

Evidence Brief

Effective CNCS-Funded Education Programs

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Corporation for
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Evidence Brief: CNCS-Funded Education Programs

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is the federal agency that leads service and volunteering in the United States, helping millions of Americans improve their lives and the lives of their fellow citizens through service. Through AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, national service members work hand-in-hand with local communities to tackle their most pressing challenges. Among the interventions and national service programs CNCS has funded in the education area, those with positive results from high-quality, independent, and rigorous impact studies are featured in this brief.¹ Through AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and other programs², the agency has made sustained investments in students, schools, parents, teachers, and communities across the country.

Who did these programs serve?

The AmeriCorps and Senior Corps interventions span a range of target groups. They cover early childhood education, pre-kindergarten through grade 12, after-school and summer programs, as well as postsecondary education including college access enrollment, persistence, completion, and job readiness. Funded programs serve low-income, low-performing, and at-risk target groups with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, in communities all over the country.³

What did these programs accomplish?

The education-focused programs supported by CNCS have produced favorable and measured outcomes in the areas of:

- Kindergarten or school readiness
- Improved socioemotional skills
- Emergent literacy skills
- Improved reading and math achievement
- Improved attendance and behavior
- Reduced school dropout rate
- Improved standardized test scores (e.g., ACT or SAT)
- High school completion
- Increased access to college and careers, college enrollment, persistence and completion, and others.

How did these programs do it?

The evidence-based AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs employ a variety of models, including inquiry-based curriculum, one-on-one tutoring/mentoring/coaching/counseling, summer programs, high school/college dual enrollment, professional development, comprehensive school reform, residential programs, training for parents or new teachers, life skills training, home visits, and general student academic support.

Two service delivery modes are common across the effective programs: (1) formal education and training delivered individually or in a group setting and/or (2) one-on-one individualized support. The dosage, intensity, and duration of these interventions vary. Of the 13 interventions in the education area that provided solid evidence of working:

- Ten focused on K–12 success. These interventions provided a wide range of services for different age groups, from literacy development programs in elementary school to one-on-one tutoring for high school students.⁴
- Two focused on school readiness. These interventions included literacy development support in preschools and home-visiting for parents with young children to develop their literacy skills.⁵
- One focused on postsecondary preparation and providing college preparation support in high schools.⁶

¹ Based on an independent meta-synthesis study conducted in 2018 (S. Richman, N. Maxwell, A. Streke, K. Needels, and K. Eddins. "Evidence of Effectiveness in CNCS-Funded Interventions: Benchmark Findings." Prepared for the Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation. Chicago, IL: Mathematica Policy Research, 2018), these programs had a range of effect sizes from 0.05 to 0.50 and an average, statistically significant, effect size of 0.26 across these impact studies. This corresponds to a 10-percentage-point increase on favorable outcomes for participants and means the average person in the treatment group would score higher than 60 percent of a control group that was initially equivalent.

² For more information, see www.nationalservice.gov

³ More details on target groups can be found in Table 2.

⁴ These programs had an average effect size of 0.22.

⁵ These programs had an average effect size of 0.38.

⁶ This program had an effect size of 0.23.

TABLE 1. EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS FUNDED BY CNCS AND THEIR KEY FINDINGS

INTERVENTIONS	KEY FINDINGS
Blue Engine places AmeriCorps members trained as teaching assistants into classrooms to provide tutoring and extra learning time for students and to implement a social cognitive curriculum.	Blue Engine students' scores on Common Core algebra tests were 4 to 5 points higher than their peers, and their pass rate was 18 to 20 points higher.
Citizen Schools improves student academic engagement and performance, as well as high school graduation rates, by providing an after-school program supported by AmeriCorps members to low-income youth.	Students were twice as likely as their peers to select a top-tier high school, and three times as likely to complete four years of high school in a top-tier school. Students also had significantly higher attendance rates, were more likely to graduate in four years, and outperformed their peers in early high school math.
College Possible supports AmeriCorps members as coaches for low-income students to overcome financial, academic, and social/cultural barriers through ACT and SAT test preparation, college application assistance, financial aid consulting, guidance during the transition from high school to college, and ongoing support toward degree completion.	Research indicates the immediate college enrollment rate for students from low-income families is 52 percent, compared to 82 percent for high-income families. Low-income College Possible students' immediate enrollment rates ranged from 82 percent to 88 percent, eliminating the income achievement gap for immediate college enrollment.
Experience Corps is an intergenerational volunteer-based tutoring program that engages AmeriCorps members to help young readers who are reading below grade level to read at grade level by third grade.	Third-grade children in the program had significantly higher scores on a standardized reading test than children in the control schools. Office referrals for classroom misbehavior decreased by about half in the Experience Corps schools, but remained the same in the control schools.
Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI) Corps uses a home-based early intervention model with a curriculum delivered by AmeriCorps members trained as paraprofessional home visitors and large-group facilitators and aims to ensure both children's and parents' school readiness.	Children in the HIPPI program showed a gain of 11 points on early-language assessments, compared to 5 points for those who were not in the program. Mothers in the program reported significantly more involvement with their young children at home.
Jeffco Summer of Early Literacy (JSEL) is a summer literacy program that engages AmeriCorps members trained as tutors to transform summer from a time when students lose reading skills to a time when students gain academic skills.	Students participating in JSEL demonstrated improved literacy skills relative to students who did not participate. On average, JSEL students scored at the 54th percentile while non-JSEL students scored at the 50th percentile—equivalent to a statistically significant effect size of 0.10. Students who participated in three years of JSEL, on average, scored at the 61st percentile.
Jumpstart engages AmeriCorps members to prepare children for preschool and kindergarten in under-resourced communities.	On a scale of 1 to 5, Jumpstart children averaged gains of 1.47 points on assessments that measure oral language and early literacy skills (compared to 1.1 points by their peers, an increase of 29 percent).
Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) , a K–3 program, improves early literacy by placing trained AmeriCorps members in early learning centers and elementary schools to provide evidence-based reading interventions.	MRC kindergarten students produced more than twice as many correct letter sounds after one semester, and first grade students demonstrated more letter sounds than students without tutors.
Playworks improves student academic performance and school climate by placing full-time AmeriCorps members trained as coaches into low-income schools to facilitate organized play during recess.	Teachers in Playworks schools reported less bullying and exclusionary behavior than teachers in schools without Playworks, and students were more likely than their peers to report better behavior and attention in class after sports, games, and play.
Reading Partners aims to improve elementary student reading proficiency by engaging AmeriCorps members to leverage community volunteers to provide one-on-one reading tutoring.	Reading Partners had a positive impact on three different measures of student reading scores equivalent to 1.5 to 2 months of additional growth. Reading Partners is a low-cost option for under-resourced schools. Schools pay \$710 per student, compared with an average of \$1,690 per student for other reading programs offered in the same school.
SEED School of Washington, DC is an urban, public charter boarding school focused on academics and college preparation, as well as on basic life skills for high school students.	SEED students' math scores were 76 percent higher than typical annual gains in the first year. In the second year, students improved by the equivalent of 1.5 years of typical growth. Students saw no increase in reading improvement the first year, but in the second year their test scores exceeded non-SEED students by the equivalent of one year of typical growth.
SPARK uses AmeriCorps members to provide in-school tutoring and family engagement to develop the literacy skills of early-grade students and to support families as they learn to support the literacy development of their students.	Sixty-two percent of SPARK students who started below benchmark met benchmark at the end of the study, compared with only 10 percent of their tutorless peers. SPARK students were absent from school 5.8 fewer times and were 27 percent less likely to be chronically absent from school.
Teach for America (TFA) improves educational outcomes by placing AmeriCorps members into high-poverty schools in hard-to-staff subjects.	TFA teachers were more effective than the teachers with whom they were compared. On average, students assigned to TFA teachers scored higher on end-of-year math assessments than students assigned to comparison teachers by the equivalent of an additional 2.6 months of school.

TABLE 2. PROGRAM BY INTERVENTION CORE COMPONENTS, OUTCOMES, TARGETED POPULATIONS, AND AMERICORPS/SENIOR CORPS ROLES

Program (Site Evaluated)	Core Components	Outcomes	Targeted Population	AmeriCorps/Senior Corps Role
SCHOOL READINESS				
HIPPY Corps (San Diego, CA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructional home visits Parent/child literacy activities Parent monthly group meetings and instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced emergent literacy skills Increased parenting skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 to 5 years old Hispanic Low income Parents of young children 	AmeriCorps members deliver school readiness and literacy interventions to families with 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds
Jumpstart (San Francisco, Fresno, Los Angeles, CA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole-class and small-group language and literacy activities Individual language and literacy activities Family involvement/communication Volunteer engagement in projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced emergent literacy skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 to 6 years old Low income 	AmeriCorps members deliver the evidence-based early education program and serve as site coordinators to leverage community volunteers.
SCHOOL READINESS AND K-12 SUCCESS				
Minnesota Reading Corps (MN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole-class literacy enrichment activities One-on-one or small-group literacy tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced emergent literacy skills Increased reading/English Language Arts (ELA) achievement Ready to enter kindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K to 3rd grade Low income 	AmeriCorps members work with children one-on-one and in small groups daily, providing literacy interventions that are tailored to each learner's needs.
K-12 SUCCESS				
Blue Engine (New York, NY)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tutoring or supplemental instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased math achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9th grade Hispanic Low income 	AmeriCorps members partner with teachers to lead small-group instruction in class and one-on-one tutoring outside of the classroom.
Citizen Schools (Boston, MA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apprenticeships High school application support College preparation Leadership skills instruction Alumni program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved attendance Increased high school completion Increased math achievement Increased reading/ELA achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6th to 8th grade African American and Hispanic Low income 	AmeriCorps members develop trusting relationships with students and their families, foster student academic and leadership skills through hands-on projects, help students make connections between current learning and future opportunity, and engage volunteers at the participating schools.
Experience Corps (Baltimore, MD; Bay Area, CA; Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; Boston, MA; Philadelphia, PA; New York, NY; Portland, OR; Washington, DC; Port Arthur, TX)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased reading/ELA achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 to 9 years old African American and Hispanic Low income 	AmeriCorps members serve as reading tutors.

Program (Site Evaluated)	Core Components	Outcomes	Targeted Population	AmeriCorps/Senior Corps Role
Jeffco Summer of Early Literacy Program (Jefferson County, CO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy instruction Professional support for teachers Parenting events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased reading/ELA achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K to 6th grade Hispanic Low income 	Struggling readers work daily, one-on-one, with trained AmeriCorps members to develop key literacy skills. AmeriCorps members helped students practice the five key building blocks to literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
Playworks (Anonymous for confidentiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized recess activities Class game time Youth leadership program After-school activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved socio-emotional skills Improved BMI/fitness level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific populations not identified 	AmeriCorps members provide a schoolwide evidence-based program, utilizing play to create supportive environments with reduced bullying.
Reading Partners New York, NY; Washington, DC; East Bay, South Bay, Los Angeles, Sacramento, CA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-on-one tutoring Dedicated school space and use of materials Structured and individualized curriculum Student assessments for data-driven instruction Rigorous and ongoing training Instructional supervision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved reading/ELA achievement Improved socio-emotional skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K to 5th grade Hispanic Low income 	AmeriCorps members manage volunteer recruitment and day-to-day operations of the literacy tutoring program.
SEED School (Washington, DC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized curriculum as needed Student life program College counseling Student support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased math achievement Increased reading/ELA achievement Increased high school completion Improved socio-emotional skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6th to 12th grade African American Low income 	Research funded through Social Innovation Fund (2009-2017)
SPARK Literacy Program (Greater Milwaukee, WI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual literacy tutoring Family engagement/communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved reading achievement Improved attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K to 3rd grade African American Low income 	AmeriCorps members serve as reading tutors.
Teach for America (Anonymous for confidentiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly selective admission criteria Pre-service training Training and professional development while teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased math achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific populations not identified 	AmeriCorps members serve as full-time teachers in district and charter public schools
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SUPPORT				
College Possible (MN; NE; OR; WI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAT and ACT preparation College admissions consulting/support Financial aid consulting/support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved ACT scores Increased college enrollment Increased college applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school and college Hmong Low income 	AmeriCorps members provide consulting for college preparation, including admission, financial and test preparatory support. They serve as near-peer coaches to high school or college students.

TABLE 3. KEY STUDIES THAT FORM BASIS FOR EVIDENCE

Intervention	Document	Evaluator
Blue Engine	Casciano, R. (2015). Estimating the Impact of Blue Engine Program on Common Core Algebra Scores	Glass Frog Solutions
Citizen Schools	Arcaira, E., Vile, J. D., & Reisner, E. R. (2010). Achieving high school graduation: Citizen Schools' youth outcomes in Boston. Policy Study Associates: Washington, DC. (Link)	Policy Studies Associates
College Possible	Howley, C., & Uekawa, K. (2013). Evaluation of College Possible postsecondary outcomes, 2007-2012. Corporation for National and Community Service. (Link)	ICF
	Avery, C. (2013). Evaluation of the College Possible Program: Results from a Randomized Controlled Trial (No. w19562). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. (Link)	National Bureau of Economic Research
Experience Corps	Rebok, G. W. (2004). Short-Term Impact of Experience Corps® Participation on Children and Schools: Results from a pilot randomized trial. <i>Journal of Urban Health</i> , 81(1), 79–93. (Link)	Johns Hopkins School of Medicine
	Lee, Y. S., Morrow-Howell, N., Jonson-Reid, M., & McCrary, S. (2012). The Effect of the Experience Corps® Program on Student Reading Outcomes. <i>Education and Urban Society</i> , 44(1), 97–118. (Link)	Washington University in St. Louis
HIPPY	Necoechea, D. M. (2007). Children at-risk for poor school readiness: The effect of an early intervention home visiting program on children and parents. University of California, Riverside. (Link)	University of California, Riverside
Jeffco Summer of Early Literacy Program	Augenblick, Palaich and Associates. (2015). An Evaluation of the Jeffco Summer of Early Literacy (JSEL) Program. Corporation for National and Community Service. (Link)	APA Consulting
Jumpstart	Grant, B.J., Shannon, L. (2015). An Evaluation of Jumpstart: Effects on Preschool-age Children in California. Corporation for National and Community Service. (Link)	Magnolia Consulting
Minnesota Reading Corps	Markovitz, C. E., Hernandez, M. W., Hedberg, E. C., & Silbergliitt, B. (2014). Impact Evaluation of the Minnesota Reading Corps K-3 Program. Corporation for National and Community Service. (Link)	NORC
Playworks	Fortson, J., James-Burdumy, S., Bleeker, M., Beyler, N., London, R. A., Westrich, L., & Castrechini, S. (2013). Impact and implementation findings from an experimental evaluation of Playworks: Effects on school climate, academic learning, student social skills and behavior (No. 8b2d9e64d91647a795a9ee93ab265c15). Mathematica Policy Research. (Link)	Mathematica Policy Research
Reading Partners	Jacob, R., Armstrong, C., & Willard, J. (2015). Mobilizing volunteer tutors to improve student literacy: Implementation, impacts, and costs of the reading partners program. (Link)	MDRC
SEED School of Washington DC	Unterman, R., Bloom, D., Byndloss, D., & Terwelp, E. (2016). Going away to school: An evaluation of SEED DC. Corporation for National and Community Service. (Link)	MDRC
SPARK	Jones, C., Christian, M., & Rice, A. (2016). The results of a randomized control trial evaluation of the SPARK literacy program. Milwaukee, WI: Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE). University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. (Link)	SREE
Teach for America	Clark, M. A., Chiang, H. S., Silva, T., McConnell, S., Sonnenfeld, K., Erbe, A., & Puma, M. (2013). The Effectiveness of Secondary Math Teachers from Teach For America and the Teaching Fellows Programs. NCEE 2013-4015. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. (Link)	Mathematica Policy Research