How a Personalized Approach to Learning Helped One Organization Quickly Adapt in a Global Pandemic

A CITY YEAR CASE STUDY

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Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

City Year is an education and human development organization that works with school and community partners to support student success, advance educational equity, and contribute to systems-level changes in policies and practice that address the root causes of inequitable educational outcomes. Every year, City Year recruits a diverse group of 3,000 AmeriCorps members, ages 18-25, to spend a year in full-time service in public schools, where they serve as student success coaches—near peer tutors, mentors and role models who provide holistic, personalized support to students as they cultivate foundational social, emotional and academic skills that are essential for success in school and in life. City Year operates in 29 U.S. cities (local City Year offices are referred to as "sites") and partners with more than 300 schools nationwide to deliver its Whole School, Whole Child® (WSWC) services.

City Year has a growing body of evidence that its WSWC services lead to positive outcomes for students, AmeriCorps members, and the broader school community. This qualitative research project aims to deepen City Year's understanding of the practices and conditions that support the organization's personalized approach so central to its WSWC services. To do this, three City Year sites that have demonstrated a different core strength in WSWC implementation were selected for visits: Columbus, who excels at developing social-emotional skills and intentional learning environments; Los Angeles, who uses data to inform decision making and continuous improvement; and Memphis, who successfully delivers evidence-based academic curricula that can be reinforced with social-emotional skill building and an asset-based approach. City Year considers these elements essential for successful personalization.

Evidence of Effectiveness Prior to and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

For over 30 years, City Year has been at the frontlines of addressing educational inequities. City Year's research-based, holistic approach is grounded in key learnings from the science of learning and development and supported by third-party research that demonstrates its effectiveness. Studies show that schools that partner with City Year are up to two to three times more likely to improve in English and math assessments. The more time students spend with AmeriCorps members, the more they improve on social, emotional, and academic skills, with students who are furthest behind benefitting the most. And, there's evidence that our work has an impact on reducing the number of students who are off track to high school graduation. AmeriCorps members also benefit from their time with City Year with 94% of

alumni stating that serving with City Year had a positive impact on their lives.

The communities with which City Year partners have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, so the organization is finding new ways to support students, teachers and classrooms, while also continuing to train and develop its diverse AmeriCorps members. Partner teachers and principals are responding positively to the adaptable, critical capacity City Year brings. In a survey of over 180 partner administrators, 95% feel that City Year has supported their school's implementation of virtual, hybrid and/or in person learning. A survey of nearly 500 partner teachers revealed that 94% feel that City Year provides high-quality service and 90% agree that City Year AmeriCorps members help students feel a stronger sense of belonging. AmeriCorps members also reported the highest engagement scores to date during this period according to the annual survey of AmeriCorps members. 91% agreed or strongly agreed with, "I am proud to have served at City Year" – up eight points from the prior year.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the abrupt closure of schools and a shift to distance learning. In response, City Year quickly adapted its operations to continue serving school partners and communities across the nation. This study also shifted its focus to capture the lessons emerging from City Year's work to continue supporting students, families, AmeriCorps members, and school partners during this period of transition.

STUDY OVERVIEW

Primary data collection included 25 semi-structured interviews and one focus group with stakeholders at City Year headquarters and the three participating sites. Additional data included informational meetings, approximately 200 artifacts (e.g., social media posts, emails, etc.) and survey data from AmeriCorps members and City Year's partner teachers and principals.

This case study is intended to bring to life insights on the practices and conditions that allowed AmeriCorps members to continue to personalize learning for students as they transitioned to distance learning in the spring and summer of 2020. It also includes insights on key in-person practices that were shared by participants based on their experiences prior to the global pandemic.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPATING SITES

City Year's 29 U.S. sites have significant flexibility in how they enact City Year's WSWC services in order to adapt the services to local conditions, which creates opportunities for site-level innovation and learning that can then be shared across the network. The three sites that participated in this project have each demonstrated strong outcomes, and through their innovative approaches, they are contributing to network-wide learning.

City Year Columbus

City Year Columbus has supported significant improvements in student outcomes through an approach that is grounded in developmental relationships at all levels and leverages evidence-based social and emotional development (SED) supports. Columbus was the first City Year site to use Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework alongside the Clover Model and to experiment with creating its own Framework for Youth Development, which helps AmeriCorps members internalize how an asset-based approach grounded in developmental relationships accelerates student growth. The positive results from Columbus led City Year's national design team to revisit how different frameworks, resources and trainings can be best leveraged to prepare AmeriCorps members to personalize the learning experience for students and support improved student outcomes.

City Year Los Angeles

A core strength of City Year Los Angeles is its use of advanced data analytics to identify students who could most benefit from AmeriCorps member support. This approach has contributed to improved student outcomes. The team then uses ongoing formative assessments to track and iteratively refine AmeriCorps member services. City Year Los Angeles's innovations include the development of its own database and system for data visualization. This work pushed City Year headquarters to adopt more sophisticated data visualization tools, such as the Student Success Navigator (Power BI) to improve data visualization for the whole organization and allow AmeriCorps members to better personalize supports to meet student needs.

City Year Memphis

City Year Memphis, founded three years ago, has already demonstrated strong outcomes through its use of evidence-based curriculum—Leveled Literacy Intervention and Do the Math—and its work integrating academics with social-emotional learning and development (SEL/SED). Its results and commitment to evidence-based practice are further supported by the practices of the Memphis leadership team, who prioritizes supporting SED for its staff and corps, along with the students and educators with whom they work. This has earned them high levels of trust within their team, enabled AmeriCorps members to take an asset-based approach to personalizing the learning environment, and built trust with partner teachers and administrators.

OVERVIEW OF THE SHIFT TO DISTANCE LEARNING

To provide context for the findings of this study, this section describes how the shift to distance learning in the wake of COVID-19 unfolded across City Year's national network in three phases. Because City Year focuses on providing services to systemically under-resourced schools and communities, many that have been hardest hit by the pandemic, this narrative provides a small window into the lived experiences of students, families and educators in these communities and the AmeriCorps members who partner with them.

Phase 1 — Navigating the Transition

The primary focus for schools and communities during the initial few weeks of the shutdown in the spring of 2020 was meeting basic needs of its community members and ensuring all students had the technology and internet necessary to engage in distance learning. City Year site staff and AmeriCorps members were proactive by reaching out to their school partners to offer support with assessing family needs, by keeping students and families updated on plans for distance learning, and by providing information on how to access resources, including food, internet and technology. City Year sites provided this support through phone calls, use of social media, and in some cases, partnering with other school support organizations.

Staff also voiced deep concern for both students' and AmeriCorps members' emotional well-being, given the abrupt ending to their in-person relationships. Though privacy laws prevented AmeriCorps members from connecting with students one-on-one, many sites found innovative ways to continue communicating with students and expressing care and support though social media. To address AmeriCorps members' emotional well-being, many sites offered community meetings, reflection activities, self-care classes, and mental health support.

In partnership with site leadership, City Year headquarters began an intensive process to develop policy guidelines for sites on adapting the organization's services to a distance learning context. Through a collaborative design process, the headquarters team delivered a set of guidelines that allowed sites to be flexible and nimble in meeting school partner needs while also staying true to the core WSWC services. They supported sites in ensuring AmeriCorps members could fulfill their service hour requirements by creating daily professional learning opportunities. City Year also created a digital resource guide for educators and families to support student learning.

Phase 2 – Spring Support for Distance Learning

A few schools and districts were able to shift to distance learning quickly and did so in a way that allowed AmeriCorps members to support students with continuity. 82% of AmeriCorps members reported continuing to support the same students following the shift to distance learning according to the survey City Year conducted of AmeriCorps members in May 2020.

In the spring, AmeriCorps members supported their partner teachers with tracking student engagement (attendance and participation), monitoring the chat in virtual meetings to answer student questions, and providing technical support for teachers, students, and parents. Where AmeriCorps members were more fully integrated into distance learning, they collaborated with teachers on ways to make distance learning more engaging for students (e.g., by integrating interactive activities into lessons), offered strategies to support struggling students, led activities to engage students, integrated aspects of social-emotional development (SED) into their work and interactions with students (e.g., by leading whole-class activities such as emotional check-ins and strategies for managing stress during distance learning), and provided academic, social, and emotional support in breakout rooms with small groups. According to City Year's end-of-year internal implementation survey results from the 2019-2020 school year, 34% of AmeriCorps members reported providing homework help sessions and 22% reported providing enrichment activities. Phone calls to families and creative uses of social media continued to be an important way in which City Year connected with educators, families and students.

The killing of George Floyd in May and subsequent national racial reckoning hit City Year communities hard. City Year responded by stepping up efforts to address AmeriCorps member well-being and creating both local and national support groups and affinity-based support groups. This created a safe space for AmeriCorps members from specific communities (Black, Latinx, LGBTQI, etc.) to connect, heal, process feelings and develop a sense of belonging. Many sites also provided access to one-on-one counseling and well-being workshops. Despite all the challenges AmeriCorps members faced during the spring, the end-of-year survey results suggest they felt more positively about their City Year experiences compared to AmeriCorps members from previous years.

Phase 3 – A Glimpse Ahead to the 2020-2021 School Year

Though most interviews for this report were conducted in the spring of 2020, a few interviews with City Year staff were conducted over the summer about the organization's plans for the fall. Additional interviews with site staff and returning AmeriCorps members in early fall shed light on what service looked like in the beginning of the new school year. Most schools planned to continue with distance learning for at least the fall of

the 2020-2021 school year and were able to more effectively integrate AmeriCorps members into distance learning.

Over the summer, City Year created a plan for three possible scenarios school districts might choose for AmeriCorps member support: in-person with social distance, distance learning, and/or a hybrid of the two. City Year continued collaborating with sites to build extensive guidelines and accompanying resources for providing service in each of these contexts. Goals for these guidelines were: ensuring the health and well-being of all City Year staff and AmeriCorps members; providing clear guidance on how sites could adapt core services to their context; and creating resources to support virtual training of AmeriCorps members and staff in this new landscape.

FINDINGS

Five key findings capture the learning and insights that emerged as City Year harnessed its personalized approach to learning to support students, partners and AmeriCorps members during this period of transition. City Year's approach to personalized learning and development, along with its commitment to equity and the holistic well-being of AmeriCorps members, staff, students, and families, helped the organization successfully meet the immediate and longer term needs of its school and district partners.

1. There were both challenges and successes in the spring shift to distance learning.

AmeriCorps members shared both challenges and successes related to four domains: student attendance; the integration of education technology; personalizing learning for students in online spaces; and accessing schools' Learning Management System data. For each challenge, there was often a bright spot that offered insight into future solutions for overcoming the challenge.

2. City Year models a personalized approach to learning and development at all levels.

City Year's approach to personalizing learning for students focuses on adapting supports to meet individual site, school and student needs. This allows the organization to be especially nimble and innovative during a time of crisis. Examples from different levels in the organization illustrated a commitment to prioritizing relationships and building trust; growth mindset; differentiation; agency and ownership of learning; and addressing the social and emotional development and well-being of all individuals.

3. Prioritizing trust and strong relationships is the foundation for successful personalization.

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The role of prioritizing trust and strong relationships was significant for personalizing support. AmeriCorps members, site staff, and headquarters staff shared nuanced examples of building trust with students, teachers and school partners; the impact of developing this trust on relationships; and how trust is repaired when it has been compromised. Key themes include: expressing care and warmth; persistence and dependability; transparency, vulnerability and emotional safety; and sharing power.

4. COVID-19 and social uprisings in 2020 have deepened City Year's commitment to social emotional development and equity.

The events of 2020 elevated City Year's holistic and equity-focused approach to service. City Year re-prioritized elevating all voices and experiences in the organization, especially those of AmeriCorps members, to ensure inclusive, human-centered practices and approaches, and creating more frequent and intentional spaces for reflection and shared learning around equity-centered topics and staff well-being.

5. AmeriCorps members leaning into the practice of building strong developmental relationships was critical for maintaining student engagement.

AmeriCorps members leveraged strategies and practices related to the Clover Model's domains of assertiveness, belonging, active engagement, reflection; growth mindset; high standards and reassurance; and trauma-informed practices and supporting resilience, to continue their support and engagement of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY YEAR

These recommendations are intended specifically for City Year on how to deepen its personalized approach to learning but may also be applicable to other organizations doing similar work. See edwheelhouse.org/city-year for additional resources to support recommendations.

1. Become even more intentional about developing and embedding organizational practices that reinforce a personalized approach at every level.

Leverage City Year's commitment to continuous learning and improvement to systematically identify, validate, codify and disseminate best practices and deepen insights around embedding a personalized learning approach at every level.

2. Consider incorporating measures of trust.

Given City Year's commitment to cultivating trust, incorporate measures of institutional and interpersonal trust to more effectively personalize learning for students and better connect with stakeholders.

3. Expand AmeriCorps member awareness of structural factors contributing to educational inequity.

Enhance AmeriCorps members' skills in recognizing and responding when the school environment or educators' actions may be inadvertently demotivating their students because they are unintentionally replicating inequitable access to opportunities, structural racism or implicit bias.

4. Expand AmeriCorps member awareness of mindset and motivation related pedagogy.

Train AmeriCorps members to recognize pedagogy that can support or undermine student motivation and sense of belonging. This will help increase their skill at personalizing their support of learning by helping them more accurately contextualize student behaviors and engagement.

5. Deepen social-emotional development (SED) practices.

Incorporate insights from research to enhance AmeriCorps member SED practices in six domains: the neuroscience of learning and emotions; meaning-making and recursive processes; growth mindset; autonomy; relevance and purpose; identity safety and integrated identity development.

6. Provide differentiated support for developing relationships between novice teachers and AmeriCorps members.

Provide differentiated onboarding experiences for novice partner teachers and coaching for their AmeriCorps members on how best to support the teacher and their students.

City Year Overview

City Year helps students and schools succeed, while preparing the next generation of leaders who can work across lines of difference to make a positive impact. In partnership with teachers and schools, diverse teams of City Year AmeriCorps members cultivate learning environments where students can build on their strengths, fully engage in their learning and experience success. City Year believes that supporting children and young adults contributes to just, equitable and vibrant communities, and that when students rise, we all rise.

While we know more than we ever have about how young people learn and develop, too many students do not have access to the learning environments they need to thrive due to systemic failings that have contributed to inequitable access to educational opportunities. Together with school and community partners, City Year seeks to support student success, advance educational equity, and contribute to systems-level changes in policies and practice that address the root causes of inequitable educational outcomes—including by working to identify and spread practices that support improvement across schools and districts.

VISION FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

City Year is contributing to a clearer and bolder vision of what public schools can and should be for all children: places of learning, exploration and risk-taking, where every student feels safe and connected to the school community; where data informs practices that promote student growth and achievement; and where all students have access to positive, caring relationships and personalized learning environments that encourage them to persevere through challenges, build on their strengths and thrive.
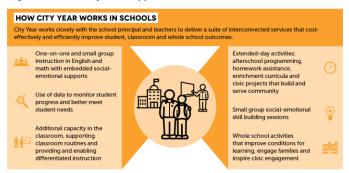
APPROACH

Every year, City Year recruits 3,000 AmeriCorps members, ages 18-25, to spend a year in full-time service in public schools. City Year operates in 29 U.S. cities (local City Year offices are referred to as "sites") and partners with more than 300 schools nationwide to deliver its Whole School, Whole Child (WSWC) services.

City Year's approach is based on research about how students learn and develop, ensuring that students are cultivating foundational social, emotional and academic skills, whether that's learning to work in teams, coping with frustration or mastering fractions—skills that are important in school and in life. Through their service in schools and communities, City Year AmeriCorps

members not only make a difference in the lives of students they serve, but also acquire valuable skills and experiences that prepare them for civic and workforce success.

Figure 1. – How City Year Supports Students and Schools

Diverse, trained teams of eight to 12 AmeriCorps members serve in their partner school as student success coaches—near peer tutors, mentors and role models who support students as they grow and thrive. City Year AmeriCorps members, who are supported and supervised by full-time, on-site City Year staff called impact managers, collaborate with the school principal and teachers to deliver data-driven interventions that help the school achieve its vision for educational excellence for all students.

AmeriCorps members work closely with students who exhibit one or more early warning indicators in attendance, behavior or course performance—indicators that are associated with whether students will stay in school and graduate from high school—to provide personalized support either one-on-one or in small groups. Students who receive targeted support are referred to as "focus list" students. In addition, AmeriCorps members provide classroom and whole school support, partnering with teachers, helping students stay focused in class, organizing school-wide events, and running afterschool programs.

The developmental relationships that AmeriCorps members cultivate with students are at the center of City Year's Whole School, Whole Child approach. Through their work with students, AmeriCorps members help students develop an understanding of who they are, a sense of agency to make a difference, and critical skills that set them on a path of lifelong learning and success.

Throughout their service year, City Year AmeriCorps members receive valuable training and professional development—including training sessions prior to beginning service in schools—to help support their work with students and to help further their own personal and career goals. City Year AmeriCorps members receive ongoing coaching and feedback from City Year staff, as well as formal professional development, guided reflection, peer learning , and career support.

Introduction

Small group interventions are a strong component of academic success. Without City Year these focus [list] groups may not have happened. Also, with City Year being close to our students' ages they were able to connect to our students emotionally.

PRINCIPAL, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS

City Year has a growing body of evidence that their Whole School, Whole Child™ (WSWC) services lead to positive outcomes for students, AmeriCorps members and the broader school community. City Year initiated this qualitative research project to gain a deeper understanding of the practices and conditions that contribute to City Year's approach to personalizing learning, which is central to its WSWC services.

Evidence of Effectiveness

For over 30 years, City Year has been at the frontlines of addressing educational inequities. City Year's research-based, holistic approach is grounded in key learnings from the science of learning and development and supported by third-party research that demonstrates its effectiveness. Studies show that schools that partner with City Year are up to two to three times more likely to improve in English and math assessments. The more time students spend with AmeriCorps members, the more they improve on social, emotional, and academic skills, with students who are furthest behind benefitting the most. And, there's evidence that our work has an impact on reducing the number of students who are off track to high school graduation. AmeriCorps members also benefit from their time with City Year with 94% of alumni stating that serving with City Year had a positive impact on their lives.

The original plan was to visit three local City Year sites to conduct observations, interviews and focus groups and to then develop case studies that would bring to life each site's practices and conditions that best support personalizing learning for students. To ensure this project utilized an equity-centered approach, City Year sites played a significant role in guiding the development of the learning goals and research plan for their site.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic reached the United States three months into the project. Schools across the country scrambled to transition to distance learning, which meant that traditional City Year services were also radically transformed. As it became clear that the crisis was going to disproportionately impact systemically under-resourced communities served by City Year, the organization began a noteworthy response characterized by adaptability and nimbleness. At every level, mobilization efforts immediately began to provide support to school and community partners wherever possible. While the research project could no longer proceed as planned, a unique opportunity emerged: to capture what City Year contributed to students, families, AmeriCorps members and school partners during this time of disruption and uncertainty. In collaboration with the project team, I revised the learning goals and research questions to focus on capturing these insights. Data collection included interviews, a focus group, artifact review (e.g., social media posts, emails, etc.), analysis of City Year data on services provided, and survey data collected from AmeriCorps members, teachers and principals on their experiences during the transition to distance learning.

This case study, written with support from the City Year project team (see Appendix A), is intended to bring to life City Year's approach to personalized learning and offer insights on what practices and conditions most effectively supported student and AmeriCorps member success during this period of distance learning. It also includes insights on key in-person practices that were shared by participants based on their experiences prior to the global pandemic.

How City Year Defines Personalized Learning

Personalized learning is the term used to describe the process of tailoring learning to focus on each students' strengths, addressing their specific gaps (i.e. differentiating learning), ensuring that they have strong relationships with the adults and peers they are learning with and from, and supporting them to develop the agency and confidence needed to take ownership of their learning (e.g. developing a growth mindset, making productive choices, making personal connections to the content, skillful self-reflection and goal setting). Creating conditions that ensure personalized learning enhances students' intrinsic motivation to learn, academic engagement, and learning outcomes (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2020; The Aspen Institute, 2018).

City Year is dedicated to accelerating organizational progress and learning by leading an equity-based approach to research[1] that informs practice improvements, builds evidence of impact and informs systemic change so that City Year can more effectively support students, schools and AmeriCorps members.

With 163 total students, it is often difficult for me to develop close relationships with every single one of my students. I have always relied on my AmeriCorps members to provide academic and social-emotional support for their… students. When I know a student is working with an AmeriCorps member, I know that they are supported academically and emotionally. This allows me to…focus on other students who may not have any additional support.

TEACHER, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES

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[1] An equity-based approach to research means that the creation of research should begin from a place of mutual understanding among community organizations, researchers and funders. Those involved in the research design must recognize unintended bias to arrive at an authentic trust that does the most good for those being researched. (Source: Chicago Beyond 2019).

Study Design

The original study design included three separate, but similar research proposals developed with input from key stakeholders at each site to ensure we utilized an equity-centered approach that aligned with sites' learning goals. When schools closed in mid-March 2020 and it became clear that visiting sites was no longer possible, the project team and I pivoted to working collaboratively with site partners to create a unified set of learning goals. The new research questions used to guide this revised qualitative research project are as follows:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did City Year's personalized learning approach enhance AmeriCorps member capacity to support their school partners (teachers and principals), and where possible, students and families during the COVID-19 school shutdown?
   a. How, if at all, did AmeriCorps members use their skills and knowledge related to addressing students' social and emotional needs and cultivating developmental relationships to support students during the school closure?
   b. How are AmeriCorps members leveraging the training and support they have received from City Year to navigate the shifts in their service?

2. What are the highest impact practices, strategies and behaviors for building strong developmental relationships between AmeriCorps members and students and families during the school shutdown?
   a. What did these practices, strategies and behaviors look like in action?
   b. How did AmeriCorps members use the Developmental Relationships Framework strategies and practices as well as other tools (i.e., Teach Like a Champion, Clover Model, and Growth Mindset) to strengthen their relationships with students?
   c. How, if at all, were AmeriCorps members able to support students and families in feeling connected to their school community during the school closure?

3. What are the most impactful context conditions, at the student and school levels, that shape AmeriCorps members' ability to support student learning and build strong developmental relationships with their students and families during the COVID-19 school shutdown?
   a. In what ways, both new and similar to in-person learning, are AmeriCorps members able to support teachers and schools as they have moved their instruction online?
   b. How does City Year help AmeriCorps members feel supported and resilient during this disruption, both personally and in their work as AmeriCorps members?

   c. What ways are AmeriCorps members interacting with students and their parents/guardians that are important but not yet well understood or defined?

4. Are there any notably outsized benefits related to each site's approach that, if adopted by other sites, could enhance City Year's ability to implement its services and have an impact on AmeriCorps members, students and school outcomes during the COVID-19 disruption?
   a. How have different sites' unique core strengths facilitated the transition to online learning?
   b. How do sites see their orientation positioning them to provide support during the reentry process when schools return to in-person learning?
   c. What kinds of flexibility have helped with meeting the different needs of schools and school districts while maintaining consistency in City Year's services?

As I began interviewing participants in the spring, I learned that across all three sites in Columbus, Los Angeles and Memphis, many AmeriCorps members did not have opportunities to support distance learning directly. Therefore, participants were invited to share their pre-pandemic experiences related to our original research questions which were:

1. How, if at all, do AmeriCorps members' developmental relationships and the social and emotional learning opportunities they create with their students lead to improved outcomes?

2. What are the highest impact practices, strategies and behaviors for building strong developmental relationships between AmeriCorps members and their students?

   a. What do these practices, strategies and behaviors look like in action?

   b. How, if at all, do these practices support AmeriCorps members in personalizing the learning for their students?

METHODS

Primary Data Sources
The primary sources of data for this project were 25 semi-structured interviews and one focus group. Participants included 16 AmeriCorps members and 12 site and headquarters staff. Interviews lasted 30-60 minutes. See https://tinyurl.com/cy-protocol for all interview protocols. I conducted all interviews through video conferencing, recorded each session and transcribed the sessions using Scribie or Rev transcription services.

Approximately half of the interviews with AmeriCorps members were conducted in the spring and the rest took place in the fall after the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. Some interviews with AmeriCorps members that were originally scheduled for late May were cancelled at the last minute due to emotional distress and nation-wide protests that erupted after the killing of George Floyd by police.

SITE SELECTION
The three City Year sites that participated in this project—City Year Columbus, City Year Los Angeles and City Year Memphis—were originally identified and invited because each site has demonstrated a different core strength in WSWC implementation which has informed practice change at the national level. To briefly summarize these strengths, City Year Columbus emphasizes student social and emotional development; City Year Los Angeles uses a data-driven, continuous improvement approach to guide focus list (students who receive targeted support from AmeriCorps members) student support; and City Year Memphis uses research-based intervention curricula. The original goal for this project was to gain a better understanding of the concrete practices and site-specific conditions that contribute to their success. Though the initial goal shifted due to the pandemic, each site graciously agreed to continue with the revised research proposal. More details about each site are provided in the Site Description section below. Table 1 below provides a snapshot of the number of AmeriCorps members and schools served by each site.

Table 1. Summary Characteristics of Participating City Year Site in 2019-2020

	Columbus	Los Angeles	Memphis
Total School Sites	7	31	6
Total AmeriCorps members	57	260	35

PARTICIPANT SELECTION – SITE STAFF AND AMERICORPS MEMBERS
Purposeful sampling was used to identify and invite participants with the experience and knowledge most relevant to answering the project's research questions. In some cases, identifying the best interviewees emerged through informational meetings with key stakeholders at each site (i.e., snowball sampling). Key stakeholders at each site who participated in the development of the research proposal and the interview protocols then invited a diverse group of AmeriCorps members to participate. Special effort was made to invite AmeriCorps members who had served in a variety of contexts (e.g., grade level, subject area) and to achieve a mix of first- and second-year AmeriCorps members. Initials are used in place of interviewees' full names unless consent to include their name was provided.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION – HEADQUARTERS
In addition to interviewing staff at each of the three sites, I also interviewed two staff from City Year's headquarters to gain overall insight on how City Year was adapting to address the shift to distance learning, supporting AmeriCorps members during the pandemic, and planning for the 2020-2021 school year.

Table 2. Data Collection by Site

Site	Focus Group*	One-on-one Interviews			Total Interviews	Total Time (hours)
		ACM Y1	ACM Y2	Staff		
Headquarters				3	3	3.0
Columbus			3	4	7	4.5
Los Angeles		4	2	3	9	5.6
Memphis	1		2	4	7	5.0
Total	1	4	7	14	26	18.1

*Five second-year AmeriCorps members who help lead teams in service participated in this focus group after each had conducted a focus group with their teams of AmeriCorps members (ACMs)—each with between 2-5 ACMs—using a subset of interview questions from the original research proposal protocol. These focus groups were initiated during a context of rapidly shifting conditions with minimal time to plan and implement formal data collection processes (e.g., recording and transcribing the focus groups and coding the results). Therefore, though these team leads did share their notes and insights from these focus groups, we have not included the participants of their focus groups in the participant count.

Secondary Data Sources
Additional data collected but not formally coded included:

Informational Meetings – Regular meetings with key project stakeholders from each site provided guidance on the development of the research proposal and background information on each site as well as City Year's overall organizational structure, evaluation methods, service delivery processes used nationally and locally, and updates on their virtual service processes. These meetings followed agendas with guiding topics developed by the researcher and project team.

Artifacts – Approximately 200 artifacts were shared to provide context and background information. Thus, they were not formally coded. These artifacts included: City Year background information; City Year national and local site training materials; and a wide array of artifacts from sites nationally on their post-school closure strategies and school support activities (e.g., social media posts, emails, etc.).

Observation of AmeriCorps Member Online Trainings – After schools closed in the spring and AmeriCorps member service in schools was truncated, City Year created virtual professional learning opportunities.

I observed three 90-minute trainings in the month of May: Equity & Education Practice, FuelEd Training on Attachment - PART 1, and FuelEd Training on Attachment - PART 2.

AmeriCorps Member, Teacher and Administrator 2020 End of Year Survey Results – Results from year-end surveys completed by AmeriCorps members and partner teachers and principals which included Likert scale and open response answers are included, where relevant.

Implementation Survey – Each year, the Managing Director of Impact at each City Year site completes a survey on the services provided. I reviewed the Implementation Survey for SY 2019-2020, which focused on services provided after schools transitioned to distance learning.

Data Analysis

For each interview, I took detailed field notes and then organized them into thematic summaries (Maxwell, 2013) describing key insights. Themes across interviews were exposed by writing analytic memos and grouping themes with sub-themes which were then reviewed with the project team part way through data collection to check for understanding and validity (Alkin, 2011). The project team and I then developed a plan to focus the remaining data collection on delving more deeply into emerging themes of interest and addressing gaps (e.g., AmeriCorps members serving higher grades). Once data collection was complete, interviews were then coded using Quirkos software. Coding categories were based both on the emerging themes (i.e., in vivo codes such as 'trust') and the research questions (i.e., COVID response, AmeriCorps member practices in action, site approach).

Overview of City Year Sites

City Year sites have flexibility in how they enact the organization's WSWC services. The three sites that participated in this project have each demonstrated strong outcomes, and through their innovative approaches, are contributing to network-wide learning.

CITY YEAR COLUMBUS OVERVIEW

City Year Columbus, founded in 1994, provides service in seven schools in Columbus City Schools, which is the largest school district in Ohio. Sixty-two AmeriCorps members serve 3,836 students.
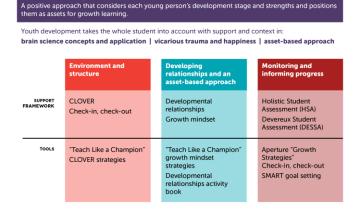
A Focus on Social and Emotional Development (SED)

A key strength of City Year Columbus is their grounding in strong developmental relationships[2] while leveraging evidence-based social and emotional development supports. They were the first site to use Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework alongside Partnerships in Education and Resilience (PEAR)'s Clover Model and created their own Framework for Youth Development (FYD) (see Figure 2. below) that incorporates developmental-relationship and SED-based tools and strategies into City Year services. City Year Columbus also provides their corps with their own spaces for reflection on their assets and strengths related to SED and cultivating meaningful relationships, including one-on-one mentoring through a partnership with Deloitte and the option to take the Gallup StrengthsFinder survey.

City Year Columbus's approach includes three categories of focus: *environment and structures; developing relationships and an asset-based approach; and monitoring and informing progress.* AmeriCorps members use specific strategies connected to each framework in their work with students. For example, City Year Columbus staff at all levels focus on creating the conditions that support a SED focus by clearly articulating and leading their work with school sites and their corps members anchored to the Framework for Youth Development.

Figure 2. – City Year Columbus Framework for Youth Development

When delivering curriculum, such as Leveled Literacy Intervention or Do the Math, City Year Columbus AmeriCorps members follow prescribed scripts that include built-in personalization grounded in developmental relationships and SED practices from the Framework for Youth Development to foster engagement and tailor supports to meet each student's developmental needs.

The positive results Columbus has achieved through this focus led City Year's national design team to develop related resources and restructure the sequence of the training provided to AmeriCorps members network-wide. For example, pre-service training that AmeriCorps members now receive is focused on developing strong relationships with their students, intentionally creating developmental environments that help to foster student resilience, and creating voice, choice, belonging, and opportunities for student reflection.

Matching Teachers with AmeriCorps Members

City Year Columbus's strength in building developmental relationships is reflected in the way in which they pair teachers and AmeriCorps members. Zandra Castro, an impact director in Columbus, describes the importance of the relational aspect of this approach, particularly when it comes to the role of impact managers, who are full time staff members that support and guide AmeriCorps members: "What has really worked is the consistency of the impact manager because they...really, year over year, [are] the steward of that relationship, and so... it's really

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[2] A developmental relationship is defined as a close connection through which young people discover who they are, gain abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to interact with and contribute to the world around them.

important that [they] know the teachers and know...their teaching styles." To also aid in the formation of strong AmeriCorps member-teacher matches and relationships, during three weeks of pre-service training, AmeriCorps members complete the StrengthsFinder 2.0™ survey and the site staff pay close attention to the personality and working styles of each corps member. As Managing Director of Impact Tiffani Gottlieb explains:

We're paying attention to your personality within the training setting. Through conversations we'll also get an understanding about your [subject preferences] and what that might mean for your placement. If you're excited about 10th grade math...you're automatically [going to be in] 10th grade math because we can help with the relationship [but] we can't help you learn 10th-grade math as much.

The site's emphasis on making careful observations of both teachers and AmeriCorps members to facilitate the best match speaks to the value City Year Columbus places on supporting the development of strong relationships at all levels.

Aligning Services with District Priorities

City Year Columbus also ensures alignment to their developmental relationship frameworks and SED focus when partnering with the district and schools, as they strive to meet district and school needs. For example, Columbus City Schools implements restorative justice and trauma-informed care in many of its schools. The site works with their school partners to understand how they are implementing these initiatives before training the school's AmeriCorps members on the relevant core concepts and language. This focus and attention to partner relationships ensures that AmeriCorps members are positioned to support the district's initiatives rather than working at odds with them.

The local site is also committed to aligning with and supporting Columbus City School's priorities, such as their focus on skills and competencies described in their Portrait of a Graduate and their emphasis on local workforce development (see the JPMorgan Chase Global Workforce Advisory Council's 2015 report Skills in Demand: Building a Middle-skills Workforce to Grow the Columbus Economy). To underscore this alignment, City Year Columbus's most recent annual report includes a section titled "Building the Workforce in Ohio," which features information on how City Year AmeriCorps members are contributing their talents to the state economy and workforce.

From partner relationships to staff training and AmeriCorps members' work with students, City Year Columbus personalizes learning by emphasizing developmental relationships and the infusion of evidence-based SED supports.

CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES OVERVIEW

City Year Los Angeles, founded in 2007, is one of City Year's largest sites. In 2019-2020, the site worked with 31 schools, 29 of which are located in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and two that are located in Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD). Their 280 AmeriCorps members served approximately 22,000 students, 99% of whom qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

A Focus on Data and Continuous Improvement

A core strength of City Year Los Angeles is the use of advanced data analytics to identify students who could most benefit from AmeriCorps member support, and then using ongoing formative assessments to track and iteratively refine AmeriCorps member services. Though all sites use formative assessments and progress monitoring, the Los Angeles team's innovations include developing its own database and system for data visualization.

City Year's Chief Transformation Officer Stephanie Wu says, "They're really an example of how technology and data visualization can be coupled with a human-centered approach to using the data, and how the technology supports scaling." These innovations pushed City Year headquarters to adopt more sophisticated data visualization tools such as Power BI to improve data visualization for the whole organization.

City Year Los Angeles's data-driven approach is anchored to three pillars of data use:

1. Progress monitoring
2. Formative assessment
3. Individualized student support maps to personalize learning

During summer meetings with City Year Los Angeles staff, partner school principals identify the teachers who will work with City Year based on teacher preference, their willingness to collaborate with an AmeriCorps member, and areas of need. In secondary schools with clear cohorts of students traveling together, AmeriCorps members follow students as a group through all of their classes, supporting relationship development.

During the first month of the new academic year, City Year Los Angeles staff and AmeriCorps members gather information to create a holistic picture of the students they will support. Data collected include academic, attendance and observational data. Up to 15 students who are earning a D or F in English Language Arts or mathematics, showing behavior challenges in class, and/or have attendance of less than 96% are identified for more individualized support from an AmeriCorps member. The students on this preliminary "focus" list are then given formative assessments for math, literacy and reading comprehension to gain a secondary data point.

AmeriCorps members create a picture of the student's current social and emotional development using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment[3] (DESSA). AmeriCorps members also gather information about student interests.

Each student's data is reviewed with teachers and principals to narrow the focus list of students who will receive support from AmeriCorps members over the course of the year down to 11. Once the students are identified, a support map for each student is developed, drawing on all of the data collected, to create a differentiated plan for academic and social-emotional development support. AmeriCorps members work to align academic tutoring with the teacher's or school's curriculum. For social-emotional skill interventions, AmeriCorps members draw upon the DESSA scores and then, at the end of the first six weeks, reassess students. Based on the findings, AmeriCorps members update support maps and intervention plans for the next six-week cycle. Over the course of the year, AmeriCorps members complete three cycles of progress monitoring and revising the student support map based on these formative assessments.

The support map is used to create weekly session plans for AmeriCorps members, which are developed by the corps member and their impact manager. AmeriCorps members update the session plans daily with observational data, which is then used to guide their decision-making for which skills to prioritize with each student. AmeriCorps members receive several training sessions at the beginning of the year to build their skills for collecting this observational data on student progress, particularly related to SED, and participate in training throughout the school year.

Each day, AmeriCorps members serving in middle and high schools work with students for four periods and have two planning periods. Elementary schools also have a comparable amount of time for planning. The structure of the time spent with students is flexible and can include in-class support, small-group blended learning sessions within the classroom, and one-on-one tutoring sessions outside of the classroom. Based on research on how best to support student success, AmeriCorps members target about 35-45 minutes of time with each student per week.

Overall, City Year Los Angeles's commitment to continuously making data-informed adjustments to student supports is leading to enhanced personalization for students and stronger outcomes.

CITY YEAR MEMPHIS OVERVIEW

City Year Memphis, founded in 2017, partners with public schools in two districts that are in the process of merging: Shelby County Schools and the Achievement School District. Together, these districts serve more than 100,000 students in over 200 schools. City Year Memphis's 35 AmeriCorps members serve approximately 2,000 students, 79% of whom are economically disadvantaged, in six schools—two elementary, three middle schools and one K-8 school. The district has undergone many organizational changes in recent years which may be partially contributing to a teacher shortage and significant turnover or transfers among school leadership and teachers.

A Focus on Evidence-based Curriculum

A core strength of City Year Memphis is its success using evidence-based curriculum to personalize learning for students and weaving social-emotional skill development into academic intervention sessions. Their results and commitment to evidence-based practice are further supported by the practices of the Memphis leadership team, who prioritizes supporting SED for its staff and corps, along with the students and educators with whom they work. This has earned them high levels of trust with their partner teachers and administrators.

The intervention curricula used in Memphis is Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) and Do the Math (DTM). As is typical at most City Year locations, students are identified for individualized intervention support in ELA or math based on school academic records and standardized test results. Once students are identified, AmeriCorps members administer the curriculum-based assessment to identify each students' current level of topic mastery within the curriculum framework. These preliminary assessments help AmeriCorps members work with their impact manager to form two groups of students who are at similar levels and determine the appropriate curriculum starting points for each group, and, where needed, differentiate support for individual students. Progress monitoring is then utilized to ensure correct placement and track students' progress. AmeriCorps members follow prescribed scripts to work with students while also building in personalization to foster engagement and meet students' developmental needs. Impact managers provide ongoing coaching using observation rubrics to assess consistency and fidelity of implementation. Both LLI and DTM come with all materials to support this implementation process.

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[3] The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) measures student strengths and challenges in eight domains: Personal Responsibility; Optimistic Thinking; Goal-directed Behavior; Social Awareness; Decision Making; Relationship Skills; Self-awareness; and Self-management. Note that DESSA uses the term social-emotional learning (SEL) whereas City Year uses social-emotional development (SED).

Social and Emotional Development (SED) Focus

Though not initially highlighted as a unique aspect of City Year Memphis's approach, it became clear during the interviews and artifact review process that like the Columbus site, Memphis places a strong emphasis on the importance of SED and cultivating strong developmental relationships. In addition to the use of the Clover Model and growth mindset approach to SED, Memphis AmeriCorps members are trained on Search Institute's Developmental Relationship Framework.

AmeriCorps members also use the Check-in, Check-out protocol to set goals with students who are identified for social-emotional skill building and coaching support at the beginning of the week based on areas of need identified through DESSA and corps member observations. During intervention time, they work with students on relevant SED competencies. For example, an AmeriCorps member might provide direct instruction on growth mindset (e.g., that abilities like intelligence and self-control are malleable and that challenging yourself to improve an ability grows your brain by strengthening the connections between neurons). Then, during the Check-Out time at the end of the week, students are supported in reflecting on whether they met their goal and in reflecting on why or why not (e.g., asking what actions they took that demonstrate challenging themselves to improve academically or behaviorally, and discussing what barriers they encountered). Together, the student and AmeriCorps member set new goals for the upcoming week and discuss strategies for success. This process gives students voice in the approach to personalized learning.

A Focus on Effective Learning Environment

City Year Memphis also focuses on fostering a learning environment that is conducive to personalization. The graphic below (Figure 3) shows how the site conceptualizes personalizing the learning environment.

Figure 3. Effective Learning Environments Graphic

The first layer of this model is Physical Space, which means creating a welcoming, safe, accessible environment that limits distraction, supports positive interactions, allows for physical movement for all students, and uses physical resources and technology to support learning.

The next level, Community and Behavior[4], involves modeling and promoting inclusivity, belonging, and setting norms for respectful interaction—all elements intrinsic to the Clover Model and the Developmental Relationships Framework. To create norms for community and behavior, AmeriCorps members are trained to facilitate an activity for co-developing community agreements with students who receive targeted support at the beginning of the year. And though a structure is provided, AmeriCorps members are also encouraged to personalize the activity to meet their students where they are developmentally and culturally. The process of co-developing community norms is an example of a practice that promotes the "Assertiveness" domain (need for choice and participation in decision-making) from the Clover Model, and the Share Power aspect in the Developmental Relationship Framework. The community agreements are posted where they are visible during intervention sessions, revisited regularly, and used to support student behavior. Two examples of agreements can be seen below in Figure 4 and 5.

Figure 4 and 5: Sample Community Agreements

Creating the conditions for the top layer, Course Content, involves implementing the LLI or DTM curriculum with fidelity as described above.

As these descriptions illustrate, each of the participating sites takes a personalized approach to supporting students and schools. In the next section we will learn how sites adapted to the shift to distance learning, and where relevant, how each approach enhanced their ability to support students, educators and schools.

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[4] City Year is moving towards using the term 'engagement' rather than 'behavior' to better align with its commitment to an asset-based, student centered approach.

The Shift to Distance Learning

In March 2020, the United States, like other countries around the world, began an unprecedented process of shutting down and quarantining—including closing most schools by mid-March. Initially, there was hope school closures would be temporary, but it soon became clear that schools would need to shift to distance learning for the remainder of the academic year. Then, as the summer progressed, continuing with distance learning into the new school year became increasingly inevitable. This section provides an overview of what navigating this ever-shifting landscape looked like as City Year adapted and found new ways to personalize learning for students. While I believe this overview provides valuable insights, it is important to keep in mind that data collection was limited due to the much narrower scope of the original project and the desire to minimize the demands on participating sites who graciously agreed to continue with the project despite the radical changes in circumstances.

This story is told in three phases to reflect the nationwide adjustment process. I primarily draw on what I learned from the three participating sites and, where relevant, include anecdotes shared by City Year sites around the country and end-of-year survey data.

As has been widely documented, the pandemic has had a disproportionately negative impact on people of color who, due to historical and present-day structural racism, are also more likely to live in low-income neighborhoods. Because City Year focuses on providing services to communities of color, this narrative provides a small window into the lived experiences of students, families and educators in these communities and the AmeriCorps members who partner with them.

PHASE 1 – NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION

This section highlights some of the ways AmeriCorps members, City Year site staff and City Year headquarters (HQ) helped to address critical needs early in the pandemic.

Assessing Family Needs and Disseminating Critical Information

City Year site staff and AmeriCorps members proactively reached out to school partners to see how they could best support students and families. The most pressing need for schools in the first few weeks of the pandemic was to communicate with families about evolving plans and how families could stay up to date. Schools also needed to quickly assess families' needs for technology, internet access and food.

PHONE CALLS

One of the first priorities was quickly assessing family needs, including food, technology and internet access. AmeriCorps members across the nation played a significant role in helping to identify these needs by making phone calls on their school partner's behalf. For example, City Year Columbus AmeriCorps members made 1,551 phone calls to students and families during the spring closure, 600 of which were made in the first four days. With each call lasting an average 10 minutes, Columbus AmeriCorps members saved partner school staff approximately 258 hours. Given how overwhelmed educators and school staff were this spring, they may not have been able to make such calls, which could have left many families uninformed about available resources and ongoing learning opportunities for their children.

This example highlights how phone calls facilitated increased responsiveness to families and students:

[A] family said, 'We don't have a Chromebook and don't know how to get one.' We said, 'Great we're on it!' We hung up and called the principal and... that day, [she] went and left one for them on their porch.

TIFFANI GOTTLIEB, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF IMPACT, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS

In many cases, AmeriCorps members fluent in a second language were also able to provide translation services on calls to parents made by teachers and administrators.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Schools and local social service organizations quickly organized to address food insecurity by setting up food distribution centers, and AmeriCorps members helped get information out using social media. For example, a City Year Memphis AmeriCorps member made a flyer on March 12, the day before schools closed, to notify families about food distribution sites. It was posted to the school's Facebook page and was shared 243 times within a few days.

Figure 6. Example of Social Media Community Information Post

COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER SCHOOL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

City Year Los Angeles provided targeted support for schools who also work with The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, an intermediary organization that helps coordinate school support activities for the Los Angeles Unified School District. In large school districts like Los Angeles, this kind of partnership can improve efficiency by minimizing the number of people with whom district and school staff interact.

City Year Memphis also collaborated with a local community support organization, Whole Child Strategies, which improved efforts to get families much-needed help. According to Hannah McFarland, City Year Memphis's director of education and learning:

Whole Child Strategies leads a coordination of efforts in a specific neighborhood in Memphis where we have three partner schools, and so they were intentionally trying to address COVID-19 related needs on the ground in those communities. We were able to partner with them closely to administer needs surveys to school families. We made phone calls and sent text messages to every single family in each of our partner schools to get them to complete the needs survey. And Whole Child Strategies got back to us and said, 'We had more participation at these three schools than any other school thanks to your outreach.' And so that meant that families then were able to have access to resources through Whole Child Strategies because they were able to [identify] their needs.

Connecting with students

When AmeriCorps members said goodbye to their students on the last day of in-person classes, everyone believed they would see each other again soon. Sadly, this did not happen, and privacy laws prevented AmeriCorps members from having any one-on-one communication with students remotely. This lack of closure was painful for everyone, but AmeriCorps members found many creative ways to connect with their students.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media was the most common strategy leveraged to reach students. Teams of City Year AmeriCorps members across the country created images and videos for their students to show care and appreciation, provide encouragement, offer mentoring and engage students in challenges. Below are a few examples of the kinds of messages sent through social media.

Figure 7. City Year Boston – Screenshots from Irving Middle School's *Pass the Joy* Video

This team also created a dance video and lyrics to remind students of safety precautions during a pandemic.

Figure 8. City Year Boston - Screenshots from Irving Middle School's *Stay Safe* Video

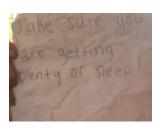**Figure 9. City Year Chicago – Example from the 'I Wish My Students Knew' Campaign**

Figure 10. City Year New Hampshire – Screenshots from Bakersville Elementary School *Wellness Tips* video

A key theme in the videos and pictures was AmeriCorps members passing items to one another with a smile or warm gesturing like a wave. This might seem trivial, but it is a clever continuation of modeling kindness and collegiality that AmeriCorps members displayed during their in-person service.

OTHER WAYS OF CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS

At some sites, AmeriCorps members were able to participate in student promotion ceremonies in May and June. For example, at City Year Columbia in South Carolina, AmeriCorps members assisted teachers and school administrators in planning virtual pre-K, Kindergarten and fifth grade promotion ceremonies.

The loss of direct communication with students was hard and several AmeriCorps members shared that they wrote letters to their students and asked the principal or their partner teacher to deliver them. Sometimes, they even heard back from their students.

Yes, we get comments from the students... on the school's Facebook page saying they miss us, or the parents will give the teacher or the principal their number so we can keep in contact with them.

DN, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

These messages of appreciation and expressions of care helped to lessen students' and AmeriCorps members' sense of loss caused by the abrupt end to in-person interactions.

Supporting AmeriCorps members

In the first few weeks of COVID-19, it was unknown if AmeriCorps members would be able to return to supporting learning in person, how much time supporting online instruction would involve, or what this support would look like. City Year headquarters recognized that its Whole School, Whole Child (WSWC) services would need to be significantly modified; they saw the need to provide flexibility for sites to adapt to their local context and needs, while also providing guidelines to ensure AmeriCorps member safety and fidelity to the core of City Year's services. Top priorities for meeting AmeriCorps member needs included: determining how best to ensure they could continue supporting their school partners; creating alternative opportunities for accumulating service hours[5]; and providing support for their professional development and physical and mental well-being. In phase one, since most sites were overwhelmed with navigating the complexities on the ground, headquarters stepped in to provide additional service training and professional development opportunities.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Relationship development is foundational to AmeriCorps members personalizing learning for their students and forming effective teams with other corps members. AmeriCorps members can spend months building trust with students before students accept their support. This approach can make these relationships feel deeply personal and intimate, so it's not surprising that the abrupt ending to the school year was painful for many AmeriCorps members. This grief, in combination with pandemic-related anxiety and uncertainty about the remainder of their service year, meant that the holistic well-being of AmeriCorps members was of great concern to City Year staff. City Year recognized that AmeriCorps members would have to be mentally strong and resilient themselves to continue to support students throughout the pandemic. Staff at many sites encouraged their corps to take personal time for self-care. Some even instituted a reduced weekly work schedule. AmeriCorps members were also engaged mentally and emotionally through virtual community meetings (also called town hall meetings), reflection activities, self-care classes like virtual yoga and mindfulness meditation classes, and mental health support including access to mental health counselors. More details are described in Phase 2.

Headquarters Transition Support

City Year headquarters quickly developed guidelines and policies to support sites throughout the spring of 2020. For an organization the size of City Year which works in highly varied contexts across the country, the challenge was balancing flexibility with fidelity to the core of their services and mission. Asked in late May how City Year supported sites in finding this balance, Alex Allen, senior vice president of AmeriCorps member experience at headquarters, responded:

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[5] In order for AmeriCorps members to continue receiving their stipend, health benefits, and to gain completion credentials, they must complete their service year as per the federal guidelines set by AmeriCorps.

She provided an example to illustrate what balancing flexibility with clear policy guidelines looked like:

Before we had [policy guidelines] in place, there were a number of sites that had already agreed to provide in-person service. So, when we first started talking about the policy, what was most contentious was this idea that ...we're going to prioritize the health and safety of our corps, we're not doing any in-person service. Period. As you might expect, initially, those sites that were still doing in-person service were worried about what they were going to [say to their partners] and what it might mean not to be in service in such a challenging moment in our communities. Again, balancing the approach we were taking with what we understood reality on the ground to be, this was a conversation, not a mandate. 'Here's the policy. For anybody currently doing in-person service...we want to talk to you, we want to strategize with you.'... And, although we were prioritizing our commitment to not doing in-person service at that time, we had to work together and be fluid given situations were shifting daily. If something comes up locally, if you're being asked to do something that you actually feel like is a good idea, let's have a conversation.

One of the findings that will be discussed is how City Year as an organization takes a personalized approach to learning at all levels. In this example, we see how headquarters leadership responded to sites' needs, shared power and collaborated to create structures that allow sites to personalize City Year services to fit their local context—while exemplifying the core values and practice frameworks embedded in WSWC services.

SUPPORTING AMERICORPS MEMBER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESILIENCE

Recognizing that sites had limited capacity to create professional learning opportunities that could help supplement/support AmeriCorps member service when schools were first shut down, City Year headquarters immediately engaged in a crowdsourcing process with staff to identify needs across the network of sites. They then used these insights to create a full schedule of service-learning opportunities that were made available to AmeriCorps members nationally beginning the week of March 23.

Each week started with a community meeting, facilitated by Senior Vice President and Dean of City Year Charlie Rose and Senior Leadership Development Director Chad Richardson. The goal of these meetings was to, "bring our network together in the community." And to, "...allow us to share information, inspiration, and perspective as we move through the ever-changing landscape of our society today."

A different department provided a training session each day. For example, the People Development department provided leadership trainings such as, "Managing Up, Sideways, and Remotely" and "Delegation Cycles." The AmeriCorps Member Experience department provided wellness and Life After City Year (LACY) trainings such as, "Mental Health and Wellness Discovery Work," or "LACY: Networking Strategies—Building & Deepening Relationships." The Impact Services department provided skills trainings such as "Virtual Learning and Student Supports," and "Using an Equity Lens to Understand Our Current Context and Service." External experts often led the trainings.

City Year focused on preparing AmeriCorps members to personalize learning in the virtual space, providing trainings on technology skills for virtual platforms, remote mentoring and motivation strategies, addressing equity in a remote space, and cyber bullying. These trainings allowed AmeriCorps members to better support their school partners.

The ... trainings that honestly helped me out a lot was how to use Zoom. Once I understood how to use Zoom, I was telling my [English] teacher, "Oh, you can stop the chat from working and students won't spam it anymore!

DIANA CORREA, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

These training opportunities are another way that City Year created flexibility and support in a time of high uncertainty. The trainings also helped sites by providing additional opportunities for AmeriCorps members to fulfill their hours when they were not able to do so either through supporting distance learning or attending locally provided trainings. In the early weeks, more than two-thirds of AmeriCorps members nationwide participated in these sessions.

As sites returned to supporting schools and began developing their own local training opportunities, attendance declined. For example, City Year Los Angeles created their own two-part training on making phone calls home that included how to set up a Google telephone line so that AmeriCorps members could maintain their privacy; scripts with guidelines for different types of calls; instruction on equity issues that may make it difficult for students to participate in online learning; and practice sessions where AmeriCorps members could give and receive peer-to-peer feedback. Los Angeles also worked with a local organization, the Museum of Tolerance, to provide a series of day-long equity workshops that started before the pandemic and recent social uprisings. After the killing of George Floyd, these sessions were modified to create space for processing and receiving emotional support.

I really like how relevant the content was to what was going on. I think City Year did a really good job of making sure that they're connecting us with what's going on in our current climate ... I think other places sometimes tend to sweep stuff under the rug or continue on as business as

usual. So, it was nice to have acknowledgement of, you know, what people might be going through during this time.

Moving forward, local sites will likely return to providing most of the training experiences for their AmeriCorps members. However, Alex Allen said: "We have gotten feedback directly from the corps that they really value gathering with their fellow corps members outside of their own site." The community meetings were particularly valuable because they promoted participants' sense of agency and feeling like their voice mattered. As Allen described, these national events also provided opportunities to contemplate universal structures and systems that are impacting the work AmeriCorps members are doing locally.

The individual circumstances that each of them was experiencing on the ground might be different in Chicago or Seattle or New Hampshire. But the systemic challenges going on around education and equity, and racism ... those things should be discussed in a more universal way, so that people can see and understand, 'Oh, this is not just my city.'

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES

Many organizations created newsletters and learning resource compendiums during the spring of 2020. City Year also released "Virtual Learning and COVID-19 Resources for Teachers and Families" with embedded links to extensive resources on supporting remote learning. City Year's document was notably different than other organizations' resources in that it included guidance for both educators and parents on how to assess the quality of resources.

PHASE 2 – SPRING SUPPORT FOR REMOTE LEARNING

Many schools and districts quickly shifted to distance learning and did so in a way that allowed AmeriCorps members to continue to personalize learning for students. In this short video from City Year Chicago's Academy High School posted to YouTube on April 12, 2020, Principal Leonard shared: "Our [AmeriCorps] team is still holding daily tutoring sessions, they are still tracking student engagement, they are still building intervention plans, they are still communicating with students, and they are still reaching out to families."

Many schools and districts, however, faced a host of time-consuming challenges in making the shift to online learning, including setting up online learning platforms, ensuring one-to-one computer access, equipping teachers with the necessary tools and technology for distance teaching, and training teachers on distance learning procedures and best practices. Districts also had

to renegotiate teacher contracts with their unions before distance learning could begin. As a result, in some districts, distance learning did not begin immediately. Despite these challenges, according to City Year's 2019-2020 end-of-year AmeriCorps member survey, 63% of AmeriCorps members reported providing virtual support. Nationally, City Year provided distance learning support to 22,015 students in 282 schools during the spring 2020 school closures.

Supporting Distance Learning

Teachers had a great deal of latitude in how they structured distance learning. Some teachers held drop-in office hours to answer questions while other teachers moved to fully synchronous online instruction. At times, it was challenging for AmeriCorps members to fully integrate into online learning. In describing the challenge for teachers in his school, an AmeriCorps member in Columbus said: "A lot of teachers were already very stressed about having to go online. They were not prepared to go online [and] don't have the tech accessibility."

For teachers who were more comfortable in the online environment, factors that seemed to influence the degree to which AmeriCorps members were able to contribute included the AmeriCorps members relationship with their partner teacher before the closure, the teacher's teaching style, and the teacher's level of comfort allowing AmeriCorps members to lead whole-class activities. Thus, the kinds of support that AmeriCorps members provided varied widely not only between schools and sites, but also within the same school by teacher.

The most commonly reported ways AmeriCorps members supported teachers virtually included:

- Tracking attendance, participation and students' engagement
- Using the chat to answer questions, encourage students to complete assignments and do check-ins with students to personalize the learning experience
- Monitoring the chat to address any inappropriate use by students in cases where the chat function was enabled
- Providing technical support for students, teachers and parents, across a variety of platforms and applications

"I'm watching the cameras because sometimes students are watching TV as they're on the Zoom call. And so, I privately message my teacher ... 'Hey, Charles is staring at the TV.'"

In contexts where teachers had the capacity to integrate AmeriCorps members more fully, AmeriCorps members reported providing the following kinds of support to personalize the learning experience:

- Debriefing with teachers after class to discuss improvement opportunities, assisting in planning future activities, and discussing how best to provide targeted support for struggling students
- Sharing their screen to walk students through how to find materials in the school's Learning Management System (LMS) where student coursework and schedules are posted
- Leading warm-up activities to engage students, create community and integrate aspects of SED
- Creating videos customized to the classroom's online lesson plans
- Providing academic or SED support with small groups in breakout rooms
- Working in breakout rooms with groups of students during teachers' office hours

In the words of a teacher in Columbus, "The Zoom sessions would be less manageable and more chaotic if my corps member was not present to help manage the learning environment."

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES AND HOMEWORK HELP
According to the 2019-2020 end-of-year AmeriCorps member survey, 34% of AmeriCorps members reported providing homework help sessions and 22% reported organizing enrichment activities, including virtual health and fitness activities, academic games, and creative arts projects. To comply with online student safety protocols, all activities were led by AmeriCorps members working in pairs or teams.

PHONE CALLS
AmeriCorps members continued to make phone calls home throughout school closures to keep families informed, help with technology access issues and ensure a smooth transition to online learning. As an AmeriCorps member in Los Angeles described, "Students didn't know what was happening … They didn't know school was going on. They didn't know what time classes were. Some didn't check their [school's LMS] … which had all their classes and everything listed … So they were lost."

In addition, AmeriCorps members spoke with parents to understand any barriers to student attendance. For example, in New Orleans, AmeriCorps members at Phillis Wheatley Community School helped to lighten teacher loads by taking responsibility for tracking which families had received their distance learning materials and making sure that parents were able to log in to the school's data system so that they could keep up-to-date on their child's grades.

City Year also conducted wellness check calls. City Year Dallas AmeriCorps members joined school guidance counselors on calls where there was a concern about student well-being. An AmeriCorps member from Columbus also shares a similar experience:

I was unable to support my class directly, [so] I made up that gap in time by doing more phone calls home for

attendance and just for wellness checks. I think that that was one of the most impactful things that I did during this spring.

AS, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

Teacher survey results from the 2019-2020 school year suggest that teachers also felt that phone calls were helpful:

Corps members making direct phone calls home to families has been extremely helpful for me and the teaching team. Students sometimes connect better with corps members and would prefer to hear information from them instead of teachers.

COLUMBUS TEACHER

COLLABORATIONS WITH ED TECH ORGANIZATIONS TO PERSONALIZE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS
Responding to the shift to online learning by forming new partnerships with ed tech companies may have been rare, but it is worth highlighting for how well it allowed AmeriCorps members to continue providing virtual support, particularly differentiated support to focus list students at City Year Memphis. Memphis staff immediately recognized that the use of their paper-based curriculum was no longer viable and initiated a partnership with BookNook, an online literacy support platform that shared many similarities with the Learned Literacy Intervention curriculum City Year sites use. Through BookNook, Memphis AmeriCorps members could work individually or in small groups to personalize instruction, and they were able to work with groups of students in approximately half of their schools.

Hannah McFarland, City Year Memphis director of education and learning, shared that their trusting relationship with school partners allowed them to pilot BookNook very quickly. "[Our partners] didn't need to know much about what BookNook was or what it looked like, they just trusted that we had a high-quality filter when deciding what to use," McFarland said. The role of trust in successful partnerships was a theme that emerged across sites and will be discussed further in the Findings section below.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT
The use of social media continued to be an important way that AmeriCorps members were able to stay connected with students and families. Engaging students in "challenges" through social media was a widespread strategy both in the first few weeks of the pandemic and over the reminder of the school year. As AmeriCorps member DN in Memphis shared, "We did social media challenges … like, 'What activities are you doing during quarantine? What books are you reading during quarantine?' And we would do little drawing contests."

A playful example of a challenge that also provided modeling for continuing to pay attention to self-presentation even during distance learning comes from a team of AmeriCorps members in Little Rock, Arkansas

who created a TikTok video set to the music of Young T & Bugsey's song *Don't Rush.* Each AmeriCorps member shows the camera what they look like when they first wake up, then what they look like when they're ready for their day. As each AmeriCorps member finishes their time on camera, they toss something to the next corps member who "catches" it. The invitation was for students to post their own before and after videos.

Supporting AmeriCorps Member Resilience

George Floyd's murder near the end of May and subsequent social justice movements hit many City Year communities and AmeriCorps members hard. The organization leveraged existing affinity groups to create safe spaces for making meaning of and processing the events. "I found it very helpful because it gives you the space to not only accept the emotions you're going through, but it also lets you know that you're not alone in those feelings," said a City Year Memphis AmeriCorps member.

Some City Year sites worked with local providers to offer counseling sessions and well-being workshops. Many interviewees said that they greatly appreciated these opportunities and how attentive site staff were to AmeriCorps member well-being.

City Year, as a whole, I think did a really good job. It is one of the first jobs I've had that has specifically been like, 'Yeah, Black Lives Matter, let's talk about this.' And that was very important because when George Floyd was killed, I was [home], seeing my family ... And so I was dealing with my family not being the best, and that was very stressful, but when work was happening, they're like, 'Yeah, we want to create space for y'all and whatever you need. Do you need to talk to someone else? Our staff are [available], but also, here's TalkSpace, if you want to talk to a different person.' ... And I think some people used it and were like, ... how do we support our Black teammates? Because they're obviously going through some rough stuff. But also ... what are some of the best tips for us White allies trying to help with our families [becoming more aware]?

AR, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

A summary of the successes and challenges shared by AmeriCorps members during the spring will be discussed in the Findings.

Despite the shift to distance learning, truncated service opportunities and social unrest, the national end-of-year AmeriCorps survey results suggest that the corps members felt more positively about their experience compared to AmeriCorps members from the previous year. For example:

- 91% agreed or strongly agreed with, "I am proud to have served at City Year" – up eight points from the prior year
- 79% agreed or strongly agreed with, "I feel personally connected to City Year and what it stands for" – up 16 points from the prior year

- 77% agreed or strongly agreed with, "The leaders at City Year demonstrate that people are important to the organization's success" – up 20 points from the prior year

PHASE 3 – A GLIMPSE AHEAD TO 2020-2021

When the 2020-2021 school year began, most schools were still engaged in distance learning. This section offers insights gained from interviews with site and headquarters staff about plans for the new school year.

Planning for 2020-2021 Back to School

One of the great challenges facing education organizations this past summer was creating a plan for the 2020-2021 academic year when there was no way to know if, or when, it would be safe to return to in-person instruction. As with the policy guidelines developed in the spring, City Year's new policy guidelines for the upcoming school year were developed with significant input from sites with the goal of providing clarity on where there is flexibility within Whole School, Whole Child (WSWC) services and what was needed to address the three main implementation scenarios:

1. In-person learning with social distance
2. Distance learning
3. Hybrid learning

The organization's primary goals were: ensuring the health and well-being of all City Year staff and AmeriCorps members; providing clear guidance on how sites could adapt core services to their local context; and creating resources to support virtual training of corps members and staff in this new landscape. They also sought to provide clarity on where sites were not able to be flexible.

WSWC services are very flexible. We're not going to be wiping down hallways as [part of] our function, but we can do temperature checks maybe as kids come into school. That's like greeting children into school now.

ALEX ALLEN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICORPS MEMBER EXPERIENCE, CITY YEAR HQ

The number of resources for AmeriCorps member basic training and the policy guidelines provided to sites were extensive. They covered a range of topics such as AmeriCorps members' use of technology, service standards for AmeriCorps members and a toolkit for change management for creating new agreements with school partners. And of course, safety guidelines for returning to in-person service were included. An example below provides a snapshot of the kinds of guidance that were provided.

Figure 12. Example of Response to Intervention (RTI) support scenarios from Services in the Context of COVID-19)

Community Building (SED/Attendance Tier I)	
ACMs create and support positive, asset-based spaces for community building and connection, purposely creating opportunities to cultivate belonging, make meaning, build trust, and foster connection	
WHAT COULD SERVICE LOOK LIKE ACROSS VARIOUS DELIVERY SCENARIOS?	
In-Person with Social Distancing	Virtual
• Morning Greeting/Check-in Questions (standing apart with masks on, limiting the number of students moving through, no high fives) • Reflection Time • Spirit Celebrations (PJ, Funny Hat, Math Fact Days) • Warm Up Questions & Activities: JRAW - Joys, Ripples, Appreciations and Whoopsies • Phone calls home to encourage attendance and build relationships, sometimes as an essential service that could take precedence over other WSWC services • Whole-school attendance celebrations per the school's attendance plan and expectations, provided that attendance during virtual learning is included only when all students have access to distance learning • Sites could support school partners with creating and supervising hand-washing or hallway social distancing routines	• Virtual Morning Greeting via Instagram or other approved school platform • Create space for small groups of students to either sign up or be assigned to a time to reflect on their week with ACMs • Virtual Spirit Celebrations -students can participate when they check into their class or tutoring session. • Virtual check-in call to families to be sure they are connected virtually using Google Classroom or Microsoft Forms for JRAW/posting/etc. • Post a daily check-in question and reply to all students by the end of the day • Virtual bulletin boards celebrating attendance and belonging • Place positive phone calls home and find out what is working well for families and students when they engage virtually: support the school's virtual attendance plan • Phone calls home to encourage attendance and build relationships, sometimes as an essential service that could take precedence over other WSWC services
Notes on Hybrid or Rotation between In-Person and Hybrid	
• Record morning greeting messages and post to social media platform with consistency (weekly, monthly) • Create intentional space In-Person and virtually. Create a schedule where both are managed by ACMs.	

City Year HQ staff highlighted the collaborative process that was used to create all aspects of the back-to-school resources and guidelines.

We did a tremendous amount of crowdsourcing to get the curriculum for the [pre-service training provided to AmeriCorps members] ready for a virtual setting. A lot of sites helped with that work...and one of the other pivot points is ... we now have a comprehensive procurement process whereby sites can order laptops, hotspots and PPE resources.

BOBBY KESSLING, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT, CITY YEAR HQ

City Year also published a blog post describing the back-to-school plan and linked resources.

Building Relationships Virtually
As the new school year started, City Year was committed to maintaining well-vetted routines and strategies for building relationships with students through, for example, continuing to greet students each morning and implementing Check-in, Check-out practices. However, without the one-on-one opportunities to connect, it was understood that building relationships would be a challenge.

It's really hard, and it's so different because I'm not feeling that connection with students that I had at this time last year. It's not like I can personally walk up to the student and be like, 'Hey, how was your weekend? How did your football game go?' That type of thing.

MY, RETURNING CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

One strategy City Year Columbus used to make things easier is pairing returning AmeriCorps members with the partner teacher they had last year. In Memphis, AmeriCorps members are meeting more regularly with their teachers.

We join the teachers in their morning and afternoon huddles to figure out how they're doing and see if we need to do anything or see if there's anything important that needs to be done and find out if we can help.

DN, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

Refining AmeriCorps Member Support in Online Classrooms
In an interview at the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, City Year Columbus impact director La'Rez Wilson described their site's approach to training incoming AmeriCorps members.

When we were organizing our training, instead of just taking a template from years past and putting it on this year, we had to ask ourselves questions that align with, 'is this most necessary in this moment? Or [with] what our school partnerships look like?' Are there things that we need to focus on even more because of the virtual relationship and implementation of service? And then, are there other things related to the societal context...that are going to help our corps members develop, be aware of, and stay successful within the work that they're doing, not only with students, but also through the leadership development [aspect] of their City Year experience?

LA'REZ WILSON, IMPACT DIRECTOR, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS

Many schools have returned to a more traditional school day structure such as regular bell schedules, and AmeriCorps members are being integrated more fully into the classroom, as another Columbus impact director described in early September 2020.

Our corps members are going to be able to have meaningful interactions with students and have some autonomy. So, I think there's a lot more structure in schools. [They] have schedules and we have corps members in classrooms with Google Classroom, all of the access issues that we had in the spring [have been resolved]. We're in everywhere we need to be right now, which is awesome, because we started school September 8. So, in two weeks, we're 10 years ahead of where we were in the spring.

ZANDRA CASTO, IMPACT DIRECTOR, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS

Wilson described what AmeriCorps members' work looked like when he observed an online class:

It was really cool to see that in those Zoom classroom setups, the teacher has recognized the AmeriCorps member as such a resource that [they] have actually allowed the chat to go directly to either the teacher or the corps member. And my look-for, if you will, in those observations, is, how is [managing the chat] actually being utilized by students? And I can hear when the teacher will ask a question to say, 'I want to hold a time for folks to respond in the chat if you have questions,' and a corps member will say, 'We actually have a question from so-and-so, and I just want to surface it for you so that we're all aware.' It's a really great way to say that, okay,

[students] may not be as confident or willing to connect with a teacher, but there's a near peer there, that they can have that quick question ... So that corps member can be that voice for that student in that classroom.

There are still ways site staff are adapting City Year services to this new context. In mid-September, just after school started, Castro described one such area:

And then this other element of evaluation. We haven't really dug deep into that yet, but really starting to think about what does it mean to track the students we work with ... and what do we need to track if we never are able to actually identify students for individualized support because the district isn't doing the same testing as they've done in the past ... [We're] basically week-to-week on how we're supporting corps members, impact managers and teachers that are in our schools, to make sure that we're being as adaptive and meeting the needs of the school to the best of our abilities for the students.

Conclusion on the Shift to Distance Learning

The pandemic caught everyone in education by surprise, creating enormous uncertainty and logistical hurdles even in the most well-resourced communities. The communities served by City Year were particularly hard hit on many levels, which made it especially challenging for them to transition to distance learning. City Year AmeriCorps members played a critical role in helping educators and families through this difficult time. They helped identify and address basic needs in the early days, found creative ways to stay connected with their students, and continued to support learning in a variety of innovative ways during the spring and into the new school year this fall. The organization overall, and all the individuals within it, demonstrated remarkable tenacity and nimbleness in how they rapidly adapted to the national shut down and shift to distance learning. This was due in no small part to their expertise at taking a personalized approach to learning not just with students, but as an organization.

Partner teachers and principals are responding positively to the adaptable, critical capacity City Year brings. In a survey of over 180 partner administrators, 95% feel that City Year has supported their school's implementation of virtual, hybrid and/or in person learning. A survey of nearly 500 partner teachers revealed that 94% feel that City Year provides high-quality service and 90% agree that City Year AmeriCorps members help students feel a stronger sense of belonging. AmeriCorps members also reported the highest engagement scores to date during this period according to the annual survey of AmeriCorps members.

Findings

This section includes five key findings from this project which show that despite the varied challenges and successes in navigating a shift to distance learning, City Year's approach to personalized learning and development, along with its commitment to equity and the holistic well-being of AmeriCorps members, staff, students, and families, helped the organization successfully meet the immediate and longer term needs of its school and district partners.

1. THE SHIFT TO DISTANCE LEARNING PRESENTED SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES.

Successes, challenges and solutions are presented together since overcoming each challenge presented a set of new opportunities. The majority of quotes are from City Year Los Angeles interviewees because Los Angeles schools were in session several weeks longer than other sites in the spring, allowing AmeriCorps members to become more deeply integrated into virtual learning. Additionally, for logistical reasons, more Los Angeles AmeriCorps members were able to participate in interviews in the spring than the other two sites.

1.a. Attendance

CHALLENGE
School systems across the country struggled with student attendance in the spring. AmeriCorps members reported that attendance varied widely, with more reporting low attendance than high. Several AmeriCorps members shared that students would briefly join a class prior to signing off. In other cases, students may have appeared to be logged on, but would either walk away or leave their cameras off and not participate in discussions, which made it difficult to know whether they were present or not. As one AmeriCorps member shared:

In terms of engagement, there's only so much we can do when students have the ability to easily get off the call and easily just leave because it's not... It's not the same thing as leaving the classroom. That was for me, I think one of the hardest parts of this space. It was very creative and it was very exciting to learn this new space, but at the same time it definitely introduced me to some things that I had never seen before...So I think that's definitely going to be just an ongoing challenge with keeping that engagement because now with this technology, you can easily just click off and say bye.

NU, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

There were many reasons for students to miss school, including increased housing and food insecurity, issues accessing internet and increased responsibilities at home. Both site staff and AmeriCorps members reported that

students in need of more academic support were more likely to experience these kinds of obstacles, but privacy guidelines prevented AmeriCorps members from reaching out directly without a teacher or school administrator present.

SUCCESSES
Some schools recognized the importance of AmeriCorps member relationships with students and helped facilitate direct connections between AmeriCorps members and their students.

This example was shared by City Year New Orleans in an email to Chief Transformation Officer Stephanie Wu in March:

The City Year team at Phillis Wheatley middle school is having virtual one-on-one meetings with their RTI (Response to Intervention) students (facilitated through the teacher) to ensure that their students are still showing up to school every day, and to continue the work they were doing before the building was closed. This plan...came about because school leaders recognized the relationships that corps members built with their RTI students and felt that they were best positioned to get students to keep showing up when it's easier than ever for them to skip lessons.

An impact manager in Memphis echoed this importance of relationships in describing why some teachers had higher turnout:

I do feel like it depended on the relationship that the student had, not only with this teacher, but also with the corps member. I know this particular corps member worked in fourth and fifth grade classrooms, he had a really strong relationship with his students, so did the partner teacher. She had a good number of students that participated in [classes] post COVID-19....[this AmeriCorps member] went above and beyond for his students, [and] his partner teacher. So that connection was known and felt [by] students.

YEMIYMAH MCLEMORE, IMPACT MANAGER, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS

A key takeaway is that when students have greater autonomy in choosing whether to participate, learning experiences will need to become truly student-centered and engaging. In this regard, we have examples of how AmeriCorps members succeeded with engagement, in partnership with their partner teachers, even during the chaotic spring semester.

1.b Experience using education technology enhanced AmeriCorps members' ability to support distance learning

SUCCESS
As described earlier, City Year provided AmeriCorps members training on how to support learning in virtual classrooms, which allowed them to better support their partner teachers and student learning. One AmeriCorps member described multiple other applications and virtual

tools her partner teacher used that she felt improved student engagement and attendance, including ClassDojo to track student engagement, the Zoom polling feature, and Kahoot, an app-based game similar to jeopardy.

Another example of an AmeriCorps member integrating online learning tools can be seen in the Day in the Life video shared by City Year Chicago's Academy High School. In it, AmeriCorps member Tyler Hildreth demonstrates using a math software program in combination with a screencast software to create tutoring videos for her students. The use of this technology made it possible for her to continue supporting her students very soon after schools closed.

CHALLENGE
By contrast, a Los Angeles AmeriCorps member described the rocky start she experienced in trying to provide tutoring in breakout rooms during class:

I think it was really confusing [for students] because it's math. So there was no way of us showing how to solve the problem... if you and I are speaking, how am I going to demonstrate how to solve a problem? Unless I had pen and paper and I can show you like that. But we didn't have any of that set up because we didn't know what it was going to look like...it was just so new; we didn't know what to expect.

NU, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

Addressing the technology skills gap will, no doubt, be a significant area of focus for City Year and their partner schools as distance learning continues.

1.c. Personalizing learning in online spaces

CHALLENGE
In cases where AmeriCorps members didn't have opportunities to engage with students in online environments, they reported that they were unable to personalize the learning.

SUCCESS
However, the online learning space offered new opportunities for personalization as this City Year Los Angeles AmeriCorps member describes:

I [also] did translation for Spanish speaking students...I would use the chat box for that...which I thought was really cool. I don't know, for me, I had never done that before. I would maybe do it in the physical space. Where I would go up to him or her and be like, 'Oh, let me explain this to you.' But in the chat box, I was really specific in terms of what was being said, the context. I would speak to them as well but simultaneous, it would be read through chat and then if there were any other questions, we would be able to talk about it because my teacher gave us that space to do it.

RIANNA RIO, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

City Year has dedicated itself to taking an asset-based approach (see WSWC Service Principles for FY21), and research shows that students who are English language learners (ELLs) do better academically and emotionally when they are able to integrate more fully into general education classes (Gandara & Orfield, 2010). Thus, what this AmeriCorps member learned could point toward new ways to support multiple ELLs simultaneously in English-only classrooms using technology—even during in-person learning.

1.d. Accessing school Learning Management Systems (LMS)

CHALLENGE
Another challenge many AmeriCorps members reported was not having access to their school's LMS where all students' coursework and schedules are posted. They also mentioned that it would have been helpful to have access to other software their schools were using to communicate with students and families, such as the Remind application used in many schools. While AmeriCorps members typically didn't have access to these systems pre-pandemic, the lack of access made it challenging for AmeriCorps members to access and understand materials, align with their partner teacher and students, and keep up with assignment deadlines when schools were transitioning to distance learning.

SUCCESS
In the spring, some AmeriCorps members were able to obtain a student login credential which made a significant difference in their ability to support teachers and students. By the fall, the issues with FERPA and data sharing agreements were addressed, and these access issues seem to be resolved.

2. CITY YEAR MODELS A PERSONALIZED APPROACH TO LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AT ALL LEVELS OF THE ORGANIZATION.

A striking theme to emerge early on was how key elements of City Year's personalized learning approach with students were also emphasized throughout the organization in the way staff approached their work. Similar to the notable positive benefits for student learning, this personalized approach enhances organizational learning overall and allowed City Year to be especially nimble and innovative during this time of crisis. Examples of personalized learning at all levels emerged, illustrating a commitment to:

- Relationships
- Instilling a growth mindset
- Differentiation
- Agency and ownership of learning
- Addressing the social and emotional development and well-being of all

Illustrative examples of each are provided below, apart from relationships which was so significant that it warranted additional unpacking. It is therefore described more fully in Finding 3.

2.a. Instilling a growth mindset

A returning AmeriCorps member who supports a team of AmeriCorps members in Memphis said that his team felt that the organization as a whole reinforced a growth mindset, making it possible for AmeriCorps members to authentically integrate this approach into their work with students.

The sentiment that came from my corps members was that they felt like their work with growth mindset was pretty strong this year. And I think that definitely comes from the ways that City Year, as well as myself and my impact manager, continually reinforce that within themselves as well... I think that's one of the really amazing things about City Year is that because we are so focused on building our members and helping them become better professionals, that a lot of the work we do with them also translates to the work that they do with their students.

BW, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER AND TEAM LEADER (ELEMENTARY)

In an interview, City Year Memphis Director of Education and Learning Hannah McFarland expressed the importance of embodying all aspects of the personalized approach to learning this way:

It's hard to model something to students if you're not experiencing it yourself. And I think that is something we're continuing to work to be really intentional around: 'How do we embody what we're hoping you [ACMs] are then going to embody with your students?'

City Year Memphis Service Quality Manager Brandy McCray added:

We had a whole session...with the corps members where we put big sticky notes [where we asked them], 'How does City Year Memphis express care for you?' Or, where is that missing for all the different parts of the developmental relationships framework, for them to think about how those needs are being met? Which I think was a powerful reflective spot for them both positively and negatively to give feedback, but then also to see all the ways that we were trying to do these things.

2.b. Supporting differentiation

Elements of supporting differentiation have already been illustrated above in how City Year, at all levels, responded to the pandemic. Other examples include headquarters supporting sites to customize their approach to service delivery—demonstrated by City Year Columbus's focus on SED and developmental relationships, City Year Los Angeles's focus on the use of data and continuous improvement processes, and City Year Memphis's focus on implementing evidence-based curriculum. Sites

differentiate service delivery with their district and individual school partners to create a customized plan that is adapted to local priorities and needs. Headquarters also supports sites in customizing the training they provide AmeriCorps members to ensure they are equipped to deliver services in a way that is aligned with their school partner's initiatives and the local school context.

The ongoing pandemic and associated uncertainty have exposed the need for, and strength gained from, building flexibility into all levels of the organization. An example of where this flexibility will likely play out is in letting sites determine whether they are able to identify and work with focus list students in some contexts. Some sites will likely be able to conduct the necessary testing and create the structures needed to support working with focus list students, but others may not.

Creating more opportunities for differentiated support to ensure the well-being of AmeriCorps members during the pandemic also emerged as a City Year strength.

We survey our corps members four times a year. At the end of this year, results were the highest that we've had in a long time, in the context of a very difficult year, and the worst possible circumstances. And when you dig into the open-ended comments... what you start to see is that people felt like they had some flexibility to take care of themselves, they had managers who... had the time to check in with them. And they felt like some supports were put in place [that] were differentiated enough that they could take advantage of them. We were approaching the corps members the way we always had with our students.

ALEX ALLEN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICORPS MEMBER EXPERIENCE, CITY YEAR HQ

2.c. Demonstrating agency and ownership of learning

The pandemic created many opportunities for demonstrating organizational and individual capacity to be proactive and take ownership of learning. City Year Columbus, for example, recognized soon after schools closed that their principals were too overwhelmed to determine what help they needed. Rather than wait to find out, they pivoted and came up with four things AmeriCorps members could do to help: make needs assessment calls to families; provide teachers logistical support in virtual classrooms; provide resources; and provide virtual homework help. City Year demonstrated how making phone calls was profoundly impactful for schools earlier in the report. City Year Columbus Managing Director of Impact Tiffani Gottlieb shared another example of the Columbus site being proactive:

If the district was using something, we transitioned into using that. We don't use Google Classroom, in terms of our communication as a site. But [we] quickly got training and figured out how do we build our own learning into that and not ask [the district] to teach us, which I think

was valued. We didn't wait for their training to show it to us. We said, "Okay, what systems are you using? Alright, cool. If you give us access, we'll figure out how we use it [to] be supportive." So I think those were key in our view of how we could be nimble and really align with what the district was doing.

2.d. Addressing the social and emotional development and well-being of all

In City Year's pandemic response, I saw how headquarters moved quickly to collaborate with sites to learn what they needed, and then develop resources and guidelines to support them with flexibility and differentiation in mind. This, in turn, allowed sites to be responsive and nimble in meeting the needs of their students, families and school partners. I saw examples of administrators and teachers leaning into City Year and AmeriCorps members when there was strong trust. And I saw how City Year headquarters and sites prioritized the well-being of staff and AmeriCorps members by providing self-care time and by moving quickly to prepare an extensive menu of national and local classes, workshops, affinity-based support groups and counseling support.

3. PRIORITIZING TRUST AND STRONG RELATIONSHIPS IS THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESSFUL PERSONALIZATION.

Participants at every level highlighted trust and strong relationships as the foundation for creating productive partnerships and effective conditions for student learning. Since trust is key for building strong relationships, it is not surprising that it came up more than 180 times during interviews and was cited as the starting point when forming new relationships.

Participants shared many nuanced stories of how they build trust with key stakeholders, the impact it has directly and indirectly, and how they have repaired trust when it has been compromised. These stories provide rich examples of what building trust and developmental relationships looks like in action. Together, they further validate the well-established importance of trusting relationships and belonging for student learning and the equally important role they play in adult and organizational thriving (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Walton & Brady, 2017).

Examples below are grouped by themes which intersect with Search Institute's Developmental Relationship Framework and other core tools used by City Year, such as the Clover Model, and other constructs present in WSWC services:

    a.   Expressing care and warmth
    b.   Persistence and dependability

    c.   Transparency, vulnerability and creating emotional safe spaces
    d.   Sharing power

Each theme is illustrated with one to two examples that describe different stakeholder relationships with an emphasis on AmeriCorps member relationships.

3.a. Expressing care and warmth

Expressing care and warmth plays a central role in building strong trusting relationships.

AMERICORPS MEMBER-STUDENT
AmeriCorps members shared that gaining students' trust required getting to know students through active listening and patience.

It doesn't have to be some big thing. It's literally just saying, "Good morning," and asking them how their day is going, and remembering the little things they tell you. So, if a student told me they were going to their favorite restaurant that night for their birthday, the next day, I'd make sure to ask about it. And if a student offhandedly told me when their birthday was, I would write it down. And a week before, I would ask them their favorite food, and I'd bring that in for them. And it's literally just showing that you do care about them and that this isn't just a job for you.

MY, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

If you ask them how their day is, if you notice that something's off, point it out. They want you to point it out. They want you to ask them what's going on because they are craving that type of attention. They're not getting it everywhere. So, for someone to notice that their attitude is different, their mood has switched...makes them feel seen. And then when you actually sit and listen to them, it makes them feel heard. And at that moment, they can develop trust with you and they can also rely on you. And that's when they'll start thinking, "Well, if you're here for me, then I want to be here for you too. So, if you're going to ask something from me, I'm willing to do it because of how much you do for me."

NU, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

AMERICORPS MEMBER-TEACHER
AmeriCorps members who had strong relationships with their teachers were also intentional about expressing care and listening.

I think it's so important just to get to know your partner teacher. When you're asking your students how their weekend was, also ask your partner teacher that. They're human, too. They have so much going on, and sometimes they just need someone to talk to. For me, it was finding that stuff out about my partner teacher and showing her

that I actually care about her and her well-being and that I'm there to listen if she needs to work something through.

MY, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

In Los Angeles, AmeriCorps members receive a day of training on building strong relationships with teachers.

In the first two weeks of [basic] training that our corps members go through there's an entire day dedicated to our school and teacher relationships where we're learning about the teacher experience. We go through something called Anatomy of Peace. So how are we responsive instead of reactive? How are we helping the situation instead of making it worse and entering like a cycle of harm, right? They did something, so then I did something, and so they did something, and then I did something. That is a cycle of harm. How do you break that? Our corps members go through a lot of training related to that and the importance of teacher relationships.

ELISHA WHITMAN, LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION DIRECTOR, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES

AMERICORPS MEMBER-PARENTS
In City Year Memphis, Service Quality Manager Brandy McCray shared a whole-school practice that helped build trust with parents by helping them express care for their child in the school context.

City Year sent home valentines for parents to fill out for their students. And then for the ones that they didn't get letters back, I think the corps members stayed late one night and wrote letters to make sure that every student had a valentine. And then the Impact Manager and the whole team went around to each classroom and read every valentine aloud. And then it was a surprise to see like, "Oh, that was mine" at the end. And I think some of the joy that was spread that morning was something even teachers... [were] glowing, teachers who are traditionally very stern, [were] really happy.

She went on to describe the impact this event had:

And then parents [became] super involved, and I think they had the highest PTA turnout...before when they were doing the valentines. And so it was just a really, I think, beautiful moment that wasn't necessarily set around academics, but you could see the value of having people bringing that love and joy and generosity into the school in such a big way to make students feel important.

-BRANDY MCCRAY, SERVICE QUALITY MANAGER, CY MEMPHIS

3.b. Being persistent and dependable

Persistence and dependability are critical to building trusting relationships.

AMERICORPS MEMBER-STUDENTS
This story provides a particularly powerful example of the importance of being persistent.

[A student] would come into class, I had her first period, and she would sleep, and she wouldn't do work and she was always on her phone. And I just started sitting with her to get her off her phone and she hated it, she really hated it at first. But... every morning, I just kept sitting with her. And soon, I found out that she was on her phone because she needs glasses and doesn't have them, so she would use her phone to zoom in on the board because she couldn't see it. And once I found that out, I made her tell [the teacher] ...because she was losing points [for being] on her phone. And after that, my teacher stopped marking it down.

MY, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

She then shared how this ultimately impacted the student's confidence and academic engagement.

She just started killing it that year, she bumped up her grades and it was all by herself... she began advocating for herself. She's the one who began asking teachers what she was missing, and she would write it down, and she would cross it off when she was done...With her, that's just me not giving up...Just me showing her that I cared and that I knew she could do the work, she started to believe it.

MY, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

AmeriCorps members also reflected on the importance of spending informal time together engaging in fun activities:

When I was in-person, I engaged a lot with them...during recess or during lunch. I would go ahead and play handball with them, basketball with them, whatever sport they were playing. And I think in that way...through playing with them, I got a lot of them to start to trust me with conflicts that would arise, like 'This person doesn't want to play fair,' or I would help them resolve their problem, I would call them up and help, just facilitate conversations among each other. And as other students, I guess, are seeing that, a lot more students start trusting me and coming up to me to talk to me about any issues.

ESR, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

AMERICORPS MEMBER-TEACHER
As with students, an important part of building trust is being proactive and consistent. An Impact Manager described one successful AmeriCorps member this way:

[She] is just very proactive. So, just making sure that she's constantly communicating with her partner teacher and offering support in any way she can. She's amazing, she goes above and beyond, not only with supporting the students. She would...debrief with her teacher after every class and help her plan the lesson and share updates she was noticing with the teacher.

KT, IMPACT MANAGER, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES

An AmeriCorps member in Columbus describes what it took to repair her partner teacher's damaged trust in City

Year due to an incident the previous year when her AmeriCorps member left abruptly.

It was difficult. But she didn't understand [what had happened] and then in her classroom...people popped in and out all year, so it wasn't cohesive. That's, honestly, how I built trust with her was just being there and being present and I never left her.

AR, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

All these stories, but perhaps this last one in particular, illustrate the important role of predictability and dependability in trust-building and the cost when this is compromised. Predictability as a core psychological need was highlighted by Carol Dweck in her reevaluation of the evidence for core psychological needs (Dweck, 2017). This was an important contribution to other highly influential frameworks on core psychological needs such as Self-Determination Theory's three core needs: *relatedness (belonging), competence,* and *autonomy* (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SITE-SCHOOL
Creating trust in City Year when AmeriCorps members change every year requires a focus on consistency across each new cohort of AmeriCorps members.

[Each year] it's a new set of people who are starting from scratch that are going to become the best practitioner they could possibly be... and then they leave, and we do it all over again. And so that can be exhausting to our schools to always have new faces, but I think because they know what to expect from the program, and students too, they don't know corps members that are new, but they know they're City Year. So, for the first three months, your name [as an AmeriCorps member] is City Year.

TIFFANI GOTTLIEB, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF IMPACT, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS

Being dependable as an organization also means demonstrating a commitment to impact and evidence which we saw play a powerful role in the Memphis team being able to integrate BookNook quickly because their school leadership trusted them to vet new curriculum.

An indicator of trust for us is that the school has a trusted liaison for City Year, so that it is not just someone they're pawning [the role] off on, but someone who is... a decision-maker, an influencer to really be able to help bridge and build the relationship with the school.

DR. CATHERINE CUSHINBERRY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS

3.c. Transparency, vulnerability and creating emotionally safe spaces

Transparency and vulnerability were key components of creating safe emotional spaces where trust was present.

AMERICORPS MEMBER-STUDENT
I think a big thing is just being able to be real and honest with them. They would ask me questions about my high school, and... high schoolers, they know when you're lying... so you cannot try to fib about anything with them. And I would just be honest with them and be like, 'Yeah, I didn't do this homework in high school, and I regretted it because now I do not know math.' And if I made a mistake, I made sure I told that student 'sorry.' Because they need to know that mistakes happen, everybody makes mistakes, and it's just a part of life... and I think that was just how I built those relationships.

MY, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

SITE LEADERSHIP & SITE STAFF
When asked what facilitated her team in being nimble and adaptive during the onset of school closures in the spring, City Year Memphis Executive Director Dr. Catherine Cushinberry said:

...constantly working on this notion of assuming good intentions and also constantly working from a place of transparency, for me, as a leader ... My staff members probably knew more than most ... I don't know, but my best guess is they probably knew more business of things that were going on [before the pandemic] than other sites because I operated from a place of professional transparency: not assuming that my staff members are folks who have things to be done to them, but that they are professionals who should be engaged and understand the process of things that are coming that will impact them. So, it's not my intent to surprise my staff. It's not my intent to drop bombs on them. It's not my intent to make decisions without clarity around why and opening the door and opportunities for them to question, challenge, wonder. That trust was established, I think, because of transparency. In my team, I talk about budget transparently. I talk about relationships with funders transparently ... My team knows that I trust that whatever we talk about as a team, it stays there. [Also,] if they have been communicated with transparently, it creates a space for them to have transparent conversations.

SCHOOL STAFF-SITE STAFF
Dr. Cushinberry then described the importance of approaching difficult conversations with transparency, vulnerability and creating emotional safety:

So we've had a couple of instances where school partnerships were struggling ... And I had staff members who were hesitant about being candid ... And I was like, 'They're not blind. Let's just talk about that.' I talk about human nature, that dissonance that people feel when there's tension. People don't love it....and they want to do whatever they can, as soon as they can, to get rid of it ... Pride and a lack of transparency or lack of the skills to figure out how to navigate it are often our barriers ... I've had meetings where team members [said], 'This is just not going to go well.' I was like, 'Oh, it's going to go well ... because we're going in first with the expectation of it being good for everybody. I want to go into it with that mindset. I always think about when you watch someone

interacting with gorillas, one of the first things they say is [don't] come in eye-to-eye. Be very humble. Put your head down, put your arm and hand out. And I think, even when you have information and data on your side, you don't go in headfirst. You go in humble, and you create a space where people feel safe and brave; to have a give and take [conversation] … on what was done well and what was not.

This commitment to transparency as well as to high standards was evident at the school level. In describing how their team built the trust with school leadership that allowed them to be nimble during the transition, Yemiymah McLemore, City Year Memphis impact manager, said:

Open communication and consistent communication were key. And both the principal and I were transparent with each other. If there was something it was like, 'Hey, I have to go with this, or I do not,' we were both able to share that.

3.d. Sharing power

Sharing power is both a consequence of trust and a way in which trust gets reinforced. It creates a virtuous cycle where all parties can become more effective.

AMERICORPS MEMBER-TEACHER
Elisha Whitman, instructional director at City Year Los Angeles, describes the importance of trust for teachers to become willing to share power with AmeriCorps members.

Once they begin to trust our AmeriCorps members and see their willingness to learn and be in the classroom to support students, then they begin to release some of that control, which allows our AmeriCorps members to do their work.

SITE TEAM
Impact Director Zandra Casto in Columbus highlights how trust, attending to the social and emotional needs of adults, and a willingness to share power builds strong teams in a self-reinforcing way.

We are explicit in saying team doesn't just happen. You have to build it. You have to get to know your people, and you have to engage in difficult conversations, and you have to have structures and community agreements in place … You have to be really intentional with carving out that time. Our impact managers (IMs) understand this [which] … then lays that groundwork for the team leaders (Second Year AmeriCorps members) [to be] accountable, because as a previous IM myself, you can get lost in, 'Schools need this. City Year's asking me to do that.' And so when we give some of that ownership to a team leader to share, 'you also know this [is important] … so you help me remember [that] we need to also focus on the people and not just on all of the 'what'. I want you [the team lead] to be really intentional and thoughtful about how we're really a team…[and say], actually, we don't need to do a business team meeting this afternoon, we need to

focus on people … People are feeling overwhelmed, or they have a lot of questions, so that's what we need to do.'

SITES-SCHOOL
Site staff understand that AmeriCorps member-teacher trust is more likely to develop when principals support a teacher's autonomy and need for buy-in.

When we [go] into those summer meetings with our admin, it's really important to ask questions around who we are partnering with teacher-wise, and really advocating for the fact that we need teachers that want City Year in their room.

EVELYNE SANTIAGO, SENIOR SERVICE DIRECTOR, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES

HEADQUARTERS-SITES
In a conversation with Senior Vice President, AmeriCorps Member Experience Alex Allen in May 2020, she shared how the pandemic forced new levels of transparency and shared ownership.

We have started to work much more collaboratively together, site and headquarters staff, around building solutions in a way that I think we didn't do before. [When schools closed] we just couldn't have everything buttoned up, ever. And so, we all just got more comfortable with conversations being messy. There was no time for anything else. And we had big problems to solve together. I think we wanted to get it perfect before. I know this new approach will continue to benefit us in the future.

4. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RACIAL JUSTICE PROTESTS IN 2020 HAVE DEEPENED CITY YEAR'S COMMITMENT TO SED AND EQUITY.

The events of 2020—the impact of the pandemic, the killing of George Floyd and the massive uprisings it triggered, political polarization, and catastrophic fires and hurricanes—have made tending to social inequity and the impacts of trauma viscerally real and unavoidable for everyone, especially for educators. City Year is dedicated to taking an asset-based, self-reflective approach that recognizes silver linings can emerge during times of crisis. This has been the case related to enhancing their SED and an equity-focused approach to service.

4.a. Centering developmental relationships more fully

Director of Product Management Bobby Kessling shared how this is unfolding at the national level:

We had been piloting the Developmental Relationships Framework by Search Institute, and we made the decision to bring as much of that as we can into the full corps experience.

We're also intentionally putting the socio-emotional work side-by-side with the academic work, then talking about those as much as we can in an integrated way. It has already been the case that in practice, a lot of that gets integrated by corps members, but we're more and more explicit about it.

4.b. Creating more space for the social and emotional needs of everyone

Based on conversations with staff across the country, Alex Allen shared how this moment in time led many sites to enhance their focus on SED:

COVID is affecting everybody's mental health to some degree. It has started to shift our cultural norms to fully include all the joy and goodness of our work and our lives but also to acknowledge and make more space for everything that is hard about it too.

She shared an example of how one site modified a core City Year practice to reflect this need for a shift in the culture and how it has now been adopted nationally:

At the beginning of every meeting, we do ripples, joys and appreciations. What we learned from a project around mental health with our corps in the months before the pandemic hit was that it sometimes felt like we didn't make space to express things that were hard or how we were struggling. Always starting with ripples, joys, and appreciations means, if you don't have something positive to say, you might not be inclined to share. This moment gave us the opportunity to shift that—it demanded it really. And so instead, what started to happen is we start meetings with ripples, joys, appreciations, and windows. Windows started to show up, which just asks you to share in a different way, 'Give us a window into how you're doing.'

Allen said the events of this year have also opened up a deeper conversation about mental health and well-being with school partners.

[Site leadership] had some good conversations with our school partners in the spring when [they] shared how we were going to approach supporting our corps members as whole people during this time. As executive directors would talk with principals they would ask, 'Aren't your teachers struggling with the same thing? Aren't you struggling with teacher motivation or your own?' There was common ground here. Everyone was impacted, and everyone was challenged in some way. This moment presented the opportunity to have different conversations with our partners, our corps members and our staff.

The narrow focus during this time, and the heightened awareness of mental health challenges facing City Year communities has also led to different thinking about how to train AmeriCorps members during their basic training academy at the beginning of the year, Allen said.

We're [now] talking about what the trauma is that kids are facing coming into their school year and what COVID-19 looks like in our communities. And we're trying to get our corps members who are relocating to serve, who aren't raised in these cities ... to reflect on how COVID-19 is different in this city versus where they came from. We're being more purposeful in building context up front that we hope allows them to provide much better support to students and their families.

While nobody feels entirely comfortable celebrating silver linings that emerge during deeply challenging times, City Year is embracing this learning and deepening their focus on the social and emotional aspects of human thriving and how best to center it across the organization.

5. AMERICORPS MEMBERS LEANING INTO THE PRACTICE OF BUILDING STRONG DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS WAS CRITICAL FOR MAINTAINING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.

A central research question we sought to answer overall (in both the original and revised research plan) was: What strategies and practices do AmeriCorps members use to build strong developmental relationships with students? And, what do these look like in action? Above we shared examples of how AmeriCorps members build trust. During the interviews, AmeriCorps members shared many other examples of strategies and practices related to taking a personalized approach to learning, both in virtual and in-person contexts. Here, I share a selection of examples of these practices which are grouped by the element they illustrate. In practice, however, a single practice or story shared may illustrate more than one element.

5.a. Assertiveness

The element of Assertiveness from the Clover Model recognizes that students need to experience autonomy and agency in their learning environment. Having choices allows a student to work in a way that is best aligned with their preferences and their mood. When AmeriCorps members were asked how they approach situations where students are not ready to learn, many shared the strategy of choice:

If they weren't ready to start, then... I made up games based on the lessons they were learning that day. They were ready to play the game, and once they got into the game, they were like, 'Oh okay, this is easy.' And I was like, 'Well, this game is based off the lesson we have today. Would you guys like to read the books?' And giving them that option, usually they were like, 'Yeah, let's read the books.' If they still weren't prepared, then I would say, 'Okay, how about we work on the writing section, so you

can have time to write and just think about what you're feeling and why you're not ready.'

DN, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

We see in this story that the opportunity for reflection is also provided, and by being attuned to their students' emotions and readiness to learn, the AmeriCorps member conveys care.

5.b. Belonging

Another element from the Clover Model that was important for leveraging strong developmental relationships to maximize student engagement was Belonging. An important aspect of belonging is helping students feel that the learning environment is a safe space for them to bring their whole selves. Seeing adults bring their whole self into the classroom is a powerful way to create this kind of safety. An AmeriCorps member in Los Angeles who worked with eighth grade students modeled this by participating in a class assignment on creating a Look-Book PowerPoint presentation in which students were invited to share about themselves. In the sample pages below, we can see how she modeled being open and vulnerable while also saying goodbye and offering final mentoring tips.

Figure 13. Sample pages from Diana Correa's Look-Book

Creating a sense of belonging in virtual classrooms has been challenging but many AmeriCorps members shared creative ways they are overcoming this challenge.

5.c. Active engagement

A team leader shared how one of her AmeriCorps members wove active engagement, physically connecting to and engaging with the world, together with collaborative problem solving before the school closures.

They started using the dry erase boards because it's a bit more fun than standard pencil and paper. [They] would walk around and give words of encouragement and have students help each other [to] instill interpersonal skills.

KH, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

A City Year Los Angeles AmeriCorps member shared how she focused on finding ways to use what she had learned about her students' interests to make lessons more relevant, and in a way that was physically engaging.

A lot of the material that was given to them they didn't like. They were just very disengaged ... however, it was a requirement for them to learn it, so it was really up to us to find ways to make it exciting. There was one instance when I had a physical activity at the beginning ... a little hopscotch thing outside. So I think just combining different things. Especially at the beginning, it's essential to make it as exciting as you possibly can, especially for fifth grade, because they have so much energy and they really need that ... so that they're able to carry through the whole lesson.

And ... [for] word problems, I would use some of their names in it, and real-life scenarios of interests that I think they would do on a daily basis [like] going to the store and looking for a video game or looking for their favorite snack. That [made it] a little bit more realistic, as opposed to, oh no, another math problem.

RIANNA RIO, CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

5.d. Reflection

Reflection is another key element from the Clover Model that AmeriCorps members utilized to strengthen

relationships with students. This same AmeriCorps member, Rianno Rio, in collaboration with her partner teacher, also found ways to acknowledge the magnitude of the events students were living through in a way that was inspiring, and asset based.

And then in terms of poems, I would stick to themes that they have heard of in the school environment … I did one 'Oh, the Places You'll Go,' because they've heard that a lot, about in terms of being fifth graders, of the elementary school and being the highest grade and transitioning … [The poem] really nailed it to a 't' that they were a specific, very special class that was experiencing this whole change in our world.

Rio went on to share how her focus on resilience in the design of these warm-up activities intentionally built towards helping them write their culmination speech.

We really saw it in the collaboration on the culmination speech, because the culmination speech … encompassed a lot of the warm-ups and a lot of the language that we have been using in terms of the ELA … so, the culmination speech's theme was being hopeful and understanding that life is like a rose. You're going to have beautiful parts, you're going to have very, very bad parts, which is the thorn, and things to look forward to. So their culmination speech … I feel really captured that …

5.e. Growth mindset

Many AmeriCorps members shared examples of how they supported their students in developing a growth mindset by careful choices in language: examples include avoiding person praise (praising qualities that are sometimes construed as fixed traits such as intelligence or talent), asking students to explain their thinking, ensuring productive reflection on mistakes, helping them see and celebrate their progress, and helping them reflect on what led to their success or what is getting in the way of their success if they were struggling.

Asking probing, open-ended questions with more than 20 seconds to answer builds the student's confidence with you.

KD, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

We really focus on like, 'Hey, this is something that you were doing in the beginning of the year, and this is how you grew.' Just bringing light to that.

JF, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

Praise their efforts. Give high-fives. In group, show love and encouragement for hard work.

BW, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (ELEMENTARY)

This AmeriCorps member integrated a practice she learned from restorative justice work to build an academic growth mindset:

We also use the 'dragon to slay' that we [learned] from our [restorative justice] book, where we have them pick something that they were struggling with either in class or on a homework problem. It can be a dragon to slay for the day or a dragon to slay for the month, and that's just something that we use to show them that we're consistent. The kids themselves, they'll take it upon themselves to say, 'Hey, I slayed my dragon!'

JF, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

This example highlights how valuable it is to adapt to the language and practices being used in other school initiatives and how clear metaphors and routine practices help students integrate and latch onto important concepts.

Lastly, this AmeriCorps member emphasizes the importance of AmeriCorps members developing a growth mindset about their own mentoring skills and having realistic expectations of their students:

We preach growth mindset to our students, but we also have to remember to have it also. And I think that's a really big thing that I had to learn last year, and I think a lot of first-year corps members have to learn, because we can get in fixed mindsets, especially if we don't see change right away. And that's not fair to our students or to us honestly because then we feel let down and so do they, and I think that's just, that's something that I've really had to reflect on.

MY, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

5.f. High standards and reassurance (belonging and growth mindset)

As addressed earlier, AmeriCorps members often learn powerful practices from their partner teachers. This AmeriCorps member shares a practice often referred to as *High Standards with Reassurance* (Yeager, Purdie-Vaughns, et al., 2014):

I really admire [my partner teacher] because she holds her kids to such high standards, but they're not unachievable. They're standards she knows that they can reach, and I think that's so important. She'll be like, 'I know it's a lot of work, but I know you can do this work.' Because in the schools we serve, there's so many people counting these students out because of the way they think they grew up, but [she] doesn't care about that. I know she would have the same standards, whether she was at a private school, a charter school … she's going to hold every single student to the same standard because she knows they can meet those standards. And that is something I really respected and caught onto pretty fast. And that's something I tried to hold on to last year, and also this year, is not counting students out.

MY, CITY YEAR COLUMBUS AMERICORPS MEMBER (HIGH SCHOOL)

Well-controlled intervention studies have shown this practice can have especially powerful effects on students

who, as this AmeriCorps member suggests, may have previously received signals that adults have low expectations of them (Yeager et al., 2014). This practice can also help resolve questions students may have about their teachers' motives for offering critical feedback or extra help. This practice will be discussed more in recommendation 5.b.

5.g. Addressing trauma and supporting resilience

Since private conversations with students are less likely during distance learning, AmeriCorps members are finding new ways to get a pulse check from students at the beginning of class or tutoring sessions. Many AmeriCorps members have shared how they are beginning to integrate technology and software in their online support. One strategy is leveraging polling technology to encourage students to share three words that capture how they were feeling at that moment in time. For some students, this makes it easier for them to share their emotions in a way they might not have otherwise.

A Memphis AmeriCorps member shared a moving story of how she helped a grieving student before schools shut down:

His mother had passed, and one day he just had a really, really bad day. He was usually a really well-behaved kid, and he just had a really bad day this day, and he was sitting outside. It wasn't a kid that I had ever really personally worked with. I had seen him around the school, and he was just sitting outside. I saw him crying. I asked

him what was wrong? And he told me, he missed his mom … I said, 'Hey, do you want to write a letter to her?' He wrote a letter to her, he signed it, and I gave him an envelope, and I let him seal it, and I was like, 'No, that's just between you and her. No one else has to read it.' And he stopped crying, he gave me a hug, he went back to class and he got through the rest of his day. Later on, he ended up writing me a letter and sealed it kind of the same way that I showed him how to, and he just wrote how thankful he was and that that was something that he was going to continue to do when he wanted to talk to her.

JF, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

This same AmeriCorps member also shared her thoughts about recognizing parents' stress:

Of course, we focus on the students, but with them being at home, we also have to in some way focus on the parents, whether it's a check in to talk to the parent or just sending a thank you note or something like that to let them know, 'We understand that this is difficult for you'…We're asking parents to allow us to come into their home to teach their kids … You don't necessarily have to say thank you but it would just be nice to [acknowledge]… 'We understand you feel stressed out. Thank you for even allowing your kid to sit here on the video.'

JF, CITY YEAR MEMPHIS AMERICORPS MEMBER (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

These examples provide a small window into the many exceptional practices AmeriCorps members are using to personalize the learning environment for their students.

Recommendations for City Year

These recommendations are intended specifically for City Year but may also be applicable to other organizations doing similar work. I have compiled additional resources to support City Year in taking action on several of these recommendations, which can be found at https://www.edwheelhouse.org/city-year.

1. BECOME EVEN MORE INTENTIONAL ABOUT DEVELOPING AND EMBEDDING ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES THAT REINFORCE A PERSONALIZED APPROACH AT EVERY LEVEL.

In Finding 1, many examples showed that City Year is intentionally developing and embedding organizational practices that reinforce a personalized learning approach at all levels. However, there was a sense that some practices emerged almost accidentally under the pressure to innovate during a time of crisis or that they came up in localized ways not necessarily connected to a national improvement agenda. One of City Year's strengths is the systematic, evidence-based processes it has developed for identifying, validating, codifying and then disseminating best practices. The recommendation here is to turn this City Year learning engine towards intentionally deepening the insights already emerging around embedding a personalized approach at every level. A few suggestions related to what was captured during this project are:

- For staff who are not proximate to the day-to-day AmeriCorps member experience, create empathy-building opportunities such as shadowing an AmeriCorps member for a day, conducting empathy interviews or engaging in participatory action research (for more information on participatory action research, see recommendation 5f).
- Use the brainstorming and feedback session practice that the City Year Memphis team used with their AmeriCorps members at other sites and other levels within the organization.
- Build on the insights gained from this project through a longer-term researcher-practitioner study. A project such as this, especially if it could include multiple equity- and evidence-focused school support organizations, could make a significant contribution to our understanding of how to lead large-scale continuous improvement efforts across the highly complex United States

education landscape. The business sector has many excellent examples of books synthesizing high-impact practices such as *Good to Great* and *Great at Work*, but far fewer examples exist for the education sector.

2. CONSIDER INCORPORATING MEASURES OF TRUST.

City Year prioritizes building strong relationships grounded in trust and this came through strongly in the findings. Study participants' experience of trust and their skill at cultivating it stands in stark contrast to the significant decline in trust that has been taking place in the United States for decades. Stanford University political historian, David Kennedy, gave a talk in September 2020 in which he shared longitudinal data showing significant declines in: public trust in government overall and in the three branches of government; trust in news media; trust in religious institutions; and most troubling of all, trust in other people, which is now at an all-time low among millennials. We need look no further than the unprecedented divisiveness of this year's presidential election to see the polarizing, corrosive impact this is having on our democratic institutions. Given the magnitude of the racial, economic and environmental injustices that can no longer be ignored, this loss of trust is deeply concerning. We greatly need public trust in democratic processes and institutions so that we can mobilize collective action to address these challenges. City Year has already amassed compelling evidence for the positive impact of its services on both student outcomes and the AmeriCorps members serving them. Given the large dataset that exists highlighting declines in trust, it could be powerful to explore if City Year is having a positive impact on this issue of institutional and interpersonal trust. Trust within school systems has also been shown to impact school performance and student outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) and therefore, may also be worth measuring.

3. EXPAND AMERICORPS MEMBER AWARENESS OF STRUCTURAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OPPORTUNITY GAP.

Provide AmeriCorps members training on how to recognize when the school environment or educators' actions may be replicating unequal access to

opportunities, structural racism or implicit bias[6]. This could help AmeriCorps members become even more effective at personalizing their approach as near-peer mentors and tutors by providing them with more context for understanding students' academic and motivational challenges. For example, a student may be disengaged or even hostile towards school and educators if they have received messages that adults in the school have lower expectations or less favorable views of them compared to students in other groups. Some signals that students may be sensitive to include: being overpraised for less rigorous work (Brummelman et al., 2014); seeing their group underrepresented in more rigorous classes and overrepresented in groups targeted for intervention support (Putnam, 2015; Venezia & Kirst, 2005); or seeing members of their group disciplined more harshly for the same offense (Okonofua et al., 2016; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). The cumulative effect of these kinds of experiences as well as individual experiences of microaggressions can cause students to disengage or to have what could seem like overblown reactions to individual events if they are not understood in this larger context. Helping AmeriCorps members recognize and be able to identify when these factors may be at play, even if they are not able to influence the circumstances, may help them become more empathetic and patient with their students.

Equipping AmeriCorps members to recognize these elements may also help them recognize and address situations where students might be experiencing dissonance between what they (the AmeriCorps member) are doing or saying and conflicting messages present in the environment. For example, if an AmeriCorps member is reassuring a female student that they can succeed in their math class, but the walls of that classroom are decorated with posters of male scientists and mathematicians, or if the teacher calls upon male students more than female students, this student may not be aware of why, but may feel more discouraged and disengaged in this class than she would in a more supportive classroom environment (Murphy et al., 2007).

Without this context, AmeriCorps members may misattribute the causes of students' disengagement or low academic aspirations to student-level factors (e.g., believing it is due to the student having a fixed mindset). Many education researchers who focus on the role of educational and societal structures that replicate unequitable outcomes have been critical and mistrusting of the push to focus on SED and mindsets because they see it as, 'locating the problem within the student' while ignoring these larger structural factors (Kohn, 2015). This is a valid concern that can, in fact, play out if educators are not trained to understand how the learning

environment, systemic racism and broader cultural factors can influence students' aspirations, motivation and engagement.

4. EXPAND AMERICORPS MEMBER AWARENESS OF MINDSET AND MOTIVATION RELATED PEDAGOGY.

Similar to recommendation three above, helping AmeriCorps members recognize pedagogy that can support or undermine student motivation and sense of belonging will help them more effectively personalize learning because it will help them more accurately contextualize student behaviors, and thus effectively target their approach. An example that brought this to mind came from AmeriCorps member DN in Memphis who described a first-grade student that had a hard time not blurting out answers when the teacher asked questions because he knew the right answer and was eager to make sure the teacher knew he did. This AmeriCorps member described how they were working with the student on controlling these impulses, which is certainly a helpful skill to support students in building. However, I was left wondering if this child's impulsiveness and desire to prove his smartness was being amplified by the classroom culture and norms.

It is not uncommon for educators who witness a student demonstrating this kind of hyper-focus on proving their smartness to jump to the conclusion that this child has a fixed mindset. But evidence suggests that this kind of fixed mindset behavior could be a transient response to the goals being emphasized in the learning environment. Substantial bodies of research conducted in educational contexts have shown that teachers can play a significant role in creating more equitable, motivating learning environments through the teaching practices they use, the beliefs they hold and the conditions for learning they create in their classrooms (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Furrer, et al., 2014; Sun, 2015; Yeager et al., 2019).

Many interviewed AmeriCorps members shared anecdotes that suggest they are quite skilled at recognizing when their partner teachers are experienced in creating inclusive, equitable and motivating learning environments even if they do not yet have the precise language to describe why. Helping them build this skill will help them grow professionally and be better equipped to personalize learning for their students.

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[6] This may already be taking place and simply did not emerge in the interviews because it was not a focus of the research questions.

5. DEEPEN SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES.

As the findings demonstrate, City Year is already providing extensive training to AmeriCorps members on how to personalize learning and support students' social and emotional development. However, because SED is an area of intense, ongoing research, new insights continue to emerge that could help deepen their practice. Here I include a short description of six motivation-related domains that may not be as well-understood by AmeriCorps members, or areas where interview data suggest AmeriCorps members could deepen their understanding:

> 5.a. The neuroscience of learning and the role of emotions
> 5.b. Meaning-making and the power of recursive processes
> 5.c. Growth mindset
> 5.d. Autonomy
> 5.e. Relevance and purpose
> 5.f. Identity safety and integrated identity

5.a. Neuroscience of learning and the role of emotions

Helping AmeriCorps members understand the role of emotions in learning will help build coherence across all the different elements of SED and in building strong developmental relationships. Specifically, it would help them to understand the three neural networks (executive, default and salience) that are involved and why they matter for decision making, learning and identity development (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019).

Integrating evidence that states learning cannot happen without emotional engagement will also strengthen the argument for embedding SED into the core of City Year's work with school and district partners.

5.b. Meaning-making and the power of recursive processes

Many aspects of AmeriCorps members' work center on helping students expand their perception of what is possible and recognizing where they may have more agency. We can see in the stories shared that they are skilled at getting to know students in order to understand the 'why' behind their actions and choices before intervening. This suggests they are already aware of the importance of understanding students' meaning-making processes. AmeriCorps member skill and confidence in the impact of their work could be deepened by sharing a few key intervention studies that demonstrate the effect of interrupting negative recursive cycles and planting seeds that can unleash more positive recursive cycles that unfold slowly but powerfully over time. Interventions designed to trigger positive recursive processes gain their power by: 1) addressing core questions students have at key moments in time when doubt can be triggered (e.g., getting critical feedback, or the transition to a more challenging learning environment) and 2) providing an alternative, more positive interpretation for the meaning of difficult experiences. To hear mindset researchers describe how these interventions work, see this 3-minute video by the College Transition Collaborative.

Learning about these brief interventions could also expose AmeriCorps members to simple but powerful messages that they could easily weave into their work.

5.c. Growth mindset

AmeriCorps members seemed to have a strong grasp of the nuances involved in helping students develop a growth mindset. Three recommendations for deepening their expertise follow:

1) Use praise carefully: This only came up a couple times in the interviews, but it is worth highlighting that a common mistake made with struggling students is to praise them excessively for even the smallest success. Some students may benefit from this, but there is evidence that it can also backfire and reinforce a fixed mindset. Students are acutely sensitive to inauthentic praise and are also acutely sensitive to how adults are praising other students in their classes. High-performing students often receive less praise and are held to higher standards which can lead over-praised low-performing students to conclude that teachers perceive them as less competent and that the praise is meant to make them feel better about their lack of ability (Brummelman et al., 2014).

2) Address collective narratives for learning and achievement differences: Students, especially in middle and high school, are strongly influenced by their peer's beliefs, even if they aren't spoken out loud in the classroom (Furrer, et al., 2014). For this reason, it is important to intentionally cultivate classroom norms that provide a growth mindset supporting narrative on root causes (e.g., having had fewer opportunities or less practice) that help explain why certain learning and performance differences exist. Using collaborative processes to develop these norms elevates student voice and creates structured opportunities for exposing and reframing fixed mindset beliefs. This, in turn, can help reduce the possible stigma for students being targeted for intervention. Of course, this requires that the teacher values promoting growth mindset norms in their class. If they don't, addressing these fixed mindset narratives about the cause of learning differences should still be addressed individually or in small group intervention work.

3) Encourage a growth mindset of emotion regulation: There is a growing body of research showing that teaching people to have a growth mindset about their ability to regulate their emotions can have a powerful impact on their emotional well-being and resilience to stress (Crum et al., 2017). Given the enormous stress the pandemic has had on everyone, teaching this explicitly to students and to the adults who work with them could have an important positive impact.

5.d. Autonomy

Review the use of practices that can demotivate students due to violating their sense of autonomy. AmeriCorps members shared many examples of how attuned they are to respecting students' autonomy in how well they listen to and support their students in developing their own solutions to challenges. This is important because autonomy is a core psychological need and thus, when violated, can have a negative impact on motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There were a few examples shared of AmeriCorps members using practices traditionally thought to violate autonomy and thus impair intrinsic motivation, such as using extrinsic rewards and more authoritarian behavior management strategies. However, interview data alone was not sufficient to verify if the strategies were, indeed, problematic. There is also recent evidence to suggest we need to refine our understanding of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in academic contexts (Locke & Schattke, 2019). To ensure that City Year is engaging in best practices, it would be valuable to explore this topic more fully through collecting more observational data and conducting a literature review.

5.e. Relevance and purpose

AmeriCorps members shared strategies they use that promote students' ability to connect to the coursework, such as building in references to topics students see as relevant and giving students choices to enhance their sense of agency. There are two additional strategies they could easily add to their toolbox that have strong evidence for promoting persistence and resilience: 1) allowing students to self-generate reflections on the relevance of their school work (Hulleman et al., 2016) and 2) supporting students in reflecting on issues they care about and how their education could help them be part of addressing these issues—also referred to as having a 'beyond-the-self' purpose for learning (Yeager, Henderson, et al., 2014; Yeager et al., 2019). These strategies help students connect to intrinsically motivating (i.e., autonomous) reasons for working hard. For more background on this research and concrete strategies, see Meaningful Work in the BELE Resources Library.

5.f. Integrated identity development and identity safety

Students may detach (de-identify) from school or from certain academic domains (e.g., STEM) if there are negative stereotypes about their group's ability to do well in that domain (e.g., women in STEM) or if identifying strongly with school would put other valued aspects of their identity at risk (e.g., peer-norm against caring about school) (Good et al., 2010; Steele, 1997). Training AmeriCorps members to understand integrated identity development, identity safety, identity threat and stereotype threat would help them support their students in navigating situations where identity threat or identity conflicts may be causing resistance to academic engagement.

Many AmeriCorps members may have successfully navigated identity conflicts of their own and may already be engaging with their students on this topic. If so, it could be fruitful to provide AmeriCorps members with opportunities to engage in Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR)[7] with the goal of designing strategies for helping students to resolve identity conflicts.

6. PROVIDE DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NOVICE TEACHERS AND AMERICORPS MEMBERS.

AmeriCorps members and City Year staff across all three sites shared that novice teachers can find it more challenging to integrate AmeriCorps members into their classrooms because they are focused on the steep learning curve of mastering their teaching craft. It may be helpful to differentiate the onboarding experience for these teachers and the coaching that their AmeriCorps members receive on how best to support their partner teacher and the students in their classes. For example, novice teachers may benefit from learning more explicit strategies used by other teachers for integrating AmeriCorps members into their classrooms, and AmeriCorps members may benefit from differentiated coaching on supporting novice teachers.

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[7] "YPAR is a youth-centered form of community-based participatory research, which is used frequently in public health, social work, and community psychology to actively engage underserved children, youth, and adults in identifying and addressing local real-world problems through an iterative research and action process. In this sense, it has been argued that YPAR is useful in efforts to address racial/ethnic and class-based equity concerns" (Jagers et al., 2019).

Limitations and Next Steps

This study had four limitations worth noting. First, this case study provides insights based on interviews with participants at three sites and three individuals from the headquarters team. Given how varied each site's context is, what local factors may have influenced their shift to distance learning and the differences in how each site enacts City Year WSWC services (including how they train their AmeriCorps members), the generalizability of these findings to other sites may be limited.

Second, all data on AmeriCorps member practices was collected remotely from a limited number of AmeriCorps members. Therefore, the insights shared by AmeriCorps members about their practices are based on self-reports only and could not be triangulated with other forms of data, such as classroom observation or interviews with other stakeholders (e.g., teacher, administrators, students and parents). The AmeriCorps members who participated were also limited in number and selected by site staff. It is likely that the AmeriCorps members who were selected to participate were chosen for their strength at personalizing learning. While we can celebrate what appear to be effective practices, further research is needed to clarify if their strengths are producing better outcomes and whether their skill is due to the training they receive or to hiring practices that are screening for specific skill. There is also likely an interaction between AmeriCorps members and the classroom and school environment that impact their effectiveness. There is still much to be learned about identifying individual strengths during the hiring process, what is the most effective scope and sequence of training and coaching for AmeriCorps

members, and what context factors influence their ability to leverage their strengths and the training they receive to become highly effective in their work with students.

Building on this, the third limitation is that the intense demands the pandemic placed on educators' time meant we were not able to interview teachers and principals. There were likely many insights they could have shared about how City Year was able to support their work during this radical shift to distance learning and what City Year is uniquely contributing during ongoing distance learning. They also likely have important insights on how City Year could improve the personalization of its services. Future work should seek to learn about educators' perceptions on the research questions asked in this study.

Lastly, most data were collected during the spring as sites were just beginning to adapt their services to be delivered virtually. As such, the tremendous learning and innovation that occurred over the summer and into the new academic year was not adequately captured. The continued learning and innovation taking place during the 2020-2021 school year will likely be equally as rich as what has been captured during the period of this investigation. If resources are available, it would be valuable to continue capturing this ongoing learning and innovation.

Despite these limitations, the insights gained through this study highlight City Year's organizational capacity to enact personalized learning systematically both within the organization and across multiple, highly varied and complex educational contexts. The findings and recommendations also provide useful guidance for future development work on personalized approaches to learning in service of improving student outcomes and achieving educational equity.

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Appendix

THE CITY YEAR PROJECT TEAM
This project was initiated and overseen by City Year Vice President of Education Research and Strategy Carolyn Trager Kliman and managed by Director of External Evaluation Jessica Proett with support from Education Research and Strategy Manager Jade Eckles.

CITY YEAR HEADQUARTERS PARTICIPANTS
The following City Year team members also provided feedback at different points throughout the project: Katie Carroll, Former Evaluation Specialist; Melissa Rowker, Former Senior Director of Academic Programs; Sheryl Boris-Schacter, Former Vice President, National Program Design; Symia Stigler, National Student Engagement Director; Alexandra Allen, Senior Vice President, AmeriCorps Member Experience; and Bobby Kessling, Product Management Director.

CITY YEAR LOS ANGELES PARTICIPANTS
LA's participation was coordinated by Impact Analytics Director Christopher Bischel. Interviews were conducted with a diverse group of six AmeriCorps members (three first year and three second year), and three site staff: Impact Manager KT, Service Director Evelyne Santiago, and Learning and Instruction Director, Elisha Whitman.

CITY YEAR COLUMBUS PARTICIPANTS
Managing Director of Impact Tiffani Gottlieb acted as the coordinator of this project in Columbus with support from Executive Director Tasha Booker. Interviews were conducted with three second-year AmeriCorps members and two Impact Directors, Zandra Casto and La'Rez Wilson. Gottlieb also participated in three interviews.

CITY YEAR MEMPHIS PARTICIPANTS
Director of Education and Learning Hannah McFarland and Service Quality Manager Brandy McCray coordinated the project for City Year Memphis with support from Executive Director Catherine Cushinberry, Ph.D. All three participated in interviews. One focus group was conducted with five second-year AmeriCorps members and interviews were conducted with two second-year AmeriCorps members and Impact Manager Yemiymah McLemore.