

[Close Window](#)[Print Story](#)

Study finds volunteers can boost reading proficiency and resources in schools

OAKLAND, Calif., March 4, 2015 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Community volunteers and AmeriCorps members can make a significant impact on student reading proficiency and are a low cost option for schools, according to the results of a study by MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research firm. The yearlong randomized control trial examined [Reading Partners](#), a national nonprofit organization that engages volunteers to deliver a structured, evidence-based curriculum through one-on-one tutoring to struggling readers in low-income communities.



The study found that Reading Partners boosted three different measures of reading proficiency over a control group of students, many of whom also received supplemental reading services. It also included a cost analysis, which revealed that the Reading Partners program is substantially less costly for schools to implement than typical literacy interventions.

Nationwide, two out of three fourth-graders are reading below grade level, and almost one-third of children lack even basic reading skills. Children who struggle with reading in elementary school are at high risk of academic failure, high school dropout, and other negative outcomes.

Key Study Findings

The [rigorous random assignment study](#) evaluated Reading Partners in 19 schools in three states, involving more than 1,200 second- to fifth-graders. Key findings, which reaffirm results released in June 2014, include:

- Reading Partners was implemented across schools with a high degree of fidelity, a notable achievement considering the challenges of implementing a tutoring program that relies on thousands of volunteers.

- Reading Partners had a positive and statistically significant impact on all three measures of student reading proficiency examined — reading comprehension, reading fluency, and sight-word reading — that equaled approximately 2 months of learning relative to the control group. This impact represents the value-add of Reading Partners, since 65 percent of the students in the control group also received supplemental reading services.
- The Reading Partners program was effective for a wide variety of students — from different grades and baseline reading achievement levels, for male and female students, and for students of different ethnicities and those who are not native English speakers.
- The study demonstrated that for every dollar invested in Reading Partners, double the resources were provided to students through the volunteer tutoring model so students benefit from an average of \$3,610 in resources per student per program year for \$1,700 in cash costs.
- The Reading Partners program is a low-cost option for under-resourced schools. On average, schools bear only about 20 percent of the total value of the resources required to implement the program.
- The portion of costs borne by the study schools to implement Reading Partners was substantially lower than for the other supplemental reading services provided by those schools. The average cost to the study schools for Reading Partners was less than half compared to other supplemental reading services available at study schools.

"The results of this evaluation are particularly exciting," said Robin Jacob, the principal investigator for the study. "They show that, by using community volunteers as part of a well-designed program, schools can provide support to struggling readers at a fraction of the cost that is typically required to support these students."

"There are 18 million Americans volunteering in schools every year – a tremendous, untapped resource in making a meaningful and measurable difference in raising reading achievement," says Reading Partners CEO Michael Lombardo. "This demonstrates that with a structured, evidence-based curriculum and the right supports and resources, any one of them can change the trajectory of a child's education. The cost study shows us that for every dollar invested in our program, our volunteers and AmeriCorps members double the resources provided to students."

The study is based upon work supported by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a White House initiative administered by [the Corporation for National and Community Service](#), the federal agency also responsible for AmeriCorps. The SIF is a public-private partnership designed to identify and expand effective solutions to critical social challenges. The research is also part of a larger investment made by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and co-investors in the True North Fund in scaling up Reading Partners.

"When the Social Innovation Fund was launched, we set a goal to find solutions that work and make them work for more people," said Wendy Spencer, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service. "Five years later, I am proud to talk about the extraordinary impact these programs are having, and I am grateful to the [Edna McConnell Clark Foundation](#) for helping us bring that promise to light. Reading Partners is a great example of what is possible when we find something that works and invest in its success."

How does Reading Partners work?

Reading Partners operates in under-resourced elementary schools where supervised volunteers from the community provide one-on-one literacy tutoring to struggling readers. At each school, Reading Partners places a full-time staff member on site (typically an AmeriCorps member), and recruits and trains up to 100 community volunteers who commit an hour a week of their time to deliver a highly-

structured, modular curriculum in twice-weekly, 45-minute sessions. Reading Partners volunteer tutors range in age from 14 to octogenarians and include all genders, ethnicities, and occupations.

[Reading Partners](#) empowers students to succeed in reading and in life by engaging community volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring. The national nonprofit organization has helped tens of thousands of children master the fundamental reading skills they need to succeed in school and beyond. To learn more visit readingpartners.org

Headquartered in New York City and Oakland, CA, [MDRC](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization with more than 40 years of experience designing and evaluating education and social policy initiatives.

Contact: Cindy Wilson, Reading Partners
510-830-3030
cindy.wilson@readingpartners.org

Photo - <http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20150304/179449>

To view the original version on PR Newswire, visit: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/study-finds-volunteers-can-boost-reading-proficiency-and-resources-in-schools-300045218.html>

SOURCE Reading Partners

© 2008 SYS-CON Media Inc.