



The six drivers of student success coaching

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This essay explores the concept of student success coaches and what elements or “drivers” are necessary to launch a student success program, particularly in systemically under-resourced schools that serve large numbers of students of color and students growing up in lower income households, similar to the students and schools served by City Year.



City Year AmeriCorps members are student success coaches

City Year calls our AmeriCorps members [student success coaches](#) to convey the proximate, caring and holistic approach they take to building positive relationships with students and supporting them socially, emotionally and academically throughout the school year. Through their partnerships with classroom teachers and activities such as afterschool programs, student success coaches also have a whole school impact on the learning environments and cultures of schools—conditions that help everyone in the school community to feel a sense of belonging and flourish.



[Learn more about how City Year AmeriCorps members are student success coaches.](#)

The additional capacity, relationships and resources student success coaches bring into public schools is particularly powerful in communities that have experienced decades of systemic dis-

investment, racism and segregation. We believe:

“Student Success Coaches (SSCs) represent an intentional counter to inequality, institutionalized privilege and prejudice, and systemic deficits, through the intentional promotion of thriving across multiple domains for those who experience inequity and injustice. This intentionality is reflected by where SSCs serve, the diversity of teams of SSCs, and their asset-based approach to the work.”

Student success coaches advance academic and social-emotional learning

The Student Success Coach framework has come into sharper focus for City Year over the past several years, as we refined our services and trainings based on feedback, insights and experiences of practitioners and partners and connected our holistic approach to the national conversation about what all students need to achieve and flourish.

We aligned our approach with recent research on the science of learning and development and [the importance of positive relationships](#), led by organizations like the [SoLD Alliance](#) and the National Commission on Academic, Social, and Emotional Development that produced the report: [A Nation at Hope](#). And we’ve more closely connected our work in schools to the advancement of educational equity—even in places that might never have a City Year program.

In the deepest sense, student success coaching represents what we’ve learned from our AmeriCorps members over a decade-and-a-half of serving in schools and what we hope to do alongside students, teachers and communities in the future. SSCs can be a critical part of providing holistic support in schools that are foundational to the creation of welcoming, safe and engaging learning environments where all students can thrive.



Explore [City Year's holistic approach to supporting students and schools](#).

Background on student success coach project

To more clearly understand what makes an effective student success coach (SSC) and what elements or “drivers” are needed to launch and sustain a student success coach model in schools, City Year partnered with Intentional Futures (iF) in 2021 to identify the key components of a K-12 student success coaching program. The project used a mixed methods research approach. Insights from student, teacher and AmeriCorps member focus groups followed by co-design workshops served as the foundation for the TPP, which was complemented by insights from an extensive literature review and survey and student outcome data analysis.

A key principle of the project was to center and elevate the voices of those closest to the implementation of the student success coach model: SSCs, students and teachers. This aligns with CY’s evolving equity-based approach to research and evaluation, reflected in [City Year’s guidelines](#).



The result: Intentional Futures developed a working hypothesis (called a [Target Program Profile](#)) that identifies six essential components or “drivers” of a SSC model.

- 1) Authentic coach/student relationship
- 2) Data-informed programming
- 3) Diverse group of skilled coaches
- 4) Intentional school integration and holistic support
- 5) Ongoing learning and development
- 6) Supportive program structure

What makes a successful success coach program?

The working hypothesis found that the coach-student relationship is the central driver in the SSC model. Positive outcomes for SSCs and students grow from that relationship and all other drivers contribute directly or indirectly to that central piece.

At the same time, because the five other elements are also essential to the SSC model and must be implemented together, the six drivers are presented as interwoven and interdependent, rather than in a hierarchy.

1. AUTHENTIC COACH/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

As near-peer tutors, mentors and role models, SSCs develop an authentic relationship with their students over time, building trust and a personal connection. This “developmental relationship” which the Search Institute describes as “helping young people be and become their best selves,” grounds their work and can help motivate coaches to persevere through their own challenges and growing pains and complete their year of service.

Key markers of this developmental relationship are trust, genuine care and belonging. SSCs promote more equitable outcomes for their students by involving them in decision making and elevating student voice to teachers and other school staff. Check out this video about City Year's developmental relationship work with Search Institute in Columbus, Ohio.



2. DATA-INFORMED PROGRAMMING

SSCs and site-based staff leverage quantitative and qualitative data to identify students for services, monitor progress for interventions and improve programming.

Data is used for improvement purposes and not as an accountability measure.

Sharing of this information requires genuine partnership and trust between schools and SSCs.

3. DIVERSE GROUP OF SKILLED COACHES

A thoughtful, data-informed recruitment process is employed by program staff to attract a diverse cohort of SSCs who are adaptable, diligent, reflective and committed to students.

Once accepted to serve, program staff ensures that proper supports—including asset-based framing of service expectations and benefits to support SSCs in acclimating to the school community and city—are in place for SSCs to begin their service year.



Learn more about what [you can expect when you serve as a City Year AmeriCorps member](#).

4. INTENTIONAL SCHOOL INTEGRATION AND HOLISTIC SUPPORTS

Teachers collaborate closely with SSCs, who become part of the school fabric. Student success coaches integrate with school staff by attending meetings and aligning their efforts with school-wide programs and curricula.

This integration is facilitated and supported by a site-based staff member, who works with the broader school staff to ensure effective cooperation between SSCs and the school community.

SSCs have frequent and consistent student contact, both in the classroom and across the school environment and help to promote a positive school climate. The program focuses on the whole child, with SSCs integrating social, emotional and academic support, leading to improved student outcomes.



Learn more about [how integrated holistic supports can improve student academic and social emotional outcomes](#) according to a study by the Everyone Graduates Center on City Year's model.

5. ONGOING LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

SSCs begin their year with pre-service training and continue through a year-long scope and sequence of professional training and support. This [learning and development](#) is designed to be a recursive experience that promotes intentional sense-making of their evolving identity as a practitioner as they continually improve through feedback and reflection loops.

What do we mean by recursive? We've learned that in many cases, the supports and connections students need—positive relationships, a growth mindset, and a sense of belonging, for example—are the same supports and connections student success coaches also need to be and feel successful during their year of service.

In this way, the SSC is experiencing a learning process similar to the one they are delivering to students. This enables them to improve their practice and acquire skills that prepare them to be changemakers who can work across lines of difference to make a positive difference.

Nine in 10 City Year alumni have reported that their City Year experience had a significantly positive impact on their lives and helped them to develop relationships with people from diverse backgrounds.

6. SUPPORTIVE PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The entire SSC program is grounded in an understanding of positive youth development, which informs how program staff support SSCs as well as how SSCs support students.

SSCs are full-time AmeriCorps members who serve in schools in teams. Full-time, site-based staff (at City Year, these staff are called "[impact managers](#)") develop district partnerships, support SSCs, and secure sustainable funding sources. The program maintains certain elements, such as

providing research-based, integrated academic, social-emotional and attendance support, while adapting to the priorities and vision of the individual school community.

Three conditions for successful implementation of student success coaching

We hope by sharing these six drivers, practitioners, policymakers, philanthropies, and young adults who are considering serving as student success coaches will gain a clearer understanding of the elements that are essential to a student success coach model and that schools and educators will feel better positioned to reflect on the elements they may already have in place as well as areas they would like to build or strengthen to launch their own SSC program.

In addition to the six drivers, we've learned over time there are three fundamental conditions for the creation and sustaining of an effective student success coach program in schools:

- 1) A commitment to educational equity and social justice is the foundation of SSCs.
- 2) The delivery of services is best understood as "universal practice" that is fully integrated throughout the school community.
- 3) The work of student success coaches must be "normalized" throughout the school community in order to benefit everyone and not unintentionally stigmatize students who are accessing specific supports.

Please explore the [Target Program Profile](#), which is a working hypothesis that will evolve over time. We're excited to learn alongside you, discover what is working well in your schools, and receive your feedback, ideas and questions.

We'd love to hear from you so please don't hesitate to [share your thoughts with our Education Research & Strategy Team](#).

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