



Student Support Specialist Update February 2016

Thanks to your generous support, over 2,000 students in kindergarten through sixth-grade who attend four area schools are receiving wraparound services that are proven to help keep them in school and graduate on time.

We are halfway through the school year and I wanted to share with you some of what the Student Support Specialists have achieved at Emma Elementary, Estes Elementary, Johnston Elementary and Eblen Intermediate schools.

In 2011, Children First/CIS became – and since has continued to be - an accredited affiliate of Communities In Schools. This means that each year we meet rigorous Total Quality Standards (TQS) requirements. These requirements help ensure the fidelity of the program as well as the fiscal health of the organization.

At the national level, Communities In Schools is constantly striving to improve services and delivery. This year, Communities In Schools unveiled TQS 2.0. Communities In Schools has identified four target areas that are proven to improve student outcomes: **Attendance, Behavior, Coursework and Parent Involvement (known as ABC+P)**. Under TQS 2.0, the majority of services delivered by the Student Support Specialists fall into these categories.



Attendance

Simply put, children do not learn when they are not in the classroom. This is particularly critical for children living in poverty, who do not have the resources at home to make up for lost time in the classroom. Our Student Support Specialists address challenges that might cause a student to miss school – for example, lack of adequate clothing, transportation, or parent involvement. At Johnston Elementary School, Student Support Specialist Courtney Crenshaw created an attendance award system to incentivize school attendance.

“We know how crucial it is to emphasize the importance of attendance, especially at such a young age, which is why we were excited to see how proud the students were about their awards, especially the youngest students.”

Courtney Crenshaw, Student Support Specialist at Johnston Elementary



Behavior

Each trip to the principal's office means an average of 45 minutes out of class. If a student is suspended, it is even longer. Being out of school means falling behind on course work, which impacts a student's chances for later success. Two of our SSS are trained in the Compassionate Schools initiative that benefits all students and focuses specifically on students chronically exposed to stress and trauma in their lives. The goal is to keep students engaged and learning by creating and supporting a healthy climate and culture within the school where all students can learn.

The Compassionate Schools initiative includes ongoing staff education led by our SSS in conjunction with the school Social Worker. One area of focus is the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES), which is used to identify trauma that students have experienced. In this way, *all* adults in the school are empowered to direct students to the SSS or inform the SSS of concerns they might have.

Additionally, the SSS work with students in small groups to help improve behavioral outcomes. For example, at Eblen Intermediate, SSS work with small groups of young women to discuss positive body image, bullying prevention and positive peer support networks.

Elliott's first week of kindergarten was troubling. He used swear words and foul language with his teachers. He was unable to follow basic instructions. He slept through the majority of his classes. That is, if he even made it to school - he was often late or absent. Fortunately for Elliot, his behavior caught the attention of the SSS, who made a home visit. She identified some key areas that could help Elliot, including creating a daily schedule and pairing Elliot with a mentor. Our SSS reports that Elliot is now completing his school work on-time, he is making new friends, and his self-esteem has risen exponentially.



Course Work

Students who fall behind on course work quickly become academically disengaged, increasing their chances of dropping out of school early. The SSS work closely with school administrators to create programs and interventions aimed at raising academic performance. For example, at Johnston Elementary, the school improvement goals predominantly surround academic improvement, including increasing proficiency in reading and in math. When SSS Courtney Crenshaw coordinates services for the school, she asks herself three questions: "What can I do to help this school? Are these services going to be effective? How do they integrate with the school improvement plan?"

SSS Lisa Barlow is particularly excited about a new Reading Buddies program made possible through a partnership with Congregations for Children. This evidence-based program paired 14 extensively trained

volunteers with a 3rd grade student who struggles with reading. Since implementation, reading buddies have been meeting for a minimum of 30 minutes twice per week, and will continue to meet until the end of the school year.

At Johnston Elementary School, most of the school improvement goals are focused on improving proficiency in reading and math. Using the school improvement goals, Courtney Crenshaw, Student Support Specialist at Johnston Elementary, asks herself, “What services can I coordinate to help students achieve positive academic outcomes?”

Antonio’s teacher was very concerned about his school performance. As a 1st grade student, he performed far below grade level on all measures. Antonio’s teacher reached out to his mom who was then connected to a SSS. Our SSS was able to review Antonio’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) and realized that his IEP did not accurately reflect his needs in the classroom. The SSS advocated on Antonio’s behalf for a new IEP. Antonio’s new IEP reclassified him as developmentally delayed, a change that will ensure he receives the help he needs, both inside and outside the classroom. to be academically successful.



Parent Engagement

The importance of parent engagement cannot be overemphasized. Regardless of income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher level programs, pass their classes, have better social skills, graduate high school, and go on to postsecondary education.

This year, SSS Lisa Barlow began “Check and Connect” at Emma Elementary and Eblen Intermediate schools. This evidence-based program involves a 5-10 minute weekly check in with each student on her caseload. She then checks in with each student’s parent to see if there is anything they need to help their child be successful. She connects the parent to community resources necessary to fulfill those needs. This model of sustained intervention has been proven to keep kids in school and on track to graduation, and dramatically decreases tardiness as well as truancy.

Katie is a kindergarten student who SSS Lisa Barlow checks in with weekly as part of the new “Check and Connect” program. During a check-in last December, Lisa learned that her family’s hot water heater had been broken all fall. Lisa was able to coordinate enough community resources to purchase Katie’s family a new hot water heater and have it installed. Katie, who had been bathing in lukewarm water heated on the stove all fall, was able to have a warm bath just days after Lisa found out about her family’s predicament. Lisa was also able to bring Katie a basket of bubble bath, shampoo and toys to help her re-acclimate to taking baths. Now when Katie sees Lisa in school, she runs up to Lisa saying, “Ms. Lisa, Ms. Lisa! Smell my hair!”

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Says Lisa, “I witnessed a transformation. Not only has this water heater helped Katie’s family to be healthier, it has also given Katie pride and confidence, **both of which help her focus in the classroom**. This is such a great example of how the Student Support Specialists can improve a child’s academic and social outcomes. It is remarkable what happens when the community comes together to support our children.”

Staff Update

Children First/Communities in Schools is proud to welcome Blair Simmons, our new Student Support Specialist at Estes Elementary School. Blair is an Asheville native who has her Master’s degree in Child and Family Studies. She has worked in the field of supporting children and families since she was 15-years old and her passion for advocating for children continues to grow each year.



Blair is excited to implement ABC+P at Estes Elementary, specifically the Parent Engagement portion. She is looking forward to engaging parents who have distanced themselves from the school in the past for a variety of reasons. She plans to get to know the community through a combination of outreach and parents workshops. Says Blair, “Every child, no matter what, deserves the chance to succeed. What I’ve seen in my work is that, a lot of times, parents don’t know how to serve their children best in day to day functioning. I hope to empower families to find what it is they are great at and do more of that. And if there are places for improvement, I want to support them as they learn how to help their children to the best of their abilities.”

Welcome, Blair!



2 SCHOOL
DISTRICTS
SERVED



4
SCHOOLS
SERVED



2000

TOTAL POPULATION
OF STUDENTS IN THOSE SCHOOLS

619

TOTAL NUMBER
OF STUDENTS
REACHED BY SCHOOL-WIDE
SUPPORTS



84

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS RECEIVING
TARGETED/INTENSIVE
SUPPORTS



76

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS RECEIVING
TARGETED/INTENSIVE SUPPORTS WITH AN
ATTENDANCE GOAL



24

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS RECEIVING
TARGETED/INTENSIVE SUPPORTS WITH A
BEHAVIORAL GOAL



92

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS RECEIVING
TARGETED/INTENSIVE SUPPORTS WITH A
CCOURSEWORK GOAL