



# KEYSTONE SMILES AMERICORPS EVALUATION REPORT

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# Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps Evaluation

## Introduction

This evaluation outlines an impact evaluation for Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps, an AmeriCorps State and National (ACSN) program that exists to serve unmet, critically important needs as identified and underserved by committed and engaged host site stakeholders. Through the evaluation process, Keystone SMILES ascertained the effects of the targeted academic assistance activities provided by its members in the schools that they serve.

This evaluation is a continuation of the impact evaluation that was required by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) for a select group of AmeriCorps state competitive grantees during the 2014 – 2017 grant cycle. Keystone SMILES was a part of the select group and received technical assistance from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago during the first year of the grant cycle. The NORC technical assistance team provided guidance on the evaluation requirements:

- Large grantees, including Keystone SMILES, must conduct an independent evaluation to measure the impact of their programs.
- In order to demonstrate the impact of a program, a comparison group must be used.
- Data collection should be conducted at two time points for both beneficiaries as well as an identified comparison group of individuals that did not participate in the program.
- Grantees are not expected to evaluate all of their service activities but are required to evaluate at least one of their major service activities.
- A minimum of one year of program activities should be evaluated.
- For programs that are implemented in multiple sites, not all sites need to be evaluated. However, a representative sample of sites should be included.

The technical assistance team met several times with Keystone SMILES and the evaluator throughout the first year (2014-2015) of the grant cycle. An evaluation plan was designed and accepted by the technical assistance team. The plan was then shared with the State Commission and CNCS staff.

A final evaluation report was submitted to the State Commission and CNCS in December 2017. Although qualitative data from host site interviews revealed themes indicating schools depend on the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program to provide a quality educational experience for all

students, the limited quantitative data available at the time, was not conclusive that receiving services from Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps results in higher test scores on the fourth grade PSSA mathematics assessment. However, only one year of data was studied. Consequently, it was recommended that the review of the data continue for a minimum of three years to determine what effect, if any, the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program on the achievement of students. The impact study was continued and this report details the findings.

*Program Background and Problem Definition:* Together with its host site stakeholders, Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps recruits, trains, develops, and engages AmeriCorps members to provide academic support with host site school districts and alternative education and mentoring with community organizations; community strengthening service to host sites; and member and community training. During this program cycle, they provided structured programs to offer academic and social/behavior tutoring support within 60 school buildings and a wide array of service-learning support services across 12 community-based host sites across 12 counties in western and northwestern Pennsylvania. The stated mission of Keystone SMILES is “to empower and strengthen people of all ages with a focus on children and youth, to enhance the quality of their lives through learning and service.”

To address the academic and social needs of struggling rural learners, Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps has created, implemented, and maintained a National Service network of partners and programs that provide expanded learning opportunities for students. As school districts and community agencies, those institutions that stand most ready to directly impact student's learning, face diminishing budgets and increasing performance targets, expanded learning opportunities become the most effective way to provide much needed interventions.

### Program Theory, Logic Model, and Outcomes of Interest

Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps' expanded learning opportunities include before, during, and after school programs and summer learning initiatives that broaden and extend learning for youngsters. Expanded learning systems help students be more connected to school, build self-confidence, and connect with caring adults, so every student can thrive. Students not only learn how to do better in school, they find new ways to ignite their passions and to engage in learning and life. During the program cycle, Keystone SMILES sought to provide two types of expanded learning activities to 20,100 (6,700 per year) rural children and youth. The two types of expanded learning activities included one-on-one and small group tutoring, other classroom support, summer learning; and service learning projects focused on rural communities, persons with disabilities, Opportunity Youth, community revitalization, and veterans and military families. Not every student served participated in the same types of interventions; instead, members, utilizing the expertise of school leaders, molded services to meet student needs.

Members employed one-on-one and small group instruction, including Response to Intervention (RTI) Model, Credit Recovery, Title I remediation and support, standardized test preparation, and progress monitoring to accelerate acquisition of knowledge and skills for students. The scope of member service was intentionally wide and varied, allowing school leaders to identify and address local needs through various assessments and educator expertise so that member engagement both supplemented and complemented, not replaced, existing programming.

One-on-one and small group instruction are methods of academic intervention designed to provide early, systematic assistance to students who are having difficulty learning. One-on-one and/or small group instruction gives students individualized attention focused on improving academic deficiencies in specific skills, concepts, and/or subject areas. The Response to Intervention (RTI) Model seeks to prevent academic failure through early intervention, frequent progress measurement, and increasingly intensive research-based instructional interventions for students who continue to have difficulty. Likewise, Title I remediation and support are provided in schools that have identified 35% of their students as being disadvantaged or at risk. Schools providing Title I services must provide identified students with additional educational opportunities designed to help them meet academic requirements. Credit recovery programs aim to help schools graduate more students by giving students who have fallen behind the chance to "recover" credits. Finally, progress monitoring is a scientifically based practice that is used to assess students' academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.

The target population for one-on-one and small group tutoring, other classroom support, and/or summer learning was at-risk students, in grades PK-12, who were identified as economically disadvantaged, having special and/or exceptional needs, and/or who did not meet proficiency benchmarks on curriculum based assessments and/or PSSA or Keystone Exams. The duration and dosage of before, during, and after school programs was 3-5 times per week for 30-90 minutes a session, for 32 weeks. The dosage and duration of summer programs was 3-5 days per week for 3-8 hours per day, for 1-8 weeks.

The other expanded learning activity of the Program Model that members engaged in centered around service learning projects focused on engaging and serving, rural communities, persons with disabilities, Opportunity Youth, and/or veterans and military families. Like academic assistance, service learning improves academic engagement. By engaging in service that teaches real-life skills, students discover a meaning and context to their studies that is

unattainable through traditional textbooks. This realization motivates struggling learners and teaches the value of academic pursuits.

The duration and dosage of Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members' projects was conducted during a concentrated block of time over several weeks or months for a total of no less than 30 hours. The target population was students, in grades PK-12, receiving other education-related interventions.

For the past 16 years, Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members have been using pre and post surveys, administered twice a year, to measure changes in student engagement. The rubric assessments used for the surveys are based on the Summerbridge School Success Rubric provided by [nationalserviceresources.com](http://nationalserviceresources.com). In the last several years, pre and post survey data indicates that there has been an increase in student engagement for those students receiving services from Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members, thus providing evidence that the short-term outcome of the program is being met.

The purpose of this evaluation study was to determine if the medium-term outcome of increased academic performance of students receiving education related interventions provided by Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members is also being met. Specifically, this was achieved by the analysis of standardized test scores, along with the inclusion of the qualitative interview data.

**Logic Model:**

Problem	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<p>The community problem that the program activities (interventions) are designed to address.</p>	<p>Resources that are necessary to deliver the program activities (interventions), including the number of locations/ sites and number/type of AmeriCorps members.</p>	<p>The core activities that define the intervention or program model that members will implement or deliver, including duration, dosage and target population.</p>	<p>Direct products from program activities.</p>	<p>Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and opinions. These outcomes, if applicable to the program design, will almost always be measurable during the grant year.</p>	<p>Changes in behavior or action. Depending on program design, these outcomes may or may not be measurable during the grant year.</p>	<p>Changes in condition or status in life. Depending on program design, these outcomes may or may not be measurable during the grant year. Some programs, such as environmental or capacity- building programs, may measure changes in condition over a period as short as one year.</p>
<p>54% of children living in the rural, Northwestern PA counties served by Keystone SMILES live below 200% of the poverty level, impacting their academic performance and stifling their dreams. In School District Performance Profiles released in October 2016, the school districts served by the program averaged a 69% Building Level Academic Score. Despite the academic needs demonstrated by</p>	<p>155 AmeriCorps members (70 Full Time, 12, Reduced Full Time, 12 Half Time, 54 Quarter Time, and 7 Minimum Time); 60 school buildings and 12 satellite sites; 6 Core Staff with 70 years combined National Service Experience; 10 Supervisory Staff with 102 years combined National Service Experience; Episodic and Ongoing Volunteers; Board of Directors; Member Training</p>	<p>Core Activities Members will provide expanded learning activities such as            1.) one- on- one and small group tutoring,            other classroom support, and summer learning.             Duration/Dosage: Before, During and After School programs - 3- 5 times per week for 30- 90 minutes a session, for 32 weeks Summer Programs: 3- 5 days per week for 3-8 hours per day, for 1-8 weeks</p>	<p>6700 students will be served in CNCS- supported K- 12 education program annually.</p>	<p>4020 students will demonstrate increased academic performance in math or literacy (one grade level). Outcomes will be measured by Pre and Post standardized test scores.            1340 students will demonstrate increased academic engagement through improved attitude, leadership and self-confidence, and increased motivation and organization.</p>	<p>Increased academic engagement and performance will result in improved graduation rates in rural school districts.</p>	<p>Increased access to post- secondary opportunities resulting in improved life- time earning potential. Over time, these changes will empower students and their families to escape the cycle of poverty in rural western Pennsylvania. As rural citizens escape the poverty cycle, rural communities can reclaim resources to revitalize industry and stimulate economic growth.</p>

Problem	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<p>these sub- par scores, a study conducted by the Center for Rural PA found that 91% of rural superintendents cited academic support programs as an essential element of meeting student needs in their districts, only 18% of all eligible students received academic support. Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps strives to stand in this gap, providing rural schools and students with expanded learning activities to address the academic needs created by the poverty they live in.</p>	<p>supported by Clarion University</p>	<p>Target Population - At risk students, in grades PK- 12, who have been identified as economically disadvantaged, having special or exceptional needs, and/ or who have not met proficiency benchmarks in curriculum based assessments and/ or on PSSA or Keystone Exams.</p> <p>2) service- learning projects focused on: Rural communities, Persons with disabilities, Opportunity Youth, Community Revitalization and Veterans and military families.</p> <p>Duration/Dosage: Projects will be conducted during a concentrated block of time over several weeks or months.</p> <p>Target Population Students, in grades PK-12 receiving education-related interventions</p>		<p>Outcomes will be measured by a program developed rubric. Rubrics have been used by the program for 16 years, so historical and longitudinal data will be compiled and analyzed.</p>		

## Research Question Addressed in the Study

Do students in schools who receive targeted services from Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members achieve better mathematics scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) standardized test than students in schools with similar academic and socioeconomic backgrounds who do not receive services?

## Study Components

### *Evaluation Design and Rationale*

The design chosen for this study was quasi-experimental (QED). (Due to the nature of schools, it is not feasible to conduct a randomized control trial (RCT).) The study employed school-level matched comparison groups by percent proficiency. An analytic treatment group was identified and evaluated against an analytic comparison group.

Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps serves rural school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania that range in size between approximately 750 and 2,500 in total student population. Due to the relatively small student population size of the school districts that Keystone SMILES serves, student-level comparison groups could not be used as the sample size would not be large enough to enable accurate and/or reliable statistical judgments. Additionally, most comparison schools (those not participating in the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps Program) would not provide student data as they would have no incentive to do so. However, comparison school-level data is available and readily accessible.

### *Analytic Sampling Method*

The target population for analysis was fourth grade students receiving academic assistance from Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members. Focused academic assistance to the students was one-on-one and/or in small group settings. The comparison data that was used is the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) standardized test data.

The analysis group was identified through Keystone SMILES host site application and verification processes, June 2015 – September 2019. Initial data was gathered and analyzed during the 2015-2016 school year as part of the previous program cycle's evaluation. The same methodology continued to evaluate this program cycle (2016-2017 through 2018-2019). The evaluator worked with Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps during the host site recruitment process to make sure host sites were aware of the study. Throughout the 2015-2016 school year, district and school level achievement and demographic data available on the Pennsylvania Department

of Education (PDE) and the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) websites was utilized to determine school-level match comparison groups by performance quartiles.

### *Primary Data Source*

In Pennsylvania, school districts are locally controlled. There is no statewide curriculum that all districts are mandated to follow. However, there are academic standards that all schools must align their curricula to and student proficiency on those standards is assessed each spring using the PSSA. Other than the PSSA, there is no other common system of assessment (formative, benchmark, diagnostic, etc.) that is consistent across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; hence, the summative PSSA summative achievement data was used for this evaluation. The strength of this study design is that it will be using standardized PSSA test data. The PSSA test is a standards-based, criterion-referenced assessment used to measure a student's attainment of the academic standards while also determining the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of the standards. Every Pennsylvania student in grades 3 through 8 is assessed in mathematics. PSSA data is disaggregated by grade level, content area, and demographics and is publicly available.

Additionally, the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics PSSA are administered to all students in grades 3-8. Historically, based on need, Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members have focused the majority of their academic assistance efforts on students in grades K-5. Due to the lack of available reliable data for grades K-2, not wanting to use first year (grade 3) PSSA testing data, and historical drops in grade 5 PSSA Mathematics data, it was determined that fourth grade mathematics data would be analyzed for purposes of this evaluation. It should be noted that ELA data was not considered for analysis in this evaluation because soon before this evaluation began, the Pennsylvania Department of Educations (PDE) had recently transitioned from assessing ELA via two separate tests – one reading and one writing – to a combined reading and writing ELA assessment for all grades 3-8.

The outcome measure for this evaluation study is directly aligned to the data source measurement. Grade 4 analysis groups received education-related interventions throughout the 2015-2016 (previous program cycle), 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school years. Academic assistance occurred in before, during, and after school programs, 3-5 times per week for 30-90 minutes each session, for a minimum of 32 weeks. Specific learning activities were determined through various performance assessment sources and classroom observations and were aligned to the Pennsylvania Core Standards and Assessment Anchors.

The evaluator analyzed the 2015 PSSA results to determine comparison match school groups based on relatively similar academic achievement and demographics.

### *Supplemental Data Sources*

The evaluator conducted periodic interviews with host site supervisors to gather qualitative information about the perceived impact of the academic assistance provided by the AmeriCorps members. The aforementioned secondary data source was only collected for the intervention treatment group.

### *Study Limitations*

The primary limitation of this design is that it only measured one post-intervention data set, the PSSA for one grade level in one content area (mathematics). There is no other standardized assessment that all host site schools use to measure mathematics achievement, hence no other measurable data sets are available for collection and analysis. The PSSA is the only common assessment for all schools across Pennsylvania. Another limitation of the study is the use of school-level matched comparison groups, potentially diluting the data set. As noted earlier, student-level comparison groups could not be used as the sample size was not large enough to enable accurate and/or reliable statistical judgments. Additionally, it was highly unlikely that student level data would be made available by comparison districts (those districts not participating in the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps Program).

Finally, the original sample size included 17 treatment schools. A total of 12 schools participated in the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program for all four school years of this study. While some schools exited the program, others entered.

### *Target Population/Analytics Sample*

Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members serve students in the following rural Pennsylvania counties: Allegheny, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, and Venango. Collectively, they represent nearly one quarter of the state's area at 8,205 square miles. Nearly one in four children (23%) residing in these counties lives below the poverty level (USDA,ERS, 2014). An additional 31% live in families classified as "working poor," a group that includes children in homes where parents or guardians are employed or looking for work but whose total household income is below 200% of the poverty level (Kids Count Data, 2009-2011). Taken together, these statistics represent an astonishing 54% of children in the counties served by Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps.

The nature of the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps Program is to be flexible and to address needs in the grade levels and content areas that are most vulnerable in the rural areas that it serves. A review of host sites indicated that there were a high percentage of fourth grade students receiving services from Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps members. The trend continued for the program cycle and an adequate number of fourth grade students received services to yield an

acceptable sample size. A power analysis was used to determine an adequate sample size for both the analysis and comparison groups.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Treatment schools are those that had an AmeriCorps member serving in them during the 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school years. A formula was created to determine comparison schools based on total number of students, the number of historically underperforming students, and percent proficiency of each group. Once the 2016 PSSA data was released in September 2016, the evaluator began to conduct a statistical analysis of the quantitative data (PSSA) using regression analysis. The evaluator also conducted host site interviews and provides qualitative data to supplement the statistical analysis of the quantitative (PSSA) data.

Quantitative Data

**Treatment School 1**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Edinboro Elementary (General McLane SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	76	80	79	70	90		
Percent Proficient	57.9%	56.3%	60.8%	62.8%	62.3%	<b>2%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	26	22	31	26	44		
Percent Proficient	23.1%	40.95%	35.5%	46.1%	54.5%	<b>28%</b>	<b>136%</b>

**Comparison School 1**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Gwyn-Nor Elementary (North Penn SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	80	94	90	80	62		
Percent Proficient	55.1%	43.6%	50%	52.6%	43.5%	<b>-5%</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	25	33	33	30	27		
Percent Proficient	28%	21.3%	33.3%	13.3%	29.6%	<b>24%</b>	<b>6%</b>

**Treatment School 2**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Elk Valley Elementary (Girard SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	124	113	118	120	115		
Percent Proficient	58.9%	64.6%	55.9%	71.7%	70.4%	<b>6%</b>	<b>20%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	69	68	72	83	68		
Percent Proficient	50.7%	54.4%	44.4%	62.7%	63.2%	<b>8%</b>	<b>25%</b>

**Comparison School 2**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Francis Sheckler Elementary (Catasauqua Area SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	117	124	117	115	84		
Percent Proficient	59.9%	56.5%	47.8%	41.7%	54.7%	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-9%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	66	84	83	73	52		
Percent Proficient	45.5%	48.8%	42.2%	27.4%	50%	<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>

### Treatment School 3

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Fairview Elementary School (Fairview SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	115	119	128	134	129		
Percent Proficient	64.3%	71.5%	75%	66.4%	62.8%	0%	-2%
Historically Underperforming Students	31	35	39	40	39		
Percent Proficient	45.1%	45.7%	43.6%	42.5%	38.5%	0%	-15%

### Comparison School 3

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Bethel Springs Elementary (Garnet Valley SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	113	100	131	94	83		
Percent Proficient	65.5%	73%	72.5%	72.3%	73.5%	3%	12%
Historically Underperforming Students	31	27	26	20	25		
Percent Proficient	41.9%	48.1%	42.3%	65%	48%	8%	15%

### Treatment School 4

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Hillview Intermediate Center (Grove City SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	139	146	140	138	141		
Percent Proficient	59.8%	65.1%	70%	70.3%	71.6%	5%	20%
Historically Underperforming Students	56	63	57	62	58		
Percent Proficient	39.3%	42.9%	49.2%	56.5%	56.9%	10%	45%

### Comparison School 4

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Central Columbia Elementary (Central Columbia SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	139	141	138	132	135		
Percent Proficient	57.5%	65.3%	74.6%	68.1%	64.4%	3%	12%
Historically Underperforming Students	55	56	57	52	63		
Percent Proficient	32.7%	44.4%	56.2%	50%	44.5%	10%	36%

### Treatment School 5

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Iroquois Elementary (Iroquois SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	102	85	98	94	83		
Percent Proficient	37.2%	44.7%	55.1%	47.9%	47%	<b>7%</b>	<b>26%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	70	56	64	73	55		
Percent Proficient	24.3%	37.5%	48.4%	38.4%	32.7%	<b>12%</b>	<b>35%</b>

### Comparison School 5

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Aloysius Fitzpatrick Elementary (Philadelphia SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	96	87	67	96	83		
Percent Proficient	36.4%	26.4%	20.9%	22.9%	31.3%	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-14%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	73	65	67	94	61		
Percent Proficient	28.7%	26.2%	20.9%	23.4%	18.1%	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-37%</b>

### Treatment School 6

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Kane Elementary (Kane SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	90	90	83	71	68		
Percent Proficient	35.5%	43.3%	42.1%	28.2%	41.2%	<b>8%</b>	<b>16%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	47	54	55	45	41		
Percent Proficient	19.1%	33.3%	36.4%	22.2%	36.6%	<b>27%</b>	<b>92%</b>

### Comparison School 6

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Canton Area Elementary (Canton Area SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	87	73	73	58	64		
Percent Proficient	39.1%	47.9%	43.8%	41.4%	36%	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-8%</b>
Historically Underperforming Students	50	48	38	40	36		
Percent Proficient	24%	41.6%	31.6%	27.5%	22.2%	<b>4%</b>	<b>-8%</b>

### Treatment School 7

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>McKean Elementary (General McLane SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	83	54	73	72	69		
Percent Proficient	61.5%	68.5%	56.2%	65.3%	71%	5%	15%
Historically Underperforming Students	28	27	36	37	31		
Percent Proficient	50%	59.2%	47.2%	45.9%	64.5%	9%	29%

### Comparison School 7

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Media Elementary (Rose Tree SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	85	87	82	70	74		
Percent Proficient	62.3%	64.3%	74.4%	62.8%	79.7%	8%	28%
Historically Underperforming Students	27	25	17	26	22		
Percent Proficient	48.1%	48%	35.2%	53.8%	54.5%	7%	13%

### Treatment School 8

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>North Clarion Elementary (North Clarion SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	32	45	42	40	43		
Percent Proficient	43.8%	15.6%	54.8%	30%	41.9%	45%	-4%
Historically Underperforming Students	18	22	21	15	19		
Percent Proficient	27.8%	9.1%	42.8%	6.7%	31.6%	148%	14%

### Comparison School 8

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Wharton Elementary (Uniontown Area SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	35	25	31	28	30		
Percent Proficient	45.7%	36%	38.7%	64.3%	40%	4%	-12%
Historically Underperforming Students	22	15	17	16	19		
Percent Proficient	31.8%	33.4%	23.6%	50%	42.1%	18%	32%

### Treatment School 9

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>North East Intermediate School (North East SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	111	132	126	131	130		
Percent Proficient	54.9%	58.3%	61.1%	51.9%	60%	3%	9%
Historically Underperforming Students	61	68	66	77	80		
Percent Proficient	42.6%	47%	53.1%	41.6%	53.8%	8%	26%

### Comparison School 9

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Jersey Shore Elementary (Jersey Shore SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	108	100	109	90	92		
Percent Proficient	55.5%	56%	50.4%	52.2%	40.2%	-7%	-28%
Historically Underperforming Students	58	54	66	40	60		
Percent Proficient	41.4%	44.4%	32.7%	32.5%	35%	-3%	-15%

### Treatment School 10

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Northwestern Elementary (Northwestern SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	57	77	70	77	65		
Percent Proficient	73.7%	68.9%	61.5%	59.8%	72.3%	0%	-2%
Historically Underperforming Students	38	50	49	49	43		
Percent Proficient	65.7%	62%	55.1%	53.1%	60.4%	-2%	-8%

### Comparison School 10

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Kratzer Elementary (Parkland SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	59	66	71	75	71		
Percent Proficient	74.6%	77.3%	74.7%	74.7%	70.4%	-1%	-6%
Historically Underperforming Students	38	32	28	31	44		
Percent Proficient	63.1%	62.5%	50%	54.9%	63.6%	1%	1%

### Treatment School 11

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Punxsutawney Elem School (Punxsutawney SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	136	143	152	156	139		
Percent Proficient	55.1%	53.9%	38.8%	34.6%	46.1%	-2%	-16%
Historically Underperforming Students	92	87	99	104	95		
Percent Proficient	46.7%	41.3%	31.3%	29.8%	41.1%	-1%	-12%

### Comparison School 11

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Grandview Intermediate School (Derry Area SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	133	147	157	144	144		
Percent Proficient	54.9%	55.1%	54.2%	56.3%	70.9%	7%	29%
Historically Underperforming Students	82	84	78	92	74		
Percent Proficient	46.3%	44.1%	46.2%	50%	56.7%	5%	22%

### Treatment School 12

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Reynolds Elementary (Reynolds SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	87	71	77	54	76		
Percent Proficient	43.4%	39.5%	48.1%	46.3%	44.85	1%	3%
Historically Underperforming Students	49	46	46	51	41		
Percent Proficient	36.8%	23.9%	34.8%	43.2%	34.1%	3%	-7%

### Comparison School 12

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Yr. to Yr. Avg. Growth	Avg. Growth 2015-2019
<b>Williams Valley Elementary (Williams Valley SD)</b>							
Total Number of Students	92	70	81	89	71		
Percent Proficient	40.2%	28.5%	35.8%	28%	31%	-4%	-23%
Historically Underperforming Students	47	38	47	53	41		
Percent Proficient	36.2%	10.5%	17%	22.7%	29.3%	13%	-19%

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Overall, a total of eight of the twelve (67%) treatment schools scored better than the comparison schools on at least three of the four measurements:

- Year to Year Average Growth for Total Number of Students
- Year to Year Average Growth for Historically Underperforming Students
- Average Growth 2015-2019 for Total Number of Students
- Average Growth 2015-2019 for Historically Underperforming Students

Those schools were: Edinboro, Elk Valley, Hillview, Iroquois, Kane, North Clarion, North East, and Reynolds. Three schools scored worse: Fairview, McKean, and Punxsutawney. Northwestern and its comparison school scored relatively about the same.

Edinboro, Iroquois, Kane, and North East scored higher than their comparison schools in all four areas. Hillview scored higher in three of the four categories and the same for Year to Year Average Growth for Historically Underperforming Students. Elk Valley and Reynolds scored higher than their comparison schools in all areas except for Year to Year Average Growth for Historically Underperforming Students; whereas North Clarion scored higher than their comparison schools in all areas except for Average Growth 2015-2019 for Historically Underperforming Students.

Northwestern scored higher than its comparison school in Year to Year Average Growth for Total Number of Students and Average Growth 2015-2019 for Total Number of Student but lower in the other two categories. McKean scored lower in all categories except Year to Year Average Growth for Historically Underperforming Students. Both Fairview and Punxsutawney scored lower than their comparison in all for areas.

### *Qualitative Data*

Interviews were conducted with 10 of the 12 treatment host sites. All schools were invited to participate in the interview process. Present during the interview was the host site coordinator and/or the site supervisor.

Interview Questions:

Question #1: During the past three school years, did an AmeriCorps member serve in least one of your elementary schools that serves 4<sup>th</sup> graders?

Question #2: Was the focused academic assistance provided by the AmeriCorps member(s) one-on-one, small group, or both?

Question #3: How were students that were served by an AmeriCorps member identified?

Question #4: How often were identified students provided focused education-related interventions by an AmeriCorps member?

Question #5: Describe the AmeriCorps member(s) service learning project(s)?

Question #6: Did organization and completion of assignments increase, decrease, or remain the same for students who received services provided by an AmeriCorps member?

Question #7: Did motivation and interest in school increase, decrease, or remain the same for students who received services provided by an AmeriCorps member?

Question #8: Did students who received services provided by an AmeriCorps member have an improved attitude towards school?

Question #9: Did academic performance increase, decrease, or remain the same for students who received services provided by an AmeriCorps member?

Question #10: Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of improving academic performance in regarding to the services provided by the AmeriCorps member? Scale: 1 (failure) to 10 (success)

Question #11: How would you rate the overall success of the AmeriCorps program in your school? Scale: 1 (failure) to 10 (success)

Question #12: What were the most important benefits/outcomes of the program?

Question #13: Any factors that contributed to the success or failure of the program?

Question #14: Any other comments?

Treatment School: Edinboro Elementary (General McLane School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	DIBELS and MAP assessments
Question #4	20-30 minutes four times per week
Question #5	Troop care packages
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	8
Question #11	8
Question #12	Able to provide additional interventions to more students
Question #13	Success and Challenge: recruiting the “right” person
Question #14	Recently there has been a lot of questions around the signing off on timesheets

Treatment School: Elk Valley (Girard School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	DIBELS Next and Accessing the Code
Question #4	60 mins/day, three or four days a week
Question #5	School beautification; Targeted STEM activities; Diversity lessons
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Improved
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	10
Question #11	8
Question #12	Meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of more students; Improved relationships with families
Question #13	Challenge: recruiting the right people with the necessary skills
Question #14	The commitment of members shows true dedication to service

Treatment School: Fairview Elementary School (Fairview School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both

Question #3	DIBELS and MAP assessments
Question #4	20-30 min/daily
Question #5	Collected blankets for NICU; collected personal care items for VA Group; and provided breakfasts for veterans
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	10
Question #11	10
Question #12	Ability to focus on building relationships and provide academic support for underserved population
Question #13	Challenge: limitations on what members can do & when they can provide services (no extracurricular – which would lead to better/more relationships)
Question #14	Service learning is now a part of school district culture. It's now in the district's mission statement. Good to model service for students, staff, and community.

Treatment School: Hillview Intermediate School – 2017 information. Multiple attempts were made to update answers.

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	AIMSweb and Progress Monitoring
Question #4	½ hr/each day
Question #5	Informal
Question #6	Couldn't recall specifics
Question #7	Yes
Question #8	Yes – particularly in grades 6-12
Question #9	Yes
Question #10	Yes
Question #11	10
Question #12	9
Question #13	Provide 1:1 support to most needy students; Relationship building
Question #14	Quality members who are dedicated to service; Lack of communication from SMILES – change in staff
Question #15	Very successful program – blessed and appreciative

Treatment School: Iroquois Elementary (Iroquois School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	aimswebPlus; Classroom Diagnostic Tool; A2i; and Fountas and Pinnell
Question #4	30 min/daily
Question #5	STEM Night; Enrichment Summer Camp; Penny War Fundraiser; Positive Behavior Video Project; Coordination of Grade Level Library
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	8
Question #11	8
Question #12	Support of students, faculty, and community; Connections to community and school; Relationship building
Question #13	Challenge: Limitations of the types of services the members can engage in
Question #14	Members were huge help with food distribution during COVID

Treatment School: Kane Elementary (Kane School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	MTSS – Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (meet monthly) and Universal Screenings [Tier 1, 2, 3]
Question #4	Reading Buddies (10-15 students) about 45 minutes/daily; 90 min reading daily in classrooms; Push in math support for 2 hrs/day; Daily assistance with intervention time
Question #5	Book Swap – used book swap with entire school; Bingo – books for prizes
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	10
Question #11	9.5
Question #12	Provide services that couldn't otherwise support; Individualized support to vulnerable population; Improved test scores and grade level success; Practical and meaningful experience for member.
Question #13	Challenge: recruitment of members
Question #14	Working with SMILES has been positive. Very organized and good team to partner with.

Treatment School: McKean Elementary (General McLane School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	DIBELS and MAP assessments
Question #4	20-30 minutes four times per week
Question #5	Transition Books for 4 <sup>th</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade and Preschool to Kindergarten
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	8
Question #11	8
Question #12	Provide support to students have learning needs
Question #13	Success and Challenge: recruiting the “right” person
Question #14	Would like to have more consistency of timing of application each year

Treatment School: North Clarion Elementary (North Clarion School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Small Group
Question #3	aimswebPlus
Question #4	30-40 min/daily
Question #5	Community Garden & Trail; Goodwill Clothing Drive
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	8
Question #11	7
Question #12	Provide academic support to needy students
Question #13	Success: when you have the “right” person and education award for members Challenge: recruitment
Question #14	It’s always good to have more adults helping students

Treatment School: North East Intermediate School (North East School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	Teacher referral; PSSA scores; MAP assessments; Study Island
Question #4	3 sessions/week for 60 minutes each session
Question #5	Recycling Program; Kindness Rocks Program; Spring into Action Clean-Up
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	10
Question #11	9
Question #12	Increase in student achievement; Relationship building with students & families to improve school engagement; Support to staff
Question #13	Success: quality of member; Challenge: recruitment
Question #14	Really appreciate the program and what we're able to offer our families.

Treatment School: Northwestern Elementary (Northwestern School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	Classroom Diagnostic Tests
Question #4	20-25 minutes/daily
Question #5	Presentation on Proper Disposal of American Flag
Question #6	Same
Question #7	Same
Question #8	N/A
Question #9	Same
Question #10	3
Question #11	5
Question #12	Success: good experience for members; hiring former members Challenge: community and staff perception of program; recruitment
Question #13	Increased adult contact with students
Question #14	Change in district leadership affected success of program

Treatment School: Punxsutawney Elementary School (Punxsutawney School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Both
Question #3	Via IST Program – PSSA scores, Classroom Diagnostic Tool, STAR, Study Island
Question #4	60 mins/daily
Question #5	Beautification of Courtyard; Google Classroom Resources, Cafeteria Mural, Recess Equipment
Question #6	Increased
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Improved
Question #9	Increased
Question #10	10
Question #11	10
Question #12	Support for teachers and extra support for students
Question #13	Challenge: recruitment – right person with appropriate skill set
Question #14	Have had some of the best members over the past couple of years

Treatment School: Reynolds Elementary (Reynolds School District)

Question #1	Yes
Question #2	Mainly small group
Question #3	DIBELS, Classroom Diagnostic Tests; local assessments
Question #4	30 min/day
Question #5	Toiletries care packages for overseas service members; Food Drive for Super Bowl
Question #6	Same
Question #7	Increased
Question #8	Yes
Question #9	50% Increased 50% Same
Question #10	6
Question #11	8.5
Question #12	Many current teachers are former members; Ability to build positive relationships with specific students; Help to build student confidence; Male member was positive role model for many students
Question #13	Success: quality of candidates Challenges: needy population; Lack of follow-through of families; Increased mental health issues of students; Population of available candidates; Background and skills of members.
Question #14	No additional comments

## *Qualitative Data Analysis*

Some general themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis:

- Most schools provided both one-on-one and small group focused academic assistance to students.
- A variety of assessments were used to identify students to receive AmeriCorps services.
- The dosage varied by host site.
- All members engaged in service learning projects that benefitted the school community and/or the community at large.
- Organization, completion of assignments, motivation and interest in school, and academic performance increased or improved as a result of AmeriCorps services.
- On a scale of 1 (failure) to 10 (success), eight out of twelve schools rated the services of AmeriCorps members an 8 or higher relative to the effectiveness of improving academic performance
- On a scale of 1 (failure) to 10 (success), eight out of twelve schools rated the overall Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program an 8 or higher.
- Support to teachers, support to students, increased academic performance, and relationship building were benefits of the AmeriCorps program.
- Finding the right member is a key to a successful AmeriCorps program.
- Availability of qualified personnel hinders the ability to get the right person to serve as a member.
- Host sites (schools) couldn't provide the educational experience they do without the AmeriCorps program.

## Conclusions

Eight of the twelve (67%) treatment schools involved in the evaluation scored better than the comparison schools on at least three of the four measurements:

- Year to Year Average Growth for Total Number of Students
- Year to Year Average Growth for Historically Underperforming Students
- Average Growth 2015-2019 for Total Number of Students
- Average Growth 2015-2019 for Historically Underperforming Students

Based on the quantitative data, there is evidence that receiving services from Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps results in higher test scores on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA mathematics assessment. Four years of PSSA data was analyzed for this evaluation. It is recommended that the review of the

data continues to determine if similar findings persist. Additionally, now that the revised English Language Arts (ELA) PSSA assessment has been in existence for several years, it is recommended that 4<sup>th</sup> grade ELA also be included in the evaluation of the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program since many members assist students with the acquisition of literacy skills.

It was noted several times during the host site interviews, that recruitment of qualified candidates is a major challenge for schools. School administrators cited that in northwestern Pennsylvania there are fewer and fewer students majoring in education and social services, thus limiting the number of qualified candidates for available teaching positions within their schools, and even less to serve as AmeriCorps members. Recruitment of members seems to be a very real risk to the success of the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program.

As noted in the *Study Limitations* section, when the evaluation began over five years ago, the original sample size included 17 treatment schools. A total of 12 schools participated in the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program for all four school years of this program cycle study. While some schools exited the program, others entered. A component should be included in future evaluations to include some data from those schools that participated in the program for less than the entire evaluation cycle.

It should again be noted that the scope of this evaluation was limited to one subject area (mathematics) in one grade level (4<sup>th</sup> grade). It is advised that in the future a more comprehensive evaluation model should be considered in an effort to assess all aspects of the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program.

During the interview process with school personnel, the following statements were recorded:

- *“Because of the AmeriCorps Program and the support it provides, we have fewer students needing intensive interventions.”*
- *“AmeriCorps enables us to have the majority of our students working at or above grade level.”*
- *“With AmeriCorps, we’re able to have extra sets of hands and eyes helping our students, as well as extra hearts showing them love.”*
- *“It’s a great opportunity for young people to gain experience and serve their community.”*
- *“AmeriCorps is a quality program that allows us to provide more support to our families.”*
- *“We don’t want to think of a day when we don’t have an AmeriCorps Program in our district. We really don’t know how we’d be able to offer the same support to our students.”*
- *“AmeriCorps is a cost-effective way to have more adults helping students in our school.”*

The themes that emerged from the host site interviews indicate that schools heavily depend on the Keystone SMILES AmeriCorps program to provide a quality educational experience for all students, especially those students needing extra support. Without the services provided by AmeriCorps members in schools, the students most in need of interventions, academic assistance, and additional support would simply not receive the extra assistance they need to be successful.