

# What Works Clearinghouse



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## WWC Quick Review of the Report “Evaluation of Experience Corps: Student Reading Outcomes”<sup>†\*</sup>

### What is this study about?

This study examined whether the *Experience Corps* program improved the reading skills of elementary school students who were at risk of academic failure.

Nearly 900 first through third grade students in 23 schools in Boston, New York City, and Port Arthur, TX participated in the study. These students were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that participated in the *Experience Corps* program or a control group that did not.

The study estimated effects by comparing changes in reading achievement over one academic year for students in the two research groups.

Reading achievement was measured using a teacher assessment of grade-specific reading skills, as well as standardized tests measuring comprehension, receptive vocabulary, and phonemic awareness.

### WWC Rating

***The research described in this report is consistent with WWC evidence standards***

**Strengths:** The study is a well-implemented randomized controlled trial.

### Key Features of the *Experience Corps* Program

Serves elementary school students considered at risk of academic failure

Offers regular one-on-one tutoring and mentoring by older adult volunteers (ages 55 or older)

Program model varies across sites:

- Structured curricula used: Book Buddies, Reading Coaches, or Brigance
- Tutoring ranges in frequency and length: 2–4 times a week for 25–45 minutes
- Volunteer training ranges from 15–32 hours
- Volunteers are provided stipends of up to \$278 per month

### What did the study authors report?

Students in the *Experience Corps* program made greater gains over the academic year on passage comprehension and on general reading skills as assessed by their teachers, with effect sizes of 0.13 and 0.16, respectively. These effect sizes are roughly equivalent to moving a student from the 50th to the 56th percentile. Effects were smaller for students in special education.

The authors found no statistically significant effects on measures of receptive vocabulary or phonemic awareness.

<sup>†</sup>Morrow-Howell, N., Jonson-Reid, M., McCrary, S., Lee, Y., & Spitznagel, E. (2009). *Evaluation of Experience Corps: Student reading outcomes*. St. Louis: Washington University, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Center for Social Development.

\*Absence of conflict of interest: Employees of Mathematica Policy Research were on the advisory committee and collected data for this study. For this reason, the study was reviewed by staff from RAND Corporation, ICF International, and Concentric Research and Evaluation.

WWC quick reviews are based on the evidence published in the report cited and rely on effect sizes and significance levels as reported by study authors. WWC does not confirm study authors' findings or contact authors for additional information about the study.

The WWC rating refers only to the results summarized above and not necessarily to all results presented in the study.