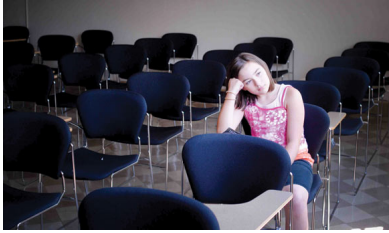


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By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

EDITOR's NOTE: The students' names have been changed to protect their identity.

Some students struggle with school due to obstacles facing them like a troubled home life or illnesses. Because of these obstacles, school becomes a low priority.

Statistics show that every 26 seconds, because of these problems, a student drops out of school and into an uncertain future. The group Communities in Schools at Liberal High School is looking to help change this trend with the work the counselors do.

CIS is a nationwide program, and it currently serves 26 schools in Kansas. Wichita was the first district in Kansas to have CIS implemented back in the early 1990s, and Liberal High School only implemented it in 2013.

“What we’re here to do is help students make progress relative to their peers during a difficult transition period,” said Denae Weber, the site coordinator at LHS for Communities in Schools. “But ultimately we’re here to promote to keep the kids from dropping out of high school.”

A recent release from CIS says studies also show that when students drop out, they are more likely to end up in poverty, suffer poor health, be dependent on social services, enter the criminal justice system and cost the U.S. billions of dollars each year in lost revenue and increased spending on government assistance programs. CIS is currently serving approximately 1,000 students at Liberal High School this year, working not just with the schools but also communities, partner organizations and families to create a support system for those who need it.

“Taryn,” a 16-year-old sophomore at LHS, has been working with the CIS program since the beginning of this past school year. She says working with the program has greatly changed her motivation to be in school even while facing her mother’s illness.

“Once I started to spend time with the site coordinators and getting help from them, I’ve become more motivated to work hard and to bring my grades up in school – which I have,” she said. “School would be difficult for me because I wouldn’t have any motivation and wouldn’t feel like I’d have anyone to go to or be there for me without CIS.”

“Taryn” added that had CIS been available during elementary school and middle school, those years would also have been easier for her.

Another student who has been helped through CIS is 15-year-old freshman “Josh.” One of the biggest obstacles he faced before getting help from CIS was a lack of transportation to school. He and his brother live on the south side of Liberal and had to get up at 5 a.m. every morning to get to classes since they had to walk.

“I would miss school like twice a week because I was tired and didn’t want to walk. They helped us get bikes and bus passes when it was cold,” he said. “If I wouldn’t have gotten help finding a way to get to school, I would have probably stopped going to school.”

He said CIS was also able to help him get an eye exam along with new glasses, as well as a sports physical so he could participate in track.

“I’d make poor decisions and be lost most of the time because Ms. Weber wouldn’t be here to help me understand what is right and wrong,” he said. “I would have lots of problems and would not be able to solve them if not for CIS.”

Weber expressed high appreciation for the help CIS has received for the LHS students.

“There’s businesses that have donated vision screenings and doctors’ offices that have donated their time to help with physicals and services to help these kids,” Weber said. “There are several obstacles that these students face at home and try to come to school, but sometimes school isn’t on their priorities list. It’s survival so that’s why we’re here to help.”

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