Evaluation of DC Reads: Year 2
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The DC Reads program was first implemented during the 1997-1998 school year (Year 1) as a partnership between the Corporation for National Service, the District of Columbia Public Schools, Communities in Schools (a non-profit organization) and six local universities (American, Catholic, George Washington, Howard, and Trinity), with Georgetown University acting as lead. During the 1998-1999 school year (Year 2), the program expanded to include two more city-based universities, Southeastern and the University of the District of Columbia. It also expanded to include more nonprofit community organizations that coordinate the delivery of tutoring services.

This evaluation focused on the DC Reads programs operated in 16 schools by Communities in Schools during the 1998-1999 school year. Four of the schools served as primary study sites for the evaluation. Across its 16 sites, the program provided tutoring to approximately 504 students. Most tutored students were in second grade and were identified by school staff as having low reading skills and being most in need of tutoring. A total of 340 tutors (most of whom were Federal Work-Study students) provided tutoring to those students. In the four study schools, 136 students received tutoring from 74 tutors.

At the beginning of the 1998-1999 school year, most schools used the Book Partners curriculum while a few schools used the Reading One-to-One curriculum. At the start of the second semester, a new blended curriculum incorporating both was adopted in all schools. Outcomes from this evaluation include:

- Significant gains on five of eight tests in the reading performance battery: letter identification, phonemic awareness, word attack, and oral reading fluency and comprehension. Students most dramatic gains were in phonemic awareness (i.e., the matching of sounds to their letter symbols). This is considered to be a fundamental skill, prerequisite to the development of more advanced reading skills.
- Lowest performers progressed at the fastest rate. In their initial scores on measures of phonemic awareness, word identification, and passage comprehension, students who had lower scores tended to grow at a faster rate than those with higher scores. This indicates that the lowest-performing students were "catching up" in some areas. In addition, students who practiced reading aloud more frequently during tutoring improved at a higher rate than students who did so less frequently.
- Nearly twice as much gain for tutored students compared to non-tutored students on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT 9). On normal curve equivalent scores (which compare students to all other students in the nation at the beginning and end of the school year), tutored students gained nearly twice as much as non-tutored students. In addition, sixty-nine percent of tutored students improved on total reading scores, while just sixty percent of their non-tutored peers demonstrated improvement.

The following effective practices (activities and methods a program engages in to produce positive results) and lessons learned (the solutions implemented in the program or envisioned as improvements for future programs, often developed in response to the challenges the program confronted) were reported from this evaluation:

- Using research-based curriculum elements produces improved reading achievement;
- Well-structured tutoring sessions are more effective when the content and delivery of instruction are carefully planned;

- Closely coordinate the tutoring instruction with the schools, school administrators, and the classroom and/or reading teacher;
- Conduct intensive and ongoing training and provide supervision for the tutors;
- Frequent and regular tutoring sessions are important for the program to be effective;
- Careful evaluation, assessment, monitoring, and reinforcement of progress all provide important information to program managers;
- Access to training and technical assistance resources such as an in-school reading specialist is important; and
- Make sure that positive, caring relationships among students, staff, and tutors are engendered.

In conclusion, students who received tutoring made significant gains in reading, and overall, the program experienced considerable success. The experiences of the partners implementing the DC Reads program offer valuable lessons to others involved in planning or implementing similar programs.