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Dear Reading Partners community,

When I joined Reading Partners as CEO back in February, I was both excited and extremely honored. A little over four months later, having met many of our wonderful staff, AmeriCorps members, VISTAs, national and regional board members, community volunteers, local and national supporters, community partners, and most importantly, our students, I am proud to report that I am even more energized by the collective impact that I know we will continue to make together.

Reflections on my first four months with Reading Partners



As I reflect on my first 19 weeks with Reading Partners—a whirlwind of meetings, reading center tours and getting to know our many communities across the country—I have been impressed most by the compelling stories shared with me by students, staff members, and so many others involved in our work. While Reading Partners is specifically designed to have a positive impact on students, it seems that the organization, through our work and mission, resonates deeply with nearly all members of our great communities.

I feel fortunate to have been able to attend an end-of-year Reading Partners celebration in one of our regions where our community of parents, tutors, school staff, and Reading Partners staff gather to celebrate students' accomplishments over the course of the school year. I was particularly struck by the the pride and confidence that was on clear display among the students who had just completed a year in the Reading Partners program. And I was encouraged to see the clear power of the Reading Partners program as students took great joy in filling their summer backpacks with numerous books to take home and enjoy during the months ahead, a time when students without access to books can lose some of the achievement gains they made during the previous school year. I'm proud that Reading Partners is taking action to help students avoid this "summer slide."

Stories like this one illustrate the indispensable role that Reading Partners plays in the communities we serve across the US. Additionally, the very well-attended regional events I have been fortunate to attend in a number of our 14 regions remind me that Reading Partners is a positive force for change and opportunity because of the incredible collection of people both inside and outside the organization committed to early literacy support for all students.

A win worth celebrating



Faced with a White House budget proposal to eliminate national service funding—including the AmeriCorps program which greatly benefits our organization and

students—our staff and supporters quickly rallied to raise awareness among the general public, the media, and key public officials about the counterproductive impact such a cut would have in the communities we serve.

Because of our collaborative effort and the advocacy of many other organizations and powerful voices, we learned that Congress will continue to support national service funding at historic levels, enabling Reading Partners to hire AmeriCorps members and VISTAs for the 2017-18 school year. As many of you know from recent communications we've shared, there remains a budget fight ahead related to the 2018-19 school year, but securing funding for 2017-18 is unquestionably a HUGE win, so I wanted express heartfelt appreciation to everyone who played a role in the outreach effort!

On a related note, here is an [in-depth feature article](#) about the national service funding issue and how it could affect important community programs like Reading Partners. It's worth a read!

Priorities for the year ahead



Looking forward, I want to give you a sense of my top priorities as we close out the 2016-17 school year and look to the year ahead.

- **Visit all of our local teams and spend more time in reading centers.**

I have already had the privilege to visit the vast majority of our 14 regions across the country and I plan to continue to do so. A key priority for me will be to spend time with our volunteers and students in our reading centers so I can

stay close and connected to our core work.

- **Ensure a strong close to 2016-17.**

By the time the program year ends, we will have partnered with more than 14,000 community volunteers to provide invaluable literacy support to more than 11,000 students across 10 states and the District of Columbia. This incredible achievement will have been made possible by thousands of donors, community partners, staff and AmeriCorps members who recognize that one-on-one attention aided by a well-structured program and curriculum, can help students develop both a mastery and love of reading that can carry them forward throughout their lives.

- **Build for success in the 2017-18 school year.**

As my team knows well, I believe in the promise of Reading Partners (even more so with every new reading center I visit) and I want to ensure the organization grows sustainably in order to serve students for generations to come. We are in the process of developing annual plans that emphasize the importance of building both financial reserves and community momentum. We will also be embarking on a process to develop a new strategic plan for the organization and our movement over the coming year and we will be soliciting input from across our diverse community as we develop the forward-looking plan.

Additional thoughts and, above all, thank you

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about my reflections as CEO of Reading Partners. If you're interested in learning more about my background and vision, please check out a [recent Q&A](#) on the Reading Partners blog. Also, as many of you know, National Volunteer Week closed out the month of April. In partnership with the CEO of Rebuilding Together, I wrote a [joint op-ed](#) celebrating the power of volunteers who bring positive change to the communities they touch.

While the op-ed was designed to express great thanks to the thousands of community volunteers across the country who form the front lines of our effort, I am keenly aware that we are all part of a special, united community that believes in every student and the life-changing power of literacy.

With sincere appreciation for your involvement in our work and mission,





Karine Apollon
CEO, Reading Partners

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