

Testimony
67th Legislative Assembly
House Appropriations Education and Environment Division
Senate Bill 2018
March 11, 2021

Chairman Monson and members of the Education and Environment Division, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB2018. My name is Jolene Garty, and I am the Director of Student Services at the South East Education Cooperative (SEEC) and I oversee North Dakota Reading Corps.

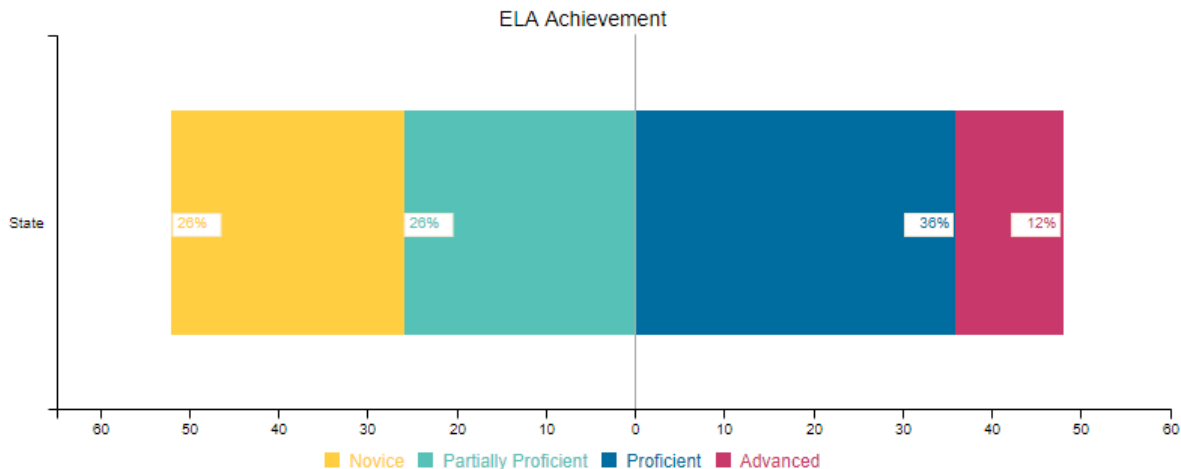
I am testifying in support of 2018 to provide background information on the \$200,000 allocation in Section 1, line 20 under “grants”. That funding would be administered as a grant for matching funds to provide literacy intervention services through ND Reading Corps, which is an AmeriCorps program.

This is a renewal of the legislation passed in 2019 which also provided \$200,000 to expand Reading Corps into new schools in the state. In this current legislative session SB2219 was introduced as a stand-alone bill. Since the grant is administered through Commerce’s Work Force Division, Senate Appropriations decided to include the funding in this bill and 2219 was subsequently killed in the Senate.

ND Reading Corps is an intervention program that partners with North Dakota school districts to deliver reading services during the school day. It combines the power of national service through AmeriCorps with the Science of Reading to help struggling readers transform into confident and capable students.

Why We Need Reading Corps

Research tells us that students who are reading proficiently by 3rd grade are 4 times more likely to graduate from high school. The 2018-19 NDSA English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement data shows that 52% of 3rd graders are not proficient in reading.



Third grade also marks the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. After 3rd grade, students who are behind in reading begin to fall behind in other subjects. Reading Corps is a cost-effective way to close the literacy gap in North Dakota to help achieve the State’s Strategic Vision Framework goal of increasing the number of 3rd graders reading proficiently.

Reading Corps works with students who score below the 49th percentile in proficiency on district reading assessments. They are often referred to as the “bubble kids”. They are at-risk for reading failure, but schools do not typically have capacity to work one on one with these students. Instead, schools need to focus their resources on students who are much further behind. This waiting period widens the gap, and it takes more intensive and expensive intervention to get these students to proficiency. The goal of Reading Corps is to catch those students before they are that far behind. By partnering with Reading Corps, the district can focus its staff and resources on students who have more intensive needs.

To implement the program, SEEC and the Central Regional Education Association (CREA) work in partnership with school districts to serve students who qualify during the school day. We recruit individuals from the community to commit to a year of service as a tutor through AmeriCorps, which is known as the domestic version of the Peace Corps. Reading Corps trains tutors to deliver evidence-based literacy interventions to students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. Our tutors come from all walks of life and many are parents, retirees, or college students. Some have experience working in education and others do not. Tutors are placed in an elementary building part-time to work one-on-one with students 20 minutes a day, 5 days a week. In exchange for their service, they earn a stipend of \$8,200 or \$11,000 each year plus an education award of up to \$3,000 to use towards student loans or future tuition expenses. Tutors who are over 55 can transfer the award to a child or grandchild for those purposes.

The success of Reading Corps is based on using strategies that are aligned to how the brain learns to read, which is known as the Science of Reading. Tutors assess students to identify which reading skills each individual student needs help with. Tutors meet with students for 20 minutes a day, 5 days a week, one-on-one to deliver evidence-based literacy interventions. “Interventions” means scripted practice which targets specific reading skills. Reading Corps helps students with phoneme (sound) blending, decoding, building fluency, comprehension, and expression. Student progress is monitored weekly to track growth and provide data for decision-making. Students “graduate” from the program on a rolling basis when they demonstrate that they have acquired the literacy skills required to “catch up” with their grade-level peers. A new student is then placed in that spot to receive services.

Reading Corps is also implemented as a full model which includes 5 days of training and a multi-layer coaching system which includes an on-site Internal Coach, who is a district employee, and an REA Master Coach. Both coaches meet with the tutor monthly to observe tutoring sessions using a fidelity checklist and to review student progress data.

Reading Corps programs are now in 13 other states and Washington D.C. Minnesota currently invests \$7.95 million of state funding annually, serving 25,000 students.

Proven Results

One of the benefits of Reading Corps is that we know that it works. During the 2019-20 school year, 79% or 499 out of 632 students served in 11 school districts had a weekly growth rate above their grade level target; meaning they made more than a year's worth of growth within a year's time to close the gap. This growth occurred even though the in-person school year and tutoring were cut short.

Reading Corps has also undergone multiple studies nationally, including a large randomized-control trial and an impact evaluation completed with West Fargo Public Schools in 2018-19. That study used a matched-comparison analysis of 99 students receiving Reading Corps service and 99 students with similar demographics (race, gender, free or reduced lunch status). Reading Corps students received an average of 65 minutes of support for 20 weeks. The evaluation found that all grade levels exceed the reading scores of the comparison group. Most notably, second and third grade students assigned to Reading Corps outperformed their peers by 68 points on STAR Reading, a remarkable feat equivalent to roughly 18 additional weeks of typical reading instruction.

OUTCOMES FROM THE 2018-2019 EVALUATION



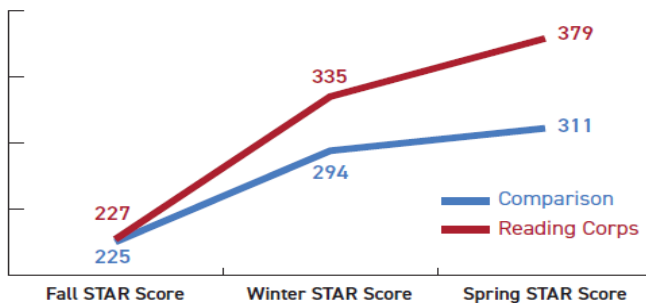
99 Reading Corps students were compared to 99 similar students in the district



Reading Corps students received an average of 65 minutes of support each week for 20 weeks

OUTCOMES FOR GRADES 2-3

Reading Corps students outperformed non-participants by a wide margin



Cost Savings

Through our partnership with AmeriCorps, we can leverage almost \$500,000 in federal funding which comes to us through the North Dakota Department of Commerce. With the combination of grants and a low fee from school districts, we can deliver effective intervention services for around \$1,100 per student. This is a significantly lower price per student than other programs. For example, Reading Recovery, a well-known program which only serves first graders and does not align to the Science of Reading costs over \$5,000 per student.

AmeriCorps has restrictions on the use of federal dollars for the required matching funds which means that school districts are limited in using CARES or ESSER to pay their cost share to participate in the program.

Support SB2219

With continued state funding, Reading Corps can serve an additional 175 students who are not receiving service. We can help support students during this time of COVID learning loss and to help increase the number of 3rd graders reading proficiently in ND. Under the 2219 testimony, you will find additional testimony in support of the program from principals and parents.

Reading Corps 2020-21 Participating Districts **expansion school*

Elementary School	Number of Students Served
Bismarck	44
Barnes County North*	12
Wilton	15
Ellendale*	11
Enderlin*	12
Litchville-Marion*	10
Minot*	41
Medina*	10
Underwood*	10
Washburn	15
Valley City*	8
Wahpeton*	8
Fargo	138
Lisbon*	13
Jamestown	9
West Fargo	59
Total as of Jan 20, 2021	415