



Communities
In Schools

Tennessee

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Contact: Lauren Butler
(615) 853-0999
lbutler@cistn.org

New Study Shows State's Vulnerable Families Struggling with Mental Health and Wellbeing as COVID-19 School Closures Cause Growing Crisis

Communities In Schools of Tennessee calls for greater government & nonprofit collaboration

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The social, emotional and physical needs of Tennessee’s students have intensified as stay-at-home orders and long-term school closures have added to the economic stress and lack of services that already challenged the state’s most vulnerable families.

These findings, revealed in survey data collected by Communities In Schools of Tennessee and released today in [Supporting Families Through a Global Pandemic](#), show that students and their families in Nashville and in many of the state’s rural communities, are struggling with issues of mental health and general wellbeing. In some cases, respondents cited excessive stress and emotional strain that kept them from wanting to participate in the needs survey at all.

In all, the top three concerns among students and their families during the time of coronavirus were:

- Child and adult stress
- Food insecurity and
- Finding and accessing educational resources

“There is no question that all families are currently experiencing the stress of ongoing stay-at-home orders and social distancing, but this is especially hard for vulnerable families who are daily contending with many other critical stressors,” said CIS-TN CEO Samantha Wigand. “Our families have told us what they need, and we are determined to do all we can to act on this

information. We need government and nonprofit partners to come together in an unprecedented way to rally around the needs of vulnerable families. Without a clear and direct effort to mitigate these unsung side effects of the pandemic, our schools and communities will be grappling with these consequences for years to come.”

Data show that for students, mental health struggles are exacerbated by a lack of medications and available counseling, as well as not having the daily structure and socialization that school provides; many families are also dealing with addiction, domestic violence and other mental health strains happening in the home. Additionally, parents and caregivers are dealing with the strain of financial instability, food insecurity or having to find creative ways to care for children who are no longer in school.

Prior to schools closing this spring to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the work of CIS-TN was done almost entirely inside school buildings — making connections with students, in some cases through the use of a case manager, or coordinator, to provide holistic support and removing academic and nonacademic barriers to their academic success. But when it became apparent schools would remain closed for an extended period of time, CIS-TN reimagined the structure of this work.

After quickly moving to remote-only support, coordinators were able to collect information about families’ needs through informal surveys conducted with the highest need students and families, those who are case managed by a CIS-TN coordinator. These assessments were conducted March 30 - April 10, 2020. In that time, CIS-TN conducted more than 900 surveys, or approximately two-thirds of the most vulnerable families the organization serves.

The following table shows the top five most frequently mentioned concerns in Nashville and in rural counties:

Nashville	Rural
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finding and using educational resources (61%) 2. Adult stress in the home (51%) 3. Food (50%) 4. Child stress in the home (47%) 5. Lack of devices (46%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adult stress in the home (45%) 2. Child stress in the home (42%) 3. Finding and using educational resources (31%) 4. Employment/Income (31%) 5. Internet accessibility (30%)

CIS-TN plans to continue tracking this data to see the ways in which families’ needs may be shifting during the pandemic caused by COVID-19, and the extent to which the organization might need to again alter or increase support in order to help meet those needs.

CIS-TN believes the far-reaching impact of this global health crisis emphasizes the need for the following:

1. **Greater collaboration among Tennessee’s nonprofits and school service**

providers. This collaboration can take many forms, but ideally, would include data sharing in order to identify gaps in service and avoid duplicative support as well as ensure that all providers working with a student are continuously communicating and delivering effective, efficient and comprehensive support, particularly to the state's most vulnerable families.

2. **Increased holistic and individualized support to students and their families.** CIS-TN's nationally proven case management delivery model is well positioned to serve Tennessee during this unprecedented time of need. We hope the communities we serve will recognize and prioritize this need and facilitate deeper partnerships with the nonprofit sector as a whole to improve the wellbeing of families hardest hit by this crisis.

"We know that student success has always been dependent on more than simply attendance and test scores, but the additional emotional and economic stress this pandemic has placed on students and families who were already vulnerable presents a real risk of creating additional barriers for academic success, and ultimately, widening achievement gaps across our state," Wigand said. "Tennesseans have a long history of stepping up to lend a hand, and we've never needed that volunteer spirit more than we do now."

Read the full report *Supporting Families Through a Global Pandemic* here https://bit.ly/CIS-TN_PandemicAssessment.

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ABOUT COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

Communities In Schools is a national nonprofit recognized for its evidence-based model that ensures students have holistic support, removing academic and nonacademic barriers to their success in school. CIS uses a case manager, or coordinator, to work with individual students to keep them on track academically. The support we offer is as varied as the students we serve, but can include connecting students to a mental health counselor, a clothing closet or a food pantry; helping families locate affordable housing, apply for health insurance or fill a prescription; or taking a student to a doctor's appointment. Our mission is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.