Minnesota Department of Education

Early Childhood Literacy in Head Start Programs

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Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) Program Vision and Description

The Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) is a statewide AmeriCorps program that is designed to provide a permanent part of Minnesota's solution to childhood illiteracy. The MRC strategy is to bring effective, research-based, data-driven literacy instruction to young children needing targeted (not just extra) tutoring to become successful readers.

The broad vision for the Minnesota Reading Corps includes the following:

1. All children in Minnesota, ages 3 to grade 3, that need the MRC, will have access to services and will start kindergarten on target to meet reading standards by 3rd grade.

2. Pre-K and K-3 settings, through their development of internal literacy coaching capacity provided by the MRC, will acquire competency in and adopt a data-based, problem-solving model of literacy instruction, and will promote this method to their colleagues.

3. AmeriCorps (AC) members, through the training, development and service opportunity provided by MRC, will pursue education-related careers and/or continue to be knowledgeable and persuasive ambassadors for children's literacy.

In 2008-2009, the Minnesota Reading Corps harnessed the power of national service to place a total of 362 AmeriCorps members at pre-K and public elementary schools across the state to deliver intensive individualized research-driven literacy tutoring to 10,637 children age 3 to grade 3 so that they could catch up to their peers and become confident, competent readers with brighter futures. The following represents the pre-K/K-3 program breakout:

- **Pre-K:** 127 AmeriCorps members served at 12 Head Start programs, 3 community-based pre-K educational centers, and 26 public school pre-K sites, to serve a total of 2,796 pre-K children.
- **K-3:** 235 AmeriCorps members served at 116 public elementary school sites to provide literacy support to 7,841 K-3 children.

In its sixth year, the Minnesota Reading Corps expanded its geographic reach, helped greater numbers of children meet grade-level literacy and reading requirements, attracted new partners and funders, and sustained support and attention from educational, political and business leaders. This report highlights the Minnesota Reading Corps 2008-2009 evaluation results, demonstrating the program's impact on the children it serves, the sites with which it partners, and the committed AmeriCorps national service members who invest a year of their lives to bring the best of literacy science to the front-lines of education.

2008-2009 Minnesota Reading Corps
Impacts at-a-Glance

- Served a total of **10,637 "Age 3 to Grade 3" students across Minnesota** with below grade-level literacy skills.
- Worked with **142 elementary schools, 12 Head Start programs and 3 pre-K educational centers** to put cutting-edge literacy research into practice to make literacy tutoring more effective.
- Recruited and supported **362 AmeriCorps members** to successfully complete a year of national service as MRC tutors and to become educated about literacy issues.
- Contributed to growing Minnesota's educator pipeline with **70 percent of AmeriCorps members** planning to use their education award to **pursue a career in teaching or education.**
- Involved 185 on-going community volunteers, 653 'one-time' volunteers and generated well over 3,000 volunteer hours to provide additional literacy tutoring and support.
- Raised $636,000 in private funds to combine with state funds of $1 million **to leverage an additional $5.6 million in federal dollars** to grow the program and invest in strengthening children's literacy within Minnesota.
- Achieved a **74 percent pass rate on the statewide 3rd grade MCA-II** test of reading proficiency for participating 3rd grade children who were identified as below grade level in literacy skills and had completed their MRC tutoring.

Regional Breakdown by Member

Region	Pre-K Members			K-3 Members
	Head Start Program	School-based	Community-based	
Duluth	0	2	0	23
Grand Rapids	20	0	0	8
Moorhead	12	0	0	19
St. Cloud	12	4	0	40
Rochester	17	2	0	26
Metro	23	26	9	119
Totals	**84**	**34**	**9**	**235**

Regional Breakdown by Site

Region	Pre-K Sites			K-3 Sites
	Head Start Program	School-based	Community-based	
Duluth	0	2	0	12
Grand Rapids	1	0	0	8
Moorhead	2	0	0	9
St. Cloud	3	2	0	16
Rochester	2	1	0	18
Metro	2	21	3	53
Totals	**10**	**26**	**3**	**116**

How the Minnesota Reading Corps Works

The MRC program model is to partner with school districts and pre-school agencies to place highly trained and professionally supported AmeriCorps members in early childhood education, Head Start, and K-3 classrooms. There members provide intensive, research-based tutoring to children age 3 to grade 3 and, as the program develops in each site, involve community volunteers and parents/families to multiply the program's reach and effectiveness. MRC members and volunteers from the community are trained in specific research-based literacy instructional protocols, and are supported by both site-based educational staff (internal coaches), as well as master coaches who are among Minnesota's top literacy experts. Members use reliable, valid assessment tools to monitor student progress on a regular basis, and with help from their coaches, use data from assessments to inform tutoring strategies for each student. The use of specific research-based instructional techniques and technically adequate assessment tools to guide interventions make MRC programming unique across the literacy landscape.

The Minnesota Reading Corps Program Model
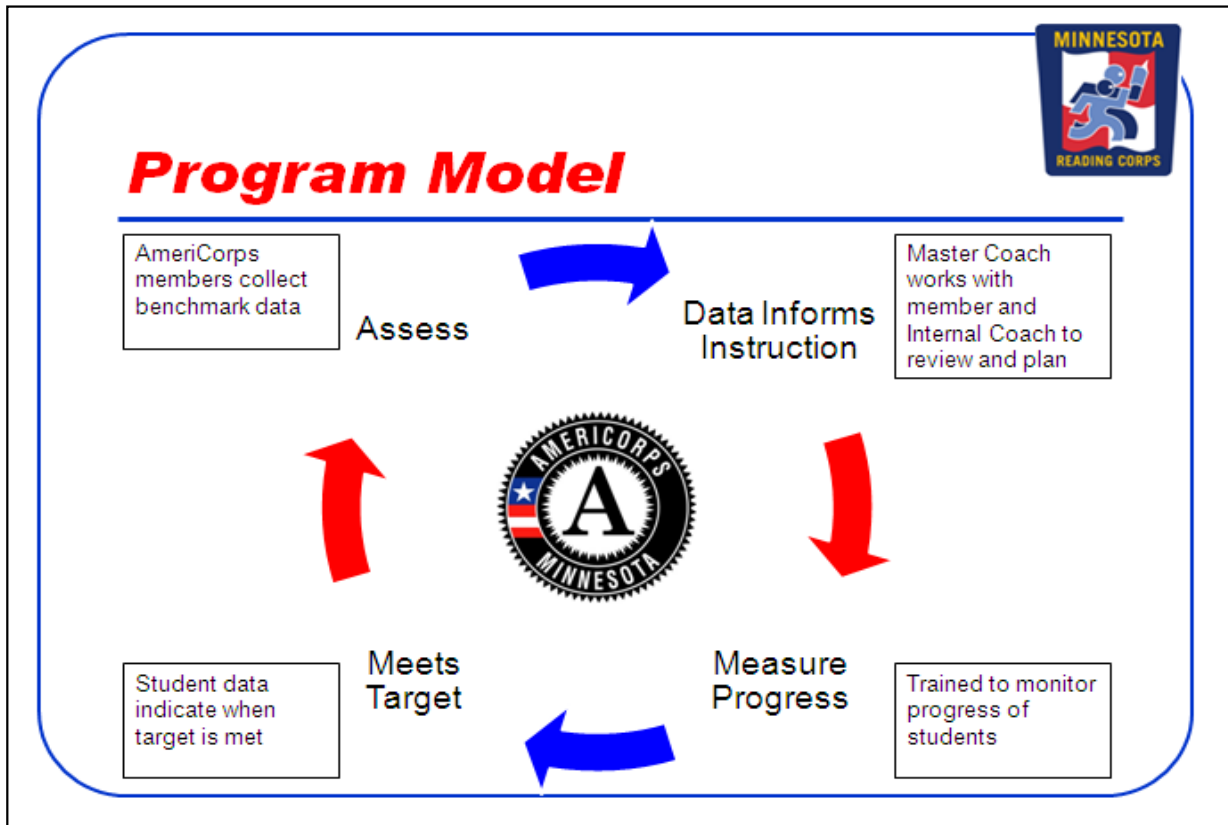
The following program components are common to both pre-K and K-3 MRC sites:

- **Intensive Training**: The MRC's success relies upon highly trained people capable of integrating cutting-edge research into educational practices on the front lines. MRC provides comprehensive up-front and on going training to both members and their internal coaches (site supervisors) on the following:

  ➢ Clear literacy standards with objective criteria so there is consistent knowledge and understanding of what children must learn to achieve reading competence.

  ➢ Research-based literacy interventions for members to use with children.

  ➢ Formative weekly assessment tools that provide ongoing progress data for classroom teachers and members to determine if the interventions are working.

  ➢ *Pre-K*: In the fall, Pre-K members also receive the research-based, seven-session SEEDS of Emergent Literacy (SEEDS) training that provides teaching strategies to support early literacy skills. The seven-week timeline allows practice and feedback as members apply training to the classroom. Members also participate in SEEDS refresher training. MRC also provides a SEEDS Train the Trainer series each summer to ensure that each MRC site has a licensed SEEDS Trainer on staff.

➢ *K-3 members* receive training in the administration of 11 literacy interventions based on the "Big 5" components of literacy defined by the National Reading Panel and recommendations of the National Research Council, National Academy of Science and other current literacy research.

- **Real-time Literacy Expertise:** Members and internal coaches receive on-site monthly coaching from literacy experts (master coaches) to tailor interventions for each child, based on the data collected on key literacy measures. Master coaches also observe the members' and internal coaches' use of interventions and assessment to ensure fidelity. For Pre-K sites, master coaches provide coaching to AmeriCorps members twice a month on the implementation of curriculum components in the classroom, use a standard checklist to observe AmeriCorps members working with small groups of children, and videotape AmeriCorps members as a coaching tool.

- **Engaging Community Support:** Members also recruit and manage community volunteers to expand the reach of each site and implement activities to involve families in helping their children become proficient readers.

Pre-K AmeriCorps members: Serve in preschool classrooms supporting one class of 17-20 children each year and perform the following specific activities:

- Collect data on each child related to key literacy skills so that specific interventions can be tailored to specific needs of each child. Data is collected twice a year and students' literacy progress is regularly monitored against five key skills – phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency.
- Create literacy-rich environments by setting up and updating five classroom centers to make play more meaningful through integrating reading, writing, and conversation into all activities.
- Implement a "5-Day Read Aloud" using dialogic reading techniques to expand vocabulary, phonological awareness and letter knowledge by reading the same book for five days.
- Provide tailored relationship-based interventions to small groups of children needing focused time on specific skills such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, alphabetic principles, conversation, and book/print concepts.
- Implement activities to make writing meaningful for young children.

K-3 AmeriCorps members: Each full-time member tutors 25-40 children during the course of the school year and performs the following specific activities:
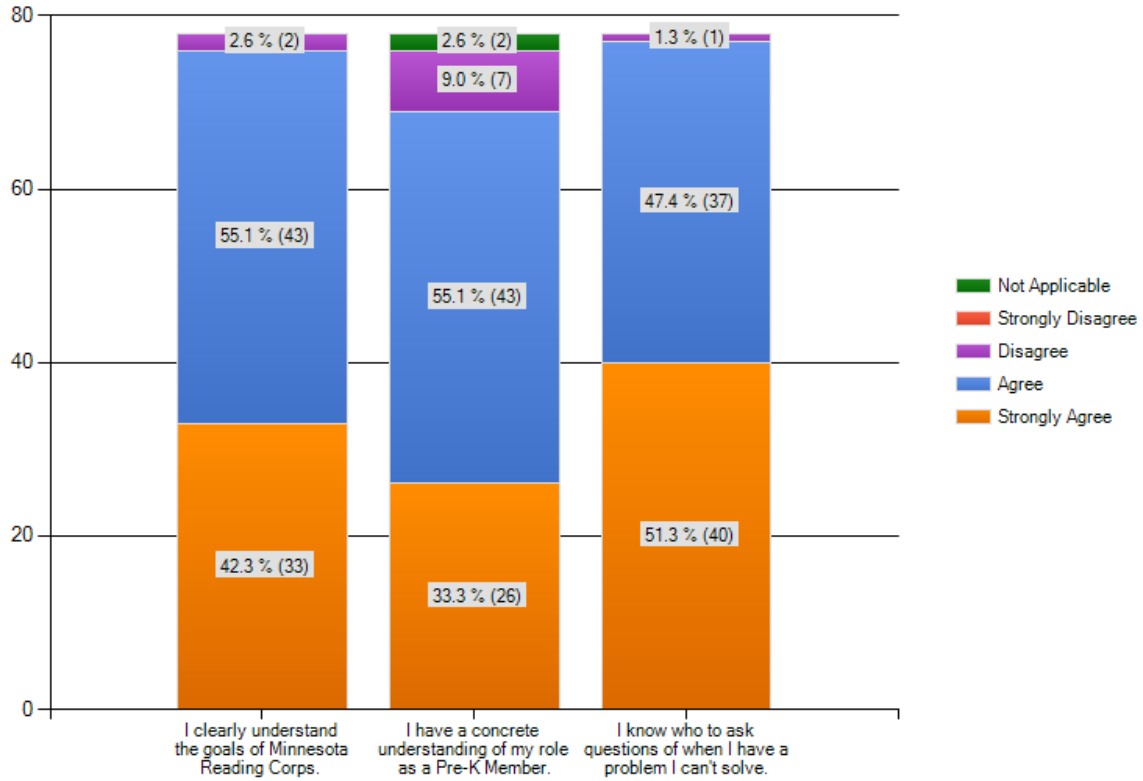
- Provide a minimum of 60 minutes of one-on-one individualized research-based literacy interventions per child, per week.
- Conduct progress monitoring by collecting weekly fluency measures on children tutored. Children graduate from the MRC on a rolling basis when they learn the literacy skills required to "catch-up" with their peers and are monitored to ensure they are re-enrolled if they do not stay on track to become successful readers by 3rd grade.

Delivering on Minnesota Reading Corps Program Management Goals

Post-training and post-service surveys indicate the MRC is equipping both members and internal coaches with the skills and support needed to effectively implement research-based interventions.

How well did the training prepare you for the 2009-2010 program year?

Chart legend:
- Not Applicable
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I clearly understand the goals of Minnesota Reading Corps.
- 2.6 % (2)
- 55.1 % (43)
- 42.3 % (33)

I have a concrete understanding of my role as a Pre-K Member.
- 2.6 % (2)
- 9.0 % (7)
- 55.1 % (43)
- 33.3 % (26)

I know who to ask questions of when I have a problem I can't solve.
- 1.3 % (1)
- 47.4 % (37)
- 51.3 % (40)

Who is Served?

The MRC has worked with educators and partners to pinpoint unmet needs within the state's educational system and to clearly define a target audience of children who would benefit most by working with its members and program.

Pre-K: For children 3-5 years old, the MRC supports educational centers such as Head Start and other public preschools with high rates of poverty and other risk-factors resulting in large numbers of children without the early literacy skills critical for beginning school ready to learn to read.

K-3: Programming focuses on the large numbers of K-3 children who are not on target to meet the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA-II) standards for reading proficiency but whose scores are not low enough to make them eligible to receive assistance from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Title I tutors or special education/learning disabilities teachers. These "Tier II" children who often "fall between the cracks" are otherwise typically assisted only through whatever extra support individual teachers manage to rally or directly provide. These children rarely receive ongoing progress monitoring to determine whether interventions are working or need altering.

Assessing Impact

MRC uses three tools to collect data on children's progress in demonstrating key literacy skills. This data is immediately and graphically available to members and their sites through a Web-based data collection system, AIMSweb, so that adjustments can be made to the interventions being used with individual children. Data from all tools is assessed on a quarterly basis using a "dashboard" reporting system.

Pre-K: The Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) literacy assessments measure literacy outcomes for 3- and 4-year-olds. After an initial reliability check, members administer IGDI's fall/winter/spring to establish benchmarks and track progress. Members consult with master coaches to analyze the data, make instructional decisions for children needing extra member support, and to set classroom goals. Final IGDI scores measure improvement in critical literacy skills and compare each child's results to benchmarks correlated with 1st and 3rd grade reading scores. The Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) (Smith, Dickenson, et.al, 2002) tool is also used to inventory strengths and areas of need in the MRC members' classroom. The tool is completed in the fall and spring. Results provide an objective report about what is needed to design a more literacy-rich classroom. Members implement improvements such as setting up stations to practice specific literacy skills, adding more books or using more visible literacy props.

Student Data for Pre-school Programs:

	Fall (Oct 6 -21)	Winter (Jan 19-30)	Spring (April 20 – May 1)
Age 3 on or before Sept 1st *	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration
Age 4 on or before Sept 1st	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration • Letter Naming Fluency • Letter Sound Fluency	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration • Letter Naming Fluency • Letter Sound Fluency	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration • Letter Naming Fluency • Letter Sound Fluency
Age 5 on or before Sept 1st but not enrolled in K	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration • Letter Naming Fluency • Letter Sound Fluency	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration • Letter Naming Fluency • Letter Sound Fluency	• IGDI Rhyming • IGDI Picture Naming • IGDI Alliteration • Letter Naming Fluency • Letter Sound Fluency

K-3: To measure K-3 literacy outcomes, members conduct one-on-one tutoring sessions based on results from benchmark testing completed three times a year. The general outcome measures contain elements of reading that precede reading connected text, named Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Good, et.al, 2002) and connected-text reading is measured by oral reading fluency (R-CBM) for the end of 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades (Fuchs and Deno, 1991). Weekly, members use a progress monitoring system with one-minute standardized tests. Results are entered into AIMSweb, which produces performance charts used to fine-tune weekly tutoring.

Student Data for K-3 Programs:

	Fall (Sept 8 – 19)	Winter (Jan 12 -23)	Spring (May 4 -15)
Kindergarten	▪ Letter Naming Fluency ▪ Letter Sound Fluency	▪ Letter Naming Fluency ▪ Letter Sound Fluency ▪ Nonsense Word Fluency	▪ Letter Naming Fluency ▪ Letter Sound Fluency ▪ Nonsense Word Fluency
Grade 1	▪ Letter Naming Fluency ▪ Letter Sound Fluency ▪ Nonsense Word Fluency	▪ Nonsense Word Fluency ▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)	▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)
Grade 2	▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)	▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)	▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)
Grade 3	▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)	▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)	▪ Oral Reading Fluency (3 passages)

Additional Data

Observations of assessment fidelity – three times per year

Observations of intervention fidelity – nine times per year in K-3 programs only

Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation – two times per year in Pre-K programs only

End of year MRC Member surveys

End of year MRC site surveys

MRC Pre-K Results: Early Literacy Outcomes for Minnesota's Youngest Students

Results linked to the literacy interventions and tutoring strategies with individual students are compelling. For five consecutive years, MRC preschool participants in Minneapolis scored significantly higher in phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, and total literacy than children in matched comparison groups entering kindergarten in Minneapolis Public Schools (based on the predictive validity of the Beginning Kindergarten Assessment used by the Minneapolis Public Schools).

Percent Children Reaching Targets in 5 Key Literacy Skills

|	Rhyme Fall	Rhyme Wint	Rhyme Spr		Pic. Name Fall	Pic. Name Wint	Pic. Name Spr		Allit. Fall	Allit. Wint	Allit. Spr		Letter Sound Fall	Letter Sound Wint	Letter Sound Spr		Letter Name Fall	Letter Name Wint	Letter Name Spr
2003-2004	10.00%	15.50%	33.30%		12.70%	24.30%	44.70%		4.00%	15.50%	26.80%		3.30%	8.90%	20.30%		16.00%	30.80%	38.90%
2004-2005	5.50%	18.20%	39.40%		18.50%	35.50%	57.10%		5.90%	15.90%	35.60%		2.40%	13.40%	32.10%		11.30%	27.10%	44.30%
2005-2006	6.97%	11.94%	24.00%		14.89%	45.74%	35.00%		5.47%	16.92%	22.00%		5.61%	15.31%	32.00%		9.45%	26.37%	44.00%
2006-2007			44.80%				50.90%				47.30%				39.40%				49.80%
2007-2008	6.83%	26.78%	44.00%		16.91%	35.79%	58.90%		5.28%	27.54%	43.40%		6.19%	34.00%	49.80%		14.64%	45.94%	63.30%
2008-2009	9.58%				17.08%				4.69%				8.64%				21.69%		

Assessment

The figure above shows the percent of 4-year-old MRC participants meeting the assessment spring target scores for fall, winter and spring assessment times across years. The 2006-2007 data was analyzed by an outside agency, and only includes students enrolled in Headstart MRC classrooms. Across successive school years, fairly stable fall performance is noted along with an overall increase in percent of students meeting spring target scores by the spring benchmark window. Data from the current year again shows performance roughly equivalent with or slightly above that of previous years on fall measures.

Minneapolis 2008-2009 Kindergarten-Aged Pre-K MRC Graduates Outperform Peers on BKA

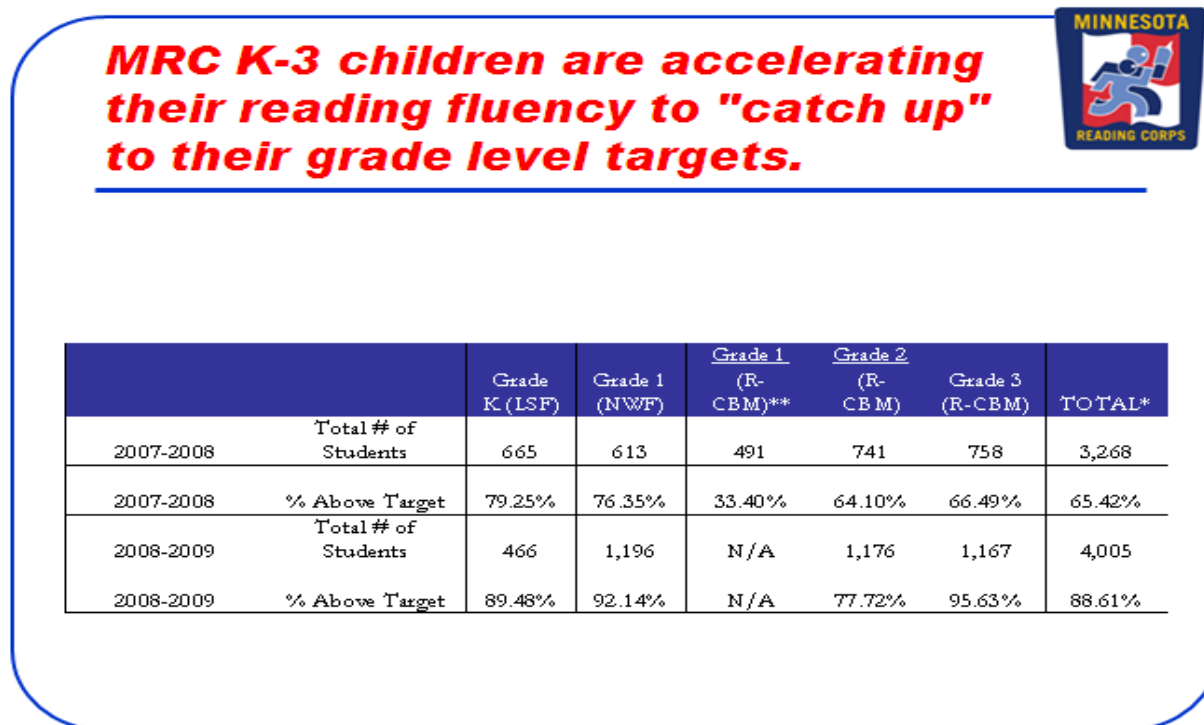|	Total Literacy Score
Reading Corps	127.6
Matched Sample	91.9
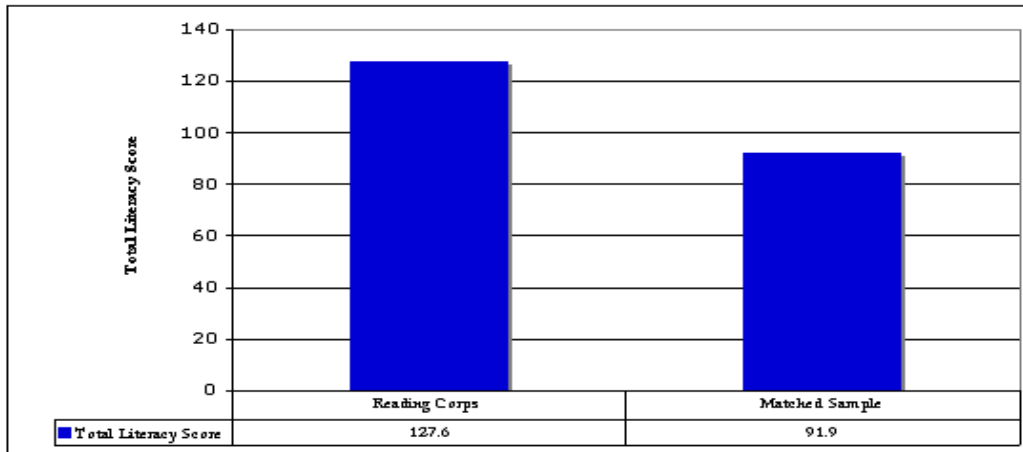
MRC K-3 Results: Partnering with the Minnesota Department of Education to Measure Program Success Against State Standards

Program year 2008-2009 marked a milestone in the MRC's role as a program with a recognized strategic role in statewide efforts to increase early literacy achievement. For the first time, the Minnesota Reading Corps secured a data-sharing agreement from the Minnesota Department of Education which allowed the program to access the 2009 MCA-II scores of all 3rd-grade children participating in the program statewide.

The MRC tutored a statewide total of 2.5 percent (1,283) of the state's 3rd graders that took the 3rd-grade MCA-IIs in the spring of 2009. Of the MRC 3rd-grade children that successfully completed their tutoring indicating they were on a trajectory to demonstrate reading proficiency, 74 percent tested as proficient. Statewide, the 2008-2009 pass rate for *all* 3rd-graders was 78 percent. Given that 100 percent of the MRC 3rd-graders who took the MCA-II's were identified by literacy specialists as at significant risk of literacy failure, this program-wide pass rate demonstrates remarkable progress for the 823 3rd-graders that were otherwise likely to have been left behind.

Additionally, within 44 percent (17) of the districts served by the MRC, the pass rate for 3rd-grade MRC graduates was between 90 – 100 percent. Also of significance was that in 56 percent (22) of the 39 districts served by the MRC, the pass rate for MRC graduates exceeded the district average for all children tested in the district.

The following chart provides additional data for 2008-2009 K-3 Literacy outcomes:

MRC K-3 children are accelerating their reading fluency to "catch up" to their grade level targets.

		Grade K (LSF)	Grade 1 (NWF)	Grade 1 (R-CBM)**	Grade 2 (R-CBM)	Grade 3 (R-CBM)	TOTAL*
2007-2008	Total # of Students	665	613	491	741	758	3,268
2007-2008	% Above Target	79.25%	76.35%	33.40%	64.10%	66.49%	65.42%
2008-2009	Total # of Students	466	1,196	N/A	1,176	1,167	4,005
2008-2009	% Above Target	89.48%	92.14%	N/A	77.72%	95.63%	88.61%

Putting Cutting-edge Literacy Science to Use in Minnesota's Classrooms and Deepening Alignment with Statewide Educational Innovations to Improve Student Achievement

Direct impact on individual student performance is the chief priority of the MRC. However, the program pursues this goal within a broader mission that includes advancing systems change to ensure its sites and their educators become equipped to transfer literacy science and research into hands-on support to struggling readers. Through the work of its master coaches and training delivery, the MRC is investing substantial resources to ensure that MRC practices are integrated and supported within the larger literacy education delivery systems of schools and their districts.

The MRC is pleased to share 2008-2009 evaluation findings that indicate the program made significant progress this year in advancing its host sites' capacity to apply proven research-based literacy strategies that maximize effectiveness and greatly accelerate the rate at which children acquire critical early literacy skills. End-of-year surveys captured how site supervisors and internal coaches at each participating site view MRC's impact on the local system, and the extent to which the MRC model is becoming an organizing structure for literacy intervention in the local building.

- 100 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the MRC program adds value to the instructional program at the local school or center.
- 86 percent of respondents indicated that participation in the MRC program has been somewhat influential or very influential in prompting systems change at the local school or center.

Preparing the Next Generation of Literacy Leaders: Impacts from a Year of Service

The MRC not only addresses the immediate education needs of children, but also impacts the quality, commitment and number of future Minnesota educators and advocates through the high-quality training, development and service opportunity provided by MRC to its AmeriCorps members. While outcome data and ongoing assessment underlies the MRC's success, it is its front-line delivery system that makes the program truly transformative. This year's AmeriCorps members brought consistent commitment and energy to making a lifelong difference in the lives of the children they served. In the process, they, too, were often transformed.

2008-2009 end-of-year surveys indicate members had a very positive experience serving with the MRC and suggest the program has played a strong role in encouraging and supporting the majority of members to pursue education-related careers and/or to continue to serve as lifelong ambassadors for children's literacy.

- Over 98 percent agree that serving with the MRC was a positive experience.
- 71 percent indicate participating in the MRC has influenced them to consider a career in education.
- Over two-thirds, 69 percent (250 of last year's 362 members), intend to use their education award to pursue a career in teaching or education.
- 97 percent are committed to continue promoting childhood literacy.
- 87 percent will continue to volunteer in schools.

In addition, close to 60 percent of pre-K site supervisors reported an increase in their staff pursuing advanced credentialing in early childhood education through their participation with AmeriCorps. The feedback underscores how the MRC is addressing not only the immediate needs of individual children and their classrooms, but is also supporting already committed educators to increase their effectiveness through additional education. MRC is especially committed to elevating the skill of existing Headstart educators, 20 of whom participate as AmeriCorps members who work daily within their current classroom and invest an additional 3-5 hours of service a week beyond their standard work day enhancing their classroom skills through MRC coaching and trainings, as well as through implementing new literacy interventions within their classrooms. Following successful completion of their term of service, they are supported to pursue and finance advanced education and credentialing through the use of their national service education award.

Finally, pointing to the need for additional expansion, nearly 80 percent of members indicate that there were additional children at their site who could benefit from participating in MRC's program that schedules were unable to accommodate.

Growing MRC to Support More Successful Young Readers Statewide

ServeMinnesota is actively engaged in taking the Minnesota Reading Corps model to scale and is pursuing a three-pronged, public-private strategy to move aggressively toward this goal:

- **Federal Funding:** Federal AmeriCorps funding will continue to provide 80 percent of the dollars required to administer the Minnesota Reading Corps. This year's authorization of the Serve America Act will lead to an unprecedented expansion of national service. With the availability of increased federal resources that target education as one of the five core areas for innovation and growth, the MRC plans to accelerate its efforts to take the

program to scale across the state. Nationally, the Minnesota Reading Corps is being looked to as a program model with high potential for replication by fellow State Commissions for National and Community Service.

- **State Funding:** The 2009 legislature increased the annual appropriation to the Minnesota Reading Corps from $1 to $1.375 million. The state funds play an essential role in leveraging federal funds for Minnesota's children and schools by supporting a national service funding model which matches every state and private dollar with four dollars in federal funds.

- **Foundation and Private Funding:** The state support also helps leverage foundation and other private support.

The importance of the state-private partnership was captured in testimony provided by Steve Shank, Chair of Capella Education Corporation, during the 2009 legislative session:

As someone familiar with education and the needs of the business community, I can tell you that the Minnesota Reading Corps represents the type of public-private effort we need if we are to ensure a literate workforce for our future. I've gotten to know the work of the Minnesota Reading Corps intimately over the last two years and can speak with confidence to the key factors that interest me as a business leader – these factors will not surprise you – the Reading Corps is data-driven and has results to prove that it works, it is highly affordable, and it is infinitely replicable. It's for these reasons that I remain committed to helping the MRC engage private support. We will stay aggressive on the private side – the last biennium we raised $1 million and this next biennium we are willing to commit to a 50 percent increase to $1.5 million, but we need the state by our side in this effort. This powerful combination then of state and private support will allow us to leverage $17.3 million in federal funds and to grow from serving 15,000 children to serving 29,000 children over the next biennium – it's a major step forward towards reaching every child in Minnesota that needs the Reading Corps and turning around the unacceptable fact that we now have 12,000 children every year failing the state's assessment of 3rd-grade reading proficiency.

Words Work!
Minnesota Department of Education/Head Start Partnerships 2007-2009

Words Work! Description

Words Work! is an early childhood literacy initiative of The Saint Paul Foundation. Words Work! partners with Head Start programs with the purpose of closing the achievement gap for children in preschool and beyond. The goals of the program are to: 1) increase the early literacy skills of children participating in Head Start to prepare them to be successful readers; and 2) increase families' participation in providing early literacy experiences to their children.

Words Work! was piloted and funded by The Saint Paul Foundation in 10 Ramsey County Head Start classrooms in 1999. Over time, the partnership expanded to include all 37 classrooms of the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties Head Start program. The foundation continues to provide $50,000 each year to offset costs of literacy materials, training and consultation. Ongoing programmatic costs are assured by the individual Head Start programs.

 In 2007 state funding provided start-up costs in an additional 43 classrooms serving approximately 1,319 children from 15 counties in Minnesota. From 2007 through June 30, 2009, Words Work! partnerships were established in 92 Head Start classrooms serving more

2007-2009			
Counties Served	**Children Served**	**School Districts**	**2007-2009 Words Work! Partnership Funding** (*MDE=state grants)
Ramsey (Words Work! pilot partner)	1,450 (37 classrooms)	5	*Foundation $50,000 (No state dollars)*
Scott, Carver, Dakota	468 (16 classrooms + 2 scholarship)	18	Foundation/UW $170,000 **MDE* for Scott/Carver $115,000 over 2 years**
Goodhue, Rice, Wabasha	210 (5 sites, 12 classrooms)	13	**MDE* $300,000 over 2 years**
Kandiyohi, Meeker, McLeod, Renville	350 (9 sites, 13 classrooms, 7 home visitors serve 80-86 children)	19	**MDE* $385,000 over 2 years**
Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, Traverse	291 (10 sites, 14 classrooms)	13	**MDE* $200,000 over 1 year** (July 1, 2008-June 30, 2009)

than 2,600 children from 68 school districts in 16 Minnesota counties. It is expected that Words Work! will be integrated into the additional Head Start programs as was done in the Ramsey and Washington Counties Head Start program.

The Words Work! Approach

Words Work! partners with Head Start programs to:

- **Create a community of learners focused on children's early literacy success**
  - Provide intensive in-service training for staff on oral language development, print awareness, early writing, phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge using research-based early literacy theory, content and instructional strategies.
  - Mentor staff through observation, feedback and goal-setting as they transfer what they learn into classroom practice.
  - Set classroom goals informed by data and observation.
  - Provide opportunities for teaching staff to share and demonstrate successful strategies.

- **Build the capacity of Head Start programs and people**
  - Develop and operationalize a teacher mentoring structure within the program, aimed at strengthening teacher skills in promoting early literacy.
  - Work closely with program leadership to build successful practices and procedures into the program structure.
  - Provide literacy resources for classrooms and homes, with an emphasis on resources in home language when possible, and seek sustainable ongoing sources for such resources.
  - Link classroom literacy goals and learning experiences with family life through family literacy kits and family communications, as well as at family events, parent meetings, conferences and home visits.

- **Promote continuous program improvement through assessment and evaluation**
  - Conduct data debriefs, assisting teachers in reviewing and interpreting student assessment data, linking assessment results to planning, goals and teaching strategies.
  - Use input from families and teachers to inform decision-making.
  - Meet regularly with program leaders to identify challenges, problem-solve and strategize how to sustain successful practices.

Accomplishments to Date

Mentoring Systems:

Literacy mentors are established in each participating Head Start program. In some cases, mentor positions were created while in other situations site managers or education coordinators incorporated mentoring as a new area of focus. Mentors have been oriented and trained in project-specific classroom and student assessment tools, stages of teacher development, adult learning and the reflective conferencing process.

Mentors observed and assessed all classrooms in fall and again in spring using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO) (Smith, Brady, Anastasopoulos, 2008).* This information was used by mentors to set instructional goals with each classroom teaching team.

Findings: Classroom Environment

Statistically significant growth was demonstrated in all five sections of the ELLCO. Fall ELLCO scores averaged in the *Basic* (3.0) category, whereas by the spring they had moved near or at the *Strong* (4.0) category.
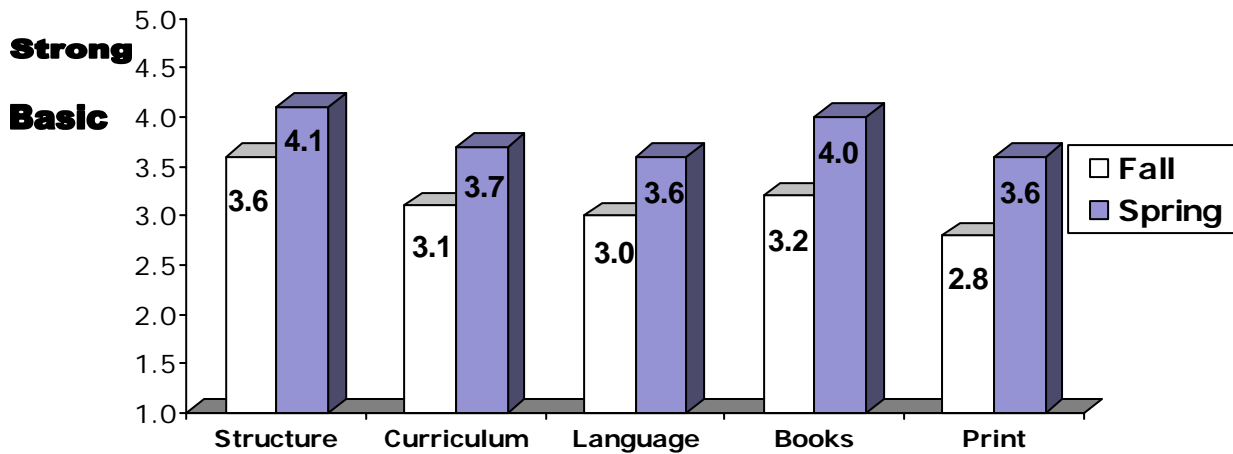
* Note: Fidelity checks were performed on each mentor's use of the ELLCO tool using observation of non-participating classrooms prior to rating of Words Work! classrooms to ensure consistency across classrooms. Mentors performed ELLCO observations on classrooms that were assigned to another mentor in order to limit observer bias.

Using Assessment for Continuous Improvement:

Baseline student assessments were completed in fall 2008 and the data was collected, aggregated and analyzed by ACET, Inc. Data was then shared with program leaders, mentors and teaching staff. Teaching staff reviewed and interpreted aggregated student data, and set goals for children and families at data debriefs. Mentors and program leaders also reviewed and interpreted student data and classroom observations, using the data to set goals for professional development and supervision of teaching staff.

Student assessments were performed again in spring 2009 and data was collected, aggregated and analyzed by ACET, Inc. Data showing fall to spring growth was again shared with program leaders, mentors and teaching staff. Teaching staff reviewed and interpreted aggregated student data, and identified teaching strategies that contributed to student success at data debriefs. Program leaders used data and teaching staff input to set program goals for the coming year.

Findings: Student Assessments

Results from analysis of key literacy indicators measured on kindergarten-bound children (data analysis performed by ACET, Inc.) show significant growth.

Demographic characteristics of the children in this study:
- 21 percent rated not fluent in English (76 percent speak English at home, 22 percent Spanish, 1.4 percent Somali, .6 percent other languages)
- 53.9 percent male/46.1 percent female
- 40.4 percent children of color/59.6 percent white
- 100 percent Head Start eligible (requires a minimum of 90 percent at *federal poverty level*)

Student Vocabulary:
As measured by a norm-referenced standardized test (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – 4th Edition)
- Fall=60 percent at or above average
- Spring=74 percent at or above average

Alphabet Knowledge:
   Average upper-case letter recognition
- Fall letters = 8
- Spring letters = 16 (statistically significant growth)

   Average lower-case letter recognition
- Fall letters = 5
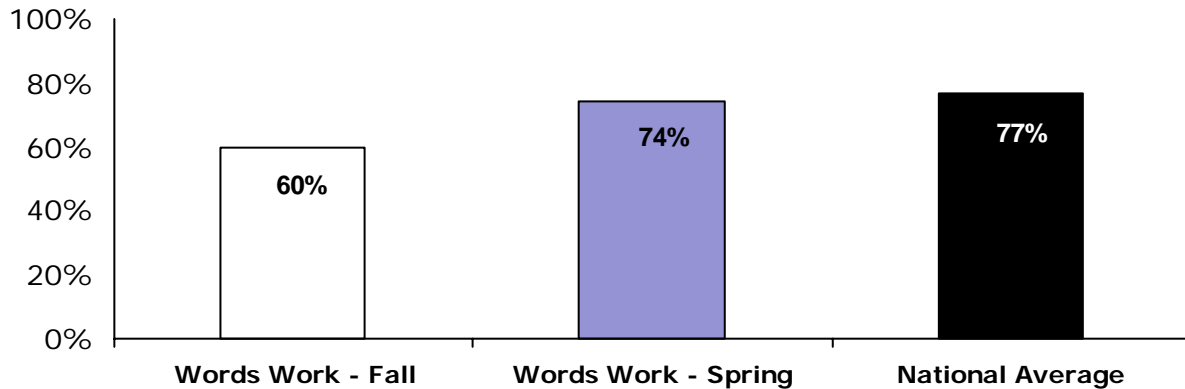- Spring letters = 13 (statistically significant growth)

Syllable Clapping:
   Average correctly clapped (out of 5):
- Fall = 2
- Spring = 3.5 (statistically significant growth)

Name Writing:
  Percent correctly writing all letters in their first name:
  - Fall= 32.6 percent
  - Spring= 81.2 percent (statistically significant growth)

[A bar chart showing three bars: Words Work - Fall = 60%, Words Work - Spring = 74%, National Average = 77%. Y-axis ranges from 0% to 100% in increments of 20%.]

Staff Training:

Teaching staff, mentors and teacher supervisors completed the five core Words Work! training sessions: *Orientation to Words Work!* (includes an overview of early literacy research and standards); *Oral Language Development* (includes information on the stages of second language acquisition); *Writing and Print Awareness*, *Phonological Awareness;* and, *Alphabet Knowledge.* Mentor teams at each site organized at least one *Teacher Sharing* meeting with site staff, where teachers demonstrated successful literacy strategies and exchanged ideas with one another.

Words Work! Institute:

In August 2008, The Saint Paul Foundation funded a Words Work! Institute in St. Cloud. More than 250 staff from Words Work! partner Head Start programs attended sessions on such topics as "Promoting Literacy Through Music," "Amazing Book Collections," "Sharing the 'Why' of Early Literacy with Low Literate/Preliterate Families" and "Building Literacy with English Language Learners." Presenters included representatives from MacPhail Center for Music, CEED/University of Minnesota, and the Minnesota Department of Education.

Families:

State grant dollars ensured that each family in Words Work! partner programs received a literacy kit at the beginning of the year. Family literacy kits contained basic literacy tools that low-income families may not be able to provide for their children, such as writing implements, paper, alphabet strips, name cards and books. Activities related to these kits have been communicated in writing and demonstrated at parent events and home visits. Mentors have provided other literacy-related activities such as "reading parties" resources for home-visiting activities, introduction to local libraries, and introducing literacy take home activities at parent meetings in Spanish and English.

Foundation Investment in the Words Work!, Minnesota Department of Education and Head Start Partnership

The Saint Paul Foundation funds two Words Work! staff to provide ongoing consultation to each Words Work! partner Head Start agency. This consultation includes frequent meetings with staff leaders and mentors as well as delivery of project training. The foundation funded the Words Work! Institute as well, covering all expenses except the cost of travel to the first Institute for Head Start staff. The Saint Paul Foundation also pays for the cost of an independent evaluation firm (ACET, Inc.) to develop the structure for a longitudinal study of children attending new Words Work! partner classrooms and to implement the baseline phase of that study. MDE staff implements the systems and protocols required to track Words Work! student progress over time.

The foundation is committed to helping Head Start programs sustain the Words Work! approach. To that end, Words Work! staff work with each partner program to strategize integration of practices within the organization and, where appropriate, identify ongoing financial support that covers the cost of such efforts to improve program quality and outcomes for children. One program has successfully secured a local foundation grant that will fund teacher mentors for their program through 2011. The foundation also informs its partners and donors of opportunities to support Words Work! partnerships.

Development of a Longitudinal Study to Follow State-funded Children

The Saint Paul Foundation has hired the independent evaluation firm of ACET, Inc. (the firm which conducted previous Words Work! longitudinal studies) to set up the structure and protocols for a follow-up study of the first cohort of children graduating from state-funded sites. Since this group of children will not be tested in schools with one common instrument until they reach the third grade, ACET has:

- Designed a research study to follow participating Head Start children from new Words Work! classrooms in 2008-2009 who are attending kindergarten in 2009-2010. The study will compare 3rd-grade MCA Reading scores of Words Work! students to a demographically similar group of non-Words Work! students of the same age group in Minnesota schools.
- Developed data agreements with MDE, Head Start programs and school districts.
- Conducted the formative evaluation of the Words Work! program including gathering baseline student data from 2008-2009. (Note: baseline student assessment and classroom observation data was collected and analyzed in November 2009).

ACET is currently locating Words Work! students in kindergarten within their local public school districts in Minnesota by matching Words Work!/Head Start student identifying data with student MARSS numbers. Thus far, they have matched 81.4 percent of the children (522 of 641 children in the Head Start file matched from the MDE database of 66,602 current kindergarten students) using multiple methods. This initial match requires further verification of approximately 20 percent of the sample. If most of the 522 are verified, this number should provide an adequate sample for detecting program impact when the study is run in 2013.

Observations on Factors Leading to Successful Outcomes

Over the course of our work with our Head Start partner programs, we have found that effective professional development for early educators links theory (why) and practice (how), with ongoing opportunities to apply, practice and adapt new strategies. Mentor/coaching that includes observation, feedback, goal-setting and reflection on what has been learned is also critical to implementing new instructional practice. Teachers benefit from opportunities to share ideas, problem-solve and demonstrate leadership. Program support for implementation of effective practices is key to sustained improvement in classroom instruction. ELLCO results showed us that novice teachers as well as experienced teachers demonstrated growth with these kinds of supports (see page 3).

Sustaining change beyond the foundation's involvement in each program has required investment in the organizational capacity of every Head Start program. Nurturing leaders at all levels begins with investing in those closest to the children (parents and teachers). This includes the cost of training, hands-on resources, tools and time. When introducing mentoring into an organization, support systems for mentors must also be developed so mentors will function effectively. We encourage programs to act as learning communities, which requires a commitment to continuous learning across the organization. Teaching staff should be included as active participants in program planning and evaluation.

Implementation of new practices across programs requires a significant investment of time. Words Work! experience has found that it takes about three years for individual teachers to integrate new practices into their classrooms. At the same time, it takes two to three years for a program to establish the related procedures and support systems to ensure newly integrated practices will be sustained and integrated consistently across the program.

A final key to success when sustaining change is ongoing work with program leadership, including addressing concerns and needs of program leaders. Their knowledge of program context, history and philosophy is critical in adapting a model to enhance the strengths of that program. By regularly meeting with them to plan, reflect, analyze and integrate changes, Words Work! provides ongoing support and encouragement that links new and useful information about current practice with the unique character and community of that particular program. All Head Start partner programs have listed Words Work! as an asset in risk management meetings with the Head Start Region V office in Chicago, evidence that they too see Words Work! partnerships as a tool to enhancing organizational quality.

The Work Continues

The state funding ends in June of 2009, however, the foundation has extended its commitment to partners for a third year. The foundation has allocated Words Work! staff time and $255,000 of funds for Head Start program costs (primarily mentor positions) toward joint efforts with Head Start partners through the 2009-2010 school year. Key goals for each of these partnerships include:

- Integrating the Words Work! approach into each program's practice, including development of sustainability plans.
- Embedding mentoring and reflective practice into each program.

Due to the highly favorable response from participants, the foundation sponsored a second Words Work! Institute for its Head Start partners in October of 2009. Five of the 2009 sessions were led by Head Start program staff on such topics as literacy tools with families, bringing books alive, and successful literacy practices with English Language Learners. Other presenters included staff from Concordia University, the University of South Dakota and the Early Childhood Resource and Training Center.

The foundation has also entered into partnership with a fifth Head Start program. Northwest Community Action Head Start (NWCAA) approached the foundation and is using a mix of their federal grant and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars to fund the cost of Words Work! training for their staff. NWCAA serves 186 preschool aged children in Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall and Roseau counties. With the addition of this new Words Work! partner program, Words Work! is now active in 20 Minnesota counties.