



June '25 Partner Spotlight



Eugene Moon
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Citizen Schools

In this edition of the Expert Spotlight, we sat down with Eugene Moon, an AmeriCorps VISTA Fellow currently serving at Saratoga Union School District, whose journey is marked by a deep understanding of educational equity and a passion for empowering students through Experiential Learning. Drawing from his own experiences, Eugene is dedicated to breaking down systemic barriers and fostering an environment where every child's unique potential can be discovered and nurtured. His work focuses on creating hands-on learning opportunities and building strong interpersonal relationships with students, mentors, and families, all while leveraging his technical skills to streamline processes and enhance the learning experience. Check out his full interview below!

What drew you to the AmeriCorps and Citizen Schools mission and approach? Share a little about your journey that led you to CS.

I previously served a year as an AmeriCorps member in the Bay area working for a nonprofit. The direct service that I did as a Program Coordinator was mentoring tutors and students through assessments. We had a 45 minute intervention with the students such as, "you read, I read, we read." It followed the model of how reading is so important for the students. We had our advanced and emerging readers and then Social Emotional Learning curriculum that we went by each week. We used Salesforce to gather and organize store data, which ultimately helped me to analyze and streamline my work, and I was able to learn so many technical skills that have brought value into the classroom in more virtual ways.

During my year of service, I realized working with kids was something that I really enjoyed and I wanted to excel a little bit more in my creative learning process. I heard about Citizen Schools through word of mouth and how serving as a VISTA Fellow has so many great benefits that I can learn through empowering students with Experiential Learning and mentorship. Coming as a second generation Korean American, I didn't always have access to mentorship resources myself, due to the lack of resources and educational barriers I faced. Understanding the impact of how education has evolved throughout the years and Citizen Schools focus on attacking systematic barriers, I feel the opportunity to empower others to support their growth has given me the opportunity to be creative in my own thinking process. This experience has driven me to get back, not only with myself growing as a leader, but also helping others to speak up and be transparent in the classroom.

In my role I am able to have authentic experiences and to engage with students' creativity through hands-on learning which allows me to build interpersonal relationships with mentors and as well families and school stakeholders. Being able to step away from a traditional classroom setting and focusing on the creative learning process of building systems and tools, is allowing me to have autonomy and accountability over my work which is something I'm passionate about.

What does Experiential Learning (EL) mean to you, and why is it important? What would it look like to truly learn experientially? To me, Experiential Learning is recognizing every child has a unique gift that's waiting to be discovered. Sometimes we know that students need a little bit more encouragement, guidance and the right opportunities to unite their passion. By creating that curiosity and growth mindset we can help them learn and unlock their full potential. I heavily learned about curiosity and growth mindset during my college years but we are trying to do it younger. At Saratoga Union School District, we have clubs and ways to help students explore ideas that are new to them and put them in situations that help to develop their potential.

What do you believe is the best first step towards advancing the future of learning? What is necessary to make it successful? I think the first step from real life hands on experience, has been towards advancing the future of learning through self-awareness. I think recognizing every student has different strengths and promoting self awareness and understanding the diverse ways that students can learn is empowering. By being able to enrich the lives of students and building their confidence in learning is something that I represent.

Here at Saratoga Union we do professional development training on Social Emotional Learning using the five CASEL competency framework which I lead every week. I've learned that by creating an inclusive, adaptable learning environment we allow students a space where they can embrace flexibility and foster a culture that helps them by meeting students where they are and helping them to feel safe.

This professional development training for students helps them understand the many different ways that they can grow and cover different focuses each week. Each week, we develop training methods and best practices to bring into the classroom. We are now doing team building exercises and ways for them to earn a Presidential Service Award by the end of their term. We will be moving into supporting effective communication, deepening empathy and strengthening relationships with students, teachers and families.

Who is the most influential mentor you have had throughout your life? What qualities did they impart that you continue to embody in your work? During the first part of my career there was a mentor who was almost a father figure to me. He would meet with me every week at Starbucks and discuss random facts and throw trivia at me like 'who's the top billionaire right now?' He would stress to me to try to focus on real human relationships because with the future of work, bots and automation will take over many elements but relationships are something that will never be able to be taken over. I think the human element is really important, and building effective relationships, interpersonal connections with others is the most important thing in my life.

Can you share an example of a successful project or activity that demonstrated the value your service year? One of the most rewarding aspects has been enriching our volunteers through training meetings. Bi-weekly training sessions are helping them understand and shaping their connections with the classroom. We have also been able to build partnerships with local schools and some other community programs around the area which has helped us to support the students through the mentorship pipeline.

Now we're building interest around the students' needs and hoping we can bring some corporate partners to support our showcase vision that we're going to be doing. It's been about investing in those relationships and also building a community around our vision through organizations such as government officials, churches and nonprofits.

Ultimately, with this I envision my goal is to foster a well-rounded learning environment that nurtures both creative and academic growth. By fostering creativity, I've seen how students succeed when given opportunities to explore their own creativity through club activities such as Saratoga Quiz Bowl, Finance Club Team, and Art Club, in conjunction with establishing the importance of expanding students' horizons in areas like technology, coding, robotics, and STEM. We're particularly emphasizing math within our system, and I'm actively exploring ways to support students with homework, projects, and engaging STEM missions.