

WASHINGTON READING CORPS

2001-2002 Evaluation Report

Volume 1

**Angela Roccograndi
Forrest Stevens**

**Evaluation Program
Dr. Kim O. Yap, Director**

August 2002

**Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 SW Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2001-2002 school year, the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in conjunction with program partners from the Office of the Governor, the Washington Commission for National and Community Service and the Washington Service Corps, continued to successfully implement reading tutoring programs in 171 schools across the state of Washington through the Washington Reading Corps (WRC). Based on information from multiple sources including: site supervisor and teacher surveys; pre- and post-assessments; and documentation such as *Innovative Tutoring Practices*, varied impacts continue to be felt at the state, school, grade, and student level.

The WRC is the product of the combined efforts of many people to encourage and support struggling readers. The WRC blends public, private, and community resources, directing them toward schools performing poorest on Washington's reading assessments. For the 2001-2003 biennium, WRC received approximately \$7,750,000 in funding, which was then allocated as grants to individual schools by OSPI. Federal funding of approximately \$4.8 million per year from the Corporation for National Service provided 350 national service positions for the WRC. Within the state, these federal funds were allocated by the Washington Commission for National and Community Service and by the Washington State Corporation for National Service Office. The Washington Service Corps, a program of the Employment Security Department, administered the WRC for the AmeriCorps and VISTA members (collectively called "national service members"). In 2001-2002, national service members served in over 80 percent of the WRC program schools.

WRC Participation

The data suggest that the WRC served over 15,000 students (15,395) with almost 8,200 tutors (8,177) during the 2001-2002 school year. Over 500,000 tutoring hours were provided to students, with students who participated for the entire school year receiving, on average, 41 hours of tutoring. On average, the typical WRC program relied on 54 tutors to serve 73 eligible students. Students tended to be in the first, second, third, or fourth grade (71 percent of all students served). Tutors tended to be national service members from the Washington Service Corps, adults from the community, and staff from the school building/district itself (93 percent of the tutor population was comprised of AmeriCorps/VISTA members, adults from the community, and cross-age and peer tutors. Due to a significant reduction in funding from the state legislature, the 2001-2002 WRC was smaller, but continued to serve the same grade-level students with the same types of tutors.

Student Selection, Teacher Participation, and Communication with Tutors

Students were most frequently identified for participation in the WRC program through recommendations by their teachers, whose major means of participation in their program was identifying students to participate. Other means for identification included classroom assessments and Standardized Test for Assessing Reading (S.T.A.R.) test results. While teachers felt their students' tutoring sessions were aligned to and reinforcing of their classroom instruction, only about half of the teachers reported they were actively involved in coordinating, planning, or implementing the tutoring session. Teachers did report recognizing, appreciating, and communicating with their students' tutors about their students' needs (on an as-needed basis), but were less likely to observe, provide feedback, or train tutors to ensure that alignment was taking place. During the 2001-2002 school year, teachers did report increased communication with tutors, compared to the 2000-2001 school year.

WRC Tutoring

WRC programs serviced students at various times during the day, including the most common format, both during and after school. When students were tutored during school they were most likely to be tutored during the reading/language arts period while students were reading silently, independently, or in groups. When students were tutored outside of the reading/language arts period they tended to be tutored outside of other primary subject areas such as mathematics or science. In addition to students being tutored inside classrooms, they were also tutored in other areas of the school building including the library, cafeteria, and hallways. Students were more likely to be tutored during language arts than in other periods, and in after-school programs than in before-school programs.

WRC Impact

Similar student impacts were reported from site supervisors and teachers in the 2001-2002 school year. Site supervisors and teachers reported that most students continued to show improvements in the areas of self-confidence or self-esteem; their attitudes towards and enjoyment of reading; and skills such as phonics, word attack strategies, vocabulary, and comprehension. Site supervisors and teachers also reported that their students also benefited from their relationships with their tutors. Documentation, cited by site supervisors and teachers, to support these impacts included pre- and post-test scores, teacher and site supervisor feedback, and improvements on district and school assessments.

Attitudes and Behaviors

In the area of students' attitudes and behaviors, both site supervisors and teachers reported better attitudes and academic behaviors from their WRC students. They indicated these students were self-confident and had increased self-esteem. Their attitudes about learning, reading, and school improved because they could see they were successful in the program. Students were trying to read; they were more willing to ask for, or receive, help in the classroom; they showed interest in learning; and they were reading more, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers and site supervisors reported that students chose to read during recess, they played reading-related games, they checked out more library books, and read more at home. Because they were more comfortable reading, they read with others and participated more in other subject area classes and school activities. Students saw themselves as readers and were proud of their accomplishments.

Literacy Skills

In terms of literacy skill enhancements, both site supervisors and teachers witnessed general skill improvements (such as increased reading skills) and specific improvements in reading skills, including the number of Accelerated Reader points, comprehension, decoding, fluency, letter/sound recognition, penmanship, phonics, questioning, reading aloud, reading levels, reading scores, test scores, vocabulary, and writing. Students were reported as being more productive, participating in the classroom more, being able to read independently, being better able to select appropriate books, and needing less help in the classroom.

Tutor's Contributions

Washington Reading Corps tutors had a huge impact on the students and programs as reported by site supervisors and teachers. Not only did the tutoring environment encourage students to read more because they enjoyed and looked forward to the time with their tutor, but the tutors impacted students emotionally and socially as well. This opportunity to spend time with an adult, or even another student, conveyed to WRC students that someone had an interest in them and saw them as valuable, socially and academically. WRC students were aware that they were special and receiving extra attention. They benefited from being able to participate in a one-on-one activity with someone who they were able to bond with. Tutors not only provided them with "TLC," but were role models—modeling "love of reading" and "good behavior choices."

Site supervisors indicated that national service members and volunteers tutored the students, recruited and organized volunteers, or provided new ideas for the program – the volunteers were the people that made it happen. In addition, they provided consistency to

the program and mentors to the students. Site supervisors were particularly thankful for having AmeriCorps and/or VISTA members and for the community involvement. Teachers were thankful that they had the tutors there to provide additional support to work with students. They also reported that the tutors were flexible to work with, dedicated, and well trained.

Grade-Level Impacts

Using the *Alphabet Letter Recognition and Sounds* test, kindergarten students' ability to recognize letters, and especially to identify the sounds they make, rose over the seven months between pretest and posttest. At the time of the pretest, students recognized an average of 6.2 letters and identified the sound of 1.9 letters. By the posttest, students recognized an average of 21.0 letters and the sounds of 18.8 letters – representing a gain in 15 letters and 17 sounds.

The *Slosson Oral Reading Test-Revised* (hereafter referred to as *Slosson*) was used as the pre- and post-assessment for first through sixth graders participating in the WRC. Over the course of the year, the average student reading level on the *Slosson* moved from a point significantly below grade level to one at or above grade level performance, except for the first- and sixth-grade students, who were nearly at grade level. By the end of the school year, the average *Slosson* scores of the first- and sixth-grade students were within 0.1 grade-equivalent score points—about one academic month—of grade level. The scores of second-grade students were 0.1 grade-equivalent score points above grade-level performance. By the end of the school year third-grade students' scores were at grade level. Fourth- and fifth-grade students performed above grade level with grade-equivalent scores that were 0.3 and 0.2 above grade level, respectively.

While no control group was used, site supervisors and teachers indicated that a highly valued feature of the WRC is that it provides extra reading time and attention to needy students, time and attention they may not otherwise receive in the classroom or at home. While the impact of regular classroom instruction and other supplemental programs is not accounted for, it is clear from teacher reports and WRC assessments that the WRC is positively impacting the population it serves, including Hispanic and Spanish home-language students.

Favorite and Innovative Features

Site supervisors and teachers valued their programs' tutors and one-on-one, individualized formats. They appreciated the opportunity for students who need additional help to receive it, the impacts the program has on the students, and the alignment of the tutoring session to the classroom instruction. Site supervisors indicated that these were also some of their most innovative features. Innovative practices included taking advantage of AmeriCorps and VISTA members and taking the time to schedule

tutoring to provide one-on-one help and to support tutors so that they were properly trained to provide instruction aligned to the classroom instruction. Another innovative practice cited by site supervisors was providing time and consistency so the tutee and tutor can establish a relationship that promotes an enjoyment of reading, additional reading, better reading, and other social and emotional impacts.

WRC Concerns

Site supervisors and teachers continued to express concerns with the quality and consistency of the tutors, indicating that their training was sometimes insufficient and their availability sometimes unpredictable—both of which impacted the overall consistency and quality of the tutoring program. Concerns that there was not enough time on the part of site supervisors and teachers to work with tutors to address the content of the tutoring session and logistics, including scheduling and pullouts, were also noted. The number of students who were served and/or could be served was also a concern that rose from program eligibility and exit criteria and tutor recruitment and retention.

About two-thirds of the site supervisors reported their programs could be sustained in their entirety, or partially, in the absence of state funding. Comments indicated that the schools had been given the opportunity to establish systems to keep their programs running or had garnered enough administrative support to ensure continued financial support from other sources. However, sustainability still remained a concern to both site supervisors and teachers. The loss of national service members was often cited as a plausible contributing factor to the possible loss of WRC tutoring programs.

Interestingly, innovative practices used by some schools, but not by a majority of the schools, could overcome some of these concerns. Less than half of the schools in the case study indicated that they developed partnerships with community and business organizations, other schools, or other partners, and dedicated time to communication between the teacher and tutors. These practices, if they were adopted more frequently, could impact the quality and consistency of the tutoring; the alignment of the instruction; scheduling; the tutor base and the number of students served; and sustainability.