



# Reaching Our Goals

## America SCORES National Evaluation Report



*Teamwork. Leadership. Commitment.*

## The Mission of America SCORES

America SCORES empowers students in urban communities using soccer, writing, creative expression, and service-learning. With teamwork as the unifying value, America SCORES inspires youth to lead healthy lifestyles, be engaged students, and become agents of change in their communities. SCORES' joint focus on language arts and soccer makes it unique among other youth development and after-school programs.

## The Purpose of this Study

America SCORES is a national not-for-profit organization that provides after-school programs for urban youth in 16 cities across the country. The purpose of this study was to evaluate, on a national basis, the participation, quality and outcomes of the America SCORES program in order to improve program practices and to respond to funders' requests for evaluative statistics.

## The Researchers

Philliber Research Associates (PRA), an independent firm nationally recognized as a leader in youth development research, conducted a national evaluation of the program during the 2005-2006 season as it was currently being implemented in 13 cities at 12 America SCORES affiliate sites including Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New England, New York, the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. PRA staff worked closely with America SCORES staff to develop all study instruments, conducted site visits, collected and analyzed all data from parents/guardians, coaches, staff, and students nationwide. PRA specializes in the evaluation of educational, human service, arts and cultural, and health programs, providing services for more than 100 not-for-profit organizations (including foundations and initiatives) across the country.

## The evaluation utilized the following data collection strategies to measure progress:<sup>1</sup>

- **Pre/Post Creative and Expository Writing Assessments**, rating participants' poetry-writing skills in dimensions of creativity, voice, insight and ideas, mechanics and structure, and use of descriptive language.
- **Pre/Post Health Assessments**, consisting of a six-minute running test to measure fitness and Body Mass Index assessments, measuring participants' weight status.
- **Youth Pre/Post Questionnaires** measuring youth attitudes and behaviors in the areas of physical activity, health knowledge, attitudes toward writing, self efficacy, peer relationships, social support, positive identity, community citizenship, and conflict resolution.
- **Pre/Post Coaches' Assessment of Players**, completed by soccer coaches, measuring changes in self confidence, soccer skills, peer relationships, and sportsmanship and teamwork.
- **Parent/Guardian Surveys**, documenting parent/guardian perceptions of SCORES benefits for their children.

<sup>1</sup> Not all instruments were administered at all locations.

## What We Looked For

The America SCORES philosophy is that by implementing programs that provide basic developmental supports and opportunities while promoting physical activity, health education, literacy, social skills, and character development, urban children will develop lasting life skills.

The primary intended outcomes of America SCORES include:

- improved performance in language arts;
- improved (or maintained) levels of physical fitness;
- increased community awareness and responsibility;
- increased cooperation and teamwork; and
- increased self confidence.

Other intended outcomes include developing a more positive attitude towards language arts (creative and expository writing), improved peer relationships (including increased conflict resolution skills), increased social support, and improved self-concept or positive identity.

## What We Found

Altogether, more than 1,300 youth and hundreds of adults participated in this first-ever national evaluation of the America SCORES program.



**Evaluation results provide evidence that SCORES participants achieve positive outcomes in the areas of language arts, physical fitness, self confidence, community awareness and responsibility.**



### Language Arts:

- Poems showed an overall improvement in creativity and ideas, voice, and the use of poetic devices.
- Expository writing improved in the areas of ideas and insight, description, clarity, voice, and mechanics/structure.

### Health:

- Students showed an increase in aerobic capacity as measured by a running test.
- There was an increase of 2% of students in healthy weight classes according to BMI-for-Age guidelines.

### Self Confidence:

Coaches and parents overwhelmingly agreed that participating in SCORES helped children feel better about themselves, including helping them become more involved, more outgoing, and more independent.

### Community Awareness and Responsibility:

Survey results provide evidence that SCORES participants believe it is important to help their communities, and that they are capable of contributing to change.

## Youth Served by America SCORES - A Snapshot

According to attendance records submitted by the 12 SCORES sites included in the evaluation, approximately 3,500 children and youth participated in the program during the 2005-06 academic year.<sup>2</sup> Of those, basic demographic characteristics were available for the 1,339 participants who completed Youth Pre-Questionnaires administered by SCORES writing and soccer directors in October 2005.

Of these participants:

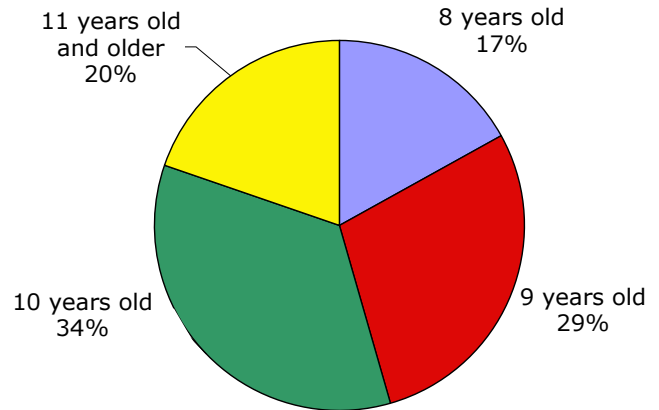
- The majority (62%) were in their first year of SCORES participation;
- Half were boys and half were girls;
- Sixty-four percent were nine or 10 years old; the average age was 9.6 years; and
- Nearly half (47%) were Hispanic or Latino/Latina; 29% were Black or African American; and the rest were from other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, as indicated in a previous evaluation report, approximately 80% to 95% of SCORES participants were eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches.

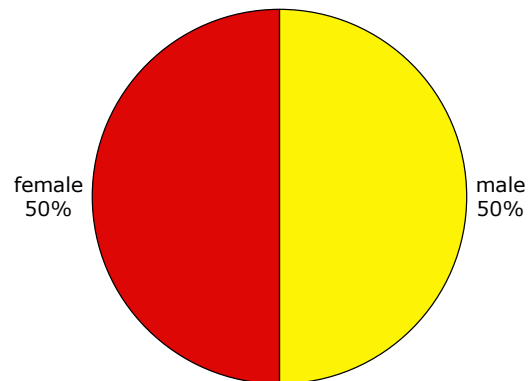


<sup>2</sup> Due to challenges in collecting accurate attendance data at some of the SCORES sites, it is possible that this number is lower than the actual number of young people served throughout the year.

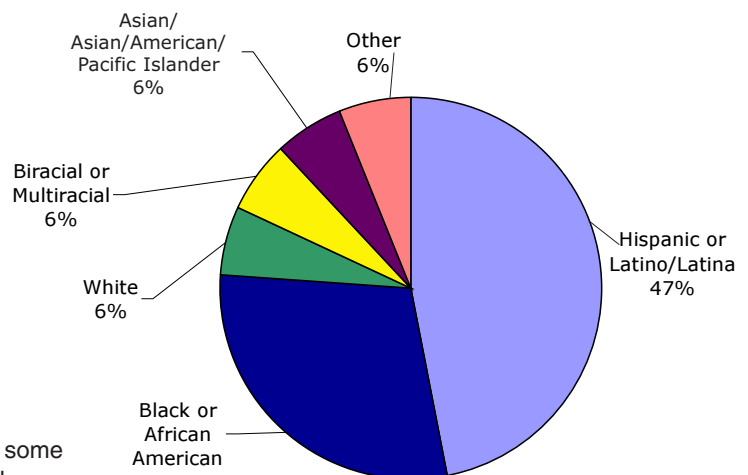
### Participant Age



### Participant Gender



### Participant Ethnic Background



## Program Components of America SCORES

America SCORES programs meet an average of 10 weeks each fall and spring season on public school grounds. Every day after school students participate in:

- Soccer practice: Two days per week
- Soccer games: One day per week
- Poetry and language enrichment: Two days per week

The literacy component includes structured lessons that focus on creative writing (poetry) during the fall and on expository writing (related to community awareness and service) and poetry in the spring.

Students also have the opportunity to participate in public performances of their work, including poetry slams, soccer tournaments and other special events. Integral to all these components is a focus on team-building, cooperation, good sportsmanship, and leadership.

Public school teachers are trained to be “writing coaches” and “soccer coaches,” thereby adding to their skill base and their rapport with students.

Parents and community members are encouraged to become involved as volunteers and participants in activities on public-school grounds.

### Parents say:

My children are learning maturity, behavior, and discipline.

My son is learning how to respect others and how to work as a team.

My daughter likes being around kids and working together. She likes the teamwork and great sportsmanship.

My son likes companionship and good exercise. He likes participating and being with new friends.

### Students say:

The best thing about SCORES is spending time learning things that you love.

Our coaches are awesome, wonderful, and helpful.

In soccer, the skills get trickier. You have to be tough and do the best you can.

The SCORES program has rules for how people are supposed to treat each other.

I learned that everyone has a role on the team.

## Issues with Pre- and Post-Evaluation Data Collection

While the number of children and youth who participated in some component of the evaluation was relatively high, pre-to-post matched results that allowed for analyses of change were available for a much lower proportion of the total SCORES population. Pre/post match rates were affected by a number of factors, including turnover in participating schools, attendance issues, and difficulty in collecting post assessments completed by coaches.

SCORES serves children and youth in urban schools in under-resourced neighborhoods that experience multiple social and economic stressors. This stress can contribute to difficulties in terms of schools maintaining the program for a full year, as well as to program attendance issues. Each year, programming is pulled from some schools due to a failure on the part of the school to meet their responsibilities in program administration. Although new schools are recruited to take their place, the students at these schools were unable to participate in the evaluation.

## Improved Health Status

In order to measure changes in levels of fitness, all SCORES sites were asked to administer a six-minute running test (modeled after the Cooper 12-minute run, a standard fitness measure used to test aerobic fitness for college soccer players). To measure weight status, sites gathered participants' heights and weights for Body Mass Index (BMI) calculations. Evaluators were attempting to measure change from pre- to post-assessment rather than to compare results for SCORES participants to national norms.

### RUNNING TEST:

For the running test, participants were asked to run laps around soccer fields, tracks or gymnasiums for six minutes; if they were unable to run or jog for this period of time, they were allowed to walk. SCORES coaches counted the number of laps (to the nearest quarter of a lap) that each participant was able to run at the beginning of the program year and again at the end. Four hundred and twelve youth participated in both fall and spring running test. Results were analyzed by computing the percentage change in the number of laps completed by participants from pre- to post-assessment.

### IMPROVED AEROBIC CAPACITY

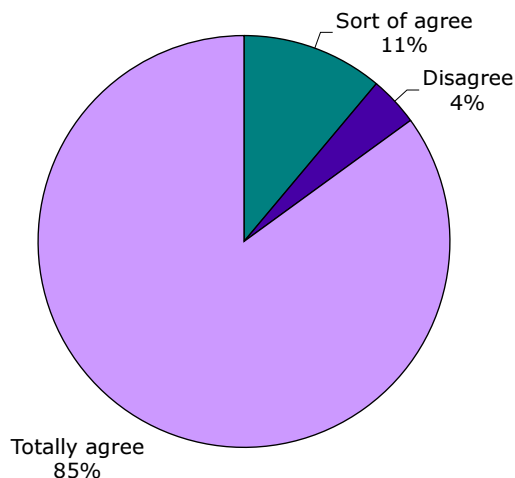
The average change in number of laps run by SCORES participants was 21%, representing an overall increase that is **clinically and statistically significant**.

These results suggest that, overall, these SCORES youth developed better physical endurance in the approximately six-month period between the fall and spring tests.

When asked what their children liked most about participating in SCORES, many parents/guardians reported that they liked playing soccer and playing sports the most. For many participants, SCORES provided their only opportunity to be part of an organized sports program. Results of this evaluation suggest that this enthusiasm, and the two to seven additional hours of physical activity per week that young people gained through SCORES, contributed to the **positive outcomes in physical fitness**.



### "At SCORES, I get lots of exercise"



## BMI-FOR-AGE:

SCORES coaches also recorded the heights and weights of the participating youth using physicians' scales at each site at the beginning and end of the program year. Evaluators calculated BMI-for-Age statistics based on a standard BMI formula but adjusted for each child's age and gender according to guidelines distributed by the Centers for Disease Control.<sup>3</sup>

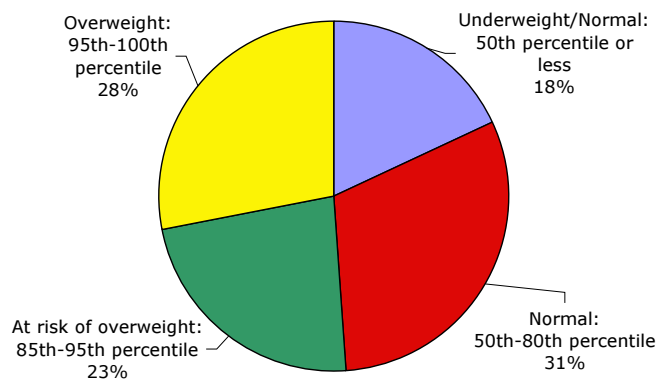
As shown in the pie chart at right, in the fall of 2005, 51% of the total sample were at or above the 85th percentile (overweight or at risk of overweight) at the time of pre-assessments.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of post-assessments, the overall percentage overweight or at risk of overweight had fallen by 2%.

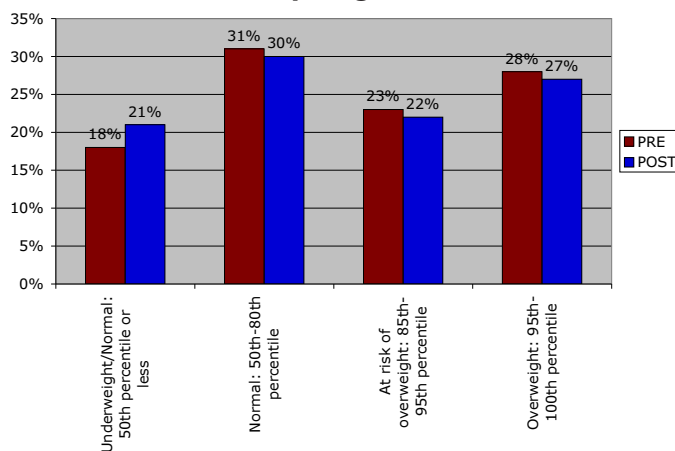
**Significantly, the percentage of girls in the pre/post BMI sample who were classified as overweight or at risk of being overweight fell by 5% during the six-month period between assessments.**

**Studies show that girls age 9-12 are most at risk for becoming overweight.<sup>5</sup>**

## BMI Status by CDC Guidelines in Fall 2005



## Change in BMI from Fall 2005 to Spring 2006



**“Participants in SCORES increased their coordination, improved their fitness and demonstrated impressive decreases in the prevalence of overweight.** This type of program is incredibly important for a number of reasons. First, SCORES aims to promote fitness and, regardless of a person's weight, fitness predicts health outcomes such as diabetes, stroke and even death. Second, SCORES significantly improved aerobic capacity in these children by 21%; even small improvements in fitness lead to better health outcomes. Lastly, participation in SCORES was associated with a **reduction** in the prevalence of obesity. This is very impressive given that the prevalence of overweight has been increasing (in California, the percent of children at-risk or overweight has increased *annually* of late). In addition, SCORES touches on other important aspects of children's lives including improving writing skills, increasing time spent reading and engaging children as a positive force for change in their communities. We need more programs like this.”

Kristine Madsen, MD, MPH  
Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
University of California, San Francisco

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/childrens\\_bmi](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/childrens_bmi).

<sup>4</sup> These percentages are higher than national statistics which suggest that 19% of US children ages 6 to 11 are overweight, with another 15% being at risk of overweight. The higher percentages are likely related to demographic characteristics. Data shows that low-income children, and children who are African American or Hispanic, have higher rates of overweight than others.

<sup>5</sup> Researchers found that girls are more than 1.6 times more likely to become overweight between the ages of 9 and 12 than in later adolescence. See <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/new/press/07-01-08.htm>.

## Improvements in Language Arts

Several evaluation strategies were used to measure improvement in language arts, including pre/post creative and expository writing assessments and questions about literacy on coach and parent/guardian surveys. **Taken together, these results suggest that SCORES participants made significant gains in writing abilities during program participation.**

**POETRY:** To measure changes in poetry writing, SCORES writing coaches asked participants to write six-line poems on “found objects” from nature, brought in for each class by the coaches. These objects included tree leaves, potted plants, rocks, and pieces of fruit.

A trained evaluation team of Education Directors from SCORES sites used a rubric for scoring, using scales of 0 to 8 in which 0 = “no attempt/refused to participate” and scores of 7 to 8 represented “excellent” poem qualities.

One hundred and fifty-two SCORES students completed poems near the beginning and end of the program year, approximately six months apart. **From fall to spring there were increases in average rubric scores** in Creativity/Ideas, Voice, Mechanics/Structure, Use of Adjectives and Adverbs, and Use of Other Poetic Devices.



### The Plant

Precious emerald  
Leaves

Tropical violet flower  
In the  
Center

Spike of a  
Porcupine

Color of a freshly brewed  
Tea.

### Leaves

Leaves grow in summer in  
the beautiful breeze.

Leaves are like pillows  
you sleep on.

Leaves make me feel  
soft and fuzzy

Like being in the  
happiest place ever.

It is like being in heaven.

Leaves make me feel good.

### The Tree

In the woods. In the spring all  
day long.

I see the tree.

In the shadows in the night  
all the time.

I see the tree so gold.

In the dark it stands alone,

In the dark at night I see the tree.

*Examples of poems written by SCORES participants.*

## EXPOSITORY WRITING:

A similar approach was used to measure changes in participants' expository writing abilities. SCORES writing coaches at four sites asked participants to write a short letter to a fictional family moving into homes next door to participants. Specifically, they were asked to describe two things they liked the most about their neighborhoods and two things they would like to change.

Participants' letters were scored on five components using the same scale of 0 to 8 that was used for the poetry rubric. Letters were completed approximately two months apart by 311 youth.

There were **statistically significant increases** in average rubric scores for all areas assessed:

- Insight and Ideas;
- Description;
- Clarity;
- Voice; and
- Mechanics/Structure.

## Examples of SCORES participants' letters:

Dear Brooks Family,
I live in Roxbury and I like it a lot. I am happy that you live in my neighborhood too. There is a lot of nice stuff here. For example, I love the Roxbury Park, the restaurant, and the stores. But something that I would change is the killing and the gangs. There is a big gang that you need to be careful of. Anyway, it is nice to have you near.
Sincerely, Alicia

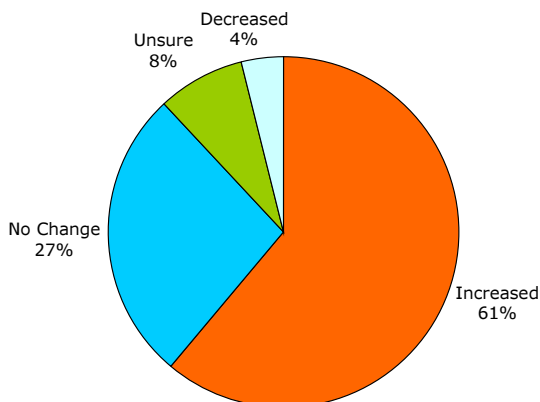
Dear Brooks Family,
My name is Vivian. I live in the house next to you. Our community has a beautiful park across the street. People are sweet and nice. But something I wish I could change is the littering everywhere. I always wish that the park would have more stuff to play on.
Love, Vivian

## Change in Time Spent Exercising and Reading

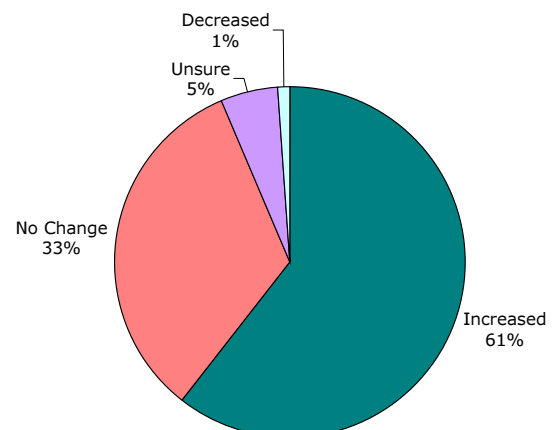
Survey results also suggest that many SCORES youth exercise more on their own and spend more time reading than before participating in SCORES. Most parents/guardians (94%) believed SCORES was helping their children learn more about poetry and creative writing, in particular reading comprehension and self-expression. SCORES coaches commented on increased participant motivation, interest, eagerness, and enthusiasm for writing, and almost all parents and guardians who completed surveys agreed (96%).

Nearly all parents/guardians (98%) reported that their children liked participating in SCORES "a lot."

### Change in Time Spent Reading



### Change in Time Spent Exercising





## Increased Community Awareness and Responsibility

As previously mentioned, the SCORES spring writing curriculum focuses on addressing community needs, and is integrated with a service-learning project that gives participants the opportunity to be involved in their communities. During the 2005-2006 program year, teams of SCORES youth were involved in more than 120 service-learning projects. These included efforts to clean up and beautify schools, parks, and other neighborhood locations; information campaigns to educate other students and community members about timely needs and issues; efforts to promote awareness of the community; fundraising projects and drives to collect goods for those in need; and direct service to such groups as younger children and senior citizens. Many of these efforts involved partnerships with other organizations. Altogether, about one-quarter involved raising funds or donations.

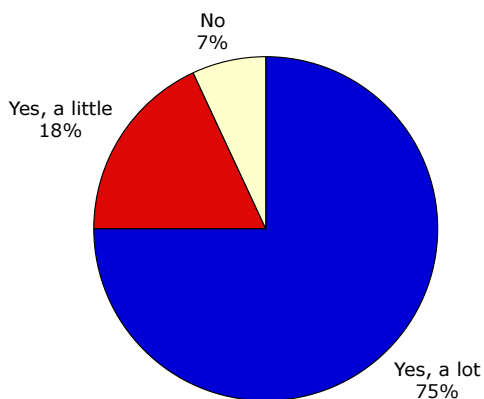
As a result of these service-learning activities, SCORES coaches reported that their students displayed increased community awareness, greater interest in helping others, and more involvement in their communities and schools.

Students surveyed at the end of the season were very positive about community responsibility, with three-quarters strongly agreeing that it was important for them to help their communities.

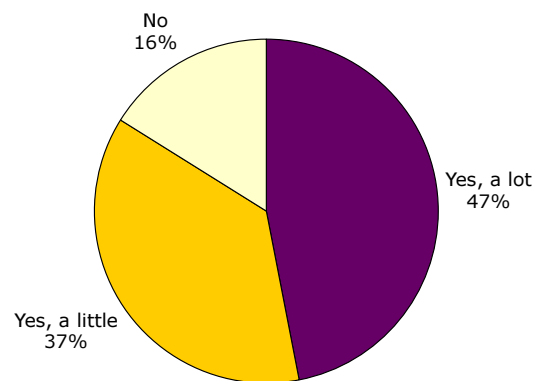
*In SCORES, we learned about community, neighborhood, and pollution.*

*“Community” is important to me. It means what is going on in my neighborhood.*

*- SCORES participants*



*“It’s important to help my community.”*



*“I can help change my community.”*

## Improved Cooperation and Teamwork

The organized sports component of SCORES presents natural opportunities to help youth learn to cooperate and work together as a team. Data from Participant Focus Groups, Parent/ Guardian Surveys, and Coaches’ Surveys suggest that many children and youth made important gains in cooperation, teamwork, and peer relationships during their SCORES participation.

During focus groups, participants frequently commented that they “learned to get along” and “not to fight.” On Youth Questionnaires, there were increases from fall to spring in the percentage who agreed that they could “help other kids stay out of a fight” and “talk problems out with other kids,” suggesting a modest increase in conflict resolution skills.

## Increased Competencies and Self-Confidence

One component of a high-quality youth development program is successfully providing skill-building opportunities that are challenging and engaging.<sup>5</sup> SCORES presents a unique opportunity for children to engage in building skills in both soccer and language arts. Evaluation results suggest that these skill-building opportunities lead to increased competencies and self-confidence in the young people who participate in SCORES.

On fall and spring Coaches' Assessments of Players, soccer coaches rated the soccer skills of 213 individual players using a four-point scale. **The average rating of participants' soccer skills showed a statistically significant increase from fall to spring.** On surveys, coaches commented on improved abilities in passing, playing specific positions, and ball handling. SCORES participants and their parents/guardians overwhelmingly agreed that the young people learned "lots of new and different skills" throughout the program.

Soccer Coaches' Assessments of Players also included a four-point scale measuring participants' self-confidence. **Again, the average ratings of players' self-confidence showed a statistically significant increase from fall to spring.** Writing coaches also believed participants made gains in self-confidence, self-esteem, overcoming shyness, and in a sense of pride in their work. These findings were confirmed by parents and guardians who overwhelmingly agreed that participating in SCORES was helping their children feel better about themselves.

Finally, an important component that links skill-building with improved self-confidence is the opportunity participants have to build caring and supportive relationships with the adults in the program. In quality youth programs, these positive relationships enable young people to experience the guidance and support they need to develop a range of skill competencies.<sup>6</sup> On evaluation surveys, both SCORES youth and their parents/guardians strongly agreed that **the adults in SCORES "really respect and care about kids."**

## Report Summary

Taken together, the results of this evaluation suggest that **America SCORES is an innovative program that helps participants in lower-income urban schools achieve a very diverse set of positive youth outcomes.** No doubt the aspects of SCORES that make it unique among other youth programs – including the combination of soccer, language arts, and service-learning; the high percentage of children of color who participate; and the involvement of nearly equal numbers of boys and girls – also contribute to the program's success.

As America SCORES endeavors to and expand the program across the United States, participant outcomes and attendance will continue to be tracked so that the program can be evaluated on a systematic basis across all SCORES affiliate sites.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development* (2002) by Michelle Alberti Gambone, Adena M. Klem, and James P. Connell, published by Youth Development Strategies, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> See the Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD) website at <http://www.cnyd.org/framework>



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