



A Pilot Initiative to Advance Replicable Academic Support Practices by National Service Participants in Urban Schools

An Innovative Partnership between City Year and Neighborhood House Charter School

A Case Study

By Rebecca Berne



Foreword by Michael Brown

City Year began with the belief in the power of young people to “give a year” and “change the world.”

That belief gave rise to a corps of idealists who dedicate a year or more of their lives to full-time national service to improve their communities and nation. More than 16,000 young people have served in the City Year corps since our founding in 1988.

Throughout our 24-year history, City Year has been on a journey — a journey to tap the civic power of young adults to meet pressing local and national needs. As you will read in these pages, a significant — perhaps the most significant — part of that journey has been our advancement into the education space. Today, our corps is fully focused on helping students and schools succeed.

Up before the sun, City Year AmeriCorps members put on their khakis and their distinctive City Year jackets, and they head out to work in schools in some of the most challenged neighborhoods in America. Throughout the school day and after school, they connect with students in a meaningful way. They help at-risk students improve their attendance, behavior and course performance — the early warning indicators that can predict whether a student may one day drop out of school. They help keep students in school and on-track to graduation.

We do this because a quality education for all is the economic, moral and civil rights imperative of our time. National service is a high-impact, affordable way to help schools to implement many of the evidence-based reforms that have been proven to increase student success.

This case study is about our partnership with the Neighborhood House Charter School (NHCS) to co-develop and field-test academic practices that corps members are carrying out in schools each day, first in NHCS and now across the country. It tells how we worked together to discover how a team of AmeriCorps members can partner with teachers to most effectively help students. It details the significant academic results our corps members helped to achieve in the school. And it describes how best practices that emerged from this pilot have become important elements of our Whole School, Whole Child service model. Most of all, this case study describes how City Year AmeriCorps members are a new kind of volunteer practitioner who can help move the needle on metrics that matter in high-need schools. In this developmental work, we had a remarkable partner, the Neighborhood House Charter School, and its deeply talented and dedicated leadership staff and teachers.

We are using the knowledge gained from this pilot to continue to develop our corps-member-as-practitioner model, rolling out learning and best practices from the pilot to City Year Boston and the City Year network nationwide.

The pilot helped put City Year AmeriCorps members on a path to becoming powerful practitioners at a time when education is key not only to the success of our nation’s young people but also to our global competitiveness. By 2018, two thirds of all jobs in America will require a meaningful post-secondary credential, which means that we must reach a 90% high school graduation rate — up from a 75% rate nationwide, and alarming 40% to 60% rate among urban students of color.

The young adults of America are prepared to do more to help reach this goal—they are demanding to serve in unprecedented numbers. City Year and AmeriCorps applications are at record levels, with more than a half million applications to AmeriCorps last year alone. As you read about this pilot and the powerful role that national service can play in education, I believe you will find that we must say yes to these young people, we must tap their enormous civic energies to help students and schools succeed.

We are tremendously grateful to philanthropists Sherry and Alan Leventhal, who not only funded the City Year/NHCS pilot, but also engaged with us during the three years to ensure its success. We are also very grateful to Janet Atkins of Ridgeway Philanthropy, for her vision and guidance throughout. The accomplishments of the pilot are a testament to the talent and dedication of NHCS Headmaster Kevin Andrews and his team, who have been outstanding partners, and to the leadership of Stephanie Wu, City Year national Senior Vice President of Program Design and Evaluation and Sandra Lopez Burke, Vice President and Executive Director of City Year Boston, and their excellent teams. A special thank you to Rebecca Berne, the author of the case study, and to each City Year AmeriCorps member who served with distinction at the Neighborhood House Charter School.



Michael Brown
CEO and Co-Founder, City Year, Inc.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. The Origins of a Strategic Collaboration	4
2. The Pilot’s Objectives	8
3. Co-Developing and Field Testing Corps Member Academic Practices.....	11
4. Demonstrating Results	16
5. Co-Developing Best Practices for City Year’s WSWC Service Model.....	22
6. Conclusions and The Road Ahead	25
Endnotes	27
Appendix A: Background Information.....	29
Appendix B: NHCS City Year AmeriCorps Member Teams.....	30

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Executive Summary

Pilot Objectives

To develop and test nationally replicable academic support practices for City Year AmeriCorps members to carry out in high-need schools, City Year partnered with Neighborhood House Charter School (NHCS). NHCS is an innovative K-8 Boston charter school whose student population reflects the demographics and learning needs of high-need schools across the country.

Together, City Year and NHCS conducted a three-year pilot that achieved exciting results, demonstrating the positive impact a trained City Year team has on student success.

Pilot Background

The City Year corps is made up of young AmeriCorps members who dedicate a year to full-time national service. In 2006, after numerous years deploying its corps to a variety of service projects in multiple fields, City Year decided to focus its work in a single area where its corps members have unique strengths: education. City Year's corps had long been working with students in schools across the country, but without a unified, strategically focused and outcomes-driven mission. City Year set out to harness the power of national service to have a significant and measurable impact on student success in high-poverty schools. With a new laser-focus standardizing its work in education, City Year began to build its Whole School, Whole Child (WSWC) service model. The organization designed the model to help keep students in school and on track to high school graduation. The model focuses on three “early-warning indicators” that research has shown can predict which students are most likely to drop out of school: (1) attendance, (2) behavior, and (3) course performance in math and English.

With the framework of WSWC in place, City Year needed a way to pilot, test and train corps member academic practices—it needed an academic partner. Neighborhood House Charter School in the Dorchester area of Boston—one of the first charter schools in Massachusetts—has bold and creative school leadership with the proven expertise and dedication to partner on this work. NHCS also serves a student population that mirrors the demographics of the high-need schools where City Year serves nationally—and is committed to continuous innovation in order to fully develop the interests and talents of all of its students. The innovative school emerged as a venue ideally suited to field testing academic practices for full-time national service volunteers.

Pilot Description

Each year of the three-year pilot, a team of 10 City Year AmeriCorps members serving at NHCS provided targeted math and literacy interventions to off-track students, along with whole-class supports and whole-school programming. During the school day, corps members implemented metrics-driven, research-based academic interventions focusing on areas including fluency and vocabulary in English Language Arts and skill building in math. These are areas that leverage the corps' unique strengths to increase student success, and also help to maximize teachers' time and attention. Corps members also led enrichment clubs, served as “lunch buddy” mentors, and ran school-wide activities to contribute to NHCS's positive school climate and learning environment. After school, corps members provided course coaching and homework help on a regular basis to off-track students. Starting with baseline individual scores and competencies, corps members carefully collected data throughout the duration of the pilot, enabling the co-development team of NHCS and City Year leadership to refine strategies, demonstrate what works, and incorporate learning from the pilot into the WSWC platform—in other Boston schools and across the City Year network.

Pilot Results

Together, the City Year/NHCS co-development team and the three impressive teams of corps members provided a proof point for the crucial role young people in national service can play driving student success.

Measurable results

Data collected over the course of the pilot show the measurable, positive impact that City Year corps members can have on off-track students' academic progress, when working with a teacher on whole-class interventions and when working one-on-one with off-track students.

In year 3 of the Pilot:

English

- Students in grades 5-7 working with City Year mastered 94% of new vocabulary terms.
- 16 of 25 struggling readers working with City Year finished the year above benchmark in oral reading fluency.

Math

- 84% of students in grades 1-6, working with City Year, mastered 20 new math skills, exceeding the pilot goal by 10%.

Course Coaching

- 21 of the 24 students who participated in City Year's course coaching intervention passed all core courses, up from 15 students in Q1.
- 88% of students completed more than 75% of their homework, up from 54% at the start of year.

And NHCS teachers report that they saw City Year's positive impact on their students:

- 100% of teachers agree/strongly agree that they were satisfied with the overall impact of City Year on their students;
- 83% of teachers agree/strongly agree that corps members helped to differentiate instruction.

A more extensive set of pilot results—including results across the pilot's three years—is included in section 4, below.

Differentiated Instruction

A team of corps members enabled NHCS teachers to provide better differentiated instruction in the classroom. Teachers could work with one small group of students at one skill level, while corps members worked with another at a different skill level—a research-based practice that maximizes student learning. In addition, with corps members fully integrated into the school, NHCS leadership was able to re-allocate the classroom distribution of special education teachers and students resulting in more and better student attention for special education and non-special education students alike.

A Transformational Partnership

School leaders, teachers, and students all report that the three-year partnership between City Year and NHCS was transformational.

“Having a corps member makes work easier. Instead of taking a month to get something in your head, it only takes a week.”

– Sam,¹ NHCS Student

“The corps members work hard and they’re focused. They also have a clear understanding of our expectations, and those expectations are high...By the end of the pilot, the City Years were like part of the faculty community, not an extra or an add-on”

– Kevin Andrews, NHCS Headmaster

“Some volunteers can make more work, but that’s not the case with City Year. The corps members are not just another set of hands. They are a higher caliber of help that I’ve come to rely on and need. It allows me to really focus my teaching—otherwise I couldn’t effectively run a small reading group. I can’t imagine going back to not having a corps member.”

– Holly Moulton, NHCS Teacher

“I still think this is the most affordable kind of support in a school that I’ve seen. That’s why the year after the pilot we built the cost of the City Year team into the NHCS budget. We need the corps in the school.”

– Janet Atkins, Ridgeway Philanthropy, pilot advisor

“The City Year corps members are not only helping the students directly, they’re also helping the teachers. Teaching is hard work. And City Year is making the teachers’ work easier, more effective, more efficient, providing important time for differentiated instruction. That’s really important and the results demonstrate the impact.”

– Sherry Leventhal, pilot funder

Best Practices

Best practices now used throughout the City Year network emerged from the pilot, including: corps members’ rigorous use of student-level performance data; the central role of the Program Manager who oversees each City Year school-based team; emphasis on training corps members; the importance of fidelity to the WSWC model; and refinement of City Year’s school partnership criteria and corps members’ profile, training, daily schedule, and service calendar.

Pilot Conclusions

During the three years of the pilot, City Year’s corps evolved from a corps of volunteers to a corps of practitioners. “When I look back, I realize that it’s largely because of the NHCS pilot this transformation happened,” said Stephanie Wu, City Year’s Chief Program Design and Evaluation Officer and Senior Vice President, who led the pilot with NHCS partners. For City Year, this means a rigorous focus on fielding, training, and deploying its corps to help schools make a real difference in at-risk students’ academic achievement.

1. The Origins of a Strategic Collaboration

The Philanthropists' Introduction to City Year



Sherry and Alan Leventhal

When Sherry Leventhal first visited City Year in 2008, the organization had recently made two big moves: to a new headquarters and to a new strategic focus on education. Her meeting with City Year leadership began as a discussion of the capital campaign for City Year's newly built headquarters, but turned quickly to the corps' work in schools. Philanthropists Sherry and Alan Leventhal do not usually make bricks-and-mortar gifts. But as longtime supporters of education and as benefactors of the Neighborhood House Charter School—Sherry Leventhal is a trustee and former board chair—they were interested in City Year's focus on public education. After the meeting, Sherry asked the Leventhals' philanthropic advisor, Janet Atkins of Ridgeway Philanthropy, to find out more about the corps and their work and determine if there was a way to have City Year fit into their philanthropic strategy.

City Year's First 20 Years

City Year's co-founders, former Harvard undergraduate and law school roommates Michael Brown and Alan Khazei, built the organization on the idea that young people in fulltime service have great, untapped power to enact positive change in their communities. They set out with the goal of creating a demonstration site—a program to affirm that young people in voluntary national service can be a potent vehicle for good.

City Year began in 1988 as a summer of service for a small, socioeconomically and racially diverse corps of young people in Boston. In the years since, it has expanded to a national corps performing a year of full-time service. 1500 corps members served at the time of Sherry Leventhal's first City Year meeting, and 2500 corps members serve today. With bright red uniform jackets, a highly-developed culture of idealism and diversity, a track-record of backing from both the corporate and public sectors, and a history of strong community partnerships, City Year has graduated some 16,500 young people who, after a year of full-time service, have gone on to have civic-minded careers in remarkable numbers.² The corps, whose average age is 22, is highly selective (five applicants applied for every one corps member position in 2012) and diverse (55% of corps members are individuals of color). President Clinton credits City Year with inspiring AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps today awards competitive grants to thousands of U.S. nonprofits each year including City Year, funding—despite serious budget threats—some 82,000 members in federal FY12, including City Year's corps members. 775,000 Americans have served in AmeriCorps since its founding.³

For many years, City Year conducted service projects as diverse as its corps. Their teams of 17-to-24 year olds served in partnership with nonprofit organizations and schools to staff, grow, and accelerate community-driven efforts. They strived to meet local needs, whether tutoring students, running community gardens, serving seniors, or helping to engage children in meaningful service.

City Year's Strategic Focus on Education

In 2005, City Year underwent a strategic planning process to standardize its service as a means to achieve greater impact. In addition to nurturing young leaders—an area in which they had demonstrated outcomes—City Year wanted to concentrate the corps' service in an area where they could provide measurable impact and help to solve a pressing problem. At the time, three quarters of all City Year corps members were already serving in schools. In consultation with outside education experts, City Year took a deeper look at this trend, which had happened organically, and saw that it occurred because of local demand for the unique value that corps members' could bring to schools: the corps is composed of diverse teams of idealistic “near-peers” who can work directly with hundreds of students every day. Corps members are young enough to relate well to students and mature enough to serve as tutors, mentors, and role models. Corps members work throughout the full school day from before

through after school adding significant capacity to schools. City Year felt that with an outcomes-based focus on using national service in the education space, they would have a powerful role to play helping at-risk students succeed in school.

Research out of Johns Hopkins University in 2007, which identified the concentration of high-need students in “dropout factories,” added further clarity to City Year’s focus. City Year’s leaders felt compelled to accelerate the organization’s work because of the gravity of the dropout crisis in the U.S. “So many schools in this country are underperforming, and many have been for decades, especially in communities of color,” said City Year CEO and Co-Founder Michael Brown. “As U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and others have said, the dropout crisis in this country is ‘the civil rights issue of our time.’ We are harnessing the idealism of trained young people in national service to address this crisis,” he said.

“We had built and honed our service program into an excellent ‘operating system,’ and it was time to take City Year’s impact to the next level,” said Brown. “Through our strategic planning process, we initiated ‘a killer application’ to work with school partners to really move the needle on the dropout crisis,” he said.

City Year’s Evidence-Based Whole School Whole Child Service Model

In 2008, the year the City Year-NHCS pilot began, City Year was in the early stages of its new strategic focus on education. The organization had begun to develop and, in a limited way implement, an early version of what would evolve into its signature, evidence-based, impact-oriented service model, then already named Whole School, Whole Child (WSWC). City Year was building the model with input and guidance from a group of thought leaders—academic experts in specialties including academic support, school climate, after school activities, and early-warning indicator systems and tiered response.

City Year based its model on human development research that shows the important role that consistent, productive, and caring adult relationships play in a young person’s life and school success, regardless of the young person’s family income level. The near-peer age and diversity of the corps enable corps members to connect with and relate to the students they serve: they are able to communicate new ideas for the student to consider and act upon in a way an older school staff member might not be able to. Corps members’ daily connections with students are positive and productive in a way that is essential in the often-chaotic learning environments of large urban schools.

WSWC performance metrics are rooted in the Johns Hopkins research that shows it is possible to identify which students are at risk of dropping out of school by pinpointing students who exhibit three “early-warning indicators:” poor attendance, behavior problems, and course failure in either math or English.⁴ Sixth graders who display at least one of the EWIs have only a 10-20% chance of graduating high school, this research shows.⁵ City Year partners with high-need

Research & Development at City Year

Beginning in 2005, City Year began to develop a four-phase research and development process to build the whole school whole child model.

1. Discovery

Engage thought leaders to perform reviews of empirical literature, review current activity and best practices from the field, and build a test model.

2. Design/Prototype

Test the model developed in Year 1 at one or more prototype sites, develop new trainings, and develop tools via learnings gathered among test site/s.

3. Refine

Revise model based on results of field test(s), engage more locations, and collect outcome data.

4. Deploy

Adoption of model at all sites network-wide which are monitored and refined using evaluation data, external research, and evolving education reform environment.

schools to help improve students' attendance, behavior and course performance—the “ABCs”—to get off-track students back on track to graduation.

The model ensures corps members are with students as much as possible, from before the first bell rings through the after school program. The WSWC supports and interventions are designed to take advantage of the powerful relationship between corps member and student: helping students advance academically, develop social and emotional skills, and strengthen the learning environment. During their year of full-time service, diverse teams of 8 to 20 AmeriCorps members (depending on school enrollment) collaborate with teachers and school leaders to identify at-risk students who are then placed on corps members' “focus lists.” City Year focus lists are designed support students with Tier 2 needs, those in need of daily moderate intensity support which allows teachers or specialists to work with students in need of more extensive professional support. City Year corps members help students set high expectations for their achievement. Corps members work with their focus list students, in addition to providing whole class and whole school supports. And working closely with school partners, City Year regularly monitors individual student performance to tailor the types and intensity of supports needed.⁶

Where City Year Serves

Today City Year's 2,500 corps members serve in 244 high need schools in 24 U.S. cities: Baton Rouge; Boston; Chicago; Cleveland; Columbia, SC; Columbus, OH; Denver; Detroit; Jacksonville; Little Rock/North Little Rock; Los Angeles; Miami; Milwaukee; New Hampshire; New Orleans; New York; Orlando; Greater Philadelphia; Rhode Island; Sacramento; San Antonio; San José/Silicon Valley; Seattle/King County; and Washington D.C.; and in international affiliates in Johannesburg, South Africa and London, England.

“The achievement gap in this country is driven by an implementation gap. While the research is clear that the most important element for student learning is an effective teacher, even a skilled teacher would find it difficult to meet each student's unique needs in a classroom where the majority of students need more than a great lesson every day,” said City Year President Jim Balfanz. “City Year provides a new human capital solution—a second shift of caring adults that can help schools get the right supports to the right students at the right time.”

The basic framework of WSWC was in place in 2008, but there was still a great deal of work remaining to field test and refine interventions that would maximize student academic gains. One clear priority was the selection and design of corps member interventions that would help students requiring Tier 2 supports improve their course performance, the “C” early-warning indicator of the ABCs. City Year knew that the organization must be very deliberate about the academic work that the corps carries out in schools—to both demonstrate measurable impact and allow for future needs to scale WSWC across all City Year sites.

“Before the pilot, we were novices on academic interventions—we were just beginning to learn about how corps members can be most effective. It quickly became apparent that to have an impact on students who are struggling, we would need to use academic practices geared specifically to the strength of a corps member,” said Wu. City Year knew that corps members were different from teachers. “We couldn't just borrow from teachers' practices. We needed to focus on which unique practices we could train the corps members in—areas where students need individualized attention that they might not be able to get from teachers teaching in a whole-class setting,” she said. And they needed to determine what specific academic areas to prioritize. They knew they would focus on literacy, but would they emphasize, for example, phonics? fluency? comprehension? vocabulary?

Developing Academic Practices: A Need and an Opportunity

When it came to achieving this important and ambitious goal, Atkins, the Leventhals' advisor, saw a need and also—given the philanthropists' focus—an opportunity. Atkins envisioned a pilot program to co-develop and rigorously test corps member academic practices in an environment where there is a significant need for corps members' help as well as some level of control. “City Year had this great idea, but they needed to show that the model works. A year of service by itself has meaning, but with a real focus, a year of service can have real leverage



Janet Atkins

in the education arena. You have to show results, and do it in a school where there is some level of control, a school that has a sense of itself, and has really smart people both in the classroom and in senior leadership.” She believed that NHCS, a school the Leventhals care deeply about, could provide this ideal environment in which to test the City Year theory of change around Whole School Whole Child.

Neighborhood House Charter School: An Ideal Collaborator

NHCS, a publicly funded charter school in the Dorchester area of Boston, was founded in 1995—it is one of the original 14 charter schools in Massachusetts. NHCS strives to provide its diverse student population with a top-quality education, leveling the playing field for students who would otherwise have limited access to the educational opportunities afforded to Boston students from affluent families. NHCS surpasses the performance of its peers and is recognized as one of the state’s top-performing schools.⁷

NHCS’s demographics help to paint a picture of the high level of need among its students: almost 80% of NHCS students receive free or reduced lunch. According to a 2010 study, “a majority of students at NHCS are at medium- to high-risk for academic, emotional, and behavioral issues” and NHCS serves a significantly larger proportion of medium-risk students and a comparable portion of high-risk students than expected in a comparison to both general and urban populations.⁸

Demographics of NHCS as compared to Boston Public Schools⁹

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	
BPS:	NHCS:
African American: 37%	African American: 53%
Asian: 9%	Asian: 4%
Hispanic Latino: 39%	Hispanic Latino: 15%
Mixed Race/Other: 2%	Mixed Race/Other: 4%
White: 13%	White: 24%
Enrollment by Income Status	
BPS:	NHCS:
Low-Income Students: 74%	Low-Income Students: 78%
Middle-Income Students: 26%	Middle-Income Students: 22%
Enrollment by Education Services	
BPS:	NHCS:
Students Receiving Special Education Services: 21%	Students Receiving Special Education Services: 16%
Students Not Receiving Special Education Services: 79%	Students Not Receiving Special Education Services: 84%

Kevin Andrews, who wrote the NHCS charter and has served as headmaster since its founding, makes it an NHCS priority to be on the “front lines of education reform, developing and testing successful models and practices.”¹⁰ While the majority of City Year’s school partners are non-charter public schools, the organization saw the potential benefits of working with NHCS’s school leaders, who are highly focused on effective reforms. “NHCS enrolls the student population we need to be working with. The school and its leadership are incredibly innovative. They also have an extremely high threshold for good performance—if we could cut it there, I knew we would be in good shape,” said Wu.

A Planning Grant to Probe the Pilot's Potential

The Leventhals made a summer planning grant to City Year. “The two organizations are very different—we needed to see if they could work together,” said Atkins. Andrews began the planning summer cautious of the work involved in incorporating the team into the school and classrooms. Sean Shirley-Davidson, NHCS Head of Middle School, and the NHCS’s liaison to City Year, had actually served in the City Year corps himself—in 1994, before City Year’s strategic shift to an education focus—and he shared some of Andrews’s concerns. On City Year’s side, leadership knew the pilot would require a great deal of time and energy. As a scaling organization with multiple demands on staff time and attention, they wanted to feel confident that the partnership would move the organization’s service model forward.

Members of City Year and NHCS leadership—what would become the “co-development team”—collaborated to frame the work the pilot would seek to accomplish and determine how to collect data to demonstrate results. Atkins facilitated these early meetings and played a role in meetings with both the school and with City Year throughout the pilot.

“During the first meetings there was a lot of pressure—getting to know each other by putting together a multi-year grant proposal,” said Wu. The co-development team came together around a plan to deploy a team of corps members to NHCS for three years, during which they would work together to design and pilot academic interventions for WSWC. Both sides felt that there was potential for great success in the work. Atkins and the Leventhals agreed.

2. The Pilot's Objectives

The Philanthropists' Charge

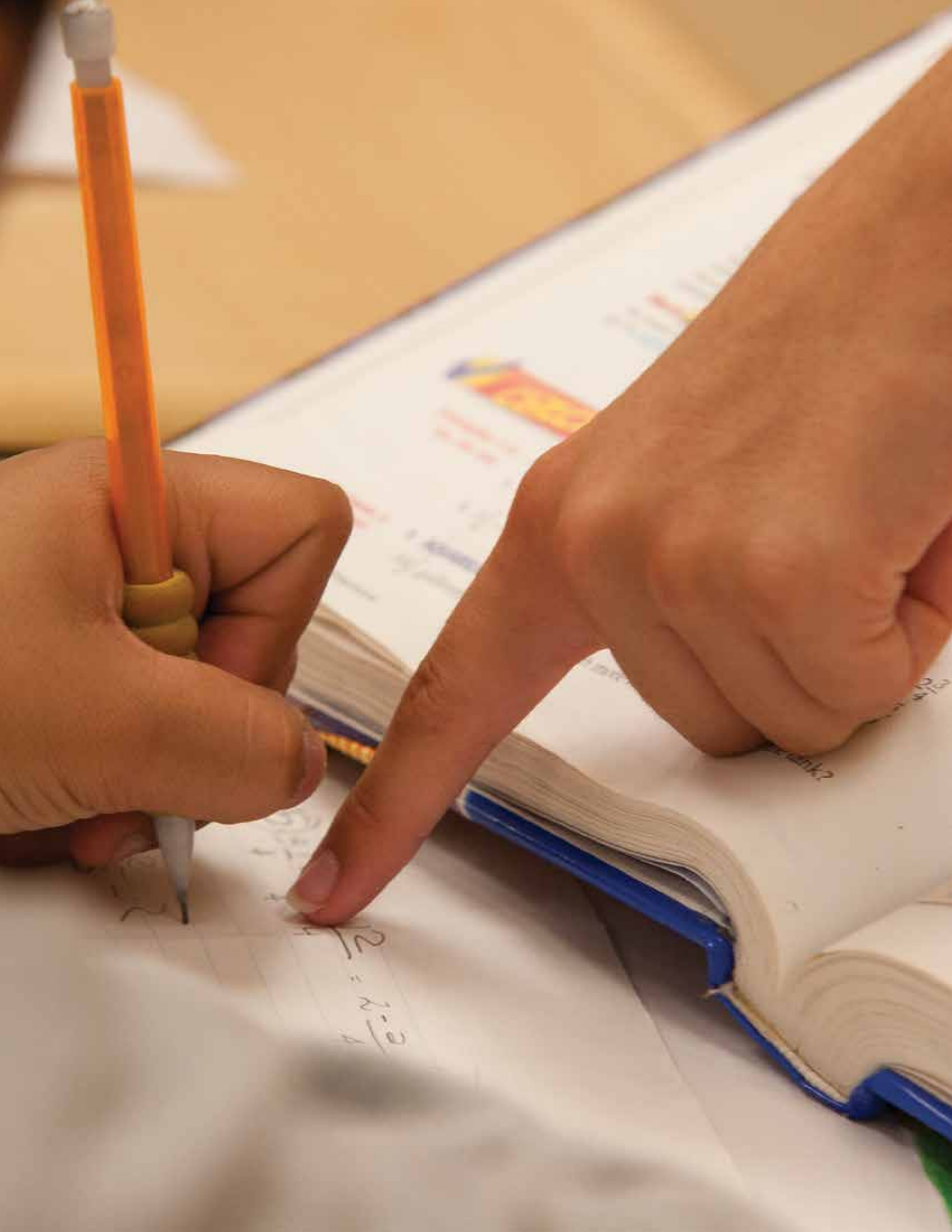
At the conclusion of the planning period, Sherry and Alan Leventhal decided to fund the proposed three-year pilot. “The Leventhals are very much about seeding new ideas,” Atkins said. “Alan always says: you need a passion and a plan. They are passionate about education. And, at the end of the day, they saw the pilot as a mechanism to help both City Year and NHCS and to improve education in our country. Time and time again, Sherry and Alan have funded demonstration projects that prove the concept and drive successful transformation.”

The Pilot's Objectives

The summer planning process resulted in a clear set of pilot goals. By end of the three-year period, the team determined, City Year would have:

- tested and refined a set of high-quality educational interventions in math and literacy that support and demonstrate real-time success for students;
- field tested and rigorously evaluated its service model with proven results that can be implemented nationally in a strategic effort to address achievement in urban schools;
- created a national demonstration site that can serve as a model for other schools and school systems wanting to integrate City Year with a clear understanding of what is needed for success in the City Year/School/System partnership.





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3. Co-Developing and Field Testing Corps Member Academic Practices

Launching the Pilot

City Year assigned one of their strongest program managers, Senior Program Manager Chris Farnkoff, to lead the team of corps members and their implementation of the pilot. Chris met regularly with NHCS administrators and teachers at the school, and he met weekly with City Year staff to monitor corps member progress and, crucially, drill down on student-level data.

Among Farnkoff's first tasks was leading selection of the inaugural team of City Year AmeriCorps members serving at NHCS. Each year, City Year advertised the pilot to the City Year Boston corps as rigorous and important—aiming to select the highest-caliber, most committed corps members from the already selective corps to carry out the pilot's crucial research and development work. The Team Leader—a senior corps member—assumed selected leadership and data collection responsibilities. Corps members were assigned, by and large, to work in a particular classroom or grade. NHCS administrators made these assignments carefully, matching corps members' subject-area and personality strengths with teachers' academic focuses and pedagogical styles.

Early this first year, as well as in subsequent autumns, NHCS administrators and teachers worked with City Year to identify focus lists of students requiring Tier 2 interventions whom the corps members would work with one-on-one and in small-groups.

Learning and Refining Over the Course of the Three Year Pilot

WSWC's framework calls for academic interventions to improve off-track students' course performance in math and English as well as activities that foster a positive school climate and learning environment. Which areas of math and literacy would the corps members focus on? What would the interventions look like? Though the academic focus on math and literacy was a constant throughout the course of the three years, the pilot—by design—changed over time. “Pilots are messy and high risk,” was Atkins's attitude. “In a good pilot, you get to miss a mark and then correct.” For this pilot, that meant making changes to the number and kind of interventions offered and refining measurement goals set from one year to the next in order to maximize impact at the school and opportunities for advancing WSWC. The key was to measure outcomes to intervention used and most importantly be able to tie those outcomes to the work of the City Year corps members.

Academic Focus: Literacy, Math, Course Coaching

Though the interventions were refined from year to year as the pilot advanced, all three corps member teams focused on the same core areas in math and English Language Arts (ELA). The co-development team elected to focus on areas within math and literacy best suited to a corps member's strengths—areas that are academically important, that corps members can be trained in, that require practice to master, and that are not possible to cover in sufficient depth by teachers teaching to a whole class. In ELA, that meant an emphasis on fluency and—later in the pilot—vocabulary. In math, that meant an emphasis on skill building.

“English Language Arts is a complicated beast in the sense that it has many different components that must be worked on to establish competency. The National Reading Panel identifies five—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension” said Emily Pratt, NHCS Director of Literacy and Social Studies/Director of Special Projects. “It is hard for teachers to find time to work on all of them, and fluency and vocabulary are fairly easy to train corps members to work on with individual students. Fluency and vocabulary are also easily measurable so we could see whether the corps members were making a difference. But most importantly, many students were behind in these areas. This work is important and it would not have happened without City Year,” she said. “Teachers invariably push fluency to the side,” agreed NHCS's Head of Middle School Sean Shirley-Davidson. “They do this because they feel they need to focus on comprehension. But difficulty with fluency actually breaks down comprehension,” he said.

In math, the corps members worked with students on mental math skills. “We had known long before the pilot that this was a priority that was not being addressed sufficiently,” said Kate Scott, Assistant Headmaster at NHCS and a math specialist, citing a “major skills deficit” among many students. This work is “very meaningful and very important to student progress but is something that someone without a ton of educational experience can come in and learn to do quickly, making it a good fit for City Year,” she said.

A Key Ingredient of the Pilot: Student-Level Data

Throughout the three-year pilot, rigorous and regular review of student-level data helped the City Year team measure and achieve results at NHCS. The NHCS pilot was the first time we were able to really drill down and work closely with student-level data,” said Wu.

Each corps member was responsible for recording data for the interventions they performed with their focus list students, noting both the “dosage” of help given and the student’s performance over time. The Team Leader—working under the direction of the City Year Program Manager—was responsible for entering student-level data into the database that charts student progress. The corps member team met regularly to review data and talk about how their focus list students were doing. Corps members also met one-on-one with Program Manager Farnkoff regularly—when a student was not improving, they discussed how to remedy that.

At NHCS, Farnkoff had regular meetings with school administrators to discuss student progress, and he also met with teachers to help make sure that corps members were doing their best work and that they were getting results. “I like to say that, at NHCS, we’re not data-driven—we’re data-informed,” said Headmaster Andrews. “It is also important to get the right kind of data.”

At City Year headquarters, Farnkoff presented student-level data each week—with student names redacted—to help City Year’s members of the co-development team to both work toward student improvement at NHCS and to refine the design work of the pilot.

7:40	“First Circle” – Morning Team Check-In
7:45 – 7:50	Check Course Coaching Students’ Homework and Call Home
7:50 – 8:10	Morning Reading Groups
8:10 – 9:00	Math Whole Class Support
9:00 – 9:50	Math Interventions
9:50 - 10:40	Math Whole Class Support
10:40 – 11:00	Recess Duty
11:00 – 11:20	Lunch Buddies
11:20 - 12:10	Teach “Green Week” Lesson in 8th Grade Science Class
12:10 – 1:00	Student Pull-Out for Math
1:00 – 1:50	Math Intervention
1:50 – 2:40	Planning Time/Collaboration with Teacher
2:40 – 3:20	Enrichments
3:20 – 4:30	Course Coaching
4:30 – 4:40	Call Home
5:00	“Final Circle” – End of day announcements and reminders
5:00 – 6:00	Plan and Prepare for Whole School Event

Year One: Field-Testing a Broad Array of Interventions

During the first year of the pilot, the co-development team, eager to make the most of the year, field-tested ten interventions in the middle and lower schools, collecting data and tracking student progress for each. Interventions in the areas of literacy, math, and school climate included: literacy support, math support (or “Math Mad Minutes”), lunch buddies mentoring program, afterschool program, 5th grade community building, and organized recess games in the lower school; and, early morning reading, afternoon homework support, middle school enrichments, middle school advisories and teambuilding in the middle school. “Our eyes were bigger than our stomach that first year—we wanted to collect data on everything,” said Atkins. “We realized we needed to keep our research questions really narrow after year one. If we couldn’t prove that results were because of City Year, we felt it shouldn’t be part of the pilot. That first year was difficult. But we were committed to determining if City Year could really move the needle on student progress.” As a result of the first year, City Year realized that its academic metrics and activities must be more focused—and connected to one another—if corps members were going to help students make meaningful gains.

Year Two: A Streamlined Roster of Initiatives

The co-development team launched the second year of the pilot with a streamlined roster of initiatives in the following areas: (1) ELA – fluency (2) math – mental math skills and (3) homework completion. To support fluency, corps members conducted an intervention called “Repeated Reading,” in which they help students practice reading aloud in timed sessions. In math, corps members administered a series of skill-building math quizzes over the course of the year, called “Mental Math Mastery,” tutoring students to help them master new math skills. In City Year’s homework initiative, corps members coached students through their homework during an afterschool program.

In addition to continuing to field test interventions to demonstrate that a corps member in the classroom could improve student achievement, the co-development team sought to test the premise—an outgrowth of the first year—that corps members can extend the school’s ability to provide differentiated instruction.

The corps member team focused on a smaller set of initiatives in year two, and they continued to conduct school climate activities including: school-wide events such as an anti-bullying assembly, a Green Week of environmental education, and a mock election; a “lunch buddies” mentoring program in which corps members eat lunch with designated students who need help with social and emotional learning; and, middle school enrichment clubs.

Year Three: Continuing to Field Test Interventions and Stretching Goals

In the pilot’s third year, work continued in the same areas as year two but with strengthened literacy and homework help interventions. In addition to oral fluency, the team added a vocabulary intervention focused on teaching students a selection of roots, prefixes and suffixes each month. Homework help evolved into course coaching, with corps members working with students to ensure proper completion of homework, providing help with organization and study skills and coaching on succeeding in their classes generally.



Selected Interventions

In the classroom, corps members provided whole-class supports, assisting the teacher throughout the lesson. In addition, they performed targeted interventions to help students who are falling behind. To the right are examples of these interventions.

1. English Language Arts

Repeated Reading: Corps members work with individual students with low fluency for at least two seven-ten minute sessions per week. The intervention begins with a student reading a passage aloud while the corps member records words read per minute. Next, the corps member and student practice “echo reading” using the same passage: the corps member reads a sentence and then the student reads the same sentence. Then, the corps member and student practice “choral reading” using the same passage: the corps member and student read each sentence together, with the student attempting to match the corps member exactly. Finally, the student reads the full passage aloud again unassisted. The corps member gives the student feedback on his or her progress. The corps member also updates the teacher on the student’s progress. Student progress is formally measured by comparing words read per minute during the first reading from one week to the next, as well as informally by comparing words read per minute at the beginning of the session to words read per minute at the end.

2. Math

Mental Math Mastery (M cubed): Students focus on learning new math skills, which are measured through assessments that the corps members administer. Corps members work individually with selected students who are falling behind in their mastery of new skills. Corps members work with students for one to two ten-minute sessions or for four five-minute sessions per week. The corps member leads the student in a practice session focused on the math skill being learned, with the aim of helping the student to master the skill. The corps member concludes the session by reviewing the student’s progress with him or her. The corps member also updates the teacher about the student’s progress.

3. Homework Help/Course Coaching

Corps members begin each session with a “Do Now” exercise that helps students transition to homework assistance. Each corps member reviews student homework assignments and assesses with students how they will get their homework finished. This review could include folders/planners/binders maintained by students either independently or in conjunction with school requirements. Students work independently or in small groups at the each corps member’s discretion. The corps member ensures quality completion of as much homework as is possible given the allotted time. If students have finished their formal assignments, corps members help them study for upcoming quizzes or tests. Before transitioning into the next activity or dismissal for the day, corps members conduct a final assignment check with students, tracking and recognizing the amount of homework each student was able to complete and reminding students of the importance of turning in those assignments.

4. Demonstrating Results

Measurable Results

The results gathered by the corps member teams over three years serving at NHCS demonstrate that they had an important impact on student-level academic achievement.

Each year, the pilot team set specific goals for each intervention to measure the efficacy of the interventions and their implementation. By refining over the three years, they finished the final year of the pilot with very strong year three results across the areas of ELA, Math, and Course Coaching:

Year 3 Results

I. Literacy

In Year 3, City Year corps members worked with 199 students in grades 2-6 to support their oral reading fluency. Two goals were set: one relating to the progress of the whole class, and one relating to students receiving targeted interventions.

Literacy Area A: Oral Fluency

Goal 1: For students participating in targeted intervention, 50% will achieve benchmark.

Results: Goal Met/Exceeded. In the third year, 25 students in grades 1-6 received repeated reading interventions twice a week. 64% (16) of Tier 2 students achieved benchmark at the end of year.

Goal 2: To improve a classroom's average positive distance from benchmark from fall to spring as measured by the DIBELS¹¹ oral reading fluency measure. If a classroom's average distance from benchmark is already above the benchmark, the classroom's average distance from benchmark will move in a positive direction relative to the benchmark.

Result: Goal Narrowly Missed. On average students in grades 1-6 ended the year above benchmark in oral reading fluency. However, performance was not evenly distributed across the grades, that is, some performed better than others. Students in grades 1, 4, and 5 improved their average distance from benchmark fall to spring (winter to spring for grade 1). Students in grades 2, 3 and 6 were above benchmark on average at the start and end of year, but they narrowly missed the goal because they did not maintain their average distance from benchmark from start to end of year.

Literacy Area B: Vocabulary

The vocabulary initiative was new in the third year. City Year worked with a total of 115 students in grades 5-7 for this initiative covering common Latin roots, suffixes, and prefixes. Students who know the meaning of these terms will be better equipped to decipher the meaning of new words.

Goal: On average, students will show mastery of 75% of the total number of vocabulary terms (66 total terms) Thus, at the end of the year they would know 50 of 66 terms.

Result: Goal Exceeded. On average, students in grades 5-7 got 93.8% of terms correct on the final vocabulary assessment, exceeding the goal by 19%.

II. Math

The Mental Math Mastery (M cubed) program leveraged corps members as a resource to administer and score quizzes to assess mastery of specific math skills. City Year corps members implemented the M cubed program this year for 180 students in grades 1-6.

Goal: In partnership with the classroom teacher, improve a classroom's math skills with 75% of students mastering 20 new skills during the course of the school year.

Result: Goal Exceeded. 84% of students in grades 1-6 (152 of 180 students) mastered at least 20 new math skills or showed mastery of all math skills assessed by the mental math mastery quizzes by end of year, exceeding the established goal by nearly 10% points.

III. Course Coaching

Corps members supported focus list students in the development of academic habits, such as studying for tests, setting report card goals and establishing steps to achieve them, using a calendar to manage time, setting homework routines, and developing a good work ethic so that they feel confident in their work and ultimately achieve better grades.

Goal: 75% of participants will complete 75% of their homework

Result: Goal Met. Over the course of the year, City Year worked with 24 students in grades 6 and 7; however, 4 of those students received less than 7 months of support. City Year's results indicated considerable progress in homework completion: in the first quarter, only 54% of students were completing 75% or more of their homework assignments and by the fourth quarter 88% of students were completing 75% or more of their homework assignments. On average, the percentage of homework assignments completed also grew from 72% assignments completed in Q1 to an average of 87% of assignments completed in Q4. Cumulatively, on average across all quarters 75% of students who received the full dosage (at least 7 months) of course coaching support met the homework completion goal.

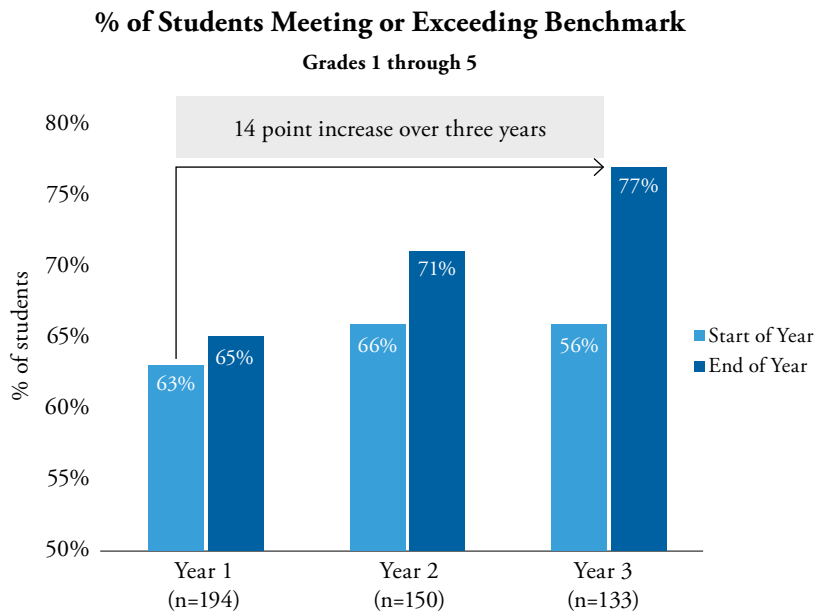
Goal: 75% of students will achieve a C or higher in 4 out of 5 core subjects

Result: Exceeded/On-track. 96% of grades 6-7 students receiving course coaching support achieved a C or higher in 4 out of 5 core subjects. Of the 24 students receiving course coaching in Q3, 88% (21) of students had a C or higher in all of their core classes, and only 1 student had lower than a C in more than one core course. The percentage of course coaching students passing all classes increased quarter to quarter. NHCS has a unique grade scale designating any grade below a C as failing.

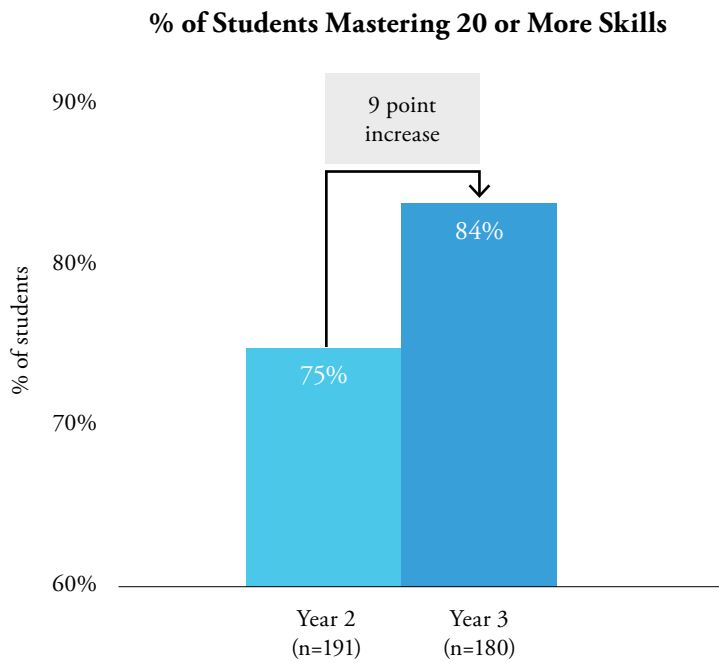
Overall Pilot Results

In addition to End-of-Year results, the pilot co-development team charted progress across years for those interventions that were continued throughout the pilot. The following data demonstrates the measurable impact that the corps members had on their students' academic achievement:

Year 1 to Year 3 Comparison: NHCS Fluency

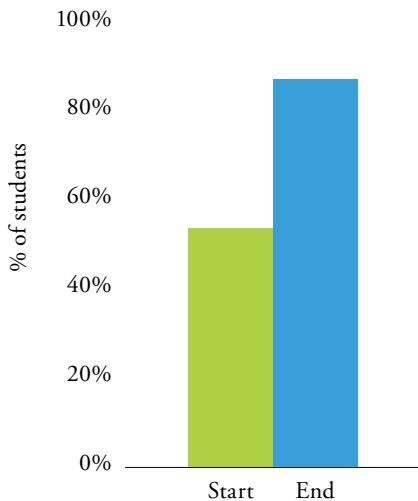


Years 2 and 3: FY11 NHCS End-of-Year Math Results

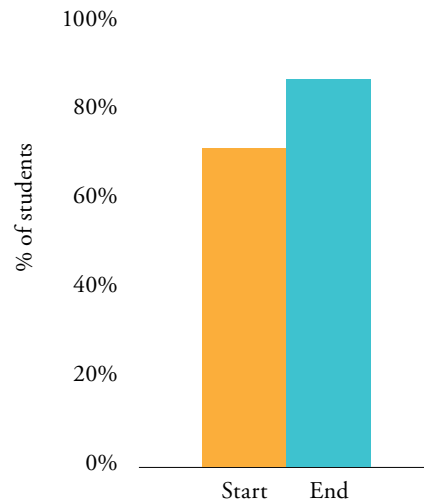


FY11 NHCS Course Coaching: Homework

**% students completing
75%+ of homework assignments**



Average % of assignments completed



Teacher Satisfaction

City Year administered surveys teachers, which revealed that teachers at NHCS were satisfied with the quality of the team's work, the overall experience of having City Year in the school, and the overall impact that corps members are having on students.

End-of-year teacher survey results for all grades:

- 100% of teachers agree/strongly agree that they were satisfied with the quality of service provided by their corps member(s);
- 100% of teachers agree/strongly agree that they were satisfied with the overall impact of City Year on their students;
- 100% of teachers agree/strongly agree that they were satisfied with the overall experience of having City Year in their school;
- 92% of teachers agree/strongly agree that corps member(s) helped increase their students' respectfulness to each other;
- 73% of teachers agree/strongly agree that corps member(s) helped improve student English/ language arts performance (of students tutored consistently);
- 75% of teachers agree/strongly agree that corps member(s) helped improve student behavior (of students tutored consistently); and
- 83% of teachers agree/strongly agree that corps members helped to differentiate instruction.
- 86% of teachers agree/strongly agree that corps member(s) helped improve student math performance (of students tutored consistently).¹²

Perspectives: Teacher, Corps Member, School Administrator

Miss McCarthy had a corps member in her fifth grade ELA classroom each year of the pilot. In her third year, corps member Erica Navalance had a breakthrough with one of her most struggling students.

“Erica has become attached to this one particular student of mine who struggles with reading, and because he doesn’t like to read he struggles in school over all. The first quarter he was almost failing. Now, he stays in the classroom during Spanish to work with Erica on reading. They’ve formed a really nice relationship. He joins Erica for lunch buddies by choice. They’ve made great progress. He wants to be on honor roll this quarter and he’s really close. His whole attitude has changed and I really do think it’s due to the work that Erica’s done with him. He’s not perfect by any means – he doesn’t love school, but all of a sudden he’s motivated and wants to do well.” – Mary McCarthy, NHCS Teacher

“There’s a student I work with 2-3 hours a week, and in the beginning of the year, he was basically failing. Now’s he’s on track – all “A”s and “B”s. The fifth graders usually go to Spanish, but if you’re failing you’re pulled, and he was. For the first three weeks, he would just sit there and cry. It was heartbreaking. I tried everything: the friend thing, the behavior management thing. I couldn’t figure out how to get through. I asked around. I learned that he’s a really great hip hop dancer, and I knew it was something he really enjoyed. I said to him: ‘I have a lot to teach you and I also think there are some things you can teach me. How about the first fifty minutes I teach you. Then you teach me.’ I said it was serious, not a free-for-all—he needed a lesson plan for me. Seeing that he had some control over the situation and something positive he could tell the other kids about being pulled from Spanish, we turned a corner. He’s become a lot more confident in his work. Hearing a little bit about his family life, I don’t think he’s ever had someone who believed in him. The other day he asked if he could miss gym—an he’s an athletic kid—to work on bringing up his one C.” – Erica Navalance, City Year Corps Member

“We have a fifth grade student who doesn’t read particularly well. He has a lot of work to do and he wants to do well, but he can’t quite do it by itself. My fifth grade teachers know this, and they’re worried about him. And they know he needs more. And the fact that they can say, ‘City Year, please take him out of Spanish, spend that time with him,’ is very beneficial for him. But it also makes my teachers feel more like they are serving the needs of kids effectively, without totally overburdening them. That piece is the piece that I would miss the most if we didn’t have a City Year team. I don’t have a teacher who has room in their schedule to spend four fifty minute blocks with two kids reading every week. But they need it.” – Emily Pratt, Director of Literacy and Social Studies, NHCS

Differentiated Instruction

Throughout the pilot, and especially in the third year, the presence of the City Year AmeriCorps members in the classroom allowed teachers to leverage differentiated instruction. This occurred in two ways: first, by using the corps members strategically within the classroom with small sets of students, and second, by deploying them strategically to classrooms where they would be most valuable.

Teachers differentiate instruction—a research-based strategy—by teaching to smaller groups of students at different levels separately, rather than teaching to the whole class at once. At NHCS, teachers work with one group and corps members with another in the same classroom, maximizing total instruction and preventing lower-level students from being left behind or upper level students from becoming bored.

“The students sitting in the classrooms in public schools have such a range of skills and abilities that it is imperative that teachers differentiate their instruction to meet the students where they are. Having a City Year corps member in the classroom makes this so much more possible,” said Sean Shirley-Davidson, NHCS Head of Middle School. “The teacher can plan small group instruction and know that the City Year can help manage and instruct one of the groups, or the City Year can manage the whole class doing independent work while the teacher

conferences with students one-one one at his/her desk. There are many ways to differentiate but having another adult in the room makes it so much more doable and successful,” he said.

Enrichment Activities

City Year corps members ran enrichment activities that were a favorite among students and helped NHCS teachers to differentiate instruction. Sample enrichment activities included:

Forensics

Students solved a mock crime by carrying out science experiments and practicing deductive reasoning skills. Science experiments included white powder testing, DNA extraction, and fingerprint analysis.

Engineering

Students designed and made a container to insulate an egg from breaking during a several story drop, competing to build the best container. They designed and built a bridge out of popsicle sticks and glue, competing to build the bridge that will withstand the most weight.

Sports Around the World

This enrichment taught students three world sports, highlighting the regions and cultures where they are played: highland games, cricket, and rugby. During the final week of the enrichment, students introduced and taught their own favorite games.

“Having a corps member in the classroom really allows me to focus my teaching,” said NHCS teacher Holly Moulton. “I can’t imagine going back to not having one.” Teacher Mary McCarthy agreed: “It’s allowed me to break students into small groups much more easily knowing I have City Year there.

From the first year of the pilot, NHCS thought boldly and creatively about how they were working with their corps members. On track students would participate in enrichment clubs led by corps members—on topics meant to be both fun and educational—giving teachers more time to focus on struggling students. In addition, in the third year of the pilot, NHCS administrators redesigned their special education program with corps members in mind: they clustered special needs students together in classrooms with additional teaching staff and used corps members to support teachers in non-special needs rooms. NHCS reported that this new distribution worked well for students and teachers alike.

Perspectives: Parent, Corps Member

Corps member Eris Hsu worked with David throughout year three of the pilot in Course Coaching, helping to bring about a transformation in David very evident to his mother:

“David has had a hard time, but Eric’s gone beyond what’s required. He gave me his call phone number. He said, any time David needs me, call me. One night David called him at 8:30. He was having a hard time with his homework. Eric didn’t hang up until David got it...Since David’s been working with Eric, he’s more diligent. He’s also more confident” – NHCS Parent

“David was a bit of an Eeyore. He would sit down, but he wouldn’t open his binder. Now he does, and gets down to work.”– Eric Hsu, Corps Member

A Sustained, Three-Year Partnership

City Year leadership found value in the fact that the pilot helped them understand what a sustained, impact-focused, three-year partnership could look like and accomplish. Referring to the co-development team's collaboration, Stephanie Wu said: "by the end of the pilot, we were finishing each other's sentences. These are the kind of relationships with school leaders we hope to have across the City Year network." "From my perspective," said Lisa Fortenberry, City Year Boston's Deputy Director of Program and Service, "the pilot really helped us understand what a true City Year-school partnership looks like. Now I can more easily say, ok, the first year there will be bumps, the second year is a turning point, and by the third year, the partnership is rolling."

Having corps members in the school for three consecutive years also transformed the working relationships between corps members and teachers, many of whom were reluctant to work with corps members when they first arrived at NHCS. "In the first year, teachers were unsure how to work with a corps member and even hesitant to be directive. By the third year, they were much more comfortable asking for what they need," said Pratt. In year three, for example, one teacher developed an on-boarding guide for corps members, which she uses to talk through everything she expects from the corps member throughout the year. Teacher Mary McCarthy noted, "Each year I was able to have a clearer conversation with my new City Year based on how things had gone the year before."

NHCS and City Year cite the transformational nature of the partnership as stemming from both the results—"the hard data"—and also the relationships corps members form with students: "How do I know I am making a difference?" asked City Year corps member Erica Navalance. "There's the data: the six students I work with all made benchmark. But there's also the unique relationship you have as a City Year corps member. It's hard to explain. Kids are comfortable coming to me with personal things. And I can help them with their behavior—I've seen so many kids grow from positive reinforcement." Atkins agrees: "I was in the school a lot—for site visits and non-site visits. To see the impact of City Year on the school, you have to look at the data," said Atkins. "But anecdotally, what I saw when I was there, was kids really loving those corps members. I saw corps members put their arm around a student and say: you can do better than this. And I saw that the kids wanted to do well for their corps members."

5. Co-Developing Best Practices for City Year's WSWC Service Model

The pilot not only helped City Year hone and field-test strategies for providing students with literacy, math, and course coaching support—as described above—but it also helped the organization identify best practices that are now integral to Whole School, Whole Child service implementation nationally. "Numerous aspects of the WSWC framework are directly derived from the NHCS pilot—they really fueled our vision," said Wu. City Year revised its academic calendar—moving the corps' start date earlier to allow for training and a strong start in school—and decided to focus supports throughout grades three through nine owing, in part, to the work of the pilot. And the following best practices are now at the heart of the WSWC model and its implementation.

Academic Content

City Year implements its WSWC service model at every City Year site. In addition to using a standardized, evidence-based service product, there is variation in what interventions corps members perform, given the need to adapt to schools' various learning approaches, curricula and state-issued mandates. City Year offers a menu of practices, interventions, and protocols from which each team can choose in accordance with their local school's priorities—while still delivering results against metrics in the areas of attendance, behavior, and course performance. Many of the practices and academic strategies piloted at NHCS, including those around fluency in ELA, have been or will be replicated throughout the network as part of the WSWC menu.

The Program Manager Job Description

Through the pilot, City Year came to realize that an effective program manager (PM) is key to the corps member team's success. At the start of the pilot, not all City Year teams had PMs—some PMs were shared across schools. “We really figured out the Program Manager role through the pilot. NHCS pushed us to develop the PMs into the leaders they are now,” said Wu.

Today, all City Year teams have a program manager, and City Year formulated the job description and performance metrics for this position from the NHCS pilot. The PM is responsible for holding corps members to a high performance standard and enabling the team to impact students. “A successful PM needs to provide overall quality control,” explained Farnkoff. The PM oversees the team's collection of data. They work closely with the corps members to make sure they are using that data to help their students improve, coaching corps members on their instructional and behavioral management techniques. Most importantly, the PM manages communications between the school and the team, making sure expectations are shared and met, facilitating a strong partnership. The PM also identifies areas where further corps member training is needed. In short, the PM keeps the team—and its impact—on track.

City Year investing in the PMs' training and excellence. High-potential Program Managers are selected for a year of professional development in partnership with Harvard's Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency. This partnership provides a Youth Development Certification (YDC) to Program Managers through trainings which reinforce and build knowledge and practices that support positive relationships, resiliency and healthy youth development in the service of promoting academic success. PMs are being developed as “impact managers,” empowered to drive the corps' impact on student performance.

Corps Member Recruitment Profile

As City Year shifted its focus from performing diverse service projects to having a measurable impact in schools, they also needed to shift the corps member profile to maximize that impact. When City Year's recruitment department worked with the program design and evaluation departments to learn what corps member qualities and qualifications would make for the strongest corps, NHCS—along with another school in Philadelphia that was prototyping the “Diplomas Now” model in partnership with Talent Development Secondary and Communities In Schools—was a touchstone for the team. This knowledge has resulted in a “score sheet” that is part of the corps member interview process. This helps the organization select corps members who: want to work in partnership with teachers and educators; have the ability to work independently and as part of a team; have the ability to set goals and strive to achieve them; and, have strong organization and planning skills; have an interest in education, especially teaching or school administration.

Corps Member Training

Corps member training evolved substantially during the three years of the pilot, at NHCS, City Year Boston, and organization-wide. “At the beginning of the pilot we did not realize just how much more training would be required to get the corps members to a place where they can have an academic impact in the classroom,” said Atkins. “That was a big gap that needed to be filled immediately in the first year—it required a lot of work from teachers and experts, but we fixed it.” At NHCS, training by Emily Pratt, Kate Scott and others ensured that the corps members were ready for the academic work that they would perform throughout the year.

City Year then engaged Pratt and Scott to lead trainings for the entire Boston corps, bringing the progress achieved at NHCS to other City Year Boston schools each year as the pilot unfolded. As Emily Pratt commented, “I trained corps members on the broad components of literacy, giving them a baseline understanding that they can use when working with students. I also did a lot of training on how to successfully function in a classroom: what to do if the teacher is doing whole-class instruction, small-group instruction, individual instruction.”

Elements of these trainings became part of corps-wide national trainings. And the NHCS pilot had another indirect, but important effect upon City Year's national training. A visit to the school by the Walmart Foundation helped City Year make the case for a major grant from Walmart to support literacy training for the whole corps. That training has been carried out at City Year's summer training academy for all staff and senior corps as well as in literacy trainings throughout the corps year.

Student-Level Data and Evaluation

The pilot played an important role in helping City Year, as an organization, to use student-level data to help students do better academically—a crucial element of the WSWC service model. “The pilot really enabled us explore how a program manager and team of corps members could effectively and efficiently collect data throughout the school day and over the course of the year,” said Gretchen Biesecker, City Year's Vice President of Evaluation. “It helped us figure out what kinds of metrics we ought to use and what processes we needed to put in place so the corps members could use that data to make adjustments in their interventions to help students improve,” she said.

City Year developed prototype tools and trackers and trained the corps member team at NHCS to use these tools with focus-list students. Through the pilot, City Year was able to test these prototypes and get real-time feedback from corps members about how the tools were working. Based on an understanding of what tools helped corps members collect and interpret data, and what systems for collecting data were practical within a corps member's busy day, City Year was able to modify the prototypes.

Figuring out how the team could use data and evaluation to achieve student results at NHCS helped City Year establish data systems and evaluation practices for the WSWC model now used throughout the network. “Some of the tools and data-related practices we developed at NHCS became the ones we use in every City Year city—the pilot has helped City Year to be able to collect data from across the country in a useful way, in a standard format,” said Biesecker.

Fidelity to the Model

Another key outcome from the pilot was City Year's understanding of the importance of fidelity in implementing the service model. To have an effective intervention strategy, City Year came to realize, they would need to deliver research-based interventions, and ensure that the corps delivers interventions consistently. This consistency includes how corps members work with a student, the number of times per week, the duration of the one-on-one intervention, and the process corps members use to evaluate whether the student is learning and improving. In the first two years of the pilot, City Year learned the significance of implementing the model with faithfulness. This meant, for example, ensuring corps members made up intervention time if a student was absent, and building a culture of discipline among corps members around accurate implementation. By the third year of the pilot, when the partners were most familiar with each other and shared transparent goals and clear roles and responsibilities, the pilot achieved the strongest results in each area. Fidelity to the model is now a nationwide priority for City Year.

School Partnership Criteria

City Year has developed partnership criteria called “conditions for success,” to guide the school partnership development process. Again, NHCS and its strong culture of high expectations was a key reference point for the program design department when working cross-departmentally at City Year and incorporating key learnings from external partners—Deloitte, Diplomas Now partners, and City Year Senior Advisor and former Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Bill Andrekopoulos—to formalize this rubric for school partnership.

6. Conclusions and The Road Ahead

Conclusions

For City Year nationally, the pilot at Neighborhood House Charter School played an essential role in transforming City Year corps members from simply helpers to a new kind of student practitioner. In their former incarnation, City Year corps members would: offer classroom assistance, provide administrative support and hall monitoring; offer a wide variance of teacher support and inconsistent student support. Their training would be limited—perhaps merely a teacher training retrofitted for a corps member. Finally, their school culture activities would need to fit into the already-existing school schedule. With a practitioner-like mindset, however, the City Year corps members' role is transformed. Today, corps members support differentiated instruction; use data; bring suggestions and resources to teachers; set academic goals; provide whole-school and afterschool enrichment and learning opportunities; and of course implement interventions to reach academic goals. They receive customized trainings and supports; and their school climate activities are embedded into the school's schedule and norms. "When I visit any school across the country I see the effects of the NHCS pilot. It was a seminal initiative for us," said Wu.

For City Year Boston, the pilot has helped strengthen their service and, thus, their school district partnership. In the spring of 2011, Boston Public Schools (BPS) and City Year Boston entered into a three-year partnership to strategically align City Year's capacity with the school district's student achievement and school transformation goals. In 2012-2013, the City Year corps is serving in 21 schools, including all of Boston's turnaround schools. The pilot "led the site to think differently about the future of our service model—what corps members could and should do in the schools where they serve—as well as about how we could best support the corps through training, supervision, coaching and other systems," said Vice President and Executive Director Sandra Lopez Burke. "Changes and upgrades driven by the pilot improved how we approach service delivery, assess and support the corps member experience and communicate to others the role we play in helping schools meet student needs," she said.

For faculty and administrators at NHCS, the pilot was successful because of the positive impact the corps member team had on the students and on the school. "Prior to the pilot, we told the teachers about the City Year team and teachers said: 'Don't need them.' Now, our teachers would take a team of 20 corps members a year if they could," said Pratt. Holly Moulton is one NHCS teacher who came to rely more on her corps member: "Some volunteers can make more work, but that's not the case with City Year. The corps members are not just another set of hands. They are a higher caliber of help that I've come to rely on and need." Andrews observed that after the pilot, "the students see the corps members' seriousness. They need to see the seriousness and urgency of their academic work and City Year has that urgency." He felt that "by the end of the pilot, the City Year corps were part of the faculty community, not an extra or an add-on."

From a funder's perspective, the pilot was also a success: "When I look at this pilot and what we accomplished, a few things are clear to me. We saw the corps members go from cheering the students on, to having a very defined impact on their academic achievement and in a measurable way," said Sherry Leventhal. For Janet Atkins, the success of the pilot demonstrates that young people in national service have an important role to play in education—both at NHCS and nationally: "I still think this is the most affordable kind of support in a school that I've seen," she said.

The Road Ahead for City Year

Today, City Year's AmeriCorps members implement Whole School Whole Child in all of its 24 locations. Funding from school districts for corps members has increased substantially as the service model has begun to demonstrate significant impact. The corps is frequently deployed in the school turnaround space, where district leaders see City Year making an important contribution with at-risk students and low-performing schools. And City Year is working with non-profit collaborators and school districts also using early-warning indicator systems to help students improve their academic performance. As City Year CEO Michael Brown expressed at City Year's 2012 National Leadership Summit this past May, City Year is "all in" on reversing the nation's dropout crisis, collaborating with other nonprofit organizations working to raise graduation rates, and getting results.

Based on this commitment, City Year felt compelled to define its long-term contribution to building the urban graduation pipeline as part of a collective impact strategy. The organization undertook a rigorous, data-driven approach to developing an ambitious but attainable long-term impact goal in 2011. "We did the analysis with our partners at Deloitte Consulting and found that on average only 44% of students in the highest need schools that City Year seeks to serve are reaching 10th grade on track. With research showing that students who reach the 10th grade on track and on time are four times more likely to graduate, City Year developed a 10-year goal to double this rate to 80%, with an understanding of the various factors that will increase or constrain our effectiveness," explains City Year President Jim Balfanz.

At its 2012 Summit, City Year announced its long-term impact goal to reach more than 900,000 students annually (the majority of off-track students in existing markets) in more than 1,200 urban schools and ensuring that 80% are on track to graduation by the 10th grade.. Additionally, City Year will focus its national growth in the communities where the problem is most concentrated, reaching the cities that account for 2/3 of the nation's urban dropouts (currently in cities that account for ~40%).

To achieve this goal, City Year will continue to invest in its model, leveraging the lessons from the NHCS pilot, and develop high impact collaborations that will increase its impact with students and schools and continue to help inform the critical role AmeriCorps and national service can play in addressing the education challenges of our country.

National Service and Education: The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act

On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act into law. City Year played a leading role on the coalition of non-profit organizations that helped pass this bipartisan act sponsored by Senator Kennedy and Senator Orrin Hatch. The Serve America Act calls for the dramatic expansion of intensive service opportunities by calling for the growth of AmeriCorps from 75,000 positions annually to 250,000 by 2017. The Act also created an education corps to mobilize national service to improve education in America. With the passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, the work of City Year's pilot with the Neighborhood House Charter School is helping to inform federal national service policy by demonstrating impact and improving the practice of national service initiatives in public education. Last year, AmeriCorps received 582,000 applications for just 82,000 positions. The work of the pilot helps provide a strong rationale for scaling AmeriCorps by tapping these willing applicants, to provide high impact, affordable full-time people power to drive evidence-based educational reforms.

7. Interviews

Interviews for this case study were conducted with the following individuals:

Kevin Andrews, Headmaster, NHCS
Janet Atkins, President and CEO, Ridgeway Philanthropy
Gretchen Biesecker, Vice President of Evaluation, City Year Inc.
Jim Balfanz, President, City Year, Inc.
Michael Brown, CEO and Co-Founder, City Year Inc.
Sandra Lopez Burke, Vice President and Executive Director, City Year Boston
Chris Farnkoff, Director of School and Community Partnerships, City Year Boston
Dinesha Fernando, Corps Member, City Year Boston
Lisa Fortenberry, Deputy Director of Program and Service, City Year Boston
Oliver Gould, Corps Member, City Year Boston
Ashley Kurth, Evaluation Director, City Year Inc.
Monica Lee, Corps Member, City Year Boston
Sherry Leventhal, Philanthropist
Mary McCarthy, Teacher, NHCS
Holly Moulton, Teacher, NHCS
Langdon Morris, Team Leader, City Year Boston
Erica Navalance, Corps Member, City Year Boston
Emily Pratt, Director of Literacy & Social Studies/Director of Special Projects, NHCS
Kate Scott, Assistant Headmaster, NHCS
Sean Shirley-Davidson, Head of Middle School, NHCS
Nikkida Tabron, Senior Director, School and Community Partnerships, City Year Boston
Stephanie Wu, Chief Program Design and Evaluation Officer and Senior Vice President, City Year Inc.

In addition, several NHCS students, whose names have been changed for privacy reasons, were also interviewed for this case study

Endnotes

1. All names of students in this case study have been changed
2. www.policystudies.com/studies/?id=33
3. www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/factsheet_cnsc.pdf
4. An Early Warning System. Ruth Curran Neild, Robert Balfanz, and Liza Herzon. Educational Leadership, October 2007, Volume 65, Number 2, "Early Intervention at Every Age, Pages 28-33.
5. <http://www.diplomasnow.org/research/> (October 7, 2012)
6. Jim Balfanz, William Andrekopolous, Allison Hertz, Carolyn Trager-Kliman, "Closing the Implementation Gap: Leveraging City Year and National Service as a New Human Capital Strategy to Transform Low Performing Schools," 2012
7. 2010 NHCS annual report
8. Noam, page 16
9. <http://www.neighborhoodhousecharterschool.org/about/demographics.jsp> (October 7, 2012)
10. <http://www.neighborhoodhousecharterschool.org/about/headmaster.jsp> (October 7, 2012)
11. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of assessments used for universal screening and progress monitoring.
12. This statistic for grades 1-5.



Appendix A: Background Information

A brief history of City Year

1988: City Year is founded with 50 corps members.

1990 First federal funds awarded to City Year as demonstration grant under President George H. W. Bush.

1993: The Clinton Administration founds AmeriCorps, uses City Year as a model .

1998: At City Year's 10th Anniversary, the organization has 10 sites nationwide.

2005: City Year launches first international affiliate in Johannesburg, South Africa.

2006: City Year's Board of Trustees approves strategic plan that calls for standardizing City Year's service model in schools. City Year begins development of Whole School Whole Child model..

2008: City Year/NHCS Pilot launches

2009: City Year announces "In School and on Track: A National Challenge" to scale City Year programs to reach the students that are most at risk of dropping out in the 19 U.S. communities where City Year serves.

May 2012: City Year announces its Long Term Impact goal to make a significant and measurable contribution to the nation's graduation challenge, ensuring that, by 2023: at least 80% of the students in schools where City Year serves reach the 10th grade on track and on time; City Year reaches 50% of the off-track students in the cities where it serves; City Year serves in cities that account for 2/3 of the nation's urban dropouts.

September 2012: City Year's 2,500 corps members begin their service in nearly 250 high-need schools in 24 cities, serving some 150,000 students.

A brief history of NHCS

1993: Charter School Law passes in Massachusetts.

1995: Neighborhood House Charter School (NHCS) is founded.

1997: Governor Weld visits NHCS to highlight the success of charter schools.

2000: NHCS launches Project for School Innovation to build effective schools by sharing knowledge and best practices among educators.

2004: NHCS waiting list reaches 2,221 students hoping for one of 200 openings.

2006: NHCS moves to new building and doubles student population.

2008: City Year/NHCS Pilot launches.

2010: NHCS named a Massachusetts Commendation School., an honor shared by just 10% of schools in the state.

Appendix B: NHCS City Year AmeriCorps Member Teams

2008-2009

Isabel Bernegger
Caroline Donahue
Kimberly Ferguson
Daniel Gottschalk
Julia Haslauer
Tracy Labady
Bradford Rogers
Burton Schaber
Kacy Walz
Chidinma Iruka

2009-2010

Steadman Graves
Julia Haslauer
Brendan Kent
Calli Kosch
Hong Ly
Landgon Morris
Breane Norvell
Maria Pena
Claudia Taylor
Huy Trinh
Katrina Zinger

2010-2011

Ramsey Brown
Dinisha Fernando
Oliver Gould
Eric Hsu
Brendan Kent
Andrea (Faith) Kniffley
Monica Lee
Langdon Morris
Erica Navalance
James Peters
Julie Tran



City Year Locations

Baton Rouge

Boston

Chicago

Cleveland

Columbia

Columbus

Denver

Detroit

Jacksonville

Little Rock/North Little Rock

Los Angeles

Miami

Milwaukee

New Hampshire

New Orleans

New York

Orlando

Greater Philadelphia

Rhode Island

Sacramento

San Antonio

San José/Silicon Valley

Seattle/King County

Washington, DC

International Affiliates

Johannesburg, South Africa

London, England



cityyear.org

City Year is an education-focused nonprofit organization that partners with public schools and teachers to help keep students in school and on track to succeed. In 24 communities across the United States and through two international affiliates, this innovative public-private partnership brings together teams of young AmeriCorps members who commit to a year of full-time service in schools. Corps members provide individual support to students who need extra care and attention, focusing on attendance, behavior, and course performance through in-class tutoring, mentoring and after school programs.



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