

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Denver Public Schools

Application ID: 15ES168261

Program Name: Denver Public Schools

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing summary feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one Reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments

Strengths:

The applicant provides a reasonable description of how poor attendance, low math proficiency, and lack of school engagement contribute to Denver's high school dropout rate and how the proposed intervention will address these factors.

The applicant presents a compelling description of how AmeriCorps members will contribute in a unique and meaningful way to fill existing gaps in Denver Public Schools' capacity without duplicating or displacing staff.

The applicant outlines a comprehensive, ongoing training plan that will equip AmeriCorps members for success in their positions, including a wide range of helpful program-specific topics, AmeriCorps-related content, and prohibited activities.

Below are some strengths that the applicant provided to support the program design:

The applicant has identified a need to increase the graduation rate in the community, quoting the 4-year graduation rate in Denver Public Schools as 61.3%.

The applicant has provided information on students failing math and explained how year to year performance has decreased at the 'targeted' schools, i.e., 51% of 4th graders, 55% of 6th graders and 62% of 8th graders were below proficiency standards in 2013-2014.

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides some data to illustrate the stated problem/need in the proposed target schools, but fails to provide sufficient context to determine the actual severity of the problem in the local community, such as data on math proficiency in other district schools, graduation rates in target vs. non-target schools, or any data on 9th grade attendance or school engagement.

The applicant cites research to justify the interventions chosen to address the problems of family/student engagement, poor attendance, and low math proficiency, but the evidence provided is insufficient to support the programs' likely effectiveness in improving these factors or high school dropout rates.

Although the applicant identifies lack of school engagement as one of the problems in target schools, neither the narrative nor the logic model clearly illustrates the relationship between this problem and inputs, activities, and outcomes related to improved engagement; e.g., lack of engagement is not listed as a problem/need in the logic model, and it is unclear how math tutoring will improve parent engagement.

The application does not provide sufficient detail about the content, duration, or frequency of training that supervisors will receive to determine whether they will be equipped to effectively support AmeriCorps members.

The applicant does not adequately describe how the skills and experience gained by AmeriCorps members through service in this DPS/UESC program will equip them for future employment. Below is a list of weaknesses in the program design:

The applicant did not provide any local or national data to describe student educational statistics in the state of Colorado.

The applicant did not include any information on the 'targeted' population that it plans to serve, such as low socio-economic backgrounds, including poverty statistics, and studies relative to support the need/problem as it relates to their community/state or national averages.

The applicant provided general information relating to students earning low test scores, however the applicant did not provide specific information on how the students in the targeted school standardized test scores compared to other students in the state.

The applicant does not provide information to support how they identified the targeted grades of 4th, 6th, 8th and 9th grade students attendance support, or why tutoring support will only be offered at the 4th, 6th and 8th grade levels.

The applicant did not provide any specific information on the communities this project is expect to support.

The applicant states that they will target non-English speakers, immigrants, low-income and refugee students, however they do not provide sufficient evidence explaining why this population is being targeted for the proposed project.

The applicant has provided some general information on the graduation rate. However, the time frame for comparison is unclear. It is not clear what the graduation rate it has provided covers, i.e., is the 61.3% graduation rate cited continuous over for the last 4 years and that might imply that no progress has been made.