

# An Evaluation of Early Learning Corps

ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



2024-2025



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COLLABORATIVE

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## **About the National Science & Service Collaborative**

We believe partnerships between researchers, AmeriCorps programs, and communities can transform research and practice, leading to sustainable, community-driven solutions. We value a broad and inclusive definition of “collaboration” because improving societal outcomes is maximized when the tools of science, expertise of communities, and resources of AmeriCorps are deployed in a truly collaborative way.

The Center’s portfolio includes projects to evaluate the impact of AmeriCorps programming, projects to advance the existing knowledge base in education, and development projects to bring new and innovative programming to communities across the nation.

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# Executive Summary

Early Learning Corps is an AmeriCorps program that places community members in Prekindergarten classrooms across the country to support the literacy and numeracy development of children ages three to five. Early Learning Corps tutors are trained to implement evidence-based literacy and numeracy instruction and assessment protocols. Tutors receive intensive, information-filled training and are supported by a multi-level coaching model that includes site-based and external coaches.

Tutors provide class-wide general educational support to all students in the classroom to ensure every moment is a learning moment. They also deliver targeted intervention to a minimum of seven students each day. Students are selected for targeted intervention based on their benchmark assessment scores, and interventions focus on one of the program's targeted skills: vocabulary and oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, or early numeracy. Several impact evaluations form the core of evidence for Early Learning Corps. These evaluations employed rigorous methods and produced positive, statistically significant, and practically meaningful results.

## Key Findings from the 2024-25 Evaluation

### **Early Learning Corps served over 6,000 students**

In the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of program operation, 323 Early Learning Corps tutors served a total of 6,779 students in 229 schools across 7 states. Tutors provided class-wide support to all students and delivered 175,157 evidence-based tutoring sessions to 3,569 students scoring below benchmark. Tutored students received an average of 49 tutoring sessions across 16 weeks. Coaching observations show program assessments and interventions were conducted with high levels of mean fidelity (>95% accuracy) and in accordance with their established evidence base.

### **90% of students improved their literacy skills and 87% of students improved their numeracy skills**

Early Learning Corps assessed students using measures of early literacy and numeracy. The literacy measure corresponds to important early literacy skills including phonemic awareness, phonics, and early vocabulary and language skills, and the numeracy measure corresponds to important early numeracy skills including subitizing, object counting, and making comparisons. 90% of students improved their literacy performance and 87% improved their numeracy performance, indicating students made progress in important skills needed for future Kindergarten success.

### **Tutors and coaches see the positive impact of the program.**

When asked in a survey about the impact of the program on students, 99% of tutor and 96% of Internal Coach respondents indicated participation in Early Learning Corps had a positive impact on students. Furthermore, 98% of tutors indicated they would recommend serving in Early Learning Corps to others, and 97% of tutors agreed or strongly agreed that Early Learning Corps had a positive impact on them personally.

# Early Learning Corps Program Model

Launched in 2003, Early Learning Corps is an AmeriCorps program that places community members in Prekindergarten classrooms across



the country to support the literacy and numeracy development of children ages three to five. The Early Learning Corps model aligns with

Response-to-Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS), which are two descriptions of a framework for delivering educational services effectively and efficiently. The key aspects of that alignment include the following:

- Benchmark assessment three times a year to identify students eligible for individualized interventions
- Clear literacy and numeracy targets
- Evidence-based interventions
- Regular progress monitoring during intervention delivery
- High-quality training in program procedures, coaching, and observations to support fidelity of implementation

## Benchmark Assessments

Early Learning Corps assesses students using measures of early literacy and numeracy. The literacy measure, the Preschool Early Literacy Indicators (PELI), corresponds to important early literacy skills including alphabet knowledge,

phonemic awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary. The numeracy measure, the Early Math Inventory (EMI), corresponds to important early numeracy skills including subitizing, object counting, making comparisons, and decomposing and composing numbers.

Tutors individually administer the measures to all students in their classroom during each screening period or “benchmark window” (fall, winter, and spring). Student scores are then compared to research-based seasonal targets that serve as predictors of performance on future Kindergarten assessments. Students, teachers, and coaches use the benchmark scores to develop plans for supporting all students and for selecting students to receive targeted intervention.

## Evidence-Based Interventions

All students in a classroom with an Early Learning Corps tutor are served by the program through class-wide general educational support. Classroom support includes oral language development activities, interactive read alouds, and educational transition songs to ensure every moment of each child's day has the potential to be a learning moment.

Tutors also provide targeted intervention to a minimum of seven students each day. Students are selected for targeted intervention based on their benchmark assessment scores. Tutors work with the seven selected students every day for 5-15 minutes, depending on the intervention. Interventions focus on one of the program's targeted skills:

vocabulary and oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, or early numeracy. Tutoring can be delivered in small groups, pairs, or one-to-one. Tutors record each student's daily minutes in the program's online data management system.

The Early Learning Corps targeted interventions support the following skills:

- Literacy Interventions
  - Interactive Read Aloud
  - Letter Naming
  - Phonological Awareness (rhyming, blending, segmenting, isolating word parts)
- Numeracy Interventions
  - Subitizing
  - Object Counting
  - Counting-Based Comparisons
  - Number After Knowledge
  - Mental Comparisons
  - Composing and Decomposing
  - Number After Equals One More

### **Regular Progress Monitoring During Intervention Delivery**

Tutors “progress monitor” students receiving targeted intervention once every two weeks using a measure that assesses progress on the targeted skill (ex. a letter naming measure for students receiving the Letter Naming intervention). Each student's weekly score is graphed on the program's online data management system.

Tutors and coaches monitor student graphs to track progress toward the proficiency targets and make data-based decisions on intervention effectiveness. Students' scores are also used by coaches to determine if students have made enough progress to “exit” the program and no longer

receive targeted tutoring in that particular skill.

### **High-Quality Training and Ongoing Coaching**

Early Learning Corps tutors receive training through an online Learning Management System (LMS). The intensive, information-filled courses on the LMS provide foundational training in the research-based assessments and interventions employed by Early Learning Corps. Throughout the courses, tutors learn the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to serve as interventionists and support class-wide instruction.

Tutors are provided with detailed manuals as well as online resources that mirror and supplement the contents of the manual (e.g., videos of model interventions and best practices). Both the manuals and online resources are intended to provide tutors with just-in-time support and opportunities for continued professional development and skill refinement. Additional training is provided throughout the tutors' year of service.

In addition to extensive training, Early Learning Corps provides tutors with multiple layers of supervision to ensure integrity of program implementation. Schools identify a staff member to serve as an Internal Coach, who is typically a literacy or numeracy specialist, teacher, or curriculum director, to serve as immediate on-site supervisor, mentor, and advocate for tutors. The Internal Coach's role is to monitor tutors and provide guidance in the implementation of Early Learning Corps assessments and interventions. Coaching Specialists, who are either program staff or contracted consultants for Early Learning Corps,

provide both tutors and Internal Coaches with expert support on assessment and intervention delivery and ensure implementation integrity of Early Learning Corps program elements.

Both Internal Coaches and Coaching Specialists conduct ongoing monitoring and observation of tutors. During regular coaching sessions, Coaching Specialists and Internal Coaches discuss student selection for service, track student progress for data-based decisions, and observe tutors administering assessments and delivering interventions. The observations allow coaches to build on a tutor's formal training and to help tutors improve their implementation of the Early Learning Corps model.

In addition to these two coaching layers, a third layer consisting of AmeriCorps program support helps ensure a successful year of AmeriCorps service. Program support staff are Early Learning

Corps employees who provide administrative oversight for program implementation to schools participating in Early Learning Corps.

## Program Evidence

Several impact evaluations form the core of evidence for Early Learning Corps. These evaluations employed rigorous methods and produced positive, statistically significant, and practically meaningful results. For more information on the Early Learning Corps evidence base visit

<https://nssc.serveminnesota.org/ameri-corps-impact/early-learning-corps>.

Rigorous evaluations across multiple states show Early Learning Corps has a positive impact on student skills.

# Early Learning Corps Serves Over 6,500 Students Across 7 States

## Tutors and Students in 2024-25

Early Learning Corps started in Minnesota in 2003 and has since expanded to 7 states across the country. Table 1 displays the number of

participating cities, districts, and schools that had at least one tutor and the number of tutors in each state. A total of 323 tutors served in 229 schools across 71 districts and 120 cities.

**Table 1. Cities, Districts, Schools, and Tutors by State**

State	Cities	Districts*	Schools	Tutors**
California	5	4	6	7
Colorado	5	4	6	9
Florida	30	5	87	130
Michigan	5	5	6	14
Minnesota	69	52	111	140
New York	3	1	7	11
North Dakota	3	0	6	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>323</b>

\*Some tutors served at non-district sites such as Head Start and community child care centers.

\*\*Defined as having entered tutoring minutes for at least one student in the program's data management system.

All students in a classroom with an Early Learning Corps tutor are served by the program through class-wide general educational support. Students are classified into age categories based on their age at the start of the school year, which generally coincides with the number of school years until the student will enroll in Kindergarten. Age 3 students are usually two years from starting Kindergarten and Age 4 and Age 5

students are usually one year from starting Kindergarten. The program sets each student's benchmark targets based on their age category. Table 2 displays the number of students served by age category in each state.

Early Learning Corps tutors served 6,779 students across 7 states.

**Table 2. Students Served by State and Age**

State	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Total
California	42	114	2	158
Colorado	36	107	84	227
Florida	489	2,044	25	2,558
Michigan	42	216	0	258
Minnesota	577	2,373	201	3,151
New York	42	188	3	233
North Dakota	8	179	7	194
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,236</b>	<b>5,221</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>6,779</b>

**Tutors and Students by Year**

Early Learning Corps started during the 2003-04 school year with just 24 tutors in one state. The program grew by adding more tutors and states, reaching its peak in the 2015-16 school year with over 400

tutors. The number of tutors serving in any year is based on a number of factors including federal grants awarded, private funding, site interest, and tutor recruitment. Figure 1 displays the number of tutors who served each year of the program.

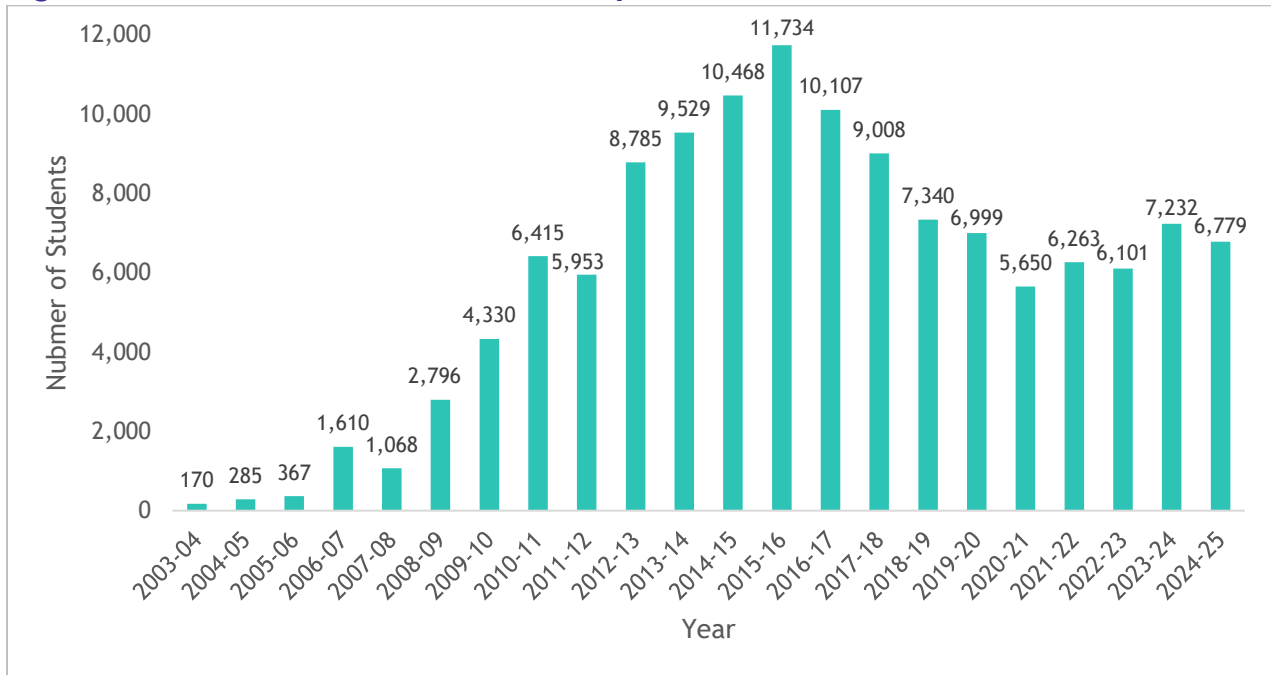
**Figure 1. Tutors Serving by Year**



The number of students served varies by program year based mostly on the number of tutors serving, but is also impacted by the number of students enrolled in each PreK classroom and whether tutors are serving one group of

students in full-day five-day per week classrooms or multiple groups of students such as separate morning and afternoon half-day classrooms. Figure 2 displays the number of students who were served each year of the program.

**Figure 2. Number of Students Served by Year**



**Targeted Tutoring Sessions**

Tutors work with the students on their targeted intervention schedule every day for 5-15 minutes, depending on the intervention. Interventions focus on one of the program’s targeted skills: vocabulary and oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, or early numeracy. Tutoring can be delivered in small groups, pairs, or one-to-one. Tutors record each student’s daily minutes in the program’s online data management system.

Table 3 shows the number of students who received targeted tutoring, the total tutoring sessions, and the average number of sessions and weeks of tutoring per student. Early Learning Corps tutors delivered a total of 175,157 tutoring sessions. Tutored students averaged 49 tutoring sessions across 16 weeks.

Early Learning Corps tutors delivered over 175,000 tutoring sessions.

**Table 3. Targeted Tutoring Sessions**

Students Tutored	Total Tutoring Sessions	Average Tutoring Sessions per Student	Average Tutoring Weeks per Student
3,569	175,157	49.1	16.0

## Tutor Fidelity

During coaching sessions, Coaching Specialists and Internal Coaches complete a fidelity checklist for each assessment or intervention they observe. Each checklist lists the important steps for accurate completion such as reading the instructions exactly as written during an assessment or providing proactive reminders and effective redirections during an intervention. After completing each assessment or intervention fidelity observation, coaches enter the number of checklist items that the tutor delivered correctly into the online program's online data management system. The percent fidelity is then calculated by dividing the number of items delivered correctly by the total number of items.

If tutors do not properly administer an assessment coaches will provide targeted training and observe the tutor

delivering the assessment again. Ongoing observation and coaching continue until the tutor achieves at least 90% accuracy. This process helps to ensure assessment data are properly collected and that the results accurately measure each student's skills. If a tutor does not deliver an intervention aligned with evidence-based practices, coaches will offer direct feedback and additional practice as needed.

Table 4 displays the total number of fidelity checks completed and the average fidelity from assessment and intervention observations. Coaches completed 8,386 fidelity checks during their coaching observations. Tutors averaged 96% fidelity on assessments and 94% fidelity on interventions, indicating assessments and interventions were delivered in alignment with their evidence base.

**Table 4. Assessment and Intervention Fidelity**

Fidelity Type	Total Checks Collected	Average Fidelity
Assessment	6,169	96.0%
Intervention	2,217	94.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,386</b>	<b>95.5%</b>

# Students Improve Literacy and Numeracy Skills Needed for Kindergarten Readiness

## Student Performance

A student's seasonal benchmark scores in literacy (PELI assessment) and numeracy (EMI assessment) allow the program to measure the student's progress over the course of the year. Spring scores can be compared to fall and winter scores to measure student growth. Scores can also be compared to each measure's end of year target to determine if the student is meeting

Kindergarten readiness targets. Table 5 shows the percent of students who improved their literacy and numeracy skills during the program year. 90% of students improved their literacy performance and 87% improved their numeracy performance, indicating students made progress in important skills needed for Kindergarten readiness.

**Table 5. Student Literacy and Numeracy Skills**

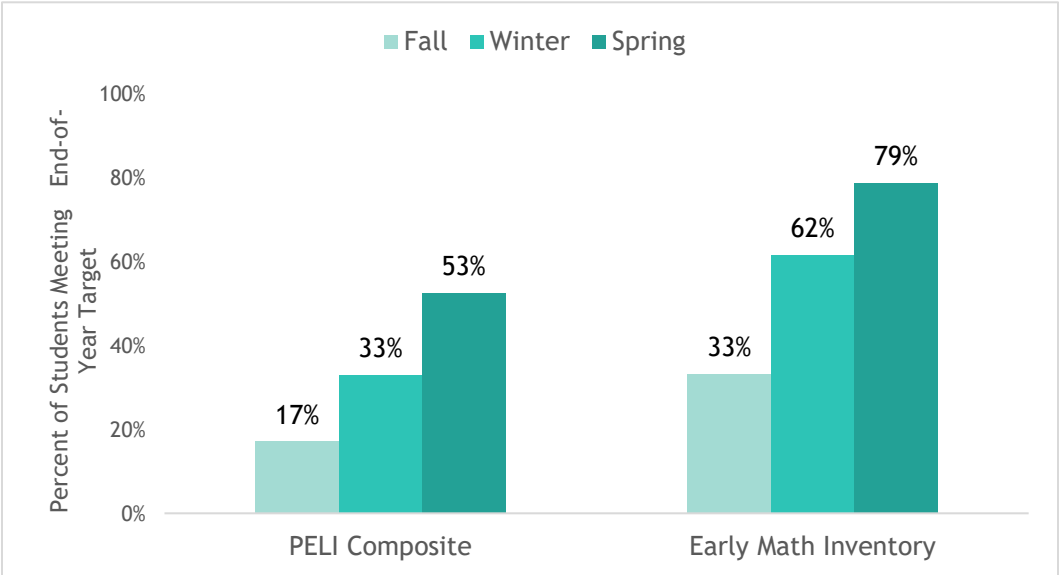
	Literacy Skills - PELI Composite	Numeracy Skills - EMI
Percent of Students Making Growth*	90%	87%

\* Includes students with scores in at least two of the three assessment windows.

Figure 3 displays the percentage of students who met the end of year Kindergarten readiness target at the fall, winter, and spring benchmark windows. 17% of students met the literacy target

at the start of the year and 53% of students met the target at spring. In numeracy, 33% of students started the year meeting the target, and 79% of students met the target at spring.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Students Meeting End-of-Year Target by Season**



## Perceptions of Student Performance

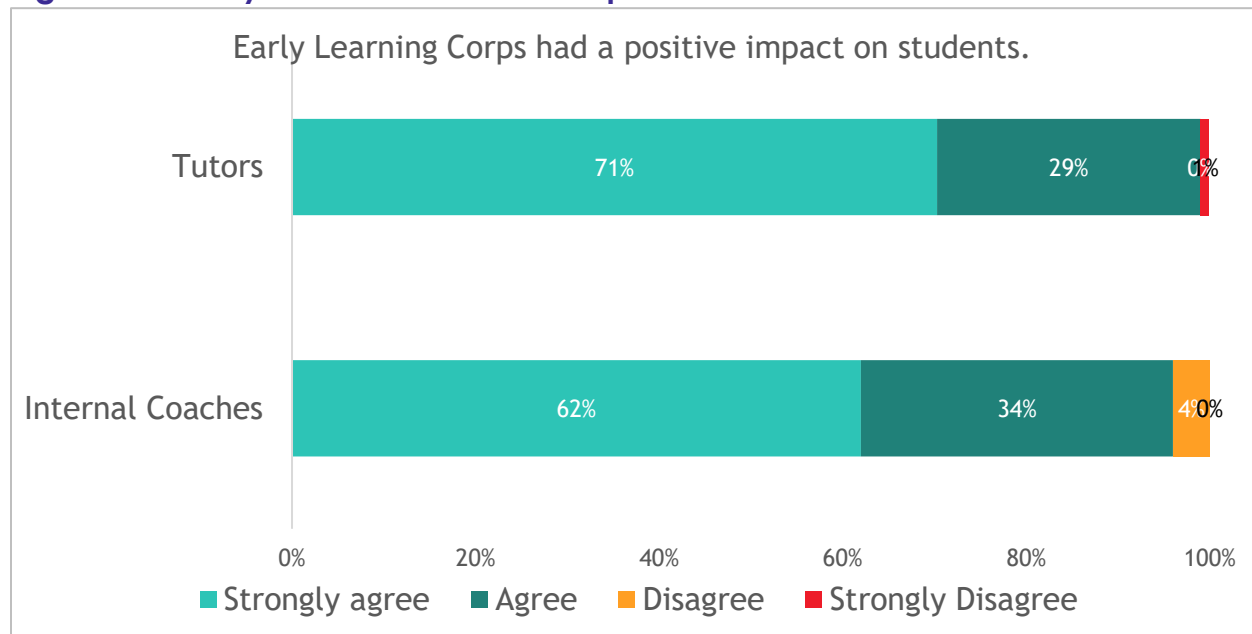
In the spring of each program year Early Learning Corps evaluators distribute an online survey to tutors and Internal Coaches. The survey asks a wide-range of questions regarding their experience with Early Learning Corps and potential impact of the program.

Figure 4 displays the percentage of respondents who agreed or disagreed that Early Learning Corps had a positive impact on students. The survey results

are notably positive with nearly all respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that Early Learning Corps had a positive impact on students.

“The program makes a huge difference in helping students be more ready for Kindergarten.”  
– Early Learning Corps Internal Coach

**Figure 4. Survey Results on Student Impact**



Note: Coaches were asked to agree or disagree with the statement “Partnering with the program(s) has had a positive impact on my site’s primary beneficiaries (e.g., students)” while tutors were asked “My service has had a positive impact on the primary beneficiaries of the program (e.g., students).”

# Early Learning Corps Service Positively Impacts Tutors

## Service Experience

While supporting student literacy and numeracy development is the primary goal for the program, Early Learning Corps also strives to provide tutors with an overall positive experience. As previously described, Early Learning Corps evaluators distribute a survey to tutors in the spring of each program year. The survey asks tutors a series of questions on their experience in Early Learning Corps and the impact the program had on them, their students, and their school. Survey results are used to evaluate the program's impact on the tutors themselves.

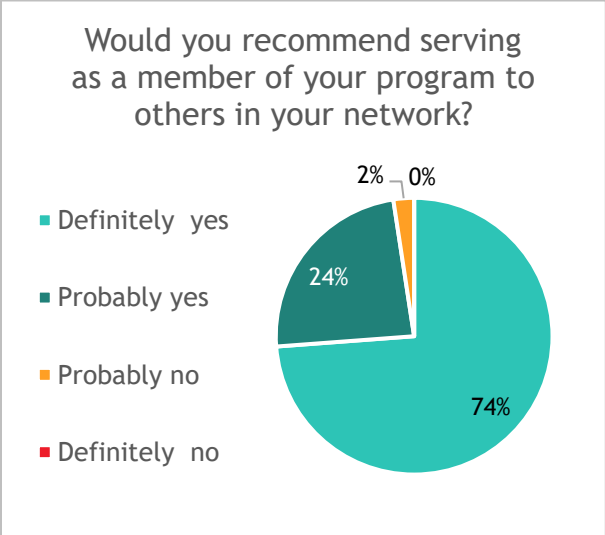
Figure 5 shows that 98% of tutors would recommend serving as a member of Early Learning Corps, with the majority of these respondents indicating they definitely would recommend the

program. These results suggest tutors had a highly positive experience while serving with Early Learning Corps.

The survey also asked tutors if serving in Early Learning Corps had a positive impact on them personally. Figure 6 shows that 97% of tutors agree or strongly agree service had a positive impact on them, demonstrating the positive personal impact of serving.

My years as an Early Learning tutor have been more fulfilling than I could have imagined. Working with 3-5 year old children has it's challenges, however the rewards are great indeed. It's wonderful to see kiddos grow and become kindergarten ready."  
 – Early Learning Corps Tutor

**Figure 5. Tutor Satisfaction**



**Figure 6. Impact on Tutor**

