
School Turnaround AmeriCorps National Evaluation: Year 1 Final Report

FINAL

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps grant program, launched in 2013–14, is a joint initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The grants provide support for AmeriCorps members, placed in low-performing schools, to help achieve the schools' school improvement goals. At the activity level, School Turnaround AmeriCorps is very similar to other AmeriCorps programs, yet it differs in three important ways. First, School Turnaround AmeriCorps program host schools must be designated as School Improvement Grant (SIG) or Priority status schools or be among the 5 percent of a State's persistently lowest-achieving Title I schools;¹ second, School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs must establish partnership agreements with the schools that must include specific grant requirements; and three, the services delivered by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in schools should be aligned with the goals and student needs identified in the schools' turnaround plans.

The program provides additional resources to help increase the capacity of the lowest-achieving schools to implement their respective turnaround models successfully. The program's goals are to improve students' academic performance, academic engagement, attendance, high school graduation rates, and college readiness. By 2014–15, its second year, the program was operating in over 70 schools.

In summer 2014 CNCS contracted with Abt Associates to conduct the first year (2014–15) of a two-year implementation evaluation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. The first evaluation year (Year 1) corresponds to the second year of program implementation. Note that for the purposes of this evaluation, only those School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools that meet specific study requirements are included; consequently, 57 of the over 70 schools in the program are participating in the evaluation.²

This report summarizes the complete Year 1 findings of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program evaluation. The study as a whole was designed to address the following research objectives:

- Examine the strategies used to support schools' capacity, school-level interventions, and the direct services that AmeriCorps members deliver to support school turnaround efforts.
- Understand how local context may affect program implementation and identify best practices for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in terms of supporting schools' ability to implement their turnaround plans.

¹ More specifically, SIG guidance defines "persistently lowest-achieving schools," as determined by the State, as (a) Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, and (b) secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds, that are among the lowest-achieving five percent or lowest-achieving five schools in each set, whichever is greater. In addition to the lowest-achieving five percent of schools (or lowest-achieving five schools) identified in this manner, a state education agency (SEA) must identify as persistently lowest-achieving schools any high schools in each set of schools that are not captured on the basis of academic achievement but that have had a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a number of years. U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Guidance on Fiscal Year 2010 School Improvement Grants under Section 1003(G) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. March 1, 2012.

² For the purposes of studying schools that were roughly comparable in their implementation of School AmeriCorps Turnaround programming, the study excluded two types of schools: those that did **not** implement the School Turnaround AmeriCorps intervention in 2013–14 and/or in 2014–15 and some of the Teach For America (TFA) schools. Only a representative sample of TFA schools (5 of 17) was purposively selected to participate in the evaluation because of TFA's distinctive intervention.

- Compare the implementation of school turnaround efforts in AmeriCorps schools to those of matched comparison schools with no or minimal AmeriCorps presence to provide insights into the perceived effectiveness of the program with respect to the following outcomes:
 - overall success in school turnaround,
 - academic achievement,
 - students’ socio-emotional health,
 - school climate, and
 - school capacity to implement its turnaround effort.

The findings described in this report include the comprehensive set of survey, qualitative, and quantitative analyses conducted throughout the Year 1 evaluation.

This report provides an overview of the goals of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and the approach and key questions the national evaluation is designed to address. It presents contextual information about the 13 grantee programs in their second year of partnering with over 70 of the lowest-achieving 5 percent of School Improvement Grant (SIG) or Priority status schools in the 2014–15 school year. It documents the types and nature of services that the over 450 School Turnaround AmeriCorps members provide to support schools’ efforts to meet their turnaround plan goals.³ Findings on implementation effectiveness and the perceived impacts of the program in improving student outcomes are presented from multiple program and school stakeholders’ perspectives: grantee staff, members, school leaders, teachers, and parents. The results of six comparative case studies provide additional context and detail for understanding the mechanisms at work across School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs that provide a wide array of academic and supportive services to struggling students in low-performing schools. This report also compares stakeholder perceptions to administrative outcomes data and discusses the potential uses and challenges of administrative data for evaluating School Turnaround AmeriCorps and other CNCS education-focused programs. Lessons learned, in the form of both strengths and challenges, are summarized into emerging promising practices, suggested improvements, and implications for the program’s theory of change.

Data Sources

This report draws from the following primary data sources:

Grantee Staff

- Online survey administered to staff of 13 School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs between May 4, 2015, and June 4, 2015⁴

³ Corporation for National and Community Service. e-Grants service location and member data as of 2014-15 for the 2014-2015 school year.

⁴ There are 12 grantee *organizations* and 13 grantee *programs*. Four grantee organizations implement their own programs. Eight grantee organizations are State Service Commissions with subgrantee organizations that implement the programs. One state commission has two subgrantee organizations, each of which operates one grantee program. The term “grantee staff” specifically refers to grantee and/or subgrantee organizations’ staff members who participated in the grantee focus groups, and is generally synonymous with the term “program staff.” Eleven of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs are single-state programs that must apply for funding through State Service Commissions and address local needs in only one state, and two are national programs that must apply for grants directly from CNCS and address local needs in at least two states.

- Pre- and post-interviews with staff at 13 and 12 grantee programs, respectively. Follow-up communications with staff of all 13 grantee programs about how they use their partnership agreements and about their data access/collection practices related to student-level data
- Online focus groups with 11 staff members from 10 of the 12 grantee organizations

AmeriCorps Members

- Interviews with 26 School Turnaround AmeriCorps members
- Online focus groups with 10 School Turnaround AmeriCorps members affiliated with 7 of the 13 programs

School Leaders and School Staff

- Surveys administered to 57 principals whose schools were in their second year of hosting a School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and to 543 instructional staff and counselors in such schools (The principal and staff surveys were administered online between Jan. 1, 2015, and Feb. 13, 2015.)
- Interviews with principals of 25 schools hosting School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs
- Small group phone interviews with nine principals (three principals in each of three separate discussions)
- Case studies of six matched pairs of 12 SIG/Priority schools, six schools with School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs and six similar schools without such programs

Case study data collection consisted of interviews with 12 principals in six AmeriCorps program schools and six comparison schools, interviews with 32 teachers or other school staff (two to four per school), four in-person focus groups with teachers in two program schools and two comparison schools, and four site observations documenting school physical appearance and school climate in two program schools and two comparison schools.⁵

Parents of Students Receiving AmeriCorps Services

- Telephone interviews with 50 parents of children attending School Turnaround AmeriCorps program schools

In addition, the study team obtained the following secondary data from existing sources:

- Partnership agreements between 12 grantee programs and their 55 partner schools⁶
- Grantee performance measures and narrative responses recorded in the 2013–14 mid-year and annual grantee progress reports (GPRs) for all 13 programs
- Grantee activity log or AmeriCorps member services tracking information from six grantees
- Student-level data, including student achievement data, student attendance, and/or student behavior data for the 2012–13 (2 grantees), 2013–14 (8 grantees), and 2014–15 (10 grantees) school years

A detailed description of data sources for the report is included in the Technical Appendixes.

⁵ Here forward, the term “program schools” refers to schools with School Turnaround AmeriCorps members.

⁶ One of these 12 grantee programs provided documents that were not identified as a “partnership agreement” per se but that function as such.

Key Findings

The story of low-performing SIG schools in their second year of operating School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs offers several insights about stakeholders' perceived impact of the program, the conditions and factors that moderate effectiveness of program implementation, and the mechanisms that help to explain the program's theory of change. In terms of *what* was achieved, in general programs were moderately successful in providing direct services and supplemental resources that help turn around low-performing schools. In terms of *how* programs achieved success, the second year of program implementation illustrated that programs demonstrably learned which conditions were important to establish and maintain to allow School Turnaround AmeriCorps members to support SIG and Priority schools effectively. Improved understanding of *why* programs were successful or experienced challenges helps to refine hypotheses that explain how and why program interventions should produce desired outcomes.

Applying these findings will improve grantees' capacity to implement effective programs and achieve stronger results in School Turnaround AmeriCorps. Because the findings are generally condition-dependent rather than intervention-specific, they may be generalizable to other CNCS education-focused programs that place national service resources in low-performing schools to support student achievement, student engagement, and college readiness. Collectively, these findings tell the story of a new program that had achieved promising results by its second year of implementation and that has the potential to increase its impact—provided that it benefits from the lessons of the initial years and addresses and resolves underlying tensions in the AmeriCorps program model to create the right conditions for success.

Perceived Impact of the Program

The study found clear evidence that the program provides services matched to schools' turnaround needs and that those services are perceived as helpful. The services address key turnaround outcomes, in particular, students' academic performance—which is typically the major reason that schools are in SIG or Priority status and, correspondingly, the yardstick used to determine whether and when schools exit improvement status. The most common program services that support improvement in student academic performance are tutoring and after-school programs—most of which also provide tutoring. These supplemental academic supports address academic achievement, which is the schools' most pervasive and severe challenge and which was commonly ranked as the most important school turnaround outcome for students by both school leaders and staff. Similarly, the specific SIG strategy ranked by school leaders as being the most influenced by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members is academic achievement, although leaders also ranked increased positive school culture and environment and increased learning time among the top three strategies. Targeting School Turnaround AmeriCorps services to students in need of academic supports is the most common recommendation from teachers and counselors, followed by targeting those in need of academic engagement.

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is perceived as contributing positively to key student outcomes, including academic achievement and student socio-emotional health; these findings reflect perceptions of the large majority (79 percent or more) of school leaders, staff, and parents. Further, 75 percent or more of staff reported having observed student improvement in other targeted outcomes, including significant and moderate improvement in attentiveness in class, getting along well with others, and coming to school motivated to learn. A majority of school staff (74 percent) reported that they observed significant or moderate improvement in academic achievement or academic engagement

outcomes for those students served by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program.⁷ In addition, 29 of 38 interviewed parents observed positive differences in their children since the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program began, about half of which related to students' academic performance.

Conditions and Factors that Moderate Effectiveness of Program Implementation

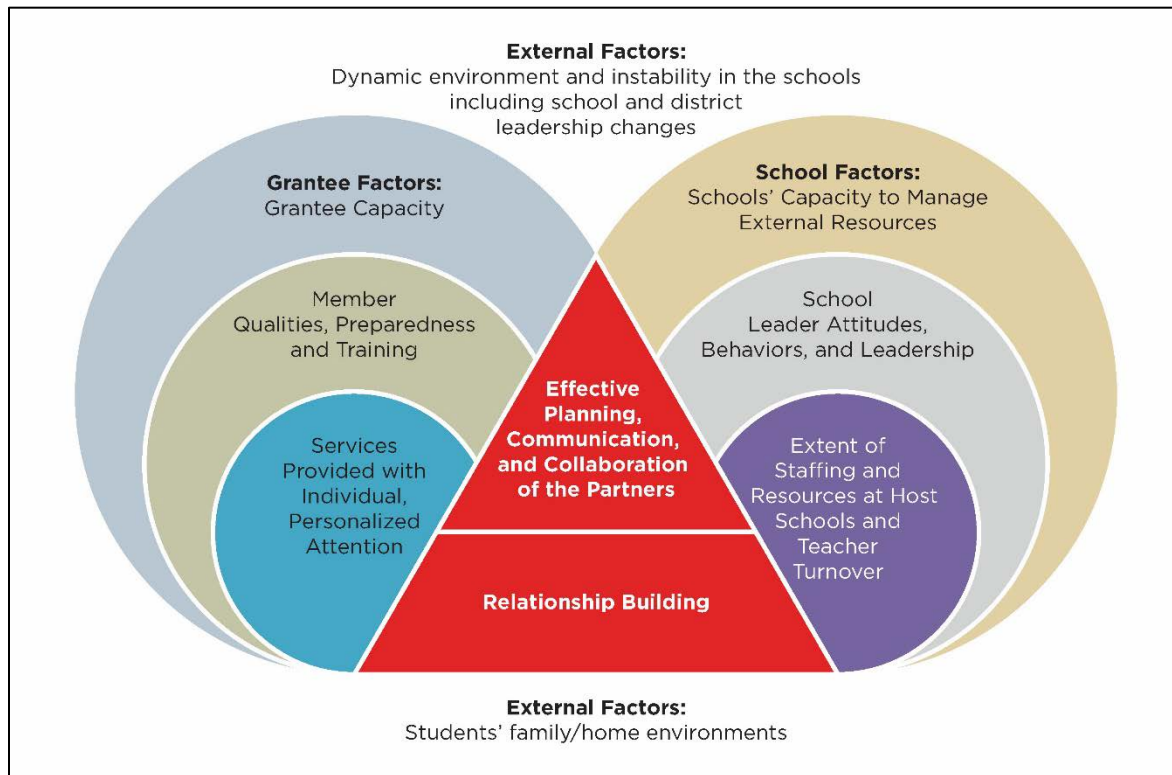
Five prominent, interrelated themes about the effectiveness of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program emerged in the evaluation of its second year of operation.⁸ Interestingly, the strongest themes about the conditions that facilitate program effectiveness are not intervention-specific, likely reflecting local variability and flexibility in grantees' mix of activities in partner schools (described in Chapter II, Part 1). Specifically, the cross-cutting themes are 1) relationship building between program and school stakeholders; 2) grantee capacity to administer programs, encompassing both grant management functions and AmeriCorps member qualities, preparedness, and training; 3) schools' capacity to manage external resources, including school leader attitudes, behaviors, and leadership, and the extent of staffing and resources at host schools; 4) planning, communication, and collaboration of the partners, including teacher collaboration and supports; and 5) external factors, such as students' home environments and the broader context of the school district that are generally outside the school's sphere of influence, the program scope, and member control.

As shown in Exhibit I-1, the importance of relationship building was a particularly prominent theme that interlaces with the grantee and school capacity themes, all of which must be considered in the context of external factors. Each of these themes (and their subthemes) emerged as key mechanisms that explain and influence the effectiveness of the strategies and direct services that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members deliver in program schools. The resulting lessons learned about which strategies worked well and which strategies were less successful are therefore broadly applicable to program operations across all grantees and intervention types.

⁷ Sources: school leader and school staff surveys.

⁸ Sources: grantee interviews and focus groups, principal interviews, member interviews and focus groups.

Exhibit I-1: Conditions that Moderate Program Effectiveness



The Conclusion, in Chapter IV, compares the original program logic model with the phenomena that have been observed to explain or influence program results based on Year 1 evaluation findings, and discusses implications for refining the program's theory of change.

Limitations

The study administered surveys to grantees, principals, and instructional staff, and achieved different response rates for each respondent group as follows. All 13 grantee programs responded to the survey. The response rate for the school leader survey was 68 percent, which suggests reasonable confidence that survey responses can characterize the perspectives of participating schools' leaders. The response rate for instructional staff and counselor surveys was less robust, as less than half of the educators invited to complete surveys did so. As a result, those responses are less likely to be representative of all instructional staff and counselors sampled in the study schools, and the study team applied statistical adjustments for nonresponse (see Appendix A.2 for more detail). All survey findings presented in this report are descriptive and are based on surveys of personnel whose organizations (grantees or schools) participate in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether and how their experiences may have differed from those of employees at similar nonparticipating organizations.

Interviews and focus groups used standard protocols; however, not all respondents provided similar information or the same level of detail to each question posed. Interview data reflect participants' responses to those questions at the time of data collection and may not necessarily have captured the same level of detail from each individual participant. As a result, the frequencies reported in this document represent the most conservative estimates of the proportion of participants reporting on an experience or perception. Further, parent interviews were conducted with individuals whose names had been provided by staff from program schools. These parents may well be the most engaged or

appreciative parents in the school so their opinions may differ from those of other parents whose children are involved in the program. For more information on the interviews and focus groups, see Appendix A.5.1.

Finally, grantees' administrative data—the performance data, member activity tracking data, and student-level outcomes data that they collect and report—were variable and inconsistent, which limited the study team's ability to analyze data across grantees systematically. Documentation of these data was limited in some instances because grantees did not provide complete and consistent data to Abt Associates; in other instances, the data that grantees shared are of such poor quality that meaningful data analyses are not possible. The section on the *Potential Uses and Challenges of Administrative Data* in Chapter II includes a more detailed discussion of the limitations of the administrative data collection and the extent of the analyses and conclusions that can be drawn from the results.

II. PART 1: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, including its theory of change, strategies, and defining elements within the context of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) partnership. It then describes the key study features, including the goals, design, and samples that allow the study to address research questions about the program’s implementation and perceived impacts.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program Overview

CNCS and ED are collaborating on a new grant program to increase high school graduation, college readiness, and educational attainment for students in our nation’s persistently lowest-achieving schools. Since fall 2013, School Turnaround AmeriCorps has been providing grants to eligible organizations that work with schools receiving School Improvement Grant (SIG) or Priority school funding.⁹ The grants are designed to improve academic outcomes for students in SIG-funded schools as they implement their improvement strategies.¹⁰ The SIG schools must implement one of four school intervention models—turnaround, transformation, restart, or school closure. Priority schools can implement interventions aligned with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility turnaround principles.

The goal of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is to improve students’ academic performance, academic engagement, attendance, high school graduation rates, and college readiness, thereby helping to turn around the lowest-achieving schools. Its premise is that AmeriCorps members are particularly well-suited to deliver effective turnaround interventions and achieve the desired student outcomes in eligible schools. The original program logic models, included in Exhibits IV-1 and IV-2, depict the core activities of the interventions being implemented by AmeriCorps members and illustrate how those activities are expected to lead to the intended short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for the target population for the intervention. They also contextualize the program by describing key assumptions that underlie the hypothesized causal relationship between program activities and intended outcomes and factors (moderators) that may condition the degree to which those activities achieve intended effects.

Both logic models also illustrate how activities funded through the program address multiple student needs and align with comprehensive school turnaround plans by incorporating at least one of the following six SIG strategies:

1. Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.
2. Establish a school culture and environment that improve school safety, attendance, and discipline and address other non-academic factors that impact student achievement, such as students’ social, emotional, and health needs.
3. Accelerate students’ acquisition of reading and mathematics knowledge and skills.

⁹ School Improvement Grants (SIG), authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Title I or ESEA), are grants to state educational agencies (SEAs) that SEAs use to make competitive subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) that demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to use the funds to provide adequate resources in order to raise substantially the achievement of students in their lowest-performing schools. Source: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>. Accessed Oct. 9, 2014.

¹⁰ Throughout this document, all references to SIG-funded schools also include Priority-funded schools.

4. Increase graduation rates through strategies such as early warning systems, credit-recovery programs, and re-engagement strategies.
5. Increase college enrollment rates through college preparation counseling assistance to include completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and college applications, and educating students and their families on financial literacy for college.
6. Support school implementation of increased learning time.

The six strategies are aligned with those required of SIG schools implementing one of the four SIG turnaround models (i.e., turnaround, transformation, restart, or school closure), as well as the requirements associated with Priority schools that are implementing the turnaround principles under ESEA flexibility. In addition, these strategies are based on research on turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

The program theory of change also recognizes that leveraging community, local education agency (LEA), and school-level support systems can be an important component in comprehensive turnaround efforts. As such, the School Turnaround AmeriCorps funding guidelines encourage grantees to partner with multiple eligible schools within an LEA and coordinate turnaround efforts among multiple school sites. Implementing the six strategies through a comprehensive and coordinated approach is hypothesized to enable grantees to take advantage of economies of scale and aid in changing school, LEA, and community cultures.

Study Goals and Research Questions

The study examines the contributions of AmeriCorps members toward the success of turnaround models in low-performing schools in which they provide direct services, and it seeks to explain the mechanisms underlying those contributions. Specifically, the goal of the evaluation is to understand the effect that AmeriCorps members have had on grantee schools' capacity to implement their respective turnaround models successfully and to improve key turnaround outcomes.

The specific goals of the evaluation are as follows:

- Describe how AmeriCorps members are supporting school turnaround efforts.
- Contrast the implementation of school turnaround efforts at School Turnaround AmeriCorps sites with school turnaround sites that are not supported by AmeriCorps.
- Identify best practices for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in terms of supporting schools' ability to implement their turnaround plans.

The study's guiding research questions are summarized below:

1. How do AmeriCorps members help schools implement their turnaround plans?
 - a. How do AmeriCorps grantees work with teachers and other school personnel to identify and target students with whom their members will engage so that the school is more likely to achieve its turnaround goals?
 - b. What are the specific direct service activities and school-level interventions that AmeriCorps members conduct at each school and how are those activities believed to support school turnaround?
 - c. What are the specific capacity-building strategies that AmeriCorps members contribute to each school? How do school leaders and staff view the role and contributions of AmeriCorps members in building the school's capacity to implement its turnaround

- effort? What are the areas in which schools believe AmeriCorps members have the most and least influence over the school's ability to achieve its turnaround goals and why? In what ways, if any, does the presence of AmeriCorps members allow school staff or volunteers to modify their activities in ways that might benefit students?
- d. Do the specific activities that AmeriCorps members conduct change over the course of the grant period? To what extent do grantees use data to inform continuous improvement efforts to meet changing needs and improve their interventions?
2. How and to what extent do School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs adhere to grantees' program designs across schools or exhibit flexibility to adapt to schools' needs and local contexts?
 - a. Which aspects of grantee-school partnerships appear to be the most promising practices in terms of satisfaction of the school leadership and the participating AmeriCorps members?
 - b. What elements of the implementation are sensitive to local contexts and might be difficult to generalize and replicate in other contexts?
 - c. Which elements of the implementation are potentially replicable in other schools?
 3. Are AmeriCorps members perceived by school leaders and other stakeholders to be more vital in supporting certain SIG/Priority strategies than others? Which activities pursued by AmeriCorps members are perceived as being more or less helpful in supporting schools' turnaround efforts with respect to the following outcomes and why?
 - a. Overall success in school turnaround
 - b. Academic achievement
 - c. Students' socio-emotional health
 - d. School climate
 - e. School capacity to implement its turnaround effort

Study Design, Study Sample, Methods and Limitations

To answer these research questions, the research design for the Year 1 national evaluation of School Turnaround AmeriCorps used a mixed methods design. The study design emphasized primary data collection from diverse stakeholder groups, including comparative case studies and surveys of grantee staff and school leaders, to examine implementation and perceptions from multiple perspectives. These primary data are supplemented by administrative data on grantee performance and member activities.

A condition of receiving grant funding was participation in the national evaluation, and therefore all 13 funded grantee programs are represented in the findings. Most School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools were included in the evaluation, with the exception of one large grantee for which only a representative sample of schools was included.¹¹ In total, 57 program schools were included in the evaluation.¹²

¹¹ The Teach for America (TFA) intervention provides schools with AmeriCorps members who have been trained as teachers to teach in school classrooms, in contrast to other School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantees whose members provide services, such as tutoring and mentoring, to support student engagement and academic achievement. Because of its distinctive intervention, only a representative sample of TFA schools was included in the evaluation.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantees began operating in schools in fall 2013. As shown in Exhibit II-1, 2013–14 was the first program year for grantees implementing the intervention, 2014–15 represents the second year, and 2015–16 the third program year. The 2013–14 school year served as a pilot year for the national evaluation to develop the evaluation design, develop and pilot test the data collection instruments, and prepare and submit the OMB clearance package. The two-year national evaluation spans the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years.

Exhibit II-1: Program Implementation and Evaluation Timeline

School Year	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Program implementation	Pre-program	First year	Second year	Third year
Program evaluation	Baseline data	Pilot evaluation	Year 1	Year 2

The evaluation was designed to examine program implementation from multiple stakeholders’ perspectives through primary data collection, including surveys, comparative case studies, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with grantees, AmeriCorps members, school leaders, school staff, and parents/guardians of students who receive AmeriCorps services. Students were not asked to participate in surveys or interviews so as not to detract from their instructional time. These data allow the study to understand and compare implementation effectiveness.

Secondary data collection included mid-year and annual grantee progress reports and performance measurement data, grantee activity logs (when available), and other outcomes data (e.g., achievement scores, attendance and behavior records) obtained from grantees. These data allow the study to describe grantees’ data collection and performance measurement capacity.

The case study approach attempts to understand how AmeriCorps members’ service contributes to program schools’ turnaround efforts and incorporates in-depth comparisons of turnaround implementation in SIG and Priority schools with AmeriCorps members to a similar group of low-performing schools not supported by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources (i.e., the comparison group).

The six case study comparison schools were matched on key characteristics (i.e., state, grade level, turnaround model) and were from the same local educational agencies (LEAs) as their School Turnaround AmeriCorps counterparts, wherever possible. Potentially eligible comparison schools were selected on the basis of SIG grant or Priority status and no or minimal AmeriCorps presence (among other criteria).

Matched pairs of one treatment school staff member and one comparison school staff member participated in either site visits or telephone interviews to provide additional context, and the study team also drew from existing data sources to learn about each case study school’s SIG status, history, and student population. Case study data were collected through one-on-one interviews with principals and teachers; site visits also included focus groups with teachers and a structured observation protocol of the school environment.

The evaluation integrates observations from the varied data collection strategies and their corresponding analytic approaches to describe the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program comprehensively, synthesize the findings, and contextualize them appropriately.

¹² This number excludes the schools newly added to the 2014–15 cohort, since their experiences in implementing the program will be qualitatively different from the experiences of the schools in the cohort that has already completed one year of program implementation.

Lessons Learned about the Evaluation Design, Recruitment, and Data Collection

The first year of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps national evaluation yielded multiple interrelated insights about the program; it also generated a number of useful lessons about the evaluation itself. These lessons encompass elements of study design, program design and operations, and the practical realities of primary data collection in dynamic contexts. The study design changed throughout the course of the study to accommodate updated information about both treatment and comparison schools—primarily because of more accurate data about the number of AmeriCorps members on site and secondarily because of changes in schools' eligibility status. The implications for both this study—and others—center on using the most current information available to determine key design thresholds before recruiting study participants and collecting data.

Originally, the Year 1 evaluation featured a quasi-experimental design with which the study would compare the full sample of School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools and a similar number of comparison schools without the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, using surveys and interviews to compare outcomes across the two groups of schools. The design called for comparison schools that met three eligibility conditions: 1) program and comparison schools were located within the same district and/or state, 2) comparison school offered the program school's relevant grades, and 3) comparison schools had fewer AmeriCorps members than School Turnaround AmeriCorps campuses. Difficulties in recruiting comparison schools that met those criteria meant the study was not able to form a valid comparison group. Consequently, CNCS and Abt Associates shifted to the comparative case study design described above. Under the revised design, no surveys were administered to school leaders and school staff in comparison schools, and therefore no comparisons of survey data were possible.

Lessons about program design and operations emerged in three key areas: currency of information, guidelines for grantees about reporting, and grantees' partnership agreements. Because schools and districts (and grantees) are dynamic organizations, priorities and needs can change, which directly affects the number of AmeriCorps members on site. Changes in numbers of member placements and schools' eligibility status are not necessarily communicated quickly to CNCS and therefore not to study contractors either; providing real time updates also was not an expectation of the grant. While obtaining such information is not within CNCS's control, it may be possible for the agency to emphasize to grantees (and therefore to districts and schools) the value of having updates in real time. The guidance provided to grantees about annual performance reporting and partnership agreements could be strengthened to ensure that CNCS and its evaluations benefit from higher-quality data and access to such data.

The lessons about recruitment and data collection in highly fluid school contexts are many. One overarching lesson is that sufficient time for planning, recruitment, and data collection is essential. There are simply so many demands on districts/schools (and their employees) that externally commissioned evaluations are low on their priority lists, which is reflected in the length of time required to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals, to recruit schools and individual study participants, and to schedule and complete data collection within the school calendar, with its multiple testing, vacation, and other scheduling constraints. The sooner an evaluation can begin to plan outreach, recruitment, and data collection the better its success in studying school-based programs. A related lesson is that conveying the importance of a given study can be facilitated through both well-timed communications from sponsoring agencies and the use of incentives.

Organization of this Document

The Executive Summary provides a brief overview of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and the national evaluation, summarizes the methods used and limitations of results reported, and highlights key findings. The study findings are organized into two distinct parts. This introductory chapter provides

an overview of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and the national evaluation, followed by a summary of findings from the evaluation as a whole. This chapter outlines the cross-cutting themes and findings, draws from results presented in earlier reports and memos as well as results from more recent analyses, and provides illustrative examples of summary tables and displays.

Chapter III, Findings Part 2 provides a comprehensive discussion of findings across all data sources. The Implementation Findings section describes services AmeriCorps members provided in schools, how partnerships are structured and operate, and how implementation was perceived across stakeholders—both in terms of accomplishments and challenges. The Perceived Impacts section presents detailed findings and accompanying exhibits on the perceived impacts of AmeriCorps members' service in turnaround schools. The Case Study Findings section provides in-depth comparisons of stakeholder perceptions from the paired case studies for all six sites. The Administrative Data Findings section summarizes the study's findings and observations about using administrative data to evaluate education-focused AmeriCorps programs.

Chapter IV summarizes lessons learned and concludes with implications for the program's theory of change. In a separate document, the Technical Appendixes include survey data tables, supplemental exhibits, data collection instruments, and references.

Implementation Findings: Cross-Cutting Themes

Five cross-cutting themes summarize the conditions and factors that moderate effectiveness of program implementation: 1) relationship building between program and school stakeholders; 2) grantee capacity to administer programs, encompassing both grant management functions and AmeriCorps member qualities, preparedness, and training; 3) schools' capacity to manage external resources, including school leader attitudes, behaviors, and leadership, and the extent of staffing and resources at host schools; 4) planning, communication, and collaboration of the partners, including teacher collaboration and supports; and 5) external factors, such as students' home environments and the broader context of the school district, which are generally outside the school's sphere of influence, the program scope, and member control. Each theme is discussed below and summarized in Exhibit II-3.

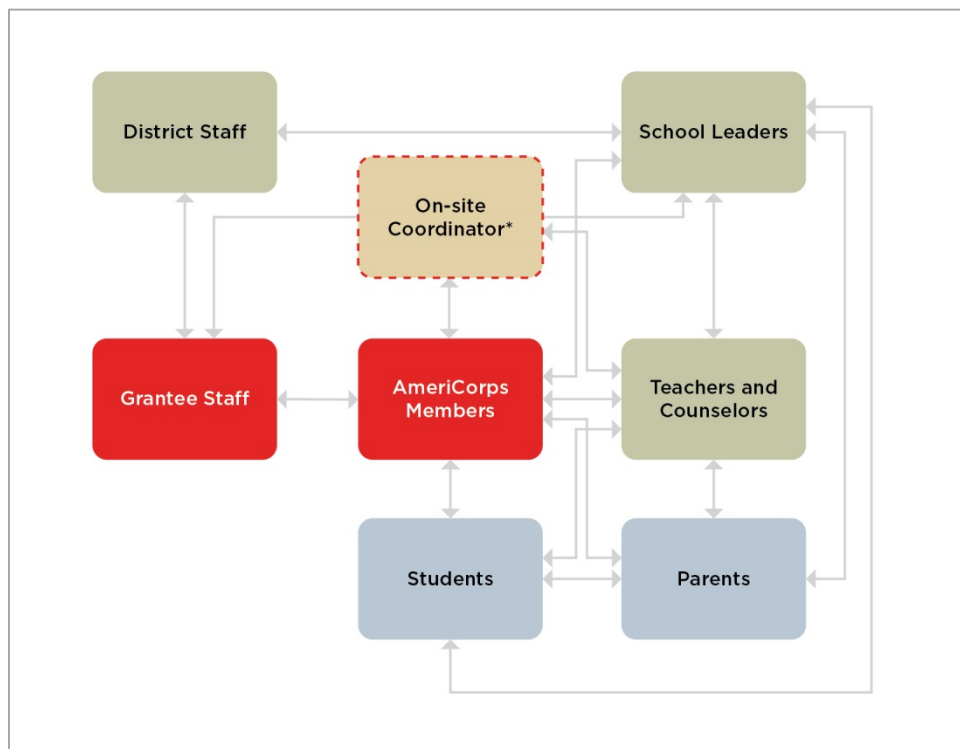
Relationship Building between Program and School Stakeholders

Relationship building was a dominant theme throughout Year 1 of the evaluation and across all stakeholders. Data from multiple respondents and data sources indicate that building strong relationships—among all stakeholders—is a crucial foundation for program success. All program activities involve communication and interactions between various stakeholders, whether among grantees, districts, school leaders, teachers, members, parents, or students. School leaders and members are central players in the network of relationships that occur in program schools. School leaders interact with all six key program stakeholders—grantee staff, members, teachers, parents, students, and district staff—while AmeriCorps members directly interact with five stakeholders—grantee staff, principals, teachers, parents, and students. The other key program stakeholders establish direct relationships with two to four program stakeholders each, as shown in Exhibit II-2.

The myriad potential inter-connections among program stakeholders help explain the importance of relationship-building themes that in turn influence program effectiveness. Given the multiplicity of relationships, it is not surprising that many schools use an on-site coordinator, a school-based liaison or coordinator who is typically a school staff member, to navigate between the people managing the

program and those delivering services (grantee staff and members) and the people in schools who are involved with the program (school leaders, teachers, and counselors).¹³

Exhibit II-2: Network of Key Program Stakeholder Relationships



*The on-site coordinator is not required by AmeriCorps or implemented in all sites.

Relationship building surfaces in three areas: structure, process, and impact. First, AmeriCorps programs have flexibility to establish *staffing structures* to support members to meet locally determined needs, so long as they ensure that members participate in eligible activities. The on-site coordinator role, filled by a school staff member, emerged as an important structural mechanism for effective implementation of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs in partner schools. Other programs employed a member of the grantee staff as a coordinator working across multiple schools or, in one case, a single school. Second, the *process* of building relationships between the program and school stakeholders influences programs’ traction in schools. When done well, relationship building creates bonds of trust and respect, and smooths implementation efforts; when ignored or done poorly, lack of personal capital leads to low receptivity of and even pushback on the program by school stakeholders. Third, effective relationship building, particularly between members and the students they support, helps to create continuity and stability in students’ lives and the broader school climate, which in turn can positively impact students. The strong one-on-one relationships members forge with students improve the efficacy of their services and help programs achieve better results in supporting students’ socio-emotional health, academic engagement, academic achievement, and overall school climate. Each of these relationship-building areas is discussed next in more depth.

The Structure of Relationship Building: partnership agreements and the on-site coordinator role.

Grantees and participating schools must demonstrate their support and commitment to their partnership in implementing the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in letters of support and written

¹³ Sources: principal interviews, partnership agreements, case studies.

partnership agreements.¹⁴ Almost all programs have established partnership agreements with their school partners, as required by their grant. All describe provisions for data sharing and nearly all contain information on the roles and responsibilities of both grantees and school partners. Most agreements describe managing collaboratively, and/or their strategies for doing so, and include resource-sharing expectations. Though grantees established partnership agreements with partner schools that helped structure relationships by defining programs' and school partners' roles and responsibilities on the front end of implementation, they did not report using or updating these agreements to address role confusion issues on the back end.

Another important structural mechanism for building strong relationships is the role of a site coordinator (either a grantee employee or a designated school employee), usually on site, who is in frequent communication with schools and grantees. Some grantees proactively hired supervisors before the summer began to begin establishing relationships with schools and preparing for the fall, making sure supervisors were strong links between schools and programs and establishing effective means of communication between supervisors and programs. The on-site coordination role facilitates better communication and improved collaboration between programs and school stakeholders, and this human connection and interaction appears to engender trust and confidence in members and the work they are doing in schools, thus creating the foundation for strong relationships.

The Process of Relationship Building: paving the road/doing the groundwork for program implementation. Although the Letters of Commitment and written partnership agreements are the first formal acts for establishing the relationship between the grantee and its partner schools, nearly all of the grantees had relationships with at least some of their target schools before implementing the program, and most of the grantees had pre-existing relationships with partner schools for at least two years before implementation.¹⁵ This suggests that grantees understand the importance of relationship building for implementing school partnerships.

Programs reported that their school turnaround activities and interventions would not be successful without the active engagement of partner districts, schools (primarily school leaders), and teachers. Across these different levels, the primary positive aspects of engagement reported by programs include collaboration, communication, relationship building, and buy-in; the most commonly reported challenges were due to insufficient coordination and a lack of engagement in these same aspects, while a few programs experienced challenges in balancing district- and school-level needs.

Survey data from multiple respondents (leaders, staff, and grantees) indicate that grantees' strong relationships with districts and leaders are a necessary (if not sufficient) condition to operate service programs in schools. Survey and interview responses from both principals and grantees showed that school leaders' buy-in and support is a gateway to teacher cooperation and collaboration with members. When programs were successful in obtaining principal buy-in, principals could serve as ambassadors for the program (and for members' presence) to school staff.

¹⁴ School Turnaround AmeriCorps applicants were required to submit a Letter or Letters of Support (for grantees funded in 2013) or a Letter or Letters of Commitment (for grantees funded in 2014) from all eligible partner schools and their corresponding local education agencies (LEAs), signed by school and LEA leadership and including evidence of the applicants' consultation with school and LEA leadership. CNCS also requires that grantees establish written partnership agreements that "articulate the alignment between the local School Turnaround AmeriCorps program design and school and LEA turnaround plans, as well as the parties' plan for ongoing collaboration throughout the grant period" (Corporation for National and Community Service, Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13, p. 31).

¹⁵ Sources: grantee survey, principal and grantee interviews.

Exhibit II-3: Factors that Facilitate Progress and Factors That Present Barriers and Challenges by Cross-Cutting Theme

Cross-Cutting Theme	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
1. Relationship Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members provide specialized attention and one-on-one support, e.g. by giving students extra time on subjects with which they struggle and tutoring directly to the students' interests • Members check in on students regularly and make them feel accountable for their attendance • Members couple college preparation with mentoring • Members leverage their positive relationships and similar ages with students they serve to make them more enthusiastic about attending college • Members help to craft the school's behavioral culture by developing positive relationships with students and encouraging them to become more engaged in their schools • Members are viewed as "near peers" and role models to students (e.g., by providing insight into college life, and contributing positively to school culture) • Members provide after school activities that combine tutoring/homework help with recreational activities (e.g. cooking, crafts) • Members encourage students to be more motivated and academically engaged • Members build trust and positive and supportive relationships with teachers, students and families • Members serve as a bridge between students and teacher relationships (i.e., intervening in situations before disciplinary action is needed) • Member communication with parents about their child's absences to improve their child's attendance • Member communication with parents about academic progress and attendance via letters about the program and in-person contact • Members keep parents and community members informed about school functions and activities to promote their involvement in the community • Members provide family engagement activities that improve families' knowledge and awareness of the school itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived diminished autonomy and lack of buy-in to the program, e.g., stemming from disagreement between districts and schools about member placements • High principal and school staff turnover reduces buy-in and increases relationship-building work • Lack of buy-in from teachers on a program's intervention strategy—e.g., a program offering an online credit recovery program teachers did not want • Member perceptions of lack of respect from school staff • Minimal-time service terms (e.g. members who come in once a week for a couple of hours to provide tutoring or credit recovery support) do not allow enough time for members to forge relationships in their time-limited interactions with students • Members' one-year service terms limit positive relationship building between students and a trusted and caring adult • Mandatory tutoring can be off-putting to students

Cross-Cutting Theme	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
1. Relationship Building (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of member roles with school culture and operations • Member participation in school functions increases buy-in from school leaders, staff, students, and parents • Grantees having prior relationships and history of effective partnerships with partner schools • Grantees build strong relationships and strong communication with school and district partners, especially school administrators • School leadership buy-in to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps partnership; supportive school leadership is a gateway to teacher cooperation and collaboration with members • On-Site Coordinators/Supervisors promote interaction among school staff, members, and Grantee staff • On-Site Coordinator/Supervisors assist member integration into school culture • Teachers serving as on-site liaisons increases investment in the program 	

Cross-Cutting Theme	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
<p>2. Grantee Capacity to Administer Programs, encompassing both grant management functions and AmeriCorps member qualities, preparedness, and training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantees having prior relationship and experience working with partner schools • Grantees' data sharing practices and trainings • Grantee data teams that regularly review data to assess the connections between program services and interventions and instructional outcomes • Grantees manage and use data to improve program operations, through quality control measures, using an external evaluator, or adjusting program activities in response to student needs • Members' mission focus and commitment to the program • Members' youth and energy helps to engage school staff and parents, and motivate students to engage in learning and academics • Members serve as a bridge between students and teacher relationships (i.e., intervening in situations before disciplinary action is needed) • Members are viewed as "near peers" and role models to students (e.g., by providing insight into college life, and contributing positively to school culture) • Members having the background knowledge and skillsets needed by schools in sufficient quantities • Members routinely review data to assess their intervention's effectiveness • On-Site Coordinators/Supervisors who work closely with members and school staff to manage member caseloads and match students to members • On-Site Coordinators/Supervisors who serve as a professional mentor and resource to members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantee know-how and capacity to manage the structures and processes required to launch a new program (e.g., manage grants, complete member recruitment and set up technology, access data, and obtain matching funding) • Ongoing grant management issues (e.g. funding cycle limits recruitment and training of members before the school year starts) • Recruiting, managing and retaining members • Lack of a communication and coordination strategy for placing AmeriCorps resources in positions that effectively support schools' turnaround efforts • Monitoring program performance and managing large volumes of program data; accessing data from the district, tracking student data, and having limited resources to analyze data and present information about student success • Disagreement between districts and schools about member placements • Mismatch between members' backgrounds and the skills schools need most and/or in subject areas needed for supporting students academically (i.e., English and humanities tutors when the school needs science and math) • Members' lack of practical experience in schools and knowledge of behavior management, de-escalation, and conflict resolution techniques • Grantees provide inadequate training of members for their service in low-performing schools; training is not sufficient or realistic enough to prepare members for their work in the schools • Member responsibilities for time-consuming data collection and data entry that takes away from direct services • Members' inability to access students during school day and slow build-up of caseloads • Lack of a dedicated coordinator and splitting time across multiple schools hinders communication with school staff about members' roles and coordination with teachers • Inconsistent service hours or presence at program schools

Cross-Cutting Theme	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
<p>3. Schools' Capacity to Manage External Resources, including school leader attitudes, behaviors, and leadership and the extent of staff and resources at host schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders' prior experience with other AmeriCorps programs • Leadership buy-in to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps partnership. • Involving school leaders and/or teachers in member recruitment, placement, and/or supervision to help build school capacity to manage external partners supporting turnaround efforts • Recruiting and designating a teacher for the program coordination role to increase teacher interest and investment in the program • Leadership that supports and facilitates teacher cooperation and collaboration with members • Member participation in school-wide professional development activities to integrate members into the school culture • Member participation in planning meetings to identify and monitor student needs and progress (academic and non-academic) and to help promote teacher effectiveness • Members provide supports for school staff (i.e. helping teachers identify students' needs and progress, helping with classroom management, or freeing up time for teacher professional development) • Having an on-site coordinator (communication, organization, collaboration) to maintain frequent, accessible, and open communication channels with school leaders and provide real-time peer support at host schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived diminished autonomy and lack of buy-in to the program, e.g., stemming from disagreement between districts and schools about member placements • Lack of clarity and tension about members' roles and responsibilities, e.g. member participation in school-wide professional development activities • Members' one-year service terms means that, typically, inexperienced members are placed in schools each year • Viewing program rules as limiting flexibility in deciding how to use AmeriCorps resources in their schools • Lack clarity or misunderstanding of program rules, especially of restricted activities for members within their schools • School leadership use of the AmeriCorps service as a pipeline to identify future staff members • Mismatch between the school's needs and services offered by School Turnaround AmeriCorps • School leaders' lack of knowledge, experience, or receptivity toward using external partner resources • Schools' lack of preparation to use external partner resources when program is first introduced, such as lack of a communication and coordination strategy • School leaders' lack of communication with school staff about the program contributes to teachers' lack of understanding of members' roles and responsibilities, such as members' data entry and administrative responsibilities • School policy changes that conflict with student attendance interventions (e.g. more suspensions to address behavioral issues) • Insufficient staffing and resources at host schools (e.g. members do not have private and/or quiet space to work with students)

Cross-Cutting Theme	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
4. Planning, Communication, and Collaboration of the Partners, Including Teacher Collaboration and Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantees establish partnership agreements with schools to define roles and responsibilities, articulate the scope of activities and interventions, and facilitate programs' access to school and student data • Grantees engage partner districts and schools in planning, communication, and coordination of activities • Grantee ongoing collaboration with school partners and other stakeholders about proactive use of data • Grantee collaboration with school partners to recruit and place members in school • Having an on-site coordinator (communication, organization, collaboration) to maintain frequent, accessible, and open communication channels with school leaders and provide real-time peer support at host schools • Member participation in school-wide professional development activities to integrate members into the school culture • Frequent member collaboration with teachers (e.g. identifying students for tutoring) when serving in classrooms facilitates classroom management • Service activities that are closely aligned with the school's curriculum • Member participation in planning meetings to identify and monitor student needs and progress (academic and non-academic) and to help promote teacher effectiveness • Designating meeting times with members to communicate student needs and combine supports • Members help rebrand school reputation as a visible intervention in an ineffective or unpopular school system • Encouraging active parent involvement in parent-teacher organization, school and program activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing partnership agreements between grantees and schools takes time • Partnership agreements are not consistently used as working documents to redefine roles and responsibilities as the program changes during the course of implementation or as a means of enforcing partner accountability • Insufficient coordination and lack of engagement between grantees and school leaders • Miscommunication and inconsistent communication between programs and schools • Lack of a communication and coordination strategy for placing AmeriCorps resources in positions that effectively support schools' turnaround efforts • Lack of a dedicated coordinator and splitting time across multiple schools hinders communication with school staff about members' roles and coordination with teachers • Lack of communication between the school administration and their staff, e.g. not inviting teachers to the discussions and not involving them in the decision process about the program • Lack of clarity and tension about members' roles and responsibilities, e.g. member participation in school-wide professional development activities • School staff reporting inconsistencies in knowing when a member would be present at program school • Member activities that disrupt classroom instructional time, e.g., pull-out tutoring • Activities that are not well-aligned with the school's curriculum • Inadequate advertising of program services at the school and to families

Cross-Cutting Theme	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
5. External Factors Beyond Program Scope and/or Member Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban areas and community schools offer more partnership opportunities and a broader range of services • Program parents who value school and make their child's attendance a priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic and unstable environment in the schools in which grantees implement their programs including school and district leadership changes • Rural areas lack external partners • Lack of discipline in school environments • Insufficient staffing and resources at host schools (e.g. members do not have private and/or quiet space to work with students) • Lack of resources, staff, volunteers and funding for some activities impede after-school activities • High teacher turnover makes it difficult for students to build enduring relationships with teachers • Lack of parent response to member outreach • Families who prioritize other family needs over student attendance e.g., keeping older siblings home to care for other children • Students lacking a "home environment that is supportive of doing homework"

Sources: Grantee staff pre- and post-interviews, member interviews, grantee and member focus groups, principal individual and group interviews, teacher interviews, parent interviews.

The relationship-building process begins when members become integrated into the school's culture and operations as they assume their roles in supporting schools as reflected in principals' views of members as part of their teams and "school families." In many schools, on-site coordinators helped members integrate into the school culture. Variations on this practice, such as assigning school staff as the on-site coordinator and involving principals in the selection and placement of members in the schools, also helped assimilate members into the school community. Having teachers serve as on-site liaisons may also have helped to increase teacher interest and investment in the program. Beyond the initial introduction into the school community, other important parts of the integration process included members' participation in school functions and their demonstrated commitment to the students themselves at a personal level. Participating in activities and demonstrating commitment helped members earn the trust of principals, teachers, students, and parents. Establishing strong relationships between members and teachers in turn supported effective delivery of AmeriCorps interventions. For example, earning the trust of students allowed members to frame attendance outreach to students in terms of building strong positive relationships with students rather than in terms of punishment for truancy.¹⁶ However, the presence of strong relationships with members did not necessarily translate into school staff fully understanding program rules, as discussed further below.

Relationship building was clearly an important aspect of members' work, demonstrated both by examples of effective and less-effective efforts. For example, a few AmeriCorps programs appeared to have been imposed on schools by the district without principal consent or buy-in, or were not removed when so requested by the principals. Principals of such schools reported high levels of dissatisfaction with the program and member quality and preparedness. Though these were not typical experiences, they illustrate the challenges faced when AmeriCorps programs had not been able to develop strong relationships. Further, these examples underscore that principals want school-level decision making and autonomy and question the authenticity of school commitment letters and partnership agreements, and they suggest that imposing external partners on pre-existing dysfunctional relationships between schools and districts is a pre-condition for failure.

The Impact of Relationship Building: the importance of being there/the value added by AmeriCorps.

Survey findings indicate that the large majority AmeriCorps members served in schools for 30 hours or more per week (roughly the equivalent of a standard work week) for 30-plus weeks during the school year, and about two-fifths of members serve in schools where they serve 40 hours or more per week.

Consequently, members' exposure to students in schools corresponds roughly to that of regular school staff—and considerably more than the exposure provided through a short-lived after-school tutoring program, for example. Nearly all parents and the majority of school leaders and staff strongly agreed or agreed that members provide activities frequently enough to be valuable. These data corroborate member sentiment that they are an important part of students' lives.

Member-Student Relationship Building

"I have 30 kids on my caseload. So I try to meet with each one of them at least every two weeks and have an in-depth conversation that's mostly just focused on getting to know them and really do that relationship building."

-Member interview

The constancy of members' presence in schools throughout the school year reinforced stakeholders' perceptions of the consistency and stability in member-student relationships, which contributed to

¹⁶ Source: principal interviews.

creating positive impacts on multiple student engagement and behavioral health outcomes, including college aspirations, school attendance, and self-confidence.¹⁷

The duration and intensity of members' presence in schools helped to immerse them in the school culture and fostered relationships with school staff and students, which in turn enabled members to provide direct services more effectively, as well as contribute to improved student outcomes and school turnaround progress in other ways (e.g., by supporting teachers, improving school climate, connecting with families). Yet members' commitment to a one-year term of service was a double-edged sword: principals and teachers lamented the break in relationships formed with students and the schools' loss of trained and already embedded members, since members are not expected or required to continue beyond one year of service.

Grantee Capacity and AmeriCorps Member Qualities, Preparedness, and Training

The first year findings identified several aspects of grantee capacity that affect implementation effectiveness:

- Grant administration and program operation challenges, program operation, and member management challenges from the grantee perspective
- Use of data for targeting, monitoring, adapting instruction, and continuous program improvement
- Stakeholder perceptions of member commitment
- Member qualifications and preparation
- On-site coordinator
- Individual, personalized attention

Grant administration and program operation challenges. Despite generally positive perceptions of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs, stakeholders described several challenges commonly associated with operating programs in dynamic school environments undergoing major school reform.¹⁸ Some of these challenges, described below, reflect schools' limited capacity to benefit fully from the program, such as school staff and resource constraints, while others are outside of the program scope and member control, including challenges with family supports, outreach, and involvement. Grantees also reported a consistent set of challenges with grant administration and program implementation, challenges that directly reflect their own capacity to effectively implement the program. The most prevalent themes related to grant administration were challenges with late starts, especially in the initial year and among programs without prior AmeriCorps experience, which prevented them from being ready on the first day of school; member recruitment/retention; keeping up with the volume of data for the program; partnership barriers; and communication difficulties between programs and schools.

Member management challenges. Grantees described several challenges associated with member management, including aligning the funding cycle with school calendars, which affected member recruitment and placement, sufficiently training members for their service, confusion among school staff about members' roles and responsibilities, and time management for members given conflicting priorities. The majority of programs also reported challenges with matching members to placements,

¹⁷ Sources: school leader and school staff surveys, principal, grantee, member, and parent interviews and focus groups.

¹⁸ Sources: grantee, member interviews and focus groups, case studies.

including tutoring/mentoring groups that exceeded the target ratios, members' inability to access students during the school day, slow build-up of caseloads, and member retention.

Use of data for targeting, monitoring, adapting instruction, and continuous program improvement. The most prominent strategy reported by grantees for dealing with member placement, caseloads, and retention issues was to engage school leaders, administrators, and/or teachers, particularly early in the year. Several programs reported that their approach to addressing caseload/management issues was to rely on supervisory staff who worked closely with members and used data to manage caseloads and match students to members. Members routinely reviewed data provided by the program or teachers to assess the effectiveness of their interventions and plan for future lessons.¹⁹

Stakeholder perceptions of member commitment. School leaders and staff familiar with the program had consistently positive perceptions of AmeriCorps members, and were satisfied with the program's implementation as well as with the overall quality of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programming.²⁰ The majority of principals acknowledged their members' contributions as positive and praised their motivation and commitment to the school's mission, their personal maturity, and their ability to apply their prior service or education-focused experiences in the school.

Member qualities and preparedness. Members' qualities and preparedness stood out as one manifestation of grantee capacity to deliver quality programming to partner schools. In several instances, principals characterized AmeriCorps members as "near peers" and role models who could relate to students in different ways than permanent school staff could. Their ability to create a bridge between student and teacher relationships strengthened the linkages between the schools, students, and their families, and supported both students and the staff's capacity—for example, by being able to intervene in situations before disciplinary action needed to be taken.²¹ However, a vocal minority of school leaders described a mismatch between members' backgrounds and the skills schools most need and desire; the specific areas cited included members' lack of practical experience and insufficient training to work in school settings, particularly in behavior management and conflict resolution techniques; members' lack of cultural competence; and members' youth, immaturity, and lack of professionalism.²² These comments contrasted with reports from the overwhelming majority of school leaders, as well as teachers and parents, that highlighted the benefits of members' youth and energy in helping to foster relationship with students and in infusing fresh outlooks and approaches in the school climate.²³ While training gaps can be addressed, the challenge member youth and inexperience highlights an inherent tension in the program model: over 80 percent of members were in their late teens to late 20s, and over 50 percent were between 22 and 24 years old when they enrolled in AmeriCorps. Though people of any age can become

Members as Student Role Models

"Even if they don't necessarily get the academics right away, they have something to strive for and they have role models to look up to. That's really big."

- Member Interview

¹⁹ Sources: member and grantee interviews, case studies.

²⁰ Sources: school leader and school staff surveys, principal and grantee interviews, case studies.

²¹ Sources: principal interviews, member interviews, case studies.

²² Source: principal interviews.

²³ Sources: parent interviews, case studies.

AmeriCorps members (and indeed, a handful of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members are in their 60s and 70s), the program tends to attract youth and young adults.²⁴

Member training. Both members and principals discussed the need for training that sufficiently addresses the breadth of content and behavioral knowledge and skills that members need once placed in a school. The long list of topics included both broader educational topics as well as topics specific to school contexts, such as establishing appropriate professional boundaries for interactions with students, developing sensitivity to cultural and economic differences, and learning strategies for managing student behavior issues with a heavier focus on the day-to-day challenges they are likely to face.

Member Roles and Behavior Management

"I would recommend they expand the roles we are in. How much behavior management is part of our job is huge."

- Member Focus Group

On-site coordinator. Having an on-site coordinator helped strengthen relationships between program and school stakeholders; on-site coordinators also served as professional mentors and resources for members. For example, a coordinator could engage members in peer support activities, serve as the on-site point person, and address member-specific questions, concerns and/or issues, including tracking member availability and level of service provided.

Individual, personalized attention. One widely used approach to delivery of direct services was tightly interrelated with the relationship-building mechanism: provision of individual, personalized attention. Members noted the close ties between mentorship, academic support, and attendance coaching. Building relationships with students was a key aspect of member-student interaction and also a core component of mentoring. Principals described mentoring as being embedded within other services members provided. They also reported that members leveraged their academic and personal relationships with students to understand students' lives more holistically, through outreach to parents via attendance coaching, parent nights, socials, and parent-teacher conferences where members served as translators and helped involve parents in their children's academic lives. The demographic composition of student populations in schools served in this sample, with large populations of English language learners (ELLs) or students with disabilities (SWDs), highlights the additional academic supports some students in turnaround schools need and might explain why this strategy is particularly effective.

Personalized Attention and Differentiated Instruction

"[AmeriCorps members improved the effectiveness of classroom instruction] by providing supplemental help to my students, providing differentiated instruction... They need small group help, and [AmeriCorps members] provide that."

-Principal interview

Schools' Capacity to Manage External Resources and School Leader Attitudes, Behaviors, and Leadership

Schools' capacity to manage external resources and leverage external partner resources was a major precondition for effective program implementation, a requirement that grantees may overlook or underestimate at the outset of partnerships with a school. Several components of school capacity emerged from the first-year findings, including having an on-site coordinator and supporting and freeing up staff time to focus on other activities and school leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and leadership.

On-site coordinator role. The on-site coordinator enhanced schools' capacity to integrate members into the school culture, target students in need of AmeriCorps services, and manage members' day-to-day

²⁴ Corporation for National and Community Service. e-Grants service location and member data as of 2014-15 for the 2014-2015 school year.

work and relationships with the school. Moreover, having this role in place could greatly influence school leaders' perception of whether external resources are useful. Using school staff in program administration roles increases the school's capacity to manage external partners and volunteers. Enlisting school leaders in planning how to best use AmeriCorps services to support turnaround efforts, through interviewing members and selecting them for placement at the school, is another promising practice for building school capacity to make good use of external partner resources. These practices were all observed in some form in participating schools.

Supporting and freeing up staff time to focus on other activities. Organizing and managing volunteering efforts effectively clearly helps schools capitalize on all outside resources more effectively. In some cases, AmeriCorps members built schools' capacity to implement their turnaround strategies by supporting school faculty and staff in enhancing their skills. For example, members' participation in planning meetings—working with school leaders and teachers to identify and monitor student needs and progress (academic and non-academic)—supported teachers' capacity to plan, analyze, reflect on, and adjust their instructional approaches accordingly. To the extent that teacher effectiveness is a mediator of student outcomes, supporting teachers should presumably contribute to enhancing the school's capacity.

School leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and leadership: program restrictions and requirements. Principals' evolving understanding of the program rules from the first to the second year appeared to influence their perceptions about the value of AmeriCorps resources and how they could usefully deploy them to support their turnaround efforts. Some principals welcomed the second year's new emphasis on collaboration and co-planning with the program; others reported feeling constrained by the rules and desired greater flexibility in deciding how to use AmeriCorps resources in their schools.

School leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and leadership: member role confusion. Both grantee staff and members described challenges with clarifying members' roles with school administrators and staff members. The confusion over members' roles in the schools appeared to reflect several types of miscommunication, the most prevalent of which was miscommunication between the school partner (usually the administration) and the program and its members. As noted above, members perceived that school administrators too often were unaware of what AmeriCorps members could and could not do within their schools under program rules. This miscommunication was compounded by insufficient communication *within* the school, between school leadership and school staff. In some cases, teachers had not participated in planning or decision-making discussions, which meant that teachers did not understand members' roles or the substantive contributions members could make to the school. In other cases, members reported that the school had misconceptions about their role, assuming they could be pulled away from their regular responsibilities to serve as substitute teachers or test proctors or be deployed for other miscellaneous tasks.

School leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and leadership: pipeline for future staff. Tensions between programs and schools may also have reflected a mismatch between schools' needs and what services members could legitimately provide. The tensions may also have reflected that some principals perceived the AmeriCorps service as a pipeline for identifying future staff members. Unlike regular school personnel, schools' significant human capital investments in the AmeriCorps members are typically shorter term and not intended to be sustained in future years. Resources allocated to AmeriCorps members can help build schools' capacity to implement turnaround goals in the short term but cannot build human resource capacity over the longer term, particularly when a new group of inexperienced members enters low-performing schools at the start of each year. Furthermore, AmeriCorps member turnover can add to the instability such schools already face due to high student and teacher turnover. This issue, to some degree, is a matter of perspective: school leaders understandably think about capacity in terms of building human capital over the longer term, whereas the underlying premise of the AmeriCorps program model

is that grantees establish partnerships and work with schools throughout their three-year funding period to effectively deploy and manage short-term infusions of human capital that typically serve in schools for one-year terms.

School leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and leadership: receptivity toward using external resources.

Effective deployment of AmeriCorps members to accomplish short-term goals (within a single year) while supporting schools' longer-term turnaround goals is clearly a challenge. In some cases, schools' limited understanding of the AmeriCorps program has resulted in a perception that the program represents a greater burden than benefit to schools. However, improving school leaders' understanding of the AmeriCorps program model would not change the crucial benefit of students' building strong relationships with caring, trusted adults and near-peers who bridge the gap between students' perspectives and experiences and the goals, needs, and pressures on schools to improve student academic performance. Indeed, the unequivocal importance of member relationship building and bonding with students surfaced as an inherent limitation of the AmeriCorps one-year term of service and resource-infusion program model when implemented in schools challenged by instability; faculty turnover; pressure to improve student academic performance; and student behavioral, attendance, behavioral health, and engagement issues. In fact, it points to how the limited term of member service can create tension with one of the most important mechanisms of the program, which is building strong relationships with students.

Given the variations in context and the dynamic school environments in which members are placed, School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs are experiencing growing pains, as are the schools while in the process of using available resources to turn around. Although programs like School Turnaround AmeriCorps are providing additional resources, not all schools appear to be ready to use resources available to them when first introduced. The implication for programs that lack a strong communication and coordination strategy is that low-achieving schools do not have the capacity to capitalize on even the most talented and dedicated AmeriCorps resources.

Planning, Communication, and Collaboration of the Partners, Including Teacher Collaboration and Supports

As the first three themes demonstrate, relationship building is foundational for service programs to successfully forge partnerships in schools; at the same time, grantees and schools must bring certain competencies and capacities to the partnership. In particular, AmeriCorps member qualifications and school leader buy-in appeared to strongly influence implementation effectiveness. With these conditions in place, grantees and schools were better positioned to conduct the work of the partnership, which is highly collaborative in nature. In fact, the findings related to this theme are consistent with

CNCS program guidance on elements of strong partnerships that grantees should pursue with their school partners: managing collaboratively, sharing data, sharing resources, articulating specific roles and responsibilities, aligning in-school and out-of-school strategies, coordinating to promote student supports, and cooperating on family engagement (Corporation for National and Community Service,

Building Relationships at the Local Level

“There really needs to be a planning term before School Turnaround programs can launch if they're brand new, and/or if they're embedded within a school district.... I think sometimes, at the federal level, this is a really unique partnership between [ED and CNCS], and that's great, but when you rush through a federal partnership, I think sometimes you end up rushing the end product, which is service programs. And it can jeopardize relationships with schools, school staff, school superintendents, [and] school principals, when you rush into the process before they're really ready to launch.”

-Grantee interview response

Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13, Appendix B: Written Partnership Agreements).

Program start-up and partnership agreements. Grantees and schools engaged in considerable planning, communication, and collaboration to start up School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs.²⁵ Creating partnership agreements involved defining roles and responsibilities as well as describing how partners would manage collaboratively or their strategies for doing so. Though the level of detail varied, most partnership agreements specified resource-sharing expectations, such as work space and materials for members and site supervisors, access to the students themselves, and involvement with stakeholders, particularly teachers and counselors.

Communication, planning and coordination. Both grantees and school leaders characterized their interactions as highly collaborative, with regular communication and collaboration. Grantees and schools planned and collaborated with varying degrees of success to clearly define members' roles, create staffing structures for on-site supervision, align interventions with school needs, and schedule AmeriCorps services to align with school and classroom schedules. The strategies used included participation in planning meetings during the summer months, frequent communication during the school year, and participation in district- or school-based meetings or regular meetings for teachers and members to discuss students' academic progress. To varying degrees, grantee and school partners also collaborated to recruit and place members in schools, organize member activities, and collect data for monitoring program success. There were clear benefits when programs and schools had strong and regular communication—and clear downsides when they did not.

Teacher collaboration and supports. Strategies involving collaboration between teachers and members were particularly important for effectively providing services to students, as well as for providing supports to teachers. Members reported that they most frequently collaborated with teachers, identifying students for tutoring, supporting differentiated instruction, or discussing student progress based on student data to help tailor instruction.²⁶ The importance of collaboration also resonated in both School Turnaround AmeriCorps and comparison schools where school leaders and staff perceived partners' activities as more effective when closely aligned with the school's curriculum, teaching techniques, and specific school goals. Interventions not well-aligned were perceived not only as less effective but sometimes even as detrimental. In addition, AmeriCorps members who served in classrooms provided helpful supports to teachers by making classroom management easier and providing wider and more services than school staff were able to provide on their own.

External Factors Beyond Program Scope and/or Member Control

External factors also affected the success of program services in improving student outcomes and school climate. These included students' home environments and the broader context of the school district—factors that were generally beyond the school's control, the program scope, and member control. For the most part, nearly all of the external factors stakeholders described were perceived as barriers and challenges to program implementation and success.²⁷

These challenges were associated with working in fluid school contexts that experienced frequent churn of staff and students. The large majority of schools in the study sample were implementing the “turnaround” or “transformation” school improvement model, both of which typically require

²⁵ Sources: grantee and member interviews, principal interviews, case studies, partnership agreements.

²⁶ Source: member interviews.

²⁷ Sources: surveys, grantee and member focus groups and interviews, principal interviews, case studies.

substantial changes in school leadership and staff. The school contexts were also characterized by relatively high rates of principal turnover and limited instructional staff experience, patterns consistent with national trends. Thus, change is a consistent feature of schools in turnaround status, and turnover in both administrative and instructional roles meant that some grantees had no choice but to reintroduce their programs repeatedly to incoming school leaders and staff.

While turnover is built into some turnaround models, it presented challenges to grantees attempting to build new relationships and earn buy-in from leaders and/or staff not present earlier in the program's history. Each year's new teachers needed to be on-boarded to the program so they could understand the role(s) members were to play in their classrooms and schools, what members could and could not legitimately offer teachers and students, and how to effectively work with members. One grantee reported decreased engagement from new school leadership who had not participated in bringing the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program to the school.

While members can play a big difference in students' lives, their sphere of influence within host schools may be quite limited. One grantee emphasized the importance of conveying to members that they must accept their host schools' structure and hierarchy: "That's something else that you have to really instill in the members ... you're going to see things done in the schools and you might not agree with them, but we're not there to change policy or we're not there—we can't—we don't have the capability to do that, but we focus on our kids. We're there for those kids ... And we have to think about what we can change." This sentiment was also echoed by a principal who observed that while members may react strongly to aspects of school life and culture they perceive as unfair, they (the members) also need to learn that districts and schools have policies and procedures in place that cannot arbitrarily be changed by an AmeriCorps member.

Perceived Impacts of AmeriCorps Services in Supporting School Turnaround Efforts: Summary

This section addresses the broad research question, "What are the perceived impacts of the program in supporting a school's turnaround plan and achieving its desired outcomes?" It draws from interviews and/or surveys of multiple respondents, including school leaders, school staff, grantees, members, and parents, and also pulls from such existing data sources as grantee progress reports and student level administrative data.²⁸

Overall, primary source respondents indicated that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program had positive impacts, both broadly, in terms of its perceived impact on the schools as a whole, and more specifically, in terms of influencing key aspects of schools' turnaround efforts, such as student academic performance, school climate and students' attendance, behavior, and socio-emotional well-being.

Multiple respondents—both those who work in turnaround schools and those whose children attend such schools—expressed perceptions that the program overall is somewhat or very successful. Not surprisingly, school leaders and staff focused on the program's success in helping schools overall, as well as the program's contributions to improving school climate, students' socio-emotional health, and student achievement. Parents, also not surprisingly, focused on the program's contributions to helping their children, and a majority of parents noted that they had observed changes in their children after they began to receive services from the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program (see Exhibit II-4).

²⁸ Analysis of the last two data sources is subject to the limitations of grantee progress reports and administrative data described in the section titled "Potential Uses and Challenges of Administrative Data."

Exhibit II-4: Vignette of Parent’s Perceived Impact of Program

“I think the program has been great for her. She’s an only child so for her it’s been great. I think it’s helped a lot in her social skills because she’s exposed [to] more than just the kids in her classroom. And it allows her to interact with different people and college students and other parents and get the help she needs with her homework. So I think she’s become more sociable. She needs help with her reading and all that kinds of stuff, but the school’s great with that, with—they have a program for that that she’s in. So that’s wonderful, and she likes the fact that there’s other adults there to help or other kids, older kids to help her with let’s say math problems or some writing assignment. So I think it’s been great. I think it’s been positive for her.”

The overwhelming majority of school leaders reported that School Turnaround efforts—including the contributions of AmeriCorps members—had led to improved student outcomes. School leaders ranked academic achievement as the highest priority among their turnaround goals, followed by increased motivation and increased attendance. School staff ranked goals similarly, listing academic achievement first, and then increased attendance, followed by improved grades. However, some staff also indicated that they did not know which specific students were actually served by the program. Grantees also ranked school turnaround goals, and their priorities differed slightly; while grantees also listed academic achievement as the most important turnaround goal, they ranked improved grades second, whereas school leaders and staff prioritized motivation over grades (see Exhibit II-5 below).

Exhibit II-5: Grantee, School Leader, and School Staff Perceptions of Most Important Student Outcomes in Next Two Years (2014–15)

School Turnaround Outcomes	Rank of Importance		
	Grantees	School Leaders	School Staff
	Mean Rankings (Standard Deviations)	Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)	Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)
Enhanced academic achievement	2.8 (2.7)	1.5 (0.3)	2.6 (0.2)
Improved grades	3.5 (2.4)	4.1 (0.7)	4.3 (0.2)
Improved attendance	4.1 (1.9)	4.4 (0.8)	4.5 (0.2)
Increased motivation	4.3 (2.0)	3.5 (0.4)	3.4 (0.2)
Improved behavior	4.6 (1.7)	6.4 (0.6)	4.4 (0.2)
Improved completion of assignments	5.4 (1.9)	5.8 (0.7)	4.8 (0.2)
Improved socio-emotional health	5.5 (2.5)	5.0 (0.5)	4.1 (0.2)
Increased self-esteem	5.8 (2.0)	4.5 (0.4)	4.2 (0.2)

NOTES: Ranks range from 1–9, with 1 as the most important; not all responses were necessarily ranked by respondents. Means are calculated based on responses only from those who ranked the option. One grantee noted that responses to this item would differ across that grantee’s schools and nonetheless ranked the outcomes’ importance across all schools.

Three school leader respondents and seven school staff respondents listed and ranked an "other" outcome.

Grantees (N=13, Missing=0)

No school leader respondents indicated that this question was not applicable. (N=38, Missing=0)

Ten school staff respondents indicated that this question was not applicable. (N=205, Missing=0)

Table rows are sorted according to outcomes rated highest first—recall that the highest ranking is a “1” on this scale--so rankings are in *ascending* order, sorted by grantees’ mean rankings.

Exhibit reads: Grantees ranked "enhanced academic achievement" as the most important student outcome, with a mean ranking of 2.8 on a 9-point scale. School leaders and school staff ranked "enhanced academic achievement" as the most important student outcome, with a mean ranking of 1.5 and 2.6, respectively, on a 9-point scale.

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q10, School Leader Survey Q10, Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q11 (“What do you consider to be the most important school turnaround outcomes for students over the next two years?”)

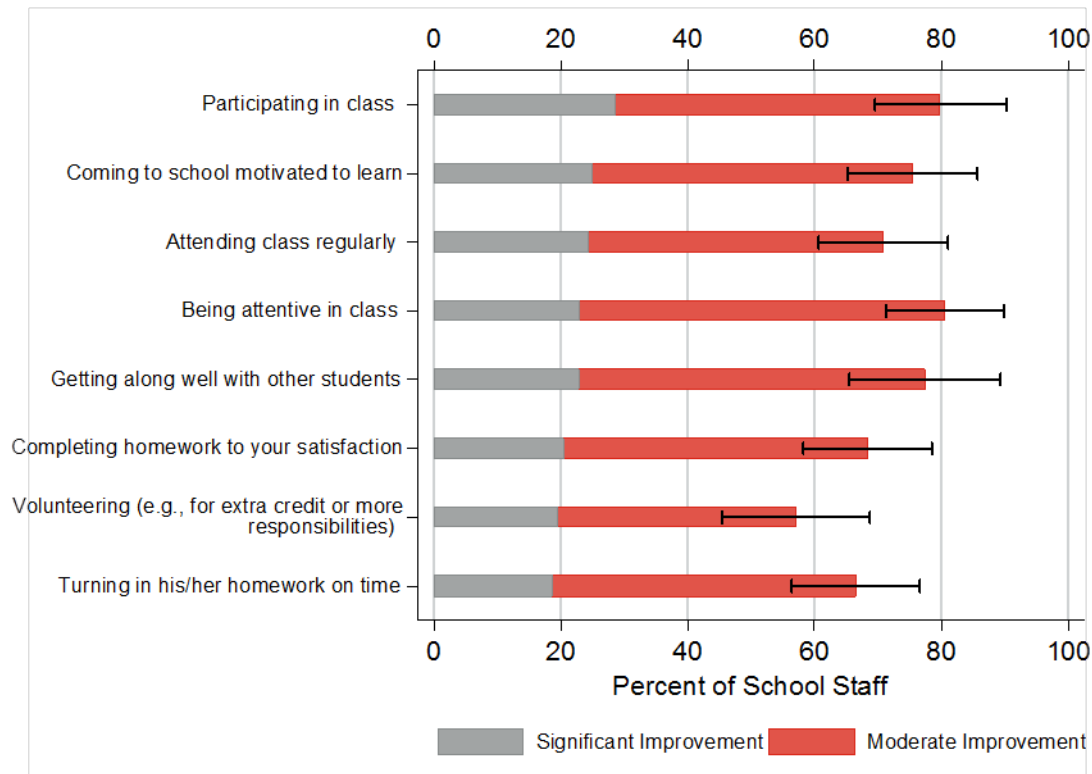
Perceived Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program on Student Outcomes

Stakeholders’ perceptions of the specific student outcomes influenced by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program were largely similar, although the rankings differed modestly. While school leaders answered questions about how the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program had affected student outcomes for the prior (2013–14) school year, school staff and grantees answered similar questions about the current (2014–15) school year.²⁹ Despite the fact that respondents were answering questions about different time periods, there are some interesting patterns and similarities across stakeholder groups. Specifically, two distinct patterns emerged from the survey findings. One, school-based respondents—both school administrators and staff—were either unaware of whether the program had led to improvements in certain areas, such as motivation or self-esteem, or did not know which students had been served by the program and therefore could not assess whether there had been improvement on student outcomes (see Exhibits III-6 and III-7, and also see Appendix Exhibits A-27 and A-47). Two, stakeholders’ perceptions of improvement track closely with their rankings of the most important student outcomes shown in Exhibit II-4 above (i.e., the program has contributed to improvement in students’ academic achievement). Improved socio-emotional health and behavior were generally rated lower on the list of improved outcomes by both grantees and school staff.

Understanding how improvement in student outcomes translates into students’ day-to-day behaviors can best be described by school staff who know which students participate in School Turnaround AmeriCorps activities. These staff reported significant or moderate improvements in participating students’ classroom or classwork behaviors—measured by students who are attentive in class, participate in class, get along well with other students, and come to school motivated to learn (see Exhibit II-6). Generally, about twice as many staff reported moderate rather than significant levels of improvement for students.

²⁹ Across respondent types, the data collection protocols focused on implementation during the current school year (2014-15) except in several cases where it was more appropriate to reflect on the prior school year. To explain the discrepancy described here, grantees were asked about the current year’s student outcomes because they were surveyed toward the end of the school year (spring of 2015) whereas school leaders were surveyed much earlier in the school year (early winter of 2014). The school staff survey was fielded slightly later than school leaders so school staff were also asked about student outcomes for the current year.

Exhibit II-6: School Staff Perceptions of Changes in Student Behavior (2014–15)



NOTES: See Appendix Exhibits A-57 and A-58 for tables with all response options. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals (represented by black capped lines) may not be symmetric because the upper bound is limited to 100 percent and the lower bound is limited to 0 percent. Responses were limited to individual school staff who had worked with at least one student in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Each respondent was asked about one student whose last name starts with a letter closest to “A” and one student whose last name starts with a letter closest to “Z.” Each student is counted separately in this graph. (N=190, Missing=6–9) Bars are sorted in descending order by the proportion of students for whom school staff reported significant improvement.

Exhibit reads: School staff perceived observing significant and moderate improvement in an estimated 28 percent and 51 percent of students, respectively. With 95 percent confidence, the proportion of all participating students perceived to have improved significantly or moderately in their class participation falls between 70 and 90 percent. SOURCE: Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q20 (“Since beginning to work with a School Turnaround AmeriCorps member(s), to the best of your knowledge, to what extent has student with the last name closest to the beginning of the alphabet changed his or her behavior in terms of ...”) - Q21 (“To the best of your knowledge, to what extent has student with the last name closest to the end of the alphabet changed his or her behavior in terms of ...”)

Perceived Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program on School Climate and Community Involvement

Across multiple stakeholders, findings point to several ways in which School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs have had positive impacts on the host schools. These include contributions to school improvement generally, contributions to school culture, and both general and targeted contributions to improvements for participating students. While perceptions from school administrators and staff are all generally positive, schools leaders’ perceptions are consistently (albeit moderately) more positive than their school staff colleagues. Members and grantee staff reported that their efforts, and those of previous

School Turnaround AmeriCorps cohorts, have effectively allowed their schools to turn around pervasive behavioral problems so that schools can then focus more on academics. A majority of parents reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps interventions have improved their children’s academic performance and simultaneously improved their students’ engagement and enthusiasm about school. One mother of a special needs student noted members’ positive effect on her child’s socio-emotional health (see textbox). Some parents also reported becoming more aware of or involved with events at their child’s school as a result of the program. The case study schools also reported that the partnership with School Turnaround AmeriCorps contributed to improvements in school climate and community engagement,

Members’ Positive Effects on Students

“Even when she feels bad she wants to go to school, so that lets me know that they are doing something to make her want to come back.”

- Parent interview

The sections above synthesize stakeholder perceptions from survey and interview data. The findings are remarkably consistent and positive overall. While there are some modest variations in priority rankings of the outcomes most influenced by School Turnaround AmeriCorps, for example, the different stakeholders all agree that the program has had an impact on schools’ capacity to implement their turnaround plans. That perceived overall program impact then translates into positive perceptions of impact on the various targeted goals.

Comparing Stakeholder Perceptions to Administrative Outcomes Data

This section summarizes insights from analyses of grantees’ performance reports and of the quality and completeness of grantees’ student-level outcomes data.

None of the grantees planned to report on all performance measures. Grantees had indicated that they planned to report on anywhere from two to four performance targets. Where available, analysis drew from explanations provided in the GPRs as well, although grantees were required only to provide explanations for *not* meeting their targets; they were not required to report any additional information when they met or exceeded a target.

The major findings from the GPR analyses indicated that grantees varied widely in whether they met performance targets. Three grantees met all of their performance measure targets (four, two, and two targets, respectively). Three other grantees met none of their performance measure targets (four, three, and two targets, respectively). Each of the remaining seven grantees met at least one performance target, and also failed to meet at least one target.

The analyses of student-level data quality aid in assessing changes in grantees’ capacity to collect and process such data and, when data quality is good or usable, can also be used to gauge programs’ success in achieving desired program outcomes. Comparative cohort analyses for student-level achievement, attendance, and behavior outcomes, which permit comparison of outcomes from different groups of students in the same grades from different school years, could be performed only for grantees whose data met predetermined data thresholds. However, only two grantees’ data met these criteria; therefore, cross-program cohort analysis of student-level outcomes data was not possible.

Case Study Findings: Comparative Analysis, Lessons Learned, and Implications about Using Partners

Case Studies Overview

This section presents the findings of case studies of six pairs of schools—six schools with School Turnaround AmeriCorps program members and six similar and nearby schools without program members. All case studies describe schools' efforts to meet their respective turnaround plan goals during the 2014–15 school year, focusing specifically on the roles of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, other volunteers, external support staff, and other external partners who helped to support school turnaround activities in the 2014–15 year.

By comparing treatment schools to otherwise similar schools with little to no AmeriCorps support, the comparative case studies describe a broad range of turnaround efforts across all SIG schools and help identify the unique contributions of School Turnaround AmeriCorps. Case study comparisons specifically examined how partnerships contributed to schools' improvement efforts, what strategies were used by external partners, the range of strategies used across case study schools, and school stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of these additional resources on key turnaround outcomes. Case studies also documented common challenges and best practices that could be replicated by other turnaround schools.

School leaders, administrators, support staff, and teachers were interviewed by phone at four pairs of case study schools (eight schools) and in person at two pairs of schools (four schools). For telephone case studies, the research team interviewed the principal or vice principal and three to four staff members who were most familiar with AmeriCorps members' work. Depending on the program's design and members' activities, the staff members interviewed included teachers—particularly for programs focused on academic support—and guidance counselors, for programs focused on attendance or socioemotional support. At site-visit schools, researchers interviewed school administrators and staff and convened a focus group with teachers about the roles of partners in the school. Finally, researchers used a structured observation protocol to note the physical condition of each school; signs of student and parental engagement; and interactions among staff, students, and members, as applicable.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools were chosen purposively to represent a range of grantees, geographic locations, and intervention types. Program schools served a range of grade levels (two elementary and four high schools), school size (e.g., high schools ranging from 338 to 1,489 students), and locations (one each rural and suburban, four urban, and four regions of the country). Program schools also varied in the types of interventions provided, which included attendance support, literacy tutoring, college preparation, and mentoring. The number of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members ranged from one in a suburban high school to 22 members providing mentoring to every student in a rural high school. These variations illustrate the wide variety of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs based on differing school needs, district and school partnerships, and grantee capacity.

Comparison schools were chosen based on several criteria:

- Comparable SIG status
- Similar grade levels served
- Similar student demographic and enrollment characteristics
- Same district, or at a minimum, same urbanicity in the same state
- Having little to no AmeriCorps presence

Comparative case studies identified the partnership strategies used at a sample of schools with and without School Turnaround AmeriCorps members. There are, however, several limitations of the

comparison group selection. Notably, comparison schools were not selected on the basis of having external partners. Half of comparison schools made use of external partners, ranging from periodic visits from volunteers to a large number of fully curriculum-integrated partners present for the full year. Half the comparison schools either had no partners or only received additional support from parents, such as through the parent-teacher organization. In two cases, comparison schools provided additional academic support to students through teachers offering after-school and weekend tutoring; in one school, the school leader expressed a strong preference for providing these supports internally. In the other case, the school's remote rural location adversely affected its ability to develop external partnerships. One comparison school and two program schools had support from an AmeriCorps program other than School Turnaround AmeriCorps. This range of partnership strategies, while not a representative sample, illustrates the considerable variation in the approaches and composition of resources available to SIG schools as they attempt to improve their performance.

The next section presents a synthesis of learnings from across the sample of case studies, followed by specific lessons learned about working with partners. Lessons are drawn from all program and comparison schools that identified common challenges and best practices about working with partners generally and with School Turnaround AmeriCorps specifically. Individual case studies are presented in Chapter III, Part 2, Case Study Findings.

Case Study Comparative Analysis

There was considerable variation in case study schools' School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs, reflecting the real-world variation of programs and schools. For example, the size of School Turnaround AmeriCorps cohorts ranged from one member (in School 6A) whose responsibility was tracking student truancy, to 22 members responsible for mentoring all students in the high school where they served (School 5A).³⁰ School Turnaround AmeriCorps served as an external partner to each of the case study program schools, and were one of multiple partners in five of six program schools, where there were between four and 20 other partners, including two schools with *other* AmeriCorps programs. The partners provided supports on a range of issues, from tutoring to parental engagement, social support services, wellness, and mentoring. Generally, the non-AmeriCorps programs (School Turnaround AmeriCorps and other AmeriCorps models) offered services that occurred less frequently and were less intensive than the year-long (often full-time) service of AmeriCorps members. Based on the small number of case studies, it is unclear whether hosting a School Turnaround AmeriCorps program builds school capacity to manage partners and volunteers, or whether schools with pre-existing capacity for managing such resources are predisposed to host AmeriCorps programs. Given that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program was in its second year, and partnerships at many of the schools were longer-standing, it may be that higher-capacity schools were better able to manage new AmeriCorps programs.

How School Turnaround AmeriCorps members supported schools' goals and augmented other resources (in-house and external) varied based on how the schools defined needs and then matched those needs to the number of AmeriCorps members. One program school in the Midwest (School 6A), for example, had only one AmeriCorps member in the 2014–15 school year (down from two in the previous year), and assigned that member to narrowly defined responsibilities: monitoring truancy among 30 at-risk students. Another school, in the West (School 3A), used its six members to provide math tutoring to all third and fourth grade (and some fifth grade) students. Only at one school did members serve all students—a high school (School 5A) with the largest cohort of members (22) who were able to divide up

³⁰ All schools are referred to by identifiers to preserve respondents' and schools' confidentiality. All program schools are School "A" and all comparison schools are School "B," with numbers indicating different sites.

the student body into manageable caseloads for mentoring (albeit larger caseloads than intended because of difficulty recruiting and member turnover).

Geography and urbanicity appeared to influence schools' capacity to leverage external partners for their turnaround goals. Urban areas offered more partnership opportunities and a broader range of services than rural schools that had few (or no) partnerships. One district, for example, a large eastern city (the largest district in the case study sample), had the two schools—one program and one comparison school (2A and 2B)—with the largest number of partnerships. Both these schools noted, however, that the breadth and intensity of their partnerships meant that the school relied on external resources for many core functions. That situation can impose a heavy burden on schools when partnerships are not working well, because it means core needs are not being met—whether because of weak performance by a partner or because the school is not able to provide adequate support and coordination to all of its many partners.

This program school (2A) and another in a Midwestern city (School 6A) both characterized themselves as “community schools” and each one brought in a wide variety of resources for students and their families—not only academic support but access to healthy food; psychiatric, medical, and dental care; youth development programs; and more. The rural schools in the sample had few (or no) partnerships, in one case because the school (School 6B) did not have structures for managing volunteers. One other school (School 1B) indicated its structural barriers prevented it from bringing in external partners; however, the school leader's strong preference for addressing issues through internal initiatives may have been more relevant than structural barriers.

Case study findings corroborated findings from other data sources that relationship building between members and other external partners was viewed as a fundamental mechanism for delivering successful interventions. Having students build positive relationships with more adults was a positive outcome for all six program schools, and for partnerships at two comparison schools. In these schools, students were perceived to become more academically engaged and have fewer behavioral needs when engaging in positive relationships with partners.

Another major avenue through which the program created benefits was in enhancing the capacity of school staff (three programs) by, for example, easing classroom management and providing wider and more services than school staff were able to provide on their own. Several schools also emphasized the importance of parent and community engagement to their turnaround efforts. Two program schools had members participate in parent engagement. In one case (School 2A), members participated in home visits led by another school partner and supported parent nights at school. In the other case (School 3A), members' outreach to parents was less structured and appeared to depend on individual members' motivations to provide these services rather than a coherent outreach strategy. Three comparison schools also described parent engagement; two schools used parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) as a significant source of external support (Schools 3B and 6B), and one school (School 2B) employed an external partner to lead a robust parent engagement strategy.

Few schools overall described strong formal channels for using data monitoring to plan and tailor interventions. Two program schools (1A and 2A) described specific ways that members and teachers collaborated regularly to review data and plan for upcoming interventions. One program school (4A) had used a formal data monitoring system but discontinued it; instead, the coordinator—not members—met with teachers periodically to plan for members' interventions with specific students. However, teachers at this school reported that these planning sessions were too infrequent. Two comparison schools also described tracking data generated by partners' interventions and using it to tailor instruction. One school (2B) tracked data with partners at different intervals for different partners but less frequently than desired by the administration. Two comparison schools (Schools 2B and 4B) employed consultants to

train teachers on how to incorporate data assessment into their teaching practice; in one case (4B), the intensity of the training was perceived as insufficient to make the desired impact at the school.

Four comparison schools placed significant emphasis on professional development supports, which may highlight the importance of internal initiatives when a turnaround school is not receiving much external support to achieve its goals. Administrators and teachers at two of these schools observed that teachers can more effectively provide additional supports than volunteers or outside organizations because of their mastery of content and experience with managing student behavior (teachers at one additional comparison school also shared this sentiment). Note that these comparison schools' emphasis on professional development does not mean that program schools ignored professional development, but rather that program school respondents spent more time describing School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs in greater detail.

The perceived impacts of having external partners were most pronounced for socioemotional health, followed by academic engagement and academic achievement. All six program schools remarked on the positive socio-emotional benefits to students of AmeriCorps members' service. One comparison school (School 5B) acknowledged the positive effect of sustained, supporting relationships between caring adults and students—in this case, teachers who provided extra tutoring and got to know students personally. Further, four program schools noted that students' positive relationships with School Turnaround AmeriCorps members made them more motivated and academically engaged. In turn, schools were anticipating they might see improved academic achievement, but this had not been substantiated yet by data.³¹ Four program schools also described their AmeriCorps members as contributing positively to the school's culture (Schools 1A, 2A, 3A and, to a lesser extent, 4A). This occurred primarily through members serving as positive role models, which made the school a more fun, engaging place for students. At two schools, members explicitly supported the school's values: in one school (School 2A) by making behavioral interventions based on the school's set of values and in the other (School 4A) by supporting that high school's recent focus on developing a college-going culture.

In conclusion, partnerships with AmeriCorps and other outside organizations appeared more successful when there were organized strategies and planning about goals as well as coordination between the program and school. More details on specific lessons learned about working with partners are presented in the next section.

Lessons Learned and Implications about Using Partners

This section presents key lessons learned at both program and comparison schools about working with partners, based on challenges and best practices identified through the case studies. Primary lessons learned, shared by most schools in the sample, were the importance of effective communication with partners, including about schedules; the need to offer adequate supervision of partners; the importance of providing clear and frequent opportunities for school staff and partners to collaborate; and the imperative to align partners' roles with school needs and priorities. Less prominent themes included the high value placed on interventions that support teachers and the positive impact of relationship building on both socio-emotional and academic outcomes.

Maintain Effective Communication with Partners

In most schools that relied on external partners (six program schools and one comparison school), there were clear benefits when programs and schools had strong and regular communication—and clear

³¹ Teachers' resistance to claim improved academic outcomes without achievement data indicates how seriously teachers and schools take the use of data.

downsides when they did not. Effective communication flowed both between the school and partners and within the school about the role of partners and how to collaborate with them. Sub-themes related to effective communication were clearly defining partner roles, having on-site supervision, and coordinating members' and other partners' services with school activities. The importance of effective communication was expressed in relation to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program as well as for other partnerships at program and comparison schools.

Teachers at four program schools described a need for schools to provide communication that helps members be more effective. At three schools, teachers wanted more information—for example, from their departments—about activities members could and could not do. In one extreme case, members worked with guidance counselors on college prep activities, yet teachers had little or no information about members' activities, which school leaders and administrators wanted to change. Teachers at another school reflected on the importance of teachers mentoring members in their classrooms to model the skills needed for effective behavior management, lesson planning, and more.

Strategies and suggested improvements at program schools included having designated meeting times between members (or coordinators) and teachers to communicate about individual student needs and coordinate supports. Another strategy that was used consistently by two schools and inconsistently by two others was integrating members into the school community through active participation in faculty meetings, trainings, and other activities to help members learn as much about the school and students as possible; when well-used, this strategy helped members strengthen relationships with faculty as well as students. Two program schools explicitly emphasized that strong communication between members and teachers facilitated impact. At one school (School 1A), for example, having members participate in faculty meetings enabled teachers to identify members' individual strengths and effectively use them. This strong collaboration was perceived to make the program more effective and ultimately of more benefit to the students.

Clearly Defining Members' Roles Was a Challenge for School Turnaround AmeriCorps Programs

Unlike other partners who come in for targeted amounts of time to do a single specific activity, AmeriCorps members (especially full time members) are in schools all day. The intensity of their service can help them have impacts on students and schools overall turnaround goals; however, their steady presence on site can also lead to confusion about how they can and cannot contribute at the school. Staff at several program schools described needing more information about AmeriCorps members' roles and responsibilities. In one program school (School 1A), administrators and school staff had frequent structured communication with members. Still, staff spoke of needing further clarification about members' roles and responsibilities and of ensuring systems were in place so that teachers could lodge a complaint, express a concern, or ask a question.

One AmeriCorps school (School 6A) had one member serving whose role was to focus on identifying students with attendance troubles, intervening with those students through outreach, and communicating with the school staff about truant students. This narrowly defined role helped the member address a clear school need and staff were pleased with how his/her work supported the school. However, when the same member engaged in less well-defined activities, especially mentoring to potentially truant students, that posed a problem, as clear guidelines had not been established about when issues needed to be escalated to school staff, or about when and for how long the member could pull students from classes.

Scheduling of Services to Align with School and Classroom Schedules

Scheduling was a concern for teachers at both program and comparison schools. At program schools, leaders and teachers reported inconsistency in knowing when members would be present, both because of professional development activities and occasionally because members simply did not appear. It was a concern when members' schedules did not follow the school's schedule, both for professional development and when members' year of service ended before the school year ended.

As indicated above, and as reflected in individual case studies, teachers faced another challenge when members' activities disrupted instructional time, as occurred when members pulled students from classes at unexpected times or for unexpected lengths of time (Schools 5A and 6A), or when members arrived to give unannounced presentations in teachers' classrooms (School 4A). Teachers also expressed frustration with receiving last-minute information about when students would be pulled from class. The same issue with disruption to instruction time was reported at a comparison school with many external partners.

Adequate Supervision and Training Are Essential

Program and comparison schools alike described challenges with adequately supervising partners and having partners with the training needed to deliver content and manage student behavior.

Five of six program schools noted using a coordinator to supervise members. The supervisory structure varied, ranging from a coordinator split among sites to a team of three supervisors for one school with 18 members on site. In the latter case, this intensive supervision was part of a long-standing relationship with the grantee that also transcended the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, such as having regular communication with the grantee and hosting events at the school for the grantee organization. Two teachers noted that the performance of this year's cohort was not as strong as that of the previous year—members struggled more to develop classroom skills and at least one member left partway through the year. However, the school's history of effective partnership helped smooth out the school staff's frustration with this particular cohort. The two schools where coordinators split their time across multiple schools (Schools 3A and 5A) discussed the negative effects of not having a dedicated coordinator. These two programs were perceived as less effective because the coordinator was neither readily available to communicate with school staff about members' roles nor to coordinate with teachers about matching tutoring plans to teachers' upcoming lesson plans. Having a dedicated coordinator on site, whether from the grantee or school staff, could alleviate many of these issues. However, one school (School 4A) that used a teacher as an on-site coordinator struggled because of its difficulty retaining teachers (including the coordinator).

Additionally, teachers in one school (School 3A) lamented that members began the school year with insufficient knowledge of effective behavior management techniques. Teachers were concerned that members' struggles to maintain orderly and engaging small group sessions, especially at the beginning of the year, detracted from the students' learning time. Teachers noted that their primary interactions with members focused on managing specific students' behavior, and they suggested that prioritizing behavior management strategies in members' summer training might increase the amount of time available for tutoring and decrease the amount of time reacting to and trying to manage student behavior issues.

Two comparison schools also struggled with the supervision and preparedness of external partners. One school (School 4B) hired external part-time tutors described as lacking necessary skills or knowledge needed to manage and deliver instruction effectively to a small group. At another comparison school (School 2B) with an extensive network of partners, three of five interviewed staff members emphatically observed that the school was not providing adequate supervision and coordination for external partners. A third comparison school's experience echoed the struggle to manage partners, because this school

elected to limit its external partners to a parent-teacher organization, reflecting an insufficient capacity to manage other volunteer organizations.

Sustained Student Relationships with Partners Lead to Better Student Outcomes

Staff at six schools (four program and two comparison) described the beneficial effects of partners' socio-emotional support on improving both student well-being and academic outcomes. In both program and comparison schools, respondents commented on the beneficial effects of additional, sustained relationships with caring adults, whether through tutoring, mentoring, college visits, career shadowing, or extracurricular activities. Notably, most respondents remarked on the social-emotional value of the relationships formed through these activities, regardless of the activities' focus. At the same time, relationships with adults were perceived as improving students' academic engagement and, in at least two cases, improved students' relationships with teachers. By contrast, one comparison school noted that a 10-week tutoring intervention was insufficient to help raise student performance.

Align Interventions with School Needs

Alignment of School Turnaround AmeriCorps activities with a host school's turnaround plan is a key program feature. In two sites, both the program and comparison schools (four schools) emphasized the importance of having external partners' activities align with the school's curriculum and needs—and the difficulty imposed on already-struggling schools when partners' activities did not support school priorities.

In one district (Schools 2A and 2B), partners' activities in both schools were perceived as more effective when closely aligned with the school's curriculum, teaching techniques, and specific school goals. Interventions not well-aligned were perceived not only as less effective, but sometimes even detrimental. Specifically, an academic intervention at the comparison school pulled students from their classrooms during literacy instruction and used different instructional strategies than teachers used. Administrators believed this created challenges, as students received contradictory messages about what was important to learn, and it also left students with gaps in their skills. By contrast, School Turnaround AmeriCorps and other AmeriCorps programs (in both schools) were said to use tutoring strategies that were effective and complementary to classroom teachers' instruction.

In one state, the program and comparison school each struggled to align external resources properly with school goals (Schools 4A and 4B). Program school administrators and staff perceived a discrepancy between the school and the AmeriCorps program's goals. Specifically, program school staff offered examples of needing everyone available to support or assist with something, while the AmeriCorps members, for various reasons, emphatically focused only on the tasks designated for them by their program. This led to tensions with school counselors and administrators who characterized the program as "self-serving" rather than aligning with the school's needs. The comparison school staff emphasized the importance of planning to integrate outside services with the school's needs to effectively "use those bodies" that volunteer in the school system. This emphasis may have been an acknowledgment that their school did not do this well, given that school staff were unsure which partners were currently active in the school.

Support for Teachers Is Highly Valued

Four schools ascribed the greatest value to interventions that supported teachers because the support made teachers more effective and helped their students perform. Two program schools (Schools 1A and 2A) described School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' activities as supporting teachers, in one case by making classroom management easier and in another by providing services to students when teachers could not. Two schools, one program and one comparison (Schools 2A and 2B) perceived a robust

parental engagement strategy as a major support for teachers. As explained by the principal of a school where School Turnaround AmeriCorps members engaged parents, “I think when kids know that their parents are involved at school, they do better. In that way, teachers are supported. Because if parents are in—it’s one less thing the teacher has to worry about ...” Another school (School 1B), which purposefully does not use external partners, focused its investment in teachers on an intensified recruitment process that would identify the most qualified teachers. This school’s leadership decided that internal initiatives were the best way for the school to support teachers and thereby reach turnaround goals.

In conclusion, most of the lessons learned from case studies about working with partners centered on provision of sufficient administrative support from both schools and partners to ensure that interventions support, instead of burden or distract from, core school functions. Designing interventions to align with school needs, providing adequate training, clearly defining roles, and establishing partner schedules with deference to school schedules were planning strategies that clearly laid the groundwork for more effective partnerships. The more effective partnerships were characterized by more frequent communication about partners; roles, scheduling changes, or tailoring of the intervention based on data analysis or emerging needs throughout the school year.

Potential Uses and Challenges of Administrative Data

This section summarizes findings that address the research questions related to grantee data access and practices in the collection of secondary quantitative data, “Under their partnership or data use agreements with their affiliated schools, what quantitative data are grantees able to access? What quantitative secondary data are collected by grantees? What is the quality of these data? What research questions can be addressed via analyses of grantees’ quantitative student-level data?” Data sources include grantee progress reports, member activity tracking logs, and student level administrative data.

The Year 1 evaluation has collected data from multiple sources. Some data were collected by the study team and are referred to as *primary data*. These include data collected via interviews, surveys, and focus groups with grantee staff, principals, teachers, and parents. Additional data were collected by grantees in service of their School Turnaround AmeriCorps reporting requirements to CNCS and were subsequently shared with the study team. These are referred to as *secondary data* and include data reported in grantee progress reports, School Turnaround AmeriCorps member tracking sheets, and student-level achievement, attendance, and behavior data obtained from grantees’ schools.

This section summarizes the main findings related to grantees’ access to data and current practices in collecting student-level secondary data. After discussing limitations in obtaining information relevant to grantee secondary data collection, four major topics are addressed. The first concerns grantee partnership and data-sharing agreements with their affiliated schools regarding access to student-level data. The second reviews the kinds and comprehensiveness of quantitative secondary data collected by grantees. The third considers the research questions that can be addressed via analysis of grantee-provided student-level outcome data. The fourth lists recommendations for improving future evaluations of School Turnaround AmeriCorps.

Limitations

Information from grantees about data access and practices was collected on an opportunistic basis, as there was no OMB-approved standardized protocol for doing so, and follow-up conversations reflected individual grantees’ varied practices. As a result, data about grantees’ access and practices were not collected using a systematic structure, and the access and practices data are therefore incomplete and/or inconsistent across grantees.

Grantees' Access to Student-Level Data

In the AmeriCorps Notice of Funding Opportunity, CNCS required that grantees establish written partnership agreements that “articulate the alignment between the local School Turnaround AmeriCorps program design and school and LEA turnaround plans, as well as the parties’ plan for ongoing collaboration” (Corporation for National and Community Service, Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13, p. 31). The Notice (p. 14) requires *letters of support* from eligible partner schools and their corresponding LEAs, including evidence of the applicants’ consultation with school and LEA leadership. The 2014 Notice further strengthens that guidance by requiring *letters of commitment* from partner schools that “include a commitment from partner schools and the LEA to participate in the national evaluation, which will include sharing student and school outcomes data with the applicant and data collection from school and LEA staff as needed.” (Corporation for National and Community Service, Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY14, p. 23). The FY13 and FY14 Notices outline the requirements for the written partnership agreements and require grantees to collaborate with school partners: “Sharing data and evaluation. Sharing information, data, performance measures, and evaluation strategies that guide project management, resource allocation, and service delivery while maintaining data privacy requirements.” Thus, only the FY14 Notice indicates that letters of commitment should include evaluation-oriented permissions and neither Notice provides any specificity about how to share student outcome data in the written partnership agreements. One reason for these permissions is to allow CNCS to retain evaluator-constructed public use and restricted use files containing student-level data, as mandated in Abt Associates’ 2014 *Statement of Work*.

All grantees but one established partnership agreements with their schools; two of the schools that established partnership agreements also established data-sharing agreements with their schools. There was one exception in which a grantee (“Grantee #4”) established a data-sharing agreement directly with Abt Associates.³² None of the grantees’ agreements gave CNCS permission to retain a permanent copy of student-level data, and aside from Grantee #4, at most one grantee’s agreement gave CNCS’s evaluator access to student-level data (the wording of one of the agreements is ambiguous). Establishing formal data-sharing agreements that explicitly specify data use permissions would also help to ensure that all grantees remain compliant with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.

Quantitative Secondary Data Collected by Grantees

CNCS-Defined Performance Measures

Grantee performance measures were reported in the mid-year and annual grantee progress reports (GPRs). The performance measures included CNCS-defined academic performance measures, such as “ED2” (number of students who completed K-12 education programs) and “ED5” (number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math), as well as measures of the quantity and dosage of AmeriCorps services (number of full-time equivalent AmeriCorps members sponsored by a grantee).³³ The GPRs compared the grantee-determined target for each measure (e.g., target number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math) to what the grantees were actually able to accomplish, and they noted whether the target was met.

³² Grantees were assigned a random identifier to maintain confidentiality when referencing specific grantees.

³³ According to the AmeriCorps State and National Grants FY2013 *Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity*, p. 9, full-time service requires at least 1,700 hours per year.

None of the grantees reported all performance measures.³⁴ Nearly all grantees reported on ED2 and ED5. When combined, these measures allow grantees to calculate the percentage of students who improved their academic performance out of all students who completed the program. Most grantees also reported on output measure ED1, which provides a count of students who start participating in the program and, when combined with ED2, can be used to calculate program attrition rates. In terms of student social and emotional learning, more grantees reported on ED27 rather than ED6 and ED7, which includes a broader range of academic engagement behaviors and recommended methods for measuring them.³⁵ Although multiple programs provided mentoring services, only two programs reported on the number of mentor matches that were sustained through the program (ED4A).

AmeriCorps Member Activity Tracking Data

Grantees used individualized forms to track member activity and service dosage information. Most of the tracking occurred on a daily or weekly basis, and occasionally on a monthly basis. All 13 grantees reported that they track some information about member activities, and the majority reported that they track this information in two common areas: ten grantees tracked which students they served and nine tracked the date/duration and/or frequency/dosage of services provided.

Data were analyzed for the six grantees who submitted aggregated member activity tracking data for the 2014-2015 program year. In general, grantees implemented a mixed combination of similar services in schools; however, there is considerable variation in how they labeled and categorized their services. Inconsistencies in how grantees classify and track these data limit the usefulness of conducting program level analyses, and even calculating a total number of students served by the program or the total and average number of service hours provided per member would likely result in an inaccurate and misleading result. Moreover, because of the time lag between the performance measure data, which covers 2013-14, and the member activity data, which was collected for 2014-15, a grantee-level analysis of program performance using the member activity data and the GPR performance measure data offers questionable benefits for meaningful program learning.

Student-Level Data Collected by Grantees

All grantees except for one collected student-level data during the first two years of implementation, and four grantees additionally collected data on their 2013–14 service recipients from 2012–13, the year before their entry into the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program (even though this was not a requirement of the grant or an expectation of the grantees). All but two grantees obtained student-level achievement test data, eight obtained student-level attendance data, and four obtained student-level behavior outcome data. Five grantees collected student-level academic, attendance, and behavior outcomes, three collected two of these outcomes, and four collected one kind of outcome.

³⁴ Grantees were not required to report all performance measures. For instance, per the *Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity Addendum: Definitions, Suggestions regarding Data Collection, and Additional Notes* (2013, p. 3), tutoring and other education programs must report ED2 and then at least one of ED5, ED6, or ED27.

³⁵ ED27 is the number of students in grades K-12 that participated in the mentoring or tutoring, or other education program including CNCS-supported service learning who demonstrated improved academic engagement.

ED6 is the number of students that improved their school attendance over the course of the CNCS-supported program's involvement with the student.

ED7 is the number of students with no or decreased disciplinary referrals and suspensions over the course of the CNCS-supported programs' involvement.

Nine of the eleven grantees that collected student-level academic data collected systematic standardized achievement test data from the respective districts/states in which their schools are located (Grantee #10 did not collect such data and Grantee #6 did not have student-level outcomes for 2013–14). Standardized test scores were of particular importance, because they are more appropriate than other academic data (e.g., grades) for cross-school and cross-grantee analyses of academic outcomes. One grantee with affiliated schools from multiple states collected test scores from multiple standardized tests.

In Chapter III, the section on *Comparing Stakeholder Perceptions to Administrative Outcomes Data, Student-level Data Quality* assesses the quality of the 2012–13, 2013–14, and 2014–15 data. For each type of outcome (achievement, attendance, and behavior), the study team determined if the student-level dataset the grantee shared with Abt included all schools affiliated with the grantee. Then, the quality of the data in the datasets was rated. The data quality was rated as *good* if there was less than 25 percent missing data, which meant that a full range of data analyses could be performed. Only three grantees provided data that both included all of their schools and was rated as good quality.

Research Questions That Can Be Addressed by Student-level Data

The assessment of student-level data quality considers how student-level data collected by grantees might be used to track students' academic achievement, attendance, and behavior outcomes as a function of participation in School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' service activities (hereafter, *treatment recipients*) at individual schools and/or groups of schools. Groups of schools could be defined in various ways, ranging from all schools supported by a given grantee, to all elementary or high schools, or to all schools within which School Turnaround AmeriCorps members are providing a specific support or service (e.g., math tutoring). Recall that the student-level data collected by grantees are from treatment recipients. The discussion below also outlines how data collected in Year 1 of the evaluation might be used as well as how expanded datasets (should expanded available data be collected) might be used in the future.

The analysis drew four main conclusions:

1. The data cannot be used to estimate treatment impacts, given the lack of comparison group data.
2. The data can be used to track outcome levels across cohorts (different groups of students in the same grade in different years) and longitudinally (the same students followed over several grades, assuming those students repeatedly participate in School Turnaround AmeriCorps services). If treatment recipients are followed pre and post treatment receipt, then interpretation of longitudinal analyses is somewhat more straightforward than interpretation of cohort analyses.
3. Examining the association of treatment dosage (from grantee activity logs) and student-level outcomes does not yield reliable assessments of the impact of different dosage levels on outcome.
4. Tracking achievement in groups of schools across grantees requires converting different states' achievement test scores to a common metric, usually obtained by standardizing scores within state.

Recommendations for Future Evaluations of School Turnaround AmeriCorps

The following recommendations could enhance future evaluations of School Turnaround AmeriCorps and education-related programming in the AmeriCorps portfolio of programs:

1. Provide guidelines or templates for grantees' partnership and data use agreements with their affiliated schools. Ideally, agreements would include detailed lists of student-level data (at the variable level, rather than the generic "student outcome" level) that schools would share with their

grantees. Further, it would be helpful if agreements explicitly acknowledge data sharing with CNCS or its designated evaluator for the purposes of the evaluation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. If CNCS desires to create public use or restricted use datasets that include student-level data, then the agreements should make it clear that it has permission from the partnering schools to do so.³⁶ In general, it would be helpful for these agreements to be much more transparent about the sharing of student data for the purposes of the program-wide evaluation.

2. CNCS could encourage grantees to collect student-level reading and math achievement data separately. This would maximize the number of treatment schools whose outcome data could be used in analyses of groups of schools. While this step would likely increase the burden to grantees above and beyond their current reporting requirements, the increased value of those data elements to the evaluation would be tangible.
3. CNCS could encourage grantees to collect longitudinal outcome data from treatment recipients, including outcomes from the current and at least the prior year. This would make possible longitudinal as well as cohort analyses. Only four grantees currently collect any longitudinal data.
4. To facilitate analysis of the association of treatment dosage and student-level outcomes, CNCS would need to establish a common template for the collection of member activity log data and provide assistance to grantees in tracking and reporting those data to improve the completeness and quality of the member activity data. In addition, the following data would be needed to perform a robust analysis of the impact of treatment dosage on outcomes: 1) measures of academic standing (e.g. achievement test scores) and demographics from the prior school year, and 2) multiple (e.g., bimonthly) measures of treatment dosage and academic standing. However, it may be challenging, in practice, to obtain such data.
5. It may be useful to reassess the timing of the evaluation contractor's receipt of student-level data and the performance and reporting of analyses of these data. Currently, student-level data from a given school year cannot be obtained by the evaluator until July of that year and, in Year 1 of the evaluation, much of these data were of poor quality. One strategy for improving data quality may be communication between grantees and the schools providing data to ascertain whether more complete data could be obtained. However, given the timing, grantees may not receive and then review data until after schools have closed for the year. It is possible, therefore, that any resubmission of more complete data would not occur until the beginning of the next school year. As a result, it may also be useful to reconsider the timing for analysis and reporting on student-level data, and shift any associated deadlines until mid-to-late fall.
6. On a related note, the performance data are based on the *prior* school year, whereas any primary data collection is based on the *current* school year. Differences between school years may not be equally meaningful for all indicators, yet any reporting on either primary or secondary data collection efforts should explicitly acknowledge when data were collected, and further, should acknowledge the lag between administrative and primary data.

³⁶ This may require further research into the feasibility of doing so without obtaining active parent consent under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.

III. PART 2: DETAILED FINDINGS

Implementation Findings

This section addresses the following broad research questions:

- “How and to what extent do School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs adapt to schools’ needs and local contexts?”
- “How do AmeriCorps members help schools implement their turnaround plans?”
- “Which activities pursued by AmeriCorps members are perceived as being more or less helpful, and why?”

Data sources include: case study research, school leader and staff surveys, grantee survey, grantee pre- and post-interviews, principal individual and small group interviews, parent interviews, member interviews, grantee and member focus groups, grantee partnership agreements, grantee progress reports, and member activity tracking logs.

Summary of Implementation Findings

Key findings related to School Turnaround AmeriCorps program implementation include those broadly focused on relationship building and perceptions of program implementation.

Findings about relationships and participation include the following:

- A majority of grantees reported having had pre-existing relationships with partner schools of at least two years duration before implementation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program.
- Schools varied considerably in the number and proportion of students served by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program as well as in caseloads for AmeriCorps members. At most schools grantees reported that AmeriCorps members meet with school staff to review student progress at least monthly.
- Knowledge of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program was inconsistent among school leaders and school staff; some leaders and staff were deeply involved in day-to-day program elements and some have no or minimal knowledge of the program. For example, not all school staff knew which students participated in services provided by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members.

Findings about program implementation include the following:

- A majority of school leaders reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members had some or substantial influence on schools’ capacity to achieve key school turnaround goals (e.g., improving academic performance, increasing graduation rates, and improving college readiness). Similarly, school leaders ranked academic achievement, school culture and environment, and increased learning time as the three strategies most influenced by AmeriCorps members.
- The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program provided value in multiple ways, according to school leaders, and did so by offering helpful supports, serving as partners in improving student outcomes, and providing activities frequently enough to be valuable to the school and students. Staff reported similar generally positive perceptions of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members based on their efforts to provide helpful supports to students, serve as partners in improving student outcomes, and support teachers in the school. Parent perceptions were similarly positive.
- Among those school leaders and staff who were familiar with the program, satisfaction with program implementation was broad, reflecting an appreciation of the program’s structure,

supports, and alignment with key turnaround goals. Those respondents reported strong communication and collaboration between school staff and School Turnaround AmeriCorps members.

Schools' Background and Context

School Turnaround AmeriCorps is one component of each host school's broader school turnaround plan. Each host school has different student compositions, resources, and designs for its school turnaround plan. These factors, in turn, affect how a school deploys members and the uses the services they can provide to support the turnaround as a whole. This section discusses these topics, reflecting the national evaluation's research goal to understand how local context affects program implementation and identify best practices in supporting schools' ability to implement their turnaround plans.

This section begins by describing findings from interviews with principals in a sample of 25 schools; these schools generally serve economically disadvantaged and high minority student populations (25 and 18 schools, respectively). Substantial proportions of students in these schools also require additional academic support. Over half of principals (16 of 25) noted that their schools serve large populations of English language learners (ELL) or students with disabilities (SWDs). About half the principals (13) discussed ELL student needs, reflecting large immigrant or refugee populations in their respective districts. About one-third of principals (8 of 25) specifically mentioned their population of students with disabilities, which ranged from 6 to 25 percent of the student body.³⁷ The population of students with disabilities can vary more than ELL or other populations, as one principal noted, based on "testing demands [with more] students needing more accommodations depending on what the test requirements are." Regardless of the number or proportion of SWDs, such students' needs can vary more widely, as they are more likely to need additional learning supports and testing accommodations. The demographic composition of student populations in this sample highlights the additional academic support needed by some students in turnaround schools.

School Turnaround Context

"Unless the circumstances are just unbearable, you should stay with the work because it is important that kids have -- that they are able to build these relationships, and they should seek consistency. Schools that normally are going to Turnaround, one of the problems has been inconsistency... So I would say that the program should really screen why people are getting into AmeriCorps."
- Principal Small Group Interview

All schools in the interview sample were receiving SIG funds at the time they applied to be School Turnaround AmeriCorps host sites. Most schools were pursuing turnaround models, a few were implementing transformation models, and a very few restart models; a few are no longer in turnaround status, including two schools that have received awards for performing near the top level statewide (as reported in principal interviews and surveys).³⁸ By a large majority, the most common component of turnaround plans described by principals was professional development, followed by teacher evaluations at half as many schools. Other turnaround activities overlapped with the types of services provided by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in support of those plans.³⁹ Specifically, tutoring, behavioral

³⁷ Note that six principals discussed both ELL and Special Education (SPED) populations. Across all public schools, an average of 13 percent of students have disabilities. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

³⁸ Two principals were unsure of their formal designation but they were "not a restart" and possibly a transformation model, respectively.

³⁹ Six (of 36) principals responded to the survey question about their turnaround plan with only information about their AmeriCorps members' daily activities.

mentoring, after-school activities, attendance support, and parental and community engagement were components of turnaround plans for which AmeriCorps members provided direct support. While principals did not make this connection explicitly, it may be that members' direct services eased the demands on teachers, and thereby gave teachers more time for professional development activities.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Interventions

Characteristics of Program Activities

Grantees of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program organize, train, and place trained and dedicated AmeriCorps members in low-performing schools to support one or more of the six School Improvement Grant (SIG) strategies to improve student educational achievement. The six strategies are engaging families and communities; addressing non-academic factors that impact student achievement (school climate and students' social, emotional, and health needs); supporting skill acquisition in reading and mathematics; increasing graduation rates; providing college preparation and increasing college enrollment; and increasing learning time. The specific combination of activities that grantees offer, and the implementation of these strategies in individual schools, varies tremendously, according to schools' turnaround plans and each school's student needs.

This section describes the range of activities in which AmeriCorps members engaged with their school turnaround partners, based on interviews with grantees, principals, and members; focus groups with grantees and members; principal surveys; and grantee progress reports. The activities include tutoring, after-school and extracurricular programs, parental and community engagement, and mentoring services. The research team also examined the structure of services across the 25 schools where principals were interviewed. Activities were similar across the schools regardless of the turnaround model they were following—turnaround (16), transformation (4), and no longer in turnaround status (3). The primary difference appeared to be that members serving in turnaround and transformation schools offered a broader range of services than members in schools that had exited turnaround status (although the sample included only three schools in the latter category, so this difference should be interpreted with considerable caution).⁴⁰ Beyond direct services, several programs also described deploying members in supportive activities intended to expand others' (e.g., school administrators and teaching staff) capacity to engage in school turnaround efforts, and programs described the overall positive effect members had on the school climate by building relationships with students.

Exhibit III-1 summarizes the prevalence of activities and interventions offered in School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools, as described by grantee staff.

Tutoring was the most common program activity, according to information from grantees (11 of 13 referenced tutoring), and members concurred that it was the activity that represented the most significant use of members' time (18 of 26). Tutoring was provided in classrooms (seven programs), as well as one-on-one (three programs), in small-group sessions (two programs), and in one instance, students were tutored outside the classroom. Tutoring services were generally offered during the school day; four programs also offered tutoring services before school, during lunch, and/or after school. Principals and members offered additional detail about tutoring services in their interviews. One principal explained

⁴⁰ Specifically, mentoring and behavioral support, organized lunch-time roles, and extracurricular activities were not reported in any of the schools that have exited turnaround status. Services were largely similar across grade levels served. Attendance support appeared more common at elementary and middle schools (four at each) than at high schools (two). (These results include one school that serves both elementary and middle school students and another that serves middle and high school students.) Logically, college readiness was only provided in high schools.

that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members improved the effectiveness of classroom instruction “by providing supplemental help to my students, providing differentiated instruction ... They need small group help, and [AmeriCorps members] provide that.” Members described additional responsibilities related to their tutoring and instruction. These include in-classroom assistance and instruction (eight members), lesson planning (four members), and grading (one member).

Exhibit III-1: Prevalence of Activities and Interventions Offered in School Turnaround AmeriCorps Schools

Activities and Interventions	Proportion of Programs
Tutoring (11)	Majority of programs
After-school programs and extracurricular services (9)	Majority of programs
Parental and community engagement (8)	Majority of programs
Mentoring (7)	About half of programs
Behavior support and school attendance coaching (7)	About half of programs
Supportive services to build school capacity (5)	Several programs
College and test prep (3)	Several programs
Teaching (1)	Few programs
Wraparound services (1)	Few programs

Source: Grantee pre-interviews (n=13).

A majority of programs (nine) programs offered **after-school programs and extracurricular services**, including homework help sessions and electives to promote student academic engagement (e.g. baking, cosmetics, Girls on the Run, photography). At interviewed schools, about half of members were responsible for after-school activities, most of which were tutoring. In no cases were after-school or extracurricular activities a member’s primary responsibility; such activities were a second- or third-order responsibility for five (of 26) members interviewed. Four programs offering extracurricular activities provided students with opportunities for service learning and volunteerism. Members led the after-school electives offered, organized field trips, events, and service days. Two programs provided extracurricular services related to college and career readiness, such as job shadowing and professional learning.

Through grantee interviews, eight programs reported activities related specifically to **parent and community engagement**, both to complement activities that directly engage students and to reach out to the broader community. When engaging parents, members leverage their academic and personal relationships with students to understand students’ lives more holistically. Members kept parents informed and aware of events in the school (11 parents, 7 members); updated them about their children’s behavior or academic performance (according to five members), occasionally called parents about attendance (three members), and in one case served as a graduation assistant. Parents reported that they used information communicated by members about their child’s performance to reinforce the members’ feedback at home. Parent engagement also included such events as parent nights, socials, and parent-teacher conferences where members served as translators to help involve parents in their children’s academic lives.

Three programs reported broader community-level engagement activities that supplemented the direct services to students and parents in school settings. Examples include partnering with the local Chamber of Commerce to organize community events, engaging students in service-learning opportunities in their communities, and leveraging members’ service to recruit more volunteers to the school. Five members (across interviews and focus groups) described community projects as a way to contribute to their respective school’s capacity to implement its school turnaround plan. Principals in small group interviews emphasized the importance of member involvement in the community—through attending extracurricular and community events—so they would be accepted by community member. Involvement

in the community was noted as a prerequisite for members' activities to be successful in their placement schools, as discussed further below.

About half of programs offered students **mentoring** or **behavior and/or attendance coaching** (seven programs). Mentoring models varied considerably but, as with parental and community engagement, principals often described mentoring as embedded in other services members provided. Three programs included one-on-one time with students during lunch and after-school programs; three other programs offered small-group counseling sessions for specific groups of students. These small groups worked with students needing help for specific issues, such as pregnancy, anger management, trauma, academic goal achievement, gang involvement, sexual identity, and LGBTQ students' safety at school. In one unique case, program members served as academic coaches on teams with school counselors. Members, in particular, noted the interrelatedness of mentorship, academics, and attendance, because building relationships was key to getting students to open up and begin to address other issues. One member commented that, "Even if they don't necessarily get the academics right away, they have something to strive for and they have role models to look up to. That's really big."

School **attendance coaching**, as a distinct activity from behavior coaching, was reported by five of the seven programs that provided this support; in three programs, attendance coaching was a stand-alone intervention. In two of these cases, attendance coaching was a component of the program's parent engagement activities, with members calling home to discuss attendance records of truant students and engage parents in their children's daily attendance. In many of these seven programs described by principals, members supported the school office to do outreach to any student whose attendance record was poor; in this way, members were buoying the capacity of the school's administrative staff to accomplish more outreach than would otherwise have been possible. In several (four) cases, principals emphasized that members framed their attendance outreach to students in terms of their positive relationships with students rather than in terms of punishment for truancy. One middle school principal, for example, explained that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' approach to a student's absence was "to touch base with them, let them know it's important to us that they're here, and ask if there are any things that we can do to support them so they continue to come to school."

Three programs had activities and interventions focused on **college readiness and/or college entrance test preparation**, chiefly helping students prepare for the ACT and for college readiness. One college readiness program partnered with local postsecondary institutions to plan in-depth introductions to college experiences for students; students visited college campuses, met professors, and sat in on college classes. Another program also worked with students and their families on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a form prepared annually by current and prospective college students to determine eligibility for student financial aid.

College Readiness Activities

"One of the things that definitely worked well is working with the teachers to help facilitate the completion of college applications in the classes that all of the seniors had to go through. As it provided an opportunity for us to touch every senior that was in school on those days, designated for us to work specifically with students around college applications, FAFSA, and the required things for a senior to move on to postsecondary education. That absolutely worked."

- Grantee Pre-Interview

Two programs offered **unique services**. One provided wraparound services, addressing student needs that may have had a negative impact on school experience. Wraparound services included providing uniforms and transportation to students in need. The other provided teaching services: their members are the teachers. The program (Teach for America) is a national teacher corps consisting of recent college graduates from highly selective colleges who commit to work in urban and rural schools for two years.

Adding School Turnaround AmeriCorps members to support the school's existing resources also built school capacity in ways other than direct work with students (15 members/five programs). Three programs enlisted school leaders in planning how to best use member services to support turnaround efforts, such as having them interview candidates and select members for placement at the school, having them train members on performance measures, or having them manage member caseloads. A majority of schools also made use of an on-site coordinator from the school staff who was responsible for managing members' day-to-day work and relationships with the school. Having program administration roles taken on by school staff buoyed the school's capacity to manage external partners and volunteers.

Perceptions of School Culture

"This project has not only flourished but has refined the culture of the school. You know the work you're doing is good, when the administration plans to sustain it and share it with other districts. Kudos, my friends. Thank you for letting me be part of your celebration."

- Neighborhood project director at community-based organization, Grantee End-of-Year Progress Report

Mechanisms for Targeting Students

Students were generally identified by school staff for services and matched with members on the basis of test scores, grades, or behavior, according to member interviews and grantee interviews, although some services were targeted to specific grade levels. In a few cases, the students who were targeted were those who had approached the members directly for help. Two principals reported wishing that members did not have to maintain the same caseload of students throughout the year but could, instead, adjust their caseloads to reflect changes when students no longer need AmeriCorps support.⁴¹

The majority of programs, however, also reported challenges in managing and/or matching members to placements, including tutoring/mentoring groups that exceeded the target ratios, members' inability to access students during the school day, and slow build-up of caseloads. The most prominent strategy reported by grantees for dealing with such issues was to engage school leaders, administrators, and/or teachers, although several programs reported that they addressed caseload/management issues by relying on supervisory staff who worked closely with members and used data to manage caseloads and match students to members.

Members' Roles in Supporting School Turnaround AmeriCorps Schools

The core of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' work is serving as tutors, mentors, and instructional and administrative supports for turnaround schools. Members' duties are defined by Partnership Agreements between the grantee and school. Members reported that they most frequently collaborated on their activities with teachers, whether in identifying students for tutoring; supporting differentiated instruction for small groups in classrooms; or discussing student progress based on assessment, behavior, or attendance data.

Members **promoted a positive school climate by building supportive relationship with students**, according to 12 of 25 principals and, interestingly, two members who said their primary responsibility was "relationships with students." These positive relationships were cited, explicitly and implicitly, as examples of how members support turnaround goals for the school climate and culture, improve student engagement, and thereby improve students' academic achievement. As discussed below, members' efforts to establish these relationships translated into positive benefits throughout members' work and presence at the schools, whether by the direct academic or behavioral coaching they provided, through formal outreach, or through informal check-ins. Principals described such contributions as members

⁴¹ The policy to have members maintain the same caseload throughout the year is a program-level decision and not a requirement of the grant from CNCS.

learning about students' home lives so they could offer them emotional or academic support, or connect their families to community resources (five interviews). In several (four) instances, principals noted that AmeriCorps members are relatable as "near peers" and role models to students in ways that permanent school staff are not, which can help members support both students and the staff's capacity—for example, by being able to intervene in situations before disciplinary action needs to be taken.

Grantees and principals emphasized the importance of **members being integrated into the school staff and into the school culture** so the relationship is "seamless." This suggests both that members should extend themselves to become part of the community during the school day and at extracurricular events and also to understand they are present to support the school's goals, policies, and structures—even if, as a principal and grantee emphasized, there are things with which the member disagrees. Three principals described AmeriCorps members as part of the school "family" considered co-equal members of the school staff. One principal mentioned that his school had made a concerted effort in the 2014–15 school year to make members feel like a part of the staff. Several principals emphasized the strong relationships between members and school staff through comments about wanting to hire members at the school or district level; one said explicitly "I would like to hire them to stay here and teach. That's how confident I am with their ability."

Members' work also **supported teachers** through an array of mechanisms. For members who served in classrooms, simply being present in the room throughout the day helped with classroom management, preventing disruptive behavior and differentiating instruction in small groups. Members also supported teachers in the use of assessments and interpreting assessment data to help tailor instruction. Two programs described member participation in planning meetings, working with school leaders and teachers to identify and track student responses to interventions. One program supports Response to Intervention (RTI), a multi-tiered approach to early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. Members focused on RTI services participated in weekly RTI meetings with school leaders and faculty, sharing information and updates from their work with students. Similarly, another program instituted biweekly Early Warning Indicator meetings for teachers and members to discuss students' academic progress, ensuring that teachers are aware of student growth and can adjust their instructional approaches based on student success. One of these programs also collaborated with teachers to provide them with additional planning time during the work day by running two assemblies for the entire student body every week.

Analysis of Member Tracking Data

In addition to stakeholder perspectives on program implementation, administrative data on School Turnaround AmeriCorps member activities were collected from grantees. During Program Year 2, grantees and/or members used varied methods to track members' activities in their host schools. Data regularly tracked by grantees include information about the number and grade levels of students served, the number of hours members served in each school, the frequency and amount of time members spent with students, the types of activities members performed in schools (e.g., tutoring in math and literacy, attendance and behavior coaching, family engagement, mentoring, college preparation and advising), and the nature of direct services members provided to students and families (e.g., one-on-one services, classroom supports or small group work, after-school or extended learning time opportunities).

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps grant did not require that grantees track member activities or service dosage data, and grantees were not asked to use a standardized template or form or to adhere to any guidelines specifying what data to track or how to track these data. Not surprisingly, each grantee uses an individualized form to track member activity and service dosage information. Most tracking occurs on a daily or weekly basis, although in some cases it is done monthly.

Administrative records on member activity and service dosage can complement primary data sources to document how AmeriCorps members support schools in implementing their turnaround efforts. However, the member activity data collected during Program Year 2 offer limited usefulness for conducting program level analyses because the data are incomplete, inconsistent, and with one exception, not linkable to student-level outcome data.

Exhibit III-2 presents the information collected by different grantees regarding their AmeriCorps member service delivery. All 13 grantees reported that they track some information about member activities, and the majority reported that they track this information in two common areas: ten grantees track which students they serve and nine track the date/duration and/or frequency/dosage of services provided. Most grantees also have their members record a description of the activities they engage in with students.

Exhibit III-3 presents the member activity data that grantees submitted for the 2014-2015 program year. Six grantees submitted aggregated member activity tracking data. Five grantees did not submit these data because they do not compile the data they track at an aggregate level, e.g. monthly, bi-annually, or yearly. The other two grantees did not confirm whether they track aggregated member activity data or did not respond to the data request in time to include their data in this analysis. Grantees who did not provide these data are represented by shaded rows in Exhibit III-3. The remaining findings thus pertain to the six grantees who submitted aggregated member activity data.

Because each grantee's activity tracking sheet is unique, variables that share the same name are not necessarily comparable. For example, of the six grantees who regularly track and submitted aggregated data for the number of students served, four grantees provided unduplicated counts of students served, whereas two grantees provided totals for students served that likely contain duplicate counts of students served (and/or of service hours) across service areas. Therefore, the total number and average number of unique students served per member shown in Exhibit III-3 is likely accurate for only four grantees.

Among these four grantees, the total number of students served per grantee in 2014-15 ranged from 534 to 1,468, and the average number of unique students served per individual grantee AmeriCorps member ranged from 13 to 65. The variability in the quantity of students served is a function of the number of schools partnering with the grantee, the number of members serving in each school, the target service population within each school, and the types of activities offered at each school, as intensive one-on-one services might require more members than group or school-level activities, all else being equal. In addition, for one grantee, the number of students served was not included with the member activity data; consequently, this information had to be calculated from the grantee's student-level attendance data submission. Given these inconsistencies in the source data, calculating a total number of students served by the program in 2014-15 would likely result in an inaccurate and misleading result.

Four of the six grantees who submitted member activity data included the number of service hours. These data were also variable; the number ranged from 106 to 34,578 total service hours per grantee, or 3.21 to 910 average service hours provided per member (equivalent to roughly half a day to 114 full work days, on average, per member). Two grantees provided data that may duplicate the number of service hours across service areas. Inconsistencies in how grantees classify and track these data likely explain the wide variation in service dosage levels. For example, some grantees may only have counted direct services hours for this metric, whereas other grantees may have included hours members spent engaged in other, non-direct service activities, such as member orientation and training. There may be other less immediately apparent explanations for the large discrepancy in hours that would require follow up discussions with grantees.

Grantees also varied in the level of detail provided about the number and types of service activities provided by their members (see Exhibit III-4). Four of the six grantees who submitted member activity

data included service activity details. In some cases, they provided the number of students served and/or the number of service hours per each service category, and sometimes they also provided these data for service subcategories. For example, one grantee listed 12 service categories, including one service category “supportive services” that itself included four subcategories: assistance with testing, computer assisted lab, test preparation skills, and tutoring. Another grantee provided service dosage information in only four indicator areas (ELA/literacy, math, attendance coaching, and behavior coaching). Yet another grantee identified nine service types, each with one to four service subtypes. A fourth grantee provided data mapping to 10 service types, all of which involve different variations of one-on-one tutoring or academic support, which other grantees might lump into one service type. Some grantees also broke out the number of services provided at each partner school while others did not. In general, grantees implemented a mixed combination of similar services in schools; however, there is considerable variation in how they labeled and categorized their services.

Two grantees provided student identifiers (study-assigned IDs) with their member activity data, and in one case those data could be linked to student level outcome data for the purpose of examining the association of treatment dosage (from grantee activity logs) and student-level outcomes. This analysis was not performed for a single grantee, however; as explained in Chapter II, Part 1, *Potential Uses and Challenges of Administrative Data*, such analysis does not yield reliable assessments of the impact of different dosage levels on outcomes, and could in fact result in misleading findings.

For grantee-level analyses of program performance, the member activity data might conceivably be paired with the GPR performance measure data. However, the lag between the performance measure data, which covers 2013-14, and the member activity data, which was collected for 2014-15, diminishes the potential value of such an analysis.

Recommendations

Improving the completeness and quality of the member activity data would involve establishing a common form or template for the data variables to be tracked, establishing common definitions for the data variables, communicating data collection and reporting guidelines, and providing some level of technical assistance to grantees as well as ample back and forth time for data review and clarification between the evaluator and the grantees. Because the full program year data do not become available until July for most grantees, the timing does not permit sufficient time for clarifying and correcting data issues for analysis and reporting within existing contractual constraints. Expectations should also be set with respect to the data collection burden on grantees and the possible need for data resubmissions to ensure completeness and consistency across the cohort. These considerations would best be addressed by establishing detailed data sharing agreements between the evaluator, the grantees, and their partnering districts and/or schools.

Exhibit III-2: Member Activity Tracking Information

Grantee Names	Members Class Schedule / Timesheet	Activity/ Tutor Logs	Name of Student	Date and time of activity, Duration, or Frequency/ Dosage	Description of Activity	Follow up Actions/ Next steps	Number of Students served/ Caseload	Member Training, Performance Review & Evaluation
Grantee #1	-	✓ (OTS)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grantee #2	✓ (OTS)	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓
Grantee #3*	-	✓ (MO, OTS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Grantee #4*	-	✓ (MO)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Grantee #5	✓ (MO)	✓ (GD)	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Grantee #6*	✓ (MO, OTS)	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Grantee #7	✓ (MO)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grantee #8*	-	✓ (MO, OTS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Grantee #9	-	✓ (MO)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Grantee #10	-	✓ (OTS)	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Grantee #11	✓ (GD, MO)	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Grantee #12*	✓ (OTS)	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Grantee #13	✓ (MO)	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓

Notes: MO = Microsoft Office; GD = Google Documents; OTS = Online Tracking System.

Using Grantee #1 as an example, the exhibit reads “Grantee #1 uses an Online Tracking System to implement AmeriCorps member activity and tutoring logs.” No further information was available about the types of information the system tracks.

All AmeriCorps members are evaluated by the grantees. However, only Grantee #13 and Grantee #2 appear to formally track member performance review and evaluation (this is subject to limitations in the collection of this information from grantees, which was done on an opportunistic basis, as there was no OMB-approved standardized protocol for doing so).

*Although, frequency and dosage is not tracked independently by these grantees, it can be calculated based on other information being tracked, such as name of student, date and time of activity, and duration of activity. Similarly, student caseloads can also be determined using the information collected by the grantees.

Exhibit III-3: School Turnaround AmeriCorps Member Service and Activity Tracking Information for 2014-15, by Grantee

Grantee Names (a)	AmeriCorps State & National experience prior to 2013-2014	Total Number of Partner Schools (b)	Total Number of Members Serving (c)	Average Number of Members per All Schools Served (c)	Number of Students Served in 2014-15	Average Number of Unique Students Served per Member	Total Number of Service Hours (d)	Average Number of Hours per Member (d)
Grantee #1	Yes	8	120	15	2044 (f)	17	19330 (f)	161
Grantee #2	Yes	11	37	3	[did not respond to the data request in time for the analysis]			
Grantee #3	Yes	2	11	6	[does not have these data at an aggregate level]			
Grantee #4	No	2	18	9	1177	65	NA	NA
Grantee #5	No	6	24	4	[does not have these data at an aggregate level]			
Grantee #6	No	4	55	14	1157	21	NA	NA
Grantee #7	No	1	10	10	[extra burden to provide aggregate files]			
Grantee #8	No	2	38	19	1468 (e)	39	34578	910
Grantee #9	Yes	5	33	7	8233 (f)	249	106 (f)	3.21
Grantee #10	Yes	5	18	4	[does not have these data at an aggregate level]			
Grantee #11	Yes	10	40	4	534	13	14154	354
Grantee #12	Yes	5	30	6	[does not have these data at an aggregate level]			
Grantee #13	No	6	20	3	[did not respond to the data request in time for the analysis]			
Grantee Total	Yes=7, No=6	67	454	6.8	[not calculated due to data inconsistencies]			

Notes:

- (a) The shaded grantees do not compile the data they track at an aggregate level or did not respond to the data request in time to confirm whether they track aggregated member activity data.
- (b) This total indicates each grantee's total number of partner schools in the 2014-15 program year. For two grantees this total is greater than the number of schools participating in the Year 1 national evaluation. One grantee included member activity data for all of its partner schools, including several schools that were not eligible to participate in the Year 1 national evaluation because they were not in the second year of implementing the program. For the other grantee, only a representative sample of 5 schools was purposively selected to participate in the evaluation because of its distinctive intervention.
- (c) Service term is unknown. These counts may include members serving full-time, part-time, and/or minimal-time terms.
- (d) These data likely do not count member service hours in the same way; some totals may or may not include time spent on other member service activities in addition to time spent in providing direct services.
- (e) This grantee did not include the number of students served with the member activity data submission; therefore this information was calculated from the student-level attendance data submission.
- (f) These totals likely contain duplicate counts of students served and/or of service hours across service areas.

Exhibit III-4: Number and Types of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Member Service Activities for 2014-15, by Grantee

Grantee Names (a)	Number of Activity or Service Types	Services Provided (Students Served per Service Type)
Grantee #1	4	ELA/literacy (600) Math (496) Attendance coaching (363) Behavior coaching (585)
Grantee #2	3 (g)	After-school and extended learning Behavioral and mentorship Teaching
Grantee #3	4 (g)	After-school and extended learning Behavioral and mentorship Community and parental engagement Tutoring
Grantee #4	6 (g)	After-school and extended learning Attendance Behavioral and mentorship College readiness Community and parental engagement Tutoring
Grantee #5	4 (g)	After-school and extended learning Behavioral and mentorship Community and parental engagement Tutoring
Grantee #6	10	After school academic tutoring support (8) Credit recover programs (27) Intensive one-on-one academic support during AmeriCorps lead "Vacation school" and summer schools (10) One-on-one academic support on an as-needed basis (10) One-on-one, small group and/or general in-classroom support (g) (891) One-on-one academic tutoring (32) One-on-one student support (h) (162) Tutoring during the school day (16) Student support in teacher classrooms (in addition to above services)
Grantee #7	4 (g)	After-school and extended learning Behavioral and mentorship Community and parental engagement Tutoring
Grantee #8	12	College visit/college student shadowing Comprehensive Mentoring Counseling/ advising/ academic planning/career counseling Educational field trips Family/cultural events Financial aid counseling/ advising Job site visit/job shadowing Other (Information Dissemination) Rigorous academic curricula Summer programs Supportive Services Workshops

Grantee Names (a)	Number of Activity or Service Types	Services Provided (Students Served per Service Type)
Grantee #9	9	Academic Assistance (35) Basic Needs/Resources (305) Behavior Intervention/Modification (315) College/Career Preparation (1200) Community Service/Service Learning (1715) Enrichment/Motivation (1581) Family Engagement (306) Life/Social Skills (2388) Physical Fitness/Health (388)
Grantee #10	5 (g)	After-school and extended learning Attendance Behavioral and mentorship Community and parental engagement Tutoring
Grantee #11	5 (g)	After-school and extended learning Behavioral and mentorship College readiness Community and parental engagement Tutoring
Grantee #12	4 (g)	After-school and extended learning Behavioral and mentorship Community and parental engagement Tutoring
Grantee #13	5 (g)	After-school and extended learning Behavioral and mentorship College readiness Community and parental engagement Tutoring

Notes:

(a) The shaded grantees do not compile the data they track at an aggregate level or did not respond to the data request in time to confirm whether they track aggregated member activity data.

(g) The number and types of services provided were not included with the grantee's member activity data submission. Information on the number and types of service activities provided by this grantee was obtained through the primary data collection.

(h) Service type - multiple: including one-one-one, small group and general in-classroom support. AmeriCorps member placements were primarily in classrooms serving all students and one-on-one student support assignments are set daily at the discretion of individual teachers

(i) Service type - one-on-one student support, including both push in and pull-out, primarily in classrooms serving all students in the school, with the exception of three classrooms, throughout the academic year.

Grantee-School Partnerships

Engaging Partner Districts and Schools

Establishing and operating effective turnaround models requires schools to make strategic use of relationships with partners. Programs reported that their school turnaround activities and interventions would not be successful without the active engagement of partner districts, schools (primarily school leaders), and teachers. Perhaps not surprisingly, the same philosophy seems to be evident from the grantees' perspective, as all but one of the grantees had relationships with at least some of their target schools before implementation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, but the length of these relationships varied (see Exhibit III-5).⁴² Most of the grantees reported having had pre-existing relationships with partner schools of at least two years duration before implementation.

Exhibit III-5: Relationship with Target School Prior to School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program

Statement	N
Any prior relationship (N=13)	
Yes, with some schools	8
Yes, with all schools	4
No	1
Duration of prior relationship (N=12)	
One year or less	1
Two years	3
Three or more years	4
Varies by school	4

NOTES: (N=12-13, Missing=0)

Duration question limited to grantees whose relationship with the school(s) existed before the School Turnaround AmeriCorps partnership agreement.

Exhibit reads: Eight grantees had a relationship with some of their target schools before the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. One of the grantees with any prior school relationships indicated that those prior relationships had existed for a year or less.

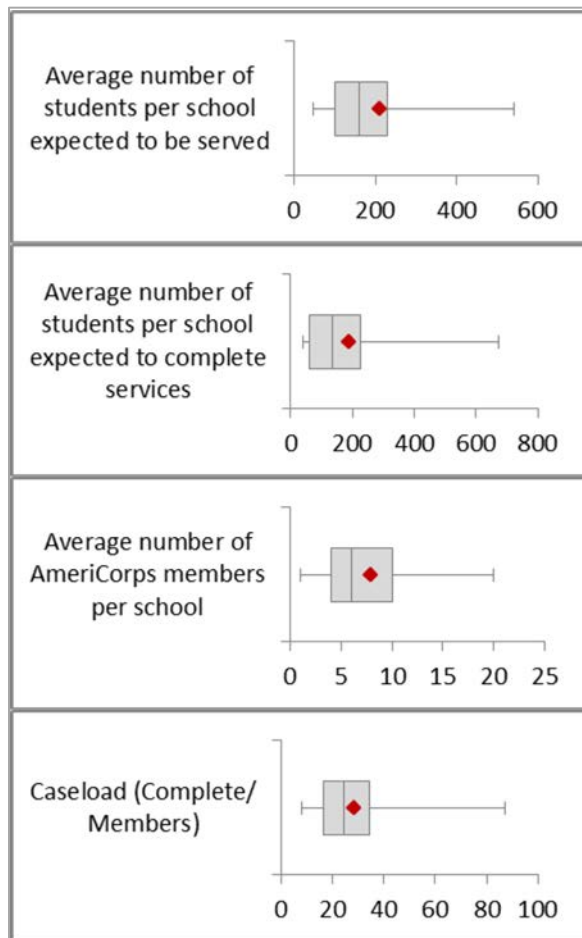
SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q1 ("Did your organization's relationship with the school(s) your grant is operating in exist before you established a partnership agreement for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program?")

Grantee Survey Q1a ("If yes, how long has your organization been collaborating with the school(s)?")

The large majority of grantees (11 of 13) and school leaders (74 percent) were aware of which specific students were served by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members (see Appendix Exhibit A-62). The number of students expected to be served and to complete services varied markedly by grantee, though the proportion of students expected to complete services was often high, sometimes over 100 percent (as occurred when grantees served more students than had been expected) (see Exhibit III-6 and Appendix Exhibit A-7). On average, grantees had 28 students receiving services for every AmeriCorps member.

⁴² Because there are only 13 grantees, results from the grantee surveys are presented in absolute numbers instead of percentages.

Exhibit III-6: Target Number of Students Expected to be Served by School Turnaround AmeriCorps



NOTES: (N=13, Missing=0)

In this box-and-whisker plot, minimum and maximum values are represented by gray-capped lines; first quartile, median, and third quartile are demarcated by gray rectangles, and mean is noted with red diamonds. See Appendix Exhibit A-7 for a tabular presentation of these data.

Exhibit reads: The minimum number of students per school expected to be served across all 13 grantees was 46, while the maximum was 540. The median number of students per school expected to be served was 160, while the mean was 210.

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q5 (“Please review the list below to confirm the schools to which your organization assigned School Turnaround AmeriCorps members. Fill in the number of members who serve at each school during 2014–15, and the targeted number of students that you expect to serve and complete the program this school year. If you don’t know, please write in ‘DK.’”)

According to the grantees, the frequency of student progress meetings between School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and school staff varied, sometimes by school within grantee (see Exhibit III-7). Grantees reported that at most schools, members met with school staff to review student progress on a monthly or more frequent basis.

Exhibit III-7: Frequency of Student Progress Meetings between School Turnaround AmeriCorps Members and School Staff

Occurrences	n
More than twice per month	5
Once per month	3
Once per year	1
Very different from school to school	3

NOTES: One grantee did not know how often School Turnaround AmeriCorps members met with school staff to discuss student progress data, and therefore that grantee’s response is not shown. (N=12, Missing=0)

Exhibit reads: Five of 13 grantees indicated that meetings between School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and school staff were held more than twice per month. Three grantees indicated that it frequency varied from school to school.

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q7 (“On average, how often do the School Turnaround AmeriCorps members meet with school staff to discuss data on the progress of all students? Please select the option that is closest to your members’ experience.”)

Of the 13 grantees, the large majority characterized their interactions with schools as highly communicative, with regular communication and collaboration; although a few grantees noted that their interactions varied across schools (see Exhibit III-8). For example, most grantees reported frequent communication between their organizations and schools, and that they could easily reach school personnel (11 and 10 strongly agreed or agreed, respectively), while the remainder indicated that such communication varied across schools. This finding corroborates the positive satisfaction levels of communication and collaboration reported by school leaders (School Turnaround AmeriCorps National Evaluation: Interim Report, June 2015, Exhibit 3-11).

Exhibit III-8: Grantee Opinions about Communication and Collaboration with Partner Schools

Statement	Strongly Agree (n)	Agree (N)	Total (N)	Very Different by School (n)
There is frequent communication between my organization and the school(s) (e.g., visits to each other’s offices, meetings, written information and telephone communications)	8	3	11	2
It is easy for me to get in touch with someone from the school(s)	8	2	10	3
The school(s) responds, if needed, when I make contact	7	4	11	2
The school(s) is (are) committed to making our collaboration a success	7	3	10	3
The school(s) has (have) the ability to accomplish set goals	6	5	11	2
The school(s) puts forth effort to maintain relationship(s) with my organization	6	3	9	4

NOTES: (N=13, Missing=0)

Exhibit reads: Eleven of 13 grantees strongly agree or agree that "There is frequent communication between my organization and the school(s)." Two grantees believed that this varied greatly from school to school. SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q12 (“Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement about your organization’s collaboration with your school partner(s) for each statement listed below. Please try to respond in reference to the typical school, if you work with more than one.”)

The importance of partnerships was roundly emphasized. The majority of programs characterized relationship building and effective collaboration and communication activities as essential, whether

between teachers and program staff (12 programs), district and grantee staff (11 programs), or between schools and grantees (8 programs). The strategies used included participating in planning meetings during the summer months, communicating frequently by email and telephone during the school year, participating in district- or school-based meetings, participating in biweekly meetings for teachers and members to discuss students' academic progress, and scheduling site visits by the program coordinator or director to maintain relationships and address concerns. At the school level, support from principals and on-site coordinators was vital to programs' successful implementation.

Collaboration with School Leaders

"... We discussed with several different superintendents and principals who would be interested in having this program, who this program could best serve ... and after we went out to the schools and looked at which counties could best be served by this and the ones that met the criteria, those were the two we chose to go with that we thought we could make the biggest impact."

- Grantee pre-interview response

The most commonly reported challenges were due to insufficient coordination and a lack of engagement in these same aspects, while a few programs experienced challenges in balancing district- and school-level needs. For example, programs noted that conveying information to the district did not necessarily result in that information being relayed to schools, school leaders, and teachers, which created tensions for program administration. Strategies grantees used to address this tension include efforts reported by two programs to work more closely with district partners and begin conversations earlier in the next school year to communicate information about the program structure and understand their resource needs.

A related challenge was balancing school and district needs in deciding which schools would receive School Turnaround AmeriCorps members when the district and its schools disagreed about which schools should receive member placements. One member, for example, noted that the school principal did not want School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in the building, saying "We sat down in a meeting with my supervisors, and the assistant principal, and the principal, and they were polite, and friendly, but the general message was that, 'We did not ask for you to be here,' this was a program that was sort of pushed upon them." One strategy two programs reported using for resolving conflicts was to engage principals in resolving disputes that arose in schools, which appeared to reduce distrust between teachers and members.

Partnership Agreements

In the Notice of Funding Opportunity, CNCS required grantees to establish written partnership agreements that "articulate the alignment between the local School Turnaround AmeriCorps program design and school and LEA turnaround plans, as well as the parties' plan for ongoing collaboration" (Corporation for National and Community Service, Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13, p.

31). Twelve of 13 programs provided written partnership agreements to the research team for analysis.

Most grantees (9 out of 12) used a single partnership agreement with standard language for all school partners, including one grantee that included all of its school partners in a single partnership agreement.⁴³ Three grantees customized agreements to reflect specific school goals, member responsibilities, curricula, and for one program, differences in how its various offices support their

Member Role Confusion

"Many of our members indicated that not everyone in the school understood the role of the AmeriCorps members and the School Turnaround program. It took some time for the members to build relationships with and educate other staff members who were not directly supervising them, including teachers."

-Grantee end-of-year progress report

⁴³ This includes one grantee that only works with one school.

members. Two of these programs that tailor partnership agreements are run by experienced grantees operating across multiple districts, which may mean it is helpful to acknowledge differences between sites more formally.

CNCS guidance further described several elements of strong partnerships that grantees should pursue with their school partners: **managing collaboratively, sharing data, sharing resources, and articulating specific roles and responsibilities**. The majority of grantees explicitly described their strategies for addressing these elements in their partnership agreements with schools. The level of detail and length of partnership agreements varied from a single page outlining the principles of partnership to 15- to 20-page documents with specific elements called out in considerable detail (e.g., a separate data use agreement). Eleven of 12 agreements described how the programs were to be managed collaboratively, and 10 of 12 described strategies for sharing data, sharing resources, and defining roles and responsibilities (not necessarily the same 10 grantees described each of those components). Five agreements specifically articulated a theory of change in the document.

Few grantees updated their partnership agreements; those who made changes did so based on revisions of responsibilities or resource allocations following annual program review. Generally, grantees perceived partnership agreements as documents that outlined partners' roles and responsibilities, not as tools for program implementation. Five grantees specifically described the agreement as recourse if and when a partner was not meeting its obligations. These same five grantees also reported they had very strong collaborations with their school partners and had not "needed to" refer back to the partnership agreements.

Grant Administration and Program Operations

Representatives from each of the 13 grantee organizations were interviewed in fall 2014 ("pre-interviews") and again in spring 2015 ("post-interviews"). Their responses from both periods suggest that grantees faced an initial learning curve with the new program but that start-up challenges abated. By the end of the second year of the grant (in post-interviews), grantees were discussing topics such as ongoing communication and relationship-building needs, challenges posed by external circumstances, and changes to implementation—all of which reflect a maturation in program implementation.

Twelve programs were successful in engaging districts, school leaders, and/or teachers by building relationships and communication channels that fostered local buy-in and collaboration between members and schools. About half of the programs (six) indicated that they had tailored their approach in schools by monitoring the effectiveness of their strategies in meeting student needs. Eight programs also experienced implementation challenges related to insufficient coordination, which contributed to a lack of buy-in from districts and schools; issues related to caseload management or matching members to students; and managing and tracking program data.

Launching and Operating a New Program

Eleven programs reported one or more start-up issues that adversely affected their ability to operate the program in its first year. Start-up issues were most prevalent among programs without prior AmeriCorps experience. These issues, discussed in grantee interviews and focus groups, include late starts (eight programs, five of which were new) due to having limited time to recruit, train, and place members in schools between award notification and the beginning of the school year. Two grantees in focus groups explained that the funding cycle made it difficult to recruit and effectively train members before the school year started—though many grantee staff (six) discussed wishing they could have engaged members earlier for more training. One grantee also noted how difficult it was to "put an effective

program together” without the “clashing of the bureaucracy at the beginning,” specifically noting the challenge posed by getting district buy-in.

Other start-up issues reported were technical difficulties with enrolling or exiting members and/or tracking requirements in eGrants (five programs, four of which were new); and misunderstanding of program requirements (three programs, two of which were new). A majority of programs reported specific issues related to managing resources, both financial and other resources, such as finding appropriate space to house members in schools (or decreasing the number of members if insufficient space was available), or obtaining access to technology. One program had to reduce the number of members assigned to one school that had need for and interest in members because of space constraints at the school.

Two examples of actions taken by programs to overcome start-up issues are (1) beginning recruitment for the following school year as early as January and (2) offering peer-to-peer learning between programs having issues with obtaining matching funds and programs reporting success with leveraging additional resources. With

program start-up challenges largely resolved, grantees’ ongoing challenges with operating School Turnaround AmeriCorps appeared to be the timing of recruiting members, deepening relationships with districts and schools, responding to school-level changes, and data analysis (see next section).

In their post-interviews, two new grantees continued to express frustration with not having as much peer-to-peer contact and mentoring as they felt would have been helpful. Specifically, one grantee suggested that new grantees be paired with experienced grantees to help them understand how to set realistic program goals, while another grantee noted that the grantee conference calls were too formal for grantees to comfortably disclose their errors and meaningfully share lessons learned.

Use of Data to Manage and Monitor Programs for Continuous Improvement

Data use is an integral element in many schools’ turnaround efforts, including efforts to monitor program performance and adjust activities accordingly; six principals described their respective school or district as “data-driven” or motivated by a “culture of data.” Inside the school, school staff use data to **track student performance and tailor instruction**. Outside the school, school staff members use data to report to partners or the state to **keep the school accountable**. These six principals’ data sources included data on students’ attendance and behavior, on state and interim assessments, on outcomes for the schools’ alumni, on parental engagement, and on the transition to Common Core standards.

AmeriCorps members reported (17 of 19 members) that they routinely handled data at host schools, worked alongside teachers and administration to help manage data responsibilities, and/or participated in discussions with teachers about student performance based on interim assessment data or student grades. In three schools, on-site coordinators, supervisors, and liaisons played a substantial role in School Turnaround AmeriCorps data collection; one of these on-site coordinators “100 percent ran the data analysis” for the school’s turnaround program, which influenced how the school worked with its members.

About half of programs (6 of 13) reported on the *beneficial role of data* for monitoring the effectiveness of their strategies and tailoring their efforts to better meet student needs. Many programs and a large

Start-Up Issues

“[O]ne school turnaround site ... changed leadership during the summer. New leadership could not commit to hosting the number of members they had agreed to with the prior leadership. The program worked to raise funds to offset the cost of the school to host additional members, but they were unable to raise all the necessary funds in the short period of time.”

-Grantee end-of-year progress report

majority of interviewed members described members working with teachers to interpret assessment data to improve targeted services. One program replicated an especially effective data strategy at multiple schools where it operates School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs. Biweekly “early warning indicator” meetings between members and students identified a focus list of students to target more intensively. The result was a nearly 70 percent increase in students’ scores, who were often several grade levels behind when they were identified for additional help.

Grantees’ access to and use of data depended upon a positive relationships with host schools, both to track whether the programs were **meeting their performance measures** and to help members evaluate and **effectively target their interventions in real time**. Data-sharing agreements proved helpful in outlining how grantees could access data, as were such collaborative structures as training sessions and regular meetings between members and teachers about student data—a strategy specifically mentioned by two grantees and almost all interviewed members.

The majority of grantees and a small number of members reported a number of **challenges with data**. Grantees experienced challenges related primarily to data accessibility and capacity to analyze the volume of data. When schools or districts were unwilling to share their data, usually out of concern for student privacy, it was extremely problematic for the grantee. Keeping up with data entry and other responsibilities was described as challenging for three members (all affiliated with the same program) who reported being overwhelmed by the volume of data and conflicted by the time-consuming work of data entry, which one member characterized as entering information already in one system into another. She explained that the data were used to support grant applications and other purposes but that entering the data affected her capacity to spend time with her students.

Data Issues Due to Staff Capacity

“To be honest with you, we only have two staff members. It’s me and we have an assistant director and we run two AmeriCorps programs ... Something that would be really helpful would be more support around—training us on how, why this data—and giving us access to people who might be able to help us analyze the data. That’s really cumbersome. It’s overwhelming. It’s a lot of data ... I’m mostly looking at the impact data [has] as far as the attendance, disciplinary issues, all that because I have to report on performance measures. But I really want to take all this stuff that I have on which interventions our members are using and compare it to which is better ... But I simply just don’t have the resources to do that. It’s a capacity issue. Yeah, we definitely have a capacity issue.”

-Grantee interview

The most common data issue grantees faced was having limited capacity and/or resources to process, analyze, and interpret data (four programs) (see textbox for an example); two grantees specifically noted that they struggled to turn data into thoughtful presentations of student success, as noteworthy student successes got lost in number-crunching and quantitative reports. Three grantees reported a related challenge, due to the use of proficiency levels that mask students’ improvement *within* the category of “Far Below Basic”; even a full grade level improvement would not register as a change in performance level. A small number of grantees also reported challenges arising from data entry errors (three programs) and missing data (e.g., student activity participation in interventions is not systematically recorded) (two programs).

Three programs reported implementing changes to data management and use to address such challenges. One program established a corrective action plan to align data tracking to the grading period, which was more meaningful than a semester system. Another program hired a staff member with expertise in data monitoring and analysis, and a third program focused on empowering members to collect and analyze data, among their other responsibilities.

Effects of School Changes on Program Implementation

Grantees' post-interviews indicate that grantees were settling into routines and working to create stronger, more efficient programming. Several grantees (three) described how their programs were maturing; one noted that changes were more noticeable at the beginning than the end of the year. This grantee emphasized the importance of continuing to build a strong relationship with districts and schools to effectively navigate challenges as they arise. As the program and the partnership matured, the district and schools were beginning to support the grantee in program success and the grantee was beginning to support the schools' turnaround goals (see textbox).

Yet change is constant in turnaround schools, and the turnover in both principals and teachers meant that grantees were in some cases continually reintroducing their programs. While turnover is a feature of some turnaround models, it imposed a challenge for grantees that had to establish relationships with new personnel, including both principals and teachers who might have been unfamiliar with School Turnaround AmeriCorps and/or less supportive of the program goals than their predecessors.

Three grantees noted (in post-interviews) that they had begun to think about next steps for their schools after grant funding ends, whether because principals had already asked questions, or because program staff were anticipating how best to transfer responsibilities from members to school staff and/or volunteers.

Member Recruitment, Matching, Retention, and Management

Member Recruitment and Retention

Finding the right individuals to serve as members was an important element of School Turnaround AmeriCorps program implementation; however, the majority (11 of 13) of programs reported challenges with recruitment and/or retention. Grantees generally perceived that they could improve their retention by improving their screening, recruitment, and training strategies, and a majority of grantees (10 of 13) reported adopting some changes regarding recruitment from year to year. Several programs reported that they offered members specific and presumably desirable responsibilities and positions in an effort to help retain qualified candidates, and several had also developed recruitment screening and communication strategies customized to their local program needs. Two noted that they planned to revisit their screening processes to emphasize elements that might improve their recruitment efforts, including highlighting the required length of service and ensuring that candidates' reading and math skills are strong enough for them to be effective tutors. Other strategies grantees used for improving retention included providing members with detailed financial compensation information

Collaboration with School Leaders

"I think that making it a priority to work with these schools that have a particular status has been a good learning curve, I think, for us, to partner with other [school districts] ...[it's] been important to have a strong partner from the district who can help us navigate that. Especially if their [turnaround] statuses do change, or you hear rumbling about a particular school's potentially closing, or changing, or changing the ages they work with. It's just really important for us to have that solid partner at this level, who can help us navigate that. It's just that over time, with any partners, when you grow more comfortable, you're able to, I think, rely on each other in new ways that you can't initially."

-Grantee post-interview

Coordinating AmeriCorps Resources

"We have all learned that it is critical that the school, AmeriCorps members, and Program Director be directly involved in the collaborative. Recruitment, retention, and member management suffered due to the lack of coordination between the District, Program Director and School Sites."

-Grantee pre-interview

up front; providing budget management trainings, with realistic sample budgets to convey constraints; and providing details on the scope of member responsibilities and obligations, including sample schedules to convey the level of commitment based on realistic caseload levels. Grantees also tried structuring positions to create as many member-preferred opportunities as possible—such as full-time rather than part-time positions, roles with both tutoring and non-tutoring responsibilities—and offering members opportunities to develop their own skills and take on greater responsibilities in their respective school and program contexts.

Member Training and Professional Development

Once selected for service, all members received training that included typical AmeriCorps orientation and training activities. Few programs (three) reported providing specialized training on topics such as behavioral coaching training (e.g., Real Time Coaching and Respect 360) and student data management. Data from principals and several members (in focus groups) offer suggestions for improvement, including having training for members address a broader range of topics than had occurred to date. Suggested topics were customizing training to specific school contexts, establishing appropriate professional boundaries for interactions with students, developing sensitivity to cultural and economic differences, learning strategies for managing student behavior issues, and describing both “best and worst case” scenarios to prepare members more realistically for the experiences they are likely to face.

Members offered various suggestions for improving their training, including using program alumni to speak with and train new members, individualizing training to specifically fit the program and school, incorporating behavior management techniques in trainings, and training members with a more realistic version of their likely work in mind and with a heavier focus on the day-to-day challenges they are likely to face. Another specific suggestion for content is de-escalation techniques for working with student behavior problems.

Some principals discussed providing school-specific trainings to increase members’ capacity to support permanent school staff more effectively. These school-based trainings for members appeared to be one method schools could use to strengthen their communication and coordination with the grantee offices. The training and professional development members continued to receive once placed in the schools was characterized as having mixed value from some focus group members’ perspectives. These focus group members said that the in-school ongoing training was a double-edged sword because it came with confusion and sometimes tension about members’ roles and responsibilities, as discussed further in the section on challenges later in the report.

Insufficient Member Training

“The training I got wasn’t bad but it wasn’t very accurate”

-Member focus group

Member Management and Supervision

Programs described using different reporting and supervisory structures to oversee members in their placements, summarized in Exhibit III-9; whether they were called site supervisors, program or project director, or site coordinator (5, 4, and 3 programs, respectively), these supervisory structures were characterized as useful—if not essential—by various stakeholders. Ten (of 12) partnership agreements specify that each partner school is responsible for appointing a primary school-based liaison or coordinator to help organize and assist program members. A majority of principals interviewed (15 of 25) reported that they use on-site coordinators, usually school staff members, typically from the attendance, guidance, or administrative offices, to manage AmeriCorps members’ work and program-school communication.

Exhibit III-9: On-Site Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Site Supervisor (5 programs)	Handles on-site issues as they arise; serves as first point of contact for AmeriCorps team; serves as liaison between teachers and members; updates grantees on program's progress; daily activity and attendance monitoring for members; matches students and members; manages logistics (members' caseloads and schedules); acts as professional mentor and resource to members; advocates to the school for members; tries to integrate members into the school community. These responsibilities may involve a teacher within the school or professionals to identify struggling students more easily.
Program/Project Director (4 programs)	Meets monthly with members, provides member feedback; mentors members to meet professional goals; maintains presence in the schools; manages caseload, logistics, recruitment and selection, retention; weekly contact with schools, program management.
Site Coordinator (3 programs)	Provides on-site support for members and school staff; provides wraparound services; oversees parental involvement; oversees day-to-day program operations; ensures members are meeting student needs; provides presence/support/supervision in absence of the program director. These responsibilities enable more frequent check-ins with members and teachers, allow for presence at multiple campuses, assistance with recruitment and retention, and supervision in absence of the program director

Across grantee, principal, and member perspectives, there was agreement about the benefits of having an on-site coordinator to manage members' work and act as a liaison between the school and grantee. Such supervisors (especially on site) were described as "the glue that helps members work through issues and gives them the support they need" in schools. One principal emphasized that her site coordinator provided "... the most bang for her buck," and helped ameliorate challenges arising from members' immaturity, which led another principal to express interest in the site coordinator position, as she too found that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members required higher levels of supervision and monitoring than she had expected. Members were also overwhelmingly positive about the support they received from their coordinators.

Those grantees who relied upon on-site supervisors adjusted their roles throughout the year. One grantee explained that they had already hired their coordinators for 2015–16 as of spring 2015, so that they would be available to plan, prepare, and forge connections during the summer months. Two grantees reported difficulties with their on-site coordinators. One program using teachers as site supervisors lost them due to teacher turnover in the schools. Another grantee that operates across multiple schools explained that it was difficult to coordinate the schedules of guidance counselors who served as coordinators to have a full program meeting.

Perceived Effectiveness of Implementation Strategies

The school leader and school staff surveys explored communication and collaboration between school staff and School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, a topic not covered by the grantee survey. Findings from these survey items were first reported in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps National Evaluation Interim Report and are reproduced here for ease of reference.

Coordination Improving Year-over-Year

"The school is working very closely with the site coordinator for [School Turnaround] AmeriCorps in setting schedules, assigning responsibilities to the AmeriCorps [members] and also for training and doing more training using our teachers and our teachers are working more closely with the AmeriCorps [members] in terms of the organization within the school as opposed to last year it was all driven through AmeriCorps. It's a much more coordinated effort and there's a higher degree of collaboration."

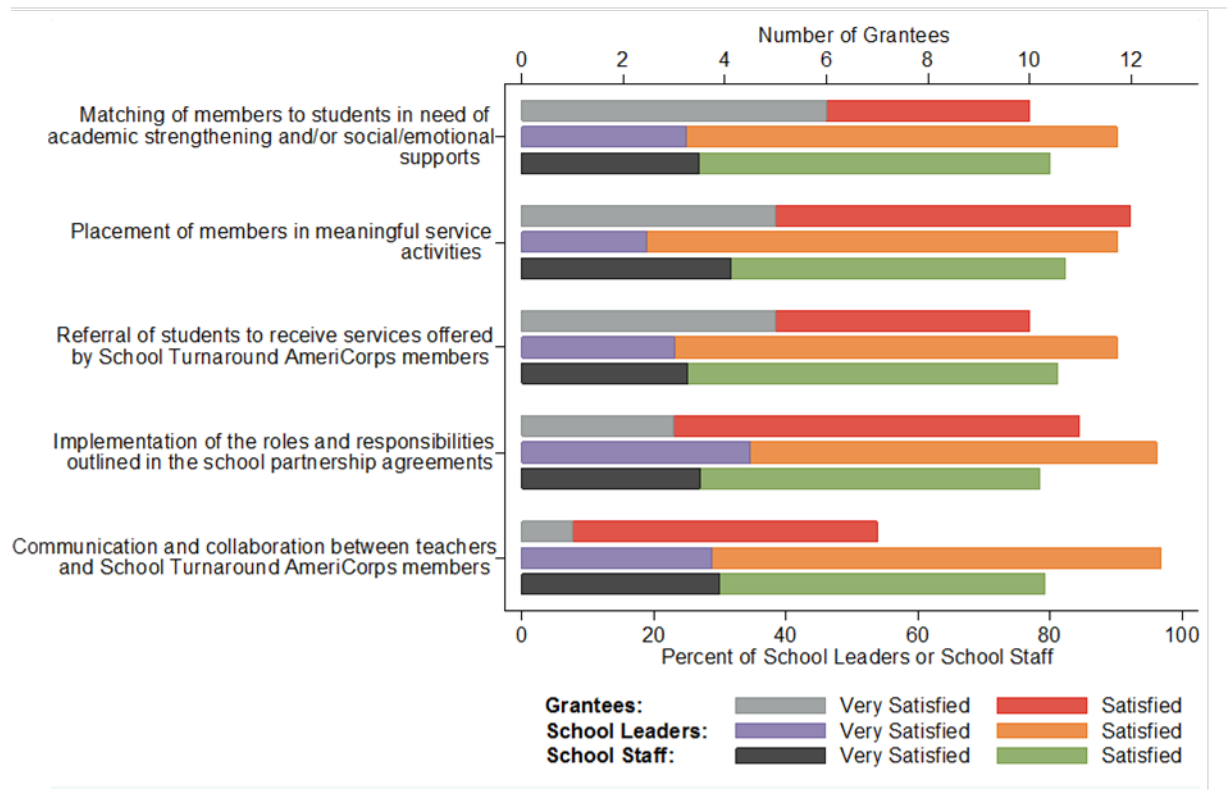
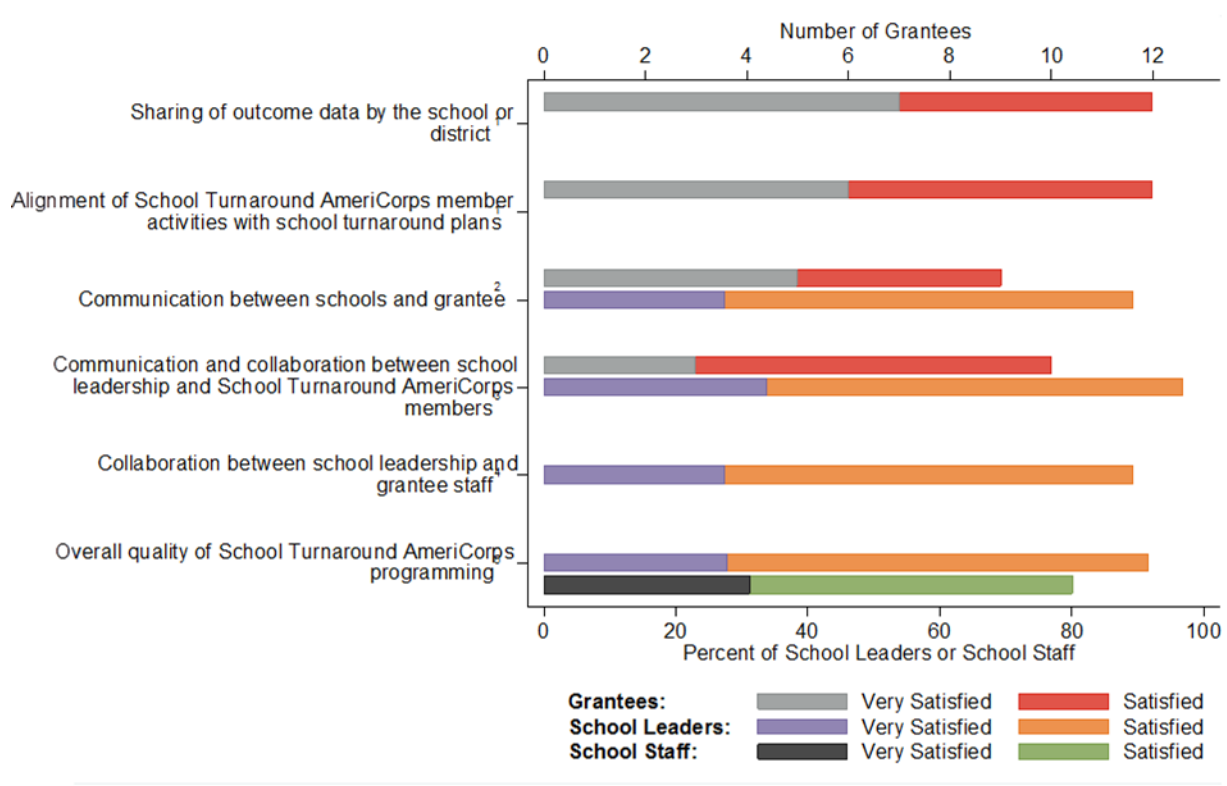
- Principal interview

The majority of school leaders strongly agreed or agreed that the school communicates about school turnaround efforts in general, teachers are supportive of the AmeriCorps program, and that the school uses several means to integrate and communicate with members (see Appendix Exhibit A-65).

School staff perceptions were generally similar to those of school leaders, both about teachers' support of the AmeriCorps program and in terms of the specific means by which the schools integrate and communicate with AmeriCorps members; for all items, at least three-quarters of staff strongly agreed or agreed. School staff responses were moderately less positive than those of school leaders (see Appendix Exhibit A-66).

The majority of all stakeholders (grantees, school leaders, and staff) reported being very satisfied or satisfied with all elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps program operations (see Exhibit III-10). Note that the exhibit has two panels; the first panel displays results for questions asked of only one or two stakeholder groups whereas the second panel displays results for all three. Generally, grantees indicated being very satisfied with school-level communication and collaboration (sharing data, alignment with school turnaround plans, referral of students, and matching and placement of members); they indicated they were satisfied with member communication and collaboration within schools and implementation of roles and responsibilities outlined in partnership agreements.

Exhibit III-10: Grantee, School Leader, and School Staff Satisfaction with Elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program Operations (2014–15)



NOTES: Number of grantees who did not know ranged from 0–1. Number of grantees who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0–2. (N=13, Missing=0)

Number of school leaders who indicated this question was not applicable ranged from 0–3. (N=38, Missing=0–1)
 School staff responses limited to school staff who worked with at least one student in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Number of school staff who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 7–17. (N=155, Missing=2–5)

¹ Question asked of grantees only.

² Question asked of grantees and school leaders only.

³ Question asked of school leaders only.

⁴ Question asked of grantees and school leaders only. In the school leader survey, this row was labeled "communication between school leadership and grantee staff"

⁵ Question asked of school leaders and school staff only.

Exhibit reads: Twelve of 13 grantees are very satisfied or satisfied with the "sharing of outcome data by the school/district." This item was not asked on the school leader or school staff surveys.

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q14 ("For this school year, please indicate how satisfied you are with each of the statements below")

School Leader Survey Q16, Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q18 ("For this school year (2014–15), please indicate your level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with each of the elements listed below. Mark one response in each row.")

The large majority of grantees and school leaders indicated that **all** seven elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs listed in Exhibit III-11 were very important or important. Both the grantees and school leaders characterized orientation and training of AmeriCorps members before they serve, supervisory structure to ensure fidelity of program implementation, recruitment process that identifies members with skills corresponding to program objectives, and comprehensive trainings of members as very important or important.

Exhibit III-11: Grantee and School Leader Perceptions of Important Elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Implementation (2014-2015)

Element	Grantees			School Leaders		
	Very Important	Important	Total	Very Important	Important	Total
	n	n	n	(%)	(%)	(%)
Orientation and training of AmeriCorps members before they serve at the school	12	1	13	65	33	98
Supervisory structure to ensure fidelity of program implementation ^a	10	2	12	67	33	100
Recruitment and selection process that identifies members with skills that correspond with the program objectives ^b	9	4	13	74	26	100
Comprehensive trainings of AmeriCorps members and program support staff during their year(s) of service	8	5	13	57	41	98
Defined framework (e.g., RTI) to guide instructional choices and allow for the assessment of program effectiveness	6	5	11	56	44	100
Research-based interventions to improve desired student-level outcomes ^c	4	4	8	64	32	96
Alignment of AmeriCorps activities to the strategies outlined in the school's turnaround plan ^d	N/A	N/A	N/A	69	29	98

NOTES: Grantee (N=13, Missing=0–1)

School Leader (N=38, Missing=0–1)

The wording of several elements differed across the Grantee and School Leader surveys:

^a Grantee: "Multi-layered supervisory structure to ensure fidelity of program implementation"

School Leader: "Clearly defined supervisory structure to ensure fidelity of program implementation"

^b Grantee: "Recruitment and selection process that effectively identifies members with characteristics/skills that correspond with the program objectives"

School Leader: "AmeriCorps member recruitment and selection process that identifies and selects members with skills aligned with the program's objectives"

^c Grantee: "Limited set of highly scripted interventions that have been shown to be effective (i.e., research based) in achieving desired student-level outcomes"

School Leader: "Highly defined set of research-based interventions to improve desired student-level outcomes"

^d This element only appeared in the School Leader survey.

Exhibit reads: All 13 grantees and 98 percent of school leaders perceived that "Orientation and training of AmeriCorps members before they serve at the school" is very important or important.

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q16 ("How important are the following characteristics to successfully implementing your School Turnaround AmeriCorps program at a typical school?")

School Leader Survey Q9 ("How important are the following to the successful implementation of School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in your school(s)?")

Exhibit III-12: School Improvement Grant Strategy Most Influenced by School Turnaround AmeriCorps (2014-2015)

School Improvement Strategy (SIG)	Rank of Influence	
	Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)	Percent Ranked
Academic achievement	1.8 (0.4)	90
School culture and environment	2.5 (0.3)	85
Increased learning time	2.7 (0.5)	91
Family and community engagement	3.6 (0.3)	91
Graduation rates	4.2 (0.3)	59
College enrollment rates	4.7 (0.5)	69

NOTES: See Appendix Exhibit A-35.

Ranks range from 1–6, with 1 being the most important; not all responses were given a ranking.

Seven respondents (23 percent) indicated that this question was not applicable. (N=31, Missing=3)

Table rows are sorted in ascending order by the mean ranking of school leaders.

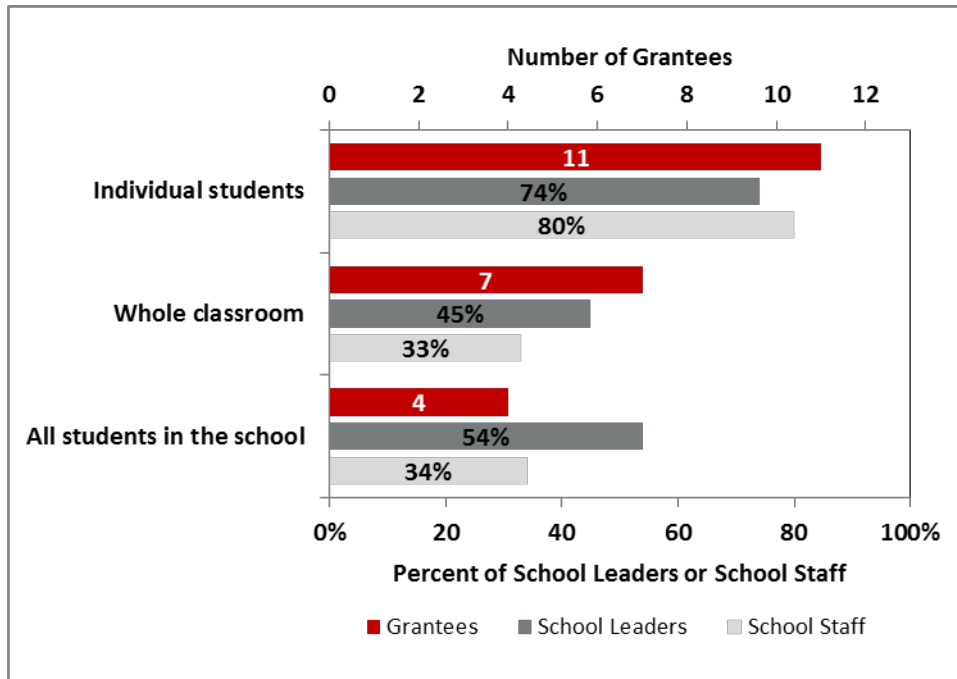
Exhibit reads: School leaders ranked "academic achievement" as the most important school improvement strategy, with a mean ranking of 1.8 on a 6-point scale; 90 percent of school leaders ranked this particular outcome.

SOURCE: School Leader Survey Q19 ("Which School Improvement Grant (SIG) strategies are influenced the most by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps members this school year?")

Synthesis and Comparisons of Stakeholder Views of Program Implementation

Grantees were generally in agreement with school leaders and school staff about how students receive services from School Turnaround AmeriCorps members. A majority of all stakeholders reported that AmeriCorps members provided direct services to individual students. A slight majority of grantees (7 of 13) reported that whole classrooms participated in direct service, whereas smaller proportions of school leaders and staff did so (45 and 33 percent, respectively) (see Exhibit III-13). Note, however, that members could provide services at all three levels, and that these categories of direct service provision are not mutually exclusive.

Exhibit III-13: How Students Received School Turnaround AmeriCorps Direct Services (2014–15)



NOTES: Grantee (N=13, Missing=0)

School Leaders (N=38, Missing=0)

Twenty-three school staff did not know the target unit of service of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programming. (N=132, Missing=0)

Percentages do not sum to 100 because multiple responses were permitted.

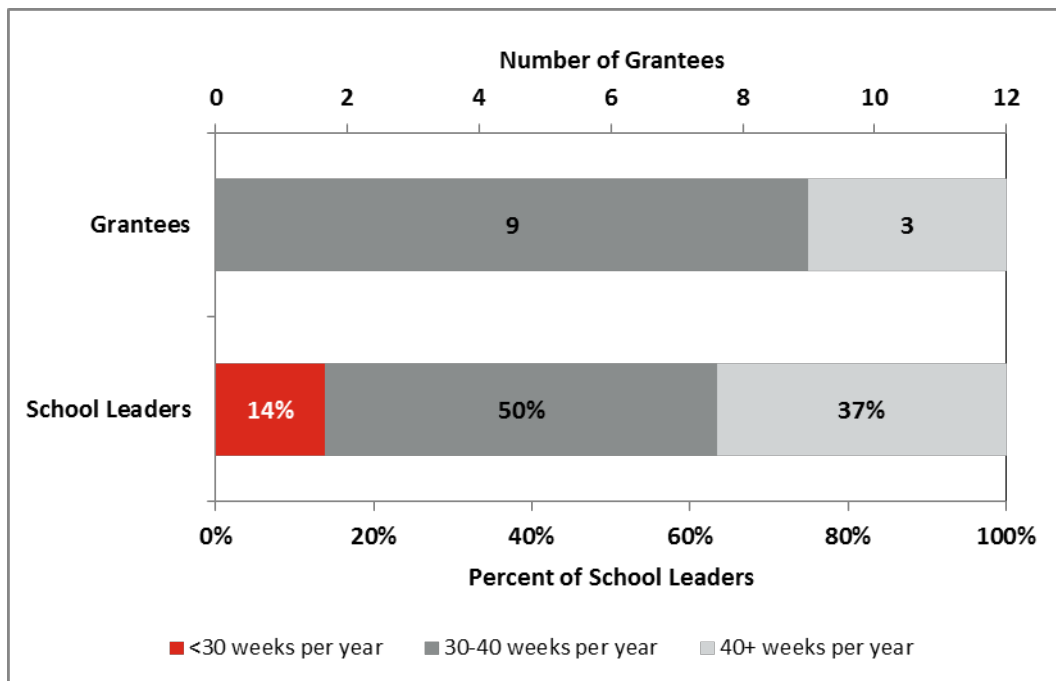
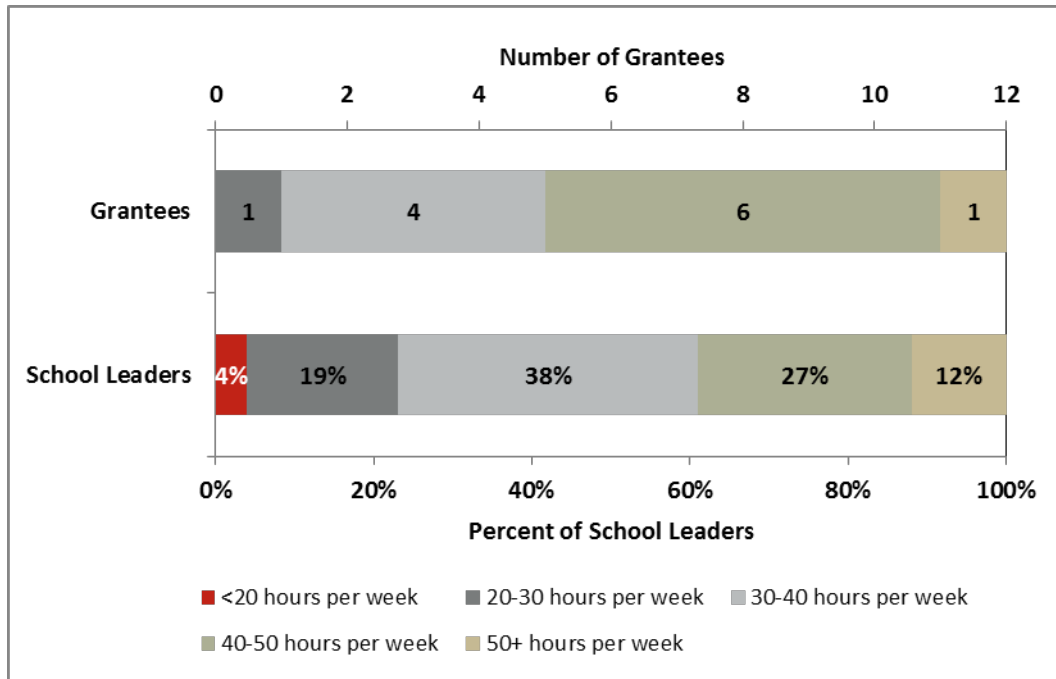
Exhibit reads: Eleven of 13 grantees, 74 percent of school leaders and 80 percent of school staff reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members served individual students.

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q2 (“To the best of your knowledge, did School Turnaround AmeriCorps members provide direct services to individual students, to the whole classroom, or to all students in the school during the 2014-15 school year?”)

School Leader Survey Q6, Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q9 (“To the best of your knowledge, to whom do School Turnaround AmeriCorps members provide direct services this school year? Check all that apply.”)

Turning now to members’ workload, a large majority of AmeriCorps members generally served at least 30 hours a week, based on responses from grantees and school leaders. A majority of grantees (7 of 11) reported that AmeriCorps members spent 40 or more hours a week in the school; a smaller proportion (39 percent) of school leaders did so. According to grantees (and school leaders), the large majority of members served for 30 or more weeks during the school year, roughly corresponding to the average duration of a school year. A higher proportion of grantees than school leaders reported that AmeriCorps members served 30–40 weeks per year (see Exhibit III-14).

Exhibit III-14: Average Hours per Week and Weeks per Year Members Served in School (2014–15)



NOTES: One grantee reported an impossibly high number of hours per week, so the grantee’s response to hours per week and weeks per year was set to missing. (N=13, Missing=1)

School Leader (N=38, Missing=0)

Exhibit reads: Zero of 12 grantees report that members serve less than 20 hours per week and less than 30 weeks per year on average. Four percent of school leaders report that members serve less than 20 hours per week on average, and 14 percent of school leaders report that members serve less than 30 weeks per year on average.

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q6 (“Please fill in the following information on the characteristics of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programming at each school served by your organization this school year (2014–15). If you don’t know, please write in ‘DK.’”)

School Leader Survey Q5_3 (“On average, how many hours per week does each of these AmeriCorps members serve this school year (2014–15)?”)

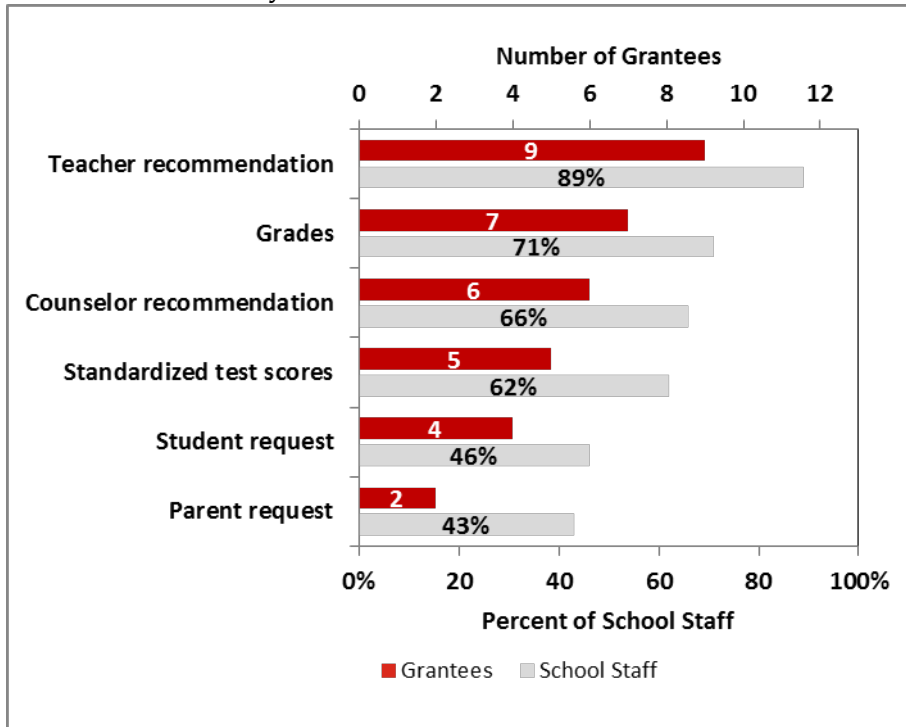
School Leader Survey Q5_4 (“On average, how many weeks do these AmeriCorps members spend in your school this school year (2014–15)?”)

Staff familiarity with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and knowledge about the number of students served varied. Over a quarter of staff respondents were unfamiliar with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, and almost a third were unaware of how many of their own students were served by the program. However, staff knowledgeable of the program indicated that it served considerable proportions of their students: nearly two-thirds of respondents knowledgeable of the program noted that at least 25 percent of their students were served by AmeriCorps (see Appendix Exhibit A-64). About 40 percent of respondents noted that 75 percent or more of their students were served by AmeriCorps.

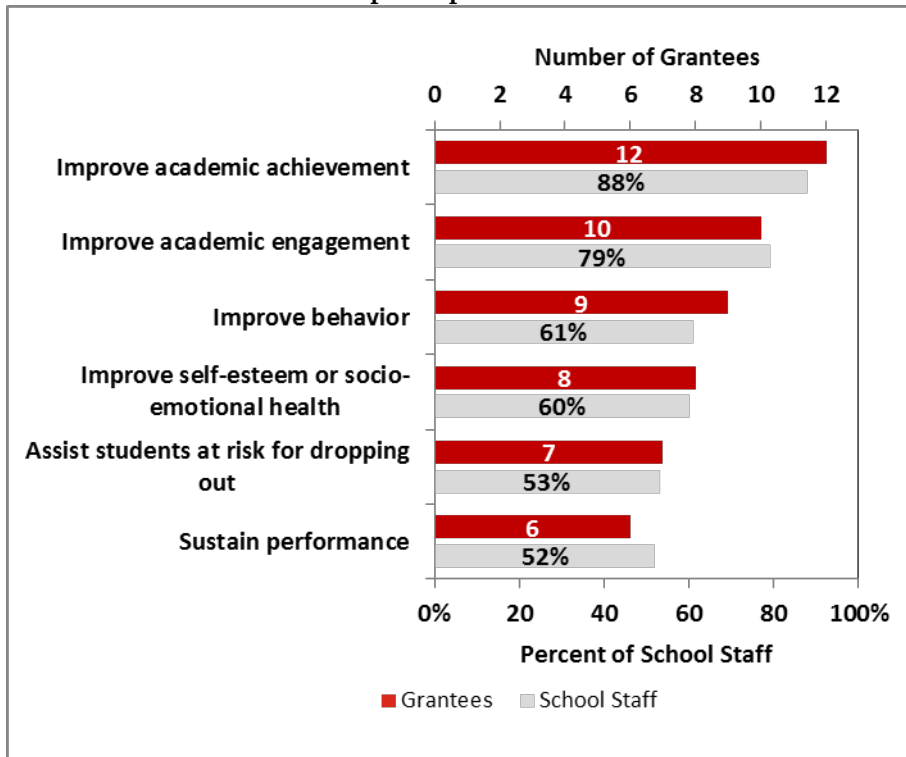
Grantees and school staff generally concurred about the specific mechanisms most often used to identify students for AmeriCorps services as well as the reasons students were identified to participate (see Exhibit III-15). Teacher recommendations were the most important mechanism, followed by grades and counselor recommendation. Grantees and school staff also concurred that improving academic achievement and engagement were the most common reasons students are identified to participate in the program.

Exhibit III-15: Mechanisms to Identify and Reason Students Identified to Participate in School Turnaround AmeriCorps Activities (2014–15)

Mechanism to identify students



Reason students identified to participate



NOTES: Grantees (N=13, Missing=0)

Fifty-one school staff did not know which mechanisms were most frequently used. (N=104, Missing=3)

Forty-one school staff did not know the reasons students were identified. (N=114, Missing=1)

Exhibit reads: Nine of 13 grantees and 89 percent of school staff chose "teacher recommendation" as a mechanism to identify students for participation in School Turnaround AmeriCorps. Twelve of 13 grantees and 88 percent of school staff indicated that students were identified to participate to "improve academic achievement."

SOURCE: Grantee Survey Q8 ("To the best of your knowledge, which mechanisms did the school(s) use to identify students to participate in activities led by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members?")

Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q7 ("To the best of your knowledge, which of the following mechanisms are most frequently used in your school to identify students for activities led by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members?")

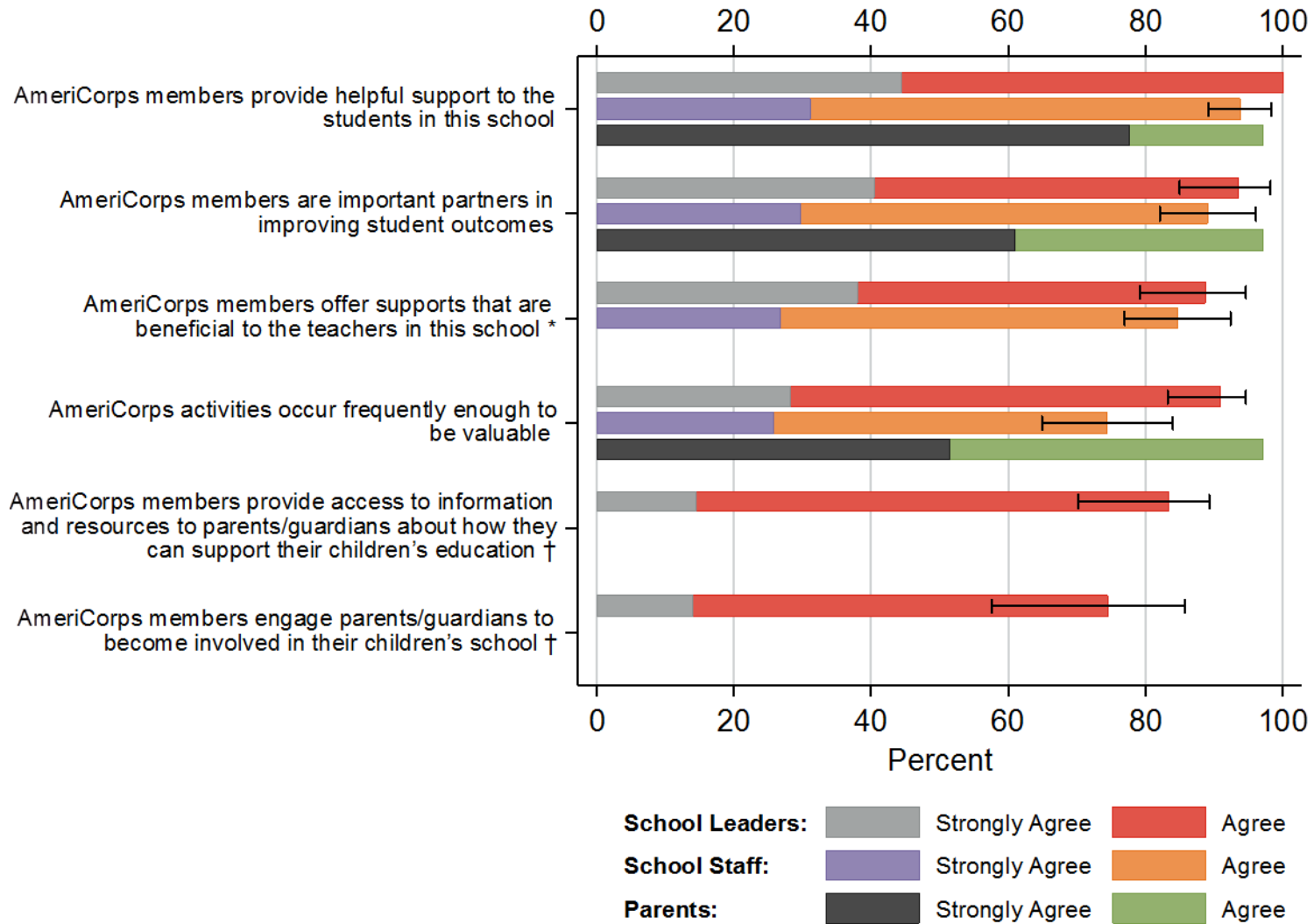
Grantee Survey Q9 ("To the best of your knowledge, what are the reasons that students were identified to participate in School Turnaround AmeriCorps programming?")

Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q8 ("To the best of your knowledge, what are the reasons that students were identified to participate in School Turnaround AmeriCorps programming this school year?")

Exhibit III-16 shows the estimated proportion of school leader, school staff, and parent respondents who "strongly agree" and/or "agree" with statements about the perceived value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps.⁴⁴ Large majorities of school leaders agreed or strongly agreed that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program provides value in multiple ways, through offering helpful supports, serving as partners in improving student outcomes, and providing activities frequently enough to be valuable. Staff reported generally positive perceptions of AmeriCorps members. The majority of staff (80 percent or more) perceive that AmeriCorps members provide helpful supports to students, members are important partners in improving student outcomes, and members offer supports benefiting teachers in the school. Interviewed parents also have strongly positive perceptions of AmeriCorps members, and were more likely than school staff to report that AmeriCorps activities occur frequently enough to be valuable.

⁴⁴ Grantees were not asked their perceptions of the value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps.

Exhibit III-16: School Leader, Staff, and Parent Perceptions of Value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps (2014–15)



NOTES: See Appendix Exhibit A-34 for a table with all response options for school leaders, Appendix Exhibit A-54 for a table with all response options for school staff, and Appendix Exhibit A-60 for a table with all response options for parents.

* Question asked of school leaders and school staff only.

† Question asked of school leaders only.

Black capped lines are 95 percent confidence intervals (see Section 7.2.2 for details on how they were calculated).

Number of school leader respondents who responded “not applicable” ranged from 0 to 3. (N=38, Missing=0)

School staff responses limited to respondents who worked with at least one student in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. (N=155, Missing=1-5)

Parent responses limited to those familiar with children in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Number of respondents who did not know ranged from 2 to 3. (N=38, Missing=0)

Bars are sorted in descending order by the proportion of school leaders who selected strongly agree.

Exhibit reads: An estimated 45 percent of all school leaders strongly agree and 55 percent agree that “AmeriCorps members provide helpful support to the students in this school; the proportions for school staff and parents are 31 percent, 77 percent (strongly agree) and 63 percent, 19 percent (agree), respectively.

SOURCE: School Leader Survey Q18, Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q17 (“Please indicate the level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements about your school this school year (2014–15). (Mark one response in each row.”)

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Parent Interviews Q10 (“Now I will read several statements about your child’s school. For each statement, please tell me whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, or don’t know.”)

Exhibit III-16 and other similar exhibits that follow also display information about the confidence intervals (the black bars shown at the end of each bar on the chart) for each item. These exhibits help convey information both about the study sample and the variability of responses. Generally, the narrower the interval, the greater the confidence in the findings. In these exhibits, intervals are narrower for the school leader than staff survey responses because nearly all leaders sampled actually responded, and a substantially smaller proportion of sampled school staff did so.⁴⁵

Exhibit III-17 presents stakeholder perspectives on factors that facilitate program implementation progress, factors that present barriers and challenges, and suggested improvements.

⁴⁵ The horizontal black “T” lines in Exhibit III-12 and similar exhibits represent a 95 percent confidence interval in the estimated proportion of population members who either strongly agree or agree with a given item. The estimated proportions are derived from survey responses, and because no sample of respondents perfectly represents the population from which it is drawn, sample-based estimates of population-wide proportions rarely recreate the true population proportion. A 95 percent confidence interval (95 percent CI) is a common way to characterize the lack of certainty in an estimated proportion. A statement like “A 95 percent CI for the population proportion of agreement is (70percent, 90 percent)” effectively makes two claims. The first is an inclusion claim: that the population-wide proportion of agreement is contained within the specified range of 70 percent to 90 percent. The second is a reliability claim: that the computational procedure producing the specified inclusion range works correctly 95 percent of the time. The width of confidence intervals is determined by a number of factors, including absolute sample size and sample size relative to population size, which is why samples approximating the population size are generally more likely to have narrower confidence intervals.

Exhibit III-17: Factors that Facilitate Progress and Factors That Present Barriers and Challenges by Program Stakeholder

Program Stakeholder	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
Grantee Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban areas and community schools offer more partnership opportunities and a broader range of services • Having prior relationships and history of effective partnerships with partner schools • Strong relationships and strong communication with school and district partners, especially school administrators • Establishing partnership agreements with schools to define roles and responsibilities, articulate the scope of activities and interventions, and facilitate programs access to school and student data • Grantees engaging partner districts and schools in planning, communication, and coordination of activities • Close collaboration with school partners to recruit and place members in school • Ongoing collaboration with school partners and other stakeholders about proactive use of data • Data sharing and trainings about data • Data teams that regularly review data to assess the connections between program services and interventions and instructional outcomes • Grantees manage and use data to improve program operations, through quality control measures, using an external evaluator, or adjusting program activities in response to student needs • On-Site Coordinators/Supervisors promote interaction among school staff, members, and Grantee staff; assist member integration into school culture, work closely with members and school staff to manage member caseloads and match students to members, and serve as a professional mentor and resource to members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic and unstable environment in the schools in which grantees implement their programs including school and district leadership changes • Rural areas lack external partners • Know-how and capacity to manage the structures and processes required to launch a new program (e.g., manage grants, complete member recruitment and set up technology, access data, and obtain matching funding) • Ongoing grant management issues (e.g. funding cycle limits recruitment and training of members before the school year starts) • Establishing partnership agreements between grantees and schools takes time • Insufficient coordination and lack of engagement between grantees and school leaders • Recruiting, managing and retaining members • Inadequate training of members for their service in low-performing schools; training is not sufficient or realistic enough to prepare members for their work in the schools • Monitoring program performance and managing large volumes of program data; accessing data from the district, tracking student data, and having limited resources to analyze data and present information about student success • Lack of communication and coordination strategy for placing AmeriCorps resources in positions that effectively support schools' turnaround efforts • Partnership agreements are not consistently used as working documents to redefine roles and responsibilities as the program changes during the course of implementation or as a means of enforcing partner accountability • Lack of a dedicated coordinator and splitting time across multiple schools hinders communication with school staff about members' roles and coordination with teachers

Program Stakeholder	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
AmeriCorps Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having an on-site coordinator (communication, organization, collaboration) to maintain frequent, accessible, and open communication channels with school leaders and provide real-time peer support at host schools • Integration of member roles with school culture and operations • Building trust and positive and supportive relationships with teachers, students and families • Serving as a bridge between students and teacher relationships (i.e., intervening in situations before disciplinary action is needed) • Having mission focus and commitment to the program • Having the background knowledge and skillsets needed by schools in sufficient quantities • Participation in school-wide professional development activities to integrate members into the school culture • Participation in school functions to increase buy-in from school leaders, staff, students, and parents • Communication with parents about their child's absences to improve their child's attendance • Members are viewed as "near peers" and role models to students (e.g., by providing insight into college life, and contributing positively to school culture) • Routinely reviewing data to assess their intervention's effectiveness • Members' youth and energy helps to engage school staff and parents, and motivate students to engage in learning and academics • Providing supports for school staff (i.e. helping teachers identify students' needs and progress, helping with classroom management, or freeing up time for teacher professional development) • Frequent collaboration with teachers (e.g. identifying students for tutoring) when serving in classrooms facilitates classroom management • Providing specialized attention and one-on-one support, e.g. by giving students extra time on subjects with which they struggle and tutoring directly to the students' interests • Checking in on students regularly and make them feel accountable for their attendance • Coupling college preparation with mentoring • Leveraging their positive relationships and similar ages with students they serve to make them more enthusiastic about attending college • Helping to craft the school's behavioral culture by developing positive relationships with students and encouraging them to become more engaged in their schools • Members help rebrand school reputation as a visible intervention in an ineffective or unpopular school system • Providing after school activities that combine tutoring/homework help with recreational activities (e.g. cooking, crafts) • Encouraging students to be more motivated and academically engaged • Keeping parents and community members informed about school functions and activities to promote their involvement in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient staffing and resources at host schools (e.g. members do not have private and/or quiet space to work with students) • High teacher turnover makes it difficult for students to build enduring relationships with teachers • Lack of discipline in school environments • Lack of resources, staff, volunteers and funding for some activities impede after-school activities • Minimal-time service terms (e.g. members who come in once a week for a couple of hours to provide tutoring or credit recovery support) do not allow enough time for members to forge relationships in their time-limited interactions with students • Members' one-year service terms limit positive relationship building between students and a trusted and caring adult, and mean that, typically, inexperienced members are placed in schools each year • Mismatch between members' backgrounds and the skills schools need most and/or in subject areas needed for supporting students academically (e.g. science and math) • Lack of practical experience in schools and knowledge of behavior management, de-escalation, and conflict resolution techniques • Training that is not sufficient or realistic enough to prepare members for their work in the schools • Lack of clarity and tension about members' roles and responsibilities, e.g. member participation in school-wide professional development activities • Member perceptions of lack of respect from school staff • Member responsibilities for time-consuming data collection and data entry that takes away from direct services • Inability to access students during school day and slow build-up of caseloads • Inconsistent service hours or presence at program schools • Member activities that disrupt classroom instructional time, e.g., pull-out tutoring • Mandatory tutoring can be off-putting to students

Program Stakeholder	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving school leaders and/or teachers in member recruitment, placement, and/or supervision to help build school capacity to manage external partners supporting turnaround efforts • School leaders' prior experience with other AmeriCorps programs • Leadership buy-in to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps partnership • Leadership that supports and facilitates teacher cooperation and collaboration with members • Service activities that are closely aligned with the school's curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement between districts and schools about member placements • Miscommunication and inconsistent communication between the programs and schools • Lack of communication between the school administration and their staff, e.g. not inviting teachers to the discussions and not involving them in the decision process about the program • Viewing program rules as limiting flexibility in deciding how to use AmeriCorps resources in their schools • Lack clarity or misunderstanding of program rules, especially of restricted activities for members within their schools • Mismatch between the school's needs and services offered by School Turnaround AmeriCorps • School leadership use of the AmeriCorps service as a pipeline to identify future staff members • Insufficient coordination and lack of engagement between grantees and school leaders • Perceived diminished autonomy and lack of buy-in to the program, stemming from disagreement between districts and schools about member placements • School leaders' lack of knowledge, experience, or receptivity toward using external partner resources • Schools' lack of preparation to use external partner resources when program is first introduced, such as lack of a communication and coordination strategy • Activities that are not well-aligned with the school's curriculum • High principal and school staff turnover reduces buy-in and increases relationship-building work • School policy changes that conflict with student attendance interventions (e.g. more suspensions to address behavioral issues)

Program Stakeholder	Factors that Facilitate Progress	Barriers and Challenges
School Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting and designating a teacher for the program coordination role to increase teacher interest and investment in the program • Member participation in planning meetings to identify and monitor student needs and progress (academic and non-academic) and to help promote teacher effectiveness • Members provide supports for school staff (i.e. helping teachers identify students' needs and progress, helping with classroom management, or freeing up time for teacher professional development) • Frequent member collaboration with teachers (e.g. identifying students for tutoring) when serving in classrooms facilitates classroom management • Teachers serving as on-site liaisons increases investment in the program • Designating meeting times with members to communicate student needs and combine supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication between the school administration and their staff, e.g. not inviting teachers to the discussions and not involving them in the decision process about the program • School leaders' lack of communication with school staff about the program contributes to teachers' lack of understanding of members' roles and responsibilities, such as members' data entry and administrative responsibilities • Lack of buy-in from teachers on a program's intervention strategy—e.g., a program offering an online credit recovery program teachers did not want
Parents/ Guardians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program parents who value school and make their child's attendance a priority • Family engagement activities that improve families' knowledge and awareness of the school itself • Member communication with parents about academic progress and attendance via letters about the program and in-person contact • Active parent involvement in parent-teacher organization, school and program activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a "home environment that is supportive of doing homework." • Lack of parent response to member outreach • Families who prioritize other family needs over student attendance e.g., keeping older siblings home to care for other children • Inadequate advertising of program services at the school and to families

Perceived Challenges and Areas for Improving Program Implementation

The challenges described by that focus group and interview respondents about implementing School Turnaround AmeriCorps in 2014–15 are challenges commonly associated with operating programs in dynamic school environments undergoing major school reform.. Challenges noted by grantee staff, principals, members, and parents clustered into challenges posed by school conditions, grant administration and partnerships,⁴⁶ member training, confusion over members’ roles and program rules, and direct service provision.

Challenges with School Conditions

Both lack of resources and instability in schools were noted as challenges by members, grantees, and principals. Principals and members described general challenges with the school environment that hampered AmeriCorps members’ efforts to work effectively. These included high levels of teacher and principal turnover; unsafe school environments; and a lack of resources—particularly staff resources, such as behavior specialists, subject matter specialists, and resources for after-school programs. Additionally, the academic and behavioral issues members sought to address were entrenched and complex. Students living in poverty or in unstable housing, families without resources or capacity to support homework or learning growth, and chronic absenteeism caused by students’ family obligations (e.g., needing to care for younger siblings or their own children), and chronic un- or underemployment in the surrounding community were a few examples of the difficult issues faced by students in turnaround schools.

Challenges for Program Administration and Partnerships

Change is a consistent feature of schools in turnaround status, and the turnover in both principals and teachers meant that grantees, in some cases, were continually reintroducing their programs. School leader turnover, which is an element of some turnaround models, meant that grantees had to frequently start over building crucial relationships and earning buy-in from the principal. In at least one case, a grantee reported that new school leadership was not as actively involved with the program because they were not involved with bringing to the school. Furthermore, new teachers come to the school each year and need to be oriented to the program and learn about the role members could play in their classrooms, including limitations on their activities, and how to effectively work with members.

Member Training Issues and Areas for Improvement

In all focus groups with grantees and members and two (of three) principal small group interviews, participants discussed difficulties with training members for service in low-performing schools. The issues that were highlighted included both gaps in training and sometimes a mismatch between members’ backgrounds and the skills schools most needed and desired. Both types of issues pose challenges for members in supporting schools’ turnaround goals, especially early on in members’ service before they have gained practical in-school experience. In one grantee focus group, four of the six participating grantee staff

Member Preparation for Service

“I have these four very young AmeriCorps members that are trying to address these issues and barriers that are really beyond their scope. They haven’t been able to figure out how to refer or where to refer, so they end up leaning on my social workers and then we just are kind of spinning at that point.”

- Principal Small Group Interview

⁴⁶ Parent interviewees were not usually directly involved in implementing activities, and therefore did not have first-hand knowledge about the activities that members and programs implemented. Their limited understanding of program challenges and issues was reflected in the interviews.

noted that they wished they could train members earlier, before the school year starts, so they could “be up to speed” on the first day of school, but their experience is that the grant timeline does not make it possible to do so.

Members, grantees, and principals also agreed that members, who are generally recent college graduates, lack familiarity with working in schools, and especially with managing behavior issues. A few principals and one parent noted problems with members’ immaturity or unprofessional behavior, such as not showing up to work or not maintaining appropriate boundaries with students. Members’ lack of behavior management skills was especially a problem at the beginning of the year, but members most often were said to have learned effective strategies by the end of the year. Some principals considered it a burden to host inexperienced members and then lose them after their one-year term of service just as the members gained these skills and became helpful to the school.

Confusion and Tension in the Schools over Members’ Roles and Program Rules

A strong theme described by grantee staff, members, and principals was confusion about members’ roles and responsibilities. The lack of clarity about members’ roles in the schools appears to come from several sources. First, programs and schools miscommunicated about members’ roles and responsibilities; second, school leaders misunderstood program rules; and third, the services offered by School Turnaround AmeriCorps were not matched with schools’ needs. A minority of principals expressed frustration with program rules they felt made the program less effective—specifically, members having to do a community service project and maintain the same caseload of students throughout the year.

The most prevalent communication issue, evident in all three member focus groups, was miscommunication between the school partner (usually the administration) and the program and its members (four members) (see textbox). Grantees reported continuing to work with schools throughout the year to mitigate misunderstanding about members’ roles and appropriate tasks (three grantees), address teachers distrust of members and the program in general (two grantees), and persuade principals to take an active role in working with members (one grantee).

Members in two focus groups discussed how school administrators often did not know what AmeriCorps members are and are not allowed to do within their schools. As a result, members feel like they have to say “I can’t do that” more often than they liked. To make members’ experiences successful, grantees worked to ensure the members felt like valued contributors to the school community, set and organized members’ schedules, and helped members work within schools where inconsistency was the norm. One grantee helped members hone an “elevator speech” about their roles in the school so that staff members could learn why the members were there and how they could be helpful.

Miscommunication between Programs and Schools

“What my coordinator is telling me is that they’ve had every communication necessary with administrators. Clearly something is missing, though.”

- Member focus group

Two member focus groups reported that miscommunication between programs and schools was compounded by a lack of communication between school administrators and their staffs. Two members in the group noted that teachers in their schools had not been invited to participate in discussions nor were they involved in the decision process as much as they should have been, such that teachers had “no warning” about the program coming but “were told they had to sign off on it.” For another member, the impact of having had the program “forced” on the school by the district the previous year still resonated. In each of these cases, the decision had led to teachers not understand members’ roles and the substantive contribution they could make to the school.

Three members reported that school administration and staff were unclear about their roles and thought members could be used as substitute teachers, borrowed as test proctors, or used for miscellaneous tasks. Another member noted that she was required to attend school-level professional development on proctoring standardized tests even though proctoring was not among her assigned program responsibilities.⁴⁷ Principals admitted in interviews that they did not always understand the program rules and activity restrictions or found the restrictions a hindrance to productivity. In the small group interviews, principals also noted that their AmeriCorps members had more restrictions and guidelines to adhere to than their other school partners, a sentiment shared by other principals and a few grantees.

Tensions about Member’s Role in the School

“They just want more teachers at the end of the day.”

-Member focus group

Tension between programs and schools about members’ roles appeared to not only be a case of miscommunication but a mismatch, to some degree, between schools’ needs and what members are allowed to offer. It is also, potentially, a misunderstanding based on the school leadership’s desire to use the AmeriCorps service as a pipeline to identify future staff members.

Several members revealed that they do not feel respected by the school staff. Two different members found their inclusion as part of school staff to be beneficial, although one emphasized that members deserve the same respect as teachers even though their roles were different—suggesting that she did not feel members received as much respect as teachers. One member wondered if her school did not communicate as much with members because members were relatively young college graduates. One grantee staff person said that while the teachers treated the members like school staff, the students treated members less respectfully, as if they were volunteers. This program struggled with helping ensure that members were accorded the respect they deserve.

Challenges with Direct Service Provision

There were notably few challenges with either the delivery or quality of members’ tutoring—the primary responsibility of most members. Challenges with tutoring were generally overshadowed by challenges with bigger-picture issues, such as members needing more training and confusion and tension in the schools over members’ roles, as described above. However, two concerns raised by members, principals, and (to a lesser extent) grantees were school staff not trusting members (especially early in the year) to engage parents, and teachers having doubts about allowing members to be responsible for student progress. Teachers’ jobs are contingent on their students’ performance and they did not want to yield control of this issue to individuals whose skills were untested. A minority of members and principals also pointed out that members’ skills did not match students’ areas of need (e.g., a cohort of literacy-focused tutors in a school with higher need for math and science tutoring).

Perceived Changes in Program Implementation in Schools over Time

Principals reported a diverse array of changes from the first to second year of implementation in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs at their respective schools. Overall, 22 principals—affiliated

⁴⁷ Another member in her focus group countered that in his program, members are fully expected and allowed to proctor for national exams.

with each of the programs represented in the interviews—spoke about changes to implementation.⁴⁸ These changes are outlined below.

About half of principals described **improvements** (11 of 21) with their School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs in the second year. Eight principals reported an improvement in communication between schools, programs, and/or members. As the quote below illustrates, schools perceived their programs to be becoming more effective over time as the schools learned how to collaborate with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and refine their processes for assigning work to their members. One principal, who had hosted a different AmeriCorps program before School Turnaround AmeriCorps began, described how the school's relationship with the grantee matured as collaboration continued: "This is their third year with us. I guess just over time, we just continue to get better. They [members] are more active in our grade-level team meetings, they're assigned to work with specific students ... I feel like we're off to a tighter alignment. And what the grant helps us to do is really, really continue to foster the relationship between us and [program name] leads." This principal's comments emphasize both that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program improves over time and also that the School Turnaround program's specific activities are not necessarily distinguished from other AmeriCorps activities/partnerships in principals' minds.

Six principals reported having either **larger or smaller School Turnaround AmeriCorps cohorts** in the second year (three apiece) and four discussed the effects of turnover among members on their schools. Among the three principals who had larger cohorts, one attributed the increase to an improvement over the late start they experienced the prior year, a delay that interfered with the program recruiting members. Another principal obtained more members by being a strong advocate for the program, both to increase the number of members and obtain the most highly-skilled members.

The three principals who reported having a smaller member cohort at their school in the second year attributed the loss to the school's strong performance. These principals noted with some frustration that as their schools improved, it seemed AmeriCorps support was withdrawn—a potential disincentive since the schools highly valued their members' service. In one instance, a principal reflected that she wished that School Turnaround AmeriCorps could be a more proactive solution and intervention in every school instead of only introduced when serious performance problems already exist. As she put it, "If AmeriCorps students were in buildings that were struggling, they wouldn't end up in the category of being level 4 ... It should be proactive; you know what I'm saying? It shouldn't be a Band-Aid." The implication in these three principals' comments was that AmeriCorps members' service was a key component of helping their schools improve. They perceive that their schools lose valuable supports as a consequence of doing well, and the schools risk returning to poor performance without School Turnaround AmeriCorps support.

Member turnover is a built-in part of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps model. Members agree to serve in their host schools for one year but may renew their service.⁴⁹ In any given year, a school could have all experienced members, all new members, or a mixture of experienced and new members. Four principals explicitly mentioned simply having new members in their schools as a change from their first year of implementation, perhaps indicating that the program design itself did not change in any substantive way. These principals differed in their perceptions of what having new members in the second year meant for

⁴⁸ The research team compared changes in implementation at schools with new principals (one year or less at their school) and principals with multiple years at their school. No substantial differences were found in the types of changes made.

⁴⁹ Local programs may have an explicit desire or expectation that members renew for an additional year of service.

their schools. Three of the principals said it was positive (e.g., the new members were well matched by the program coordinator and they were able to place members in the school earlier in the second year) and one was neutral.

Five principals reported making changes to their programs based on their **evolving understanding of the program rules**. Principals were split on what their current knowledge meant for their programs, with three feeling more empowered and two feeling more constrained in their programs. One of the three principals who felt positively about her understanding of program rules commented that the message sent by the program to school administration had changed. This year “the message is [to] collaborate, co-plan much more.” By contrast, both principals who came to understand the program as more restrictive indicated that in the second year they could not maximize the time that members had available to provide services to more students. One principal observed that monitoring members’ work hours and caseload was an issue; she explained that she felt that the “handcuffs or the limitations that I have on how we can be involved is challenging and often makes me wonder if it's worth even the small bit of money that I do have to contribute from my budget ... I unfortunately can't deploy these folks and maximize every single minute because we don't want to break the rules.” This year, the school is more attuned to limits on members’ hours and the number of students they can serve.

Four principals reported an **overall change in strategy** in using the program. One principal elaborated on his school’s new strategy to place and support low-performing students, including greater emphasis on formative assessments throughout the year to identify students to participate in AmeriCorps math tutoring. Another principal noted that his school’s focus on behavior paid off. As a result of that prior effort, the school is now able to focus more on conflict resolution and social skills than on reprimanding and discouraging violent outbursts (see textbox).

Perceived Improvements in Students’ Socio-emotional Health

“In the past, there's been a heavy focus on behavior and we have pretty much turned around the behavior issues in this school since last year, and so now it's just increasing social skills and how to deal with conflict and those types of things rather than putting out fires where students need to be removed from class because of explosive behaviors or defiance or disruption.”

-Principal interview

Change for Members

Twelve of 26 members reported no change in their activities over their time at the school. Of the 14 members that reported changes, seven reported minor changes to their activities, such as more time allowed for lesson planning, increased responsibility for leading other members, and increased after-school activities.

Four members identified one major change: being able to implement their interventions more effectively. This change was described as a direct result of developing and strengthening relationships with students and becoming more comfortable in school environments. One member explained that he/she originally focused on developing relationships with students. Feeling that the relationship development had been accomplished, the member planned to focus more on tutoring. Another spoke specifically about gaining more confidence in his/her ability to tutor students, making greater connections with school staff, and becoming more comfortable in the program and school environment, all of which helped to increase the efficacy of the member’s role at the school.

Two members identified structural changes to their activities over time. One member explained that his/her coaching conversations developed, and that they diversified small groups to incorporate multiple learning styles. The second member said his/her tutoring changed from a pullout model to tutoring in the classroom. The member explained,

“Toward the beginning of the year we were doing pullout groups of the fourth graders that needed extra-extra help ... But we were doing it on the fourth-grade level, and we realized they still weren’t really accessing it because they ... couldn’t do subtraction effectively; how were they going to start with division yet? So we changed our plan to have them self-contained in the classroom... but I would just provide like feedback with those little packets that they work on and that they can access better.”

Change for Grantee Programs

Grantees also reported mostly minor changes to their programs in both their pre- and post-interviews.

In the pre-interviews, several programs reported implementing changes to management and data use. One program established a corrective action plan to ensure data quality by changing data tracking to a grading period system rather than a semester system, which allowed program staff to track student data that corresponded to more meaningful time periods. Another program hired a staff member with expertise in data monitoring and analysis, and a third program focused on empowering members to collect and analyze data in addition to their other responsibilities.

Six programs reported monitoring the effectiveness of their strategies to inform and tailor efforts to meet student needs in their respective school settings. Examples of program changes included incorporating extracurricular activities or electives (i.e., cosmetology, cooking, and sewing) in response to students’ expressed interests, providing personalized attention to students’ needs within the context of tutoring and mentoring activities, and providing intensive interventions to incoming ninth graders by conducting home visits to meet with students and parents in response to the school administration’s requests. One other program identified an effective strategy for collaborating with teachers at one of its schools, which was replicated in two other schools.

In post-interviews, grantees discussed changes that reflected their desire to deepen and strengthen their programs and the services that their members offer to schools and students. This desire to improve existing relationships and establish more relationships was reflected throughout the interviews (see textbox), and such changes specifically focused on increased communication and monitoring, additional staff positions, and better training for members and school personnel.

Deepen Existing Relationships in Year 3

“Now that we’ve got the foundation laid down, we want to go deeper, which is relationships.”

-Grantee post-interview

Other grantees noted that they would need to accommodate district and school-level changes into their programs. Such changes included shifts in district or school leadership and, in one instance, a switch from a typical high school to an early college high school program. The grantee noted that they were having conversations with school leadership to figure out “how to shift community resources” to better support the school and students as they transition.

Another grantee specifically noted getting together with other school partners and outside organizations to make sure they were not “duplicating services and we’re really utilizing members.” The grantee also maintained that their broad reach throughout the district and collaboration with other programs created a more sustainable relationship between program and school, saying,

“These grants can get on people’s nerves sometimes when you have turnover members or when you have a member that may not be the most effective. Seeing that this is just a small piece of a bigger partnership, I think, makes the school more tolerant and understanding that there will be hiccups. I think if this was the only project we had in these schools it wouldn’t be as successful because the school wouldn’t be as bought-into the program.”

Two other grantees also were anticipating and preparing for a more sustainable future. One grantee noted that it would be putting together a “start-up kit” for schools to smooth the transition process and increase understanding and awareness of their AmeriCorps program. A second grantee reported that its last year of the funding cycle was fast approaching, and, as a result, it was including staff in its training that they received from another partner so that they could provide similar interventions in the future: “We’re hoping to continue the members there but if we [don’t] at least then the capacity would be built for the work to continue.”

Grantees also noted that programs were aligning better with school curriculum, and one grantee noted that teachers were tailoring their curriculum to fit a credit recovery program run by AmeriCorps members. One grantee also mentioned that it was taking its “brand off of things” to integrate more smoothly into the community.

Effects of School Changes on Program Implementation

Grantees’ post-interviews indicated that grantees were settling into routines and working to create stronger, more efficient programming. Three grantees described ways that their programs were maturing, including one that noted that the changes were subtler at the end of the year than the larger changes early in the year. This grantee emphasized the importance of continuing to build a strong relationship with districts and schools to effectively navigate challenges as they arise. As the program and the partnership matured, the district and schools were beginning to support the grantee in program success and the grantee was supporting the schools’ turnaround goals.

In their post-interviews, three grantees described that they were beginning to think ahead to when the grant ends, and the effects that may have on the schools with which they work. In one case, the grantee was fielding concerns from principals of its partner schools about the grant expiring at the end of the third year. Two grantees were anticipating the effect of removing their members from the schools, including one grantee that was training teachers to do the attendance intervention provided by members. A third grantee, worried about what would happen to its schools when the grant money runs out, was shifting its focus in its third year toward recruiting “outside volunteers that may be able to continue some of the services” that the grantee had been providing. The grantee also was working to create a full-time position for the fall that would focus solely on volunteer recruitment.

Changes Reported by Principals

Principals, in small group interviews, also noted the ways in which their School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs changed throughout the year. Overall, they indicated that members became more involved and integrated into their communities with time. One principal, who felt that the program was forced on her school, also noted that the program had given her a bit more leeway over time.

In addition, another principal likened the experience of having a School Turnaround AmeriCorps program to having someone tell her the best route to drive in her own neighborhood. She explained, “When somebody tells you the right way to get somewhere and you know, because it’s your neighborhood, you know there’s an easier way. You try to tell them and they don’t believe you until they actually ride in the car with you.” Over time however, she felt that the AmeriCorps program had begun to listen to her when she said something would work better differently, and that some of the restrictions on members’ roles in her school had been lifted.

Perceived Impacts of AmeriCorps Services in Supporting School Turnaround Efforts

This section addresses the broad research question, “What are the perceived impacts of the program in supporting a school’s turnaround plan and achieving its desired outcomes?” Data sources include: case

study research, school leader and staff surveys, grantee surveys,⁵⁰ principal individual and small group interviews, parent interviews, member interviews, grantee and member focus groups, grantee progress reports, and student level administrative data.

Summary of Perceived Impact Findings

Key findings related to perceived impacts of School Turnaround AmeriCorps services that help to support turnaround efforts include:

- Surveyed school leaders and staff and interviewed parents reported that the program overall is successful and valuable.
- Nearly all school leaders reported improvement in student outcomes, with the greatest degree of improvement reported in academic achievement, followed by increased motivation and increased attendance. Staff perceptions were broadly similar; although some staff reported not necessarily knowing which students were served by the program, the outcomes they ranked as showing the greatest improvements included attendance, academic achievement, and improved grades.
- Staff also reported significant or moderate improvements in participating students' classroom or classwork behaviors in terms of being regularly attentive in class, participating in class, getting along well with other students, and coming to school motivated to learn.
- Information collected from members and parents suggests that School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs have positive impacts on schools overall, as well as on specific student outcomes, such as helping more students complete college applications, improving student attendance, and improving the school climate.
- The case studies highlighted the importance of program schools' purposeful selection, alignment, and deployment of external partnerships to support key school turnaround goals; in particular, the role of partners' contributions in the area of students' socio-emotional health.
- Review of administrative data from GPRs indicated substantial variability in grantees' self-reported progress toward meeting performance targets; three grantees met all their targets, three other grantees met none, and the other seven grantees met one or more targets yet also failed to meet one or more targets.
- Analysis of student-level outcomes data for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 cohorts from the two grantees whose data could support such analyses indicated considerable fluctuation from year to year, and no clear pattern of results, not surprisingly, as the number of grantees (and schools served by grantees' programs) was very small.

AmeriCorps Members Are an Asset to the School

"We have four full time AmeriCorps here that are -- they are just like part of the staff...To see them, they are a tremendous asset to our school. They contribute in so many different ways...it's seamless."

-Principal Small Group Interview

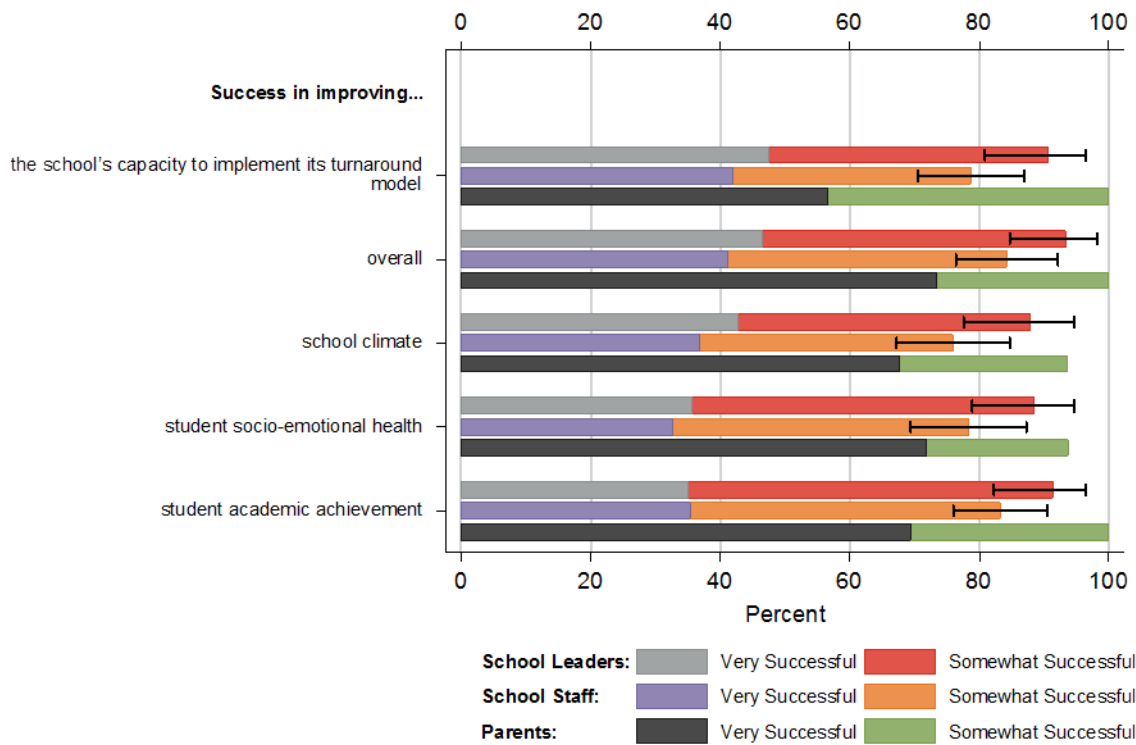
Perceived Overall Success of School Turnaround AmeriCorps

The vast majority (over 90 percent) of surveyed school leaders and staff reported that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program was somewhat or very successful as a whole, and similar proportions noted the program's success in improving school capacity to implement the turnaround plan and

⁵⁰ Grantee surveys asked about outcomes, and their relative importance, but not ask about perceived impact. Grantee interviews also did not include questions about perceived impact.

improve school climate (see Exhibit III-18). The exhibit also presents responses from interviewed parents along the same dimensions. Interviewed parents were generally familiar with and had overwhelmingly positive impressions of the success of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, although a sizeable fraction of parents did not know enough about program details to answer questions about specific areas of program success.

Exhibit III-18: School Leader, Staff, and Parent Perceptions of Success of School Turnaround AmeriCorps (2014-2015)



NOTES: See Appendix Exhibit A-33 for a table with all response options for School Leaders, Appendix Exhibit A-56 for a table with all response options for school staff, and Appendix Exhibit A-61 for a table with all response options for Parents.

Number of school leader respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0–1. (N=38, Missing=0–1)

Number of school staff respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 6–11. (N=155, Missing=3–5)

Responses limited to those parents familiar with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program (N=38, Missing=0).

Table rows are sorted in descending order by the proportion of school leaders who selected “very successful.”

Exhibit reads: 47 percent of school leaders perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps to be very successful and 43 percent perceived it to be somewhat successful in improving the school’s capacity to implement its turnaround model.

Forty-two percent of school staff perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps to be very successful and 37 percent perceived it to be somewhat successful in improving the school’s capacity to implement its turnaround model.

Fifty-seven percent of parents perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps to be very successful and 43 percent perceived it to be somewhat successful in improving the school’s capacity to implement its turnaround model.

SOURCE: School Leader Survey Q17, Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q19 (“In your opinion, how successful is the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in the following areas this school year (2014–15? Mark one response in each row.”)

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Parent Interviews Q11–Q15 (“On a scale of 1–4, what is your perception of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program’s success in terms of …”)

Thirty-eight (of 50) parents interviewed were familiar with the School AmeriCorps program in their child’s school and reported overwhelmingly positive views of it. Four parents offered no feedback, and one parent reported overall negative feedback; she noted that her son “hated” the program because a member placed in his high school behaved unprofessionally. Parents’ positive feedback included general statements about the program being helpful along with more detailed feedback about personal connections members had forged with students and how members had increased student engagement, reminded parents to have students participate in college admissions testing, and provided tools for parents to become more engaged in their children’s college preparation.

Parent interviewees were asked whether they had noticed changes in their child since participating in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps intervention. Twenty-nine of 38 parents interviewed familiar with the program reported noticing positive differences in their children after the AmeriCorps program began. In about half of those cases (15 of 29), positive improvements were reported in academic performance, followed by college readiness (7), homework completion (6), and behavioral and social skills (5).

Eight parents said they had not noticed any changes in their respective children. However, two of these parents explicitly mentioned that their high-school-aged children were already straight-A students, so there was not much for members to improve on.⁵¹

School Turnaround Goals for Student Outcomes

On average, enhanced achievement was ranked as the most important student outcome for school turnaround efforts by all stakeholders (grantees, school leaders, and school staff) (see Exhibit II-4 in Section II of this report). Grantees considered improved grades as the next-highest-ranked important outcome, whereas school leaders and staff prioritized motivation over grades. In general, grantees, principals and staff reported slightly different priorities.

Among survey respondents, only school leaders were asked about the level of influence of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on their school turnaround goals. Across applicable school turnaround goals (e.g., improving academic performance and increasing graduation rates and college readiness), a majority of school leaders reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members had either substantial or some influence (see Exhibit III-19). Leaders were more likely to characterize the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program as exerting some rather than substantial influence on all goals. Additionally, not all the goals listed below were applicable to all schools; for example, high school graduation and college readiness goals were not applicable to elementary or middle schools.

⁵¹ These students both attend a high school that has exited SIG/Priority status. The major components of the grantee’s program in that school were mentoring and college preparation.

Exhibit III-19: School Leader Perceptions of Level of Influence of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on School Turnaround Goals (2014–15)

Element of School's Turnaround Goals	Substantial Influence (%)	Some Influence (%)	Minimal Influence (%)	No Influence (%)
Establishing a school culture and environment that fosters school safety, attendance, and discipline	24	62	14	0
Improving academic performance in ELA and/or math	24	61	6	9
Increasing rates of high school graduation †	15	59	15	11
Increasing college readiness and enrollment rates †	10	72	5	13
Providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement	10	53	31	6

NOTES: See Appendix Exhibit A-36 for a table with all response options.

† Many school leaders indicated that these turnaround goals are not applicable to their schools.

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 1–16.

(N=22-37, Missing=0-1)

Table rows are sorted in descending order by the proportion of school leaders who selected “Substantial Influence.”

Exhibit reads: 24 percent of school leaders perceived that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members had substantial influence on “establishing a school culture and environment that fosters school safety, attendance, and discipline.” 62 percent perceived they had some influence, 14 percent perceived they had minimal influence, and 0 percent perceived they had no influence.

SOURCE: School Leader Survey Q20 (“Please indicate the level of influence School Turnaround AmeriCorps members have over the following elements of your school’s turnaround goals? Mark one response in each row.”)

Perceived Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program on Student Outcomes

The exhibits below summarize perceptions of improvement in schools overall, as well as perceptions about which improvements had been influenced by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program specifically. Exhibit III-20 presents school leaders’ perceptions of areas in which their schools had improved in 2013–14. The data on school leaders’ perceptions of overall improvements in the prior year provide a useful context within which to examine grantees’ and staff perceptions about the contributions of the program.

Nearly all school leaders reported improvement in all student outcomes in 2013–14, the academic year that had most recently been completed at the time of data collection, though around a quarter of school leaders did not know whether their school improved student motivation or self-esteem (see Exhibit III-20). Of the school leaders who reported improvement in any student outcomes, the greatest degree of improvement was in academic achievement.

Exhibit III-20: School Leader Perceptions of Improvement in Student Academic Achievement and Academic Engagement Outcomes (2013–14)

Area of Improvement	Any Improvement		Degree of Improvement
	Yes (%)	Don't Know (%)	Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)
Enhanced academic achievement	100	0	1.7 (0.3)
Increased motivation	74	26	3.2 (0.3)
Improved attendance	96	4	3.5 (0.9)
Improved grades	92	8	3.7 (0.5)
Improved behavior	97	3	4.0 (1.1)
Increased self-esteem	70	30	4.3 (0.7)
Improved completion of assignments	91	9	4.3 (0.6)
Improved socio-emotional health	84	16	5.2 (0.6)

NOTES: See Appendix Exhibit A-27 for a table with all response options.

Ranks of improvement range from 1–9, with 1 being the greatest improvement; not all responses were given a ranking. Means are calculated for respondents who ranked the option.

Any improvement: (N=38, Missing=1)

Degree of improvement: (N=1-33, Missing=0)

Table rows sorted in ascending order by the mean ranking of school leaders.

Exhibit reads: One hundred percent of school leaders reported that there had been improvement in “enhanced academic achievement” in the prior school year. The average ranking of this outcome was 1.7 on a 9-point scale, which is the highest ranking for any outcome.

SOURCE: School Leader Survey Q11 (“Please answer the following about school outcomes for students. Was there improvement in this area at your school(s) last year (2013–14)?”)

Staff perceptions of the 2014-15 academic year reflected a moderately different ranking pattern than school leaders’ perceptions for the prior academic year. As reported in Section 2 (see also Appendix Exhibit A-45), not all staff necessarily knew which specific students were directly served by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, and, not surprisingly, between about one-third and nearly a half of staff did not know whether or how many participating students had demonstrated improvement in selected outcomes. However, those who were knowledgeable (about which students were served by the program) indicated that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program had influenced improvement in such student outcomes as academic achievement, improved motivation, and increased assignment completion (see Exhibit III-21).

Exhibit III-21: School Staff Perceptions of Improvement in Student Academic Achievement and Academic Engagement Outcomes (2014–15)

Student Outcome	Quantity of Students			Degree of Improvement Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)
	All or Most (%)	Some (%)	Few or None (%)	
Increased self-esteem	53	38	10	3.8 (0.4)
Enhanced academic achievement	51	36	12	2.6 (0.3)
Improved behavior	46	40	14	4.1 (0.5)
Improved socio-emotional health	45	38	17	4.6 (0.5)
Increased motivation	52	36	11	2.9 (0.2)
Improved grades	39	45	16	3.3 (0.3)
Improved completion of assignments	42	39	19	3.1 (0.3)
Improved attendance	41	38	21	5.1 (0.5)

NOTES: See Appendix Exhibits A-47 and A-48 for tables with all response options.

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Ranks of improvement range from 1–9, with 1 being the greatest improvement; not all responses were given a ranking. Means are calculated for respondents who ranked the option.

Number of respondents who did not know ranged from 47–76. (N=79-99, Missing=2–5)

Table rows sorted in ascending order by the mean ranking of school staff.

Exhibit reads: Fourteen percent of school staff perceived that all students demonstrated enhanced academic achievement. 37 percent perceived enhanced academic achievement in most students, 36 percent in some students, 10 percent in few students, and 2 percent in no students. School staff ranked “enhanced academic achievement” as the most important student outcome, with a mean ranking of 2.6 on a 9-point scale; 74 percent of school leaders ranked this particular outcome.

SOURCE: Instructional Staff and Counselors Survey Q12 (“For how many of the students served by School Turnaround AmeriCorps at your school this year (2014–15) are there improvements in the following areas?”)

Grantees’ and staff reported perceptions of areas in which students in schools that had received School Turnaround AmeriCorps services improved *this year* (2014–15) (see Appendix Exhibits A-12, A-47, and A-48). While the patterns are similar across the two stakeholder groups, there are some modest differences. Both grantees and staff rated academic achievement as the area with the greatest degree of improvement. Improved socio-emotional health and behavior was generally rated lower on the list of improved outcomes by both grantees and school staff. Stakeholders’ perceptions of improvement track closely with their rankings of the most important student outcomes shown in Exhibit II-4.

A large majority of staff (of those who knew which specific students had participated in School Turnaround AmeriCorps activities) reported such improvements in participating students’ classroom or classwork behaviors as students’ attentiveness and participation in class, positive interactions with other students, and motivation to learn (see Exhibit II-5 earlier in this report). Generally, about twice as many staff reported moderate than significant levels of improvement for students.

Perceived Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program on School Climate and Community Involvement

Across multiple data sources, stakeholders pointed to several ways in which School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs had positive impacts on the host schools. These include contributions to school improvement generally, contributions to school culture, and both general and targeted contributions to improvements for participating students. While perceptions from school administrators and staff were all

generally positive, schools leaders' perceptions were consistently (albeit moderately) more positive than their school staff colleagues. Members and one grantee staff reported that their efforts, and those of previous AmeriCorps cohorts, had effectively allowed their schools to turn around pervasive behavioral problems so that the schools could then focus more on academics. A majority of parents reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps interventions had improved their children's academic performance and simultaneously improved their students' engagement and enthusiasm about school. Some parents also reported becoming more aware of or involved with events at their child's school as a result of the program.

Comparing Stakeholder Perceptions to Administrative Outcomes Data

In this section, CNCS-defined performance measures reported by grantees in their 2013–14 year-end GPRs are presented and discussed, and then the quality of the 2012–13, 2013–14, and 2014–15 student-level datasets is analyzed to assess changes in grantees' capacity to collect and process student level data. Data quality refers to the completeness of the student-level data, both in terms of whether all of a grantee's schools are represented in its dataset and whether the data that do appear are largely free of missing values.

Grantee Performance Reporting Results: 2013-14

The exhibits in this section present the CNCS-defined, education (ED) performance measure results reported in end-of-year 2013-14 grantee performance reviews (GPRs). Mid-year 2014-15 GPR results are not presented here, as they reflect an incomplete summary of data from the 2014-15 school year. End-of-year 2014-15 results have not yet been reported by grantees.

None of the grantees planned to report on all performance measures. Grantees had indicated that they planned to report on anywhere from two to four performance targets. Where available, the text below draws from explanations provided in the GPRs as well, although grantees are required only to provide explanations for *not* meeting their targets; they do not have to report any additional information when they do. Key findings from these analyses include the following:

- Three grantees met all of their performance measure targets (four, two, and two targets, respectively).
- Three grantees met none of their performance measure targets (four, three, and two targets, respectively).
- Each of the remaining seven grantees met at least one performance target, and also failed to meet at least one target.

Exhibit III-23 presents the results for the seven grantees who reported performance on ED1 (number of students who start in a CNCS-supported education program); four of seven met their performance target.

Exhibit III-22: GPR Data for End-of-year 2013-14 ED1 Performance Measure

Grantee	Target	Actual	% of Target	Met Target?
Grantee #1	1,111	1,260	113%	Yes
Grantee #3	450	458	102%	Yes
Grantee #4 ^a	800	920	115%	Yes
Grantee #5	2,048	1,593	78%	No
Grantee #7	224	141	63%	No
Grantee #11 ^a	530	535	101%	Yes
Grantee #13	6,000	1,808	30%	No

Notes. ED1 = Number of students who start in a CNCS-supported education program.

^aThe grantee did not provide any explanation about meeting or exceeding the target.

One grantee that exceeded the ED1 target worked with multiple schools, and indicated that the explanations varied across the multiple schools served by the program. The explanations included fluctuations in student class size and requests from school administrators to provide intensive interventions to all incoming 9th grade students, high student mobility rates, larger numbers of students than expected whose beginning-of-the-year performance merited intervention, and increases in the amount of time schools made available to members to work with students.

Those grantees who explained why they had not met the targets described idiosyncratic explanations. One of the three grantees that did not meet the ED1 target explained that the age range associated with their intervention limited the amount of eligible students, causing them to not meet their target (the 7th grade classes were unable to participate in the program due to age requirements, thus only the 8th grade class was able to participate). Another grantee explained that their performance measures were entered incorrectly (their three-year goals were entered as one-year goals). In addition, their largest obstacle to achieving each performance measure was student attrition in the district, due to parents removing children from the school system. The third grantee fell short of its ED1 target because of inexperience in how to formulate this target, which initially was based on the number of at-risk students at the school targeted by the intervention and an independent estimate of the number of members per site based on its financial and management capacity; this resulted in poor alignment between performance measure targets and the number of AmeriCorps members requested. They also started the program late. “After reviewing program data and networking with other AmeriCorps tutoring programs,” this grantee learned how to calculate more accurate targets (by multiplying the number of full-time members by a reasonable caseload of students).

Exhibit III-23 presents the results for the 12 grantees reporting on ED2 (the number of students who completed participation in CNCS-supported K-12 education programs). Six grantees met their targets, and five of those exceeded their targets. Six grantees did not meet their targets.

Exhibit III-23: GPR Data for End-of-year 2013-14 ED2 Performance Measure

Grantee	Target	Actual	% of Target	Met Target?
Grantee #1	833	1,166	140%	Yes
Grantee #2	3,586	2,200	61%	No
Grantee #3	405	240	59%	No
Grantee #4 ^a	970	310	32%	No
Grantee #5	1,536	112	7%	No
Grantee #6 ^a	600	948	158%	Yes
Grantee #7 ^a	224	508	227%	Yes
Grantee #9 ^a	400	496	124%	Yes
Grantee #10	360	445	124%	Yes
Grantee #11	480	236	49%	No
Grantee #12 ^a	315	661	210%	Yes
Grantee #13	2,547	750	29%	No

^aThe grantee did not provide any explanation about meeting or exceeding the target.

One of the six grantees that exceeded the ED2 target provided an explanation.⁵² This grantee credited the better than anticipated performance to strong relationships with school staff, who helped match members with students in need of intervention.

The grantees that failed to meet targets provided a variety of explanations. Specifically, two grantees attributed the problem to student attrition due to parents removing their children from the school or the district, and two reported that members perceived the program goals were unrealistic, as students demonstrated improvement and moved out of the “at-risk zone” after fewer hours of intervention than was anticipated. One grantee explained that member enrollment was low, despite the high demand for members, because the timing of properly matching the needs of the school to available members having the needed qualifications is strongly impacted by the fluidity and uncertainty of the school landscapes. The final grantee described multiple factors, including late start of the program, which reduced the amount of time for members to provide services, and hampered members’ ability to form stronger bonds with school staff. Further, the design changed, from the district level, to pull-out to in-class tutoring, which made the target more difficult to meet. The final problem was staffing. The grantee was unable to fill two full time member positions and only had one onsite supervisor for two sites.

Exhibit III-24 presents the results for ED4A, the number of disadvantaged youth/mentor matches that were sustained by the CNCS-supported program for at least the required time period. Two grantees reported this performance measure, and both met their performance target. No additional information is available.

Exhibit III-24: GPR Data for End-of-year 2013-14 ED4A Performance Measure

Grantee	Target	Actual	% of Target	Met Target?
Grantee #8	1,080	1409	130%	Yes
Grantee #9	64	80	125%	Yes

Notes. ED4A = Number of disadvantaged youth/mentor matches that were sustained by the CNCS-supported program for at least the required time period.

Exhibit III-25 presents the results for the 11 grantees reporting on ED5 (the number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math); three grantees met their performance targets.

⁵² As stipulated by the CNCS performance measure guidance for ED2, at the outset of the activity, the program should indicate the amount of dosage (i.e. how many days or hours) that is required in order to count a student as having completed the activity. This number should be used as the denominator for selected measures and therefore the amount of participation should be enough to influence the results.

The explanations for not meeting program targets included program design changes, issues accessing data and receiving reliable data, and inaccurate goal setting.⁵³

Exhibit III-25: GPR Data for End-of-year 2013-14 ED5 Performance Measure

Grantee	Target	Actual	% of Target	Met Target?
Grantee #1	235	227	97%	No
Grantee #2	2,064	1,706	83%	No
Grantee #3	305	188	62%	No
Grantee #4	370	1	<1%	No
Grantee #5	1,152	29	3%	No
Grantee #6	480	0	0	No
Grantee #7	50	70	140%	Yes
Grantee #9	340	426	125%	Yes
Grantee #11	210	53	25%	No
Grantee #12	205	235	115%	Yes
Grantee #13	2,547	225	9%	No

Notes. ED5 = Number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math.

Exhibit III-26 presents the results for ED6 (the number of students who improved their school attendance over the course of the student’s involvement with CNCS-supported program). One grantee reported this performance measure; it did not meet its performance target. This grantee indicated the reasons included a late launch date and challenges with member recruitment efforts. In order to remedy the target not being met, the grantee indicated plans to start its subsequent program year in line with the school year calendar for 2014-2015, and it also planned to add a second site supervisor position.

Exhibit III-26: GPR Data for End-of-year 2013-14 ED6 Performance Measure

Grantee	Target	Actual	% of Target	Met Target?
Grantee #4	305	55	18%	No

Notes. ED6 = Number of students that improved their school attendance over the course of the CNCS-supported program’s involvement with the student.

Exhibit III-27 presents the results for ED7 (the number of students with no or decreased disciplinary referrals and suspensions over the course of the CNCS-supported program involvement). Two grantees reported this performance measure, one of which met and one of which failed its performance target. The latter’s explanation was that the program had experienced a substantial decline in the number of disciplinary referrals from the first part of the year to the second part of the year. The grantee did not describe any obstacles, or explain why the decline in referrals was not sufficient to meet the performance measure target.

Exhibit III-27: GPR Data for End-of-year 2013-14 ED7 Performance Measure

Grantee	Target	Actual	% of Target	Met Target?
Grantee #4	25	48	192%	Yes
Grantee #7	50	3	6%	No

Notes. ED7 = Number of students with no or decreased disciplinary referrals and suspensions over the course of the CNCS-program involvement.

⁵³ It should also be noted that ED5 (as well as ED6, ED7, and ED27) is calculated as the numerator over a denominator of the number of students who complete participation in the activity (ED2) or the number of qualifying mentor-mentee matches that were sustained over the course of the program (ED4A); thus a grantee’s performance in meeting the targets for ED5, ED6, ED7, and ED27 depends on having met the dosage requirements for ED2 or ED4A.

Exhibit III-28 presents the results for the eight grantees who reported on ED27 (the number of students in grades K-12 that participated in the mentoring or tutoring, or other education program including CNCS-supported service learning who demonstrated improved academic engagement). Three of eight met their performance target. The five grantees who did not meet their targets reported issues with data, transient student populations, and inaccurate goal setting as the explanations.

Exhibit III-28: GPR Data for End-of-year 2013-14 ED27 Performance Measure

Grantee	Target	Actual	% of Target	Met Target?
Grantee #1	219	278	127%	Yes
Grantee #3	324	218	67%	No
Grantee #7	50	47	94%	No
Grantee #8	1,015	362	36%	No
Grantee #9	64	80	125%	Yes
Grantee #10	270	348	129%	Yes
Grantee #11	336	96	29%	No
Grantee #13	1,250	416	33%	No

Notes. ED27 = Number of students in grades K-12 who participated in the mentoring or tutoring, or other education program including CNCS-supported service learning who demonstrated improved academic engagement.

Summary

Three grantees met all of their performance measure targets (four, two, and two targets, respectively). Three grantees met none of their performance measure targets (four, three, and two targets, respectively). Each of the remaining seven grantees met at least one performance target and also failed to meet at least one target. In summary, ten grantees met at least one target and three failed to meet at least one target. Taken together, the considerable variability in grantees’ capacity to meet performance targets—both across grantees and within individual grantees—might suggest that it would be useful to revisit the process of establishing meaningful targets.

Student-level Data Quality

This section describes the data quality of student-level achievement test, attendance, and behavior data obtained from School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantees for the 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-15 school years. All grantees except for one collected student-level data during the first two years of implementation (2013-2014 and 2014-15), and four grantees additionally collected data on their 2013-14 service recipients from 2012-13, the year before their entry into the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program (even though this was not a requirement of the grant or an expectation of the grantees). The detailed analyses and exhibits included in this section provide the basis for the data quality findings summarized in Chapter II, Part 1, *Potential Uses and Challenges of Administrative Data*. In summary,

- Only three grantees provided data sets suitable for supporting cogent analyses of 2014-15 outcome data.
- Rigorous and substantively interesting cross-grantee analyses cannot be performed.

Data quality here is assessed with respect to the feasibility of conducting meaningful single-year data analyses; cohort analyses comparing 2013-14 outcomes to 2014-15 outcomes was feasible for only two grantees, thus it was not possible to perform a cohort analysis at the program level.

For a given grantee and a given type of student-level data (achievement, attendance, behavior), the data may be:

- Unavailable because the grantee never planned to provide these data to Abt.
- Unavailable because the grantee has not transferred data promised to Abt.

- Transferred data with high levels of missingness (e.g., not all affiliated schools reported data, a high proportion of students in the dataset have missing values).
- Transferred data with low levels of missingness.

Exhibit III-29 summarizes the quality of the 2012-13 and 2013-14 student-level data, and Exhibit III-30 summarizes the quality of the 2014-15 student-level data in an analogous manner.

Each exhibit provides information about data quality in two ways. For each type of outcome (achievement, attendance, and behavior), it first indicates if a grantee's student-level dataset shared with Abt includes all schools affiliated with the grantee. If a school is not represented in a dataset, then its progress on the given outcome cannot be tracked and grantee-wide analyses of all its schools cannot be performed. Second, the quality of the data that do appear in the datasets is rated. The data quality is rated as *good* if there is less than 25% missing data; this means that a full range of data analyses can be performed. The data quality is rated as *useable* if there are low levels ($\leq 25\%$) of missing data on some, but not all, measures. This allows a limited number of cogent data analyses to be performed with the data. Finally, data quality is rated as *unusable* if there is so much missing data that no cogent analyses can be performed.

Exhibit III-29: 2012-2013 / 2013-2014 Student-level Data Quality

Grantee ^a	Data to be Transferred	Achievement Tests		Attendance		Behavior	
		Data from all of the Grantee's Schools?	Data Quality	Data from all of the Grantee's Schools?	Data Quality	Data from all of the Grantee's Schools?	Data Quality
Grantee #1	Years: 12-13, 13-14 Types: A, AT, B	Yes	Unusable	No	Useable	No data shared	No data shared
Grantee #3	Years: 13-14 Types: A	Yes	Good	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grantee #4	Years: 12-13, 13-14 Types: A, AT, B	Yes	Good	Yes	Good	Yes	Good
Grantee #5	Years: 13-14 Types: A	Yes	Useable	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grantee #6 ^b	Years: 13-14 Types: A, AT	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grantee #7	Years: 13-14 Types: A, AT	No data shared	No data shared	Yes	Good	N/A	N/A
Grantee #8	Years: 12-13 Types: AT	N/A	N/A	Yes	Useable	N/A	N/A
Grantee #9	Years: 13-14 Types: A, AT, B	No	Useable	No data shared	No data shared	No	Unusable
Grantee #10	Years: 13-14 Types: A, AT, B	No data shared	No data shared	Unclear: no school IDs provided	Unusable	Unclear: no school IDs provided	Unusable
Grantee #11	Years: 13-14 Types: A, AT, B	Yes	Good	Yes	Good	Yes	Good
Grantee #12 ^c	Years: 13-14 Types: A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grantee #13	Years: 13-14 Types: A, AT	Yes	Unusable	No data shared	No data shared	N/A	N/A

Notes. A = Achievement tests; AT = Attendance; B = Behavior. N/A = not applicable, because grantee does not collect the given type of data.

Using Grantee #9 as an example, the exhibit reads “Grantee #9 collects 2013-14 achievement, attendance, and behavior outcomes. Regarding the achievement test data shared with Abt, the data do not include all schools affiliated with the grantee, and some cogent data analyses can be performed with the shared data. This grantee did not share any attendance data. Regarding behavior outcome data shared with Abt, the data do not include all schools affiliated with the grantee, and there is so much missing data in the shared dataset that no cogent analyses can be performed.” As another example, Grantee #8 has “N/A” for achievement and behavior data because it does not collect these types of outcomes.

a Grantee #2 is not included in the exhibit because it does not centrally track any student-level data. Its district’s policy did not allow the study team to collect student data from any treatment schools in the district, even though they had written partnership agreements with the grantees, unless the grantees’ data sharing agreements explicitly state that the data will be used for the CNCS or national evaluation. Two grantees that have partnership agreements with this district do not explicitly state this in their agreements.

b Grantee did not collect student-level data for 2013-2014.

c Grantee is not permitted to share student-level data with Abt.

Summary

From Exhibit III-29, there are a number of instances of promised data not being shared with Abt (e.g., Grantee #7, Grantee #13); a number of instances in which some of a grantee’s affiliated schools are not represented in its data (e.g., Grantee #1, Grantee #9); other instances where the data that were shared are of such poor quality that meaningful data analyses are not possible (e.g., Grantee #1, Grantee #13); and still other instances where the shared data can be used to perform a limited number of analyses (e.g., Grantee #8, Grantee #1). The instances where a grantee’s full array of analyses of student-level data can be performed are the minority of cases, and it does not appear that substantively interesting cross-grantee analyses can be meaningfully performed. For instance, because of missing data in Grantee #8’s dataset, it would not be possible to examine 12th grade attendance outcomes for all high schools across all grantees.

Below, Exhibit III-30 repeats this analysis for grantees’ 2014-2015 student-level data.

Exhibit III-30: 2014-2015 Student-level Data Quality

Grantee	Data Expected ^a	Data Received	Data from All Schools Received?	Student IDs Provided?	Student Grade Level Provided?	Quality of Data Received		
						A	AT	B
Grantee #1	A, AT, B	A, AT, B	Unknown-No Crosswalk	Yes ^f	No	Unusable	Unusable	Unusable
Grantee #3	A	A ^j	No	No	Yes	Unusable		
Grantee #4	A, AT, B	A, AT, B	Yes ^b	Yes	Yes	Good	Good	Good ^c
Grantee #5	A	A	Yes	No ^l	Yes	Unusable ^m		
Grantee #6	A	NONE ^k						
Grantee #7	A, AT, B	B ^d	N/A ^e	No	No			Unusable ^c
Grantee #8	AT	AT	Yes	No	Yes		Good	
Grantee #9	A, AT, B	A, AT, B	No ^g	No	Yes	Usable ^h	Unusable	Unusable
Grantee #10	A, AT, B	AT, B	Yes ^b	Yes	Yes		Good	Good
Grantee #11	A, AT, B	A, AT, B	Unknown-No school IDs	No	Yes	Usable	Good	Good
Grantee #12	A	NONE ⁱ						
Grantee #13	A, AT	A	Yes ^b	Yes	Yes	Unusable		

Notes. Exhibit III-30 documents the 2014-15 data collected from AmeriCorps grantees and the quality of these data. Using Grantee #10 as an example, data may be interpreted as follows:

Grantee #10 was expected to submit student-level achievement, attendance and behavior data, but only submitted attendance and behavior data. Data were received from all the grantee’s AmeriCorps schools and student identifiers were provided. The attendance and behavior data submitted were of good quality.

Cells are greyed out where data is not applicable. For example, the data quality of Grantee #8’s achievement and behavior data are greyed out, as it did not submit any of these data to Abt.

Grantee #2 is not included in the exhibit because it does not centrally track any student-level data. Its district’s policy did not allow the study team to collect student data from any treatment schools in the district, even though they had written partnership agreements with the grantees, unless the grantees’ data sharing agreements explicitly state that the data will be used for the CNCS or national evaluation. Two grantees that have partnership agreements with this district do not explicitly state this in their agreements.

[a] A=Achievement AT=Attendance B=Behavior

[b] Data provided for more schools than were part of the grantee's AmeriCorps program.

[c] Grantee #4 and Grantee #7 only provided records for students with behavioral issues rather than data on all students. However, for Grantee #4 it is possible to determine which students had no behavioral issues by matching behavior data to the full cohort of students that received AmeriCorps students provided in the attendance data files.

[d] Grantee #7 submitted aggregated, grade-level attendance data but did not submit student-level attendance data.

[e] Grantee #7 only oversees AmeriCorps at a single school. As such it is unnecessary to identify individual schools within this grantee's data

[f] Student IDs were provided only for one school.

[g] One school was missing all data. Another school was missing attendance and behavior data. A third school was missing attendance data.

[h] The standardized 2014-15 achievement data submitted used a different scale for test scores (raw rather than scaled) than was used for 2013-14. As such, these data cannot be used in comparing the 2013-14 and 2014-15 cohorts despite being relatively complete.

[i] Grantee #12 was not permitted to share student-level data with Abt. School-grade level attendance rates for 2013-14 were for all program schools. No data were submitted for 2014-15.

[j] While these data refer to the 2014-15 school year, they were submitted during the 2013-14 data collection. As such, the study team is unsure which year these data represent.

[k] Grantee #6 did not collect student-level data for 2013-14. They were supposed to provide student-level data for 2014-15 but did not.

[l] IDs are provided, but do not link across datasets. As such, their utility is limited.

[m] Grantee #5 submitted data that appeared usable, but told Abt their data were incomplete and hence an inadequate representation of their program. As such, the study team classified these data as "unusable."

Summary

From Exhibit III-30, there are a number of instances of promised data not being shared with Abt (e.g., Grantee #7, Grantee #6); a number of instances in which some of a grantee's affiliated schools are not represented in its data (Grantee #9, Grantee #3); other instances where the data that were shared are of such poor quality that meaningful data analyses are not possible (e.g., Grantee #1, Grantee #13); and still other instances where the shared data can be used to perform a limited number of analyses (e.g., Grantee #9). The instances where a grantee's full array of analyses of student-level data can be performed are the minority of cases, and it does not appear that substantively interesting cross-grantee analyses can be meaningfully performed. For instance, because of the poor quality of the attendance data from Grantee #1 and Grantee #9, it would not be possible to examine attendance outcomes for all schools across all grantees that provided attendance data (and only six grantees provided attendance data). Only three grantees – Grantee #4, Grantee #8, and Grantee #10 – provided data sets suitable for supporting cogent analyses of 2014-15 outcome data.

Case Study Findings

Comparative Case Studies

This section addresses the broad research questions, “Which activities pursued by AmeriCorps members are perceived as being more or less helpful, and why?” and “What are the perceived impacts of the program in supporting a school’s turnaround plan?” It presents the paired case studies for all six sites. Within each case study, the school supported by School Turnaround AmeriCorps is presented first (labeled with an A), followed by a description of its matched comparison school (labeled with a B). Each case study includes the following sections:

- Demographic information about the matched schools;
- Description of School A’s local context, partnership strategies, promising practices, implementation challenges, and perceived effects;
- Description of School B’s local context, partnership strategies, challenges, and perceived effects; and
- Description of physical environment for schools that received site visits (Schools 3A, 3B, 5A, and 5B).

The individual case studies provide an in-depth comparison of stakeholder perceptions of school climate and schools’ progress in accomplishing the goals of their turnaround plans with the assistance of School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources compared to the progress of similar schools with no or minimal AmeriCorps presence. Data sources are principal interviews, teacher interviews and focus groups, and school climate observations at AmeriCorps and matched comparison schools. A synthesis of findings and lessons learned across all case studies was presented in Part I.

Case Study 1

Brief Overview

This case study describes two urban high schools’ efforts to meet their turnaround plan goals during the 2014–15 school year, focusing specifically on the roles of AmeriCorps members and/or other volunteers, external support staff, and other external partners that help to support school turnaround activities. One of the schools (School 1A) engaged School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in a range of activities, while the other (School 1B, which did not have School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources) used internal staff to provide some additional tutoring and college preparation supports and generally detailed a culture of “handling things” themselves. School 1A’s case study is based on telephone interviews with the principal and 3 teachers; School 1B’s case study is based on telephone interviews with the principal and 3 teachers.

Context

Local Demographics

Schools 1A and 1B are high schools located in urban areas in the southwestern region of the United States. The two schools served generally comparable student populations with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds and income levels (see Exhibit III-34).

Exhibit III-34: At a Glance: Characteristics of Case Study Schools (2013-14)

	School 1A	School 1B
District urbanicity	Urban	Urban
SIG Turnaround Model	Transformation	Transformation
SIG funding	2013-2015: \$1,194,000	2011—2014: \$5,999,251
School enrollment	1,358	1,489
District enrollment	86,516	86,516
Free- and reduced-price lunch	1,206	1,341
Racial/ethnic composition		
White	2.9%	4.4%
Hispanic	83.6%	80.1%
Black	10.0%	1.3%
Asian	1.8%	3.8%
Other	1.5%	1.3%

School 1A

Perceptions of Local Context

School 1A, a transformation school that became a part of school turnaround in 2013, became an early college high school in spring 2015. In the 2014–15 school year, School 1A had nine School Turnaround AmeriCorps members who were organized and sent to School 1A by the district. According to School 1A’s principal, the school faces disadvantages due its high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and English language learners.

Partnership Strategies

In addition to its School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, the school had a long list of partner organizations and programs. It had three programs for mentoring or social support (in addition to School Turnaround AmeriCorps), one for discipline support, one for after-school tutoring, one for college readiness, and one organization that provides psychiatric evaluations to students.

In 2014–15, nine School Turnaround AmeriCorps members served in the building. The program had an on-site coordinator, an employee from the district. Members provided English and math tutoring to students both in the classroom and after school when needed. Some School Turnaround AmeriCorps members offered other activities and supports for parental engagement. At least one member called parents at home in an attempt to prevent students from dropping out, though this appeared to be a small component of the program. Members also participated, seemingly voluntarily, in after-school activities, including a running club.

Effective Strategies and Promising Practices for Partners

Relationships with students. All three interviewed teachers felt that members had forged strong, lasting relationships with students that positively influenced students’ lives beyond academic improvement. Teachers reported witnessing students seeking out members for advice, for tutoring, and just to spend time with members. As the year progressed, two teachers felt that members’ influence and activities became, as one stated, “wider and deeper” and their work fundamentally encouraged community and relationship building. Another teacher noted that members served in a challenging school where students were often reluctant to build relationships with adults. Her observation was that members were able to overcome the barriers and build meaningful relationships with students. Another teacher gave an example of one of her students staying for after-school tutoring twice a week because of his bond with his tutor and she noted that the student was “always able to catch up on work, and ... [became] more confident in his academics.”

School staff and member collaboration. All three teachers reported that school staff and members collaborated well and frequently. Members at School 1A attended weekly staff meetings as well as biweekly department meetings. Two teachers specifically mentioned that members attended teacher training and that they found this very beneficial and felt like members were “in sync” with school staff. One teacher elaborated, explaining that she spoke with her tutor every day about lessons, expectations for students, and academic and/or behavioral challenges for specific students. Two teachers also attempted to give members meaningful roles in their classrooms, to do what they “have a knack” for and what they “feel comfortable” doing. This communication enabled teachers to pinpoint the strengths of individual members and how to use them to their advantage in their departments and classrooms. In this sense, members collaborated with School 1A teachers, with teachers also supporting members.

Supporting teaching staff. Two teachers felt that members’ relationships with students supported teachers. One explained that large class sizes meant that she could not check on every student and that she “can’t be two places at once.” With a School Turnaround AmeriCorps member in her classroom, there was another adult in the classroom to support and check on students. A second teacher expressed a similar sentiment, noting that she and her colleagues were under great pressure with time commitments and that members were able to stay after school to tutor students even when teachers had to work on something else or return home for family obligations.

Member dedication. Two teachers specifically noted the high level of dedication School Turnaround AmeriCorps members exhibited. One teacher noted that her tutor stayed after school until 5:30 p.m. to tutor students and was willing to meet them at other times. She reflected that students are less likely to do homework when they do not have a place to sit down and study and that members helped create this space and atmosphere. A second teacher also reported high levels of member dedication and elaborated that one of her tutors helped a student enroll in health care services. A third teacher reported that several members joined an after-school activity that helps students complete a marathon. The members joined the students in the six-month training, and the teacher was impressed by their fortitude.

Implementation Challenges in Working with Partners

Although members were perceived as expanding the school’s capacity in some important areas, school leadership and staff acknowledged implementation challenges in addition to successes.

Member roles and expectations. The principal and three teachers from School 1A cited confusion and concerns with members’ roles and expectations. Two teachers felt that their departments should have offered more specifics about what members were allowed to do so that members could have had a better understanding of their roles within the departments. One wanted to offer more freedom to members by allowing them to come up with supplemental assignments and create lessons to benefit their tutees. Another wished her department set clear expectations for them when they arrived so they did not feel “lost” and stuck in a “gray area.” One teacher spoke specifically about struggling with program restrictions regarding the amount of hours members had to work with specific students in their caseload. Even if the teacher had other students she wanted her member to focus on, the member could not shift his/her attention because members had to work within their caseload. She wished there had been more flexibility in the program to accommodate more students’ needs.

The principal suggested several strategies for other schools to use when acquiring similar services to ensure their expectations for members are clear to avoid frustration, which indicated that these suggestions were a result of the school’s own frustrations. He suggested that schools ensure that schedules are predetermined before members arrive and that weekly meetings are scheduled on the calendar with the director or supervisor to guarantee “the main concerns are met” in assisting the tutors. He also emphasized that protocols should be in place before tutors arrive on campus so that staff

members, if necessary, know how to formally lodge a complaint, express a concern, or ask a question about members' services and performance.

Perceived Impact/Success in Using Partners to Meet Key Turnaround Outcomes

Multiple respondents from School 1A perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps as contributing to success in meeting key school turnaround outcomes in the following ways:

Academic engagement. As described above, School 1A's principal and teachers found the members' in-classroom support and tutoring to be beneficial to both teachers and students, allowing teachers more flexibility in their schedules and bolstering students' academic engagement and performance.

Social-emotional support. All three teachers from School 1A found that the School Turnaround members contributed on a social-emotional level by building relationships with students. This, in turn, allowed students to work in safe spaces where they could ask for additional attention and support and engage with tutors in a mentorship capacity.

Providing after-school programming. One teacher reported that her tutor stayed after school when teachers could not to support students in math and reading. Another reported that tutors joined an after-school activity that helps students complete a marathon.

School 1B

Perceptions of Local Context

The community around School 1B has drastically shifted within the last three decades, from a suburban, white, affluent population to an area populated by a high percentage of Spanish-speaking and Asian immigrants, English language learners, and impoverished residents. School 1B was 96 percent nonwhite and linguistically diverse with over 65 different nationalities represented. In the 1980s, the schools faced "darker days," and the principal elaborated that, "the community didn't get the kids, and the kids didn't feel like they were supported by the community." In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the school suffered from a series of murders and gang violence. In 2008, the graduation rate was 54.7 percent. However, due to reform efforts, the school achieved a graduation rate of 91.7 percent in 2014. The principal cited Title I funding, other grants, improving pedagogy, training around challenges faced by the student population, and developing and retaining staff as the key reform efforts. He concluded that School 1B is currently was "not where we want to be but we're a far, far cry from where we were when I started teaching."

Partnership Strategies

Six years ago, School 1B restructured into smaller learning communities and, in 2011, it was awarded SIG funding as a transformation school. School 1B also hired a company to provide professional development for every teacher. Overall, School 1B seemed to function successfully by using grants, investing in professional development for its staff, recalibrating teacher hiring practices, and offering teacher-led support services for students.

The principal and two teachers were unaware of the school having external partners. One teacher noted that the school worked with the Boys and Girls Club and another organization that worked with students on issues such as teen pregnancy and maturing into manhood. Those who were unaware of partners explained that their school prefers to handle issues with internal resources because of the trade-offs required by working with partners. The principal explained candidly that partnerships "come with encumbrances" and not being tied to partner organizations allows School 1B the freedom to be "nimble enough" to preserve its own culture. As an example of this philosophy, the principal noted that School 1B used to have a grant that funded pullout tutoring for algebra students. For future partners, the principal would prefer to work with academic service partners rather than other supports because the academic

service providers are “more based on standards” than on trying to integrate into the school culture and community.

School 1B’s principal did feel, however, that his students needed postsecondary coaching. He explained that many students did not understand the importance of their grade point averages and college readiness and, while Title I provided some funding for postsecondary coaching, it was not enough. He elaborated, “... They [students] don't understand the whole college framework and schemas and all of that. They don't understand what dorms are. They don't understand all of these types of things that—it's hard because you have to incentivize it without it sounding scary.”

Teachers corroborated the principal’s statements about School 1B handling issues on its own. They explained that their school was able to do so because certain teaching staff at their school were able to serve students. Teachers did this primarily by staying after school, coming in on Saturdays, or tutoring in the summer months on reading and math or to help with test preparation for state tests or the SAT. One teacher noted that the district made it difficult for volunteers to come into School 1B—they “have to go through a lot of approval processes”—and this meant that teachers were nearly the only volunteers.

Challenges with Partnerships

The three interviewed teachers offered differing perspectives on the perceived value of having internal versus external tutors. The teacher who noted the barriers for community volunteers felt that outside tutoring did not have the same impact as tutoring done by the teachers. Two teachers, who also wanted to provide tutoring themselves, worried that teachers serving as tutors would not be enough. As one teacher said, “It is really hard to work an entire day and then stay an extra two hours at night, or show up on a Saturday, and not feel completely burned out.” A third teacher hypothesized that students would benefit from outside instructors, saying “We're wondering if having an outside partner would make it better for the students, that way they are getting different information from different people in different ways, and it's not us just re-churning up the same things that we've done in class.”

Perceived Impact/Success in Meeting Key Turnaround Outcomes

One of the teachers explained how, in her estimation, the math department had achieved improvements through internal initiatives, especially the school’s changed hiring practices. The school now asks interviewees to teach model lessons and probe to see if they will be a good fit for the school and student population. The same teacher also explained that the district gave the school “the power to make our own roadmaps for our kids” and tailor the school’s curriculum and culture to match their students’ needs. The teacher concluded, “With all of that put together, I think the realization that we are a different campus, we do need to do different things to reach our students, and kind of the acceptance and gracing of that has helped our campus move forward in healthier ways.”

Case Study 2

Brief Overview

This case study describes the efforts of two elementary schools in an urban district to meet their school turnaround plan goals during the 2014–15 school year, focusing specifically on the roles of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and/or other volunteers, external support staff, and other external partners who help to support school turnaround activities. School 2A’s case study is based on a pre-interview with a vice principal in January 2015 and case study interviews with that same vice principal, another vice principal, and two teachers in late April and early May 2015. School 2B’s case study is based on interviews with a principal, assistant principal, and three teachers.

Context

Local Demographics

Schools 2A and 2B are urban elementary schools in the eastern United States. The two schools serve generally comparable student populations with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds (97 to 99 percent African American) and low family incomes, with about 9 out of 10 students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)(see Exhibit III-35). In addition, School 2A currently has the highest population of homeless and transitional students in the district.

Exhibit III-35: At a Glance: Characteristics of Case Study schools (2013-14)

	School 2A	Comparison School 2B
District urbanicity	Urban	Urban
SIG Turnaround Model	Restart	Turnaround: Arts
SIG funding	2011–2015: \$1,279,599	2011–2014: \$550,387
School enrollment	587 students	420 students
District enrollment	46,500 students	46,500 students
Free- and reduced-price lunch	89%	99%
Racial/ethnic composition		
African American	97%	99%
Hispanic	3%	1%

School 2A

Perceptions of Local Context

When School 2A was placed in turnaround status five years ago, it was the second-lowest-achieving school in the district and, to facilitate its turnaround plan, was partnered with a dedicated turnaround organization. To boost reading and math scores, students receive double reading and double math in addition to science, social studies, art, and music. The school has seen improvement in its academic performance. However, in speaking about the 2014–15 school year, the principal explained that the school still faced significant academic challenges. It was using the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) model, wherein 80 percent of students are assumed to be performing at grade level, 15 percent need moderate intervention, and 5 percent need significant intervention. However, At [our school], the triangle is upside-down,” the principal said.

Partnership Strategies

School 2A had a significant number of partnerships with outside organizations, beginning with a dedicated turnaround partner. Staff members mentioned an additional 10 outside organizations that addressed a broad range of student needs to help the school be a “community school.” External partners provide services such as access to healthy food, including a program specifically for homeless children, those in transitional housing, and others that are food insecure. Other services provided by partners included parental engagement, youth development and recreation, and tutoring. Tutoring was provided by members of a community organization and by other AmeriCorps members (not part of School Turnaround AmeriCorps).

School 2A had had a long-standing relationship with its grantee organization, even before entering turnaround status, though the partnership was “enriched” after the school entered turnaround status and received School Turnaround AmeriCorps members. In 2014–15, the school had a large cohort of 18 members, giving it a low member-to-student ratio. There were two team leaders and a site coordinator,

all of whom worked for the grantee organization. In addition, the school had hired at least eight previous AmeriCorps members as teachers to work in the school in recent years.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps members are “an integral part of our day-to-day academics” serving in a variety of roles, according to one vice principal. Each member is assigned to work with students in one or more classrooms, as well as with different students in intervention blocks and students with behavior or attendance issues. From the school’s analysis of its RTI data, members were matched with students in the middle tier who needed some support but did not have the greatest needs. Members were matched to their classroom teachers based on what one teacher described as a “speed dating” event at the beginning of the year where members and teachers met and rated each other as to how strongly they would like to work together. The school placed members at the highest match level between member and teacher ratings (e.g., each rated the other a 4 out of 5).

In-class support. Each member was assigned to a classroom for much of the day where he or she was assigned a small caseload of students pulled out for math and reading groups. Members also monitored student progress as part of assessments. Additionally, simply by being in the classroom, members played a key role in providing more adult attention, which both helped prevent students from acting out for attention and meant that members could de-escalate situations when a student became upset. Teachers and members met weekly or biweekly to review students’ progress and discuss lesson plans and upcoming teaching strategies.

Intervention. Members pulled students from their caseloads for interventions during a dedicated block when each student received differentiated instruction with a group of similarly-performing peers. School 2A trained members on the same pedagogical techniques and program components that teachers used so that members’ instruction could complement what students receives in the classroom.

School culture. Members generally contributed to making school a “fun” environment for students and were closely involved in the school’s behavioral interventions, which were based on the school’s values. Members checked in with them daily with students with high behavioral needs to discuss the students’ behavioral goals and if they succeeded in meeting them. At the classroom and school level, members hosted biweekly behavior reward parties based on exhibiting the school’s core values. Lastly, members contributed to building an age-appropriate college-going culture—in this case, normalizing the expectation at an early age that these elementary students were expected to go to college.

Family engagement. Parental engagement was a significant part of School 2A’s overall turnaround strategy. The school had engaged another outside partner specifically for parent engagement, including home visits. Members participated in and led several activities to engage parents, including participating in home visits with teachers. Members were an integral part of Parent Nights throughout the year, where they distributed data to parents and talked with them about their children’s progress. Members also hosted events designed to get parents involved in specific school initiatives, for example, a night where parents and students worked together toward students’ home reading goals. School Turnaround AmeriCorps members also ran the after-school program, which a vice principal noted was “a huge help to parents in the community,” presumably because the children had supervised activities while parents were still at work. Members also participated in other activities for families, such as distributions of healthy food once a month.

Attendance. Attendance support was a major program component mentioned by vice principals and teachers. One vice principal characterized the school’s approach to attendance outreach as “restorative,” where members phrased calls to elementary students as “telling them they miss them when they’re absent.” With parents, members tried to gain insight into what might have been happening at home,

especially for chronically absent students. Members also tried to incentivize attendance by holding lunch clubs for students with attendance problems.

Effective Strategies and Promising Practices for Partners

School 2A administrators and staff perceived members to be particularly effective in the following areas.

Building relationships with students. All the interviewed school staff emphasized that members played a highly valuable role in supporting the school culture. Fundamentally, this was based on members' relationships with students where they earned students' trust because students saw them as "a little cooler." Members used their relationships with students to learn what additional supports they needed, generate ideas about effective strategies to reach them, and broker smoother relationships with teachers. Several staff members specifically mentioned that members de-escalated situations when students become upset.

Supporting teachers. Two vice principals emphasized that members' relationship building with students supported teachers. By being in classrooms with teachers much of the day, members made the classroom environment less stressful. Students were getting more attention and not acting out and members de-escalated disruptions, helping the teachers remain calmer and more effective. Likewise, building relationships with parents got parents more involved in their children's schoolwork, which also supported teachers. A vice principal and teacher noted the key role of the teachers was as mentors and managers of the member in their classrooms. As one teacher put it, "The [Ameri]Corps member is going to be as effective as the teacher allows him or her to be," highlighting the additional responsibility teachers take on with coaching members, who usually do not have classroom experience.

Close integration into school goals and operations. School administrators and teachers described the program as offering services closely aligned with the school's strategies, such as the values-based behavior intervention and ensuring that members were well-versed in the intervention models teachers used. Operationally, there were several mechanisms for frequent contact among the members, school staff, administrators, and grantees. Two team leaders and an on-site coordinator were provided by the grantee. The team leaders were former members who provided coaching and professional development for members. Team leaders and the grantee's coordinator (who worked with two to three schools) had weekly and monthly meetings. The school has a long history of working with the grantee on multiple programs and they had achieved a high level of collaboration.

Implementation Challenges in Working with Partners

School 2A's relationship with the grantee organization appeared to be very strong, with only minor issues at the administrative level. The technical requirement that members have separate caseloads for reading and math was a source of frustration for teachers who had students struggling with both subjects who could have benefitted from coaching in both subjects. A vice principal also noted that there was not much coordination between the school and grantee about members' professional development, making it hard for the school to know what trainings members were receiving or which school-wide trainings were most appropriate for members. Members' term of service ended before the end of the school-year, which a vice principal described as, "jarring for the kids and it's difficult for teachers who have become reliant on their [Ameri]Corps member."

One teacher noted the school's heavy reliance on AmeriCorps members, which imposed a real burden on the school when problems arose. "It was a really tough school year," according to another teacher. As he and others mentioned, the 2014–15 AmeriCorps cohort was not as strong as the prior year's, leading to frustration among teachers whose members were less committed (including one who left halfway through the year) and less effective. While interviewees were not clear about how this had happened,

some wondered if the grantee's screening process changed, or if because the school was closed for construction in the summer the school had not offered members the typical two weeks of professional development before students arrived and during which time they normally would have been matched with teachers. Instead, members were not paired with teachers until after school started. Throughout the year, the school had team leaders coach members whose teachers had provided negative feedback, "to provide development around that area that the member is struggling in." Administrators and teachers who had a history in the school observed that the difficulties with this cohort represented an aberration from their usual experience with the grantee's AmeriCorps members.

In fact, one teacher explained that, even though "sometimes, it feels like there's too many bodies in the building ... we push for [AmeriCorps members] every year because it's so important to have them." She also wished that members could stay for two years but recognized that it was not "sustainable to do it for two years because of the financial challenge of it."

Perceived Impact/Success in Using Partners to Meet Key Turnaround Outcomes

Socio-emotional health. Administrators and teachers reported that members were very effective at building relationships with students and improving their behavior. Both interviewed teachers commented that they noticed remarkably more behavioral challenges in the classroom when their members were not present. A vice principal noted, however, that he did not think the school had done a good job of capturing the impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on behavior: "I just don't think that anybody's really quantified how that's impacted socio-emotional development."

Academic achievement. Corps members' presence in classrooms, especially with small group work, helped improve students' academic engagement and, therefore, their academic achievement. An assistant principal and teacher noted that many students showed marked improvement in their performance, particularly in literacy. One teacher explained that, "the [members] that have worked with me, their kids grew and—whether it was their math or reading interventions ... the kids in the small groups really do learn and benefit."

School 2B

Perceptions of Local Context

School 2B is located in the same high-poverty area as School Turnaround AmeriCorps school 2A and serves a similar student population from pre-kindergarten (as young as 3) through fifth grade. At the time of the study, its student population was almost entirely African American (99 percent), with 1 percent of students reporting Hispanic ethnicity and 1 percent of students who were English language learners (ELL). Virtually all of School B's 420 students (99 percent) are eligible for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL).

Substantial numbers of students experienced growth in their math and reading capacities in 2013–14 as compared to 2012–13 (54 percent and 40 percent, respectively). Over the same time period, however, student truancy rose (from 5 percent to 9 percent) and student satisfaction decreased (from 90 percent to 82 percent). Retention of teachers rated highly effective also declined from 2012–13 to 2013–14—from 100 percent to 71 percent, according to performance data collected by the district and posted on the school's website.

School 2B has a school-wide emphasis on the arts and, in 2012, received the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities Turnaround: Arts designation. It had a diverse set of partners and programs for arts (10), academic support (10), and wellness (6), including an AmeriCorps program; interviewed staff discussed 17 distinct partners. School 2B's turnaround plan emphasizes seven principles: strong principal leadership, formal and informal teacher evaluation, professional development for teachers through an

instructional coach and external partners, transformation of the school culture to focus on increasing student academic performance, visibility of its arts-integration programs, effective use of data, and parental engagement.

Partnership Strategies

Professional development. School 2B engaged many partners and internal strategies for professional development for its teachers. These included district- and school-level professional development for teachers, external consultants, a literacy-focused assistant principal who provides instructional coaching, and other external partners. Other external partners include arts organizations that teach teachers how to integrate material from the fine arts into core academic subjects. As one teacher who “loves” the approach explained, she has learned how to teach students “to read a book by learning how to read a painting.” The school also has ongoing instructional coaching from the assistant principal who continually reviews data with teachers and has, with the help of an external partner, emphasized the importance of flexible small-group strategies to tailor instruction.

Curriculum-integrated partners. Several of School 2B’s partners provided additional academic content tailored to the school’s instructional standards. In effective cases, partners delivered the content in different but complementary ways to teachers’ regular classroom delivery. One program, for example, worked with older elementary grades; it presented several units throughout the school year, each of which was aligned to specific standards. The unit included a pre- and post-test surrounding an enrichment trip led by the external partner for the students and teacher. Another partner, an AmeriCorps program that had two members (though the school lost one late in the year), targeted younger grades, and was also noted to tailor its instructional strategies to match those used in the classroom. At least one other academic partner co-planned lessons with classroom teachers and its volunteers were highly regarded for their strong understanding of the school’s standards and curriculum. Professional development activities for pedagogy in both core subjects and arts-integrated teaching were provided by a number of partners and were closely tailored to the school’s standards.

By contrast, one literacy-focused partner was noted by an assistant principal to not only be ineffective but potentially damaging to student progress because the tutors used different instructional strategies than the school’s standards—and the skills on which students would be tested. This tutoring occurred during students’ literacy block and into their math block, meaning that struggling students were potentially even further behind relative to the skills their peers were acquiring in full-class instruction.

Shared experiences for students and teachers. An administrator and two teachers discussed the benefits of shared experiences for teachers and students. In the field trip-based unit described above, a school leader suggested that teachers’ participation in trips changes the dynamic between teachers and students from, “I’m telling you, I’m telling you” to “remember when we did this.”

With parental engagement, too, external partners help by relieving some of the pressure on teachers to handle all the logistical aspects of an evening. This allows teachers to be able to “sit along with families during the process and either be learners or participants with our families, and kind of engage with them in a much less stressful manner.”

Challenges with Partnerships

School 2B experienced turnover in its leadership in 2014–15; a new principal arrived in the fall and a vice principal left midway through the school year, which interview respondents noted made the school year challenging. The new principal tried to continue existing partnerships, although some partnerships ended. The vice principal’s mid-year departure led to other challenges as her responsibilities then had to be reassigned. An administrator and teacher also mentioned teacher turnaround as having a negative

impact on the school, as did high absenteeism and low morale among some other teachers. One teacher, who is was going to lead an initiative in the 2015–16 year about improving school culture and behavior, spoke of the interrelated challenges of setting standards for student behavior, especially when morale is low among teachers.

Another challenge was inconsistent coordination and communication between the school and its multiple partners. This meant that, with at least two partners, students were not being picked up and dropped off at expected times, and in other cases that either school staff or partners did not have needed information in a timely fashion. One partner, for example, provided recreation and social skills programs that were much-loved by students and parents, yet inconsistent coordination and communication between the school and the partner led to administrator and staff perceptions that the program was not as effective as it could have been. Other cases of inadequate communication were when academically-focused intervention partners did not meet frequently with school leaders or teachers to discuss data (and translate periodic interventions into classroom teaching), or when school leaders did not have a roster of partners that were coming to the building.

Perceived Impact/Success Meeting Key Turnaround Outcomes

Interviewed School 2B staff agreed that external partners played large roles in increasing engagement and enthusiasm among both students and parents; the partners' contributions were generally very highly valued. One external partner helped build a key bridge between parents and the school by communicating the importance of attendance, homework completion, and rigor through Common Core standards. Teachers and administrators also believed that students were very excited about most of the programming offered by external partners, especially physical activity, field trips to historic sites or cultural institutions, and the AmeriCorps program. Teachers perceived the AmeriCorps program as being more effective than a similar academic intervention because the members were present all the time, which allowed them to both forge relationships with students and “make a connection between what was going on in the classroom and what they were doing with their intervention.” Administrators and teachers withheld stronger specific comments about perceived impact as they had not yet seen assessment data that would back up their personal observations, however, they did seem to expect that achievement data would show improvement.

Case Study 3

Brief Overview

This case study describes two urban elementary schools' efforts to meet their turnaround plan goals during the 2014–15 school year, focusing specifically on the roles of AmeriCorps members and/or other partners. One school (School 3A) engaged School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in diverse activities while School 3B, which did not have School Turnaround AmeriCorps support, had other external partners engaged in various support activities. This case study is based on a site visit to Schools 3A and 3B in May 2015. At each school, there were interviews with the principal, two teachers, a teacher focus group with four teachers, and a structured observation protocol of the school environment.

Context

Local Demographics

Schools 3A and 3B are elementary schools in the same city in the southwestern United States. Schools 3A and 3B are located in two separate school districts that are 11 miles apart. They serve comparable student populations with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds (a majority of Hispanic students) and income levels (the vast majority of students were eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch), although School B is

in a considerably smaller school district. The two schools received significantly different SIG funding amounts; School A receiving nearly \$1,500,000 more than School B (see Exhibit III-36).

Exhibit III-36: At a Glance: Characteristics of Case Study Schools (2013-14)

	School 3A	School 3B
District urbanicity	Urban	Urban
SIG Turnaround Model	Turnaround	Transformation
SIG funding: years and total award	2010–13: \$2,256,517	2010–13: \$760,200
School level	Elementary	Elementary
School enrollment	395 students	384 students
District enrollment	83,377 students	10,069 students
Proportion of students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch	85%	91%
Racial/ethnic composition		
White	5.8%	8.9%
Hispanic	64.0%	82.0%
Black	25.0%	2.1%
Asian	2.5%	4.7%
Other	2.5%	2.3%

School 3A

Physical Environment

The School 3A building was generally a clean and inviting space. Various posters were on the walls in the hallway encouraging students to stay focused during standardized testing and reminding students of testing tips and norms (testing was ongoing during the site visit period). Some of these posters appeared to be created by students. Flyers posted throughout the building announced family and community events, such as a Family Ceramics Night, illustrating the school’s efforts to engage and involve students’ families in activities going on at the school. Students also had access to a gymnasium, playground, cafeteria, art room, library, and computer lab, which were all separate dedicated spaces.

During the study team’s short visit to School 3A, teachers and school staff engaged in frequent and positive interactions with one another and with students. AmeriCorps members were not typically distinguishable from other school staff in any way, but their space in the building was clearly visible to visitors; the hall outside the AmeriCorps classroom featured a large banner with their name on it.

Perceptions of Local Context

According to the teachers and principal at School 3A, the student population in general has a high need for socioemotional support. The school had a full-time counselor and a part-time social worker, yet several staff members commented that the school’s limited resources meant it was unable to meet students’ socio-emotional needs. Additionally, three teachers expressed frustration with the lack of a district-wide mathematics curriculum and said that this created additional work and challenges for teachers, such as needing to align curriculum across multiple grades.

Partnership Strategies

School Turnaround AmeriCorps was one of several external partnerships supporting School 3A. Another partner was a group of local professionals that visited the school once a week during their lunch hour and read books with second and third grade students. The principal commented on the way in which that program provided socio-emotional support for students by having additional adult mentors with whom students could form relationships.

Another partner was a philanthropic organization that supported student participation in the Accelerated Reader program with a program in which students read books and took comprehension tests. The program logged the amount of time spent reading, and students' scores on the comprehension tests; students received prizes and could track their progress toward goals. The principal explained that the Accelerated Reader program encouraged students to read more frequently, which she said could positively impact their academic performance.

Additionally, School 3A partnered with an organization that provided consultant visits throughout the year to help teachers learn how to interpret student data and how to use the data to tailor their instruction. The principal and teachers reported that their partnership with this organization enabled teachers to use student data effectively and ultimately positively impact student academic performance.

In the 2014–15 school year, six School Turnaround AmeriCorps members served in the building plus a coordinator who split her time between three schools. Two members left the program and were replaced at the beginning of the school year.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps members focused primarily on math tutoring, which was provided to all fourth graders and some third and fifth graders. All members were assigned small groups of students to meet with every day. The AmeriCorps coordinator met with the third through fifth grade teachers regularly to plan instruction based on the specific areas in which students needed additional support. The coordinator then communicated the plans to the members. Members spent 50 minutes with each small group of students, starting on grade-level material for 10 to 15 minutes and then working with the students on their level, which was often different than their grade-level.

A secondary goal of the AmeriCorps members at School 3A was mentoring. Through frequent small-group tutoring sessions and members' participation in school events and interaction with students throughout the day (at lunch or recess, for example), they were in a unique position to form bonds with their students.

Effective Strategies and Promising Practices for Partners

School 3A's principal and staff perceived members to be particularly effective in the following areas:

Academic tutoring. Each member was assigned multiple sets of small math tutoring groups that remained consistent throughout the year. They provided tailored support to students, spending additional time on the grade-level material students were being taught in the classroom and also working with students on material at their current level of understanding. Teachers reported that members used many strategies for engaging their students and checking for their understanding, such as the use of games, contests, and exit tickets (a school-wide strategy teachers used to check for student understanding). The principal and teachers mentioned that they believed the academic support members provided had a beneficial effect on the students' academic performance and socio-emotional health.

Mentoring and relationship building. The principal and teachers commented several times that the members worked hard to build relationships with their students, which they noted helped keep students engaged in their small group tutoring sessions. Members regularly had lunch with students, attended school events, and spent time outside their required tutoring time with the students in their tutoring groups. As previously noted, staff at School 3A noted that the student population at their school had a lot of socio-emotional needs and not enough school resources to support all of them. The principal and the school counselor commented that the mentoring provided by the members added to the school's efforts to meet students' socio-emotional needs.

Members serving as a team. Administrators and staff reported that the consistent teamwork displayed by the members was noticeable and beneficial to their work. Teachers noted that the members would all

come to the classroom together to pick up their groups at consistent times and in a consistent manner. Members were also known to collaborate with each other and with their coordinator frequently. If a member was out of the building one day, the other members would take on the students from their groups so that the students' and teachers' routines were maintained.

Implementation Challenges in Working with Partners

Although members were perceived to expand the school's capacity in some important areas, school leadership and staff acknowledged some implementation challenges as well.

School staff and member collaboration. While teachers noted that members were consistent in the ways they worked with students, they felt that there were missed opportunities for members to collaborate with school staff. A few teachers mentioned that they felt members were separate from the rest of the school community; they also commented that teachers were not always aware of what was occurring in the tutoring sessions. The majority of teachers' interactions with members were reported to be around managing student behavior. Teachers said they did not have a lot of direct contact with members outside of when members picked up and dropped off students. While members frequently attended school events, some teachers felt that the members could have played a larger role in planning or executing the events.

Progress monitoring. Several teachers and the principal at School 3A highlighted the lack of progress monitoring in the tutoring groups as a challenge. In previous years, the members had apparently assessed their students' progress frequently and shared data and insights with the teachers. The School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee organization discontinued use of the progress monitoring system, which disappointed those teachers who were interviewed, as they had found the progress monitoring data helpful for their use and to help them assess the impact of members' tutoring. Three teachers were somewhat hesitant to say that the tutoring definitely had an impact on their students' academic performance as they felt they had no data or information to back up their claim.

Member support and training. Three teachers and the school counselor at School 3A felt strongly that the coordinator splitting her time among three schools was a challenge to both the members and the teachers. One teacher mentioned that the coordinator served as a conduit for information to members, and the coordinator's part-time schedule posed a challenge. Additionally, a few teachers mentioned that they would have liked for the members to have additional training in managing student behavior before starting the school year. These teachers noted that behavior management was difficult for all school staff, but that it would have been helpful if the members had started the year being aware of some strategies to help them work effectively with their students.

Perceived Impact/Success in Using Partners to Meet Key Turnaround Outcomes

Multiple respondents from School 3A perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps as contributing to success in meeting key school turnaround outcomes in the following ways.

Academic support. As described above, all of the staff interviewed at School 3A believed that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps members had a beneficial effect on the academic performance of the students receiving tutoring supports, though they could not quantify the improvement at the time of the site visit.

Socio-emotional support. As described above, the administrator and teachers at School 3A reported that the member mentoring and relationship-building time increased their school's capacity to meet the socioemotional needs of their students.

Participating in before school or after-school learning time. Multiple teachers commented on the amount of time the members spent tutoring students before school and participating in clubs after school. They

reported that the time members spent in these activities contributed to their success in impacting students' academic performance and providing additional socio-emotional support for their students.

Improving the school environment and climate. The principal and multiple teachers commented on the ways in which members had positively impacted the school environment and culture at School 3A. One teacher explained that the close relationships formed between the members and their students resulted in positive impacts on student behavior which then impacted the school culture. Another teacher commented that the members were consistent in their routines and interactions with students, such as when transitioning from the classroom to tutoring groups. Orderly and calm transitions prevented learning time from being wasted and contributed to the positive school climate at School 3A.

School 3B

Physical Environment

School 3B's interior was clean and organized, but the building itself showed signs of aging. Additionally, the gymnasium and cafeteria were a shared space and seemed noisy and crowded with multiple activities going on simultaneously. The kindergarten and special education classrooms were located in satellite buildings separate from the main school building. There also seemed to be a lack of meeting space for school staff; the teacher interviews were held in the principal's office as no other space was available at that time.

There were multiple displays on the walls supporting school spirit and positive climate, as well as displayed student artwork and writing. One of the halls featured student essays in which they explained their goals for college. There was clear evidence of parent and community involvement with flyers and handouts on school and community information in the lobby, a designated parent drop-off zone called the "hug and drop-off zone," and a dedicated parent room where parents could meet to help plan school events or participate in parent education classes.

Perceptions of Local Context

The principal at School 3B explained that his/her school was unique in terms of its level of parent engagement. The principal commented that parents frequently came together to plan school events, participate in parent education classes, and assist in after-school activities. Additionally, School 3B was a competency-based school, meaning that students were grouped by level rather than age or grade. For example, a student may have been age-appropriate for a third grade class in a typical school but he or she could be in a range of levels, such as level two or five, depending on how he or she was performing in each subject. The principal believed that the competency-based groupings would negatively impact students' scores on standardized testing as it was possible to have an age-appropriate third-grade student who had never seen third-grade material.

Partnership Strategies

While School 3B did not receive support from a School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, it had several partnerships with external organizations. Two partnerships provided support for field trips; one to a golf course, with lessons and equipment provided as well, and the other to a museum, supplemented by professional development for teachers. The principal and one teacher commented that these opportunities allowed their students to engage in activities that they may otherwise not have been able to due to their families' incomes. A teacher also noted that the students were excited leading up to the field trips, which positively impacted the school climate.

The staff at School 3B also cited the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) as a partner. Some parents at School 3B collaborated on planning school events and assisting with after-school activities and clubs,

such as dance club. A few teachers noted that the PTO and other parents were primarily involved in the school's non-academic activities rather than academic endeavors.

Another partner worked with school staff on literacy skills, through use of the Burst: Reading Literacy Intervention program, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment and regular progress monitoring. The partnership provided a literacy consultant for five full days during the year to work with teachers and discuss classroom and individual student data.

Finally, School 3B partnered with two tutoring companies for 10 weeks of the school year that worked with students from level 1 (first grade material) to level 5 (fifth grade material). Each tutoring company provided reading intervention tutoring twice per week for the 10-week period. One company's tutors (company 1) were all teachers at School 3B who had received training and additional compensation to tutor students in the reading intervention after school. The other tutoring company (company 2) employed some teachers and staff from School 3B but mostly hired their own part-time tutors. Company 2 trained teachers and the external tutors on the program, which followed a phonics-based method that teachers said was very prescribed and detailed.

Challenges with Partnerships

The primary challenge that emerged from interviews with staff at School 5B was that some of the interventions were perceived to not be long enough to have a meaningful impact. Specifically, teachers reported that the Burst literacy intervention could potentially have been more effective if staff had more time to work with the literacy consultant. One teacher mentioned that in past years the school had a dedicated literacy consultant in the building and that the support she provided was extremely helpful to the teachers and ultimately very beneficial to the students. In addition, some teachers questioned the size of impact that tutoring company 2 could achieve with a 10 week program.

Perceived Impact/Success Meeting Key Turnaround Outcomes

Teachers and the principal confirmed that the PTO and other parents not involved in the PTO positively contributed to the school environment and school culture.

The principal and teachers reported that the support provided by the literacy consultant for Burst was ultimately somewhat beneficial to their students' academic performance due to teachers learning how to effectively interpret student data and provide targeted instruction, with the caveat that it could have been more helpful if teachers had been able to spend more time with the consultant.

Teachers described the program used by tutoring company 1 as more holistic and literature-based and allowing for more teacher flexibility. School 3B staff felt that tutoring company 1 was superior to tutoring company 2 in that the teachers themselves were the tutors and they were able to better target the intervention to students' individual needs and use their own knowledge and creativity in their lessons. Some teachers questioned whether the external part-time tutors were able to provide the same quality of tutoring as the experienced teachers could. These teachers noted that the external part-time tutors from company 2 seemed inexperienced in working with struggling students and did not seem to be knowledgeable in effective behavior management strategies. The principal and teachers felt that the tutoring provided by both tutoring companies 1 and 2 probably had a beneficial effect on students' academic performance.

Case Study 4

Brief Overview

This case study describes two urban high schools' efforts to meet their turnaround plan goals during the 2014–15 school year, focusing specifically on the roles of AmeriCorps members and/or other volunteers,

external support staff, and other external partners that helped to support school turnaround activities. One of the schools (School 4A) engaged School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in a range of activities while School 4B (which did not have School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources) had small volunteer efforts that were not able to fill School B’s needs. In School 4A, one principal, one assistant principal, and two guidance counselors were interviewed. In School 4B, the principal and three teachers were interviewed. All interviews were conducted by telephone.

Context

Local Demographics

Schools 4A and 4B are high schools located in different urban districts a little over an hour apart in the U.S. Midwest. The two schools served generally comparable student populations with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds (almost 100 percent African American) and income levels (slightly over 80 percent of students were eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch); see Exhibit III-37. As of the 2014–15 school year, School 4B was no longer receiving Title I funding, as the district made multiple funding cuts.

Exhibit III-37: At a Glance: Characteristics of Case Study Schools (2013-14)

	School 4A	School 4B
District urbanicity	Urban	Urban
SIG Turnaround Model	Transformation	Transformation
SIG funding: years and total award	2009–2014 \$5,788,125	2009-2014 \$1,034,512
School enrollment	724	975
District enrollment	8,625	8,485
Free and reduced-price lunch	86% (623/724)	82% (802/975)
Racial/ethnic composition		
White	0.1%	6.0%
Hispanic	0.1%	2.0%
Black	97.2%	89.0%
Asian	2.2%	0.0%
Other	0.0%	3.0%

School 4A

Perceptions of Local Context

School 4A began receiving SIG funding in 2001 and became a college readiness school at the beginning of the 2014–15 school year. Its new principal and assistant principal had been the driving forces behind the college readiness agenda. According to the principal, the school had a high percentage of students at-risk of having academic challenges and attendance problems. Creating a college-going culture at the school was a major focus of School 4A’s turnaround efforts and of the initiative served by AmeriCorps members.

Partnership Strategies

School Turnaround AmeriCorps was one of several partnerships supporting School 4A; it provided college readiness and mentoring supports to the school and its students. In 2014–15, four members served in the building, although due to retention issues, only one remained by the spring of 2015. The program’s on-site coordinator, one of school 4A’s guidance counselors, supported the members in providing college readiness and parental engagement activities. School 4A also had a new partnership with an organization that provided coaching and training for teachers, an existing partnership with a local college for tutoring, and an existing partnership with another AmeriCorps program that placed teachers in low-income schools.

College readiness was the major focus of School 4A's AmeriCorps program. One member was assigned to each grade, and each grade had a specific set of focus areas. In twelfth grade, the focus was on financial aid literacy, college applications and essays, and scholarship completion. In eleventh grade, the focus was on the ACT, resume writing, and job readiness. For tenth grade, the focus was on school and career awareness, and ninth grade focused on understanding high school and the high school mindset. All members were assigned caseloads of students based on which grade they were in, however, not all students received members' assistance. No one interviewed, including the site supervisor, seemed to understand how members were assigned their caseloads, which suggests that assignment occurred outside the school.

Some members offered other activities and supports for parental engagement. At least one member provided workshops for parents on college readiness, called parents at home to check-in about their children's progress, and helped to establish a support room for parents where they could ask questions and find resources.

Effective Strategies and Promising Practices for Partners

School 4A administrators and staff overall perceived members to be effective in the following areas:

Student mentorship and motivation. The principal, assistant principal, and both guidance counselors spoke about the importance of member relationships with students. Both guidance counselors commented that having another positive adult role model available to students was crucial for their success. The on-site supervisor guidance counselor stressed members' ability to motivate students and beneficially affect attendance and academics as particularly important. The assistant principal noted that he had heard positive feedback about members from students, who seemed enthusiastic about working with members.

College readiness and climate. Interviewees also commented on members' positive impact on college readiness and school climate. One guidance counselor indicated that members could speak the same language and convey the same college readiness mindset that School 4A's staff did and that this alone contributed to School 4A's culture.

Parent engagement. Another perceived benefit came from member responsibilities related to engaging parents via conducting workshops about college readiness, calling parents at home to check-in about their children's progress, and helping establish a support room parents could visit to ask questions and find resources. Member relations with parents, in some cases, smoothed teacher-parent relations. One guidance counselor noted, "If a teacher has been contacting a student [at home] forever and they are not able to get through, an AmeriCorps member can say, "Hey, well I talked to that parent, let me call," and use that connection to a teacher's advantage.

Implementation Challenges in Working with Partners

Although members were perceived to have expanded the school's capacity in some important areas, school leadership and staff acknowledged some implementation challenges.

School staff and member collaboration. School staff and member collaboration was minimal and was limited to the members' on-site supervisor, who was the only interviewee who could provide a full account of members' activities. Another guidance counselor and the assistant principal reported knowing very little about the program. No teachers were interviewed because they knew so little about the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program.

All three interviewed staff members explained that there was a wide disconnect between teachers and members, which was problematic for the program. The assistant principal felt that member training

should have included “spending time with teachers” and “knowing what type of support teachers need.” For example, when members entered a classroom to present a college readiness workshop, their workshop “wasn’t necessarily communicated to the teachers” beforehand. As a result, teachers felt members interrupted their classes.

Member roles and visibility. Interviews highlighted the lack of clarity within the school about members’ roles and that members did not maintain a strong, visible presence on site. As one guidance counselor noted, teachers were generally unaware of exactly what members were there to do and apparently had not been provided updates on student progress after members began working with students. The principal noted the program also had issues with “accessibility,” explaining that the program served multiple schools, which limited its ability to focus and attend to School 4A’s needs specifically. As a result, “there [were] certain things that still fall through the cracks.” As one guidance counselor explained, “I think it would have been helpful to have had them more present in the building ... just more visible throughout the building.” The same guidance counselor also wished that members were able to more widely disseminate the college readiness culture, explaining that she thought the hallways could have used some “boards or posters or some kind of information throughout the building” that highlighted support systems and student successes.

Member-school alignment. All three interviewed staff members reported that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program was not well integrated into school 4A’s operations and goals. The assistant principal (new to the role in 2014–15), explained that he was told, “these people are going to be in your building, in this room, doing X, Y, and Z rather than here’s a partnership that we have.” His perception was corroborated by the guidance counselors; they described the program as not being integrated into the school. Instead, their perception was that the program operated as a separate entity. The assistant principal described the program as “self-serving” instead of pitching in when the school needed all hands on deck. The counselor who acted as an on-site supervisor noted in hindsight that it would have been helpful to have had an orientation for members and guidance counselors at the start of the school year to align goals and priorities. The supervising guidance counselor recommended that members communicate with their school’s principal early in the year to specifically tailor their plans and to help School 4A where it needs it the most. She recommended that they create a calendar “to structure them in the building” and to increase member-school alignment.

Member retention. The principal, assistant principal, and one of the guidance counselors characterized member retention as a challenge and a disappointment, reflecting the departure of three of four members before the school year’s end. The principal explained that with such low wages there is no “incentive to retain or stay or to matriculate with the students” so at least one member left to pursue another opportunity. Members’ unanticipated exits from the school meant that the school had to adjust midstream to continue its college readiness programming absent the level of support it had been promised. In an ideal world, the principal would have had members start working with students in the ninth grade and continue to work with them as they progress through high school. The grantee, in response to members leaving midyear, explained that they asked the remaining members either to pick up another grade or to work together to service all grades.

On-site supervisor. While school staff and administrators focused on the issue of member retention, grantee staff also mentioned that they struggled (across all their partner schools) with retention of on-site supervisors because of turnover in school faculty, specifically guidance counselors. Grantee staff noted that if a site supervisor decided to leave, they worked with the principal to identify someone else or, if no one else took the position, the principal sometimes had to take on that role and responsibility.

Relationships with students. While their relationships with students were listed as one of the members' strengths, the supervising guidance counselor also noted that it took time for members to build relationships with students. She explained that members' training taught them certain strategies that did not apply to all students and "saying hello, hi my name is this, may not develop that relationship" so members needed to be more creative and persistent. However, once the supervisor provided relationship-building supports to members, they were able to effectively implement those strategies with students.

Perceived Impact/Success in Using Partners to Meet Key Turnaround Outcomes

School 4A respondents perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps as contributing to success in meeting key school turnaround outcomes.

Social-emotional support. The principal and guidance counselors of School 4A described the School Turnaround members' main contribution as on the social-emotional front, through building relationships with students and motivating students to be engaged in school.

College readiness and school climate. School 4A's staff observed that members contributed to fostering a strong college readiness climate. Although they also commented that the members (or the program) could have done more to advertise and communicate about their mission, school staff concluded that members' presence in School 4A enhanced the school's college readiness environment.

Parental Engagement. School leaders and staff perceived members to be helpful in engaging parents by including them in workshops and communicating with them about available resources.

School 4B

Perceptions of Local Context

According to School 4B's principal and staff, School 4B faced multiple challenges stemming from a high percentage of at-risk students, an impoverished population, and a district in considerable debt. School 4B had suffered from recent and repeated funding cuts and high staff turnover. As one teacher noted, "We service probably the most oppressed, marginalized kids in the city. And with that comes everything else."

With so much district debt, School 4B had struggled with its transformation school status. As the principal explained, "They're doing some things that transformational schools do, but they have no resources to back it." The school struggles with staff turnover, which adversely affects its capacity to carry out turnaround plans and activities. Safety is another concern that negatively affects the school's capacity to attract and retain volunteers. On the day of the interview with one teacher, for example, School 4B was still reeling from a riot and three resulting fights that occurred on school property the day before.

The school's challenges were compounded by the district's elimination of Title 1 funding for all of its high schools in 2014–15, which meant School 4B lost its behavioral specialist and lost some of its security guards. One teacher noted that even if people wanted to volunteer and support the school, the school did not offer a safe environment for them. Morale was also an issue, as teachers typically worked for seven hours each day without a break. Severe negative impacts from funding cuts as reported by the principal and teachers, however, meant that the funding will be restored for the 2015–16 school year.

Partnership Strategies

In spite of these challenges, there were multiple volunteer organizations and programs at School 4B, including an after-school tutoring program, a meditation program, a student-parent exchange program

with another high school, and partnerships with local colleges that supported students in math, and, in one case, college readiness. Volunteers ranged from community members to members of religious organizations, from parents to security guards and a former principal. All four interview respondents (three staff members and the principal), however, struggled to name the different organizations and could not recall whether given partners were active or had withdrawn from the building.

Challenges with Partnerships

Staff members disagreed about whether the multitude of programs and volunteers were beneficial or detrimental. One observed, “Any program that you can get in to help students prepare them to improve their academic performance or to help them move onto college or if it's just to help them at being a better person and citizen in the community, any of those programs are good. I think all schools could use any program like that.” Another commented that having multiple organizations in the building was counterproductive, because the school had no plan about how to use the partners or volunteers. A third wished there were more tutoring, parental engagement, and in-classroom support services.

Perceived Impact/Success in Meeting Key Turnaround Outcomes

Staff expressed hopelessness about the school and its students and deep concern about having insufficient numbers of teachers, interventionists, parent facilitators, and security advocates and inadequate supplies. Staff members also noted a desperate need for more parental engagement, explaining that the school did not have a PTA nor did it have an effective way or program to assist with engagement. As one staff member concluded, the changes in School 4B's city had taken the school from a “model for community schools” to its current struggles to provide services and safety (see Exhibit III-38).

Exhibit III-38: Teacher Perspective on the Challenges of a Changing School Community

“It used to be a community. We used to be the model for community schools for the nation. You know, I mean, there were people that looked at us -- that looked at our district on a national platform as being what you should do with community schools. And I think that if we went back to things to engage our community, afterschool programs that supported not just kids but parents as well and adults... I think that we would -- we would go really far towards improving our district.”

This teacher explained that once factories and other employers left their city, jobs left with them, as well as the community grants and education opportunities they provided. The same teacher, who had been teaching in the district for 12 years and lived in the community, explained that in her entire life, “this year has been the most dysfunctional year and place that I've ever worked.”

Case Study 5

Brief Overview

This case study describes two rural high schools' efforts to meet their turnaround plan goals during the 2014–15 school year, focusing specifically on the roles of AmeriCorps members and/or other volunteers, external support staff, and other external partners who help to support school turnaround activities. One of the schools (School 5A) engaged School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in a range of activities while the other (School 5B, which did not have School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources) incentivized teachers to provide additional academic supports. This case study is based on a site visit conducted at Schools 5A and 5B in May 2015. Data sources are principal interviews (one per school), teacher interviews (two per school), a teacher focus group (one per school with four teachers per school), and a structured observation protocol of the school environment.

Context

Local Demographics

Schools 5A and 5B are high schools located in rural districts about two hours apart in the south central region of the United States. The two schools served generally comparable student populations with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds (almost 100 percent white) and income levels (slightly over half of students were eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch) (see Exhibit III-39). As of the 2014–15 school year, School 5B was no longer receiving SIG funding, as grant funding ended the prior year.

Exhibit III-39: At a Glance: Characteristics of Case Study Schools (2013-14)

	School 1A	School 1B
District urbanicity	Rural	Rural
SIG Turnaround Model	Transformation	Transformation (no longer receiving funding from SIG grant)
SIG funding: years and total award	Ongoing (until 2017)	No longer receiving funds as of 2014-15
School enrollment	847 students	602 students
District enrollment	4,538 students	2,525 students
Free- and reduced-price lunch	62%	58%
Racial/ethnic composition		
White	97.0%	99.0%
Hispanic	0.7%	0.2%
Black	1.9%	0.7%
Asian	0.0%	0.2%

School 5A

Physical Environment

School 5A had recently been renovated, and its interior was clean and full of natural light. Large sports fields surrounded the building. The school’s mascot was prominently displayed throughout the school, as were school rules, and order seemed to be emphasized in the school’s public spaces. Science and history projects were displayed in the hallways, along with posters and bulletin boards of student work outside classrooms. The well-stocked library was spacious. Photos of faculty of the month, student of the month, and most-improved student were displayed in the central office, which helped to convey the school’s focus on school improvement and student achievement. The school’s focus on career and college readiness was evident through numerous posters about college preparation, scholarships, and college entrance examinations. Parent and community involvement was not evident in displays around the building.

Based on the study team’s observations, the principal seemed to have good rapport and frequent interactions with school staff and students. School staff seemed respectful of each other and of students. AmeriCorps members were recognizable as they wore green vests or other AmeriCorps insignia.

Perceptions of Local Context

According to School 5A’s principal, the school faces disadvantages because of its rural location: “There’s not a lot of opportunity for students in this area. Students can’t go out and get a job. There’s definitely more people than there are jobs.” The principal also noted that students do not typically leave the immediate area for college or employment opportunities after high school, despite the lack of local options. Many students would be the first member of their families to attend college.

Partnership Strategies

School Turnaround AmeriCorps was the only outside partnership supporting School 5A in 2014–15, and the program provided various supports to the school and its students. In 2014–15, as many as 22 members served in the building; due to turnover among members, the school did not reach its planned capacity of 24 members, and by late spring 2015, only 18 members remained.

One major focus of School 5A’s AmeriCorps members was mentoring; with the entire cohort of 22, members were able to offer mentoring to all students in the school. All members were assigned caseloads of students. The members were available in the library as needed for any type of support (which was voluntary for students), and they occasionally pulled students from classrooms in response to teacher referrals.

Attendance monitoring was another major focus of members’ work, as reported by members who participated in focus groups and interviews and by the grantee. This work involved contacting families (primarily via telephone) to encourage better attendance. Although the School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee reported that family and community engagement was a core activity, School 5A’s members focused primarily on attendance monitoring versus engaging more broadly with families, as noted by school leadership and teachers. Some members led extracurricular activities and sold tickets at athletic events, and some members also helped students with college preparation activities, such as assisting with ACT registration and college visits.

Other activities and supports were offered by some, but not all members, including in-classroom instructional support to support English and math teachers. Members worked with groups or individual students as needed. In addition, some members stayed after school to focus on credit recovery with students who needed to make up course credits to be eligible for high school graduation.⁵⁴

Effective Strategies and Promising Practices for Partners

School 5A administrators and staff perceived members to be particularly effective in the following areas:

Adult advocacy. School 5A’s leadership identified “adult advocacy” as the most effective contribution of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Through mentoring, the members provided additional “listening ears,” bridged gaps between students and school staff, and helped integrate personal interests into the school. As the principal reported, “the biggest thing that they [members] have been able to do is open some communication lines. They are another body that’s in the building that allows the students to have an adult advocate.”

Attendance monitoring. School 5A’s leadership also perceived attendance monitoring as a particularly valuable contribution. Members contacted families of students who were habitually absent and/or truant. Without such daily focus by the members, the school would not have had the capacity to follow up regularly about attendance with students and their families.

College preparation. Member assistance with college preparation was perceived by school leadership as another helpful activity. In 2014–15, members began conducting “mission transition trips” with students. These trips provided students with the opportunity to visit campuses and learn about programs outside of the immediate geographical area. The principal commented, “Just getting to those schools was big. A lot of times students see University of [State Name] and don’t know anything about it and feel that this is

⁵⁴ Respondents were not able to give a sense of how many of the school’s 22 members provided these non-core services, indicating that the services may have been of an ad hoc nature and may have depended on the needs of students in their caseloads.

their only option. When that's their only option and they think they can't go there, they don't look at the other technical schools we have here, the other colleges they have around here."

Implementation Challenges in Working with Partners

Although members were perceived as expanding the school's capacity in some important areas, school leadership and staff acknowledged some implementation challenges as well.

Recruiting and retention. School 5A experienced difficulties with School Turnaround AmeriCorps member recruitment and retention and was not able to reach full capacity because of turnover. The principal reported that member turnover made it more difficult for students to bond with the members. Member mentoring caseloads were also higher because fewer members were available to students, which made it more challenging for them to reach all students and build close relationships.

Member roles and focus. Some School 5A staff reported confusion about members' roles and the focus of their work. Grantee staff indicated that School 5A's principal was very involved with the program and members, yet program information had not seemed to reach the staff level. School staff were particularly confused about the members' schedules (when they would be present or absent), the students' schedules (when students would be pulled from classes for mentoring or college visits), and what members were supposed to be helping with when in their classrooms.

On-site supervisor: Some School 5A staff were concerned about the lack of an on-site supervisory structure to monitor members on a daily basis and to help communicate with school staff. Although a grantee staff person was responsible for coordinating members across both School 5A and another school, school staff were not aware of his presence and reported that they did not communicate regularly with him. School staff commented that daily supervision could ascertain whether members were performing their assigned roles and responsibilities, including regularly attending classes to which they had been assigned and pulling students out of classrooms at appropriate times, indicating that these were perceived problems at the school. School staff also indicated that having an on-site coordinator could help communicate more effectively to teachers how members' activities related to the larger goals and mission of the school.

School staff and member collaboration. School 5A's staff and members did not have a formal structure or time set aside to communicate with school staff, particularly teachers, about activities and students. As a result, according to some school staff, members lacked clear understanding of the context in which they were working, which likely contributed to them taking students out of important core classes or during critical exam preparation activities. Another challenge, noted by some school staff, was that members did not routinely explain the purpose of their activities to faculty and staff, including, for example, why it was important for students to miss full days to attend college trips. Some school staff observed that the lack of collaboration resulted in missed opportunities for them to communicate with members about how to work with high-need students, including those with learning disabilities, home issues, or consistent truancy problems.

Student instructional time. School leadership and staff expressed concerns about members taking students out of the classroom (or school) during instructional time. The grantee explained that their staff worked with higher learning institutions to arrange trips that were tailored to each student's interests; it was unclear, however, how the trips were scheduled or why teachers were unaware of the scheduling. As the principal commented, "I've taken a hard hit with these [college] trips because what may happen is that these two people miss this day, another person misses another day, three people miss this day, and that's been hard. It's hard for a teacher to have a lot of time to see the big picture. If all you see is room 200 and something interferes with room 200 they have issues."

Perceived Impact/Success in Using Partners to Meet Key Turnaround Outcomes

Multiple respondents from School 5A perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps as contributing to success in meeting key school turnaround outcomes in the following ways.

Social-emotional support. The principal of School 5A perceived that members' main contribution was on a social-emotional level (personal rather than academic). Staff also reported that the members' main contributions were to help strengthen relationships between students and staff and contribute to after-school mentoring and activities.

School climate. As already described, School 5A's leadership, staff, and members reported that the members helped to improve the school climate in several ways including creating beneficial relationships between members and students and providing additional support to improve attendance. Staff also reported that members provided encouragement when students performed poorly on academic work and helped them focus on how to improve instead of being discouraged, which improved the classroom environment.

School 5B

Physical Environment

School 5B's clean and well-used interior demonstrated a focus on academic achievement and college readiness, as well as school spirit. The school's mascot was present both inside and outside the school. The hallways did not contain much student work or colorful decor.

Student achievement data were prominently displayed in the principal's office and outside one classroom. There was also a data wall with the number of students above benchmark on assessments, and another wall displayed photos of seniors who had met their graduation requirements along with the colleges they planned to attend. There was not any physical evidence of parent or community involvement.

Study team members observed positive interactions between school leadership and staff, and both positive and negative interactions between school leadership and students. School rules were prominently displayed, and school staff were observed as they disciplined several students who were not complying quickly with posted rules. School staff greeted students who walked by or entered the office and asked them about their day. School leadership described the contributions of vocational students within the school, including the culinary students (who cooked for athletic events), the construction class (which made the benches for the athletic fields), and the agriculture class (which planted a garden in the spring).

Perceptions of Local Context

According to School 5B's principal, the rural setting and lack of population density presented a few unique challenges—including students who had to travel significant distances from home and could not stay for after-school activities or extended-learning-time programming. In addition, the large geographic size of the county meant that the school had a diverse socioeconomic population, with some higher-income students coming from closer by and economically disadvantaged students coming from more remote areas with considerably fewer resources.

Partnership Strategies

School 5B did not have outside partnerships to support its turnaround activities (either during the current year or in prior years), yet it was able to provide supplemental tutoring to students through its own staff who put in additional hours, as well as by having retired teachers come into the school. School 5B offered

extended tutoring (called Extended School Services or ESS). Regular teachers tutored students who were referred or opted to participate for an hour or two per week in content areas for which they needed help. Teachers applied to be part of the tutoring program and, if selected, were compensated with stipends. Teachers tutored in the same general content area in which they taught, with one tutor each for reading, math, history, and science.

The school also had a daytime waiver program focused on math; this program was run by a retired teacher who was in the school 10 hours a week during regular school time. Through the program, students identified as falling behind were provided a waiver to receive targeted tutoring instead of regular classroom instruction, with the goal of improving their academic proficiency in math.

School 5B leadership and staff reported some challenges with their tutoring model, including 1) lack of staff capacity; 2) constraints on participation in after-school tutoring arising from limited transportation options and/or other after-school activities; 3) lack of content expertise in certain areas; and 4) general lack of funding/resources to support tutoring efforts.

Challenges with Partnerships

School 5B leadership also expressed interest in more community involvement, including collaboration with local industries and making connections to additional college and career readiness supports. More generally, school leadership expressed interest in identifying partners with particular content knowledge or skills including but not limited to math, reading and grammar, and test-taking strategies.

Perceived Impact/Success in Meeting Key Turnaround Outcomes

School 5B's leadership and staff perceived the tutoring provided by teachers to be very helpful. They observed that students who participated in ESS and the waiver program improved their performance in the specific units for which they had come to tutoring, improved grades on tests and quizzes, had better performance on written assignments, and had higher assessment scores. Staff also noticed that tutored students passed classes they had previously failed after electing to go to tutoring.

These supplementary programs also allowed students to build strong one-on-one relationships with teachers. Staff reported that by building these relationships, some students became more invested in their schoolwork and had an adult with whom to talk when struggling with non-academic issues.

Case Study 6

Brief Overview

This case study describes two high schools' efforts to meet their turnaround plan goals during the 2014–15 school year, focusing specifically on the roles of AmeriCorps members and/or other volunteers, external support staff, and other external partners who help to support school turnaround activities. One of the schools (School 6A) engaged one School Turnaround AmeriCorps member in activities focused on attendance and truancy, while the other (School 6B) did not have a School Turnaround AmeriCorps presence or other significant support from external partners. The case study is based on telephone interviews with the principal and three teachers at each school.

Context

Local Demographics

School 6A, which had a School Turnaround AmeriCorps presence, and School 6B, which did not, are both high schools located in the upper Midwest of the United States. School A is located in a suburban district and School B is located in a rural district about a third the size of School 6A's district. The two schools, approximately 90 miles apart, are in different counties in the same state. The two schools are quite

different; School 6A serves more than twice the number of students as enrolled in School 6B and serves a largely non-white student population, while School 6B serves a predominantly white student population (see Exhibit III-40).⁵⁵

Exhibit III-40: At a Glance: Characteristics of Case Study Schools (2013-14)

	School 1A	School 1B
District urbanicity	Suburban	Rural
SIG Turnaround Model	Transformation	Transformation
SIG funding: years and total award	2010–2012: \$1,400,000	2010–2012: \$1,000,473
School enrollment	741	338
District enrollment	2,214	783
Free- and reduced-price lunch	79.7%	50.3%
Racial/ethnic composition		
White	19.0%	85.0%
Black	43.0%	4.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	16.0%	1.0%
Hispanic	19.0%	3.0%
American Indian/Alaskan	1.0%	7.0%

School 6A

Perceptions of Local Context

School A is in a suburban community with a rising poverty rate. The principal explained that the community had yet to recover from the 2008 recession and housing crisis. The principal also noted that a high percentage of students had entered the school multiple grade levels behind in both math and reading. School 6A also was in the midst of a number of changes, including implementing an updated curriculum and a new teacher evaluation system.

Partnership Strategies

School 6A is a community school and provides social and emotional supports, including mental health and medical services, to students and families on site. These resources include a health clinic open to students two days a week for doctor and/or dentist visits. In addition, two mental health organizations provide on-site licensed family therapists and social workers who offer therapy sessions for both students and their families, if appropriate. The school also has a partnership with a local nonprofit that provides after-school activities and extended learning time support for students.

School 6A had one School Turnaround AmeriCorps member during the 2014–15 school year, down from two members in 2013–14. School 6A’s program represented the smallest School Turnaround AmeriCorps cohort size by school in 2014–15. In addition, the model was unique for primarily targeting one specific issue. The member’s focus was on attendance monitoring and truancy outreach for about 30 students. The member reviewed attendance records daily and systematically tracked students’ absences and tardies, flagging students whose absences were approaching a designated threshold and compiling a list of those who had to be reported to the state for educational neglect. The member also advised the attendance team—which was made up of counselors, social workers, a vice principal, and other staff—about which students needed additional support.

⁵⁵ The comparison school that provided best match declined to participate due to other major school reforms. The replacement comparison school provided a poor-to-mediocre match.

Based on information gathered from the attendance monitoring, the member intervened with frequently truant students. The intervention included reaching out to parents and regularly meeting with these students. Through these meetings, the member would try and find out why students were missing so much school and direct them to necessary resources. The member also used the meetings to talk to students about their academic performance, and explain how truancy negatively affects academics, and offer students an opportunity to discuss out-of-school issues with which they were struggling

The member was supervised by a vice principal who also served as the school's truancy officer. The supervisor held daily check-ins with the member, reviewed timesheets, and handled any questions or concerns. Although not originally a part of the program's design, the member also worked closely with a school counselor who provided guidance on working with high-risk students and on which local resources to direct students to. If necessary, the member shared information with the counselor about questions and concerns beyond her/his capacity to address and told the counselor when a student was struggling with something the member did not feel equipped to handle.

Effective Strategies and Promising Practices for Partners

School 6A administrators and staff perceived their School Turnaround AmeriCorps member to be particularly effective in the following areas:

Systematic attendance tracking. Both the principal of School 6A and school staff reported that having a person dedicated to systematically tracking attendance led to more effective identification of students at high-risk for falling far behind academically or dropping out. While the school had other resources to handle truancy concerns, the member's presence provided the capacity for daily monitoring and follow-up on attendance issues. The principal commented that having the member focused on attendance "[took] a ton off of the social worker's plate, the school counselor's plate, the dean's plate and helped us get to the reason why they're not coming to school, [which was] a huge support for all of us."

Attention to high-risk students. The targeted attention to high-risk students was identified as a valuable contribution by leadership and staff. The principal noted that the school's administration "looks at attendance as probably the biggest indicator of success at schools" but highly truant students often still "fall through the cracks." Staff reported that, by meeting with highly truant students, the member was also often helping those most in need of academic assistance. The member often "went beyond the attendance piece" and helped these students with homework, organization, and identifying what else they needed to do to raise their grades.

Staff also reported that frequently truant students often benefited from having another adult who was available to talk with them as well as advocate for them. As the guidance counselor explained, the member was able to "build a relationship and establish that rapport, so when kids were struggling they [had] another person outside the classroom to go to."

Connecting students to resources. The member's role in connecting students to resources both in and out of the school also was perceived as helpful. Staff reported that, because of trust built during regular meetings, students often opened up to the member about issues that affected their ability to attend school. The member encouraged students to talk to the administration and other faculty and partners about these issues so they could provide the necessary guidance and support. The guidance counselor explained that "even if [the member] did not know what to do, [the member] would at least talk to me and we would come up with an additional problem solving plan and I would take it from there to access additional supports for those kids."

Implementation Challenges in Working with Partners

Although the member was perceived as expanding the school's capacity in some important areas, school leadership and staff acknowledged some implementation challenges as well.

Clear definition of member's role. School 6A staff and leadership reported issues stemming from a perceived lack of clarity about the member's role. The principal explained that, while the member's attendance monitoring responsibilities were clear, responsibilities for the mentoring component were not as well defined by the grantee, which led to the member's engagement in activities perceived by school leaders as outside the appropriate scope. Specific examples included repeatedly taking students out of classrooms for long periods of time, sitting in on classrooms to observe when students had disagreements with teachers, and counseling students on issues that should have been referred to the behavior dean.

Leadership and staff believed that these issues arose because the member's mentoring responsibilities were not well defined by either the school or the member. One staff member commented that such problems could be addressed by "a training before school starts with the person who is going to be supervising them, establishing the ground rules for how they will be working in our school, including the process for pulling kids."

School staff and member communication. Leadership and staff noted that a stronger connection between the member, teachers, and other staff would enhance the effectiveness of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. One staff member explained that some issues reflected teachers' lack of information about who the member was and how he/she could be helpful. The staff member stressed that sharing such information more broadly within the school might lead teachers to perceive the member "as an asset, not just someone who's going to take kids away from them."

Staff also noted that improved communication also would likely benefit members. The guidance counselor explained that, when the member went outside the scope of the program, it was because "[the member] did not necessarily know who to go to with the information" so was instead handling it alone. Staff mentioned that this problem could be addressed by trainings for staff early before the program began and also regular relationship-building time throughout the year.

Instructional time. School leadership and staff expressed concerns about students being pulled out of the classroom (or school) during instructional time. There was not, however, clear guidance about when and how often the member was allowed to take students out of the classroom. Consequently, the member pulled students out at their request or when he/she determined it was appropriate, which led to diminished instructional time for students and resentment on teachers' part.

Perceived Impact/Success in Using Partners to Meet Key Turnaround Outcomes

Multiple respondents from School 6A perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps as contributing to success in meeting key school turnaround outcomes in the following ways.

Understanding of attendance patterns. As previously mentioned, leadership at School 6A reported that the member's attendance monitoring efforts gave them a much better understanding of attendance patterns. The principal explained that the member's system helped them "put together trend data around attendance and truancy patterns in our building" which helped them see "where issues clustered at grade level and certain times of year." Having this information allowed the administration and guidance staff to more effectively identify and intervene with those who were at risk of becoming chronic truants.

In addition, having up to date truancy data allowed School 6A to devote additional resources to vulnerable grades and populations. The principal mentioned that the member's monitoring allowed them to recognize potential truancy concerns with their younger grades and, by with current information, they

were able to reach out to the district and request additional “support and outreach for our most vulnerable students.”

Social-emotional support. Counselors and guidance staff at School 6A perceived that the member’s main contribution was providing social-emotional support to high-risk students. By developing trusted relationships with these students, the member reinforced the idea “that someone [was] watching them, and assisting them, and caring about them.” Staff explained that this additional support also helped students academically as “having one more voice for them to talk to, [made one] more person they [felt] accountable to” and that by simply checking in and showing students that someone was concerned helped them “stay on task academically.”

School 6B

Perceptions of Local Context

School 6B serves a small population in a small district (enrollment is under 1,000 students) in a large rural area. The school’s staff includes fewer than 25 full-time teachers, most of whom are from the area. The principal reported that the limited number of staff members can make it hard to implement new ideas because “if you have one or two outliers, it has a significant impact on things.” The principal observed that the faculty size also meant that individuals were less comfortable sharing either successful strategies or struggles, which made it difficult to identify where the school needed assistance or improvement.

Partnership Strategies

The only outside support School 6B had in 2014–15 was through parent-teacher organizations (PTOs). The principal noted that the school’s size, location, and dearth of resources limited the opportunities offered to students, noting “it would be fabulous if we could fund a fab lab or a robotics team or vocational trainings” but that is “not feasible in the community that we live in.”

Challenges with Partnerships

The principal and another teacher explained that the school struggled to develop other external partnerships because of an inability to create the structures necessary for outside individuals to come in and be helpful, not because of a lack of interest from the community. One teacher mentioned “our biggest struggle is we have a lot of community members that want to come in, want to help, want to tutor and do all of those things, but we don’t have the systems set up in our own building for them to do that.” Staff explained that the first step in developing effective partnerships would be “starting from the inside and figuring out where our needs are” because right now they “don’t know how to utilize [volunteers].”

Perceived Impact/Success in Meeting Key Turnaround Outcomes

School 6B’s main PTO helps connect the community and the school; it organizes events (e.g., book fairs and service trips), advertises athletic events and performances, fundraises for school spirit clothing and other supplies, and shares student success stories. The PTO also highlights important dates in the school calendar (e.g., testing periods) and opportunities for tutoring or other outside-the-school community assistance. The PTO does this primarily through social media, including an active Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Staff described one particularly helpful event the PTO organized: a day for students to shadow local business owners. This activity helped to motivate students and to see that if they applied themselves and improved their grades, they might be able to operate small businesses too. The principal concurred, and said “students are more driven after they know somebody in the community cares about what they’re doing.” Staff also explained that this was an important day for families who could observe students in the

community and see them being enthusiastic about careers, which, as one teacher explained, built more trust in the school and “excited parents to view their kids out in public doing something neat.”

IV. CONCLUSION

Summary of Implementation, Case Study, Perceived Impact, and Grantee Administrative Data Collection Findings

Over the 2014–15 program year, the evaluation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program examined the program’s implementation in detail and learned about progress and challenges from key program stakeholders. The study’s combination of program-wide data collection strategies generated consistent findings that the program operates largely as intended, is perceived as contributing substantially to schools’ turnaround goals overall as well as toward attainment of school-specific outcomes. The findings generated by the case studies illustrate both the diversity of school contexts—including the wide range of supportive activities in which members engage—and the importance of relationship building and communication in sustaining effective partnerships in turnaround schools. The study’s exploration of grantees’ administrative data underscore both the advantages and challenges of reporting requirements designed for broad accountability purposes yet flexible enough to be customized by individual grantees. Taken together, these findings provide comprehensive insights into what the program actually does in schools.

The evaluation’s first-year findings also point to the conditions that help support School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and their host schools and illustrate why implementation varies across schools and contexts. These collective insights can inform the program as it continues to support grantees’ capacity to implement more-effective programs and achieve more-consistent results. The fact that implementation varies primarily as a function of local needs and contexts suggests that the findings from this evaluation may also inform other CNCS programs in low-performing schools. The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program had achieved demonstrated moderate success by its second year of implementation, and it clearly has the potential to increase its impact, by heeding lessons learned thus far, and by addressing underlying tensions in the AmeriCorps program model to create the right conditions for success.

Lessons Learned, Promising Practices, and Suggested Improvements to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program

Effective School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs are ones that cultivate relationship building with district and school stakeholders at multiple levels—and particularly with school leaders—to become successfully embedded in host schools, establish staffing structures that enable coordinated member placements and optimal student caseloads, and clearly communicate members’ roles and the services they can (and cannot) offer to support teachers, schools, and families. The clearest lesson learned from the first-year findings is that once this groundwork has been laid, AmeriCorps members add the greatest value to low-performing SIG schools by providing additional academic supports and individual, personalized attention to students. They also add value by collaborating with teachers to identify students in need of tutoring, support differentiated instruction, promote use of student progress and assessment data to improve instruction, and help with classroom management.

While several unresolved tensions will likely continue into the third funding year—most notably members’ term of service and relative inexperience and confusion over members’ roles and program rules—there were clear signs of program maturation by the end of its second year, as programs worked to make changes to address challenges in the first two years. Principals noted improvements in communication between schools, programs, and/or members, and expressed a desire to collaborate better with School Turnaround AmeriCorps in refining their processes for assigning work to members at their schools. Overall, principals indicated that members became more involved and integrated into their

communities with time, and programs were more open to listening to schools' approaches, allowing more flexibility in the restrictions placed on members.

Looking ahead to the last year of the funding cycle, grantees considered the effect of losing AmeriCorps resources on their partner schools, including ways to smooth the transition process and prepare for a more sustainable future. Grantees also discussed implementing changes to management and data use to monitor the effectiveness of their strategies and tailor their interventions to meet students' needs.

Further research is needed to better understand themes of interest from the first-year findings. Areas for deeper research in the second year of the evaluation might include (1) the process for selection and placement of members in partner schools; (2) how grantees, districts, and schools work together (or not) to determine which and how many members are placed in which schools; (3) the effectiveness of member strategies in serving targeted student populations (e.g., English language learners, students with disabilities) in need of additional academic supports and individual, personalized attention; and (4) how well the program builds school capacity to implement turnaround efforts by easing the demands on teachers, thereby giving teachers more time for planning, instruction, and professional development activities.

Implications for the Program Theory of Change

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps logic model specifies the inputs the program brings, and the activities and services members offer to schools, and illustrates how these inputs/activities lead to changes in such proximal outcomes as student engagement, academic abilities, and school climate and more distal outcomes as academic achievement, graduation rates, and college readiness. Additionally, the program-level logic model includes whole-school turnaround and program sustainability and growth among the long-term outcomes. Inputs include AmeriCorps member resources, AmeriCorps grant funds, SIG and Priority school funding, and grantee partnerships with schools. Key activities include supplemental academic and wraparound services; supports for increased learning time; community and parental engagement activities; and AmeriCorps member recruitment, training, monitoring, and oversight.

Overall, the program logic model accurately reflects what was observed in Year 1 of the evaluation, including actual program strategies and the perceived impacts of AmeriCorps services. However, several changes are needed to reflect new learning, including updates to the types of direct service activities programs deliver to schools. In addition, improved understanding of the moderators and assumptions will allow more systematic documentation of how and why change happens, which can be especially useful for a new program still in the formative stages of development. Specifically, the Year 1 findings reinforce or refine the following moderators and assumptions that explain the program theory of change:

- Academic engagement is closely related to academic achievement.
- Relationship building is a critical ingredient for effective service provision.
- Member qualities, preparedness, and training are key to grantee capacity to successfully implement the program.
- School leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and leadership are key to schools' capacity to effectively manage and leverage external partner resources such as AmeriCorps.

Academic Engagement and Achievement

The original program-level and direct-services logic models, provided in Exhibits IV-1 and IV-2, presumed that shorter-term changes in student confidence and resilience, as well as increased learning time and attendance, would lead to increased academic engagement in the medium term. The logic

models also hypothesized that improved engagement would lead to improved student reading and math abilities and ultimately improved academic performance in these areas over the longer term. The underlying assumption of this causal relationship is that the “presence of AmeriCorps members will enable students to foster positive relationships with a trusted adult, which positively influences students’ educational experiences and academic engagement.”

The findings to date support this hypothesis. Stakeholders’ perceptions of the program’s success indicate that members’ services helped to shape a positive school climate, mediated student attendance and behavioral issues, improved students’ self-concept and attitudes about school, and influenced students’ outlook and aspirations for postsecondary education. In addition to tutoring and other academic services, programs provided parental and community engagement, mentoring, behavior support and school attendance coaching, and other supportive services to build school capacity. These services represent the range of strategies programs used to turn around pervasive behavioral problems, which help schools, and teachers in particular, focus more effectively on academics. A majority of interviewed parents reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps interventions had improved their children’s academic performance as well as their engagement and enthusiasm about school. This close connection between academic achievement and academic engagement supports the program theory of change: When a student is motivated, participates in class, demonstrates an interest in school and a desire to learn, that student will perform better academically than a student who is disengaged and disconnected from learning and absent from school.

Importance of Relationship Building to Effective Service Provision

The original program logic model (see Exhibit IV-1) also recognized communication and cooperation between schools and AmeriCorps members and grantee staff as a moderator of program outcomes, and it assumed that programs would exhibit evidence of collaboration from schools and local education agencies. The Year 1 evaluation findings bolster these assumptions, by illustrating the importance of relationship building in School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs. This important theme was observed in programs’ approaches to structuring relationships with schools and in how programs formed relationships among the network of key stakeholders, as well as in the tangible impacts of strong relationships between members and students.

The Year 1 findings also suggest strongly that relationship building is an important pre-condition for effective service provision—in tutoring and mentoring relationships with students, in engaging parents to support their children’s academic success outside of the classroom, and in providing attendance and behavior coaching. Because all of these activities fundamentally involve working in and through relationships, the findings to date support the hypothesis that the level of trust established in those relationships moderates the degree to which these activities produce the desired outcomes of improved student engagement and academic achievement.

Taken together, the importance of establishing structures to support relationship building (e.g., partnership agreements and on-site coordinators), of members’ successful integration into school culture, and of relationship building for improving school climate and effective service provision, helps to refine the program theory of change illustrated in Exhibit IV-3:

Exhibit IV-1: CNCS School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program—Program Level Logic Model

Goal: To turnaround lowest-performing schools by increasing students' educational achievement, high school graduation rates, and college readiness.

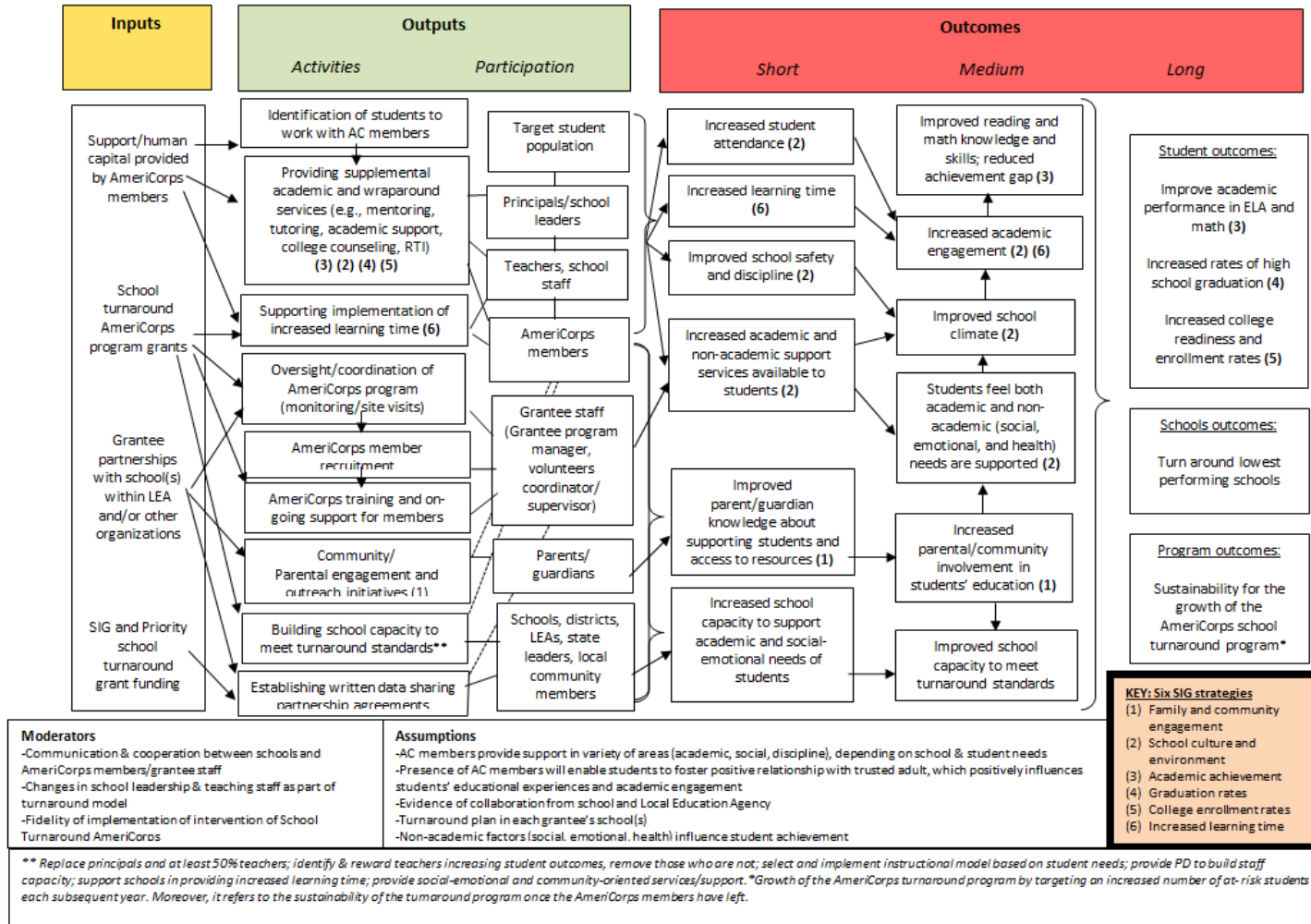


Exhibit IV-2: CNCS School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program—Direct Service Provision by AmeriCorps Members Logic Model

Goal: To turnaround lowest-performing schools by increasing students' educational achievement, high school graduation rates, and college readiness.

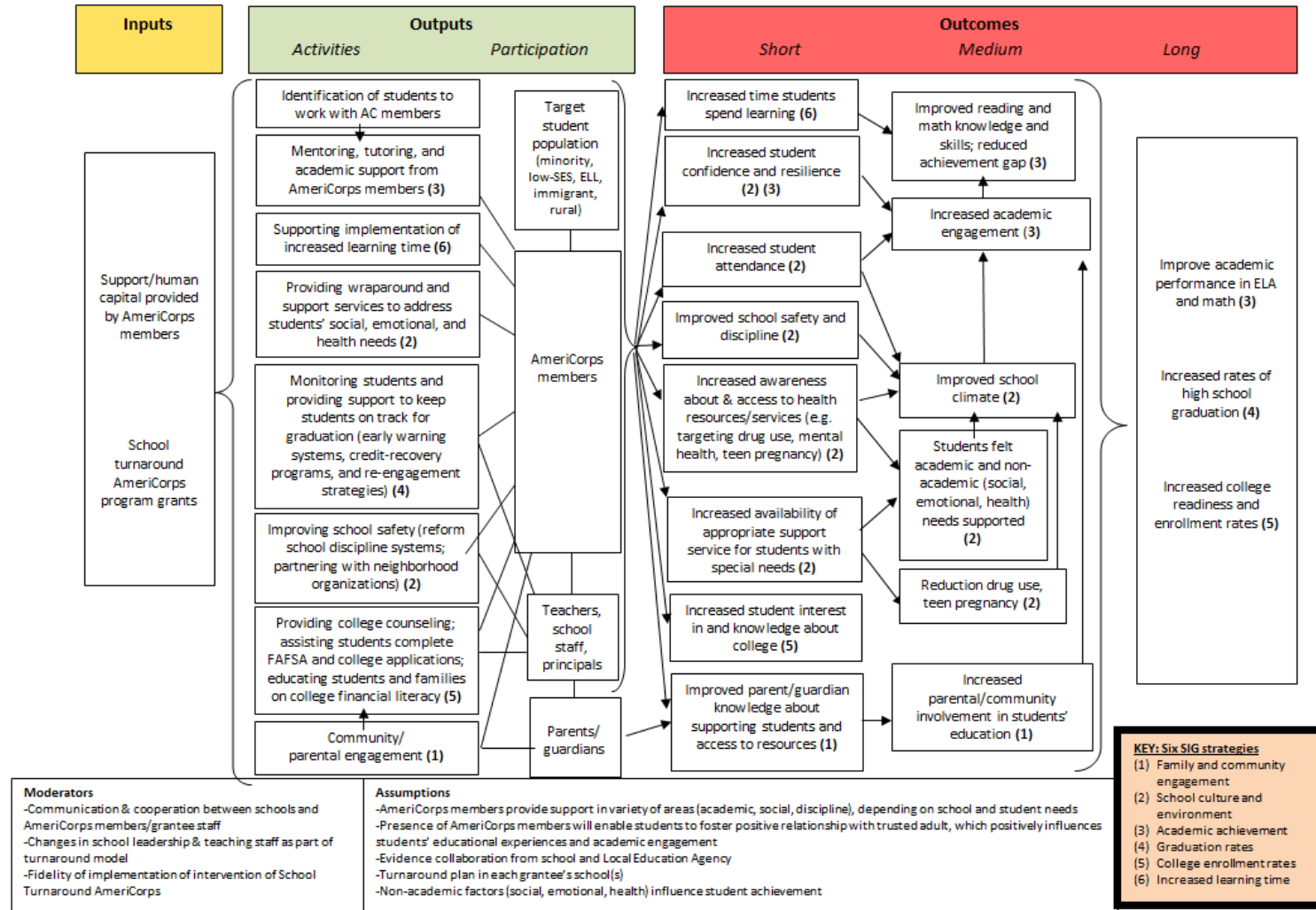
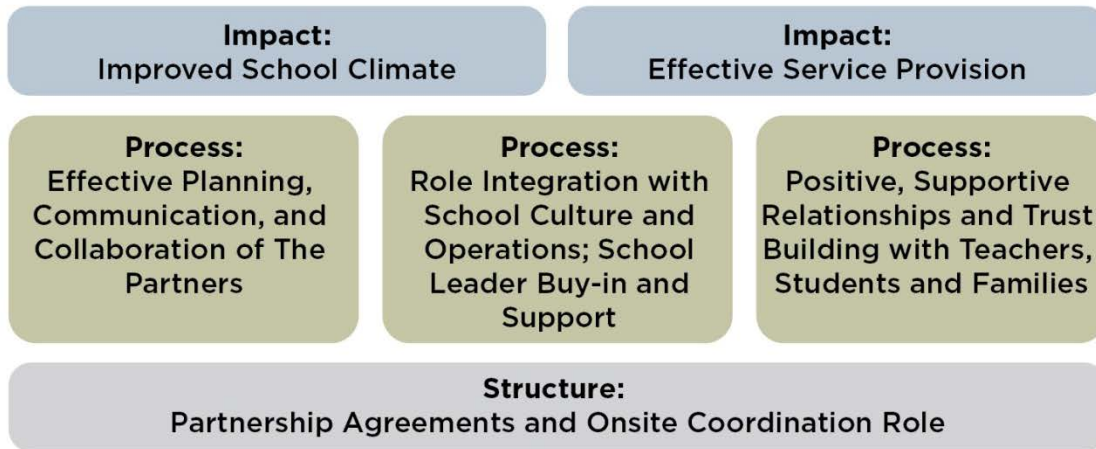


Exhibit IV-3: Relationship-Building Mechanisms Observed in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Theory of Change



Member Qualities, Preparedness, and Training

The program-level logic model (see Exhibit IV-1) also identified having procedures for member recruitment, training and ongoing support and for oversight and coordination of AmeriCorps programs as necessary for successful implementation of School Turnaround AmeriCorps. The importance of these procedures was borne out by the Year 1 findings, which identified both strengths and challenges in grantee capacity. Strengths include (1) use of data for targeting, monitoring, and adapting instruction and for continuous program improvement; (2) member commitment, qualities, and preparedness; (3) the on-site coordinator role; and (4) interventions characterized by individual, personalized attention. Challenges involve such issues as (1) grant administration and program operation; (2) member recruitment, management, and retention; and (3) member qualities, preparedness, and member training. In particular, member qualities, preparedness, and training are key to understanding the most-effective ways to deploy School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources in SIG schools and build grantee capacity to implement the program successfully.

School Leaders' Attitudes, Behaviors, and Leadership

Finally, "building school capacity to meet turnaround standards" was also included as an activity in the original program logic model (see Exhibit IV-1).⁵⁶

Sustainability and growth of the program also is a long-term outcome in the program logic model. In a program in which members serve one-year terms (and can reenroll for up to four terms, but with no expectation or guarantee of reenrollment) program sustainability and growth is defined as "targeting an increased number of at-risk students each subsequent year." Moreover, the model refers to the sustainability of the turnaround program once the AmeriCorps members have left.

While the logic model articulates several important factors in program implementation, Year 1 findings suggest that another factor, the role of the school leader, should be reflected as well. School leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and leadership fundamentally drive schools' capacity to effectively manage and

⁵⁶ Building school capacity was defined in similar terms as the SIG improvement models: "Replace principals and at least 50 percent of teachers; identify and reward teachers who are increasing student outcomes, and remove those who are not; select and implement instructional models based on student needs; provide professional development to build staff capacity; support schools in providing increased learning time; provide social-emotional and community-oriented services/support."

leverage external partner resources such as AmeriCorps. Although most programs have established written partnership agreements with school partners, and many of these agreements contain the elements of strong partnerships outlined in CNCS guidance, authentic buy-in and support of the program by school leaders appears to be a critical element of a school's capacity to leverage external partner resources and facilitate effective delivery of AmeriCorps services.

For example, school leaders can facilitate members' integration in the school community and, importantly, strengthen members' relationships with teachers by including members in faculty meetings and trainings. School leaders may inadvertently hinder implementation when they neither involve nor communicate with teachers about the program and members' roles in the school and in their classrooms. In rare cases, the study observed instances of school leaders openly opposed to hosting the program in their school, leaving members poorly positioned to access school resources and carry out impactful activities.

School leaders' divergent understandings of members' roles in schools can translate, in some cases, into a misunderstanding of program rules about the allowable activities members can perform and about how principals can deploy members most usefully (from their perspective) to support their turnaround efforts. Principals' attitudes toward the program's rules also may reflect the operational flexibility granted to them as a required component of their turnaround model. And, finally, their perspectives might reflect the competencies and qualities considered important for effective school turnaround leaders, such as being "entrepreneur-style" leaders who drive for results by "break[ing] organization norms or rules to deploy new tactics needed for early wins" and "discard[ing] failed rules and routines when they inhibit success" (Center on Innovation & Improvement and Council of Chief State School Officers. School Improvement Grant (SIG) Intervention Models, March 2010).

For these reasons, incorporating the influential role of school leaders in moderating program success in their respective schools should be acknowledged in the program theory of change.