

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (HEPA)  
+  
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)



## DC SCORES

Washington, D.C.

2,945

Average number of students served during the school year

98%

Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Corporations
- ▶ 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Local funding, including grants from the DC Commission on Arts & Humanities and Learn24
- ▶ Individual giving

## Training staff to model healthy behaviors in order to support students' healthy eating and physical activity, as well as develop their social and emotional skills and competencies.

Taking a comprehensive approach to wellness—which includes healthy eating and physical activity and extends to additional aspects of health, such as social and emotional skills and competencies—can provide the necessary supports to help healthy children grow into healthy adults. Afterschool and summer learning programs are well-situated to be a component of solutions that address the whole child. Children in quality programs have access to healthy snacks and meals, take part in physical activities, feel safe and supported by caring mentors, work collaboratively with peers, develop new skills, and gain confidence as they learn to set goals and make responsible decisions for themselves.

### Overview

*DC SCORES* offers students in grades K-8 a unique year-round afterschool experience through the intentional integration of soccer, poetry, and service learning. This multifaceted model helps youth build physical fitness and learn about healthy eating, while finding their voice, building their self-worth, celebrating their own and their peers' successes, and establishing their sense of belonging.

### A typical day for students

While there is no typical day for DC SCORES students, a weekly schedule consists of two soccer practices, two writing and poetry sessions, and one game day. Throughout the season, coaches guide students to work together as a team to support one another in soccer, the creative writing process, and service learning. Whether it is traveling for a game to a new neighborhood to meet new students or planting a school garden, all DC SCORES' activities incorporate similar components—goal setting, collaboration, time for reflection and celebrating accomplishments, and promoting sportsmanship.

### Outcomes

In 2017, 85 percent of DC SCORES students said that because of the program they care more about their school, 96 percent discovered something they are good at, and 96 percent said that they now understand the importance of

respecting others. Additionally, 70 percent of DC SCORES students improved their body mass index, and 77 percent improved their aerobic capacity. Among parents surveyed, 92 percent reported that because of DC SCORES, their child feels better about themselves and 81 percent said that their child's physical activity increased.

## Program characteristics

The program emphasizes cultivating a positive youth experience by establishing a safe and supportive environment in which kids are given the chance to be team players and community leaders. DC SCORES clearly and consistently connects components of healthy eating and physical activity (HEPA) with social and emotional learning outcomes to help students, staff, and other stakeholders understand the holistic nature of the program's design. For example, language highlighting the core values of teamwork, leadership, and commitment help students and staff see and practice the links between physical activity and social and emotional skills and competencies.

The program dedicates staff to work closely with frontline staff, or coaches, who guide students to work as a team through the soccer season and their creative writing process, model sportsmanship, promote goal setting, and celebrate students' individual and team accomplishments. Coaches receive training based on the program's quality standards—which have integrated HEPA standards and social and emotional learning best practices—and are provided technical assistance and supplemental materials. As DC SCORES grows, ensuring that each student is receiving the positive experience they deserve depends on the ability to prepare and train front-line coaches.

## Program history

Serving students in grades third through eighth (which was later expanded to grades K-8) whose families lived below the poverty line, DC SCORES was founded in 1994 when a teacher, Julie Kennedy, began playing soccer with a group of 15 girls after school. As the seasons changed and outdoor space became limited, Kennedy used her background in writing to lead poetry workshops and noticed that the team-centered relationships developed on the field translated to the classroom environment. The development of teamwork and leadership prepared these particular students to act as agents of change and inspired her to introduce service-learning projects. In 2017, DC SCORES served 2,945 kids at 60 sites. Nationally, America SCORES reaches close to 15,000 poet-athletes across 14 cities in 194 schools.

## Recommendations

*for training staff to model healthy behaviors:*

- ▶ Develop intentional programming that is working for and engages the community.
- ▶ Create a program design that you would want to send your own children to or participate in yourself.



## Challenges

**National public health issues among children today are physical, and social, and emotional.** The National Survey of Children's Health found that close to 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese, placing them at a higher likelihood for a number of health issues including asthma and high blood pressure. Additionally, 45 percent of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), which has been linked to negative health outcomes and behaviors.

**There are linkages between children's physical and social and emotional health.** While one does not automatically lead to the other, research has found that children who are obese are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, and studies have shown the association between ACEs and a higher likelihood of being overweight and obese.

**Issues in childhood have long reaching effects.** ACEs have been linked to negative health issues in adulthood, such as a higher likelihood of drug abuse and heart disease, and obesity in childhood has been associated with a higher likelihood of obesity in adulthood. At a national level, the estimated lifetime economic costs of ACEs are \$124 billion and obesity is \$150 billion.

Read [A Big-Picture Approach to Wellness: Afterschool Supporting Strong Bodies and Minds](#) to learn more.