

**B) STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Research demonstrates that students with poor academic skills are more likely to be delinquent and subsequently involved in the juvenile justice system; a large number of youth who are incarcerated are marginally literate or illiterate and have already experienced school failure.<sup>1</sup> According to a meta-analysis of the academic performance-delinquency relationship, researchers estimated that 35 percent of academically low-performing children became delinquent compared with only about 20 percent of academically high-performing children.<sup>2</sup> Across our country, millions of children fail to learn to read proficiently by the end of third grade, a benchmark that is critical to their long-term success. Poor early literacy skills are part of a dangerous web in which children not only face academic challenges, but are also much more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors and become involved with the juvenile justice system. According to a 2006 study<sup>3</sup> by two Stanford University researchers, low literacy levels in first grade are strong predictors of long-term disciplinary problems by third grade, and low literacy in the third grade predicts highly aggressive behavior in the fifth grade and beyond. The researchers found that children who have early difficulties learning to read become more aggressive in the ensuing years, contributing to long-term academic failure.

The U.S. Department of Justice has long recognized the relationship between poor literacy skills, whether measured by achievement on standardized tests or teacher assessment of student progress, and delinquency for children as early as the first grade.<sup>4</sup> The ultimate

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<sup>1</sup> Leone, P. E., Meisel, S., & Drakeford, W. (2002) Special Education Programs for Youth with Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 53, 46 – 50.

<sup>2</sup> Maguin, E., & Loeber, R. (1996). Academic performance and delinquency. In Michael Tonry (Ed.), *Crime and justice: A review of research* (Vol. 20). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Stipek and Sarah Miles. "Contemporaneous and Longitudinal Associations Between Social Behavior and Literacy Achievement in a Sample of Low-Income Elementary School Children." *Child Development*. Jan.-Feb. 2006.

<sup>4</sup> OJJDP, *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, October, 1994

manifestation of this connection: over one third of all juvenile offenders and 70% of adult inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level.<sup>5</sup>

The **Experience Corps Academic Mentoring Program** (EC) is a juvenile delinquency prevention effort that addresses the link between reading proficiency and delinquency head-on by providing high-risk children in grades K-3 with a caring older academic mentor. These mentors provide each student with an intensive literacy intervention that has been proven to help children build critical reading skills; and with the support to reduce high-risk behaviors such as chronic absenteeism and truancy, aggression, withdrawal from peer groups, and inattention in the classroom. The Experience Corps program has been rigorously evaluated and effectively implemented in 19 communities nationwide. Findings from studies conducted by Washington University in St. Louis, with Mathematica Policy Research, and by the Johns Hopkins University prove that Experience Corps improves reading skills, increases attendance, and helps create a positive school climate, while enhancing the lives of older adult mentors. The Washington University evaluation is one of the largest studies of a community-based tutoring program conducted in the past 10 years. The U.S. Department of Education's *What Works Clearinghouse* recognized the study<sup>6</sup> as "consistent with *What Works Clearinghouse* evidence standards," and as a "well-implemented randomized controlled trial."<sup>7</sup> The study showed that the Experience Corps program works for students across a wide spectrum of abilities. Of study participants: 58% were African-American; 36% were Latino; 94% were eligible for free lunch; and 24% were Limited English Proficient. Twenty-five percent of the students studied spoke English as a second language and half of them tested at or below the 16th percentile (nationwide) in reading.

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<sup>5</sup> Global Literacy Campaign, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> The study, conducted by a team at Washington University in St. Louis with assistance from Mathematica Policy Research, can be viewed here: <http://news.wustl.edu/news/Pages/13890.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> What Works Clearinghouse Quick Review: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/quickreviews/QRReport.aspx?QRID=129>

The study revealed that in a single school year, students with Experience Corps tutors made over 60% more progress in learning two critical reading skills than similar students not served by the program, including statistically greater gains over the academic year on reading comprehension and sounding out new words.

Experience Corps has been a recipient of funds from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) from 2009-2013 for its Academic Mentoring Program. Under this grant, we have served over 3,500 students. With renewed funding from OJJDP, Experience Corps will enhance and expand the Academic Mentoring Program over the next two years recruiting 370 mentors who will serve 3,990 students. We will also be expanding our geographical reach by delivering the Academic Mentoring Program in 6 additional EC project sites located throughout the country.

### **Illiteracy and Delinquency: Our National Challenge**

There is consensus across the juvenile justice and education communities that it is critically important for children to be reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Research has demonstrated the connection between a student's reading ability at this juncture and his or her subsequent success in life; given that a child who can read at grade level by third grade is significantly less likely to engage in aggressive behavior and is significantly more likely to graduate from high school than a child who cannot read by the end of third grade. Until the third grade, students are “learning to read;” in fourth grade and beyond students are “reading to learn.” According to The National Research Council, “academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of 3rd grade. *A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school.*” If children cannot read, they cannot learn.

Students who drop out of high school generally exhibit warning signs years in advance. The recent report Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle the Dropout Crisis, warns that in order to identify students who are most at-risk for dropping out of high school, schools and parents must begin by monitoring basic reading skills (how many students enter 3rd grade without strong reading skills) and positive school experiences (how many students exhibit serious behavioral problems in K-3 grades) from as early as Kindergarten.<sup>8</sup>

In 2010, The Annie E. Casey Foundation released the report Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. It documents the millions of American children who reach fourth grade without learning to read, a phenomenon most pronounced among low-income children in high-need schools. In 2011, of the fourth graders who took the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading test, 83% of children from low-income families and 85% of low-income students who attend high-poverty schools failed to reach the “proficient” level in reading.

Low literacy skills in the early years is a leading cause of school failure and a key contributing factor to incidents of “high risk behaviors.” It is these behaviors that are often the most apparent in young children, and signify a critical need for early intervention. Children who exhibit these “early warning signs” are at a high risk for “poor performance in school, substance abuse, criminal activity and the passing of weakly-attached relationships to the next generation,” in short, of perpetuating the cycle with their own children.<sup>9</sup> Many factors contribute to low reading proficiency levels among children. Children’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs must be met at home before they enter a classroom. However, compared to their higher-

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<sup>8</sup> Balfanz, J. et al. America’s Promise Alliance, *Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle the Dropout Crisis* (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Karen (1998), as quoted in “Securing Our Future: Planning What We Want For Our Youngest Children.” Massachusetts Department of Education (2001), [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu).

income peers, low-income children are less likely to have access to books, literacy-rich environments, high-quality early care, and pre-kindergarten programs. Since the average child living below the poverty line has limited access to parental time and attention and to a pro-literacy environment, they often enter school with a vocabulary of only 5,000 words. By comparison, children who grow up in a language-rich environment enter school with a vocabulary of 20,000 words.

Well-designed interventions in the early educational years can counter the challenges faced by low-income, high-need children. The Casey Foundation report on third grade reading (cited above) describes effective methods for building early reading proficiency, including providing children with high-quality learning opportunities and reducing truancy – two areas where the Experience Corps model excels. Our evidence-based approach is proven to improve reading skills, increase attendance, and help create a positive school climate.

### **Need for Program at Local Level**

Experience Corps serves schools with significant numbers of low-income children and test scores and literacy proficiency rates that are below state standards and No Child Left Behind benchmarks. We use a combination of local census data, state standardized literacy tests, and interviews and needs assessments with local school principals and teachers to target communities with the greatest need. Over 90% of all students participating in the Experience Corps program nationwide are income-eligible to receive a free- or reduced-price school lunch.<sup>10</sup> With support from OJJDP, Experience Corps will serve the following communities:

**Experience Corps-Baltimore City:** Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) and its students face numerous challenges: 86% are eligible for free and reduced price meals, 92% are under-served minorities, and 28% live in poverty compared to 8.2% statewide. As a result, many BCPS

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<sup>10</sup> Washington University, *Evaluation of Experience Corps* (January, 2009).

students lag behind students in the rest of the state on many measures of achievement. For example, 81% of kindergarten students statewide are fully school-ready vs. only 67% in Baltimore City. In 2012, 35% of third graders scored at the basic reading level on the Maryland Student Assessments (MSA) and 74% of high school students graduated on time.<sup>11</sup>

**Experience Corps - Bay Area:** In San Francisco, 50% of third graders scored below proficient in the 2012 California Standards Test:English-Language Arts. In Oakland, 58% of third graders scored below proficient in the 2012 California Standards Test:English-Language Arts.<sup>12</sup>

**Experience Corps-Greater Boston:** There are a staggering number of elementary students in Greater Boston who are not proficient in literacy. In the 2012 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), 65% of third graders in Boston Public Schools (BPS) received a “Failing” or “Needs Improvement” on the Reading section of the test. In Revere, public school students fared slightly better, however there is still a great need for improvement with 48% of third graders receiving a “Failing” or “Needs Improvement” on the Reading Section of the MCAS. In contrast, only 20% of third graders in middle-class Newton received a “Failing” or “Needs Improvement” on the MCAS, with 80% reading proficient or higher. This has been clearly documented by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) and by the Boston Public School District. Public schools in Boston and Revere are up against an incredible number of barriers to having their students achieve grade-level success. According to MDESE, 72% of students in Boston and 76% of students in Revere are from low-income families and for 45% and 51% of students their first language is not English,

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<sup>11</sup> 2012 Maryland Report Card. Baltimore City. <http://www.mdreportcard.org/Entity.aspx?K=30AAAA>. April 17, 2013

<sup>12</sup> California Department of Education. 2012 Star Test Results. <http://star.cde.ca.gov/star2012/SearchPanel.aspx>. January 18, 2013.

respectively.<sup>13</sup> These factors weigh very heavily on a child's ability to be proficient in English and successful in school.

**Experience Corps-Cleveland:** The Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) continues to face difficulties in educating its more than 44,000 children. The District's 2011-12 report card reflects the challenges: the Ohio Department of Education ranked the District in 'Academic Emergency', the lowest designation within the state system. Forty three percent of third graders are reading below proficiency in the 2011-12 school year.<sup>14</sup> Last year it received the second lowest designation of Academic Watch and in previous years it was rated as being in Continuous Improvement. It has not met Ohio's Adequate Yearly Progress measures for four or more consecutive years.<sup>15</sup> The School District is implementing an ambitious Transformation Plan in order to increase the quality of education across its many schools. One of the plan's key elements is to "repurpose...low performing-schools" through customized interventions.<sup>16</sup> The involvement of a community-based group such as Experience Corps is one such intervention. A 2012 article in *The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland's local newspaper, mentioned that the District is seeking to learn innovative practices from area charter schools, and cited as an example the practice of bringing in "senior citizens, who come in to read, act as tutors and serve as mentors."<sup>17</sup>

**Experience Corps-Evansville:** In 2012, 20% of third graders in Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation did not pass the ISTEP-Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress in

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<sup>13</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. *School/District Profiles*. <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>. September 27, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Ohio Department of Education. "Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Cuyahoga County: 2011-2012 School Year Report Card." <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2011-2012/DIST/043786.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Ohio Department of Education. "Statement from Acting Superintendent Michael Sawyers." March 1, 2013. [http://www.cmsdnet.net/~media/Files/CEO/0\\_spring2013/Sawyers%20Statement%20on%20CMSD.ashx](http://www.cmsdnet.net/~media/Files/CEO/0_spring2013/Sawyers%20Statement%20on%20CMSD.ashx)

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, Frank G. Mayor of the City of Cleveland. "Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools: Reinventing Public Education in Our City and Serving as a Model of Innovation for the State of Ohio." February 2, 2012. <http://media.cleveland.com/metro/other/ClevelandPlanFinal.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> O'Donnell, Patrick. "Breakthrough charter schools play central role in Cleveland school district's plans." *The Plain Dealer*. April 29, 2012. [http://impact.cleveland.com/metro/print.html?entry=/2012/04/breakthrough\\_charter\\_schools\\_p.html](http://impact.cleveland.com/metro/print.html?entry=/2012/04/breakthrough_charter_schools_p.html).

Language Arts, compared to 15% who did not pass statewide. Unfortunately, from 2011 to 2012 Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation received a “D” grade for school accountability. In this Corporation 57% of students receive free or reduced priced meals.<sup>18</sup>

**Experience Corps-Minneapolis/ St. Paul:** During the 2011-2012 school year, 63.2% of 3rd grade students in St. Paul Public Schools and 64% of 3rd graders in Minneapolis Public Schools achieved proficiency on the Grade Three MCA-II reading test compared to the Minnesota statewide average of 80% proficiency by grade three.. This crisis in literacy is supported by more recent data from the 2012 Children’s Defense Fund’s report on Minnesota which indicates that 64% of public school students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade do not read at grade level.<sup>19</sup> In Minneapolis, 35-47% of minority 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students are reading at or above proficiency compared to almost 86% of white students, representing the largest achievement gap in the country. In the 2011-12 school year, 97% of the students in Experience Corps were rated by their teachers as reading below grade level at the beginning of the program.

**Experience Corps-New York City:** In New York City, nearly half of all students who are referred to the Experience Corps program struggle so greatly with reading that they are at or below the 16th percentile nationwide. In 2012, 71% of fourth graders in New York City scored at or below basic reading level in the NAEP.<sup>20</sup>

**Experience Corps-Philadelphia:** Some 61.6% of Philadelphia’s school age children live in low-income households with 33% below the poverty level.<sup>21</sup> Just 50% of Philadelphia high school students graduate on time; over 40% drop out altogether. Nearly 42% of Philadelphia’s 3rd

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<sup>18</sup> Indiana Department of Education. Corporation Results by Grade. <http://www.doe.in.gov/achievement/assessment/istep-results>. February 22, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Children’s Defense Fund’s. “Children in Minnesota State Report 2012”. <http://www.cdf-mn.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics. District Profiles: New York. 2011. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/dst2011/2012456XN4.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> United States Census, 2010

graders scored below reading proficient in the most recent PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) testing results published by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

**Experience Corps-Portland:** Students across the Experience Corps Portland service area are lagging behind the state average in reading proficiency and are also more economically disadvantaged. While the percentage of children in poverty varies across individual schools, the numbers are alarming. Up to 95% of students in schools served by the Portland program are eligible for free/reduced lunch, a reliable indicator of poverty. Up to 58% of students are English Language Learners. The percentage of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students who are not meeting reading benchmarks averages 41%, but for English Language Learners, this increases to 64%.<sup>22</sup>

**Experience Corps-Tempe:** The Tempe Elementary School District, which serves the majority of Tempe's elementary school-aged students, has documented 67 different languages in the homes of their students. The district serves over 3,085 students who are ELL and require individual assistance. Schools specifically targeted for the Experience Corps program have an average of 26% English language learners enrolled. Overall, 74.9% of students in the district are eligible for free and reduced lunch. On average, only 60% of the third grade students in targeted Title 1 schools had passed the reading portion of Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test. By comparison the Arizona State average was over 75%.<sup>23</sup>

**Experience Corps-Washington, DC:** On average, 67% of students attending the schools in which the program operates scored below reading standards on the 2012 DC Comprehensive Assessment System (DCCAS).<sup>24</sup> In Washington DC, 56% of fourth graders scored below the basic level in reading on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Oregon Department of Education. Assessments 11-12. <http://www.ode.state.or.us/home/>

<sup>23</sup> Tempe Elementary School District. <http://www.tempeschools.org/index.cfm>

<sup>24</sup> District of Columbia Public Schools. School Profiles and Directory. <http://profiles.dcps.dc.gov/>

<sup>25</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. NAEP: State Profiles. <http://profiles.dcps.dc.gov/>

**C) GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

The Experience Corps Academic Mentoring program brings trained teams of community-based older adults together to form a service corps of 6-18 mentors per urban school and afterschool program, serving children in grades K-3. Mentors serve between 2 and 15 hours per week and are required to attend trainings and monthly in-service meetings. All mentors are supported by an Experience Corps program coordinator who ensures that the site meets program goals and supports mentors on a daily basis. Before starting service, each volunteer team is trained on relationship building, behavior management, and techniques to motivate children and to help them achieve positive academic outcomes. Mentors engage with children as tutors, mentors, and community role models.

The goals of the Experience Corps Academic Mentoring Program are to:

1. Reduce incidents of “high-risk behavior” in school, including withdrawal from peer group and instructors, aggression, and inattention to teacher instruction;
2. Increase academic outcomes among participating mentees; and
3. Expand and enhance our current mentoring program through mentor training and support.

To support these goals, Experience Corps has identified outcomes that can be implemented and monitored by the eleven Experience Corps local programs listed in the previous section. These outcomes have been designed specifically to support the mandatory objectives of the Multi-State Mentoring Initiative.

***Objective #1: Reduce high-risk student behaviors: By the end of the school year, 65% of students will be rated by teachers as having “moderate” to “high” levels of engagement for four critical behaviors.***

To support this objective, the Experience Corps Academic Mentoring Program will focus on building quality relationships with mentees. These quality relationships will decrease “high-

risk” behaviors and lead to an increase in student engagement, including increased participation in classroom activities, concentration in class, attendance, and motivation to learn.

We will accomplish this by:

- Ensuring mentors have training to specifically target student improvement in the critical high-risk behaviors.
- Sharing best practices among programs, through monthly network conference calls or webinars, to ensure the most effective mentoring strategies are being used across the Experience Corps network.

**Methodology:** Increases in positive student behavior will be collected through Experience Corps pre- and post- surveys. These surveys are completed by each mentee’s teacher at the beginning and end of the school year. On the survey, positive behavior will be measured by improvement in the mentee’s 1) participation in classroom activities, 2) concentration in class, 3) attendance, and 4) motivation to learn.

***Objective #2: The delivery of structured activities and programs for the mentoring match will lead to 65% of students demonstrating improvement in overall reading and literacy performance, thus decreasing their risk of delinquency.***

To support this objective, the Experience Corps Academic Mentoring Program will:

- Provide mentors with a toolkit of structured activities to guide their mentoring interactions with their mentees. Maintain our evidence-based mentoring practices, as confirmed by Washington University and Johns Hopkins University, and deepen evidence-based mentoring services to reach more children and engage more mentors across programs by implementing a one-to-one and small group school-year academic mentoring program via 11 programs in: Baltimore City, the Bay Area, Greater Boston, Cleveland, Evansville, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland,

Tempe, and Washington, D.C. Nationwide, we will engage older adult mentors to serve a minimum of 3,990 elementary students over two years (1,985 in year one and 2,005 in year two). In order to ensure 65% of mentees demonstrate improved overall reading and literacy skills, mentors will meet with mentees for at least 35 sessions throughout the school year.

**Methodology:** Pre- and post- surveys are completed by each mentee's teacher at the beginning and end of the school year. On each survey the teacher will evaluate the student's reading and literacy skills. We will also track the number of sessions each student receives on mentoring session logs to ensure that students receive a minimum of 35 intervention sessions – a benchmark that Washington University documented to improve certain literacy skills.<sup>26</sup> The toolkit is a collection of age appropriate literacy activities, organized by reading skills including phonics, phonemics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Mentors can draw on the many structured activities in this toolkit to engage with their mentees in a manner that builds skills, confidence, and relationships. The toolkit is constantly evolving and tools specific to reinforcing objectives in the Common Core State Standards will be added during the first year of the grant.

***Objective #3: Enhance ongoing training and additional support for members to ensure strong mentor-mentee relationships:*** 90% of mentors will report that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the relationships they had with the students that they mentored.

To support this objective, the Experience Corps Academic Mentoring Program will:

- Ensure that program staff and school-based coordinators (EC program staff/volunteers assigned to oversee schools) who interact with mentors on a daily basis receive an orientation to best practices in mentoring, based on MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*<sup>TM</sup> (*Elements*). These evidence-based, quality guidelines serve as

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<sup>26</sup> Washington University, *Evaluation of Experience Corps* (January 2009).

the mentoring field's most widely used standards for quality practice. Standards with respect to match duration, mentor training and match oversight and support are clearly articulated in the *Elements*. They include adherence to critical evidence-based factors, such as mentor screening, pre-match training, matching practices and ongoing match support and supervision—standards that can favorably affect the efficacy of mentoring relationships. Experience Corps's mentor selection, recruiting, screening and training practices align with the *Elements*. This additional training will allow school-based coordinators to provide additional support to mentors and act as mentor coaches.

- Ensure that mentors receive 6-8 hours of pre-service training and a total of 25 hours of training over the course of the program year, including training in mentoring best practices.
- Unite participating EC programs in regular strategy sessions to share best practices for training mentors. Sessions will include monthly conference calls or webinars.
- 100% of mentors who participate in our program will be screened and cleared for service, and trained to effectively deliver the mentoring program.

**Methodology:** Experience Corps's current requirement for mentor training is a minimum of 25 hours over the course of the year, approximately 6-8 of which are pre-service. The remainder is provided monthly and covers topics such as addressing behavior or relationship issues and additional literacy tutoring strategies. Specific training on mentoring strategies guided by MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™ (Elements) will also be included. Program staff will receive copies of Elements and participate in a webinar demonstrating how Experience Corps practices align with mentoring best practices. All mentors will be trained to deliver the Experience Corps academic mentoring model, using best practices in mentoring.

Program sites will tailor specific trainings to local needs, but can include training on relationship building with a mentee, the role of a mentor, behavior management, active listening for mentors, and the mentoring life cycle. Mentors will meet once a month with fellow mentors to discuss best practices for engaging and mentoring students. Monthly meetings will also be a venue for in-service training. Additionally, Experience Corps staff will receive training to enhance their ability to coach and train mentors.

### **Measuring Program Performance**

All Experience Corps programs currently track the baseline skills of incoming students by the completion of a common teacher referral/survey (the pre-survey). The survey asks teachers to rate each student's decoding skills, expression and fluency, reading comprehension, and overall reading and literacy performance on a scale ranging from far below grade level to far above grade level. Teachers also rate student behavior and demonstrated social skills in class, including: concentration, classroom participation, and motivation to learn. The common teacher survey allows us to pinpoint student needs and then tailor the approach of our intervention. The surveys are collected from individual teachers by school-based coordinators at each individual program. Pre-surveys are collected after the initial enrollment of students in the school year. Post surveys, which are also completed by the teachers, are collected at the end of the school year and show us how the student has progressed. Programs send the surveys to the Experience Corps National Office and an evaluation expert analyzes the data, allowing us to effectively report our progress.

In addition to the data listed above in the goals and objectives section, programs will track and report data requested by the OJJDP grant program, including but not limited to:

(1) Increase in the number of mentors recruited; (2) Percentage of mentors who complete training; (3) Percentage of mentors trained who exhibit increased knowledge of the program area; (4) Program mentor retention rate; (5) Number of evidence based programs/practices used; (6) Percentage increase in youth enrolled since the beginning of the program/grant period; (7) Percent of mentoring programs with active partners; (8) Number of program youth served; (9) Number of youth who successfully complete program; (10) Percentage of program youth exhibiting desired change in the targeted behavior; and (11) Percentage of youth with whom an evidence-based practice was used.

In addition to the pre and post surveys listed above, this data is tracked by program staff via an online Salesforce database. The Salesforce database was developed and piloted with our previous OJJDP Multi-State Mentoring grant. During the two-year grant period, all 11 program sites will use the database. Technical assistance and training will be provided throughout the grant period to the program sites by a full-time employee, the Literacy & Impact Specialist, at the National Office. The database will ensure that the data collected is in the same format and monitored for any inconsistencies to ensure data integrity. Similarly, we will continue to engage a system administrator as a consultant to provide support to the database as needed.

#### **D) PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Experience Corps has mobilized 11 programs nationwide to provide academic mentoring for high-risk students. During the 2013-2014 school year, we will engage 350 older adult (50+) mentors to provide 1:1 and/or small group mentoring sessions to 1,985 elementary-school aged students in Baltimore City, the Bay Area, Greater Boston, Cleveland, Evansville, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, Tempe, and Washington D.C. In

2014-15, 370mentors will serve 2,005 students for a total of 3,990students served over the two year period.

The Experience Corps approach to engaging older adults as mentors is unique, as is our 80% retention rate for mentors. We are also one of the only national tutoring and mentoring programs that has been proven effective by two randomized control studies. Our 1:1 and small group interventions increase the number of adults available to serve struggling children and improve student performance both in and outside the classroom. In schools served by Experience Corps, the overall school climate improves as a result of increased resources available to students and the presence of caring community members. The Experience Corps program unites teachers, schools, and mentors to help improve academic and behavioral outcomes for children. Our model is a triple win for children, schools, and communities.

Our program is successful because it is aligned with local school benchmarks. By giving each student the opportunity to read in a 1:1 or small group setting, while being prompted by a caring mentor trained to predict and analyze the text, mentoring sessions provide “horizontal relevance,” teaching lessons and skills that are directly applicable to the students’ lives. The supportive atmosphere of our mentoring sessions, combined with an interactive learning process and directly-applicable lessons, are all factors that have been identified as highly important in engaging and motivating younger students to succeed in school<sup>27</sup>.

Our model also builds strong relationships between young children and their older mentors. Each mentor has a lifetime of experience to share with their mentee, acting as a role model, guide, and friend. Most of our mentors choose to serve in their home communities for good reason – they want to help support the future success of children in their neighborhoods. Children benefit from having an additional adult in their lives who is committed to their success.

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<sup>27</sup> Katz, L. (1991), as quoted in *Securing Our Future* (2001).

In 2007 Public/Private Ventures published a study on Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Initiative<sup>28</sup>, highlighting several best practices for the improvement of school-based mentoring programs. The Experience Corps Academic Mentoring Program meets or exceeds these best practices:

- *Start matches as early in the school year as possible:* Over 70% of Experience Corps mentor matches occur within the first 10 weeks of the school year.
- *Ensure that mentors provide at least one school year of mentoring:* On average, 30% of urban students transfer schools at least once in the school year. To combat this, Experience Corps works hard to target students who enter the program late or transfer out, ensuring that 65% of all students receive a minimum of 35 intervention sessions – a benchmark that Washington University documented to improve certain literacy skills.<sup>29</sup>
- *Build programs (or relationships with established programs) in feeder schools to sustain matches and provide youth with consistency through school transitions:* In each local program, Experience Corps targets geographically related schools, helping to ensure that when students transfer, they are often able to resume programming.
- *Select supportive schools for program involvement and continually foster these partnerships:* Program staff work diligently to ensure that the Experience Corps program fits within their site's Whole School Improvement plan, and actively engages teachers in analyzing program benefits.
- *Explore ways to bridge the summer gap:* Because the schools are closed in summer months, mentors, when possible, try to communicate with children over the summer with post cards

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<sup>28</sup> Herrera, C., et al. *Making a Difference In Schools* (2007).

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

or letters. We are currently exploring other ways of increasing summer program participation.

- *Explore more ways to provide mentors with support and ongoing training to create high quality, effective mentoring relationships:* We support mentors with year-round training events and progress review meetings. Each year, over 80% of Experience Corps mentors return for another year of service. This coming year we will enhance this by introducing Elements mentoring training, volunteer mentor coaches, and a toolkit of structured activities mentors can use with their mentees.

### **Implementation of Program Activities**

Experience Corps matches struggling students with active older adults (age 50+) in school and afterschool-based mentoring relationships that last the entire school year. Sessions take place a minimum of twice per week, either within the classroom or in adjoining school space. All mentors are trained to follow curricula that complement classroom based learning and behavior management. Experience Corps literacy training focuses on building vocabulary, increasing reading comprehension and increasing each child's motivation to both read and succeed in school. Our structured mentoring sessions include:

- learning to recognize, read and write letters (for younger children) and new words;
- reading books aloud and asking questions to encourage textual analysis and foster higher levels of reading comprehension;
- follow-up activities to help the child to relate the story to their own life experiences;
- completion of a review form to track student attendance, progress, and difficulty areas.
- an opportunity to build a supporting relationship between mentor and mentee.

Our program is designed to follow the key elements of a successful reading program as outlined by Barbara Wasik (1998)<sup>30</sup>, including a designated coordinator who knows about reading instruction; structured mentoring sessions; training mentors to follow the program curriculum; and coordination between our academic mentoring program and classroom instruction.

### **The Importance of Early Intervention**

There is strong evidence suggesting that the earlier structured academic education begins, the more likely children will see success in school and beyond. Preventing and correcting high-risk behavior early is more effective and far less costly, than trying to turn around a delinquent adolescent. According to a study of the Baltimore Experience Corps program performed by Johns Hopkins University, children in K-3 are in “a particularly high-risk period, as a major predictor of their subsequent educational and occupational outcomes. Children who do not learn to read by third grade are at risk for failure in school.”<sup>31</sup>

The landmark *2001 Chicago Longitudinal Study* on early childhood intervention programs revealed that academic programs targeting at-risk children at a young age create a “cumulative advantage” that can help to empower children to draw upon their previous successes and achieve greater gains – both in terms of academics and self-esteem – through high school. And, the 2001 Massachusetts Future Education Trends Report indicates, “Early education can save money during a child’s public school years in special and remedial education; during the teenage years in lower rates of unwed pregnancies and higher levels of high school graduation; and through adulthood in lower rates of unemployment, public assistance and crime<sup>32</sup>.”

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Fried, L., Rebok G., et al. (2004).

<sup>32</sup> RAND (1998) Schweinhart, Barnes and Weiert (1993), as quoted in *Securing Our Future* (2001).

### Frequency of Intervention

Our program model aligns with the “best practice” baseline for one-to-one and small group mentoring programs of meeting for an hour a week. Additionally, Experience Corps’s Academic Mentoring Program increases the frequency and quality of the tie between mentor and mentee, providing 35 twice-weekly academic mentoring sessions totaling at least one hour per week and lasting throughout the school year. This frequency and duration of intervention work and external evaluation substantiates this: according to Washington University researchers, “Although program effects were detected in the full [test group], including students who received very few Experience Corps sessions, program effects were stronger for the subset of Experience Corps students who received 35 or more sessions<sup>33</sup>.”

One significant outcome for the Experience Corps Academic Mentoring program is therefore to ensure that in year one, 65% of all participating students receive at least 35 intervention sessions during the school year. Because we know that one-third of all urban elementary school students transfer schools at least once within the school year, Experience Corps will make every effort to ensure that students receive at least 35 sessions before transferring, and that sessions resume as quickly as possible when students move between schools we serve.

We believe when students receive individualized attention in one-to-one or small group (no more than four students) mentoring sessions, they are more likely to continue coming to program sessions, and ultimately, to continue coming to school. The reason: *students who receive individualized academic attention increase their self-confidence, academic performance, and skill-sets*. Washington University researchers found that both teachers and mentors noticed

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

significant benefits for participating students. More than 95% of participating teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that the Experience Corps program is beneficial to participating students. And, more than 75% of mentors said they saw a significant increase in their student's reading ability during the year. Mentors also noticed significant positive changes in student confidence and behavior: 89% of mentors said they noticed significant improvement in their student's self-confidence after completing the program, and 73% said they noticed that their student's behavior had improved at the completion of the program compared to when they first started sessions.

### **Program Referral and Mentor Matching**

The Experience Corps model targets students who are referred by teachers based on individual literacy needs, including low academic achievement, English language learners, requiring additional assistance through an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and/or other behavioral needs perceived by the teacher. Washington University's independent study revealed that: *Students referred to the Experience Corps program were very poor readers and clearly in need of assistance. From the scores on the WJ-Passage Comprehension, we can conclude that half of the students referred to Experience Corps perform as low as or lower than 84% of the student their age nationwide, and 12% score worse than 97% of the population.*

This indicates our program targets the students who need the most help with literacy and thus the students who are most at-risk of falling behind in school and engaging in high-risk behavior. It should also be noted that one-quarter of the students referred to our program are ELL students, and 14% are special education students. Both of these groups have been identified by Washington University as needing additional literacy support.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

As part of our admissions process, teachers complete a referral/survey form highlighting the child's current reading ability and specific "problem areas" that mentors can target for improvement. At the end of the year, teachers complete a post survey indicating student performance gains in literacy, self-confidence and overall school behavior. Mentors are also asked to complete program assessment forms, which ask them to quantify both the academic and personal gains their student has made.

Before the school year begins, Experience Corps staff meets with principals and teachers to ensure that mentoring tools and lessons align with in-class curricula and Whole School Improvement Goals. Teachers refer students based on literacy needs, including low academic achievement, English-language learner, requiring additional assistance through an Individual Education Plan (IEP), or other needs perceived by the teacher. Mentors and Experience Corps personnel meet monthly to ensure that each program is on track to achieve program goals.

### **Mentor Screening and Training**

All local programs require a written application, interview, and references from prospective mentors. We also require a full background check aligned with each school district's required protocols and the Experience Corps background check policy which includes a State, FBI and National Sex Offender Registry check. Mentors cleared for training attend a minimum of 6-8 hours of pre-service training, including on-site training with teachers and/or EC staff. All pre-service training includes an orientation to Experience Corps' core elements and philosophy; mentoring best practices; information about child and youth development; managing behavior tools for a one-on-one setting and small groups; communicating with teachers and afterschool staff; and team work skills. Academic mentors receive training to support No Child Left

Behind's reading-related requirements and we are working to align the program with new Common Core State Standards. Pre-service training is supplemented by monthly in-service training as well as ongoing coaching at the service site. Examples of in-service training topics include program development, such as instruction on working with ELLs; choosing good children's books for interactive reading aloud; and building skills related to other aspects of service, such as diversity, working effectively with teachers, or conflict resolution.

### **Parent Outreach**

Engaging parents and families to create a home-school connection is a critical element in increasing student academic performance and positive behaviors. To build this connection, effective communication is essential. At the beginning of the school year, most programs send letters to parents of mentees describing the Experience Corps program. Parents are invited to have an in-person meet-and-greet to get to know the Experience Corps team and the member assigned to their student. This meeting often occurs in conjunction with another school event, such as a back-to-school night. In addition, some mentors work with Experience Corps staff to engage the families of program participants in their child's education and progress. Experience Corps also encourages new and on-going collaboration with school and community partners, including after-school homework clubs, enrichment activities, and cultural outreach opportunities for families. Events will also be held to recognize and provide positive encouragement for students demonstrating academic achievements, positive behavior, and increased attendance.

A key part of parent involvement is ensuring that parents understand the importance of their role in their child's academic success. This requires those involved in the child's educational growth and well-being to communicate frequently and work together. The

Experience Corps program encourages parents to become educational advocates for their children as a means to improving student academic outcomes and attitudes toward school and learning. Staff and volunteer members work to promote the connection between schools and families to create a support network for every child in the Experience Corps program.

The **Logic Model** and **Timeline** for the Academic Mentoring Program are included as attachments.

## **E) ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES AND COMPETENCIES**

### **Organizational history and presence in five or more states**

Experience Corps (Experience Corps dba AARP Experience Corps) was founded in 1995 to harness the time and talent of older adults to help children succeed by building stronger schools and communities. The program has grown from a five-city demonstration project to an award-winning national service program that spans 19 cities across the country. Today, over 2,000 mentors serve 20,000 elementary school students in 19 communities. The program's approach is simple, but highly effective: mentors are trained and deployed to high-need public elementary schools, offering small group and one-to-one tutoring that builds reading and literacy skills for K-3 students identified as in need of intervention. Working in the classroom under the direction of the classroom teacher, Experience Corps mentors provide support in the five components of reading identified by the National Institute of Child Health and Development and the Secretary of Education: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. Experience Corps is a truly innovative model that provides an intensive level of reading intervention from well-trained, adult mentors within a standardized practice.

Experience Corps is planning major growth over the next five years to meet the increasing need for tutoring and mentoring across the country. We are currently developing

strategic alliances with other organizations that share our vision and mission to support this growth plan. Most notably, on January 8, 2012 Experience Corps became affiliated with AARP, the nation's largest social welfare organization representing people over the age of 50. This new relationship will support priorities of both organizations: Experience Corps desires to increase its capacity to engage older Americans who want to give back to their communities through volunteering in its program; AARP seeks new ways to engage older Americans in one of its top service priorities, which is volunteering through tutoring and mentoring youth.

We anticipate that our growth goals and affiliation with AARP will have a positive impact on our Academic Mentoring Program. Moreover, we expect it to have a very positive effect on what Experience Corps is able to accomplish going forward, in terms of serving more children and having more senior volunteers in communities. For example, we will have access to a significantly bigger pool of older adult volunteers for recruitment purposes. Through AARP's extensive communications network, we will have the ability to share program outcomes with a much broader audience. In short, Experience Corps will more effectively be able to serve the students covered under our current award from OJJDP and will prepare us to serve a greater number of children in the years to come.

### **Previous federal grant experience**

Experience Corps has successfully competed for and been awarded several large federal grants. We have been a recipient of AmeriCorps National Direct funding since 2001 and we are the largest national direct grantee of AmeriCorps targeted for adults age 50+. The 2011-2012 AmeriCorps grant enabled 7 Experience Corps project sites to serve 8,573 students in over 100 urban public schools located in high-need communities across the nation.

Across the Experience Corps program, ninety-three percent of teachers surveyed reported that they were “satisfied” with the mentor’s ability to help address student’s learning needs. Seventy-six percent of teachers reported that the mentor had a “strong or very strong impact” on providing them with extra time to assist students who were struggling academically. Sixty-seven percent of students who were rated as having a low motivation to learn at the beginning of the year showed improvement by the end of the year as a result of having an Experience Corps tutor. Sixty-five percent of tutored students reached “good” or “excellent” attainment of grade level benchmarks.

Experience Corps received a \$2.7 million, three-year grant from the Department of Justice in 2009 to support the Academic Mentoring Program. Over three years, 4,767 children received academic mentoring from our highly trained and dedicated mentors. This number surpassed the 3,090 children we set forth as a goal in our original grant applications by over 1,600 children. In July 2012, in our report to the Department of Justice, Experience Corps reported that 64% of mentees demonstrated improved attendance and were able to reach the threshold of 35 sessions and that over 55% of mentees demonstrated improved participation in classroom activities and in their concentration.

### **Organizational Structure and Staffing**

Lester Strong, CEO of Experience Corps, has ultimate responsibility for the success of the program. Reporting directly to the CEO, the Experience Corps senior management team is comprised of professionals with extensive non-profit work experience in the fields of education, policy, and social work. The senior management team is responsible for creating and guiding the

strategic growth of the organization, and for ensuring that the goals of the Academic Mentoring Program are met.

The Academic Mentoring Program will be led by Christina New-Watling, Affiliate Relations Advisor. Ms. New-Watling will provide daily oversight for the program, monitor progress toward the work plan objectives and overall goals, ensure clear roles and deliverables for participating programs, and prepare reports and other communications to OJJDP as needed.

Experience Corps's most critical partners are our local operating sites which have been implementing the Experience Corps model for over ten years. Each site is fully staffed and includes a local project director who ensures service delivery to each school, and other staff responsible for mentor recruitment and management, school-based coordinators, and team leaders at each school. Local sites are supported by Experience Corps's National Office, which guides organizational growth, creates operational standards, builds a cohesive organizational identity, supports the network of local sites, and shares best practices throughout the network.

Program quality and compliance will be overseen by the Education and Evaluation Department. The Education and Evaluation Manager, Susan Siegel, is responsible for the programmatic integrity of the Academic Mentoring Program and for leading a strategy to ensure the consistent application of this evidence-based model across the EC network. She will be assisted by the Grants Management Advisor, Joanna Wald, who will play a lead role in the day-to-day management of the program. Literacy and Impact Specialist Stephanie Okpala and Database Administrator Rachel Cannon support the program goals and database goals respectively. The Education Strategy Advisor will support the program by making sure mentor training materials align with best practices. The Research and Evaluation Advisor will be responsible for the evidence base component of the EC program model. These two positions are

currently vacant, but under active recruitment. Jasmine Milner, Grants Analyst, will serve as the grant financial contact and ensure that the lead applicant and all sub-grantees are in compliance with grant regulations set by OJJDP. She will assist with the invoice and drawdown process of OJJDP funding.

Staff positions described above are reflected in the organizational chart. These positions, except for the CEO, are included in the budget along with job descriptions and respective resumes.

### **A Community Resource in Serving Youth**

In each community where Experience Corps works, the program is viewed as a valued partner in serving youth and families. Each site works in collaboration with local partners to maximize outreach and recruitment efforts; leverage mentors; work collaboratively on planning community events; and support the growth and development of children. Partnerships vary from community to community and include partner schools; PTAs; Foster Grandparents; resident associations; YMCAs; and a myriad of other community-based organizations. We have attached letters of support from various organizations and a list of program partners to demonstrate our value in the local communities.

### **Leveraged resources and sustainability**

Experience Corps and its local programs have developed a plan for long-term sustainability of the Afterschool Mentoring Program. This plan will build private investment from individual donors and foundations; develop an Adopt-A-School model, which will appeal to corporate donors; and secure funding from local school districts that have witnessed the impact and cost-effectiveness of the model and are willing to pay for it on a per student or per school basis. Undoubtedly, recent previous support from the OJJDP allowed Experience Corps to

build its mentoring program. With renewed support, we will expand the reach of the program and enhance critical program elements including mentor support and training.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Failure to achieve reading proficiency by the third grade presents long-term risks both for the individual and for the greater societal good. Students who struggle to meet this benchmark are less likely to graduate from high school and, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, each student who fails to complete high school “costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earning, taxes, and productivity.” Cost-effective investments in students’ early academic achievement, such as the Experience Corps Academic Mentoring Program, can prevent the need for more intensive, cost-prohibitive interventions down the road.