



Evaluation Report
Notre Dame Mission Volunteers Program, Inc. - 22ED242684
Atlanta Programs

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Conducted by

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Executive Summary

A research team from the Tift College of Education at Mercer University conducted a process evaluation with Notre Dame Mission Volunteers AmeriCorps (NDMVA) programs in Atlanta, Georgia in the 2020-2021 academic year. NDMVA partners with community organizations in efforts to improve academic achievement and increase student engagement within under-resourced communities. The Atlanta programs all focus on immigrant/newcomer youth and the AmeriCorps members supplement those efforts in a variety of ways. The evaluation consisted of focus groups and a program observation conducted via Zoom as a result of the ongoing national struggle with the CoVid-19 pandemic. The evaluation team was able to conduct one site visit, but clearly the hopes that on-site programs would open up for more observations and interactions proved impossible given safety and public health concerns.

This report includes an extensive review of the existent research literature in the hopes of being useful to the programs as they continue to develop and reinforce their curriculum and pedagogical efforts. Several aspects of the NDMVA programs can clearly be considered *research-based* educational approaches and interventions. In fact, these programs can be considered in alignment with four of the five recommendations by the Education Trust's 2020 report on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development through an Equity Lens¹. Those recommendations include:

- I. Provide meaningful professional development and supports;
- II. Engage parents, students, and communities as full partners;
- III. Diversify the workforce;
- IV. Ensure equitable access to and supports for success in rigorous and culturally sustaining coursework;
- V. Develop inclusive discipline and dress code policies (*not observed/relevant in this project*);
- VI. Provide access to integrated wraparound services and supports.

The educators and advocates involved in the work of the NDMVA programs highlighted the importance of the socio-emotional aspects and their connection to academic success in working with the youth and communities they serve. Backed by extensive research included in this report, the NDMVA programs emphasis and commitment to a holistic approach to working with immigrant/newcomer youth enabled them to meet multiple student needs when the pandemic brought those concerns into sharp relief.

The balancing of one-on-one and small group approaches while involving the broader community proves to be a remarkable strength of the programming. Taking advantage of the broader Atlanta context by working with other community partners serving the immigrant community only strengthens NDMVA's ability to meet learner's needs. In short (and even under the constraints of CoVid-19) this research team has been notably impressed with the partnering sites and educators/advocates' research-based work with these diverse communities.

¹ See references but also available at <https://edtrust.org/social-emotional-and-academic-development-through-an-equity-lens/>

Context

In an effort to curb low math and reading proficiency among students in US schools, and thereby curb unemployment and poverty rates, Notre Dame Mission Volunteers (NDVMA) partners with community organizations to provide one-on-one and small group services to students to increase school engagement and academic success. In 2020, NDMVA partnered with 200 organizations in 25 cities across the United States placing 520 Notre Dame AmeriCorps members to serve in those sites. These members had direct impact on 13,112 K-12 students during the 2020-2021 school year with 7,375 instances of reaching out to frequently absent students and 17,693 instances of giving technology support to students and their families in the transition to online learning. Additionally, NDVMA members distributed 94,327 meals to students, their families, and senior citizens. In 2019, NDMVA conducted pre- and post-service student surveys and found increased school engagement among 63% of k-12 students served by NDMVA members.

NDMVA Partnerships in the Atlanta Area

Notre Dame Mission Volunteers has a rich history of serving in the Atlanta area and has experienced significant growth in its programs over the past few years. There is a combination of long-term sites and new sites, with a variety of member activities conducted across the sites. Beneficiary demographics in Atlanta are similar to those in many other operating sites, and most service locations are similarly structured across the city. However, the variation of member position descriptions among service locations is great enough that a case study could reasonably identify distinct member activities and explore the ways in which those varied activities support students.

Notre Dame Mission Volunteers has been placing AmeriCorps members in Atlanta since 2011 and has formed a rich network of both formal and informal relationships there, with NDMVA members serving in a combination of after-school and in-school sites throughout the city. The presence of NDMVA in Atlanta has rapidly grown over the last few years, with 19 members now serving across 6 sites and an Atlanta Site Director who serves NDMVA members across sites. Some sites where NDMVA members currently serve have been partners for years, while others have been service locations for just one. Established sites with a longer history of partnering with NDMVA include Agape Youth and Family Center (which provides a variety of programs for under-served families); Global Village Project (a high school preparatory program for refugee girls and young women); and the International Rescue Committee (a site that serves refugee families). The NDMVA Site Director utilizes local connections and relationships to forge partnerships with new sites in response to community needs as well as designs/modifies training and curriculum around the specifics of the Atlanta-based work. During CoVid, much of the Site Director's role was in checking in with NDMVA members as they all struggled with the dynamics of the pandemic and their site's response. The Site Director works collaboratively with Site Supervisors to ensure that there are supports in place for members to best meet the needs of the learners they serve. **Table 1** shows the roles held by the NDMVA AmeriCorps members at the four participating sites.

Table 1*Roles and Responsibilities of NDMV AmeriCorps members at participating Metro Atlanta sites*

| Site | NDMVA Member Position | Description of responsibilities |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Agape Center | Sutton Middle AmeriCorps Counselor | Member works primarily with sixth graders on the middle school team tutoring and supporting asynchronous school days. Supported the development of virtual club activities for middle school program. |
| | Bolton Academy (Elementary) AmeriCorps Counselor | Member tutors K-2 students in person and K-5 virtually, supports asynchronous school days, taught theater classes in the afterschool program, and supports the summer camp. |
| Catholic Charities | Refugee Youth Education Specialist | Member works with volunteer management and supports academic and mentoring programs. |
| | Refugee Youth Mentor Support Specialist | Member supports academic tutoring program. Member also provides direct tutoring and mentoring. |
| | Refugee Youth Support Specialist | Member provides direct tutoring and mentoring to youth. |
| Global Village Project | Health and Wellness Support AmeriCorps Member | Member is responsible for (1) coordinating and facilitating Health, Wellness, & Fitness classes as a part of GVP's Specials programming, (2) coordinating and facilitating morning and afternoon study hall sessions, (3) supporting and facilitating GVP's summer book club program, (4) supporting GVP's Women's Health program (held once weekly for 8 weeks), and (5) coordinating an end-of-year field day for all students. |
| | School Support AmeriCorps Member | Member is responsible for (1) coordinating and facilitating morning and afternoon study hall sessions, (2) supporting teachers and students in guided reading and/or guided math groups, and (3) facilitating GVP's summer book club program. |
| International Rescue Committee | Youth Futures AmeriCorps Specialist | Member supports college preparation, identity development, tutoring, and student engagement efforts. Member also leads the Reading Buddies program in cooperation with the Catholic Charities organization. |

Agape Youth and Family Center

The Agape Youth and Family Center is located in northwest Atlanta in a neighborhood that is undergoing rapid development and population growth. Agape's core service model involves in-school and after-school academic support programs for students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Agape serves approximately 200 school-aged children year-round through over 947 hours of programs and services. NDMVA members serve in the elementary and middle school after-school tutoring and enrichment program by helping implement educational and recreational activities, tutoring, mentoring, homework assistance, physical fitness and family involvement programming. The average student who enrolls at Agape participates for seven years and high school seniors enrolled in Agape have had a 98% graduation rate since 2009. The current population served is 90% Hispanic/Latino and 10% African American.

Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities serves immigrants and refugees resettling in the Metro Atlanta area. NDMVA members work in the after-school program teaching and tutoring elementary school students who attend Indian Creek Elementary School, located in Clarkston, Georgia just east of the I-285 perimeter. The school is a high performing school based on the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) College and Career Readiness Performance Indicator (CCRPI). In 2019, the latest year for which data is available, students at Indian Creek Elementary outscored 70% of all elementary schools in Georgia and experienced growth in the 99th percentile, indicating the fastest growth measure available. The school serves a population of 908 students that is 60% Asian/Pacific Islander, 31% Black, and 5% White, with 71% receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and 81% designated English Language Learners (ELL). The school serves a

large immigrant and refugee population and provides regular communications in seven languages including English, Burmese, Karen, Nepali, Arabic, Swahili, and Tigrinya.

Global Village Project

The Global Village Project (GVP) is a high school preparatory program serving middle school girls who have interrupted schooling as a result of fleeing their home countries. NDMVA members serve as teaching assistants and tutors offering one-on-one services in academic core content, literacy, STEAM, and summer programming. The girls enrolled at GVP are between the ages of 11 and 18 years old and read at a pre-k to kindergarten level in English. GVP boasts that 60% of the enrollees go on to access secondary education compared to 31% of refugees worldwide and 30% of alumnae go on to college compared to 3% worldwide. GVP is located in Clarkston, Georgia. The school serves between 40-50 students each year and has served over 300 girls since its inception in 2009.

International Rescue Committee

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) resettles refugees in the Greater Atlanta area. IRC in Atlanta coordinates with local school systems to provide enrichment programming for refugee youth. NDMVA members serve through the Youth Futures Afterschool Program, which provides school-year tutoring and academic counseling as well as a summer enrichment camp and summer internship programs that develop leadership and career skills. Youth Futures primarily supports high school students. The IRC is located east of Atlanta, just inside the I-285 perimeter.

Literature Review

The literature review that follows highlights research on school and after-school programs that support immigrant and refugee students. These findings from the extant research literature provide a framework for understanding the practices employed by NDMVA volunteers to support immigrant and refugee youth.

Immigrant and Refugee Populations

The immigrant population in the United States has grown from about 9.6 million in 1970 to over 44 million in 2019 (Department of Homeland Security, 2018; USAFacts, 2021).

Immigrant children now comprise one in every four school-age children in the United States, placing pressure on school and district leadership as well as communities to develop and adopt policies, practices, and resources that are inclusive and supportive for this growing population.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS, 2021) loosely defines an immigrant as any person who enters the country for the purpose of adopting permanent residency, however, different citizenship statuses—permanent resident aliens, deferred action for childhood arrivals (DACA), refugees, undocumented, etc.—as defined by the federal government have access to varying levels of legally available support and resources.

In Georgia, one in 10 residents was born in another country in 2018, while one in 13 was a second-generation immigrant having at least one immigrant parent (Department of Homeland Security, 2020). Atlanta's immigrant population began rising in the mid-1990s, marking it at the time as an “emerging gateway” (Singer, 2004). Then, in 2013 Mayor Kasim Reed made Atlanta the nation's 22nd “Welcoming City”, a national grassroots initiative by the organization Welcoming America to support cities in being “intentional [about] inclusive policies, practices, and norms that enable all residents to live, thrive, and contribute fully—including immigrants”

(Welcoming America, 2021). At the time, Atlanta's immigrant population comprised more than 13 percent of the citizens in 2013 (Campos & Torres, 2013). In 2017, Atlanta joined the SAFE Cities Network, committing to provide publicly funded legal representation to immigrants facing deportation in cooperation with the Vera Institute of Justice (Miller, 2017). Although the immigrant population in Atlanta has since shrunk to 7.6 percent of the total population, due largely to overall population growth of 18.7 percent over the same period (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), 21,573 people obtained lawful permanent resident status in the Atlanta core based statistical area in 2019, marking it as the 10th fastest growing city in the country in this regard (Department of Homeland Security, 2020).

Unlike traditional gateway cities like New York, Chicago, and Boston, emerging gateway cities like Atlanta do not have the historical immigrant enclaves that mark the traditional gateway cities. The lack of these enclaves results in decentralized settlement. As immigrants move into cities like Atlanta, they spread deeper into suburban areas where jobs are more readily available (Singer, 2004). Hagelskamp et al. (2010) found that economic factors dominated migration motivations, so it follows that in cities like Atlanta where suburban areas retain a large share of employment opportunities and where housing is less expensive, immigrants would find suburban areas economically appealing. On the other hand, however, smaller towns may be less equipped to provide adequate resources to support English as a second language (ESOL) in school and other supports immigrant and refugee students and their families may need. Additionally, non-government organizations (NGOs) that support immigrants and refugees in the cities might be more difficult to access in the suburbs. Over 80 percent of immigrants in emerging gateways like Atlanta hail from Mexico, Latin America, and Asia, indicating very different migration patterns compared to the early part of the 20th century, where European immigration dominated. Atlanta

specifically stands out for having higher-than-average percentage of immigrants from Africa, while Mexicans and Indians rank as Atlanta’s largest immigrant groups by population (Singer, 2004). Immigration patterns in Atlanta set the tone for the work of aid organizations that support immigrant and refugee populations.

Refugees

The United Nations (UN) defines refugee as “someone who has been forced to leave their home country because of a ‘well-founded fear of persecution, war or violence’” (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021, p. 5). The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) further defines refugee as “any person who is outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution...based on the alien’s race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). Refugees in the United States have varying citizenship statuses, with some being admitted as permanent resident aliens. How a person comes to reside in the United States has implications for the types of resources available to them—from health care to schooling—and the avenues through which they have to access, defend, and broaden their rights. However, all children residing in UN member nations are protected by Articles 28 and 29 of the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children under the age of 18 have the right to compulsory and free education for “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (United Nations, 1990). The United States Supreme Court more clearly defined the boundaries of the right to education through the *Plyler v. Department of Education* decision in 1982, holding that undocumented children of illegal immigrants maintained the right to attend public school in the United States

because holding children responsible for their “parent’s misconduct...does not comport with fundamental conceptions of justice” (Plyler v. Doe, 1982).

The right to education is specifically important to newcomers who face language and cultural barriers to enrolling and succeeding in school (i.e. Olguin & Sanders-Smith, 2021; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Although not a DHS category, *newcomers* are those who have most recently entered the country and include permanent resident aliens, refugees, and undocumented immigrants. Oikonomidou et al. (2019) defined newcomers as refugee, immigrant, and undocumented immigrant youth who have been in the country for fewer than 10 years. Although refugees, immigrants, and undocumented Americans each face different political and educational circumstances as they integrate into schools and society in the United States, as newcomers, they experience common challenges such as enrolling in school, learning the language of instruction, and adjusting to the culture of schooling in America. Despite these shared challenges, the political climate one experiences in the United States may vary by country of origin, gender, native language, accent, and resettlement location, as well as pre-migration experiences that have important effects on postmigration educational trajectories (see McBrien, 2005 for discussion). The newcomer period, regardless of immigration circumstances, is of particular importance for immigrant and refugee youth as the first 5-10 years play a key role in gaining English-language proficiency, academic trajectories, and post-secondary opportunities (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010).

Decentralization of Resettlement Communities

Prior to the 1990s, most immigrants had settled in large cities (Singer, 2004). The influences of overcrowding and expensive housing costs in the cities over the last 30 years, and the prevalence of less expensive housing and economic opportunity in the suburbs, have spurred

the rise of new immigrant gateway cities in suburban and rural towns across the country. Welcoming campaigns, driven by the organization Welcoming America, support localities that develop “intentional, inclusive policies, practices and norms that enable all residents to live, thrive, and contribute fully—including immigrants” (Welcoming America, n.d.). These decentralized patterns have both positive and negative effects on communities and newcomers. Despite narratives that refugees are a drag on local economies, statistics show, albeit with a lag, higher than average employment rates (Kallick & Mathema, 2016; Singer & Wilson, 2006; Kim & Bozarth, 2020), economic contributions (Kallick & Brick, 2015; Bahar & Dooley, 2020), entrepreneurship (Azoulay et al., 2020), and community revitalization (Kim & Bozarth, 2020). Small towns that have opened their doors to newcomers have experienced reversals of decades-long population and economic declines (Kim & Bozarth, 2020). Resettlement seems, in the long term, to benefit local economies (Azoulay et al., 2020). However, in the short term, newcomers often draw on resources at higher rates than established residents. For example, healthcare and welfare systems often cannot adequately support a rapidly increasing and non-English speaking population that tends to require greater resources. The short-term impacts are exacerbated when immigrants and refugees are not granted parity for foreign earned degrees or professional training, forcing these newcomers to professionally start from scratch upon their arrival (Kim & Bozarth, 2020).

Pre-Migration Schooling Experiences of Newcomer Youth

Although over 80 percent of refugees remain in countries neighboring their origin country (Bahar & Dooley, 2020; Dryden-Peterson, 2016b, 2016a), those who do migrate to the United States, often have lived in a neighboring country of first asylum² for years awaiting

² First asylum country refers to the country that permits refugees to enter its territory for purposes of providing asylum temporarily, pending eventual repatriation or resettlement. It can be provided locally or in a third country.

approval to enter the United States. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not allow refugees to choose their final resettlement country (i.e. the United States, Great Britain, or Canada, as well as several other countries) (McBrien, 2005), so depending on the age of the youth and the speed of their migration, refugee youths arriving in the United States may have experienced one schooling culture in their home country, a second in the country of first asylum, and yet another as they start school in their final resettlement community. Reconciling prior schooling experiences from countries of first asylum with those encountered in the United States creates additional challenges for refugee youth and the teachers serving them, who are often unaware of these pre-resettlement experiences (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). In a study of the pre-resettlement experiences of refugee youth globally, Dryden-Peterson (2016b) found that refugee youth have three common educational experiences in countries of first asylum: language barriers, teacher-centered pedagogy, and discrimination in school settings.

In the 14 countries that provide first asylum to most of the world's refugees, the majority require students to speak English or French. Refugee students who are unable to speak the language of schooling are often assigned to classes with younger children to learn the language at the expense of receiving on-grade level instruction in other areas (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). These children spend a disproportionate amount of time in language-learning classes and fall behind in other content areas (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). Language barriers often continue as refugees enter the United States. Olguín and Sanders-Smith (2021) illustrated language barriers in the United States in a case study of a refugee who entered the United States and was made to

Usually, first asylum countries obtain the assistance of United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR) to provide basic assistance to the refugees (<https://definitions.uslegal.com/f/first-asylum-country/>).

repeat kindergarten because the documentation from the origin country was disregarded for not being in English. The student was subsequently placed in special education due to difficulties keeping up with English-only instruction.

A second shared experience among refugee youth in countries of first asylum was the dominance of teacher centered pedagogy and lecture (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). Didactic methods (sometimes known as Direct Instruction or Lecture) can limit opportunities for students to talk and practice the language of instruction, thus extending the time it takes to learn the language. Often teachers and schools will withhold content area instruction until a student is proficient in the language of instruction, a practice which encourages subtractive schooling. *Subtractive schooling* refers to schooling practices and policies that openly seek to force students to turn away from their home culture, religion or language, or effectively force students to do so by making it difficult to maintain ties to home cultures, religions, or languages (Valenzuela, 1999).

Countries of first asylum tend to be poorer and face financial restraints that bar them from investing in refugees who typically live in poor living conditions in temporary refugee camps (Bahar & Dooley, 2020; Dryden-Peterson, 2016b; McBrien, 2005). The refugee population may be very large and put economic strains on the local residents who themselves may live in poverty or extreme poverty. The tension caused by this economic strain fuels anti-refugee sentiment and rhetoric. Negative and nationalistic attitudes toward refugees may lead to refugees avoiding school if there is a fear of deportation. Furthermore, discrimination often shows up in curriculum that frames refugees in a deficit light and “can be at best difficult to relate with and at worst highly politicized and discriminatory” (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b, p. 143).

In some countries, refugee students have been taught that refugees were terrorists, and that refugee is a “bad” word. Refugees reported bullying and aggressive surveillance from other students and school staff. These experiences make it difficult for students to socially integrate in school settings and may even cause additional trauma for students who have previously had to flee their homes (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). Furthermore, these experiences encourage distrust among refugee parents who then transfer that distrust and become wary of their final resettlement school. Just as with language barriers, Olgúin and Sanders-Smith (2021) illustrated that newcomers also experience hostilities in U.S. schools. In their study, a participant compared helpful teachers and school leaders in her home country of Guatemala to those she encountered in the United States who “allowed” her to struggle. However, a sense of belonging within schools may counter hostilities operating in the broader political community (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021; Kohli, 2011; Rodriguez, 2019).

Post-Migration Schooling in United States Contexts

Once refugee youth arrive in the United States, one of the most persistent academic challenges they face is the adoption of academic English and the stigma associated with less-than proficient English language skills or prominent accents (McBrien, 2005). Gaining proficiency in academic English is particularly challenging in states where bilingual education is illegal (as of this writing, bilingual education is illegal in Arizona; Hernandez, 2021), or not offered. Rodriguez (2019, 2020) found that after seven years in the U.S., only seven percent of students had developed academic English proficiency comparable to native-born peers. This is due in some cases to the premature withdrawal of ESOL supports as students quickly develop Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS)—the basic vocabulary and grammar required for everyday communication— and are presumed to be Cognitive/Academic Language Proficient

(CALP), although academic language proficiency requires much more cognitive demand and takes longer to develop as it is not embedded in everyday communication (Cummins, 1981). CALP can take more than five years to develop, thus, even after many years, most refugee youth are unable to access instruction in math, science or social studies due to limited English proficiency. Furthermore, ESOL teachers are in short supply in many communities and often support students in a pull-out model rather than a co-taught model. The pull-out model both removes students out of regular classroom instruction and leaves content area teachers unsupported in delivering instruction to students who do not speak English. Finally, teachers who lack skills to support ESOL students may not provide adequate opportunities to learn—expecting students to learn in silence or withholding content until students gain oral language proficiency (Gebhard, 2002). The lack of English proficiency or a prominent accent can become a source of stigma and ridicule for the students (McBrein, 2005), and can also fuel the development of support programs that emphasize language learning as a path to assimilation and employability over belonging, community building, and engaged citizenship (Rodriguez, 2020).

Belonging may be an important variable for academic success for newcomer youth. Newcomer youth who perceived that they were socially supported experienced lower rates of *acculturative stress*—the stress caused by the process of negotiating two cultures with different rules and expectations, differences across boundaries, experiences of prejudice, and trying to maintain elements of one’s own culture while incorporating elements of the new (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010). Social support is defined as “feeling as though there are “people to turn to” in one’s life” or a community that provides “sustenance, acceptance, and a sense of belonging” (Katsiaticas et al., 2013, p. 29). Lower levels of acculturative stress, as mediated by feelings of social support, are associated with better academic trajectories (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2010).

Data on the academic trajectories of newcomers supports the notion that adjusting to the social and academic realities in the United States is difficult for most newcomers. Suárez-Orozco, et al. (2010) looked at data from the Longitudinal Immigration Student Adaptation (LISA) study through the lenses of ecological-development and stage-environment fit theories (Eccles et al., 1991) and identified five projected academic trajectories for immigrant students based on whether and how quickly they experienced academic decline or improvement. The students included in the LISA study (n=407; 53% female) were within one year of arrival from Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico. Participants ranged from ages 9-14 at the beginning of the study, with an average age of 11.7 years. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) identified five academic trajectories for newcomers. Of the three groups whose GPAs declined over the course of the study, slow decliners had an average grade point drop of 0.5 over a five-year period, precipitous decliners had a drop of about 1.5 grade points, and low achievers started with lower GPAs than other participants and experienced a GPA decline of 1.44 points over 5 years. Two groups of students experienced academic success as measured by GPA, the high achievers began the study with GPAs of 3.5 and maintained that average across the study; and improvers began with an average GPA of 2.29 and pulled their GPAs up by an average of two-thirds of a grade point over the same time.

Among the students included in the study, 67% (24.3% slow decliners, 26.8% precipitous decliners, and 14.4% low achievers) experienced academic declines as measured by grade point averages. Although pre-migration experiences have an impact on these trajectories, Suárez-Orozco found that “factors that contributed to membership in different trajectories included having two adults in the household, school segregation and school poverty, students’ perceptions of school violence, level of academic English proficiency, reported psychological symptoms,

gender and being overaged for grade” (p. 612). Notably, several of these factors are environmental, rather than personal, which underlines the importance of laws, policies, and practices at the school and community levels to support positive academic growth. Newcomers who improved (10.9% improving achievers and 23.6% high achievers), tended to attend schools characterized with less violence and tended to have access to a mentor.

Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010), did not consider prior migration experiences in their study, however these experiences appear to have consequences for academic trajectories. Hagelskamp et al. (2010) looked at the same data from the lens of migration motivations and found that parents across the groups cited economic reasons over academic reasons for migration. Additionally, there was a relationship between the saliency of economic reasoning and future academic decline with greater saliency related to steeper academic declines in the children over time. In other words, the greater the frequency the parents reported economic factors for migrating, the worse the academic outcomes for students. Furthermore, Ritter (2006), through a series of case studies found that past educational experiences similar to resettlement contexts and environments where teachers hold high expectations for students resulted in improved academic performance.

Academic Programming to Support Newcomers

Much of the research on refugees and schools centers the social-emotional and mental health factors associated with transitioning to a new community and healing from prior traumatic experiences (McBrien, 2005). These psychosocial needs include “a sense of safety, a sense of self, and an adjustment to the cultural expectations of a new country while maintaining a connection to their heritage” (McBrien, 2005, p. 339). Within this psychosocial framework, resuming school post-migration is viewed as a key factor in successful long-term adjustment for

refugee youth (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012), however, the emphasis on psychosocial adjustment often casts a shadow over the instructional practices and academic supports that are successful with newcomers, creating a false dichotomy where initiatives that focus social adjustment are prevalent while those that focus on academic adjustment are limited. This approach under appreciates the interconnected nature between psychosocial and academic adjustment.

Holistic Approach

Schools that contribute to successful outcomes for refugee and immigrant youth tend to pour into both academic and social supports. In a series of case studies of Australian schools that were regarded as doing a “good job” with refugee youth, Taylor and Sidhu (2012) found six themes emerged across the cases:

- (a) Targeted policy and system support—the schools and their local education agencies had explicit policies and budgetary support to meet the needs of refugee students;
- (b) A commitment to social justice—school staff promoted social justice, equity, and diversity and made these values explicit;
- (c) A holistic approach to education and welfare—the schools established support centers for homework and other schoolwork, a trust fund for refugees’ post-school education, and empowered parents to participate in their children’s education;
- (d) An inclusive approach to education, whereby refugee students were included in classes with ESOL teachers serving as co-teachers, and included in the broader school community as quickly as appropriate based on student needs;
- (e) A whole-school approach whereby ESOL teachers co-taught in the regular classrooms and administrators tracked data on non-academic impacts of the whole-school approach, such as whether refugee students developed or maintained “a sense of their own dignity as a person” (p. 52); and,
- (f) Community partnerships with health services, homework services, and welfare services to ensure needs were met outside of school hours.

The findings of this study suggest that supporting refugee students academically involves creating an inclusive environment, providing support for social, emotional, and academic well-being, and providing ample language support within the classroom. These school characteristics went beyond compliant actions and instead were rooted in the core values of school staff. For example, school leaders advocated for students and their families not only on campus, but in the public sphere—two school leaders wrote public letters in opposition to the prime minister at the time who had made public statements vilifying refugees.

Taylor and Sidhu's (2012) study supports prior research in the United Kingdom by Pinson and Arnot (2007, also, Arnot & Pinson, 2005) who also found inclusive pedagogies supported the academic success and belonging of newcomer youth in schools. Arnot and Pinson conducted case studies of schools employing a holistic approach to asylum-seeking and refugee youth, and identified parental involvement, community links, and a multi-agency approach as factors contributing to the successful integration of these youth into schools and society. The holistic approach has also been shown to be beneficial to creating a sense of feeling socially supported.

Transnational Curriculum

Taking Taylor and Sidhu's (2012) findings of a social justice commitment a bit further, Bajaj and Bartlett (2017) found that US public high schools that serve large populations of newcomers enacted a critical transnational curriculum that was culturally sustaining. The authors defined a critical transnational curriculum by four tenets: (a) using diversity as a learning opportunity; (b) engaging translanguaging; (c) promoting civic engagement as curriculum; and (d) cultivating multidirectional aspirations. The authors found that teachers enacted a critical transnational curriculum when teachers and school leaders intentionally integrated students to

create diverse classrooms, rather than isolating newcomers into language learning or remedial classes during parts of the school day. Additionally, rather than engage in subtractive schooling that encourages students to abandon aspects of their culture in order to “fit in” at school (Valenzuela, 1999), a critical transnational curriculum encouraged belonging and engagement, a finding confirmed Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2018). Jaffe-Walter and Lee interviewed recently arrived immigrant youth and found that engaging their emerging transnational identities and lives was an important part of a culturally sustaining curriculum (see Paris & Alim, 2017). Recently arrived immigrant youth are far more likely than previous generations to develop identities that incorporate life in two locations, often seeking to spend time in both their homeland and the United States. The authors found that these transnational identities were important for educators to recognize. Teachers who built culturally sustaining curricula that incorporated the students’ homelands into the teaching of academic content promoted belonging and engagement. Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2018) also found that successful schools provided authentic experiences with civic engagement that allowed students to develop a critical consciousness and promoted community action. Finally, the schools in this study prepared youth for work and post-secondary options both within the United States and internationally, recognizing the emerging transnational identities of many students.

Biculturalism/Bilingualism

Furthermore, schools that are successful in supporting immigrant and refugee populations encourage *translanguaging*, or “the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential” (García, 2009, p. 140). Translanguaging is the act of crossing the boundaries of languages so that the language becomes community property. The “language of

the classroom” in a class or school that encourages translanguaging integrates all the other spoken languages the students bring with them. Formally, the school may offer bilingual education, and informally the school may encourage these forms of language hybridity.

Community and Afterschool Programming to Support Newcomers

Much like school programs, community programs that have positive results with newcomer youth tend to take a holistic approach by supporting social belonging, academics and language and family needs. Warren (2005) argued that schools that work with community organizations gain an understanding of their students’ cultures and lives that allow for healthier relationships with students’ families. This knowledge, Warren argued, supports the development of curriculum and pedagogies that are less likely to “[alienate] and [discriminate] against children of color” (p. 135). Additionally, schools that work with community organizations are better able to link students and families to resources, which supports students coming to school better able to learn. Simpkins et al. (2017) proposed a framework for designing culturally responsive after-school programs that included eight features: (a) physical and psychological safety, (b) appropriate structure, (c) supportive relationships, (d) opportunities to belong, (e) positive social norms, (f) support for efficacy and mattering, (g) opportunities for skill building, and (h) integration of family, school, and community efforts.

A key point of the holistic approach includes engaging with community partners to meet all sorts of outside-of-school and family needs. In one example, Rodriguez (2019, 2020) found that a library program became a “hub” for newcomer youth, offering services that included English language classes, tutoring, job-skills training, and social services. These wraparound services combined with less-structured social and study time where school rules and English-only requirements did not apply. As a result, newcomer youth developed a sense of belonging in

their new community. Rodriguez also found that the community program fostered an asset-based perspective among staff and participants, which in turn helped to “[counteract] hostile political climates toward newcomers” (p. 135).

Foreign-born parents interviewed in a study that examined a program geared toward supporting the mental health of immigrant and refugee children, revealed that they did not distinguish between academic, behavioral and emotional help for their children and viewed family engagement as foundational to all other supports (McNeely et al., 2020). The authors found that community programs needed to combine family engagement, assistance with basic needs, assistance with adaptation to a new culture, and emotional and behavioral supports through home visits, parent resource centers, and cultural brokers (McNeely et al., 2020).

Although after-school programs have shown promise in supporting newcomer youth, participating in an after-school program on its own may not be sufficient (Park et al., 2015). In a study of Latino youth participating in after-school programs, Park et al. (2015) did not find a significant difference in the performance of Latino youth who participated in an after-school program and those who did not participate in after-school programs in either academics or behavior. Importantly, the authors note that “typical after-school programs in the United States may not be designed to offer “rich and varied academic support; recreation, arts, and other enrichment activities; age-appropriate learning opportunities (e.g., tutoring, games); community-based activities; instructions from trained staff; a low ratio of children to staff; and strong connection with schools, communities, and parents” (p. 81). Thus, typical after-school programs may not be designed with frameworks that support immigrant youth.

Clarkston, Georgia

Two of the four metro Atlanta sites are in the suburban city of Clarkston, which is located east of Atlanta city proper. The location of these sites is important as an example of the decentralized settlement patterns of immigrants in the metro Atlanta area generally. More specifically, the proximity of these sites to one another and to other NGOs within a welcoming city has resulted in symbiotic relationships that create networks of academic and non-academic supports for families with children across grade bands.

Georgia's state laws have banned sanctuary cities since 2009. In 2016, in line with the federal ban on sanctuary cities, the state removed local funding support for cities that did not furnish certification that they were in compliance with state non-sanctuary policies (Torres, 2016). However, the city of Clarkston, a small enclave on the eastern border of Atlanta, boasts a majority-minority foreign-born population (47% in 2016, Kim & Bozarth, 2020). In a case study on the city of Clarkston, Kim and Bozarth (2020) highlighted the welcoming nature of the Clarkston city leadership in the wake of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Despite city-level resolutions in support of the immigrant and refugee population, Clarkston High School, the school serving a majority of newcomer students, received a failing score on the 2019 Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)³. Clarkston High School's low performance on state assessments points to ineffective or absent structures within schools to support the immigrant and refugee population that makes up nearly half of the student population. Kim and Bozarth (2020) note that newcomers to Clarkston found low levels of home ownership and high levels of

³ CCRPI is a measure of school performance that includes overall student achievement on yearly Georgia Milestones Assessments, overall student growth in math and English language arts on the Georgia Milestones Assessment, Closing the Gaps scores for demographic subgroup performance, school climate ratings, attendance, and for high schools, graduation rates. These ratings are combined to give the school an overall A-F grade.

under and unemployment due in part to non-transferable foreign education credentials. The high need for support in the city of Clarkston has made room for a number of NGOs to step in to provide resources to the burgeoning immigrant community.

Method

Evaluation Design

This Process/Implementation Evaluation used a qualitative, multi-site, case study research design. Qualitative research design best meets the need of this program evaluation in exploring and understanding the meanings participants (teachers, students, and AmeriCorps members) place on receiving the services provided by NDMVA. As this case study involves four sites in the Atlanta area (n=4) and sought to allow for the analysis to provide for significant contextual differences across sites, the study employed an embedded case study design (Yin, 2003). This approach offers an aggregate cross-case analysis as well as localized, contextual specificity within case analysis. The NDMVA program represents the overarching case and the four participating sites are considered embedded cases. The strength of the case study design lies in its reliance on eliciting rich descriptions of individual and collective experiences in a common setting. To supplement these evaluation activities, this evaluation employed an additional approach, which allows for research questions and processes to emerge and be modified based on the data and participants' responses to the prior assumptions and questions created at the onset of the study (Creswell, 2003); given the realities of the CoVid-19 pandemic, this emergent design proved to be essential. This evaluation examined the ways in which the services/interventions provided by NDMVA members (n = 8) are impacting students and interacting with teachers, sites, and the community surrounding each site. The process evaluation included an overall review of the program's design and implementation within each embedded

case through observations, interviews, and focus groups gathered during a single service year from the perspective of those who most directly are involved: teachers, students, AmeriCorps members, and the site/school's administration.

To accomplish this, the evaluator used the case study method. A case study is an examination of a single individual, group, or organization. Its primary focus is description and possible explanations of why phenomena occur in terms of the following:

- Humanizing problems and data
- Making people, problems, and situations “come alive”
- Providing a holistic view of a phenomenon
- Helping to “get inside” others to view the world as they perceive it
- Helping to attach emotions and feelings to phenomena.

(Stake, 1995)

The qualitative nature of this evaluation provided detailed, in-depth information on the implementation and quality of the NDMVA support programs for students. During the past several evaluations, the primary focus was quantitative in nature—the use of standardized surveys—with focus groups and interviews used to supplement the data collected from the surveys. This evaluation, however, focused on the program's implementation and qualitative aspects to directly understand the specific ways in which the activities of NDMVA members support the work of participating stakeholders.

Participants

The single location of metro Atlanta from the entire NDMVA network was selected as the focus of this process evaluation/case study. The evaluation team worked directly with the leadership of NDMVA to select a location that is representative of the entire NDMVA network,

including gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic setting, and other demographic indicators.

Site Selection Methods:

For this evaluation, four service locations were identified in the Atlanta service area and provided the focus for study. These sites were selected based on the following considerations: the variation in member activities; the longevity of partnership with NDMVA; and the average change in student engagement among students over the 2018-19 service year (as indicated by internal performance measures) relative to other sites. These sites are: Agape Youth and Family Center, Catholic Charities, Global Village Project, and the International Rescue Committee.

The International Rescue Committee is NDMVA's longest-running partnership in Atlanta, with Agape Youth and Family Center and Global Village Project falling in the middle of the longevity spectrum. Between these firmly established partner sites, the "ways in which members support students and educators" differ. At the International Rescue Committee and Agape Youth and Family Center, members support students in after-school programs through tutoring, small group instruction and enrichment activities, while members at Global Village Project typically provide in-school instruction and classroom support and through tutoring, study hall and small group instruction. On the newer end of the spectrum is Catholic Charities, where members provide support to students in the after-school program through tutoring. Due to COVID-related restrictions, members across all four sites are primarily conducting service activities virtually, although this has been varied and subject to change throughout the course of the pandemic.

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) was used to identify and select students, teachers, and AmeriCorps members from each site who have

knowledge, experience, and understanding of the services and support provided by NDMVA at the site. In addition, the availability and willingness to participate as well as the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in a coherent, thoughtful, and purposeful manner are critical sampling criteria of this methodology. Thus, educators who participate in NDMVA services and support at each of the four partner sites were sampled, in addition to teachers who have students in their classes, and those members who provide the support.

The research team conducted five focus group interviews over a two-month period, one for each of the four organizations, a final focus group interview of NDMVA members, an in-person site visit to Agape Youth and Family Center, and one observation of a session with youth participants in the Catholic Charities program. Focus group participants included staff from each organization, NDMV AmeriCorps members, and other volunteers who work with the NDMVA members to facilitate tutoring and other programming. Additional information provided by the organizations included an end of the year impact summary report for 2020-2021 academic year as well as annual reports for each of the organizations. Interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo © software. Researchers then compared codes and grouped like codes to develop themes that best explained the practices that contribute to the success of students served by the four programs in the Atlanta area.

Findings

Each newcomer organization primarily works with students and secondarily with families supporting academic and non-academic needs to create a sense of community and belonging. A high degree of alignment between Simpkins et al. (2017) framework for culturally responsive afterschool programs was noted at each organization and specifically with the contributions shared by NDMVA members. Additionally, the organizations have created cultures of caring that

influence volunteer recruitment and retention efforts. In the last year, 69% of all volunteers were ongoing, meaning they volunteered more than one time over the course of the year. Additionally, five of the 19 (26%) AmeriCorps members were offered jobs by their service site. Although it is difficult to separate the holistic work of each program from the individual work completed by NDMVA members, the final focus group interview was an attempt to understand the core of the contributions made by NDMVA members to the overall program. Through these interviews we found that NDMVA members provided invaluable services to each organization and played a key role in redesigning and implementing programming during the CoVid-19 pandemic through the training of non-NDMVA staff on virtual platforms, the development of virtual programming, and a commitment to individualized service even over virtual platforms. NDMVA members served essential functions, stepped into leadership positions, and provided a source of innovative ideas during the shift to virtual platforms and virtual programming. However, it is important to note there was a clear sense that the impacts of CoVid-19 had led to significant role overlap across staff, non-NDMVA volunteers, and NDMVA members who were all working to support the overall mission and goals of the partnering organization within the community during this time. NDMVA members were viewed as valuable collaborators in a shared effort.

Themes around working with students and families identified included: inclusive pedagogies drive academic and non-academic programming; time and place intersected with politics and core values to drive participants' motivation to join the organization; and relationships helped foster a sense of belonging among students.

Inclusive Pedagogies Drive Programming

Although each program draws from different teaching philosophies, participants noted drawing from culturally responsive, social-emotional, and trauma informed pedagogies, and

spoke about the assets and strengths of the students and families. These research-informed approaches set the tone for the programming offered by each organization. Participants stated that these frameworks were explicitly taught in their training through their respective organizations (except for some work in the IRC), instead, they had become familiar with these frameworks through NDMVA orientation and trainings as well as prior experiences and studies. Participants noted the value in these approaches in their current work across all four sites.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogies in Practice

Cultural competence was demonstrated across staff and NDMVA members of all identities and was tied to participants' educational and volunteer experiences prior to onboarding with the respective organizations. As part of formal NDMVA training, members attend a “cultural orientation” to the refugee committees they will work with to learn about different cultural practices, things to expect, some history of the refugee/immigrant community in Atlanta, and of the conflicts that often drive refugee mobility. Orientation also includes ESOL training in addition to Classroom Management as virtually all of the Atlanta members work with students learning English as a second or other language. This curriculum was put together with local resources and often includes guest speakers from the community. NDMVA also includes a Trauma-Informed Practices training led by a former NDMVA Site Director who now works in the broader trauma field (see Appendix I). NDMVA members in our study also specifically noted prior national and international volunteer experiences, educational backgrounds in international studies, social work, and education, and a desire to work with the specific groups—youth, refugees—due to their prior experiences.

One example of culturally responsive pedagogies is the Reading Buddies Program, organized by an NDMVA member at the IRC and Youth Futures volunteers from Georgia Tech,

fosters a relationship between elementary students at Catholic Charities and high schoolers at IRC. Through this program, high school students with IRC meet every other week with elementary students at Catholic Charities to read to the elementary students. This program supports high schoolers’

leadership, reading out loud, [and] speaking in front of an audience. They’re learning basically how [they] can create this idea, plan it out, and complete it.

The elementary students likewise gain literacy and English language practice as well as the opportunity to see and interact with student leaders in the community who share cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These interactions build cross-generational and cross-cultural ties within the community and organization.

Another example was in the form of encouraging translanguaging, or the use of native languages in conjunction with English, by asking students explicitly to explain things in their own language and to share native approximations to American words in class. One NDMVA member shared,

With teaching, it can easily become there is a teacher and the teacher is the person who knows everything and is kind of depositing knowledge into students. But when you start engaging with students like that and when I or my fellow co-teachers start asking the students, ‘well, how do you say this in your language?’, ‘Can you teach me what this is in Swahili?’, and really engaging with them and showing them that I value their native languages and their knowledge and think of them as smart, then they all of a sudden become much more interested and engaged and confident to participate in class.

This quote reflects Freire’s (1970/2018) critical description of a “banking model of education” and contrasts it with an approach that centers the culture and knowledge of the students. The banking model is a passive model of learning where students are perceived as empty receptacles to be filled up with knowledge provided by a more knowledgeable teacher. As discussed in the literature, didactic models of education such as the banking model, deny students opportunities for active learning and practice in the language of instruction. Rather than

being passive recipients of information, participants spoke about ensuring the students were able to engage in civic life and community service as a result of the relationships built with the organizations and within their community. Evidence across each organization suggested that developing skills for community and civic engagement was valued and supported with intentional efforts and programming like Reading Buddies.

Honoring the students' cultures further supported program engagement as one NDMVA member explained,

During the last two months of the after-school program, we did like around the world, so every day we talked about a different culture, a different country. And if that day was represented by a country or culture, that one that resonated with one of our students, they were more likely to speak up and teach us something. Or if we talked about certain foods or even ask them, 'what's your favorite food?', or if we ask them, 'how do you say hello in their language?' That day I did notice that the students were a lot more engaged and then also to go back to them teaching each other.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity supported the development of enrichment programming that affirmed students' emerging transnational identities. For example, one NDMVA member spoke about asking students to share favorite foods and to use national flags or figures as their Zoom backgrounds during virtual meetings. This is an example of using readily accessible cultural features to promote an inclusive environment but also as a starting point for deeper academic engagement. Participants shared that it was important to lead with cultural awareness and sensitivity in this work. Programming at each site included cultural nights, food festivals, and family nights that centered identity and culture and highlighted the value of diversity in the community. NDMVA members shared in the design and implementation of these programming initiatives.

“An Ecosystem” of Culturally Affirming Interactions with Students and Families

It's important for us that we step in as advocates for them...We're just looking to be advocates for quality education, address the gaps that lie in literature and math. We do

our best to address the gaps that come between kindergarten and third grade with reading proficiency in third grade and having those math concepts foundation by third grade as well.

In addition to culturally responsive pedagogies, each organization's mission statement communicates a values-centered, holistic approach to support that reinforces efforts to work with other organizations to meet academic and non-academic needs of students and families.

NDMVA members and staff in all four organizations shared a belief that academic success is bred when students' and families feel safe, connected, and have basic needs met. For example, one IRC staff member shared,

The IRC in Atlanta's mission is to create opportunities for refugees and immigrants to thrive in Georgia communities. The idea is to really be empowering for folks to thrive in their new home after escaping harm. I think that's the vision that we (participants) have as well. We've really been intentional about formulating more of a holistic approach to supporting our students. So, yes, we are a tutoring program and that's kind of the origins of it being an academic tutoring program, but then we've expanded that to include workshops that are related to a whole gamut of different types of support. Whether it's college readiness support, social emotional support, or sometimes even bringing in mental health professionals with trauma informed backgrounds. And then the STEM workshops as well as different creative initiatives—opportunities for students to engage in art, and sharing their talents, music and that kind of thing... We're kind of a catch all for any needs that students have.

Staff and NDMVA members at IRC shifted to a more directed case-management approach during the CoVid-19 pandemic to ensure that each student and family had access to aid, healthcare, recreation, and academic supports through regular check-ins that included home visits, phone calls, text messages, emails, and virtual meetings. Like the IRC, participants at each organization talked about helping to organize non-academic support and initiatives, especially to support needs that arose as a result of CoVid-19. For example, one of the organizations hosted a CoVid-19 testing site and subsequently a vaccination drive. Additionally, one NDMVA member spoke of visiting houses to ensure that students had internet access and devices to connect to online learning during school building closures resulting from CoVid-19.

Participants shared that the success of these programs was due to “*an ecosystem*” of support that each organization provides. Another example of the ecosystem of support was the food and culture nights that one organization hosted prior to CoVid-19. These nights included parents and members of the community in an effort to engage a broader audience in the work of the organization and in supporting the youth and their cultural and religious identities.

One-on-One Interactions with Students

Each organization leveraged a mix of group and individual activities to engage with students and families, but both staff and NDMVA members noted that one-on-one interactions, especially throughout the transition to virtual formats, allowed the participants to build better relationships with students. These individual interactions allowed the participants to get to know the students’ interests and cultural backgrounds. Staff at IRC talked about developing case files for the students and families that supported getting to know the students and communicating across different aspects of their programs. Staff at GVP shared that although GVP is a full-time middle school for girls, the one-on-one tutoring sessions were meaningful for getting to know students and, especially during CoVid-19, to keeping students engaged in classes and the extracurricular programming.

Benefits of the Metro Atlanta Area

Proximity to Atlanta played an important role in the success of these programs. This proximity allowed each program to draw from other aid organizations located in and around metro Atlanta. Atlanta also has a history of welcoming policies in regard to immigration and refugee resettlement, this has resulted in a number of NGOs focused on supporting these populations. Additionally, participants expressed comfort with working in and with the newcomer community. One participant shared “*this is home for me,*” speaking of the Clarkston

network of families and advocates. The roots some participants have in the community as well as intentional efforts to engage with the students' home communities, led to an effort and desire to invite parents and program alumni still in the area to participate and reinvest in each organizations' programming. Notably, Atlanta and more recently Clarkston, have become hubs for immigrant and refugee resettlement in the southeast. About half of Clarkston's population holds or has parents who hold an international birth certificate. These cities have also been the center of controversial struggles in Georgia for taking progressive stances on immigration. The success of these programs, despite the decentralized nature of immigrant settlement in the metro Atlanta area, cannot be divorced from the socio-political climates of Clarkston and the greater Atlanta region.

Nearly all the NDMVA members interviewed joined after the COVID-19 pandemic had spread to the United States. Typically, NDMVA members commit to the AmeriCorps program for one service year, which begins in September. One NDMVA member noted her desire to support immigrant and refugee populations by pushing back against deficit-laden narratives about immigrants and refugees. The motivations of NDMVA members centered around themes of advocacy and wanting to work with diverse populations—youth, immigrants, refugees. These motivations were evident in the culturally responsive pedagogies enacted by the NDMVA members.

Community Partnerships

Throughout CoVid-19, each of the organizations noted an increased effort to connect students and families with other aid organizations in the community. This work helped develop a positive reputation in the community that supported each organization in developing holistic programming and meeting the needs of students and families.

It is the reputation that we have in the community that helps. We value our volunteers at every level. So, I know our volunteer department [of the organization] makes great efforts to connect with the parents in the community because we know that our parents are going to be our greatest pool of supporters. So, I think by having a reputation that we do good work as an agency, we commit to certain tasks, or we commit to helping immigrants and refugees, we commit to helping veterans in other programs that we have, I think our reputation is what pulls people in. I think serving our clients and providing good services and not just doing the bare minimum provides opportunity for our clients once they get to the position to give back—that they want to give back through our agency because they remember the good services that they received.

Although there was an increase in partnerships during CoVid-19, each organization had a reputation for working with the local schools and other NGOs prior to the pandemic. In particular, the relationships with the schools and with one another were leveraged to support student academic engagement and performance. Catholic Charities has an office within the school they support and interacts with teachers to better understand the strengths and challenges students they serve are experiencing in class. Participants from GVP noted that their relationships with Clarkston High School position the organization to provide experiences that enhance their students' high school experiences. Each of the organizations operates within the context of the community and the schools in that community.

CoVid-19 Impacts

CoVid-19 resulted in additional emphasis on families as programs moved to Zoom as their online mode of interaction and thus found themselves inside the participants' homes. Each organization talked about partnerships with other organizations to support family members in finding jobs, and accessing health care, CoVid-19 tests and vaccines, and the local food pantry.

At the beginning of the pandemic we would be the ones receiving the calls like, 'hey, we have a sick family member, what do we do?' 'Hey, we can't afford rent because we don't have a job. What do we do?' 'Hey, we don't have Internet for school. What do we do?' So, we kind of had to address all these issues as they came head on.

In addition to increasing non-academic supports to students and families in response to CoVid, curriculum and service models shifted to meet students social-emotional needs for connection. During school building closures, Agape opened its doors to allow students to use the space to log in to virtual class meetings. Agape staff helped keep students on task and supported students with assistance while they were in class if necessary. At GVP, greater emphasis was placed on building community for students who had difficulty engaging in the remote setting. A GVP participant shared,

This past year [we] had to shift focus a lot to maybe care a little bit less about the students actually learning the material and just focus on building a relationship with the students, because that relationship is what kept that student and many other students coming every single day to help hour and eventually somewhat willing to work with the teachers to finish some homework.

Other shifts in the curriculum included integrating social-emotional learning into lesson plans such as incorporating meditation and other mental health strategies. As noted earlier, NDMVA members supported the shift to virtual programming by training staff in using virtual platforms, helping to design virtual programming, and supporting students in one-on-one and small group tutoring and social activities.

Notre Dame AmeriCorps Members “Absolutely Vital”

A common thread among all four programs was the importance AmeriCorps members played in successful programming. AmeriCorps members came from a range of backgrounds, with backgrounds in education, psychology, international studies, and social work being common among many of the participants. Several participants connected to these organizations through their colleges and universities. The pathways many participants took prior to joining the organization gave them experiences working with immigrant and non-English speaking populations as well as youth populations, both in the United States and abroad.

Our AmeriCorps members are really important. One of the biggest things is you can't train passion, you can't train to care. And I think that's something AmeriCorps members bring because they care. They want to help. And you can't train that and you can't pay that off.

The recruitment of culturally competent individuals and demographically similar participants may play a role in the success of the programming. The 2020-2021 Atlanta NDMVA team collectively spoke 13 languages, which proved to be helpful skills in their service but also helped in forming and expanding community connections. Over the past few years NDMVA has been heavily utilizing the Atlanta sites' networks of families and clients as well as volunteers so that refugees and immigrants who are now more established in the US have the opportunity to use their skills and experience to serve. To date, a handful of immigrants and former refugees joined the team in various roles over the years. Evidence from ethnic studies programs demonstrates that the cultural competence of the individuals planning and delivering after-school programming plays a role in the overall success of this type of initiative (Davis & Hall, 2020; Dee & Penner, 2017). Thus, the efforts on the part of these organizations to recruit, train, and retain volunteers who have a range of diverse experiences and backgrounds may play a role in the overall success of these programs.

Conclusions

Research based practices

Immigrant and refugee students face a number of challenges as they adapt to the cultures and norms of United States schools. With sufficient support, however, programs such as the ones highlighted in this report have made strides in supporting students across this transition with evidence that a full two-thirds of the students enrolled in these programs demonstrate increased engagement as a result of participating in these programs. These programs support the development of a sense of belonging among students, work with networks of NGOs to support

non-academic needs of students and families, and recruit and retain NDMVA members and other volunteers with diverse areas of expertise to allow for creative problem solving and agile responsiveness across the organization.

The pedagogies and program design of all four programs are supported with evidence in the research literature. Foremost is the sense of belonging that each program works to develop through one-on-one and small group interactions with students, interactions with families, programming that promotes an appreciation for diversity, and through developing a network of support with other aid organizations within the community. Focusing on one-on-one and small group interactions, NDMVA members work to build relationships with students where they learn about the students' cultures, languages, and academic strengths. This information is then leveraged to create culturally sustaining curricula that encourages deeper engagement in the process of academic learning (see for example: Alim & Paris, 2017; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). To clarify, culturally sustaining curricula includes the “explicit goal [of] supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Moving beyond culturally responsive or relevant education efforts, Paris (2012) explains that this approach to working with minoritized youth “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95). This commitment democratizes schooling by “supporting both traditional and evolving ways of cultural connectedness for contemporary youth” (p. 95). Honoring the students emerging identities, NDMVA members support biculturalism, which allows students to accept both their home culture and the school's western culture, an important factor in feelings of belonging. These programs also support the development of transnational identities, honoring the students' potential futures living across borders.

The holistic approach and coordination across NGOs and within each program helps to create a system of social support, which the research demonstrates may be linked to lower levels of acculturative stress and better academic outcomes (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). This system relies heavily on the geographic proximity to a city that is welcoming to immigrant and refugee resettlement. This culture has led to an influx of migration as well as a flourishing of NGOs to support these migrants. Furthermore, the decentralized nature of the metro Atlanta economy, which pushes deep into the suburbs, has led to similar patterns in resettlement, with the majority of immigrant and refugee families resettling outside of the city proper. The economic and migratory patterns of metro Atlanta and Clarkston have cultivated a community of NGOs with which these NDMVA partner organizations can work to support the academic and non-academic needs of students and their families. These organizations effectively operate as “hubs” for all sorts of economic, social, political, and academic needs (Rodriguez, 2019; 2020)

Finally, the recruitment efforts of these organizations hinge on the reputations they hold within their communities. Positive reputations allow for partnerships with other NGOs, but also aid in the recruitment of high-quality individuals through the NDMVA partnership who bring diverse experiences and knowledges to the organization. Evidence suggests that the impact of culturally responsive practices is greater when the person implementing the practice has developed their own cultural competence and an understanding of the cultures of the students they serve (Davis & Hall, 2020; Dee & Penner, 2017). The recruitment and training efforts of NDMVA and partnering organizations have ensured that the members are culturally competent. Additionally, we heard from each organization that the topic of culture is front and center in collaborative sessions to plan programming as well as professional development.

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APPENDIX I
2020-2021 NDMVA Training Calendar

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|----------------|---|
| Sept 1- 3 | Orientation Cultural Orientation included New Way Speakers: Diversity/Community Building Training |
| Sept 7 | Labor Day - Schools Closed |
| Sept 18 | Classroom Management and ESOL |
| Oct 2 | Guest Speaker: Responsible Volunteering Practices |
| Oct 8 - 12 | DeKalb Schools Fall Break |
| Oct 12 - 13 | APS Fall Break |
| Oct 16 | Communication and Professionalism Time and Project Management |
| Oct 30 | Guest Speaker: Trauma-Informed Practices |
| Nov 3 | DeKalb and APS No School//Election Day |
| Nov 13 | AmeriCornicopia & Team Building Through Storytelling |
| Nov 23 - 27 | Thanksgiving Break |
| Dec 11 | Self Care Pt 1 & Storytelling |
| Dec 21 - Jan 4 | Winter Break |
| Jan 8 | Volunteer Management Volunteer Recruitment |
| Jan 18 | MLK Day Service Project |
| Feb 5 | Leadership Development |
| Feb 12 - 16 | Mid-Year Conference |
| Mar 5 | Guest Speaker: Roots of Immigration to the US (joint meeting with Apopka, FL team) |
| Mar 12 | DeKalb No School |

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| Mar 15 | APS No School |
| Mar 19 | Self-Care Pt 2 - Compassion Fatigue |
| Apr 2 | Conflict Reconciliation |