

## **AmeriCorps Tutoring Outcomes Study, Abt Associates, February 2001**

An evaluation of reading tutoring outcomes in AmeriCorps programs.

The Corporation has directed substantial resources toward addressing the national issue of children's reading performance. This focus supports a national mandate as articulated in the America Reads initiative: to help ensure that every child can read well and independently by the end of the third grade. Toward that goal, the Corporation has encouraged its programs to provide literacy services to young readers. A typical AmeriCorps tutoring program in reading places members in schools and after-school programs to provide tutoring to elementary students.

This report describes the results of an evaluation that examined the effect of participation in AmeriCorps' tutoring programs on children's reading proficiencies and other classroom behaviors among 869 first, second, and third grade students in 68 AmeriCorps programs. Student reading performance was measured using a sub-set of tests from the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised, a well-known standardized achievement test.

Students' reading levels at pretest were generally in the low average to average range. Most AmeriCorps tutors were female (85 percent) and ranged in age from 17 to 80, with the average age of 27. The majority of AmeriCorps tutoring programs implemented tutoring practices that research has found to be effective in helping struggling students learn to read. More than 70 percent of programs were moderately or fully implemented, conducted formal evaluations, coordinated tutoring activities with classroom reading instruction, and provided training to tutors both before and during the course of tutoring.

Tutored students at all grade levels improved their reading performance from pretest to post-test, more than the gain expected for the typical child at their grade level. Reading comprehension and reading skills started out below grade-level; by year-end, students closed the gap and were reading at or near the grade-level expectation. The magnitude of reading gains was the same for students of different ethnic/racial backgrounds. Boys in first and second grade showed greater gains than girls on some subtests. According to the ratings of classroom teachers, most students at all three grades improved their reading skills, at least to some degree over the course of the year as a result of the AmeriCorps tutoring.

Only boys in first and third grades showed significant gains on the Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem test of classroom behavior. On the cooperation subscale of the Social Skills Rating System, most students stayed at the same level from pretest to post-test.

Four effective practices were significantly related to gains in students' reading skills: 1) tutors met with students at least three times a week; 2) programs conducted formal evaluations; 3) tutors were trained both prior to and during the tutoring program; and 4) programs were moderately or fully implemented. Students in programs implementing these four effective practices showed larger gains in reading skills (5.4 points) than their counterparts in programs that had three of these elements (2.5 points). Students in programs implementing none of the four effective practices showed no significant gains in reading skills from pretest to post-test