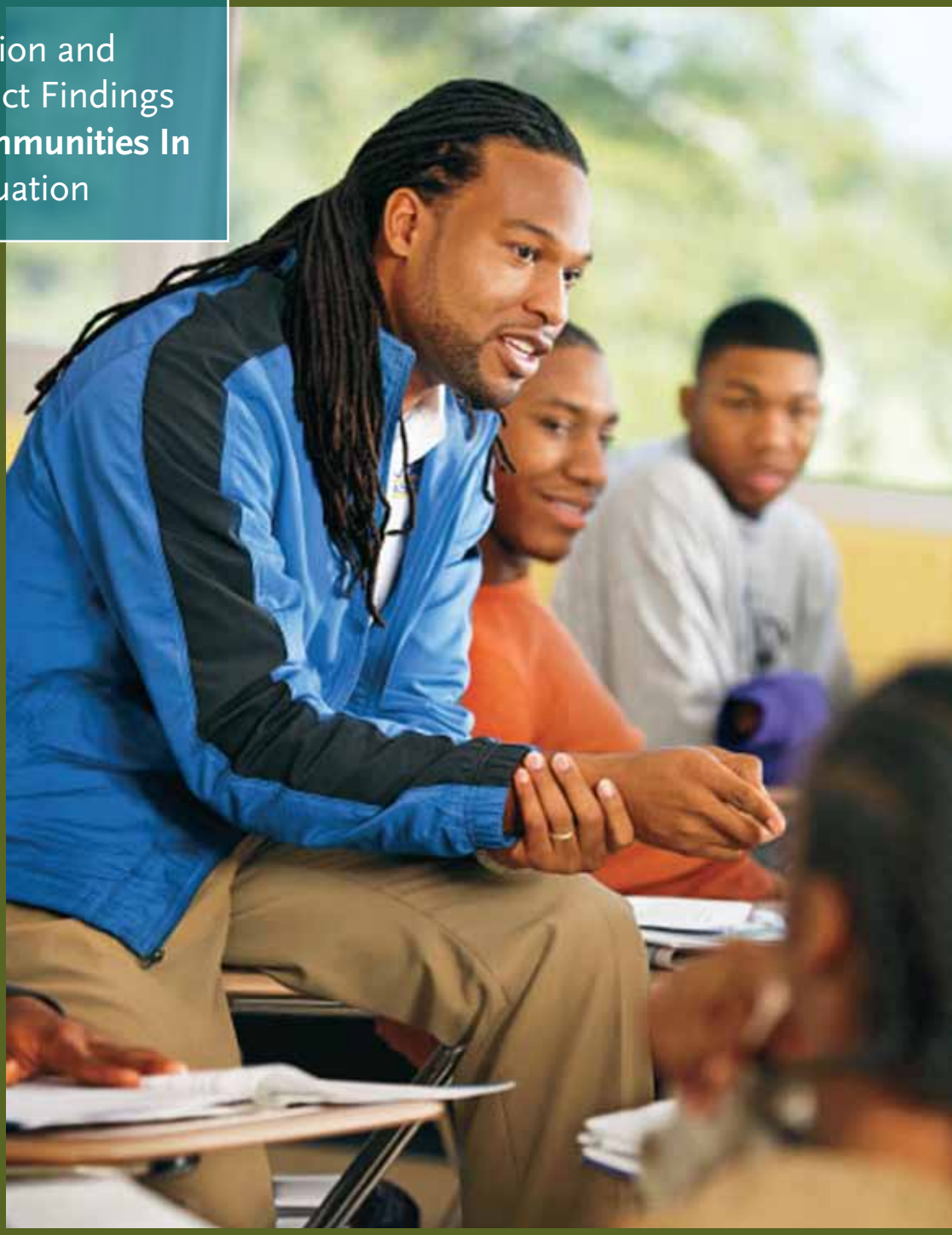
CASE MANAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT

Executive Summary

Implementation and Interim Impact Findings from the **Communities In Schools** Evaluation



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April 2015

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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Overview

Too many students drop out and never earn their high school diploma. For students at risk of dropping out, academic, social, and other supports may help. Communities In Schools seeks to organize and provide these supports to at-risk students in the nation's poorest-performing schools, including through "case-managed" services. School-based Communities In Schools site coordinators identify at-risk students, work with them individually to assess their needs, develop a case plan to meet those needs, connect them with supports in the school and community based on that plan, and monitor their progress to ensure that their needs are met.

This report, the first of two from a random assignment evaluation of Communities In Schools case management, focuses primarily on the implementation of case management in 28 secondary schools during the 2012-2013 school year. The implementation research yielded several key findings:

- The services provided by Communities In Schools were an important component of the participating schools' support systems for students, but there were also many services provided by school staff members and other external partners.
- Over about 30 weeks, case-managed students received an average of 19 service contacts totaling 16 hours. More than 75 percent of case-managed students received academic services, about 60 percent received social or life skills support, and half received behavior support.
- "Higher-risk" case-managed students — those who failed a course or were chronically absent or suspended in the previous year — did not receive more case-managed services than others.
- Compared with those randomly assigned to the non-case-managed group, case-managed students reported participating in more in-school support activities in several categories, including academically and behaviorally focused meetings with adults and mentoring.

The report also includes interim one-year findings about case management's impact on student outcomes.

- Case management had a positive impact on students' reports of having caring, supportive relationships with adults outside of home and school, the quality of their friendships, and their belief that education matters for their future. But for most outcomes concerning students' interpersonal relationships and educational perspectives — relationships with caring, supportive adults at home or school and educational attitudes, engagement, goals, and expectations — there were no notable differences between case-managed and non-case-managed students.
- After one year, Communities In Schools case management has not yet demonstrated improvement in students' attendance or course performance, or reduced behaviors that lead to disciplinary action — outcomes associated with increasing their chances of graduation. It is possible that case management could take more than a year to show an effect.

This report concludes with suggestions for improvement for Communities In Schools based mainly on the implementation findings. The next report will present two-year impact findings and more about the implementation of case management in the 2013-2014 school year.

Preface

School success for young people depends on more than teaching and learning; many students require supports that go beyond the classroom. Young people growing up in low-income communities often face social and economic challenges that put obstacles in the way of their progress through school and increase the chances that they will drop out. Fortunately, schools and local community-based organizations often provide services to students intended to address these challenges. Unfortunately, having an array of providers can result in fragmented or inconsistent service delivery, redundancies, and gaps, which can limit the power of these services to help students.

Communities In Schools, an organization with a wide national reach, supports the implementation of a school-based model of integrated student support services that is intended to organize and supplement disparate services in a given school and community in an effort to strengthen their effectiveness. With a network of local affiliate offices across more than half the states in the nation, Communities In Schools has the potential to make a difference in the school outcomes of millions of students connected to its programming. Communities In Schools has also committed to being a learning organization, regularly evaluating aspects of its programming in order to improve its work on behalf of students.

This report is the first of two from an experimental evaluation of Communities In Schools student case management being conducted by MDRC. Case management is one component of the Communities In Schools whole-school model. This evaluation is valuable for a few reasons. First of all, it is generating information about aspects of Communities In Schools' on-the-ground program implementation intended to encourage organizational reflection and change regarding how to serve students better. Second, it is assessing the impact of case management, providing Communities In Schools staff members with information about how much of a difference they are making in the lives of case-managed students and where they might want to consider adjustments. Third, these findings will benefit other service providers who work with students facing similar obstacles.

Targeting services is a central challenge for school-based student support programs. Schools located in low-income communities often serve large populations of students who are struggling academically in the face of other demands on their time and attention. In this context, should student support programs concentrate their resources on a smaller group of students facing the greatest obstacles to high school completion or on a larger group at somewhat lesser risk of dropping out? As one of the largest providers of school-based integrated student services, Communities In Schools encounters such dilemmas regularly. In this evaluation the researchers hope to inform this and other decisions for Communities In Schools and for the field at large.

Gordon L. Berlin
President, MDRC

Acknowledgments

This report is based upon work supported by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a key White House initiative and program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The Social Innovation Fund combines public and private resources with the goal of increasing the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States.

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Social Innovation Fund includes support from CNCS and 15 private co-investors: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Duke Endowment, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The JPB Foundation, George Kaiser Family Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Open Society Foundations, The Penzance Foundation, The Samberg Family Foundation, The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Starr Foundation, Tipping Point Community, The Wallace Foundation, and the Weingart Foundation. The Wallace Foundation also provided additional support separate from their involvement with the Social Innovation Fund. This report would not have been possible without the support of these funders.

The assistance and cooperation of Communities In Schools national and affiliate staff members were critical to the success of this study. At the national level, Heather Clawson, Gary Chapman, and Dan Linton provided important information about the work of their organization and coordinated communications with other national and affiliate staff as necessary. Affiliate staff and school-based site coordinators supplied key information about their work locally, which helped shape communication and planning regarding several aspects of the study. Additionally, their efforts helped make all in-school data collection activities possible, and the research team is grateful for their support and cooperation. They also helped connect the team with school district staff, who provided critical school records data to be used in the analyses herein.

The research team received useful feedback and encouragement throughout the project and comments on drafts of this report from Heather Clawson at CIS National; Gabriel Rhoads, Kelly Fitzsimmons, and Partheev Shah at The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation; and Hilary Rhodes and Dara Rose at The Wallace Foundation.

Survey Research Management (SRM) administered the student surveys that yielded data analyzed for this report. They did final formatting and production of the student surveys, administered them on-site in the participating schools, executed the data entry, and produced the necessary data files for the research team. Linda Kuhn, Tony Lavender, Ashley Bronzan, Betsy Quicksall, and Rob Schroder were leaders of this work at SRM.

At MDRC, Leslyn Hall supported the design of student surveys, and Seth Muzzy, Nicole Morris, and Kelly Granito helped manage communications between MDRC and SRM. Kelly Granito, Rachel Pedraza, and Emily Pramik all played roles as site liaisons between the research team and local Communities In Schools and school staff members. Emily Pramik programmed and managed the online surveys administered to Communities In Schools site coordinators and school leaders. Deni Chen, Nicholas Commins, Kateryna Lashko, and Emily Pramik contributed to the processing and analysis of quantitative data. Emma Alterman, Kelly Granito, Rachel Pedraza, and Emily Pramik contributed to the coding and analysis of qualitative data. Emily Pramik and Kelly Quinn contributed to report production, including producing exhibits and checking tables and text. In addition to the above project work, Emily's tireless efforts at monitoring the team's project timeline and coordinating the many revisions of this report were critical to its completion.

Caroline Mage assisted the team with site visits and also helped draft the project's evaluation plan. Pei Zhu and Kristin Porter helped refine the text around the evaluation design and quantitative analyses. Janell Smith and Christian Foster helped get the evaluation work off the ground. Kelly Granito was essential in helping our team organize its work on this project, with support from Kate Gualtieri. Kate Gualtieri was also a valuable link between the project team and the broader Edna McConnell Clark Foundation True North community of program organizations and evaluators. Fred Doolittle, Ivonne Garcia, Rob Ivry, Robin Jacob, Joshua Malbin, and Elizabeth Zachry-Rutschow carefully reviewed earlier drafts of the report and offered helpful critiques throughout the writing process. Jennie Kaufman edited the full report, and Carolyn Thomas prepared the report for publication.

The Authors

Executive Summary

Every day more than 7,000 students drop out of school.[1] One-fifth of students who enter high school do not graduate within four years,[2] and more than two-fifths of Latino and African-American boys drop out.[3] Compared with high school graduates, dropouts are more likely to live in poverty, suffer from poor health, be involved in crime, or be dependent on social services.[4] Many students at risk of dropping out need academic, social, and other supports to make it through high school, but these services are scattered across numerous government agencies and nonprofits. This fragmented delivery of services limits their potential to change the path of an at-risk student. And teachers and principals, for their part, are often overwhelmed by the emotional, social, and personal issues facing students. Integrating student support services and connecting them with schools is viewed as a promising approach to assist school staff members and help students stay on track to graduate.[5]

The Communities In Schools Model of Integrated Student Supports

Communities In Schools uses an integrated student support model to assist schools and communities, working with low-income students at risk of failing or dropping out of the nation's poorest-performing schools. Founded in 1977 by children's advocate Bill Milliken, Communities In Schools now serves more than 1.3 million students and their families.[6] It is active in over 2,000 school sites, and the national office oversees a network of nearly 200 local affiliates in 26 states and the District of Columbia. Communities In Schools' national office establishes guidance on standards of practice, offers technical assistance to the local affiliates, and acts as a political advocate on behalf of the network. In these roles, the national office can influence how the affiliates approach model implementation within the local school districts with which they

[1]Christopher B. Swanson, "Progress Postponed," *Education Week* 29, no. 34 (2010): 22-23, 30.

[2]Richard J. Murnane, *U.S. High School Graduation Rates: Patterns and Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2013); Marie C. Stetser and Robert Stillwell, *Public High School Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates and Event Dropout Rates: School Years 2010-11 and 2011-12* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

[3]Schott Foundation for Public Education, *The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (Cambridge, MA: Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

[4]Child Trends, "High School Dropout Rates," last modified October 2014, http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=high-school-dropout-rates.

[5]Kristin A. Moore, Selma Caal, Rachel Carney, Laura Lippman, Weilin Li, Katherine Muenks, David Murphey, Dan Princiotta, Alysha Ramirez, Angela Rojas, Renee Ryberg, Hannah Schmitz, Brandon Stratford, and Mary Terzian, *Making the Grade: Assessing Evidence for Integrated Student Supports* (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends, 2014).

[6]Communities In Schools, *2013 Annual Report* (Arlington, VA: Communities In Schools, 2014).

work. But as independent nonprofit organizations with their own boards of directors and local funding support, the affiliates have final determination in how the Communities In Schools model is carried out in their school sites. This autonomy results in variation in the details of the model's implementation around the country.

Nonetheless, there is a common understanding of the nature of the Communities In Schools comprehensive service model across the national network. The intent of this model is to reduce dropout rates by integrating community and school-based support services within schools through the provision of "Level 1" and "Level 2" services. Level 1 services are broadly available to all students or to groups of students and are usually short-term, low-intensity activities or services (for example, making clothing or school supplies available to students, organizing a school-wide career fair, or hosting a financial aid workshop for twelfth-graders). Level 1 services also include short-term "crisis" interventions when an extreme event disrupts a student's life (for example, finding a solution if the power is turned off at the student's home or providing short-term counseling in response to a traumatic event). Communities In Schools site coordinators — those responsible for all school-based operations — spend much of their time focused on more intensive Level 2 "case-managed" services, which they provide to a subset of students displaying one or more significant risk factors, such as poor academic performance, a high absentee rate, or behavioral problems. In case management, site coordinators work with individual students to identify their needs, connect them with supports in the school and community to address those needs, and regularly monitor their progress to ensure that their needs continue to be met.

Communities In Schools Case Management

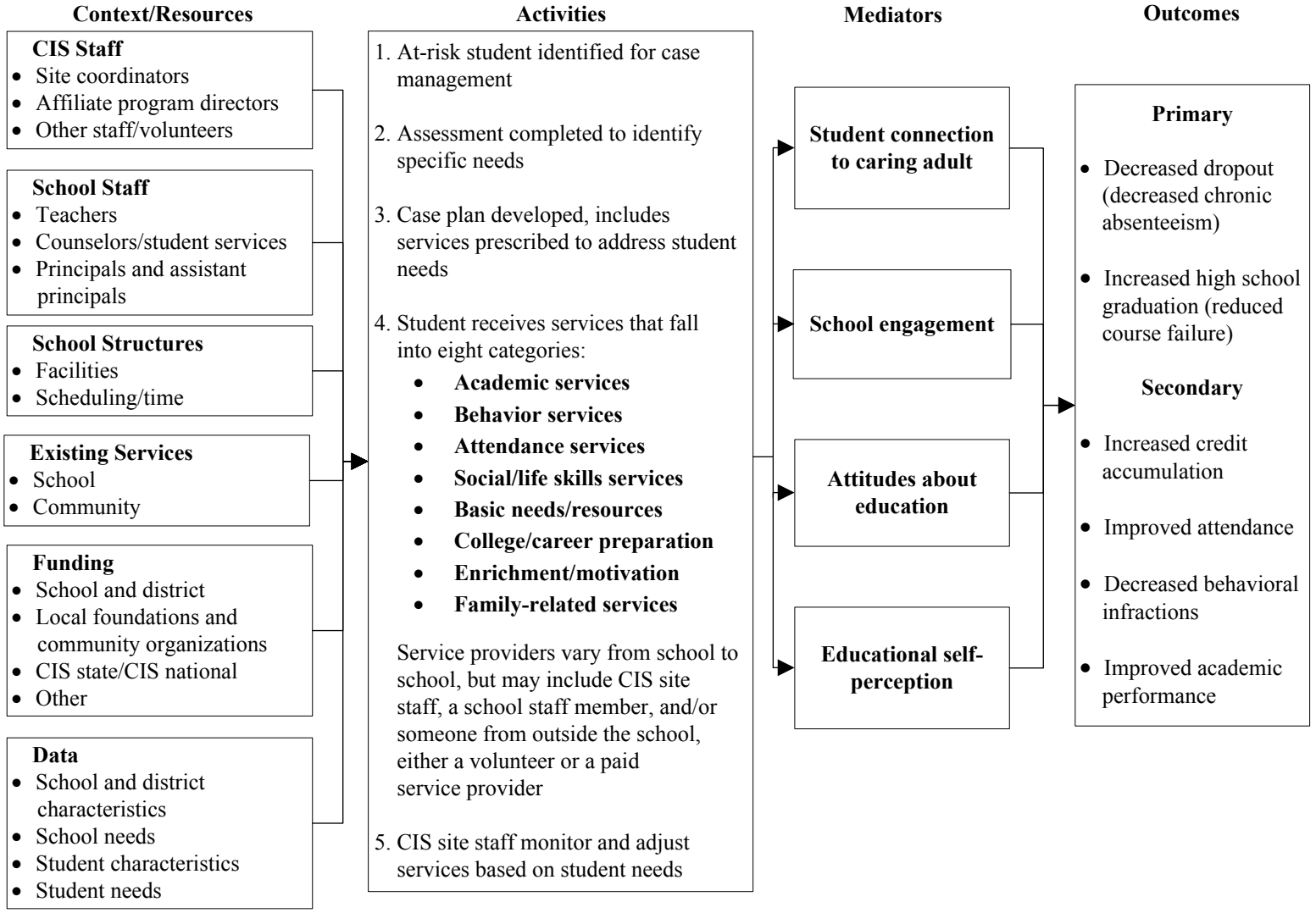
This report focuses on the Level 2 case management component of the Communities In Schools comprehensive model of integrated student supports, as implemented at both the middle school and high school levels.[7] Figure ES.1 presents the case management logic model. The "Context/Resources" column in the figure shows factors that support or affect case management service provision. For example, available financial resources and the number of students in a school influence how many site coordinators might be assigned there; existing youth and family service organizations represent the pool of potential local service providers with which site coordinators can partner.

The second column, labeled "Activities," outlines case management itself. Through a review of data or by referrals from adults in the school, the site coordinator identifies a student

[7]The comprehensive Communities In Schools model is implemented across grades K-12, in elementary, middle, and high schools. This evaluation of case management focuses only on secondary schools.

Figure ES.1

Communities In Schools (CIS) Case Management Logic Model



as potentially at risk for eventually dropping out and seeks consent from a parent or guardian for the student to receive case-managed services. The site coordinator then assesses the student's needs, develops an individualized case plan, and sets goals with the student. Based on the case plan, the site coordinator provides or connects the student to services specific to his or her needs. (See Box ES.1 for examples of these services.) During the year, the site coordinator monitors student progress and adjusts the plan as necessary based on changes in the student's needs.

The case management activities are expected to affect "Mediators" (the third column) related to students' attitudes, behaviors, and relationships. The services provided to a student are intended to help foster supportive relationships with adults and peers, encourage greater engagement with school, stimulate greater effort to meet academic and behavioral expectations, and increase the value that students see in their schooling. Impacts on these mediators are theorized to affect such student outcomes as attendance, performance in class, and disruptive behavior in school, as listed in the "Outcomes" column.

Box ES.1

What Kinds of Activities Are Included in Each Service Type?

Academic services. Adult or peer tutoring, homework assistance, study skills activities, student-teacher conferences

Behavior services. Conflict resolution groups, anger management or other behavioral counseling, violence prevention activities, behavior monitoring and interventions

Attendance services. In-person attendance check-ins and planning

Social or life skills services. Goal-setting activities; self-esteem enhancement activities; girls' or boys' groups; social, relationship, and communication activities; team-building games and activities; crisis and grief counseling services

Basic needs and resources. Provision of school supplies; assistance with utilities, rent, etc.; food and clothing assistance; health activities and checkups

College and career preparation. College admissions preparation and assistance, career counseling, college visits and career field trips, college awareness activities and programs

Enrichment or motivation services. Community service, field trips unrelated to college or career preparation, sports or exercise activities, scouting, arts and crafts, student recognition activities and incentives

Family-related services. Parent education, home visits, parent conferences and contacts, parent and family events and activities, family counseling

Evaluating the Communities In Schools Integrated Student Services Model

In its ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, the Communities In Schools national office looks to external organizations to provide independent and objective research intended to help its staff understand how its model is being implemented in schools and what its impact is on schools and students. A previous evaluation by ICF International suggested that young people who receive Communities In Schools services are more likely to achieve a number of positive outcomes than those who do not.[8] Given the opportunity to expand its evidence base and strengthen its network through a federal grant program, Communities In Schools engaged MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization, to conduct an independent, two-study evaluation funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation Social Innovation Fund and the Wallace Foundation.[9]

One study focuses on the implementation and impact of Communities In Schools Level 2 case-managed services, examining service provision, student experiences, and student outcomes in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. This study relies on a random assignment research design, often referred to as the "gold standard" evaluation design. Random assignment is a lottery-like process by which individuals are assigned either to participate in a specific program or to continue with whatever the "business as usual" alternative(s) might be. When there are more individuals interested in and eligible for a program than there are available slots, this process both provides a fair way to determine who participates in the program and creates two equivalent groups. The 16 middle schools and 12 high schools included in this study each had more eligible students — those facing academic, attendance, behavioral, and/or personal challenges that threatened to impede their progress toward high school graduation — than could be included on site coordinators' caseloads. Thus students were randomly assigned to join site coordinators' caseloads (1,140 students in the *case-managed* group) or to continue with business as usual at their schools, with access to whatever other student supports were available (1,090 students in the *non-case-managed* group). Since random assignment created two comparable groups and the sample is large, individual characteristics of the students are, on average, the same for both groups. Therefore, any

[8]ICF International, *Communities In Schools National Evaluation: Five Year Summary Report* (Fairfax, VA: ICF International, 2010); Allan Porowski and Aikaterini Passa, "The Effect of Communities In Schools on High School Dropout and Graduation Rates: Results From a Multiyear, School-Level Quasi-Experimental Study," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)* 16, no. 1 (2011): 24-37.

[9]The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF) received a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant from the federal Corporation for National and Community Service. Communities In Schools is a subgrantee to EMCF within the SIF program. Thus, while Communities In Schools was interested in ongoing evaluation, this evaluation is also being conducted as one of the required activities of the SIF grant program. It also aligns with EMCF's interest in supporting organizations that are participating in evidence-generating research.

differences that emerge over time between these two groups in outcomes such as their attendance, course performance, and behavior, as well as their attitudes about school and their relationships with peers and adults, can be attributed to Communities In Schools case management. This report is the first of two planned for this study.

The second study in this evaluation investigates the impact of the Communities In Schools comprehensive model, including both Level 1 and Level 2 services. In the second study, the impact of the comprehensive model is estimated by looking at student outcomes at schools before and after they implement the model and comparing the outcomes with those of students at a set of similar schools not implementing the model during the same period of time.[10] The results from this quasi-experimental study will be presented in a separate evaluation report.

Studying the Implementation and Impact of Case Management

This first report from the evaluation of Communities In Schools case management focuses primarily on its implementation. It looks at Communities In Schools' operations and the contexts of the schools in which site coordinators work, the case management process, and how case management affects students' school experiences, in particular which kinds of services students receive in an effort to help them succeed. Since it is expected that case management may take more than one year to start having an impact on students' school outcomes, the one-year impact findings are considered interim findings.[11] The second report from this study of case management will present more definitive, two-year impact findings.

This study draws upon varied quantitative and qualitative data sources to learn about case management's implementation and interim impacts. They include surveys of school leaders and Communities In Schools site coordinators; in-person interviews with school principals, site coordinators, case-managed and non-case-managed students, and staff members of the local Communities In Schools affiliates; management information system (MIS) data (regularly reported information on the services site coordinators provide or coordinate for

[10]This is known as a "comparative interrupted time series" design.

[11]Research on other student support programs such as AVID and the Higher Achievement Program have found null or negative impacts on outcomes such as attendance, course grades, and standardized test scores after the first year of student participation, and then found positive impacts by the second or third year of support. A report on integrated student services has also indicated that the impacts of such services can take time to emerge. See Elizabeth Dunn, Heather S. Fowler, Doug Tattrie, Claudia Nicholson, Saul Schwartz, Judith Hutchison, Isaac Kwakye, Reuben Ford, and Sabina Dobrer, *BC AVID Pilot Project: Interim Impacts Report* (Ottawa: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2010); Carla Herrera, Jean B. Grossman, and Leigh L. Linden, *Staying On Track: Testing Higher Achievement's Long-Term Impact on Academic Outcomes and High School Choice* (New York: A Public/Private Ventures project distributed by MDRC, 2013); Moore et al. (2014).

individual students); surveys of case-managed and non-case-managed students; and student records data obtained from the local school districts. The first four data sources — adult surveys, in-person interviews, MIS data, and student surveys — all inform the implementation research, providing information about the "Context" and "Activities" categories in the case management logic model. Student surveys also provide information for the analysis of the impact of case management on mediating outcomes ("Mediators"). Student records data provide information for the analysis of its impact on school outcomes ("Outcomes").

One-Year Implementation Findings

The implementation research investigates the nature of Communities In Schools site coordinators' work with students and adults within their schools — the "where, what, and how" of their work. The findings from this research address questions about context, fidelity of implementation, service receipt, and service contrast.

Context: Where and Under What Circumstances Is Case Management Being Implemented?

The 28 schools participating in this study are spread across seven school districts and five Communities In Schools local affiliates in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas. Most of these schools are located in and around large or midsized cities, and all receive funding under Title I, the federal program that supports schools that have a large proportion of disadvantaged children. About 60 percent of the students in the study schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and nearly 85 percent are black or Hispanic students. On average, the high school and middle school student enrollments are more than 1,500 students and 700 students respectively.

School leaders and Communities In Schools site coordinators reported that many types of services are offered by school staff, Communities In Schools, and other external partners to address challenges faced by their students. Communities In Schools appears to be an important part of the study schools' student support environments, offering a variety of Level 1 services that are widely available to students in the school and providing Level 2 case-managed services to approximately 10 percent of students on average. The site coordinators in the study schools had an average of more than five years of experience in their positions and many had or were working toward advanced degrees in social work or counseling.

Program Fidelity: How Similar Is Case Management As Implemented to the Model As Designed?

Fidelity was assessed qualitatively, drawing predominantly on interviews conducted with site coordinators, school staff, and students on site visits conducted at 18 of the study

schools across all five local affiliates. This assessment focused on the process of case management (Figure ES.2), or how site coordinators identified and worked with students on their caseloads. Each step of the case management process — identification, assessment, case planning, service provision, and monitoring and adjusting — was implemented across all visited sites, which is notable given the autonomy of the local affiliates within the Communities In Schools national network. Details of how each step was implemented varied across affiliates, however.

Site coordinators primarily turn to administrators, teachers, and other support staff to help identify students in need of case management and to begin to understand students' areas of need. But needs assessments for case-managed students are conducted differently across affiliates, with some being substantially more in depth than others. After the needs assessment, all site coordinators develop case plans for and with their case-managed students. The level of detail included in the case plan and the extent to which it guides practice throughout the school year also vary by affiliate and by school.

Across schools and affiliates, the services provided for case-managed students focus primarily on academic assistance, behavior, and social skills development. Many services are provided directly by Communities In Schools staff or associated partner organizations; other services are activities or supports provided by school staff, which the site coordinator facilitates or encourages students to participate in. Once students have started receiving services, most site coordinators monitor case-managed students' progress by reviewing students' school records, although the frequency of these reviews differs across affiliates, and many site coordinators explained that formal adjustments to case plans may only occur periodically.

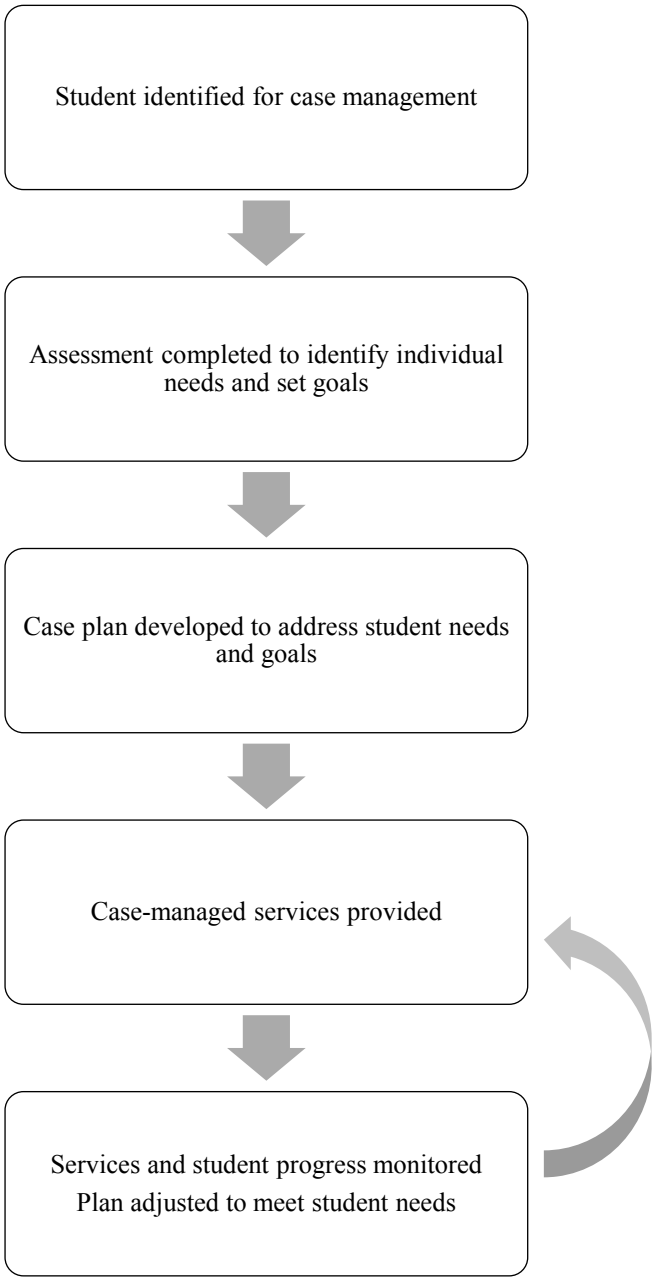
Service Receipt: What Services Do Students Receive, How Many Times, and for How Long?

Students in the Communities In Schools case-managed group received an average of 19.4 service contacts during the year, which amounted to an average of 16.2 total Level 2 service hours. These services include both those provided directly by site coordinators and those to which site coordinators referred students. Students were enrolled on caseloads for an average of about 30 weeks of the year, translating to about 2.5 service contacts monthly lasting an average of about 50 minutes each. The greatest proportion of case-managed students (three out of four) received academic services, three out of five received social or life skills services, and half received behavior-related services.

There was substantial variation in service receipt among case-managed students, with some students receiving very low levels of services and others receiving high levels. The study team looked at whether this variation was associated with a student being "high risk" (having

Figure ES.2

Communities In Schools Case Management Process



failed a course, been chronically absent, or been suspended in the prior year).[12] While there were minor differences in the levels of services Communities In Schools provided to high- and moderate-risk students, high-risk case-managed students did not receive more Level 2 service contacts or total hours overall than moderate-risk students.[13] If high-risk students, who are more likely to drop out of school, need more support than moderate-risk students, the provision of Level 2 services may need to be weighted more toward this group.

Service Contrast: Does Case Management Create a Difference Between the Experiences of Case-Managed Students and the Experiences of Non-Case-Managed Students?

Compared with non-case-managed students, Communities In Schools case-managed students generally reported participating in more support activities. Specifically, case-managed students were significantly more likely to report participating in individual and group meetings with adults in school, meeting with a mentor, participating in community service, and participating in positive behavior programs. The two groups of students were similar in their receipt of such services as homework help, tutoring, and college and career planning, and their participation in job shadowing or internships. At this stage of the study, it is unclear whether the number and magnitude of the differences between the two groups are enough to affect student outcomes. Also, because Communities In Schools coordinates Level 1 services accessible to all students, non-case-managed students have opportunities to engage with some of the same support services accessed by case-managed students. Thus it is possible that there is less contrast between the services used by the two groups of students than if Communities In Schools were not providing whole-school services as well as case management.

Interim Impact Findings

The implementation of Level 2 case management is intended to advance the larger goal of Communities In Schools to have a positive impact on students' *school progress*. That is, Communities In Schools seeks to reduce the number of dropouts and to increase the number of graduates. During the time frame for this study, it is not possible to track all students through high school graduation. Therefore, the focus of the impact analysis is on *primary outcomes* that

[12]Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver (2007) have found that as early as the sixth grade, 50 percent of future school dropouts in high-poverty schools exhibit indicators of falling off track — poor attendance, poor behavior, and poor course performance (that is, course failure). See Robert Balfanz, Liza Herzog, and Douglas MacIver, "Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions," *Educational Psychologist* 42, no. 4 (2007): 223-235.

[13]Since all students must be deemed to have some risk to be eligible for case management to begin with, case-managed students who were not high risk are categorized as "moderate risk."

are predictive of students dropping out: chronic absenteeism and course failure in core academic subject areas.[14] The study also analyzes the impact of case management on a few *secondary outcomes*: attendance rate, course grades, credit earning (in high school), and suspensions. Furthermore, the study looks at the impact of case management on *mediating student outcomes* related to school engagement, relationships with adults and peers, student self-perception, and educational aspirations and expectations, which often represent nonacademic obstacles to academic success for students at risk of dropping out. Communities In Schools seeks to support students in overcoming these obstacles, setting a foundation for them to succeed in school. (See "Mediators" and "Outcomes" in Figure ES.1.)

Primary and secondary outcomes. Compared with non-case-managed students, case-managed students had a slightly higher rate of chronic absenteeism and a similar rate of core course failure. There were no significant differences between the groups on other measures of school progress, behavior, and academic achievement. Thus, after one year, Communities In Schools case management has not yet demonstrated improved outcomes for students related to attendance, course performance, and school discipline.

Mediating outcomes. Based on students' reports, Communities In Schools case management had a positive and statistically significant impact on students' likelihood of having caring, supportive relationships with adults outside of home and school; on the quality of their peer relationships; and on their belief that education has positive value for their lives. But for most of the mediating outcomes — relationships with caring, supportive adults at home or school, educational attitudes, school engagement, and educational goals and expectations — there were no notable differences between students in the case-managed and non-case-managed groups.

Suggestions for Continuous Improvement

Although the evaluation study of Communities In Schools Level 2 case management is ongoing, the research after one year suggests some areas where Communities In Schools may want to consider change.

[14]Allensworth and Easton (2005) indicate that earning course credits and not failing core courses in ninth grade is predictive of eventual graduation, and Herlihy and Kemple (2004) and Quint (2006) discuss how crucial ninth grade is to students' progress to graduation. See Elaine M. Allensworth and John Q. Easton, *The On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2005); Corrine Herlihy and James J. Kemple, *The Talent Development High School Model: Context, Components, and Initial Impacts on Ninth-Grade Students' Engagement and Performance* (New York: MDRC, 2004); Janet Quint, *Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform: Lessons from Research on Three Reform Models* (New York: MDRC, 2006).

- The implementation research suggests that the participating schools and affiliates follow the same steps in the case management process — a noteworthy finding given Communities In Schools' expansive national network of relatively autonomous local affiliates — but with variations. In particular, site coordinators' ongoing assessment of students' needs and their use of data collected as part of the monitoring process may benefit from greater consistency across schools. Communities In Schools' national office could consider suggesting best practices for the network regarding how and with what kind of data site coordinators assess students' ongoing needs, as well as how site coordinators can best use these data to ensure that services are adjusted to continually address students' needs and increase the likelihood of improvements in student outcomes.

- Recognizing that some students have more intensive needs than others, Communities In Schools may want to develop additional guidelines regarding the relationship between levels of service and student needs. Even though site coordinators indicated in interviews that they paid different levels of attention to different students according to their needs, the analyses of service receipt in this study showed little variation in the services received by high-risk and moderate-risk students. Site coordinators might benefit from more guidance on assessing levels of student risk and identifying appropriate levels of service in response, in order to focus more time and energy on the most struggling students. Such service differentiation, if standardized within the Communities In Schools model, would in effect result in a three-level service model.

- The schools in this study have a range of services in place to help students be more successful, including the broadly available Level 1 services provided by Communities In Schools. In schools with many services available, it may be more challenging for Level 2 case management to make a difference above and beyond the other services that exist, including Communities In Schools' own Level 1 services. Therefore, it may be beneficial for Communities In Schools to consider where it can add the greatest value in each school building, and how that may change over time. Perhaps in schools with many services already available to students, Communities In Schools should focus their efforts on providing Level 2 case-managed services only to the students most in need and focus much less, if at all, on Level 1. In schools with relatively few school-wide supports, the organization may be able to add substantial value by having site coordinators spend more time on Level 1 services. The Communities In Schools national office may be in a position to

provide guidance to affiliates regarding how to determine an appropriate balance between Level 1 and Level 2 services so that Communities In Schools can maximize its value in each school.

Next Steps for the Study of Case Management

The research activities that are part of this study have continued, and the results from ongoing analyses will be shared in a second report. The next report will build on and complement this report in three ways:

- **Two-year impacts.** Similar student data on primary, secondary, and mediating outcomes is being collected for the 2013-2014 school year. The analysis of these data will result in two-year impact findings that better assess the effectiveness of case management, given that most students on a site coordinator's caseload receive case-managed services for more than one year. Preliminary data suggest that about two-thirds of the 2012-2013 case-managed students in our sample continued to receive case management in 2013-2014.

- **Additional implementation findings.** The second report will include more implementation information, creating an opportunity to see whether the case management experience for students changed over the course of two years. It will again include information about service provision and receipt, as well as on the contrast that case management creates in the services students receive. New implementation data were collected during the 2013-2014 school year that will make it possible to discuss how the types of services provided to students align with their specific needs. The second report will also discuss the roles of Communities In Schools' community partners and the nature of the partnerships. And to further understand the contrast that site coordinator case management might make in student service provision, the report will present more information about the work of guidance counselors and social workers, the school staff members whose work is generally most comparable to that of Communities In Schools site coordinators.

- **Variation.** Furthermore, the next report will investigate variation across school sites in terms of both implementation and impacts and the associations between the two. This analysis may generate lessons about which contexts and implementation characteristics are associated with positive impacts on student outcomes.

Taken together, the two evaluation reports will provide comprehensive information about the implementation and impact of Level 2 case management. This information will be useful to Communities In Schools and other organizations that are trying to improve student outcomes through individualized case planning intended to better connect students to support services aligned with their needs.

About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.