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Executive Summary

Project Transformation AmeriCorps (PT) addresses the chronic problem of academic underachievement among children and youth living in low-income and severely distressed neighborhoods. PT meets the needs of over 800 children and youth in low-income Dallas neighborhoods and under-served communities in outlying urban areas by providing free after-school programming and summer day camps. Our programs focus specifically on improving students' literacy, academic performance, and retention rates.

Rationale and Approach

a. PROBLEM

Project Transformation AmeriCorps (PT) addresses the chronic problem of academic underachievement among children and youth living in low-income and severely distressed neighborhoods. Our programs focus specifically on improving students' literacy, academic performance, and retention rates. While a host of interrelated factors contribute to the racial and socioeconomic disparities in student achievement, it is well documented that children and youth living in poverty and low-income communities perform far below their counterparts in middle- and upper-class communities. A strong and consistent correlation exists between family income and academic achievement, according to a 2006 research brief, *The Academic Achievement Gap*, by the Dallas-based Foundation for Community Empowerment. According to a 2009 report by McKinsey & Company (*The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*), impoverished students (defined as those receiving federally subsidized lunches) lag academically behind their more affluent counterparts by roughly two years. The poverty gap appears early and persists over the student's lifetime. Schools composed mostly of low-income students perform much worse than schools with more affluent enrollments.

Economically disadvantaged students advance their education at rates consistently lower than their

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middle- and upper-income peers. According to the Texas KIDS Count Project Report for 2008-09, the passing rate for economically disadvantaged students across the five Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests was 14.4% below their more affluent peers (75% versus 89%). According to a 2010 Texas Education Agency (TEA) report for the same period, students in every elementary grade (1-6) who were economically disadvantaged also had a higher retention rate (3.1%) than students from higher-income households (2%).

The vast majority of the low-income students served by PT also have limited English proficiency (LEP). According to the TEA, reading and language difficulties have been strongly implicated in elementary school retention. In 2008-09, LEP students overall had higher rates of retention (3.7%) than English-proficient students (2.3%) in all grades (1-6) in Texas.

Lack of summer reading has also been identified as a significant problem among low-income children. A 2007 research report from the National Center for Summer Learning found that two-thirds of the ninth-grade reading achievement gap between low- and higher-income students can be attributed to unequal access to summer learning opportunities. By the end of 5th grade, low-income students are up to 2.5 years behind in reading compared with their higher-income peers, largely because low-income students' reading skills stagnate or decline over the summer break. However, research shows noteworthy improvement in vocabulary, comprehension, phonics skills, and recitation among children enrolled in summer programs that emphasize reading enrichment.

Addressing an issue as vast and complex as academic performance demands a collaborative response, and PT is uniquely positioned to bring together various community groups: By basing the programs in urban churches and community centers that were otherwise vacant and nearly abandoned, PT turns neighborhood liabilities into assets by providing safe spaces for children and youth to grow and develop; by partnering with the United Methodist Church, other faith-based groups, and local businesses, PT attracts the volunteer support of over 1,200 individuals to serve in the program; by

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training AmeriCorps members to take the lead in planning and implementing the program, a new generation of leaders emerges with hands-on experience and a passion for improving the education of under-served children and youth; and by actively seeking AmeriCorps members from the communities served, PT empowers youth to invest in the education and development of their own communities.

Though each of the nine neighborhoods surrounding the inner-city sites has its own distinct challenges, all share similar characteristics, according to statistics gathered from the 2000 U.S. Census, the Dallas Independent School District, and the TEA.

According to the Census, an average of 42% of adults in the nine communities served have not completed high school, far above the national average of 20%. Also, over 41% of families speak a language other than English at home, compared with 19% nationwide. These statistics are both a fair indicator of parents' confidence and ability to assist their children with their studies.

The Census also shows the number of households living below poverty in the nine neighborhoods is two times higher than the national average of 9.2%. The TEA provides the most telling statistic demonstrating financial need: Of the 17 elementary and middle schools in neighborhoods served by PT, an average of 90% of the enrollments qualify for a low-income subsidy of free or reduced-price lunches. Analyze Dallas, a project of the Foundation for Community Empowerment, reports that all of the neighborhoods in Dallas served by PT exceed the 2000 Census criteria for severely distressed neighborhoods: greater than 34% of males ages 16-24 are unemployed, greater than 26% of all residents are living in poverty, greater than 35% of families are headed by a female, and greater than 23% of children drop out of high school. Results of standardized testing show most of the schools are struggling to educate their students. On the 2009-10 state-mandated TAKS test, the majority of 17 schools in the neighborhoods served by PT scored below the passing average of 70%. Ten of the 17 inner-city neighborhood schools had passing rates below 62%. The average reading and math TAKS

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scores were also below the state averages. Sixty-one percent of the students have limited English proficiency.

Grade retention rates also reflect the high number of students struggling in area schools. The average retention rate of students in elementary schools nearest each of the sites (3.1%) is higher than the state average of 2.39%.

Though PT's primary focus is on education and child development, it is also important to note that the program, by its very nature, fills another pressing need: child safety. Access to quality affordable summer and after-school supervision is among the most crucial issues that face all low-income families, and no less so in the communities that PT serves. According to a 2007 study performed by Austin-based Clickin Research, Inc., 19% (64,293) of Dallas County's 330,050 children go unsupervised during out-of-school hours. Numerous national studies consistently show that "latchkey kids" are more likely to be involved in violent crime, substance abuse, tobacco use, and other high-risk behaviors. To accommodate the current unmet need in Dallas County, 97,000 spaces would need to be added to its out-of-school programs. Clickin Research, Inc. also reported that 80% of Dallas County citizens have identified out-of-school care as a "serious" or "extremely serious" issue. This sort of data, however, cannot complete the portrait of worry and struggle that occurs in these families' day-to-day lives. "These children and youth face influences like gangs, drugs, sex, and negative personal, family, and social behaviors on a daily basis," says Rev. Edgar Bazan, supervisor of the PT site in the Oak Cliff neighborhood. "They need a lot of personal attention and support to continue to be encouraged to reach for high ideals."

Health and nutrition are additional poverty-related issues addressed by PT that have an impact on children's educational success. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that children lag academically when they eat poorly or engage in too little physical activity. A 2008 study in the *Journal of School Health* documented a direct correlation between poor nutrition and poor literacy.

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Additionally, a study published in the July 2001 issue of the journal Pediatrics found that children with poor nutrition have significantly lower math scores, and are more likely to repeat a grade and be suspended from school.

According to a 2006 study by the Texas Department of Health Services, 35% of Texas school-age children are considered overweight or obese, a condition that has startling long-term effects: A child who is overweight at age 12 has a 75% chance of being an overweight adult. The study further shows that the psychological impact of obesity includes lower self-esteem, emotional distress, depression, and anxiety.

PT's services address yet another critical need among the wider community: a variety of quality volunteer opportunities. According to the 2001 Independent Sector Survey on Giving and Volunteering in the United States, only 4% of Americans devote more than 25 hours per month to volunteering. Of those who volunteer, 71% do so only because they are asked. Volunteer retention often depends on an organization's ability to effectively manage and place its volunteers in a useful setting. PT's volunteers consistently report that this program answers these needs. Kim Brannon, a volunteer who has served with the organization since its inception, now has made service with PT a regular tradition for her entire family. "Somewhere in all those years," she says, "this stopped being a volunteer job and became a labor of love."

PT selected this population it serves because low-income status is among the primary at-risk factors for poor academic performance. Our programs exclusively serve those in most economic need, and our service sites are strategically located to reach this population easily.

b. SOLUTION: AMERICORPS MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

For children and youth in severely distressed neighborhoods to have a greater chance of becoming productive citizens, they need academic assistance, constructive activities, and proper nutrition, but a key factor that must accompany these services is increased interaction with responsible adults. PT

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meets the needs of over 800 children and youth in low-income Dallas neighborhoods and underserved communities in outlying areas by providing free after-school programming and summer day camps. The relationships built and the support provided by PT's AmeriCorps members, help each participant have a greater chance of becoming a contributor to the community.

PT's activities are composed of two interrelated projects that are divided into the school year and the summer:

1) The after-school program operates at six sites, serving 150 children, grades 1 through 9, four days a week during the fall and spring semesters.

The sites -- five churches and one community center -- are staffed by a total of seven full-time members, seven half-time members, seven quarter-time members, and 14 minimum-time members. The seven full-time members serve as "site coordinators" at the six locations (two site coordinators serve at one site that has separate activities for elementary and youth). They are responsible for all aspects of the planning and implementation of the programming, as well as assisting in overseeing the efforts of the volunteers. PT's director of programming and leadership development and the staff supervisors from each site offer weekly support to site coordinators for their leadership role. The half-time, quarter-time, and minimum-time members assist the site coordinators in leading all activities. Many of the members are also enrolled in local colleges and universities, so the variety of service positions and schedules accommodates class schedules, allowing more members to serve.

A typical day for full-time members begins at 9:30 a.m. when they arrive at PT's Leadership Center and begin planning the program activities for the afternoon. Even though members fan out to different locations in the afternoon, they work as a team to plan the same curriculum for each week. This instills in the members a sense of responsibility for all the children in the after-school program, not just the students at their own site. Members also use the morning and early afternoon to meet with PT's director of programming and leadership development, share new ideas and successes,

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address challenges, meet with students in their schools during lunch, and communicate with teachers to discuss the children's needs and struggles. Members also plan bi-monthly "Family Fun Nights," parent-involvement events where participants enjoy a special meal, children's performances, site tours, and games.

Once the children arrive, between 3 and 3:30 p.m., members provide them with a safe, constructive environment until 6 p.m. During the first hour, members help the students with homework, focusing especially on math, and provide additional academic-enrichment activities. The children are then served a hot, balanced meal prepared by a cook recruited from the neighborhood; many of the children would not otherwise receive an evening meal. After supper, the children finish homework, then participate in a rotating assortment of group activities, such as Movement Minutes (30 minutes of vigorous physical activity), Healthy Habits (interactive nutrition education lessons), Special Thirty (educational games or special activities prepared by the members), arts and crafts projects, and guest presentations. Throughout the afternoon, volunteers and work-study students regularly offer assistance. Parents pick up their children by 6 p.m.

2) The summer program, PT's centerpiece, operates at nine sites, serving over 800 children and youth, grades 1 through 9, four days a week from June through the first week of August. While the primary focus of the summer is a one-on-one literacy program for children, the following components address the many needs of children, youth, their families, and the community:

i) The day camp offers a safe, community-oriented, constructive environment four days a week for eight weeks. In 2011, PT will serve over 800 children and youth, grades 1 through 9, at nine sites -- eight churches and one community center -- all of which are partner organizations.

The summer program is implemented by 86 quarter-time members, seven full-time members and seven half-time members. These members are divided among the nine sites in a manner that maintains a minimum of an 8:1 student-to-member ratio. A typical day begins at 8:30 a.m. when the

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members arrive at the sites. The elementary children arrive at 9 a.m. for "Harambee," which is Swahili for "coming together." For 30 minutes, the members and children play games, sing, and get ready for the day. The children then divide into three groups, according to grade level, and rotate through different activity centers, including one-on-one reading with volunteers, arts and crafts, and recreation. The reading volunteers, who are recruited from area churches, organizations, and businesses, help the children improve fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension, which are three of the five basic reading components. These volunteers also help students to improve their reading self-efficacy and attitudes toward reading, which research shows has a direct correlation to reading achievement levels.

At noon, a nutritious lunch is served. Starting at 1 p.m., members lead the children in afternoon enrichment activities, such as swimming at a city pool, doing creative-arts projects, or visiting a museum. Invited guests and community organizations, such as the Dallas Children's Theatre or the local fire department, also present programs in the afternoon.

The youth, grades 6-9, begin their day at 9 a.m. and follow a different schedule, which includes a book club (group reading with age-appropriate books), training in team-building, mountain bike excursions, discussions on current events, leadership development, and service learning. The youth from each site also participate in several service projects throughout the summer, such as a neighborhood clean-up effort or a car wash to benefit a community need they select. In addition, the youth assist members with activities for the younger children, including reading, arts, crafts, and games.

The day for the children and youth ends at 3 p.m.; members then spend an hour cleaning up and preparing for the next day. At least once a week, they make home visits to get better acquainted with the children's families and gain a deeper understanding of their needs and challenges.

ii) Special events offer members other opportunities for community development. On two evenings

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during the eight weeks, members and partner organizations collaborate on Family Fun Nights, which encourage community fellowship.

iii) At the end of eight weeks, approximately 180 participants in grades 6-12 attend a free five-day overnight camp designed for the personal development of under-served youth. Among the activities are swimming, horseback-riding, cooking, sports, and a ropes course. Members serve as camp counselors at the facility, which is located in a rural setting about 100 miles northwest of Dallas. As a result of increased interest in the camp among older youth, PT started the L.I.T.E. (Leaders In Training Experience) Program in 2006, which invites high school students who previously attended camp to serve in leadership positions alongside the members. This program allows older youth to develop leadership skills and serve as role models for the younger students. To date, five L.I.T.E. participants have returned to PT to serve as AmeriCorps members.

iv) All members are required to speak at least once to a church or civic group in an effort to recruit and sustain volunteers. Through the public speaking and readiness-to-serve trainings, members develop the skills and authority to talk about AmeriCorps, PT, their service experience, and opportunities for volunteers.

c. AMERICORPS MEMBER SELECTION, TRAINING, AND SUPERVISION

The PT staff carries out a year-long strategic recruitment and selection plan. This innovative program primarily recruits applicants in these ways:

- 1) The 679 former members scattered in 35 states are the best recruiters, and they have committed themselves to seeking out potential applicants and encouraging their participation.
- 2) The program staff solicits area churches, groups, and colleges, seeking recommendations for possible applicants, then contacts the candidates. To promote a diverse member corps, PT specifically targets minority churches and colleges, as well as groups devoted to minority interests. The past four years, 35% of members represented racial minorities.

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3) Site supervisors and PT staff identify and encourage possible applicants from the neighborhoods the program serves. Because the program is 12 years old, PT participants are now graduating from high school and enrolling in college, often with the anticipation of serving as AmeriCorps members, through PT, in their home community. To date, five former participants have served as members and dozens more return to volunteer.

4) Many Internet sites related to college internships are linked to the program website, which features an application form that can be downloaded.

5) The program's registration on the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)'s online-recruiting tool widens the net even further.

Before members enter the field, they undergo a week of training by professionals in these areas: child development, team-building, CPR/first aid, classroom management, conflict resolution, bullying, child-abuse identification and reporting, curriculum planning, volunteer recruitment and management, parent engagement, communication skills, policies and procedures, food program management and national service topics. Also, PT administrators thoroughly train members on program objectives. Former members and site supervisors offer training, as well as insight into the communities' need for PT's service. Team-building exercises lay the groundwork for members to develop rapport. Members complete training evaluations and provide ongoing feedback throughout their service regarding the effectiveness of the training. PT staff meet annually to review the members' feedback and make any changes to improve their preparedness for service.

Team unity is built through weekly meetings with the director of programming and leadership development to assess needs, make assignments, and discuss interpersonal issues. Each morning, members share resources and ideas and collaborate on lesson plans for each site. Program administrators also are available for guidance and questions during these planning meetings.

A crucial component of member development during the summer is a weekly half-day visit to

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community-based organizations. Top administrators at each destination discuss the needs and resources of the populations they serve. These sessions also introduce members to role models of community service, as well as to opportunities in a host of service fields such as education, social outreach, counseling, and public health.

During the school year, ongoing training occurs weekly through PT's leadership course, with topics such as how to lead interactive nutrition lessons, close the achievement gap, address an individual child's educational needs, and creatively engage children in rigorous physical activities. Community experts are also recruited to lead social-awareness training on topics such as immigration, poverty, nutrition education, and illiteracy. During this time, members have the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their community service and civic engagement.

The entire architecture of the program is designed to instill in members the hallmarks of civic engagement in a democracy: cooperative work that cuts across socioeconomic, education, racial and ethnic lines; collaboration among various sectors; and community-building through grassroots connections. Members are doing the most elemental work of citizenship, rolling up their sleeves to tackle some of the country's most pressing issues at the ground level: education of children and youth, health, safety, and family concerns.

But besides their day-to-day work, members have other opportunities to reflect and learn from their AmeriCorps service. Our members have collaborated with other Dallas-area AmeriCorps agencies to generate group service projects. These service-learning activities allowed PT's members to interact with other AmeriCorps agencies and understand they are part of a national service movement.

During the past two years, intake and exit surveys were conducted to quantitatively measure members' changes in attitudes and beliefs about service and low-income communities over the course of their term of service. Results show that after their service, they were significantly more confident in their knowledge of the needs of low-income communities and more confident that they could use

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their specific gifts and talents to serve others. Members reported a greater likelihood that they would be involved in future service with low-income communities -- an impressive finding considering that the applicants selected already tend to be highly involved in service activities.

Members are supervised by an employee on site, who also interacts daily with site coordinators and partner organizations. During the site application process, the site church or community center determines which staff member will serve as supervisor. In addition, each site selects a leadership team of other staff or members of the community to provide support for the program and for members. Prior to the start of the after-school or summer program, all site supervisors receive comprehensive orientation and training. Training topics include: responsibilities of the site supervisor, PT staff, and members; program objectives; agendas for pre-program and weekly meetings between site supervisors and members; participant registration procedures; AmeriCorps guidelines; and important program events. Before the actual programming begins, the supervisor offers members at least one day of site- and community-specific training. Each site receives a PT staff visit at least once per month to ensure proper member supervision and provide ongoing support to site supervisors. Also, PT's executive director and director of programming and leadership development meet with each site supervisor for a mid-program evaluation to discuss successes, challenges, and goals.

PT's director of programming and leadership development provides additional supervision and support to members. All members receive a mid- and end-of-term formal evaluation, besides ongoing informal feedback and one-on-one meetings. Evaluations are conducted by program administrators, allowing the opportunity to highlight member growth, discuss member or staff concerns, identify additional training needs, and set future goals.

d. OUTCOME: PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The primary goal of PT is to help under-served children and youth improve their education. By the end of the three-year grant cycle, we expect to improve the academic performance of children who

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participate over that period. Through its after-school and summer programs, PT also expects to achieve measurable results annually in four areas: 1) improved literacy rates, 2) improved homework completion rates, 3) increased grade performance in math, and 4) decrease in grade retention. The logic model has served as the roadmap for PT, bringing together the needs, resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. PT staff have consulted with three AmeriCorps coaches over recent years to strengthen our data collection and measurement procedures. We have revised and streamlined all of our performance measures and instruments in order to ensure progress is recorded and reported in the most effective way. Performance measure targets have been developed based upon past performance data and local educational statistics, as well as through consultation with AmeriCorps coaches. Several program activities directly align with the four measurable areas, although PT utilizes the Corporation's national performance measures specifically for after-school program attendance, completion, and grade-level retention.

i) The after-school program uses an aligned performance measure, which focuses on attendance, program completion and grade-level retention. PT also measures impact through monitoring homework completion, confidence in academic capability, and grade performance in math. Participants' attendance is recorded using a student-tracking log to measure output. Each day, students receive 60 to 90 minutes of homework assistance, and a daily tracking log records the number of students who complete their homework assignments. PT's target is to have at least 85% of regular participants complete 100% of their homework assignments each day. Students are administered a survey to measure their confidence and ability to do well in school. PT's target is for at least 60% of 150 students to indicate that they have increased confidence in academic capability. In addition, members monitor participants' report cards throughout the year. PT's target is for at least 60% of 150 students to improve their grades or maintain successful grades in math over each grading period. The homework assistance and accountability provided by members is ultimately intended to

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result in an overall decrease in the participants' grade retention. PT's national performance measure target is for at least 98% of participants who complete the after-school program to progress to the next grade.

ii) Given that the primary focus of the summer program is one-on-one reading, PT's output target is for at least 800 students to receive individualized reading support. As an outcome, participants will increase their interest in reading and reading-related activities as a result of the summer program; this change will be measured by a student survey. PT's target is for at least 60% of 800 participants who regularly attend to indicate an increased interest in reading. PT relies heavily on volunteers for its summer reading program: At least 1,000 will be recruited annually to read one-on-one with participants.

e. VOLUNTEER GENERATION

Volunteer support is critical to PT's success and sustainability. Opportunities for volunteers to take part in PT's programming are wide and varied, including reading one-on-one with children during the summer; providing one of 50 meals to members, also during the summer; assisting members with students' homework during the school year; collecting supplies; and providing Family Fun Night dinners. More than 1,000 volunteers serve in the one-on-one reading program alone.

Members are actively involved in recruiting, supporting, and recognizing volunteers. Throughout the year, members recruit volunteers through public-speaking opportunities at various venues, including church services, volunteer fairs, high school associations, and PTA meetings.

All volunteers are trained by members, who also are responsible for tracking hours of service. When volunteers arrive at a site, members provide an overview of the day's schedule, methods for reading with the children, and strategies on engaging the children on their own reading level. Not only are volunteers trained for specific activities, but they also are educated about the important service that PT and AmeriCorps provide.

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Members also play a crucial role in recognizing volunteers at PT's annual banquet, which several hundred volunteers and supporters attend. Members are responsible for inviting and thanking volunteers, as well as giving presentations during the banquet.

The names, addresses and phone numbers of more than 5,000 current and former volunteers have been collected in a database, and all receive frequent program updates and requests for donations. PT expects to recruit a total of 1,200 volunteers each year, providing a minimum of 3,000 service hours in various capacities for both the after-school and summer reading programs.

f. PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

PT staff and members work to build ongoing relationships among the children, their parents, and community stakeholders. The goal is for all community members to feel welcome to communicate needs or program ideas.

The PT staff and board of directors actively seek to incorporate the viewpoints of parents, educators, volunteers, AmeriCorps members, and AmeriCorps alumni into the program design and implementation. Parents provide input through program surveys and members' regular visits to homes. PT board members and educators from the local community offer regular feedback, as well as consultation on program design and member training. Volunteers provide formal feedback regarding how their experience and the program can be improved. The board of directors includes one AmeriCorps alumna, who helps inform the board about member-development needs and members' capacity to meet community needs. Other community partners include the Salesmanship Club of Dallas, which provides training on discipline techniques, child protection issues, and counseling support for children and families; the North Texas Food Bank, which provides free, healthy meals and nutrition education to program participants; the Dallas After School Network, which provides professional development and quality improvement trainings for staff and members; and the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, which provides significant volunteer, in-kind, and

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financial resources to support the program.

The PT board of directors, which represents a cross-section of the community, recently completed another three-year strategic plan for the organization. This plan builds on two prior strategic plans, both of which were developed through input from over 30 community partners on program planning and development.

g. SUSTAINABILITY

In accordance with PT's long-range funding development strategy and the AmeriCorps matching requirements, the organization continues to diversify its funding sources. Funding is pursued year-round through grant proposals to private foundations. Corporate and private foundation support has grown over the past several years, strengthening continued relationships and forming new ones. PT is expanding the development staff in January 2011 to include a development associate, who will be fully dedicated to increasing foundation support. Thus, the director of development will be free to spend more time cultivating major donors, our fastest growing base of financial support. The level of individual contributions has increased 149% over the past four years, and we plan to continue nurturing this growth.

A significant component of PT's strategic plan develops methods to increase the number of multi-year major donors. In 2008, PT began leading groups of volunteers on monthly "Discover PT Tours" of our programs. These one-hour presentations have given volunteers an in-depth look at the organization, allowing them to learn more about how they can help meet the needs of the communities served.

Participants are then invited to become donors at a separate event. These donors become PT's newest advocates, and they are encouraged to invite their friends to a tour. Such new connections heighten the awareness of the program and the commitment to these neighborhoods.

PT broadens its support base by connecting each member with a church congregation or civic group, thus offering a focus to the member's commitment to provide reading volunteers, financial support,

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and in-kind resources. The member speaks to the congregation or civic group at least once to share program needs and ways to get involved. In 2010 alone, PT engaged 773 new volunteers in the after-school and summer programs.

Area universities also have become more involved in PT. Southern Methodist University, in particular, provides several work-study students for the after-school program. These partnerships constitute over \$10,000 of in-kind support to the organization.

PT continues to build strong partnerships to expand community support for the program. In 2007, PT became a founding member of the Dallas After School Network (DASN), a nonprofit agency dedicated to improving the quality of programs for the 135,000 Dallas County children requiring after-school care. In 2011, PT will be recognized as a two-star member of the DASN, the highest member level, which is given to those organizations who are actively pursuing a culture of quality improvement. In partnership with the DASN, PT's programs were highlighted twice on local television station WFAA's "After the Bell" series.

Since 2001, PT has been a key partner in the North Texas Food Bank's Kids' Café Program. Through this partnership, PT is able to serve nearly 42,000 healthy meals and snacks annually to over 800 children and youth. Additionally, the food bank provides training for members, and its financial support has increased as PT has grown to serve more children.

Organizational Capability

a. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Eric Lindh, PT's executive director, is the primary contact, and Casey Mellody-Camacho, PT's director of programming and leadership development, is the secondary contact for the grant application. PT has over eight years' experience successfully administering an AmeriCorps grant. The program's experience with administering a federal grant formally began in September 2002 when it became an AmeriCorps affiliate. The PT budget has been developed in accordance with AmeriCorps principles

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since the program's founding in 1998. Every facet of the program narrative, budget, and budget narrative interrelate. The budget reflects PT's emphasis on the members and their development, which account for more than half of all program expenses. The budget also reflects a reliance on volunteers and in-kind contributions, which keeps PT focused on the goal of building community around each host site.

Since PT's inception, we have raised funds, apart from federal dollars, to support the service activities of the organization. Sources of support include individual donors, private foundations, corporations, churches, and community partners. The AmeriCorps program is a significant component of the organization, representing 89% of overall expenses. PT has received an AmeriCorps State grant in 2003-06, 2006-09, and 2009-12 from the OneStar Foundation, as well as an AmeriCorps State Recovery Award in 2009-10. Funding from the OneStar Foundation/CNCS makes up 45% of the organization's budget.

PT's staff has demonstrated a high level of engagement and investment in the program. All staff members involved with the AmeriCorps program have attended at least one commission or CNCS-sponsored conference -- a demonstration of their passion for the program and their interest in continuing their development in the organization. All staff members are thoroughly trained on the importance of our AmeriCorps relationship and given proper orientation of all grant requirements by the executive director.

A 14-member board of directors supervises the executive director and provides additional oversight to the AmeriCorps program. This active, diverse, and experienced board has been essential to the growth and success of PT. One, a former AmeriCorps member, provides important insight from her experiences. Another has extensive experience working with similar organizations serving children and youth. Another is a member of the Dallas City Council and represents a district that encompasses some of the low-income communities served by PT. Several board members are on staff with PT

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partner organizations and assist in forging new relationships in the community.

The board meets six times a year and participates in separate planning sessions with the staff. Retreats for board and staff members and strategic-planning sessions provide an opportunity for everyone to collaborate in setting goals and identifying strategic centers of attention. Board members are also intentional about meeting the AmeriCorps members and sharing meals throughout the summer and during the after-school program.

b. STAFFING

PT is led by a six-member staff and a 14-member board of directors. The current staff members bring a wealth of experience to their respective responsibilities:

- 1) Eric Lindh, executive director, reports to the board of directors and is responsible for management of the operations and fiscal oversight. Lindh has directed PT for over five years, and his background includes experience in nonprofit management, education, and youth ministry. He graduated from Rhodes College with a bachelor of arts degree in biology, and he holds a master's degree in business/nonprofit arts management from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- 2) Casey Mellody-Camacho, director of programming and leadership development, oversees all aspects of the after-school and summer programs, including supervising and training AmeriCorps members, as well as planning and implementing the leadership course for members. Before joining the staff in April 2010, she served two AmeriCorps terms in PT's after-school and summer program.
- 3) Kristin Kelley, director of development, manages all fundraising efforts and foundation grant proposals. She filled this position in 2008 after serving as a volunteer in both the summer and after-school programs for over five years.
- 4) Daniel Canafax, program manager, oversees member recruitment and manages all programs serving middle school youth. He is also an AmeriCorps alumnus and brings several years' experience working with church youth groups.

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5) Janalee Shadburn, volunteer coordinator, recruits and manages an annual roster of over 1,200 volunteers from partnering churches and other community organizations. Her experience includes extensive work with inner-city organizations in Philadelphia, St. Louis, New York City, and Jackson, Miss.

6) Mary Norsworthy, administrative assistant, manages the organization's database, as well as collecting and monitoring data. She brings many years of experience as a contracts administrator with Siemens Corporation.

As the need for additional staff arises, PT plans to recruit from its expanding pool of former members and volunteers, a strategy that dramatically decreases the need for introductory training and increases the level of commitment.

PT's staff and board of directors actively support the AmeriCorps program by offering input in program planning and reviewing annual program evaluations. PT's staff and board also have had several opportunities to review this AmeriCorps proposal and provide feedback to ensure it reflects the three-year strategic plan of the organization.

PT exercises sound fiscal oversight and follows comprehensive internal accounting procedures. The executive director works closely with the board's finance committee to ensure that assets are safeguarded, that financial statements are in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles, and that finances are responsibly managed. The board's finance committee has developed detailed policies, procedures, and systems that address such issues as cash receipts, cash disbursements, reconciliations, purchases, payroll, financial reporting, grant compliance, and staff responsibilities. PT has always contracted with a certified public accountant to monitor the financial system that administers the AmeriCorps grant, and it will continue to do so. The current CPA has attended the AmeriCorps financial-management training and has contracted with the organization for 12 years.

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PT's executive director has over five years' experience in successfully learning and interpreting the legal guidelines, regulations, and OMB Circulars that are required to manage a large federal grant. PT's current and former board members bring additional legal expertise and oversight when needed. All staff members receive individual orientation to the AmeriCorps program from the executive director, and they also attend commission- or corporation-sponsored conferences relevant to their roles. PT's program staff also work closely with site supervisors through monthly monitoring visits to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps regulations and program objectives.

c. MULTI-SITE INFORMATION

PT manages the multi-site program from a central office in inner-city Dallas. Sites include eight United Methodist churches and one United Methodist-affiliated community center in low-income communities. Each host site must apply annually to participate in the program, ensuring ongoing commitment and performance review. Applications are evaluated by the board of directors based on the host site's demonstration of a clear commitment to and understanding of national service, desire to make an impact on the community, documentation of the economic needs of the immediate neighborhood, capacity to financially support the program, and willingness to support members' service.

Every year, a representative of each host site signs a memorandum that affirms an understanding of the program, roles, responsibilities, expectations, policies and procedures, and intended outcomes.

At each host site, a supervisor -- a pastor, community center director or qualified staff member -- is assigned to oversee all activity. All programming is planned and implemented by members. The host sites provide the use of their facilities and cover utility costs, which total more than \$200,000 in in-kind contributions annually.

Three times each year, PT staff hold a meeting with site supervisors to accomplish several goals: review the program's objectives, assess performance, cultivate new opportunities for growth, share

Narratives

best practices, offer training on AmeriCorps 101, and reinforce what service activities are prohibited.

The site supervisor serves as liaison between host site, members, and program staff, ensuring a prompt response to training and technical-assistance needs. A program staff member visits the host sites every two weeks to meet with site supervisors and ensure members are in compliance with program objectives.

Additional oversight is accomplished in part through the use of several monitoring tools that track attendance, volunteer support, homework completion, grade improvement, and reading progress. In order to generate feedback about the program sites, members complete evaluations at the end of each term to allow them to reflect on their service, recommend improvements, and assess their training. Evaluations are also completed by participants' parents in order to solicit their impressions of the program and its impact on their children and community.

All aggregated data is used to identify program strengths and areas for improvement. Information gathered from logs and evaluations is regularly reviewed for use in planning, and data is distributed to host organizations, so they can review substantiation of the program's impact.

The proposed sites have hosted PT's program anywhere from two to 12 years. Three of the sites have hosted the program since PT's founding in 1998. Each site contributes space, supplies, and utility costs in-kind to the program.

d. ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION

We have high expectations for our members and emphasize the need to make a full commitment to fulfilling their term of service. Since 2002, the first year of administering an AmeriCorps grant, PT's cumulative enrollment and retention rates have been between 94% and 100%. This speaks to the thorough recruiting, interviewing, and screening process undertaken to select members. In 2009-10, PT had a 97% enrollment rate and 96% retention rate. We did not achieve 100% enrollment last program year due to the delay of adding one new expansion site. This site is expected to open in

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September 2011. In 2009-10, we retained 114 of 118 members. Two half-time members were released for cause based on poor performance, one exited early due to financial reasons, and one exited early for medical reasons. PT will continue to emphasize the importance of commitment during the recruitment and selection process to further increase retention rates.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a. COST EFFECTIVENESS

PT has well-established support from churches and other faith-based organizations throughout north Texas. About 13% of the current budget comes from these committed organizations. PT secures much of this support by matching every AmeriCorps member with a sponsoring partner church, which then commits to assisting the member's work through volunteer and financial contributions. PT has also experienced a steady increase in private and corporate foundation grants, which now make up nearly 20% of the budget. Individual contributions, which account for 17% of the budget, are another important stream of income for PT, and the new three-year strategic plan calls for continued increases in major gifts and individual giving. Also, almost 14% of the overall budget is met by in-kind community support.

b. CURRENT GRANTEES ONLY

Even though PT has been an AmeriCorps agency for only nine years, it has already achieved a 54% match, exceeding the 10-year AmeriCorps goal of at least a 50% match. As a result of strategic planning, PT is focused on expanding its programs to reach other under-served communities in north Texas, as well as strengthening the quality of existing programs. These efforts will increase costs; however, because of the collaborative nature of the program, PT's base of support increases as its service expands. Additional partner organizations provide new volunteer and in-kind support, as well as help offset costs for more members. PT has experienced success in securing grants from private foundations, and continued success is anticipated. PT will create a new development associate position

Narratives

in 2011 to further increase this foundation support. By developing new funding sources and nurturing existing sources outside of AmeriCorps, PT plans to gradually decrease its reliance on federal support with each grant cycle.

c. BUDGET ADEQUACY

With nine years' experience successfully managing the program in partnership with AmeriCorps, our organization fully anticipates the budget will support the program design. There are 4.6 full-time-equivalent permanent staff persons and six full-time-equivalent summer support staff persons to support 38.113 Member Service Year positions (121 members). The majority of members serve during the summer in quarter-time positions, so additional support staff is necessary only during this limited time.

Since an important component of the program is member development, ample funds are included for year-round training and support. Also, the residential living program in the summer creates an environment for more intensive member development. Housing and dinner costs are calculated based on the previous year's expenses.

The grantee share of costs is 73% for Sections 1 and 3, and 41% for Section II. Overall, 62% of the budget will be supplied by the grantee. Because of the breadth of community support, the grantee match far exceeds the required amount.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

OneStar Foundation will be conducting a statewide evaluation for all AmeriCorps Projects that are part of the 2009-2012 cycle. Each program applying to OneStar Foundation for AmeriCorps funds is required to set aside a portion of funds for this evaluation. Project Transformation is part of this portfolio evaluation which is currently in progress. Upon completion of the evaluation, a copy will be provided to the Corporation.

Amendment Justification

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N/A

Clarification Summary

Budget Clarification Items:

Please make the following changes directly in the application budget in eGrants:

* Please revise your budget to equal the funding and MSY amount listed above.

-Budget is revised to \$478,073, 37.88 MSYs and 120 member positions.

* Section I-C (Staff Travel) Please itemize all travel expenses related to staff travel to CNCS sponsored meetings and Commission sponsored trainings to include air, hotel, ground transport, mileage, and number of attendees.

-This item was discussed between OneStar and CNCS and no change will be made. OneStar requires that programs budget for travel to CNCS and OneStar meetings/events; however, the dates, locations and number of events has not been determined. Because of this we are unable to itemize potential costs.

* Section I-E (Supplies) please itemize the costs associated with the Program Materials.

-Program Materials have been itemized in the following detail: (art supplies: \$4,000, books: \$7,000, recreation equipment: \$2,000, educational curriculum and reading program materials: \$1,000)

* Section I-I (Other Program Operating Costs) Please verify that the criminal history checks conducted for members and staff will include an FBI fingerprint check in addition to the state registry check and the NSOPR for anyone with recurring access to vulnerable populations.

-Criminal history checks for staff and members have been updated to include an FBI fingerprint check costs for 120 members and 21 staff at \$45 per check. This is in addition to the state registry check and the NSOPR.

* Section I-I (Other Program Operating Costs) Please clarify that all volunteers are receiving

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background checks as the budget narrative includes volunteers/staff/members at 300, while the program narrative states 1,200 volunteers will be recruited.

-Project Transformation's program recruits 1,200 volunteers annually; however, the majority of volunteers are recruited in groups from local churches. These volunteer groups do receive background checks, which are paid for by their respective church and also satisfies Project Transformation's background check policies. Project Transformation receives written verification of these checks. Non-church group volunteers are paid for by Project Transformation, which explains the lower number of 300 in the budget.

* Section I-I (Other Program Operating Costs) Please justify the costs associated with the residential program. The costs for a residential program are included in the budget but not explained adequately in the narrative.

-This item was discussed between OneStar and CNCS. CNCS now understands these costs and therefore no change will be made.

* Section III (Source of Funds) Please clarify appropriate permission has been obtained to use other federal funds as match for the AmeriCorps grant. The budget reflects \$10,500 in-kind match from Federal Work-Study program (U.S. Department of Education) - used as administrative/program support to assist in data collection and entry.

-The Federal Work-Study program is funded through SMU. PT has an agreement with SMU to place students in off-campus tutoring positions with Project Transformation for additional in-kind program support. Our written agreement with SMU is on file in our office and will be made available as necessary.

* Source of Funds - Please clarify why the total amount for source of funds at \$706,100 is less than the total amount reflected as grantee share at \$823,839.

-The \$706,100 is the total source of funds from Section 1 and 2. If you add in Grantee share of

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Administrative/Section 3 costs, you get the \$823,839 total amount. These amounts have been adjusted due to CNCS's to revise the budget.

Programmatic Clarification Items:

Please make the following changes in the eGrants narrative field labeled "Clarification Summary".

* Please clarify and explain the purpose and duration of the residential component of the summer program as it relates to the FT, HT and QT AmeriCorps members.

-This item was discussed between OneStar and CNCS. CNCS now understands the residential component of this program and therefore no additional information will be needed.

* Please clarify where members are housed during the residential component of the program.

-Members are housed in dorm-style living arrangements on the campuses of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX and Austin College in Sherman, TX.

* Please clarify how the 86 QT, 7 HT and 7 FT members are assigned to each of the nine sites participating in the summer camp program.

CNCS's request to change the MSYs affects the previously included number of different member types and so the new slot breakdown is now 87 QT, 6 HT and 7 FT. The 7 FT and 6 HT members are serving for the full year and will transition from their respective after-school site locations into the summer program at that same site. The 87 QT members are assigned to each of the nine sites by the PT staff to create a minimum of 1:8 adult to child ratio based on enrollment. Six of the site locations will have 9 QT members, two sites will have 10 QT members, and one site will have 13 QT members.

* Please clarify the grades in which the program serves. The application narrative states grades 1 through 9, however, the week-long overnight camp for L.I.T.E targets grades 6-12.

-The 8-week summer day camp serves grades 1 through 9. The week-long overnight camp is

Narratives

primarily for youth grades 6 -- 9, but the L.I.T.E. program is a leadership development component of camp for high school students grades 10-12. This is why the overnight camp states that grades 6 -12 are served.

* Please clarify the use of work-study students as volunteers in the program.

-Work-study students from SMU are recruited to serve in Project Transformation's after-school program to assist members in helping our participants with homework.

Performance Measure Clarification Items

Clarification items for national performance measures reflect our assessment of the following criteria:

* measures align with the need, activities and outcomes described in the narrative

*outputs and outcomes are correctly aligned as directed in the NOFO background document

*measures utilize rigorous methodologies to demonstrate significant impacts

Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants:

* Please clarify by selecting an intermediate outcome from ED5 through ED11, or ED26 for the Afterschool Program Enrollment performance measure. The application does not specify which intermediate measure was selected from the options provided in the National Performance Measure Pilot. Applicant-determined intermediate outcome measures are not allowed under the Education Focus Area.

-This has been changed to ED5 -- grade progression.

* Please remove the applicant-determined output and intermediate outcome performance measure for the Reading Programs performance measure. Applicant-determined measures are not allowed for programs that opt-in to the National Performance Pilot under the Education Focus Area.

Narratives

-The applicant-determined measure for the summer reading program was included in the application because it did not fit any of the national performance measures. (See response below)

* Please determine if the Summer Reading Program performance measure is appropriate for the National Performance Measure Pilot under the Education Focus Area. If it is, please consider selecting one of the Pilot output and outcome performance measures. Possible options are ED1 and ED2 and possibly ED5, if the program can demonstrate it can meet the rigors for demonstrating improved academic performance. Please reference the definition for improved academic performance on page 4 of the 2011 National Performance Measures: Background Information. If this activity is not appropriate for the National Performance Measures Pilot, you may create an applicant determined measure under Other and indicate it is "Other Education"?

-We have included the summer reading measure under "Other" as the Serve America Act Focus Area and marked it as "Other Education" for the Service Category. The summer reading program measure is separate from the National Performance Measure in the Education Focus Area because the reading program Performance Measure does not fit any of the National Performance Measures.

* If applicable, the performance measures target numbers may need to be re-calculated to align with the above funding and MSYs recommendations.

-The performance measure target number have been re-calculated to align with CNCS MSY recommendations.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Performance Measures

SAA Characteristics

- AmeriCorps Member Population - None c
- Geographic Focus - Urban
- Geographic Focus - Rural
- Encore Program

Priority Areas

- Economic Opportunity
Selected for National Measure
- Education
Selected for National Measure
- Veterans and Military Familie
Selected for National Measure
- Disaster Services
Selected for National Measure
- Environmental Stew ardsthip
Selected for National Measure
- Healthy Futures
Selected for National Measure
- Other
Selected for National Measure

Grand Total of all MSYs entered for all Priority Areas 11.54

Service Categories

- Afterschool Programs Primary Secondary
- Other Education Primary Secondary

Summer Reading Program

Service Category: Other Education

Measure Category: Not Applicable

Strategy to Achieve Results

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

On the 2009-10 state-mandated TAKS test, the majority of 17 schools in the neighborhoods served by PT scored below the passing average of 70%. Ten of the 17 inner-city neighborhood schools had passing rates below 62%. The average reading and math TAKS scores were also below the state averages. Lack of summer reading has been identified as a significant problem among low-income children. Participants in the summer program will read aloud with volunteers and AmeriCorps members each day to improve their interest and confidence in reading and activities related to reading.

Results

Result: Output

Students will receive support in reading during a summer activity program.

Result: Output

Indicator: student beneficiaries

Target: At least 800 students will receive support in reading during the summer program.

Target Value: 800

Instruments: Student tracking logs will indicate the number of students who receive support in reading.

PM Statement: At least 800 students will receive support in reading during the summer program.

Prev. Yrs. Data:

Result: Intermediate Outcome

Students who participate regularly in the summer program will report an increased interest in reading and activities related to reading. "Regular attendance" is defined as attending at 60% of the program days. We anticipate that at least 60% of the students will attend the summer program on a regular basis.

Indicator: student beneficiaries

Target: At least 60 percent of students who regularly attend the summer program will indicate that they

"agree" or "agree a lot" with at least five out of eight questions indicating an increased interest in reading and activities related to reading.

Target Value: 60%

Instruments: Student surveys will be used to determine the percent of students who indicate that they have increased their interest in reading and activities related to reading.

PM Statement: At least 60 percent of students who regularly attend the summer program will indicate that they "agree" or "agree a lot" with at least five out of eight questions indicating an increased interest in reading and activities related to reading.

Prev. Yrs. Data:

National Performance Measures

Priority Area: Education

Performance Measure Title: After-School Program Enrollment

Service Category: Afterschool Programs

Strategy to Achieve Results

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

Children in low-income communities served by Project Transformation are in great need of academic enrichment. The scores on the state-mandated standardized tests for the schools attended by the majority of students were well below the state average. Project Transformation's After-School Program will provide academic assistance and enrichment activities for children in low-income communities. Sites are housed in urban churches and community centers that are close to elementary schools with high populations of low-income students. At least 150 students will enroll in Project Transformation's After-School Program at the beginning of the program year and receive homework academic assistance during the year.

Result: Output

Result.

Students will receive homework help in after-school programs.

Indicator: ED1: Students who start in an ACED program.

Target :At least 150 students will receive homework help in the after-school programs during the program year.

Target Value: 150

Instruments: Student tracking logs will indicate the number of students who receive homework help in the after-school programs.

PM Statement: At least 150 students will receive homework help in the after-school programs during the program year.

Priority Area: Education

Performance Measure Title: After-School Program Completion and Grade Progression

Service Category: Afterschool Programs

Strategy to Achieve Results

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

Children in low-income communities served by Project Transformation are in great need of academic enrichment. The scores on the state-mandated standardized tests for the schools attended by the majority of students were well below the state average. Project Transformation's After-School Program will provide academic assistance and enrichment activities for children in low-income communities. Sites are housed in urban churches and community centers that are close to elementary schools with high populations of low-income students. At least 150 students will enroll in Project Transformation's After-School Program at the beginning of the program year and receive

National Performance Measures

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

homework academic assistance during the year. At least 60% of participants will complete the program, which is defined as attending 60% of possible program days. We expect that at least 98% of students who complete the after-school program will progress to the next grade level.

Result: Output

Result.

Students will receive homework help and complete the after-school programs.

Indicator: (PRIORITY) ED2: Number of students who complete an AC ED program.

Target :At least 150 students will receive homework help in the after-school programs during the program year. At least 90 (or 60%) will complete the program, which is defined as attending at least 60% of possible program days.

Target Value: 90

Instruments: Student tracking logs will indicate the number of students who receive homework help and complete participation in the after-school programs.

PM Statement: At least 150 students will receive homework help in the after-school programs during the program year. At least 90 (or 60%) will complete the program, which is defined as attending at least 60% of possible program days.

Result: Intermediate Outcome

Result.

Students who regularly attend the after-school program will progress to the next grade.

Indicator: (PRIORITY) ED5: Students with improved academic performance.

Target :At least 98% of students who complete the after-school program will progress to the next grade.

"Program completion" is defined as attending at least 60% of the possible program days;

therefore, we expect at least 88 of the 90 students to pass.

Target Value: 88

Instruments: Students' report cards or teacher/parent verification of grade progression.

PM Statement: At least 98% of students who complete the after-school program will progress to the next grade. "Program completion" is defined as attending at least 60% of the possible program days; therefore, we anticipate at least 88 of the 90 students who complete the program to pass to the next grade.

Required Documents

Document Name

Status

Evaluation

Sent

Labor Union Concurrence

Not Applicable