

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

### Executive Summary

NYC Service, in direct partnership with the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE), will support 156 AmeriCorps members who will contribute to the transformation of 128 New York City schools in low income communities into Community Schools by working with Community School Directors in leading and coordinating student mentoring or parent engagement in each school (determined by each school's needs assessment completed in summer of 2015), supporting overall system-wide capacity building efforts being developed by the NYCDOE Community Schools Office, as well as leading beautification efforts at five schools in need to improve the schools' environments.

More specifically, at the end of project period, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for helping students who are "chronically absent" (i.e. missing 20 or more days of school) become more connected, engaged and supported in school (e.g. through positive school activities), ultimately decreasing the number of these students who are chronically absent, and more long-term, decreasing drop-out rates and increasing graduation rates; helping parents become more connected to school and staff and engaged in student learning, ultimately participating in more school activities/trainings and/or meetings, and finally, taking on leadership positions in their children's schools and contributing to decisions that affect their children's education, helping sustain the Community School, long-term; and engaging the larger school community (i.e. students, parents, school staff, and local residents) to participate in beautification efforts at the five schools in need.

Specifically, from September 2015 to June 2016, 128 AmeriCorps State and National members (one AmeriCorps S/N Members per school) will operate as either a "Mentoring Coordinator" or "Parent Organizer" depending on school's need, as determined by the school's needs assessments. Mentoring Coordinators will recruit, train, and manage volunteer mentors (internal or external) as well as directly mentor students themselves; identify students who are chronically absent as mentees; oversee mentor and mentee engagement by organizing group activities/events; and maintaining communication with mentors and mentees through private meetings (i.e. setting annual goals, helping identify and address challenges, measuring progress). Parent Organizers will recruit school parents to get involved in the school's planning process, decisions, and leadership opportunities, which includes providing parents with numerous ways to become active with the school (ladder of

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engagement;) by organizing events/group activities and identifying tools/opportunities which engage them in student learning, leadership opportunities, and the development of the community school model; and coordinating outreach/communication with parents regarding school meetings (e.g. School Leadership Team (SLT) sponsored monthly Community School Meetings, Community School Planning Process).

Continues in "Clarification Summary"

### **Rationale and Approach/Program Design**

Rational & Approach/Program Design

Introduction

The NYCDOE is the largest school district in the United States, serving 1.1 million students in over 1,800 schools.

Over the course of 2014, under New York City's new Mayoral administration, the City announced two initiatives to transform a total of 128 public schools into Community Schools, building the evidence-based structure and support needed to address each school's challenges so they can better serve New York City's children and prepare them for the future as well as help build stronger families and healthier communities.

"We believe in investing in the whole child. Every student comes to class with different challenges that can make it difficult to learn. Community Schools respond to families' needs in innovative ways so that students become more likely to attend class, and better able to focus and succeed." Mayor Bill de Blasio.

"For our students to succeed they must be in school learning, and within the community school model, the whole needs of students are addressed," NYCDOE Chancellor Carmen Fariña.

Though these specific efforts are pieces of a much larger Community School strategy surrounding the City of New York's transformation of these schools, they will play a critical role in the transformative goal of not only improving the overall health of the school in terms of student achievement (e.g. increasing academic engagement among students, reducing chronic absenteeism ) all critical

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NYCDOE measures), but also breaking the cycle of poverty in target communities by building infrastructure essential for long-term sustainability and success.

In her 2010 book "Inside School Turnarounds" education journalist Laura Pappano observed that turning around struggling and failing schools involves more than just the people inside the school and that well-structured and articulated partnerships can contribute to turnarounds (e.g. organized partnerships connecting schools to nonprofits and corporations have contributed to turnarounds in Cincinnati and Hartford, two of Pappano's observed sites, which have community school initiatives) (1). In fact, Cincinnati Public Schools, which made a commitment to make every school a Community Learning Center in 2002, has seen its district-wide graduation rate increase 31 percent over six years (51% to 82%) (2).

Through strategic partnerships between schools and other community resources (including one community-based organization that will be matched with each school), the transformation of these 128 schools will involve spending the next several years developing the core elements of the NYC Community School model, which includes performing school asset and needs assessments across the NYCDOE's six elements of the Capacity Framework (i.e. rigorous instruction, supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective school leadership, strong family-communities ties, and trust), developing internal systems and structures, as well as programs around each school's specific needs, setting clear goals, and holding each school community accountable for rapid movement.

Of the 128 schools selected:

- 45 Schools are supported through an AIDP (Attendance Improvement and Dropout Intervention) grant in partnership with the United Way of New York, and includes a specific focus on chronic absenteeism and drop-out prevention. Over 400 of the 700 qualified schools applied for this opportunity, of which 45 were selected, a clear demonstration of local demand for this kind of transformational change.

- 94 Schools are supported through NYCDOE's School Renewal Program, which targets historically low performing schools.

NOTE: 11 Schools are part of both the AIDP and School Renewal Program.

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The 45 schools that were selected for AIDP support met the following criteria:

- Higher than the average chronic absenteeism
- Below average attendance

The 94 schools selected for the School Renewal Program met the following criteria:

\* Identified as a Priority or Focus School by the State Department of Education:

- Priority Schools are determined as schools that are at the bottom 5% lowest-performing schools statewide (53 schools)
- Focus Schools are determined as schools that are at the bottom 10% of progress in a subgroup (41 schools)

\* Demonstrated low academic achievement for each of the three prior years (2012-2014):

- Elementary and middle schools in the bottom 25% in Math and ELA scores
- High schools in the bottom 25% in four-year graduation rate

\* Showed limited capacity for improvement:

- Most recent Quality Review result of "underdeveloped," "developing," or "proficient" (see attached NYCDOE Quality Review Rubric for more information on categories).

The 128 schools by grade configuration are as follows:

- Elementary: 22
- ES/MS (K-8 Model): 9
- Middle School: 48
- High School/Transfer: 49

As previously mentioned, the 128 chosen public schools (60,442 students) are located in low income communities, with 89.4 percent of students being eligible for free or reduced price lunch during the 2014-15 school year. Over 80 percent of the students enrolled are Black or Latino and during the 2013-14 school year nearly 38.7 percent of students were absent for 20 or more days of school. In that same school year, the high schools selected here only graduated a little over half (53.2 percent) of their

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students in four years and had 17.2 percent of students drop out of school. According to the American Psychological Association, a strong connection exists between poverty and high school dropout rates. Students from low-income families dropped out of high school five times more than students from high-income families in 2009. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics found that when broken down by race, the estimated event dropout rates were 2.4% for Whites, 4.8% for African Americans, and 5.8% for Latinos when looking at students who were enrolled in high school in October 2008 and left before October 2009 without completing school. The average annual income for a high school dropout in 2009 was \$19,540, compared to \$27,380 for a high school graduate. Furthermore, high school drop outs are far more likely to experience reduced job and income opportunities, chronic unemployment, incarceration, or require government assistance than the rest of the population (6).

Working with community and school, the city's Community Schools approach will build the necessary supports and systems student mentoring and parent engagement being two to improve student success in the long term and change the trajectory of students in these communities while creating new paths for future students.

Each school implementing the Community School approach utilizes results from an asset and needs assessment to build a holistic set of support systems, which work together to personalize the experience of attending and learning in school for every child and their family. Mentoring (hereinafter referred to as "Success Mentors") or parent engagement are two key elements that will play out in these Community Schools.

In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage volunteers, who will be recruited for student mentoring, parent engagement opportunities, and beautification efforts. The specific number of volunteers leveraged is to be determined and dependent on the needs within each of the 128 schools, which are being assessed by the NYCDOE by the summer of 2015.

### Success Mentors

The NYC Success Mentors Corps ("Success Mentors"), a key strategy to be used to engage chronically absent students in some of the 128 schools, was first piloted during the 2010-2011 school year and

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eventually reached nearly 10,000 students over the course of the next three years. Following a report about the prevalence of chronic absenteeism in New York City schools, with roughly 250,000 students chronically absent every year for hundreds of different reasons, the program was developed by an NYC inter-agency task force established to create a set of strategies to fight chronic absenteeism.

A report evaluating the task force's three-year effort found the Success Mentors program to be the most effective element of the taskforce's effort across all school types, with previously chronically absent students with mentors adding nearly two weeks of school per student, per year. Success Mentors could also be a valuable dropout prevention strategy, as previously chronically absent high school students with mentors were more likely to remain in school the next year than students who were not mentored. In terms of behavior and attitudes, 75-91 percent of mentored students reported they enjoyed having a mentor and that this person helped them improve their attendance, schoolwork, motivation, and confidence (3).

Success Mentoring in some of the 128 schools may vary depending on needs, but mentors will generally meet with a cohort of 20 students for a minimum of three times per week. Mentors will serve as a "coach" and "sounding board" for these students, but will also stress the importance of regular attendance and attention to coursework and will help students and their families address the barriers contributing to irregular attendance by calling the homes of mentees if they are not in school, welcoming students to school in the beginning of the day, and helping connect mentees and their families to local support systems like community partners, local businesses and City agencies to address significant issues outside their capacity. To assist in this work, a robust Success Mentor professional development program and Curriculum will be developed and shared with schools, and centrally, trainings will be provided for AmeriCorps members.

### Parent Engagement

The long-term sustainability of Community Schools depends largely on parent and community members developing in parents a deep ownership and leadership in schools. This means that shifting the paradigm from parents as "participants" to parents as "leaders" and "decision-makers and problem-solvers" who work hand-in-hand with school staff and community-based organizations to

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co-create; co-implement and co-monitor the school, is required. Research also demonstrates that increased parent engagement in schools can play a very critical role in improving student attendance, academic achievement, as well as behavior and social skills (4).

In year one, schools will be given information on developing a "Ladder of Engagement," in which parents will be encouraged to move along a continuum of participation by providing them with multiple pathways to become involved in the school, and subsequently opportunities to increase their level of investment and leadership in the school over time. They eventually become champions and experts in transformative parent engagement and spread the practice within their school. During this first year, schools will be asked to prioritize a few initial components of the work, including engaging parents fully in the development of the Community School plan and building an infrastructure to support strong parent engagement in the Community School planning process.

In year two, schools will be asked to begin to flesh out and more fully develop their Ladder of Engagement and will be given support to do so. To assist in this work, a Transformative Parent Engagement Curriculum will be developed and shared with schools, with trainings to be provided at the school level, as well as centralized trainings.

### **Purpose and Impact**

Community Schools are a strategy for organizing the community and its resources around student success and invites schools, families, and communities to become partners in support of that effort as well as builds stronger families and improve communities in the long-term (5).

While each school will set its own specific goals based on its asset and needs assessment, the direct service and/or capacity building activities of AmeriCorps members in the primary areas of mentoring or parent engagement will play a critical role in decreasing chronic absenteeism, helping increase student engagement and alter behavior and social skills, as well as influence the sustainability of these Community Schools through the creation and management of partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

As previously mentioned, AmeriCorps State and National members will serve as "Mentoring

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Coordinators" or "Parent Organizers" at the 128 schools (depending on the needs assessment), ultimately responsible for coordinating a Success Mentors program that targets chronically absent students and managing a Parent Engagement that seeks to build opportunities and capacities of parents to contribute to their school's success and keep their schools accountable for students learning and development.

While VISTA members will coordinate with and support AmeriCorps State and National members (i.e. helping develop their respective school's mentorship or parent engagement model, establishing and coordinating management and reporting systems among members, organizing trainings and events/group activities or meetings, etc.), AmeriCorps State and National Members will report directly to their school's Community Schools Director (one in each school working for the school's CBO partner – e.g. Children's Aid Society, Bronx Works, Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation, The Door), who is responsible for leveraging resources in the community and overseeing both mentoring and parent engagement activities at their school, among other things. On the other hand, VISTA members will report to an NYCDOE Community Schools Office Program Manager.

These member activities will help build a necessary foundation of support within community schools (i.e. school-community-home partnership) that will help sustain the schools, long-term, while also impacting student educational success.

The AmeriCorps NCCC team, supervised by a Director within the Community Schools Office, will work on internal and external beautification efforts at five schools in most need and organize community members around specific projects. Not only will the team make physical improvements at the five schools, but also contribute to the school's foundation of support by providing community members with other avenues for school involvement and leadership on future projects, bringing more community members into the partnership fold.

Foster Grandparents, part of the Senior Corps, would be scouted out as potential volunteer mentors for students in Community Schools, as they already have experience working with students in New York City. NYC Service and the NYCDOE will coordinate with the NYC Department for the Aging (DFTA), which runs the program.

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Overall, this program proposal will focus on education. The CNCS investment of \$1.6 million (\$1,669,620) for year one will be matched with approximately \$1.8 million (\$1,807,142) primarily from the NYCDOE and NYC Service.

### Conclusion

As demonstrated in this application, the work of AmeriCorps members would be a crucial part of this holistic approach toward elevating student educational outcomes in our highest need schools and more long-term, increasing opportunities for students post-graduation and working to eliminate the cycle of poverty in these low-income communities.

As New York City continues preparations to transform 128 public schools in low-income communities into NYC Community Schools, we look forward to being considered for the Operations AmeriCorps opportunity. Our city is launching more Community Schools than any other city in the nation and we hope to make AmeriCorps members a part of this transformative moment in our city's history.

### Sources

(1) Pappano, L. (2010) *Inside School Turnarounds: Urgent Hopes, Unfolding Stories*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

(2) Axelroth, R. (2009). *The Community Schools Approach: Raising Graduation and College Going Rates--Community High School Case Studies*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.

(3) Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V. (2013) *Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism: Impact of the NYC Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Chronic Absenteeism and School Attendance and Its Implications for Other Cities*. Baltimore, MD: Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

(4) Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J. M., Moore, L. A., & Fox, J. H. (2010). *Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in ending the high school dropout epidemic*. Baltimore, MD: Everyone Graduates

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Center, Johns Hopkins University; Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.  
<http://www.every1graduates.org/gradnation/item/download/201.html>.

(5) National Center for Community Schools. (2011). Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action. New York.

(6) American Psychological Association. (2012). Facing the school dropout dilemma. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropout-prevention.aspx>

### Organizational Capability

Organizational Capability

Member Experience: Organizational Strength and Supervision

NYC Service has several years of experience administering successful AmeriCorps grants, most consistently through its NYC Civic Corps Program. NYC Civic Corps is a federally-funded AmeriCorps program run by NYC Service since 2009 (763 members over the last five years) and unites a diverse group of professionals to serve full-time with partner organizations (nonprofits and city government agencies), working to increase their organizational capacity to engage volunteers, build sustainable volunteer initiatives, as well as engage in direct service. Anti-poverty programming includes reducing food insecurity by engaging volunteers in activities that connect New Yorkers with local benefits as well as working with the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) to create support for libraries and tutors in DHS Family Shelters. NYC Service's experience managing a large corps (105 members/year) serving at locations all over the New York City (50 different sites with 1-3 members each) puts the organization in a good position to successfully oversee the city-wide program being proposed in this application.

With the full partnership of the NYCDOE, which is leading the transformation of these 128 schools under the leadership of Chancellor Carmen Fariña with the full support and involvement of Mayor Bill de Blasio and as indicated in the executive summary and guidance and oversight from the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives Richard Buery, NYC Service is confident that the necessary support is in place to implement this program successfully and build on that success the following

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year.

In terms of staffing and supervision, the NYCDOE has recently formed the Office of Community Schools - led by Executive Director Chris Caruso - to oversee the transformation of these schools. Three staff members devoting 100 percent of their time to this AmeriCorps program (includes an NYC Community Schools Corps Program Officer, Members Services Officer, and Compliance Officer) will be hired with grantee funds to actively manage overall day-to-day program management, provide support to the overall Corps, and consistently ensure that members (and supervisors) are aware of and adhering to all AmeriCorps rules, including those regarding prohibited activity, which apply to volunteer generated by members. Four Program Managers in this office will also directly oversee the day-to-day work of 16 VISTA members and provide them with guidance as they coordinate with and support eight AmeriCorps S/N members in eight schools (checking in with them and their supervisors monthly, while also assisting the Community Schools Office with larger capacity building efforts that will touch all schools). Program Managers will report to a Director who oversees the Community Schools Office programs and reports to the Executive Director. Since the AmeriCorps S/N members will work in schools on a daily basis, Community School Directors on the ground will supervise and guide their daily work around parent engagement or student mentoring. The Service Years Director at NYC Service will serve as the grant manager responsible for reporting to CNCS and coordinating directly with the NYC Community Schools Corps staff (Program Officer, Members Services Officer, and Compliance Officer) within the Community Schools Office to ensure constant and consistent communication and proper reporting.

Member Experience: Training, Branding, and Compliance

An NYC Community School Training Team (CSTT) will be formed to provide structured, interactive and relevant organizational and professional development seminars that will enable AmeriCorps (hereinafter referred to as *corps*) members to achieve the objectives set forth by the NYCDOE Community Schools Office and host sites (i.e. schools). The CSTT will coordinate the delivery of a two-day orientation getting members familiar with AmeriCorps and Community Schools, as well as monthly seminar content focused on skill-building, knowledge-acquisition, and personal development as well as providing motivational and inspirational segments.

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Additionally, compliance will consistently be part of seminar to ensure members are constantly aware of rules and regulations and understand they have staff they can discuss any issues or questions with (i.e. VISTA member or NYC Community Schools Corps Compliance Officer, who will oversee compliance across the program). NYC Service and the NYCDOE both understand they will be accountable if any instances or risk or noncompliance are identified, which is why a staff member will be devoted to overseeing this key aspect of the program.

An overall key goal of the seminars is to facilitate collaboration among corps members, Community School Directors (hired by Community-Based Organizations that are paired with 128 schools to adopt the community school approach), the members of the Community Schools Office, and NYC Service. Results of the seminars will be a cohesive community of corps members able to speak confidently about their experience and a continued commitment to shared goals and objectives of the Community School initiative in New York City.

The CSST will also meet weekly for the planning and evaluation of seminars (surveys will be issued to members after seminars for the latter). Please see the attached training plan for more detailed topics and a timeline for training AmeriCorps S/N members and VISTA members.

In addition to these consistent trainings, two-three causal socials will be organized by the CSST to encourage networking and team building among members in a relaxed environment.

With regards to branding, NYC Service will purchase AmeriCorps program t-shirts for members to ensure they are able to fully represent AmeriCorps and create awareness when they are working in schools on a daily basis an array of community members including students, parents, teachers, and local community-based organizations.

### **Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy**

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

Research shows that Community Schools are not only an effective approach to education, they are an efficient approach as well. The Children's Aid Society and The Finance Project collaborated on a Social Return on Investment (SROI) study that demonstrated a \$1 investment in a Community School in NYC can deliver between \$10.30 and \$14.80 in return on investment (1). This is largely due

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to the model's ability to build capacity among schools and their community partnerships to leverage additional public and private dollars.

In June of 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the NYC Community Schools Initiative would launch with a \$52 million grant to support the development of 45 Community Schools. This four-year grant leverages the Attendance Improvement and Drop-out Prevention (AIDP) funding provided by the New York State Department of Education and is being managed by the NYC DOE, in partnership with the United Way of New York City (United Way) and The Children's Aid Society's National Center for Community Schools, organizations which were selected to help lead this effort through a competitive bid process. This \$52 million in funding is allowing 45 schools to partner with a dedicated community-based organization (CBO) provider to render direct services. Partner CBOs receive on average \$300,000 in AIDP funds per year over the course of the four years. Specifically, the grant is focused on improving attendance rates, preventing drop-outs, and serving students and families with high needs.

The City is also engaging private sector organizations in developing partnerships that support sustainability. This is one of City's initial funding priorities, as it is committed to working with all stakeholders to establish a coherent and sustainable funding strategy that provides consistency and clarity for schools and CBO providers from the start.

Separately, approximately \$1.8 million (\$1,807,142) is being invested by the NYCDOE and NYC Service to specifically support structured student mentoring or parent engagement programs within the 128 schools. NYC Service and the NYCDOE are requesting CNCS to cover approximately \$1.6 million (\$1,669,620) for year one and, as demonstrated above, is investing a match well above 50 percent. CNCS funding combined with the NYC Service and NYCDOE investment (total of \$3,476,762) will ensure a positive and supportive experience for members as they work with the city to transform these 128 schools and their communities.

### Sources

1) Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools. (2013) The Children's Aid Society & The Finance Project. Retrieved October 1, 2014 from

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[http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/GUIDE\\_final\\_0.pdf](http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/GUIDE_final_0.pdf)

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Given the volume and complexity of this Community Schools work (i.e. the initiative as a whole), the City will partner with a third party evaluator to assist in the refinement of selected metrics and the development of a robust evaluation focused on student outcomes.

The next steps in this effort will include:

- Developing an agreed upon logic model to identify inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes of this work. Data collection will include qualitative and quantitative data, both of which will allow City leadership and researchers the opportunity to track Community Schools outcomes.
- Creating observation instruments, metrics for formative assessment, and conducting an independent summative evaluation.

The first year of this effort is focusing on evaluating system-building and implementation, while the subsequent years will be focused on students' academic, attendance, and behavioral outcomes.

### Amendment Justification

N/A.

### Clarification Summary

Executive Summary Cont.

From July 2015 to June 2016, 16 AmeriCorps VISTA members will coordinate with and support eight AmeriCorps S/N Members in eight schools and support the Community Schools Office with the roll out of key capacity building efforts, the latter across the 128 schools. Some specific activities include supporting the development of each of their respective schools' mentorship and parent engagement models, coordinating trainings/briefings for incoming S/N members and others on the developed plan and implementation; developing reporting system for S/N members; training school staff,

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Community School Directors, and CBO partners in new data reporting system; work with the Community School Director to coordinate resources within the school's community (e.g. attend Community Partnership Program (CPP) meetings discussing community resources, attend weekly school meetings and propose resource coordination plans); support Community Schools Office with the integration of expanded learning (i.e. three additional school hours per day) opportunities by coordinating with the Community School Director, school staff and CBO partners at respective schools on program options; visit respective schools and communicate with Community School Directors on the work and progress of S/N members; manage direct communication with S/N members regarding events/activities, and networking opportunities; organize group meetings with S/N members they coordinate with to allow S/N members to share best practices and challenges as well as build a support network between them.

One AmeriCorps NCCC teams of 12 members will work on both internal and external beatification efforts at five (5) Community Schools in need, organizing and coordinating with community members (i.e. students, parents, school staff, local residents) around this need for one month from May to June 2016. NYC Service will find a nonprofit partner in the city to coordinate with and pay for housing over the team's month of service.

VISTA Area of Focus: Education (K-12 Success in student educational and behavioral outcomes in low performing schools)

### Capacity Building Measures

OUTPUT: G3-3.5 Number of staff and community volunteers that received training (of one or more types) as a result of capacity building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants

OUTCOME: G3-3.15 Number of additional types of services offered by organizations as a result of capacity building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants in a) Disaster Services, b) Economic Opportunity, c) Education, d) Environmental Stewardship, e) Healthy Futures and/or f) Veterans and Military Families

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Anti-Poverty (K-12 Success)

OUTPUT: Number of mentees completing a full school year of the mentoring program with a mentor.

OUTCOME: Number of mentees with increased academic engagement (i.e. improved school attendance)

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A.