



Putting Evidence to Work in the Context of the **EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT**

How a District Might Find a Program That Meets Local Needs

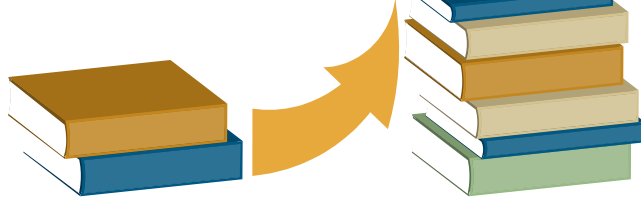
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — which replaced No Child Left Behind as the main federal K-12 education law — gives states greater latitude and responsibility for choosing strategies to improve underperforming schools. ESSA stresses accountability and evidence-based practice but recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

MDRC’s evaluations offer rigorous evidence on a range of educational programs and interventions. Here is just one example of how a school district might identify an effective way to meet the challenges it faces.

District challenge

A high number of elementary students read behind grade level. How can the district help improve their reading proficiency?

GRADE LEVEL



Potential solution

The Reading Partners tutoring program recruits and trains volunteers to help students who struggle with reading.

- Effective at improving literacy
- Cost effective



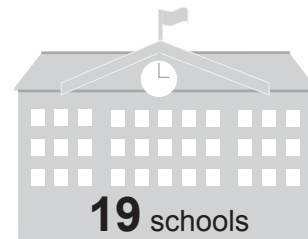
readingpartners

How do we know it works?

MDRC’S RIGOROUS RANDOM ASSIGNMENT EVALUATION OF READING PARTNERS



3 states



19 schools



1,265 second- to fifth-graders

FINDINGS

Reading Partners had a **positive and statistically significant impact on student reading proficiency** — reading comprehension, reading fluency, and sight-word reading.

After one year, the effect was equivalent to 1.5 to 2 months of additional growth in literacy beyond the level of the control group.



This study is an example of Tier 1 (strong) evidence according to ESSA guidelines.

Keep in mind, ESSA specifically provides for school improvement: The legislation calls for states to reserve at least 7 percent of Title I funds to support efforts by schools with low performance or persistent achievement gaps to improve on those measures using approaches that meet ESSA’s evidence guidelines. States also may reserve up to 3 percent for direct student services.



Are you targeting low-performing subgroups?

Educational equity for historically underserved students is a critical goal of ESSA. The act lays out accountability expectations for economically disadvantaged students, students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, children with disabilities, and English language learners, and set-aside funds may be used for targeted support and improvement for schools with low-performing student subgroups.

Key points from the Reading Partners evaluation

MEASURABLE IMPACTS The Reading Partners program produces measurable progress on reading skills among students who struggle with reading.

LOW COST Because the program is staffed primarily by volunteers, the cost to schools is quite reasonable compared with other early literacy interventions.

EASY INTEGRATION The program integrates easily as an add-on in schools with different curricula and standards. There is moderate principal and teacher involvement.

RANGE OF CHARACTERISTICS The Reading Partners program was effective for a wide variety of students — at different grade levels, with different baseline reading levels, male and female, and both native English speakers and those who are not.

Evidence is great! The program has been proven to increase student reading ability . . . but is it a fit for your district?

Here are some other factors to consider:



WHAT RESOURCES MUST A SCHOOL PROVIDE?

RESOURCES

- **Space** — Reading Partners requires a designated space to serve as a reading center, with enough room for several student-tutor pairs to work without disturbing one another.
- **Funds** — The nonprofit program charges a fee for its service.
- **Student time** — Because students are pulled out of class or use after-school time for tutoring sessions, schools need to have scheduling flexibility and the ability to support a pull-out program.

WILL SCHOOLS BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT THIS PROGRAM EFFECTIVELY?

IMPLEMENTATION

The Reading Partners staff and AmeriCorps members handle almost all the implementation, and MDRC found a high degree of fidelity to the program model. Reading Partners:

- Supplies its research-based curriculum
- Recruits, continuously trains, and supervises volunteers as direct service providers
- Works with school leaders to identify students for the program and matches students with volunteers
- Uses observational and assessment tools to monitor reading gains and program implementation

Does the community have a sufficient number of available volunteers who can travel to and commit to serving at the school? Volunteers may be high school or college students, working adults, or retirees. All volunteers are required to pass a background check and must be age 14 or older.

DOES THIS PROGRAM TARGET THE STUDENTS YOUR DISTRICT SERVES?

STUDENT FIT

The program targets students 1-25 months below grade level in reading and focuses on schools that face a shortage of resources. Reading Partners serves English language learners if they can converse and be instructed in English. While the program is not designed for students with Individualized Education Programs, it does sometimes serve such students.

For more about Reading Partners, see readingpartners.org and the evaluation reports, *Reading Partners* (2014) and *Mobilizing Volunteer Tutors to Improve Student Literacy* (2015), at mdrc.org.

Looking for more evidence to inform your district decisions?

Sign up at www.mdrc.org/newsletter to stay informed about research on other educational programs and interventions.

