



# Research Base Supporting City Year's Whole School Whole Child Services (WSWC)

## City Year: A Legacy of Human Development

Since its inception in 1988, City Year has identified itself as a human development organization dedicated to creating experiences in which people, particularly young people, build new skills and cultivate lifelong dispositions for civic and community engagement. Within the overarching frame of continuous human development, a youth development and asset-based lens has been a reliable foundation upon which City Year has viewed both the AmeriCorps members it recruits and the students they serve. This orientation, along with the organization's commitment to service and developing its AmeriCorps members and youth to be leaders, has proven to positively influence AmeriCorps members both during and beyond their service year, as evidenced by their civic involvement and career choices. A longitudinal survey of City Year alumni in 2007 showed that alumni excelled on every measure of civic engagement (PSA, 2007); a more recent survey in 2018 demonstrated that 47% of City Year alumni work in the education sector, with 16% serving as teachers (City Year, 2018).

These two populations, diverse adults who serve as AmeriCorps members and K-12 students, come together for an academic year to make meaning and create authentic relationships in the context of positive learning environments that tackle the needs of the whole school and the whole child.

### Integrated Social, Emotional and Academic Development

City Year's Whole School Whole Child (WSWC) approach deploys teams of eight to 15 diverse AmeriCorps members to serve in the high schools with the lowest graduation rates and the middle and elementary schools that feed into them.

AmeriCorps members, who receive training and coaching throughout the year, serve full-time as student success coaches—near-peer tutors, mentors and role models who are positioned to help students build on their strengths and cultivate social, emotional and academic skills, whether that's mastering fractions or learning to work in teams—skills that are important in school and in life. They partner with teachers and principals to ensure that students receive individualized attention and help students to feel valued, supported and invested in their learning. AmeriCorps members also help students stay focused in class, organize school-wide events and run afterschool programs (Karcher et al., 2002, Noam, et al., 2013, Destin, et al., 2018). AmeriCorps members use a holistic model that integrates the academic with the social-emotional (SEAD), and places authentic relationship building at the center of the practice. There is an equal emphasis on social-emotional mindset and competency development, and a balance between the creation of an overall learning environment and the progress of individual students (Kidron and Osher, 2010, DePaoli, et al., 2017).

There is a growing understanding that this integrated approach to social, emotional and academic development provides the best path for students graduating from high school prepared for postsecondary and adult success (Aspen Institute, 2019). The [Science of Learning and Development](#) shows that social and emotional factors interact with cognitive actions to shape learning experiences and outcomes (Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond, & Krone, 2018 and 2019), and that social-emotional and environmental factors seem to be able to impede or enable the effort, focus and time that academic learning requires (Cantor, et. al., 2018).

City Year AmeriCorps members apply a consistent, asset-based approach that cultivates positive developmental relationships with students (America's Promise Alliance, 2015, Roehikepartain, et al., 2015; Roehikepartain, et al., 2017). This purposeful attention to relationship building, coupled with specific and ongoing professional coaching and development in educational content, enable AmeriCorps members to maintain a growth mindset that creates intentional student experiences and transformed learning environments (Dweck, 2016, Dweck, et al., 2011, Taylor, et al. 2017, DePaoli, et al., 2017. CASEL, 2017, Malti and Noam, 2009). With these conditions reinforced throughout the school day by a team of AmeriCorps members, students are better able to reach responsible decisions, contribute to the community, make academic strides, construct meaning from their experiences, reflect on their identity and learning, and feel a sense of safety and belonging.

### Providing a continuum of support to increase on track rates

City Year AmeriCorps members regularly confer with teachers and monitor the performance of students on focus lists—those who exhibit one or more early warning indicators (EWIs) (Bruce, et al., 2011) that place them at increased risk of dropping out: low attendance; poor social-emotional skills that present as behavioral issues; or course failure in English Language Arts or mathematics. Guided by this data, City Year provides customized supports

and personalized learning opportunities to students such as individual or small group tutoring in academics or social-emotional skill development. In addition to this targeted intervention, AmeriCorps members address the needs of whole classes and schools by helping students stay engaged, running afterschool programs, and organizing school-wide events that encourage attendance and foster an engaging culture and climate. In turn, the sense of efficacy experienced by AmeriCorps members when students respond positively to their role modeling and instruction is invaluable to their own sense of agency and development.

Absent intervention, students in systemically under-resourced schools fall off-track at alarming rates, and those who begin behind, fall further behind (Allensworth, 2007, Bruce, et al., 2011). City Year concentrates student services in grades 3-9 in order to address the fourth-grade reading decline (Carnegie Foundation, 2009); support students through vulnerable grade level transitions (Evans, et al., 2018); and capitalize on the effectiveness of the near-peer model (Destin, 2018). City Year helps students feel connected to school and confident that they can catch up and keep up with the core curriculum. The comprehensive, asset-based strategy to provide integrated academic and social-emotional services for struggling students in all three early warning indicators has proven effective not only for individual focus list students, but also for entire schools. By eliminating off-track markers for students beyond those on a focus list and maintaining a constructive learning environment, a school's overall academic achievement improves (Meredith and Anderson, 2015).

### **Collaborating with teams to meet individual student needs**

Consistent with the Early Warning Indicator research and working closely with school principals and teachers to build meaningful, transformative partnerships over time that support their school and classroom goals (Teitel, 2010), Whole School Whole Child services improve students' attendance, social-emotional development, and academic growth by applying a delivery model with many elements of Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI is a multi-tier approach to the early identification of students in need of additional support that uses research-based practices and frequent data collection to inform instruction and chart progress (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006).

For instance, City Year AmeriCorps members help schools track students who are frequently absent. Corps members call home to encourage regular attendance and host school-wide activities to promote attendance, including greeting students when they arrive at school and holding celebrations for perfect attendance (Attendance Works, 2015). For students needing a more tailored response, Check in/Check out is used (Campbell and Anderson, 2011, Maggin, 2015). In this approach, students work individually with AmeriCorps members twice weekly to set personal goals and engage in collaborative problem-solving, a structure that enhances student engagement and agency in their own learning. All of these strategies are research-based, proven practices that positively influence student attendance, an early warning indicator.

Similarly, City Year measures its impact on social-emotional development (SED) using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a standardized, strengths-based observational tool of social competencies aligned to the CASEL framework (LeBuffe, 2014). The scores not only indicate student growth, but also pinpoint skill strengths and needs. AmeriCorps members can then target and customize instruction, using such research-based strategies as Check In/Check Out. City Year is beginning to enhance its global understanding of students' meaning making and school experience by adding a self-assessment instrument, the Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) (Allen, et al., 2017). Together, the DESSA and the HSA provide an instructional map for the AmeriCorps members to use to successfully navigate students' social, emotional growth. At the same time, because the HSA is a self-assessment, student voice is elevated to empower them and promote the development of the CASEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2017).

Since City Year knows that social-emotional and academic skills and growth are mutually dependent and amplifying, AmeriCorps members also support struggling students directly in building foundational skills in the early warning indicators of literacy and mathematics. Again, following the Response to Intervention model, teachers are consulted and assessments are used to chart progress and pinpoint what students are ready to learn next. Research-based intervention curricula, or the evidence-based pedagogy behind the curricular content, are used to guide instruction. For mathematics, the curricula are Do the Math and Do the Math Now (Burns, 2016, Burns, 2007) and for literacy, it is Leveled Literacy Intervention (Fountas and Pinnell, 2012, Fountas and Pinnell, 2015). The literacy approach uses explicit instruction in vocabulary and comprehension, with opportunities for text interpretation and fluency practice (Shanahan, et al., 2010). In mathematics, AmeriCorps members stress problem-solving, computational fluency, mathematical concepts and notation, think-alouds, and visual representation (National Research Council, 2001, Woodward, et al., 2018).

### **Extending Learning Time**

Finally, the Whole School Whole Child approach includes leveraging relationships and the information that AmeriCorps members have regarding individual student learning and the core curriculum to provide additional

support, learning, engagement and growth in afterschool programs. Extended learning times are a key part of City Year's strategy and an essential step toward providing equity of student experience and opportunity. The framework for the afterschool programs includes: research-based best practices such as activity variation; tracking time spent in the program; providing homework support; using continuous improvement methods; and offering quality enrichment (After School Alliance, 2014). City Year employs a multi-year piloting process to select enrichment curricula that extend the school district offerings in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math), thus revealing untapped student strengths and interests, and introducing potentially new career and college paths. These offerings present families whose children are enrolled in systemically under-resourced schools served by City Year with after school options that are safe, enriching and produce measurable social-emotional and academic results (After School Alliance, 2016).

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