

Communities In Schools Brief History

The history of CIS of the Midlands dates back to 1986 when a diverse, five partner collaboration consisting of the Junior League, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice, Richland One School District and the Solicitor's Office joined together to address the dropout epidemic in Columbia.

During this time, several members of the partnership who were familiar with Cities In Schools in Atlanta suggested the concept be brought to Columbia. In October of 1986, community representatives from Columbia went to Atlanta to review the Cities In Schools concept. After hearing about the program during a meeting in January of 1987, the Richland One school board approved a feasibility study for the project. That spring, the Junior League Board approved a motion to fund a Project Director position, for one year, to start building the foundation for Cities In Schools Columbia.

In August of 1987 Rick Noble was selected to be the Executive Director for Cities In Schools Columbia, and on November 6 of that year, CIS Columbia officially became the 23rd Cities In Schools program in the nation. That March, Five Points High School opened its doors at the recreation center in Martin Luther King Park. The next year, through a partnership with Richland One, SCANA and DSS, Five Points High School moved into its own building. Over time, a change in the national model resulted in CIS partnering with schools, rather than competing with them, to surround students with a community of support, and empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

In the year before CIS's founding (1986), the family court system became overloaded with cases related to truancy because of a new, strict statewide educational policy that had recently been enacted. After a short time, family court judges began pleading with the school systems and the community to deal with the truancy problem once and for all. With support from the Junior League, a small group of concerned citizens from Columbia traveled to Atlanta to learn more about a successful program that kept students in school called Cities In Schools (CIS). Lead by Francis McMeekin, the group took back to Columbia what they had learned and developed Cities In Schools-Columbia (CIS).

In May of 1987, Richland County School District One (RSD1) approved a partnership with CIS that would eventually lead to the first two CIS-Columbia sites. Executive Director Rick Noble was hired in August of 1987 to initiate the program and in March of 1988, the first CIS program was underway, Five Points High, which opened at Martin Luther King Park with the partnership of RSD1, SCANA and South Carolina Department of Social Services. Later that year, funds were provided to initiate the CIS Burger King Academy at C.R. Neal School. The first graduation of CIS students was in May of that year.

In 1991 two more CIS-Columbia partnerships were formed, Epworth Children's Home and the Department of Juvenile Justice. Both programs were initiated by the respective institutions because of the success of the two other programs. Epworth Children's Home served kindergarten through eighth graders, while DJJ served sixth through twelfth grades.

In the years that followed a large public awareness campaign in 1991 and 92, many events took place which furthered the success and expansion of CIS. In 1994, the first student from the Five Points School,

Wayne Simmons, graduated from college and in 1995, the first student from the CIS C.R.Neal program, Jermaine Singletary, graduated from college. That same year, Barbara Weston, a Five Points teacher, received the Miliken Foundation Education Award.

Cities In School changed its name to Communities In Schools in 1996 shortly after welcoming its second Executive Director, Joan Fail Hoffman. In 1997, the Rhittie Gettone Leading By Example scholarship was created in honor of the hard work and dedication of its first Development Director. The scholarship was endowed with a \$10,000 contribution to ensure ongoing funds can be provided for CIS students. CIS/DJJ Lead Teacher, Tim Bunch, was named Coordinator of CIS programs for DJJ.

In 1998, The Bobby J. Jacobs scholarship in memory of one of our students was established for future CIS students. Later that year, after a review of the organization by the national Quality and Standards Team, Communities In Schools-Columbia was awarded Charter Organization Status by the National CIS.

In 1999, Richland County Council moved CIS funding into the non-discretionary category. After CIS celebrated 10 years of graduates from its own schools, the program implemented the first whole-school model inside Hand Middle School and A.C. Flora High School and changed its name to Communities In Schools of the Midlands to increase the potential to partner with both Richland and Lexington counties.

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In 2000, CIS of the Midlands was awarded \$462,682 from the SC Department of Social Services to establish after school programs in five schools. This grant allowed CIS to expand into three new districts: Lexington One and Two and Richland Two. The first Case Management models opened in after school programs at Crayton, E. L. Wright, Gilbert, Pine Ridge Middle Schools and Pelion High School. Site Coordinators were hired for each site. In October of that year, four additional case management models opened at Cyril B. Busbee, Dent, Sandhills and W. G. Sanders. This expansion created an additional partnership with Lexington Four.

In 2001, a Project Director was hired to coordinate the Site Coordinators and provide program development and oversight. These programs ran successfully until 2003, when the after school grant was eliminated. CIS restructured and attempted to convert the after school programs to the Whole School model through numerous small grants. Staffing was restructured which required laying off some staff and assigning the remaining staff to 2 or more schools. During the 2003-2004 year, it was determined that skill sets for staff working in after school programs and whole school programs were not easily transferable. Sites in Lexington County were closed as staff resigned and funding was not available to continue services. A grant for \$59,000 was awarded from SC DAODAS to continue the Whole School model and add a family support program, Families and Schools Together (FAST) at E.L. Wright and Dent Middle Schools, which allowed the continuation of services to Richland School District Two. The Learning Center at Olympia was opened which incorporated the C.R. Neal and Five Points schools as well as the W.A. Perry Bridges program.

In 2004, Communities In Schools of the Midlands welcomed its third Executive Director, Terry L. Linder, who had previously served as the Director of Programs and Evaluation for the organization. That same year, the organization received a grant from the Nord Foundation to undertake a strategic planning process to create a plan to navigate challenges and opportunities that had occurred over the past two years. Anne Sinclair was hired to facilitate the process, which resulted in a new mission statement, vision and set of goals for the future. CIS of the Midlands' board determined that the organization would be a mobilizer of existing community resources into schools so that students can learn, stay in school and succeed in life. Later that year, a partnership with IBM brought e-mentoring to the young men at the CIS school at SC DJJ. IBM provided laptops for the students and SCDJJ connected them to the internet so that they could be mentored by retired and current IBM employees using a curriculum based mentoring program designed for IBM. Tim Bunch, lead teacher of the program at DJJ, was named to the USA Today's 2004 All-USA Teacher Team for his efforts.

In 2005, a new three-year grant was received from DAODAS to continue programming at E.L. Wright and Dent Middle Schools and communities resources continued to be identified and matched into the Olympia Learning Center (OLC) and Barnes Learning Center at Epworth. A partnership with the Columbia Youth Commission resulted in 14 Lunch Buddies for students and the Columbia Museum of Art and Junior Achievement brought programs to OLC. A new multi-year MOA was signed with SC DJJ to expand the school into a live/learn holistic program serving incarcerated youth.

2006 saw the revitalization of a partnership with Midlands Technical College's Human Services department which resulted in a number of long term interns serving in the core office and as Site Coordinator assistants in the schools. CIS of the Midlands led the formation of a partnership between 5 other agencies, Girl Scouts, EdVenture, Community Mediation Center, Eau Claire Health Cooperative and Capital Senior Center to submit and receive a three year grant which would bring 10 AmeriCorps VISTAs to the community to address the issue of poverty in the Midlands.

In 2007 Beth DeHart was hired as the new Director of Programs and Evaluation. Numerous three-year grants were written which resulted in funding for full-time Success Coaches at E.L. Wright and Dent Middle School. An expanded partnership with the Olympia Learning Center resulted in the funds to support a full-time Site Coordinator at that site. This moved the organization closer to reaching its goal of one full-time Site Coordinator per site.

During 2008-2009, CIS of the Midlands was selected to be one of 17 CIS affiliates to be involved with the new CIS Total Quality System (TQS) national certification program with a goal of being fully certified by December, 2009. To facilitate meeting the TQS requirements, CIS National awarded us a \$25,000 sustainability grant.

In 2009-2010, due to the economic situation, grant and government funding were reduced leading to the elimination of The Olympia Learning Center Site. Staff worked to replace those funding sources with serve students while remaining true to the CIS Model. In November 2009, CIS National notified CIS of

the Midlands that it had met all TQS standards as a fully certified organization, one of the first two in the country. E. L. Wright was awarded the designation of Comprehensive Site under the national standards.

In 2010-11, thanks to accreditation efforts, Communities In Schools was awarded a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. This allowed CIS of the Midlands to expand to five new sites in Richland County School District One.