



**Early Childhood
Literacy in Head Start
Programs**

February 2008

**FY 2008
Report
To the
Legislature**

**As required by
Minn. Stat. 119A.50**

COMMISSIONER:

Alice Seagren

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Upon request, this report can be made available in alternative formats.

ESTIMATED COST OF PREPARING THIS REPORT

This report provides information which is maintained and published as Minnesota Rules by the Office of Revisor of Statutes as a part of its normal business functions. Therefore, the cost information reported below does not include the cost of gathering the data but rather is limited to the estimated cost of actually preparing this report document.

Special funding was not appropriated for the costs of preparing this report.

The estimated cost incurred by the Minnesota Department of Education in preparing this report is \$600.

Early Childhood Literacy in Head Start Programs

Poor early literacy achievement correlates with high rates of school drop-out, poverty and underemployment. This report provides information on the impact of two early literacy programs funded by the state legislature through the Minnesota Department of Education.

Minnesota Statutes 119A.50 Subdivision 3 Early Childhood Literacy Programs establishes research based literacy programs in Head Start classrooms. The law also allows program providers to extend literacy programs to children in kindergarten through grade 3.

Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) Description

The Minnesota Reading Corps places AmeriCorps members in early childhood, after-school and school settings to work with children age 3 to grade 3. AmeriCorps members are trained in research-based tutoring techniques and assessments developed by the University of Minnesota. Additionally, they regularly monitor each student's progress. As the program develops at each site, AmeriCorps members also recruit community volunteers allowing the program to reach more children. The program continues to expand and includes over 136 AmeriCorps members serving in 77 sites across the state.

Minnesota Reading Corps Implemented in Head Start Classrooms

AmeriCorps members are trained in the following components of the program.

1. Create Literacy Rich Classrooms:
 - a. Set up 5 Centers in pre-k classrooms that promote continual focus on reading, writing and talking including making play meaningful in promoting literacy concepts.
 - b. Implement "Five Day Read Aloud" where members utilize dialogic reading techniques to expand vocabulary, phonological awareness and letter knowledge by reading the same book each day for five consecutive days.
2. 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 per year and students' literacy progress is regularly monitored against five key skills – phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency.
3. Implement tailored interventions to small groups of children that need time focused on specific skills such as phonological awareness, letter and sound knowledge, vocabulary, alphabet principles, conversation, and book and print concepts.
4. Implement activities that make writing meaningful for young children.
5. Enrich literacy skills development through meaningful play.

The Minnesota Reading Corps provides Master Literacy Coaches to Head Start Programs to do the following:

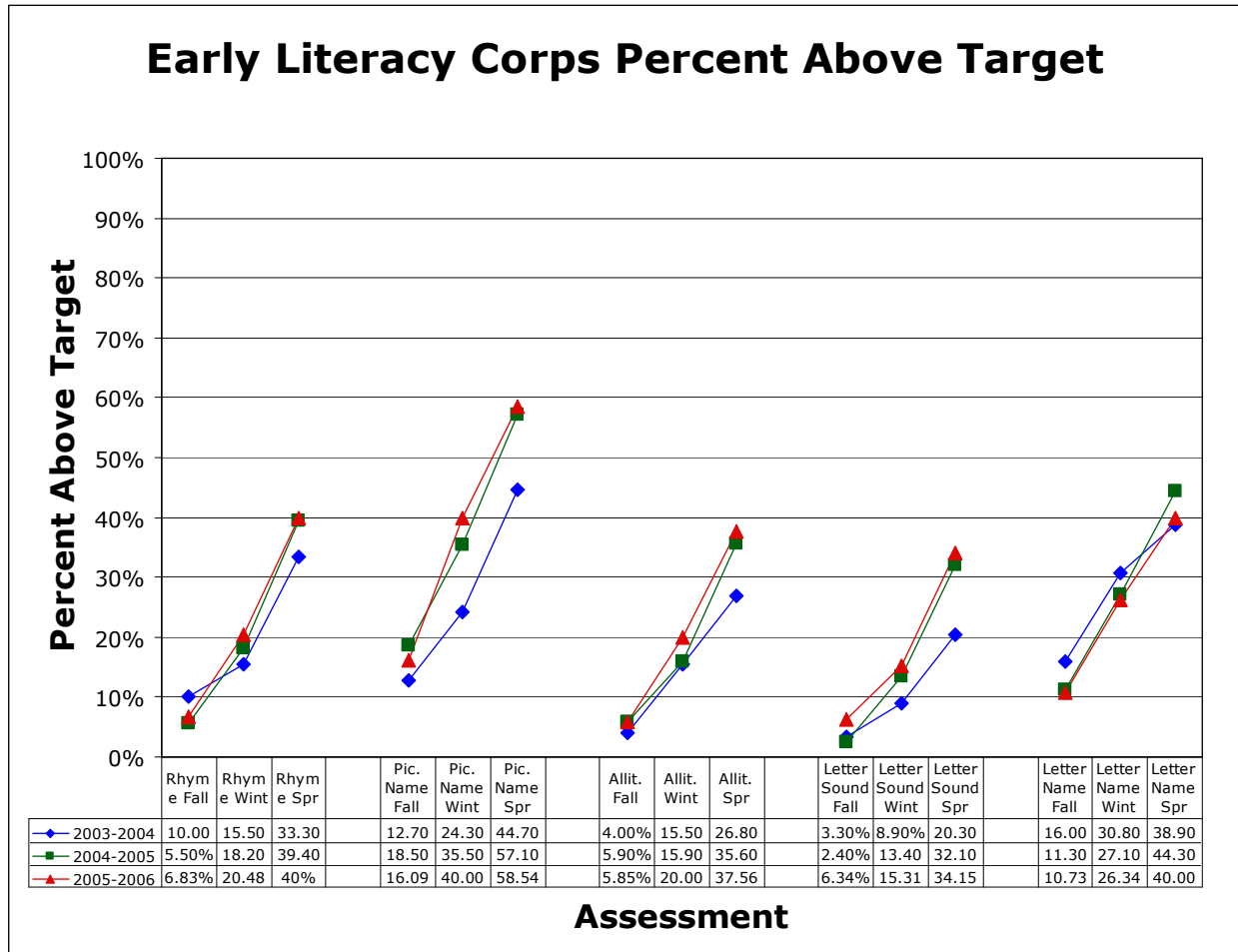
1. Train an internal literacy coach (or coaches) from each Head Start program on Seeds of Early Literacy Curriculum and on coaching techniques to ensure application of curriculum principles.
2. Visit each site monthly to:
 - a. Observe the internal coach providing coaching to AmeriCorps members.
 - b. Along with the internal coach, observe the AmeriCorps member with children in the classroom.
 - c. Administer the Early Learning Classroom Observation tool to compare pre and post literacy rich environments.
 - d. Observe small group work with children.
 - e. Provide feedback/coaching to the AmeriCorps members and to the internal literacy coach through use of video taping and guided observations.

Each Head Start program designates an existing teacher to acquire internal literacy coaching skills and to do the following:

1. Provide coaching to AmeriCorps members twice per month on the implementation of curriculum components in the classroom.
2. Observe AmeriCorps members (using a checklist) working with small groups of children.
3. Video tape AmeriCorps members as a coaching tool.

The MRC has completed four years working in Head Start classrooms. The first year more than 23 AmeriCorps members were placed in Head Start classrooms and served approximately 400 children. Last year (2006-2007) over 90 AmeriCorps members were in Head Start classrooms and served approximately 1,500 Head Start children. The MRC also serves pre-k children at child care sites.

Minnesota Reading Corps Results: Three Years of Achievement



Participating Head Start children improved their pre-literacy skills at two to four times the average rate of their peers.

Note: The above information on the Minnesota Reading Corps program is provided by Serve Minnesota.

Words Work! Description

Words Work! is an early childhood literacy project, developed by the Saint Paul Foundation, for the purpose of closing the achievement gap for children in preschool and beyond. The program has been operating in several Head Start classrooms since 1999. The goals of the program are to: 1) increase the 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.

Results have demonstrated that participating children outperform their peers in alphabet knowledge and counting and on national standardized tests. Prior to beginning Words Work!, 39% of the children scored at or above average in reading and math. After participating in Words Work!, 86% scored at or above average in reading and 88% scored at or above average in math. These are children with at least one indicator that puts them at high risk for academic failure.

Words Work! Implemented in Head Start Classrooms

The Words Work! strategies include:

1. Surrounding children with literacy in the environment and in the teaching activities.
2. Respect for home language and culture so that learning can be supported appropriately in the classroom and reinforced at home.
3. Teaching teachers through intense training and regular support of literacy mentors and other project staff.
4. Utilizing assessment for continual improvement in teaching strategies and organizational development.

Words Work! Grants to Head Start Programs

A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued through the Minnesota Department of Education on August 22, 2007. It was projected that 3-5 Head Start programs would be served at \$200,000 or less or \$500 per child each year. Deadline for submission was October 2, 2007. One proposal was received which exceeded the \$500 per child limit.

The Request for Proposals was reposted on October 22, 2007 with the same \$200,000 limit per program but without the per child amount. The deadline to submit a proposal was set for December 18, 2007 to give the programs ample time to conceive and write their proposals. Four proposals were received. A review committee met on January 3, 2008 and recommended funding for all four programs. Two were approved without questions and two were asked for minimal clarification. Procedures for preparing the Official Grant Award Notices are currently underway. The funding will be distributed as follows:

➤ **Heartland Community Action Agency,
\$385,140**

Heartland Head Start will use the funding to integrate the Words Work! approach in all of their Head Start classrooms in Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker and Renville counties. Three hundred fifty children and their families will be served. A particular interest is to serve more effectively families whose first language is not English. In addition, the program will collaborate with four school districts to share training and to extend services to the children through third grade in school.

➤ **Scott Carver Dakota CAP Agency, Inc.
\$115,000**

Scott Carver Dakota CAP Head Start will use this funding to extend the same opportunity, already available to Dakota County families, to the 468 enrolled children in Scott and Carver counties. The program will also serve increasing numbers of families who are English Language Learners.

➤ **Three Rivers Community Action, Inc.
\$300,000**

Three Rivers Community Action, Inc. Head Start program provides services to 228 children and their families in Goodhue, Rice and Wabasha Counties. Their goal for this grant is to increase the skills and knowledge of their teaching staff through the mentoring of Words Work! and to incorporate reflective practices that will strengthen their assessment and evaluation of children's progress.

➤ **West Central Minnesota Community Action, Inc.
\$199,860**

West Central Head Start provides services to 289 children in Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens and Traverse Counties. Words Work! will be integrated into all classrooms. The provision of more intense literacy training and mentors for teaching staff will allow them to increase their capacity for utilizing the latest research and practices in language development.

TOTAL	\$1,000,000
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The Saint Paul Foundation has agreed to offer training and support for programs as they begin work on this project. Words Work! staff have provided technical assistance to programs as they developed their proposals and will continue their relationship through the implementation phase. Joint training and regular networking opportunities for all four grantees are planned.

The RFP requires that literacy data on children involved in this program be reported to the Minnesota Department of Education. Each program will work with Words Work! staff to develop joint literacy indicators and reporting procedures across their programs. Data will also be collected on the children involved through grade 3.



THE MINNESOTA READING CORPS

Closing the Achievement Gap



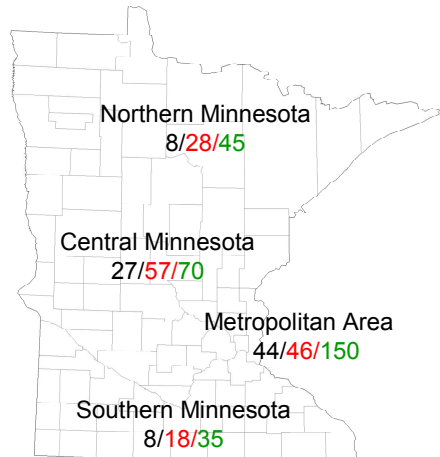
Key Features

- Grounded in Research
- Compelling Results
- Leveraging Power



Geographic Spread

2005-'06/2006-'07/2007-'08



Member Competencies

Pre-K

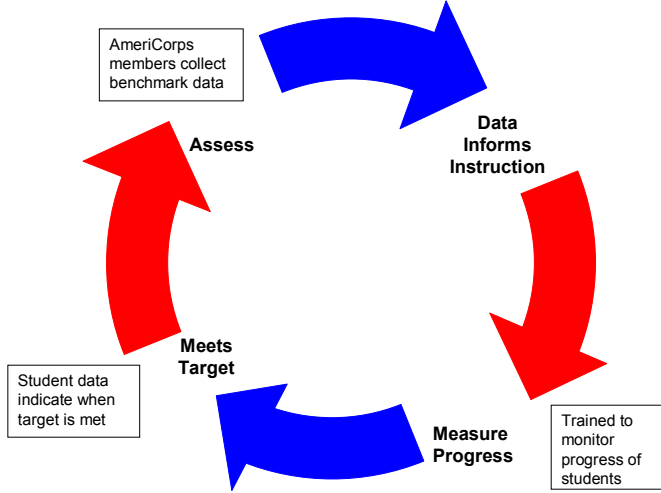
- Book & Print Rules
- Letter Knowledge
- Conversation Skills
- Vocabulary
- Phonological Awareness
- Data Collection

K-3

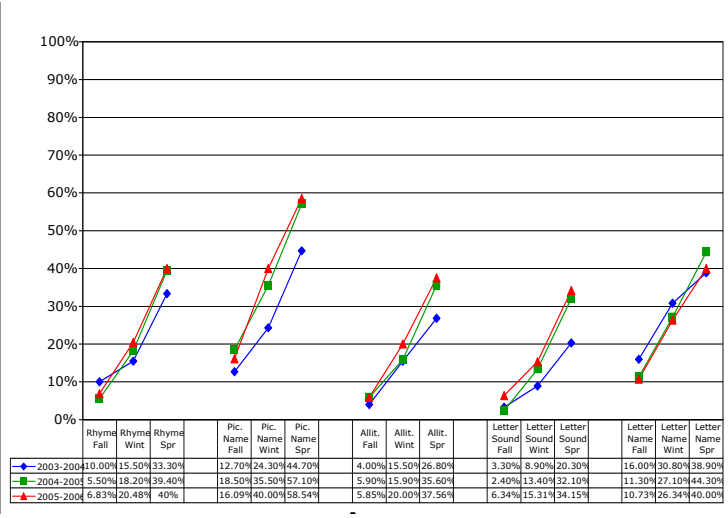
- Phoneme Segmentation Fluency
- Nonsense Word Fluency
- Letter Sound Identification
- Word Use Fluency
- Oral Reading Fluency
- Data Collection



The MRC Model

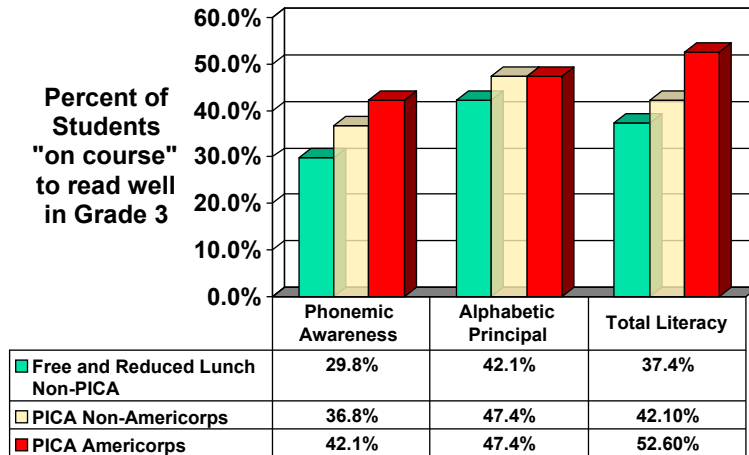


Early Literacy Corps Achievements





Percent "on course" to read well in grade 3 on MCAs Fall 2005 (n=72 students per group)



Dave Heistad, Ph.D., Executive Director
Research, Evaluation and Assessment
Minneapolis Public Schools



Minnesota Reading Corps (K-3)

- Serves students just below grade level skill
- Students receive 60 minutes per week, supplemental to core instruction
- Research validated interventions designed to build fluency in literacy skills
- Weekly progress monitoring for instructional planning

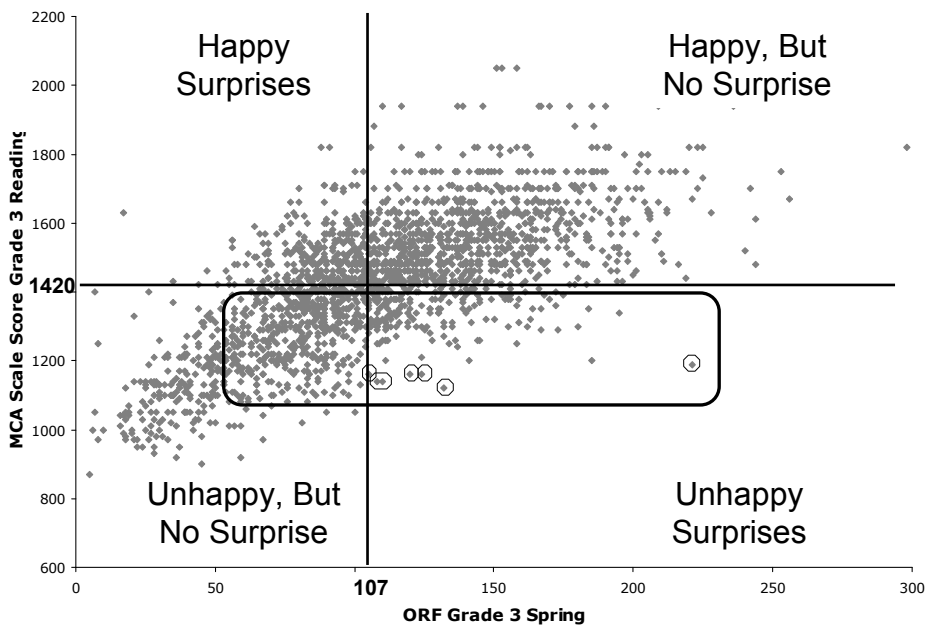


Reading Corps Assessment

- Curriculum Based Measures of Literacy
 - Valid, reliable, simple, quick, inexpensive, easy to understand, sensitive to growth
- Progress is Monitored for 1 minute 1 time per week

Grade	Progress Monitor Measure
Kindergarten	Letter Sound Fluency
Grade 1	Nonsense Word Fluency/Oral Reading Fluency
Grade 2	Oral Reading Fluency
Grade 3	Oral Reading Fluency

Multi-Year Correlation between MCA and ORF (N = 2135)





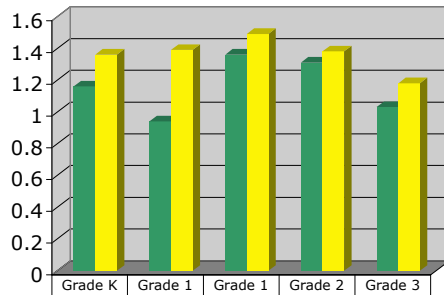
Curriculum Based Measures Target Scores

Grade	Fall	Winter	Spring	Growth Rate/Week
K	7	16	36	1.16
1	28	44		0.94
1		20	49	1.36
2	43	72	90	1.31
3	70	91	107	1.03



Reading Corps Achievements

Comparison of Growth Rates: Expected vs. Reading Corps



	Grade K	Grade 1	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Target Growth Rate	1.16	0.94	1.36	1.31	1.03
Reading Corps Growth Rate	1.36	1.39	1.49	1.38	1.18



Reading Corps Achievements

Grade & Measure	Percent Above Target Growth Rate
Grade K LSF	71%
Grade 1 NWF	65%
Grade 1 ORF	48%
Grade 2 ORF	53%
Grade 3 ORF	67%



MRC Business Advisory Committee

An extension of business leadership in early literacy.

Committee Purpose

- Promote public awareness
- Provide business guidance
- Assist with marketing
- Raise local financial support