

67th North Dakota Legislative Session, Testimony for Senate Education Committee

SB 2219 *A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation to the department of commerce to provide funding for research-based literacy intervention services to students.*

Submitted by: Thomas Hill, Vice President of Community Impact, United Way of Cass-Clay

January 26, 2021

Dear Senate Education Committee,

United Way of Cass-Clay (United Way) improves lives by activating resources to solve complex community issues and create lasting social change. We seek to make measureable progress toward increasing access and reducing barriers for underserved, at-risk, and vulnerable individuals and families to achieve four Bold Goals:

1. Reduce Hunger & Homelessness
2. Prepare Children to Succeed
3. Help People be Independent
4. Lift People out of Poverty

By focusing on our Bold Goals, we look to improve lives and create a better tomorrow for everyone in

In order to *Prepare Children to Succeed* United Way strives to ensure students are successful as they progress through school and upon graduation are “choice ready” for postsecondary or workforce. We accomplish this by partnering with community-based organizations to organize a system of wraparound supports for students as they progress through school and by partnering with schools to ensure student engagement and learning as they progress through school. These partnerships are allowing us to make strategic, data-driven decisions that will make the greatest difference in the lives of students. One of the strongest, research-based investments United Way of Cass-Clay is making is to support Reading Corps.

Beginning in 2013, United Way provided local seed funding to bring this research-based reading program to the state, specifically in Cass County.

Reading Corps works in partnership with local school districts to place elementary literacy tutors in their buildings to provide evidence-based literacy interventions to students who are at risk for reading failure. Schools included in this project currently provide classroom reading instruction, including core reading instruction for all students, and supplementary instruction to students identified with moderate to severe reading skill deficits through Title teachers, Reading Specialists, and Special Education teachers.

However, there are a number of students who could benefit from additional instruction and practice in reading who are not typically served by existing resources in a school. These students typically fall in the 35th to 49th percentile. These students are the focus of this project. They are what educators often call the "bubble kids", the children who are close to reaching proficiency but aren't given the attention to boost their abilities.

Partner school districts identify which school buildings to place Reading Corps tutors in by taking into account their existing resources as well as the number of students who would qualify for service (building-level data is annualized annually). Previous district-wide data showed that nearly a third of students in these districts scored below the 49th percentile on reading assessments.

Reading Corps achieves improved educational outcomes for targeted children by:

1. Partnering with school districts to place trained and supported AmeriCorps members in elementary schools where each member provides intensive, research-based tutoring and literacy support to approximately 15 children over the course of the school year.
2. Requiring members and their Internal Coaches to participate in the 3 day Reading Corps Institute where they receive intensive training on collecting benchmark data, monitoring student progress, and implementing research-based literacy interventions.
3. Providing members and Internal Coaches with monthly on-site coaching from Master Coaches (literacy experts) to tailor interventions for each student, based on the data collected on key literacy measures.
4. Monitoring students who have successfully learned the literacy skills and graduated from Reading Corps to ensure that they stay on track to become successful readers by the end of 3rd grade.

United Way of Cass-Clay has financially supported Reading Corps locally in Cass County for almost a decade. Each year, outcome data demonstrates that children who are NOT reading at the grade-appropriate level receive the assistance, guidance and tutoring necessary to bring them up to be able to the grade-appropriate level.

Reading proficiency is significant for many reasons. First being that grade-level reading proficiency is one of the highest indicators of whether or not a student will be able to graduate from high-school. According to national research, children who do not reading proficiently by 3rd grade are more than four times as likely to NOT graduate high school.

Secondly, from birth to grade three, children are learning to read. Their minds are learning the sounds of letters, the forming of words, the structure of sentences, and how to comprehend information. From third grade on, children read to learn. Reading fluency and proficiency are critical for students to be able to learn and retain lessons, thus preparing them for success in the future.

Finally, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction supports the Choice Ready Framework-where students will be ready for post-secondary, labor or military service upon high school graduation. Whatever choice and path a student is preparing for, reading proficiency is paramount to their future success.

United Way of Cass-Clay strongly supports making data-driven decisions and supports making investments into research-based interventions for students locally.

United Way of Cass-Clay is supportive of the North Dakota Legislature making an appropriation into research-based literacy interventions for students across the state and ask for a DO PASS recommendation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Hill', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas Hill
Vice President of Community Impact
United Way of Cass-Clay

