

## **America SCORES' Best Practices: Organization of Activities**

*Interview with Dwayne Simmons, Program Director  
and Ive Mendoza, Program Manager*

America SCORES Boston strengthens at-risk youth through programs that promote health, academic advancement, and development of the whole child.



Photo Credit: America SCORES

### **Key Takeaways:**

- All coaches participate in a pre-season training that addresses common challenges and best practices.
- A curriculum pacer is created for the season that helps teachers choose which lessons to use.
- Staff reinforce the program's values: commitment, teamwork, and leadership.
- Staff go over the program schedule each day with students so that they know what the day's expectations are.
- Coaches are encouraged to start and end the program on time because of site visits by staff.
- Consequences to tardiness or unexcused absences are clearly communicated to students.

### **Q: What work goes into organizing activities prior to the start of the program?**

A: We do mandatory preseason training with all of the coaches. Each session is about 2-3 hours long. We separate the trainings based on the elementary school and middle school programs as well as providing separate trainings for all of the site coordinators. Some of the teachers who are in the trainings have been with America SCORES for several years, while others are brand new. Trainings cover everything from the curriculum, what to expect, and what a typical lesson looks like.

In addition, I create a pacer for the season. There are so many lessons that new and even old teachers can become bogged down by it. I look at the entire curriculum and pick the lessons that are the best fit for the program. I then look at the calendar for the entire program and suggest lessons for each week. I also leave time for questions and best practices. This includes what people have previously found difficult and how to combat any challenges that might pop up during the season, especially in an after-school setting. I also show the coaches our online system where they can access anything and everything they need. This way, if they need something quickly they can just download it online rather than emailing us.

**Q: How are students focused to minimize disruptions during activities?**

A: Sessions are about an hour and a half long. Because we teach writing and soccer together, we have found that students are more focused if we cover the writing component first. Students have pent up energy after school. But, by the time they are done with soccer, the students are hot, sweaty, and they are ready to go home and no longer want to pay attention. The “Scores” model indicates that students are supposed to show, commitment, teamwork, and leadership. Coaches reiterate these values throughout the session.

It is also helpful that students have a snack time to help them transition from the school day to after-school. During this time, coaches often break down what is expected of the students and the schedule for the day. For example, for the first 20 minutes students learn about onomatopoeias, then for the next 20 minutes students start writing a poem, and the next 20 minutes the students share what they have written to the class. Telling the students what is expected of the day and the time breakdown is really helpful for them.

**Q: How do staff ensure that activities begin promptly?**

A: Staff do site visits. Coaches anticipate these visits, and I share the evaluation form with them prior to the visit so they know what to expect. One of the expectations during these evaluations is that the session starts and ends on time because we want students to receive the full impact of the program. There is also a site coordinator at each school who manages the start and end times of the program. One of the biggest things for me was to establish relationships with all of the teachers. Every teacher is different, just like every student is different. Some teachers should be addressed in a friendlier manner, whereas with others you can be more direct.

To ensure that students are ready to start on time, every school has a different policy for students being late or absent. At some schools, if a student is late they require a note from a teacher. Tardiness can also be counted as an absence in some schools. For us, three unexcused absences results in the student not being able to play a game. We are very clear with the students about the consequences of an unexcused absence. Students are held accountable because they want to be able to participate in the games. We also have a parent-contract that is sent home with students that parents must sign. The contract details the consequences of unexcused absences.

*America SCORES Boston strengthens at-risk youth through programs that promote health, academic advancement and development of the whole child. Through youth development programming based around soccer, academics and the arts, the mission of America SCORES Boston is to inspire Boston youth to lead healthy lives, be engaged students, and have the confidence and character to make a difference in the world. The organization serves up to 1,400 students.*