

Jonathan Russell - AmeriCorps Fall 2003-2004

Hempstead High School and Summer Playground

When I was initially introduced to AmeriCorps, it seemed promising because of the flexibility of the hours and the fact that I could continue in education for a year even though I was "officially" taking a break from teaching professionally. During my first few months at Hempstead, I found my time was not being used to its potential. However, the situation took a positive turn in the second semester when I was given my own study hall. I became the students' tutor and study hall monitor. Some students flourished and turned around their year in a number of weeks while others continued along their previously established study patterns. There were many challenges, and I simply concerned myself with what I could do each day.

Playing tag was a nightly event, the kids loved the idea that an adult would spend time with them, acting as a big brother.



After some struggles, I realized I was making some of the same mistakes I had made as an early educator - I was trying to change too much at one time. Instead, I realized that this position with AmeriCorps was just like teaching, and I had to do things a little bit at a time. Rather than worrying about what I would be able to accomplish, I focused on what I could do that day with the students that were sitting in front of me. I would like to think I turned some of their educational careers around; but I have no idea what kind of influence I had.



Chess taught new skills in patience, strategy and problem-solving. It was also a great way to wind down after we overexerted ourselves playing tag!

I tried to take everything in stride, going through personal battles with students whose life problems were much bigger than grades.