

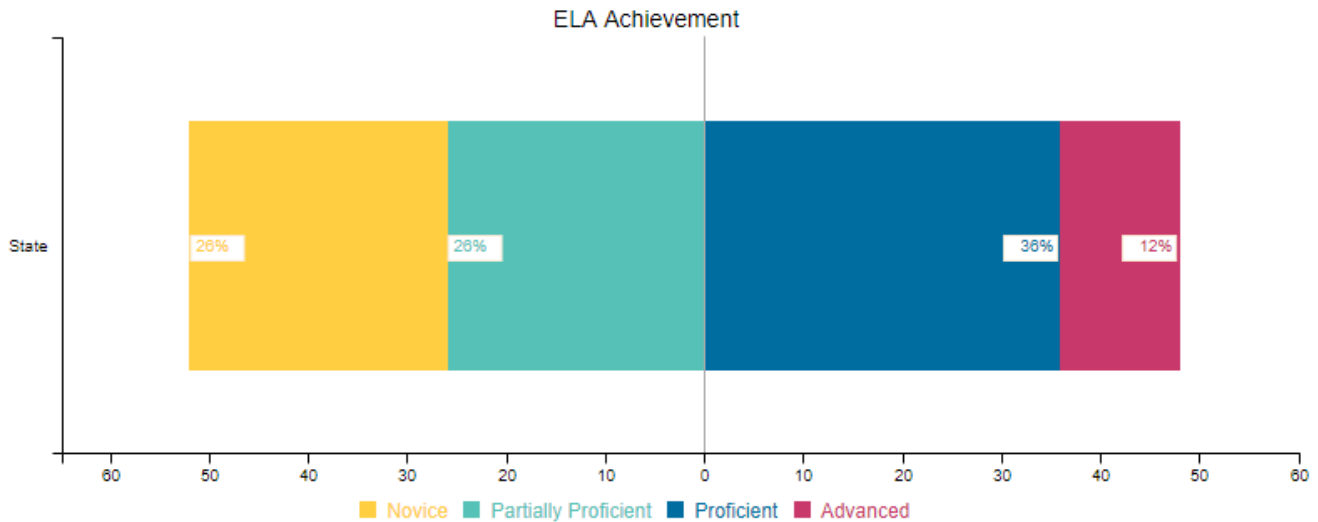
Testimony
67th Legislative Assembly
Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill
January 25, 2021

Chairman Schaible and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity share information about North Dakota Reading Corps. 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.

ND Reading Corps is a reading intervention program that partners with school districts in North Dakota to deliver services during the school day. Reading Corps combines the power of national service through AmeriCorps with the Science of Reading to help struggling readers transform into confident and capable students. During the 2019-20 school year, we served 622 students. Students served by Reading Corps score below the 49th percentile in proficiency on district reading assessments. These students 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. Schools focus their resources on students who are 1 to 2 years 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 doing so, the district can focus its staff and resources on students who have more intensive needs.

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” so a lack of reading proficiency continues to affect students throughout their education. 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.

How K-3 Reading Corps Works

SEEC and the Central Regional Education Association (CREA) work together along with school districts to implement this program. The program recruits 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 Corp. Reading Corps trains these individuals 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 \$2,400 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.

Tutors use evidence-based interventions tailored to student need based on assessment data to boost early literacy skills like letter names, letter sounds,

phoneme (sound) blending, letter sound correspondence, and connected text skills like fluency, expression, and comprehension. 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.

The success of Reading Corps is based using strategies that are aligned to how the brain learns to read, which is known as the Science of Reading. Reading Corps helps students learn phonemes, to decode, build fluency and comprehension skills. 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.

Proven Results

During the 2019-20 school year, 79% or 499 out of 632 students 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.

Further, in 2018-19, we completed an impact evaluation using 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



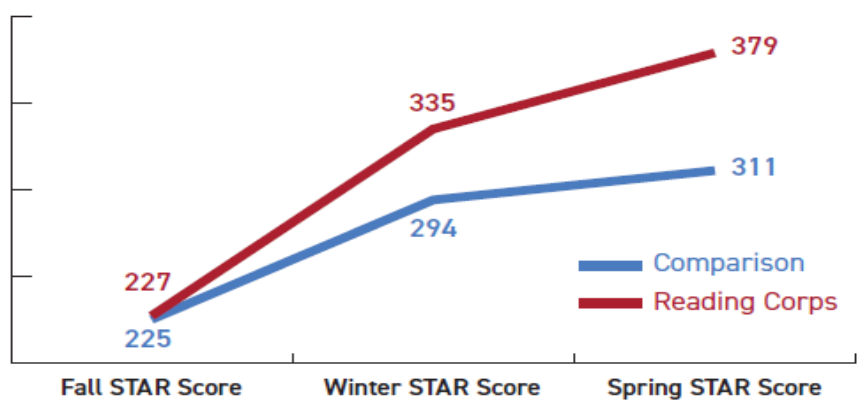
99 Reading Corps students were compared to 99 similar students in the district



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



Reading Corps Expansion Through Legislative Support

During the 2019 Legislative Session, \$200,000 was appropriated to ND Reading Corps through a grant from Department of Commerce which also holds our AmeriCorps funding. This funding has been used over the biennium to expand the program to 11 new school districts which has served 139 additional students this school year alone. The chart below outlines the school districts served this year, including the expansion sites:

Reading Corps 2020-21

**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

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 does not align to the Science of Reading and only serves first graders costs over \$5,000 per student. Further, a study conducted in Minnesota found that the average cost to deliver special education, once the gap is wide enough for a student to need that level of intervention, is over \$10,000 per student.

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.

Support SB2219

In closing, I would like to thank the committee again for the opportunity to testify in support of SB2219. North Dakota Reading Corps is an evidence-based literacy intervention program with a proven track record of helping students close the proficiency gap. With continued state funding, Reading Corps will have the funds to help expand the program to additional schools across the State to serve an additional 175 students. Reading Corps can help during this time of COVID learning loss and to help achieve North Dakota's vision to increase the number of students who demonstrate reading proficiency in 3rd grade.

I'll stand for any questions from the committee.

Submitted by:

Jolene Garty

Director of Student Services

SEEC