

School Districts and States are Leveraging National Service

Denver Public Schools



Overview of Denver Public Schools

- Serves more than 90,000 students across roughly 200 schools.
- The majority of students are Latino (23% of students are White and 13% are Black).
- 69% of students are low-income.
- High school graduation rate is 65%.

National Service Supporting Denver Public Schools

National service programs support thousands of elementary, middle, and high school students in Denver Public Schools (DPS). AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs provide tutoring, mentoring, school turnaround, school climate, attendance support, and other services in schools.

The role of national service in DPS is somewhat unusual because the district sponsors its own national service programs, meaning that it has applied for and received funding for national service members from CNCS.

AmeriCorps programs, including the Family and Community Education Service Corps (FACE), are managed by the district's Family and Community Engagement office. The FACE Corps is a critical component of the DPS strategy to increase multi-generation interventions and wraparound services that support student academic achievement. DPS has leveraged their own AmeriCorps program in addition partners and programs that increase opportunities for both students and families.

Some program highlights include:

Attendance and Wraparound Services

The FACE AmeriCorps program provides attendance support and small-group math instruction to targeted students throughout the district. Approximately 500 AmeriCorps members work to increase student attendance and retention, increase math attainment, and foster multi-generation engagement through service projects and wraparound supports. FACE AmeriCorps members receive training and support in best practices to engage parents and guardians as part of a multi-generation approach to increase academic achievement and family stability.

AmeriCorps members support roughly 6,000 students annually throughout DPS with small-group math instruction and daily attendance support. Over 50% of students receiving attendance support increase their attendance by 3-5% (which translates to five to nine additional days of instruction for students). Over half of the students receiving math interventions increase their math scores by at least one achievement level. The Corps also leverages hundreds of additional volunteers throughout the district to support school events, after-school programming, supply drives, and other activities that increase student and parent engagement.

Infrastructure Improvement, Tutoring, and Food Security

The Denver Green School (DGS), in southeast Denver, is the first school in the city with a focus on sustainability. AmeriCorps NCCC teams at DGS have worked in classrooms as math and literacy coaches and helped launch DGSs' farm to cafeteria program. More than 100 AmeriCorps members on 11 teams have served at DGS since 2012. Members have provided more than 9,500 hours of tutoring, sorted 2,050 books, painted/renovated over 1,400 square feet, inventoried/distributed 13,650 pounds of food, and repaired/constructed two playgrounds.

One-on-One Mentoring and Tutoring

The Senior Corps Foster Grandparents Program (FGP) places 17 volunteers at four Denver public schools. FGP volunteers provide one-on-one tutoring and mentoring to students with special needs. Last year, 83% of students paired with a volunteer achieved moderate to high improvement in their teacher determined academic goals. Denver's FGP program has also developed a partnership with Reading Partners Colorado, an evidenced-based literacy program. Last year, through Reading Partners, eight Foster Grandparents contributed 1,283 hours of literacy tutoring..

Capacity Building for Charter Schools

Rocky Mountain Prep is a charter school of the Denver Public School system, serving Pre-K to 5th grade. The school sponsored two AmeriCorps VISTA members to provide support with fundraising to build capacity and successfully transition students out of Rocky Mountain Prep into middle school.

School Turnaround

City Year has been a DPS partner since 2011. Using its Whole School, Whole Child model, City Year AmeriCorps members recently helped support nine Denver schools. Last year, 74 City Year AmeriCorps members supported more than 4,000 students with tutoring and mentoring services. Some of the program's accomplishments during the past few years include:

- 68% of students showed overall growth in literacy.
- 85% of teachers agreed that City Year improved students' math performance.
- 88% of City Year Denver partner schools improved their performance ratings on the Denver School Performance Framework, from 2014-2016.

What Local Leaders are Saying About National Service

“At North High School, City Year allows us to connect with students in ways that would otherwise not be possible as it relates to attendance, behavior, and course completion and is a main reason for the sustained growth scores we have seen on 9th grade state testing.”

Scott Wolf, Principal, North High School in Denver, CO

Takeaways for Other School Districts

School districts interested in leveraging national service resources can learn the following from DPS' approach:

- A school district can have substantial impact by sponsoring its own national service programs. DPS has implemented its AmeriCorps programs at a relatively large scale across multiple schools delivering key academic instruction to thousands of students.
- Sponsoring your own program allows your district to have full ownership of managing funds, defining members' responsibilities, managing members, and supervising members on a day-to-day basis.
- Before applying for funding as a district, make sure your district has the capacity to manage funds and members. School districts that are sponsors typically have staff dedicated to running the programs.
- Regardless of whether your district is interested in sponsoring a program, take advantage of partnerships. In addition to its own AmeriCorps programs, DPS receives support from other AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs through partnerships with local organizations.