 News Release

**Editorial Comment** **Contact:** **Jim Purcell**

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For over a year the Governor and state agencies have discussed the need to concentrate efforts and funding around behavioral health in Delaware’s schools. For the past ten years, efforts to raise the achievement of our schools and students have concentrated on pedagogy to create reform and increase opportunities. As a non-profit leader and Delaware resident I was very pleased with the recognition of the need to concentrate behavioral health resources in our schools. Unfortunately, I have considerable reservation and concern about how the RFP for Behavioral Health Services has been developed over the course of the last year. First of all the process by which the scope of work, positions and how the program is to be implemented was never adequately discussed in a public forum involving public and private stakeholders. In fact, when the proposal was introduced in December 2012 there was discussion that, the Department of Education, Department of Youth and Family Services and the Lt. Governor were to convene stakeholders to discuss how this funding would be used in our schools. To my knowledge schools, non-profit and for profit agencies were never consulted on the structure and implementation of these funds. Now that the funding has been approved in the FY 14 budget, the state has released the RFP and is looking for independent contractors to manage, support and implement the scope of work for the project. The state will contract individually with a Contract Manager ($81,500), to manage the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the program. The state will contract for three Behavioral Health County Coordinators ($83,400 each) to provide clinical training and coordination at the county level; and, then the state will contract with thirty individuals ($79,400 each) to manage the interventions with children and families at the school building level (middle schools). From a strategic and tactical view this process of hiring independent contractors seems to be diffuse and impractical. The RFP, doesn’t provide an opportunity for qualified and impactful community agencies and organizations to bid on the contracts, especially if those agencies are already providing intervention programs that address student behavior and family services that may impact school performance and social and emotional development. Additionally, with so many independent contractors how can we be assured that local issues, accountability, consistency of services and coordination will take place at the state, county and school level.

Communities In Schools and other non-profit agencies working in our schools know that a child who is disengaged or troubled will not improve solely because of curriculum, standards are higher or assessments are better. We know children must be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and academically challenged in order to be successful. Common sense and extensive research tell us hungry kids can’t learn, scared kids can’t think, and bored kids don’t thrive. We also know that many of our most challenged schools and students come from very difficult socio-economic conditions and children and their families face many social and economic barriers. We need to put students and their families at the center of focus and align the resources we have with their individualized needs. The inclusion of parents and support from the community (e.g. mentoring, health, safety programs, needs and resources) raises the achievement level and success of the student. Schools can’t do this work alone. Every corner of our community must help educate and support the whole child.

Its relationships and positive adults in student’s lives that change the dynamics of a child and school, not programs. We agree that schools need more access to mental health clinicians (i.e. psychologist, psychiatrist and other mental health professionals), but support for other more holistic approaches including mentoring, parent engagement and other services that organizations like Communities In Schools brings to schools is just as crucial.

CIS brokers and develops mentoring/tutoring, after-school programming, individualized interventions, future planning, and family assistance. Different kids have different needs. Some need academic help; some need a stable home and food on the table, or someone who will listen and help guide the way. Others need medical attention. Helping kids move beyond their circumstances requires an individualized approach, not one-size-fits-all. We treat young people as individuals and coordinate support around their specific needs.

Aligning these services is the true strength of the Communities In Schools model. We integrate services in support of students. Through our model, we work within the local community, engage stakeholders and providers of services in support of youth and then to ensure these services are provided to the young people.

Communities In Schools (CIS), a national and Delaware based non-profit, positions a dedicated site coordinator inside partner schools.  In this pivotal role, the coordinator works with school staff to identify students at risk.  Our unique model of “integrated student services” addresses the total student—because students with unmet physical, psychological and social needs cannot learn effectively—and the whole school environment. Our research has shown that this attention to the needs of both the entire school and the individual student is critical to safe schools and child well-being. CIS positions a “Site Coordinator” inside schools to assess needs and deliver resources. Site Coordinators are consistent, caring adults whose only job is to support students to succeed. These extraordinary and dedicated individuals change lives one day and one student at a time. As a single point of contact, they are uniquely positioned to match the needs of students and families with resources in the community, and to be active participants in the work of teachers and administrators in making their schools places of learning and achievement.

The CIS staff are highly trained and certified as site coordinators and hired in concert with our school district partners. The staff we hire also has strong community background in social work, counseling, student advocacy and prevention services. Many of them have a Masters in Social Work or counseling as well as years of experience in the field, servicing youth and their families.

While we cannot put a price on our state’s youth, or the promise of their future, resources will undoubtedly be a consideration in any policy discussion. To that end, the cost per student served by CIS is about $200 per year. From a broader perspective, EMSI one of the nation’s leading economic modeling firm determined that for every dollar spent on CIS, the community will receive a benefit in excess of $12.50. They also determined the average annual rate of return to society from CIS is over 19.6%. In short, resources spent working with well positioned, standards driven non-profits can yield savings for the state and our citizens. Let’s consider what resources we have to bare in the state and engage partners instead of creating a whole new bureaucracy of consultants and state workers to do the job that local service providers can be doing at a fraction of the cost.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss further, please contact Jim Purcell, President of for Communities In Schools-Delaware at 302-678-4929, or via e-mail: [jpurcell@cisdelaware.org](mailto:jpurcell@cisdelaware.org)

Thank you for this opportunity and your consideration.

**About Communities In Schools of Delaware**

**Communities In Schools of Delaware** is part of the national Communities In Schools network, one of the nation’s leading dropout prevention organizations. The mission of Communities In Schools **is to** surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.  Through a school-based site coordinator, **CISDE** connects students and their families to critical community resources, tailored to local needs. Last school year, **CISDE** served **10,000** students, empowering **98%** to graduate on time. It has been shown through an independent evaluation that Communities In Schools is the nation’s only dropout prevention organization proven to both increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates. Visit our website at **www.cisdelaware.org**.

**CISDE Data 2011-12**

We also require extensive data collection and measurement at our sites. This has yielded the following information from students we served for the most recent year of our case managed students (530 students statewide):

* 61% met their behavior improvement goals;
* 90% of students graduated on time;
* 90% of students were promoted to the next grade level;
* 77% of all Seniors are attending post secondary opportunities;
* 72% met their attitude and commitment to school improvement goals;
* 82% met their suspension reduction goals;
* 68% met their academic achievement goals.