



**Early Childhood
Literacy in Head Start
Programs**

February 2009

**FY 2009
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 through 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 370 AmeriCorps members serving in 160 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:

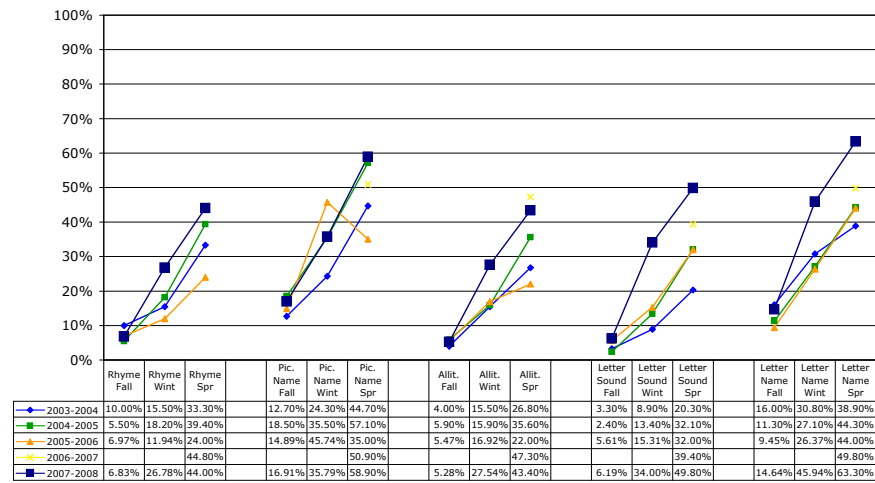
1. Provide coaching to AmeriCorps members twice per month on the implementation of curriculum components in the classroom.
2. Observe AmeriCorps members (using a checklist) working with small groups of children.
3. Video tape AmeriCorps members as a coaching tool.

The MRC has completed five 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 (2007-2008) 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.

MRC children are starting kindergarten more prepared to become successful readers by 3rd grade.



Percent of Children Achieving Targets in 5 Key Literacy Areas



Assessment

Words Work! Description

Words Work! is an early childhood literacy initiative of The Saint Paul Foundation. Words Work! partners with Head Start programs for the purpose of closing the achievement gap for children in preschool and beyond. 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.

Words Work! was piloted and funded by The Saint Paul Foundation in 10 Ramsey County Head Start classrooms in 1999. 2007-08 state funding supported Words Work! partnerships in 43 classrooms serving almost 1000 children from 15 counties in Minnesota. In total, Words Work! currently partners with five Head Start programs, working with 92 Head Start classrooms serving more than 2,600 children from 68 school districts in 16 Minnesota counties.

Counties Served	Children Served	School Districts	2008-09 Words Work! Partnership Funding (*MDE=state grants)
Ramsey (Words Work! pilot partner)	1,450 (37 classrooms)	5	<i>Foundation \$50,000 (No state dollars)</i>
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

The Words Work! Approach

Words Work! partners with Head Start programs to:

- **Create a community of learners focused on children's early literacy success**
 - Train staff in 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 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 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 have been hired (or their function has been incorporated into the organizational structure) in each participating Head Start program. 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.

All classrooms have been observed and assessed using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO) or an equivalent instrument. This information is currently being used by mentors to set instructional goals with each classroom teaching team.

Using Assessment for Continuous Improvement:

Baseline student assessments have been completed and the data shared with program leaders, mentors and teaching staff. Teaching staff have reviewed and interpreted aggregated student data, and set goals for children and families at data debriefs. Mentors and program leaders have also reviewed and interpreted student data and classroom observations, using the data to set goals for professional development and supervision of teaching staff.

Staff training:

Teaching staff, mentors and teacher supervisors have all completed the first three 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), and *Writing and Print Awareness*. *Phonological Awareness* will be completed in January and *Alphabet Knowledge* will be completed in March. By April, staff at each site will have participated in at least one *Teacher Sharing* meeting, where teachers demonstrate successful literacy strategies and exchange ideas with one another.

Words Work! Institute:

In August 2008, The Saint Paul Foundation funded a Words Work! Institute in St. Cloud. Over 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. Due to the highly favorable response from participants, the foundation plans to sponsor another Words Work! Institute for its Head Start partners in October of 2009.

Families:

State grant dollars ensured that each family in partner programs received a literacy kit at the beginning of the year. Family literacy kits provides simple 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 Words Work/Minnesota Department of Education/Head Start Partnership

The Saint Paul Foundation funds two Words Work! staff to provide 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 for program staff. The Saint Paul Foundation also pays for the cost of an independent evaluation firm 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.

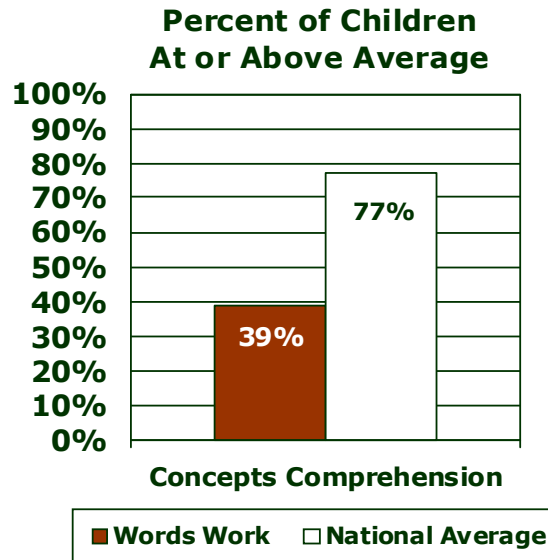
The foundation is also committed to sustainability of Words Work! within Head Start programs. To that end, Words Work! staff work with each partner program to strategize integration of practices within the organization and, where appropriate, identification of ongoing financial support that covers the cost of such efforts to improve program quality and outcomes for children. For example, one agency is exploring various mentor models as they look at sustaining key elements of mentoring within their program. The foundation also informs its partners and donors of opportunities to support Words Work! partnerships.

Longitudinal Evidence of Impact

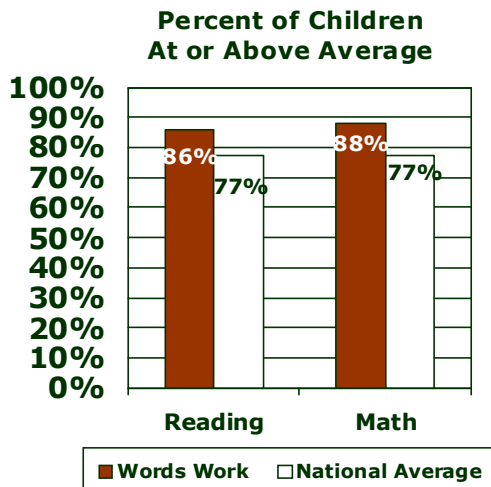
A longitudinal comparison study (conducted by the independent evaluation firm of ACET, Inc) of the first cohort of Words Work! children demonstrates that Words Work! children outperform their elementary school peers in reading and math. When Words Work! children entered Head Start, a nationally normed vocabulary test showed a gap between their vocabulary and that of national peers:

Before Words Work, children were academically challenged (39% scored at or above average as compared to the national normal distribution of 77%).*

* Boehm Test of Basic Concepts (for preschool children)



ACET followed children into the St. Paul Public Schools, conducting a comparison study that showed Words Work! children demonstrate a statistically significant lead over their peers that lasted over time. When ACET compared Words Work! children to their national peers on fifth grade math and reading tests, Words Work! children were ahead of the curve.

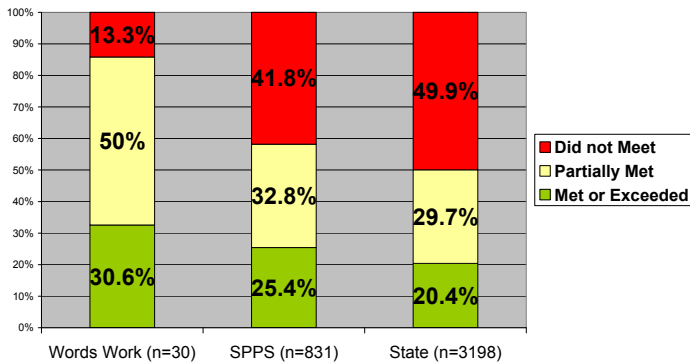


After Words Work, children are academically successful (86% scored at or above average in reading and 88% scored at or above average in math as compared to the national distribution of 77% for each subject).*

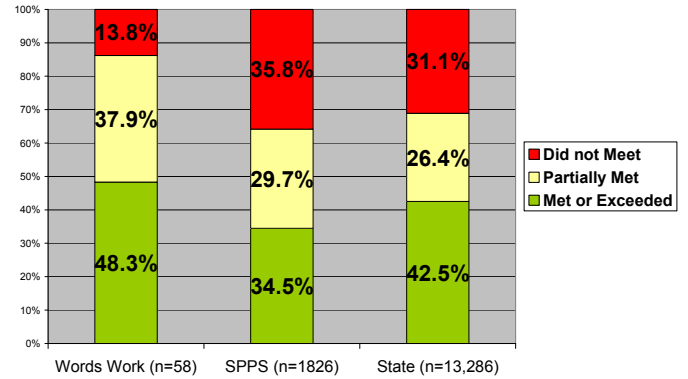
* Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition (fifth grade scores) results from a 2006 study conducted by ACET Inc

The trend continued in 2008, when Words Work! children in the longitudinal study outperformed their St. Paul Public School peers in MCAII Reading Test proficiency. When compared to peers with similar risk factors, Words Work! students also outperformed their peers statewide. The study conducted by ACET found the trend in comparing children with the risk factors of income (using “free and reduced meals/FRM”), English Language Learners (ELL), and Students of Color as follows. Not only do more Words Work! children meet or exceed standards, but also the proportion of Words Work! students unable to meet state standards is significantly lower than other St. Paul Public School and statewide peers with similar risk factors.

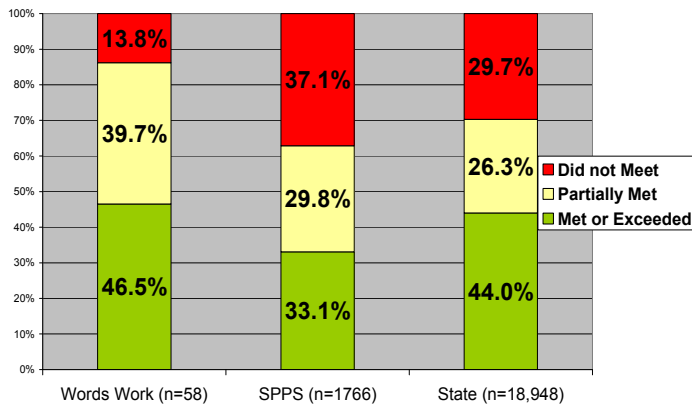
**MCA-II Reading Achievement Levels 2008
Students who receive Free/Reduced Meals
and who are also English Language Learners**



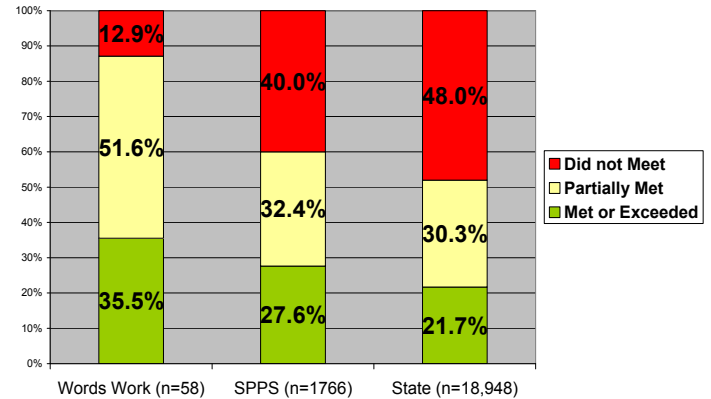
**MCA-II Reading Achievement Levels 2008:
Students of Color**



**MCA-II Reading Achievement Levels 2008:
Students with Free or Reduced Price Meals**



**MCA-II Reading Achievement Levels 2008:
English Language Learners**



Development of a Longitudinal Study to Follow State-funded Children

The Saint Paul Foundation hired the independent evaluation firm of ACET, Inc. to set up the structure 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 will:

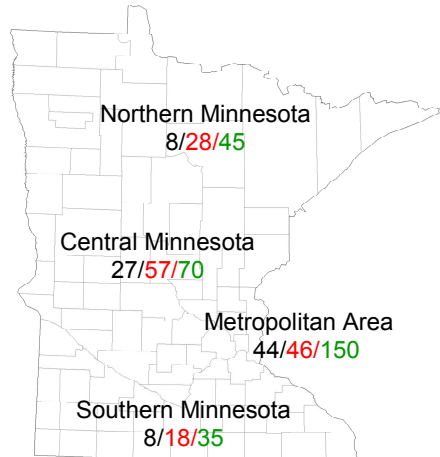
- Design the research study and develop data agreements.
- Conduct the formative evaluation of the Words Work! program including gathering baseline student data from 2008-09. (Note: baseline student assessment and classroom observation data was collected and analyzed in November 2009).
- Conduct data matching of WW/Head Start student identifying data with student MARSS numbers.

Once the first cohort of children are tested in the MCAs in 2013, the Minnesota Department of Education will provide data to ACET to use the structure and baseline student data to perform the longitudinal study of the program.



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

MRC Vision is to Provide a Permanent part of Minnesota's Solution to Childhood Illiteracy:



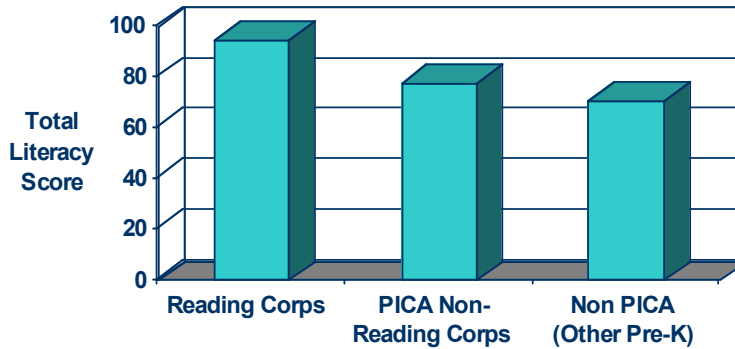
- **All children** in Minnesota, ages 3 to grade 3, who qualify for MRC, will have access to MRC and **will meet reading standards by third grade.**
- **AmeriCorps members**, through the training, development and service opportunity provided by MRC, will pursue education-related careers and/or continue to be **ambassadors for children's literacy** throughout their lives.
- **Schools** and community institutions/organizations, through their experiences with MRC, will **understand, adopt and promote the MRC methods for increasing literacy.**

MRC sites are changing their systems to integrate a data-driven problem-solving model of literacy instruction.



- Over 70% of school literacy supervisors agreed that due, at least in part, to MRC participation, sites are now:
 - Using screening data to identify students for additional support
 - Selecting research-based interventions
 - Collecting frequent progress data on at-risk students and using these data to inform instruction
 - Sharing aggregated data with parents and other stakeholders as a means of systems evaluation

Minneapolis 2007-2008 Kindergarten-Aged Pre-K MRC Graduates Outperform Peers



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



	Grade K	Grade 1		Grade 2	Grade 3
	Letter Sound Fluency	Nonsense Word Fluency (Fall to Winter)	Oral Reading Fluency (Winter to Spring)	Oral Reading Fluency	Oral Reading Fluency
Target Growth Rate	1.15	1.11	1.67	1.31	1.08
Reading Corps Mean Growth Rate	1.75	1.87	1.48	1.47	1.23
Number of Students	665	613	491**	741	758

* Only students with 3 or more data points on the given measure were included in growth rate calculations
 ** Students in this group may have also participated in Grade 1 (NWF)

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

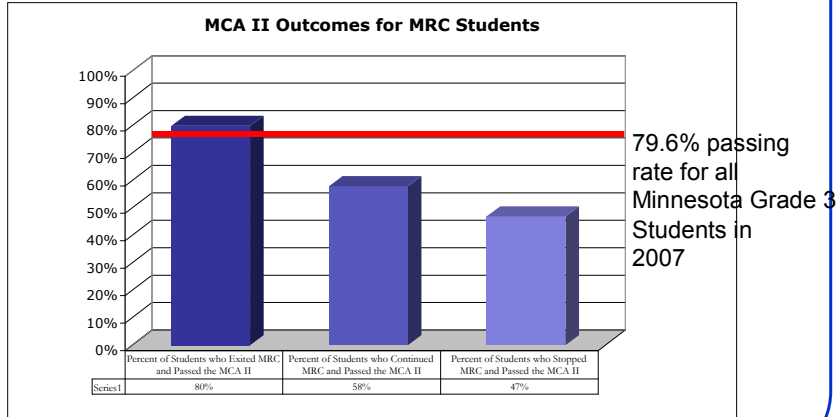


		Grade K (LSE)	Grade 1 (NWF)	Grade 1 (R-CBM)**	Grade 2 (R-CBM)	Grade 3 (R-CBM)	TOTAL*
Duluth	% Above Growth Target	76.27%	80.49%	28.70%	62.99%	67.92%	64.54%
	Total # of Students	118	164	115	154	106	657
Grand Rapids	% Above Growth Target	81.08%	64.29%	33.33%	58.33%	69.70%	64.89%
	Total # of Students	37	28	21	36	66	188
Metro	% Above Growth Target	81.50%	75.09%	31.31%	63.66%	65.97%	65.69%
	Total # of Students	346	269	214	366	382	1577
Moorhead	% Above Growth Target	74.19%	73.91%	30.16%	55.68%	52.43%	56.88%
	Total # of Students	62	69	63	88	103	385
Rochester	% Above Growth Target	76.92%	79.07%	48.28%	72.22%	77.27%	72.48%
	Total # of Students	26	43	29	54	66	218
St. Cloud	% Above Growth Target	77.63%	77.50%	48.98%	83.72%	82.86%	73.66%
	Total # of Students	76	40	49	43	35	242
TOTAL	% Above Growth Target	79.25%	76.35%	33.40%	64.10%	66.49%	65.42%
	Total # of Students	665	613	491	741	758	3268

* TOTAL represents the total number of slopes analyzed, not the total number of students, as students in Grade 1 may have participated in two categories

** Students in this group may have also participated in Grade 1 (NWF)

MRC children are passing the 3rd grade MCA II at rates higher than Minnesota children in general.



Appendix B - Prepared by Words Work!

Words Work! in Minnesota

