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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 18, 2025

Communities In Schools of Northwest Michigan Hosts State Representatives for Powerful Site Visits in Kalkaska and Vanderbilt

Communities In Schools (CIS) of Northwest Michigan recently welcomed two Michigan State Representatives—John Roth and Ken Borton—for meaningful visits to Kalkaska High School and Vanderbilt Area School, offering an inside look at the critical work CIS does to support students across the region.

In Kalkaska, Rep. Roth joined CIS board members, school leaders, and students to learn more about the organization's work and the difference CIS is making in the school community.

Site Coordinator, Jessica Davenport, began the visit by leading a tour of the high school. The group then transitioned into a discussion led by CIS Program Director, Wendy Arsnøe, who shared site-specific goals and priorities, setting the tone for an impactful visit.

Jessica Davenport shared her perspective from the ground, explaining how CIS supports students through consistent, relationship-based interventions that go far beyond academics. Her deep connections with students, especially graduating seniors, underscore the heart of CIS's mission.

Kalkaska High School Principal Mrs. Short also spoke on the transformative impact CIS has had on school culture, particularly in addressing challenges like chronic absenteeism and student turnover. Two students shared personal stories of how CIS helped them academically, emotionally, and socially, reminding everyone of the power of trusted relationships in schools.

In Vanderbilt, Rep. Ken Borton visited with fellow CIS supporters to observe programming firsthand. The event opened with a social-emotional activity led by Site Coordinator David Livermore, who used a playful “Would You Rather?” icebreaker to set a positive, welcoming tone.

CIS Executive Director Amy Burk followed with an overview of the organization's history and its Integrated Student Supports (ISS) model, emphasizing CIS’s expanding reach in Northern Michigan. She highlighted current partnerships in Mancelona, East Jordan, Central Lake, Ellsworth, Kalkaska, and Vanderbilt, and announced two exciting new sites coming to Elk Rapids and Gaylord in the 2025–26 school year.

David Livermore then shared insights about his role in helping meet students' basic needs while building strong, trusting relationships. “What I love most is being able to truly see students and help meet their needs,” he shared.

Superintendent and Principal Dr. David Harwood praised the collaboration between Vanderbilt Area School and CIS, noting that CIS has become a key partner in tackling student barriers like attendance and transitions. Vanderbilt students also offered heartfelt reflections on the difference CIS has made in their lives.

Both site visits demonstrated the profound impact of Communities In Schools of Northwest Michigan — not only in supporting academic achievement but also in strengthening the emotional and social well-being of students. These visits were a powerful reminder that being present matters, and that when students are surrounded by a community of support, they can thrive.

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.

