

Testimony before the Joint Committee on Education
By
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Communities In Schools of Kansas
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Dear Chairman and Chairwoman and Members of the Committee;

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share my story with you today.

My name is Esme Banuelos and I am a Communities In Schools success story. Presently, I'm a senior at Wichita State University in the performing arts program. I also work full time and take 15 hours a semester.

Without Communities In Schools I am not sure where I would be. CIS staff valued my opinion and ideas. I wasn't just a teen being blown off. Knowing there is an adult who cares (the CIS site coordinator), not in a judgmental way, but an adult who will mentor and care, is the most beautiful thing in the world.

My experiences and relationship with Communities In Schools at North High built my self-confidence, which helped me overcome family issues including my parents' marital problems. This confidence helped me recognize that dating relationships involving physical violence are not acceptable and gave me the strength to walk away. Increased self-confidence also played a role in helping me balance the expectations of being a first generation American and being part of a Mexican culture.

One of the highlights of my association with Communities In Schools was receiving a STAR award at the annual luncheon. I was recognized for improved academics, and it really made me feel very special. As the result of my academic achievement, I received a full ride scholarship my freshman year at Wichita State. I am proud of this accomplishment because I worked two jobs while in high school. I have worked in the family business since the age of seven. Further, I had additional responsibilities at home as the oldest of six children.

As a part of my Communities In Schools activities, I participated in a peer mentoring program. The opportunity to help my peers made a positive difference in my life. It provided me with the ability to help other young people in similar situations. It also provided me with a sense of responsibility and made me feel like an adult.

I now look back and try to find ways to give back. My relationship with Communities In Schools was so important and supportive to who I am as a person, that I want to try and pay it back in some way, by helping others.

While I was only in the Communities In Schools for three years, the skills, support and confidence I received have benefitted me every day and play a large part in the person I am today.

I understand that policymakers have to make a lot of tough choices. I also know that resources are tight. I am here today to encourage you to find some resources and make a choice to support this vital program. Because for every person like that me who was pointed, pushed and loved into the right direction, there are future generations who need this same help. Thank you for your time and consideration.