



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



Aug. 29

First Day of School (CMS)

Sept. 26-30

All In For Kids - A Week of Giving

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Newsletter for Friends of CIS | Spring/Summer 2022

CONGRATS to the Class of 2022!



Congratulations to the Class of 2022!

We are so proud of our 600+ CIS-Charlotte graduates in the Class of 2022! It was another challenging school year for students, parents, and teachers, but our seniors stayed focused and finished the year strong. Photos above are from a celebration CIS hosted at the Mint Museum-Randolph on May 26 in honor of CIS seniors who received college scholarships through CIS sources/funds. It was a special evening for CIS staff, parents and siblings to recognize and celebrate these outstanding scholars!

Scan the QR code to view the full Photo Gallery of the event.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT-CEO

I think that we all can agree that this summer has been a scorcher! Nonetheless, I hope that you are enjoying yourself and finding time for a much-needed break. July 1 is the start of our fiscal year and we utilize this time to reflect, recharge, and plan ahead.

While reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of this past school year, we are thankful for the ongoing support of the community. Your trust in our work enabled us to develop new and innovative ways to help students recover from the trauma and learning loss associated with the pandemic. A significant area of focus for our team was supporting the mental health and social-emotional well-being of our students. National studies, along with our own parent-student surveys, confirmed that there is still a critical need for support in this area. In this edition of our newsletter, you will read how we implemented a variety of evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, ranging from intermittent group activities, to more intensive, ongoing programs based on students' individual needs.

On a lighter note, I am thrilled that we were able to hold our in-person graduation celebration for our CIS seniors. The Class of 2022 has endured a lot and their high school experience was very different from what they initially imagined. One of the highlights of being CEO is that I



get a chance to personally congratulate these young scholars and share in their pride and excitement with their families. Having worked all year to ensure that each student maps out a post-secondary plan makes the celebration that much more meaningful. We are so proud of the 600 CIS seniors that received their diplomas this year.

Thank you for your continued support, which allows us to directly impact students' lives in this meaningful way and prepare them for a future of success. Try to stay cool and enjoy the rest of your summer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Men Tchaas Ari'.

Men Tchaas Ari
President and CEO

LEON LEVINE FOUNDATION Investment in CIS Surpasses \$1 Million

The Leon Levine Foundation (TLLF) has a long history of supporting Communities In Schools-Charlotte, beginning in 2012. TLLF recently awarded a grant of \$200,000 to CIS, bringing their total investment in CIS over the past 10 years to more than \$1 million. The current grant will support programming and services across the entire CIS-Charlotte network of 54 Charlotte-Mecklenburg (CMS) schools, including support for academic and cultural enrichment, mentoring, tutoring, social-emotional learning and mental health referrals, college and career readiness, and exposure to social capital and work-life experiences.

"Our longtime partnership and investing more than \$1 million is a testament to how much we believe in Communities In Schools," said Tom Lawrence, president of The Leon Levine Foundation. "CIS has a strong track record of student success, particularly among students from low-income backgrounds who need the greatest amount of support to maintain a positive trajectory in life."

"We also know that CIS is committed to finding solutions so all students have the same opportunities to achieve success," Lawrence added. "The Foundation is incredibly proud to support this important work."

"We are deeply grateful to The Leon Levine Foundation for their generous support over the years," said Men

Tchaas Ari, CIS-Charlotte President and CEO. "This most recent grant will allow us to maintain the quality and level of services in the schools we currently serve, and help provide a continuum of services across district feeder patterns where we have had some gaps. This is so important to ensuring continuity of services for students and families."

Established in 1980 by Leon Levine (Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Family Dollar Stores, Inc.), The Leon Levine Foundation supports programs and organizations that improve the human condition through investments in education, healthcare, human services and Jewish values.

Based in Charlotte, N.C., the Foundation invests in nonprofits across North Carolina and South Carolina with strong leadership, a track record of success, and a plan for financial sustainability. Through its investments, the Foundation intends to create pathways to self-sufficiency, champion strategies for permanent change, and facilitate opportunities for growth. Learn more at www.leonlevinefoundation.org.



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: Kaytlyn Goldson

Kaytlyn Goldson is one of those rare students who seems able to do it all: at East Mecklenburg High School, she juggled a demanding IB class schedule and dual-enrollment classes at CPCC (for college credit), along with a school sport (volleyball), a part-time job, participating in many CIS opportunities, and her personal life – all while maintaining a 4.4 GPA and being recognized as one of East Meck's Top 20 Seniors!

Kaytlyn has participated in CIS since she was in the 9th grade. Her CIS Site Coordinator, Carlea Atkinson, said that Kaytlyn has been involved in everything CIS has to offer its students. "Kaytlyn is extremely helpful and a student I can rely on for anything," said Atkinson.

While Kaytlyn made her high school career look effortless, she says it was not without its struggles. She said that Atkinson played a crucial role in helping her manage it all by providing her with an abundance of resources and supporting her through difficult decisions.

"I knew that I could call Ms. Atkinson day or night and she would answer no matter what she was doing," said Kaytlyn. "She goes above and beyond to support her students."

Kaytlyn added that CIS was a huge support for her by serving as an outlet whenever she was feeling stressed or overwhelmed by outside

factors such as school, work, or even friends.

"Ms. Atkinson's office has been a safe space for me, and that isn't something I can say about anywhere else at school," said Kaytlyn.

"And the number of opportunities I have been given through CIS, including the CIS scholarship, have benefitted me in so many ways. I'm so grateful that I've had such an amazing mentor and Site Coordinator to expose me to each and every one."

Kaytlyn is headed to N.C. State University this fall, where she was accepted into the Honors and Scholars program. She plans to study Criminology, and after receiving her bachelor's degree, she'd like to attend law school and become a criminal prosecutor.



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: Justice Crawford

Myers Park High School graduate Justice Crawford is practically a "Renaissance Man" . . . one minute you'll find him running lightning-speed sprints on the school track, the next you'll see him onstage accepting the top Orchestra Award at Myers Park (he plays the viola). Then again, you can often find him clicking the keys of his laptop as he learns the latest tips and tricks of coding and cybersecurity.

Justice is headed to Florida A & M University, where he has received scholarships to join the track team. His specialties are sprinting and long jumping. While he loves the sport, he is just as passionate about landing a job in cybersecurity as an "Incident Responder." To that end, he plans to major in Computer Science at FAMU.

Justice says that CIS has played a big role in his career interest. His CIS Site Coordinator, Stacey Weinstein, arranged for Justice to participate in a cybersecurity workshop with professionals based in California. "We learned how to develop and solve solutions to cybersecurity attack scenarios," said Justice. "It was cool."

CIS has supported Justice in other ways, too. One of the things he is most proud of in his high school career is just getting through the pandemic while doing school remotely.

"As an athlete and someone who likes to be around people, I was unmotivated at times and it was hard," said Justice.

"I was worried about my athletic opportunities, too. Fortunately, it all worked out and I found strength to get past that with support from family, school and CIS."

"CIS has been a great thing for me," added Justice. "Mrs. Weinstein is someone I can go to. She has written so many recommendation letters for college scholarships for me, too."

Justice was also enrolled in CIS at Winterfield Elementary School with Anna Kennington, who is now a program director with CIS. "I've been lucky to have great people in my corner," he added.



DIFFERENCE MAKERS® CLT Reignites in D.C.

It was an exciting time for the group of 58 CIS students, community members, CIS staff and Gambrell Foundation staff gathered in the early morning hours of March 24 at Charlotte Douglas International Airport. The group was preparing to travel to Washington, D.C. for a three-day adventure as part of the 2022 Difference Makers® CLT program. After the pandemic postponed this special trip and hallmark of the Difference Makers® program for two years, it was especially thrilling to see it “take flight” – literally – once more.

Initially launched in 2019 as a collaboration between The Gambrell Foundation and Communities In Schools, Difference Makers® CLT is a leadership development program for CIS students and community

members. The goal is to increase participants’ understanding of social capital and create spaces for meaningful exchanges.

This year’s trip included a visit to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History & Culture, a big red bus tour of the D.C. sights, evening walking tours of the Mall, group dinners with special guests, a visit to the CIS National Office, and much more.

Students and community members bonded quickly and deeply while taking in the sights, sounds and history of our nation’s capital. Knowledge, power, encouragement and wisdom were shared by all and the impact was abundant. The group discussed what it means to be a “Difference Maker” and how they would bring their learnings back to Charlotte.

E. J. Carr, a junior from Independence High School, says the trip changed his perspective on his role in helping make the world a better place.

“The trip was definitely impactful,” said E.J. “The conversations I had were so empowering and deep. When we were at the Lincoln Memorial, my group had a powerful conversation about being your true and authentic self, like being able to wear your hair and skin how you want to... Like knowing who you are and being who you are without being judged.”

Check out this powerful video of the group’s experience in Washington.



Outside the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture.

STEAM LEARNING Can Be So Much Fun!

On Saturday, May 21, CIS and Digi-Bridge teamed up to hold a day of STEAM learning activities at Walter G. Byers K-8 School - who knew that science and math on a Saturday could be so much fun?! It was wonderful to see Moms and Dads and kids all learning together and having lots of fun while doing so. Thank you to Principal Calloway at Walter G. Byers for hosting us, and especially to **Digi-Bridge**, **Merancas Foundation**, and **Barings** and **AvidXchange** (who provided volunteers) for collaborating with us to make this awesome event possible!



USING ART THERAPY to Support Students' Grief, Trauma

Communities In Schools has been providing social-emotional learning (SEL) activities and programs for students for years, but the need to provide SEL and mental health supports took on a heightened focus this school year. Due to the pandemic, children and teens experienced long periods of remote instruction, isolation, and trauma. Many needed opportunities to process their emotions and learn healthy ways to address loss, grief, and anxiety, which in turn improves their ability to focus in the classroom.

This spring at Myers Park High School, our three CIS Site Coordinators there – Stacey Weinstein, Renee Drake, and Olivia Hughes – collaborated to offer an art therapy workshop for a group of their students who have recently experienced serious trauma and grief, such as loss of a parent, depression, anxiety/stress, coping with gender identity, and more.

They contracted with Rebeca Carvajal of Rebelucion Arte. Carvajal is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and a Board Certified

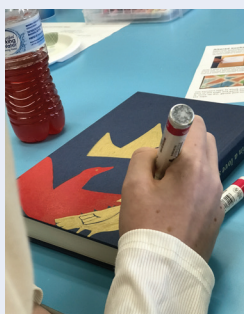


“This experience allowed me to just breathe.” - CIS Student

Registered Art Therapist (ATR-BC). The workshop series centered around creating “Altered Books,” where various mixed media techniques and journaling prompts are used on an actual book to “alter” the book to become a personalized work of art and self-expression. As Carvajal explains, “Art often can express what words cannot.”

“The workshop was amazing and the kids absolutely loved it,” Weinstein said. “We had originally planned for four sessions, but they were getting so much out of it and enjoying it, that we added two more sessions.”

Kudos to our team at Myers Park for arranging this opportunity with Rebelucion Arte to support students’ mental health and social-emotional needs.



“A different way to express myself”

One of the students who participated in the Rebelucion Arte therapy workshops was Pharaoh, a 9th grader on CIS Site Coordinator Renee Drake’s caseload at Myers Park. Pharaoh loves the arts, musical theatre, drawing and painting. Drake says that Pharaoh is talented and very creative, and in fact had been accepted to the Northwest School of the Arts in theatre. But family circumstances necessitated a move, and attending NWSA was no longer an option. Then Pharaoh’s mother passed away in December 2020. As an only child living with his father, the loss of his mother has been very difficult. Pharaoh is also open about exploring his gender identity and being a part of the LGBTQ community.

For the most part, Pharaoh is positive and upbeat, but shared that some days it was a struggle just to get out of bed. The art therapy workshop came along at a very good time. Pharaoh loved participating in the sessions, saying he got to meet new people and he liked that it was “a different way to express myself.” After a very tough year academically the year his mother died where he earned only two credits, he recently learned from Drake that he gained enough credits this year to be promoted to the 10th grade! Congrats to you, Pharaoh!



CIS STUDENT WINS Do The Write Thing Contest

CIS 8th grader (now rising 9th) Briell Taylor is headed to Washington, D.C. in July, courtesy of the Do The Write Thing (DTWT) Essay Challenge! Briell is one of only two Grand Prize winners in the CMS district, out of nearly 1,000 students who participated this year.

The contest is a partnership between Mecklenburg County's Community Support Services (CSS) and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD), held annually for middle school students in CMS, and students in other school districts across the country. The theme focuses on how youth violence and drug abuse impacts young lives, and encourages participants to use the contest as an outlet to express their ideas and emotions on this vital topic.

CIS has always supported the contest and this year, CIS staff submitted essays from nearly 300 students. Two students from each participating school are selected as local winners - then two from the entire district are selected to attend the national event in Washington.

Briell and her mom, along with Briell's CIS Site Coordinator Michael Clark, will travel to Washington to be recognized with the other Grand Prize winners from across the country.



Briell (center) with Stacy Lowry, Director of Mecklenburg County Community Support Services, and Lt. Stephen Flatt, Division Commander with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.

Briell attended Coulwood Middle School and will be a freshman at Phillip O. Berry this fall. Mr. Clark said Briell is an excellent student and a positive, outgoing young lady who is "always looking for the next challenge." We believe it! Congrats to you, Briell!

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Midwood Smokehouse
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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING at Ashley Park

Social-Emotional Learning, or “SEL”, is a buzz word in education these days; however, providing SEL programming for students is not new for CIS – it has always been a cornerstone of our program. But the need to offer SEL support became an even greater priority for CIS and took on a heightened focus this past school year.

Many national studies and our own student/family assessment surveys confirmed that the long periods of isolation and trauma due to the pandemic has impacted students’ stress levels, mental health, and social-emotional development. The natural development of these important life skills by interacting with peers and adults in the school setting was lost during remote instruction. Students fell behind not only academically, but in their social-emotional development as well.

To support our students in this crucial area of development, our staff received additional training, materials, and best-practices for offering evidence-based SEL programming for different ages/stages of development. They then implemented activities/programs at their school based on their school’s and students’ needs.

At Ashley Park K-8 School, CIS Site Coordinator Phyllis Cunningham arranged for SYDKIMYL, an educational consulting group, to offer weekly SEL workshops for her 6th grade students for the fall (2021) semester. The students were enjoying it and getting so much out of it that she extended it through the spring and added her 7th and 8th graders as well. Two of Cunningham’s students (below) shared what they learned and enjoyed most about the SYDKIMYL sessions.



CIS Site Coordinator Phyllis Cunningham with students Melanna and Calvin.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

The process by which people acquire and apply the knowledge, attitude, and skills to:

- recognize and manage emotions
- set and achieve positive goals
- appreciate the perspectives of others
- establish and maintain positive relationships
- make responsible decisions.



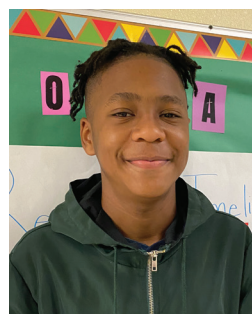
MELANNA

On a recent visit to Ashley Park, Melanna stood out during the SYDKIMYL workshop. She was very engaged and raised her hand often to respond to questions posed by the counselor. Animated and bubbly, Melanna clearly enjoyed participating in the group session.

“It’s cool,” said Melanna, when asked about SYDKIMYL. “I like the different lessons. I’m learning a lot and also how to make new choices.”

Melanna has been in CIS with Ms. Cunningham for three years now. She said Ms. Cunningham helps her by “giving me small talks and checking on my grades.”

Melanna likes school and was glad to return to in-person learning. Her favorite subject is science, and she’s on the cheerleading squad. She’s not sure about a career yet, but said she might want to be a chef! She shared that her current goals for the school year were to “become a better me” and “make it to the 8th grade.” CIS is happy to report that she did and is now a rising 8th grader at Ashley Park!



CALVIN

Calvin comes across as a young man of few words, but he said he’s found someone he can talk to in his CIS Site Coordinator, Ms. Cunningham.

“She’s a good person. You can talk to her about anything and she will help you with anything,” said Calvin.

Being at home during the pandemic was hard for Calvin. He hated staying in the house all the time and virtual learning did not work well for him. He was glad when in-person school resumed, but was having trouble adjusting, including some frustration and anger issues. Ms. Cunningham has helped him use writing as a way to process his emotions, and she knew the SYDKIMYL workshops would support Calvin in this area of his social-emotional development as well.

About the SYDKIMYL workshops, Calvin said one session that really stood out to him was the one on Empathy. He also shared that “it’s a chill place to come to, and it’s a learning place. You also get to talk about how you are feeling.”

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Bruns Avenue
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Devonshire
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
Alexander Graham
Cochrane / iMeck (6-12)
Coulwood
Eastway
James Martin
Martin Luther King, Jr.
McClintock
Quail Hollow
Ranson
Sedgefield
Whitewater
Wilson

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East Mecklenburg
Garinger
Harding
Hopewell
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