School Turnaround AmeriCorps National Evaluation: Final Evaluation Report

FINAL

Contract No.: CNS-HQ-14A-0004
Task Order No.: CNS14A0004-0004

July 22, 2016

Prepared for:
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Community Service**
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps grant program, launched in school year 2013–14, is a joint initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the U.S. Department of Education. The grants provide support to help low-performing schools achieve their school improvement goals by placing AmeriCorps members in schools. At the activity level, School Turnaround AmeriCorps is very similar to other AmeriCorps programs, yet it differs in three important ways. First, to host School Turnaround AmeriCorps, schools must have been designated as School Improvement Grant (SIG) or Priority status schools or be among the five percent of a state's persistently lowest-achieving Title I schools.[1,2] Second, School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs must establish partnership agreements with the schools that detail specific grant requirements. Third, the services to be provided by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members should align with the goals and student needs identified in the schools' turnaround plans.

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is intended to increase the capacity of these lowest-achieving schools to implement their turnaround models successfully, primarily through efforts to improve students' academic performance, academic engagement, attendance, high school graduation rates, and college readiness. By 2015–16, its third year, the program was operating in nearly 70 schools.

CNCS contracted with Abt Associates to conduct an implementation-focused national evaluation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, funding the evaluation in two successive year-long increments, referred to as Year 1 and Year 2.[3] In this report, Year 1 represents the first year of the *evaluation*, which corresponds to the second year of *program operation* (2014–15 school year), and Year 2 references the evaluation's second and the program's third year (2015–16). The goal of the evaluation is to deepen current understanding of the perceived effect of AmeriCorps members on the capacity of host schools to implement their respective turnaround model successfully and to improve key turnaround outcomes. The evaluation is assessing School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' contributions to low-performing schools' success in their turnaround efforts, and it seeks to understand the mechanisms underlying those contributions. Note that the evaluation included only those School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools that met specific study requirements; consequently, only about three-quarters of the nearly 70 schools in the program participated in the evaluation.[4,5]

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[1] 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 5 percent or lowest-achieving five schools in each set, whichever is greater. In addition to the lowest-achieving 5 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. Source: U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2012, March 1). *Guidance on Fiscal Year 2010 School Improvement Grants under Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.* https://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance02232011.pdf.

[2] For the 2016–17 program year competition, CNCS expanded eligibility to also include Focus schools.

[3] CNCS also funded the design year of the evaluation during the first year of *program operation* (2013–14).

[4] 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

This report comprehensively summarizes the findings from Years 1 and 2 of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps national evaluation, including the entire set of survey, qualitative, and quantitative analyses conducted throughout both years. Overall, the study was designed to address the following research objectives:

- Examine the capacity-building strategies, school-level interventions, and direct services that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members deliver to support school turnaround efforts, and how those activities are similar or different from activities provided by other partners in similar SIG/Priority schools.

- Understand how local context may affect program implementation, and identify promising practices for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in supporting schools' ability to implement their turnaround plans.[6]

- Understand how the structure and functioning of grantee-school partnerships affect program implementation, and identify promising practices for involving school leadership and participating School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in support of schools' ability to implement their turnaround plans.[7]

- Compare the implementation of school turnaround efforts in School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools versus 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:

  o Overall success in school turnaround.
  o Academic achievement.
  o Students' socio-emotional health.
  o School climate.
  o School capacity to implement its turnaround effort.

- Identify the strategies used by School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs in schools that have successfully exited SIG/Priority status that helped them engage students and school stakeholders to reach their turnaround goals, in order to inform other education-focused programs at CNCS.[8]

This report presents contextual information about the 13 grantee programs funded by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps grants. These programs partnered with approximately 70 SIG/Priority schools in the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years, and they recruited about 450 School Turnaround AmeriCorps

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America (TFA) schools. In Year 1, only a representative sample of TFA schools (5 of 17) was purposively selected to participate in the evaluation because of TFA's distinctive intervention.

[5] In Year 1, 57 School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools met the eligibility criteria to be included in the sample; in Year 2, 54 schools were eligible.

[6] This is a Year 1 study objective that was not explicitly included in Year 2 of the evaluation; however, the study team continued to analyze how local context affected program implementation in Year 2.

[7] This study objective was added in Year 2 of the evaluation to probe further into specific aspects of implementation based on the findings that emerged from Year 1.

[8] This study objective was added in Year 2 of the evaluation to probe further into specific aspects of implementation based on the findings that emerged from Year 1.

members annually to provide services in those schools.[9] The report also presents findings on implementation effectiveness, program-school partner relationships, and the perceived impacts of the program in improving student outcomes from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, including grantee staff, members, school leaders, teachers, and parents. The results of 29 case studies, including comparative case studies of matched schools with and without School Turnaround AmeriCorps services, provide additional information on the mechanisms at work and members' added value across School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs. Additionally, the report explores the potential uses and challenges of administrative data for evaluating School Turnaround AmeriCorps and other CNCS education-focused programs.

The report concludes with a summary of grantee programs' promising practices for delivering effective interventions and serving schools. The conclusion describes implications for program improvement, for the AmeriCorps education program model, and for sustainability of strategies implemented with AmeriCorps resources beyond grant funding.

Data Sources

This report describes the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in two complementary ways: by focusing on *grantee programs* (in which the program represents the unit of analysis) and on participating *program* and *comparison schools* (in which the school represents the unit of analysis).[10] Data collection was conducted during three time periods: Spring 2015, Fall 2015, and Spring 2016. Findings are based on multiple primary and administrative data sources, as described below.[11]

Grantee Programs[12]

Primary Data Sources:

- Online survey administered to staff of 13 School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee programs in Year 1 (Spring 2015) and again in Year 2 (Spring 2016).[13]

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9   Source: Corporation for National and Community Service. e-Grants service location and member data as of 2014–15 for the 2014–15 school year.

10   Here forward, the term "program schools" refers to schools *with* School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and "comparison schools" refers to schools with little or no AmeriCorps presence from other programs. This means that comparison schools were selected (among other criteria) on the basis of not having any form of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps intervention, and having no or minimal AmeriCorps State and National or VISTA member presence.

11   The units of analysis and data sources summarized below include respondents who participated in multiple data collection efforts. This is a comprehensive list of all data collected; de-duplicated counts are reported in the findings sections of this report as well as in the Technical Appendix.

12   There are 12 grantee *organizations* and 13 grantee *programs*. Four grantee organizations implement their own programs; eight organizations are state service commissions whose subgrantees implement grantee programs. One organization is a state commission with two subgrantee organizations, each of which operates one grantee program. Eleven School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs are single-state programs that address local needs in only one state; two are national programs that address local needs in two or more states. Throughout this report, grantee programs are referenced by a random ID number from 1 to 13 rather than their program name to preserve confidentiality of responses.

13   The term "grantee staff" refers to staff members of grantee and/or subgrantee organizations who participated in the Grantee survey, interviews, and focus groups; the term is generally synonymous with "program staff."

- Beginning and end of school year interviews with grantee staff in both years (four interviews with each of 12 grantee staff, three interviews with one grantee staff).

- Online focus groups with 11 staff from 10 of the 12 grantee organizations in Year 1

- Telephone interviews with 26 School Turnaround AmeriCorps members serving all 13 grantee programs in Year 1.

- Online focus groups with 10 School Turnaround AmeriCorps members serving in 7 of 13 grantee programs in Year 1.

Administrative Data Sources:

- Grantee program performance measures and narrative responses recorded in annual grantee progress reports (GPRs) covering the 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years for all 13 grantee programs.

- Grantee program activity logs or AmeriCorps member services tracking information ("member activity data") covering the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years for all 13 grantee programs.

- Partnership agreements between 12 grantee programs and their 55 partner schools, reviewed in Spring 2015, Fall 2015, and Spring 2016.[14]

- Student-level data, including student achievement data, student attendance, and/or student behavior data, for the school years 2012–13 (2 programs), 2013–14 (8 programs), and 2014–15 (10 programs).

Program Schools

Primary Data Sources:

- Surveys administered to principals whose schools were in their second year of hosting a School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, administered in Year 1 (56 principals in Spring 2015) and Year 2 (56 principals in Fall 2015 and 54 principals in Spring 2016).[15]

- Survey administered to 543 instructional and counseling staff whose schools were in their second year of hosting a School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, administered in Year 1 (Spring 2015).

- Telephone interviews with principals of 35 schools hosting School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs, conducted at different points in time throughout Years 1 and 2 (25 one-on-one interviews, 17 participants in small-group interviews, some respondents participated in both).

- Telephone interviews with 50 parents representing 14 program schools that provided family and community engagement services to families of students receiving School Turnaround AmeriCorps services, conducted in Spring 2015.

Case Studies:

- Case studies in Year 1 of six SIG/Priority schools *with* School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs (matched to six comparison schools). Site visits were conducted at two of the program schools in Spring 2015, including interviews with the principal and two to three teachers, and an

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[14] One of these 12 grantee programs provided documents that were not identified as a "partnership agreement" per se but that functioned as such.

[15] See Exhibit A-1, "Response Numbers and Rates for School Leaders, Instructional Staff, and Counselors" for more detail on survey administration.

observation checklist. Phone interviews were conducted with the principal and three teachers apiece in the other four program schools in Year 1 (Spring 2015). Four of the program case study schools were re-interviewed by phone in Year 2 (Spring 2016).[16]

- Case studies in Year 2 of another six SIG/Priority schools *with* School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs (matched to six comparison schools), plus one replacement case study of a program school not matched to a comparison school. Site visits were conducted at three of the program schools in Spring 2016, including interviews with the principal and two to three teachers, a member focus group, a parent focus group, and an observation checklist. Phone interviews were conducted with the principal, three teachers, and one to four members apiece in the other three program case study schools in Spring 2016.

- "SIG Exiter" case studies in Year 2 of four schools that exited SIG/Priority status with the help of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs. Case study interviews were conducted by phone with the principal and two to three school staff members per school who had knowledge of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Interviews were conducted in Spring 2016.

Case study data collection for the 17 program case study schools in Year 1 and Year 2 included 22 principal interviews, 65 teacher or other school staff interviews (two to three per school), five in-person focus groups with teachers in five program schools, 19 members serving in program schools, 12 parents of students receiving School Turnaround AmeriCorps services in site-visited program schools, and site observations documenting the physical appearance and school climate at five program schools.

Comparison Schools

Case Studies:

- Case studies in Year 1 of six SIG/Priority schools *without* School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs (matched to six program schools). Site visits were conducted at two of the comparison schools in Spring 2015. Phone interviews were conducted with the principal and three teachers apiece in the other four comparison schools in Year 1 (Spring 2015). Five of the comparison schools were re-interviewed by phone in Year 2 (Spring 2016).[17]

- Case studies in Year 2 of another six SIG/Priority schools *without* School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs (matched to six program schools). Site visits were conducted at three of the comparison schools in Spring 2016. Phone interviews were conducted with the principal and three teachers apiece in the other three comparison schools in Spring 2016.

Case study data collection for the comparison case study schools in Year 1 and Year 2 included interviews with principals of 12 comparison schools, interviews with 49 teachers or other school staff (three to four per school), five in-person focus groups with teachers in five comparison schools, and site observations documenting the physical appearance and school climate at five comparison schools.[18]

Because the numbers of survey, interview, and case study respondents varied by data collection method and timing, the study team adopted the following conventions to help anchor the magnitude of the findings across data collection strategies. The conventions apply to findings at the *grantee program* level as well as at the *school* level.

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[16]   Two of the Year 1 case study program schools did not participate in Year 2 of the evaluation.

[17]   One of the Year 1 comparison schools did not participate in Year 2 of the evaluation.

[18]   See Exhibit A-10, "Number and Type of Case Study Participants by Case Study Site" for further detail on case study participants.

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

Exhibit ES-1: Reporting Conventions by Unit of Analysis

| Represents | Grantee Programs (n=13) | Program Schools (n=41) | | Case Studies (n=29) | |
		Interviews (Case Studies, Principals) (n=41)	School Leader Surveys (n=36)	Program Schools (n=17)[a]	Comparison Schools (n=12)
All/almost all	11–13	35–41	31–36	14–17	10–12
Most/majority	8–10	23–34	21–30	10–13	7–9
About half	6–7	18–22	16–20	8–9	5–6
Some/minority	3–5	6–17	7–15	4–7	3–4
Several/few	1–2	1–5	1–6	1–3	1–2

[a] Including four SIG Exiter schools.

Notes. "Program Schools" includes those schools within which the following data collection activities occurred: case study interviews and focus groups with principals, teachers, and, in Year 2, parents and members, and non-case study interviews with principals. Across both years of the evaluation, stakeholders from 41 unique schools participated in data collection. These data were collected at different points in time so not all 41 schools were observed at the same points in time. Thirty-six schools participated in Year 1 and 23 schools in Year 2. Of the 23 schools that participated in Year 2, 18 also participated in Year 1.

Exhibit reads: All/almost all means 11-13, out of n=13 Grantee Programs, reported a theme; 35-41, out of n=41 Interviews, reported a theme; 31-36, out of n=36 School Leader Surveys, reported a theme; 14-17, out of n=17 Program School Case Studies Only, reported a theme; or 10-12, out of n=12 Comparison School Case Studies, reported a theme.

Key Findings

The Context and Need for School Turnaround AmeriCorps

This section describes the need for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and the environmental challenges it faced in often challenging contexts. Even in the third grant year, grantee programs continued to experience volatility due both to dynamic conditions in low-performing K–12 school environments and to external school or community factors beyond the control of grantee programs and members; this finding corroborates the Year 1 final report.[19] In particular, programs' implementation efforts were affected by high turnover of school leaders and staff, lack or loss of resources, and other family-related, community, statewide, and geographic conditions that contributed to pervasive instability.[20] Whether changes in school leadership and teaching staff were part of the turnaround plan or a consequence of morale and retention issues, schools that experienced such turnover had to re-introduce their programs, start building crucial relationships and earning buy-in anew, and prepare new faculty to use school-specific curricula and interventions.

Large majorities of school leaders and staff identified pervasive challenges faced by their schools, including student academic performance, disruptive student behavior and discipline, student attendance, student engagement, and student depression. The case study research documented schools whose

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[19] Bagnell Stuart et al. (2015).

[20] Survey findings from Year 1 and Year 2 substantiate the relatively high rates of principal turnover in partner schools. According to the Year 1 survey, 28 percent of school leaders had worked at their current school fewer than three years; in Year 2, 43 percent of principals had worked at their current school fewer than four years (not adjusted for nonresponse bias).

diverse student populations faced special needs and challenges, ranging from attendance and behavioral issues to language and personal barriers. School Turnaround AmeriCorps members supported school staff working to meet the needs of English learners, students with disabilities, and students with low levels of math and reading proficiency, many of whom required additional instructional support. The majority of students in program schools faced substantial economic disadvantage and experienced multiple challenges associated with poverty, including families who cannot meet their basic needs.

The conditions in turnaround schools described in this and prior reports highlight the need for external partners and programs such as School Turnaround AmeriCorps. Partners can help increase state and district capacity to support school efforts to improve student performance in high-needs schools by implementing effective school improvement strategies.[21]

Program Implementation Findings

Programs varied across multiple dimensions: the number of schools, number of members serving, number of service hours provided by members, and the number of students served, as well as the amount of time that represented the minimum dosages of AmeriCorps services for students to be counted as having completed the program. Member activity data for Years 1 and 2 indicate that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program had a smaller footprint in Year 2 (the third program year), as reflected in approximately 12 percent fewer school partners, 18 percent fewer members serving, and 25 percent fewer students served.[22] During Years 1 and 2, programs also continued to experience persistent challenges with member enrollment and retention, and these challenges appear to be related to programs' challenges with establishing realistic performance measure targets.

In Year 2, grantee programs responded to challenges with member recruitment, retention, and—another persistent challenge—confusion about members' roles by emphasizing member preparation and training. Strategy adjustments that programs made to tackle these challenges included providing more tailored pre-training to members about their school's community and demographics, training on how members should carry out their roles in the school, and training for the administration and staff about how to use AmeriCorps members appropriately in their school.

Once members were placed in schools, teacher referrals were the most common mechanism for identifying students for services, according to survey data from both years. One shift in Year 2 was reflected in an increased emphasis on using data to target students in need of additional academic or behavioral support, reflected in survey responses as well as Year 2 case studies (albeit based on a subsample of schools).

Service offerings changed only slightly from one year to the next, such that grantee programs generally provided the same general types and combinations of services and activities in the second and third years of implementation. Many programs used on-site coordinators to support members in their roles and make the program run more smoothly in host schools.

Case study findings indicate some commonalities in how program schools used AmeriCorps members to support turnaround efforts, including use of data to inform interventions and providing socio-emotional learning supports to students. Fewer comparison schools (than program schools) relied on providing

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[21] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development (2010).

[22] The comparison in total members serving and students served across years excludes grantee program #6 because grantee program #6 reported members serving and students served in 2015–16 but not in 2014–15. Including grantee program #6 in 2015–16 only, there are 1 percent fewer members and 18 percent fewer students in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in 2015–16 compared to 2014–15.

socio-emotional learning support and targeted and individualized academic support to struggling students. The case study research further suggests that using embedded, full-time School Turnaround AmeriCorps members effectively may require a different partnership model than is required for partners who are on site episodically (volunteers, trainers, etc.). Programs operated more effectively when members immersed themselves in the school culture and operations and regularly collaborated with teachers, for example, in discussing their intervention or reviewing student data.

Findings from the four SIG Exiter case studies suggest that Exiters perceived their partnership with School Turnaround AmeriCorps as one of multiple important factors that helped them to successfully exit SIG status. Notably, in Exiter schools, members' efforts were in the same areas deemed important on surveys of school leaders—the strategies most consistently influenced by members' contributions include academic achievement, school culture and environment, and increased learning time.

Grantee staff reported somewhat different challenges in grantee progress reports from the first to the second program year, suggesting that administrative challenges typically associated with launching a new program became less prevalent. In their GPRs for the second program year, grantee programs reported fewer start-up challenges and greater investment in strengthening relationships and communication with school partners. The types of implementation challenges reported by grantee staff and school stakeholders suggest that program start-up and grant administration issues decreased over time, while underlying tensions in the AmeriCorps program model persisted (see Exhibit V-1). These included:

- **Member demographics**: Members were near peers and could be role models to students, yet sometimes exhibited inexperience and immaturity.

- **One-year term of service**: Dedicated, often full-time AmeriCorps members who were embedded in the school throughout the year were valued by schools, but relationships built with students ended with their term of service, interrupting student progress.

- **Modest living stipend**: The amount of the living stipend was prohibitive in areas with a high cost of living and/or high opportunity cost of obtaining other full-time work.

- **Service dosage requirements**: The requirement that students receive the targeted amount of intervention hours limited members' and programs' flexibility to meet schools' needs or the needs of highly transient student populations.

- **Program goal of building schools' capacity**: Members augmented school capacity during their term of service, but because school capacity gains were based on member presence, these gains were not sustainable when members left the school.

Finally, analyses of first- and second-year GPR data and second-year student-level data paint a different, and somewhat less optimistic, picture than do stakeholders' perceptions during the program's second and third years of implementation. The GPR and student data suggest more limited success.

Perceived Impact of the Program

The themes documented through in-depth case studies, interviews, and focus groups—and confirmed by survey results from Years 1 and 2—indicate generally positive stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of the program's interventions. Overall, across both years of the evaluation, respondents (grantee staff, principals, teachers, members, parents) characterized the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program as successful, and they reported that it influenced key aspects of schools' turnaround efforts, such as student academic performance, school climate, and students' attendance, behavior, and socio-emotional well-being. The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program was also perceived as contributing

positively to key student outcomes. These findings reflect perceptions of the large majority (79 percent or more) of grantee staff, school leaders and staff, and parents in Year 1, and of grantee staff and school leaders in Year 2.[23]

In Year 1, large majorities of school leaders and staff rated the program highly for providing helpful supports to schools and teachers, and they perceived that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members were important partners in improving student outcomes. School leaders' perspectives were similar in Year 2. Enhanced academic achievement was ranked as the most important school turnaround outcome for students by both school leaders (in both years) and staff (in Year 1). A majority of school leaders (in both years) also reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' contributions influenced applicable school turnaround goals, including establishing a school culture and environment that fosters school safety, attendance, and discipline and improving academic performance in English language arts and/or math.

Program-School Partnerships Findings

Generally, grantee staff and principals reported that partnership agreements are useful tools for defining roles and responsibilities in the partnership planning stage, yet are seldom revisited if and when implementation challenges arise later in the partnership. Instead, most grantee programs used on-site coordinators to supervise members and manage relationships with school stakeholders throughout the year, a practice that was used somewhat more widely in Year 2 than Year 1.

Grantee-school partnerships appeared to function more effectively when partnership relationships were stable over time; such stability improved communication and program implementation. Partnerships also experienced the converse when school leader turnover or other external conditions or implementation factors hindered relationship building. Overall, all stakeholders reported high levels of satisfaction with their partnerships, both broadly with program operations and specifically with elements of program implementation; a minority of grantee staff reported having challenges with partnerships.

Key Mechanisms of Program and Member Effectiveness and the Value-Added of AmeriCorps

The premise of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is that its members are well suited to deliver effective turnaround interventions and help schools achieve their desired student outcomes. Three themes emerged as necessary (yet not sufficient on their own) conditions for member and intervention effectiveness:

- School leader receptivity toward using external resources, openness to robust partnership engagement, and buy-in to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program.

- Having an on-site coordinator manage members and facilitate communication with the school staff.

- Close collaboration between teachers and members about classroom support and how to review student data.

Other mechanisms for integrating members into school operations and culture were established through members' consistent (daily) presence in schools and through participation in other school functions beyond service provision alone—"AmeriCorps presence." Multiple school and program stakeholders described several other key means by which that presence contributes to perceived effectiveness, including these:

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23   Only school leaders and grantee staff were surveyed in Year 2. School staff and parents were not surveyed during Year 2 of the evaluation.

- Building trusting relationships with students, an important mechanism for supporting students' socio-emotional learning and improving student academic engagement and behavior.

- Contributing to creating a positive school climate.

- Boosting classroom and overall school capacity.

In sum, the study details the range of activities and the structure of services that AmeriCorps members delivered to their school turnaround partners. Underlying the variation in how these services were structured or delivered is a common thread: All School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs provided additional human capital resources to their under-resourced and under-staffed school partners. Among the central findings of this two-year evaluation is that the value of AmeriCorps is based on the consistent presence of additional helpful, caring adults who support students by developing strong relationships with them. This defining feature of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps model is the unifying element in what program schools most appreciated about the program.

As the first grant period for School Turnaround AmeriCorps comes to an end, the insights that may guide future programming include understanding the key mechanisms of program and member effectiveness, understanding how School Turnaround AmeriCorps adds value to school improvement efforts in low-performing schools, and recognizing that some implementation challenges may reflect tensions between school contexts and the program model. Other insights reflect learning from the grantee programs and partner schools about specific practices that stakeholders have reported to be particularly useful in their efforts to deliver effective interventions (see textbox below).

Promising Practices for Delivering Effective Interventions and Serving in Schools

- ***Communication and Relationship Building:*** Communicate proactively at program level (grantee programs to districts, school leaders; members to teachers, students, on-site coordinator, and school leaders); build sustained relationships to increase program understanding and ease challenges.

- ***Recruitment and Retention***: Recruit early, advertise through multiple channels, communicate expectations about the service commitment and school conditions clearly, recruit and match members with schools' needs, place members in full-time positions.

- ***Preparation and Training***: Provide pre-service orientation and training, specialized training in behavior management and school-specific strategies; include members in faculty and professional learning community meetings, school-level training, and teacher professional development during the school year.

- ***Supervision and Support***: Rely on on-site coordinators to manage, organize, and support members and facilitate communication with school staff; cultivate school leader buy-in, integrate members into school culture and operations.

- ***Service Delivery:*** Establish effective and trusting relationships with both teachers and students, maintain a consistent presence in schools and classrooms to aid with classroom management, collaborate with teachers to review student data and target supports appropriate to students' needs, and be flexible in meeting schools' needs.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

Based on the study team's observations over the two-year evaluation period, the report also offers recommendations about aspects of program implementation and structure for CNCS to consider:

1. Provide grantee programs communications technical assistance and more opportunities for peer learning.

2. Clarify the expectations and standardize the requirements for how programs collect and report administrative data.
3. Consider encouraging greater continuity of members' service within participating schools to alleviate some of the implementation challenges associated with member onboarding and relationship building that now occur anew each year.

The first recommendation is focused on helping to improve communications; by improving how grantee programs communicate with members and schools, some common and persistent implementation challenges may be avoided or minimized, tensions in the program model may be mitigated, and program delivery may be enhanced. Communications assistance could be helpful in several modes and formats, including messaging and materials development, one-on-one support, and facilitated peer group learning for both grantee staff and host school staff. For example, materials in using language that is accessible and formats that are engaging (e.g., one-page FAQs, posters, short videos) and developing concise and consistent talking points that clarify the program rules and the most effective ways to leverage members in schools could provide useful, program-wide tools for managing schools' expectations about the program, particularly related to tensions and challenges with AmeriCorps model features and how to mitigate them. The program could also benefit from disseminating promising practices more broadly; for example, by making available on the AmeriCorps program website a communications toolkit tailored to different audiences (districts, school leaders, teachers and school staff, parents, and students).

Despite considerable variability in GPRs, member activity data, and student-level data, the study team was able to identify opportunities for enhancing these data for future reporting years and future cohorts, potentially for both the School Turnaround AmeriCorps and other education-related CNCS programming. In the Year 1 final evaluation report, the study team offered several recommendations for improving the collection, reporting, and analysis of administrative data, focused on providing more explicit guidance, articulating common reporting procedures, and developing common templates. Building on those Year 1 recommendations, the second recommendation is for CNCS to consider an alternative approach to the collection and analysis of grantee program administrative data to improve measurement of program performance. The approach is summarized in the Conclusion of this report, and described in detail in Appendix A.4.

The third recommendation focuses on encouraging greater continuity of members' service within participating schools. While the grant program statute requires terms of service to be no longer than one year, some grantee programs enroll members into two consecutive one-year terms, which provides some stability and continuity to the program.[24] Perhaps CNCS could consider providing explicit acknowledgement that two consecutive years of service for members might be a viable option for programs (assuming continuity of funding and satisfactory member performance), as having some continuity in members' service might mitigate some persistent and program-wide implementation challenges. This recommendation is based on the finding that starting over each year with a new cohort of members requires substantial time and energy from programs and schools. One possible alternative might be to build in some continuity across school years to help reduce the time lost each fall, by staggering members' service terms so that some members begin in the fall semester and others in the spring semester. The study team recognizes that considering such a change might lead programs to provide mid-year orientation to new members, although the members already on-site could potentially help accelerate the onboarding process for their newly arrived peers.

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[24] The Citizen Schools organization, for example, asks its AmeriCorps members to commit to a two-year term in large measure to provide continuity in staffing from one year to the next.

SUMMARY OF PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF AMERICORPS SERVICES IN SUPPORTING SCHOOL TURNAROUND EFFORTS

Key findings related to perceived impacts of School Turnaround AmeriCorps services that help to support turnaround efforts include these: [25]

- The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is perceived as contributing positively to achieving key outcomes, including improving students' academic achievement and socio-emotional health.

- All grantee programs, a majority of schools, and most principals reported that positive relationships between members and students have a positive impact on students' academic engagement and behavior and/or are effective at meeting school turnaround goals.

- Stakeholders from case study schools noted capacity improvements in several areas: leveraging grants and partners to increase the services and opportunities available to students; hiring or assigning a dedicated staff member responsible for managing and analyzing student data; and improvements in teacher professional development systems and practices. Stakeholders in about half of program schools reported that AmeriCorps members increased capacity in classrooms.

- Improving student achievement was ranked as the most important student outcome for school turnaround efforts in both evaluation years, and most grantee staff reported improvement in academic achievement outcomes for students served by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in all or most of the partner schools. School leaders also reported the greatest degree of improvement in academic achievement, followed by increased motivation and attendance; staff perceptions were broadly similar.

- Stakeholders in program schools consistently characterized members' assistance as valuable in helping their school address turnaround goals, whether there was one or as many as 22 members serving within the school; most stakeholders reported that AmeriCorps members positively influenced students' socio-emotional well-being and academic engagement.

- School leaders, school staff, and parents agreed or strongly agreed that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program provides value through offering helpful supports, serving as partners in improving student outcomes, and providing activities frequently enough to be valuable (see Exhibit IS-1).

- Case study and SIG Exiter school case study findings suggest that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members helped schools increase their capacity to achieve turnaround goals and improve students' socio-emotional well-being. However, SIG Exiters also reported loss of the same resources that had helped them exit SIG status, including School Turnaround AmeriCorps services, and commented that these losses would have negative consequences for their schools' continued progress.

- Not all stakeholders knew about School Turnaround AmeriCorps program goals or which students were served, and therefore were not able to offer perceptions about program impact; stakeholders' perceptions of improvement, not surprisingly, reflect their rankings of which student outcomes are most important (i.e., the program has contributed to improvement in students' academic achievement).

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[25]   See Chapter III for a more comprehensive discussion of the perceptions of impact summarized here.

Exhibit IS-1: School Leader, Staff, and Parent Perceptions: Value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps

Percent of School Leaders/School Staff/Parents

AmeriCorps members provide helpful support to the students in this school
- Year 1: School Leaders 55% Agree, 45% Strongly Agree; School Staff 63% Agree, 31% Strongly Agree; Parents 18% Agree, 74% Strongly Agree
- Year 2: School Leaders (Spring) 52% Strongly Agree, 43% Agree; School Leaders (Fall) 75% Strongly Agree, 22% Agree

AmeriCorps members offer supports that are beneficial to the teachers in this school[a]
- Year 1: School Leaders 51% Agree, 38% Strongly Agree; School Staff 58% Agree, 27% Strongly Agree
- Year 2: School Leaders (Spring) 46% Strongly Agree, 47% Agree; School Leaders (Fall) 63% Strongly Agree, 31% Agree

AmeriCorps members are important partners in improving student outcomes
- Year 1: School Leaders 53% Agree, 40% Strongly Agree; School Staff 59% Agree, 30% Strongly Agree; Parents 34% Agree, 58% Strongly Agree
- Year 2: School Leaders (Spring) 41% Strongly Agree, 48% Agree; School Leaders (Fall) 58% Strongly Agree, 36% Agree

AmeriCorps activities occur frequently enough to be valuable
- Year 1: School Leaders 63% Agree, 28% Strongly Agree; School Staff 49% Agree, 26% Strongly Agree; Parents 42% Agree, 47% Strongly Agree
- Year 2: School Leaders (Spring) 30% Strongly Agree, 49% Agree; School Leaders (Fall) 46% Strongly Agree, 45% Agree

AmeriCorps members engage parents/guardians to become involved in their children's school[b]
- Year 1: School Leaders 61% Agree, 14% Strongly Agree
- Year 2: School Leaders (Spring) 22% Strongly Agree, 54% Agree; School Leaders (Fall) 28% Strongly Agree, 39% Agree

AmeriCorps members provide access to information and resources to parents/guardians about how they can support their children's education[b]
- Year 1: School Leaders 69% Agree, 14% Strongly Agree
- Year 2: School Leaders (Spring) 20% Strongly Agree, 43% Agree; School Leaders (Fall) 29% Strongly Agree, 49% Agree

Percent of School Leaders/School Staff/Parents

Year 1 — Year 2

Legend:

Year 1	Strongly Agree	Agree
School Leaders:	(purple)	(orange)
School Staff:	(black)	(green)
Parents:	(blue)	(pink)

Year 2	Strongly Agree	Agree
School Leaders (Spring):	Strong Agree (dark purple)	Agree (orange)
School Leaders (Fall):	Strongly Agree (light purple)	Agree (light orange)

Notes: School Leaders Year 1 (N=38, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 2-Fall (N=37, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 2-Spring (N=40, Missing=1).School Staff Year 1 (N=155-215, Missing=1-5). Parents Year 1 (N=38, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 1: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0-3. School Leaders Year 2-Fall: No respondents indicated that this question was not applicable. School Leaders Year 2-Spring: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0-4. Year 1 and 3: Chart excludes school leaders who indicated not applicable. School Staff Year 1: Responses limited to school staff restricted who worked with at least one student in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Parents Year 1: Number of respondents who did not know ranged from 2-3. Responses limited to those familiar with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Exhibit sorted by Year 2-Spring School Leader responses. See Appendix Exhibits C-29, C-49, and C-55 for tables with all response options.

[a] Question asked of school leaders and school staff only.

[b] Question asked of school leaders only.

Source: School Leader Survey Q18 ("Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements this school year. (Mark one response in each row.)"). School Staff 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.)"). Parent Interview 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 reads: 100% of school leaders in Year 1, 97% of school leaders in Year 2-Fall, 95% of school leaders in Year 2-Spring, 94% of school staff in Year 1 and 97% of parents in Year 1 agreed or strongly agreed that "School Turnaround AmeriCorps members provide helpful support to the students in this school."

Improved Academic Achievement

"In English, we saw our [end-of-course] scores rise significantly; a large part is because there is another dedicated person that is constantly reinforcing what we're teaching. The data is there, we're seeing increas[es] in the number of kids who are passing. It only happens because all oars are rowing in the same direction."

—Teacher Interview (2016)

Improved Academic Engagement

"I've had a student come up to me and he assists me in some of my duties here at the school. And he told me once … 'If I wasn't helping you, like helping me, I'd probably be in detention right now.' So basically he's saying, 'You keep me on track.'"

—Member Interview (2016)

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 (2015)

I.   INTRODUCTION

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

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program Overview

In 2013, CNCS and the Department of Education launched a new grant program, School Turnaround AmeriCorps, that supports the placement of a dedicated cadre of AmeriCorps members from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) in persistently underachieving schools across the country. These AmeriCorps members serve in schools implementing school turnaround interventions as required by Department of Education's (ED) School Improvement Grant (SIG) program or as required through Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility.[26,27]

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 help deliver effective turnaround interventions and help achieve the desired student outcomes in eligible schools.

The program logic model depicts the core activities of the interventions being implemented by AmeriCorps members. It illustrates how those activities are expected to lead to the intended short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for the target population (see Exhibit V-2). The logic model also contextualizes the program by describing key assumptions that underlie the hypothesized causal relationships between program activities and intended outcomes and factors (moderators) that may affect the degree to which those activities achieve intended effects.

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps logic model illustrates how activities funded through the program address multiple student needs and align with comprehensive school turnaround plans by incorporating one or more 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 affect student achievement, such as students' socio-emotional and health needs.

3. Accelerate students' acquisition of reading and math knowledge and skills.

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[26]   School Improvement Grants (SIGs), authorized under Section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), are "grants to state educational agencies (SEAs) that SEAs use to make competitive subgrants to local education 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 substantially raise the achievement of students in their lowest-performing schools." Source: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html. Accessed Oct. 9, 2014.

[27]   Priority schools can implement interventions aligned with the provisions provided in the ESEA. 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 and college applications, and through 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 (Turnaround, Transformation, Restart, or School Closure).[28] 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 important comprehensive turnaround efforts. As such, the School Turnaround AmeriCorps funding guidelines encourage grantee programs to partner with multiple eligible schools within an LEA and to coordinate turnaround efforts among multiple school sites. Implementing the six strategies through a comprehensive and coordinated approach is hypothesized to enable programs to take advantage of economies of scale and to aid in changing school, LEA, and community cultures.

Study Goals and Research Questions

The study examines the contributions of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members toward the success of turnaround models in low-performing schools in which members provided direct services, and it seeks to explain the mechanisms underlying those contributions. The goal of the evaluation is to understand how AmeriCorps members contributed to schools' capacity to implement their turnaround models successfully and to improve key turnaround outcomes.

The specific goals of the evaluation are as follows:

- Describe how AmeriCorps members supported school turnaround efforts.

- Contrast the implementation of school turnaround efforts at School Turnaround AmeriCorps sites with implementation at school turnaround sites that were supported by other AmeriCorps programs only minimally or not at all.

- Identify promising practices for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in supporting schools' ability to implement their turnaround plans and achieve key turnaround outcomes.

- Identify promising practices and key lessons from the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program that could be applied to other education-focused programs at CNCS.

The study's guiding research questions are summarized below: [29]

1. How do AmeriCorps members help schools implement their turnaround plans and achieve key turnaround outcomes?

   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?

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[28] As well as the requirements associated with Priority schools under ESEA flexibility.

[29] Based on Year 1 findings, the research questions were slightly modified from Year 1 to Year 2 in order to examine specific aspects of implementation in more detail.

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?

    i. 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?

    ii. 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?

    iii. 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 conducted 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?

e. How are School Turnaround AmeriCorps activities similar to or different from activities provided by other partners in SIG/Priority schools?

2. Which aspects of grantee-school partnerships appear to be the most promising practices in terms of involvement and satisfaction of the school leadership and the participating AmeriCorps members?

a. How have written partnerships agreements changed, if at all, over the course of the grant period?

b. What improvements could be made to written partnership agreements and how they are used to improve desired outcomes for schools and for students?

c. What lessons from the School Turnaround AmeriCorps partnership could be applied to other education-focused programs in CNCS's portfolio?

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.

4. For School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools that have exited SIG/Priority status since the beginning of the grant period, what strategies have they used to improve?

a. What strategies do school leaders and other stakeholders perceive as being most helpful?

b. To what extent do school leaders and other stakeholders attribute improvement to the contributions of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program?

Study Design, Study Sample, Methods, and Limitations

Study Design, Sample, and Methods

To answer both the broad and more specific questions, the research design for Years 1 and 2 of the national evaluation of School Turnaround AmeriCorps uses a mixed-methods design. The study design emphasizes 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 program performance and member activities.

One condition of receiving School Turnaround AmeriCorps grant funding was that grantee programs participate in the national evaluation, and therefore all 13 funded programs are represented in the findings. Most of their host schools were included in the evaluation, with the exception of one large program for which only a representative sample of schools was included during Year 1.[30] In Year 1, 57 School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools met the eligibility criteria to be included in the sample; in Year 2, 54 schools did.[31]

As shown in Exhibit I-1, school year 2013–14 was the first program year for School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee programs implementing the intervention. School year 2014–15 was the second program year, and 2015–16 the third program year. For the evaluation, the 2013–14 school year served as a design year, during which the study team developed the evaluation design, developed and pilot-tested the data collection instruments, and prepared the clearance package for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The two-year national evaluation spanned the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years.

Exhibit I-1:   Program Implementation and Evaluation Timelines

School Year	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16
Program implementation	n/a	First year	Second year	Third year
Program evaluation	Baseline data	Evaluation design	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 grantee staff, AmeriCorps members, school leaders, school staff, and parents/guardians of students who received AmeriCorps services. The study purposefully excluded data collection from students, so as not to detract from their instructional time. Taken together, these data allow the study to describe implementation in detail.

Administrative data collection included mid-year and annual grantee progress reports to CNCS and performance measurement data, member activity data, and other outcomes data (e.g., achievement

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[30]   The Teach For America (TFA) intervention provides schools with AmeriCorps members who have been trained as teachers for school classrooms, in contrast to other School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee programs whose members provide services, such as tutoring and mentoring, to support student engagement and academic achievement but do not teach. Because of TFA's distinctive intervention and its relatively large number of school partners in Year 1, only a representative sample of TFA schools was included in the evaluation. In Year 2, five of six TFA schools were included.

[31]   This number excludes schools newly added to the 2015–16 cohort, as it was likely that the experiences of schools just starting the intervention would be qualitatively different from those of schools in the cohort that had already completed one year of program implementation. Several schools that were new to the 2014–15 cohort and were not included in the Year 1 evaluation were added to the Year 2 evaluation, and several Year 1 schools that stopped participating were dropped from it.

scores, attendance and behavior records) obtained from grantee programs.[32] These data allow the study to describe programs' capacity for data collection and performance measurement.

The case study approach attempts to understand how services from School Turnaround AmeriCorps members contributed to schools' turnaround efforts. It also incorporates in-depth comparisons of turnaround implementation in SIG schools *with* support from members (*program* schools / treatment group) versus a similar group of low-performing schools *without* support from members (*comparison* schools / comparison group). All program schools relied on School Turnaround AmeriCorps members to help achieve turnaround goals, whereas the comparison schools relied on other partners and/or school staff.

The case studies consist of 12 matched pairs of SIG schools, each pair comprising one program school and one comparison school, plus five case studies of single schools. These five consist of one program school replacement case study and four "SIG Exiter" case studies of schools that exited SIG status with the help of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs. The purpose of the SIG Exiter case studies is to identify the major strategies school leaders and teachers perceived as supporting their school's success in exiting SIG status, including the role of AmeriCorps members in implementing each strategy.

Six of the 12 paired comparative case studies, representing six grantee programs, were conducted in Year 1. Six of the 12 paired comparative case studies, representing another six grantee programs, were conducted in Year 2, as was follow-up data collection from five of the Year 1 pairs. The five individual case studies were all conducted in Year 2. The Year 1/Year 2 follow-up case studies cover the 2014–15 and (follow-up) 2015–16 school years; the Year 2 case studies cover only the 2015–16 school year.

The 12 comparison schools were matched to program schools on key characteristics (i.e., state, grade level, urbanicity) and were from the same LEAs, wherever possible. Among other criteria, potentially eligible comparison schools were selected on the basis of being a SIG-funded school and having no or minimal AmeriCorps presence.

Matched pairs of one program school staff member and one comparison school staff member participated in either site visits or telephone interviews to provide additional context. 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 telephone or in-person interviews with principals and teachers; site visits also included focus groups with teachers and a structured observation protocol of the school environment in program and matched comparison schools. The team collected additional data from program schools in the pairs, including interviews and focus groups with AmeriCorps members and parents. For the SIG Exiter case studies, the team conducted interviews with principals and selected teachers. For the replacement program school case study, interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, members, and parents.

The evaluation integrates findings 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.

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[32]   Because of the variability and poor quality of student-level data collected from grantee programs in Year 1, and the difficulty in interpreting data analyses that do not include a comparison group, no student-level data were collected in Year 2.

Limitations

Survey Data

The study team administered surveys to grantee staff and to school principals and instructional staff, achieving different response rates for each respondent group for each year.

All 13 grantee programs responded to the Grantee survey in Year 1 and in Year 2. The response rates for the School Leaders survey were 68 percent in Year 1, 66 percent in Fall Year 2, and 74 percent in Spring Year 2, which suggest reasonable confidence that survey responses can characterize the perspectives of leaders at the participating schools. The Staff survey of instructional staff and counselors was administered only in Year 1. Its response rate was 40 percent, which suggests that those responses are less likely to be representative of all staff in the study schools. The study team applied statistical adjustments for nonresponse for all the school leader and school staff surveys (see Appendix A.1 for more detail).

All survey findings presented in this report are based on surveys of personnel whose organizations (grantee programs or schools) participated in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and are descriptive only of participants; it is not possible to determine whether and how their experiences may have differed from those of personnel at similar nonparticipating organizations.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data sources present some limitations in terms of their content, sampling methods, and analysis over time. In terms of content, interview responses may be incomplete, as not all respondents had equally comprehensive insights about the full range of activities. Similarly, although interviews followed a semi-structured protocol, not all respondents necessarily answered questions comprehensively or with the same level of detail. As a result, individual interview responses reported here likely represent lower-bound estimates for the reported themes.

Focus group data should be interpreted with the caveat that participants may have influenced one another. Further, while focus group discussions with the same type of stakeholder (e.g., teachers, members) used the same protocol, the discussions in each group unfolded in different ways based on the composition of the group and perspectives of the participants.

Grantee progress reports required grantee staff to provide explanations when they did not meet their targets, yet no such requirement was in place when they met or exceeded their targets. This limits the usefulness of reports for understanding what strategies or circumstances contributed to a program's success. Not all grantee staff reported on all (or the same) set of performance measures, and when they did track the same performance measure, they usually had different instruments and different targets for improvement. Such variability in reporting on possible performance measures leads to considerable variability in the number of grantee programs for any individual performance measure, and also means trends across programs are difficult or impossible to describe because the sample sizes are too small for any individual (shared) measure.

When seeking school staff and parent participants for interviews, the study team requested referrals from principals for individuals who had some knowledge of and/or experience with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. This process helped identify interview participants who could meaningfully answer questions about the program, although principals may have chosen teachers or parents whose perspectives did not necessarily represent the experiences of all other teachers in the school or families. However, because the study team heard such varied feedback from these stakeholders (from teachers in particular), there seemed to be no systematic bias in teachers' responses either overly favorable or overly critical of the program or of turnaround initiatives at comparison schools.

The main limitation of this case study research is sample size. The study team triangulated information from at least three stakeholders within each school, yet such a small sample may not represent that school's full range of experiences or opinions. The team designed the comparative case studies to offer breadth across the School Turnaround AmeriCorps portfolio rather than breadth across more stakeholders within each case study school. The findings are not representative of the sample of continuing program schools or the larger universe of SIG-funded schools and so should be interpreted with caution.

In terms of analysis, when data sources across years are comparable, the study team compared findings across the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years. However, in cases when data are not directly comparable—such as the different samples of schools in Year 1 and Year 2—the study cannot describe changes within specific schools from one year to the next. The Year 1 case study schools are an exception, as follow-up data were collected from a subset of those schools in Year 2. The team has assessed change over time based on both quantitative changes in the frequency of themes and a qualitative assessment of changes in the intensity or quality of a theme across the full body of sources.

Administrative Data

The member activity data have several noteworthy limitations. First, the 2015–16 data were collected from grantee programs in May 2016, so the figures do not account for any changes that may have occurred in the last few weeks of the academic year or over the summer.[33] Consequently, comparisons between the two school years should be made with caution. Second, grantee staff varied in their ability to report member, service hour, and student counts using specified activity categories because they differed from the activity categories some programs used to track member activities for internal purposes. This limited the study team's capacity to analyze counts of service hours and students served by program, school, and service type.

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

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. Based on lessons about program design and operations and about the practical realities of primary data collection in dynamic contexts, the study team adapted the evaluation from Year 1 to Year 2 in the following areas, each of which is described in more detail below:

- *Evaluation design* to address unanticipated difficulties in forming a valid comparison group.

- *Research questions* to enable the Year 2 evaluation to build on findings from Year 1.

- *Data collection instruments and incentive structure* to better align the instruments with the modified design and research questions and increase incentives to help ensure more successful comparison school recruitment and improve data collection response rates.

- *Collection and analysis of administrative data* to improve the consistency and completeness of administrative data collected and reported by grantee staff.

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[33] Several of the grantee programs provide substantial services over the summer.

Evaluation Design

During the first year of the program (2013–14), the School Turnaround AmeriCorps evaluation focused on developing the research questions and an appropriate, credible, and feasible design of an impact and implementation study for the national evaluation. Because of the small sample size and the estimated low analytic power of an impact study, the initial design year resulted in considering—and rejecting—a research design that would measure impacts. CNCS instead opted for a quasi-experimental design focused on examining program implementation by comparing implementation of turnaround models in SIG schools with AmeriCorps members versus a matched comparison group of schools with little or no AmeriCorps presence.

During Year 1 of the evaluation, however, the study team encountered a significant methodological challenge in its efforts to form a comparison group needed to implement this design. During recruitment, the team gained a better understanding of the broader comparison condition—specifically, the limited pool of potential comparison schools available for the evaluation, and further, the dynamic and fluid nature of schools' reliance on external partners, including other AmeriCorps programs that were not part of School Turnaround AmeriCorps. These conditions threatened the study's internal validity, both because there was insufficient contrast between treatment and comparison schools and because the comparison group was too small to yield sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful differences between AmeriCorps schools and comparison schools.

To address this challenge, CNCS and Abt Associates changed the research design midway through Year 1, from a quasi-experimental design to a comparative case study design. That latter design would enable descriptive and qualitative analyses of the value-added of School Turnaround AmeriCorps by comparing implementation progress and efforts to improve school climate and achieve turnaround goals in a purposively selected sample of matched pairs of AmeriCorps and comparison schools.

Research Questions

Based on the findings from Year 1, the research questions were adjusted and expanded in Year 2 to probe further specific aspects of implementation, including the use of partnership agreements as a planning and accountability tool and describing strategies used by programs in schools that have exited SIG status since the beginning of the grant period. The Year 2 evaluation also emphasized comparing the strengths and challenges that School Turnaround AmeriCorps program schools had experienced over time and across the different strategies and partnerships.

Also in response to the evaluation's findings, CNCS strengthened and clarified its guidance given to applicants for the 2016-17 grant application process. CNCS updated its guidance on partnership agreements to add the expectations that programs would update the written partnership agreement annually and would describe how their activities align with schools' turnaround plans and how they will collaborate with school partners throughout the grant period.

Recruitment, Data Collection, and Incentives

The lessons about recruitment and data collection in highly fluid school contexts are many. First, because schools and districts (and grantee programs) 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 are not shared with study contractors either; however, providing real-time updates was not an expectation of the grant.

Another 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 approvals, to recruit school and individual study participants, and to schedule and complete data collection within the school year 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 third lesson is that the importance of a given study can be conveyed through both well-timed communications from sponsoring agencies and the use of incentives.

In response to these challenges, the Year 2 evaluation contract began in the summer, rather than the start of the school year, to facilitate earlier communications with school districts to request continued and new approval for data collection activities in program and comparison schools, as well as to secure agreements for data collection from comparison schools once district approvals were obtained. Also at the beginning of Year 2, the study team assisted CNCS in requesting OMB approval to modify the incentive structure to improve school recruitment and response rates. Year 1 response rates were fairly low for some groups (teachers and members, as noted above), and many comparison schools declined to participate in data collection activities. Thus, the study team recommended increasing incentives for comparison schools, adding incentives for SIG Exiters (since they may no longer have members), and modestly increasing incentives for principals, teachers, and AmeriCorps members in order to recruit schools and districts, encourage study participation, and increase response rates to data collection activities.

Administrative Data Collection

In Year 1, the School Turnaround AmeriCorps study attempted to collect from grantee staff student-level administrative data on academic achievement, as well as attendance and behavior data. The study team assessed and found the data, on the whole, incomplete and unusable for performing portfolio-level data analyses. As a result of these findings, CNCS discontinued the collection of student-level data in Year 2. The study team continued to collect other types of administrative data (performance measures data in grantee progress reports, member activity data) and worked with programs to improve the consistency and completeness in reporting these data in Year 2.

Organization of This Document

Chapter II, **Program Implementation Findings**, describes school contexts and program operations, the types and structures of service activities AmeriCorps members delivered in schools, members' roles in supporting schools, and how implementation was perceived across stakeholders, in terms of both accomplishments and challenges. Chapter II also summarizes the study's findings and observations about using administrative data to evaluate education-focused AmeriCorps programs, as well as the findings across all 17 case studies, which are also discussed in the next two chapters.

Chapter III, **Perceived Impacts**, presents detailed findings and accompanying exhibits on the perceived impacts of AmeriCorps members' service in turnaround schools.

> **Summary Sections**
>
> **Executive Summary**—Brief overview of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and the national evaluation, summarizing the methods used and limitations of results reported and highlighting key findings.
>
> **Impact Summary**—High-level summary of the perceived impacts of AmeriCorps services in supporting schools' turnaround efforts.

Chapter IV, **Partnership Findings**, describes partnership structures, stakeholders' perceptions of grantee programs' relationships with their school partners, including communication and collaboration practices, and common challenges with partnerships.

Chapter V, **Conclusion,** summarizes lessons learned about intervention effectiveness, promising practices, and changes over time. It concludes with implications for the program's theory of change and suggestions for program improvement. **References** are provided in Chapter VI.

In a separate document, the **Technical Appendixes** include the sampling, data collection, and analysis methodologies; supplemental case study material for the 17 individual case studies; survey data tables; supplemental exhibits; and the data collection instruments.

II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS

Summary of Implementation Findings over Time

This chapter summarizes implementation findings over time based on grantee progress report (GPR) data covering the first and second year of program implementation (2013–14, 2014–15), as well as on member activity data and primary data collected for the second and third years of implementation (2014–15, 2015–16; evaluation Years 1 and 2).

Findings about **program size and scope** indicate the number of schools, members placed, and students served continued to vary, while program size decreased, in the third implementation year:

- Grantee programs varied significantly in size and scope, from 1 to 11 schools, 13 to 95 members serving, and 248 to 2,437 students served, in 2014–15. Between 2014–15 and 2015–16, the number of schools hosting School Turnaround AmeriCorps members decreased (from 68 to 60 schools), resulting in reductions from 394 members to 325 and 13,404 students served to 9,544.[34,35] In 2015–16, grantee programs placed between 6 and 91 members who served between 242 and 1,663 students.

- Across both years, schools, too, varied considerably, in the number and proportion of their students served by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, as well as in caseloads for members. On average, grantee programs reported 25 students received services for every AmeriCorps member in Year 2, slightly lower than the 28 students reported in Year 1.

Stakeholder Views

Findings related to **program implementation challenges** indicate member enrollment and retention challenges persisted. They suggest that in general, grantee programs have not established realistic performance measure targets:

- School Turnaround AmeriCorps member enrollment and retention are key indicators of a grantee program's performance, and failure to meet member enrollment or retention targets can correspondingly limit a program's capacity to meet other performance measure goals.

- Challenges with member enrollment and retention were serious issues for grantee programs in 2013–14 and remained so in 2014–15. Notably, programs in rural areas had limited success in

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[34] The comparison in total members serving and students served across years excludes grantee program #6 because grantee program #6 reported members serving and students served in 2015–16 but not in 2014–15. Including grantee program #6, grantee programs in 2015–16 had 389 members serving and served 11,001 students.

[35] Several reasons explain discrepancies between counts of members serving in School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools reported in GPRs versus the counts in member activity data collection administered by the study team. The primary reason is different time points in reporting member enrollment figures, which reflected idiosyncratic fluctuations in member enrollment and retention, early member exits from the program, and grantees' responses to fill vacant slots throughout the program year. In addition, one grantee program experienced challenges in member activity tracking at the school level. A third reason for the discrepancies is differences in the eligibility criteria for program schools to participate in the evaluation. Per the Evaluation Design Plan, the study team requested and grantee programs reported counts of members serving only at those schools that participated in the program for at least one year prior to their participation in the evaluation (this eligibility criterion applied to both years of the evaluation). In at least one case, the program reported in its GPR, but not in its member activity data, additional members serving in newly approved schools that were ineligible to participate in the current year of the evaluation.

overcoming structural barriers associated with their rural locations, such as limited transportation options and the opportunity cost of taking a stipended service position over full-time work.

- The majority of program targets remained the same from 2013–14 to 2014–15, and half of the targets that were not met in 2013–14 were set again in 2014–15. Detailed examination of these unmet and subsequently unadjusted targets suggests that a number of these were overly optimistic.

Findings about **members' roles** and preparing and training them to support schools include these:

- Grantee programs reported providing more tailored pre-training to members in Year 2 than in Year 1. Topics included their school's community and demographics, culturally responsive education (e.g., focused on students' ethnic or immigration histories and school-specific contexts), and relationship building.

- Grantee programs in Year 2 continued to provide training on how members should carry out their roles in the school, with increased attention to ensuring that members understood the reality of school contexts before they were placed in schools, as well as providing training to the administration and staff about how to use School Turnaround AmeriCorps members appropriately in their school.

Survey data indicate that teacher referrals were the most common **mechanism for identifying students** for services in both years; these data also indicate a somewhat stronger emphasis in Year 2 on use of data for targeting students in need of additional academic or behavioral support services:

- Grantee staff reported teacher recommendations and grades as the primary mechanisms for identifying students for School Turnaround AmeriCorps services in both years, with standardized test scores replacing counselor recommendations in Year 2. Year 2 case studies with a subsample of schools also indicated them using student performance data to identify students for services.

Findings related to **program activities and service delivery** indicate that grantee programs provided the same types and a similar mix of services and activities in the second and third years of implementation:

- Grantee programs appear to cluster into three groups depending on how many of the 11 types of services they offered in a program school: all or almost all, between 2 and 5, or only 1 (see Appendix Exhibit D-1). Tutoring was the most common service activity, offered by approximately four-fifths of program schools, nearly twice as many schools as any other type of service.

- Within schools offering multiple services, all or nearly all School Turnaround AmeriCorps members participated in each of the activities, suggesting that members did not generally specialize in one particular activity.

- Not surprisingly, some services were more commonly provided in small groups or one-on-one settings (e.g., tutoring, mentorship, attendance coaching), whereas others were offered more frequently in large-group settings (e.g., community engagement, college readiness).

Overall, findings related to **understanding members' roles** suggest that many programs used on-site coordinators to make the program run more smoothly in the host schools, as well as member integration with school operations and regular collaboration with teachers.

- Most interviewed principals reported that members were integrated in their school's staff, while grantee staff and principals continued to regard the role of on-site coordinator as crucial for supporting members and communication among grantee programs, school leaders, teachers, and members.

- Across both years, programs consistently reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members met with school staff to review students' progress monthly or more often.

- Member roles appear to be somewhat more clearly understood by principals in Year 2.

Findings from the case study data suggest several **patterns in how program schools used AmeriCorps members** to support their turnaround efforts, and these patterns are quite similar to the SIG strategies that school leaders ranked as being most influenced by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members:

- The two most prevalent turnaround strategies among both program and comparison case study schools are using data to drive interventions and investing in teacher professional development including training in implementing specific curriculum to meet turnaround goals.

- Substantially more program schools reported providing socio-emotional learning supports and targeted and individualized academic support to struggling students than did the comparison schools.

- Other turnaround strategies reported more frequently by program schools than comparison schools included member-teacher collaboration and classroom supports; on-site coordinators to support members and facilitate communication; and flexibility in meeting schools' needs.

- In both years and across the three administrations of the School Leader survey, school leaders ranked academic achievement, school culture and environment, and increased learning time as the three strategies most influenced by AmeriCorps members.

Tentative **findings that emerged from the four SIG Exiter case studies** suggest that the schools that successfully improved on their turnaround goals embraced their partnership with School Turnaround AmeriCorps, and that they viewed its members as one among a combination of factors that helped them to successfully exit SIG status:

- Stakeholders in all four schools viewed strong leadership from the principal as a critical factor in their school's ability to exit SIG status, and they described multiple ways that school leaders influenced their school's turnaround. Examples included changing the school culture, supporting and empowering teachers to implement turnaround strategies, and facilitating communication and clarifying expectations between the school and grantee program.

- Having School Turnaround AmeriCorps members provide socio-emotional support for students was an improvement strategy employed by all four schools, which stakeholders described as helping to attend to students' socio-emotional needs, overcome barriers to learning, and improve their ability and motivation to succeed in school.

- All four schools were characterized as open to using School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and reported that fully integrating them into the school staff was important in successfully achieving student- and school-level outcomes. Three schools also mentioned the importance of member flexibility, particularly in terms of spending additional time with students and school staff beyond the formal intervention.

- Three schools indicated that implementing a targeted curriculum, in math or literacy, for example, was an effective strategy in successfully exiting SIG status.

- All four schools reported using data to measure how their school was performing, specifically to help guide goal setting, interventions, and matching members and students.

- All four schools also mentioned the importance of having sufficient resources for successfully exiting SIG status, and three schools reported that local support (through their school board, district, or parents) played a big role. Conversely, stakeholders from three SIG Exiter schools described experiencing a detrimental decline in resources upon exiting SIG status; two of the schools lost resources that included their School Turnaround AmeriCorps members.

Key findings related to **challenges in program implementation** suggest that program start-up and grant administration issues decreased over time, whereas the factors intrinsic to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps model persisted, simultaneously representing program strengths and challenges:

- Grantee programs faced an initial learning curve, but their initial start-up challenges with setting up their new program's operations and administering their grant abated toward the end of the second year of implementation and further diminished in the third.

- Program schools primarily reported implementation challenges with defining members' roles, members' need for additional training on site, their uneven quality and preparation, and inconsistent AmeriCorps presence in the school. These tensions in the AmeriCorps model persisted in the second and third years of implementation.

- By the end of the second implementation year, the primary challenges for grantee programs were member enrollment and retention, structural issues specific to the AmeriCorps model (the amount of the stipend, opportunity cost of forgoing full-time or permanent work), and (continuing) issues around accessing student data.

Performance Data and Student-Level Data

The key findings from analyses of GPR data covering a School Turnaround AmeriCorps program's first and second year performance and student-level data collected in its second year are not always consistent with stakeholders' views collected during the program's second and third years of implementation. The performance data suggest more limited success:

- More grantee programs met all or most of their 2014–15 output and outcome performance measure targets (6 of 13 programs) than met their 2013–14 targets (4 of 13).

- In 2014–15, of grantee programs reporting on improved academic engagement (Performance Measure ED27), four of seven met or exceeded their targets, while a fifth program approached its target.

- In 2014–15, of grantee programs reporting on improved academic performance (Performance Measure ED5), 3 of 10 met their targets.

Programs did not meet their targets for a variety of reasons, including lower-than-expected member enrollment, retention issues, barriers at the school level, and problems accessing student assessment data.

- Student-level data, including 2013–14 academic achievement, attendance, and/or behavior outcomes, were collected from all grantee programs (except for one) during evaluation Year 1 but not during evaluation Year 2.

- Three programs provided 2013–14 data that represented all of their partner schools and that had a low level of missing data. Meaningful cross-grantee program data analyses could not be performed.

Grantee Program Characteristics and Partner School Contexts and Demographics

School Turnaround AmeriCorps is one component of each host school's broader school turnaround plan. Each host school had different student compositions, resources, and turnaround goals, which determined how a school deployed members and the services it provided to support its turnaround efforts.

This section discusses the characteristics and contexts of the grantee programs and partner schools to address the evaluation's research objective of understanding how local context affects program implementation and identifying

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - *Program Schools* (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - *Grantee Programs* (n=13: Grantee survey and interviews)

promising practices in supporting schools' ability to implement their turnaround plans. The section describes findings from Grantee surveys and interviews with grantee staff, as well as interviews with principals in a sample of 25 schools in Year 1 and 17 case studies of program schools across the two years of the evaluation (see textbox).

Grantee Program Characteristics

Of the 13 grantee programs in both years, 11 are single-state programs and 2 are multi-state programs.[36] Most served multiple schools (ranging from 1 to 11 schools); 10 served high schools, 9 served elementary schools, and 5 served middle schools in Year 2, but 9 served middle schools in Year 1. Of the 13 programs, 6 were new to AmeriCorps, and 7 were experienced AmeriCorps grantees when School Turnaround AmeriCorps began in 2013.

Partner School Contexts and Demographics

Almost all of the SIG partner schools (more than 90 percent in both years) were implementing the Transformation or Turnaround model. On average, the partner schools had an enrollment of 518 students in Year 1 and 580 students in Year 2 in grades targeted by the AmeriCorps program. A large majority of these students (85 percent) were eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL). Almost all interviewed school staff reported serving economically disadvantaged student populations. Principals specifically mentioned the high proportion of FRPL-eligible students, or they described the majority of their students as economically disadvantaged without specifically referencing the proportion of students eligible. (Case study school demographics are shown in Exhibit II-12).

About half of schools reported having large minority student populations. Substantial proportions of students in these schools also required additional academic support. A minority of schools specifically discussed the needs of English learners, reflecting large immigrant or refugee populations in their respective districts. In this group of schools, English learner students comprise anywhere from about 10 percent to about 50 percent of the student population, placing varying levels of demands on each school's instructional and financial resources. A minority of principals specifically mentioned their population of students with disabilities, which ranged from 6 to 25 percent of the student body. Some case study schools reported highly transient or homeless student populations, and a few schools classified themselves as alternative high schools serving teens aged 17 to 21, one of which serves pregnant and parenting young women.

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[36] There are 12 grantees, one of which works with two subgrantees to operate two different School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs.

Across both years of the evaluation, most grantee programs and some schools reported high levels of turnover in school staff. Sometimes this was part of a turnaround plan to bring in new leadership and mostly new teaching staff. Other times, the turnover was due to morale and retention challenges. For example, one case study school reported having four principals in five years. Another case study school reported teacher turnover as high as 30 percent per year. Principal turnover was a persistent challenge for School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee staff because it disrupted the implementation and efficacy of their programs (discussed in the Partnership Challenges section of the **Partnership Findings** chapter).

Member Recruitment, Retention, and Management

This section summarizes findings about member recruitment, enrollment, and retention, including challenges with these issues and changes in them over time.

Member Recruitment

Recruitment (and retention) of qualified School Turnaround AmeriCorps members was a prominent theme discussed by grantee staff in Years 1 and 2. When recruiting members to serve in schools, grantee programs appear to have balanced two primary considerations—the size and individual needs of a school and the skill sets of recruited members. A minority of grantee staff explained that they scaled the number of members placed in schools by the size and needs of individual schools, and in one case, by teachers' needs.

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for this Section**
>
> - *Program Schools* (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - *Grantee programs* (n=13: grantee interviews, GPRs, member activity data)

A minority of grantee staff also noted having either surveyed or ascertained members' skill sets prior to matching them to their student caseloads. One grantee staff explained that ideally this process leads to a diverse team of members with varying strengths, "making sure that each team has someone that is strong in math, someone that is strong in English, someone that has done youth development in the past."

Member Enrollment and Retention and Grantee Program Performance

Member enrollment and retention are of paramount importance for understanding grantee programs' performance. Member enrollment targets affect how programs set other performance measure targets because the number of members in a cohort determines how many students the program can serve in a given year. For example, if a program estimates it can recruit and place 30 members, it may set a target to serve 900 students (Performance Measure ED1), assuming each member can work with a caseload of 30 students. Associated performance measures, such as improved academic performance in literacy and/or math (ED5), are relative to the number of students served because they are derived in part from the number of members serving. Therefore, a shortfall in member enrollment or serious problems with retention may have a cascading effect on a program's capacity to meet other performance measure goals (see textbox).[37]

> **Member Enrollment Affects Ability to Reach Performance Targets**
>
> "Without 100% enrollment the program is unable to reach the number of students originally targeted."
>
> *–Grantee #11 (2014–15 GPR)*

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[37] However, a grantee program's ability to meet its performance measure goals is not entirely dependent on meeting its member enrollment and retention targets. Grantees make assumptions not based on member cohort size (such as the number of eligible students in a school) that may allow them to serve more students than expected rather than fewer, helping grantees sometimes exceed their targets. For example, a grantee may set a

Member Enrollment and Retention Challenges

Challenges regarding enrollment and retention are intertwined. Grantees that have difficulty attracting applicants to fill all of their AmeriCorps member slots also tend to have difficulty retaining members through the end of the school year, for many of the same reasons.

Some grantee staff reported challenges due to members leaving for other opportunities; most of these reported that members sought higher-paying positions. Other reasons reported in the GPRs for under-filled member positions include these: partner schools not being able to accommodate all the member slots available or the grantee program adding additional schools to its grant; school closures and limits on the number of members who could be placed in remaining schools; and insufficient communication to applicants during application and enrollment about the nature of working in an urban school environment (grantee program #10, grantee program #2, grantee program #4). Several other programs reported structural barriers associated with their rural locations (grantee program #8, grantee program #7, grantee program #6), including limited transportation options and the discrepancy between the cost of transportation and the living stipend, presented challenges.

The enrollment and retention challenges that grantee staff reported were echoed in interviews with school staff. For example, several schools requested more members in order to more effectively implement their program, while several others reported that not all of the members placed were a good fit for the role.

Member Enrollment and Retention Trends over Time

Challenges with member enrollment and retention were serious issues for grantee programs in 2013–14 and remained so in 2014–15. Of 13 grantee staff interviewed, 7 reported challenges with enrollment and 10 with retention. Exhibit II-1 shows enrollment and retention rates reported by staff in their 2013–14 and 2014–15 GPRs. While 2014–15 data suggest modest improvements, enrollment and retention continued to be challenging. For example, five programs met or exceeded enrollment targets in 2014–15; of them, four had met or exceeded targets in the prior year, and one had met targets in 2014–15 but not the prior year. Eight programs had not met enrollment targets, of which four were new programs. One program dramatically improved its enrollment (from 27 percent to 95 percent), while two others achieved 90 percent or more of their enrollment targets in the second year. Exhibit II-2 shows this general upward trend graphically. It is also clear from the graph that three programs struggled with enrollment in 2013–14 and 2014–15 (grantee program #2, grantee program #7, grantee program #6).

target assuming there are 200 students at one of its partner schools, but the true figure may be closer to 250 students. If the grantee enrolls five AmeriCorps members from their eight slots but still provides services to all students in the school, they would exceed their performance measure goals if each member provided services to a larger group of students (50 students per member rather than 25, in this example).

Exhibit II-1:   School Turnaround AmeriCorps Member Enrollment and Retention Rates in 2013–14 and 2014–15

Grantee Program	2013–14 Enrollment Rate	2014–15 Enrollment Rate	2013–14 Retention Rate	2014–15 Retention Rate[a]
Grantee program #3	119%	88%	84%	79%
Grantee program #9	118%	103%	60%	80%
Grantee program #1	101%	102%	95%	95%
Grantee program #8	100%	107%	88%	86%
Grantee program #5	100%	117%	88%	79%
Grantee program #11	92%	94%	89%	78%
Grantee program #13	92%	83%	86%	60%
Grantee program #12	85%	100%	88%	90%
Grantee program #10	81%	90%	88%	94%
Grantee program #2	74%	54%	98%	95%
Grantee program #7	48%	43%	33%	39%
Grantee program #6	39%	38%	70%	74%
Grantee program #4	27%	95%	88%	85%

Notes:

[a] Retention rates are based on the number of members, not the Member Service Years (MSY). Attrition would be expected to have a greater or lesser effect on a program depending on the composition of its cohort overall and the type of members (full-, part-, or minimum-time) who leave. For example, if a program with 10 members lost 1 member, its retention rate would be 90 percent. However, the member may have been one of only two full-time members, while the rest of the cohort is serving half-time. The relative impact of that member's departure would be higher than the program's retention rate would show. The converse is true if part- or minimal-time members leave from a cohort that also includes full-time members.

Exhibit reads: Grantee program #3 had an AmeriCorps member enrollment rate of 119 percent in 2013–14 and 88 percent in 2014–15. Grantee program #3 had an AmeriCorps member retention rate of 84 percent in 2013–14 and 79 percent in 2014–15.

Exhibit II-2:   Trends in School Turnaround AmeriCorps Member Enrollment Rates over Time
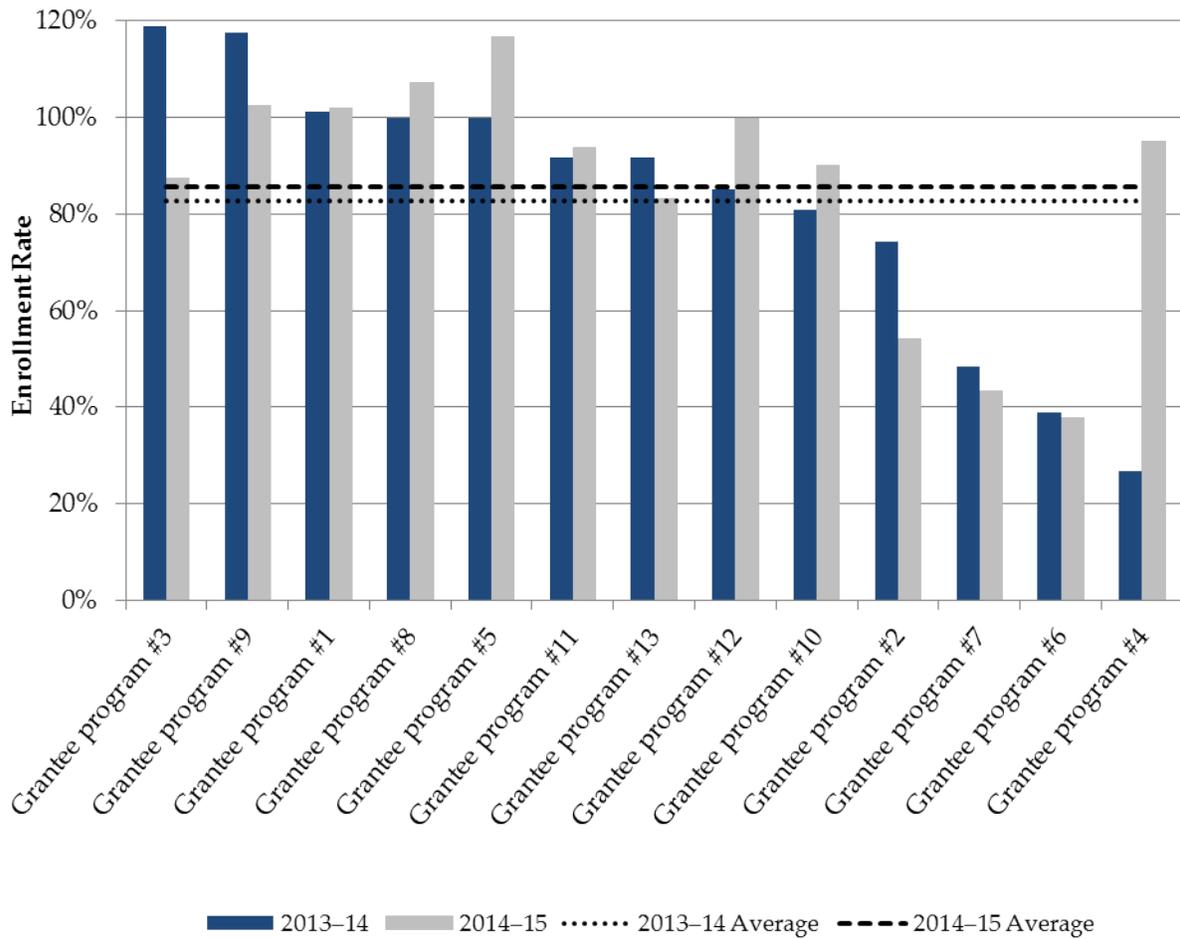
Exhibit II-3 displays member retention rates for 2013–14 and 2014–15. Across programs, retention remained essentially flat year over year and averaged around 80 percent. Grantee program #2 had the highest and Grantee program #7 the lowest retention rates in both years. No grantee program met the CNCS retention expectation of 100 percent in either year, though Grantee program #2 reached a 98 percent retention rate in 2013–14.[38]

Exhibit II-3:   Trends in School Turnaround AmeriCorps Member Retention Rates over Time
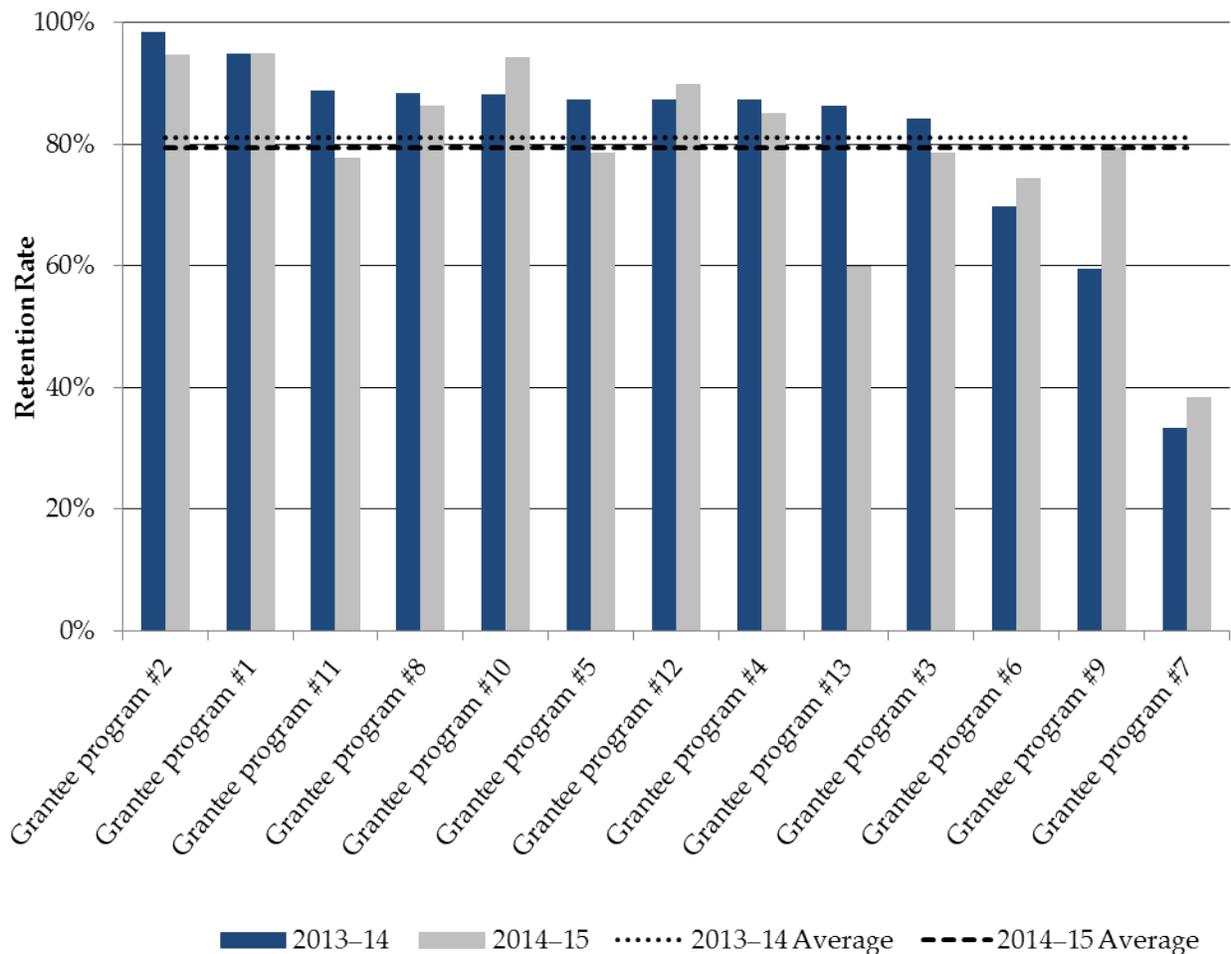
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Although grantee programs faced ongoing challenges with member recruitment and retention across the years, references to these challenges decreased in frequency over time. Almost all program staff reported in interviews challenges with recruitment and/or retention of members in 2013–14, the first year of the program; by the end of 2014–15, approximately half of grantee staff reported in their GPRs challenges with member recruitment and some with retention. By the end 2015–16, only a few staff referenced difficulties, specifically in terms of recruiting both the right quantity and/or quality of members.

Grantee Staff Responses to Enrollment and Retention Challenges

Grantee staff generally perceived that they could improve their retention rates by improving their recruitment, screening, and training strategies, and a majority of staff reported that in Year 1 they planned to adopt some changes regarding recruitment. Staff reported trying various strategies to improve enrollment and retention rates in 2014–15 and/or 2015–16, including more-explicit communication with potential members pre-enrollment, as well as stronger collaboration with school and district leaders (some grantee staff); creating new application procedures (a few staff); or using surveys or other tools to learn about members' plans and priorities (a few staff).

Among the grantee staff who mentioned better upfront communication, a few also indicated that in their orientation and training, they would communicate more clearly with members about what they are signing up for. To recruit potential members, five grantee programs either hired new staff or worked with school staff, and four programs focused on using media sources, including Facebook and radio. Other strategies for improving enrollment and retention included adding more member training, asking for advice from marketing specialists, and placing ads in local media sources. Two rural programs described attempts to overcome these barriers by recruiting high-schoolers as part-time members and recruiting at community agencies and a local university with an education program. Ultimately, neither strategy was effective in improving their enrollment. In response to an increase in members leaving before completing their term of service due to mental health issues, one grantee discussed "ways to provide some different opportunities for members for [support] throughout the year as far as … maybe life coach or opportunities … to help alleviate [mental health issues], as well."

Some of these strategies may have helped, as slightly fewer grantee programs reported issues with recruitment and retention in Year 2 compared with Year 1. Even so, almost all programs fell short of their enrollment and retention goals in Year 2.

Member Training and Preparation

Grantee programs provided pre-service training in Years 1 and 2 to orient members to their host school, roles, and responsibilities. A few programs reported providing specialized training on topics such as chronic student absenteeism, strategies for engaging parents, behavioral coaching (e.g., Real Time Coaching and Respect 360), and student data management. The model of a pre-service training carried over from Year 1 to Year 2 in all grantee programs, with a minority of programs in Year 2 shifting to providing members with more site-specific training.

Topics covered in Year 2 trainings included community and demographics of the school, culturally responsive education (e.g., focused on students' ethnic or immigration histories and school-specific contexts), and relationship building, generally with training on how to carry out member roles in the school. These changes appear to be responsive to the training topics suggested in Year 1 by principals and members. A few grantee programs described ongoing training provided to members to build on the pre-service training. A few other programs also emphasized the importance of explaining to members what AmeriCorps is about before placing them in schools. In a few other cases, programs provided training to the school's administration and staff about how to appropriately use AmeriCorps members in their

school. Finally, a few programs noted that they added training in Year 2 on issues they or their members had struggled with in Year 1; namely, program rules, school calendars, and attendance interventions.

Grantee program training occurred before members entered the schools, though members also received additional training at their host school before the school year began. Several principals described school-level training and professional development participation for members. As with program training, this was primarily to orient and integrate members into the school community. One principal explained that at her school, this training allowed members to join teachers in summer professional development to learn about specific school procedures, that "the earlier we get a hold of them, the better." Across Years 1 and 2, many principals, teachers, and members reported that the pre-training was not fully sufficient to prepare members for the realities they would face in turnaround schools, although notably there were changes made in Year 2 in response to feedback on Year 1 trainings.

Surveys of school leaders corroborated interview data describing the importance of member training and preparation. More than 90 percent of school leaders across all three administrations of the survey (Spring 2015, Fall 2015, and Spring 2016) reported considering orientation and training of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members before they served at the school, as well as comprehensive trainings of members and support staff during members' year of service, to be somewhat or very important.

Member Management and Supervision

Most schools in the evaluation sample reported using on-site coordinators to supervise members' daily work, and found these supervisors to be very useful—if not essential. Almost all partnership agreements specify that the partner school is responsible for appointing a primary school-based liaison or coordinator to help organize and assist program members. A majority of principals reported that they used on-site coordinators, usually school staff, typically from the attendance, guidance, or administrative offices, to manage School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' work and program-school communication. A few programs with many partner schools provided on-site coordinators, who were program staff members.

Almost all grantee staff and principals regarded the on-site coordinators as crucial for supporting both members and communication among grantee programs, school leaders, teachers, and members across both years. About half of grantee staff described site coordinators as key linkages in communicating with the school. In fact, one grantee program that reported communication challenges in 2014–15 added on-site coordinators for 2015–16 at each of its three partner schools to improve communication. Another program cited site coordinators' importance in navigating changes in school leadership.

In a majority of schools, there was agreement across grantee staff, principals, teachers, and members in both years about the benefits of having an on-site coordinator to manage members' work and act as a liaison between the school and program. Such coordinators (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' inexperience or 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 grantee programs that relied on on-site coordinators adjusted their roles throughout the year. One program staff explained that the program had already hired its coordinators for 2015–16 as of Spring 2015, so they would be available to plan, prepare, and forge connections during the summer months. Two program staff reported difficulties with their on-site coordinators. One program that used teachers as site coordinators lost them due to teacher turnover in the schools. Staff from another program, which

operated 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 (i.e., with the grantee staff and coordinators from all partner schools).

Identifying Students for Services

Awareness of the Program and Students Served

The large majority of grantee programs (11 of 13) were aware of which specific students were served by their School Turnaround AmeriCorps members in both Years 1 and 2 (see Appendix Exhibit C-3). Whether school staff were familiar with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program and knew about the number of students served varied. More than a quarter of school staff respondents in Year 1 were unfamiliar with the program, and almost a third were

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - ***Program Schools*** (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - ***Grantee Programs*** (n=13: Grantee survey, interviews, GPRs)

unaware of how many of their own students were served by it. However, school staff who were knowledgeable about the program indicated that it served considerable portions of their students: Nearly two-thirds of these respondents noted that at least 25 percent of their students were served by School Turnaround AmeriCorps (see Appendix Exhibit C-4). About 40 percent of respondents noted that 75 percent or more of their students were served.

Identifying Students for Services

Grantee staff and school staff generally concurred about the specific mechanisms most often used to identify students for School Turnaround AmeriCorps services. The primary mechanisms used to identify students for services were teacher recommendation and grades (for both years), with test scores replacing counselor recommendations in Year 2. Year 2 case studies with a subsample of program schools also reported that schools used student performance data to identify students for services (and for other decision making such as enrollment in other types of interventions).

Grantee staff and school staff also concurred that improving academic achievement was the most common reason students were identified to participate in the program (see Exhibit II-4).

Exhibit II-4: Mechanisms to Identify and Reason Students Identified to Participate in School Turnaround AmeriCorps Activities

Mechanism to Identify Students

Number of Grantees

	Year 1	Year 2
Teacher recommendation	Grantee Staff: 9 / School Staff: 89%	9
Standardized test scores	Grantee Staff: 5 / School Staff: 62%	8
Grades	Grantee Staff: 7 / School Staff: 71%	7
Counselor recommendation	Grantee Staff: 6 / School Staff: 66%	5
Student request	Grantee Staff: 4 / School Staff: 46%	3
Parent request	Grantee Staff: 2 / School Staff: 43%	1

Percent of School Staff

Year 1
Grantee Staff:
School Staff:

Year 2
Grantee Staff:

Reason Students Identified to Participate

Number of Grantees

Improve academic achievement — Year 1 Grantee Staff: 12, School Staff: 88%; Year 2 Grantee Staff: 11

Improve academic engagement — Year 1 Grantee Staff: 10, School Staff: 79%; Year 2 Grantee Staff: 8

Improve behavior — Year 1 Grantee Staff: 9, School Staff: 61%; Year 2 Grantee Staff: 8

Assist students at risk for dropping out — Year 1 Grantee Staff: 7, School Staff: 53%; Year 2 Grantee Staff: 8

Improve self-esteem or socio-emotional health — Year 1 Grantee Staff: 8, School Staff: 60%; Year 2 Grantee Staff: 7

Sustain performance — Year 1 Grantee Staff: 6, School Staff: 52%; Year 2 Grantee Staff: 6

Percent of School Staff

Year 1 — Grantee Staff (red), School Staff (green)

Year 2 — Grantee Staff (gray)

Notes: Grantee programs in both years (N=13, Missing=0).

Grantee frequencies in both years do not sum to 13 because multiple responses were permitted.
Fifty-one school staff did not know which mechanisms were most frequently used in Year 1. (N=104, Missing=3).
Forty-one school staff did not know the reasons students were identified in Year 1. (N=114, Missing=1).

Note that school staff were not surveyed in Year 2. See Appendix Exhibits C-6, C-7, C-37, and C-38.

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 Q8 ("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 reads: Nine of 13 grantee staff (in both years) and 89 percent of school staff (in Year 1) chose "teacher recommendation" as a mechanism to identify students for participation in School Turnaround AmeriCorps. Twelve of 13 grantee staff and 88 percent of school staff in Year 1, and 11 of 13 grantee staff in Year 2 indicated that students were identified to participate to "improve academic achievement."

<u>Member Matching and Caseloads</u>

Most school leaders across all three time periods considered matching of members to students on the basis of academic strengthening and social/emotional supports, as well as to program objectives, to be important or very important.[39] Consistent with school leader survey findings, interviewed grantee staff, members, and school staff reported that students were, indeed, generally identified by school staff for services and matched with members on the basis of test scores, grades, or behavior, although some services were targeted to specific grade levels. In a few cases, the students who were targeted for services were those who had approached the members directly for help. In most cases, programs or schools matched members to students who were identified as struggling based on low test scores. One case study program school described changing its model for 2015–16, from having members work with the students struggling most to working with students performing closer to grade-level. This way the neediest students could receive more attention from teachers with more expertise in the subject area and instructional strategies.

The majority of programs reported some 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 programs for dealing with such challenges was to engage school leaders, administrators, and/or teachers, although several program staff 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. A few principals reported wishing that members did not have to maintain the same caseload of students throughout the year, but could instead adjust their caseloads when students no longer needed their support. Interestingly, one principal in Year 2 reported some flexibility in the caseload, discussing how the members in that school sometimes volunteered to check in with or add students who were not in their original caseload.

The numbers of students expected to be served and to complete services varied markedly by grantee program, though the proportion of students expected to complete services was generally close to 100 percent for most schools. On average, programs had 25 students receiving services for every AmeriCorps member in Year 2, slightly less than the 28 students reported in Year 1 (see Appendix Exhibit C-4).[40]

Description of Program Activities and Services

School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee programs organized, trained, and placed dedicated 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 SIG strategies are:

- Engaging families and communities.

- Addressing non-academic factors that affect student achievement (school climate and students' socio-emotional and health needs).

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - ***Program Schools*** (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies, 54–57 School Leader surveys)
> - ***Grantee Programs*** (n=13: Grantee surveys, interviews, GPRs, member activity data, member interviews)

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[39] Source: Principal survey, Year 1 and Year 2 (2014-15, 2015-16).

[40] Source: Grantee survey, Year 1 and Year 2 (2014–15, 2015–16).

- Supporting skill acquisition in reading and math.

- Increasing graduation rates.

- Providing college preparation and increasing college enrollment.

- Increasing learning time.

The specific combination of activities that programs offered, how services were structured, and the implementation of these strategies in individual schools varied tremendously, according to each school's turnaround plan and the needs of its students. This section describes grantee program size and scope, the range of activities offered, and the structure of services that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members delivered to their host schools.

Program Size and Scope

Grantee programs reported detailed counts of students, members, and service activities in evaluation-eligible schools in the member activity data collection. However, the reported data are sufficiently variable to warrant caution in interpreting them (see the section **Member Activity Data** for more detail).

In 2014–15, grantee programs varied significantly in size and scope—from 1 to 11 schools, 13 to 95 members serving, and 248 to 2,437 students served. Between 2014–15 and 2015–16, the scope of School Turnaround AmeriCorps decreased (68 to 60 schools, 394 to 325 members, 13,404 to 9,544 students).[41] Some of that decrease reflects a considerably smaller number of one grantee program's schools—from 11 to 3. However, most programs experienced modest decreases in their numbers of students served; 8 of the 12 programs that reported student counts for both school years served fewer students in 2015–16 than in 2014–15.

Changes in number of students served do not appear related to whether the grantee program planned to recompete for the next round of School Turnaround AmeriCorps funding, as only one of the six recompeting programs had steady or increasing student counts. Several grantee programs plan to operate summer programs in 2016, so their student counts for those are not represented in the data. Exhibit II-5 presents each program's total number of schools, members, and students who participated in any School Turnaround AmeriCorps activities.[42]

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[41] The comparison in total members serving and students served across years excludes grantee program #6 because grantee program #6 reported members serving and students served in 2015–16 but not in 2014–15. Including grantee program #6, grantee programs in 2015–16 had 389 members who served 11,001 students.

[42] Member counts cannot be used to directly compare levels of School Turnaround AmeriCorps presence because some grantee programs use full-time members, while others use a mix of full- and part-time members.

Exhibit II-5: Number of Schools, School Turnaround AmeriCorps Members, and Students Served, by Year and Grantee

Grantee Program	2014–15 Schools	2014–15 Members	2014–15 Students Served	2015–16 Schools	2015–16 Members	2015–16 Students Served
Grantee program #2	11	38	2,437	3	6	436
Grantee program #11	10	33	388	10	21	242
Grantee program #12	9	41	685	9	42	621
Grantee program #1	8	95	1,797	8	91	1,165
Grantee program #13	6	19	1,808	6	24	1,636
Grantee program #10	5	18	587	3	13	350
Grantee program #5	5	24	1,874	5	27	1,663
Grantee program #9	4	30	342	4	27	407
Grantee program #6	3	a	a	5	a	a
Grantee program #4	2	20	1,451	2	15	1,552
Grantee program #8	2	49	1,339	2	32	1,349
Grantee program #3	2	14	448	2	13	321
Grantee program #7	1	13	248	1	14	248
Grantee Program Total	**68[b]**	**394**	**13,404**	**60**	**325**	**9,544**

Notes: This exhibit reports each grantee program's total number of schools eligible for the evaluation and its corresponding numbers of AmeriCorps members and students who received any School Turnaround AmeriCorps services. Student are counted even if they dropped out of the program or left the school midway through the year. See footnote 35 for the definition of evaluation-eligible schools.

[a] Member and student counts were not reported by grantee program #6 for the 2014–15 school year. Grantee program #6 provided member and student counts only for the 2015–16 school year (64 members, 1,011 students). The 2015–16 member and student counts are excluded from the exhibit to facilitate comparisons across years.

[b] Two schools are served by two grantee programs each. Both sets of programs reported information on their members' activities in these two schools.

Exhibit reads: In the 2014–15 school year, grantee program #2 had 11 partner schools and 38 AmeriCorps members who served 2,437 students. In the 2015–16 school year (through May), grantee program #2 had 3 partner schools and 6 AmeriCorps members and served 436 students.

Grantee programs reported significantly varied total AmeriCorps member service hours, ranging from 3,200 to 116,620 hours in 2014–15 (see Exhibit II-6). Hours per member are often in the range expected of full-time members (1,700 hours), although several programs reported fewer average hours per member, suggesting a mix of full- and part-time members or members serving for only a portion of the school year. Service hours per student participating in School Turnaround AmeriCorps activities also varied significantly in 2014–15, from 9 service hours per student to 95.[43]

Total service hours and hours per member were about four-fifths as large in 2015–16. However, 2015–16 data were collected in May 2016, before the end of the academic year. Average hours per student were nearly the same in both years.

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[43] Service hours per student participating in School Turnaround AmeriCorps activities are equal to total average service hours divided by number of students served.

Exhibit II-6: Average Hours per Member and Student, by Year and Grantee

Grantee	2014–15 Total Service Hours	2014–15 Average Hours per Member	2014–15 Average Hours per Student	2015–16 Total Service Hours	2015–16 Average Hours per Member	2015–16 Average Hours per Student
Grantee program #1	116,620	1,228	65	125,649	1,381	108
Grantee program #12	64,917	1,583	95	59,288	1,412	95
Grantee program #2	64,600	1,700	27	10,200	1,700	23
Grantee program #8	63,947	1,305	48	20,480	640	15
Grantee program #5	42,460	1,769	23	43,144	1,598	26
Grantee program #4	34,000	1,700	23	23,900	1,593	15
Grantee program #11	32,739	992	84	18,900	900	78
Grantee program #10	28,337	1,574	48	15,651	1,204	45
Grantee program #13	25,700	1,353	14	24,276	1,011	15
Grantee program #3	20,614	1,472	46	19,700	1,515	61
Grantee program #9	3,200	107	9	3,200	119	8
Grantee program #7	a	a	a	5,995	428	24
Grantee program #6	a	a	a	18,034	282	18
Grantee Total	**497,134**	**1,262**	**37**	**388,417**	**999**	**35**

a Data were not reported by the grantee program.

Exhibit reads: Grantee program #1's AmeriCorps members served a total of 116,620 service hours in the 2014–15 school year. Since grantee program #1 had 95 AmeriCorps members who served 1,797 students in 2014–15 (see Exhibit II-5), the average number of service hours per member was 1,228 and the average number of service hours per student was 65. Grantee program #1's AmeriCorps members served a total of 125,649 service hours in the 2015–16 school year (through May). Since grantee program #1 had 91 AmeriCorps members who served 1,165 students in 2015–16 (see Exhibit II-5), the average number of service hours per member was 1,381 and the average number of service hours per student was 108.

Activity Types and Service Delivery over Time

School Turnaround AmeriCorps members engaged in a range of activities with their school partners, including tutoring, after-school and extracurricular programs, parental and community engagement, and mentoring services. Exhibit II-7, based on interviews with grantee staff, and Appendix Exhibit D-1, based on member activity data collected from grantee programs, summarize the range and prevalence of activities and interventions offered in School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools in 2014–15 and 2015–16.

Both data sources indicate that, generally, grantee programs consistently offered the same activities and services across the years. However, depending on the data source, there were minor discrepancies in reporting of the prevalence of activities and changes in service configurations over time. Tutoring was the most common service offering in 2014–15 and 2015–16,[44] followed by mentoring and behavior support,[45]

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[44]   The member activity data indicate that tutoring was offered by 9 and 10 grantees, respectively, in 2014–15 and 2015–16, whereas grantee staff reported in interviews that tutoring was offered by 11 programs in both years.

[45]   The member activity data indicate that mentoring and behavior support was offered by six and seven grantees, respectively, in 2014–15 and 2015–16, whereas grantee staff reported in interviews that these services were offered by nine programs in both years.

and after-school programs and extracurricular services.[46] According to the member activity data (see Appendix Exhibit D-1), in 2015–16 only one program added a service (grantee program #7 added college readiness) and only one program dropped a service (grantee program #9 dropped supportive services). By contrast, according to interviews with grantee staff (see Exhibit II-7), a few of the 13 programs discontinued their parental and community engagement interventions from one year to the next. Two grantee staff explained that their parental and community engagement activities in 2014–15 served to help their students engage in academic, attendance, or mentoring activities.

Programs that dropped parental engagement did not explain why they made this shift; however, one possible explanation is that the parental engagement component, designed to raise awareness and buy-in for a new program, would no longer be relevant once the new program had been established. Dropping the parental engagement component, in particular, may help explain why fewer school leaders perceived that families play an active role and that the school/members connected parents to information and resources to support their children's education. While nearly two-thirds of school leaders in Year 1 agreed or strongly agreed that families play an active role in their school, only half agreed or strongly agreed in Year 2-Fall, falling to 42 percent agreed in Year 2-Spring. Similarly, while nearly all school leaders in Year 1 agreed or strongly agreed that their school (98 percent) or its School Turnaround AmeriCorps members (83 percent) connect parents/guardians to information and resources to help them support their children's education, slightly fewer school leaders agreed in Year 2-Fall (91 percent and 78 percent, respectively) and fewer still in Year 2-Spring (86 percent and 63 percent, respectively).[47]

Exhibit II-7: Number of Grantee Programs Offering Various Program Activities, by School Year

Activity	Number of Grantees 2014–15	Number of Grantees 2015–16
Tutoring	11	11
Behavior support and mentoring or coaching	9	9
After-school programs and extracurricular services	9	9
Parental and community engagement	8	5
School attendance coaching	5	7
Supportive services to build school capacity	5	5
College readiness and test preparation	3	3
Wraparound services	1	1
Teaching	1	1

Sources: Grantee interviews (Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015).

Exhibit reads: Eleven grantees offered tutoring during the 2014–15 school year. Eleven grantees offered tutoring during the 2015–16 school year.

The study team also analyzed member activity data to examine service delivery at the school level, since service activities sometimes varied across a given grantee program's schools. The types of activities delivered across schools were similar regardless of the turnaround model they were following and across grades served, with the exception of college readiness services provided only at high schools. As

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[46]   The member activity data indicate that after-school programs and extracurricular services was offered by four and five grantees, respectively, in 2014–15 and 2015–16, whereas grantee staff reported in interviews that these services were offered by nine programs in both years.

[47]   Source: School Leader survey Year 1, Year 2-Fall, and Year 2-Spring (2014–15, 2015–16). See Appendix Exhibits C-23, C-25, and C-29.

Appendix Exhibit D-2 also shows, there was modest fluctuation in service offerings from year to year, although the changes in number are so modest that there are no observable patterns. Tutoring was the most common service activity, offered in nearly twice as many schools as any other type of service, or approximately four-fifths of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program schools. At about 25 schools, on average, programs offered mentoring and attendance-related services, and at about 20 schools they offered parental engagement, community engagement, school climate, after-school, and behavioral support services.

The grantee programs generally cluster into three groups, depending on how many of the 11 types of services they offer: either all or almost all types (four programs), between 2 and 5 types (three programs), or only 1 service (five programs) (see Appendix Exhibit D-1).[48] Within schools where programs offer multiple service activities, all or nearly all AmeriCorps members provide each of the activities, suggesting that members do not generally specialize in one particular activity. Grantee programs are required to establish minimum dosages of School Turnaround AmeriCorps services received by students to count toward the programs' performance measure goals; here, too, there is considerable variation across programs as well as across service activities (Appendix Exhibit D-4). For example, the minimal threshold (in hours) established for tutoring ranges from 15 hours to 130 hours.[49] Programs typically use other time metrics for other service activities (e.g., days or weeks of support provided), and the dosage thresholds range from 30 to 90 days.

Activity Descriptions

Tutoring

Tutoring was the most common program activity, offered by almost all programs, according to information from grantee staff, teachers, and principals. Tutoring was provided through one-on-one and small-group instruction either in the classroom or outside the classroom. Tutoring services were generally offered during the school day; five programs also offered tutoring services before school, during lunch, and/or after school.

Behavior Support and Mentoring or Coaching

Behavior support and mentoring or coaching was offered in a majority of programs. Mentoring models varied considerably but, as with parental and community engagement, principals often described mentoring as embedded in other services that members provided. Members and teachers 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.

After-School Programs and Extracurricular Services

A majority of programs offered after-school programs and extracurricular services, including homework help sessions and electives for student enrichment (e.g., baking, robotics, photography, and woodworking) that improved students' attitudes about and engagement with school. Members led the after-school electives offered, organizing field trips, events, and service days.

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[48]   One grantee program did not report information on services offered.

[49]   One grantee program (grantee program #10) defines tutoring dosage by days of support provided rather than activity hours, and another (grantee program #9) defines tutoring dosage by number of contacts.

Parental and Community Engagement

Through grantee staff interviews, a minority of programs reported activities related specifically to parental and community engagement. When engaging parents, members leveraged their academic and personal relationships with students to understand students' lives more holistically. Members informed parents of events in the school and their children's behavior and academic performance. Parents reported that they used the performance information to reinforce the members' feedback at home. Parental engagement 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.

School Attendance Coaching

School attendance coaching, as a distinct activity from behavior coaching, was reported by about half of programs in Year 2. Two grantee programs added attendance coaching to their intervention in the 2015–16 school year. One of these mentioned attendance coaching as an offshoot of mentoring, meaning that members encouraged students to come to school when they mentored them. The other grantee based its intervention on the needs of individual students, so attendance support was added in response to its experience with students. Among the remaining programs, attendance coaching was a component of their parental engagement activities, with members calling home to discuss attendance records of truant students and to engage parents in their children's daily attendance. In many of these programs, members conducted outreach to students with low attendance, thereby adding capacity to the school's outreach efforts over what administrative staff would otherwise have been able to accomplish. In most 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.

College Readiness and Test Preparation

Three programs offered services focused on college readiness and/or college entrance test preparation, chiefly helping students prepare for the ACT and for the college experience. 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, a form prepared annually by current and prospective college students to determine their eligibility for financial aid.

Wraparound Services; Teaching

Two programs offered unique services in that only one program used them. 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 program provided teaching services: Its members served as classroom teachers. That program (Teach For America) is a national teacher corps of recent college graduates from highly selective colleges who commit to work in urban and rural schools for two years.

Structure of Services

School Turnaround AmeriCorps members could provide services to all students in the school, whole classes, small groups, and individual students; these categories of direct service provision are not mutually exclusive.

Nearly all grantee staff reported in Year 2 that members provided direct services to individual students, similar to findings in Year 1 (11 grantee programs). Some three-quarters of school leaders in Year 1, Year 2-Fall, and Year 2-Spring reported that services were provided to individual students (74, 77, and 75

percent, respectively). A minority of grantee staff reported that services were provided to whole classrooms or all students in the school in Year 2 (see Appendix Exhibits C-2 and C-17). A similar proportion of school leaders in Year 2-Fall and Year 2-Spring reported services targeting whole classrooms (58 and 39 percent, respectively) and all students in the school (50 and 40 percent, respectively). In Year 1, seven staff and 45 percent of school leaders reported members provided services to whole classrooms, whereas four staff and 54 percent of school leaders reported members provided services to all students in the school.[50]

Most services were offered in multiple formats, including one-on-one, small-group settings, and larger group settings; not surprisingly, services designed to support individual students, such as tutoring, mentorship and attendance coaching, were more likely to be offered to individuals or small groups, whereas community engagement and college readiness services were more likely in large-group settings (see Exhibit II-8 and Appendix Exhibit D-2).[51] Beyond direct services, several programs also described deploying members in supportive activities intended to expand the capacity of school staff to engage in school turnaround efforts. Programs also described how members' contributed to creating a positive school climate by building relationships with students.[52]

Exhibit II-8:   Level of Service Offering, by Service Type Provided
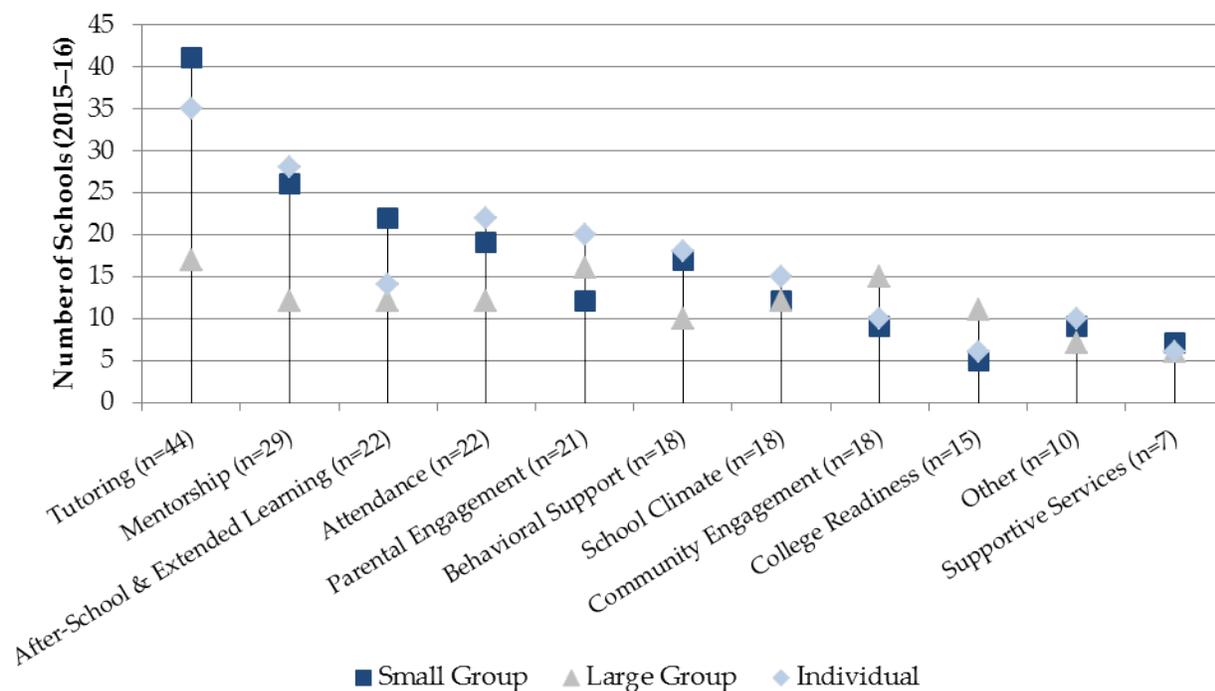
Notes: "Other" services include summer camps; service-learning, civic engagement, and leadership opportunities; teaching; graduation assistance; and a credit recovery program. See Appendix Exhibit D-1 for more details.

Exhibit reads: Forty-four schools offered tutoring during the 2015–16 school year. Seventeen offered tutoring in large groups, 35 to individuals, and 41 in small groups. Many schools offered services at more than one level.

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[50]   Source: Grantee survey, Year 1 and Year 2 (2014–15, 2015–16). School Leader survey, Year 1, Year 2-Fall, and Year 2-Spring (2014–15, 2015–16).

[51]   Source: Member activity data, Year 1 (2014–15).

[52]   Source: Grantee interviews (2014–15, 2015–16).

Members' Roles in Supporting School Staff and Building School Capacity

Members' Roles in Supporting Classrooms and School Staff

Members' work supported teachers in several ways. For members who served in classrooms, simply being present throughout the day helped with classroom management, preventing disruptive behavior and allowing differentiated instruction in small groups. In about half of case study program schools, stakeholders emphasized the importance of having an additional person in the classroom to provide individualized attention to students who needed it.

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - ***Program Schools*** (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - ***Grantee Programs*** (n=13: grantee staff interviews, GPRs, member interviews)

Across all program schools, stakeholders from about a third of schools reported desiring more members in the school to increase the reach of individualized academic and socio-emotional support. This more individualized attention from School Turnaround AmeriCorps members helped students better access academic material and engage in learning by supporting their socio-emotional health needs—for example, by improving their confidence and self-concept, their ability to regulate their emotions, and their resilience and ability to persevere through challenge. According to stakeholders in all four SIG Exiter schools, members were able to increase capacity as the schools lost their SIG funding, although several school staff members also lamented the loss of AmeriCorps members (in some cases when schools exited SIG status, in others in anticipation of losing members). Several principals emphasized the value members added and their desire to keep them in the school by hiring them 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 also supported teachers in using and interpreting assessment data to help tailor instruction. In some cases, AmeriCorps members discussed student data with teachers to specify which students needed additional, individualized attention. In others, AmeriCorps members or the on-site coordinator from the grantee program were responsible for managing student data, which removed some responsibility from school staff, allowing them to focus more on teaching. Programs also reported that members participated in planning meetings and worked with school leaders and teachers to identify and track student progress, as in one program, by supporting its Response to Intervention system, a multi-tiered approach to early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs.

Members' Roles in Supporting School Climate and Building School Capacity

A majority of grantee staff and some principals emphasized the importance of members being integrated into the school staff, culture, and operations to make their school-based relationships "seamless." Stakeholders described several promising practices for integrating members into schools, from extending themselves to become part of the community during the school day to participating in extracurricular events outside of school hours, which increased their presence and visibility in the school and demonstrated their support for the school's goals, policies, and structures. School leaders' welcoming and strong support of members in their schools was also important for ensuring successful program-school partnerships (discussed further in the **Case Study Cross-Site Analysis** section below). Several principals described School Turnaround AmeriCorps members as part of the school "family" and as co-equal members of the school staff. Despite these efforts, schools' understanding of members' roles was a lingering challenge in some schools (discussed more in the **Program Implementation Challenges** section).

The Role of School Turnaround AmeriCorps in Supporting SIG Strategies

Across all three administrations of the School Leaders survey, school leaders in Year 1 and Year 2 ranked academic achievement, school culture and environment, and increased learning time as the three strategies most influenced by AmeriCorps members (see Exhibit II-9). School leaders also consistently ranked family and community engagement highly, but not as highly as the above three strategies.

Exhibit II-9:   School Improvement Grant Strategy Most Influenced by School Turnaround AmeriCorps (Year 1 and Year 2)

School Improvement Strategy	Year 1 Rank of Influence Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)	Year 1 Rank of Influence Percentage Ranked	Year 2-Fall Rank of Influence Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)	Year 2-Fall Rank of Influence Percentage Ranked	Year 2-Spring Rank of Influence Mean Rankings (Standard Errors)	Year 2-Spring Rank of Influence Percentage Ranked
Academic achievement	1.8 (0.4)	90	1.9 (0.3)	98	1.9 (0.2)	100
School culture and environment	2.5 (0.3)	85	2.7 (0.3)	95	2.6 (0.3)	100
Increased learning time	2.7 (0.5)	91	3.3 (0.3)	91	2.8 (0.3)	93
Family and community engagement	3.6 (0.3)	91	4.0 (0.3)	93	3.9 (0.3)	90
Graduation rates	4.2 (0.3)	59	4.1 (0.3)	82	4.2 (0.3)	86
College enrollment rates	4.7 (0.5)	69	4.5 (0.3)	80	5.2 (0.2)	83

Notes: Year 1: (N=31, Missing=3); Year 2-Fall: (N=34, Missing=2); Year 2-Spring: (N=35, Missing=2). See Appendix Exhibit C.30.

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. Table rows are sorted in ascending order by the mean ranking of school leaders in Year 2-Spring.**Source:** School Leader Survey Q19 ("Which School Improvement Grant (SIG) strategies are influenced the most by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps members this school year?")

Exhibit reads: School leaders across all three surveys ranked "academic achievement" as the most important school improvement strategy, with a mean ranking of 1.8 on a 6-point scale in Year 1 and 1.9 in Year 2-Fall and Year 2-Spring; 90 percent of school leaders in Year 1, 98 percent in Year 2-Fall, and 100 percent in Year 2-Spring ranked this particular outcome.

Use of Data to Manage and Monitor Programs for Continuous Improvement

Data use and monitoring were integral to most schools' turnaround efforts and emerged as a prominent theme in about half of program schools, including nearly all case studies. Schools described assessing students frequently, using formative assessments to monitor student progress, determine student needs/weaknesses, and inform instructional strategies; for example, by addressing gaps in English language arts and math instruction. In addition to using data to identify students for services, schools used student data to help manage School Turnaround AmeriCorps member workloads. Some program schools, including almost all case study schools, provided teacher professional development in using data and gave school staff time to work together to review and interpret data, and some used a staff member dedicated to supporting student-level data. These themes are described in more detail in the **Case Study Cross-Site Analysis** section.

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - *Program Schools* (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - *Grantee Programs* (n=13: grantee interviews, GPRs, member interviews)

There is ample evidence that grantee programs and members embraced this culture of data use and implemented many of the same data use practices documented in their partner schools. All programs used data to manage and monitor themselves for continuous improvement. Among the ways programs used data were these:

- Establishing data-sharing agreements with school partners outlining how they could access data.

- Providing training to members on how to use assessments or attendance records to create targeted interventions for students.

- Tracking whether they were meeting their performance measures, and monitoring the effectiveness of their strategies.

- Helping members to evaluate and effectively target their interventions and to tailor their efforts to better meet students' needs.

Members routinely handled student data at host schools, and they used data to improve their interventions:

- Participating in training sessions and regular meetings to help manage data responsibilities at some host schools.

- Working collaboratively with teachers in some schools to discuss student performance and interpret interim assessment data to improve targeted services.

The majority of grantee staff and a small number of members also reported a number of challenges with data. Programs 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 programs.

The most common data issue grantee staff reported in Year 1 was having limited capacity and/or resources to process, analyze, and interpret data. A related challenge was extracting and communicating meaningful information from data reports, in part due to the use of proficiency levels, which mask students' improvement *within* the category of "Far Below Basic," so that even a full grade-level improvement would not register as a change in performance level. A few grantee staff apiece also

reported challenges arising from data entry errors or missing data (e.g., student activity participation in interventions is not systematically recorded).

Beginning in 2014–15 and continuing in 2015–16, a few 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. A third program focused on empowering members to collect and analyze data, among their other responsibilities. Two of these programs specifically noted that their changes had improved the impact of their programs.

Potential Uses and Challenges of Administrative Data for Measuring Grantee Performance

The evaluation collected data from multiple sources in both years. 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, members, principals, teachers, and parents. Additional data collected by grantee programs in service of their School Turnaround AmeriCorps reporting requirements to CNCS were subsequently shared with the study team. These are referred to as *administrative data* and include the following: data reported in grantee progress reports, School Turnaround AmeriCorps member tracking sheets, and student-level achievement, attendance, and behavior data obtained from partner schools.

This section begins by discussing two general challenges to using administrative data for evaluation purposes. It then considers, in turn, student-level data, member activity data, and GPR performance measure data. For each type, main findings are summarized and particular challenges in using the data for evaluation are discussed. Additional results are presented in Appendix D.

General Challenges in Using Administrative Data

The use of administrative data presents challenges in data collection adequacy and interpretive clarity. The data adequacy challenge reflects the fact that grantee programs and their host schools are primarily concerned with delivering educational services, not with data collection. To be sure, schools collect student attendance, behavior, and achievement data, both to monitor and assist individual students and to comply with local reporting requirements—but not necessarily to support larger-scale (and external) cross-school data analyses. Programs collect data from their partner schools, but again may not be orientated to the level of detail a rigorous evaluation requires.

As a result, the study team has encountered numerous obstacles in data collection, including receiving data that were delayed, incomplete, and/or inconsistent with other data about the same grantee program and school(s). In addition, the possibility of cogent cross-grantee data analyses can be greatly diminished when data content and format are not shared across grantee programs. For example, because each program had its own approach to collecting member activity data in Year 1 of the evaluation, the study team was unable to do much meaningful analysis with those data. In Year 2, the study team developed and distributed a member activity data template to most programs to encourage them to use a common set of data fields, which allowed the study team to perform somewhat more extensive analyses.

The second general challenge relates to making credibly unambiguous summative interpretations based on analyses of administrative data. CNCS wants to know whether member-provided services are satisfactorily benefiting students and whether service provision is increasingly beneficial in successive years, as schools gain experience in using School Turnaround AmeriCorps members. Reliable answers to such summative questions require comparisons between service recipient students and a very similar group of non-recipient students, but the administrative data are limited to participants only. For example, nearly all grantee programs (12) report the number of their students who complete a course of a member-provided service such as tutoring; they also report the number of completers who exhibit satisfactory

improvement on standardized achievement tests. To what extent do the improvers owe their success to the tutoring (or other member-provided services) they received? In addition to the tutoring, these students may well have also benefited from turnaround efforts provided by non-members in their school, but separating out the respective contributions of the different kinds of services and efforts requires a comparison group.

The results of analyses of administrative data can, at best, suggest certain summative interpretations.

Student-Level Data

For the Year 1 evaluation, all grantee programs except for one collected student-level data for member service recipients during the first two years of implementation; four programs also collected data for their 2013–14 service recipients from 2012–13, the year before their entry into School Turnaround AmeriCorps (even though this was not a requirement of the grant or an expectation of its grantees). All but two programs obtained student-level achievement test data, eight obtained student-level attendance data, and four obtained student-level behavior outcome data. Five collected student-level academic, attendance, and behavior outcomes; three collected two of these outcomes; and four collected one kind of outcome data.

For each type of outcome (achievement, attendance, and behavior), the study team first verified whether the student-level datasets shared by grantee programs included all partner schools. Then the team assessed data quality in those datasets. 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 adequately. Only three programs provided data that both included all of their partner schools and was rated as good quality: grantee program #7 (attendance data), grantee program #3 (achievement test data), and grantee program #11 (achievement test, attendance, and behavior data). Given the relative comprehensiveness and quality of the datasets, it was not possible to perform any cogent cross-grantee analyses.

Because of the data collection challenges and the difficulty in interpreting data analyses that do not include a comparison group, no student-level data were collected for the Year 2 evaluation.

Member Activity Data

Member activity data for the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years were collected from grantee programs in February 2016. Updated data from the 2015–16 school year were collected in May 2016. The study team administered a standardized, online data form to nine programs and provided detailed instructions and examples to the remaining four programs.[53] Grantee staff reported information on students, AmeriCorps members, and program activity types using categories the team had identified based on analysis of Year 1 materials. The study team followed up with programs as needed to resolve discrepant values (e.g., more students listed as completing School Turnaround AmeriCorps services than ever participated in them).

The member activity data reported here corroborate a consistent finding of this evaluation: Grantee programs track and report on program activity data idiosyncratically. The data reported by programs are so persistently and pervasively variable that the study team has not been able to characterize patterns in program activities meaningfully to support program-wide analyses.[54]

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[53] The study team developed a standardized form for collecting member activity data that is not included in the study's OMB clearance. Therefore, the study team administered the data form to nine grantee staff and provided only general instructions to the remaining four staff, to remain compliant with OMB Paperwork Reduction Act guidelines.

[54] Abt reported on the variability and poor quality of program-collected student-level data and member activity data in two previous reports: *School Turnaround AmeriCorps National Evaluation: Memorandum #3: Secondary Data*

It is important to note that variability in member activity data is not surprising, given the dynamic school environments in which the School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs operate. Study findings—not to mention efforts to recruit participants for the study's varied data collection activities—consistently indicate that over the course of a school year, school partners change, school needs change, member placements change to meet schools' and districts' evolving priorities, and sometimes members leave (e.g., transition to other employment, relocate due to personal circumstances). The Year 2 case studies discussed below in the **Case Study Cross-Site Analysis** section underscore the importance of such local adaptations evident even when examining a relatively small number of schools that use whatever resources they have to meet their unique needs; it is also evident that turnaround partners and programs in particular benefit from the flexibility to follow a "whatever is needed now" approach to be useful.

The study team recognizes that there should be some local adaptation because schools have different priorities. Yet until there is more consistency both in the specific elements of information that grantee programs report and in how they report it, so that the same activities and outcomes are reported similarly, CNCS will continue to face the same challenge: information so variable across its grantees that it can make only the most general observations about patterns across interventions and grantee programs. If programs adopt and maintain consistent practices in tracking and reporting administrative data, then it will be easier to understand outcomes both across School Turnaround AmeriCorps and specific to grantee programs. To establish a standard of consistency, CNCS will need to provide explicit guidance to its grantees about applying the same definitions and conventions in administrative data reporting. In short, analyzing what happens locally in response to clearly articulated local needs is an important program dimension, but local flexibility should not come at the expense of the funder's ability to make assessments using metrics that can meaningfully characterize the program-wide results.

As discussed below, careful accounting of member activity also aids in the interpretation of grantee progress report performance measure data.

GPR Performance Measure Data

Grantee performance measures were reported in the mid-year and annual grantee progress reports (GPRs). There are three types of performance measures: enrollment, output, and outcome. *Enrollment* measures (Performance Measures ED1, ED3A) count the number of students who start participation in a member-offered service. *Output* measures (ED2, ED4A) count the number of students who complete (receive the specified dose of) a member-provided service. *Outcome* measures count the number of students who complete a member-provided service and exhibit a specified amount of improvement in achievement or engagement (ED5, ED27). The performance measures are summarized in Exhibit II-10.

Exhibit II-10: Performance Measures Definitions

Performance Measure	Definition	Theoretical Denominator[a]
ED1	Number of students who start in a CNCS-supported education program	n/a
ED2	Number of students that completed participation in CNCS-supported K–12 education programs	ED1 (optional)
ED3A	Number of disadvantaged youth/mentor matches that are commenced by the CNCS-supported education program	n/a
ED4A	Number of disadvantaged youth/mentor matches that were sustained by the CNCS-supported program for at least the required time period	ED3A (optional)
ED5	Number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math	ED2 or ED4A
ED6	Number of students that improved their school attendance over the course of the CNCS-supported program's involvement with the student	ED2 or ED4A
ED7	Number of students with no or decreased disciplinary referrals and suspensions over the course of the CNCS-supported programs' involvement	ED2 or ED4A
ED27	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	ED2 or ED4A

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service. *Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity Addendum: Definitions, Suggestions regarding Data Collection, and Additional Notes (FY 2013)*.

[a] CNCS guidance on performance measures.

Exhibit reads: The definition of Performance Measure ED1 is: Number of students who start in a CNCS-supported education program. There is no theoretical denominator for ED1 (it is an enrollment measure).

Meeting performance targets is not a compliance requirement for continued funding. Rather, the performance targets indicate whether or not each grantee program is making adequate progress against its own defined targets. Programs must provide an explanation and implement a corrective action plan if targets are not met.

CNCS expects all grantee programs to achieve the highest enrollment and retention possible, but understands that many extenuating circumstances affect these rates. Even though the official enrollment and retention rate targets are 100 percent, program model and circumstances are taken into consideration when assessing whether a program's enrollment and retention rates are acceptable. Additionally, CNCS assesses output and outcome performance measures in the context of enrollment and retention, noting where low enrollment or retention may have constrained output and outcome values.

Grantee programs propose performance measure targets in their grant applications. During the clarification process, CNCS may ask applicants to change their targets if they seem too high (unrealistic) or too low (insufficiently ambitious). Programs may also change their targets if CNCS awards funding at a lower level than requested. After awards are made, CNCS examines proposed reductions in grantee targets with great scrutiny. In general, target reductions are approved under one of the following circumstances:

- The program requests fewer AmeriCorps members.

- The program has been approved for a change in how the interventions are delivered (e.g., change in dosage).

- The program misunderstood the performance measure instructions, and a correction is needed in order to collect accurate data.

- The target was set so unrealistically high that it would be unattainable even after corrective actions are implemented for program improvement.

CNCS also allows grantee programs to adjust targets for future years based on lessons learned in the current year. However, School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs had to submit their continuation applications three months after the beginning of their first program year, at which point they lacked complete information on how close they were to meeting their targets in the first year.

A GPR compares the program-determined target for each measure (e.g., target number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math) versus what the program was actually able to accomplish, noting whether the target was met. None of the grantee programs reports all performance measures.[55]

As reported in the Year 1 final evaluation report, grantee programs variably met their performance targets in 2013–14: of the 13 programs, 3 met all targets, 3 met no targets, 1 met almost all of its targets, and the remaining 6 met at least one of their targets. Exhibit II-11 provides an overview of grantee programs' success in meeting their self-selected performance measure targets in 2013–14 and 2014–15. Within each cell of Exhibit II-11, the first and second letters (Y=Yes, N=No) indicate whether the grantee met its performance measure target in 2013–14 and 2014–15, respectively. The exhibit is ordered by programs that met more of their 2013–14 targets, and then by those that met more of their 2014–15 targets.

In 2014–15, of the 13 programs, 4 met all of their performance targets and 3 met none of their targets. Overall, about half of programs (6) met all or almost all of their targets, while about half (7) met half or fewer of their targets. This is a noticeable increase over 2013–14, when 4 programs met all or almost all of their performance targets and the remaining 9 met half or fewer of their targets.

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[55] Grantees are not required to report all performance measures. Grantees are required to report on at least one output measure (ED2, ED4A) and at least one outcome measure (ED5, ED6, ED7, or ED27) and can opt to report any other 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.

Exhibit II-11: Grantee Performance in Meeting 2013–14 and 2014–15 Performance Measure Targets

Grantee Program	Activity Type[56]	ED1	ED2	ED4A	ED5	ED6[a]	ED7	ED27	2013–14 Targets Met	2014–15 Targets Met
Grantee program #9	Tutoring		YY		YN				4/4	3/4
	Mentoring and Wraparound Services			YY				YY		
Grantee program #10	Attendance and Academic Engagement		YY					YY	2/2	2/2
Grantee program #12	Tutoring		YY		YN				2/2	1/2
Grantee program #1	Academic Achievement	YY	YY		NY				5/6	6/6
	Academic Engagement	YY	YY					YY		
Grantee program #7	Classroom and Extended Learning		YY		YY				3/6	2/6
	The Whole Child	NN	YN				NN	NN		
Grantee program #6	Academic Performance		YY		NY				1/2	2/2
Grantee program #8	Early Warning System			YY				NN	1/2	1/2
Grantee program #4	Tutoring	YY	NN		NN				3/10	8/10
	Family/Community Engagement	YY	NY		NY	NY	YY			
	Early Warning System		NY			NY				
Grantee program #3	Academic Engagement	YN	NN		NN			N‡	1/4	0/3
Grantee program #11	Academic Engagement and Achievement	YN	NN		NN			NN	1/4	0/4
Grantee program #13	Project Graduation	NY	NY		†			NY	0/3	3/3
Grantee program #5	Academic Interventions	NY	NN		NN				0/3	1/3
Grantee program #2	Academic Achievement		NN		NN				0/2	0/2

Notes: See Performance Measure definitions in Exhibit II-10.

Y/N cell indicates that the grantee program did meet / did not meet the performance target for 2013–14 and then 2014–15.

Blank cells indicate that the grantee did not report on the performance target.

[a] According to the performance measure guidance documented in CNCS's *Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity Addendum for AmeriCorps State and National Grants FY 2013*, "Applicants and grantees may report on either ED27 or ED6 but not both measures to ensure an unduplicated count. Applicants are encouraged to select ED27, which is a more direct measure of academic engagement than ED6, but ED6 may be preferred if it is significantly easier to collect school attendance data than to obtain parental consent and administer a pre-post survey" (p. 7).

[b] Performance Measure ED5 was selected in error for this grantee, so data are not reported. The relevant outcome Performance Measure is ED27.

[c] Performance Measure ED27 was reported by grantee program #13 in 2013–14 only.

Exhibit reads: Grantee program #9 Tutoring reported the following CNCS-defined performance measures in its GPRs: ED2 and ED5. It did not report ED1, ED4A, ED6, ED7, or ED27. It met its targets for ED2 and ED5 in 2013–14, and met its target for ED2 but not ED5 in 2014–15.

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[56] The Activity Type column in this exhibit and other exhibits throughout this report presents the Aligned Performance Measure names provided by grantees in their GPRs, with some of the names shortened and standardized to aid comparisons across grantees. A crosswalk of names reported in GPRs and in exhibits in this report is provided in Appendix Exhibit A-13.

Case Study Cross-Site Analysis

Overview

This section addresses two broad questions: Which activities pursued by School Turnaround 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? Over Years 1 and 2 of the evaluation (2014–15 and 2015–16 school years), the study team conducted case studies of 29 schools: 17 program and 12 comparison schools.

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
> - *Program Schools* (n=17, including 4 SIG Exiters)
> - *Grantee Programs* (n=13: grantee interviews, GPRs)
> - *Comparison Schools* (n=12)

Twenty-four schools (12 pairs) participated in comparative case studies, in which one school (labeled School 1A, etc.) was supported by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and one school (labeled School 1B, etc.) had no School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and no or minimal AmeriCorps presence. By comparing program schools with otherwise similar schools with little to no AmeriCorps support, the comparative case studies describe diverse turnaround efforts across multiple schools receiving SIG funding, endeavoring to distinguish the unique contributions of School Turnaround AmeriCorps. The case studies specifically examine how partnerships contributed to schools' improvement efforts, what strategies external partners used, the range of strategies used across case study schools, and school stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of additional resources on key turnaround outcomes. Case studies also document common challenges and promising practices that could potentially be replicated by other turnaround schools. An additional replacement case study examines a single program school without a comparison school.[57]

In 2015–16, the study team also conducted case studies of four School Turnaround AmeriCorps schools that had successfully exited SIG status. The "SIG Exiter" case studies describe the major strategies school leaders and teachers perceived as supporting each school's success in exiting SIG status, including the role of members in implementing each strategy, program implementation conditions and challenges, and perceived impacts of turnaround strategies, including the contributions of School Turnaround AmeriCorps.

Evaluation schools were chosen purposively to represent a range of School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantee programs, geographic locations, and intervention types. Program schools served a range of grade levels (six elementary, including one elementary/middle; one middle; and six high schools), school size (e.g., an elementary school with 249 students, a high school with 1,489 students), and locations (one town, one suburban, four rural, 11 urban; six regions of the country). Program schools also offered varied types of interventions, including attendance support, literacy tutoring, college preparation, and mentoring. The number of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members ranged from 1 (in a suburban high school) to 22 (providing mentoring to every student in a rural high school). Other sources of variation in School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs reflect individual school needs, district and school partnerships, and grantee capacity.

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[57] Year 1 case study Schools 4A and 4B were not included in Year 2 follow-up data collection (for separate reasons detailed in Appendix B). Program School 4A was replaced with a program-only case study (School 13A) without a comparison school, as potential comparison schools declined to participate.

In each pair, comparison schools were chosen as matching program schools based on several criteria:

- Comparable SIG status.

- Similar grade levels served.

- Similar student demographic, enrollment, and academic proficiency characteristics.

- Same district or, at a minimum, same urbanicity in the same state.

- Having little to no AmeriCorps presence.[58]

Data sources for the case studies include principal interviews, teacher interviews and focus groups, member interviews, school climate observations for 10 schools visited in person, and materials from grantee programs, as appropriate (i.e., staff interviews, GPRs). Further details on the case study methodology are presented in Appendix A.3.

The next section presents an overview of school contexts for the case studies, followed by a synthesis of findings on turnaround strategies, including implementation challenges. Lessons are drawn from all program and comparison schools that identified common challenges and promising practices in working with partners generally and with School Turnaround AmeriCorps specifically. The section concludes with perceived impacts of turnaround strategies, those using School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and others. Individual case studies are presented in Appendix B.

School Context

Understanding how School Turnaround AmeriCorps members supported their respective school's turnaround strategies first requires describing the local contexts within which members served. Across the 29 schools, there are three overarching contextual themes: factors that influence the broader school context, school leadership and leaders' attitudes and approaches to using external partners, and the challenges presented by heterogeneous student populations. Exhibit II-12 shows selected demographic and school characteristics for the 29 case study schools.

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[58]   To be eligible, comparison schools had to have less than or equal to three Member Service Years and at least two less Member Service Years than the program school it would be matched to.

Exhibit II-12: Selected Characteristics of Case Study Schools

School	Number of AmeriCorps Members		Number of Non-AmeriCorps Partners	SIG Funding	School Level	School Enrollment	District Urbanicity / Enrollment	Academic Proficiency in Reading / Math	Proportion of Students Eligible for FRPL[a]	Racial/Ethnic Composition				
	2014–15	2015–16								White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Other
Year 1 /Year 2 Follow-Up Case Study Schools														
School 1A	10	6	7	2011-14: $6,000,000	High	1,358	Urban 86,516	50% / 35%	89%	3%	84%	10%	2%	2%
School 1B	0	0	3	2011-14: $5,992,251	High	1,489	Urban 86,516	65% / 30%	90%	4%	80%	10%	4%	1%
School 2A	18	16	8	2011-14: $1,279,599	Elementary	391	Urban 44,179	19% / 28%	84%	0%	1%	98%	0%	0%
School 2B	3	8	6	2011-14: $550,387	Elementary	387	Urban 44,179	19% / 16%	78%	0%	0%	99%	0%	1%
School 3A	4	5	4	2010-13: $2,136,713	Elementary	395	Urban 83,377	41% / 38%	85%	6%	64%	25%	2%	3%
School 3B	0	0	7	2011-14: $760,200	Elementary	384	Suburb 10,069	40% / 45%	91%	9%	82%	2%	5%	2%
School 4A	4	n/a	3	2011-14: 5,788,125	High	724	Urban 8,626	<10% / <10%	86%	0%	0%	97%	2%	0%
School 4B	0	0	4	2011-14: $3,103,536	High	975	Urban 8.358	17% / <10%	82%	6%	2%	89%	0%	3%
School 5A	24	14	0	2010-13: $308,417	High	874	Town 4,538	43% / 11%	62%	97%	1%	2%	0%	0%
School 5B	0	0	0	2010-13: $1,324,949	High	602	Town 2,525	59% / 16%	58%	99%	0%	1%	0%	0%
School 6A	1	n/a	3	2010-13: $1,400,000	High	741	Suburb 2,177	30% / 27%	80%	19%	19%	43%	16%	3%
School 6B	0	0	2	2010-13: $1,000,473	Middle/High	338	Rural 783	48% / 37%	50%	85%	4%	4%	1%	7%
Year 2 Case Study Schools														
School 7A	9	11	9	2010-11: $2,696,299	Elementary	249	Urban 354,262	18% / 26%	96%	1%	20%	79%	0%	0%
School 7B	0	0	17	2010-11: $1,343,612	Elementary	368	Urban 260,226	28% / 33%	99%	1%	2%	94%	0%	2%
School 8A	4	6	2	2011-14: $267,000	High	369	Urban 2,431	20% / 11%	91%	1%	0%	98%	0%	1%
School 8B	0	0	0	2011-14: $938,707	High	985	Urban 41,323	44% / 10%	84%	1%	0%	98%	0%	0%
School 9A	n/a	8	2	2009-10: $500,000	Middle	287	Rural 1,738	86% / 74%	45%	75%	22%	1%	0%	3%
School 9B	0	0	2	2009-10: $530,970	Middle/High	378	Rural 778	88% / 72%	51%	80%	17%	1%	1%	1%
School 10A	9	7	9	2011-12: $475,000	Elementary	486	Urban 8,852	41% / 57%	75%	77%	2%	5%	1%	15%
School 10B	0	0	2	2011-12 $490,000	Elementary	962	Town 4,187	47% / 60%	60%	51%	34%	12%	1%	2%

School	Number of AmeriCorps Members		Number of Non-AmeriCorps Partners	SIG Funding	School Level	School Enrollment	District Urbanicity / Enrollment	Academic Proficiency in Reading / Math	Proportion of Students Eligible for FRPL[a]	Racial/Ethnic Composition				
	2014–15	2015–16								White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Other
School 11A	n/a	8	4	2009-10: $1,215,057	High School	488	Rural 1,614	44% / 40%	46%	97%	1%	2%	0%	0%
School 11B	0	0	3	2009-10: $1,623,200	High School	569	Rural 1,809	45% / 40%	48%	93%	2%	1%	1%	3%
School 12A	2	1	2	2011-12: $4,899,454	Elementary	380	Urban 25,283	18% / 35%	99%	7%	67%	15%	9%	1%
School 12B	0	0	3	2011-12: $4,899,454	Elementary	403	Urban 25,283	34% / 47%	93%	6%	65%	25%	1%	2%
School 13A	6	5	1	2010–11 $1,398,750	Elementary/ Middle	939	Urban 2,431 students	53% / 61%	89%	1%	1%	99%	0%	0%
Year 2 SIG Exiter Schools														
SIG Exiter 1	2	1	6	2011-12: $4,899,454	Elementary/ Middle	392	Urban 25,283	2012-13: 57% / 64% 2014–15: 67% / 62%	68%	21%	43%	27%	1%	8%
SIG Exiter 2	3	2	4	2011-12: $4,899,454	Elementary	354	Urban 25,283	2012-13: 21% / 21% 2014–15: 27% / 34%	98%	1%	86%	13%	0%	0%
SIG Exiter 3	n/a	7	2	2010-11: $3,386,154	Elementary	427	Rural 6,966	2012-13: 55% / 47% 2013-14: 60% / 50%	73%	40%	5%	41%	10%	5%
SIG Exiter 4	25	18	1	2010-11: $1,497,464	High	497	Rural 1,918	2012-13: 36% / 40% 2013-14: 56% / 31%	59%	99%	0%	1%	0%	0%

Notes:

[a] Free or Reduced-Price Lunch.

AmeriCorps member counts:

Conflicting information was received from the grantee and school for program schools 1A and 10A regarding total number of AmeriCorps members. The grantee confirmed initially having seven members, but they recently had to exit a member and now have six, while School 10A confirmed four members at the time of the site visit in January 2016. Program School 4A did not participate in 2016 data collection because its grantee was having grant compliance issues. Comparison School 4B did not participate due to a public health crisis in its city. Program School 6A had no AmeriCorps members in 2015–16 and declined to participate in follow-up data collection. Program schools 9A and 11A and SIG Exiter School 3 did not provide 2014–15 AmeriCorps member counts.

SIG funding: Data on SIG funding was obtained from state websites and cannot be referenced without revealing school identities.

School Enrollment, Urbanicity, District Enrollment, Free and Reduced-Price Lunch, and Racial/Ethnic Composition: U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. 2012–2013.

Academic Proficiency: Proficiency data are from 2012-13 unless otherwise noted. Data obtained from state websites; principals provided data for the year of SIG exit.

Program school 1A/Comparison school 1B: End-of-course assessment; Program school 2A/Comparison school 2B: grades 2-6; Program school 3A/Comparison school 3B: grades 3, 4, 5; Program school 4A/Comparison School 4B: grade 11; Program school 5A/Comparison school 5B: End-of-course assessment; Program school 6A: Reading: Grades 6, 7, 8, 10; Math: Grades 6, 7, 8, 11; Comparison school 6B: Reading: 7, 8, 10; Math: 7, 8, 11; Program school 7A/Comparison 7B: grades 3, 4, 5; Program school 8A/Comparison school 8B: End-of-course assessment; Program School 9A: grades 7, 8 (2011-12); Comparison School 9B: grades 7, 8, 10 (2011-12); Program School 10A/Comparison School 10B: grades 3, 4, 5; Program School 11A/Comparison School 11B: grade 11; Program School 12A/Comparison School 12B: grades 3, 4, 5; Program School 13A: grade 8; SIG Exiter 1 and 3: grades 3-8; SIG Exiter 2: grades 3-5; SIG Exiter 4: End-of-course assessment.

Factors Influencing the Broader School Context

Case study respondents in all schools described multiple factors that influence their respective school's climate and culture (see textbox).

> **School Climate, Culture, and Context**
>
> This report uses the following definitions to distinguish concepts that describe different aspects of the school environment.
>
> - *Climate* is the quality and the characteristics of school life, which include the availability of supports for teaching and learning. It includes goals, values, interpersonal relationships, formal organizational structures, and organizational practices.
> - *Culture* refers to shared beliefs, customs, and behaviors. Culture represents people's experiences with ceremonies, beliefs, attitudes, history, ideology, language, practices, rituals, traditions, and values.
> - *Context* is the conditions surrounding schools, which interact with the culture and the climate in a school.
>
> Source: Clifford, M. (2012). *Measuring School Climate for Gauging Principal Performance: A Review of the Validity and Reliability of Publicly Accessible Measures*.

Examples of **climate factors** reported by the case study schools include:

- High turnover in school leadership and staff, including new principals who took ownership of the turnaround effort and initiated new policies that created a more positive tone in the school, but also teacher turnover that impeded progress, as new teachers had to be trained each year in the curriculum and school-specific interventions.

- Changes in schools' structure or focus, such as serving different grades or transitioning to an early college access school.

- School building upgrades that influenced people's outlook on their environments.

Examples of **cultural factors** reported by case study schools' turnaround initiatives include:

- School leader ownership of the turnaround effort and attitudes and approaches to using external partners (discussed below).

- Staff attitudes toward collaboration and sharing instructional strategies.

- The psychological stigma reported by school staff resulting from working in schools widely known as among the lowest performing schools in their state.

- The reported psychological uplift of working in a school that has moved from the lowest-performing school-level classification in its state (outside of Receivership) to the highest classification level.

Examples of other **contextual factors** in the case study schools include:

- The social and economic conditions of the surrounding community, including safety in the school environment.

- Challenges specific to schools in rural areas, including limited availability of partner resources, transportation barriers that affect both students traveling to/from school and teachers attending professional development, and inadequate guidance or advice from state-level experts who offered advice more applicable to urban and more-accessible communities.

While school climate and culture changes can be broad and their effects difficult to quantify, it is important to acknowledge that these and other contextual factors can both facilitate and impede the ability of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members to support schools' efforts to reach their turnaround goals. In particular, school climate factors were highly fluid, which added an additional layer of complexity to schools' efforts to provide consistent environments or interventions.

School Leader Ownership of the Turnaround Effort and Attitudes and Approaches to Using External Partners

School leaders play an important role in setting the tone for their turnaround strategies, a key element of school culture. Notably, across all four SIG Exiter schools, strong leadership was critical to exiting SIG status. Principals provided leadership by taking ownership of the turnaround initiative as a whole and by focusing on shifting the school culture from a demoralized state to one committed to improvement. Several SIG Exiter principals were assigned to their schools specifically to carry out the turnaround plan, including two principals in the same district (at SIG Exiter Schools 1 and 2) with prior successful turnaround experience. Some stakeholders at these schools noted that changes in principal and school leadership enabled their schools to address their challenges and change their cultures. In these several SIG Exiter Schools, the principals empowered teachers by providing them with significant leadership roles in setting the strategy for the school's turnaround path.

Principals' receptivity toward using external resources was a major theme in Year 1, Year 2, and the SIG Exiter case studies. A school's predisposition toward partners can influence its success (or lack thereof) in using them, making it difficult to isolate the added value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources in instances where there were multiple partners. Not surprisingly, school leaders had varying perspectives about using external partners; leaders in a minority of all case study schools welcomed partners, while a few comparison school principals intentionally limited the number and scope of partners' activities (one subsequently expanded use of partners in 2015–16). All four SIG Exiter School principals were open to robust partnership engagement, including fully integrating members into school operations. Principals' receptivity to partners varied and did not necessarily mirror the schools' use or not of School Turnaround AmeriCorps.

Student Populations with Socio-Emotional or Special Needs and Challenges

Respondents in some schools described using turnaround strategies to address student populations facing special needs and challenges, ranging from attendance and behavioral issues to language and personal barriers. This meant that school staff were working to meet the needs of English language learners, students with disabilities, students who were homeless or in foster homes or shelters, and/or students who themselves or whose families were refugees or otherwise transient. In addition, all case study schools served economically disadvantaged student populations (e.g., eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), ranging from 45 to 99 (median 82) percent of students. Several schools noted that because students and their families faced multiple challenges associated with poverty, students often did not have their basic needs met (such as clothing, school supplies, sufficient food) and parents often had less capacity to be highly involved in schools.

> **A School with Large Refugee Populations**
>
> The big, big job for us has been to get families involved to understand the school system. And when you think you've got it made, then it's a new group coming in and you have to…learn what their needs are."
>
> *–Teacher Interview (2016)*

Across all case studies, most schools also reported changes in their student populations, such as increases in English language learners (ELLs), or refugees from different national and linguistic backgrounds.

These changes in the student population meant that schools needed to recalibrate their services to accommodate the changing student body.

Turnaround Strategies

Cross-Cutting Turnaround Strategies

This section presents cross-cutting findings about turnaround strategies from all case study schools. Almost all case study schools were dynamically adjusting their goals and strategies. In some, a school changed its turnaround goals because it had met one or more prior goals. In others, schools found that the interventions they had been trying were ineffective, so they adopted new interventions they believed would be more effective.

The three most prevalent strategies among the case study schools are using data to drive interventions (all schools), teacher professional development (most schools), and providing supports for students' socio-emotional learning (SEL) (most program schools, a minority of comparison schools). Other common strategies include provision of targeted and individualized academic support to struggling students.

As shown in Exhibit II-13, almost three times as many program schools provided socio-emotional learning supports than did comparison schools, likely because such supports were the most common strategy employed by School Turnaround AmeriCorps members regardless of academic interventions. Several other turnaround strategies were reported almost exclusively by program schools because they are specific to the AmeriCorps member role, which did not exist at comparison schools, including teacher buy-in, collaboration, and classroom supports; on-site coordinators to support members and facilitate communication; and flexibility in meeting schools' needs.

Exhibit II-13: Prevalence of Schools Reporting Use of Turnaround Strategies, by School Type

Turnaround Strategies	# Program Schools Reported Using This Strategy	# Comparison Schools Reported Using This Strategy
Cross-Cutting Turnaround Strategies		
Frequent student assessment and monitoring student data to identify student needs and inform interventions to boost student performance (29)	17	12
Providing supports for students' socio-emotional learning to improve student engagement and behavior (19)	14	5
Investing in teacher professional development and implementing specific curriculum to meet turnaround goals (23)	12	11
Providing targeted and individualized academic support to struggling students, or credit recovery to failing students (14)	12	2
Strategies Specific to School Turnaround AmeriCorps		
Member-teacher collaboration and classroom supports (17)	17	0
On-site coordinators to support members and facilitate communication (10)	10	0
Flexibility in meeting schools' needs (8)	7	1

Notes:

Themes are ordered by program school frequencies. Appendix Exhibit A-12 "Prevalence of Themes by Unit of Analysis, Stakeholder, and Change over Time" provides further detail on the frequencies presented in this exhibit, including prevalence by stakeholder type.

The most common turnaround strategies are discussed below.

Frequent student assessment and monitoring of student data to identify student needs and inform interventions to boost student performance

Monitoring data to assess progress and tailor instructional strategies was an integral part of all schools' turnaround strategies.[59] Schools described assessing students frequently using formative assessments to monitor student progress, guide goal setting, and inform instructional strategies; for example, by addressing gaps in ELA and math instruction. A few program and comparison schools dedicated a staff member to supporting data use, while in other schools teachers monitored their own students' data.

Almost all program schools used student test scores or standardized assessment scores to identify students' needs and match School Turnaround AmeriCorps members with students. Typically, a staff member analyzed student data, and students with low scores were matched with a member. Program schools also monitored student data to determine students' needs/weaknesses, such as highlighting subjects where students were struggling and needed additional attention, and then using data to help guide specific types of interventions. They also used student data to help manage member workloads. One school (4A), however, changed its program model in 2015–16 so that members no longer worked with students struggling most, instead working with students performing close to grade level, so that more-experienced teachers could work with the students facing the most severe academic challenges.[60] Teachers and the principal at the school were more satisfied with the efficacy of the program after making this change.

Stakeholders at all comparison schools discussed using Response-to-Intervention (RTI), standardized testing and reporting (STAR), and other assessments to track student progress, on a weekly or less-frequent basis. Stakeholders at those schools described having professional development (PD) focused on learning to use data and ongoing structures, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in several schools and data retreats, to give staff time to collaborate on using and interpreting data (as discussed below). Interestingly, teachers at one comparison school (7B) that provided extensive support for students' basic needs expressed skepticism that assessment data truly measured student success or potential.

Providing supports for students' socio-emotional learning to improve student engagement and behavior

Almost all program schools and a minority of the comparison schools reported providing socio-emotional learning supports to improve student engagement and behavior. As discussed further in the **Perceived Impacts** chapter, members' ability to provide such supports was perceived to boost the schools' capacity to serve students' needs and to work toward turnaround goals. Stakeholders' descriptions of their school contexts as having high proportions of students with socio-emotional or special needs and challenges highlight the importance of having School Turnaround AmeriCorps and other added resources for providing those supports.

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[59]   The three schools not included in this count are the three Year 1 schools that did not participate in case study data collection in Year 2 (Schools 4A, 4B, and 6A). It may be possible that these schools were also using this strategy and either it was not reported in Year 1 or it was adopted for the 2015–16 school year.

[60]   The study team identifies examples of single schools with their case study identifier so that readers may reference the case study summaries in Appendix B. In a few other cases in the report, single examples are drawn from schools that did not participate in case studies and therefore do not have school identifiers to reference.

Socio-emotional supports took various forms, including mentoring students during lunch, providing one-on-one mentoring sessions to talk about strategies to meet behavioral and attendance goals and to motivate students to attend school, providing enrichment activities through after-school programs, and one-on-one tutoring. SIG Exiter School 1 deployed members in a unique way, as school counselors dedicated to working in specific classrooms. These members were master's of social work students fulfilling their internship placement requirement, placed by a local college (the grantee program). The members' specialized background—plus professional supervision on site and through the college—enabled them to provide students with professional socio-emotional and mental health supports well beyond the capacity of members without such training.

In program schools, members' trusting relationships with students were the key mechanism for socio-emotional learning to succeed. In some program schools, one-on-one interventions were perceived as supporting both behavior and student academic achievement, because students reportedly felt supported by members and more accountable as a result of their one-on-one relationships. Members' various strategies and interactions with students enabled them to develop trusting relationships with students by giving them their focused attention and getting to know them, which helped students open up and become more willing to engage in school academically and socially. In several program schools, School Turnaround AmeriCorps members assisted in the implementation of a formal incentive-based, positive behavior system called Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS), which rewarded students for appropriate or positive behavior.

Stakeholders in all SIG Exiter schools described how attending to students' socio-emotional needs enabled them to learn and was a crucial precipitating factor to increase their academic performance, in conjunction with other interventions. Similarly, School 2a described in 2015–16 that it had focused on behavior and school climate in previous years, but having attended to those issues, it could then focus more on academic improvement.

Socio-emotional learning supports were also used in a minority of the comparison schools, and their use increased in 2015–16 compared with 2014–15. A few comparison schools added new socio-emotional learning initiatives in 2015–16, including one (2B) whose initiatives were to improve the school climate and student satisfaction. One school (1B) was the last in its district to be able to adopt the district-wide socio-emotional learning curriculum, delivered twice weekly; teachers reported they were eager to be able to implement it. Another school (6B) was able to hire a school psychologist and bring in two mental health providers from outside agencies, who were perceived as successful in improving the school climate. Socio-emotional learning supports were less consistent in two other comparison schools: One school (7B) emphasized "understanding the whole child" by assessing each student's individual situation to determine how to address attendance and discipline issues and measure improvements. A teacher at the second comparison school (9B) primarily focused on parental engagement and communication to improve student behavior.

Investing in teacher professional development and implementing specific curriculum to meet turnaround goals

Most case study schools described increased professional development (PD) for teachers as a key component of their turnaround strategies. Administrators and teachers at most comparison schools (2015 interviews) observed that teachers can more effectively provide additional supports than can volunteers or outside organizations, given their mastery of content and experience managing student behavior.

Schools employed multiple strategies to improve teaching quality. In combination with the student data monitoring strategy, in all comparison schools and about half of the program schools, increased PD for teachers focused on their school's goals and testing data, as well as for planning curriculums and sharing

ideas and learning from other teachers. Stakeholders in some comparison schools and one program school also described receiving additional training to ensure teachers were teaching specific curricular content to help students meet their goals (as well as, in one comparison school, teaching to the test).

PD took several forms, ranging from one-time trainings (off site or at schools) to periodic trainings in the school to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and other standing structures for teachers to strategize and collaborate. PLCs were used by some program schools and about half of comparison schools to keep focused on improving teachers' instructional strategies and skills. They provided dedicated time for teachers to meet regularly to share promising practices, collaborate in reviewing student data, and strategize how to improve instructional practices throughout the school and for particular struggling students. One comparison school (6B) reported in 2014–15 that teachers were resistant to sharing information in the PLC or having their work called out (even positively) in front of colleagues. In 2015–16, stakeholders at that school reported that collaboration in the PLC had improved; another addition was that they began reviewing student data in PLC meetings.

Other PD strategies described by fewer schools included supplementing district-wide teacher PD by partnering with local universities; sending teachers to data retreats and off-site trainings or courses; and implementing peer observations and coaching for probationary teachers to learn from observing their colleagues' classroom practices.

Providing targeted and individualized academic support to struggling students or credit recovery to failing students

Providing targeted and individualized academic support or credit recovery interventions to struggling students was a strategy used by most program schools and a few comparison schools. In program schools, it was a key role played by members to provide this level of differentiated instruction; in comparison schools, teachers typically provided additional academic supports.

At program schools, interviewed principals and teachers emphasized the value of small-group and one-on-one interventions. Program schools reported that members placed in core classrooms (i.e., English language arts (ELA), math, and science) could work with students individually or in small groups and use different teaching techniques to accommodate individual students' levels or focus on different needs. In these schools, stakeholders appreciated members' consistent presence. One school (SIG Exiter 1) previously tried an approach in which members floated across multiple classrooms to provide socio-emotional support, but found that approach too diffuse to be effective for targeted students.

School staff reported that they appreciated member-provided one-on-one and small-group interventions because reduced responsibility for helping struggling students meant they could attend to their already full workloads. Members also provided one-on-one tutoring during school or after-school programs, and they helped motivate students to stay on task and complete their school work, which allowed members to build strong relationships with students while addressing their socio-emotional needs (as discussed below) and to provide more tailored academic instruction or support than typically possible in classrooms.

Members worked with students in small groups to help students practice their reading; this strategy helped to differentiate student learning and provide more individualized learning within classrooms. A few programs used student data monitoring to target credit recovery interventions to students struggling to stay on track toward on-time graduation.

Strategies Specific to School Turnaround AmeriCorps

Grantee programs were described by schools' principals and teachers as distinct from their other partnerships because their members are a consistent daily presence throughout the year. Such immersion

benefits schools by boosting classroom and overall school capacity. It also enables—and requires—different partnership strategies than can be provided by more episodic partners (volunteers, trainers, etc.).

The most common strategies employed by School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs were member-teacher collaboration around classroom support (most program schools), having an on-site coordinator to manage members and facilitate communication and understanding with the school staff (most program schools), and being flexible in meeting schools' needs (about half of the program schools).[61]

Member-teacher collaboration and classroom supports

Across both years of data collection, collaboration between teachers and members emerged as an important mechanism in member and intervention effectiveness. All program schools described member-teacher collaborations. Some stakeholders across all program schools viewed the types of academic supports members provided, including small-group and one-on-one interventions and push-in classroom support to keep students on task, as beneficial because they generally allowed members to use different teaching techniques or to support students in ways that teachers were not able to.

In addition, collaboration and communication between teachers and members increased teacher buy-in and understanding of members' roles; schools achieved this through multiple strategies. Teachers at some program schools in 2014–15 described a need for schools to provide communication that helps members be more effective. At several schools, teachers wanted more information—for example, from their departments—about activities members could and could not do. Strategies and suggested improvements at program schools included having designated meeting times when members (or coordinators) and teachers communicated about individual student needs and to coordinate supports.

Another strategy that was used consistently by several schools and inconsistently by a few 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. In 2015–16, teachers in a minority of different program schools described providing on-site training to build members' confidence and ensure that members knew exactly how to support them and work in their classrooms effectively, which also helped build teachers' trust in members' contributions.

Teachers in some program schools perceived members as resources to reduce teachers' workloads and/or to intervene with students who needed more attention, which in turn increased teachers' receptivity to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps intervention. Teachers in a few additional schools reported that members' relationships with teachers were valuable to creating successful interventions, and these improved with increased communication and teachers' familiarity with the program. Several teachers felt positively influenced by AmeriCorps

> **Member-Teacher Collaboration**
>
> "[T]hese AmeriCorps members are so dynamic. I learn something from them every day. They always thank me. They say, 'Thank you. I'm learning so much.' And I flip it. I turn it right around. I go, 'You know, thank you. I'm learning so much from you,' because they bring a wealth of passion to the table, because I really believe the philosophy behind AmeriCorps is something that can be life changing. That's why people go into the Peace Corps. That's why people do different things in other countries. It's so community focused and other focused. It's just a great, great program."
>
> *–Teacher Interview (2016)*

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[61]   One comparison school also noted the importance of having partners that were flexible about meeting the school's needs.

members, saying they appreciated members' passion and positivity and reaffirmed their love of teaching (see textbox). Teachers at one school also reflected on the importance of teachers mentoring members in their classrooms to model the skills needed for effective behavior management, lesson planning, and more.

When member and teacher communication and collaboration functioned well in a school, teachers praised the members (reported by some program schools). In schools where communication and collaboration functioned less well, teachers perceived members as burdensome or ineffective. For example, in School 4A, teachers interviewed in 2015 reported that they did not understand the work members did with the guidance counselor, and they had negative views of the program (see the **Program Implementation Challenges** section).[62]

On-site coordinators to support members and facilitate communication

On-site coordinators were described as crucial in supporting successful programs in most program schools across both years of the evaluation.[63] On-site coordinators appeared to be an important structural mechanism for building relationships between program and school stakeholders. Again, no comparison schools reported using an analogous strategy of placing an external partner staff member or volunteer in the school to facilitate communication and coordinate its program activities on site.

In several program schools, stakeholders reported that coordinators were valuable resources for School Turnaround AmeriCorps members to manage their caseloads based on member data. Most of those schools also used on-site coordinators to analyze student data and communicate it to members to help guide their interventions. In several other program schools, coordinators' communication with school staff and leaders was reported to be crucial to understanding member roles and increasing school buy-in of members. Stakeholders in all program schools reportedly liked having someone they could consult to provide feedback on members, or to work out a different placement. In all program schools, the member coordinators also served as a liaison between the member and school staff (although they were not viewed positively in all of these schools). In the absence of receiving support from the school, one member also reported leaning on her coordinator for leadership.

Flexibility in meeting schools' needs

Although not a formal intervention per se, flexibility was reported by some program schools, including almost all SIG Exiters, and by one comparison school as an important turnaround strategy. These program school staff viewed the flexibility afforded to their schools by members as an asset; they described wanting more flexibility to be able to assign members to different students, classrooms, or ability levels as needed. For example, one school staff person described working to find a better placement for a member who was not a "good fit" with another staff member. In another case, an AmeriCorps member requested a transfer to provide the school's intervention in a different subject area. In a third school with only one member, the member's caseload was purposefully fluid so students could

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[62] It is unclear whether these issues persisted into the 2015–16 school year, as School 4A did not participate in Year 2 data collection.

[63] This includes volunteered information from one of the four SIG Exiter schools. Interviews do not have details about how the other three SIG schools perceived supervision of their School Turnaround AmeriCorps members. SIG Exiters were not explicitly asked about supervisory structures, since not all such schools still had members at the time of the interviews (spring 2016). The partnership agreements for SIG Exiter Schools 1 and 2, which were served by the same grantee program, make clear that there is both on-site and grantee-provided supervision. The grantee program at SIG Exiter School 4 increased the amount of on-site supervision for members in 2015–16 due to challenges in the prior year.

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receive support even if they were not identified at the beginning of the year. In a final example, members who were usually distributed across grades were placed all in one grade-level to provide additional support where there was increased need.

These examples suggest that grantee programs understood and responded to schools' desires to flexibly deploy members to meet their needs. However, case study data do not indicate how programs monitored members with respect to meeting minimum dosage levels for an intervention. One principal appreciated members' flexibility, while noting a tension between meeting the needs of the school's highly transient student population and the School Turnaround AmeriCorps model's requirements for meeting the targeted amount of intervention hours per student. Staff from three SIG Exiter schools also commended members' willingness to spend time with students and school staff outside of providing the formal intervention.

Program Implementation Challenges

The challenges described by grantee programs, school leaders, school staff, and members about implementing School Turnaround AmeriCorps are challenges commonly associated with operating programs in dynamic school environments undergoing major school reform.[64]

Challenges noted by these stakeholders primarily clustered into school-level conditions and program implementation challenges. Challenges at the school level included staff turnover, a lack or loss of resources, school conditions, and rural-specific challenges. Program implementation challenges included member recruitment and retention; confusion over members' roles and program rules; uneven member quality, preparation, and training; an inconsistent level of AmeriCorps presence; member skill sets for direct service provision; and grant administration. Less common challenges were related to program design and schools' turnaround strategies, such as flexibility in the program's approach to meeting students' needs, teacher professional development, and using data to target interventions. Exhibit II-14.   Implementation Challenges over Time summarizes the implementation challenges programs experienced over their three-year grant period, including the challenge's magnitude (major, moderate, or minor theme) and prevalence (reported by most, some, or few schools).

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - *Program Schools* (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - *Grantee Programs* (n=13: grantee interviews, Grantee surveys, GPRs, member interviews)

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[64]   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.

Exhibit II-14: Implementation Challenges over Time

Challenges with…	2013-14[a]	2014–15	2015–16
School-Level Conditions			
School Leader and Staff Turnover	Not documented	Minor (some programs)	Major (most programs and few schools)
Lack or Loss of Resources	Not documented	Major (most programs and some schools)	Major (most programs and some schools)
Challenges with School Conditions	Major (most programs)	Major (most programs)	Minor (few programs)
Distinct Challenges Facing Schools in Rural Areas	Minor (few programs)	Minor (few programs)	Minor (few programs)
Program Implementation			
Member Recruitment and Retention	Major (most programs)	Moderate (some schools)	Moderate (some schools)
Confusion and Tension over Members' Roles	Not documented	Moderate (some schools)	Moderate (some schools)
Uneven Member Quality, Preparedness, and Training	Not documented	Moderate (some schools)	Moderate (some schools)
Inconsistent AmeriCorps Presence	Not documented	Moderate (some schools)	Moderate (about half of schools)
Member Skill Sets for Direct Service	Not documented	Moderate (some schools)	Moderate (some schools)
Grant Administration	Major (most programs)	Major (most programs)	Minor (few programs)
Access to School Data	Moderate (some programs)	Major (most programs)	Major (most programs)
Program Design and Schools' Turnaround Strategies			
Flexibility in Meeting Schools' Needs	Not documented	Not documented	Minor (few schools)
Teacher Professional Development	Not documented	Not documented	Minor (few schools)
Use of Student Data to Inform Interventions	Not documented	Not documented	Minor (few schools)
Program Constraints Affecting Member Recruitment or Retention (e.g., amount of stipend vs. cost of living, opportunity cost vis-à-vis full-time work)	Minor (few programs)	Minor (few programs)	Minor (few programs)

[a] 2013-14 challenges identified retrospectively through Fall 2014 grantee interviews and 2013–14 GPRs.

Sources: Grantee interviews and focus groups (Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015, Spring 2016); GPRs (2013–14, 2014–15); principal interviews (Spring 2015); member interviews and focus groups (Spring 2015); case studies (Spring 2015, Fall 2015, Spring 2016)

Exhibit reads: Challenges with School Leader and Staff Turnover were not documented in 2013–14; were a minor challenge in 2014–15, reported by some programs; and were a major challenge in 2015–16, reported by most programs and a few schools.

School-Level Challenges

Both instability and lack of resources in schools were noted as challenges by members, grantee staff, teachers, and principals. Principal and teacher turnover was a significant source of instability within schools, while various family-related, community, statewide, and geographic conditions further contributed to the instability and resource challenges that hampered AmeriCorps members and grantee staff in working effectively.

School Leader and Staff Turnover

Most grantee programs and a few members and program school stakeholders described high levels of teacher and principal turnover. Interestingly, this was a challenge mentioned much more frequently by grantee staff than by school stakeholders—one of the few instances with markedly different perspectives among stakeholder groups. This may be because establishing school relationships is a primary grantee program responsibility and a crucial factor for programs in successful implementation, whereas it may be a general challenge in turnaround schools—though one that is not seen as specific to School Turnaround AmeriCorps or that may be expected due to Turnaround status or pre-existing trends. As mentioned in the **School Context** section, turnover in both principals and teachers meant that some grantee programs were continually reintroducing their services. School leader turnover, which is an element of some turnaround models, meant that grantee staff 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 it 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. High teacher turnover (reported to be as high as one-third per year in School 2A) was a significant drain on school resources and a loss of knowledge about the program. These challenges from fluctuating school teams limited how much grantee programs could mature their programs' implementation.

Lack or Loss of Resources

Almost all grantee programs noted challenges due to limited resources in their partner schools. A minority of program schools (and about half of program case study schools) and almost all comparison schools reported lacking or losing resources—particularly staff resources, such as behavior specialists, subject matter specialists, mental health practitioners, and resources for after-school programs. In addition, most of the SIG Exiter schools that had reported increased internal capacity experienced (or anticipated) deleterious effects of losing the SIG resources that had helped them exit SIG status. In one case, this explicitly included losing the school's seven School Turnaround AmeriCorps members because the district had higher-needs schools that would benefit from those members.

A common sentiment among the few schools that reported losing resources (including losing members) as they improved was that they were being "punished" for achieving their goals, because they no longer could afford the resources that helped them to improve. Two principals that exited SIG status indicated that there were clear data that the school was improving with the assistance of those SIG and School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources and "that we should keep those systems of support in place" because "[if] schools get out of that [status], it doesn't mean the school won't go back into it." Two comparison schools also reported lacking volunteer resources and partner resources, the latter because of the school's rural location.

Challenges with School Conditions

Almost all grantee programs reported at least one challenge posed by school conditions they could not change, including the inability of school staff to communicate with parents and community members, low statewide education spending, classrooms with large populations of English language learners, and student transience. Additionally, the academic and behavioral issues members sought to address were entrenched and complex. According to a majority of school leaders in all three surveys, academic performance, attendance, and engagement, as well as disruptive behavior, discipline, and bullying were moderate or severe challenges, with slightly larger majorities in Year 2-Fall compared to the other two time periods. According to grantee programs, students living in poverty or in unstable housing, families

without resources or capacity to support homework or learning growth, chronic absenteeism due to 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 turnaround schools in the study sample. More grantee programs reported challenges with school conditions in Year 1 compared with Year 2, suggesting that programs were adapting to turnaround schools' conditions.

Distinct Challenges Facing Schools in Rural Areas

A few case study schools were in small towns or rural areas, and stakeholders from these schools described barriers and challenges unique to rural locations.[65] These include limited availability of partner resources, transportation barriers that affect both students traveling to/from school and teachers attending professional development, and inadequate guidance or advice from state-level experts who offered advice more applicable to urban and more-accessible communities. Two remote areas with a high influx of refugees (Somali, Burmese, Iraqi) also struggled to support their ELL students and the needs of these students' families.

Program-Level Challenges

Three major grantee program implementation challenges persisted over the second and third program years: member recruitment and retention; confusion about member roles; and uneven member quality, preparation, and training. Inconsistent AmeriCorps presence was a moderate theme experienced by most schools. Insufficient member skill sets for direct service provision presented a moderate challenge experienced by some programs and schools. Grant administration was a major problem for most programs in the first year that markedly improved over the second and third years.[66]

Member Recruitment and Retention

As described in the **Program Implementation Findings** chapter, all grantee programs reported challenges with either member recruitment or retention; a majority of programs reported each challenge, with more programs having challenges with retention. Reported by all grantee programs and most program schools, member recruitment and retention were the most prevalent types of challenge identified in the evaluation. Many turnaround schools depend on external resources, such as the additional staff that can be hired with SIG funds and School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, to support core school functions. A cohort of members that was unexpectedly small or mid-year departures created a disruption in schools' plans and abilities to work toward their turnaround goals. In schools where members were placed in the same classroom throughout the year, a member leaving partway through the year burdened teachers who had come to rely on members for differentiating instruction and it upset students who depended on their relationships with members. Even when members completed their services hours, it could still pose a problem if they finished before the school year ended, leaving the school unable to continue providing those services for the rest of the year.

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[65]   Case study schools over-represent rural areas compared with all schools surveyed for the evaluation, which was between 7 and 9 percent per year.

[66]   Administrative data (grantee progress reports) provided limited information about challenges in the first program year, but administrative data as well as primary data sources provided a more complete and more nuanced understanding of challenges in the second and third program years.

Confusion and Tension over Members' Roles

Confusion over members' roles was a persistent challenge for a minority of schools, grantee programs, and members in Year 1 and Year 2. Unlike other partners who worked in schools for targeted amounts of time providing a single specific activity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps members (especially full-time members) served in schools all day.

While the intensity of their service helped them positively benefit students and schools' overall turnaround goals, their steady presence on site also led to confusion about how they could and could not contribute at the school.

Most grantee staff and stakeholders at a minority of program schools (including most case study schools) emphasized the importance of understanding AmeriCorps members' roles; still some degree of confusion about how teachers could use them in their classrooms remained.[67] School stakeholders across almost all case study schools—the only program schools where teachers, who interact with members on a daily basis, were interviewed—expressed confusion or concerns about member role definition. This was explicitly discussed as a challenge in three Year 2 case studies. As noted under the turnaround strategy of member-teacher collaboration (above), teacher expectations and understanding of members' roles were not homogeneous, but rather varied within schools.

The lack of clarity about members' roles in the schools appeared 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 always matched with schools' needs.

A minority of principals expressed frustration with program rules they felt made the program less effective—specifically, members having to maintain the same caseload of students throughout the year and do a community service project (required by their grantee programs). Principals admitted in interviews that they did not always understand the program rules and activity restrictions or they found the restrictions a hindrance to productivity. Some principals also noted that their AmeriCorps members had more restrictions and guidelines to adhere to than their other school partners did, a sentiment shared by a few grantee staff. Interestingly, in the 2015–16 school year, some principals in SIG program schools and all four of the SIG Exiter principals responded that they and their teachers did understand members' roles.

Confusion over members' roles was sometimes manifested in teachers' disinterest in using members because they (teachers) were doubtful about how they could productively use members' services. Sometimes it manifested in members' own confusion about what they were expected to do. For stakeholders at some case study schools, confusion about members' roles seemed to reflect lack of communication and insufficient relationship building between teachers and members. Whether members understood their roles but not how to inform school staff or members lacked understanding, the result was members struggled to find their place in the school.

Teachers' lack of buy-in was more pronounced in one rural program school, and may also reflect broader challenges members faced building relationships in a local community they described as "closed" and "guarded." Members there were not invited to attend either faculty meetings or teacher professional development sessions. One member reported that while some of the school's teachers were approachable and communicative, others did not welcome members' help, perceiving it as intrusive or interfering. One

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[67]   Note that these perceptions were not unanimous in these schools.

teacher corroborated such member perceptions, noting that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members were underutilized because some school staff were unsupportive and that in one instance, teachers turned the members away from participating in a school activity after members helped set it up. By contrast, teachers and members in several other case study schools described how they addressed this challenge; simply put, teachers were willing to take the time to support members by having conversations with them to help them understand their role.

In one school, a teacher and her colleagues developed a checklist to clarify members' roles for both teachers and members themselves, which all found to be an effective resolution.

> **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 (2015)*

Members in two Year 1 focus groups observed that school administrators often did not know what School Turnaround AmeriCorps members are and are not allowed to do within their schools. As a result, members said they felt like they had to say, "I can't do that" (i.e., substitute teach, proctor tests, perform miscellaneous other tasks) more often than they liked. Several members revealed that they did not feel respected by the school staff; one grantee staff echoed that, saying that grantee staff struggled to ensure members received the respect they deserve.

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

Issues of Member (Partner) Quality, Preparation, and Training

Concerns with members' quality and preparation were consistently reported by a minority of principals, teachers, and members and by about half of grantee staff across Year 1 and Year 2. 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. Stakeholders across most program schools and one comparison school commented on the need for more on-site training for members placed in schools, on uneven performance by members, on members' lack of professionalism and soft skills, or on the importance of quality when recruiting members (or volunteers, in the case of the comparison school). All these issues posed challenges for members in supporting schools' turnaround goals, especially early on in members' service before they gained practical in-school experience.

Although members generally reported receiving considerable training and orientation before being placed in schools—and all grantee programs reported providing at least two weeks of pre-service training—stakeholders in most program schools reported that members placed in schools still needed specific, on-site training to build teacher buy-in. Desires for additional member training reflected members' lack of training in classroom management and behavior issues, or in specific curricula and literacy interventions, or in working with student populations with special needs (e.g., students in Special Education and with Section 504 plans). Across Year 1 and Year 2, 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.

Stakeholders in some schools lamented that members almost always left just as they had gained practical experience to make them substantially more helpful. A few principals even reported in Year 1 that it was 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.[68] To mitigate this tension, a few members, in fact, were reported to stay on for a second year precisely because they wanted to increase their impact in a second year of service.

As noted, on-site supervision was seen as a crucial component to well-functioning programs. A majority of program schools reported that on-site coordinators supported members in implementing their duties; a few reported that site coordinators provided additional training to members. 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. Stakeholders from several program schools and one comparison school emphasized the importance of whom their schools brought in as members and volunteers. Several teachers and one principal stressed the importance of member (or other partner) quality during recruitment and selection, noting that they emphasized finding engaged individuals who were willing to attend staff meetings and be professional and outgoing.

Two schools in Year 1 where coordinators split their time across multiple schools (Schools 3A and 5A) discussed the negative effects of a school not having a dedicated coordinator. These two programs were perceived by school stakeholders as less effective because the coordinator was not readily available either to communicate with school staff about members' roles or to coordinate with teachers about matching tutoring plans to teachers' upcoming lesson plans. In 2015–16, the grantee program for School 5A brought on a full-time coordinator instead of having her split her time between three schools.

Two comparison schools also struggled with the supervision and preparedness of external partners. One 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; this partnership was discontinued in 2015–16. At another comparison school (2B) with an extensive network of partners, most interviewed school staff members emphatically observed that the school was not providing adequate supervision and coordination for external partners in 2014–15; the same issue was not noted in 2015–16.

In one focus group, some grantee staff 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. Their experience was that the grant timeline did not make it possible to do so, however.

Inconsistent AmeriCorps Presence

Some program schools reported dissatisfaction with inconsistent AmeriCorps presence due to a variety of reasons. Such inconsistency came from member turnover and retention, transportation issues in rural schools, disruptions in instructional time due to School Turnaround AmeriCorps schedules that had not

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[68]   This specific challenge was not mentioned in Year 2.

been communicated, and the yearly change in member cohorts in a given school. Four of these schools experienced member attrition during the school year, limiting the program's ability to serve the target student caseload and meet defined performance measure targets. Although commitment to a one-year term of service is the standard required by AmeriCorps, parents in one school commented that the change in members every year means their children did not experience enough continuity in the program.

One program school shared member recruitment responsibilities with the grantee staff (as outlined in the partnership agreement); the principal reported that challenges with member recruitment made this responsibility burdensome rather than beneficial. A teacher in another program school explained that recruitment and retention challenges adversely affected schools' ability to sustain gains made by AmeriCorps members, particularly in building relationships with students and families from one year to the next. Stakeholders perceived members' consistent presence in the school as necessary for teachers to rely on member-provided supports, which in turn engendered teachers' buy-in and students' trust—but inconsistency in members' presence in the school had the opposite effect, eroding teachers' buy-in to the roles and purpose of members in the school.

> **Inconsistent Member Presence**
>
> "So I think [students] were really excited about [the AmeriCorps program] to begin with, but then when you're constantly having to change and adapt to a new person and a new way of doing things, it almost became too much work versus the benefits that the kids were getting."
>
> *—Teacher Interview (2016)*

Negative stakeholder perceptions also stemmed from inconsistent quality in the members' performance over different program years (i.e., having a "bad batch" of members in certain years vs. high performing members in other years, particularly those who served in a school for more than one year). In one School (2A) with a long-standing relationship with its grantee program (that transcended School Turnaround AmeriCorps), several teachers across both years noted that each new cohort of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, and the performance of these new members, deteriorated each year; specifically, that members struggled to develop classroom skills. Retention at the school also worsened from 2014–15 to 2015–16. Still, the school's history of effective partnership with that grantee and its overall reliance on AmeriCorps to provide core functions meant the program remained essential to the school.

Member Skill Sets for Direct Service Provision

Throughout both years of the evaluation, there were notably few challenges with either the delivery or quality of members' tutoring—the primary responsibility of most members. A minority of schools and about half of grantee staff reported shortcomings in members' skill sets for direct service delivery. Challenges with tutoring were generally overshadowed by challenges with the bigger-picture issues discussed above, such as members needing more training and confusion and tension in the schools over members' roles.

However, two concerns raised by members, principals, and (to a lesser extent) grantee staff were school staff not trusting members to engage parents (especially early in the year) and teachers not being confident about allowing members to be responsible for students' academic progress. Teachers are evaluated based on their students' performance, and they did not want to yield control to others 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 needs for math and science tutoring).

Grant Administration

Grantee programs reported a changing set of barriers from the first year of implementation through the third, as reported in GPRs and interviews. In the first year (2013–14), program start-up issues (e.g., timing of award notification/school start, technical difficulties with eGrants, misunderstanding of program requirements, managing financial and other resources, challenges with accessing or analyzing data, and obtaining access to technology) were the most prevalent type of barrier reported. Almost all programs reported at least one such challenge.

The 2014–15 barriers differed notably from the barriers previously reported. By the end of that second program year, programs were not reporting grant administration challenges. Rather, their primary challenges were member enrollment and retention, structural issues specific to the AmeriCorps model (the amount of the stipend, opportunity cost of full-time or permanent work), and (for some) continuing challenges with accessing school-level student data. Various strategies to ensure access to data also appeared to be an area where programs could improve—for example, consistently implementing pre- and post-tests and negotiating access to student records with the school or district.

The changing character of grantee programs' challenges as reported in GPRs from 2013–14 to 2014–15 suggests that the programs successfully overcame administrative challenges typically associated with a new effort.

Less Common Challenges with Program Design and Schools' Turnaround Strategies

While not common, some program schools as well as comparison schools experienced challenges with the design of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program or the turnaround strategy they implemented. These are included because they provide informative examples about potential challenges inherent in certain turnaround strategies, which can impact the effectiveness of external partners engaged in supporting those strategies.

Flexibility in Meeting Schools' Needs

Most program schools demonstrated flexibility in meeting schools' needs. However, one school simultaneously appreciated the program's flexibility and lamented the grant restrictions prohibiting School Turnaround AmeriCorps members from administering tests and grading, creating lesson plans, and disciplining students. Its principal and teachers believed the restrictions hampered the program's potential effectiveness in their school. The principal also viewed the member caseload dosage definition as misaligned with the school's highly transient student population, where students exiting and enrolling throughout the school year made meeting targeted dosage levels unlikely.

Teacher Professional Development

A few comparison schools experienced challenges related to implementation of their teacher professional development strategies. In one case, the principal and teachers noted that insufficient resources to retain and recruit staff and volunteers impeded the school's turnaround efforts focused on investing in teacher professional development. In another case, the school's culture of privacy and teachers' discomfort with critiquing one another's instructional practices hindered its progress in creating Professional Learning Communities as a means for teacher professional development.

Use of Student Data to Inform Interventions

Using student data to inform interventions was the most prevalent school turnaround strategy in program and comparison schools alike. However, one comparison school teacher suggested that the school's turnaround status led staff to teach to the test, an unintended negative consequence of focusing so heavily on this strategy.

Effectiveness of Strategies and Adjustments over Time

Perceived Effectiveness of Implementation Strategies

The large majority of grantee staff and school leaders in both years indicated that all seven elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs listed in Exhibit II-15 were very important or important. The stakeholders characterized as very important or important 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.[69]

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - *Program Schools* (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - *Grantee Programs* (n=13: Grantee surveys, grantee interviews, GPRs)

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[69] Sources: Grantee survey, Year 1 and Year 2 (2014–15, 2015–16). See Appendix Exhibit C-12; School Leader survey Year 1, Year 2-Fall, and Year 2-Spring (2014–15, 2015–16). See Appendix Exhibit C-20.

Exhibit II-15: Grantee and School Leader Perceptions of Important Elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Implementation (Year 1 and Year 2)
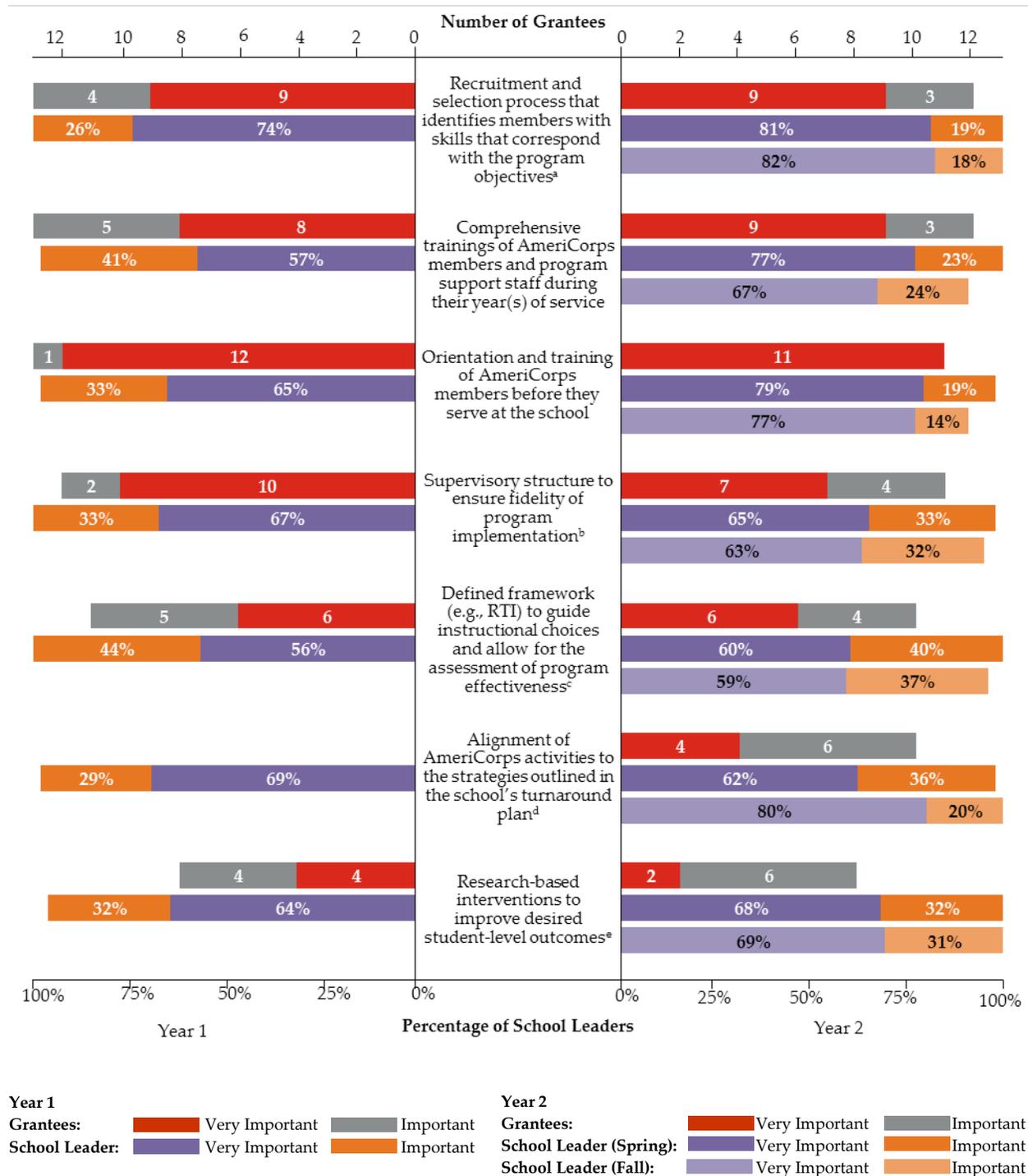
Notes:

Grantees Year 1: (N=13, Missing=0–1); School Leaders Year 1: (N=38, Missing=0-1); Grantees Year 2: (N=13, Missing=1); School Leaders Year 2-Fall: (N=37, Missing=0-1); School Leaders Year 2-Spring: (N=40, Missing=0).

Grantees Year 1: Number of respondents who indicated the question was somewhat important ranged from 0 to 2. Number of respondents who indicated the question was not at all important ranged from 0 to 2. School Leaders Year 1: Grantee Year 2: Number of respondents who indicated the question was somewhat important ranged from 1 to 2. School Leaders Year 2-Fall: Number of school leaders who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0 to 1; School Leaders Year 2-Spring: One respondent indicated the question was not applicable. Exhibit is sorted according to Year 2 grantee staff responses.

The wording of several elements differed between the Year 1 Grantee, Year 2 Grantee, Year 1 School Leader, Year 2-Fall School Leader, and Year 2-Spring School Leader surveys:

[a] Year 1 Grantee: "Recruitment and selection process that effectively identifies members with characteristics/skills that correspond with the program objectives."

Year 1 School Leader: "AmeriCorps member recruitment and selection process that identifies and selects members with skills aligned with the program's objectives."

Year 2 Grantee and School Leader: "AmeriCorps member recruitment and selection process that effectively identifies members and selects members with characteristics/skills aligned with the program's objectives."

[b] Year 1 Grantee: "Multi-layered supervisory structure to ensure fidelity of program implementation."

Year 1 School Leader: "Clearly defined supervisory structure to ensure fidelity of program implementation."

Year 2 Grantee and School Leader: "Clearly defined multi-layered supervisory structure to ensure fidelity of program implementation."

[c] Year 1 Grantee: "Defined framework (e.g., RTI) to guide instructional choices and allow for the assessment of program effectiveness."

Year 1 School Leader: "Defined framework (e.g., RTI) to guide instructional choices and allow for the assessment of program effectiveness."

Year 2 Grantee and School Leader: "Clearly defined framework (e.g., RTI) to guide instructional choices and allow for the assessment of program effectiveness."

[d] This element did not appear in the Year 1 Grantee surveys.

[e] Year 1 Grantee: "Limited set of highly scripted interventions that have been shown to be effective (i.e., research based) in achieving desired student-level outcomes."

Year 1 and Year 2 School Leader: "Highly defined set of research-based interventions to improve desired student-level outcomes."

Year 2 Grantee: "Highly defined set of research-based scripted interventions to improve student-level outcomes." See Appendix Exhibits C-12 and C-20 for tables with all response options.

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 reads: Thirteen grantees and 100 percent of school leaders in Year 1 perceived that a "recruitment and selection process that identifies members with skills that correspond with the program objectives" is important or very important to implementation of AmeriCorps. Twelve grantees in Year 2-Fall, 100 percent of school leaders in Year 2-Fall, and 100 percent of school leaders in Year 2-Spring also perceived this as an important or very important element of implementation.

Effective Strategies That Continued or Increased over Time

Grantees' programs generally remained the same year over year (see Exhibit II-7), meaning that members' activities in schools were generally stable throughout the grant period. While about half of members interviewed reported that their activities changed over the course of the service year, most of these were minor changes, such as more time allowed for lesson planning, increased responsibility for leading other members, and increased after-school activities. Few members reported structural changes to their activities over time, such as diversifying small groups to incorporate multiple learning styles or changing from a pull-out tutoring model to in-class support.

Over the program's first three years, program implementation matured, as grantee programs both identified and adopted promising strategies and made strategy adjustments in response to challenges. This section describes the most prevalent, key changes to implementation, summarized in Exhibit II-16.

Exhibit II-16: Implementation Strategies and Change over Time

	Change over Time (2013–14 to 2015–16)
Effective Strategies	
Communication and collaboration between members and teachers, grantee programs and school leaders	↑
On-site coordinators	↑
Use of data to target students for services and tailor interventions	↑
Individualized attention from members to students	↔
Strategy Adjustments Based on Challenges	
Confusion and tension over members' roles	↓
Member recruitment and retention	↑
Training for members to address issues in preparation	↑
Loss of SIG funding/resources	↑

Notes:

↔   Represents a theme that continued at the same prevalence or intensity over time.

↑   Represents a theme that increased in prevalence or intensity over time.

↓   Represents a theme that decreased in prevalence or intensity over time.

Communication and Collaboration Between Members and Teachers, Grantee Programs and School Leaders (Increased)

The most pronounced change in program strategies from 2014–15 to 2015–16 was in the type and amount of communication and collaboration between program stakeholders (grantee programs and members) and school stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, and counselors). Understanding members' roles was an important theme across the majority of schools in both years of the evaluation, and well served by increasing communication among all stakeholders.

Several grantee programs emphasized communication and relationship development with districts and schools as means to settle into routines and work to create stronger, more efficient programming. These strong ties helped programs navigate challenges as they arose—such as using district relationships to help smooth over changes in school leadership—and facilitated programs and school and district

partners mutually supporting one another's goals. At the school level, for most case study schools and a minority of other schools, collaboration and communication between teachers and members increased teacher buy-in and understanding of members' roles. Several members specifically credited their ability to implement their interventions more effectively to developing stronger connections with school staff, which in turn helped members strengthen relationships with students and become more comfortable in school environments.

Notably, this strategy change was used both proactively—increasing communication in programs and schools that were already successful—and in response to challenges with members' roles, described below.

On-Site Coordinators (Small Increase)

On-site coordinators were widely perceived by stakeholders at majorities of schools and programs to be an effective means of organizing members' work in schools and maintaining open communication between school stakeholders and program members and staff. Interviewed stakeholders from a majority of schools and almost all programs reported using on-site coordinators in 2014–15. A few programs noted specific challenges with insufficient member supervision that year and chose to add on-site coordinators in 2015–16.

Use of Data to Target Students for Services and Tailor Interventions (Increased)

All grantee programs and interviewed stakeholders from about half of the schools (and almost all case study schools) reported using data frequently to identify students for School Turnaround AmeriCorps member interventions and to assess student progress. Several program staff and members, and some school stakeholders, also reported some challenges with data. For programs, these challenges included inability to access school or district student data and limited staff capacity to handle large volumes of data.

In 2015–16, grantee programs had taken more proactive steps to negotiate data-sharing agreements with schools and districts and to align their reporting periods with school grading periods (to get more meaningful views of student progress). Programs also in a few cases provided staff to schools to handle student data for the program and sometimes to boost the school's overall capacity to manage student data. Schools also improved their ability to use data by increasing professional development for teachers in using assessment data to tailor their instructional strategies, which also meant teachers increased their skills for reviewing student data with members to help tailor members' interventions.

Individualized Attention from Members to Students (Continued)

Members providing individualized attention to students was reported by stakeholders from a majority of schools and programs to be among the most effective mechanisms for members to positively affect the outcomes of the students in their caseloads. This was due both to members building trusting relationships with their students and to the more targeted instruction members were able to provide.

Over the two years of the evaluation, schools continued to engage in this strategy; no schools or programs reported decreasing their use of this strategy. Across both years, a majority of principals and teachers from program schools reported members building positive relationships with students.

Strategy Adjustments Based on Challenges

Confusion and Tension over Members' Roles (Improved)

To make members' experiences successful, grantee programs worked to ensure the members felt like valued contributors to the school community, set and organized members' schedules, and helped

members' roles be understood by school staff. Overall, the challenges with confusion over members' roles, while they did persist, were significantly less in 2015–16 compared with prior years. One grantee program helped its members hone an "elevator speech" about their roles in the school so that school staff would learn why the members were there and how they could be helpful.

One program staff, however, described persistent challenges over two years in one school with having members' roles understood. The staff reported having tried several strategies but that, "if anything, … it got worse." Ultimately, this program resolved the issue by dropping the school (School 6A) from its partnership and working with another partner district to identify a different school with more buy-in to the program and capacity to support members. The improved level of understanding of members' roles overall seems likely to be related to improvements in the communication and relationships between programs and partner schools, most of which occurred in the third year of implementation.

Member Recruitment and Retention (Improved)

All grantee programs experienced challenges with member recruitment and retention, though these challenges lessened somewhat in 2015–16 compared with prior years. The modest improvement may have emerged from several strategies grantee programs employed. In response to recruitment challenges, programs (and in a few cases, school partners that were partially responsible for recruiting) sought to begin recruiting earlier in the year and to diversify their advertising channels, including using social media. Retention problems persisted over both years of the evaluation, and programs also used a variety of strategies to address member turnover. These strategies included more and clearer up-front communication with prospective members about service commitments and the stipend, conditions, and challenges in turnaround schools, as well as contingency plans for members when personal circumstances interfered with service.

Training for Members to Address Issues in Preparation (Increased)

A minority of schools and members over the two years of the evaluation consistently described shortcomings in members' preparation to work in turnaround schools, most often because they lacked skills in managing student behavior, preparation for understanding students' socio-emotional challenges, and training in the host school's specific interventions or policies. Across years, almost all grantee programs reported providing member training, and a majority of schools provided school-based training and/or professional development for members.

Both grantee programs and schools (a minority of each) reported providing members more and more-targeted trainings in 2015–16 compared with 2014–15. Several programs provided more training to members in response to reports of them being underprepared for the specific conditions of their service—such as cultural competency training for working in diverse school settings and on the demographics and conditions of the schools. Teachers and principals in a majority of program schools described providing on-site training to build members' confidence and ensure that members knew exactly how to support them and work in their classrooms effectively, which also helped build teachers' trust in members' contributions.[70]

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[70] This finding emerged in significantly more case study schools than schools where only the principal was interviewed. It may be that more case study schools offered this training compared with other schools; it may also be that the single principal interviews did not elicit information on members' on-site training as did the more in-depth case study interview protocols.

Loss of SIG Funding/Resources (Increased)

A minority of schools described with some frustration that as their schools improved their performance, they lost resources—SIG supports, School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, or both. This was perceived as a perverse incentive, for schools to lose more resources the better they were performing, even though they attributed part of their success to the contributions of those resources. A few principals specifically noted that they received smaller member cohorts as their schools improved.

All four SIG Exiter schools profiled in case studies noted a version of this theme. The loss of SIG and School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources was likely more pronounced for the SIG Exiter schools because they experienced the most improvement (and concomitant loss of resources associated with SIG status). Two SIG Exiter schools lost all SIG resources, including School Turnaround AmeriCorps, upon exit. For the other two SIG Exiters, the AmeriCorps members provided a much-needed, albeit temporary, boost to those schools' capacity after other supports, such as instructional specialists, coaches, and grant funds, were withdrawn. (As noted in the SIG Exiter case studies, grantee programs sometimes need to reallocate members based on the needs of their partner districts overall.)

Grantee programs echoed these concerns in both Year 1 and Year 2 interviews. While almost all programs noted challenges with a lack of resources in their partner schools, a minority of programs in each year specifically identified concerns about not having sustainable interventions in those schools. In a few cases, programs sought to train and recruit teachers and external volunteers to continue the AmeriCorps members' activities when they were gone. In 2015–16, several grantee programs discussed having to discontinue School Turnaround AmeriCorps interventions at certain schools and the negative impact the withdrawal of members had on the schools.

III. PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF AMERICORPS SERVICES IN SUPPORTING SCHOOL TURNAROUND EFFORTS

This chapter addresses the broad question, What are the perceived impacts of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in supporting a school's turnaround plan and achieving its desired outcomes?" It presents the broad findings on perceptions of the program's overall success and the perceived value of the partnership to school stakeholders. It then describes school leaders' turnaround goals for student outcomes and program stakeholders' perceived impacts of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program on specific student and school outcomes, including the perceived impacts achieved by case study schools in specific student and school outcomes.

Data sources include the case study research, School Leader and Staff surveys, Grantee surveys, principal individual and small-group interviews, parent interviews, member interviews, and grantee staff and member focus groups.[71]

Summary of Perceived Impact Findings over Time

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

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - **Program Schools** (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies, School Leader and Staff surveys)
> - **Grantee Programs** (n=13: Grantee survey, interviews, member interviews)

- The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is perceived as contributing positively to key student outcomes, including students' academic achievement and socio-emotional health; these findings reflect perceptions of the large majority of grantee staff, school leaders and staff, and parents in Year 1, and grantee staff and school leaders in Year 2.

- A majority of grantee staff ranked enhanced achievement as the most important student outcome for school turnaround efforts in both years. In both years, nearly all grantee staff reported improvement in outcomes for students served by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in all or most of their partner schools, with the greatest degree of improvement reported in academic achievement.[72]

- Nearly all school leaders in both years reported improvement in student outcomes, with the greatest degree of improvement reported in academic achievement, followed by increased motivation and increased attendance. School 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.

- School staff also reported significant or moderate improvements in participating students' classroom or classwork behaviors in Year 1, in terms of being regularly attentive in class,

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[71] 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.

[72] Improvement in academic achievement is based on survey responses, not direct analysis of academic achievement measures by the study team. Survey respondents were not asked to indicate on what basis they claimed improved academic achievement (e.g., based on individual student-level comparisons of standardized test scores or end-of-year grades).

participating in class, getting along well with other students, and coming to school motivated to learn.

- School stakeholders in program schools consistently characterized members' assistance as valuable in helping their schools address turnaround goals, regardless of the number of members serving within the school (the number ranged from 1 to 22). School stakeholders most often reported that members affected students' socio-emotional well-being and academic engagement, with stakeholders from about half of schools perceiving members as positively affecting school climate, and a substantial minority reporting improvements in student academic achievement.

- School stakeholders in about half of program schools reported that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members increased capacity in classrooms and improved their school's ability to address students' academic as well as socio-emotional needs comprehensively.

- In all four SIG Exiter schools (and about half of all program schools), school stakeholders perceived their School Turnaround AmeriCorps members as increasing the school's capacity to implement its turnaround efforts. Stakeholders credited members' contributions to increased capacity by providing additional classroom support that allowed teachers to focus on the entire class and by providing tailored, one-on-one support for individual students, academically and through relationship building.

Perceived Overall Success of School Turnaround AmeriCorps

Stakeholder Perceptions of Overall Program Success

Almost all (more than 90 percent) of surveyed school leaders and staff in Year 1 and school leaders in Year 2 reported that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program was somewhat or very successful as a whole. Similar proportions noted the program's success in improving the school's capacity to implement the turnaround plan and to improve school climate (see Exhibit III-1).

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-1: School Leader, Staff, and Parent Perceptions of Success of School Turnaround AmeriCorps (Year 1 and Year 2)
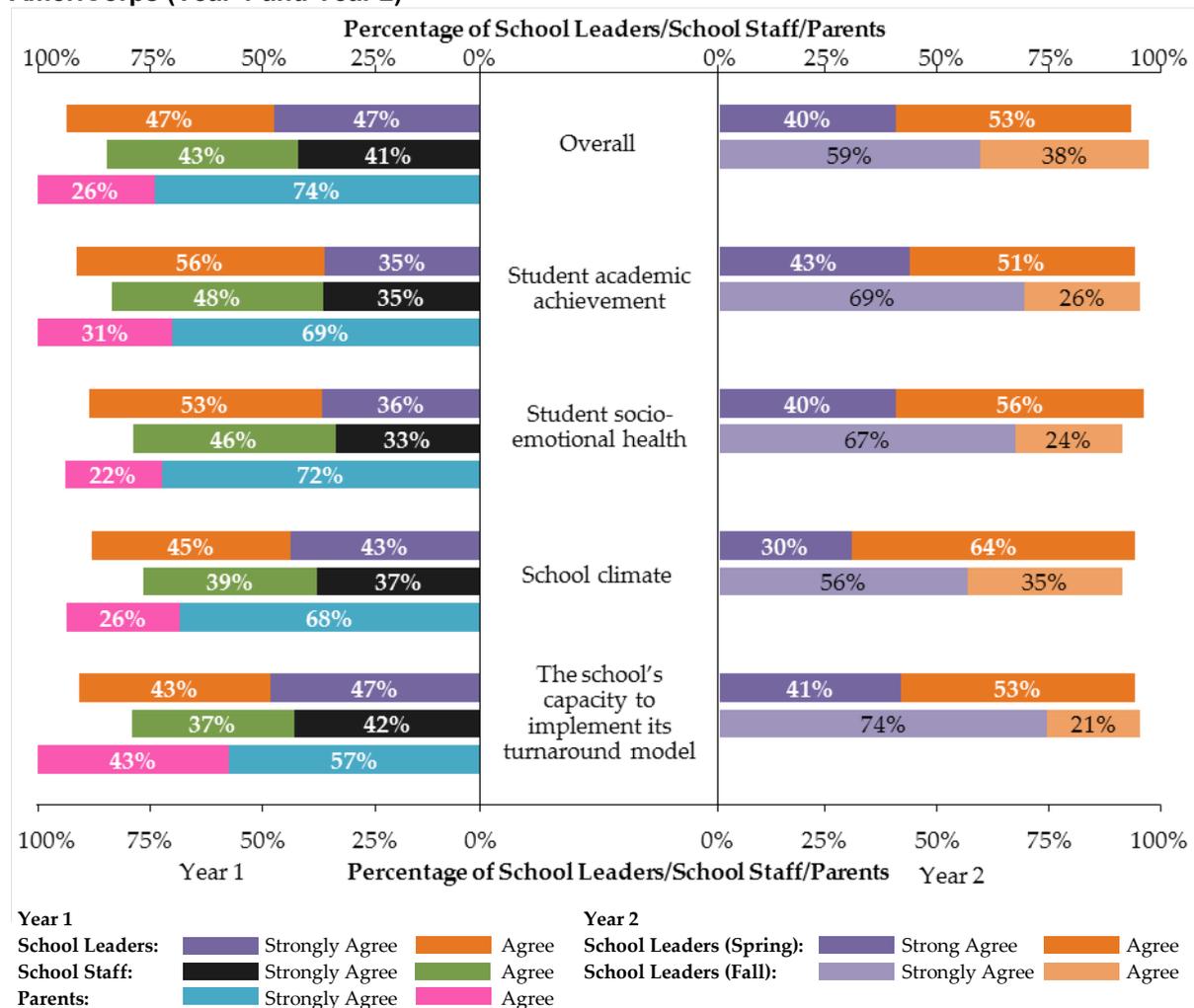
Notes: School Leaders Year 1 (N=38, Missing=1). School Leaders Year 2-Fall (N=37, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 2-Spring (N=40, Missing=0). School Staff Year 1 (N=155, Missing=2-5). Parents Year 1 (N=38, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 1: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0-1. School Leaders Year 2-Fall: No respondents indicated that this question was not applicable. School Leaders Year 2-Spring: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0-1. Year 1 and 3: Chart excludes school leaders who indicated not applicable. School Staff Year 1: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 6-11. Responses limited to school staff who worked with at least one student in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Parents Year 1: Number of respondents who did not know ranged from 2 - 8. Responses limited to those familiar with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Exhibit sorted by response option in survey. See Appendix Exhibits C-28, C-51, and C-56 for tables with all response options.

Source: School Leader Survey Q17 ("In your opinion, how successful is the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in the following areas this school year? (Mark one response in each row.)"). School Staff Survey Q19 ("In your opinion, how successful is the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in the following areas this school year? (Mark one response in each row.)"). Parent Interview Q11–Q15 (On a scale of 1–4, what is your perception of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program's success in terms of "Overall", "Student academic achievement", "student socio-emotional health", "School climate", "The school's capacity to implement its turnaround model")

Exhibit reads: 91% of school leaders in Year 1, 95% of school leaders in Year 2-Fall, 94% of school leaders in Year 2-Spring, 83% of school staff in Year 1 and 100% of parents in Year 1 perceived School Turnaround AmeriCorps to be very successful or somewhat successful in improving student academic achievement.

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Value of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Partnership

Exhibit III-2 shows the proportion of school leader, school staff, and parent respondents who strongly agreed and/or agreed with statements about the perceived value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps in Year 1 and Year 2.[73] Large majorities of school leaders in both years 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. Agreement was strongest in Year 2-Fall. Staff reported generally positive perceptions of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members. The majority of staff in Year 1 (80 percent or more) perceive that 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 members.

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[73] Grantee staff were not asked their perceptions of the value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps. School staff and parents were surveyed only in Year 1.

Exhibit III-2: School Leader, Staff, and Parent Perceptions of Value of School Turnaround AmeriCorps (Year 1 and Year 2)

Percent of School Leaders/School Staff/Parents

Year 1 — **Year 2**

Statements:
- AmeriCorps members provide helpful support to the students in this school
- AmeriCorps members offer supports that are beneficial to the teachers in this school[a]
- AmeriCorps members are important partners in improving student outcomes
- AmeriCorps activities occur frequently enough to be valuable
- AmeriCorps members engage parents/guardians to become involved in their children's school[b]
- AmeriCorps members provide access to information and resources to parents/guardians about how they can support their children's education[b]

Year 1 data:
- Helpful support: School Leaders 55%, 45%; School Staff 63%, 31%; Parents 18%, 74%
- Beneficial to teachers: School Leaders 51%, 38%; School Staff 58%, 27%
- Important partners: School Leaders 53%, 40%; School Staff 59%, 30%; Parents 34%, 58%
- Activities occur frequently: School Leaders 63%, 28%; School Staff 49%, 26%; Parents 42%, 47%
- Engage parents: School Leaders 61%, 14%
- Provide access: School Leaders 69%, 14%

Year 2 data:
- Helpful support: Spring 52%, 43%; Fall 75%, 22%
- Beneficial to teachers: Spring 46%, 47%; Fall 63%, 31%
- Important partners: Spring 41%, 48%; Fall 58%, 36%
- Activities occur frequently: Spring 30%, 49%; Fall 46%, 45%
- Engage parents: Spring 22%, 54%; Fall 28%, 39%
- Provide access: Spring 20%, 43%; Fall 29%, 49%

Percent of School Leaders/School Staff/Parents

Year 1
School Leaders: Strongly Agree, Agree
School Staff: Strongly Agree, Agree
Parents: Strongly Agree, Agree

Year 2
School Leaders (Spring): Strong Agree, Agree
School Leaders (Fall): Strongly Agree, Agree

Notes: School Leaders Year 1 (N=38, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 2-Fall (N=37, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 2-Spring (N=40, Missing=1).School Staff Year 1 (N=155-215, Missing=1-5). Parents Year 1 (N=38, Missing=0). School Leaders Year 1: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0-3. School Leaders Year 2-Fall: No respondents indicated that this question was not applicable. School Leaders Year 2-Spring: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0-4. Year 1 and 3: Chart excludes school leaders who indicated not applicable. School Staff Year 1: Responses limited to school staff restricted who worked with at least one student in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Parents Year 1: Number of respondents who did not know ranged from 2-3. Responses limited to those familiar with the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Exhibit sorted by Year 2-Spring School Leader responses. See Appendix Exhibits C-29, C-49, and C-55 for tables with all response options.

[a] Question asked of school leaders and school staff only.

[b] Question asked of school leaders only.

Source: School Leader Survey Q18 ("Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements this school year. (Mark one response in each row.)"). School Staff 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.)"). Parent Interview 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 reads: 100% of school leaders in Year 1, 94% of school staff in Year 1, 92% of parents in Year 1, 95% of school leaders in Year 2-Spring, and 97% of school leaders in Year 2-Fall, agreed or strongly agreed that "School Turnaround AmeriCorps members provide helpful support to the students in this school."

Across both years, principals of schools that were not involved in case studies reported positive perceptions of the program's impacts. Principals expressed both overall assessments of the program—or AmeriCorps generally—and specific assessments of each cohort and individual members. For example, at schools with longstanding grantee partnerships, principals acknowledged the enduring value of their partnership even if one particular year (or member) was challenging or underperformed. This reiterates the value of sustained relationship building between grantee programs and schools and/or districts, especially in light of documented challenges some grantee programs faced with either recruiting or retaining a sufficient number of members or members with desired skills or maturity.

Perceived Impacts Achieved by Program Schools

Interviews and case studies also examined how schools progressed on key components of their turnaround plans—specifically, student academic performance, school climate, students' socio-emotional well-being, and the school's capacity to meet its turnaround goals. With the support of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, most program schools—and all case study program schools— reported having impacts on students' socio-emotional health and academic engagement, as did the majority of comparison schools, as shown in Exhibit III-3.

The next most commonly reported impacts in program schools were on school climate and the school's capacity to reach its turnaround goals—reported by about half of total program schools and by almost all case study program schools. Finally, a minority of program schools—though a majority of case study program schools—reported improvements in students' academic achievement.

Exhibit III-3: Summary of Impacts Perceived by Program Schools

Key Turnaround Outcomes	Grantee Programs (n=13)	Program Schools (n=41, including 17 case studies)	Comparison Schools (n=12, all case studies)
Student academic achievement	12	16 (including 11 case studies)	5
Student socio-emotional well-being and academic engagement	13	27 (including 17 case studies)	10
School climate	13	21 (including 16 case studies)	11
School capacity to reach turnaround goals	12	21 (including 16 case studies)	2
Student academic achievement	12	16 (including 11 case studies)	5

Note: Table excerpted from Appendix Exhibit A-12.

Sources: Principal one-on-one interviews (2015), case study interviews (2015, 2016).

The following sections include the specific impacts achieved by the 41 program schools from which qualitative data were obtained (case studies or single interviews) and 12 comparison school case studies. The discussion draws heavily on case study school findings: Because of the greater depth involved in case studies, including interviews with multiple stakeholders, there is more detailed evidence of the impact of turnaround activities in those schools, including School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' contributions. AmeriCorps members contributed to their host schools' progress through a variety of means. The most prominent contributions they made, compared with similar schools without School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, were in providing socio-emotional supports, temporarily increasing schools' capacity, and (to a lesser degree) improving school climate and culture.

Findings from the SIG Exiter case studies provide a helpful lens for understanding the specific contributions School Turnaround AmeriCorps can make toward a successful exit from SIG status. These schools' experiences suggest that a combination of factors contributed to successful SIG exit. SIG Exiter schools had strong leaders who established a shared vision for achieving the school's turnaround goals; these leaders set a tone and promoted a culture of collaboration, and they implemented turnaround plans that empowered other school staff to take ownership in their school's success. Importantly for School Turnaround AmeriCorps, all four leaders embraced external partners and integrated them into the school's broader set of turnaround strategies in ways that leaders viewed most appropriate for their needs.

The SIG Exiter case study findings thus corroborate themes from other data sources about the importance of school leadership and culture in setting the tone for schools' receptivity and use of School Turnaround AmeriCorps resources. The SIG Exiter case studies also reinforce the findings from other data sources about successful strategies. Specifically, these were:

- Using data to match members and students as well as to inform and tailor interventions.

- Providing socio-emotional supports to students to help them become academically engaged in school. They did so by building relationships, implementing behavioral improvement plans, and providing attendance coaching.

- Tailoring small-group and one-on-one supports to give students individualized attention and support teachers' classrooms. This strategy required close collaboration between teachers and members.

The SIG Exiter schools did not explicitly describe how the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program contributed to improved student academic performance, yet all four schools' stakeholders perceived that their AmeriCorps members helped improve student academic engagement and their schools' capacity to implement their turnaround efforts. The stakeholders in these four schools clearly perceived that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members played a role in the schools' improvement, although the available data do not allow the study team to quantify the extent to which members contributed to these schools' successes more or less in the SIG Exiter schools than in other case study schools.

School Turnaround Goals for Student Outcomes

On average, in both Year 1 and Year 2, enhanced achievement was ranked as the most important student outcome for school turnaround efforts by all stakeholders (grantee staff, school leaders, and school staff) (see Appendix Exhibits C-8, C-9, C-10, C-46, C-48). In Year 1, grantee staff considered improved grades as the next highest ranked important outcome, whereas school leaders and staff prioritized motivation over grades. Attendance was ranked second by school leaders in Year 2-Fall and second by grantee staff in Year 2-Spring. In general, grantee staff, school leaders, and school staff reported slightly different priorities from one another and across years.

Among survey respondents, only school leaders were asked about the level of influence of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on their schools' 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, although the majority was slightly smaller in Year 2-Spring and higher in Year 2-Fall than in other time periods (see Exhibit III-4). 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.

Exhibit III-4: School Leader Perceptions of Level of Influence of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on School Turnaround Goals (Year 1 and Year 2)

Improving academic performance in ELA and/or math	Year 1: 85% / 15%	Year 2-Fall: 91% / 8%	Year 2-Spring: 85% / 15%
Establishing a school culture and environment that fosters school safety, attendance, and discipline	Year 1: 86% / 14%	Year 2-Fall: 95% / 5%	Year 2-Spring: 83% / 17%
Increasing college readiness and enrollment rates	Year 1: 82% / 18%	Year 2-Fall: 86% / 14%	Year 2-Spring: 68% / 32%
Increasing rates of high school graduation	Year 1: 74% / 26%	Year 2-Fall: 85% / 15%	Year 2-Spring: 66% / 33%
Providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement	Year 1: 63% / 37%	Year 2-Fall: 67% / 33%	Year 2-Spring: 59% / 42%

Year 1
- Some influence or Substantial influence
- Minimal influence or No influence

Year 2- Fall
- Some influence or Substantial influence
- Minimal influence or No influence

Year 2- Spring
- Some influence or Substantial influence
- Minimal influence or No influence

Notes: Year 1: (N=22-37, Missing=0-1); Year 2-Fall (N=21-37, Missing=1); Year 2-Spring (N=23-40, Missing=0).

Year 1: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 1 to 16. Year 2-Fall: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0 to 16. Year 2-Spring: Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0 to 17.

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.)")

Exhibit reads: 85% of school leaders in Year 1, 91% of school leaders in Year 2-Fall and 85% of school leaders in Year 2-Spring indicated that School Turnaround AmeriCorps had some influence or substantial influence on "Improving academic performance in ELA and/or math."

Perceived Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on Student Academic Achievement and Socio-Emotional Health Outcomes

Overall Perceived Impacts on Student Academic Achievement

As shown in Exhibit III-1, large majorities of school leaders, school staff, and parents across (applicable) years perceived that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is successful in improving student academic achievement. This trend has remained steady over Years 1 and 2 covering Spring 2015, Fall 2015, and Spring 2016.

Impacts on Student Academic Achievement Perceived by Program Schools

A minority of all program schools and a majority of the case study program schools reported improvements in students' academic achievement. This includes all six of the Year 2 case studies, three of the Year 1 case studies, and not surprisingly, all four of the SIG Exiter case studies that had improved enough to exit SIG or Priority status. A few schools referenced state or end-of-year test scores and noted explicitly that students' test scores had improved.

Stakeholders perceived that AmeriCorps members contributed to improvements in students' academic achievement: Stakeholders in some schools reported that members helped students improve in both reading/ELA and math, while stakeholders in a few other schools commented that they credited members with helping students improve in reading/ELA. Overall, almost all grantee programs reported their members having an impact on students' academic achievement. Specifically, in interviews in Spring 2016, a minority of grantee staff described the impact of their AmeriCorps members on increasing assessment scores for reading and/or math standardized testing. In a few instances, members were able to support students at schools that had

> **Improved Academic Achievement**
>
> "In English, we saw our [end-of-course] scores rise significantly; a large part is because there is another dedicated person that is constantly reinforcing what we're teaching. The data is there, we're seeing increas[es] in the number of kids who are passing. It only happens because all oars are rowing in the same direction."
>
> —*Teacher Interview (2016)*

switched to new standardized tests that they expected to be especially challenging for students. In one of these, the grantee program had prior experience with the assessment and had trained members specifically in how to work with it. These comport with school leader perceptions across all three time periods that academic achievement was the school improvement strategy (and improved academic achievement the school turnaround goal) most influenced by AmeriCorps members.

Importantly, in schools with improved academic achievement, it appeared that a combination of factors (including AmeriCorps, teacher professional development, extended learning time or new schedules, and new curricula) were responsible for higher academic achievement and could not be isolated to the AmeriCorps intervention.

Furthermore, by providing academic and college readiness supports, members helped to fill gaps in supporting academic achievement that students might not otherwise have filled in their home environments. A few program schools reported increasing their on-time graduation rates and/or college readiness, as did a minority of comparison schools. In program schools, members assisted failing students with online credit recovery sessions; in one comparison school (5B), two retired teachers ran a school-day program for failing students to make up coursework. College readiness activities included members encouraging, registering, and tutoring students for the ACT or helping them fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Overall Perceived Impacts on Students' Socio-Emotional Health and Student Engagement

Stakeholders' perceptions of the specific student outcomes influenced by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in Year 1 were largely similar, although the rankings differed modestly.[74] There are two distinct patterns and similarities across stakeholder groups that emerged from the survey findings. One, school-based respondents—both school administrators and staff—either were 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 Appendix Exhibits C-9A and C-9B). Two, stakeholders' perceptions of improvement track closely with their rankings of the most important student outcomes shown in Appendix Exhibits C-8, C-9A, C-9B, C-21, C-22, C-41, C-42 and C-43 (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 grantee 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 during the second year of implementation—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 III-5).[75] Generally, about twice as many school staff reported moderate rather than significant levels of improvement for students.

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[74]   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 grantee staff answered similar questions about the current (2014–15) school year. 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, grantee staff were asked about the current year's student outcomes because they were surveyed toward the end of the school year (Spring 2015) whereas school leaders were surveyed much earlier in the school year (Winter 2014). Because the Staff survey was fielded slightly later than the School Leaders survey, school staff were also asked about student outcomes for the current year.

[75]   Exhibit III-5 displays 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 about both the study sample and the variability of responses. Generally, the narrower the interval, the greater the confidence in the findings. For more information see footnote 45 in Bagnell Stuart et al. (2015).

Exhibit III-5: School Staff Perceptions of Changes in Student Behavior (Year 1)
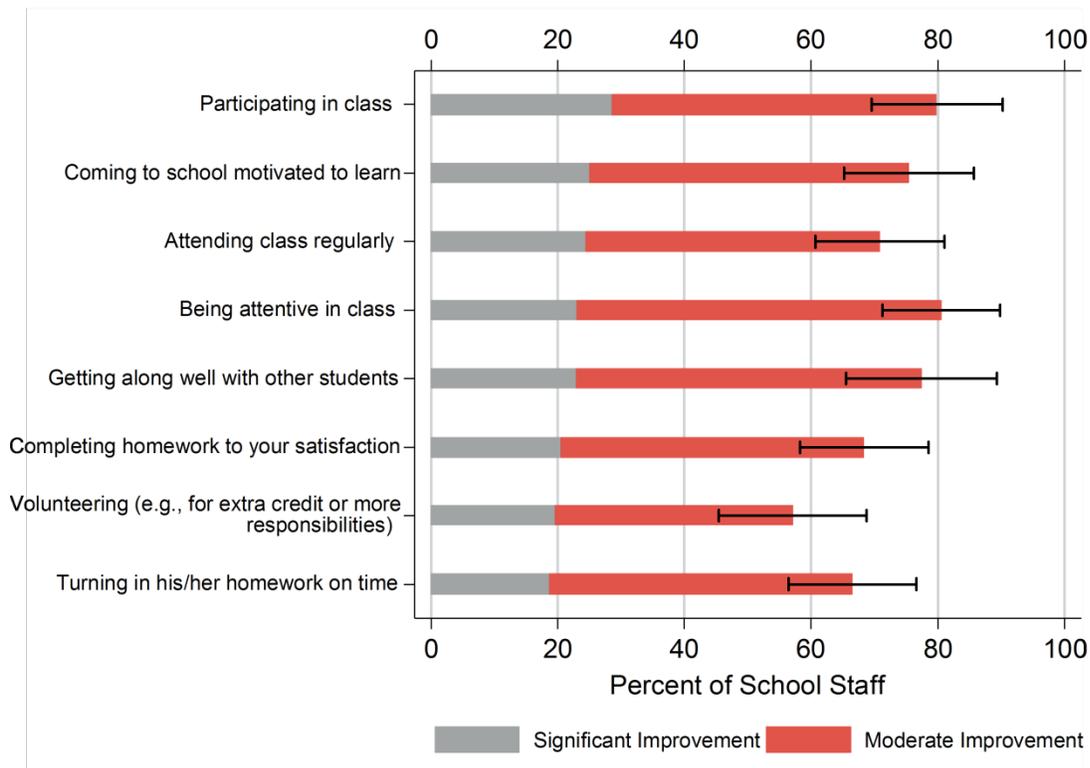
Notes: See Appendix Exhibits C-52 for tables with all response options.

Black capped lines are 95 percent confidence intervals (see Year 1 Final Report Appendix for details on how they were calculated).

Ninety-five percent confidence intervals 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 students 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.

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. …").

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.

Impacts on Student Socio-Emotional Health and Academic Engagement Perceived by Program Schools

Across both years of the evaluation, improvements to students' socio-emotional health and academic engagement were the strongest, most consistent impacts attributed to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Interviewed school stakeholders in a majority of program schools, including all 17 case study program schools, reported benefits to students' socio-emotional health that they specifically credited to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, as did all grantee programs by the end of the 2015–16 school year. One grantee staff, however, noted a tension between the program's positive influence and that members typically serve only one year in a school: "It takes time to build relationships with students and that they … felt like they really were in a groove further into the year." Several members affiliated with that program returned for a second year of service because they wanted to further their impact on the students and the school where they were serving.

> **Improved Academic Engagement**
>
> "I've had a student come up to me and he assists me in some of my duties here at the school. And he told me once … 'If I wasn't helping you, like helping me, I'd probably be in detention right now.' So basically he's saying, "You keep me on track.'"
>
> —*Member Interview (2016)*

This strong agreement about members' contributions to socio-emotional health compares with about half of comparison schools staff that reported improvements in students' socio-emotional health. Along with school capacity improvements, this is the largest gap between program and comparison schools and suggests that socio-emotional support is a major distinguishing component of what AmeriCorps members offer to struggling students.

Members added value to schools through their supports for socio-emotional learning (SEL), which are based on building trusting relationships with students. A substantial minority of case study stakeholders who mentioned positive relationships specifically noted trust as an important component of these relationships. The case study data indicate that engendering trust in relationships is important because it allowed students to share information with members that they may not have shared with teachers, other school staff, and in some cases, their parents. The information students reportedly shared with members but not teachers was more personal in nature, such as their feelings about troubles at home or appearing vulnerable for not knowing an academic concept.

Generally, respondents commented on the different forms that partners' socio-emotional supports could take, including tutoring, mentoring, college visits, career shadowing, or extracurricular activities. Notably, most respondents remarked on the socio-emotional value of the relationships formed through these activities to students' growth and development, regardless of the activities' focus, because of the relationships members developed with students in their caseloads. Many school stakeholders noted these relationships would form because students would share information with a member that they were not sharing with other school staff. Sometimes this was because members were perceived as closer to peers, and thus students would feel more comfortable sharing personal struggles with people they did not perceive as authority figures; in other cases, it was explicitly because teachers cannot give all students individualized attention because they are responsible for managing the whole classroom.

> **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 (2015)*

One aspect that was important in this relationship was member consistency. By serving as a consistent, daily presence at schools, members made students felt more comfortable seeking relationships and assistance.

These relationships often encouraged students to succeed academically and behaviorally, while allowing students to have a resource they trusted to help them solve problems (both academic and personal). Because of their positive relationships with members, students were reported (by teachers, members, and parents) to be more motivated and academically engaged. Additionally, these trusting relationships also helped students be better prepared to learn. A few schools identified this relationship building as increasing students' confidence and, in several cases, also improving students' relationships with teachers.

At a minority of schools, strong member-student relationships helped encourage more regular student attendance, because students looked forward to seeing members in school. Members' interventions were also specifically targeted to improve attendance at several schools, whether this was through attendance monitoring and mentoring (e.g., Schools 5A, 6A) or through leading a "walking school bus" (SIG Exiter 2), members employed varied strategies to motivate students to come to school.

Perceived Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program on School Climate

Overall Perceived Impacts on School Climate

Findings from multiple stakeholders suggest that School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs have had positive impacts on their schools. The programs made contributions to school culture, school improvement, and both general and targeted contributions to improvements for participating students. School leaders and staff all have positive perceptions of the program's impact, with school leaders' perceptions being consistently (albeit moderately) more positive than school staff perceptions (see Appendix Exhibits C-18 and C-56).

Impacts on School Climate Perceived by Program Schools

Improvements in school climate were reported by interviewed stakeholders in about half of all program schools, almost all case study program schools, all grantee programs, and also in almost all comparison schools. Stakeholders from most of the program schools specifically mentioned AmeriCorps members positively influencing the school climate in several respects, which in turn positively influenced student outcomes. One grantee concurred, observing that members "have the time in their day to announce and say everything good they see," contributing to a positive school culture.

First, school climate improved through programs placing members committed to one year of service, which established a consistent AmeriCorps presence in schools throughout the year. By providing a full-time presence of additional trusted and caring adults and near peers in the schools, members supplemented students' relationships in school and at home and expanded their network of social supports.

Second, member presence is an element of many of the turnaround strategies described above. For example, through individualized, one-on-one academic supports and building positive, caring relationships with students, AmeriCorps members helped foster a school climate that values academic achievement in which students want to succeed. In several high schools, AmeriCorps members' influence was as acting as positive role models, nurturing students' interest in and confidence about attending college.

Third, members supported positive school climate when they participated in activities (e.g., extracurricular and community service activities) outside of their planned interventions, which helped to

increase student engagement. School stakeholders viewed members' voluntary participation in school activities as constructive contributions toward encouraging and celebrating student engagement in the school community.

Fourth, in tandem with the socio-emotional supports members provided, they also served as positive role models who made school a more supportive and encouraging environment where students wanted to be. Members in several schools contributed either by leading interventions specifically supporting the school's values or by implementing the Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) program.

These findings reinforce the hypothesis that integrating members into the school's culture and operations as key members of the school community helped to strengthen relationships with school staff and students.

Because almost all comparison schools also reported improvements in school climate, it is unlikely that AmeriCorps members were solely responsible for school climate improvements in their host schools. Instead, members supported and augmented the school climate initiatives designed by their host schools.

Perceived Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program on School Capacity

Impact of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on School Capacity Perceived by Case Study Schools

Stakeholders from about half of program schools, including almost all case study program schools, described multiple ways in which their turnaround strategies helped improve their school's capacity to meet turnaround goals. Only a couple of comparison schools also reported improvements in school capacity, making this the largest gap between program and comparison schools along the dimensions of impact described in this report. Stakeholders from both program and comparison schools noted capacity improvements in three areas: leveraging grants and partners to increase the services and opportunities available to students; hiring or assigning a dedicated staff member responsible for managing and analyzing student data; and improvements in teacher professional development systems and practices. Program schools did not attribute all of these capacity gains solely to AmeriCorps contributions.

Stakeholders in a minority of program schools overall reported a specific capacity improvement from AmeriCorps members' classroom support, which improved their school's ability to address students' academic as well as socio-emotional needs comprehensively. This came from members' consistent presence in classrooms that enabled the teachers to differentiate instruction into smaller, more-targeted groups or one-on-one with struggling students as needed. Teachers also noted that they do not have the ability to give all students individualized attention because they are responsible for managing the whole classroom. Hence, this level of individualization would be impossible without AmeriCorps members and certain students' needs would not have been met without them. Further, a minority of schools (especially in 2014–15) used members to bolster parental engagement strategies, such as through making calls home about attendance or supporting parent nights at school. In a few schools, AmeriCorps members also served to increase school capacity by helping to monitor student data and discussing it with school staff, allowing staff to focus more on teaching.

Notably, a majority of SIG Exiters described experiencing a detrimental decline in resources when they exited SIG status. These included the loss of instructional specialists, coaches, counselors, and other support staff, as well as reduced funding for professional development and supplies. For half of the SIG Exiter schools, the lost resources also included their School Turnaround AmeriCorps members—a tension that their respective grantee staff also noted.

IV. PARTNERSHIP FINDINGS

This chapter addresses the following broad research question, Which aspects of grantee program-school partnerships appear to be the most promising practices in terms of involvement and satisfaction of the school leadership and the participating AmeriCorps members?

Data sources include these: Grantee surveys and grantee staff interviews; School Leader and Staff surveys; case study interviews and/or focus groups with school leaders, teachers, parents, and members; principal small-group interviews; member interviews and focus groups; partnership agreements; and grantee progress reports.

Summary of Partnership Findings over Time

Findings about partnership structures indicate that programs generally considered partnership agreements as useful tools for setting up their partnerships, while most programs used on-site coordinators for supervising members and managing relationships with school stakeholders throughout the year:

- Grantee staff and principals reported that partnership agreements are useful tools for defining roles and responsibilities in the partnership planning stage, but they are seldom invoked to address implementation challenges later in the partnership.

- A majority of the updated partnership agreements from 2015–16 differed from those of the previous year, and they included more specificity about partners' responsibilities, the relationship between the intervention activities and school improvement goals, and in granting more autonomy to those implementing the program.

Findings about grantee program-school partnerships and participation suggest that stability in relationships over time is related to improved communication and program implementation efforts, while the converse is true when school leader turnover and other conditions disrupt the relationship-building process:

- In both years, a majority of grantee staff reported having had pre-existing relationships with partner schools of at least two years duration before implementation of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Most of grantee staff characterized their interactions with schools as highly collegial, with frequent communication and collaboration. Some grantee staff in Year 2 did not report having frequent communication and collaboration.

- Dynamic school environments, especially principal turnover, posed an ongoing, inherent challenge to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Whereas programs can deepen their relationships and service effectiveness in schools with stable leadership and partnerships, changes in school leadership require re-establishing buy-in to the program and rebuilding understanding of and trust in the program and members' service.

> **Units of Analysis (and Data Sources) for This Section**
>
> - **_Program Schools_** (n=41: 47 principal interviews, 50 parent interviews, 17 program school case studies)
> - **_Grantee Programs_** (n=13: grantee interviews, GPRs, written partnership agreements)

- Almost all grantee programs described focusing on issues related to communication and relationships with schools and school staff, and about half reported overcoming these issues. One

program, for example, purposefully added on-site supervisors in the 2015–16 school year at each of its three partner schools to improve communication.

One of the evaluation's strongest findings, reported in both years of the evaluation across all stakeholders, was members' ability to forge strong relationships with students:

- All grantee programs, a majority of schools, and about half of principals reported that positive relationships between members and students have a positive impact on students' academic engagement and behavior and/or are effective at meeting school turnaround goals.

Overall, all stakeholders reported high levels of satisfaction with their partnerships, both broadly with program operations and specifically with elements of program implementation.

A minority of grantee programs reported challenges with partnerships:

- Among those school leaders and staff who were familiar with the program in Years 1 and 2, 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.

- Grantee staff reported being very satisfied or satisfied with all elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps program operations. Overall, more grantee staff indicated satisfaction in Year 2 than in Year 1, although the strength of satisfaction moderately decreased from Year 1 to Year 2. Generally, a majority of grantee staff were satisfied with all the elements of the program in both years.

- Most grantee programs and a minority of schools reported a challenge with confusion over members' roles.

- Other challenges reported by a minority of programs and schools were, balancing district and school needs, cultivating principal and (more commonly) teacher buy-in, and some schools' mixed experiences with member quality and consistency, suggesting a need for greater member supervision and training.

Written Grantee Program-School Partnership Agreements

CNCS Grant Requirements and Guidance for Grantee-School Partnerships

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 [local education agency] turnaround plans, as well as the parties' plan for ongoing collaboration."[76] 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.

For the 2016–17 application process, CNCS issued updated guidance on partnership agreements to ensure they describe how grantee activities align with schools' turnaround plans and how the parties will collaborate throughout the grant period.[77]

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[76]   Corporation for National and Community Service, *Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13*, p. 31.

[77]   See *2016 Notice of Funding Opportunity, School Turnaround AmeriCorps Appendix* (pp. 8–9). The partnership agreements reviewed for this report were not expected to follow the updated guidance.

Content and Elements of Written Partnership Agreements

In Year 1, the majority of grantee programs explicitly described their strategies for addressing the CNCS-required elements in their partnership agreements with schools. The level of detail and length of partnership agreements varied significantly, from a single-page outline to a 20-page document with a separate data use agreement.

In Year 2 the study team obtained written partnership agreements from 11 of 13 grantee programs. A majority of the written partnership agreements (8 of 11) showed greater detail than in Year 1. Three agreements specified additional aspects of the partners' responsibilities; for example, one referenced schools' responsibility to select members by a certain date or have them assigned to another school. Two agreements added details on how the intervention activities map to school goals. Two agreements also granted more autonomy to those implementing the program: in one case, the school, and in the other, members to set and validate thresholds for participating students. Three agreements provided more detail on member roles and responsibilities and school responsibilities for supporting members, such as providing a work space with internet access for members' use and the school playing a bigger role in tracking members' activities.

Setup and Use of Partnership Agreements in Practice

Generally, in Year 1, grantee staff perceived partnership agreements as documents that outlined partners' roles and responsibilities, not as tools for program implementation. Five grantee staff specifically described the agreement as recourse if and when a partner was not meeting its obligations. These same five grantee staff also reported they had very strong collaborations with their school partners and had not "needed to" refer back to the partnership agreements.

As in Year 1, grantee staff and principals in Year 2 characterized partnership agreements as tools that can be useful in the planning stage of establishing the partnership but that are seldom used during implementation. Interviews suggest that conversations about partnership agreements are more robust when partnerships are first established than they are annually. Some grantee staff noted that their partnership agreements do not involve a lot of "back and forth" with school leaders, while some more indicated they use a memorandum of understanding or a template for all partner schools. Some grantee staff indicated that they met with or communicated with school leaders prior to signing agreements to ensure buy-in at partner schools.

Most principals asked directly about the partnership agreement indicated they were not involved in drafting partnership agreements for their schools (only a few were). Those not involved generally described "signing the partnership agreement" as the first time the school and grantee program created and signed an agreement. Some of these principals were new to their turnaround schools, and had not, therefore, been part of the initial drafting and signing of the original agreement. Overall, however, principals had to sign an updated partnership agreement at the beginning of each consecutive school year.[78]

One principal who had participated in the original drafting of the school's agreement had been "heavily" involved and described it as an effective document. Another had previously been an assistant principal at another school with AmeriCorps presence, and believed the experience shaped his partnership agreement and gave him an "advantage" in drafting the document.

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[78] It is unclear what level of engagement principals had with updating the partnership agreement at the two schools where assistant principals were interviewed.

Although principal turnover requires grantee programs to reestablish relationships and develop a new understanding of the program, there was little evidence of programs using partnership agreements in those instances. One grantee, however, expressed a strong opinion about the partnership agreement's value, describing it as a key tool: "I don't think we can do what we do without an agreement. … People transition, and so you need to have an agreement that regardless of who's where, that we're all on the same page."

In contrast to Year 1, in a few cases in Year 2, grantee programs used partnership agreements to address specific problems. One grantee described the agreement's primary use as a "planning document" that lacks concrete power, explaining, "Honestly, it's not like we have some sort of giant hammer we can hang over the head of school districts. If the principal doesn't want to do it, they don't want to do it." However, the grantee added that they used the agreement "maybe a couple times a year" to open discussions with schools around various challenges, demonstrating that it is useful for resolving implementation challenges.

School Partnerships: Relationship-Building, Communication, and Collaboration Practices

In Year 1 of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps evaluation (2014–15, the second year of implementation), findings on partnership revolved around the quality, preparedness, and training of AmeriCorps members and the experiences and challenges grantee programs encountered while setting up their program operations and administering their grants. Representatives from each of the 13 grantee programs were interviewed four times, twice in the 2014–15 school year and twice in the 2015–16 school year.[79]

Their responses from both years suggest that programs faced an initial learning curve with the new program but that start-up challenges abated toward the end of the second year of implementation and further diminished in the third. By the end of the second year of the grant, grantee programs were discussing topics such as ongoing communication and relationship-building needs, challenges posed by external circumstances, and changes to implementation—all of which reflected maturation in program implementation and were themes that continued to be prevalent in the third year of the grant. In the third year, an even heavier emphasis on a varied set of relationships emerged—those between members and students, members and teachers, and programs and schools. These findings are summarized in Exhibit IV-1 below.

Exhibit IV-1: Summary of Partnership Findings

	Grantee Programs (n=13)	Program Schools (n=41, including 17 case studies)
Members' positive relationships with students	13	29
Members' positive relationships with teachers	12	29
Grantees' positive relationships with schools	12	6

Note: Table excerpted from Exhibit A-12, Prevalence of Themes by Unit of Analysis, Stakeholder, and Change over Time. Please see Exhibit A-12 for more detail.

In the final interviews of Year 2 of the evaluation, both program schools and grantee programs had begun to grapple with the loss of SIG funding and/or the impending loss of their School Turnaround AmeriCorps grant, leading to questions of sustainability. This was particularly true for schools that were close to or had met their turnaround goals, which oftentimes resulted in a cut in funding and resources.

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[79]   Grantee staff from one program was interviewed three times.

Grantee Programs' Relationships with Schools

Establishing and operating effective turnaround models require 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 grantee programs' perspective, as a majority of the programs in both years (11 of 13) reported having had relationships with at least some of their target schools before implementation of School Turnaround AmeriCorps, but the length of these relationships varied (see Appendix Exhibit C-1). Most of grantee staff reported having had pre-existing relationships with partner schools of at least two years' duration before implementation.

As discussed in the **Case Study Cross-Site Analysis** section, support from school leaders is a critical component to successful implementation of School Turnaround AmeriCorps—a perspective that was not only evident in case study schools but echoed strongly by grantee staff. All 13 grantee staff in their final Year 2 interviews discussed the importance of having dedicated relationships with school principals at their host schools, with some specifically noting that school leaders' support enabled School Turnaround AmeriCorps members to achieve their goals.

Even though grantee programs generally matured in their implementation of services over the first three years, each year represented a new beginning in other ways. Specifically, each year, programs recruited a new cohort of members and reestablished services in school contexts that had experienced changes in leadership, staff, and/or student needs. About half of programs added or removed schools to or from their partnership in 2015–16, as shown in Exhibit IV-2.

Exhibit IV-2: School Turnaround AmeriCorps School Partnerships by School Year

Count	2014–15	2015–16
Grantee Programs	13	13
Schools	72	69
New Schools Added to Partnerships	4	13
Schools Dropped from Partnerships	2	16

Sources: Corporation for National and Community Service, *FY15 School Turnaround AmeriCorps Approved Schools*" and phone calls made to program schools by the study team, August–December 2015.

Exhibit reads: Of the 72 schools with which the 13 grantee programs partnered in school year 2014–15, 4 new schools were added to the partnerships and 2 schools were dropped from the partnerships.

Among the minority of grantee programs that added schools, they coordinated with districts to provide extra support to schools in need of additional resources. Other programs received grant expansions that allowed them to add more schools; one grantee wanted to expand its reach throughout the feeder pattern of a school it partnered with the prior year. Among the four programs that dropped schools for the 2015–16 school year, the capacity, demographics, or needs of the school changed in ways that could no longer support the AmeriCorps presence.[80] Three programs discussed not being able to continue in certain schools, two due to a school's change in turnaround status and in the other due to a district discontinuing matching funds for School Turnaround AmeriCorps. The staff of the grantee program that could not continue its support of a school due to its new status described "delivering the news" to school staff in a

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[80]   Two grantees replaced and added partner schools because they believed their resources could be put to better use elsewhere.

staff meeting and it being "not a great day" even as the program strove to figure out how to continue the support of the school after its change in status.

Members' Relationships with Teachers

Members' relationships with teachers were also a key connection that laid the groundwork for success in School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs, especially those that involved members serving directly in teachers' classrooms.

Collaboration between teachers and members is an important mechanism in member and intervention effectiveness and its use appeared to increase from Year 1 to Year 2. Among case study schools, some program schools reported member-teacher collaboration and member classroom support as an effective turnaround strategy. Stakeholders across all program schools viewed as beneficial the types of academic supports members provided, including small-group and one-on-one interventions and push-in classroom support to keep students on task. This was primarily because these interventions allowed members to use different teaching techniques or to support students in ways that teachers were not able to.

In addition, collaboration and communication between teachers and members increased teacher buy-in and understanding of members' roles. When member and teacher communication and collaboration functioned well in a school, teachers praised the members (reported by most program schools); in schools where communication and collaboration functioned less well (a few schools), teachers perceived members as burdensome or ineffective.

Two grantee staff in their final interviews shared lessons learned in Year 2 that reflected the importance of engaging teachers in members' work. One grantee staff noted that the most important and hardest hurdle for grantee programs is "getting the message [about how to work with an AmeriCorps program] to the teachers." In order to convey program details and collaboration strategies to teachers effectively, the grantee drafted action plans that included attending staff meetings to explain the roles of members. A second grantee program collaborated with its host school to identify new teachers who would be open and receptive to working with members. The grantee requested that principals ask prospective new teachers in their interviews, "When you're working in this school you will have a [GRANTEE] Corps member to help you reach your academic goals. How do you best see this implementation going?" As a result of this process, the program believed that it was "easily able to identify teachers who had the correct mindset and openness and willingness" to work with members. The school's willingness to modify its interview process to accommodate the AmeriCorps program speaks to the high value the school places on the contributions made by AmeriCorps.

Members' Relationships with Students

One of the evaluation's strongest findings, reported in both years of the evaluation across all stakeholders, was members' ability to forge strong relationships with students. Across most program schools, many teachers and principals interviewed for case studies discussed the importance of the bonds members developed with students, oftentimes explaining how members bridged a gap between students and the school by forging relationships that other school staff could not. In their Year 2 follow-up interviews, about half of grantee staff discussed members' abilities to form strong relationships with students. One grantee staff reflected that not only did the program help shape students through strong relationships with members, it also changed members. The grantee staff elaborated, "We are not only within 10 months turn[ing AmeriCorps members] into amazing tutors, we also turn them into mentors and into people who understand kids at the level at which kids need to be understood."

Stakeholder Satisfaction with Grantee Program-School Partnerships

In both years, at least 9 of the grantee programs were satisfied or very satisfied with the different elements of communication and collaboration between themselves and the partner schools, although a few grantee staff noted that their interactions varied across schools (see Appendix Exhibit C-11)[81]. In Year 2, three grantee staff reported that they did not have frequent communication with their partner schools, whereas none reported so in Year 1.

The School Leader and Staff surveys explored communication and collaboration between school staff and School Turnaround AmeriCorps members, a topic not covered by the Grantee survey. The majority of school leaders strongly agreed or agreed that the school communicates about school turnaround efforts in general, that teachers are supportive of the AmeriCorps program, and that the school uses several means to integrate and communicate with members (see Appendix Exhibit C-25).

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 school staff strongly agreed or agreed. School staff responses were moderately less positive than those of school leaders (see Appendix Exhibit C-25).

According to grantee staff, the frequency of student progress meetings between School Turnaround AmeriCorps members and school staff varied, sometimes by school within grantee program (see Appendix Exhibit C-5). Grantee staff reported that at most schools, members met with school staff to review student progress on a monthly or more frequent basis.

Partners' Satisfaction with Program Operations

The majority of all stakeholders (grantee staff, school leaders, and staff) in Years 1 and 2 reported being very satisfied or satisfied with all elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps program operations (see Exhibit IV-3).[82] 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, grantee staffs in both years 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.

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[81]   In Year 1, all 13 grantee programs responded. In Year 2, one grantee staff did not know enough about their program's school partners to answer this question.

[82]   School staff were surveyed only in Year 1 (2014–15).

Exhibit IV-3: Grantee, School Leader, and School Staff Satisfaction with Elements of School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program Operations

Number of Grantees

12 10 8 6 4 2 0   0 2 4 6 8 10 12

Placement of members in meaningful service activities
- Year 1 Grantees: 7 (Satisfied), 5 (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Leaders: 71% (Satisfied), 19% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Staff: 51% (Satisfied), 32% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 2 Grantees: 1 (Very Satisfied), 12 (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Spring): 42% (Very Satisfied), 43% (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Fall): 49% (Very Satisfied), 41% (Satisfied)

Referral of students to receive services offered by AmeriCorps members
- Year 1 Grantees: 5 (Satisfied), 5 (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Leaders: 67% (Satisfied), 23% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Staff: 56% (Satisfied), 25% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 2 Grantees: 3 (Very Satisfied), 9 (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Spring): 35% (Very Satisfied), 51% (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Fall): 51% (Very Satisfied), 37% (Satisfied)

Implementation of the roles and responsibilities outlined in the school partnership agreements
- Year 1 Grantees: 8 (Satisfied), 3 (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Leaders: 62% (Satisfied), 35% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Staff: 51% (Satisfied), 27% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 2 Grantees: 1 (Very Satisfied), 11 (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Spring): 38% (Very Satisfied), 50% (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Fall): 44% (Very Satisfied), 44% (Satisfied)

Communication and collaboration between teachers and AmeriCorps members
- Year 1 Grantees: 6 (Satisfied), 1 (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Leaders: 68% (Satisfied), 29% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 1 School Staff: 49% (Satisfied), 30% (Very Satisfied)
- Year 2 Grantees: 4 (Very Satisfied), 7 (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Spring): 34% (Very Satisfied), 55% (Satisfied)
- Year 2 School Leaders (Fall): 51% (Very Satisfied), 37% (Satisfied)

100% 75% 50% 25% 0%   0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Year 1   **Percentage of School Leaders/School Staff**   Year 2

Year 1:
- Grantees: ▮ Very Satisfied ▮ Satisfied
- School Leaders: ▮ Very Satisfied ▮ Satisfied
- School Staff: ▮ Very Satisfied ▮ Satisfied

Year 2
- Grantees: ▮ Very Satisfied ▮ Satisfied
- School Leaders (Spring): ▮ Very Satisfied ▮ Satisfied
- School Leaders (Fall): ▮ Very Satisfied ▮ Satisfied

Notes: Grantees Year 1: (N=13, Missing=0), Number of respondents who did not know ranged from 0 to 1. Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0 to 2. Grantees Year 2: (N=13, Missing=0), Number of respondents who indicated not applicable ranged from 0 to 1.Grantees did not have an option to select Don't Know or Very Different in Year 2. School Leaders Year 1: (N=38, Missing=1-2), Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0 to 3. School Leaders Year 2-Fall: (N=37, Missing=0-1), Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 0 to 2. School Leaders Year 2-Spring: (N=40, Missing=1-2), Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 1 to 4. Chart excludes school leaders who indicated not applicable. School Staff Year 1: (N=155, Missing=2-5), Number of respondents who indicated the question was not applicable ranged from 7 to 17. Responses limited to school staff who worked with at least one student in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. Exhibit is sorted according to Year 2 grantee responses. See Appendix Exhibits C-11, C-27, and C-50 for tables with all response options.

Source: Grantee Survey Q14 (Year 1: "For this school year, please indicate how satisfied you are with each of the statements below"; Year 2: "For this school year, please indicate your level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with each of the elements listed below. (Mark one response in each row.)"). School Leader Survey Q16 ("For this school year, please indicate your level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with each of the elements listed below. (Mark one response in each row.)"). School Staff 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)").

Exhibit reads: Ten grantees in Year 1, 97% school leaders in Year 1, 13 grantees in Year 2, 93% school leaders in Year 2-Spring, and 93% school leaders in Year 2-Fall are satisfied or very satisfied with the "Collaboration and communication between school leadership and AmeriCorps members."

Challenges with Partnerships

As noted above, all stakeholders overall reported high levels of satisfaction with their partnerships. The challenges that stakeholders reported with partnerships were generally reflections of when the elements of successful partnerships, reported above, were not going well. Aside from the difficulty with fully understanding members' roles in the schools, these challenges were reported by a minority of grantee programs and schools.

Balancing District and School Needs

All grantee staff described initially obtaining program buy-in from the school districts of their host schools, with those relationships ranging in involvement from "hands off" to quarterly (or even more often) coordination meetings with the district. Districts identified eligible schools and in most cases worked with programs to help determine how to allocate members among eligible schools. Occasionally grantee staff encountered tensions between a district's assessment of how members should be distributed and schools' assessment. In at least one case, a school had the program "forced" on it by the district, which led to strain between the school and grantee program and for members placed in the school. More often, districts reallocated members from one school (usually an improving one) to a school with higher perceived need. As one grantee staff explained after having to pull members from a school that exited SIG status, "We're getting more schools but no new members, so we have to kind of move people around. … We finally get them out of [the lowest performance category] and then we take away all their resources. … It's a balance."

Principal and Teacher Buy-in

Principal buy-in to the program was usually not a challenge, as it is principals who sign partnership agreements to bring School Turnaround AmeriCorps into a school. A majority of grantee programs, however, noted challenges with principal turnover and having to reestablish the working relationship and program buy-in repeatedly. In a few cases, grantee staff reported that changes in school leadership meant that a principal was less invested in the program because he or she had not been part of bringing it to the school. In at least one case, a new principal was simply overwhelmed by the responsibilities and not able to devote time to developing a strong understanding of the program.

In the schools where teacher buy-in was a challenge, it was a more difficult challenge than principal buy-in for several reasons. First, teachers have less direct interaction with the grantee program than do principals, hence receiving less direct information about the program and how to work with members. Second, in some schools, teachers felt threatened by the AmeriCorps members' presence in their classrooms and wary of trusting them with students' progress. Teachers' evaluations and jobs are contingent on their students' academic progress and some teachers and members reported that teachers did not feel comfortable trusting members—especially early in the year when they were unproven—with students' learning.

A related challenge was teachers' (and sometimes principals') confusion over members' roles in the school. This lack of clarity meant that schools sometimes asked members to do activities outside the program scope or that schools were not using members effectively (i.e., underutilizing their skills).[83] A few grantee staff described increasing the time they spent orienting teachers to the program and providing guidance on how best to collaborate with members, and this challenge lessened somewhat over the first three years of implementation.

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[83]   Sometimes these out-of-scope activities were ineligible activities as defined by CNCS and sometimes were activities out of scope for how the grantee program had defined its intervention.

Member Supervision and Training

The day-to-day relationships between members and grantee staff with school staff and leaders were of paramount importance. As discussed above, support from the principal is an important enabling condition, followed by strong relationships and collaboration between teachers and members. Overall, members helped to sustain capacity in schools and generally had good relationships with school staff; however, case studies revealed that schools had mixed experiences with members. Among the Year 1 case study schools that were re-interviewed in Year 2, stakeholders reported a range of experiences with members, from a significant improvement in teacher-member relationships over the prior year (School 4A) to worsening teacher-member relationships (School 2A) due to decreased member quality and lack of time to appropriately match teachers and students. In a few cases when schools lost members due to attrition and school stakeholders reported a diminished capacity to serve and support their students, grantee staff reported a strain on grantee program-school relationships.

In the final grantee staff interviews, about half of them suggested that programs could be improved by enhanced supervision at the school level. Several grantee staff spoke about the importance of training. Several staff discussed the importance or coordinating with the districts to create successful relationships, and two different grantee staff discussed getting schools to buy into their programs more—in one case by creating better partnerships and in another by having schools pay a "cash match" so that they are financially invested in the program.

V. CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Overall, primary source respondents (grantee staff, principals, teachers, members, parents) 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. Most respondents—both those who work in program schools and those whose children attend such schools—perceived 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 in contributing to improving school climate, students' socio-emotional health, and student achievement. Most parents (in both years) reported overwhelmingly positive views of the program, noting contributions to helping their children they had observed after their children had begun to receive School Turnaround AmeriCorps program services.

The modest and mixed results in the performance measures data contrast with grantee programs' narrative reports and stakeholder perspectives, both of which suggest that the program has contributed meaningfully to improvements in school turnaround progress, student socio-emotional health, academic performance, and school climates. Combined, the findings from both the GPRs and stakeholder perceptions provide especially valuable information about the mechanisms underlying programs' success as well as the challenges in implementation and working with school partners that hindered improved performance.

Summary of Comparisons of Schools with and without School Turnaround AmeriCorps

The comparative case study analyses indicated that program and comparison turnaround schools relied upon similar strategies overall, but that School Turnaround AmeriCorps helped schools augment selected interventions in ways that comparison schools were not able to do. Specifically, the two types of schools were similar in using data to assess student progress and tailor academic interventions, using those data to provide targeted and individualized academic support to students identified as struggling or failing, providing enhanced teacher professional development with SIG resources, and in providing increased socio-emotional supports to students.

By contrast, many more schools with School Turnaround AmeriCorps members (than comparison schools) were able to augment their capacity, especially in terms of providing socio-emotional supports (because of their trusting relationships with students) and differentiated instruction to individual or small groups of students, which allowed them to provide more robust and sustained one-on-one or small group instruction to struggling students. Because members were usually placed in single classrooms or worked with the same students in all their classes, their sustained presence made it possible to deliver individual or small group instruction consistently throughout the day and after school. Members most often worked with students in the middle tier of performance—behind grade level but not with the most severe academic deficits (see School 4A for an exception). In comparison schools, teachers most often provided additional tailored academic support.

The comparative case studies also suggest that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is distinct from other resources SIG schools use to implement their turnaround strategies in that it enables—and requires—different partnership strategies than more episodic partners (volunteers, trainers, etc.). The most common AmeriCorps-specific partnership strategies were member-teacher collaboration around classroom support (reported by all case study program schools), having an on-site coordinator to manage members and facilitate communication and understanding with the school staff (most program schools),

and being flexible in meeting schools' needs (a minority of case study program schools, one comparison school).

Summary of Intervention Effectiveness, Promising Practices, and Changes over Time

Over the course of the first three years of implementation, grantee programs continued to use the same broad interventions; adjustments programs made were primarily to recruitment, retention, supervision, and other administrative functions. There were modest increases in the number and intensity of programs pursuing strategies in training, service delivery, and partnerships that emerged as promising practices.

Grantee staff and principals agreed that pre-service activities by grantee programs and schools—recruiting members with skills matched to the school's needs and pre-service orientation and training—established a strong foundation for a successful program. Further, grantee staff and school stakeholders strongly agreed that strong supervisory and support structures for members and clearly defined measures of progress were helpful during implementation.

Grantee programs made strategy adjustments in response to the most common challenges they faced: member preparation and training and a lack of sufficient communication, which manifested as confusion over members' roles in schools and a lack of buy-in from teachers. The most significant adjustment from 2014–15 to 2015–16 was in the type and amount of communication and collaboration between program stakeholders (grantee staff and members) and school stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, and counselors). Relatedly, several programs and schools described providing more specialized training to members at the beginning of and throughout the year, and increasing members' coordination with teachers, such as by attending PLC meetings or reviewing student data together. These strategies, along with continued on-site coordination, may have contributed to the reported increased

> **Promising Practices for Delivering Effective Interventions and Serving in Schools**
>
> - *Communication and Relationship Building:* Communicate proactively at program level (grantee programs to districts, school leaders; members to teachers, students, on-site coordinator, and school leaders); build sustained relationships to increase program understanding and ease challenges.
> - *Recruitment and Retention*: Recruit early, advertise through multiple channels, communicate expectations about the service commitment and school conditions clearly, recruit and match members with schools' needs, place members in full-time positions.
> - *Preparation and Training*: Provide pre-service orientation and training, specialized training in behavior management and school-specific strategies; include members in faculty and professional learning community meetings, school-level training, and teacher professional development during the school year.
> - *Supervision and Support*: Rely on on-site coordinators to manage, organize, and support members and facilitate communication with school staff; cultivate school leader buy-in, integrate members into school culture and operations.
> - *Service Delivery:* Establish effective and trusting relationships with both teachers and students, maintain a consistent presence in schools and classrooms to aid with classroom management, collaborate with teachers to review student data and target supports appropriate to students' needs, and be flexible in meeting schools' needs.

understanding of members' roles between 2014–15 to 2015–16. Despite increased evidence of member training in 2015–16, respondents continued to note limitations in members' preparation for managing student behavior and knowledge of intervention strategies specific to their host schools.

About half of programs reported challenges with member recruitment and retention. Grantee programs employed a variety of strategies to improve recruitment, including beginning recruitment earlier in the year and diversifying the channels through which they advertised positions. They also employed multiple strategies to improve retention, including clearer communication to members about the expectations for service (one year commitment, conditions in turnaround schools). Grantee programs and schools realized modest improvement on recruitment and retention in 2015–16 compared with prior years, though some of the issues may be persistent challenges with the program model (see **Implications for School Turnaround AmeriCorps** section below).

The most effective strategies members and schools employed for delivering interventions were frequently assessing data to identify students for services and gauge progress, and having members provide individualized attention to students for both socio-emotional and academic improvements. School stakeholders and programs reported continuing both strategies and increasing their uses of data over the years.

Implications for School Turnaround AmeriCorps

This section discusses implications of the study's findings for informing program improvement, by revisiting the program design and its relationship to program implementation, as well as the potentially broader implications for the AmeriCorps education program model. The report concludes with the study team's suggestions for program implementation and insights about the sustainability of strategies implemented with AmeriCorps resources beyond the designated time period for service provision.

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps Theory of Change and the AmeriCorps Education Program Model

The Value Added of AmeriCorps Presence

As designed, School Turnaround AmeriCorps delivered a range of services and supports to schools, most often tutoring and providing general socio-emotional support to students. Members typically had little prior experience in delivering educational interventions and managing student behavior, which raises the importance of pre-service training or job-embedded practice at their host schools. Some programs provided more substantive or skill-based supports (e.g., a math instruction-focused program in School 3A, or members in SIG Exiter 1 who were Master's students in social work providing socio-emotional supports supervised by professional staff). While most programs did not offer such specialized interventions, the evaluation findings suggest that schools valued School Turnaround AmeriCorps because it allowed schools to provide targeted and individualized academic support and socio-emotional learning supports to students. Moreover, members were valued for their dedication, consistency, professionalism, and alignment with school activities more than for their expertise. Examples such as SIG Exiter 3 suggest that school stakeholders also placed considerable value on having another "warm body" in the classroom to assist teachers, to be another caring adult in students' lives, and to be available to flexibly meet schools' changing needs and priorities. However, the evaluation found that, the added value is more likely to occur in settings where it is well organized and well received by the school (i.e., by a site coordinator, and by establishing school leader buy-in and collegial relationships with teachers).

Arguably, the 'AmeriCorps presence' approach to supporting schools is not in itself a particularly innovative strategy; rather it tends to augment schools' existing approaches and not pioneer new models. This emphasis on AmeriCorps presence is reflected in the program's theory of change: when trusted and caring adults connect with students by giving them their time and attention, it helps students engage and develop an intrinsic interest in school and learning. Such increased academic engagement in turn engenders positive student behaviors and attitudes—better attendance, improved study habits, increased

completion of assignments and homework—critical to improving student academic achievement. In short, the value that the 'AmeriCorps presence' adds to schools is the defining feature of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program model. In practice, consistent AmeriCorps presence—and members' relationships with students—was a unifying element in what program schools most appreciated about the program.

Program Model Features And Tensions

As a whole, study findings suggest that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps model worked well, when done right. However, the case studies and interviews with program and school stakeholders illuminated the conditions that hampered program and member effectiveness. Barriers to program effectiveness came in the form of external factors at the school or community level over which grantee staff and members had little or no influence or control—such as school leader turnover or a closed school culture that was apprehensive of outsiders—as well as internal factors related to program design and implementation. Interestingly, some of the factors intrinsic to the program model simultaneously represent program strengths and challenges, as summarized in Exhibit V-1. For example, member demographics, the one year term of service, living stipend, service dosage requirements, and program goal of building schools' capacity to implement their turnaround plans and achieve their turnaround goals are core program elements that generally have both clear positives and clear challenges. Notably, all of these School Turnaround AmeriCorps program model features are applicable to any AmeriCorps educational program working in K-12 school settings.

Exhibit V-1: Tensions between the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Program Model and Serving in Educational Settings

Program Model Feature	Strength	Shortcoming
Member Demographics	Ability to build relationships and relate with students as "near peers" and role models	Immaturity; variability in content knowledge and experience working in low-performing school environments
Term of Service	Dedicated, often full-time, AmeriCorps members embedded in the school throughout the year	Relationships with students built over the year ended, interrupting student progress
Living Stipend	Not reported	Amount of stipend was prohibitive in an area with a high cost of living and/or high opportunity cost of obtaining other full-time work
Service Dosage Requirements	Requires that students receive the targeted amount of intervention hours per student to improve in reading/ or math	Prohibits flexibility in meeting schools' needs or the needs of high transient student populations
Building School Capacity	Members augment school capacity during their term of service	Because school capacity gains are based on member presence, these gains are not sustained when members leave the school

Member demographics

As reported in the Year 1 evaluation report, over 80 percent of School Turnaround AmeriCorps members serving in 2014–15 were in their late teens to late twenties, and over 50 percent were between 22 and 24 years old when they enrolled in AmeriCorps.[84] This demographic profile mirrors the general AmeriCorps

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[84]   Corporation for National and Community Service. e-Grants service location and member data as of 2014–15 for the 2014–15 school year.

population.[85] One of the key study findings is School Turnaround AmeriCorps members' ability to build strong relationships with students and relate to them as "near peers" and role models, yet some principals viewed members' inexperience and (some members') immaturity as a burden. In addition, variability in members' content knowledge and in their experience working in low-performing school environments may have been more pronounced due to the relative youth of the member cohort.

Term of service

Full-time members commit to a one-year term of service, and average service hours per member were often in the range expected of full-time members (1,700 hours). Schools clearly benefited from having dedicated partners embedded in their schools throughout the school year. The downside of the one-year term of service is that the next year's members (and the school staff and students) have to begin developing relationships from scratch.

Living stipend

The modest living stipend for AmeriCorps members was another implementation challenge reported by grantee staff, who noted that the amount of the stipend versus the cost of living in some areas adversely affected recruitment, and the low stipends also affected retention because of the opportunity cost of other possible employment, especially in areas with poor job markets (e.g., rural or remote areas where opportunities were scarce). No positive comments related to the AmeriCorps stipend were documented.

Service dosage requirements

Another AmeriCorps program model tension arose from programs' service dosage requirements, which sometimes conflicted with school partners' needs for flexibility. Individual students must receive a minimum amount of services for grantee programs to meet their performance measure targets and, as shown in programs' GPRs, meeting the minimum dosage requirement was a common struggle. Many schools reported wanting more flexibility in members' services and caseloads. For example, some schools have transient student populations, who join later (and may not be able to be assigned to a member) or leave before the end of the school year (and are therefore unable to meet the dosage requirement). Several schools also reported students making benchmark gains before completing the required dosage, in which case schools would appreciate being able to assign more struggling students to the member.

Building school capacity

Finally, the most basic contribution that all School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs provided is additional human capital support for their school partners. This strength of the program also presents a potential challenge to building schools' capacity to operate at the same level when the designated time period for service provision comes to an end. Successfully exiting SIG or Priority status and continuing to operate at its improved level is one way to measure a school's ability to sustain its turnaround successes even after School Turnaround AmeriCorps members have left. Schools' ability to effectively engage and utilize external partners (AmeriCorps programs or other) after an intervention ends is another way to assess the School Turnaround program's longer-term benefits. In this sense, grantee programs' persistent challenges with member enrollment and retention, barriers at the school level, and problems with student assessment data, are important program implementation lessons for any turnaround partner. To the degree that both grantee programs and schools were learning how to navigate these challenges, such learning should be transferrable to working with other AmeriCorps programs as well as external partners.

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[85] Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development (2004); Cardazone, G. et al. (2015).

Suggested Improvements to Program Implementation

To complement programs' promising practices documented over both years of the evaluation, the study team recommends two areas in which CNCS can further improve school partnerships and program implementation.

1. Provide grantee programs communication technical assistance and more opportunities for peer learning

The first recommendation is that providing technical assistance in communications to programs could go a long way in addressing common and persistent implementation challenges, mitigating tensions in the program model, and enhancing program delivery. Communications assistance could be helpful in several modes and formats, including messaging and materials development, one on one support, and facilitated peer group learning for both grantee and host school staff.

As this study has helped to document, relationship building is an important pre-condition for effective service provision. Exhibit II-2 in the Year 1 final evaluation report diagrammed the network of key program stakeholder relationships that occur in schools, illustrating why communication and interactions between and among these various stakeholders so heavily influence program effectiveness. Indeed, many of the program implementation challenges are essentially communication issues. It follows that communications assistance could help grantee programs improve in the following areas: maintaining and improving strong relationships with districts and school partners, defining members' roles, promoting teacher buy-in, increasing communication with grantee programs about the use and usefulness of partnership agreements, and disseminating the program promising practices documented in this report.

For example, developing materials in accessible language using engaging formats (e.g., one-page FAQs, posters, short videos) and developing concise and consistent talking points that clarify the program rules and the most effective ways to leverage members in schools can be useful, program-wide tools for managing schools' expectations about the program, particularly related to tensions and challenges with AmeriCorps program model features and how to mitigate them, to improve principals' understanding of how to balance adhering to program rules and flexibly using AmeriCorps resources to support turnaround strategies. Creating a web page on the school website or short presentations for faculty meetings or teacher work days using clear and consistent messaging can also help explain members' roles to school stakeholders, especially teachers, including what they are permitted and not permitted to do, as well as this study's findings on how they can be used most effectively in schools. These techniques could also help to promote the program to teachers who are unaware of the program and what the members are doing in the school and might be interested in referring their students for services.

Additionally, given that CNCS recently issued updated guidance on partnership agreements for the 2016-17 application process, creating open communication channels could help encourage adoption of this special program design requirement of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program. The program's success depends on grantee programs' ability to execute the terms of their written agreements in practice—align their activities with schools' turnaround plans and collaborate with school stakeholders—and this involves cultivating relationships and buy-in with school leaders and teachers, ensuring that members receive appropriate training and supervision and are integrated into school operations, making members' roles clearly understood, and sharing resources and data to measure the program's progress in helping to improve student outcomes. However, guidance is only useful when it is communicated clearly and well understood, and its principles are put into practice and refined with new knowledge and experience by its intended audience. Communication could focus on highlighting the importance of following the terms of written partnership agreements, and identifying early warning signs when

conflicts arise or agreements are not respected, or when adjustments to partners' roles and responsibilities are needed.

Other communication guidance could occur through regular, informal check-ins with grantee programs to discuss whether the spirit of the partnership established in the written agreements as well as in school leaders' letters of commitment is being implemented by both parties in good faith. Creating opportunities for open communication about partner relations can also help to identify promising practices for involving school and program stakeholders in support of the partnership, for example, by using partnership agreements to facilitate grantee-school communication about challenges or to navigate transitions in school and district leadership and priorities.

Lastly, the program could also benefit from disseminating the program's promising practices more broadly, by making a communications toolkit tailored to different audiences (districts, school leaders, teachers and school staff, parents, and students) available on the AmeriCorps program website. CNCS employed this strategy with the first cohort of School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantees by providing technical assistance through topical peer-led discussions on common program challenges and the successful strategies some programs have used to address them, which possibly accounts for improvements in program implementation strategies noted above. Additional topics that could be explored for the next cohort of School Turnaround AmeriCorps grantees include how to replicate successful strategies in different school contexts, e.g. member training and supervision, member recruitment and retention, developing a checklist to clarify members' roles for teachers and members, use of partnership agreements to open discussions with schools and resolve implementation challenges, and approaches to engage teachers in members' work and support their roles in the school. Expanding the types and frequency of peer learning opportunities in a community of practice setting can provide a safe environment for grantee staff to test and practice new communications skills.

2. Clarify the expectations and standardize the requirements for how grantee programs collect and report administrative data

The study team's efforts to collect and analyze the GPRs, member activity data, and student-level data, despite their considerable variability, produced many insights and recommendations for enhancing future evaluations of School Turnaround AmeriCorps and education-related programming in the AmeriCorps portfolio of programs. In the Year 1 final evaluation report the study team offered several recommendations for improving collection, reporting, and analysis of administrative data, focused on providing more explicit guidance, articulating common reporting procedures, and developing common templates.

In Year 2, the study team implemented one of the Year 1 recommendations to establish a common template for the collection of member activity log data and provide assistance to grantee programs in tracking and reporting those data to improve the completeness and quality of the member activity data. However, despite a more standardized approach, Year 2 findings indicate that grantee programs track and report program activity data idiosyncratically. Absent changes in what and how grantee programs report, inconsistency of information in the GPRs is likely to persist, and consequently, the study team proposes an alternative approach to the collection and analysis of grantee administrative data to improve measurement of grantee performance. The approach is summarized here and described in detail in Appendix A.4.

Performance measure data present a considerable interpretive challenge, as they do not present a sufficiently fine-grained summary of grantee performance. Grantee programs' schools operate under constraints that are partly or largely beyond their control, and a more comprehensive depiction of grantee performance (than available from performance measures) is needed to evaluate the contribution of

members given these constraints. One reason performance measures may not adequately capture participation and completion in services accurately is that the counts of eligible and participating students ignore the fact that some students enroll in school well after the school year starts while some students leave mid-year, so any overall number may mask salient indicators of students' enrollment history. Grantee programs cannot exercise control over such fluctuations in student enrollment, and performance measures based in whole or in part on student enrollment (and eligibility) are therefore subject to over- or under-prediction. Appendix Exhibit A-5 in Appendix Section A.4 provides a more detailed explanation, and presents a potential exercise for grantee programs: using data from the most recently completed year, record the numbers of students in three groups: stayers, movers, joiners, and for each of those groups, record the number of students who were eligible, completed service, or exited (for various reasons). Completing such an exercise might help grantee programs provide more accurate performance targets in the future and would help them better judge the performance of their members over the past school year.

3. Consider encouraging greater continuity of members' service within participating schools to alleviate some of the implementation challenges associated with member onboarding and relationship building that now occur anew each year.

The third recommendation focuses on encouraging greater continuity of members' service within participating schools. While the grant program statute requires terms of service to be no longer than one year, some grantee programs enroll members into two consecutive one-year terms, which provides some stability and continuity to the program.[86] Perhaps CNCS could consider providing explicit acknowledgement that two consecutive years of service for members might be a viable option for programs (assuming continuity of funding and satisfactory member performance), as having some continuity in members' service might mitigate some persistent and program-wide implementation challenges associated with member orientation, training, supervision, support, and relationship building (between school faculty/staff and members as well as between members and students) that now occur anew each year. This recommendation is based on the finding that starting over each year with a new cohort of members requires substantial time and energy from programs and schools. One possible alternative might be to build in some continuity across school years to help reduce the time lost each fall, by staggering members' service terms so that some members begin in the fall semester and others in the spring semester. The study team recognizes that considering such a change might lead programs to provide mid-year orientation to new members, although the members already on-site could potentially help accelerate the onboarding process for their newly arrived peers.

The Sustainability of Strategies Implemented with AmeriCorps Resources beyond the Designated Time Period for Service Provision

CNCS defines capacity building in its agency-wide performance measures as activities that "achieve lasting positive outcomes for the beneficiary populations served by CNCS-supported organizations."[87] Generally, CNCS considers capacity building activities to be "indirect services that enable organizations to provide more, better and sustained direct services."[88] This definition would seem to preclude a primarily direct service intervention such as School Turnaround AmeriCorps—and the AmeriCorps

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[86] The Citizen Schools organization, for example, asks its AmeriCorps members to commit to a two-year term in large measure to provide continuity in staffing from one year to the next.

[87] The Corporation for National & Community Service (2011). Demonstrating Impact through Capacity Building: An Overview of the National Performance Measures.

[88] Ibid.

education program model generally—as they are not designed to build capacity in their host organizations, i.e. schools. For the purposes of this study, building school capacity has been evaluated in terms of the program's ability to support schools in implementing their turnaround plans and achieving their turnaround goals, without an explicit expectation of how such support would continue beyond the grant period.

CNCS also defines the concept of sustainability as "a lasting outcome of the capacity building activity or intervention. This may include maintaining service after the CNCS resource is gone, maintaining enhanced or increased services after the CNCS resource is gone, or both."[89] As shown in Exhibit V-2, the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program logic model includes sustainability for the growth of the program as a long-term outcome, achieved through: 1) targeting an increased number of at-risk students each subsequent year, and 2) sustaining the turnaround program once the AmeriCorps members have left. However, these long-term outcomes for growth of the program (presumably with AmeriCorps members), and sustainability of the program without AmeriCorps members, have not been well-defined; nor has CNCS articulated a cogent theory of change for achieving them.

Even acknowledging the implementation challenges and tensions in the program model, this study finds that the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program has helped some schools progress sufficiently to exit SIG status. Based on the four SIG Exiter case studies, however, the program has not helped schools build long-term capacity that outlasts members' presence. Nevertheless, the program appears to be making some progress toward the first sustainability outcome, as six of the 13 original grantee programs plan to recompete for the next round of School Turnaround AmeriCorps funding.

In considering the implications of School Turnaround AmeriCorps for CNCS's larger education portfolio, the SIG case studies demonstrate that schools need a variety of supports and resources to exit and remain out of SIG status, and they suggest that three years is not a sufficient investment to sustain schools' improvements. In the context of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps federal partnership, the questions of continued investment and sustainability are particularly relevant. The two-year national evaluation suggests that the program is perceived as supporting schools, and it has already addressed some of the impediments described in earlier reports and memos about implementation challenges and promising practices. Just as importantly, some school stakeholders perceived that School Turnaround AmeriCorps would be more valuable to them as a long-term and proactive strategy rather than a short-term solution.

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[89]   Ibid.

Exhibit V-2:   CNCS School Turnaround AmeriCorps, Program-Level Logic Model

Goal: To turnaround lowest-performing schools by increasing students' educational achievement, high school graduation rates, and college readiness.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes		
	Activities	*Participation*	*Short*	*Medium*	*Long*

Inputs

- Support/human capital provided by AmeriCorps members
- School turnaround AmeriCorps program grants
- Grantee partnerships with school(s) within LEA and/or other organizations
- SIG and Priority school turnaround grant funding

Activities

- Identification of students to work with AC members
- Providing supplemental academic and wraparound services (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, academic support, college counseling, RTI) (3) (2) (4) (5)
- Supporting implementation of increased learning time (6)
- Oversight/coordination of AmeriCorps program (monitoring/site visits)
- AmeriCorps member recruitment
- AmeriCorps training and on-going support for members
- Community/ Parental engagement and outreach initiatives (1)
- Building school capacity to meet turnaround standards**
- Establishing written data sharing partnership agreements

Participation

- Target student population
- Principals/school leaders
- Teachers, school staff
- AmeriCorps members
- Grantee staff (Grantee program manager, volunteers coordinator/ supervisor)
- Parents/ guardians
- Schools, districts, LEAs, state leaders, local community members

Short

- Increased student attendance (2)
- Increased learning time (6)
- Improved school safety and discipline (2)
- Increased academic and non-academic support services available to students (2)
- Improved parent/guardian knowledge about supporting students and access to resources (1)
- Increased school capacity to support academic and social-emotional needs of students

Medium

- Improved reading and math knowledge and skills; reduced achievement gap (3)
- Increased academic engagement (2) (6)
- Improved school climate (2)
- Students feel both academic and non-academic (social, emotional, and health) needs are supported (2)
- Increased parental/community involvement in students' education (1)
- Improved school capacity to meet turnaround standards

Long

Student outcomes:
- Improve academic performance in ELA and math (3)
- Increased rates of high school graduation (4)
- Increased college readiness and enrollment rates (5)

Schools outcomes:
- Turn around lowest performing schools

Program outcomes:
- Sustainability for the growth of the AmeriCorps school turnaround program*

KEY: Six SIG strategies
(1) Family and community engagement
(2) School culture and environment
(3) Academic achievement
(4) Graduation rates
(5) College enrollment rates
(6) Increased learning time

Moderators
- Communication & cooperation between schools and AmeriCorps members/grantee staff
- Changes in school leadership & teaching staff as part of turnaround model
- Fidelity of implementation of intervention of School Turnaround AmeriCorps

Assumptions
- AC members provide support in variety of areas (academic, social, discipline), depending on school & student needs
- Presence of AC members will enable students to foster positive relationship with trusted adult, which positively influences students' educational experiences and academic engagement
- Evidence of collaboration from school and Local Education Agency
- Turnaround plan in each grantee's school(s)
- Non-academic factors (social, emotional, health) influence student achievement

** Replace principals and at least 50% teachers; identify & reward teachers increasing student outcomes, remove those who are not; select and implement instructional model based on student needs; provide PD to build staff capacity; support schools in providing increased learning time; provide social-emotional and community-oriented services/support. *Growth of the AmeriCorps turnaround program by targeting an increased number of at-risk students each subsequent year. Moreover, it refers to the sustainability of the turnaround program once the AmeriCorps members have left.

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