and thought about how tough that was," said Witherspoon. "Academics is a big thing for me, and [those types of distractions] can take your sights off going further in your education."

CIS was thrilled to hear from Witherspoon and her desire to provide a scholarship for a graduating senior. Jordan Grant, a CIS student in the Class of 2021 at East Mecklenburg High School, was awarded the scholarship in June and is now a freshman at Catawba College.

CIS is proud of Kayla's educational and career success and grateful for her generosity to today's students and the next generation!



# PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: B.B. Dance Productions

*B.B. Dance has provided more than 300 dance scholarships to CIS students - and so much more.*

Since 2014, B.B. Dance Productions of Charlotte has been bringing the joy of dance to hundreds of CIS-Charlotte students – at no cost to them or their parents. Over 300 CIS students to date have received scholarships – valued at \$1200 per student per year – through the studio’s Irene Bradley Scholarship Foundation. The scholarship covers tuition, dancewear, dance shoes, recital and costume fees. Students are able to renew their scholarships each year as long as they meet attendance requirements, have good behavior and participate in the annual dance recital.

During the 2020-21 school year, 27 CIS students received the Irene Bradley Scholarship from BBDP. All of these students participated in the annual recital in June, and several were recognized for 3, 5, and 7 years of participation. This year, CIS student Adesnee Camp, an Eastway Middle School seventh grader, will participate in the Competitive Dance Program. She is the first CIS scholarship recipient to reach the competitive level. Adesnee began dancing three years ago with BBDP when her CIS Site Coordinator at Shamrock Gardens Elementary recommended her.

Veronica Bradley Badgett Perry founded B.B. Dance Productions in Charlotte in 1991. The studio offers classes in ballet, tap, jazz, gymnastics and hip hop. Perry was introduced to dance as a child by her grandmother, Irene Bradley, as a way to reiterate the importance of having confidence and strong self-esteem. Perry is passionate about the art of dance and how the discipline instills values in young people.



*Adesnee Camp is the first CIS scholarship recipient to audition and reach the Competitive Dance level with B.B. Dance Productions.*



*B.B. Dance Productions Spring Dance Recital in 2021.*

“Dance teaches individuals to believe in themselves, their dreams and their abilities,” said Perry. “This passion led me to develop a program that brings the art of dance to children in the Greater Charlotte Area. Partnering with Communities In Schools allows me the opportunity to offer dance to even more children.”

Perry was introduced to CIS by CIS staff member Angela Cunningham, whose daughter danced with BBDP for many years. When Perry learned more about CIS from Cunningham, she realized partnering with CIS would be a great way to provide this opportunity to students who otherwise would not be able to afford dance lessons. The studio places an emphasis on the importance of education and has ongoing communication with students’ CIS Site Coordinators and parents about their academic progress and behavior in school.

Many parents see this participation in the B.B. Dance scholarship program as an incentive for academic success. In a letter of gratitude to Perry and the Irene Bradley Foundation, CIS parent Nicole Hall wrote:

*“These scholarships have changed my daughters’ lives in so many ways. Having the opportunity to dance has increased their self-confidence and improved their ability to set goals for themselves. The program has helped me as a parent to reiterate what I teach my children, which is work diligently towards your goals because you never know where your hard work will take you. The scholarships have given my girls new life opportunities that I would not have been able to do.”*

Many studies show that children’s participation and exposure to arts programming contributes to both their short-term and long-term success. CIS is grateful to B. B. Dance Productions for these generous dance scholarships and the marvelous opportunities they provide for our students!

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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



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Charlotte, NC 28202

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



## 'TIS THE SEASON!

Thank you for considering a gift to Communities In Schools this holiday season. CIS serves over 4,000+ students each year, but the pandemic has drastically increased the number of students who need support to reengage in school and recover from instructional loss and social-emotional trauma. Now through December 31 is a critical fundraising window to support current program needs, as well as plan for the 2022-23 school year. Every donation is appreciated – no gift is too small. Thank you and happy holidays!

MAKE YOUR GIFT  
[cischarlotte.org/donate](https://cischarlotte.org/donate)



## CIS SCHOOL SITES, 2021-22

### Elementary Schools

Albemarle Road  
Allenbrook  
Briarwood  
Bruns Avenue  
Cotswold  
Hidden Valley  
Highland Renaissance  
Merry Oaks  
Newell  
Rama Road  
Reid Park  
Shamrock Gardens  
Statesville Road  
Sterling  
Tuckaseegee  
University Park  
Westerly Hills  
Winding Springs  
Winterfield

### PK - 8 Schools

Ashley Park  
Berryhill  
Druid Hills  
Governor's Village  
Marie G. Davis  
Thomasboro  
Walter G. Byers

### Middle Schools

Albemarle Road  
Cochrane / iMeck (6-12)  
Coulwood  
Eastway  
James Martin  
Martin Luther King, Jr.  
McClintock  
Quail Hollow  
Ranson  
Sedgefield  
Whitewater  
Wilson

### High Schools

Butler  
East Mecklenburg  
Garinger  
Harding  
Hopewell  
Independence  
Julius L. Chambers  
Mallard Creek  
Myers Park  
Olympic  
Performance Learning Center®  
Phillip O. Berry  
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