



# 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



**June 18**

Dine Out For Kids®

**Aug. 14-25**

School Tools

**Oct. 5**

Lowcountry

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Newsletter for Friends of CIS | Spring 2019

# WHAT WE ARE MADE OF

## The Class of 2019

*Hats off to our CIS graduates! Nearly 600 amazing CIS seniors graduated in June. Here is just a small sampling of graduates in the Class of 2019. . . prepare to be as inspired and proud of this next generation as we are!*

### ORNELLA MAKOLO Myers Park

Communities In Schools is so proud of Ornella, who was recently named a finalist in the CIS National Student Voices Sweepstakes, "What We Are Made Of." What is Ornella "made of?" Here in her own words are five items that she chose to represent her identity, giving readers a glimpse into what an outstanding young lady she is:

- **Lieutenant Colonel in JROTC** – This is the highest rank a high school student can hold, and at Myers Park, it has always been held by a male, non-minority student. Ornella is the first African-American female to obtain this rank in Myers Park's battalion! She loves being a role model for girls and other minority students.
- **The color yellow** – "Because it is very vibrant, like my personality."
- **Books** – "I absolutely love reading, especially fiction, because it can transport me to another world where I can envision my dreams lived out."
- **Thrift shopping** – "I like to put new and old styles together - it represents my creative side and how I can combine two worlds or cultures and make them into one."
- **My natural hair** – "I express myself by wearing my hair natural, which magnifies my confidence and allows me to be just that - 'me' – no excuses, no mirage, no altered state."

Ornella has faced challenges in her life, but believes those challenges have helped make her who she is today. Her family was homeless for a while when she was younger. "When you are without material things, you learn just how valuable people are for just being their true selves in a very hard and difficult time," Ornella explained.

Ornella also shared that her brother has severe autism. "He has taught me to have a lot of patience and to love hard – and I have come to realize that I need him as much as he needs me."



*(continued on page 2)*

# PRESIDENT-CEO MESSAGE

For more than 30 years, the Council for Children's Rights (CFCR) has produced an annual report, formerly known as the "State of Mecklenburg's Children," as a data resource on children and families in Mecklenburg County. This year, Communities In Schools partnered with CFRCR to create an expanded report, with a slightly altered, but meaningful new title, *The State of Our Children*. The 86-page report was released in April and includes policy recommendations, based on statistics about our community's youth, to address community efforts to increase equity and opportunity for all children in Mecklenburg County.

The report includes some promising data, but a significant amount of sobering data as well. I hope that you will review the report yourself to see what stands out to you, but here are two statistics that stood out to me:

- CMS ranks 90<sup>th</sup> out of 115 school districts for per-pupil spending. We spend \$2,200 less per student than the national average. After adjusting for inflation, we are currently spending less per pupil than we did before the 2008 recession.
- Approximately 1 out of 5 kids in middle and high school report having seriously considered suicide, and 1 in 4 report feeling sad or hopeless almost every day.

The kids in our community – all of our kids – need our community more than ever. They need to feel safe and loved. They need to know they matter to strangers across the street, or across town. They need us to believe in their strengths and potential. Our kids need our community, and equally as important, we need them.

As the report states in the opening page, "the measure of a society's health is how well it cares for its youngest and most vulnerable." We all share in the responsibility for *taking action* to ensure all of Mecklenburg's children have what they need to grow into healthy, successful adults. Thank you for your commitment to Communities In Schools and all of our community's children.



To view the full report, go to <http://bit.ly/SOOC2019>

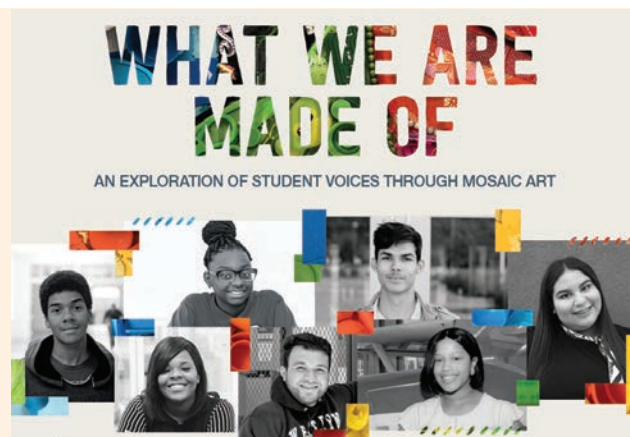
## Ornella Makolo *(continued from page 1)*

And all of her life, Ornella has watched her mother struggle but never give up on what she set out to give her children. "My mother left a war-zoned country to come here and make a better life for me and my brother," Ornella said. "I have watched her sacrifice and struggle a lot, but she constantly pushed responsibility, confidence, and love on me. She has by far been the biggest influence in my life."

Another significant influence in Ornella's life has been her CIS Site Coordinator, Stacey Weinstein, whom she met in the 9th grade at Myers Park.

"I've always had to push harder with grades and have had some confidence issues," said Ornella. "Ms. Weinstein saw a future in me. She saw growth and was going to do anything to help me see that as well. She instilled hope in me, and has helped me grow into a woman with a mindset that is confident with what I want to do with my life."

Ornella's dreams are no longer fiction: she is headed to Winston-Salem State University in the fall to study Business/Marketing. And CIS is certain she has a vibrant future ahead – just like her personality!



Earlier this year, the CIS National Office launched an exciting new storytelling campaign, one that uses a unique way to explore student voices and "what they are made of" through oversized mosaic art portraits. Renowned pop artist Jason Mecier created unique 4' x 4' portraits of seven CIS students from across the country, inspired by each student's self-description and incorporating actual items of personal significance to the student. All of these student stories and portraits are amazing! – See for yourself at <https://whatwearemadeof.us>.

# THE CLASS of 2019 (continued from page 2)



**DIEM-MI "MIMI" TRA**  
**South Mecklenburg**

Mimi Tra is passionate about many things, but none more so than mental health, particularly with adolescents. She believes that misuse of technology (too much screen time, lack of sleep related to technology use), and cyberbullying are huge factors in depression and mental health issues among teens. Mimi herself has suffered from severe depression, but eventually she got the support and treatment she needed and is doing well today.

Mimi says her Site Coordinator, Jezmarie Allen, has been there for her during this difficult journey. "Ms. Allen is one of the few people I can trust with all my heart," said Mimi. She was always there to listen to me, and with her powerful and encouraging words, I was able to open up and express my feelings. She has watched me grow and mature as a person."

Resiliency, determination, and hope are three words that Mimi uses to describe herself – and those characteristics are clearly evident in Mimi Tra today. Mimi will be attending CPCC this fall and says she has "an abundant list of goals I wish to achieve." We have no doubt she will!



**TIM REECE**  
**East Mecklenburg**

Timothy Reece is an incredibly well rounded student who has excelled academically and in extracurricular activities while championing through adversity in his personal life.

A graduating senior at East Meck, Timothy has earned a 4.0 GPA in the International Baccalaureate program. He will be attending UNC Greensboro and will participate in their Honors College and study Computer Science. Timothy also enjoys theatre and performing arts and was a stand-out in the school musical, *Anything Goes*. He's also an athlete (track and field), and works after school at Carowinds as an area manager in food and beverage.

Timothy has matured at an admirable pace as he matriculated through East. Early on in high school, Timothy really struggled with emotions lingering from his parents' divorce when he was younger. Growing up in a single parent household, he and his family faced many challenges. Struggling to cope, Tim found himself battling with anger

and stress management. CIS Site Coordinator Nichelle Wilson provided him with a much-needed outlet to express himself and develop coping skills. "Ms. Wilson has been an awesome support figure for me," said Timothy. "She helped me find the strength within myself to keep going during the hardest times. She instilled in me the confidence I needed to pursue my dreams."



**LA'MYA MOFFETT**  
**Harding**

When asked to describe herself, La'Mya Moffett used these five words: *Enthusiastic. Vulnerable. Dedicated. Humble. Independent.* La'Mya's story clearly embodies all of these characteristics, but "Independent" and "Dedicated" especially stand out.

In some ways, independence was thrust upon La'Mya at a young age when her mother was incarcerated. Throughout La'Mya's formative years, her mother continued to be in and out of the criminal justice system. But La'Mya says the hardships she and her family have endured have taught her valuable life lessons and have contributed to her independence.

"I understand that my actions are most important and can affect my future," said La'Mya, "At the same time, independence has taught me to be my own biggest advocate and source of strength."

Chapman Archer, La'Mya's CIS Site Coordinator, echoes La'Mya's perspective: "La'Mya is a strong advocate for herself, friends, and family," said Archer. "She is driven and determined to find success by continuing her education."

La'Mya is first-generation in her family to attend college and was served by our TRiO Talent Search program as well as CIS. She is excited to attend Fayetteville State University this fall and will study Computer Science or Aerospace Engineering. La'Mya was recognized by CMS as an Outstanding Senior, and she has received a renewable \$3,000 scholarship through Urban Promise. Independent, dedicated – and successful!



# LEAN FORWARD with Our High School Students

On Friday, April 12, the Charlotte Convention Center came alive with the power of “social capital exchange” between 160 of our high school students and more than 90 volunteers from the community!

Communities In Schools partnered with Accenture to host “Lean Forward,” where students and volunteers collaborated in a series of career exploration activities. Thirty-five companies across eight different industries were represented, allowing students to network with professionals in industries aligned with their career interests. Resume crafting and feedback, mock interviews, and “strategy sessions” that challenged students to develop solutions to real-life business issues, were all a part of the day.

Students and volunteers alike were genuinely engaged and held rich dialogue as they built bridges across difference. Volunteer Melia Mauldin, with Miles McClellan Construction Company, followed up after the event with this comment: “I had the most amazing time and was so impressed with all of the students in our group. They were so prepared and engaged, asked great questions and were just all-around amazing kids.”

CIS is proud of our students and grateful to these wonderful volunteers. To learn more and participate in our next “Lean Forward” event, contact [volunteer@cischarlotte.org](mailto:volunteer@cischarlotte.org).



*Volunteer Sherman Mumford (center) from UNC-Charlotte engages with students in a team strategy session.*

## CIS National CHALLENGE SCHOOL WINNERS

Communities In Schools National announced in February that 14 CIS affiliates or state offices will share \$13 million in grant funding to support approximately 94,000 more students in 23 communities across 11 states. CIS-Charlotte was among the Challenge School grant recipients and will be expanding into additional schools to serve more students over the three-year project period.

The winning affiliates were selected in a competitive grant process funded through a multimillion dollar donation by AbbVie, a research-based global biopharmaceutical company. Recipients were chosen based on their ability to improve graduation rates, reduce chronic absenteeism, and increase college and career readiness for students in kindergarten through grade 12, especially in high-poverty neighborhoods.

“Every day, we work with thousands of students who inspire us with their intelligence, courage and tenacity, despite facing tremendous challenges resulting from systems beyond their control,” said Molly Shaw, President and CEO of CIS-Charlotte. “This major investment by Communities In Schools National and AbbVie will allow us to reach more students in our community to ensure they have the support and resources needed to create their own path to success in school and in life.”

In November of last year, AbbVie announced a total donation of \$30 million to the Communities In Schools National Office to provide essential support services to underserved children. This investment is the largest single corporate donation Communities In Schools has received in its 40-year history. The remaining support from the AbbVie grant is going to students in 16 high-need Chicago public schools.

abbvie



### Challenge School Grant Recipients include these CIS Affiliates or State Offices

Georgia  
West Palm Beach, FL  
Indiana  
New Orleans, LA  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC  
Lehigh Valley, PA

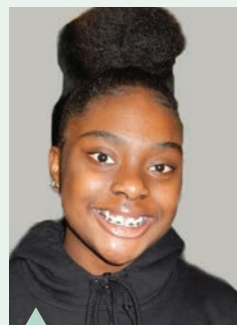
Memphis, TN  
Austin, TX  
North Texas and Fort Worth, TX  
San Antonio, TX  
Virginia  
Kent, Renton, and Federal Way, WA

# Two CIS Middle School Students win FRIEDLAND SCHOLARSHIPS

Exciting news for two CIS middle school students, Kendrea Gbonah and Jasmine Paredes, who were recently awarded college scholarships through Charlotte's Friedland Foundation! Kendrea is a 7th grader at Whitewater Middle School and will receive fully-funded tuition for four years to attend a state school within North Carolina. Jasmine, a 7th grader at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, will receive a total of \$20,000 (\$5,000 per year for four years), to attend a state school within North Carolina.

The Friedland Foundation, which funds the scholarships, was established in 2008 by local physician Dr. Michael Friedland. Its primary mission is to provide hope of a college education to middle school students attending Title I schools within CMS. A special component of the Friedland Scholarships is that each recipient also receives an individual mentor, who is trained and supported by the Friedland Foundation from the time the scholarship is awarded in 7th grade until the student graduates high school.

Congratulations to Kendrea and Jasmine, as well as their CIS Site Coordinators, Diana Partlow (Whitewater) and Kamiya Jones (MLK), who prepared them for their interviews and supported them throughout the process!



*Kendrea Gbonah  
Whitewater Middle School*



*Jasmine Paredes  
MLK, Jr. Middle School*

## More Student AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

### Discovery Place STEM Summer Camp Scholarships

Not one, not two – but THREE CIS students at McClintock Middle School are winners of a week-long STEM Summer Camp at Discovery Place! Congratulations are in order for 6th graders Sophia Rodriguez, Jennifer Romero, and Allison Schenkweiler who will attend the camp, designed for girls-only, this June 24-28. The girls' CIS Site Coordinator, Casey D'Alessandro, said she recommended these students based on their academic efforts, strong attendance, and interest in STEM-related careers. Students had to have letters of recommendation from teachers and answer five essay questions as part of the application.



*CIS Site Coordinator Casey D'Alessandro, Allison Schenkweiler, Jennifer Romero, Sophia Rodriguez, and Lydia Evans with Discovery Place.*

### Do the Write Thing Essay Contest

Each year, Community Support Services of Mecklenburg County partners with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department to hold the "Do the Write Thing" Essay Challenge. The contest is open to middle school students across CMS and gives students an outlet to creatively express their ideas and emotions on the topic of youth violence and drug abuse, how it has impacted their lives, and to consider what they might do about it.

This year, 34 students from 18 CMS schools were selected as finalists – including three CIS students – G'nyla Hairston and Yuliza Maricela Cabrera Benitez from Eastway Middle School, and Kemani Rushing from Whitewater Middle School. Their CIS Site Coordinators, Sherese Rodriguez (Eastway) and Diana Partlow (Whitewater) encouraged their students to participate and helped them through the process. All of the 2019 winners, their family members, and CMS or CIS staff who supported them were invited to a dinner and Awards Ceremony in March.



*G'nyla Hairston*



*Yuliza Cabrera Benitez*



*Kemani Rushing*

# SHAW+ERQUIAGA: Charlotte is investing in Social Capital to help students move up the economic ladder. Other cities should follow suit.

*This Opinion piece, co-authored by Molly Shaw, CIS-Charlotte President and CEO, and Dale Erquiaga, CIS National President and CEO, was published in March 2019 on the national education website, "The 74" [www.the74million.org](http://www.the74million.org)*

BY MOLLY SHAW AND DALE ERQUIAGA

On a recent evening in Charlotte, North Carolina, 10 high school students from low-income backgrounds met with top executives of the Albemarle Corp., a global specialty chemicals company. The teens were there to meet role models, learn about building a successful career and give the execs advice about how Albemarle could improve its business.

Many young people never get this type of opportunity to make connections and share expertise. For many children and families served by our organization, Communities in Schools, the American Dream of upward mobility is just that — a dream, and an unlikely one. Growing up segregated from wealthier families and economic opportunity, they are very likely to remain in cycles of generational poverty. To change this, they need a resource that isn't measured in dollars.

Sociologists call it social capital, the connections and relationships that help people navigate toward a successful future. Colloquially, it's who you know and how they can help you navigate careers and opportunity.

The job-shadowing experience at Albemarle was one small step toward delivering this valuable commodity to children who might not otherwise have access to it, and to help them and their families move up the economic ladder in Charlotte. A citywide effort aims to boost economic opportunity, in part by helping children and their families build relationships across socioeconomic lines. These relationships provide valuable information, support and connections they would otherwise lack; empower them to unlock their own potential; and enable them to get ahead.

Other cities around the country should follow suit. Though social capital won't show up on anyone's balance sheet, its benefits are profound and make for a strong investment in our future. It allows people to navigate postsecondary education, enjoy successful careers, receive promotions or obtain loans to start a business or invent the next big thing. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely than their more affluent peers to have access to such important social networks that go beyond their neighborhoods and families. But they know how powerful this non-fiscal resource is, and they want it. High schoolers in Charlotte defined social capital as:



- *"Creating bonds you've never experienced before."*
- *"When everyone plays a role in gaining access to opportunity."*
- *"Building a better community."*
- *"Making a positive impact."*
- *"The balance of relationships and connections within a community."*
- *"Equivalency."*
- *"Togetherness."*

To us, it's clear that boosting young people's social capital belongs on the list of things society must do to prepare them for life. We are part of a national network of organizations that work in schools to give children the full range of supports they need to do well academically. Helping students build social capital means that when we send high schoolers to shadow professionals on the job, we're not just telling them to put on dress clothes and introduce themselves. We're coaching them to see themselves as leaders, build enduring relationships with the people they meet and think about the value they have to offer.

Economic segregation contributes to the problem, so it follows that the solution doesn't lie solely with individuals. We have to take action at a larger scale, as is happening in Charlotte, Detroit, Seattle and other communities that have prioritized improving economic opportunity for those who have been left behind or stuck in the middle. Communities and experts in economic mobility are still figuring out how to do this work, but Communities in Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg is among the organizations helping to lead the way and pinpoint policies that will turn a city, its schools, its youth organizations, its cultural and faith institutions and its businesses into relationship incubators for students.



# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

## Reggie Nelson

### Westerly Hills Academy

As a CIS Success Coach to a fourth grade student at Westerly Hills Academy, a Dine Out For Kids' supporter with his Kona Ice Truck in Northwest Charlotte, and as a Social Capital Investor through his previous employment at Vanguard, Reggie Nelson has completely immersed himself into our Communities In Schools' culture and family.

Reggie is on his second year volunteering with Communities In Schools. He heard about our program and mission from a colleague at Vanguard and has grown to be a leader and an all-star volunteer. After hearing about CIS from his colleague, Reggie fell in love with our mission and knew he had to get involved. Being so involved in CIS has given him the chance to give back to his peers and community. Before joining the CIS team, Reggie researched the program and saw success story after success story. After learning about the impact CIS has been having in Reggie's community, he thought to himself, "I have to be a part of this!" — and he hasn't looked back since.

While Reggie volunteers with CIS in many ways, his favorite volunteer role is spending time with his mentee, Kelvin, at Westerly Hills Academy. Whenever Reggie walks through the door at Westerly Hills, Kelvin runs up to him, yelling, "BUDDY!" and gives him a big hug. Kelvin and Reggie usually spend their lunches hanging out in the library reading books, talking about their favorite ice cream flavors, or exchanging their stories and dreams for the future. Reggie has built a trusting relationship with Kelvin, not only by helping with school work, but also by playing games and just spending time together talking. Kelvin now feels comfortable talking to Reggie about challenges he may face with his friends at school and things going on at home or around his neighborhood — important factors, especially for a young boy. Providing a safe place for Kelvin to learn and grow is one of Reggie's primary goals as a Success Coach.

Reggie shared that programs like the ones CIS offers did not exist when he was growing up, and he recognizes the impact of a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult. It makes Reggie's day knowing he is making a positive difference in someone's life. It is obvious the positive and lasting impact he is making in Kelvin's life and so many of our other students' lives by being an "all in" community partner. We are so thankful that Reggie is All In For Kids!



*Reggie Nelson with Kelvin, his Success Coach mentee and "Buddy" at Westerly Hills Academy.*

## SHAW+ERQUIAGA

*(continued from page 6)*

This is not a call for wealthy, privileged people to swoop in and save poor children. The children we work with, and others like them across the nation, don't need to be saved. They aren't helpless. They are strong, resilient, talented, full of potential and ready for opportunity. Yet they lack networks and access — to someone they can have their first conversation about college with. Or someone to teach them about growing industries. Or someone to help them crack open doors that might otherwise be closed to them.

What we're calling for is the desegregation of social networks so every child is exposed to experiences that can open up a world of opportunity. When that happens, whole communities will be transformed.



### 2017-18 Annual Review

Our Annual Report for fiscal year 2017-18 is now available online at [www.cischarlotte.org/annual-report](http://www.cischarlotte.org/annual-report).

## Board of Directors

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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

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Charlotte-Mecklenburg

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## DINE OUT FOR KIDS® Tuesday, June 18 | ALL DAY!



Communities In Schools (CIS) is fueling kids' potential through our favorite annual event, **Dine Out For Kids®!**

Participating restaurants will donate a

portion of sales on June 18 to CIS. Make plans now to dine out with friends and family on Tuesday, June 18! See the full list of restaurants at [www.cischarlotte.org](http://www.cischarlotte.org).



## CIS SCHOOL SITES, 2018-19

### Elementary Schools

Albemarle Road  
Allenbrook  
Billingsville - Cotswold  
Bruns  
Dilworth - Latta Campus  
Hidden Valley  
Highland Renaissance  
Merry Oaks  
Montclair  
Rama Road  
Reid Park  
Renaissance West  
STEAM Academy  
Shamrock Gardens  
Statesville Road  
Westerly Hills  
Winterfield

### K-8 Schools

Ashley Park  
Berryhill  
Druid Hills  
Governor's Village  
STEM Academy  
Thomasboro  
Walter G. Byers

### Middle Schools

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

### High Schools

East Mecklenburg  
Garinger  
Harding University  
Independence  
Myers Park  
Olympic  
Performance Learning Center®  
Phillip O. Berry  
Rocky River  
South Mecklenburg  
Vance  
West Charlotte  
West Mecklenburg  
Re-Entry Program