A Year In The SSC Learning Network: Reflections Of Impact

A report prepared in August 2023 for California Volunteers, Office of the Governor

Report Summary

In 2021-2022, California's Governor Gavin Newsom included $15 million in the 2021- 2022 California State Budget for an AmeriCorps California Student Success Coach Grant Program (SSC Grant). This funding, made possible by [California Volunteers](#), supports eight AmeriCorps programs working with California's schools and school districts to enhance equity in K-12 education:

- *[Bay Area Youth Agency Consortium (BAYAC](#)*
- *[City Year, Inc](#)*
- *[Elev8 - Safe Passages](#)*
- *[Equality California Mentorship Corps](#)*
- *[Healthy Choices](#)*
- *[Improve Your Tomorrow (IYT)](#)*
- *[Porterville Unified School District](#)*
- *[Promoting Achievement and Student Success (PASS)](#)*

These eight AmeriCorps organizations comprise the Student Success Coach Learning Network (SSC Learning Network), a consortium of AmeriCorps organizations that support equity in K-12 education through academic, socio-emotional, and mental help supported by City Year's Student Success Coach Model. Members of the SSC Learning Network primarily serve students of color from low-income backgrounds across Northern, Central, and Southern California. This report offers insights into the SSC Grant's impact and implementation during FY 2022-2023 within the SSC Learning Network.

Members of the SSC Learning Network have utilized the SSC Grant to invest in recruiting Student Success Coaches, supporting students' academic and social-emotional needs, and providing support to school administrators and teachers. Organizations in the SSC Learning Network continue to underscore the need for sustainable public investment to continue to attract, retain, and develop SSCs who can work in schools directly with students, teachers, and school staff. **Despite a 32% decrease in SSC recruitment and deployment in FY 2022- 2023, the number of students served decreased by only 11.5%. Because of the grant funding, SSC Learning Network participants report an increase in recruiting numbers for the current year.**

As part of their participation in the SSC Grant, organizations in the SSC Learning Network participate in Technical Training Assistance (TTA). TTA serves as a foundation for enhancing programming and organizational capacity to promote equity in K-12 education through strategic deployment of skilled Student Success Coaches. Most organizations in the SSC Learning Network reported benefiting from TTA. Members of the SSC Learning Network report that the TTA has enabled them to reflect on organizational policies and practices as well as their leadership and management style to support SSCs and school communities. Members of the

network completed a survey about their overall experience participating in the SSC Learning Network. The data gathered from the survey was used to inform the information outlined in this report.

The Student Success Coach Learning Network Grant Implementation & Impact

As part of the funds received, organizations in the SSC Learning Network have made critical investments to strengthen their programs and presence in K-12 schools. A primary goal for organizations in the SSC Learning Network was to use the SSC Grant to invest in recruiting and retaining AmeriCorps members, known as Student Success Coaches (SSCs), by increasing stipends to combat the high cost of living. In addition to being able to attract and retain SSCs, the grant has allowed the SSC Learning Network to make critical investments in supporting SSCs through training and professional development opportunities.

As a recipient of the SSC Grant, City Year also invested in material and people support resources to facilitate the recruitment, onboarding, retention, and professional development of SSCs. As a leading expert in the Student Success Coach Model, City Year obtained additional funding to provide Student Success Coach Training and Technical Assistance (TTA). These funds have enabled City Year to extend its support and expertise to members of the SSC Learning Network who seek to enhance their Student Success Coach programming across the state.

At the time of their application to the SSC Grant, the eight organizations that make up the SSC Learning Network **deployed 744 Student Success Coaches who supported more than 35,000 students**, predominantly students of color from low-income communities, across 26 cities throughout California. The SSC Learning Network spans Southern California, Central California, and Northern California.

Table 1: Organizations in the SSC Learning Network, Regions, Grade Levels, and Areas of Need Addressed Through Programming

Organization's Name	Region Served by Programming	Grades Levels Served	Area of Need Addressed by Programming
BAYAC AmeriCorps	Northern California	3rd grade through 12th grade	Academic Support, Mental Health, Housing, and Food Insecurity
Building Community Changing Lives	Central California	3rd grade through 5th grade	Language Development, Academic (Math and English) and Socio-emotional Support
City Year Los Angeles	Southern California	3rd grade through 12th grade	Academic and Socio-emotional, College Access and College Readiness
City Year Sacramento	Northern California	Kindergarten through 8th grade	Academic and Socio-emotional Support
City Year San Jose	Northern California	1st grade through 12th grade	Language Development, Academic and Socio-emotional Support

Elev8	Northern California	Kindergarten through 12th grade	Academic and socio-emotional support
Equality California	Central and Southern California	6th through 12th grade	Academic, socio-emotional, and mental health support.
Healthy Choices AmeriCorps	Northern California	Kindergarten through 12th grade	Socio-emotional and mental health support
Improve Your Tomorrow	Northern California	7th grade through 12th grade, and college students.	College readiness, college access, academic, socio-emotional, and mental health support for males of color
PASS AmeriCorps	Southern California	3rd grade through 12th grade	Academic, socio-emotional support, and Mental Health

The communities served by the SSC Learning Network continue to endure educational inequities. One year after receiving the SSC grant, the organizations in the SSC Learning Network highlight how their programming is helping to address educational challenges and disparities throughout California. After the COVID-19 pandemic, many school communities are facing a shortage of educators and mental health practitioners at a time when students need additional academic and mental health support due to learning loss. Most organizations in the SSC Learning Network reported that the attrition rate for teachers and mental health practitioners in the communities they serve is a moderate problem. They continue to work with schools to provide students with additional in classroom and out of classroom support based on their individual needs.

Creating a Pipeline in Education

Student Success Coaches come from diverse educational backgrounds. Coaches are high school graduates. college students (in the community college or four-year university system), recent college graduates, and graduate students. They also come from a wide range of disciplines in social sciences, humanities, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Many coaches grew up in the same communities they serve in the SSC Learning Network.

Although only two out of the eight organizations in the Student Success Learning Network report tracking post-service outcomes for SSCs, interactions with all program directors in the SSC Learning Network suggest that **SSCs enter the field of education once their service term is completed — usually in the same communities where they completed their service.**
For example, two program directors reported that **as many as 50% of their Student Success Coaches enter the field of education as teachers, counselors, mental health professionals, and after-school program staff.** Interviews with Student Success Coaches across the eight organizations in the SSC Learning Network suggest that service influences SSCs to pursue a career in education.

Many SSCs shared insights how their service experiences reaffirm their commitment to pursue a career in education.

"I have always wanted to be a teacher. Serving as a [Student Success Coach] has reassured me that I belong in the classroom." Another Student Success Coach added: "Serving as a Student Success Coach has given me a glimpse of teaching and what to expect when I enter the field and start working with students." - Student Success Coach

"I want to be a school social worker. Working with students and assisting them with their social-emotional needs has given me a purpose and reaffirmed that I am ready to be a social worker. I am ready to go to graduate school." - Student Success Coach

Understanding their impact in creating a pipeline in education, organizations in the SSC Learning Network shared how the SSC grant has enabled them to continue to invest resources in recruitment and professional development of SSCs. Our partner organizations aspire to continue providing training for post-service transitions for SSCs to build a pipeline of educators from and for the communities they serve. Members of the SSC Learning Network have also expressed a desire to track or continue to track post-service outcomes for their SSCs.

"I come from the foster youth system. I do not do this for the money. I do this because I want to serve and be involved in the community as an educator. I want to be a role model for students. I see myself in the students I serve." - Student Success Coach

Challenges: Recruiting SSCs

Currently, AmeriCorps-based organizations across the United States are facing a recruitment crisis. Although the SSC Grant has enabled the SSC Learning Network to make critical investments in recruitment and retention efforts, member organizations are still facing recruitment challenges.

In FY 2022-2023, the number of Students Success Coaches deployed by organizations in the SSC Learning Network was 507, a 32% decrease from the start of the program. **Seven of the eight programs continue to express concerns regarding recruitment challenges and the need for sustainable funding to address recruitment and retention challenges.** The cost of living remains challenging to attract and retain competitive applicants to serve as SSCs. To address the ongoing recruitment challenges of SSCs, program directors underscore the need for public investment to sustain AmeriCorps organizations and remove economic barriers to service engagement.

While the SSC Learning Network continues to grapple with recruitment challenges, there have been positive outcomes regarding attrition rates for Student Success Coaches post-SSC Grant. As shown in Table 2, five organizations have reported improvements in the retention of SSCs

after receiving the SSC Grant. Furthermore, in the current academic year, the SSC Learning Network has observed an increase in recruitment figures compared to the previous year.[2]

Table 2: Perception of SSCs' Attrition Before and After the Grant and Areas of Needs

Organization's Name	SSCs: Attrition Before Grant	SSCs: Attrition After the Grant	Program Needs
BAYAC	A serious problem	A moderate problem	Funding to increase recruitment and program capacity.
Building Communities, Changing Lives	A moderate problem	A minor problem	Need for funding to increase the living allowance for SSCs and expand to offering socio- emotional learning.
City Year Los Angeles	A serious problem	A minor problem	Recruitment continues to be a challenge.
City Year Sacramento	A minor problem	A minor problem	Recruitment; not having enough SSCs.
City Year San Jose	A serious problem	A serious problem	Funding is needed to sustainably fund SSCs at higher living allowance rates due to California's high cost of living.
Elev8	A moderate problem	A moderate problem	The recruitment of SSCs due to the high cost of living is a serious problem.
Equality California	A serious problem	A moderate problem	Desire to implement data-informed programming in the face of challenges with staff capacity.
Healthy Choices	A minor problem	A minor problem	Supportive program structure as an area of need.
Improve Your Tomorrow	A minor problem	A minor problem	Recruitment is an area of need .
PASS	A serious problem	A serious problem	Stable and increased funding is needed as the cost of living remains challenging to attract and retain competitive applicants.

[2] It is important to note that recruitment data for the current academic year is not official. Data is still preliminary. Recruitment efforts are ongoing at the time of writing. This insight has been gained from informal conversations with members of the SSC Learning Network.

Community Impact

Before the official establishment of the SSC Learning Network in FY 2022-2023, the eight organizations comprising the Student Success Learning Network served a little over 35,000

students across 26 cities throughout Northern, Central, and Southern California. Overwhelmingly, the students served by the organizations in the Student Success Learning Network were students of color from low-income backgrounds. In many instances, these students also had intersecting identities. They were in the foster youth systems or experiencing homelessness. They were also English Learners, students with disabilities, or members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

In its first year, the Student Success Learning Network still serves the same student demographic and helps combat the educational inequities afflicting these different student groups. **Despite experiencing challenges in recruitment, the Student Success Learning Network reached 31,000 students from disadvantaged academic, social, and economic backgrounds. Even though the members of the SSC Learning Network experienced a decrease of 32% in the SSCs deployment, these organizations only saw a 11.5% decrease in the number of students served.** These numbers suggest that the SSC Learning Network has maintained its student impact despite enduring significant challenges in recruiting and retaining SSCs.

Professional Development

Technical Support Assistance

The SSC Learning Network participates in monthly Technical Support Assistance (TTA) activities rooted in the Student Success Model. TTA helps members of the SSC Learning Network enhance their programming and their capacity to provide equitable K-12 educational services by deploying highly skilled Student Success Coaches in school communities. City Year's vision for the TTA in the SSC Learning Network is rooted in nine areas of training and technical assistance:

1. Integration of social, emotional, and academic development strategies
2. Establishment of successful student-success coach-teacher partnerships
3. Implementation of policies and practices for continuous program enhancement
4. Cultivation of transformative school partnerships
5. Establishment and enhancement of career development support for AmeriCorps members
6. Exploration of funding models for sustaining Student success coaching programs
7. Incorporation of strategies to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice
8. Enhancement to policies and practices regarding the recruitment of AmeriCorps members
9. Effective management of AmeriCorps and other federal grants.

In addition to the nine areas of focus, TTA is further informed by [City Year's Target Program Profile](#) — a framework to support SSCs, students, school, and community partners—while

engaging with local and national educational leaders and scholars in these areas. Through the research and evaluation arm of this initiative, City Year's TTA team conducted a program landscape analysis and site visits that helped to inform programming and forge positive relationships with members of the Network.

During FY 2022-2023 the SSC Learning Network delivered over 10,000 program content hours, which encompassed virtual and in-person convenings (formally referred to as Institutes and Residencies, respectively), implementation coaching, and executive coaching.

Findings from this section are based on an end-of-the-year survey aimed at capturing the lived experiences of program participants in the TTA. Survey responses were anonymous to encourage candid responses. Respondents to the survey represent all eight organizations in the SSC Learning Network. In total, 13 participants responded to the survey. Formal and informal interviews with SSC Learning Network members further support this section's findings.

Institutes
Institutes expose participants to theoretical and practical knowledge and allow them to build a community of practice to implement the Student Success Coach Model. Institutes occur every other month, offering participants the opportunity to engage with subject matter experts through theoretical and hands-on activities aligned with the Student Success Coach Model.

During FY 2022-2023, six Institutes were organized. Each Institute required a commitment of approximately five hours from participants. During the grant period, participants also convene in a two day in-person event, Residential Institutes. The SSC Learning Network held its first in-person Residential Institute in November 2022. In total, there will be three Residential Institutes over the SSC Grant period.

As shown in Table 3, all participants emphasized the significance of their exposure to local and national experts, which enhanced their Student Success Coach programming. Additionally, **nearly all participants expressed their appreciation for gaining practical tools that support the implementation and expansion of Student Success Coaches programming to support their students and Student Success Coaches.**

Reflecting on their overall experience, most participants acknowledged that the Institutes effectively addressed their organizational needs, bolstering their capacity to deliver Student Success Coach programming. Out of the 13 participants, 12 specifically highlighted that the Institutes had proven to be at least moderately effective in implementing and expanding the Student Success Coach Model within their respective organizations.

"Institutes have been invaluable for contemplating SSC recruitment and retention, particularly during challenging times. It makes me feel less isolated when dealing with my organization's recruitment issues." - Member of the SSC Learning Network

<u>Institute Improvements</u>
Members of the Network also shared feedback on the professional development opportunities, specifically requesting more hands-on activities, shorter virtual sessions, more resource-sharing, and more in-person convenings. Additionally, some have expressed a desire to dive deeper into the topics covered during the Institutes by having smaller discussion groups and access to more support personnel during the Institute sessions, and more members from their organizations join these meetings. This data was used to improve the institutes in real time, and we are committed to using participants' feedback to enhance our institute's programming and continually improve.

These points underscore the SSC Learning Network's value in creating a community of practice to facilitate the understanding and implementation of the Student Success Coach Model while allowing participants to engage in timely sensitive issues affecting their programming.

<u>Implementation Coaching</u>
Implementation Coaching sessions provide participants with a deeper understanding of the Student Success Coach Model while establishing a space to share best practices and resources that help address each organizations' needs. To date, there have been five Implementation Coaching Sessions. In these monthly sessions, the SSC Implementation Coach facilitates group dialogue, peer learning protocols, and resource-sharing opportunities to translate knowledge and theory from the Institutes into actionable implementation strategies by program participants.

All survey respondents expressed benefiting from accessing a community of practice to support their students and Student Success Coaches. Majority of our Network valued having a community to collaborate with and find solutions to their programs' challenges and needs, including recruitment, professional development for Student Success Coaches, data-informed programming, and school partnerships.

"[I] appreciate the space to openly talk about our programs, get feedback [on our implementation of the Student Success Coach model, and talk about the importance of this work." - Member of the SSC Learning Network

<u>Implementation Coaching Improvements</u>
Some members of the network requested more comprehensive discussions on the history, goals, and objectives of the Student Success Coaching Model in relation to their organization's

goals, objectives, and history. Additionally, they also requested increased opportunities for in-person Implementation Coaching and more chances to communicate in smaller groups and resource sharing. We are committed to incorporating this feedback to enhance participants' experiences in Implementation Coaching.

Executive Coaching
Monthly Executive Coaching enhances participants' abilities to engage in effective management and leadership practices. Participants engage in reflection and collaborative strategies to enhance their individual and collective coaching strategies to support their unique program-staff needs.

As participants reflected on the impact of Executive Coaching, they highlighted the impact of this space on their management and leadership style.

Majority of the Network believes that Executive Coaching:
- Provides them with a safe space to discuss challenges and opportunities affecting their ability to operate, as leaders, within their organization.
- Enables participants to self-reflect on their leadership and management style.

Participants found value in having a community of practice as they aspired to become effective leaders in their organizations. While some survey respondents still doubt whether Executive Coaching has enabled them to grow as leaders, more than half of the survey respondents shared that Executive Coaching has enhanced their ability to grow as effective leaders.

Executive Coaching Improvements
Participants would like to move from individual reflections and peer conversations to a more hands-on coaching approach to address specific leadership challenges in the upcoming year. We will continue to act on participants' feedback to enhance their experience and the effectiveness of Executive Coaching.

Summary
The engagement of participants in the Institutes, Implementation Coaching, and Executive Coaching has facilitated their individual learning and cultivated a vibrant community of practice among participating individuals and organizations. This collective learning environment has significantly contributed to participants' organizational growth and professional development as they seek to implement and/or expand Student Success Coach Programming.

All 13 participants rated the effectiveness of the SSC programming as at least moderately effective and a majority of our members expressed satisfaction with the programming they received through the SSC Learning Network.

Increasing Public Awareness of the SSC Learning Network

The SSC Learning Network has implemented a series of communications efforts to help amplify engagement and awareness among grantees of the SSC Grant, support from California Volunteers for this work, and the greater education landscape of California. Some of these efforts include and are not limited to, bi-monthly newsletters, an SSC Learning Network fact sheet for policymakers, a private [Google Microsite](#) for resource sharing, an [external website](#) where interested parties can learn more and contact the Network, and the creation and distribution of original social media content across [Facebook,](#) [Instagram,](#) [Twitter (X),](#) and [LinkedIn.](#) Through social media, the public, including individuals in the education and public sectors, are learning about the positive impacts of the Learning Network across California.

The bi-monthly SSC Learning Network newsletter highlights grantees of the network, focuses on the content for our online Institutes, and provides a platform to share updates across the network, highlights of our National Faculty, and announces opportunities for resource sharing of best practices.

During the March 2023 in-person Residency in Los Angeles, SSC Grantees had the opportunity to engage in media training provided by Actum LLC. In this dynamic training, participants began by learning the keys to successful communication, they learned how to deliver a consistent message, and they received interview guidelines for several types of reporters. They also practiced their new skills amongst each other, utilizing the SSC Learning Network fact sheet to respond to sample questions. The media training was very well received, and grantees gained new communications skills that they can use to talk about the program in the future.

The SSC Learning Network partners with Actum LLC to raise awareness and support the communication strategy. Actum has supported the SSC Learning Network by garnering positive news stories and op-eds as well as launching a paid media campaign to drive engagement to our social media pages launched on Facebook and Instagram. **The campaign has garnered 591,673 impressions, 124,989 engagements, and 1,001 link clicks to the SSC external website thus far,** with the goal of raising awareness among individuals and stakeholders in the education sector and California policymakers.