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AmeriCorps at CIS of Central Texas: Year 3 Impact Analysis

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Introduction

Established in 1985, Communities In Schools of Central Texas (CIS) is a dropout prevention program that encourages students to stay in school through campus-based programs offering a network of volunteers, social services, and business and community resources. The mission of the organization is to provide a support system to at-risk students, encouraging them to be successful in school. Its parent organization describes itself as the “nation’s largest and most effective organization for keeping kids in school and helping them succeed in life.”

The AmeriCorps program “engages more than 75,000 Americans in intensive service each year at non profits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups across the country” Members dedicate one year to the program, and, in return, receive money for college, work experience, and (at times) a small living stipend.

The AmeriCorps program directly supports CIS’s efforts by providing members who mentor and counsel students. Almost one hundred young people serve CIS of Central Texas each year through the AmeriCorps program at over two dozen campuses, working with over 1200 students. Members serve fullr time, partr time, or quarterr time, working directly with students as mentors and tutors.

The purpose of this evaluation report is to detail the findings of an impact analysis examining the unique effects of working with AmeriCorps members. Specifically, we were most interested to see if students served by AmeriCorps members would have better outcomes compared to students served by other CIS staff that were not AmeriCorps members.

Research Questions

This analysis was formed around five distinct Research Questions. These questions, listed below, are each addressed in turn in this report.

- 1. What were the characteristics of AmeriCorps members in 2013-2014?**
- 2. What are characteristics of students served by AmeriCorps members? How are they similar/different to other students served by CIS?**
- 3. How do outcomes for students served by AmeriCorps members compare to those not served by the program?**
- 4. Do students in AmeriCorps improve over time? Is there a relationship to the number of hours served, or any student characteristics?**
- 5. When pre-test differences are controlled, are there any significant outcome differences of students served by AmeriCorps vs not?**

Methodology

Data on CIS students and members from the 2013-2014 school year were obtained. We obtained a variety of data on these students including the items listed in the box below.

We were primarily interested in discovering if there were differences in outcomes of students who were served by an AmeriCorps member compared to those who were served by other CIS staff.

Our previous findings (Hutson et al., 2014) indicated that students that were served by AmeriCorps members are typically targeted for academic issues. Therefore, we were certain students at the same campus who were served by AmeriCorps members and those who were not would not be comparable.

Our solution to this problem was to compare students working with AmeriCorps members to students at campuses that did not have AmeriCorps members. We hoped that this sampling method would create two groups that were more similar than dissimilar at pre-test.

Data obtained for CIS Students

Demographics/Background Information:

Gender
 Ethnicity/Race
 Does student live at home?
 What is the family structure at home?
 Does the student have an incarcerated parent?

Outcomes Information:

Grades: (Pre, 6th Six Weeks, Post)

- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Reading

Attendance

Tardies

STAAR Assessment

- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Reading
- Writing

Improvement in various areas, including:

- Social Skills
- Testing
- Basic Needs
- Classroom Participation

Question 1: What are characteristics of AmeriCorps members?

Our first goal was to describe the characteristics of AmeriCorps members that served students in 2013-2014. We obtained data on service type, gender, race, ethnicity, and education level for all members.

Service Type

There were 101 members in the data set for the 2013-2014 school year. Members had the option to serve full-time, part-time, or quarter-time through an Education Only Award (EAO). The majority of members were EAO and served quarter-time.

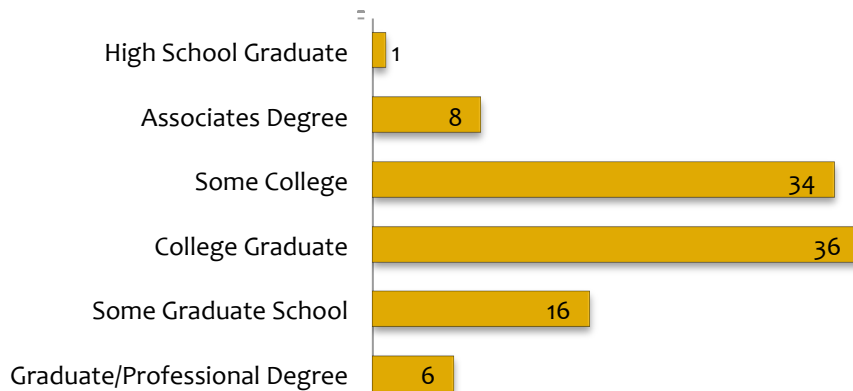
	#	%
Full Time	30	29.7%
Part Time	19	18.9%
EAO	52	51.4%

Gender and Race/Ethnicity

The majority of members were female (91 of 101, or 90%). Most were also white (79.2%). About a quarter of members (24.8%) were Hispanic.

Education Level

Members were highly educated, overall. 92% had attended at least some college, and over half were college graduates.



Question 2: What are characteristics of students served by AmeriCorps Members?

Next, we wanted to examine the characteristics of students served by AmeriCorps members. Even more importantly, these characteristics should be compared to those students who were not served by AmeriCorps members to see if our sample is equivalent.

Background Characteristics / Demographics

There were 2584 students in the sample. 1295 (50.1%) were served by AmeriCorps members, and 1289 were not.

Gender

There were slightly more girls than boys served by CIS; approximately 53% (vs 47%). There were no differences in gender for students served by AmeriCorps or not.

Race & Ethnicity

There were significant differences in race/ethnicity by group. Students served by AmeriCorps members were more likely to be Hispanic or White and less likely to be Black than students that were not served by AmeriCorps members.

	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Significant difference?
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.5%	NO
Black/African American	36.0%	25.9%	YES
Hispanic/Latino	59.5%	68.4%	YES
White/Caucasian	5.6%	7.4%	YES

Campuses

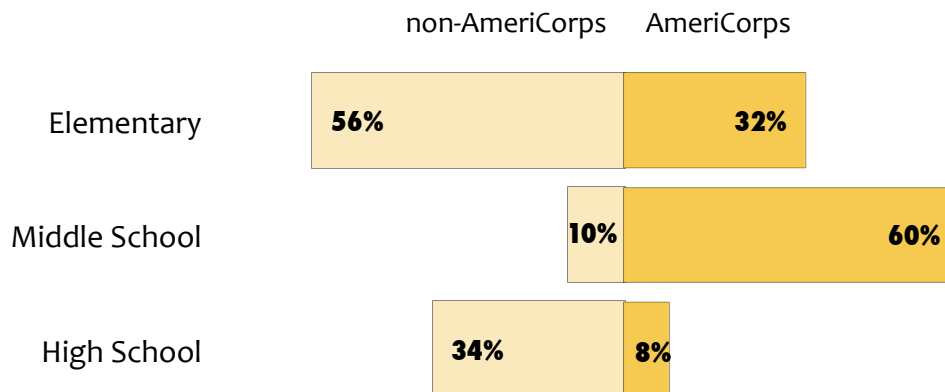
Students in the sample were from six school districts in Central Texas. The majority of students in both groups were from Austin ISD, but students were also enrolled in Del Valle ISD (non-AmeriCorps only), Hays (AmeriCorps), IDEA (AmeriCorps), and Lockhart (primarily non-AmeriCorps; a few AmeriCorps students attended Lockhart Junior High)

	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps
Austin ISD	807	1000
Del Valle ISD	207	0
Hays ISD	0	178
IDEA	0	12
Lockhart ISD	95	8
Manor ISD	184	100

Grade

There were large differences between students served by AmeriCorps and those served by other CIS staff by grade level. The sample of students was drawn such that there were no schools that had both students served by AmeriCorps members and those not served by AmeriCorps members. Doing so meant that a large number of non-AmeriCorps students were from Elementary and High school, while the majority of students in served by AmeriCorps were in Middle school.

Differences in grade level by condition. The majority of students served by AmeriCorps were in Middle School, followed by Elementary and then High School. The majority of students in our sample that were not served by AmeriCorps were in Elementary school.



Because of these differences in population, all outcome analyses conducted were conducted first with all students, and then with Elementary students only.

Living Situation

Does the student live at home or with another family member, friend, in a foster home, or by themselves? Slightly more students served by AmeriCorps lived at home than those not served by the program (92.4% vs 88.4%).

Students were also asked to indicate who they lived with (parents, relatives, etc.). There were significant differences in students who lived with two parents, a single parent, or with non-parents (e.g., with another relative or in a foster home). Students working with AmeriCorps members were more likely to live with two parents, and those that did not were more likely to live with a single parent or without a parent in the household.

	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Significant difference?
No Parents	8.3%	4.9%	YES
Single Parent	48.3%	43.1%	YES
Two Parents	41.5%	50.8%	YES

Additionally, students served by AmeriCorps members were twice as likely to have an incarcerated parent (8.9% vs 3.6%).

School Attendance

Information on absences and tardies were available at both pre-and post test. Students in served by AmeriCorps members had fewer absences at pre-test than those not served by AmeriCorps (1.68 vs 2.23) for both the entire sample and for the elementary only sample (1.34 vs 1.88). Both groups had about the same number of tardies (2.85) in the entire sample, but in the elementary sample, students that were served by AmeriCorps members had fewer tardies (1.22 vs 1.73).

Disciplinary incidents

The number of disciplinary incidents for both groups was very small. Students served by AmeriCorps members had slightly fewer incidents at pre-test on average in both the entire sample (0.30 vs 0.53) and the elementary sample (0.08 vs 0.26).

Course Grades

We were able to obtain data on grades in English Language Arts (ELA), Math, Science, Social Studies, and Other classes.

Students had similar grades at pre-test in Math, Science, and Social Studies, but students who were not served by AmeriCorps members tended to have higher grades in English/Language Arts and Other subjects.

	All Students			Elementary Only		
	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig. diff?	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig. diff?
ELA/Reading	80.34	79.25	YES	80.95	79.55	YES
Math	79.24	78.38	NO	79.95	77.99	YES
Science	82.21	82.20	NO	83.69	83.36	NO
Social Studies	82.89	82.69	NO	85.51	87.22	YES
Other	84.64	79.84	YES	78.67	80.83	NO

Question 3: How do outcomes for students served by AmeriCorps members compare to those not served by the program?

We know from the previous section that students who were served by AmeriCorps members and those who were served by other CIS staff had large pre-existing differences. We wanted to see if working with AmeriCorps members caused the differences between the groups to lessen or disappear. We were also interested in seeing if students served by AmeriCorps members had greater academic growth than students served by non-members.

CIS Data

Hours Served

On average, students received services for about 47 hours in the 2013-2014 school year. There were no differences between students served by AmeriCorps and those that were not when we examined all students. However, when only Elementary students were examined, we found that students served by AmeriCorps members received about 6 fewer hours of services (35.8 hours vs. 42.0).

Recommendation to continue services

Teachers were asked if each student who participated in CIS should continue receiving CIS services for the next year. About the same number of teachers returned the form for each group (96.2% overall). Teachers of students who were served by AmeriCorps members were significantly more likely to say “yes” to this question, 91.7% vs. 79.8%. In the Elementary sample, the same trend held, although the difference was smaller – 94.2% vs 86.9%

Documented improvement in Key Areas

CIS Program staff take copious notes on each of their students and document, by end-of-year, progress in these areas. Results are listed in the table on the next page. Importantly, students only had progress noted in those areas that were of concern for them. Students who were served by AmeriCorps members made fewer gains in Social Skills, Basic Needs, Emotional Crisis, Career/Employment, and Health than those served by non-members.

CIS Outcomes by Prevalence and Improvement

	N	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Significant difference?
Social Skills	2591	3.57	2.93	YES
Academic Readiness	1255	3.84	3.77	NO
Self Esteem	1175	3.88	3.82	NO
Basic Needs	437	3.24	2.80	YES
Classroom Conduct	372	4.56	4.62	NO
Grades	345	3.29	3.43	NO
Family Crisis	344	3.57	3.73	NO
College Readiness	276	2.78	2.84	NO
Absences	249	3.17	3.07	NO
Mental Health	201	2.91	2.97	NO
Tardies	195	3.36	3.19	NO
Homework Completion	178	3.50	3.54	NO
Classroom Participation	118	3.66	3.71	NO
Emotional Crisis	117	3.94	3.61	YES
Career / Employment	105	1.82	1.53	YES
Life Skills	82	2.99	2.97	NO
Grief / Death	76	1.78	1.97	NO
Testing	64	3.3	3.32	NO
Language (ESL/LAP)	64	2.05	1.91	NO
Health	50	3.89	3.40	YES
Delinquent Conduct	36	3.62	3.00	NO
Housing	29	2.25	1.80	NO
Suspected Substance Abuse	12	2.38	2.00	NO
Violence	8	1.50	3.00	NO
Suspected Gang Involvement	6	2.00	2.00	NO
Day Care	1	NA	5	NO

Attendance

Both groups of students had similar absences at the six-week mark. Whereas at the beginning of year there was a significant difference in the number of absences of students served by AmeriCorps members and those that were not, by end of year, this difference was not significant for either the entire sample or the Elementary sample.

There were significant differences at the six week mark and end of the year for tardies, even though there were not significant differences at beginning of year. Students served by AmeriCorps members had significantly more tardies: by end of year, almost 6 more, on average, than those not served by AmeriCorps members. There were no significant differences, however, in the elementary sample.

	Non- AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Significant difference?
Absences: Pre-Test	2.23	1.68	YES
Absences: Six Weeks	2.85	2.67	NO
Absences: Final	9.97	9.20	NO
Tardies: Pre-Test	2.87	2.84	NO
Tardies: Six Weeks	2.52	3.67	YES
Tardies: Final	8.43	14.34	YES

Discipline

The number of disciplinary incidents at end-of-year continued to be lower for students served by AmeriCorps members and was about half that for students not served by AmeriCorps members, 0.52 incidents to 1.25.

Grades

At the beginning of the year, there were significant differences in grades for English Language Arts and for Other (with students not served by AmeriCorps members having higher grades in these areas). By the sixth six week grading period, students who were served by AmeriCorps members had significantly lower grades than those not served by members.

	All Students			Elementary Only		
	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig. diff?	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig diff?
ELA/Reading	81.10	79.70	YES	82.72	79.57	YES
Math	81.10	80.19	YES	82.46	79.96	YES
Science	83.38	82.19	YES	85.98	83.54	YES
Social Studies	84.18	82.34	YES	87.08	85.73	YES
Other	83.7	75.00	YES	83.00	66.63	YES

Final grades, however, told a different story. There were no significant differences in grades for English/Language Arts, Social Studies, or Other, but there were differences in Math and Science, with students served by AmeriCorps members scoring higher than those served by other CIS staff. Students in elementary school only had six-week grades recorded; final grades only apply to students served in middle and high school.

	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Significant difference?
Final Grades (MS/HS only)			
English/Language Arts	78.53	79.00	NO
Math	77.12	78.37	YES
Science	78.43	80.09	YES
Social Studies	78.79	79.65	NO
Other	85.38	83.58	NO

There were significant differences at the six-week mark and at end-of-year, but were there significant changes over time? The answer was complicated. In middle and high school, final grades generally decreased compared to pre-test grades in all subjects. Students served AmeriCorps had smaller decreases compared to students not served by AmeriCorps in English/Language Arts and Math.

However, for elementary students, there was generally positive growth from the Pre-test to the 6th six weeks. However, there was less growth for students served by AmeriCorps members in Science. Students served by AmeriCorps members showed no increases in averages in English/Language Arts, while those served by other CIS staff had improvements. In Social Studies, the grades for students served by AmeriCorps members actually decreased, while grades for students not served by members increased. There were no significant differences for Math or Other, where both groups had significant increases from pre-test to the sixth six weeks.

	All Students (Final Grades)			Elementary Only (6 th 6 Weeks)		
	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig. diff?	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig. diff?
ELA/Reading	-1.32	-0.02	YES	+1.67	+0.01	YES
Math	-1.70	-0.12	YES	+2.43	+2.01	NO
Science	-2.55	-1.56	NO	+2.16	+0.17	YES
Social Studies	-0.79	-0.74	NO	+1.42	-1.48	YES
Other	-1.35	+1.56	NO	+5.42	+6.61	NO

STAAR

The percentage of students that passed STAAR varied significantly between students served by AmeriCorps members and those served by other staff. Data for previous STAAR tests was not included in the data set, so it is likely that many of these differences were pre-existing. Interestingly, at the Elementary level, there were no significant differences in STAAR scores for any subject but Science.

	All Students			Elementary Only		
	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig. diff?	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Sig. diff?
ELA/Reading	73.3	58.8	YES	66.5	60.5	NO
Math	69.4	54.4	YES	63.0	58.7	NO
Science	80.2	54.8	YES	74.8	60.5	YES
Social Studies	81.3	30.3	YES	N/A	N/A	NO
Writing	68.2	45.1	YES	59.2	50.4	NO

Question 4: What is the relationship between the amount and type of services students receive and outcome variables?

Previous evaluations have found that dosage is very important when it comes to the effectiveness of CIS. Our own AmeriCorps Evaluation (Agile Analytics, 2014) found that students who were served more hours had better outcomes and more improvement over time. We wanted to see if this was the case for data for the 2013-2014 school year.

Hours of Participation

The number of hours that students participated in CIS was positively correlated with grades, and negatively correlated with absences, tardies, and disciplinary incidents. In particular, students who participated for more hours had higher grades in the last six weeks in Science and Social Studies. Additionally, middle/high school students who participated more hours showed more improvements from pre- to post-test in Social Studies. They had fewer absences and tardies at the end of the year. They also had more improvements in Social Skills. Finally, teachers were more likely to recommend that students who participated more hours should continue receiving CIS services next year. Students who participated more hours were also less likely to pass the Reading and Social Studies STAAR.

In the Elementary sample, these trends were similar, except there was no relationship between the number of hours of participation and 6th Six Week grades or a relationship with STAAR passing rates. There was also a *negative* correlation between the number of hours of services and Classroom Participation.

However, we found that the number of hours that students participated in CIS was *also* positively correlated with pre-test grades in ELA, Science, and Social Studies, and with the number of disciplinary incidents at pre-test. This finding indicates that there is likely a factor that is unaccounted for in the data that explains why students both have better academic performance & behaviors and why they attend more CIS hours. For example, these students could be more motivated than other students, or better able to focus, which might cause them to both attend more CIS sessions and to do well academically.

Due to the finding that some pre-test variables were highly correlated with the number of hours of participation, we also examined other background variables to see if they were related to the number of hours of participation. The item with the highest correlation between the number of hours of participation in CIS and outcome variables was student participation in after school services. Students who were

served for more hours by CIS were also more likely to participate in at least one after school activity. No other student variables, including gender, race/ethnicity, living situation, parental status, etc. had a relationship with the number of hours that students were served. In the Elementary sample, students who received more hours of services were significantly more likely to live in a single-parent household and less likely to have two parents at home.

Next, we separated the data and examined correlations between the number of hours served and improvements for students who were served by AmeriCorps members and those that were not served by the program. Surprisingly, there were no correlations at all between the number of hours of attendance and outcomes for AmeriCorps students.

Number of Sessions

For students who were served by an AmeriCorps member only, we had data on the sessions attended by month (e.g., “September sessions”). We counted the number of sessions (average = 6.43, minimum=0, maximum=10) and examined the correlation between session attendance and some outcome data that were reported only for AmeriCorps students: student pre- and post-surveys and teacher pre-post surveys, and a measure of increased engagement (YES/NO).

We found that the number of sessions attended was positively correlated with improvements in engagement and improvement on the student survey from pre- to post-test. There was also a positive correlation between the number of sessions attended and teacher pre- and post-survey results.

Member Status

Next, we wanted to see if member term (EAO, PT or FT) affected student outcomes. Pre- and post-test teacher and student surveys and student engagement were examined. We found significant differences in student engagement improvement by status. Only about 8.7% of students showed increased engagement overall. 14% of students served by part time members, compared to 10% of students served by full time members and 4% of students served by EAO members, increased engagement. Additionally, EAO members had students whose teachers’ pre-test surveys were higher. There were no other differences by term.

Question 4: When pre-test differences are controlled, are there any significant outcome differences of students served by AmeriCorps vs not?

Because we found large pre-existing differences between students served by AmeriCorps members and those not served by AmeriCorps, we created a small sample of students that was carefully matched on several pre-test characteristics. Our hope was that by using matching scores that we would be able to create a sample with no differences in pre-test scores or demographic/background characteristics.

Sample Characteristics

Our final matched sample contained 133 students (71 in the control group, 62 in the treatment group). The sample was chosen so that each student had a match in the following demographic and academic categories:

- Grade
- Lives at Home
- Pre-test absences
- Pre-ELA Grade
- Pre-Math Grade

Details on the final sample are below. It is important to note that this sample looks very different from the sample examined in Question #2, and also that the students in the sample were very closely matched on these characteristics.

	Non-AmeriCorps	AmeriCorps	Significant difference?
Pre-test Absences	0.32	0.29	NO
Pre-ELA Grade	80.3	80.5	NO
Pre-Math Grade	79.0	78.0	NO
Lives at Home?	98.6%	98.4%	NO
Grade	3.50	3.92	NO

Of course, matching data is not perfect. There may have been other factors that we did not control for that are creating differences that are still in the sample; however, we hoped that matching data in this way would eliminate most differences. Indeed most of the differences disappeared. The only significant pre-test difference that remained was ethnicity: None of the students in the AmeriCorps groups were White, compared to 7% of the students in the non-AmeriCorps group.

Outcomes

There were a few significant differences in this small sample. The first was that Social Skills increased significantly less for students served by the AmeriCorps Members (2.74 vs 3.60). Secondly, CIS staff were less likely to say that students served by AmeriCorps had grades that improved, 3.23 vs 4.50. This was supported by one piece of data -- students who were served by AmeriCorps members had grades in Social Studies that decreased from pre-test to the last six weeks (by 3.0 points), but students served by other CIS staff had a slight increase (by 0.5 points).

This lack of findings should not be interpreted to mean that AmeriCorps was ineffective. AmeriCorps members target students that are struggling in school, and therefore it should be expected that these students will not grow at the same rate academically as their peers who were not in CIS for academic reasons. All of the findings should be interpreted with caution. The matched sample size used was a small subset of students. They were matched on academic and demographic variables, but it is possible that there are other underlying differences that were not controlled for that are in the data.

Conclusion

The report details an Impact Analysis of the AmeriCorps program at Communities in Schools of Central Texas. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine if there were any positive changes that could be attributed to the AmeriCorps program. Specifically, we were most interested to see if students served by AmeriCorps members would have better outcomes compared to students served by other CIS staff that were not AmeriCorps members.

The sample drawn for this study included all CIS students served by AmeriCorps members in Central Texas as well as CIS students in schools that did not have an AmeriCorps program. We had hoped that creating the sample in this way would create two groups that were highly similar; however, this was not the case. **The two groups of students were very different.** First, the grade level of the students varied significantly by condition. The AmeriCorps sample had few students in High School, and the non-AmeriCorps sample had few Middle School students. Because of this, we conducted all analyses with the entire group of students, and then separately with Elementary students only. We also found demographic differences between students (students served by AmeriCorps were more likely to be Hispanic, to have an incarcerated parent, and to live at home with two parents). They also had fewer absences and disciplinary incidents, but lower grades.

When we examined outcomes for these two very different groups, it was not surprising to see differences persist. Students working with AmeriCorps members were more likely to be recommended to continue services next year. They showed less progress in five areas documented by CIS staff. They continued to have fewer disciplinary incidents, but had more tardies at end-of-year than students not served by AmeriCorps. They had lower grades in all subject areas at the six-week mark, but middle and high school students had higher final grades in Math and Science. When we examined changes in grades, we found that Middle and High School students showed decreases overall from pre-to post-test, but students served by AmeriCorps members had smaller decreases. At the Elementary level, there were generally improvements in grades from pre-test to the 6th Six weeks, but students served by AmeriCorps members had smaller improvements.

We next looked at the impact that the number of hours of participation had on outcomes. For students who were not served by AmeriCorps members, we found positive correlations between number of hours of services received and grades, improvements in Social Skills, and negatively correlated to absences, tardies, and disciplinary incidents. However, there were also strong pre-test correlations, leading us to believe that there were inherent differences between students who attended CIS more often and those who did not. **When we examined students served by AmeriCorps members, we found no significant relationships between the number**

of hours of services received and any of the outcome variables. That is, students served by AmeriCorps members had similar outcomes regardless of the amount of participation in programming.

Because students served by AmeriCorps members were so different than students not served by members, we created a small sample of students that were matched on key variables (grade level, pre-test absences, pre-test ELA/math grades, and housing status.) We found that students in this small sample were highly similar at pre-test. At post-test, students served by AmeriCorps members had smaller documented improvements in Social Skills and Grades. They had a slight decrease in pre-test to 6th Six Week Grades for Social Studies, whereas students not served by AmeriCorps had a slight increase.

Based on these analyses, we can conclude that students served by the AmeriCorps program are fundamentally different than those not served by AmeriCorps, even when they are not at the same school. They had smaller improvements in many areas than students not served by the program, but this may be due to their pre-existing differences. Data for students not served by CIS but with similar characteristics to students served by AmeriCorps were not available, but would help determine if AmeriCorps members have had a positive impact on their students. **We can be reasonably confident from our careful examination of the data that the AmeriCorps program is no more effective at improving student academic outcomes than traditional CIS services.**

However, these data do not tell the whole story of AmeriCorps members' impact with students. When we examined data for the number of months in which students received AmeriCorps sessions, we saw positive correlations in student engagement and change from pre- to post-test improvement on the student survey. There may be other areas in which AmeriCorps members positively affected the students they served that were not measured by the data available.