



**AmeriCorps at Communities in Schools of Central Texas
Impact Analysis, 2016-2017**

Prepared by



Creekside Research Solutions

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Executive Summary

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Prepared by Stephanie Fairchild, Creekside Research Solutions

Communities in Schools of Central Texas (CIS) is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to working with their community to develop strategies to empower students to stay in school and reach their full academic potential. Since 1985, CIS of Central Texas has provided dropout prevention and scholastic support services to over 40,000 students on campuses all around Central Texas. CIS primarily serves schools in underprivileged communities with large percentages of students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Each of its campus-based programs plays a critical role in providing a network of mentors, volunteers, and community partners who support students through behavioral and mental health interventions, case management, and tutoring services. Through evidence-based strategies and targeted programming, CIS teaches students skills that help them focus on their own growth and learning.

AmeriCorps is a network of national service programs that provide an opportunity for individuals to serve in their local community and join with others to help solve local social challenges. The program “engages more than 75,000 Americans in intensive service each year at nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups across the country.” Members dedicate a year to service, and in return they receive money for college, valuable work experience, and, in some cases, a small living stipend.

The AmeriCorps program supports CIS by placing members on school campuses where they serve as mentors and tutors to at-risk students. Each year, hundreds of AmeriCorps members spend valuable service hours working with over 1,000 CIS students to help them stay in school and succeed in life. Members serve full-time, part-time, or quarter-time, and they work directly with students to provide supportive guidance.

The principle objective of this evaluation report was to summarize the findings of an impact analysis that was undertaken to examine the unique contributions of AmeriCorps members to the CIS program. The evaluation was developed as part of an effort to understand the added value that AmeriCorps members bring to the students whom they serve above and beyond the service provided to students served by CIS staff alone. Data were collected from campuses that did have AmeriCorps members serving on campus, as well as those that did not. The evaluation implementation included collecting data via interviews, focus groups, and surveys with CIS Program Managers and AmeriCorps members, a rigorous quantitative analysis of CIS student data, and analyzing and interpreting the data to answer evaluation questions. The evaluation questions were divided into two sections: the first section of questions was designed to measure the implementation and fidelity of the program, and the second measured the impact and outcomes of the program.

Implementation/Fidelity Measures

1. What are the considerations/reasons/factors that influence a Program Manager's decision to request or decline an AMC member to serve on campus?
2. What are the considerations/reasons/factors that influence a Program Manager's decision to place a student with an AMC member?
3. To what extent are students served by AMC receiving the full "dosage" of service (i.e. 1 hour/week for 6 months)?
4. What are the most commonly targeted issues of students who are referred to AMC members, by grade level and member type (FT/PT/EAO)?
5. How well did the AMC orientation and regular training (Resource Days) prepare AMC members for service?
6. How clearly defined were the AMC members' service goals prior to starting their service period? Did these goals (or members' understanding of them) change throughout the service period?
7. What was the quality of communication between AMC members and Program Managers during the term of service, and what is its relationship to member effectiveness?

Impact/Outcome Measures

1. How many AMC members, on average, choose to serve more than one service year? To what extent are members who have served more than one AmeriCorps term more impactful with students in targeted outcomes, if at all?
2. To what extent does the member position type (FT/PT/EAO) have an impact on student outcomes, if at all?
3. To what extent do members plan their activities to align with the targeted issues of the students they serve? How often, on average, are members able to engage students on specific targeted issues during sessions? Does this type of engagement lead to overall improvement on the specific issues that were targeted during sessions?
4. What are the differences, if any, in discipline referrals between students served by AMC compared with students served by CIS PMs? If differences are detected, what are the possible reasons for such differences?
5. What do AMC/PMs perceive to be the benefits of AMC members (e.g., to what extent do they believe they actually see a change in students as a result of AMC member intervention)? How do AMC/PMs rate members' ability to meet and/or exceed program goals?
6. What are the differences, if any, in targeted issues and academic outcomes between students served by AMC and students who attend CIS at schools without an AMC member on campus? Between students served by AMC and students who attend CIS with an AMC member on campus but who are not served by AMC?
7. What are the differences, if any, in the number of students completing the school year/being promoted to the next grade level between AMC students and those attending CIS at campuses not served by AMC? Between students served by AMC and students who attend CIS with an AMC member on campus but who are not served by AMC?
8. How do AMC members/PMs rate members' ability to meet/exceed program goals?

Key Findings

- *AmeriCorps members are very highly valued by their supervisors and other CIS Program Managers who agree that the reach and impact of CIS on the students they serve is much greater than it would be without them. AmeriCorps members function in a supporting role to the Program Managers with whom they work and provide crucial assistance to them in their work with students.*
- *An AmeriCorps member's impact on the students they serve has less to do with the students with whom they are paired than with the member's dedication, grit, personal strength, and commitment to personal growth.*
- *The majority of AmeriCorps members felt the training they received prior to starting their service term prepared them for their service to the extent that it was possible, but that nothing could fully equip them for the day-to-day challenges they faced in their service with students.*
- *The relationships between AmeriCorps members and their supervisors are extremely important to member success in working with students and fulfilling their service requirements. Supervisors provide on the spot training for members, as well as much needed support for stressful times.*
- *AmeriCorps members believe they have the greatest impact on students' self-esteem and behavior and less impact on academic issues.*
- *There was almost no impact of member position type on student outcomes. Students served by full-time, part-time, and EAO AmeriCorps members all fared about the same in behavioral and academic outcome measures.*
- *Students served by AmeriCorps members tended to have higher rates of promotion to the next grade level than those not served by AmeriCorps members.*
- *A careful analysis of academic data from students served by AmeriCorps members and those not served by AmeriCorps members indicates that the AmeriCorps program is no more successful at improving academic outcomes than CIS.*
- *AmeriCorps members make it possible for CIS to serve as many students as they do while maintaining the integrity of the care they provide to each student. Without AmeriCorps members, CIS staff would be overextended and the quality of service provided to students would certainly decrease.*

Methodology

Data Collection Methodology

1. Interviews

Evaluators conducted telephone interviews with CIS program leaders and managers who oversee and direct program implementation, and who are also directly responsible for AmeriCorps members. The interview protocol was designed to answer evaluation questions regarding AmeriCorps member training, their role within the CIS program, and their overall impact on CIS students.

1. Focus Groups

Evaluators conducted focus groups with a random selection of AmeriCorps members to answer evaluation questions regarding AmeriCorps member experiences with CIS, where it can be improved, and to gain a deeper understanding of their perceived impact on CIS students.

1. Surveys

Evaluators designed the survey instruments to answer evaluation questions regarding the traits of a highly successful AmeriCorps member, to collect demographic and characteristic data of AmeriCorps members, and to understand how AmeriCorps members perceive their service with CIS.

Data Analysis Methodology

1. Interviews

Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed using a coding scheme based on evaluation questions. Responses were coded using the constant comparative method and emergent themes were identified.

1. Focus Groups

Focus group transcripts were coded and analyzed using a coding scheme based on evaluation questions. Responses were coded using the constant comparative method and emergent themes were identified.

1. Surveys

Survey data were collected using Survey Monkey, an online survey data collection and analysis tool, and were analyzed quantitatively. A coding scheme was developed based on the project evaluation questions. All narrative responses were coded using the constant comparative method and emergent themes were identified.

Demographics

AMC Members Demographics

Figure 1: AMC Member Race (N=30)

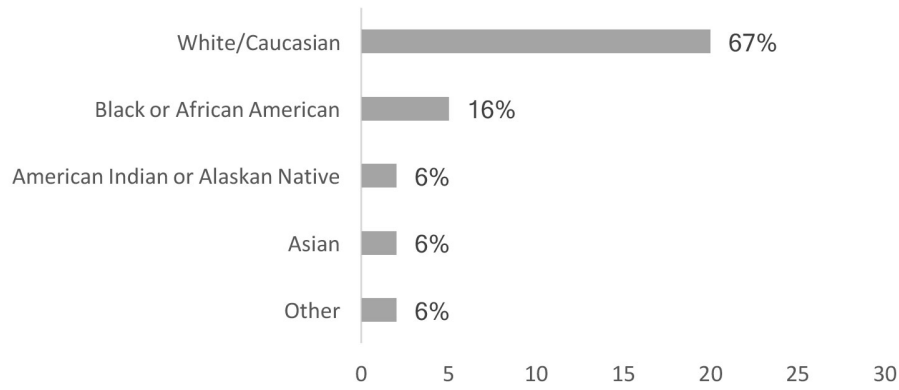


Figure 2: AMC Member Ethnicity (N=30)

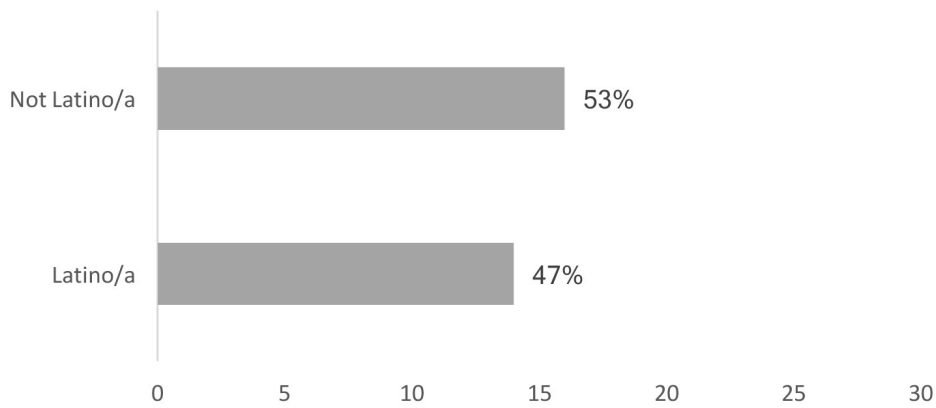


Figure 3: AMC Member Gender (N=30)

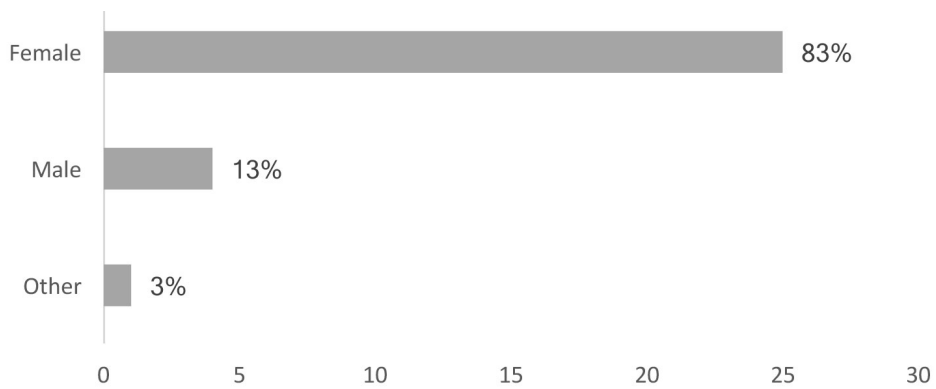
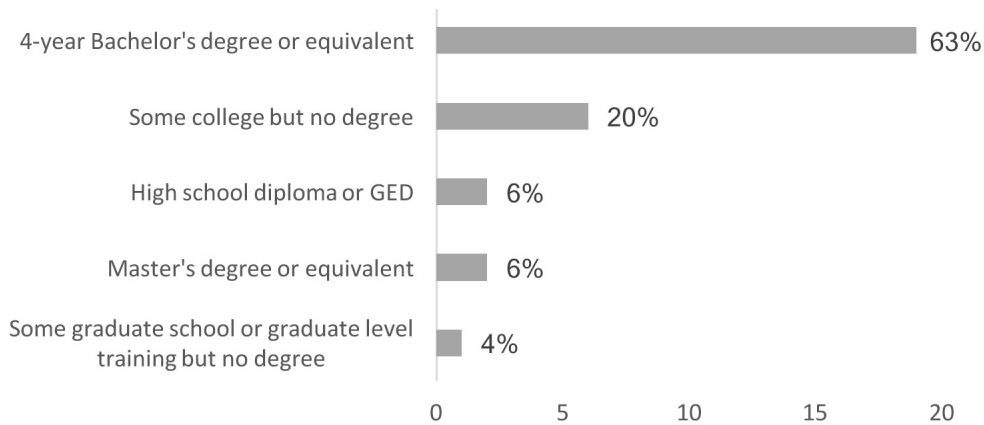


Figure 4: AMC member educational level at the beginning of the 2016-2017 service term (N=30)



Race and Ethnicity of students served by AMC members

Figure 5: Race of students served by AMC members (N=617)

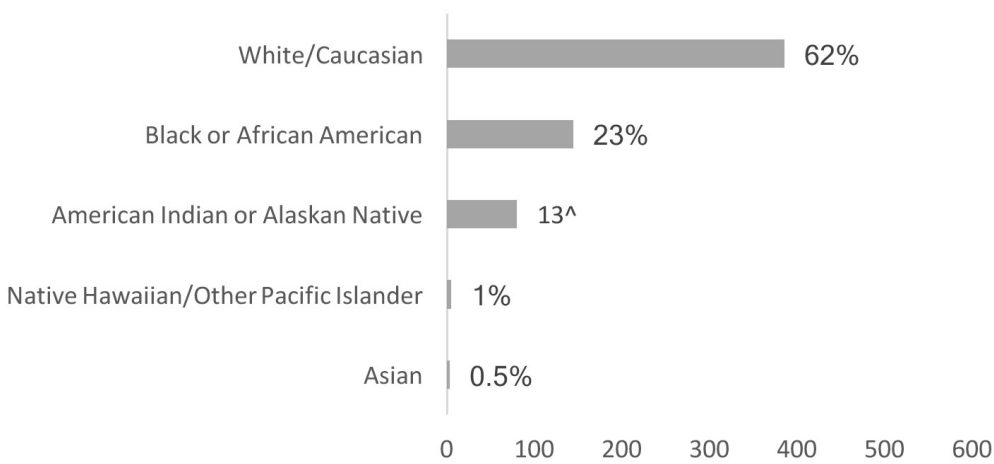
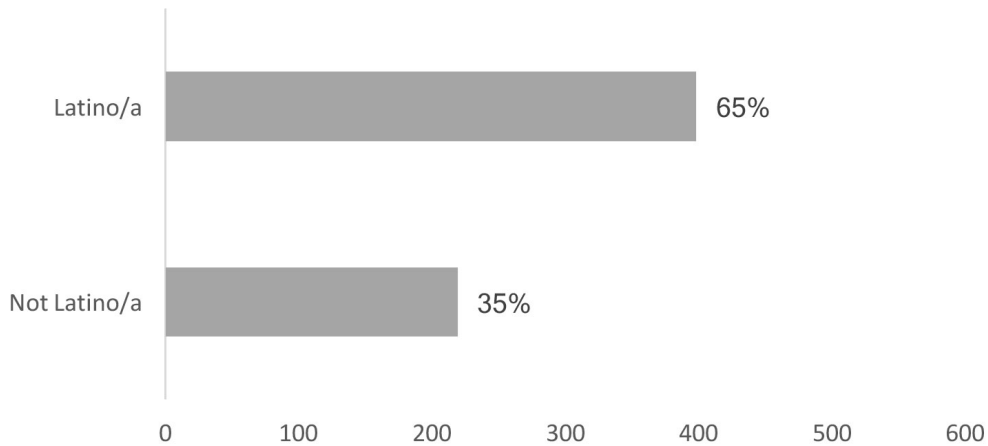


Figure 6: Ethnicity of students served by AMC members (N=617)



What are the considerations/reasons/factors that influence a Program Manager's decision to request or decline an AMC member to serve on campus?

Telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of four CIS Program Managers who had direct supervision of AmeriCorps members on campus and an equally sized random sample of Program Managers who did not have an AMC member serving on campus. These interviews included questions regarding the AmeriCorps members' roles within the schools, as well as their impact on CIS students.

All interview participants were asked to rate their investment, or "buy-in," to the AMC program. This measure was meant to be a starting point to understanding why Program Managers would request or decline an AMC member to serve on campus. However, on average, the buy-in to the AMC program was very high amongst participants. The majority of interview participants indicated that they were very invested in the AMC program itself and recognized the program's value to CIS. Only one participant was ambivalent about her buy-in, but she stated that the reason was out of concern for the members because the stipend they received was very low, not because the members did not bring value to the CIS program. The decision to request or decline an AMC member to serve on campus did not seem to be related to a Program Manager's investment in the AMC program itself.

Participants who requested to have an AMC member serve on campus agreed that they made the request because members were able to provide services to students who may not otherwise receive mentoring or tutoring due to time constraints on the part of Program Managers, or due to lack of other staff. They indicated that having another adult on campus and in the CIS office helped them to reach more students who needed their services and also allowed them to keep the CIS office open when the Program Managers themselves were off campus or helping other students. These participants tended to believe that they would be over-extended, or "stretched too thin," to effectively serve all of the students who come to CIS for support. One such participant summed up the general position of this group of Program Managers, saying, "They [AMC members] add so much to the CIS program. There's no way I could do what needs to be done by myself. It's just not possible." Another participant stated that AMC members act as allies on campus "who can provide services that align with the CIS mission." For these Program Managers, the reach and support of the AMC members was a necessary and welcome addition to their campuses.

Interviews with Program Managers who did not request to have a member serve on campus revealed varied reasons for why a Program Manager would decline such support. In fact, each participant gave a different response to this question. The four reasons given by participants for declining an AMC member to serve on campus included:

1. AMC members are not trained to effectively deal with the high needs students that CIS serves on one participant's campus. The participant stated that any person working in the CIS office needs to be well trained and comfortable with working with such a population, and she further indicated that

she has not had much success working with AMC members in the past due to this lack of knowledge and training.

2. The service requirements placed on AMC members are a deterrent to having a member serve on campus. The participant stated that too many requirements are placed on AMC members and that she did not have the time to help the AMC members fulfill their service requirements due to her own obligations and rigorous schedule.
3. The participant stated that she was unable to request an AMC member to serve on the high school campus where she currently serves.
4. Participant stated that the CIS office in which she serves is not able to support an AMC member due to the lack of capacity (i.e., desk space and computer availability is limited). The participant stated that she therefore prioritizes interns over AMC members.

What are the considerations/reasons/factors that influence a Program Manager's decision to place a student with an AMC member?

Four randomly selected Program Managers who were responsible for the supervision of AMC members were interviewed via telephone and asked to describe their reasons for placing students on an AMC member's caseload. A survey was also distributed to all Program Managers to gather further insights..

Program Manager Interviews

All four participants replied that they placed members with students who were lower-need, appropriate for mentoring, and not in need of counseling. They prioritized appropriate member-student pairings to the extent that it was possible, given their knowledge of members' skills and experience and the needs of the students. Participants stated that these pairings were helpful to students who may have had difficulty developing healthy relationships with adults. AMC members provided healthy modeling of such relationships, including how to develop and maintain appropriate boundaries and how to handle a relationship's closure.

No participants indicated that they would change their member-student pairings if they had the chance to do it over again.

Program Manager Survey

A survey was distributed to all CIS Program Managers, and in it participants were asked to rank the importance of certain member characteristics to an AMC member's success in mentoring and tutoring CIS students. A list of member characteristics were provided for participants to rank from "very important" to "not at all important." There were 29 participants in the survey.

Characteristics with the highest ranking included:

- The member establishes and maintains healthy boundaries (100% very important)
- The member is able to work as a team with other CIS staff and/or faculty (97% very important)
- The member is committed to completing the service term (97% very important)
- The member demonstrates respect for cultures other than their own (97% very important)
- The member holds him/herself accountable for his/her actions (97% very important)
- The member has active listening skills and is able to be a student's "safe place (97% very important)

These data suggest that the pairing of AMC members with students is not the highest determining factor for student success, but rather the member's personal characteristics carry more weight with Program Managers in deciding whether or not a member is able to successfully serve the students on their caseload.

To what extent are students served by AMC receiving the full “dosage” of service (i.e., 1 hour per week for 6 months)?

Telephone interviews were conducted with a four randomly selected Program Managers who had supervision of AMC members and two focus groups were conducted with randomly selected groups of AMC members. These data were collected to gain insight into the experiences of AMC members, as well as the perspectives of those who were in direct supervision of them.

Program Manager Interviews

Program Manager interview participants stated that their AMC members were able to meet with students for the number of hours required to fulfill their service. They indicated that they support their members in fulfilling their hours by helping them with their schedules and sharing calendars with them to help monitor their time. The one participant whose responses diverged from these statements disclosed that her AMC member was sick for a significant portion of the service year, so the member missed a lot of service hours as a result.

The structure of the campus was the primary factor mentioned by participants as having an impact on whether or not an AMC member could easily meet his or her hour requirements. Participants stated that meeting durations varied amongst members, depending on a range of factors including teacher requests, campus restrictions, testing restrictions, field trips, and other issues. They stated that some teachers only allowed students to leave for part of class, or they would allow the member to stay in class to observe and work with the students during class sessions. One participant stated that students were only allowed to leave during elective classes and occasionally the students did not want to miss their elective. Participants said that they encouraged their members to be creative with their hours and help them plan check-ins and short meetings with students if they are not able to meet with them for a whole hour.

Participants indicated that due to the STAAR test and other activities and projects, the Spring semester was structurally different than the Fall semester. These participants agreed that during testing, often students were not allowed to leave class at all because the teachers were working on a specific subject that they wanted the students to learn. Participants further stated that the Fall semester was easier for AMC members to fulfill their service hour requirements than the Spring semester, mainly due to STAAR testing. Two participants stated that their AMC members were not allowed to see their students during testing times, so they could only check in at the end of the day. This made fulfilling the required hours during the Spring semester more difficult for these members.

AMC Member Focus Groups

On average, AMC members reported that it was not too difficult to meet the 1 hour per week requirement, but that the hour was usually broken up into sessions in which one-on-one meetings were augmented with other interactions throughout the week. One member elaborated, saying, "I don't get the whole hour but I supplement with other times. [Students] all pass in and come and hang out in the

CIS office so I'm constantly seeing students. There's never a time when I'm alone, so I feel like fulfilling that one hour is not a problem for me." Another member stated, "I don't usually see them for an hour - 45 minutes is max. Then I supplement with lunch bunches and stuff, unless kid is in crisis it's really rare for me to get an hour session. In my opinion, there are kids who can't handle an hour or even 45 minutes so I reduce that to 30 minutes. This has changed a bit with rapport but not that much, unless it's in a group setting they don't do too well."

Almost all members agreed that testing weeks were particularly disruptive. In addition to students not being available for most of the day, students' schedules are not predictable and that, members state, can make it hard to find their students during the day. Another factor that made fulfilling the necessary hours a difficulty was if the member was in school him or herself. One such member stated, "I had to really juggle around my schedule. I'm part-time but even then it was very hard. You really have to sweet talk a lot of teachers. Sometimes I only had 2 hours a day and it just wasn't quality time."

Members also stated that often teachers can be a bit of a hindrance to meeting regularly with students. Some members reported that if teachers do not recognize the work they are doing with students then they are less likely to be ok with students leaving class. One member stated that the teacher of one of her students believed that the student was embarrassed when pulled out of class for meetings and the teacher requested that the AMC member be more covert about the reason for taking the student from class.

Several members stated that the lack of a private, quiet meeting space that was regularly available for their use was another disruption to meeting the requirement. These members went on to say that this was an issue especially if their Program Manager was using the CIS office for a meeting with one of their own students: "When my PM does groups I can't be in the room, so it's a challenge to find a private place to meet with students. We sometimes meet in hallway but confidentiality is an issue and kids don't want to go outside because it's too hot." "There are really no good places to meet that are quiet and that we can be alone. And empty rooms are all locked and it's hard to find anyone to unlock the doors at such a big school." However, participants indicated that if CIS office calendars and schedules are shared up front then this becomes less of a problem.

When asked what types of things helped them meet this requirement, several members agreed that the student's desire to meet with them played a big role. Kids may "shy away" and refuse services. Members stated that when this happened they would try meeting in a group setting instead and this worked frequently, especially with students who needed social skills practice.

Members also stated that being allowed to observe or co-facilitate groups with their PMs was very useful training and served to help them meet their hours. To this end, members went on to say that they would like more training on how to facilitate successful groups, including how to keep kids from disrupting and/or oversharing.

What are the most commonly targeted issues of students who are referred to AMC members, by grade level and member type (FT/PT/EAO)?

Academic concerns are the most common types of targeted issues for which students are referred to CIS. This category includes a student’s academic readiness, grades, STAAR outcomes, and homework completion records. Students paired with AMC members are typically low-need and suitable for tutoring or mentoring.

AMC members commit to a year of service as either a full-time or part-time member. Full time members serve an average of 45 hours per week, or 1,700 hours per year, and part-time members serve an average of 25 hours per week, or 900 hours per year. Additionally, individuals planning to complete a college internship through CIS may apply to be an Educational Award Only (EAO) AMC member. EAO members serve an average of 10 hours per week, or 450 hours per year.

Table 1 : Frequency of AMC position types during the 2016-2017 service year

Position type	Frequency (%)
Full-time	298 (59%)
Part-time	39 (8%)
EAO	170 (34%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>507</i>

Frequency analyses were conducted to identify the types of targeted issues of students paired with these groups of AMC members. Data suggest that the majority of pairings line up with the rest of CIS students, such that academic issues are the most common for all member groups. Interestingly, full-time and part-time members are more likely to be paired with students who have behavioral issues, while EAO members are more often paired with students who have targeted mental health issues.

Table 2: Frequency of targeted issues for all member position types

	Academic N (%)	Behavior N(%)	Mental Health N (%)	Crisis Situation N (%)
Full-time	194 (65%)	83 (30%)	39 (13%)	13 (4%)
Part-time	24 (62%)	12 (31%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)
EAO	108 (65%)	17 (10%)	38 (23%)	17 (10%)

How well did the AMC orientation and regular training provided at Resource Days prepare AMC members for service?

Randomly selected groups of AMC members participated in focus groups and a survey was distributed to all AMC members to further assess their experiences within the AMC program.

AMC Member Focus Groups

Focus group participants were asked to distinguish between the Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) and the on-site training sessions, also known as Campus Expectations.

On average, focus group participants were somewhat mixed in their ratings of the AMC orientation. Overall, they agreed that it was a helpful time to interact with and bond with other members, knowing that they would "all be in this together." Members indicated that although it did not necessarily prepare them for the actual experience of their service on campus, they saw it as a useful time to learn about paperwork requirements and how to fill out timesheets, as well as to get to know the history of AMC. Campus Expectations were more favorably mentioned. Participants stated that their Program Managers oriented them very well and provided insight into the individual campuses that helped them feel more prepared for day to day challenges ahead.

When asked if Resource Days were helpful in preparing members for their service, participants mainly agreed that they were but that some training sessions are better than others. To a great extent, the helpfulness of Resource Days depended on the presenter and the time of day. Members seemed to agree that there were pros and cons to Resource Days. They were helpful, but often the information presented came too late to be of great use to them during their service term. One participant articulated this and said, "It would have been helpful to have Resource Days at the beginning of the year because you learn all of the things throughout the year, but you need it sooner than that. But at the same time there's so much being taught at the beginning so I'm not sure how to balance that."

Members admitted sometimes "checking out" during Resource Days, especially when they considered the students they could be helping during those times. One possible solution to the "checking out" suggested by members was for presenters to offer a mix of training on administrative requirements, such as paperwork, for half of the session and the other half would cover student issues, such as dealing with trauma. This, they stated, would provide a learning experience that would be useful and would help keep them engaged.

AMC Member Survey

Questions regarding AMC member orientation and training were included within the member survey in an effort to gather as much data as possible regarding the usefulness and efficacy of the training systems utilized by CIS and AMC staff:

1. Please rate the overall usefulness of the initial AmeriCorps Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) and member overnight retreat.
2. How well did the initial AmeriCorps PSO and overnight retreat prepare you for your service?
3. Please rate the usefulness of the Resource Days in your professional development and training.

Figure 7: Please rate the overall usefulness of the initial AMC PSO and member overnight retreat. (N=30)

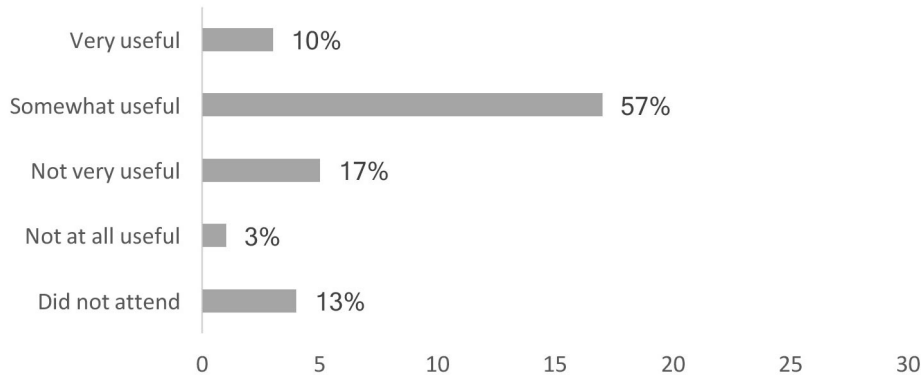


Figure 8: How well did the initial AmeriCorps PSO and overnight retreat prepare you for your service? (N=30)

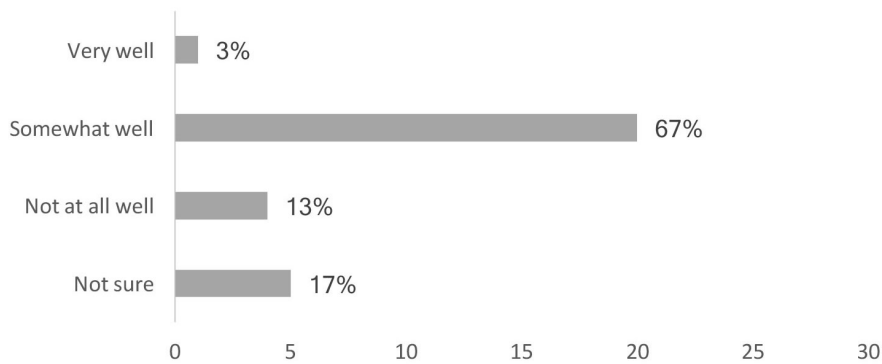
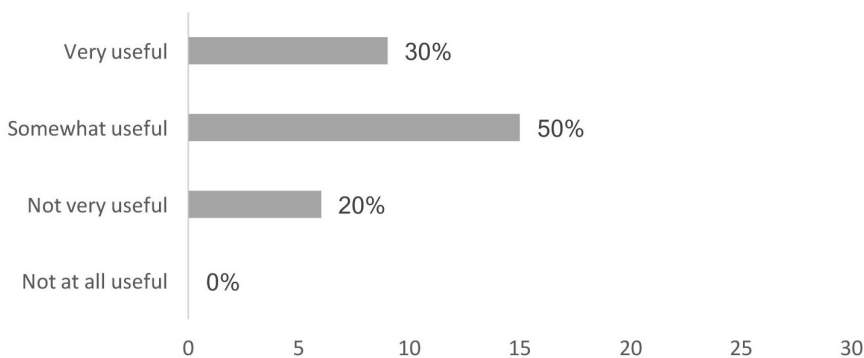


Figure 9: Please rate the usefulness of the Resource Days in your professional development and training. (N=30)



These data suggest AMC members value the pre-service training they receive and most feel that the continued training days are useful. Survey data analysis also supports what focus group participants stated regarding their orientation and training: members have relatively positive opinions regarding the usefulness of the Pre-Service Orientation and overnight retreat, but there is still some ambivalence. This holds true perhaps to a greater extent for the Resource Days. Data suggest that although these offerings are useful, members may feel there is room for improvement.

How clearly defined were the AMC members' service goals prior to starting their service period? Did these goals (or members' understanding of them) change throughout the service period?

Data were collected from telephone interviews with four randomly selected Program Managers who had supervision of at least one AMC member, as well as via focus groups with randomly selected AMC members. Additionally, a survey was distributed to all AMC members to gain further insights into member experiences.

Program Manager Interviews

Interviews with participating Program Managers indicated that their AMC members' service goals were clearly stated from the beginning and that their members did a good job of fulfilling these goals. However, one participant stated that there is a "disconnect" between the expectations a member has of his or her service and the reality of the actual experience. She further stated that the AMC team does a good job up front of explaining the goals of the program, but that the lived experience can still be very different. Another participant said that she is good at sitting down with her AMC member to lay out expectations at the beginning of the year. She indicated that training and supervision by the Program Manager was important to helping the member understand his or her service goals.

Participants indicated that their AMC members' service goals did change and evolve during the service year. They stated that new goals emerged with new opportunities and challenges faced by the member, and that as the members got to know their roles on campus they could create more opportunities to learn and grow.

AMC Member Focus Groups

Participants stated that they did feel very well informed of their service expectations prior to beginning their service terms. They agreed that the Program Coordinator who oriented them over the summer did a good job of letting them know what to expect and what was expected of them, including sharing pertinent dates and calendars. Members went on to say that their expectations did match their experiences, to the extent that their experiences could be described in training. Almost all participants stated that nothing AMC staff members could do would prepare them for their actual daily service with students. One participant stated that attempting to explain what they would actually experience on campus was like "trying to describe a rainbow to a blind man."

Participants did not explicitly state that their service goals changed throughout the year, but some participants did indicate that they did not feel not fully prepared for the level of care they would be providing to students. These members stated they would appreciate more training on ethics and dealing with gray areas.

- "I would have appreciated it if we had been prepared for more difficult challenging things. We could do different scenarios and talk about when to call CPS, etc. It was exhausting and emotionally

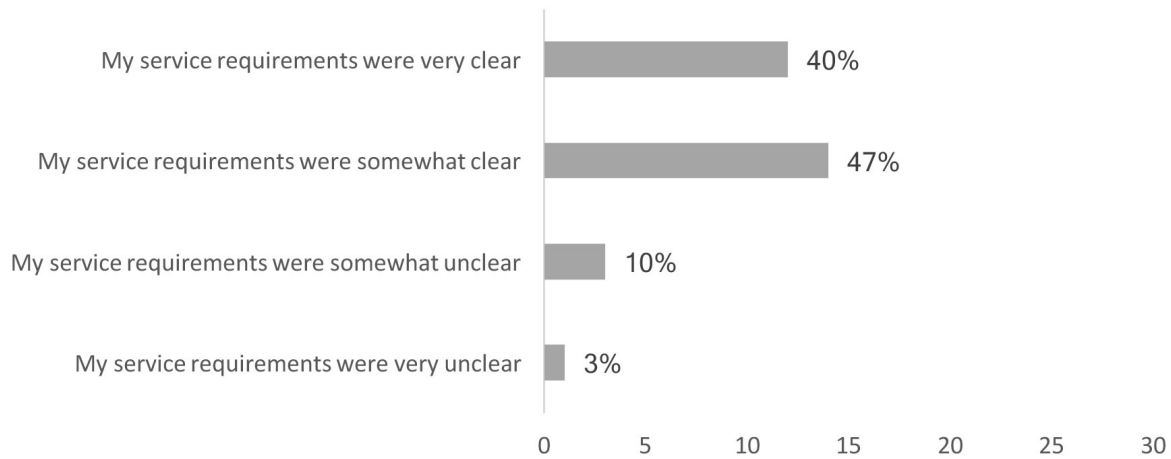
challenging; Resource Days didn't capture that in the slightest - what a high needs campus looks like."

- "The only thing is that I wasn't expecting my campus to be as high needs as it was - hearing all the situations that my students were going through was shocking to me. Working one on one with students was very eye opening to me because they were battling all these fights but still going in to school and trying to succeed. It was powerful. I was able to be a positive influence and being that person has been rewarding."

AMC Member Survey

Survey participants were asked to rate how well-defined their service requirements were prior to beginning their 2016-2017 service term (N=30). The majority (87%) of participants indicated that their service requirements were either very clear or somewhat clear prior to beginning their service. This further supports the focus group data that members believe that AMC staff do a good job of preparing them for their service.

Figure 10: AMC member rankings of clarity of service requirements prior to beginning service year



What was the quality of communication between AMC members and Program Managers during the term of service, and what is its relationship to member effectiveness?

Data were collected via telephone interviews with four randomly selected Program Managers who had supervision of at least one AMC member and focus groups with randomly selected AMC members.

Program Manager Interviews

Interview participants stated that they have good, open, and honest relationships with their AMC members. They try to set expectations regarding office culture and let them know what day-to-day life on campus is like from the beginning, and continue to cultivate a connection with their AMC members through weekly supervisions and check-ins as needed.

All participants stated that they believe their relationship with their AMC members has had a positive impact on the members' ability to be effective in their service with students. They talk about the members' progress and review the interactions with students the members have had throughout the week. PMs also say that they give their members ideas for activities to plan with students and various intervention techniques they may use in difficult situations.

Participating Program Managers further stated that they played a large role in helping their AMC members fulfill their service goals. These participants stated that they challenged members to excel in their service and build strong relationships with the students they served. They encouraged members to think about the type of service year they wanted to have and helped them meet the goals they set for themselves by giving feedback, helping them build confidence, and being a person that the members could confide in as needed.

AMC Member Focus Groups

All participants reported having positive relationships with their Program Managers. AMC Members, on average, stated that their Program Managers are supportive of them and their goals and are good resources for them in their service with students.

- I love my Program Manager. She is awesome and I can't say enough good things. We have each other's back no matter what. She makes it really easy to talk. If I have questions she's there with answers and different ideas to deal with certain students. I lucked out."
- My Program Manager is nothing but great and I've learned so much from her. She includes me a lot. I know all of her students and all my students. She informs me of what's going on and that's really helpful when students come in and I know what's going on with them. She takes me to different social work meetings and truancy court to help me learn. I feel like we have daily supervision. We have open relationship and I can ask her anything at any time and she will be there with an answer. She knows everything."

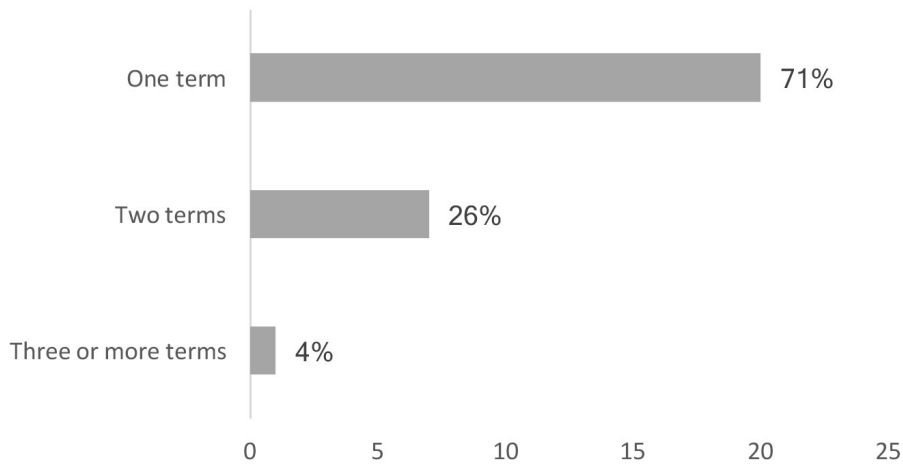
Members agreed that their Program Managers had a large impact on their ability to be effective in their service with students. They provide advice and support for the members to become more comfortable in their service with students. Additionally, members receive continuous training and feedback from their Program Managers, who can help guide them through specific daily challenges with students. One participant elaborated on this point, saying, "Sometimes my PM listens in to my meetings and then afterwards she gives feedback and ideas for how to handle different situations." Program Managers are able to address issues on the spot when training may be most effective. Members can go on to use these specific, targeted lessons with students on the same day they are received.

How many AMC members, on average, choose to serve more than one service year? To what extent are members who have served more than one AmeriCorps term more impactful with students in targeted outcomes, if at all?

Focus groups were conducted with a randomized selection of AMC members to gain insights into member experiences. Additionally, a survey was distributed to all AMC members to collect data that could be utilized, along with the qualitative data, to create a more full and accurate representation of a member’s service experience

Survey results indicated that only about a quarter of AMC members chose to serve more than one service year with AMC during the 2016-2017 service term (N=28).

Figure 11: Frequency of AMC members’ service terms



Participants of member focus groups who had served multiple service terms indicated some differences in their experiences this service year compared to their first service year, as well as compared to members who had only served one service term. Members who had served multiple service terms reported holding more realistic expectations of their service requirements prior to beginning the service year and had greater confidence levels in preparing to work with students and in day to day student interactions. They indicated that they had already developed some coping mechanisms for stressful days and they had games and activities prepared for their sessions with students. However, there was no evidence to suggest that student targeted outcomes were different between groups.

To what extent does the member position type (FT/PT/EAO) have an impact on student outcomes, if at all?

Data analysis was conducted to compare the average means of student outcome data. As a caveat, it's important to note that the groups were non-homogenous, such that there were notably fewer part-time members who served this service term than the other two groups. Additionally, there may be a number of other factors that impact student outcomes that are not included in this model.

Attendance

Absences

Member position type does not appear to have a significant impact on student absences ($p=.214$). Contrast tests were performed to see if any of the groups differed significantly, but none revealed significant differences between groups in the average number of absences that AMC students received during this service year. The effect of member position type on absences was very low, overall ($\eta^2=.006$). Effect size comparisons (using Hedge's g , due to non-homogeneity of group sizes) between each group were conducted, revealing small effects of member position type on this measure:

- Full-time compared to Part-time: $g=.08$
- Full-time compared to EAO: $g=.15$
- Part-time compared to EAO: $g=.23$

Tardies

Analysis of variance tests revealed significant differences between the three groups for the average number of tardies received by AMC students. Further examination revealed the nature of these differences, such that students served by EAO members had significantly more tardies, on average, compared to those served by FT members. The effect of member position type on tardies was low, overall ($\eta^2=.021$). However, effect size comparisons (Hedge's g) between each group were conducted, revealing small to medium effects of member position type on this measure.

- Full-time compared to EAO: $g=.51$
- Part-time compared to EAO: $g=.23$
- Full-time compared to Part-time: $g=.21$

The FT-EAO comparison could reasonably be interpreted as a medium effect, meaning that there could be a moderate but theoretically meaningful effect of member position type on tardies, with the FT and EAO groups being the most likely to see this effect in comparison with each other.

Disciplinary Assignments

There was an absence of evidence to suggest that member position type has an impact on the average number of disciplinary incidents AMC students had this service year ($p=.879$). Contrasts tests further supported this evidence, as there were no significant contrasts between any of the individual groups. The effect of member position type on disciplinary assignments was very low, overall ($\eta^2=.001$). Effect size comparisons (Hedge's g) between each group were conducted, revealing small effects of member position type on this measure:

- Full-time compared to Part-time: $g=.09$
- Full-time compared to EAO: $g=.01$
- Part-time compared to EAO: $g=.07$

Grades

English

There was no evidence that member position type had a strong impact on average English scores for AMC students this service year ($p=.303$). AMC students, on average, had similar scores across groups. The effect of member position type on English grades was very low, overall ($\eta^2=.005$). Effect size comparisons (Hedge's g) between each group were conducted, revealing small effects of member position type on this measure:

- Full-time compared to Part-time: $g=.003$
- Full-time compared to EAO: $g=.15$
- Part-time compared to EAO: $g=.14$

Math

Average math scores did not vary much between groups and there is a lack of evidence that member position type has a very strong impact on the grades of AMC students. No significant differences were detected between any of the three groups of members ($p=.167$). The effect of member position type on math grades was very low, overall ($\eta^2=.007$). Effect size comparisons (Hedge's g) between each group were conducted, revealing small effects of member position type on this measure:

- Full-time compared to Part-time: $g=.15$
- Full-time compared to EAO: $g=.18$
- Part-time compared to EAO: $g=.03$

Science

AMC students' average scores did vary significantly between the three member groups ($p<.001$). Further investigation revealed that students who were served by PT members had higher science scores, on average, compared to those served by the other two member groups. The effect of member position type on science grades was fairly moderate, overall ($\eta^2=.03$). Effect size comparisons (Hedge's g) between each group were conducted, revealing small to medium effects of member position type on this measure:

- Full-time compared to Part-time: $g=.63$
- Full-time compared to EAO: $g=.067$
- Part-time compared to EAO: $g=.69$

There is a moderate but theoretically meaningful effect of member position type on science grades, such that students served by PT members had a moderate but potentially important difference in outcomes compared to students served by FT and EAO members.

Social Studies

AMC student average grades for social studies did not differ significantly between the three member groups ($p=.125$). It does not seem that member position type has a large impact on AMC student social studies grades. The effect of member position type on social studies grades was very low, overall

($\eta^2=.009$). Effect size comparisons (Hedge's g) between each group were conducted, revealing small to medium effects of member position type on this measure:

- Full-time compared to Part-time: $g=.19$
- Full-time compared to EAO: $g=.15$
- Part-time compared to EAO: $g=.36$

The PT-EAO comparison could reasonably be interpreted as a medium effect, meaning that there could be a moderate but theoretically meaningful effect of member position type on tardies, with the PT and EAO groups being the most likely to see this effect in comparison with each other.

To what extent do members plan their activities to align with the targeted issues of the students they serve? How often, on average, are members able to engage students on specific targeted issues during sessions? Does this type of engagement lead to overall improvement on the specific issues that were targeted during sessions?

AMC Member Focus Groups

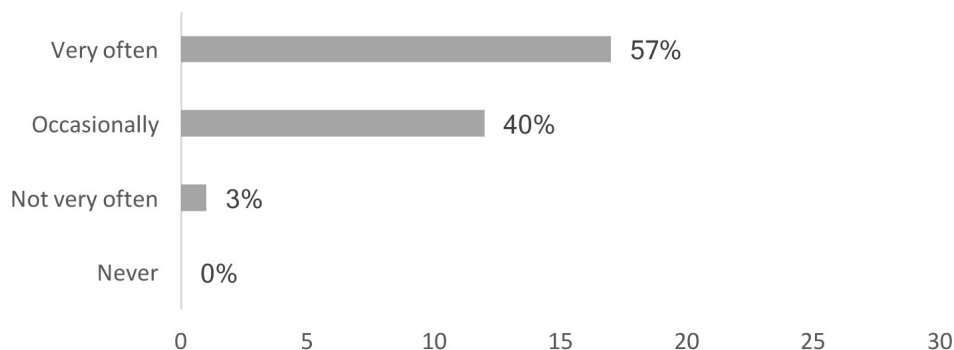
The majority of focus group participants stated that their meetings with students are not strictly planned out, but that they usually allow students to guide the flow of the meetings. These members went on to say that giving the students some say in what they did during their meeting times allowed them to build rapport and often helped the students to open up and talk about what was going on in their lives. This type of structure, they explained, seemed to be more impactful with the students.

Members reminded evaluators that every student is different and some students are talkative, while others need a game to distract them and keep them entertained. One participant explained, "We don't really do activities explicitly about the issues, but we do an unrelated activity and I ask probing and intentional questions, reflection questions." This statement was met with agreement from other focus group participants. However, one member who is planning to come back for a second service term stated that her meetings this past service term were mostly "free for all," but that she planned to be more intentional in the activities she planned with her students during her next service term.

Members who stated that they did plan meetings reflected that they were not always successful, especially if they had not developed a good rapport with the student yet. These members stated that the student would participate in the activity or game, but it felt forced and the student would have more difficulty opening up to them. Members went on to say that targeted engagement did not necessarily lead to changes in those specific areas, but that giving the students a safe space to talk and disclose the issues in their lives did seem to help the students improve generally.

AMC Member Survey

Figure 12: How often, on average, do you feel you were able to engage your students on the targeted issues for which they were referred to CIS? (N=30)



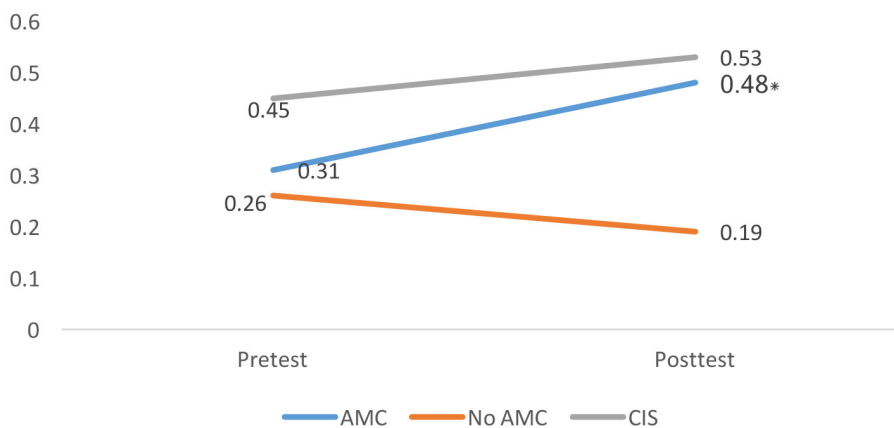
Interestingly, AMC member survey results do not reflect the statements given by focus group members regarding this issue. The vast majority (97%) of AMC members who were surveyed stated that they were able to engage their students on targeted issues during their meetings. However, these data cannot outline the steps these AMC members may have taken at the start of their service year to build rapport with their students and be able to engage them on their key issues. Further information is needed to determine whether or not the focus groups data can be generalized to all AMC members.

What are the differences, if any, in discipline referrals between students served by AMC compared with students served by CIS Program Managers? If differences are detected, what are the possible reasons for such differences?

Quantitative data were collected by CIS staff on student behavioral and academic outcomes. These included disciplinary referrals received by students at the beginning and end of the school year.

On average, all groups had low incidents of disciplinary assignments overall. Only the AMC and the CIS groups showed an increase in these incidents, while the No AMC group actually had a decrease on average. Only students served by AMC members showed a statistically significant increase in disciplinary assignments from the beginning of the year to the end. However, the effect size statistics (Cohen’s d) for each group were small for this measure (AMC $d=.12$; No AMC $d=.040$; CIS $d=.045$).

Figure 13: Average number of disciplinary assignments from the beginning of the year to the end of the year



*Denotes significant difference

Interviews with Program Managers and AMC member focus groups gave some explanations for this phenomenon, including that AMC members are not as equipped to deal with the higher level of disciplinary incidents that tend to arise during the Spring semester. Program Managers and AMC members indicated that the Spring semester is more stressful and challenging for students and staff and many students tended to act out, even if a student didn’t have a history of behavioral issues. This, Program Managers and AMC members explained, is the result of the stress that comes with additional expectations placed on students, including testing (STAAR and other end of semester testing) as well as the fact that other projects and large assignments may be reaching their due dates.

What do Program Managers and AMC members perceive to be the benefits of AMC members (e.g., to what extent do they believe they actually see a change in students as a result of AMC member intervention)?

Program Managers

Interviews with Program Managers revealed that the most significant benefit that AMC members bring to individual students is an example of a consistent, safe, and healthy relationship with an adult. Beyond that, participants stated that members are able to model healthy closure of a relationship, provide mentoring and tutoring, give students desperately needed personal attention, and help improve their academic interest and self-esteem. Program Managers stated that members provide an outlet for students to talk honestly and they show compassion for the students.

Participants did not mention any specific noticeable changes in students as a result of AMC member interventions, but the interview participants agreed that AMC members bring a lot of value to CIS as a whole by allowing CIS the ability to reach more students than they would otherwise be able to reach without them. Program Managers stated that their own caseloads would include the same number of students, but without the support of the AMC members they would be stretched very thin and would have difficulty serving students who were not high need.

AMC Members

Members who participated in focus groups stated that students may not improve in specific targeted areas, but they do generally improve as a result of the members' interactions with them. Participants stated that they felt they were able to serve students by being a safe, consistent adult who they could trust. These members went on to say that many students in CIS did not have such a person in their lives, so it was a role they were able to take on that could help students in future relationships.

Survey data from AMC members gave insight into the types of impacts members believed they had on students during their service year. Interestingly, participants indicated that they had the greatest impacts on issues relating to self-esteem and behavior. This supports statements from focus group members who indicated that they had more success in reaching students with behavioral and emotional issues than with issues related to academics. Members offered an explanation for this, stating that often during their sessions students would be unable to focus due to emotional concerns or teachers would report behavioral disruptions and that forcing the student to try to focus on academics would be unproductive.

Table 3: What types of impacts do you believe you had on the students you served?

	Huge Impact	Moderate Impact	Small impact	No Impact	Total
Self esteem	24 (80%)	6 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	30
Social skills	22 (73%)	8 (27%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	30
Behavior	13 (43%)	16 (53%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	30
Academic improvement	13 (43%)	12 (40%)	5 (17%)	0 (0%)	30
Decreased likelihood of dropping out	8 (27%)	16 (53%)	4 (13%)	2 (7%)	30
Improved attitudes about school	8 (27%)	17 (57%)	4 (13%)	1 (3%)	30
Attendance	9 (30%)	15 (50%)	5 (17%)	1 (3%)	30

What are the differences, if any, in targeted issues and academic outcomes between students served by AMC and students who attend CIS at schools without an AMC member on campus? Between students served by AMC and students who attend CIS with an AMC member on campus but who are not served by AMC?

Data collection

Quantitative student data were collected from CIS campuses that both did and did not have AMC members serving on campus. These data included demographic and background characteristics, academic scores, and targeted areas of need and progress in those areas. The evaluative sample included 2,568 students.

Data analysis included data from three groups of students:

- 1) Students served by AMC (N=552);
- 2) Students from campuses not served by AMC (N=1,140); and,
- 3) Students not served by AMC but who attend a campus upon which an AMC member is present (N=876)

A representative sample of all three student groups were randomly selected for analysis.

For clarity, student groups are labeled as follows:

- 1) Students who are served by AMC members – “AMC”
- 2) Students who are served by CIS on campuses without an AMC member – “No AMC”
- 3) Students who are served by CIS on campuses with an AMC member but who are not paired with an AMC member – “CIS”

Students were referred to CIS for a wide range of mental, behavioral, and academic issues. Data suggest students were largely referred to CIS across all campuses for reasons relating to academics, and the distribution of issues between groups was relatively homogenous. Interviews with program managers revealed that they normally paired AMC members with students who were lower-need and suitable for mentoring; however, the severity of each student’s targeted issue may differ within these categories, making some more suitable for pairing with AMC members than others.

Table 4: Key areas of need

	AMC N (%)	No AMC N (%)	CIS N (%)	Total
Academics	328 (63%)	695 (62%)	594 (69%)	1,617 (65%)
Behavior	83 (16%)	264 (23%)	150 (18%)	497 (20%)
Mental Health	87 (17%)	131 (12%)	91 (11%)	309 (12%)
Crisis Situations	20 (4%)	38 (3%)	21 (2%)	79 (3%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>518</i>	<i>1,128</i>	<i>856</i>	<i>2,502</i>

Targeted issues outcomes

At the end of the year, students from all groups were assessed to determine progress on their key areas of need. Data analysis revealed that the majority of students from all groups showed improvement in these targeted issues.

Table 5: Targeted issues outcomes

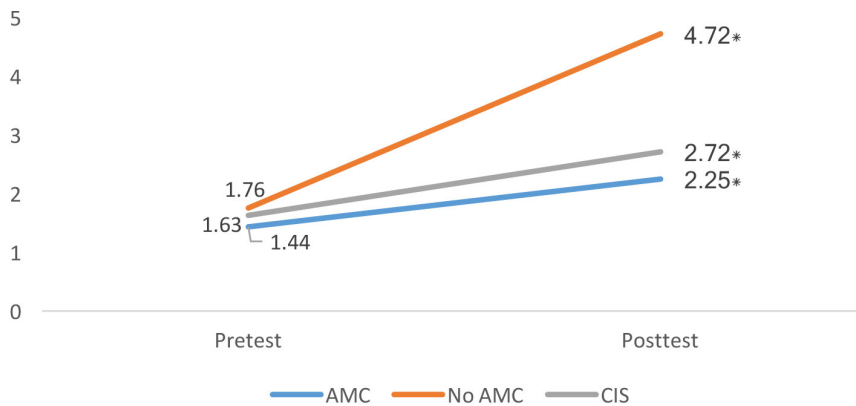
	Improved N (%)	No Change N (%)	Regressed N (%)	Total
AMC	305 (65%)	159 (34%)	8 (2%)	472
No AMC	802 (77%)	242 (37%)	0 (0%)	1,044
CIS	536 (68%)	253 (32%)	0 (0%)	789
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,643</i>	<i>654</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>2,305</i>

Attendance

Absences

All three groups showed statistically significant increases in the average number of absences from the beginning of the year to the end. However, students paired with AMC members had lower average absences than the other two groups overall. The effect size statistics (Cohen’s d) for each group were small for this measure (AMC d=.23; No AMC d=.10; CIS d=.30).

Figure 14: Average number of absences from the beginning of the year to the end of the year

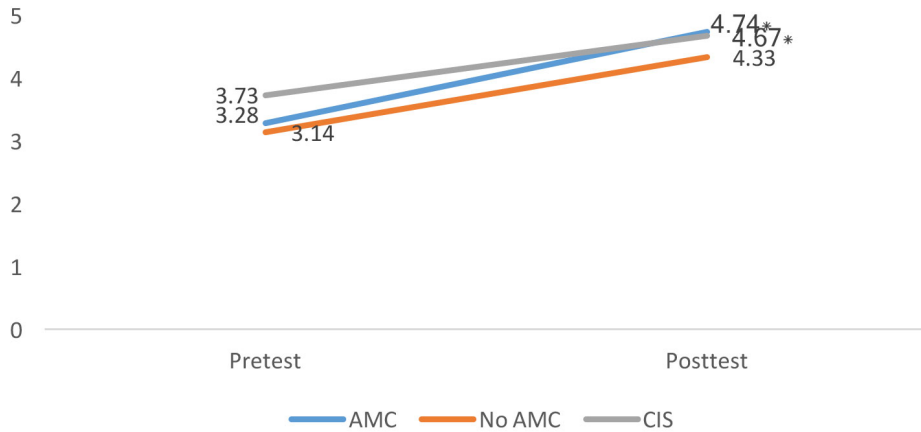


*Denotes significant difference

Tardies

Again, all three groups showed increases in the average number of tardies recorded from the beginning of the year to the end. These increases were statistically significant for the AMC and CIS groups, but in practical terms none of the groups showed a very great increase the average number of tardies recorded from the beginning of the year to the end (i.e., each group’s average only increased by approximately one to one and a half more tardies from pretest to posttest). The effect size statistics (Cohen’s d) for each group were small for this measure (AMC d=.21; No AMC d=.04; CIS d=.12).

Figure 15: Average number of tardies from the beginning of the year to the end of the year



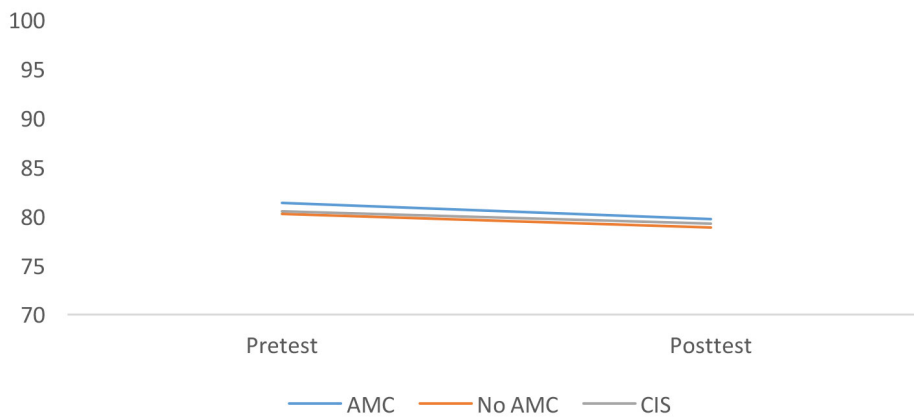
*Denotes significant difference

Grades

English

The differences in grades between the three groups are almost imperceptible. All groups showed a decrease in average grade from the beginning of the year to the end. Decreases in average grade were statistically significant for the No AMC group and for the CIS group. The effect size statistics (Cohen’s d) for each group indicated small effect sizes for this measure (AMC d=.10; No AMC d=.10; CIS d=.11).

Figure 16: Average English grades from the beginning of the year to the end of the year**



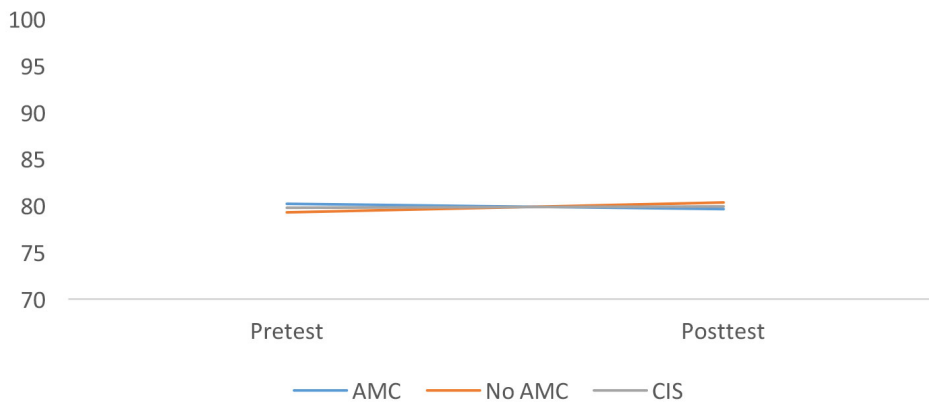
**Note the x-axis minimum is >0 to show three distinct lines. The above data points are as follows:

- AMC Pretest: 81.4%, Posttest: 79.7%
- No AMC Pretest: 80.3%, Posttest: 78.9%*
- CIS Pretest: 80.5%, Posttest: 79.3%*
 - *Denotes significant difference

Math

Again, the grades at the beginning and end of the year are very similar across groups. However, the No AMC group showed a slight grade increase, while the AMC and the CIS groups decreased slightly. None of these differences were statistically significant. The effect size statistics (Cohen’s d) for each group indicate a small effect size for this measure (AMC $d=.04$; No AMC $d=.07$; CIS $d=.02$).

*Figure 17: Average math grades from the beginning of the year to the end of the year***



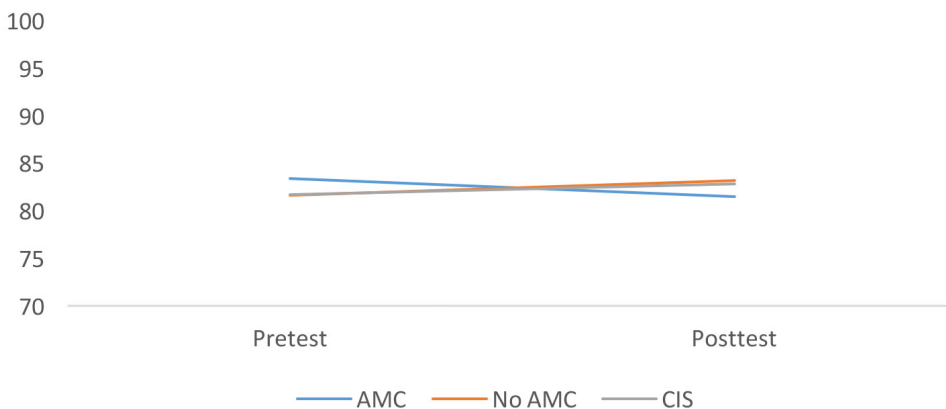
**Note the x-axis minimum is >0 to show three distinct lines. The above data points are as follows:

- AMC Pretest: 80.2%, Posttest: 79.6%
- No AMC Pretest: 79.3%, Posttest: 80.3%
- CIS Pretest: 79.8%, Posttest: 80%

Science

Students across all groups had fairly high science grades on average (i.e., all scores were in the 80% range). Students who were paired with AMC members had a marginal but statistically significant decrease in science grades from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, while the other two groups showed a non-significant increase on average. The effect size statistics (Cohen’s d) for each group indicated small effect sizes for this measure (AMC $d=.15$; No AMC $d=.11$; CIS $d=.03$).

*Figure 18: Average science grades from the beginning of the year to the end of the year***



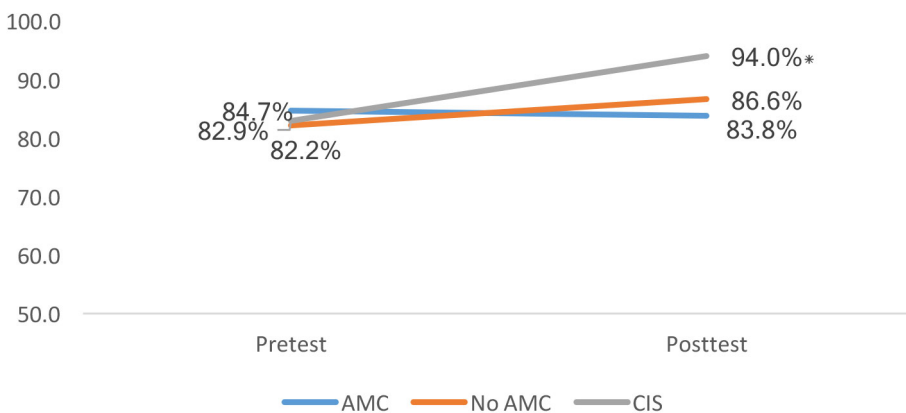
**Note the x-axis minimum is >0 to show three distinct lines. The above data points are as follows:

- AMC Pretest: 83.4%, Posttest: 81.5%*
- No AMC Pretest: 81.6%, Posttest: 83.2%
- CIS Pretest: 81.7%, Posttest: 82.8%
 - *Denotes significant difference

Social Studies

All three groups of students had high achievement in social studies from the beginning of the year to the end. However, grades for the AMC group did decrease slightly on average while grades for the No AMC and CIS groups increased. The CIS group had a statistically significant increase from the beginning to the end of the year. The effect size statistics (Cohen’s d) for each group indicated small effect sizes for this measure (AMC d=.07; No AMC d=.02; CIS d=.10).

Figure 19: Average social studies grades from the beginning of the year to the end of the year**



*Denotes significant difference

**Note the x-axis minimum is >0 to show three distinct lines

STAAR Outcomes

STAAR outcome data provided to evaluators included only whether or not students passed or failed each STAAR exam. Data were not available for all students included in the evaluative sample, so these scores may not present an accurate representation of the STAAR scores across the three sample groups.

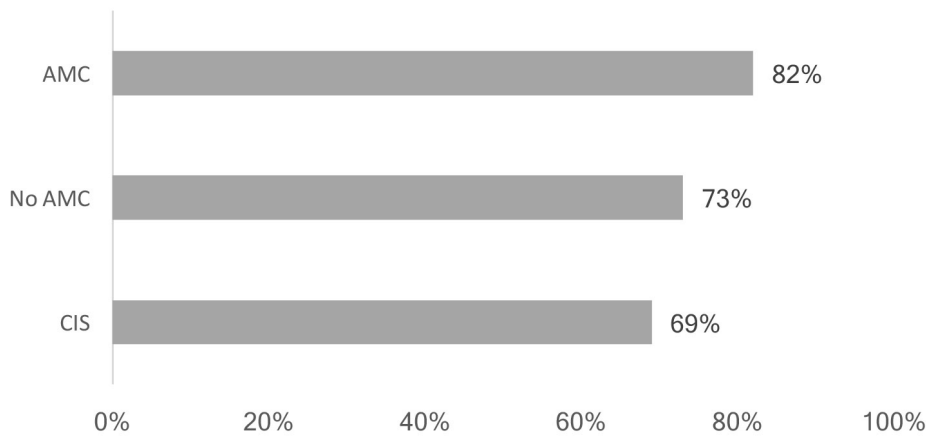
Table 6: Percentage of students who obtained passing STAAR exam scores

	AMC (Total N)	No AMC (Total N)	CIS (Total N)
Reading	48% (351)	52% (370)	49% (405)
Math	54% (363)	60% (459)	54% (460)
Science	60% (120)	65% (238)	57% (217)
ELA	47% (129)	42% (129)	40% (156)
Social Studies	88% (24)	46% (230)	45% (119)

What are the differences, if any, in the number of students completing the school year/being promoted to the next grade level between AMC students and those attending CIS at campuses not served by AMC? Between students served by AMC and students who attend CIS with an AMC member on campus but who are not served by AMC?

Frequency analyses revealed that the majority of all CIS students were promoted to the next grade level. However, students paired with an AMC member were the most likely of all students to be promoted at the end of the 2016-2017 service year.

Figure 20: Frequency of students promoted to the next grade level between groups



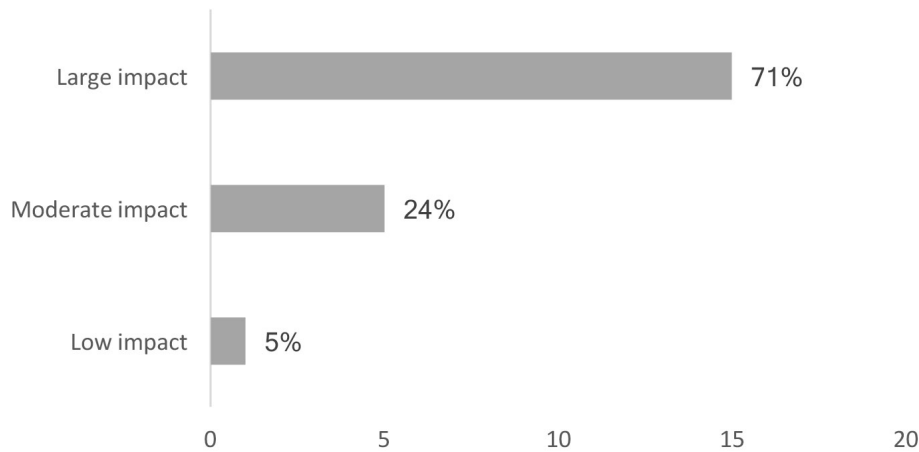
How do Program Managers and AMC members rate members’ ability to meet or exceed program goals?

Program Managers

All Program Managers who supervise at least one AMC member and who participated in telephone interviews stated that their AMC members were doing very well in completing their program goals. They stated that the members are receptive to feedback and are improving in their service as they feel more comfortable with their roles on campus. One participant indicated that her AMC member has been absent frequently due to illness, but that when she is there "she is 110% present and still giving everything even though she knows she will not complete a full term."

Survey data from Program Managers further indicated that the majority of Program Managers (71%) believe AMC members had a large impact on the students they served. Overall, data suggest that Program Managers have a high view of AMC members and their ability to meet or exceed their goals.

Figure 21: How would you rate the impact of your AMC member on the students they served? (N=21)



AMC Members

On average, focus group participants believed that they were successful at meeting their program goals this service year. They indicated that they progressed in their professional goals and grew as people. Members stated that they believed they had a positive impact on the lives of the students they served.

A few participants who had not already chosen a career path stated that they decided to pursue a career in social work as a result of this service year. Some already started looking into school programs in social work so they could get started. Members, overall, reported being satisfied with their experiences and stated that they gained more knowledge and experience than they expected at the start of their service term.

Limitations

As with all research involving humans, this evaluation did have some limitations.

First, there were differences between student groups in grade level and sample size, which although accounted for in data analysis, may have had an impact on research validity. Second, STAAR outcomes were missing for many students in each of the samples, which limits our ability to accurately compare groups and reach valid conclusions regarding these outcomes. Finally, the evaluator was unable to gather data directly from the population of interest due to lack of access to students, parents, teachers, and other school administrators. This limitation limits the scope of the evaluation and presents a one-sided view of the AmeriCorps members and their service to students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide an impact analysis of the AmeriCorps Program at Communities in Schools of Central Texas. Specifically, the goal was to understand the distinct contributions of AmeriCorps members to students, above and beyond what is provided by the CIS program staff. To that end, evaluators collected qualitative and quantitative data from CIS and AmeriCorps program leaders about the AmeriCorps program, as well as student outcome data from the beginning to the end of the school year. The students included in this evaluative sample included randomized selections of CIS students served by AmeriCorps members, CIS students who are not served by AmeriCorps members, and CIS students who attend campuses upon which AmeriCorps members serve but who are not paired with an AmeriCorps member. These three groups were chosen specifically to gain a clear picture of the impact AmeriCorps members have on the students they serve as well as on the campuses on which they serve as compared to students who have no interactions with AmeriCorps members at all.

When outcome data for the three groups of students were analyzed, results revealed that students served by AmeriCorps members were more likely to be in middle school than students not served by AmeriCorps members. And although students served by AmeriCorps members had slightly worse academic outcomes than the other two student groups, they were more likely to be promoted to the next grade level than those not served by AmeriCorps. This finding was not very surprising, as many students are paired with AmeriCorps members for academic reasons and need extra help with tutoring. There is reason to assume that these students may perform more poorly, on average, than their peers without the extra support from AmeriCorps members. Their rate of academic development may be slower than their peers.

Evaluators also looked at outcome data for students' absences, tardies, and disciplinary incidents from the beginning to the end of the year. Data analysis showed that although the groups did not differ from each other very much in practical terms, the students who were not served by AmeriCorps members fared slightly better than those who were served by an AmeriCorps member in all areas but absences. Students served by AmeriCorps members showed a slight but statistically significant uptick in disciplinary assignments from the beginning of the year to the end.

Based on these detailed analyses, it can be concluded that the AmeriCorps program is no more effective than CIS at improving students' academic outcomes. However, this does not tell the whole story of the services AmeriCorps members provide to CIS as a whole and to the campuses on which they serve. The mentoring support they provide to the students may not lead directly to academic improvement, but it is a crucial service to underserved students such as those represented in this sample, who often just need a consistent adult in their lives to model positive behavior and provide an emotional safe place and much-needed compassion. A program as extensive and ambitious as this requires further examination to understand the lasting impacts that AmeriCorps members have on the students they serve.