

Evaluation Report Brief

Corporation for National and Community Service and U.S. Department of Education: School Turnaround AmeriCorps Grant Program



Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

What is the community challenge?

The Department of Education (ED) provides funding to the country's lowest performing schools designated as School-Improvement Grant (SIG) or Priority schools. The SIG- and Priority-funded schools are implementing one of four school intervention models: turnaround, transformation, restart, or school closure. These intervention models are designed to improve academic outcomes for students.

What is the promising solution?

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and ED are collaborating on a new grant program called School Turnaround AmeriCorps. This program supports placement of AmeriCorps members in SIG- and Priority-funded schools to help implement turnaround models successfully. The premise is that AmeriCorps members are particularly well-suited to deliver effective turnaround interventions and can achieve the goal of the program to improve students' academic performance, academic engagement, attendance, high school graduation rates, and college readiness.

What did the evaluation find?

CNCS engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate the implementation of the program:

- A majority of school leaders, staff, and parents perceived the program to be **successful and valuable**.
- School leaders perceived the greatest degree of improvement in **academic achievement**, followed by **increased motivation** and **increased attendance**.
- School staff reported significant or moderate **improvements in students' classroom or classwork behaviors**.
- **Relationship building between program and school stakeholders was identified as one of the most important conditions** supporting success because it provides the groundwork for maximizing the support of the AmeriCorps members.
- Some challenges faced during implementation were: start-up challenges, data collection challenges, overly ambitious targets, confusion about AmeriCorps members' roles, and provision of adequate supervision and training of AmeriCorps members. However, there were **clear signs of improvement by the end of the program's second year**.

Program At-a-Glance

Intervention: School Turnaround AmeriCorps Grant Program.

Subgrantee: 13 grantee programs.

Intermediaries: Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

Focus Area(s): Education, Capacity Building.

Focus Population(s): Students at schools implementing school turnaround interventions.



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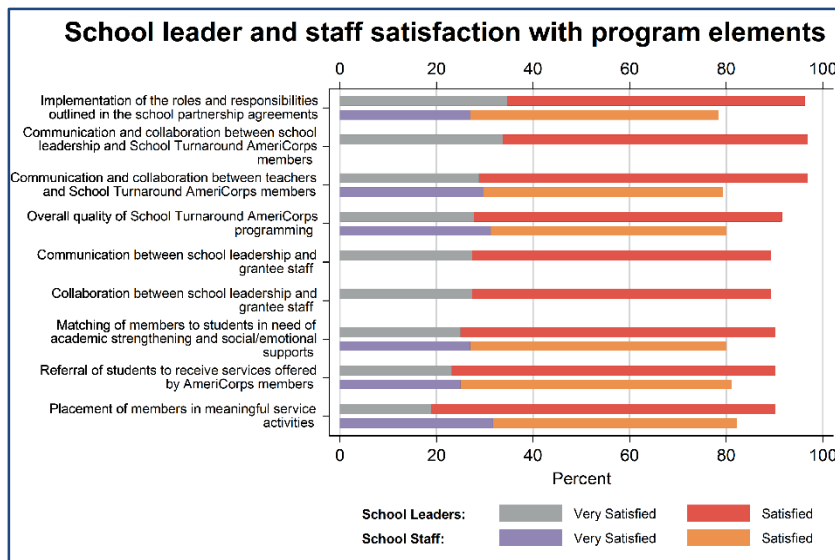
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Evaluation design, timeline and study locations

This report covers the first year (2014-2015 school year) of the two-year evaluation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program being conducted by Abt Associates. The evaluation is an assessment of implementation and outcomes across all 13 grantee programs, as well as comparative case studies of matched pairs of SIG- and Priority- funded schools with and without School Turnaround AmeriCorps members serving in them. The

goal of the evaluation is to understand the effect that AmeriCorps members have had on grantee schools' capacity to implement their turnaround models successfully and to improve key turnaround outcomes.



Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Comparative Case Study, Implementation Study.

Study Population: School leaders and staff, grantee staff, AmeriCorps members, and parents.

Evaluator: Abt Associates.

How are CNCS and ED using the evaluation findings to improve?

As a result of the evaluation CNCS has incorporated changes to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and to its training and technical assistance for grantees. The NOFO was strengthened by clarifying expectations for allowable activities and school and program coordination via written partnership agreements and letters of commitment. CNCS is providing targeted training and technical assistance to programs by implementing check-in calls, technical assistance calls with prospective applicants, and monitoring visits. CNCS also facilitates peer support among School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantees on topics such as data collection and data sharing agreements, data quality, and overcoming the challenges inherent in working in low-performing schools.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the evaluator. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contributions of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

AmeriCorps State and National supports a wide range of local service programs that engage thousands of Americans in intensive community service each year. We provide grants to a network of local and national organizations and agencies committed to using national service to address critical community needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment.