



March 14, 2017

John White
State Superintendent of Education
Louisiana Department of Education
1201 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5243

Superintendent White,

City Year Baton Rouge and City Year New Orleans are grateful for the opportunity to provide a comment on Louisiana's Consolidated State Plan Pursuant to the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

City Year, Inc. is an education nonprofit fueled by national service that, at the request of school system leaders and community members, currently deploys 138 AmeriCorps members to serve full-time in 16 public schools, providing direct support to nearly 9,000 Louisiana students annually. City Year's work in schools is grounded in more than a decade of research that indicates the students most at risk of dropping out can be identified as early as Grade 6 through one or more of the "early warning indicators" of low attendance, poor course performance or failure in English or math. Through City Year's Whole School, Whole Child model, AmeriCorps members serve in elementary, middle and high schools, partnering with teachers and school leaders, to deliver a continuum of individual student, classroom and whole-school supports. This holistic set of services helps students develop crucial academic and workforce readiness skills and create the conditions for learning shown to keep students, particularly those most at-risk, on a path to graduation and college and career success. A recent third party evaluation found that students in schools that partner with City Year are two times more likely to improve proficiency rates on state English Language Arts assessments and three times more likely to improve proficiency rates in math than students in non-City Year partner schools.¹ Principals and teachers recognize the crucial role City Year plays in supporting school improvement efforts in Baton Rouge and New Orleans with 94% of teachers reporting that City Year provides essential academic supports their students wouldn't otherwise receive, and 100% of principals agreeing that AmeriCorps members foster a positive environment for learning. City Year is funded by a mix of national and local private and public dollars, which bring additional resources into the communities we serve, accelerating school improvement efforts. In fact, every public dollar invested in City Year is matched two to one by private sector investments.

To further support our partners, City Year provides a steady source of future educators for Louisiana who understand the dedication and commitment needed to support effective school improvement. With one to two years of pre-preparation before engaging in formal teacher preparation programs, City Year alumni who enter into teaching are far ahead of their peers in terms of knowledge of, and familiarity with, the opportunities and challenges of teaching in a high-need classroom setting. Since 2012, through partnerships with Relay Graduation School of Education, FirstLine Schools, and New Schools for Baton Rouge among others, nearly 40% of City Year alumni in New Orleans have become teachers. In Baton Rouge, 10% of City Year AmeriCorps members become teachers in Baton Rouge classrooms.

¹ Meredith, J. & Anderson, L.M. (2015). Analysis of the impacts of City Year's WHOLE SCHOOL, WHOLE CHILD Model on partner schools' performance

We appreciate the opportunity to work with schools in Baton Rouge and New Orleans every day and offer this comment to Louisiana's Consolidated State Plan Pursuant to the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the spirit of shared accountability and collaboration with the State and all who work to provide great educational opportunities and achieve excellent outcomes for all students in our partner schools, and in schools across Louisiana.

School Improvement and Partnerships

City Year supports the thoughtful approach the State has taken to gathering feedback on and determining the most effective way to support improvement efforts in low-performing schools. The State's recognition of the crucial role that proven external partners that provide a holistic set of services aligned with school needs, are accountable for producing results, and are committed to working with schools for multiple years play in school improvement efforts is laudable. The innovative School Redesign Summit the State hosted provided a unique opportunity for system leaders to interface with such partners and determine which partner(s) would best meet school and student needs moving forward. City Year is grateful to have been included in the Summit.

Further, the State's plan to support school leaders in building an improvement plan, potentially including supporting the execution of a needs assessment and partner identification and resource allocation based on that needs assessment will help schools identify the right partners and strategically leverage a diverse set of resources to improve student outcomes. As the State considers any guidance it may provide around partner selection and partnership development, it may consider suggesting that schools look for specific characteristics in their partnerships. A few characteristics of successful partnerships include: aligned goals, a customized set of holistic supports, clear performance metrics to determine effectiveness, and role clarity – all codified in a multi-year partnership agreement.²

Additional Accountability Indicator

City Year appreciates the focus the State is placing on reducing chronic absenteeism and encouraging LEAs to leverage Title IV funds, in combination with other state and local dollars, to address that need. City Year has seen the positive effect such efforts have had in partner schools and will look forward to continuing to support those schools in continuing to implement those strategies in alignment with the state's vision for the use of Title I and Title IV funds.

We've appreciated the opportunity to serve in Louisiana for more than 10 years, and look forward to continuing to support schools in Baton Rouge and New Orleans for years to come. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Louisiana's Consolidated State Plan Pursuant to the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,



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² American Institutes for Research (2012) Guide to Working with External Partners. Retrieved from http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/External_Providers_Guide_0.pdf.