

# Evaluation Fact Sheet

## School Turnaround AmeriCorps Grant Program



### What is the community challenge?

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

### What is the promising solution?

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps grant program, launched in 2013–14, is a joint initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and ED. The program funds low-performing schools' efforts to achieve their school improvement goals by placing AmeriCorps members in schools. The AmeriCorps members increase these schools' capacity by helping 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.

### What did the evaluation find?

CNCS engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate program implementation effectiveness, program-school partner relationships, and stakeholder perceptions of program impacts in improving student outcomes.

#### What worked:

- The School Turnaround AmeriCorps program is perceived as contributing positively to achieving key outcomes, including **improving students' academic achievement and socio-emotional health**.
- Stakeholders in the majority of School Turnaround AmeriCorps program schools perceived that **AmeriCorps services support turnaround efforts by offering helpful supports**, serving as partners in improving student outcomes, and providing activities frequently enough to be valuable.
- Case study findings demonstrate how **the program helps to build school capacity, leverages resources to increase services for students**, uses AmeriCorps members to review student data, supports classroom teachers' efforts, and also contributed to some schools' success in exiting turnaround status.
- All grantee programs and the majority of schools reported that **strong relationships between members and students have a positive impact** on students' academic engagement and behavior and/or are effective at meeting school turnaround goals by helping to bridge a gap between students and the school and forging relationships that other school staff could not.

**Program At-a-Glance**

Intervention: School Turnaround AmeriCorps Grant Program.

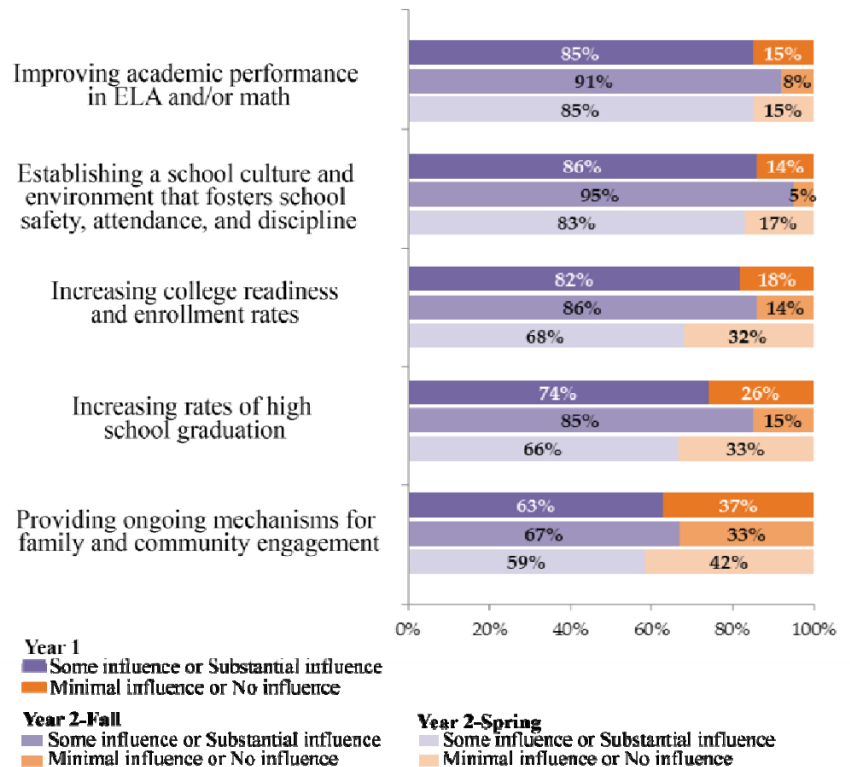
Grantees: 13 grantee programs.

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

Focus Area(s): Education, Capacity Building.

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

**School Leader Perceptions of Level of Influence of School Turnaround AmeriCorps on School Turnaround Goals (Year 1, 2014–15 and Year 2, 2015–16)**





### Promising practices for delivering effective interventions and serving in schools:

- Programs' focus on **communication and relationship building** with school stakeholders helps build program buy-in, increase program understanding, and ease challenges inherent in serving in low-performing schools, such as high turnover of school leaders and staff.
- Programs ensure **member quality and consistency** by improving member recruitment and retention, providing specialized member training and preparation, and providing on-site supervision and support.
- Members **effectively deliver school-based services** by establishing trusting relationships with students, maintaining a consistent presence to aid with classroom management, collaborating with teachers to review student data and target supports to students' needs, and being flexible in meeting schools' needs.

### Lessons learned and programs' strategy adjustments to tackle challenges:

- Program start-up and grant administration challenges typically associated with launching a new program became less prevalent, while other challenges intrinsic to the AmeriCorps program model persisted, including member recruitment, retention, and role definition.
- Programs made strategy adjustments to tackle these challenges; these included providing more tailored and specialized training to members, school administrators and staff.



### What are the design and goals of the evaluation?

**To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit [nationalservice.gov/research](http://nationalservice.gov/research).**\*

This comprehensive report summarizes findings from the two-year School Turnaround AmeriCorps national evaluation conducted during the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years. It presents contextual information about the 13 grantee programs funded by the School Turnaround AmeriCorps grants, which recruited about 450 School Turnaround

AmeriCorps members annually to provide school-based services. The report describes AmeriCorps members' contributions to low-performing schools' success in their turnaround efforts, and discusses the mechanisms underlying those contributions. The report also presents findings on a set of schools studied more intensively in 29 case studies, including both program schools and similar matched comparison schools without School Turnaround AmeriCorps services. Stakeholders in these schools reported how AmeriCorps members helped to build school capacity and contributed to achieving turnaround goals, and provided additional information on members' added value across School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs.

#### Evaluation At-a-Glance

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

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

Evaluator: Abt Associates.

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

In response to the evaluation's findings, CNCS clarified the expectations for allowable activities, and added the expectations that programs would update the written program-school partnership agreement annually and describe how their activities align with schools' turnaround plans and how they will collaborate with school partners throughout the grant period. CNCS also provided targeted training and technical assistance to programs and prospective applicants.

\* The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.