

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: West Fargo Public School District

Application ID: 14AC157453

Program Name: North Dakota Reading Corps

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

The applicant satisfactorily articulates the importance of reading proficiency, noting linkages between reading proficiency and high school graduation, and also providing examples of how North Dakota students rank very low on a number of indicators of reading proficiency across grade levels.

The applicant provides specific data on reading proficiency in North Dakota schools as well as district-wide data related to 3rd grade reading proficiency, citing data obtained from a least two sources indicating that approximately one-third to one-half of students in the target area for the proposed intervention are not reading at grade level.

The applicant notes that between one third to one half of students entering kindergarten in the target school districts do not demonstrate proficiency with pre-literacy reading skills necessary to becoming successful readers.

The applicant clearly establishes why the problem they will address, reading underachievement, is important to the community and why it matters. The applicant presents state and location specific data to document the prevalence of reading skill deficits in the state. The proposal identifies the target population as “bubble kids” and documents their reading issues along with the lack of service availability to address their needs.

The applicant details that the need in West Fargo and Fargo is severe by providing statistics about the percentage of students entering Kindergarten that are not proficient in key reading benchmarks.

The applicant indicates that the problem is worsening, providing data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2013) that documents a loss in average reading scores for the 4th graders in North Dakota.

The applicant provides data to demonstrate the correlation between reading proficiency and future academic outcomes. For example, students who do not read by grade three are four times more likely to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011).

The applicant identifies a need that is not currently being addressed by other programs: children that are identified as “at-risk” for reading failure but do not qualify for special reading services in the school.

The proposed intervention, a comprehensive reading support program strategically providing assessment and reading interventions for pre-k and k-3 students, is likely to be a highly effective means of filling the service gap for students who are “at-risk” for reading problems but do not qualify for special education services.

The combined intervention protocol includes multiple, sequential student assessments and targeted one-on-one reading interventions implemented by AmeriCorps members who receive coaching and supervision to ensure fidelity to the Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) model. This intervention protocol is likely to lead to the identified short, medium and long term outcomes.

The applicant pinpoints an important gap in service delivery and develops a program designed to prevent a specific target population from ‘falling through the cracks’ by “combining the people power of AmeriCorps with the science of how children learn to read”. The program proposed by the applicant is designed to replicate a successful program implemented in Minnesota.

The applicant was chosen by MRC as a full replication partner. The program design is based on a highly successful program implemented in Minnesota and the applicant will receive ongoing support and mentoring from MRC throughout the program.

The applicant targets their intervention at a very specific population, one that is identified to be “at-risk” for reading deficiencies but does not qualify for school-provided reading programs. The activities proposed are appropriately designed for this group, for example, short bursts of one-on-one reading activities.

The AmeriCorps Members will receive meaningful, ongoing support and coaching throughout the program. Each Member will be paired with Internal Coaches (on-site) and will receive monthly coaching from a Master Coach.

The applicant’s past performance demonstrates successful intervention with 421 elementary students, with 89% of participant students achieving grade level reading proficiency.

The applicant reports that students across all grade levels who participated in the program had average rates of growth higher than the target rate of growth, and the average rate of growth for many participant students doubling or tripling the target rate of growth in reading proficiency.

The applicant proposes a partnership with organizations that have administered Americorps programs and/or worked with North Dakota schools successfully for a number of years and therefore have important experiences to guide the development of this program. For example, the applicant proposes to replicate a program that has been implemented in Minnesota.

The program elements that the applicant seeks to implement has some research support.

As stated in the narrative, the applicant met all of its performance measures during the 2012-13 program year and

documented a positive impact on student literacy. For example, 89% of students achieved grade level proficiency.

Weaknesses:

The applicant identifies students who do not qualify for “special reading services from a trained teacher” as the target group for the proposed intervention, yet does not provide specific information about how many West Fargo students in each age category to be serviced (age 3 to grade 3) might need supplemental reading supports.

Without a solid, “data-portrait” of pre-k and k-3 need (for example, the number of at-risk students in the district in the targeted age categories who do not qualify for special education/specialized reading supports), it is difficult to know if the intervention as designed is sufficient in scope to make a significant community impact.

The applicant does not demonstrate successful past performance in providing pre-literacy supports to pre-kindergarten children.

The applicant does not present information about successes with the proposed pre-k component of the program.