

**Testimony**  
**67<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly**  
**Senate Appropriations Committee**  
**Senate Bill 2219**  
**February 10, 2021**

Chairman Holmberg and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB2219. For the record, 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.

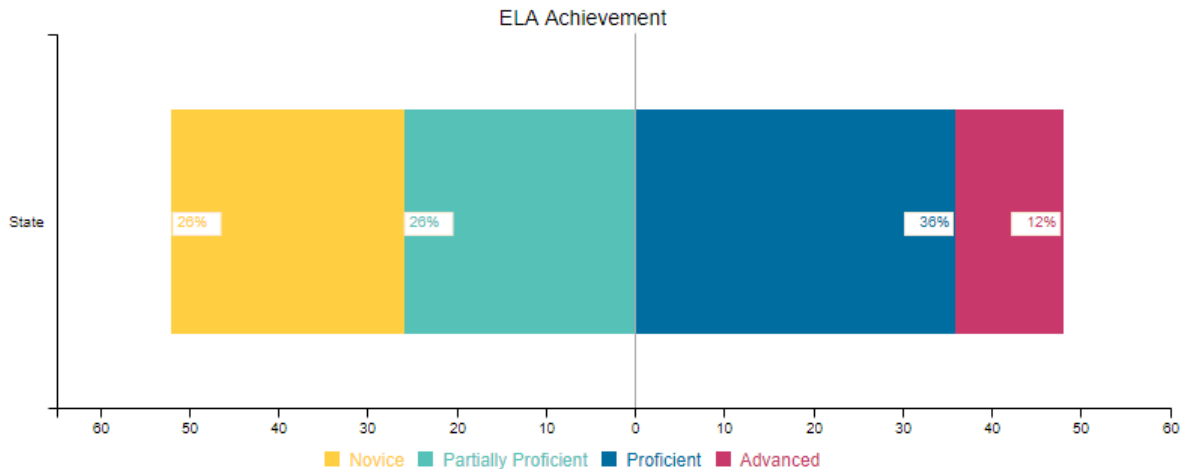
SEEC is one of the seven Regional Education Associations or REAs in North Dakota. We are based out of Fargo and serve 33 public schools, 3 private schools and more than 2,800 teachers and 35,000 students.

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.

This bill is a renewal of the legislation passed in 2019 which appropriated \$200,000 to ND Reading Corps to expand the program to new schools in the state. This funding has been used over the biennium to expand the program to 11 new school districts which has served 139 additional students.

I'd like to explain how Reading Corps works and why this program is an important support for school districts.

Research tells us that students who are reading proficiently by 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are not proficient in reading.



Third grade also marks the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. After 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> graders reading proficiently.

Reading Corps works with students who score below the 49<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 years' 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**



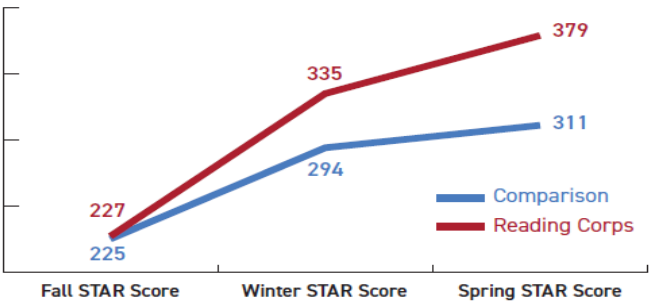
99 Reading Corps students were compared to 99 similar students in the district



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.

**Support SB2219**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of 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 3<sup>rd</sup> graders reading proficiently in ND. You will find additional testimony in support of this bill online from principals and parents who have had students in the program.

I'll stand for any questions from the committee.

**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                        |
| <b>Total as of Jan 20, 2021</b> | <b>415</b>                |