



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Communities In Schools of Northwest Michigan and Vanderbilt Area School Celebrate Partnership at Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Communities In Schools of Northwest Michigan (CIS) proudly hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to officially mark their new partnership with Vanderbilt Area School. The celebratory event, held on Tuesday, October 22 at the school, was attended by Superintendent & Principal Dr. David Harwood, CIS Executive Director Amy Burk, students, CIS staff, school staff, and board members.

Currently serving over 1,600 students in Northwest Michigan, CIS surrounds K-12 pupils and families with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve. On a national level, CIS has a bold ambition to grow into every Title I-eligible school in America and to build a stronger system that better supports the 12 million students living in poverty nationwide. The Scaling for Success Initiative, funded by Ballmer Group, supports this mission by granting funding to 56 affiliates nationwide, with Communities In Schools of Northwest Michigan among them. Through this funding, CIS was able to expand services in several schools and establish a new partnership with Vanderbilt Area School. CIS of Northwest Michigan is currently established in six school districts: Mancelona, Kalkaska, East Jordan, Ellsworth, Central Lake, and Vanderbilt.

CIS strategically placed Jenn Cherwinski in Vanderbilt as the school day Site Coordinator. A Vanderbilt native, Cherwinski attended school there as a child, giving her a deep connection to the area. Cherwinski plays a dynamic role at the Vanderbilt school, supporting student success in multiple areas. She provides sensory breaks for kids who need help regulating their emotions and behaviors, offering a calming presence in moments of distress. Additionally, she lends her expertise in behavioral interventions, working one on one with students to address specific challenges. In the social-emotional learning domain, Cherwinski leads small group sessions, empowering

students with essential life skills. She goes to great lengths to ensure each student has access to guidance and support to thrive academically and personally.

During the event, Cherwinski was joined by enthusiastic students, Lenyx, Cole, Eliana, and Jewel, who held the ribbon as she cut it, symbolizing the partnership between CIS and Vanderbilt Area School. Students proudly wore their custom Vanderbilt School shirts, provided by CIS through a grant from the Michigan Department of Education, showcasing school spirit and the organization's commitment to the community. Students cheered "All in for Kids" as the ribbon was cut to celebrate the partnership, and then were surprised with cookies donated by Family Fare in Gaylord, adding to the celebratory atmosphere. Dr. Harwood delivered a heartfelt speech, emphasizing the importance of the CIS-Vanderbilt Area School collaboration in supporting student success.

"It has been very helpful having Jenn Cherwinski on our team. It is nice having another trusted space for students to go to if they need help," shared Dr. Harwood.

Amy Burk, CISNWMI Executive Director, agrees wholeheartedly. "We are overjoyed to have officially launched our new partnership with Vanderbilt Area School. This milestone represents our deepening commitment to the community and our shared goal of empowering students to reach their full potential. We're grateful for the warm welcome and look forward to a bright future together."

About Communities in Schools of Northwest Michigan

Communities In Schools® (CIS®) is a national organization that ensures every student, regardless of who they are, their ability, zip code or socioeconomic background, has what they need to realize their potential in school and beyond. Working directly inside more than 3,000 schools across the country, we connect students to caring adults and community resources that help them see, confront, and overcome the barriers that stand between them and a brighter future. Together, we build a powerful change movement made up of peers, students, and alumni committed to building an equitable path to education for future generations.