IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE

Minnesota Reading Corps

K-3 Program

Corporation for NATIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

More than two-thirds of fourth grade students in the United States -- as many as six million children -- do not read proficiently. The problem is most acute for children living in poverty, children of color, English Language Learners, and children with disabilities.

The implications are profound: Third grade marks the pivotal point when children transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Children who cannot read by then struggle more with the increasingly complex, multidisciplinary information introduced in later grades. **Those who read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to graduate from high school than those who do not.**

A growing body of research validates what works in teaching children to read: **Well-trained tutors delivering early, targeted, evidence-based interventions to students in need.** This report describes the result of a randomized controlled trial evaluation of Minnesota Reading Corps, an AmeriCorps program that translates literacy research into effective practice.

By combining the people power of AmeriCorps with proven education strategies, this evidence-based initiative can successfully address one of our nation's most critical priorities.

KEY FINDINGS

This independent evaluation showed that AmeriCorps members can produce significantly greater increases in student literacy outcomes among elementary students over one semester of tutoring.

- The average kindergarten student with an AmeriCorps tutor performed twice as well as students without one.
- AmeriCorps tutors helped the average first grade student perform 26 percent better than the expected level for on-track students.
- Students with higher risk factors* who received AmeriCorps tutoring significantly outperformed students who did not.

  ** such as dual language learners and students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch*
- The Minnesota Reading Corps program is replicable in multiple school settings using AmeriCorps members with varied backgrounds*.

  ** gender, race, age, years of education, full/part-time status, prior experience*

THE READING CORPS MODEL

Minnesota Reading Corps, a strategic initiative of ServeMinnesota, demonstrates how service and science can accelerate improvement in both students and systems. By mobilizing the people power of AmeriCorps, Reading Corps provides proven literacy interventions and data-based assessments to children from age three to grade three. Using the latest research on reading intervention strategies and guidance from literacy experts, Reading Corps fixes a critical link in literacy acquisition. It provides what struggling readers need – individualized, data-driven instruction, one-on-one attention, well-trained tutors, instruction delivered with fidelity, and the frequency and duration necessary for student achievement.

For teachers, regularly delivering individualized, one-on-one instruction can be difficult, if not impossible. Because Reading Corps tutors are focused solely on providing reading support, they can target instruction and dedicate the time needed for each child. Tutors commit to a year or more of AmeriCorps service, receive rigorous training and ongoing support throughout the year, and use rich data assessments to ensure their efforts produce the desired results – helping children achieve grade-level reading proficiency.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Although the impact was smaller for third grade students, and no significant difference was found for second grade students, additional exploratory analyses showed that improvement for these students continued after the first semester. These findings support a conclusion that the program may be effective for some older students, and that more time in intervention may produce larger impacts.

METHODOLOGY

Beginning in 2011, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) sponsored a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the impacts of the Minnesota Reading Corps program on elementary students' literacy outcomes.

A sample of 1,530 kindergarten through third grade students identified as eligible for Reading Corps services were randomly assigned to either the Reading Corps program or control group at the beginning of the first semester, prior to the start of tutoring. Each eligible student in each grade within a school was matched with another eligible student based upon test scores. Students within pairs were then randomly assigned to either the program or control condition.

AmeriCorps members collected grade-appropriate literacy outcome data from students each week for 16 weeks between the fall and winter semesters of the 2012-2013 school year.

Schools eligible to participate in the evaluation had fully implemented the Reading Corps K-3 Program for at least two consecutive years. Stratified random sampling was employed to select schools. The study included a final sample of 23 urban, suburban, and rural schools.

PROGRAM GROWTH

Since 2003, **Minnesota Reading Corps has helped more than 100,000 struggling readers** progress toward proficiency by the end of third grade. The program has grown from serving just 250 students to reaching more than 30,000 annually – all while improving its effectiveness.

With support from CNCS and matching funds from private sector and other sources, the Reading Corps program has expanded to seven states and the District of Columbia. Altogether, an estimated **1,270 AmeriCorps members** are serving students nationwide using the Reading Corps model.

AMERICORPS AND EDUCATION

CNCS invests more than half of all AmeriCorps grant dollars in education, bringing tens of thousands of caring adults to schools across the country. AmeriCorps members provide teaching, tutoring, mentoring, afterschool support, and other services to students in **more than 10,000 public schools**, including one in three persistently low-achieving schools.

"The Minnesota Reading Corps has been a key partner in our efforts to ensure all students are reading well by third grade. This new data confirms that strong early learning supports and interventions get great results for kids, and set them on a path for continued academic success."

-- Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Education

RESEARCH COMPONENTS

Funded by CNCS, researchers from **NORC at the University of Chicago** conducted the following studies:

-- Feasibility study
-- Process assessment
-- Quasi-experimental evaluation of the pre-kindergarten program
-- Survey of AmeriCorps members
-- Impact evaluation of the kindergarten through third grade (K-3) program

COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

Each year, evaluations of Reading Corps show that **thousands of at-risk students reach critical milestones**. ServeMinnesota invested in a five-year quasi-experimental study of preschool participants which demonstrated that Reading Corps participants outperformed their peers on validated assessments that predict school readiness. Further, research conducted by the Center for Learning Solutions (2012) has shown that **Reading Corps participants are three times less likely to be assigned to special education** than non-participants, creating a permanent benefit to children and a **significant ongoing savings** to schools that can be redirected back into the classroom for the benefit of all children.

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AMERICORPS

MINNESOTA reading corps
A strategic initiative of ServeMinnesota

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Full report and methodology: **nationalservice.gov/research**

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