



# The Opportunity and Counseling Corps

Helping K-12 Students and Young Adults Recover From the Coronavirus Crisis

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# Introduction and summary

*This report contains corrections.*

As the coronavirus spread this winter and spring, nearly all of the United States' 55 million school-aged children saw their schools close. Families did the best they could to balance work, financial instability, family life, and efforts to continue their children's learning while distanced from friends, teachers, extended families, and support networks. Policymakers, school leaders, public health officials, and families are now staring down difficult decisions about how to start the coming school year. And with COVID-19 diagnoses increasing in many regions, it is likely that disruptive and traumatic school closures could continue in order to keep children, educators, and communities safe from COVID-19.

It is clear that federal aid is needed to open schools safely, prepare for more equitable remote learning, and stabilize declining state and local revenues. But recovering from this crisis will require more than that, which is why the Center for American Progress is proposing the creation of an Opportunity and Counseling Corps. This investment would enable schools and their partners to take the following actions:

- Hire tens of thousands of recent high school graduates, college graduates, and other community members to support students and educators as they serve in high-poverty schools.
- A significant portion of corps members would be devoted to tutoring—an effective educational intervention that has been extensively studied and found to improve educational outcomes across a range of subjects, grade levels, tutoring frequencies, and group sizes.
- Opportunity Corps members could also serve as resident teachers, mentors, classroom aides, or apprentices in order to provide technical support to families needing assistance with remote learning technologies; or they could learn trades to maintain school facilities.
- Opportunity Corps members could be hired through the expansion of existing national service programs, such as AmeriCorps, and other nonprofit partners; or they could be hired directly by school systems.

- Hire tens of thousands of additional social workers, psychologists, and counselors. These professionals could support students' and educators' mental health needs, connect students and their families with available social services and supports, and help students develop—and support them through realizing—plans for graduation, postsecondary education, and careers.
- The presence of social workers and counselors is associated with a range of positive outcomes for students, including improved attendance and grades, decreased behavioral infractions, and a higher likelihood of graduation.

Targeting Opportunity and Counseling Corps investment in high-poverty communities is critical because the effects of the pandemic have not and will not be experienced equally. As a result of systemic racism and inequality, job losses, COVID-19 diagnoses, and deaths from the disease have been disproportionately high in Black, Latinx, and Native communities; they are particularly severe in areas such as Detroit, the Navajo Nation, the New York metropolitan area, Phoenix, and Miami.

The efforts of one Detroit-based network of charter schools to stay connected with students led to several disturbing discoveries: Educators had difficulty contacting one child because she was on life support in a hospital as a result of COVID-19, and they were unable to contact another who was being cared for by a grief-stricken older sibling after their father died. In total, an estimated one-third of students and staff in the network lost someone close to them as a result of the virus.<sup>1</sup>

The social, emotional, and learning effects of this pandemic will ripple through education systems and society for years to come. Research has shown that following the Great Recession, school districts with higher poverty rates saw larger funding cuts, communities with the highest concentration of job losses saw achievement measures decline the most, and heavily affected communities saw more adolescents suffer from mental health challenges. Yet the current coronavirus-induced recession has seen faster and steeper job losses than that which occurred in 2008. Meanwhile, housing and food insecurity has accelerated for millions of families; there have been months of school closures and social distancing; millions have been diagnosed with the disease; and more than 160,000 have died.<sup>2</sup> Without significant federal investment, the pandemic will have even greater impacts than the Great Recession and amplify existing inequities.

As families and educators prepare for the upcoming school year, Congress is considering additional federal funding for schools.<sup>3</sup> There are three distinct types of federal support that public education systems require:

- **Respond:** In order to keep students, educators, and families safe and to ensure that children are able to learn in schools, the federal government must continue to require funding for things such as food assistance for children who rely on meals at school; deep and ongoing cleaning; improvements to heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems; personal protective equipment; equitable access to technology for students; equitable access to safe transportation; and planning and training time so that educators can manage multiple types of in-person and remote learning environments.
- **Stabilize:** Since most states and localities are required to pass balanced budgets, the massive job losses and slowdown of economic activity in recent months have dramatically reduced the tax revenues available to support public education. Without additional support, school leaders estimate that hundreds of thousands of educators' jobs will be at risk in the coming school year.<sup>4</sup> Increasing class sizes, cutting out electives and other programs, and reducing services for students would all exacerbate the effects of COVID-19 as remaining educators grapple with uncertainty and the need for flexibility if diagnoses increase.
- **Recover:** Given the lost instructional time, interruption of services and supports, economic strain, and physical and mental health impacts of COVID-19, the pandemic's effects on children will extend for years into the future. Just stabilizing budgets to maintain pre-coronavirus levels of services and supports will not be enough to recover from the trauma and learning loss that students and educators are facing.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, passed in March 2020, included \$13.5 billion for K-12 education. But that constitutes little more than a down payment for responding to the crisis in schools as they prepare for the upcoming academic year.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, which the House passed in May, includes nearly \$60 billion dedicated to K-12 education as well as other state fiscal stabilization funding.<sup>6</sup> But even if passed by the Senate and signed into law, those levels would not be sufficient to offset forecasted decreases in revenue. Nor would they be sufficient to address the need to increase state spending on public health, health care, and unemployment insurance in order to fully protect education budgets.<sup>7</sup> CAP and more than 70 other organizations recently called on Congress for at least \$250 billion in federal stabilization aid for the upcoming school year.<sup>8</sup>

No matter the total funds allocated, state and local fiscal stabilization aid will not be sufficient to help students recover from the spillover effects of the pandemic. The Opportunity and Counseling Corps echoes similar calls from prominent researchers, elected officials and advocates, and other commentators to invest in tutoring and national service programs in response to COVID-19's disruptions.<sup>9</sup>

While federal support is needed to bring this idea to significant scale, states could also jump-start similar efforts in high-poverty communities. Each \$1 billion invested in the Opportunity and Counseling Corps by the federal government could support some combination of the following:

- Up to 17,000 Opportunity Corps members could act as tutors, as resident teachers, and in other roles in schools and districts. By engaging with small groups of three students multiple times per week, these tutors could work with approximately 765,000 students.
- Up to 12,000 Counseling Corps members could serve as social workers, school counselors\*, and psychologists in schools.

Not only would the Opportunity and Counseling Corps provide significant benefits to students, it could also provide tangible benefits for corps members whose own postsecondary plans may have been upended by the pandemic. From February 2020 to May 2020, 4.7 million workers between the ages of 16 and 24 lost their jobs.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the disappearance of internships, summer jobs, financial resources to continue postsecondary education, and full-time jobs themselves could affect young adults for years. Research from prior generations has shown that for certain unlucky cohorts, graduating into a deep recession has lasting effects on employment, income, and even mortality.

Investing in the Opportunity and Counseling Corps can accelerate recovery in communities deeply affected by COVID-19. Children will have opportunities to build relationships with more caring adults, accelerate their learning, and receive the support needed to address traumatic events. Meanwhile, increased employment and local hiring preferences can stimulate local economies. Corps members just starting their careers or making transitions can build leadership and workforce skills that will benefit them as their careers continue. And thousands can be introduced to career opportunities in education and play a part in diversifying the teaching, social work, and counselor ranks in public schools.

# Effects of recessions and lessons from 2008

The Great Recession offers important lessons that can help the country to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, and a federal investment such as the Opportunity and Counseling Corps will be needed to overcome these effects. Interruptions to learning and trauma experienced by children will be strongly tied to the local concentration of job losses and economic strain, cuts to state and local education budgets, and COVID-19 prevalence.

Months of school closures and uncertainty about what school will look like this fall have and will undoubtedly continue to affect students' learning. Studies of prolonged school closures—whether due to lengthy teacher strikes or natural disasters—have shown long-term effects on students' academic progress.<sup>11</sup> And despite efforts to stand up remote schooling to mitigate the loss of instructional time, expectations, programming, and execution have been wildly uneven across the country.<sup>12</sup> Remote learning and education technology are not equitable buffers to meet the full range of students' needs; in fact, approximately 1 in 7 children lack home internet access, according to a 2017 census survey.<sup>13</sup> The lack of access is also significantly higher for students of color and students from families with low incomes.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, families differ greatly in their ability to provide and oversee remote instruction for students. While some families have the flexibility, time, and money to intensively support their children's learning, many families are prioritizing more immediate needs—particularly if they have lost a job, have additional caregiving responsibilities, or contracted the virus.<sup>15</sup>

This variance in instructional loss is likely to be further compounded by the extent to which a community relies on state dollars for education funding. Research from the Great Recession highlights that high-poverty schools faced the brunt of cuts to education funding and that increases or cuts to funding affected educational outcomes. Given the scale of job losses as the coronavirus has spread, it will be critical for the United States to avoid similar funding cuts and invest in the Opportunity and Counseling Corps to address additional needs.

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## Decreases in state funding disproportionately hurt high-poverty schools

Across the country, some combination of state and local revenue comprises more than 90 percent of funding for public schools.<sup>16</sup> Since local revenue for education funding predominantly comes from property taxes, wealthier areas have more of it and rely on it more heavily. State funding disproportionately supports high-poverty areas to help balance this disparity, sometimes as a result of court mandates.<sup>17</sup>

State revenue comes primarily from two sources: income taxes and sales taxes. COVID-19 has caused a historic number of workers to be laid off, and people are spending less overall, meaning that a rapid fall of income and sales taxes is squeezing state budgets.<sup>18</sup> Since high-poverty districts rely more heavily on state dollars and state dollars are shrinking, the looming economic downturn could hit students from families with low incomes and their schools the hardest.<sup>19</sup>

This phenomenon is not new. More than a decade ago, the Great Recession led many states to reduce their K-12 education funding. Per-pupil state funding in 29 states was still lower in 2015 than it was in 2008, and a number of states still had not restored their education spending to pre-recession levels by 2017.<sup>20</sup> While the federal stimulus and recovery package prevented even deeper cuts, that funding expired by 2013—and some states made it even harder to restore education funding by cutting income tax rates.<sup>21</sup>

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## Money matters in education

Studies show that when states reduced education funding during the Great Recession, the burden of these cuts often fell most heavily on the districts that served predominantly students from families with low incomes.<sup>22</sup> While wealthier districts were often able to offset the cuts in state dollars through increases in local property taxes, this was not possible for high-poverty districts. When combined with the fact that many of these districts incurred additional costs to provide compensatory educational programs,<sup>23</sup> there was a disproportionate impact on the capacity of these districts to provide services for various student populations, such as English language learners and emerging bilingual students.<sup>24</sup>



A growing body of research consistently points to increased investments resulting in increased student outcomes.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, these investments tend to be markedly effective for students from families with low incomes.<sup>26</sup> The converse seems to be true as well: Disinvestment in schools results in decreased student outcomes, which are particularly pronounced for students from low-income families and for students of color.<sup>27</sup> Put simply: Money matters in education.<sup>28</sup>

A study published by the American Educational Research Association in 2019 found that funding cuts imposed on schools by the Great Recession were associated with measurable and continuous declines in student math and reading scores and that they were felt most acutely in school districts serving predominantly students of color and students from families with low incomes.<sup>29</sup> The study also suggested that divestments in educational spending matter nearly as much for student achievement as do investments. This means greater fiscal support should be targeted to schools that serve the most vulnerable student populations and that are located in the communities most vulnerable to the adverse consequences of an economic recession.<sup>30</sup>

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## COVID-19's economic fallout will likely be worse than Great Recession

The ripple effects of an economic recession extend beyond the classroom. Sudden layoffs and business closings can exacerbate problems such as homelessness and domestic violence.<sup>31</sup> Local job losses can also inflict anxiety and frustration in communities and on individuals, even if they do not directly experience job losses, and they have been linked to worsening adolescent mental health.<sup>32</sup> When paired with the fact that COVID-19 infection and death rates are affecting certain communities disproportionately,<sup>33</sup> students from families with low incomes and communities of color are facing and will continue to face a high degree of trauma in the coming years.<sup>34</sup>

The breadth and scale of the economic crisis is literally and figuratively “off the charts,” with the U.S. Department of Labor reporting that the United States lost 20.5 million jobs in April 2020 and saw an unemployment rate of 14.7 percent—the worst records seen since the Great Depression.<sup>35</sup> Instead of being spread out over a long period of time, these intense job losses happened in a matter of weeks. The country is already seeing the consequences of projected tax revenue shortfalls, with states reporting revenue declines that outpace those of the Great Recession and with both cities and states ramping up layoffs.<sup>36</sup>Top of Form

The term “unprecedented” is ubiquitous these days, but it is an appropriate way to describe the combination of school closures and state and local budget cuts that school systems are encountering. Significant aid is needed to stabilize education funding and prevent the kind of cuts that lingered after the Great Recession. An investment such as the Opportunity and Counseling Corps will be required to recover from the trauma and learning loss that children and young adults will experience as a result of the pandemic.

# Importance of Opportunity and Counseling Corps' priorities

Given the massive scale of the recovery challenge ahead, an ambitious federal investment is needed. The proposed activities of Opportunity and Counseling Corps members are intended to address a range of academic, social, emotional, economic, and career development needs for students, school systems, communities, and corps members themselves.

The activities recommended below—tutoring, teacher residencies, social work, and counseling—are all evidence-based investments to address students' needs. Research on national service programs highlights benefits for corps members beyond immediate employment, such as skill development and civic participation. And there is an urgent need to prevent long-term damage to the career development—and even future health—of cohorts of young adults starting their careers during this recession.

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## The immense value of tutoring

In reviews of educational interventions, tutoring is routinely found to have some of the most positive and robust effects on academic success. A 2009 synthesis of hundreds of meta-analyses exploring achievement as an outcome variable found that tutoring programs typically have an effect size of approximately half a standard deviation, representing a moderate to strong effect.<sup>37</sup> Meta-analyses over the past decade have continued to find robust effects for both peer and cross-age tutoring,<sup>38</sup> seeing improved student success in a variety of subjects across elementary, middle, and high school students.<sup>39</sup> In a review of more than 100 studies of a dozen different types of academic interventions for students from families with low incomes, tutoring was found to have the largest average effect on educational achievement.<sup>40</sup>

One recent cross-age tutoring program has garnered a lot of attention for its widespread success. Modeled after the Match Corps program in Boston,<sup>41</sup> Saga Education brings AmeriCorps members fresh out of college to tutor math to ninth

and 10th grade students from families with low incomes. Today, Saga serves 3,300 students across 26 schools in Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C.<sup>42</sup> In a rigorous study of the model's effectiveness among male Chicago students during the 2013-14 school year, researchers found that students in the program learned the equivalent of two additional years of math, compared with their peers who did not receive the tutoring.<sup>43</sup> The benefits of the program in this study were seen across standardized test scores, end-of-year grades, and reduced course failures—an effect equal to one-third of the Black-white test score gap in 8th grade math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.<sup>44</sup>

To help students recover from the effects of the pandemic, a similar program should be scaled nationwide and to additional grade levels and subjects. Tutoring programs to buffer against learning loss are already expanding through formal and informal networks.<sup>45</sup> However, there are vast differences in how schools of different sizes and locales, as well as with different access to resources, currently deliver required academic tutoring for students who have fallen behind.<sup>46</sup>

A significant national investment would ensure access to quality tutoring for students who need it, regardless of where they live or what school they attend. Some proposals have already been made, including one that puts up to five tutors in every school and another that deploys volunteer tutors to support children on days when they are not in the classroom—in case versions of social distancing continue through the 2020-21 school year.<sup>47</sup> The Opportunity and Counseling Corps builds on these recommendations and would leverage existing systems to stand up a large-scale, evidence-based program that would benefit current students, recent graduates, and overburdened educators alike.

Tutoring should not be viewed as a substitute for traditional classroom instruction. Quite the opposite, as peer tutoring is typically found to be most effective as a supplement to, not a replacement for, traditional teaching methods.<sup>48</sup> In three recent reviews published in 2017 and 2018, paraprofessionals were found to be as effective—and in some cases more effective—as professional teachers were at tutoring.<sup>49</sup> The experience may be beneficial for the tutors themselves as well. In addition to securing employment in a tumultuous job market, tutors would likely see academic benefits for themselves. Tutors typically see improved achievement themselves as a result of tutoring others.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, recent high school and college graduates who saw their own educational experiences interrupted by COVID-19 could help serve current K-12 students while also becoming more prepared for their own future pursuits.

By supporting children with a significant investment in tutoring, the Opportunity and Counseling Corps can provide a path to make up for lost learning time due to COVID-19 closures. This would be more cost-effective than many other alternative investments.<sup>51</sup> Holding students back, for instance, would require an additional year of funding for each child's education and could take an emotional toll on already vulnerable students.<sup>52</sup>

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## The need for teacher residencies

In addition to serving as tutors, Opportunity Corps members could work in schools through teacher residencies established by partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education. Adding resident teachers to learn from and support experienced teachers of record could bring more adults into classrooms. This would allow teachers to devote more time to small groups of students and provide them with one-on-one support.

Policy experts have debated how widespread teacher shortages are nationwide.<sup>53</sup> However, there are acute challenges faced by high-poverty districts and in high-needs fields such as special education, math, and science; meanwhile, teachers for English language learners face additional obstacles.<sup>54</sup> These shortages are a function of schools struggling to not only recruit new teachers but also retain their existing teachers, essentially resulting in districts dealing with both a shrinking pipeline and a “leaky bucket” effect.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, there has long been a large demographic mismatch between the composition of student enrollment and the teaching workforce in public schools, where approximately 80 percent of teachers but fewer than 50 percent of students are white.<sup>56</sup> Numerous studies have pointed to the effectiveness of increased teacher diversity in helping to narrow achievement gaps and increase nonacademic benefits for all students.<sup>57</sup>

Teacher residency programs, in part modeled after medical residencies, provide a strong pre-service component for incoming teachers that supports gradual entry into the profession through extended clinical practice with experienced teachers, ongoing guidance and feedback from mentor teachers, opportunities to observe and collaborate with their peers, and aligned coursework often culminating in an advanced credential.<sup>58</sup>

Studies of teacher residency programs show that graduates of teacher residencies consistently fill vacancies in high-poverty schools and high-needs subject areas such as special education, STEM instruction, and teachers who work with English language learners.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, there are high retention rates for graduates of teacher residencies, even after several years in the profession, generally ranging from 80 to 90 percent in the same district after three years and 70 to 80 percent after five years—much higher than the retention rates of their nonresidency peers.<sup>60</sup>

Teacher residencies have also been shown to be effective in bringing more teachers of color into the profession. Close to 49 percent of teaching residency graduates identify as people of color, which far exceeds the 20 percent of public school teachers nationwide who identify as people of color.<sup>61</sup>

A large-scale federal investment in high-quality teacher residencies would provide a needed infusion of funding to help these programs grow and operate at scale across the country, allowing states and districts to make up for lost learning time and also improve the quality of the teaching profession as a whole.

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## The importance of counselors, social workers, and psychologists

In addition to the academic needs of students returning to school this fall, there will be a litany of mental health and emotional support needs as well. Culturally competent care and support from school social workers, psychologists, and school counselors will be especially crucial in the years to come. Social workers, for example, have a positive impact on a variety of student outcomes, including reducing behavioral infractions, improving attendance, and increasing GPAs.<sup>62</sup> The number of social workers in a district is also positively associated with the number of students graduating high school.<sup>63</sup>

Counselors, specifically, are necessary for helping students with transitions and providing professional mental health support. Students need support in order to perform well in school; a meta-analysis found that school counseling interventions have an average positive effect size of a third of a standard deviation for student mental health outcomes.<sup>64</sup> In practice, this means that both the quantity and quality of counselors is important. Lower student-to-counselor ratios are associated with a host of positive outcomes, such as decreased discipline rates and increased attendance, especially in high-poverty schools.<sup>65</sup> In a recent review, students with

more effective counselors were more likely to graduate high school and spend at least two years in college.<sup>66</sup> Importantly, the results were strongest for students of color and students from families with low incomes.

Unfortunately, schools were already struggling to meet demand for such support before the pandemic. Social workers lack opportunities to collaborate effectively with teachers or to support school administrations, and they face intense burnout and turnover due to harsh conditions, understaffing, and lack of social support.<sup>67</sup> There is also evidence of a gap between the research base for effective social work practices and current implementation in schools.<sup>68</sup> Most students give their high school counselors fair or poor ratings when it comes to preparing them for postsecondary success,<sup>69</sup> an unsurprising finding given that a 2009 survey from the U.S. Department of Education found that students receive an average of only 38 minutes of college counseling across their entire high school career.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, amid a need for mental health services that was already growing before the pandemic, only 20 percent of students attend a school that meets the recommended ratio of at least one counselor for every 250 students.<sup>71</sup> As of 2019, 14 million students attended schools staffed with at least one police officer but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.<sup>72</sup> Schools simply do not have the resources to secure these support staff. In a 2016 nationally representative survey of principals, 75 percent of respondents cited lack of funding as a limitation to providing mental health services, and 64 percent cited inadequate access to licensed professionals.<sup>73</sup> With the country on track to face a social worker shortage by 2030, the time is now for an intervention that provides young people with a paid entry-way into the profession without requiring a postgraduate degree.<sup>74</sup>

Following the pandemic, there will only be a greater need for social workers and counselors to serve students facing new trauma, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about higher education and the job market. All students will begin the 2020-21 school year with the burdens of social isolation and distance learning fatigue,<sup>75</sup> which, according to developmental scientists, can take an especially large toll on young people.<sup>76</sup> Many more students will return with additional trauma following the loss of jobs in their families, housing, or even loved ones. And older students will be facing difficult decisions about postsecondary options given uncertainty around remote learning in higher education paired with a dismal job market.<sup>77</sup>

These burdens will likely be concentrated in communities that were underresourced before the pandemic. Schools that predominantly serve students of color and students from families with low incomes are already those least likely to have support staff available.<sup>78</sup> Black and brown communities are also seeing disproportionately high death rates and job loss during this pandemic.<sup>79</sup> And compared with their white peers, students of color are more likely to report that they are worried about long-term effects of the coronavirus.<sup>80</sup> As a result, the schools least prepared to provide students with support will be the ones needing to support students the most.

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## Lasting benefits of investing in corps members' service

In addition to the positive outcomes for students, research has shown that a national service initiative similar to the Opportunity and Counseling Corps could provide benefits for the young people who do the work. According to a recent report by the Corporation for National and Community Service, participating in service programs has been shown to increase the likelihood of finding employment by 51 percent among volunteers without a high school diploma.<sup>81</sup> Another study showed that alumni of service-year programs go on to complete bachelor's degrees at higher rates than their peers—and of those who earn degrees, 75 percent complete their full four-year degree program after finishing their service year.<sup>82</sup>

Service programs also allow individuals to cultivate valuable career skills that are attractive to employers—such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, self-direction, and the ability to work with a team.<sup>83</sup> These programs have been shown to enable participants to gain financial and personal resources, including health benefits; to hone their leadership, organizing, and communication skills; to connect with organizations in the community; and, ultimately, to be recruited into many forms of civic, social, and economic life.<sup>84</sup>

Participation in national service programs has also been associated with improving measures of individual citizenship and civic-mindedness, including a higher likelihood to vote and volunteer in the future.<sup>85</sup> In an impact report studying alumni of various AmeriCorps programs, participants noted being more engaged with their communities and more committed to public service than those who did not serve.<sup>86</sup> This was particularly true for people of color and people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Survey and longitudinal data from City Year and other AmeriCorps programs have also shown sustained interest in teaching and other public service careers after corps members' service.<sup>87</sup>



National service initiatives consistently show a high return on investment: Every \$1 invested in national service returns close to \$4 to society in terms of higher earnings, increased economic output, meeting public needs, and savings to taxpayers in the form of lower spending on government programs.<sup>88</sup>

Expanding national service programs has received significant support. In 2009, President Barack Obama signed legislation to triple AmeriCorps positions,<sup>89</sup> though those plans were never fully realized due to budget cuts in future fiscal years.<sup>90\*\*</sup> Several candidates in 2020 included expansion proposals in their campaigns.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the Senate recently introduced bipartisan legislation to expand AmeriCorps in response to the pandemic—and the bill has received support from more than 150 organizations nationwide.<sup>92</sup> With looming state budget shortfalls, coupled with many youth and unemployed adults seeking new pathways to opportunity, the timing is right for an initiative such as the Opportunity and Counseling Corps to leverage national service as a workforce development strategy.

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## Prevention of lasting effects for students graduating during a recession

Youth entering or preparing for the job market in 2020 saw opportunities for summer jobs, internships, and full-time employment disappear as shutdowns and social distancing measures were enacted. This spring, unemployment rates for young people skyrocketed faster than they did for workers who were more established in their careers.<sup>93</sup> Making matters worse, those unable to find a job when they are just entering the workforce are not eligible to receive unemployment payments. Employment in the Opportunity Corps would be especially valuable for vulnerable young adults, such as graduating foster youth, to help them avoid poverty and homelessness.

While this could be a temporary pandemic-related blip as these individuals launch their careers, research from prior recessions has shown that earnings effects on cohorts graduating into recessions can extend a decade or more into their careers.<sup>94</sup> There is also evidence from the early 1980s finding that college graduates entering the workforce during that deep recession suffered increased mortality beginning in their late 30s as a result of causes such as heart disease, lung cancer, liver disease, and drug overdose.<sup>95</sup>

This kind of “scarring” effect on wages and workforce participation continued for cohorts graduating during and after the Great Recession. Wages for cohorts graduating into that recession have finally recovered, but workforce participation rates for those and future cohorts remained lower than models would have predicted even before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>96</sup>

Before this dramatic increase in youth unemployment ossifies and lingers throughout these cohorts’ careers, one of the levers that the federal government has to connect young people to the workforce is through national service. The benefits of a massive influx of corps members would not only accrue to students currently in school, they would also provide income, valuable career skills, and connections to the workforce for young adults.

# Opportunity Corps program and cost estimates

The Opportunity Corps' design should allow for the expansion of AmeriCorps programs where there are partners ready and able to expand; enable districts to establish agreements with other nonprofits to recruit, manage, and train corps members; or allow local educational agencies to directly hire young people to work in their schools. A few requirements for the program are outlined below:

- Target and concentrate funding to support high-poverty local education agencies and high-poverty schools within those communities.
- Prioritize the hiring of corps members from local communities to increase local employment and support their younger peers. Local officials should also be able to set minimum threshold levels for the hiring of local residents.
- Offer a range of compensation levels based on education and experience as well as geographic cost-of-living adjustments. This would involve compensation at levels above living allowances in many AmeriCorps programs in order to ensure that the Opportunity Corps is a viable option for young adults from families with low incomes and that it can offer a family-sustaining wage for more experienced corps members.
- Include benefits such as health insurance and resources to continue their education, earn credentials, or pay off student loans.
- Create a cohort experience for corps members focused on helping them build relationships with each other and within the school community, develop the skills needed to succeed in their roles, and develop additional skills to prepare them for success in their careers.

While tutoring of students most affected by school closures should be a high priority for Opportunity Corps members, there are also a number of other roles that these young people could play in school systems to support teachers, improve services, and prepare for a range of career opportunities. Roles and responsibilities could include the following:

- Tutoring students most affected by school closures
- Acting as resident teachers as part of teacher preparation programs to learn from mentor teachers and be an additional support in classrooms, enabling more teacher time for small-group and one-on-one attention
- Acting as classroom aides and helpers, particularly in younger grades, to support teachers and enable more teacher time and small-group attention
- Helping with before- or after-school programs and activities to build relationships with students, promote wellness and mindfulness, provide additional opportunities for students to spend time outside, and share their passions through programs and activities that may otherwise be unavailable
- Providing technology support to students and families that may be more reliant on education technology while navigating or recovering from the effects of COVID-19
- Providing translation support for families and students
- Serving internships with building trades and repair staff to provide additional support in school facilities and explore potential career opportunities
- Serving internships with administrative departments in schools and districts to support professional staff and learn about career opportunities in fields such as finance and human resources

CAP estimates that the total investment required for each Opportunity Corps member would be nearly \$59,000. This would include paying corps members an average of \$21 per hour throughout the school year, three weeks of summer activities with students or in their other roles, and two weeks of training. It would also include health insurance and funding for an educational benefit of a similar value as the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award to continue their education, earn additional credentials, or repay student loans. The final component would provide administrative funding for recruitment, management of corps members, program design, and overhead.

TABLE 1

### Estimated hours worked, wages, benefits, and additional overhead costs per Opportunity Corps member

Number of paid weeks per year	44
Number of hours per week	40
Average pay per hour	\$21
<b>Wages</b>	<b>\$36,960</b>
Educational benefit	\$6,400
Health insurance	\$7,392
Supervision, recruitment, program design, and overhead	\$8,000
<b>Average cost per Opportunity Corps member</b>	<b>\$58,752</b>

Sources: Authors' calculations based on assumptions in text, made in part from consulting Corporation for National and Community Service, "Amount, Eligibility, and Limitations," available at <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amicorps/segal-amicorps-education-award/amount-eligibility-and> (last accessed July 2020); Eddie Adkins, "Survey: Charities Should Spend 23% On Overhead," *The NonProfit Times*, August 15, 2012, available at [https://www.thenonprofitimes.com/npt\\_articles/survey-charities-should-spend-23-on-overhead/](https://www.thenonprofitimes.com/npt_articles/survey-charities-should-spend-23-on-overhead/).

The research on tutoring programs has shown that multiple program designs can improve outcomes for students. Saga Education, the tutoring program that hires AmeriCorps members, matched two students to a tutor for five sessions per week during the school day. But there is evidence that fewer sessions with larger groups can be successful as well.<sup>97</sup> Some successful tutoring programs rely on hourlong sessions, while others see progress with even 15-minute check-ins throughout the week.<sup>98</sup>

The authors' estimate below assumes that tutoring sessions would average three students meeting 2 1/2 times per week for 40 minutes per session. If each corps member spent five hours of their eight-hour workday tutoring, they could support 45 students.

TABLE 2

### Estimated structure of Opportunity Corps tutoring sessions and total number of students tutored accordingly

Number of students per tutoring session	3.0
Number of needed tutoring sessions per week	2.5
Length of tutoring sessions in minutes	40
Tutoring minutes per Opportunity Corps member per day	300
<b>Total number of students tutored per Opportunity Corps member</b>	<b>45</b>

Sources: Authors' calculations based on assumptions in text, made in part from consulting Philip J. Cook and others, "Not Too Late: Improving Academic Outcomes for Disadvantaged Youth" (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research, 2015), available at <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/our-work/working-papers/2015/ipr-wp-15-01.html>; Jens Dietrichson and others, "Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students With Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* 87 (2) (2017): 243–282, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0034654316687036>; Gary Ritter and others, "The Effectiveness of Volunteer Tutoring Programs for Elementary and Middle School Students: A Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* 79 (1) (2009): 3–38, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0034654308325690>.

While not all Opportunity Corps members would be focused on tutoring, the authors expect that to be a significant focus of the initiative. Using the estimated cost per corps member and the number of students that each corps member could tutor, the estimate below calculates the size of the Opportunity Corps as well as the maximum number of students that could receive tutoring at multiple levels of investment.

The table also calculates what percentage of students in each school Opportunity Corps members could tutor if funds were restricted to 20 percent, 40 percent, or 60 percent of schools. For example, a \$2 billion investment focused on tutoring could support 34,041 corps members and tutor 15 percent of the students enrolled in the 20 percent of schools with the highest-poverty levels.

**TABLE 3**  
**Understanding the potential reach of the Opportunity Corps**  
 Estimated number of students reached, by investment size and schools served

Annual investment	Opportunity Corps size	Number of students tutored	Percentage of enrolled students served in 20% of schools	Percentage of enrolled students served in 40% of schools	Percentage of enrolled students served in 60% of schools
\$1 billion	17,021	765,931	7%	4%	2%
\$2 billion	34,041	1,531,863	15%	7%	5%
\$3 billion	51,062	2,297,794	22%	11%	7%
\$5 billion	85,103	3,829,657	37%	18%	12%
\$10 billion	170,207	7,659,314	74%	37%	25%
\$15 billion	255,310	11,488,971	111%	55%	37%
\$20 billion	340,414	15,318,627	148%	74%	49%

Source: Authors' calculations based on National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 216.10. Public elementary and secondary schools, by level of school: Selected years, 1967-68 through 2016-17," available at [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18\\_216.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_216.10.asp) (last accessed June 2020).

# Counseling Corps program and cost estimates

Given the need for social workers, school counselors, and psychologists to hold degrees and other certifications, the Counseling Corps would be less likely to rely on national service programs such as AmeriCorps for staffing support. AmeriCorps does allow professional corps members to receive regular salaries, and some communities may rely on partnerships with nonprofit organizations to provide services. But it is likely that many Counseling Corps members would be directly employed by school districts.

Using wage data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, data on the cost of benefits from the National Center for Education Statistics, and assumptions on the wage distribution for corps members, CAP estimates that the average Counseling Corps member's compensation would be just under \$81,000.

This estimate is based on the following assumptions:

- Funding is targeted and concentrated to support high-poverty local education agencies and high-poverty schools within those communities.
- Three social workers are paid at the 25th percentile for every one social worker paid at the median level, and one social worker in a supervisory capacity is paid at the 75th percentile of social workers' pay.
- Four school counselors are paid at the 25th percentile for every one school counselor paid at the median level, and one school counselor in a supervisory capacity is paid at the 75th percentile of school counselors' pay.
- Four psychologists are paid at the 25th percentile for every one psychologist paid at the median level, and one psychologist in a supervisory capacity is paid at the 75th percentile of psychologists' pay.

- Compensation levels would vary from these assumptions based on geographic cost-of-living adjustments so that school systems could attract and retain culturally competent corps members with competitive compensation.
- Benefit costs are 42 percent of pay.
- Fifty percent of Counseling Corps funding is dedicated to social workers, 30 percent is dedicated to school counselors, and 20 percent is dedicated to psychologists.

TABLE 4

### Understanding the potential reach of the Counseling Corps

Estimated number of Counseling Corps members per school, by investment size and schools served

Annual investment	Counseling Corps size	Number of Counseling Corps members per school if serving 20% of schools	Number of Counseling Corps members per school if serving 40% of schools	Number of Counseling Corps members per school if serving 60% of schools
\$1 billion	12,356	0.6	0.3	0.2
\$2 billion	24,712	1.3	0.6	0.4
\$3 billion	37,068	1.9	0.9	0.6
\$5 billion	61,780	3.1	1.6	1.0
\$10 billion	123,561	6.3	3.1	2.1

Sources: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2019: 21-1021 Child, Family, and School Social Workers," available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211021.htm> (last accessed June 2020); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2019: 19-3031 Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychologists," available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes193031.htm> (last accessed June 2020); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2019: 21-1012 Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors," available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211012.htm> (last accessed June 2020); National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 216.10. Public elementary and secondary schools, by level of school: Selected years, 1967-68 through 2016-17," available at [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18\\_216.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_216.10.asp) (last accessed June 2020).



# Conclusion

States, local governments, school districts, and charter schools are encountering an incredibly complex budget and planning scenario for the upcoming school year as a result of the pandemic. What needs to be in place for parents, students, and staff members to feel safe reopening schools? What alternative approaches do schools need to be prepared for if they need to close or if some parents are not comfortable sending their children back to school buildings? How quickly will jobs, economic activity, and tax revenue rebound to understand if budgets need to be revisited mid-year? Will there be another appropriation of state and local fiscal stabilization aid from the federal government?

There is, however, one thing that is certain: The coronavirus will continue to be a traumatic disruption to the education of tens of millions of students. Moreover, this disruption will have a more severe impact on children in Black, Latinx, and Native communities—the same communities with a higher prevalence of COVID-19 cases, deaths, and concentrations of job losses. It will take time—and a sustained investment in student services and supports—to fully address the academic, social, and emotional disruptions children have experienced.

During the Great Recession, job losses and education funding cuts were concentrated in many high-poverty communities and negatively affected student outcomes and even adolescent mental health. Yet the current recession has led to more severe job losses as well as disproportionate COVID-19 diagnoses and deaths in Black, Latinx, and Native communities. Money matters in education, and the nation needs federal investment now in order to help schools respond to the pandemic, stabilize education budgets, and recover from these traumas. Offsetting school closures, social isolation, economic instability, coronavirus diagnoses and deaths, and inequitable access to learning opportunities will require substantial investments in evidence-based interventions such as tutoring and counseling.

The Opportunity and Counseling Corps can help mitigate the effects of the pandemic for students while also providing good jobs and valuable skill-building opportunities for young adults. Research has shown that there are long-lasting scarring effects on the unlucky cohorts of young adults graduating into recessions. The United States needs to do everything it can to preempt decreased labor force participation, compensation, and health effects for today's young adults and for future graduates. It needs a large, sustained investment in the Opportunity and Counseling Corps.

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*\*Correction, August 12, 2020: The term “guidance counselor” has been replaced with “school counselor” throughout this report to reflect the more comprehensive role of counselors.*

*\*\*Correction, August 19, 2020: This sentence has been updated to correctly state the year in which President Obama signed legislation to triple AmeriCorps positions.*

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