

## Using School-based Volunteers in RTI

April 13, 2011 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

### *About this Talk*

Learn how school-based volunteers are making a difference in RTI implementation and how you can increase the impact your volunteers are making in your school or district. Join **Jason Waite** from City Year and **Audrey Suker** from Minnesota Reading Corps during our next RTI Talk as they answer your questions about how they use school-based volunteers in their work and how volunteers can be valuable assets to RTI implementation.

### *Transcript*

**Q** **Jim O'Brian**  
What methods can a school utilize to recruit volunteers?

**A** **Audrey Suker**  
Our program uses AmeriCorps members to recruit community volunteers but our RTI services are almost exclusively provided by AmeriCorps members due to the intensity of the required training and the need for members to work with a child five days/week for 20 minutes/day.

**Q** **Matthew Jay**  
How do you suggest I begin the conversation with my school volunteer coordinator about working together?

**A** **Audrey Suker**  
I think the starting place would be to ask your Volunter Coordinator to (or your school could do this) seek an AmeriCorps program that was interested in working with you or to be in conversation with your State Service Commission about starting an AmeirCorps program for this specific purpose. In our experience we've needed to have AmeriCorps members willing to give 900 or 1700 hours/year to this effort as the training is intense and the schools rely on our members managing a caseload of approximately 15 children that they see every day for 20 minutes. It's not realistic to expect this level of intensity and fidelity to a model implementation with volunteers that can't give this kind of commitment. We are currently working on a training model that would bring in community volunteers to work with children one hour/week but it would be under the supervision of our AmeriCorps members and would provide a double dose of one of the simpler interventions ? Duet Reading or Repeated Reading.

**Q** *Kathy Dooley*

Is it appropriate for volunteers to provide tier two and three interventions? We need all the help we can get, but I fear this isn't appropriate.

**A** *Audrey Suker*

ServeMinnesota's Reading Corps program relies on stipended volunteers (AmeriCorps members) to provide tier two interventions and the members work under the direction of Master Literacy Coaches. Additionally, we ask schools to provide someone on their staff to serve as an internal coach. We train both the AmeriCorps member and the internal coach on the Reading Corps model and then the Master Coach goes on site monthly to review data on children and consult with the member and the internal coach on the most appropriate interventions for the children. The Master Coach also observes the member delivering the interventions (or observes the internal coach observing the member) so we know the interventions are being provided with fidelity. Our members sometimes provide tier three interventions but only if it's clear that the child is also receiving more intense support from specialized teachers and our work is an appropriate supplement. This spring we will be piloting using community volunteers to provide a double dose of our two simplest interventions ? duet reading and repeated reading.

**Q** *Marty Davis*

Who should provide and how much training is ideal for these volunteers?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

The Minnesota Reading Corps members receive between 68 and 71.5 hours of training, including 30 hours on literacy content and 3.5 hours on AIMSweb assessments for members working with kindergarten through third-grade students. These trainings are provided by literacy experts. Other training topics included site orientation (6.5 hours), behavior management (6 hours), diversity (6 hours), poverty issues (6 hours), active citizenship (6 hours), life after AmeriCorps (6 hours), and tutoring basics (1.5 hours). In addition to formal training, members received guidance and support from the internal coach at their site.

On year-end surveys 88% of the members strongly agreed that the training resulted in them feeling confident in their abilities.

**A** *Jason Waite*

We leverage several sources for training, both before the year begins and to support ongoing service delivery. Depending on the content of a specific training, we may have internal trainers, district trainers, school-based trainers, and/or other local subject matter experts. Throughout the year, it is also important to include volunteer observation and coaching, both to maintain fidelity, but also to support those volunteers in maximizing their time with students.

**Q** *April Scot*

How can you secure a sufficient number of volunteers--particularly if your school is not near a university?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

I think the wisest way to structure a program that utilizes volunteers to provide RTI services is through an AmeriCorps program that has the advantage of having stipended volunteers that make a commitment of 900 or 1700 hours a year. With this kind of commitment and the infrastructure that comes with an AmeriCorps program it's possible to have an adequate number of AmeriCorps members to serve a significant number of children. In Minnesota for example we have 645 AmeriCorps members serving all across the state and they will serve nearly 18,000 children this year. AmeriCorps members then can also recruit and supervise community volunteers when the program has evolved to the point of having meaningful opportunities for community volunteers to be part of the program implementation.

**Q** *T. Allen*

How do you handle the issue of student confidentiality with parent volunteers?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

Regardless of whether our AmeriCorps members are a parent, grandparent, family friend, neighbor, etc. we expect all members to maintain student confidentiality. We train members on child confidentiality at the start of their term of service and also train them on ethical boundaries, professional boundaries, data privacy, and mandated reporting. Each AmeriCorps member signs a contract prior to beginning their service that also reiterates their responsibility to maintain student confidentiality.

**Q** *Betty Hines*

Who would be considered our school based volunteers? Where will they come from?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

In the case of a RTI program that relies on AmeriCorps members the AmeriCorps program would recruit the members and then would involve your school in the selection of the members that would serve your specific school. AmeriCorps members are often recent college graduates but also can be retired teachers, other boomers, or stay at home moms that want to re-enter the workforce, etc.

**Q** *Sally Grimes*

Are you training the volunteers in specific ways, for example, in Phonemic Awareness activities , etc.?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

The K-3 interventions that the Reading Corps AmeriCorps members are trained to provide are all aligned with ?The Big Five Ideas? reported in the National Reading Panel Report and have a scientific base for their use. The interventions identified for use in the program are each designed to provide additional practice that is supplemental to the core reading instructional program offered by the local school site. In a Response to Intervention (RtI) model, these would be Tier 1 or 2 interventions. The chosen interventions share a common theme in focus on building fluency for basic reading skills such as phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, decoding skills, and sight word recognition. It is important to note at the outset that students participating in the program do so in addition to, not in replacement of, a comprehensive core reading instructional program.

Each intervention is associated with the following targeted skills:

- Phoneme Blending- Builds the skill of blending individual phonemes (smallest individual units of sound of spoken language) in to words.
- Phoneme Segmenting- Builds the skill of breaking words into their individual phonemes.
- Letter Sound Correspondence- Builds the skill of associating the correct sounds with letters.
- Blending Words- Builds the skill of blending individual sounds into words.
- Newscaster- Builds skills in reading with expression through extensive modeling and practice.
- Duet Reading- Builds fluency skills with modeling and practice.
- Repeated Reading with Comprehension Strategy- Builds skills in reading fluently (rate+accuracy+expression) while reading for comprehension.
- Pencil Tap- Builds skills in reading accurately instead of carelessly.
- Stop/Go-Builds skills in reading fluency
- Great Leaps- A reading program designed to increase fluency in phonemic awareness, letter recognition and phonics, high frequency words, and connected text.

**Q** *Gretchen Biesecker*

What are some best practices to get buy-in from classroom teachers in order to integrate school-based volunteers in an RTI process? How do you gain and maintain consensus around which tiers volunteers can most effectively serve?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

The Minnesota Reading Corps gets buy-in from classroom teachers by taking responsibility for ensuring that the AmeriCorps members come to the school well trained for their positions and the program also provides a Master Literacy Coach so teachers can be assured that the interventions

**A** provided by the AmeriCorps members will be under the supervision of a literacy expert. The Reading Corps literacy experts determine which tiers the AmeriCorps members can most effectively serve and are clear that it works best for members to start serving the children closest to their grade level targets as they will take the shortest amount of time to catch up to target and then other children can be brought into the caseload. This frees up time for Reading specialists at the school to work with the lowest children.

**A** **Jason Waite**

There are a number of demands placed on teachers' time and attention, so we are very intentional about how we approach these relationships. In most circumstances, there is an initial meeting between teachers and AmeriCorps members who serve their students. Throughout the year, our members maintain these connections, conferring with teachers and school-based specialists to maintain alignment of their efforts. In our most successful partnerships, there is common planning time where grade-level teachers, specialists, and City Year members review student performance data to inform instruction and interventions.

Though our members should build strong relationships, teachers can always access the team's leader, or Program Manager, for any challenges they may encounter. These Program Managers also conduct periodic check-ins to ensure continued alignment.

To the second question, it is important to work with district leaders, school leaders, and teachers to clarify appropriate roles for volunteers. Variations in role definition may exist based on state, district or school definitions regarding their RTI approach.

**Q** **Linda Bonsall**

In what capacity would you use parent volunteers to help with RTI? What kind of qualifications would you use for screening volunteers?

**A** **Audrey Suker**

We encourage parent volunteers but screen and train them in the same way we do all our AmeriCorps members. We screen members to ensure they have the literacy skills themselves; that they understand what they are committing to both in terms of the time commitment and what their day will be like; and that they have the temperament and interest needed to be successful with students.

**Q** **Cynthia Baranowski**

How can we insure that volunteers present the interventions with fidelity?

**A** **Audrey Suker**

**A** To ensure that child assessment data are collected completely and accurately and that Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) interventions are implemented according to standards, the MRC implements protocols that include observations of members conducting assessments and interventions. Results of the observations are also used to provide immediate feedback to members about their assessments and intervention skills and areas that warrant additional training or clarification from coaches, if needed.

The checklists, Accuracy of Implementation Rating Scales, are completed by internal or master coaches who are trained to conduct observations of members as the members administer and score the assessments. Coaches complete a minimum of one checklist for each of the assessments conducted by members at least three times during the program year.

**Q** **Susan E Busch**  
How do you respond to support personnel unions when they say that volunteers make it easier for Districts to lay off paid aides? Have you run into this issue in your work?

**A** **Audrey Suker**  
Our program, The Minnesota Reading Corps, utilizes AmeriCorps members to provide supplemental practice to students. AmeriCorps provisions are clear that AmeriCorps members cannot replace staff and because we are clear that our members are not to perform duties that could be confused with duties of a classroom aide (bus duty, hall monitoring, etc.) this has not been an issue for us.

**Q** **Karl Robins**  
How do you train your volunteers to provide interventions? Do you use some sort of assessment?

**A** **Audrey Suker**  
The success of Reading Corps relies upon highly trained individuals capable of integrating cutting-edge research and educational practices on the front lines. Comprehensive training is provided in advance of and throughout a member's service. This intensive training model ensures that both members and internal coaches are able to successfully implement the Reading Corps tutoring model. Reading Corps provides training on the following topics every year:

- Literacy Standards: Participants learn objective criteria so there is consistent knowledge and understanding of what children must learn to achieve reading proficiency.
- Introduction to Literacy: Participants learn importance of literacy and the skills children need to learn in order to read.
- Assessment: Participants learn how to administer fall, winter and spring assessments with students to pinpoint literacy gaps.
- Interventions: Participants learn how to implement research-based interventions with students.

**A** There are 11 interventions that are based on the “big 5” components of literacy as defined by the National Reading Panel and recommendations of the National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences and other current literacy research.

- Progress Monitoring: Participants learn how to administer regular progress monitoring assessments that provide necessary data to teachers and inform instructional decisions for children.

Other topics include child confidentiality, motivating students, and family engagement. In addition, members serving in preschool classrooms receive an additional 17.5 hours of early literacy training (SEEDS of Emergent Literacy) to learn effective literacy instruction methods that can be used during core instruction time. In an effort to build sustainability, Reading Corps provides a five-day Train the Trainer session to allow one staff person from each prekindergarten program to become a licensed SEEDS Trainer. The SEEDS Trainer is then able to provide training to the Reading Corps members AND staff each year at their site.

**Q** **Linda Earley**  
Any suggestions for sustaining energy levels /commitment to program implementation?

**A** **Audrey Suker**  
Our Reading Corps model relies on Master Coaches that visit each site monthly to provide support to the AmeriCorps members as well as to the internal coach at the site that is providing the daily supervision to the members. We also observe members providing interventions to both rate the fidelity of their implementation as well as to provide feedback to further develop their skills.

Because the members monitor progress of each child on a weekly basis they experience the satisfaction of seeing the child's progress which is highly rewarding for them and for the teachers.

**A** **Jason Waite**  
Though individual motivations are different, there are a number of ways to motivate volunteers. For one, our AmeriCorps members are always excited to see student progress. One of the great benefits of the RTI approach for volunteers is the focus on progress monitoring. The immediate feedback is gratifying and provides key insights, even if students are not making gains as quickly as one would hope. To do this, you can use timeline graphs with students so they feel a sense of agency over their learning or have a data wall in the school where your teachers and volunteers can see updated student performance information. With data walls, you can use ID numbers to maintain confidentiality, while increasing transparency of data.

You can also find ways to include volunteers in the planning and implementation of broader appreciation and recognition programming, which helps blend Tier 1 supports and Tier 2 interventions. For example, in addition to providing attendance coaching for students who are chronically absent, our members may also recognize a class with perfect attendance for a specified

**A** month or provide treats for the first 100 students to show up at school on a surprise day.

Volunteers also appreciate validation by school partners. Even with explicit roles and guidance, it can often be tough for volunteers to feel fully part of the school community and a few words of encouragement or a hosted breakfast by the professional faculty and staff of a school can go a long way to recognize that all the adults in the building are working toward shared goals.

**Q** **Gail Adora**  
How do you define "volunteer" in your settings?

**A** **Jason Waite**  
We have AmeriCorps members, who have sign on to provide 1700 hours of full-time service over the course of a school year. We separately engage community volunteers, though not for specific RTI services.

**Q** **Jean Ramirez**  
Will you shed some light on the volunteer experience? What are some of the top comments you hear from volunteers using RTI in schools?

**A** **Audrey Suker**  
We survey our AmeriCorps members at the end of their year of service and in 2010 95% reported that participating in the MRC program had a positive impact on them personally. When asked an open-ended question about the most positive aspects their answers included:

1. Seeing children making academic progress and enjoying working with children in general.
2. The experience made them feel accomplished and was a confidence booster.
3. The experience provided experience in teaching and/or working in schools.
4. The opportunity to have a positive impact in their community.

**A** **Jason Waite**  
Participating in schools with a strong Rtl approach can help them forge stronger relationships with teachers, content specialists, their City Year team members, and the students they serve. The shared language of Rtl can also help them make quicker connections with school-based partners than they may have before we adopted the approach. Our AmeriCorps members also use the Tier language with each other with their peers locally and across locations. Because we are spread across the country, this kind of conceptual shorthand is invaluable in helping them feel like a community of practitioners.





**Kim**

Will you explain the process your settings/volunteers use to communicate their work to parents and educators?



**Audrey Suker**

We rely on the school to communicate with parents about our program and about individual student progress. We provide templates for letters that the AmeriCorps members and schools can use but want the school to incorporate our work into the big picture of how each child is performing.

We rely on internal coaches (that we've trained at each site) to be the communication link between the AmeriCorps members and individual teachers.



**James**

Before I read about this RTI Talk, I would have never considered your organizations were involved in RTI. How did your organizations become interested in RTI implementation?



**Audrey Suker**

ServeMinnesota is responsible for Minnesota's state AmeriCorps programs and our involvement with RTI began with the insight of a state legislator who was impressed with results that a RTI school district was achieving for children. She identified the potential of AmeriCorps members to expand the capacity of schools to have access to data on greater numbers of children that could then be used to tailor instruction. She connected us to literacy experts that designed an AmeriCorps model where AmeriCorps members are trained to perform assessments, provide progress monitoring, and to deliver specific literacy interventions.



**Jason Waite**

For us, there were many guides that pointed to this approach. We were first introduced to the Rtl pyramid by Dr. David Osher. His work on school climate and student support included a tiered approach to better meet student needs. Secondly, we launched a collaborative partnership called Diplomas Now with Talent Development/Johns Hopkins University and Communities in Schools. This partnership has Rtl at its core, with strong school organization and professional development as a foundation, focused interventions for students who are off track, and intensive supports for students who require a higher level of intervention.



**Annette Sullivan**

How do schools use school-based volunteers within Rtl and maintain confidentiality?

**A** *Jason Waite*

This is a great question and one that should be taken seriously when involving volunteers in your RtI approach.

We work with district and school leadership to make sure that we are compliant with FERPA. As part of our AmeriCorps member (volunteer) contract, we also have language regarding the appropriate use and handling of any student-level data or information. This language is covered explicitly with corps members when completing the contract to ensure clarity. Once formal confidentiality elements have been addressed, we also have guidance for our members that they must be very cautious with any related documentation and should not discuss students by name, for example.

Our partners, by and large, understand that we are committed to using information only for instructional purposes. In addition, our partnership agreements at the district and school levels have provisions for student data sharing for summative purposes.

**Q** *Brenda Woodward*

Will you please describe the training that volunteers receive in order to implement research based interventions with fidelity?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

Our AmeriCorps members receive 3 days of intensive training provided by literacy experts prior to being placed in schools. They are trained in conducting assessments and in 10 different research based literacy interventions. Once they are working with students literacy experts conduct observations of assessment fidelity three times/year and observations of intervention fidelity nine times per year.

**Q** *Brenda Woodward*

Do parents raise concerns about having volunteers, rather than paid staff, assist in the implementation of interventions? If so, how do you address these concerns?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

We are very clear that our AmeriCorps members are providing students with extra targeted practice (through the use of Tier 2 interventions) in addition to their core reading instruction so it's clear to parents that nothing we do is replacing what a reading teacher would be providing to their child. With this approach we have not had any concern on the part of parents. We actually have many stories of parents that are thrilled with the extra practice their child is receiving and attribute their child's success to the extra one-on-one support.

**A** *Jason Waite*

In general, we have not had concerns like this arise, though it is important to be clear with parents that interventions are intended to support and enhance, but not supplant or duplicate, regular classroom instruction. Students who participate in intervention tutoring do not receive less instruction from the core classroom teacher. The work of the teacher is enhanced by the intervention. The teacher and other school staff heavily inform the scope and sequence of the intervention through the use of formative assessments and additional guidance.

If the concern is specifically about the implementation of interventions, it is important to be clear that volunteers are part of your strategy from the outset. Early information on volunteer roles and training and support are essential to build parent understanding.

**Q** *Brenda Woodward*

Were there any expected or unexpected pitfalls to overcome when incorporating volunteers into the RTI process?

**A** *Jason Waite*

There are two that stand out quickly. First, schools have varying interpretations of Rtl and are in different stages of implementation. Because we serve in over 160 schools across 24 school districts, we get to experience a breadth of approaches. Due to this variation, we have already learned a lot about the relationship between school conditions and successful integration of our members into the Rtl process. Though this presents a challenge at times for implementation, the Rtl approach has also helped us bridge our work across multiple grade levels and content areas.

It can also be tough in the early stages to help school partners understand the role that our teams of full-time members can play as part of their broader Rtl approach. Many of our schools have experienced more sporadic volunteerism and in some cases those volunteers have not been as attuned to the school's instructional and student support goals. We hope that City Year and AmeriCorps programs like those represented by Audrey can demonstrate the ability for national service programs to help drive key educational outcomes with school and other community partners.

**Q** *Brenda Woodward*

Can you highlight some of the benefits of using volunteers in the RTI process?

**A** *Jason Waite*

In our program, AmeriCorps members are at schools when students show up in the morning and stay through the after-school time at least four days per week. This provides a level of continuity for the students and school staff. For instance, a student may receive literacy tutoring services

**A** during the day and also participate in our after-school homework assistance and enrichment programming. For the student, this translates into an adult knowing areas in which they need additional support and being able to leverage after school time to further support those areas even beyond focused interventions. This also provides an opportunity to see adults outside their family demonstrating interest in their growth and success.

In schools where there is a high concentration of need, well trained and supported volunteers can provide necessary human capital to address challenges and work toward shared partnership goals. We have seen that some students whose performance would indicate that they require Tier 2 services may just need additional time with a trained practitioner who can help them stay focused until they work through some learning gaps.

Engaging volunteers in the RTI process can also ensure there is a connection between the schools instructional program and tutoring services.

**Q** *J Tucker*

Since progress monitoring is such a critical element in a successful RTI program, having the school-based personnel document their RTI time is vital. How can we express this need to them when they are inconsistent in keeping and turning in documentation? Also, what are some creative ways of encouraging them to do this on a regular basis?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

We require the internal coaches that provide the supervision to our AmeriCorps members to document their time in an on-line reporting system and it is part of what they agree to when they become a Reading Corps site. I am also aware that in some school districts (Minneapolis is an example) they have an on-line reporting system that asks teachers to document their problem solving meetings. It's not mandated at this point but is encouraged.

**Q** *J Tucker*

How do you determine appropriate intervention activities for the school-based personnel, who in our school are the Special Area teachers?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

We provide 3 days of training to school-based personnel and ask principals to identify someone in their school that has the necessary background to be trained to function as an internal literacy coach that can eventually supervise AmeriCorps Reading Corps members without the supervision of our master coaches ??? ideally we can gradually withdraw the support of master coaches over a 3 year period with the goal that the site has gained the capacity to implement the model on their own.

**Q** *J Tucker*

What are some simple ways of sharing information collected during pull-out interventions with classroom teachers?

**A** *Jason Waite*

Though we always prefer data review meetings with relevant teachers, content specialists and student support staff, that may not always be possible. In those cases, our AmeriCorps members can find a regular time just before school, at lunch, or during a planning period to share updates from their interventions. In cases with really tough scheduling constraints, our members have shared notes taken in their lesson plan documents or kept a running log, similar to a shared journal, with their teacher to maintain constant updates.

**A** *Audrey Suker*

AmeriCorps members use a software system called AIMSweb and can print out PDF files that shows the progress of each child against their target to share with teachers. They can also provide progress monitoring graphs teachers can use in data review team meetings and in parent teacher conferences.

**Q** *Jean*

How do you fit interventions into the school day with volunteers?

**A** *Audrey Suker*

Scheduling the tutoring sessions is the responsibility of the internal coach (often the school's literacy coach) who works with individual teachers to determine which children are best served by the Reading Corps and ensures that children are not pulled from core reading instruction time. We expect the internal coaches to ensure that our AmeriCorps members have a full caseload of 15 children that they see for 20 minutes a day five days/week.

**A** *Jason Waite*

Though there are a number of ways to schedule, we look for consistent time that does not conflict with explicit instruction in core subjects. In general, we have found that typical scheduling in elementary schools or secondary schools using a block schedule with cohorts of students is the most amenable to interventions provided by volunteers. In some cases, schools have converted blocks for intervention purposes. We also have found situations where some after-school time is used to support the double-dosing required.

**Q Liz Heyer**

In your experience, have you found that there a difference between students who can be best served by a trained volunteer and those who require a teacher with depth of experience and training? In other words, can all struggling students be effectively served by a volunteer?

**A Audrey Suker**

In our experience the children best served by a trained volunteer (in our case AmeriCorps members) are the tier 2 children that benefit greatly from additional targeted practice time. We rely on our Master Coaches working in partnership with internal coaches at each site to understand if tier 3 children really need specialized teachers to focus on additional instruction vs. supplemental practice. We are careful to emphasize that our members are not teachers.

**A Jason Waite**

As the classroom instructional leaders, teachers face challenges when a lot of students in their class have low performance on average or student scores span a wide range. We hope to alleviate the overall differentiation challenges teachers face by working with students who are in the early stages of falling off-track or close to grade level expectations. If you can focus volunteer attention on this key group of students who are on the cusp of success and achievement, it frees up teachers and other content area experts to a certain extent so they can provide additional focus on students who have the most significant needs. This can also create opportunities for teachers to give extra attention to students who are well above benchmark or grade level expectations in key indicator areas.

**Q Sally Grimes**

Do you know if AmeriCorps is working this way in other states? This is wonderful.

**A Audrey Suker**

We are currently partnering with United Way Worldwide to pursue replication of our Reading Corps model in other states. Depending on some final funding decisions from the Corporation for National and Community Service we expect the model to be replicated in New York, Michigan, Florida, and Texas by this coming school year. We also have an additional dozen states or so that are interested in replication so will begin working with them to pursue replication for the 12-13 school year. Last year we partnered with the Education Commission of the States and submitted an i3 proposal to help with replication ? we were rated a "promising applicant" but weren't funded ? we'll try again this round if additional innovation funds are appropriated.

Beyond the work described above the State of Washington has a statewide reading corps that gives preference to RTI schools ? they rely on the schools to provide the RTI training to the AmeriCorps members. The University of Texas-Austin also has an AmeriCorps program called ACES and they are in the process of replicating our model.

**Q Cheryl Ward**  
What are your biggest challenges?

**A Audrey Suker**  
Early in our evolution the biggest challenge was helping schools understand our model and that members were not being provided to do things like lunch room monitoring and just extra "tasks". Over time schools have grown to love the support they're receiving. We are reaching more of their children with targeted practice so now our greatest challenge is keeping up with the demand.

**Q Julie**  
You mentioned literacy experts check assessment fidelity 3x/yr and intervention fidelity 9x/yr. Is this expert an employee of the district? How much time do they spend doing the fidelity checks?

**A Audrey Suker**  
Our Master Literacy coaches train internal coaches on how to do fidelity checks -- we rely on the district to recommend staff that have the skill set to become literacy experts. The total time required from internal coaches to do fidelity checks and to review student data is approximately 6 - 9 hours/month/member.

**Q Dorothy A. Schrader**  
Can you explain how the funding is secured for RTI/AmeriCorps volunteer programs?

**A Audrey Suker**  
As Minnesota's state commission on National and Community Service we take responsibility to ensure that the funding is available for this program. Funding comes from 3 sources ??? the Corporation for National and Community Service (Federal Funds); our state legislature; and the philanthropic community.

**Q Brenda Woodward**  
As a follow up to Jason's answer to Marty's question regarding training: How is the training funded if you use "district trainers, school-based trainers, and/or other local subject matter experts"?

**A Jason Waite**  
Our locations across the country budget for annual training expenses and through local and national fundraising, we ensure the members get the required initial and ongoing training.

**A** More specifically, we work with district-level administrators to identify any relevant professional development opportunities that would be appropriate for our members to attend and come to a mutual agreement through our formal agreement. At the school level, our partnership agreement includes a school liaison who helps coordinate resources. In order to stay closely aligned with the school's instructional and student support approach, this person is essential in helping us identify relevant learning opportunities, including everything from the school's disciplinary code and norms to time with in-house content specialists.

**Q** *Lisa D*  
Most school buildings do not have the extra classrooms or space to handle the volunteers and the interventions. Where do your interventions take place?

**A** *Audrey Suker*  
It's not uncommon for the tutoring to take place in the hallway right outside the classroom where core instruction is occurring. Our biggest concern is that there's not a lot of time lost in getting to and from tutoring sessions and that it's quiet enough for both the tutor and the child to concentrate. We have found that many of our schools have found space (often a corner of their libraries) where tutoring can occur in a quiet spot.

**Q** *Lisa D*  
Do your volunteers see students on an individual basis or are they in groups?

**A** *Audrey Suker*  
Our AmeriCorps members primarily work with children one-on-one although we have done some pilots of having members work with pairs and I can imagine doing more of that moving forward. Our Kindergarten focused members do some small group work. Our pre-k members are embedded in classrooms and do some small group work of children identified as needing specific targeted interventions.

That concludes our RTI Talk for today. Thanks to everyone for the thoughtful questions and thanks to our experts, Mr. Jason Waite and Ms. Audrey Suker, for their time today.

**Additional Resources:**

- [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#)
- [City Year](#)
- [Minnesota Reading Corps](#)
- [Serve Minnesota](#)



- [Americorps](#)
- ["The Good Life: Minnesota's Guide for Active Adults"](#) - *Minnesota Star Tribune* article on seniors signing up to help struggling students in reading and math.
- [Diplomas Now](#) - City Year's collaboration with Johns Hopkins University and Communities in Schools
- [Building a Grad Nation](#) - a report that helps frame how different organizations can support students by tackling the high schools and feeders with the highest prevalence of students off-track.
- [ABCs for Drop-Out Rate Reform](#) - As part of "Reading, Writing and Reform," Byron Pitts reports on Chicago's Talent Development Charter High School, a former so-called "drop-out factory" taking a new approach to an old problem.
- [Minnesota Reading Corps Evaluation](#)
- [Minnesota Reading Corps Final Evaluation](#)