



"It's been incredibly helpful to have a City Year [AmeriCorps member] so that we can break the kids apart [into smaller groups] because online, even more so than in a classroom, it's hard to support 24 students with just me when I can't see what they're doing."

– City Year partner teacher in virtual focus group conducted in 2021



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: STUDENT AND PRACTITIONER EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19

During the past year, students' learning trajectories have shifted, and many students have experienced numerous interruptions and losses in their lives due to COVID-19, even as they have also honed skills such as flexibility, resilience and creativity.

When schools began shifting to distance learning there was no playbook for how to best support students. Teachers, families, and others seeking to support student success have risen to the challenge, adjusting their approaches to meet students' expanded needs during this time. City Year leaned into its evidence-based approach to adapt to this unprecedented moment in time. Though challenging, the past year has enabled creativity and shed light on important lessons as we think about how to reimagine schooling and advance equity moving forward.



Challenges and Opportunities: Student and Practitioner Experiences during COVID-19 elevates the voices of those closest to the work—students, AmeriCorps members and teachers—bringing to life their extraordinary efforts to support student learning and development.



The report draws insights from City Year's work across the country and highlights how City Year sites and Compass Academy have adjusted their practices to respond to the unique challenges that students and teachers are facing in the wake of pandemic-induced school closures.

WHAT WE SOUGHT TO LEARN

During the 2020-2021 school year, we explored: what practitioners and students were experiencing as a result of COVID-19 induced school closures; how practitioners shifted their practices in virtual and hybrid learning environments; to what extent City Year's guidance and tools were helpful; and how school closures have affected student, teacher and AmeriCorps members experiences.





METHODOLOGY

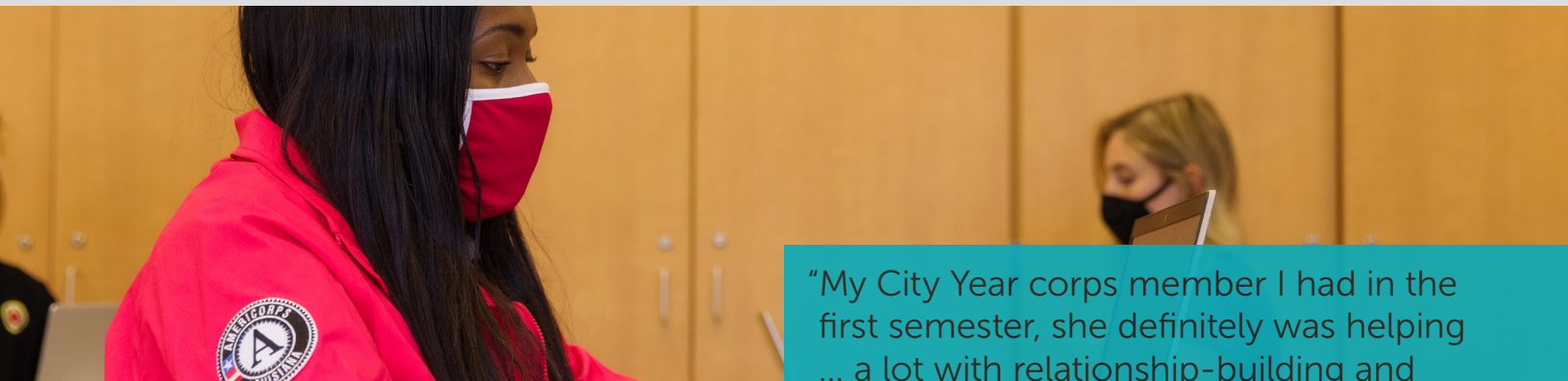
The primary sources of data for this report were 8 focus groups¹, 2 interviews², and one student survey (n=487)³. Secondary data sources for this project include Compass Academy artifacts, 2020-2021 Compass Academy Mid-Year Survey (n=232)⁴ results as well as the 2020-2021 City Year AmeriCorps member (n=2,314)⁵, teacher, and principal survey results (n=825)⁵.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Social-emotional health should be a factor when assessing a student's readiness to learn. Integrating academics and social-emotional learning and viewing students holistically was already an increasingly supported framework pre-pandemic but has now become more important than ever and should be central to any efforts to reimagine schooling.

- AmeriCorps members' holistic approach is rooted in **social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD)**. The approach that AmeriCorps members take allows students to thrive academically, make meaning of their experiences, and feel that they are safe and that they belong.
- Results from a student survey piloted at a City Year site on the West Coast this year show that the majority of respondents expressed feelings of agency in their interactions with AmeriCorps members, and a majority of students also **feel supported by AmeriCorps members** as they navigate academic challenges this year.

-  **79%** of students feel that their City Year really listens to them often or almost always
-  **77%** of students say that their City Year considers their ideas when making decisions.
-  **84%** of students feel that their City Year AmeriCorps member teaches them how to self-advocate and ask for help when they need it—critical skills for life and workforce success.
-  **76%** of percent of students feel that their City Year explains things in a different way if they don't understand it the first time, personalizing the learning experience.




- COVID-19 ushered in unprecedented disruptions to students' mental and emotional health, social systems of support, and learning environments.
- Given the disruption to students' social systems of support, the relationship between AmeriCorps members and students is crucial. AmeriCorps members have worked hard to build relationships with students in the ways they can in a virtual setting.
- Developmental relationships between AmeriCorps members and students helps boost student attendance and engagement.


"My City Year corps member I had in the first semester, she definitely was helping ... a lot with relationship-building and making contact with all of my students that I had.... Definitely the students felt like somebody was paying attention to them... because there [were] two or three sets of eyes in the classroom.... And I notice the students that she did build a bond with, their attendance was a lot better, and they were turning in more work. And I kind of understood their personal lives a lot more."

— City Year partner teacher in virtual focus group conducted in 2021

AmeriCorps members serving as **Student Success Coaches** proved to be invaluable partners to teachers in the classroom as they worked together to meet students' shifting needs—a testament to the value of this strategically integrated additional capacity. In many schools, COVID-19 has allowed for even deeper collaboration among AmeriCorps members and teachers.

- AmeriCorps members helped with technology, administrative, and management tasks in the classroom (like admitting students, taking attendance, connecting students to the online platforms, managing the chat function in Zoom, etc.).
- Principals strongly agree that City Year has supported their school's implementation of multiple learning models (e.g. virtual, hybrid, in-person), and that City Year has supported their school's transition from one type of learning structure to another.

 **94%** of partner principals agree that City Year has supported their schools' transitions between in person and distance or hybrid learning.

 **95%** of partner principals and partner teachers say City Year AmeriCorps members have supported the engagement and participation of students in school during the pandemic.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, a silver lining emerging is that COVID-19 has enabled practitioners to get creative about pedagogical practices, class material, service delivery, and more. This innovativeness has yielded several effective practices that practitioners want to continue to incorporate into their classrooms post-pandemic. AmeriCorps members serving as Student Success Coaches have enabled many of these practices, leading teachers to want to increase Student Success Coach integration into the classroom.



THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A CRITICAL INPUT TO ANY EFFORTS TO REIMAGINE SCHOOLING:



1. CONTINUE INTENTIONAL INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY.

- Practitioners have increased their use of technology during virtual schooling, which has proven useful for teachers and students.
- Some students have thrived using online programs, and some programs have increased student engagement.
- Practitioners want to continue to build their computer literacy and skills once they return to in-person instruction.



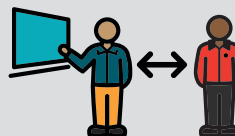
3. ENHANCE ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS, INCLUDING THOSE PROVIDED AFTERSCHOOL.

- Practitioners want to expand afterschool programming to include additional extracurricular activities aside from academic supports. Practitioners have formed connections and partnerships with afterschool providers that they wish to maintain post-pandemic.



2. CONTINUE INCREASED ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES.

- The transition to virtual learning resulted in increased connections between families and practitioners compared to past years. Interactions between practitioners and families during the pandemic were also more positive and less focused on problems.
- Practitioners think it's important to maintain the increased family engagement that occurred during COVID-19.



4. CONTINUE TO LEVERAGE CRITICAL ADDITIONAL CAPACITY PROVIDED BY STUDENT SUCCESS COACHES.

- Recognizing the role SSCs have played this year, teachers are looking for ways to even more intentionally integrate SSCs into their classrooms.

"I literally could not do my job with fidelity without [my AmeriCorps member]."

— City Year partner teacher from 2020 Q1 Service Partner survey



ALIGNED ACTIONS

Virtual schooling has made the value of AmeriCorps members, who serve as Student Success Coaches, undeniable. AmeriCorps members' ability to take a personalized, responsive, integrated approach when serving students means they have a vital role to play in recovery and renewal efforts when students return to school. Recognizing that schools in systemically under-resourced communities have long faced underinvestment and inequities and have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, City Year believes that an infusion of strategically integrated additional capacity grounded in local decision-making and community assets is critical.

City Year is supporting the expansion of Student Success Coaches to systemically under-resourced public schools so that more students and schools can benefit from the additional holistic, research-based supports grounded in relationships that Student Success Coaches provide.

CONCLUSION

We believe that by working with local communities and continuing to learn from the voices closest to our students and schools, we will be able to nurture learning environments that benefit all young people, while creating a system that provides sustainable support to address long-standing inequities in our most under-resourced communities.



NATIONAL STRATEGIC PARTNERS



NATIONAL PARTNERS



SOURCES **1** AmeriCorps members, partner teachers, and Impact Managers affiliated with two City Year sites in the Midwest and a City Year site on the West Coast shared their experiences navigating COVID-19 in virtual focus groups conducted in January 2021. **2** Two first-year AmeriCorps members at Compass Academy described their experiences serving students during COVID-19 in virtual interviews conducted by Jade Eckels in March 2021. **3** The student survey piloted at a City Year site on the West Coast sought to capture student experiences with AmeriCorps members and the learning environment during COVID-19. The survey yielded 487 responses. Survey items included customized questions from Search Institute's Developmental Relationships survey tool and UChicago's Cultivate survey tool. The survey opened on February 10, 2021 and closed on February 26, 2021. **4** The 2020-2021 Mid-Year survey for Compass Academy was administered to 6th, 7th, and 8th graders in December 2020. There were 232 survey responses from students or an 81.6% response rate. **5** The 2020-2021 Q2/Q3 Service Partner Survey opened in early February 2021 and closed in early March 2021. 825 teachers and 295 principal/administrators from 21 sites responded. Each quarter, City Year conducts a survey of partner teachers and administrators to understand the impact of and inform improvements on the services provided. For the 2020-2021 Q3 AmeriCorps Member Engagement Survey, there were 2,314 responses from AmeriCorps members across the network. The survey had an 83% participation rate. The survey opened on March 1st, 2021 and closed on March 12th, 2021. This survey was designed to measure engagement. For reference, the 2019-2020 Q3 AmeriCorps Member survey received 2,180 responses.