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An Examination of the Impact That Communities In Schools' Interventions Make On High School Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT

The following study seeks to answer the question: What impact does a local

Communities In Schools (CIS), a nationwide dropout prevention program, affiliate's

interventions have on a high school student's academic performance, absenteeism, and

completion rates? To do this, the study examines the grade point average, absenteeism

rate, and completion rate of 1298 students across four years of existing data from a local

school district. For comparison purposes, the study uses a quasi-experimental approach

and breaks the data into four groups: two experimental groups (At-Risk CIS students and

Not-At-Risk CIS students) and two control groups (At-Risk students and Not-At-Risk

students). To calculate the above variables for the four groups, two-sample *t*-tests were

conducted for grade point average and absenteeism, while a cross tabulation analysis was

conducted to compare the completion rate of the four groups. Findings report that At-

Risk students who received CIS services at one or more points during their high school

career experience an average increase of 6.6% in their grade point averages, there was

virtually no difference in absenteeism between those At-Risk students who received CIS

services and those who did not, and there was virtually no change in the completion rate

of At-Risk students who received CIS services and those who did not.

An Examination of the Impact That Communities In Schools' Interventions Make On

High School Academic Performance

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Science in Social Work

By

Coleton Cooper Dean Spruill

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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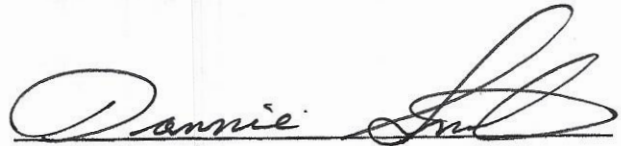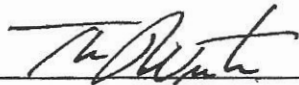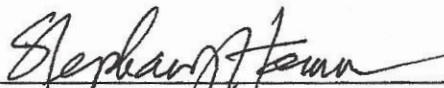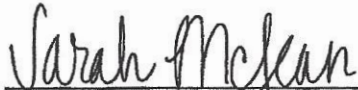Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

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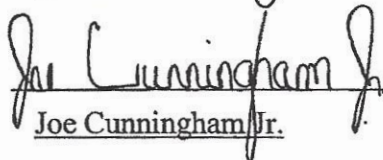_____

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This thesis is dedicated to the Spruill family.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important aspects in the secondary school system is high school graduation: a ceremony following the completion of one's education throughout their time in the education system. At graduation, an individual receives their secondary school diploma, a tool that opens doors to higher education or employment in the work force. A countless number of students strive to achieve the feat of graduating from secondary school each year, but not all do.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) there are 50.7 million students in the United States public education system alone. Of those 50.7 million, 15.7 million are currently enrolled in grades nine through twelve (National Center Education Statistics, 2017). If this were a perfect world, each of those 50.7 million students would one day achieve the goal of graduating, but that is realistically and statistically an improbable goal. In the real world, the road to graduation is riddled with obstacles of varying size and structure.

Spanning a range of anything from learning disabilities to family crises, any number of obstacles can deter students on their climb towards graduation. Often, there is no easy solution to the obstacles students face in their educational journey. For example, racial narratives and stereotypes of failure have been observed as obstacles that promote stagnation and deter any drive for young black Americans to attempt to thrive in the school system (Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017). With our youth facing a range of

challenges, society's overall desire to invest in support programs and dropout prevention is strong (Bloom, 2010). Despite the desire being there, it is often unclear which route society should take when directing its resources to ensure the best results (Bloom, 2010).

One particular way schools and society have answered this question is through the development of dropout prevention programs (Dropout Prevention Act, 2001, Sec. 1442). One such program is Communities In Schools, or CIS. Bill Milliken founded CIS in early 1977. CIS is a dropout prevention program in which individuals, called Student Success Coaches, act as bridges towards relief for students who are at risk of dropping out or who are struggling in school. Overall, the program intervenes in students' lives by focusing on three major aspects of student success: behavior, academics, and attendance. Additionally, CIS is often a gateway to social services and basic needs such as food, supplies, and clothing for students in need Communities In Schools (CIS, 2017). Since its inception in the 1970s, CIS has grown from its roots in New York to serve 2,300 schools across 23 states and the District of Columbia (CIS, 2017). In West Texas, CIS is woven into all of the high schools and middle schools throughout the school district.

In a 2015 article on the cost of high school dropouts, the authors projected that the total cost to society will climb well into the trillions over the next decade (Rinka, Robertson, & Smith, 2015). With a high cost on the line, it is important to closely examine the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs. This study seeks to examine the effectiveness of CIS interventions as they relate to graduation rates. To do this, this study compares two differing populations' completion rate, academic performance, and attendance data across the cohorts' years in high school (2012-2016) using statistical analysis. The population will be broken down into four groups: Group 1, consisting of a

sample of previous at-risks students who received services from CIS; Group 2, consisting of Not-At-Risk students who received services; and Groups 3 and 4, which are control groups of At-Risk students and Not-At-Risk students that did not receive services. The data analyzed within the study was collected from a West Texas 5A high school. This research attempts to investigate the following questions:

- Do At-Risk students who are receiving services improve in their overall academic performance?

- Is there a difference in graduation rates between At-Risk students who receive services and those who do not?

- Lastly, can CIS interventions be related to graduation rates?

This study utilizes several defined terms throughout. Some of these terms are included below for reference:

- **Dropout**: In Texas, a dropout is a student who is enrolled in public school in Grade 7-12, does not return to public school in Grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, receive a General Educational Development certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die (Texas Education Agency, 2017)

- **Dropout Rate**: The dropout rate is an annual percentage of students who drop out of school during one school year (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

- **Graduation:** Conferral or receipt of an academic degree or diploma marking completion of studies (Graduation, 2016).

- **At-Risk Student**: A student is at risk of dropping out of school if they are under the age of twenty, one who meets one or more of thirteen criteria which are expanded on within the literature review (Texas Education Agency. 2017).

- **Ethnicity**: A method individuals use to identify into a group based on heritage, people, and nation (Gindro, & Moore, 2003).

- **Socioeconomic Status:** A combination of one's education, income, and occupation.

- **Poverty:** An individual's lack of essential material such as shelter, food, drinking water, and funding (Socioeconomic Status, 2001).

- **Mentoring:** An activity or type of relationship that exists between two or more individuals interested in advancing their knowledge or skills in a helping fashion (National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2017).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section is a review of the literature that covers national and regional dropout disparity in the United States, factors that contribute to the dropout rate, the development of dropout intervention programs, and an overview of some interventions that are being used today. Portions of the literature review focus on regional data from Texas and specific information concerning Communities in Schools.

In order to examine the conversation of the literature review and inform the research, the following databases were utilized: ERIC and EBSCOhost. In addition to this, ACU One Search was consulted, and the following keywords comprised the majority of the searches: "High School Graduation," "Dropout Rates," "At-Risk Students," "Unaccompanied Student," "Student Success," "Academic Interventions For Students," "Behavioral Interventions For Students," "Attendance Intervention For Students," "High School Students," and "High School Education."

The Dropout Situation

Throughout the United States educational system's history, individuals have failed to complete the varying grade levels. Over time, the rate of students who exit the public school system has varied, but an overall positive trend has emerged over the first twentieth century with graduation rates rising from six percent to eighty percent (Murnane, 2013). Inversely, the dropout rates have seen a decline over the past century.

Still, the students who exit the public school system are a chief concern for society as a whole. The individuals who chose to leave the public school system prior to completion are referred to as "dropouts," and the overall rate of a student becoming a dropout composes the "dropout rate." Despite an upward trend in graduation rates, there are areas within the dropout rate that are concerning. Most specifically, Pharris-Ciurej, Hirschman, and Willhoft report that high school students who fail to return for their sophomore year do so because of poor academic performance during their freshman year (2012).

The National Center for Education Statistics defines the high school dropout rate as the percentage of sixteen to twenty four year olds who are no longer enrolled in schools and have not earned a secondary school diploma or an equivalent, such as a General Education Diploma (GED) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) the dropout rate is a mandatory percentage that is to be calculated each year throughout the nation's different education agencies in each of the fifty states (Texas Education Association (TEA), 2017).

There are several consequences that occur on an individual level and on a societal level when a student opts to remove himself/herself from the school system. Some of the more tragic individual effects a student faces after removing themselves from a school system include: the possibility of earning lower wages than individuals with diplomas, increased likelihood to require public assistance, increased likelihood to be incarcerated, and likelihood to die at a younger age (Olson, 2006). For example, in 2003, secondary school graduates earned 34% more on average than their dropout counterparts (Olson, 2006). In March of 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that secondary

school dropouts earned $8,000 less than secondary school graduates annually and $26,500 dollars less than college graduates annually (Alliance For Excellent Education, 2017). Over a lifetime, a secondary school dropout earns $260,000 less than a secondary school graduate (Communities In Schools, 2017).

In addition to heavy individual costs, there is larger cost to society as well. As individuals earn less, the gap between income classes grows larger and larger, the overall pool of taxable revenue decreases, the cost of health care increases, and the cost of social welfare programs like Medicare and Medicaid increases (Jordan, Kostandini, & Mykerezi, 2012). To cover the needs of society, social programs like Medicare and Medicaid consumed 25% of the federal budget in 2016. Overall, the cost of Medicare itself is expected to rise by 2.5% over the next ten years as more Americans, including high school dropouts, enter the system (Cubanski & Neuman, 2017). In 2007, the American Psychological Association predicted that over 12 million students will have dropped out between 2007-2017, which by their estimates cost the United States around three trillion dollars (American Psychological Association (APA), 2012). In a study conducted by CIS's national headquarters, the class of 2008 alone is estimated to cost the nation a staggering $319 billion in lost wages throughout their lifetimes (Communities In Schools, 2017).

As it stands, 70% of overall American secondary school students graduate in the expected amount of time. Despite this, only 57.8% of Hispanic and 55.3% of African-American students graduate in the expected amount of time (Amos, 2008). This disparity among races becomes apparent when compared to Caucasian students who on average graduate on time 77.6% of the time (Amos, 2008). As such, it would stand to reason that

current and future interventions/policies be implemented to serve these students and empower them to graduate.

The Dropout Rate In Texas

In Texas, the TEA defines dropout students in a way similar to the National Center for Education Statistics, except their definition adds the criteria of any student who does not continue school outside of the public school system, does not attend any two-year or four-year university, or dies (Texas Education Agency, 2017) Additionally, homelessness is a factor that relates to the high school dropout rate. In an article on the relationships between homelessness and high school graduation, the Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness states that homeless students graduate at a lower rate than their peers by 20% (52% compared to 72%) (Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, 2017).

In Texas, a student must meet one or more of the following criteria to be considered homeless:

1) Did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test throughout: prekindergarten, kindergarten or grades one, two, or three and did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year; 2) is in grades seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, or twelve and did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum (Language Arts, math, science, and social studies) during a semester in the preceding or current school year or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester; 3) was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more

school years; 4) did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student under Texas Education Code (TEC) Subchapter B, Chapter 39, and who has not in the previous or current school year subsequently performed on that instrument or another appropriate instrument at a level equal to at least 110 percent of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument; 5) is pregnant or a parent; 6) has been placed in an alternative education program in accordance with TEC §37.006 during the preceding or current school year; 7) has been expelled in accordance with TEC §37.007 during the preceding or current school year; 8) is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release; 9) was previously reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to have dropped out of school; 10) is of limited English proficiency, as defined by TEC §29.052; 11) is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or has, during the current school year, been referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court, or law enforcement official; 12) is homeless, as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, Title X, Part C, Section 725(2), the term "homeless children and youths," and its subsequent amendments; or 13) resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district, including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, or foster group home. (TEA, 2013, n.p.)

Over the past five years, the dropout rate for students either in or between grades nine through twelve has steadily decreased from 2.4% of the overall student population to

2.0% of the population. In 2010-2011, 2.4% of the student population represented 32,833 students out of 1,394,523 students (Texas Education Agency, 2012). However, the above statistics only represent the students who dropped out in or between grades nine through twelve. If the lens is widened to include students in or between grades seven through twelve, the number of students who have dropped out increases to 34,363 out of 2,122,414 (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

Of the students that dropped out between grades nine through twelve, 7,128 of them were African-American, 209 were American Indian, 389 of them were Asian, 45 were Pacific Islander, and 287 were of mixed race. The largest demographic represented in the dropout rate are Hispanics with 20,736 Hispanic students dropping out within the 2010-2011 schoolyear. Lastly, 5,569 Caucasian Americans dropped out during the 2010-2011 schoolyear. Of those who dropped out, 20,238 students were targeted as economically disadvantaged. Lastly, a total of 19,201 male students and 15,162 female dropped out of the public school system (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

In the TEA's latest data on 2015-2016 graduates, a positive trend begins to emerge. In 2015-2016, 2.0% of the student population between grades nine through twelve dropped out of Texas public schools. That 2.0% represents 30,683 out of 1,537,216 students in last year's cohort. If students in or between grades seven through twelve are included, the number of students who have dropped out increases to 33,466 out of 2,330, 946 (Texas Education Agency, 2017). This brings the dropout percentage to 1.4%. In 2015-2016, the demographics for the total dropout rate included African-American, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Caucasian students.

Overall, 22,545 of these students are considered by the TEA to be economically

disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

From this data, one can observe that the dropout rate in Texas correlates largely

with ethnically diverse students and those from a lower economic background. Overall,

Texas seems to be experiencing an increase of graduation rates among the school

districts. The question as to why this is occurring is difficult to answer. Many aspects

such as parenting style, shifts in demographics, school interventions, and education

policies factor into the graduation rate. Still, from the above data, one can observe a

downward trend of .4% in the total number of students that have dropped out within the

last five years (Texas Education Agency, 2017). While Hispanics and African-Americans

comprise the largest percentage of the Texas dropout rate, their margins have decreased

by a total of 393 Hispanic students, and 738 African-American students (Texas Education

Agency, 2017). Despite this positive trend, these two populations remain Texas's most

vulnerable populations within the dropout data. Overall, TEA's data reports Texas

dropouts from an objective, unbiased, third-party standpoint. One weakness of the data is

that it does not list causation. Without causation it is often difficult to pinpoint areas

where intervention is most needed.

Factors That Influence the Decision to Drop Out

Dropping out of public secondary schools is often a difficult and life-altering

choice that several students face each year. Ultimately, there is no one single reason why

students chose to drop out, instead there are several factors that can influence a student's

decision to drop out. Common risk factors include academic deficiencies, insufficient

social services, and unmet basic health needs like food, clothing, and transportation

(Communities In Schools, 2017). Oftentimes, however, the decision to drop out is influenced by factors outside of the student's control. These factors are referred to by Barry and Reschly (2012) as *unalterable factors,* while other factors are referred to as *alterable factors* (McLean, 2016). Often, it is the alterable factors, which are learned traits and behaviors, such as academic performance, attendance, and behavior that are targeted to change.

Unalterable Factors

These are factors that are often immovable and out of the student's control, such as the student's ethnicity and socioeconomic status (McLean, 2016). Often there is not much that can be done to alter these aspects of students' lives; still, because these factors impact students who are largely at risk to drop out of school, it is important to consider them when serving and intervening with students.

Ethnicity. As previously mentioned, Hispanics and African Americans graduate at lower rates than their Caucasian counterparts. Amos, author of the 2008 study on the relationship between the nation's economy and secondary school diplomas, calculated that Caucasian Americans graduate 77.6% of the time, while Hispanics graduate at 57.8%, and African Americans graduate 55.3% of the time. However a similar study conducted in 2016 assessed the graduation data of 684 public and private schools. In their study, authors Wood, Kiperman, Esch, Leroux, and Truscott found that when compared with Caucasian students, the African-American graduation rate was not statistically significant (2017). Instead, the Hispanic population emerged as statistically significant with a much higher probability to drop out of the public school system (Wood, et al, 2017).

Unfortunately, it appears race has been a longstanding issue that has plagued graduation rates throughout the American public school's history. In a report, author Miyoshi B Juergensen gathered African-American educators' ideas for improving secondary school graduation rates from the 1920-1940s. In his report, makes it clear that African-American educators were focused on propelling African-American students to new heights. In their approach, these educators focused on three primary issues: adjusting the school day to fit students' needs, differentiating the curriculum to encourage participation, and restructuring school programs to emphasize the completion of schools. (Juergensen, 2015). Despite these efforts and more, the race problem still persists within the country today.

Socioeconomic status. Another unalterable factor is socioeconomic status, the status and opportunities that wealth and social standing provide an individual. In the education system, students of lower socioeconomic status are referred to as "economically disadvantaged." According to the TEA, economically disadvantaged students are students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the national school lunch and Child Nutrition Program (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Tragically, these students are largely at risk to contribute to the dropout rate.

According to the American Psychological Association, poverty has a high impact on graduation rates. Oftentimes, dropouts stem from the lower socioeconomic classes, and as such, they can face difficult economic situations. In addition to bleak economic situations, family poverty is associated largely with food insecurity, drug abuse, and a variety of other debilitating issues (Rumberger, 2013). Often these factors culminate in extra stress on the student and can push an individual to drop out.

Additionally, the effect of socioeconomic impact is exacerbated by America's school districts being segregated by income. In his study, Rumberger found that nine percent of all secondary school students attend poverty-stricken secondary schools (Rumberger, 2013). This factor ties in greatly to the above unalterable factor of race. In that same study, 21% of African Americans and Hispanics attended high-poverty schools. To emphasize the disparity among the races that same study found that only two percent of Whites and seven percent of Asians attended these secondary schools (Rumberger, 2013).

Alterable Factors

While unalterable factors persist and are often unchangeable through interventions or social support, alterable factors are quite different. These factors are often learned behaviors that can be altered over time through intervention and attention. The following are alterable factors that have the ability to affect school performance.

Attendance. Attendance is a critical factor that impacts a student's overall performance. If a student is not attending school or classes regularly, it is difficult for that student to perform well academically. If a student falls too far behind, the challenge of completing school and succeeding in school becomes incredibly difficult; thus, the temptation to drop out becomes greater. In a study conducted by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium in 2011, poor attendance at the middle school level stood out as a predictive factor of whether or not the student would graduate at the secondary school level. Through the use of linear regression, the team calculated that students with chronic absences, meaning students that accrued twenty or more absences, would reduce from 34.2% to 18.6% in their graduation rate over their middle school career (Baltimore

Education Research Consortium, 2011). Despite this downward trend, the team's linear regression predicted that 1,084 students within that particular Baltimore's class of 2015 would be at risk for dropping out due to chronic absences (Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011). In certain cases, transportation can play a key factor in a student's absenteeism. As such, legislation has been passed in the McKinney-Vento Act, which assists homeless and special need students in acquiring transportation (Texas Education Agency, 2006).

Behavior. In addition to attendance, poor and disruptive behavior can cultivate a difficult path to graduation. Often times, students who behave in such a way receive a variety of disciplinary actions. If they are unresponsive to these interventions, their actions can hinder their academic performance (Lynch, Kistner, & Allan, 2014). In their article, Finn, Fish, and Scott (2008) establish the negative impact of misbehavior on graduation and dropout rates with 64.6%, 27.1%, 8.3% of the individuals in their study who did not graduate high school reported having experienced a low, intermediate, and high amount, respectively, of serious misbehavior.

Additionally, in a study conducted in 2011, a team from Florida State University's psychology department researched the relationship between disruptive behaviors, gender, and secondary school graduation rates. Throughout their study, the team surveyed 745 students with disruptive behaviors, 47% percent of which were male and 53% of which were female. After gathering their data, the team used a hierarchical linear regression to determine the strength of the correlation. In total, 354 of the 746 students were predicted to drop out. In their model, 54% of those that dropped out were male and 46% percent were female. This data suggests that males with disruptive behavior are more at risk of

dropping out than females who exhibit disruptive behavior (Lynch et al., 2014). When questioning whether gender was a factor that contributed to student behavior, the sample of male students with disruptive behaviors proved insignificant to the overall male population. However for females, the sample of female students with behavioral problems stood out as significant indicator when predicting future graduation rates.

Academic achievement. One of the hallmarks of a student's time in school is their legacy of achievement in the classroom. Whether poor or excellent, a student's effort in the classroom directly translates into their overall success as a student. If a student has poor academic achievement, they run the risk of failing classes. If a student fails too many classes, they can be forced to repeat the courses or not advance from one year to the next. In a longitudinal study conducted over five years in 1989, eighty percent of the males studied and seven percent of the females studied dropped out of secondary school before reaching the twelfth grade due to a multitude of factors. When surveyed about the factors that contributed to their dropping out, poor academic performance scored the largest with a mean score of 4.92 (Cairns, B. D., & Neckerman, 1989).

The Birth of Dropout Prevention Programs

The label "dropout" did not develop into a social norm until the early 1960s, when graduating from secondary school became the national norm for students (Gonzales, Kennedy, & Julien, 2009). Up until the early 1900s, receiving an education and graduating from secondary school was a rare opportunity. The opportunity for children to participate in a school system did not exponentially grow until child labor laws in the 1930s, such as the Walsh-Healey Act of 1936 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, produced fewer opportunities for corporations to employ children (Child

Labor Laws, 2009). With fewer students in the workplace, the public school system became a mainstay for children, and thus graduation rates rose. With secondary school graduation rates on the rise, secondary school dropout rates became a prevalent issue for our nation.

In an effort to combat the growing dropout rate, small dropout prevention programs began to emerge, but their scope and impact was too limited (Gonzales et al, 2009). Due to limited resources, limited funding, and limited impact on the dropout rate, the push for dropout prevention programs on the national and state levels began to dry up by the end of the 1960s. By the end of the 1970s and 1980s, the attention surrounding the dropout situation fell silent to other key issues of the time.

However, rising dropout rates and the status of American education would regain the spotlight in the early 1990s. In 1994 the status of American education pushed the Clinton administration to pass "Goals 2000: The Educate America Act," a legislative piece that sought a partnership between federal funds and state leadership to combat the rising needs of American education and American employment. Through this act, the government requested states to give/regulate fair and proper use of school to work programs, adult education programs (Civic Impulse, 2018). In his speech, President Clinton charged state bodies to approach the challenges of the American school system and assured them that federal funds would be there to support them in their efforts (Clinton, 1993). With this new-found partnership and federal funding in place, dropout prevention programs and new organizations, such as America's Promise, a pact between six nationally recognized community-based organization designed to provide a healthy start for children within the education system, gained momentum. The government's

efforts towards addressing the challenges of the public school system further expanded in 2001 with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, an act designed to level student achievement gaps by providing all students with an equal chance of success within the school system (No Child Left Behind, 2002). Together, these two pieces of legislation encouraged continued support of our nation's school system and established a standard for public and private schools to follow.

Communities In Schools

One of the dropout prevention programs fueled through these pieces of legislation is Communities In Schools. With its inception rooted in the early 1970s, Communities In Schools is one of the nation's oldest and longest-running dropout prevention programs. Its model centers on coordinating the efforts of CIS affiliates, Site Coordinators who case manage students at the varying campuses, and collaborative partners within the community to engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate in the lives of at-risk students.

Overall, the CIS model contains the following six steps: conducting a needs assessment, planning, selecting an intervention, implementing the intervention, monitoring and adjusting, and evaluating. In the needs assessment portion, the Site Coordinator engages with the student to discover the student's goals and aspirations for their life and academic career. In the second stage, planning, both student and Site Coordinator step into an area of planning feasible steps to obtaining the student's goal through three categories: the student's academics, the student's behavior, and the student's attendance (Communities In Schools, 2017). Once an established plan is in place, the CIS staff then introduces student support through a three-tiered program. The first level of support, titled a Tier 1 service, is a campus-wide service that supports the

students of the campus in their academic endeavors. The second, titled Tier 2 services, are targeted programs that support groups of students in a more individualized way. Lastly, Tier 3 services, are services that provide support on the individual student level. Together the three services tiers create a network of support for students as they strive to achieve their goals throughout the year. The fourth step, monitoring and adjusting, is a vital step that informs both the student and Site Coordinator on how effective the plan established in step two has been and if any alterations are needed for it. The final step in the process, evaluation, allows for the Site Coordinator and the student to reflect on their progress throughout the year, and report what achievements were accomplished.

Today, 164 CIS affiliates utilize this model to serve and empower students in 363 school districts and 2,400 K-12 campuses across the country (Communities In Schools, 2017).With its expansive growth and long tenure of serving the nation's students for forty years, CIS is and remains the nation's largest dropout prevention program (Communities In Schools, 2017).

Interventions

With the dropout situation clearly defined and dropout prevention programs in place, the key to making a difference in the lives of students becomes strategic interventions that encourage success. The National Dropout Prevention Center, the nation's leading dropout research center, identifies fifteen effective strategies to impact a student's decision to drop out. Under the Basic Strategies section of the list, authors Smink and Reimer (2005) list mentoring/tutoring, services learning opportunities, after school opportunities, and alternative schooling as the interventions that are consistently effective at impacting the dropout rate amongst the varying student age groups. In the

same list, the NDCP emphasizes community engagement, family engagement, and early literacy education as intentional areas that impact a student's academic success.

Mentoring falls under the tier three category as an academic service and is naturally implemented when serving students. Mentoring's importance can be found in CIS's founder Bill Milliken's quote on the subject: "Programs don't change children . . . relationships do" (Milliken, 2007, p.9).

Check and Connect. One intervention that relies on mentoring is called Check and Connect. In Check and Connect, a mentor, normally a case manager, monitors student absences, academic performance, and behavior in intentional, timely ways to aid students in navigating challenges. Overall, the mentor and student collaborate together for at least two years. Together, the process of checking in with the student and connecting with the student through mentorship forms the Check and Connect process. Serving CIS as a tier 3 service, Check and Connect reportedly decreased truancy, absenteeism, and dropout rates in at least six CIS affiliates. (Communities In Schools, 2017).

Other programs. In addition to mentoring, intentional improvement programs that target areas of development and provide space for natural relationships to flourish are integral to the CIS model. One service recently integrated throughout CIS is the Never Been Absent (NBA) program, an incentive-based program, in which students collaborate with CIS's faculty to set achievable attendance goals throughout the school year. If the student achieves their set goal, they are rewarded with an incentive and challenged to meet larger goals with larger incentives (Communities In Schools, 2017).

Simultaneously, students enrolled in the program are entered in a campus-wide raffle to win larger prizes. Due to its nature, Never Been Absent has elements of each tier of CIS services: the individual meetings classify as a Tier Three service, the group of students participating in the program can classify as Tier Two, and the campus-wide raffle can be classified as tier one services (Communities In Schools, 2017). In its first year of implementation, the two secondary schools surveyed within Communities In Schools of the Big Country area reported an 83% and 100% percent increase in attendance amongst 27 students in the program (Communities In Schools, 2017). However, the student data used throughout the study predates the implementation of this intervention by CIS of the Big Country.

Through these and other interventions, CIS affiliates have enjoyed success with their students. In 2016, *Brunswick News* of Brunswick, Georgia, reported that the local CIS affiliate saw a 7% increase in graduation rates for the 2014-2015 school year. The article attributes this increase to efforts made by CIS to increase academic support by surrounding students with supportive resources, interventions, and mentoring (Hall, 2016).

The effort to retain students in secondary schools dropout has been made for several years. It is a fight that is not easily won or easily defined. The cost of dropping out of secondary school has tremendous implications on both the individual and society. As such, dropout prevention programs were established to intervene and affect the dropout rate in positive ways. Today, Communities In Schools, the nation's leading dropout program targets students for improvement in three areas: academic, behavioral,

and attendance. By targeting these areas CIS aims to collaborate with the student in ways that bolster their academic improvement and reduce the nation's dropout rate.

In summation, the above literature suggests that dropping out of secondary school is a detrimental decision that affects the individual student and the country at large in both financial and socially. Additionally, the literature suggests that minority populations are at higher risk of dropping out of the secondary school system. Lastly, the literature suggests that increased attention through mentoring and intentional programming has an overall positive impact in reducing the dropout rate and increasing academic performance. As such, the question whether CIS's interventions reflect the above points of the literature. If so, how do CIS services effect the high school graduation rate? Do services have a positive or negative impact on grades and attendance? From the above literature this researcher hypothesized a total of six hypotheses to be either verified or unsupported by the study:

(1) Students who are at risk of dropping out have a lower grade point average than those students who are not-at-risk.

(2) At-risk students experience a higher amount of absenteeism than those students who are not-at-risk.

(3) At- risk students who receive CIS services have a higher grade point average than at risk students who do not receive CIS services.

(4) At-risk students who receive CIS services have a higher attendance rate than at risk students who do not receive services.

(5) At-risk students complete high school at a lower rate than students who are not-at-risk.

(6) At-risk students receiving CIS services complete high school at a higher rate than At-risk students who do not receive services.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In an effort to explore the success of CIS's interventions and their impact on

secondary school graduation, this study used a post-hoc quasi-experimental comparison

design to examine existing data from Abilene Independent School District (AISD) (White

& Sabarwal, 2014). Specifically, the existing data used in this study was originally found

on the 2013 AISD at-risk list, the 2013 cohort list, the 2013-2016 CIS caseload lists, and

academic data and attendance data of the occupants of those lists. To identify the four

necessary groups of students needed for the study, the individuals on the AISD's at-risk

list and 2013 cohort list were compared to the CIS caseload lists from 2013-2016.

Through this comparison, the researcher identified four student groups: a group of At-

Risk students who received services from CIS, a group of At-Risk students that did not

receive services from CIS at any point during their high school career, a group of Not-At-

Risk students, and a group of few Not-At-Risk students who were served by CIS.

After identifying the groups, the research team averaged the four groups'

academic performance and attendance records from their freshman year of 2013-2014 to

their senior year 2015-2016. The averages were then culminated into group means

through the use of independent two sample t-test, and reflect each of the four group's

averages as they correspond with each hypothesis of the study. Lastly, a cross-tabulation

analysis was used to determine each of the four group's completion rate. Through data analysis, the study seeks to address the above six hypotheses.

Human Subject Protection

This post-hoc study falls under the exempt status of human research per the guidelines of Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) criteria as it revolves around the examination of existing data. As such, there will be no interaction with human subjects throughout the research. Instead, the researchers only interacted with existing data from AISD. All identifiers presented within the data were removed from the data. Student data within the file were assigned identification numbers to further protect the student's identity throughout the survey. Abilene Christian University's IRB's consent was required to conduct this study (see the Appendix).

Population

The sample for the research is the existing at-risk and Not-At-Risk student data which was broken down into four groups. The first group are At-Risk students that were referred to the Communities In Schools program, per their prior performance, risk factors, or by parent or teacher recommendation. The comparison group consists of At-Risk students from the same cohort who were not enrolled in the CIS program for unspecified personal reasons. A comparison group of Not-At-Risk students was randomly generated from the data to provide a comparison group for the at-risk groups. In the data the researchers found a select few Not-At-Risk students that received services from CIS for unspecified reasons. Due to the groups that were served by CIS in the at-risk pool and not-at-risk pool of students being a sub-populations of the school's student body, the study will analyze the overall population of not-at-risk and At-Risk students when

dividing the data into the four groups. All student data used within the research are of students from the graduating class of 2016.

The data was requested by the researchers through the local school district's data and research department. Once the request was approved the data was dispersed to the local Communities In Schools affiliate. Once there, the program support special de-identified the data. Once de-identified, the researcher was given the data for analysis.

Data Analysis

To compare data between the four groups of students this study utilized the Statistical Package for The Social Services (SPSS) program. When comparing data, the central analysis used were two sample t-tests and a cross tabulation analysis which examined the four groups' academic data, attendance data, and completion rate. An examination of the four groups variables in this way allowed for a cross-sectional look at the impact of CIS intervention across the four years of data.

Operationalization

- **Grade Point Average:** Grade point average was calculated by taking the average of each student's final grades for each of the four years, and averaging those averages together to create group averages.

- **Attendance:** Attendance was calculated by taking the average of each student's percentage of days attended for each year, and averaging those averages together to create group averages.

- **Completion Rate:** Completion rate was calculated by examining whether or not a student was given a grade for their final year of high school rather than an "N/A".

Completion rates were calculated by finding the percent of students who had a final grade for their senior year within the data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

The study compared data from a single cohort of At-Risk students receiving CIS

services with a group of At-Risk students and Not-At-Risk students within the same

cohort across from their freshman year (2012) to their senior year (2016). A total of 1,298

students were examined throughout the study (Table 1). Of those examined 671 (51.7%)

of them were classified as At-Risk students (Table 1).119 students (9.2%) of those At-

Risk students receive services from CIS (Table 1). The remaining 487 students (37.5%)

in the study were students not classified as At-Risk students and did not receive services

(Table 1). 21 Not-At-Risk students (1.6%) received CIS services (Table 1). In total, there

were 790 cases of At-Risk student data examined that 508 cases of Not-At-Risk students

data examined.

Table 1:

Descriptive Statistics

	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cumulative
Not-At-Risk	487	37.4%	37.5%	37.5%
Not-At-Risk W CIS	21	1.6%	1.6%	39.1%
At-Risk	671	51.6%	51.7%	90.8%
At-Risk W CIS	119	9.1%	9.2%	100.0%
Total	1298	99.8%	100.0%	100.0%

Hypotheses

The following section reports the findings of each of the six hypotheses as either verified

or unsupported by the study:

Hypothesis (1) At-Risk Grade Point Average

To examine whether students who are at risk of dropping out have a lower grade

point average than those students who are not-at-risk, a two-sample *t*-test was conducted

in which the group of At-Risk students' average GPA was compared against the group of

Not-At-Risk students' average GPA. Results from the *t*-test report that the group of At-

Risk students' overall GPA for the four years was a 69.91 when averaged (Table 2).

Further results from the *t*-test report that the group of not At-Risk students' overall GPA

for the four years was an 83.21 when averaged (Table 2). The significance value or *p*

value for the data is .000, the data's *t* value is 8.99, and the data's degrees of freedom is

1217 (Table 2). With a *p* value that is less than .05, the data is statistically significant.

These findings support the first of the six hypotheses of the study and suggests that At-

Risk students do achieve a lower GPA across four years than their not-at-risk

counterparts.

Table 2

Overall Group GPA Statistics

Status	N	Mean	*SD*	*SEM*	*t*	*df*	*p*
At-Risk	790	69.91	28.95	1.03	8.99*	1217	.000
Not-At-Risk	508	83.21	23.95	1.06			

*t-value is for unequal variances

Hypothsis (2) At-Risk Absenteeism

To explore whether At-Risk students experience a higher amount of absenteeism than those students who are not-at-risk, a two-way sample *t*-test was used to examine the two groups (at-risk and not at-risk) of students' attendance data across the four years. Results from the T-test report that the group of At-Risk students' overall attendance averaged a 90 across the four years (Table 3). Further results from the *t*-test report that the overall attendance for the not At-Risk students was a 94 when averaged across the four years (Table 3). The significance value or P value for the data is .000, the data's t value is -9.11, and the data's degrees of freedom is 1271. With a p value that is less than .05 the data is statistically significant (Table 3). These findings support the second of the six hypotheses and suggest that At-Risk students do experience a higher amount of absenteeism than their Not-At-Risk counterparts across four years of high school.

Table 3

At-Risk Group Attendance Statistics

Status	N	Mean	*SD*	*SEM*	*t*	*df*	*p*
At-Risk	790	0.90	0.10	0.00	-9.11*	1271	.000
Not-At-Risk	508	0.94	0.07	0.00			

*t-value is for unequal variances

Hypothesis (3) CIS Impact on GPA

To explore whether At-Risk students who receive CIS services have a higher grade point average than at risk students who do not receive CIS services, a two-way sample *t*-test was conducted that examined average the GPA of at-risk students who did

receive CIS services at one or more points in their high school career and of At-Risk students who did not receive CIS services at any point during their high school career. Results from the T-test report that overall GPA for At-Risk students who did receive CIS services had a mean average of 75.24 when averaged across the four years (Table 4). Further results report that At-Risk students who did not receive services from CIS at any point during their high school career averaged a GPA of 68.97 across the four years (Table 4). The significance value or p value for the data is .000, the data's t value is -2.66, and the data's degrees of freedom is 788 (Table 4). With a p value that is less than .05 the data is statistically significant. These findings verify the third of the sixth hypotheses and suggests that At-Risk students who receive CIS services at one point or another in their high school career achieve a higher GPA than At-Risk students who do not.

Table 4

At-Risk GPA Statistics

At Risk	N	Mean	*SD*	*SEM*	*t*	*df*	*p*
At-Risk	671	68.97	29.87	1.15	-2.66*	200	0.009
At-Risk W CIS	119	75.24	22.47	2.06			

*t-value is for unequal variances

Hypothesis (4) CIS Impact on Absenteeism.

To explore whether At-Risk students who receive CIS services have a higher attendance rate than at risk students who do not receive services, a two-sample t-test was used to test hypothesis three. This T-test explored the variable of attendance between the at-risk group of students who received CIS services and At-Risk students who did not

receive CIS services. Results from the *t*-test report that At-Risk students who received

CIS services averaged an 89% across the four years (Table 5). Further results report that

At-risk students who did not receive services averaged an 89.3% in attendance across the

four years (Table 5). The significance value or p value for the data is .478, the data's t

value is .522, and the data's degrees of freedom is 788 (Table 5). With a p value that is

larger than .05 the data is not statistically significant. With a p value of .581 these

findings do not support the fourth of the six hypotheses.

Table 5

At-Risk Attendance Statistics

At Risk	N	Mean	*SD*	*SEM*	*t*	*df*	*p*
At-Risk	671	0.90	0.10	0.0039	0.552	788	0.581
At-Risk W CIS	119	0.89	0.09	0.0082			

Hypothsis (5) At-Risk Completion Rate

To test whether At-Risk students complete their schooling at a lower rate than

students who are Not-At-Risk, a cross tabulation analysis was conducted on the

calculated completion rate of both the group of At-Risk students and Not-At-Risk

students. The results of the cross-tabulation report that those in the 51.7% of the not-at-

risk who did not receive CIS services completed school (Table 6). Further results of the

cross-tabulation report that 48.1% of the At-Risk students completed school (Table 6).

These findings support the fifth of the six hypotheses and suggests that At-Risk students

did indeed graduate at a lower rate than their Not-At-Risk counterparts.

Table 6

At-Risk vs. Not-At-Risk Completion Rates

	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cumulative
Not-At-Risk	672	51.7%	51.8%	51.8%
At-Risk	626	48.1%	48.2%	100.0%
Total Valid	1298	99.8%	100.0%	
Missing	3	.2%		
Total	1301	100.0%		

Hypothsis (6) CIS Impact on Completion Rate

To explore whether At-Risk students receiving CIS services completion at a higher rate than At-Risk students who do not receive services, the same cross tabulation analysis that was used to test hypothesis five was used to explore the graduate rate between those At-Risk students that received CIS services and those At-Risk students that did not. The results of the cross-tabulation report that those At-Risk students that received CIS services graduated at a rate of 35.30% (Table 7). Further results report that the At-Risk students that did not receive CIS services graduated at a rate of 34.10% (Table 7). With total chart p value of less than .001 the rates within the table are in fact significant, but the graduate rates between the two at-risk groups are virtually identical (Table 7). Therefore, the findings do not support the sixth of the six hypotheses and suggests that At-Risk students who receive CIS services do not complete at a higher rate than At-Risk students who do not receive CIS services.

Table 7

Cross Tabulation of At-Risk and Not-At-Risk Completion Rates

At-Risk Status	Did not Complete	Completed	Total
Not At-Risk Without CIS	140 (28.70%)	347 (71.30%)	487 (100.00%)
Not At-Risk With CIS	13 (61.90%)	8 (38.10%)	21 (100%)
Total Not At-Risk	153 (30.10%)	355 (69.90%)	508 (100.00%)
At-Risk Without CIS	442 (65.90%)	229 (34.10%)	671 (100.00%)
At-Risk With CIS	77 (64.70%)	42 (35.30%)	119 (100.00%)
Total At-Risk	519 (65.70%)	271 (34.30%)	789 (100.00%)
Total Count	672 (51.8%)	626 (48.20%)	1298 (100%)

Chi.Square = 16566; df=3; $p < .001$

The following summary summarizes the six hypotheses of the study and whether or not they were supported or unsupported. (1) Students who are at risk of dropping out have a lower grade point average than those students who are not-at-risk was supported, (2) At-Risk students experience a higher amount of absenteeism than those students who are not-at-risk was supported, (3) At-Risk students who receive CIS services have a higher grade point average than at risk students who do not receive CIS services was supported, (4) At-Risk students who receive CIS services have a higher attendance rate than at risk students who do not receive services was not supported, (5) At-Risk students complete high school at a lower rate than students who are not-at-risk was supported, and (6) At-Risk students receiving CIS services complete high school at a higher rate than At-Risk students who do not receive service was not supported.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The following discussion interprets the results of each hypothesis as they relate to the literature. The results of testing the first hypothesis: students at risk of dropping out have a lower grade point average than those students who are not at risk. With the at-risk mean average GPA of 69.9 and a not-at-risk average of 83.2, there is a 13.3-point difference between the groups. As such, the results of the study verified this hypothesis. Due to the unalterable factors/alterable factors which contribute to their at-risk status, these students are our most susceptible to increase the dropout rate (Barry & Reschly, 2012). Due to their conditions, these students are susceptible to poverty, malnourishment, and other aspects of life that could detract from their focus at school. Therefore, as their focus is spread further and further, the gap between those individuals who experience the adverse effects of poverty and limited resources, fall further and further academically from those who do not experience these factors in life. As such, the support for this hypothesis verifies that these students are indeed in need and supports them being target populations of the CIS model/a target of other dropout prevention programs (Communities In Schools, 2017).

The same could be said for the second hypothesis which hypothesized that At-Risk students experienced a higher amount of absenteeism. When tested, the data for this hypothesis reported that At-Risk students in this study attended school 89.7% of the

school year and Not-At-Risk students attended 94%. Like academic performance, a student's attendance can severely hamper their ability to graduate, and in the worse cases, can prevent graduation (Texas Education Agency, 2006). To guard against this, Texas enacted a rule labeled the "ninety percent rule" which states that a student must be in attendance 90% of the time throughout the school year (Texas Education Agency, 2006). If a student does not comply with this attendance law, they risk their credit being denied for each class that they have not been in attendance for (Texas Education Agency, 2006). With the at-risk data reflecting a percentage just under 90% if left unrounded, it is clear that attendance and attendance interventions are rightfully placed as an area of focus within the CIS model (Communities In Schools, 2017). When combined, the suggestions from hypothesis one, a picture of At-Risk student need emerges. Due to these factors, At-Risk students are in need of multiple resources and interventions. Among the most effective to combat these is added attention to these student, long term mentorship, and access to needed resources (Smink & Reimer, 2005).

The third hypothesis, At-Risk students who receive CIS services have a higher grade point average than at risk students who do not receive CIS services, was also verified through the study. This particular hypothesis reflects the notion that CIS interventions such as mentoring and extended attention/ intentional investment into each student can make a real difference in the student's life. The data reports that students receiving CIS services had a 6.26-point increase from a mean score of 68.9 (the mean score of At-Risk students not receiving CIS services) to a 75.23. This particular increase is significant not only for its increase of six points, but also for where it is located on the grading scale. Traditionally, the 70 or "C" grade mark is the line that defines the students

as either passing or failing. Thus, the location of this increase in average GPA as it suggests that At-Risk students who receive CIS services experience an increase in GPA that pushes them over the boundary line of the pass-fail mark. Thus, this data suggests that CIS's interventions and overall effort is translating into transforming the lives of these At-Risk students in academic achievement. The cause of this increase could be CIS's three-tiered intervention model which focuses on the campus, groups of students, and the individuals (Communities In School, 2017). This approach concurs with the literature produced by the NCDP that mentorship and added attention to At-risk students makes an impact (Smink & Reimer, 2005).

Hypothesis four, At-Risk students who receive CIS services have a higher attendance rate than at risk students who do not receive services, was not supported by the data. Within the at-risk groups of students, there is a .5 difference between the CIS group's average (89.3) and the non-CIS group's average (89.8). As such, the difference in the two groups attendance is virtually non-existent. The answer could lie in the individual student's alterable factors, such as their transportation needs. If so, certain students who are considered "special needs" or "homeless" may need to explore little known transportation options under the McKinney-Vento act (Texas Education Agency, 2006). Additionally, while these students were in high school, the local CIS affiliate did have programs like Never Been Absent implemented (Communities In Schools, 2017). As such, this data reflects the outcome of the program without any major intervention for absenteeism in place which could be a cause for virtual indifference between the At-Risk students who received services and those which did not. This statistical indifference

suggests that more could be done in this area within CIS, and as such supports the construction and creation of the Never Been Absent Program.

Without data that suggests that CIS services have a positive or negative relationship on student absenteeism, it is difficult to see that CIS services has an impact on the subject. Still, targeting absenteeism is a cornerstone of the CIS model, as chronic absenteeism can be a barrier to student success (Communities In Schools, 2017; Texas Education Agency, 2006).

Hypothesis five, At-Risk students complete school at a lower rate than students who are not at-risk was also verified by the data. The results of the cross-tabulation report that those in the 51.7% of the not-at-risk completed school. Further results of the cross-tabulation report that 48.1% of the At-Risk students completed school (Table 10). These findings show the determent of hypothesis one and two being supported. With At-Risk students experiencing lower GPAs and higher absenteeism than Not-At-Risk students, it stands to reason that they would complete their schooling at a lower rate. These factors highlight the effects of a student's environment as a whole, as their unalterable and alterable factors work together throughout their life to inform the performance in school and in life (Barry & Reschly, 2012).

Finally, hypothesis six, At-Risk students receiving CIS services graduate at a higher rate than At-Risk students who do not receive services, was not supported by the data. The total difference between the graduate rate of At-Risk students who did and did not receive services (35.3% and 34.1%) is a negligible 1.2% (Table 11). This is particularly interesting as data from hypothesis three suggests that At-Risk students receiving services from CIS experience a higher GPA by six points when compared to

At-Risk students who did not receive services, and data from hypothesis four suggests that at-risk attendance data for both groups is comparable with or without CIS interventions. If academic performance and attendance within the at-risk CIS group is increased and comparable to their at-risk counterparts, it stands to reason that the at-risk CIS group's graduation rate would be impacted positively.

Instead, the data suggests that the graduation rates are comparable between the two populations and thus the impact of CIS intervention on the graduation rate is not statistically significant to verify this particular hypothesis. Perhaps the answer to the question of why this is lies in the third variable that the CIS model targets, student behavior (Communities In Schools, 2017). This particular data connects back to Finn, Scott, and Fish's article that speaks on the negative impact of misbehavior on completion (Finn et al, 2008). As such, behavior could be an important variable that is impacting at-risk graduation rates regardless of CIS service.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Practice

The above hypotheses affirm actions that are taking place within CIS affiliates, and propose investigation into others. Verification of hypothesis three suggests that CIS investment in mentoring through programs like Check and Connect and academic interventions such a tutoring have a positive impact on At-Risk students' GPA. Therefore, more widespread use and implementations of these programs across the several schools in the CIS affiliates would be beneficial to the program at large.

Hypothesis four being unsupported indicates that absenteeism is an area that can be further invested through the implementation of programs like the Never Been Absent program which is designed to target student absenteeism. As such, the agency could implement Never Been Absent on all of the campuses associated with the affiliate for further implementation of the program. Any available data analysis of the CIS of the Big Country's N.B.A. program could be referenced to inform a further expansion of the program.

Implications for Policy

Implications for policy on the CIS affiliate level include wider implementation of the Never Been Absent across different campus, further exploration and use of specific interventions that target absenteeism, academic performance, and behavior. Through the

use of policy these implications could become a uniform platform for each of the campuses affiliated with CIS to stand on as a baseline for what interventions are used on the different campuses. Lastly, further development of policy concerning behavior and research into the impact of behavior would fill a needed gap within the research.

Implication for the local school district include further exploration of the at-risk population as it compares to the not-at-risk population. With 671 of the 1296 student cases labeled at-risk within the study, the at-risk sample is large enough to warrant attention by the school districts. As such, further investigation of how to meet the alterable needs of these students is encouraged.

Additionally, investigation of how to best serve this population at every level of the education system is encouraged. The study by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium identified the middle school level as a significant time in students' lives that determine whether students go on to complete their schooling (2011). As such, further investigation and support of the middle school level of the school district could further encourage completion rates. Lastly, support of hypothesis four: At-Risk students who receive CIS services have a higher grade point average than at risk students who do not receive CIS services was supported by the study. Therefore, the data suggests that CIS in schools is effective in elevating their students' academic performance. Further funding and expansion of the program provided by the school district would allow the program to impact more students as a whole.

Lastly, support of hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 speak to the needs of legitimacy of what At-Risk students are endangered of: lower GPA, higher absenteeism, and lower

completion rates as a whole. As such the Texas Education Agency should continually evaluate how policies, interventions, and overall effort is impacting the population.

Implications for Future Research

With four of the six hypotheses verified and two unverified, it is important that this study be replicated before any suggestions made by the data in this study be considered concrete. With that said, the results of this study present clear areas for further investigation such as: why does CIS have a negligible impact of At-Risk student absenteeism, and why At-Risk students who receive CIS services are not graduating at a significantly different rate than their at-risk counterparts that did not receive services despite an average increase in GPA and comparable absenteeism? A limitation to this study is the absence of any data or analysis of the effects of behavior on high school graduation. Without quantifiable data of that kind, an answer to that second question could not be reached in this study. As such an implication for future research is the need for CIS to investigate the effects of behavior on their student population. By conducting similar research focused on behavior, a gap in the knowledge base would be filled.

Additionally, there was an absence of clear graduation rate data within the survey. As such, completion rates were calculated by recording whether or not a student had a grade recorded for their final year in school. Definitive graduation data would communicate the impact CIS interventions have on graduation rates as a whole. Through a similar study with definitive graduation data, researchers could evaluate CIS's impact on graduation rates and evaluate the affiliate's effectiveness in carrying out the mission of the dropout prevention program. On absenteeism, the existing data used within the study came from a time where absenteeism based programs such as Never Been Absent

was not implemented at CIS. Repeating the study with data that includes the time frame where Never Been Absent was implemented would speak to the impact of the programs implementation.

Lastly, to further support or un-support the hypotheses presented in the research, future research should replicate the different analysis used within the study on CIS affiliates of various sizes that interact with high school populations of various demographic, backgrounds, and sizes to determine validity among a broader population of students.

Lastly, the variable missing in hypothesis six is behavior, as such specific interventions for behavior within CIS could be developed, as Never Been Absent was for absenteeism. Increased behavior interventions coupled with the interventions in place such as Never Been Absent for absenteeism, and Check and Connect for academic performance would have a theoretical impact on affecting graduation rates.

Strengths

There are several strengths to this study. First, is the quasi-experimental nature of the study which allowed for a randomized control group to be created which allowed for comparison with the experimental CIS groups. The large sample size of 1298 students provided a dynamic range of student data to analyze. Academic data and attendance data that spans the length of four years. Thus, producing a high amount of internal validity, reliability, and stronger significance values.

Limitations

At the same time there are several limitations of the study. First, there was a relatively small number of students who received CIS services within the data ($N= 140$).

Second a breakdown of how many years of services each one of the 140 students received was unachievable due to time constraints on the project. Third, the data did not definitively state whether or not a student graduated from their high school. Without this data, high school completion was assumed by the presence of a final passing grade in the senior year of 2015-2016. Fourth, the data itself could not control for any movement of students transferring in and out of the different schools of the school district, and could not communicate how many years of service each CIS student received while in high school. Lastly, researcher bias is a factor. The researcher of this study has experience interning for CIS and, as such, holds a favorable bias towards CIS's work. While no efforts were made to skew the data in any way, researcher bias could exist within the findings, discussion, and implication sections of the research.

Final Thoughts

This study was concerned primarily with investigating the sixth hypotheses in effort to examine CIS's effectiveness in impacting their focus areas to promote graduation. While some hypotheses remain unverified, further investigation is needed. The data suggest the CIS is making a positive impact in the lives of the At-Risk students they serve academically, while impact on absenteeism and graduation rate is marginal. Still, the work CIS affiliates, Student Success Coaches, staff, and interns conduct on a daily basis is important and integral to those At-Risk students they serve. I believe Communities In Schools (2007) said it best when recounting their founder, Bill Milliken's quote, "Programs don't change children - relationships do" (p.8).

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APPENDIX

IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

March 19, 2018
Cooper Spruill
Dept. of Social Work
ACU Box 26880

Dear Cooper,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled
An Examination of the Impact Communities In School's Interventions Make on High School Graduation Rate

(IRB# 18-006   )is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs