Launched in 2015, Promise Corps, an AmeriCorps Program, is being nominated for the best new program addressing a critical priority. The nominator, Kerry DiNardo, program Site Supervisor, can be contacted at kerry.dinardo@phila.gov. Promise Corps connects high school students with pathways to work experiences that allow them to better prepare for a career upon graduation. Promise Corps  
is implemented through 25 College and Career Ambassadors —AmeriCorps members serving students at four schools in the Philadelphia Promise Zone. The Promise Zone is a federal designation of the Obama administration that encourages collaboration among private, public, and community organizations. The Philadelphia Promise Zone contains 35,315 residents and an overall poverty rate of 51 percent, nearly double the city’s rate of 27 percent.  In the four high schools served by the program — West Philadelphia, Overbrook, Sayre, and School of the Future — 100 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged. At Overbook and Sayre, the four-year graduation rates as of 2015 were 50 percent and 48 percent, respectively.

Each Ambassador supports a caseload of 50 students. In collaboration with the school counselor, responsibilities include helping students create individual work plans,providing individual and small group counseling, and offering a series of workshops exploring postsecondary options including college access, jobs and internships, the local workforce, and military and national service. The goal is that at minimum, 75 percent of these students will achieve grade level proficiency or graduate with postsecondary college or career plans.  In addition to these concrete responsibilities, Ambassadors offer programming including field trips to college campuses, financial aid assistance, presentations by guest speakers, and shadowing opportunities with employers to help students envision and prepare for their postsecondary pathways.

In Promise Corps’ first year, the program served roughly 2,500 students. Ambassadors organized six college visits attended by a total of 125 students to gain firsthand knowledge about the colleges of their interest, a critical step in their postsecondary decision-making process. For a program in its infancy, this is very powerful student engagement to have occurred in the inaugural year.

Promise Corps is deserving of this award because as an AmeriCorps program, we do not just “get things done.” Members have dedicated an average of 12.5 hours of time per student on their caseload. In this time spent with students, members have gotten to know their students and gained their trust. This has resulted in the creation of after school clubs that teach the Chinese language, coding, SAT skills, self-care practices, and more. Ambassadors also respond to student crises. This year, Ambassadors have supported students who were experiencing homelessness, navigating challenging guardianship legalities, and seeking guidance on navigating the college application process as an undocumented individual. Promise Corps members have saved a life each year of the program by working with suicidal students who trusted their Ambassadors enough to share their intentions. Members go above and beyond what is asked of them, and have taken on roles that go much further than college and career advising.



