

YEARBOOK 2025

End the Year
Strong, Start the
Future Brighter



DEAR FRIENDS,

Goals are an essential part of the Communities In Schools model.

Through conversations with teachers and students, alongside robust data analysis, our program managers identify the biggest challenges facing schools and individual students, and help set the type of “SMART” goals that you are likely familiar with - goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound - in response.

Our case-managed students set a total of 3,632 individualized goals this year. Many focused on improving chronic absenteeism, our primary directive at the school-wide and individual student levels.

For students who need support in other areas - behavior, coursework, or social and life skills - we set a goal focused on progress in the most relevant area of need.

From there, students meet regularly with their program managers to monitor their progress. Our team provides encouragement, support, accountability, and a safe space for students to strategize and learn to navigate setbacks as they work towards their goal.

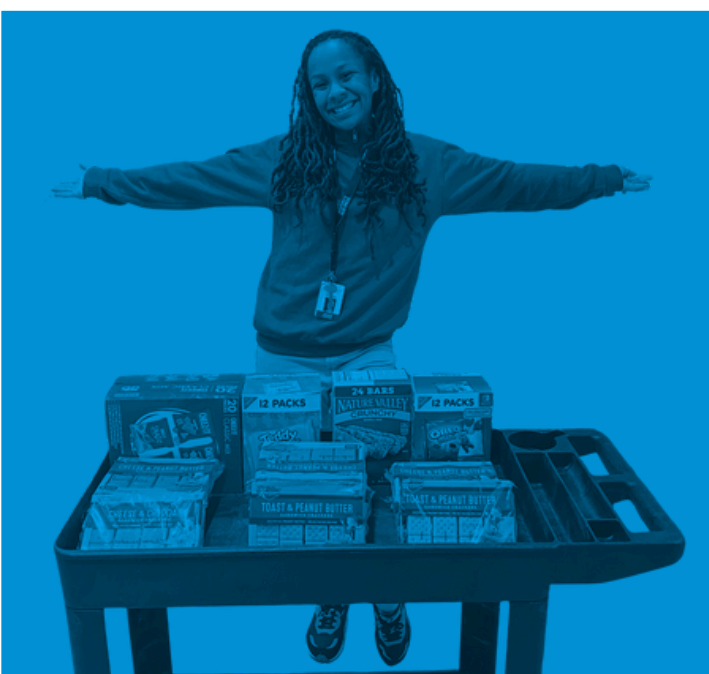
It’s inspiring to watch, and you are about to read four incredible stories of students who worked hard and achieved their goals this year. We are so proud of the resilience and determination shown by Carson, Mariah, Sierra, and the Newton siblings this year.

Thank you for joining us as we celebrate their success.

Sincerely,

Meredith Benton
Chief Executive Officer

Tiffany Patton
Chief Program Officer



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GOAT SETTING PROCESS



IDENTIFY STUDENTS WITH THE GREATEST NEED

Students are referred for 1:1 case management in a variety of ways, from recommendations by teachers and school staff to word of mouth from friends and other students, and school data.



SET ABCS GOALS FOR EVERY STUDENT

All case-managed students have an ABCS goal — related to **A**ttendance, **B**ehavior, **C**oursework, or **S**ocial and Life Skills— based on the most relevant area of need.



REGULAR CHECK-INS

CISTN program managers meet with students on a regular basis to monitor their progress, discuss challenges, and provide ongoing support and encouragement.



PROVIDE WHOLE-CHILD SUPPORT

In addition to their focused goal, CISTN program managers work with students on topics including behaviors, coursework, college/career readiness, and life and social skills to help remove barriers to success.



Communities
In Schools®

Tennessee





MEET SIERRA

At Ripley High School, senior Sierra set out to make her last year her best - and she more than delivered. Referred to CISTN by her principal (and herself), Sierra connected with Hope, her CISTN program manager, to tackle two big goals: improving her attendance and getting career ready. It wasn't an easy road - Sierra was navigating the grief of losing her father, battling old habits, and working hard to rewrite a story that included nine trips to alternative school since the fifth grade. From their first meeting, Hope believed in her, and Sierra began to believe in herself.

Through a mix of grief counseling, goal setting, and offering a safe place to land, Hope helped Sierra stay focused. Field trips, career networking events, and daily check-ins became the new normal. Hope's office turned into Sierra's "safe zone," a place where she could regroup when things got tough. Sierra leaned into the support - reminding herself daily that it wasn't worth going back to the start. Prayer, discipline, and a lot of self-redirection became part of her toolkit for success.

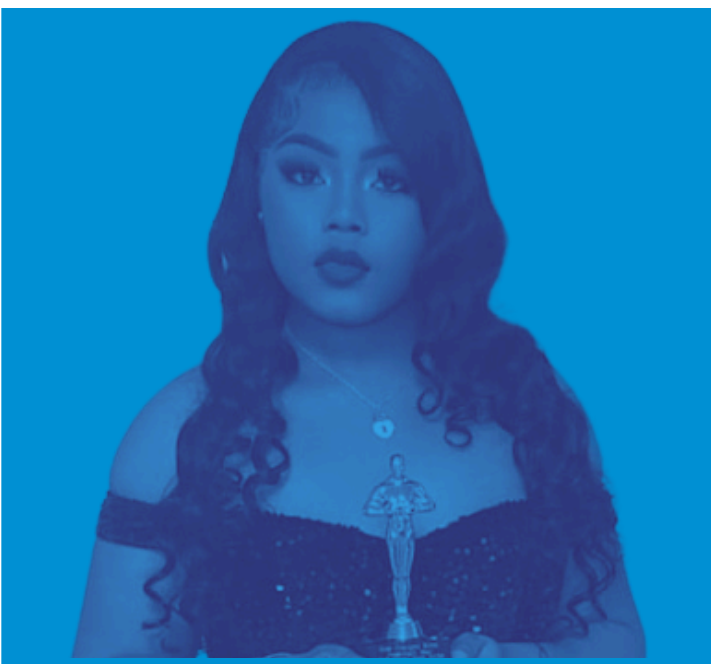
And it paid off. **Sierra's attendance soared from a 65% baseline to 81.58% by the end of the fourth quarter**, making this her first fully completed school year since fourth grade. Her grades jumped from a D average to an A/B average. She became a leader on campus, joining Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), making the Homecoming Court, and winning the "Most Changed Since Freshman Year" award at Ripley High's Oscar Night. For a student who once struggled just to show up, Sierra's senior year became a full-circle moment.

Today, Sierra has her eyes on the future, as she is planning to become a medical assistant and possibly transition into a four-year college or university after earning her license. She's proud of the progress she's made and wants other students to know that showing up matters. "Of course you want to have fun, but paying attention in class and working hard now puts you in a better position later," she says. It's advice she's living by - and a reminder that with the right support and a lot of heart, it's never too late to change your story.

GRADE: Senior

FAVORITE THINGS TO DO: Singing, working, and helping individuals with special needs

SENIOR HIGHLIGHTS: Made Homecoming Court and won "Most Changed Since Freshman Year" Award



GOAL: Improve career readiness and school attendance

SUPPORT NEEDED: Help with coping mechanisms, grief counseling, goal setting, motivation, and consistent encouragement to stay on track academically

MEET MARIAH

When Abby, the CISTN program manager at Paragon Mills Elementary, first started working with fifth grader Mariah, attendance was a serious challenge. Mariah ended the previous school year with 43 absences - often arriving late, exhausted, or not at all. But underneath the struggle, Abby saw a bright, curious student who loved her weekend scooter and bike rides. She just needed someone in her corner.

Abby started showing up for Mariah - literally. At the beginning of last year, she would go to Mariah's house to wake her up and make sure she caught the bus. On Fridays, she'd offer rides to school as a reward if Mariah made it to the bus the rest of the week. When that worked, she upped the ante: hot chocolate runs from the coffee shop down the street if Mariah could get herself ready each day. Alongside the incentives, Abby worked closely with Mariah's mom to create better routines at home, especially around sleep.

That consistency paid off. **This year, Mariah had perfect attendance for the first two quarters and is ending the year with just 8 absences - a huge jump from her previous 76% attendance rate to now a near-perfect 94.2%.**

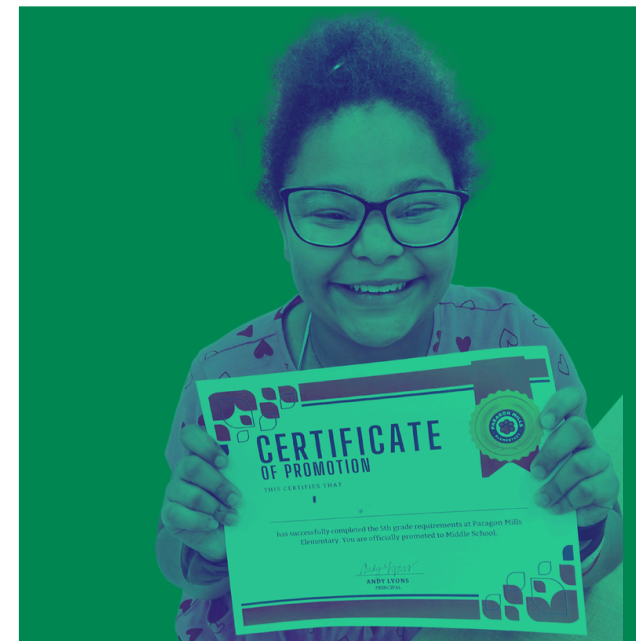
It's not just the numbers that have improved. Last year, she often fell asleep in class, felt unsure about answering questions, and struggled with behavior. Now, she's alert, engaged, and thriving socially and academically in her favorite classes, math and science. One of her struggles was staying up too late and waking up exhausted. Now, she leaves her phone and laptop in the living room and sets her clothes out the night before so she can go to bed on time and wake up prepared and refreshed for school.

Ask Mariah what changed, and she'll tell you straight up: "Miss Abby is the best ever." Whether it was the prizes, the one-on-one support, or just knowing someone believed in her, Mariah says she's proud of how far she's come - and she's a little nervous to leave it all behind as she heads to middle school. However, thanks to the CISTN system, she'll have another CISTN program manager waiting to help her continue her success at her middle school. Although she's not excited to leave Miss Abby just yet, she's taking some **solid advice with her that she wanted to share with other students who may be struggling to make it to school in the morning, "When you're tired in the morning and you don't feel like going to school, go to the bathroom and spray your face with water."** Sounds like a future mentor in the making.

GRADE: Fifth

FAVORITE THINGS TO DO:
Riding her bike and scooter

GOAL: Improve attendance and become more engaged and confident in the classroom



Outcome:

18% INCREASE
In attendance
since last
academic year.





MEET CARSON

At Community Middle School in Unionville, eighth-grader Carson faced the kind of pressure that kids his age shouldn't have to carry. He was navigating anxiety, bullying, and the absence of both parents in his daily life - all while living with his grandmother and worrying constantly about his baby sister back in Nashville. By the time the school year started, Carson was in a tough spot: struggling with low self-esteem, missing school frequently, and facing truancy court. It all felt overwhelming - like he was stuck in a hole he couldn't climb out of.

GRADE: Eighth

FAVORITE THINGS TO DO:

Going on walks, riding his four-wheeler, spending time in nature, and being around horses

GOAL: Improve attendance and develop strategies to manage anxiety



At the beginning of the year, Carson was struggling with more than just attendance. He was being bullied, experiencing regular panic attacks, and waking up each morning with a sense of dread that made it hard to even get out of bed. The anxiety left him feeling physically sick, and the pressure of falling behind in school made everything worse. He was eventually visited at home by a school resource officer and a representative from truancy court, who warned that continuing to miss school could lead to juvenile detention. That moment made things real - and overwhelming. But it also became a turning point, when Carson knew he needed help and someone to walk alongside him.

That's when he met Allison. As his CISTN program manager, Allison began working with Carson in the second quarter - not just to improve his attendance, but to support him through the deeper challenges he was facing. Together, they set quarter-by-quarter goals and built a foundation of trust. Allison helped him recognize his anxiety, gave him space to talk through it, and worked with him to build coping strategies. As Carson puts it, "Ms. Allison helped me learn that anxiety doesn't disappear and you have to learn how to cope with it."

With support, things started to shift. Carson's attendance jumped from **just over 54% in Q1 to 90% in Q3**. His teachers noticed the difference too - he became more present, more focused, and more confident. He joined the Kindness Crew at school, pushing himself outside of his comfort zone socially and learning how to better connect with peers. His wellness scores climbed, and the bullying began to ease. Even when he faced setbacks, including illness and moments of self-doubt, he kept moving forward.

Now, Carson is proud of the progress he's made and more hopeful about what lies ahead. With a little strategy, a strong support system, and a lot of resilience, he's learned how to manage his anxiety, rebuild confidence, and show up for himself, one school day at a time.

Outcome:

36% INCREASE
In attendance
since start of
school year

THE NEWTONS

At Gateway Elementary, siblings Kristen (2nd grade), Dexter (3rd grade), and Kylie (1st grade) have each faced more than their fair share of challenges. Living in a household struggling with housing insecurity, food scarcity, and limited access to basic needs, all three children also receive intensive support services for intellectual disabilities. Two of the siblings, Kristen and Dexter, began the year nearly non-verbal, while Kylie entered first grade with significant social-emotional challenges. But thanks to the wraparound support provided by CISTN, they're each finding their voice and their stride in school.

Each of the Newton children brings a unique light to the classroom. Kristen is artistically inclined and loves writing, drawing, and solving puzzles. Dexter has a strong analytical mind and enjoys math, technology, and playing Minecraft. Kylie, the youngest, has an advanced vocabulary for her age and a love for all things creative and expressive. Despite their gifts, the road hasn't been easy. Personal struggles at home and a lack of stable resources often made it difficult for the siblings to attend school consistently, let alone thrive once they were there.

CISTN program manager Jacob stepped in with consistent one-on-one support - including wellness check-ins, coordination with paraprofessionals and exceptional education staff, and tangible resources like hygiene kits, seasonal clothing through Unicycle and Operation School Bell, and regular food supplies. Jacob also built strong relationships with the children's parents to ensure sustained, wraparound care. **As a result, all three siblings have improved their attendance dramatically this year, with Kristen reducing her absences by 38%, Dexter by 60%, and Kylie by 32%. Each child now has an attendance rate above 90%.**

Even more meaningful, their growth in social and life skills as well as academics has been profound. Kristen and Dexter, who started the year mostly non-verbal, now greet others, recite their ABCs, and show improved eye contact and independence. Kylie is considered one of the brightest students in first grade and is learning new strategies to manage her emotions. Their mom, Ms. Collins, said it best: "CISTN has been excellent help." She noted that the kids had "the best Christmas they ever had" due to CISTN Christmas support.



Outcome:

46% DECREASE
Of total
absences since
last academic
year

GRADES: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd

FAVORITE THINGS TO DO: Kristen enjoys solving puzzles, Dexter loves spending time outside, and Kylie enjoys creative art projects

GOALS: Improve attendance, develop verbal communication skills, and increase social and life skills.



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our goal of \$40K before June 30.
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start the future brighter!

