Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development

AmeriCorps VISTA Community Partnership Project
The Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND) is a consortium of over 30 colleges and universities in the greater Philadelphia area. PHENND works to build the capacity of its member institutions to develop mutually beneficial, sustained, and democratic community-based service-learning partnerships. The consortium actively seeks to revitalize local communities and schools and foster civic responsibility among the region’s colleges and universities.
PHENND

K-16 Partnerships Network

VISTA Project
What is a VISTA?

An AmeriCorps VISTA is full-time federally funded volunteer who is responsible for capacity building initiatives and community outreach for an organization.

The VISTA program is a tool in our tool kit.

VISTAs are not standard employees or allowed to displace other workers.
VISTA Role

The VISTA builds capacity of schools in four major areas through specific activities:

- Documentation and Needs Assessment
- Communication and Relationship Building
- Strategic Planning
- Evaluation
Where are the PHENND VISTAs?
Where are the 2015-16 PHENND VISTAs?
Accomplishments

- The 13 school VISTAs have engaged more than 300 partner organizations this year alone in aligning with school schedules, holding partner meetings, and planning school/community events.

- Cultivated new or revived old partnerships to meet defined school needs (literacy organizations, graduate schools of education, service learning college students, non-profits, museums, environmental groups).

- Successful MLK days, math and literacy nights, career/college fairs, parent engagement events.

- This year alone generated over $20,000 in cash and non-cash resources valued at through small grants, community fundraisers, DonorsChoose.org, as well as over 1,000 volunteers.
Lessons Learned So Far

- Partners respond positively to regular meetings and hearing school needs. Grateful for an “in” to school and want to help in creative ways.

- VISTAs flourish with strong task supervision at the school level.

- Hard for VISTA to carve out his/her role if there is one very dominant partner at the school.

- Principal and leadership team need to want to do this work.
Baby steps to a community school

- Helping school identify outstanding needs and define goals and priorities
- Helping leadership better align partner organization resources to school needs
- Helping partners build capacity to better serve students through increasing collaboration with other partners
6 buckets: programs and services inside a community learning school

- Medical (primary, dental, vision)
- Mental Health
- Academic support
- Out of School Time (OST)
- Parent and family support
- Community engagement and programs

PHENND VISTA
Future Aspirations

- Embed PHENND VISTA project in a larger city-wide community schools strategy.
- Use VISTA project cycle to assess school's readiness to be a Community School.
- Share lessons learned with other intermediaries and SDP.