

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**National Service Program in NYC Schools Produces Big Gains in Student Learning
Senior Volunteers Combine Compassion, Education and Personal Attention for
Successful Education Program for Public School Children**

New York, NY, April 9, 2009 - A unique program in which seniors tutor elementary school children has proven to increase test scores in New York City schools. Rigorous new research from Washington University in St. Louis shows significant gains from Experience Corps, a national service program, that trains experienced Americans to help low-income children in urban schools in New York and 23 other cities nationally.

The central finding is that over a single school year, students with Experience Corps tutors made over 60 percent more progress in learning two critical reading skills than similar students not served by the program.

Researchers at Washington University in St. Louis conducted a randomized, control-group study of Experience Corps, which engages Americans age 55 and older in helping struggling students learn to read, to assess its effectiveness. The two-year, \$2 million study, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, is one of the largest of its kind, involving more than 800 first, second and third graders (half with Experience Corps tutors, half without) at 23 elementary schools in three cities. The Community Service Society (CSS), which operates the Experience Corps program in New York City, was selected to participate in the national study.

"Experience Corps has resulted in significant improvements in New York City schoolchildren since its inception in 1996," said David R. Jones, president and CEO of CSS. CSS currently operates Experience Corps in four Harlem public schools. "Experience Corps has changed the lives of thousands of elementary school children by giving them a solid foundation in reading," said Mr. Jones. CSS in partnership with Experience Corps has served more than 9,000 students in New York City since 1996. Originally operating in 12 schools - and at its height in 16 schools in four boroughs - the program now operates in four schools in Harlem. Mr. Jones said, "Experience Corps has matured to the point where an investment by the city could give the program the citywide presence it needs to maximize its impact on school children."

Other key finds from the Washington University research are 1) Experience Corps tutors were able to improve young students' reading comprehension, one of the toughest skills to affect for struggling readers; 2) As an intervention, Experience Corps compares to smaller class size; 3) Experience Corps works for all students, including those farthest behind; 4) Teachers welcome Experience Corps; and 5) Experience Corps is beneficial for the older adults.

"The research shows that Experience Corps tutors can increase student reading skills," said Jean Grossman, an expert in youth mentoring programs and evaluation design at Princeton University and Public/Private Ventures. "That's great news for parents, children, educators and the many people of all ages who want to respond to President Obama's call to service and want to know that their efforts will make a significant difference."

Many of the volunteers live in the schools' neighborhoods and feel connected to the children, school and principal. PS 154 (Manhattan) teacher Ms. Cynthia Allan who has been working with Experience Corps for five years with the same volunteer, Ms. Carrie Cooper, said, "Ms. Cooper provides the right mix of love, structure and high expectations for each child." She continued, "I look around and see children with smiles with a feeling of success walking with their Book Buddies tutor."

"Experience Corps works because Experience Corps members are carefully screened and trained to support local literacy instruction," said Lester Strong, the program's CEO. "Plus most Experience Corps members come from the neighborhoods where they serve. They know these kids, they believe in these kids, and they see a future in them. Experience Corps puts a growing national resource, *experienced Americans*, to work on a pressing national need — giving *all* students the reading skills they need to succeed," Strong continued. "There's no shortage of older adults — nearly 10,000 Americans turn 60 every day — and no shortage of kids who need help — half of our urban students never graduate from high school. We could be doing so much more to put these two generations together."

To download a copy of the research findings, please go to:

<http://csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/RP09-01.pdf>

About the Research

In 2006, researchers at the Center for Social Development at Washington University's Brown School of Social Work were awarded a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies to evaluate the effects of the Experience Corps program on student reading outcomes. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) provided data collection services.

Three school systems agreed to be part of the study and 23 schools in Boston, New York City and Port Arthur, Texas, participated. At the beginning of the school year, teachers referred all students who needed assistance with reading to the program. More than 1,000 students were referred, and parental consent to participate in the study was obtained for 81 percent of those referred. Those students were then randomly assigned to work with an Experience Corps tutor for one academic year or to a control group. All students were tested at the beginning and end of that academic year.

The Experience Corps program tutored 430 of these students; 451 were in the control group. There were 332 first, 304 second, and 186 third graders; 420 males and 402 females in the final data set. Analysis of pretest data collected by MPR showed that the Experience Corps students and control groups were equivalent on all measured characteristics.

The program succeeded in delivering the intervention to a large number of the students. About half of students received 30 to 49 sessions, and the mean number of sessions was 45. Three-quarters of the students received over 35 sessions, which represents about one session a week throughout the program period. When including only the students who received at least 35 sessions, a criterion that was chosen to indicate that for the students received the intervention as intended, the effects appear to be stronger.

Data for the study came from three sources: interviews with the students, assessments completed by teachers, and school records. MPR interviewers assessed reading ability at the beginning and end of the school year in face-to-face interviews with the students. Standardized reading tests were used: the Woodcock Johnson word attack subscale (WJ-WA), which tests students' ability to sound

out new words; the Woodcock Johnson passage comprehension subscale (WJ-PC), which tests reading comprehension; and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test (PPVT-III), which tests vocabulary acquisition for young children.

At the beginning and end of the academic year, teachers completed assessments of grade-specific reading skills and classroom behavior. At the end of the year, school records were abstracted to ascertain demographics and other student characteristics, and tutors rated the quality of their relationships with students.

About Experience Corps

Experience Corps, an award-winning national program founded in 1995, engages people age 55 and older in meeting their communities' greatest challenges. Today, in 23 cities across the country, 2,000 Experience Corps members tutor and mentor elementary school students struggling to learn to read. Independent research shows that Experience Corps boosts student academic performance, helps schools and youth-serving organizations become more successful, and enhances the well-being of the older adults in the process.

Experience Corps is supported by public and private funders, including: The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps), and the Deerbrook Charitable Foundation.

For 160 years, the Community Service Society of New York has been the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and continues to advocate for the economic security of the working poor in the nation's largest city.