



High Impact Tutoring Case Statement
Anne Ryan, Executive Director, Read to Succeed Buffalo, Inc.

The Urgent Need for Early Grade Tutoring: Case for Early Intervention to Achieve Reading Proficiency

The Challenge: Compelling evidence underscores the pivotal role of early reading proficiency in shaping a child's future academic success. Shockingly, in 2022, two-thirds of fourth-grade students in the United States were unable to read at their grade level (Nation's Report Card, n.d.). For economically disadvantaged children this statistic is even worse. These alarming statistics point to a significant issue that demands immediate attention: the need for early intervention in reading skills, as supported by science-based reading research.

Research consistently demonstrates that reading at grade level by the end of third grade is a critical predictor of success in school, workforce productivity, responsible life choices, and reduced rates of incarceration (Morrison, Griffith, & Alberts, 2011). It's imperative to recognize that students who struggle with reading in fourth grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school. The impact of this deficiency on their prospects cannot be overstated.

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five fundamental skills as the cornerstone of effective reading programs: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Science-based reading research (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) affirms that these skills are interconnected and build upon each other as a student advances in their journey of learning how to read. Without a strong foundation in early skills like phonemic awareness and phonics, students will encounter considerable difficulties in developing higher-level reading abilities such as fluency and comprehension. The need for mastering these early skills is undeniable (Foorman et al., 2017).

Addressing this critical challenge requires immediate action. The AARP Foundation Experience Corps program provides a compelling solution by matching well-trained and supported senior volunteers, aged 50 or older, with children in first through third-grade classrooms who are struggling with reading. The impact of early tutoring cannot be overstated as classroom teachers simply do not have the time to provide every student with one-to-one instruction at the intensity that high impact tutoring provides.

High Impact Tutoring Evidence-Base: Not all tutoring is high impact tutoring. While homework help and other supports are admirable, high impact tutoring requires five components to achieve the results that research demonstrates it can have with underperforming students.

High impact tutoring is personalized, high-quality instruction in one-to-one sessions that create positive mentoring relationships between tutor and student. The characteristics of high impact tutoring include:

- 1) Regularity of 2-3 times per week for 10+ weeks
- 2) Consistence of a well-trained and supported tutor
- 3) Use of high quality learning materials that align with science of reading
- 4) One-to-one or small groups (preferably one-to-one)
- 5) Embedded during the school day to promote attendance

Experience Corps Buffalo High Impact Tutoring: Experience Corps is an intergenerational tutoring/mentoring program of the AARP Foundation that is approved as an intervention under Every



Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the USDOE's What Works Clearinghouse. Experience Corps harnesses the social capital of older adults (retirees age 50+) by training and deploying them to tutor/mentor first - third grade students who are below grade level in reading. Volunteers utilize an evidence-based structured session steeped in the science of reading. This 30-year old program provides tutoring and mentoring to 3,659 students, in 192 schools, with 1,284 trained volunteers across the country.

It came to Read to Succeed Buffalo, Inc. (RTSB) in 2016 through a competitive grant process funded by the Corporation for National & Community Service Social Innovation Fund and the AARP Foundation. While there are 17 programs throughout the country, RTSB is the sole program partner implementing Experience Corps in New York State.

In Buffalo, the 30-minute structured tutoring session is laser-focused on building fluency and comprehension skills in first through third grade students through repetition, practice, immediate correction and feedback while nurturing the tutor-student relationship through consistent sessions (2-3x per week with a goal of completing a minimum of 35+ sessions with each student/year) and quality talk.

Previous randomized controlled trials of Experience Corps have consistently demonstrated that this one-on-one tutoring intervention leads to significant improvements in passage comprehension and overall reading skills among kindergarten through third grade students (Lee, Morrow-Howell, Jonson-Reid, & McCrary, 2010). This underscores the effectiveness of early intervention and high impact tutoring in bolstering reading proficiency.

Experience Corps Buffalo tutors are much more than just volunteers reading out loud to children; they are dedicated individuals who receive 15 hours of training each year in a wide range of topics, including science-based reading research, 21st-century classroom strategies, culturally responsive practices, and early literacy, in addition to the mechanics of the structured session. This rigorous training is complemented by the on-site coaching, supervision and fidelity observations they receive from RTSB Experience Corps Buffalo literacy coaches (ECLCs). ECLCs are dual-certified teachers in early literacy and early childhood education, trained in adult learning theory and coaching best practices. This robust level of supervision, professional training and coaching support empowers volunteers to deliver high-quality, evidence-based tutoring and mentoring for their students. The fact that these tutors are older, primarily retired adults, means that they take their role very seriously and understand the value of consistency and fidelity of tutoring implementation.

The fact that 100 percent of students served in 2023-24 improved in their oral reading fluency (number of words read correctly in a timed passage), 100 percent improved on one or more Social Emotional Learning (SEL) measures, and 100 percent improved in overall reading ability (AARP Foundation national office administered school staff survey) is a testament to the success of high impact tutoring in building the foundation for reading success.

The high level of satisfaction expressed by volunteer tutor/mentors participating in Experience Corps Buffalo's program is a testament to the level of support they receive from their ECLC. This satisfaction leads to consistently high rates of attendance and retention of volunteers year after year, further reinforcing the consistent student-tutor-teacher relationships.



And the high level of satisfaction expressed by school administrators and teachers is also indicative of the strength of the intervention and the importance of children receiving one-one instruction from a trained, caring and consistent adult. End of year partner surveys rate Experience Corps Buffalo with very high customer satisfaction and a Net Promoter Score of 90. One administrator commented:

“Read to Succeed is extremely helpful for our students. It is rare that teachers have time to provide individual reading support when they have classes of 20-30 students. Read to Succeed helps fill in that gap and provides much-needed tutoring to our students!”

A teacher stated: “I would recommend partnering with Experience Corps to other schools, based on how my students have made positive and increasing progress with skilled tutors supporting their effort in reading. My students who work with skilled tutors have shown a greater ability to read and enjoy reading because of the extra support they are getting from the partnership”.

In conclusion, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that early grade high impact tutoring is a key strategy to help schools, particularly schools serving predominately economically disadvantaged students, address reading proficiency challenges. Waiting until third grade for New York to release ELA test scores is not an option when it comes to setting our children on a path to academic success. Programs like Experience Corps Buffalo, with their well-trained volunteers and structured interventions, offer a compelling and effective solution in support of closing the low-income early literacy gap, ensuring that every child can become a proficient reader from the very beginning of their educational journey.