



## **Reading Partners Policy Platform 2015**

Reading Partners is a national education nonprofit dedicated to improving students' reading skills. We recruit and train community volunteers to work one-on-one with students in low-income elementary schools to tutor students from low-income communities who are reading below grade-level. Reading Partners is an example of an evidence-based, public-private partnership that can bring substantial resources to schools.

### **Our challenge:**

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2011, just 34% of our nation's 4th graders read proficiently. Once students start to fall behind in reading, they tend to fall faster and further behind their peers every year. Early reading is critical to providing educational opportunities. Children who are not reading proficiently in 3rd grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school than their reading-proficient peers. Early literacy must be a priority as our nation aims to close the overall achievement gap and provide better opportunities for all youth.

### **Our Policy Goals:**

We seek to ensure a greater percentage of students across the nation can read proficiently by fourth grade. We believe that making significant gains in this area will take a collaborative and comprehensive approach, and we will work with policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state and federal levels to gain support for the following policies and programs:

### **City and Local**

- We believe cities and other local governments can play a strong role in partnering with school districts to close the early childhood reading proficiency gap. We support efforts by local governments to fund and support evidence-based literacy programs, including public-private partnerships; tutoring programs; before and after school and summer programs.
- We support local policies and programs that encourage or allow government employees to volunteer with schools and nonprofit organizations.



## State

- We support state funding and other resources for evidence-based reading interventions in kindergarten through fourth grade aimed at ensuring all students are reading proficiently by fourth grade, including support for tutoring; before and after school and summer literacy programs; family involvement reading programs; and reading technology tools.
- We discourage laws that require mandatory retention of any student who is not reading at grade level by the end of the school year as determined only by a single, standardized test . Should such laws be enacted, we seek to ensure that they take a comprehensive approach to the problem, including also providing sufficient funding for evidence-based reading interventions in kindergarten through 3rd grade and that such funding is distributed proportionately based on the number of students who are reading below grade level, and that any decisions to retain are not made based on the results of a single, standardized test, but rather are made by a local-level team that includes the student's teacher, parents or guardians, and qualified reading specialists.
- Even if not specifically aimed at accomplishing early childhood reading proficiency, we support funding for before and after school, and summer programs that foster public-private partnerships between schools and nonprofit or other organizations that require a private match component and that can be used for programs that will provide additional learning time for students to improve their reading skills.
- We want to ensure responsible stewardship of state-funding for early literacy programs by instilling accountability and programs that produce positive, measurable results for students.
- We support policies and programs that help even very young children develop pre-reading skills, such as literacy-focused quality childcare and preschool programs, funding full-day kindergarten, and family literacy programs.
- Reading Partners supports state reading standards that are sufficiently rigorous and will enable measurable results for fourth grade reading proficiency that can be consistently compared to the fourth grade reading results of other states.
- We believe that state government is a critical partner in promoting service and volunteerism and important stewards of federal funds for national service. We support providing full support to State Service Commissions and encourage strong and transparent partnerships with high performing organizations. We also support state and local policies that encourage or allow government employees to volunteer with nonprofit organizations.



## **Federal**

- We support federal programs that provide a focus on student literacy, early learning and programs that bring together public, nonprofit and private partners toward this aim. We support efforts to expand funding and re-open the grant application process for the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program to help states pursue a comprehensive approach to improving literacy outcomes for all children from birth through 12th grade. We support continued robust funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers for academically enriching programs, including literacy and continued efforts to enhance flexibility for this program.
- We support federal funding for national service. The federal government should be a permanent leader in the national service movement and national service must be a robust and growing part of the public solution to poverty alleviation. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) must be funded both with consistency and at increasing levels to engage all ages of Americans in service. Therefore, we support continued and increased funding for The AmeriCorps program, including AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps NCCC; the Social Innovation Fund; and Senior Corps.
- We support efforts to update the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to enable schools more flexibility in the sharing of student records and information with nonprofit and other organizations who have entered into partnerships with the schools to provide academic services to their students when sharing such data is necessary to monitor student academic progress and measure program effectiveness.
- We support federal funding and other resources for solutions that demonstrate strong student outcomes and encourage competition for the highest performing governmental entities and nonprofit organizations. The government should continue to support programs that incentivize integrated efforts to meet needs and make catalytic investments that scale solutions.