AMERICORPS STATE AND NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
SEPTEMBER 12 – 14, 2017 ★ ARLINGTON, VA
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RESEARCH AND EVALUATION GRANTEE PANEL
• Hear findings from high quality AmeriCorps evaluations across a range of focus areas and grantee types
• Learn how AmeriCorps grantees are using evaluation results to improve their programs
PANELISTS

• Kathleen Brennan, AARP Foundation
• Luella Provenza, Up2Us Sports Coaches – Louisiana
• Curtis Jones, Evaluator for SPARK Literacy Program, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee
• Adrienne DiTommaso, CNCS
• Beth Slater, CNCS
AmeriCorps Implementation Evaluation:

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Program Overview

Mission:
Experience Corps engages highly trained adults 50+ who help children attain literacy proficiency by the end of 3rd grade so that children succeed and older adults thrive.
Program Overview

In 2016-17, 2,336 EC tutors served 31,627 K-3 students in 279 classrooms in high need communities across the nation.
Program Overview

**Sustained Tutoring:** At least 80 percent of tutoring hours spent on “sustained” tutoring, pairing a tutor with one student or a small group of students for the school year. **2-3 days each week with students 20-40 minutes per tutoring session.**

**Literacy Assistance:** Additional tutoring time devoted to classroom-wide literacy assistance, supporting all students’ ability to learn daily lessons.

**25 hours of new volunteer training and 20 hours of returning volunteer training**—both pre-service and during the school year. Training focuses on 10 tutor competencies identified as having an impact on student success.
EC Evaluation Timeline/Overview

1995
- EC founded
- 5 local programs

2006-08
- EC Impact Evaluation : 1:1 Model
- AmeriCorps Implementation Evaluation Begins

2015
- EC 20th Anniversary
- 17 local programs

2016
- EC grows with new SIF sites
- 20 local programs
- SIF Evaluation Begins: Small group focus
- Awarded SIF

2018
- SIF Impact Eval
AmeriCorps Implementation Evaluation

Evaluation Questions

1. How are the two EC strategies – **sustained tutoring** (one-on-one or small-group setting) and classroom **literacy assistance** – being implemented? Fidelity?

2. How are core program components currently implemented across the network (e.g., tutor training, coordination with classroom teachers, program model selection, EC leadership structure, tutor stipends, student assessment)? Fidelity?

3. Based on implementation evaluation results, where can the EC program be strengthened?
Evaluation Timeline/Methods

**Timeline:**

- **2015:**
  - Site Director Interviews
  - Develop PMCs
  - AmeriCorps Site Visits
  - Site Visit Memo
  - Survey Development and Administration
  - Sustained Small Group Topical Report
  - Site Director Follow-Up Interviews
  - Update PMCs

- **2016:**
  - (Bar chart showing the timeline and methods)
Key Findings/Results

1. Strong fidelity to program model with sustained tutoring, more variability with literacy assistance.

2. Not all tutors comfortable with small group tutoring—need to increase training and support.

3. Teacher tutor communication strong for most part—but not across the board.

Next Steps/Using Findings

Using implementation evaluation results to strengthen implementation prior to impact evaluation.

New guidance /tools for:

- Curriculum
- Teacher /Tutor Communication
- Making the Instructional Match
- Literacy Assistance
COACHING FOR IMPACT

An Evaluation of Up2Us Sports
Conducted by the Louisiana Public Health Institute
About Up2Us Sports

Up2Us Sports, a national nonprofit, inspires youth to achieve their potential by providing coaches who are trained in positive youth development.

Using a research-informed Sports-Based Youth Development (SBYD) model, Up2Us Sports utilizes sports to:

- provide youth with opportunities to live healthier lives,
- increase academic success, and
- reduce risky behavior
Up2Us Coach Program
The flagship program of Up2Us Sports, formerly known as Coach Across America, identifies, trains, and supports coach-mentors to serve in youth sports organizations, often in their own communities.

Coach Training

- **SBYD Coaching Skills**: The power of play, coaching for outcomes, positive program culture.
- **Inner-City Community Context**: The impact of context on youth development; trauma-sensitive skills.
- **Sports-Life Connection**: Competence and self-efficacy—from the field to the future.
- **Healthy Competition**: Skill-building and learning to help youth thrive.

**ESSENTIAL FOR INNER-CITY COACHES**
**SPORTS SKILLS INTO LIFE SKILLS**
**MAXIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF SPORTS**
Program Overview

HIGH IMPACT ATTRIBUTES

Research tells us that kids who develop these attributes do better in all parts of their lives. They are the things that kids learn while playing sports that help them do better in school, in a job or in their community. They are the things that help youth make good decisions.

SELF-AWARENESS
- you really know yourself
- you recognize your strengths and weaknesses
- you know your limits

POSITIVE IDENTITY
- having confidence in yourself
- loving who you are
- being resilient to attacks on your character
- not letting haters affect you

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS
- knowing your surroundings
- reading the defense
- knowing your environment

PLAN B THINKING
- having a backup option
- knowing when to call an audible
- covering all your bases

FUTURE FOCUS
- goal setting
- game planning
- looking ahead

DISCIPLINE
- being determined
- having a strong will
- having a strict regimen
- putting in work

SOCIAL CONFIDENCE
- comfortable in large groups
- speaking your mind to others
- being firm in your beliefs

PRO-SOCIAL CONNECTIONS
- being a good friend or teammate
- being very welcoming
- having a strong network

AMERICORPS STATE AND NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
Evaluation Design

**External Evaluator:** The Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI)

**Purpose:** Measure the extent to which the Up2Us Coach program contributes to improved fitness and the development of positive attributes for youth.

**Research Questions**
- To what extent does working with an Up2Us coach at a host site improve the physical fitness of youth participants?
- To what extent does working with an Up2Us coach at a host site increase the development of attributes that contribute to healthy decision-making among youth participants?
- To what extent does working with an Up2Us coach at a host site improve the nutrition habits of youth participants?
- What elements of program implementation contribute to positive outcomes the most based on kids’ and coaches’ perception of the kid-coach relationship?

**Design:** Quasi-experimental, mixed methods

**Collection Methods**
- PACER fitness test - a widely used multistage aerobic capacity test (Physical Fitness)
- Validated survey to measure High Impact Attributes in youth grades 3-12.
- Focus groups with Up2Us coaches and youth participants
- Various measures of coaching skill level including observation, self-report, & youth report
Youth Comparison

UP2US SPORTS GROUP

- Number of Participants: 1353
- Average Age: 12.45
- Grades: 3-12

GENDER
- 50.3% male
- 49.7% female

ETHNICITY
- 94.9% African-American
- 3.4% Hispanic
- 3.3% White
- 2.4% Other

COMPARISON GROUP

- Number of Participants: 827
- Average Age: 12.59
- Grades: 3-12

GENDER
- 47.4% male
- 52.6% female

ETHNICITY
- 92.7% African-American
- 4.2% Hispanic
- 1.1% White
- 2.0% Other
Key Findings

Youth in the Up2Us Sports program demonstrated statistically significant increases in their physical fitness as measured by the PACER test during the 2015-2016 program year while youth in the comparison group had a statistically significant decrease.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADES 3-5</th>
<th>UP2US SPORTS</th>
<th>COMPARISON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+3 LAPS</td>
<td>-1 LAPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADES 6-12</td>
<td>+1 LAP</td>
<td>NO CHANGE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically Significant Change within and between subjects

Pacer Scores & Genders

Females in the comparison group experienced a statistically significant decrease in PACER fitness scores while Up2Us Sports program had no change.
Key Findings

Up2Us Sports Group 6th – 12th Grade

Significantly higher future focus/plan B thinking scores at endline than youth in the comparison group.

Up2Us Sports Group 3rd to 5th grade

Statistically significant increase in a measure of overall well-being during program participation had no significant change.
Program Improvements

Finding: Decrease in physical fitness in girls without trained coaches

Improvement: Increase the number for female AC members serving as coaches across the country

Finding: Higher skilled coaches had bigger impact

Improvements: Increased training and support structures for members, conducting more focused follow-up to increase skill development, and more frequent coach observations and feedback
Evaluation of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee SPARK Early Literacy
From development to validation
The need for increased literacy development opportunities for Milwaukee students is urgent. According to the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 15% of 4th grade MPS students were “At or Above Proficient” in reading.

This need is even more pronounced for low-income and minority students.

- **38%** of 4th grade, White MPS students were proficient in reading, compared to **9%** of Black and **14%** of Hispanic students.
- **11%** of 4th grade low-income (free/reduced lunch participants) MPS students were proficient in reading, compared to **39%** of non-low-income students.
2005 – With the support of AmeriCorps, SPARK was created to address this need by Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee and piloted at one site in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

2006 – With the support of United Way and AmeriCorps, SPARK was expanded to three MPS schools.

2010 – With the continued support of United Way and AmeriCorps, and the addition of a Department of Education investing in innovation (i3) grant, SPARK was expanded to seven more schools (10 total).
The SPARK Multifaceted Approach

Program: SPARK Early Literacy Logic Model
Situation:
The need for increased literacy opportunities in the Milwaukee area is urgent. According to the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 10% of 4th grade MPS students were At or Above Proficient in reading. This need is even more pronounced for low-income and minority students, 38% of 4th grade, while MPS students were proficient in reading, compared to 9% of Black and 14% of Hispanic students. 11% of 4th grade low income (free/reduced lunch participants) MPS students were proficient in reading, compared to 39% of non-low income students.

Inputs
- After-School
  - Boys & Girls Clubs
- Staffing
  - Programmers (e.g. KGB/TL)
- Tutoring
  - SPARK site manager (certified teacher), tutors, SPARK room, materials (time)
- Family
  - Engagement manager, parent liaison, parent visits
- Support/Collaboration
  - Project director, district liaison, teacher, evaluation, school and district leadership
- Assumptions
  - SPARK works capacity in a school by supplying tutors and a parents liaison to work with students.
  - Typical literacy interventions only focus on skill acquisition and ignore the reasons why students fall behind.
  - The benefits observed in other literacy interventions have typically faded over time. Boys & Girls Clubs is in a unique position, however, to continue to work with students and families beyond SPARK.

Outputs
- Activation
  - Students participate in Club programming throughout elementary school.
- Participation
  - Students receive 30 minutes of tutoring, three times per week, for up to two years.

Outcomes
- Short
  - Improved reading (Running Records)
- Medium
  - Improved literacy (PALS Assessment)
- Long
  - Sustained improvement in reading achievement; School success

Context:
Many districts face staffing and budget shortages that prevent them from using other reading interventions. The RTI model does not work when 90% of students are below proficiency in reading. Chronic absenteeism (missing more than 10% of school days) is a serious program in MPS and other urban districts. Many parents do not understand the importance of early grade participation.
Within the SPARK Lesson

- AmeriCorps tutors pull students out of non-core classes.
- Start with familiar activity.
- Sometimes do a Running Records assessment.
- Word play - Students receive instruction using Word Sorts and Making Words. Word Sorts involve students sorting words into categories to increase their understanding of sounds and letters. Making Words involves students using letters to make words so students learn how the sounds of language are put together.
- Reading a book at instructional level.
- Writing sentences - Elkonin boxes are a central piece of SPARK writing and used to help students encode words.
- End with tutor read aloud.
Before subjecting SPARK to a randomized control trial impact study, we worked with SPARK for two years to:

- Define SPARK through a logic modeling process,
- Use data to define levels of acceptable implementation,
- Build an internal fidelity/implementation monitoring process,
- Improve implementation by connecting SPARK with literacy and parent engagement experts,
- Build connections between BGCGM and MPS that could increase buy-in from the district and better integrate SPARK into schools.
As part of our Investing in Innovations (i3) – funded projects, we conducted two randomized-control trials of the impact of SPARK to answer the following three questions.

1. What is the impact of SPARK on reading achievement? (study 1 and 2)
2. What is the impact of SPARK on literacy development? (study 2 only)
3. What is the impact of SPARK on regular-school-day attendance? (study 2 only)
Two Randomized Control Trial Studies of SPARK

**Study 1**

- In 2011-12, six schools and 496 K-2nd grade students were included in a study of SPARK.
- 245 were randomly selected to receive SPARK for two years.
- **The results showed that overall, SPARK had a positive, statistically significant impact on reading achievement.**
- The results also showed that SPARK was much more effective with older students (2nd grade) than younger students (K).
- As a result, SPARK revamped its approach to working with younger students.
Two Randomized Control Trial Studies of SPARK

Study 2

• In 2013-14, seven schools and 586 K-2nd grade students were included in a study of SPARK.

• 286 were randomly selected to receive SPARK for two years.

• The results showed that overall, SPARK had positive, statistically significant impacts on school attendance, reading achievement, and literacy development.
Two Randomized Control Trial Studies of SPARK

- SPARK students were 27% less likely to be chronically absent from school than control students.
- Overall, the impact was .25 standard deviations.
• SPARK was found to have a .4 standard deviation impact on literacy development.
• SPARK was found to have a .23 standard deviation impact on reading achievement.
Two Randomized Control Trial Studies of SPARK

- Lower achieving students benefited more from their participation – SPARK now prioritizes participation for lower achieving students.
- The impact was found to persist at least one year after student participation had ended.
- Siblings of SPARK participants were also found to benefit, with improved school attendance.
- We are currently applying for funding to validate the results with seven clubs, primarily serving rural schools.
Both studies of SPARK were reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse and determined to meet their design standards without reservations. To read their reviews go to:

Study 1: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/81511
Study 2: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/32028

SPARK is also featured on the Evidence for ESSA website:

https://www.evidenceforessa.org/programs/reading/elementary/spark-literacy-program-struggling-readers

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Questions?