

## **Executive Summary:** **Engaging Students at the End of the Day:** **An evaluation of EW/NSCC CIS & 21st Century after-school programs**

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This summary highlights findings from evaluation research conducted for EducationWorks (EW) about their after-school programs funded by Children's Investment Strategy and 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the School District of Philadelphia. EW operates the National School and Community Corps (NSCC), an AmeriCorps program. The research data included 48 surveys of after-school program staff (EW/NSCC after-school program team leaders, corpsmembers and staff) from 12 after-school program sites; 34 interviews (of team leaders, corpsmembers, principals, teachers and parents) at five after-school sites; observations of after-school programs at five sites; and four interviews with key informants (staff from EW/NSCC, Children's Investment Strategy and the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania).

Overall, **both survey and interview data revealed a very positive picture of EW/NSCC after-school programs.** Across roles (parent, teacher, principal, team leader, corpsmember) and schools, interviewees affirmed the need for these programs and gave positive evaluations of how they worked.

At every school, parents, and staff members said that the **individual corpsmembers and the teamwork they exemplify were strengths of the program.**

Interviewees at every school mentioned **improved student behavior as an outcome of program participation.** At three schools, one or more interviewees noted that the desire to participate in the after-school program acted as an incentive and actually helped to improve behavior and that some children behaved differently (better) in the after-school program than in school. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed said that they had seen the behavior of those children participating in their after-school program improve either "a great deal" or "moderately" throughout the year.

### **Key Issues**

#### Staffing:

After-school program staff members are perceived as a program strength. Corpsmembers pointed to the **need for full staffing starting from the beginning of the school year.** Past research about EW/NSCC programs has shown that it can be difficult to fully staff teams at the start of the school year and this often happens for reasons outside of EW/NSCC control.

#### Space:

After-school programs sometimes function without adequate space. Space is linked to staffing issues in that both enough staff and enough rooms are needed to divide children into smaller groups.

#### Behavior, Discipline and Climate:

Corpsmembers' ability to relate to children and to contribute to a positive climate, including constructive discipline, is seen as a strength of EW/NSCC at many schools. At the same time, corpsmembers identified behavior and discipline as an ongoing challenge. While the data indicate that EW/NSCC has an effective support structure and training program, this research points to **behavior and conflict resolution as key areas for ongoing and continued training.**

#### Meeting Children's Academic and Developmental Needs:

EW/NSCC supports four academic programs for its after-school programs. Three of the four programs (the 100 Book Challenge, Crafty Readers and Big Books) aim to support reading skills development. (The full report provides more comprehensive information about the implementation of these three programs and the fourth, Make and Take Math.) **Both interviewees and survey respondents named improvement in reading skills as a strong program impact.**

In addition to the four academic programs above, after-school programs also provide additional academic and enrichment programs.

Philadelphia's Core Standards for after-school programs promote filling a range of children's needs, including academic, physical, social, and cultural. **Interviews indicated that EW/NSCC after-school programs offer some very effective enrichment programming for children.** These programs can integrate academic and non-academic learning, build social skills, strengthen student confidence, and generate high student engagement.

**One concern expressed by many corpsmembers involved finding a good balance between academics, enrichment, and fun, both to engage students and to meet their developmental needs.** Some team leaders wanted more freedom to judge whether a particular academic program was useful for their students. Others hoped to develop more enrichment programming that could draw upon both staff talents and students' needs at their sites.

#### Communication:

Communication between school and EW/NSCC staff appears strong at many sites but there were requests for improvement. The biggest issue is the degree of communication and coordination between the school and the after-school program. Some school and EW/NSCC staff request more coordination, particularly in relation to academics and supporting students' academic growth. **Interviews indicated that there are significant knowledge gaps among school staff and parents about the academic portion of the after-school programs.**

#### School-Program Relationship:

In general EW/NSCC after-school teams, school staff and parents **all seemed to view the relationship between the school and the after-school program quite positively.** There were almost no overt complaints about relationships between schools and the after-school programs in either interviews or surveys.