

City Year Program Evaluation: 2015-16

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At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) partnered with City Year, a non-profit organization that is a member of the AmeriCorps national service network, and a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service. The education-focused organization is dedicated to helping students (grades 3-12) and schools succeed. A highly selective program, AmeriCorps members provide high-impact student, classroom and schoolwide support to help students stay on track to graduate from high school, ready for college and career success.

Several components are utilized to improve school attendance, student behavior, and course performance in English and mathematics. The components include:

- attendance monitoring and engagement,
- social-emotional support,
- English and mathematics support, and
- whole school transformational support.

AmeriCorps members commit to approximately 10 months of service beginning with several weeks of intensive training during the summer, before the start of the new school year. Training includes orientation on the City Year program culture and how to work within the schools. Each participant is assigned to serve on a team, at a specific school, where they work continuously through the end of their service term. AmeriCorps members work with teachers, administrators and other professionals to help improve student attendance, behavior and course performance.

Eligible students are identified as “sliding” or “off track” in a particular indicator (English, mathematics, attendance, and behavior) and are provided targeted interventions. No limits are placed on the amount of support students receive. Formal and informal assessments are used to monitor student progress.

City Year Dallas

The City Year program started as a pilot program in the Dallas ISD during the spring semester of 2014-15 at Franklin D. Roosevelt High School in grades 9-12. In 2015-16, the program was offered during the full year (fall and spring semesters) at five Dallas ISD campuses including: H. Grady Spruce (grade 9) and Franklin D. Roosevelt (grades 9-12) high schools, and E. B. Comstock, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Francisco P. Medrano middle schools (grades 6-8, respectively). In 2015-16, the Dallas ISD paid \$100,000

per campus for a total of \$500,000. Five teams of ten AmeriCorps members served selected students in grades 6-12 at the five campuses. They provided one-on-one and group tutoring to improve literacy and mathematics skills and worked to promote a positive school climate by providing a variety of evening and weekend activities. These activities were designed to engage students, families, the school, and the community.

A total of 477 students were served by the City Year program with either literacy and/or mathematics support during the 2015 fall semester. Students were selected by City Year program staff in collaboration with classroom teachers, instructional coaches, counselors, administrators, principals, and any other school personnel who had insight into a student's needs. Students with a borderline status in academics, attendance, or discipline behaviors were prioritized for program participation. However, students were not included if they had an individualized education program, special education needs, or were chronically absent.

Program eligibility for Dallas ISD students was determined using the following resources:

- City Year's Scholastic Reading and Mathematics inventory scores (students at "Basic" level).
- Course grades (English, Language Arts, and mathematics),
- *Assessments of Course Performance (ACPs)*, and *STAAR* test scores (English, Language Arts, and mathematics),
- Attendance and behavior or social emotional support needs, and
- Input from teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school personnel to ensure the selection of the right students.

Evaluation Methods

A data file containing 2015-16 student participants was obtained from City Year and merged with the district's chancery file (created October 30, 2015). The following district files were also merged with the chancery file: attendance files (created on June 29, 2015 and June 6, 2016), discipline file (created July 13, 2016), and course files (created June 23, 2016). The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

Limitations

There are three important limitations to consider with this evaluation. First, students were selected to participate in the City Year program using several criteria for course grades, attendance, and discipline. As a result, it was not possible to have a single measure for each criteria that was applicable for all participants. For example, a student could have a passing course grade in a math course but not perform well on the STAAR test. In addition, a teacher could identify a student as having disciplinary problems in the classroom when the student did not have any discipline referrals. Second, because students were selected for the program using several different criteria for each variable, it was not possible to create an equivalent comparison group. The non-participating students at each of the five schools were chosen as the comparison group, but this group included a wide range of students. Consequently, these results cannot be generalized to other students outside of these five schools. Third, AmeriCorps members working with City Year provided social-emotional support to students; however, it was not possible to measure outcomes related to social-emotional changes. Students could have been receiving benefit from this service, but the evaluator was unable to analyze any data related to this variable.

City Year Student Demographics

The sample of City Year participants was approximately 54 percent male and 46 percent female. Seventy percent of the sample were Hispanic, 29 percent were Black or African American, and 1 percent were White. Lastly, approximately 64 percent of the students were in middle school and 36 percent were in high school.

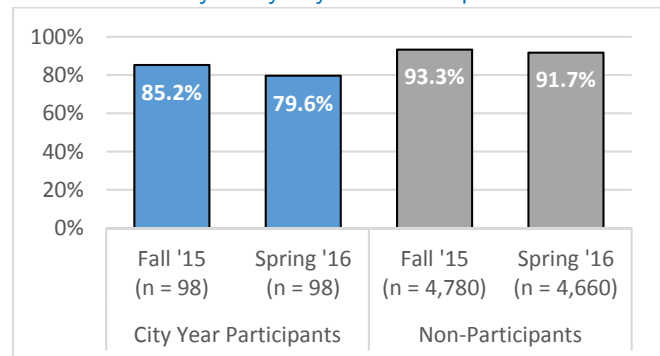
Program Participant/Non-Participant Comparison

To determine the differences between City Year participants (n = 477) and non-participants (n = 4,428) at each participating campus during the 2015-16 school year, attendance and course grade data were analyzed for all students at the five schools. While 258 City Year participants were identified as having disciplinary issues, the majority of these students were selected based on recommendations from school personnel, and disciplinary data (e.g., number of discipline referrals) were only available for a small number of these students. As a result, not enough discipline data was available for the current evaluation. Analyses related to attendance and course grades only include program participants who were identified as needing assistance in these areas compared to the remainder of students on the campuses.

Average attendance was calculated by dividing the number of days attended by the number of days enrolled during the 2015-16 school year. Figure 1

indicated that City Year participants had lower attendance rates than non-participants during the fall and spring semesters.

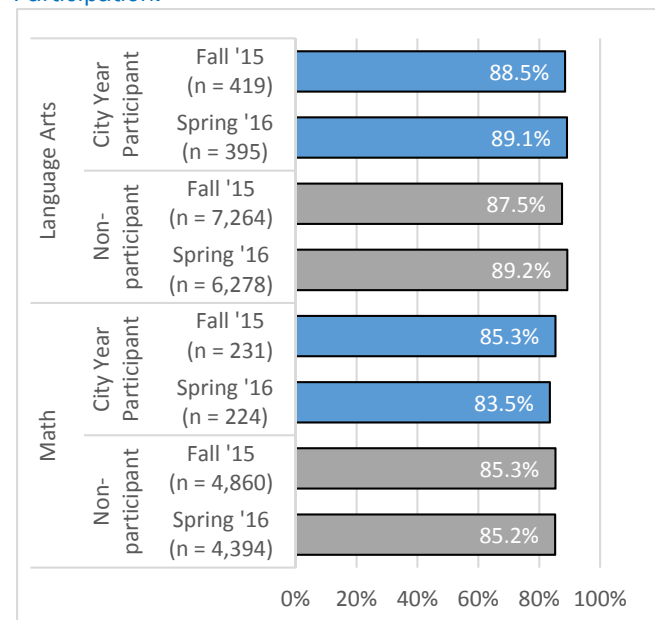
Figure 1: Percentage of School Days Attended during the 2015-16 school year by City Year Participation Status.



Note: Sample includes only students who were identified as needing help with attendance.

Two hundred and thirty-four City Year participants were identified as needing help in reading during the 2015-16 school year. As indicated by Figure 2, there was a nearly identical percentage of language arts courses passed by non-participants and City Year participants by the end of the school year. In addition, City Year identified 201 students as needing help in math. There was a slightly higher percentage of math courses passed by non-participants than City Year participants by the end of the school year (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of Language Arts or Math Courses Passed during the 2015-16 School Year by City Year Participation.



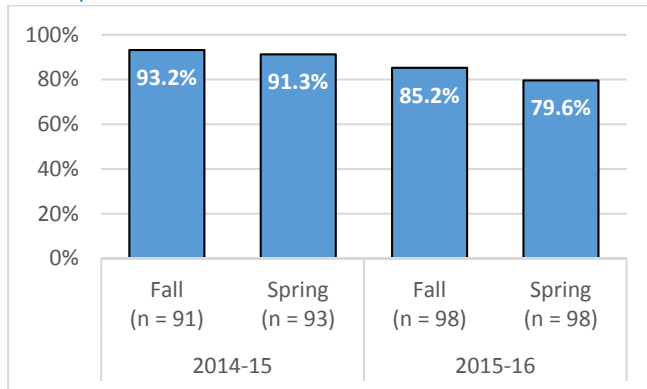
Note: Sample size reflects the number of course enrollments because students could enroll in more than one language arts or math course. Sample includes only students who were identified as needing help in language arts or math.

Measuring Student Growth

To measure student growth, attendance and course grade data were analyzed for City Year participants. Discipline data were not analyzed because only a small number of City Year participants had discipline referrals.

For the 2015-16 school year, 98 students who participated in the City Year program were identified as having attendance issues. Figure 3 includes the average percentage of school days that these students attended during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. While they had attendance rates above 90 percent for the 2014-15 school year, the average attendance rate decreased to approximately 79 percent by the end of Spring 2016.

Figure 3: Percentage of School Days Attended for City Year Participants



Note: Sample includes only students who were identified as needing help with attendance.

In regards to course grades for City Year participants, student growth during the 2015-16 school year can be found in Figure 2. The percentage of language arts courses passed slightly increased from 88.5 percent to 89.1 percent, whereas the percentage of math courses passed slightly decreased from 85.3 percent to 83.5 percent.

Summary

City Year is a non-profit organization that provided one-on-one and group tutoring to improve student literacy and mathematics skills at five middle and high schools in Dallas ISD during the 2015-16 school year. When comparing City Year participants to non-participants, City Year participants had lower attendance rates than non-participants during the fall and spring semesters. In addition, there was a nearly identical percentage of language arts courses passed by City Year participants and non-participants by the end of the school year. However, there was a slightly higher percentage of math courses passed by non-participants than City Year participants by the end of the school year.

When measuring student growth, the attendance rate for City Year participants decreased over time. Furthermore, while the average percentage of language arts courses passed by City Year participants slightly increased during the 2015-16 school year, there was a slight decrease in the average percentage of math courses passed by City Year participants over time.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on the results of the evaluation:

1. City Year program staff should implement clear guidelines for selecting participants to ensure that the most appropriate students are served. In addition, program staff should use specific criteria for attendance, course grades, and discipline to ensure that student growth can be accurately measured over time.
2. Because average attendance rates did not improve for targeted students, City Year program staff should identify the factors that impact student attendance and work with students, parents, and school personnel to increase the percentage of school days that participants attend.

For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at 972-925-6457.