



School Turnaround AmeriCorps Initiative

Reagan High School and Travis High School, 2015–2016

Background

In 2013, Austin Independent School District (AISD) was awarded a 3-year grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Initiative. This grant helped fund AmeriCorps members as they worked in low-performing schools to improve students' academic performance, attendance, and college readiness. From Fall 2013 through Spring 2016, AmeriCorps members worked at Reagan High School and Travis High School, both of which had been identified as Texas Title I Priority Schools. This report describes the program activities and the students who were served during the final year of the program.

Program Description

For the 2015–2016 school year, AISD was awarded \$183,472 from the CNCS and an additional \$292,020 was provided by the district to fulfill program costs. The majority of the budget was used to pay the living allowances of the 13 AmeriCorps members who worked at Reagan and Travis High Schools.

Of the 13 AmeriCorps members, seven members assisted students at Reagan High School and six members assisted students at Travis High School. Most members provided tutoring in academic core subjects to students who were at risk of failing. These tutors served more than 550 students during the school year, 94 of whom were tutored for 30 hours or more. At least one AmeriCorps member at each high school worked as a graduation assistant and made daily contact with students who were frequently absent. More than 700 students were contacted by a graduation assistant at least two times over the course of the school year (Table 1).

Table 1
Number of AmeriCorps Members and Number of Students They Served by Activity Type

	Tutoring		Graduation assistance	
	AmeriCorps members	Students served	AmeriCorps members	Students served
Reagan	6	68	1	81
Travis	3	26	3	643
Total	9	94	4	724

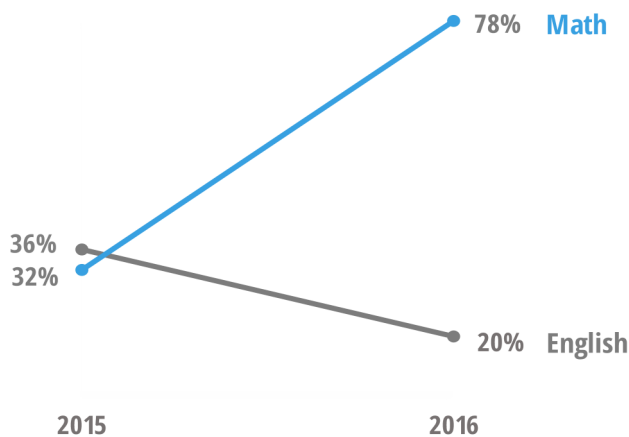
Source. AmeriCorps members' activity logs

Note. Counts are for students tutored at least 30 hours and for students contacted by a graduation assistant at least two times during the 2015–2016 school year.

Program Outcomes

One goal of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Initiative was to improve students’ academic performance. Specifically, students who were tutored for at least 30 hours in a core academic subject (English/reading or math) were expected to perform better on the state assessment in 2016 than they performed in 2015. As Figure 1 illustrates, passing rates improved for students tutored in math but not for students tutored in English/reading.

Figure 1
Among students tutored for at least 30 hours, passing rates on the state assessment were higher in 2016 than in 2015 for **math** but not for English.



Source. State assessment data obtained from Student Aggregate Reports

Note. The majority of students tutored were in the 9th grade during the 2015–2016 school year. For these students, 2015 data are from the 8th grade State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in math and reading, and 2016 data are from the English I and algebra I end-of-course exams.

Students’ limited English proficiency may have been one factor that contributed to the low passing rates on English assessments. District-wide research indicates that English language learners (ELLs) typically perform better in math than they do in reading or English (Orr, 2016). Among the students tutored at least 30 hours in English/reading, more than half were ELLs (Table 2).

Table 2
Percentage of Students Classified as English Language Learners

	Tutored in reading	Tutored in math	Entire campus
Reagan	79%	32%	29%
Travis	53%	39%	23%

Source. AISD student demographic records

What is AmeriCorps?

AmeriCorps is a national service program that places more than 75,000 Americans in intensive community service opportunities each year. AmeriCorps members serve in schools and nonprofit organizations, as well as in community and faith-based groups. Some AmeriCorps members travel in teams across the United States and provide disaster-relief services. Other members are stationed in one community for an extended time, targeting issues such as illiteracy, economic development, public safety, and the environment.

For more information about AmeriCorps, visit

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps>



In addition to improved academic performance, the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Initiative aimed to improve the attendance of truant students with the help of AmeriCorps graduation assistants. Of the 724 students who received at least two phone calls from a graduation assistant during the 2015–2016 school year, 23% had improved attendance compared with their attendance rate from the prior school year. Travis High School’s graduation assistants also attended weekly Child Study Team meetings, where they discussed their students’ attendance and social-emotional learning with other school staff. At Reagan High School, the graduation assistant worked closely with the college and career coordinator to inform students about postsecondary options and accompanied students to the campus-wide college and career fair.

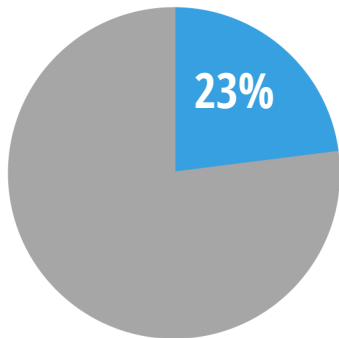


Figure 2
Among students served by a graduation assistant, 23% had improved attendance.

Source: AISD attendance records

“The AISD AmeriCorps graduation assistants have continued to be a program point of pride in 2015–2016.”
– Program facilitator

Program Challenges

During its final year of implementation, the program experienced some challenges. One challenge was limited organizational capacity. For example, the program had almost 30% fewer AmeriCorps members in 2015–2016 than it needed for full operation. Another limitation was student mobility. With some students leaving and others enrolling throughout the school year, it was difficult for AmeriCorps members to maintain a steady student caseload, which resulted in fewer students being tutored for the targeted 30 hours. Teacher attrition also contributed to unstable student caseloads because some students had to change classes during the school year.

References

Orr, A. (2016). *Bilingual education program evaluation summary, 2015–2016*. (DRE publication No. 15.71). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.

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