

# AmeriCorps Member Experiences

## Final Report

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## Overview

[Reading Partners](#), a national literacy nonprofit, engaged [Child Trends](#), a national, nonprofit research group, to learn more about how to improve programming and, ultimately, boost learning outcomes for students who struggle with reading. In California reading centers, Child Trends evaluated five key areas of Reading Partners programs:

- **Dosage:** Document the amount of tutoring each student receives.
- **Tutor engagement and quality:** Examine the extent to which Reading Partners is successful in recruiting, engaging, and retaining tutors. Assess the quality of tutors' interactions with students and the effect those encounters have on children.
- **AmeriCorps member experiences:** Identify skills AmeriCorps members bring to Reading Partners and collect feedback about their experiences.
- **Student reading growth:** Determine how student learning is linked to implementation characteristics and dosage.
- **Social-emotional learning:** Take a first look at how Reading Partners affects students' social-emotional learning (SEL).

The findings in this report on AmeriCorps member experiences show that AmeriCorps members serving at Reading Partners:

- Bring diverse skills, and report that these skills generally improve during the year.
- Are more likely to report that their service developed their skills than those in a national cohort of alumni.)
- Consistently rate their leadership skills lower than other skills.
- Are highly satisfied with their experiences at Reading Partners.

Nevertheless, opportunities exist to further enhance their experiences through targeted training related to working with school partners and students with challenging behavior students. AmeriCorps members also said they would welcome more opportunities for career guidance, mentorship, and leadership skill building.

Three companion briefs discuss findings related to the other evaluation focus areas; an accompanying infographic integrates and summarizes findings throughout the study.

This brief is based on findings from an independent evaluation conducted by Child Trends for Reading Partners.



## Introduction

Reading is a critical academic skill, yet only 37 percent of U.S. fourth graders read proficiently.<sup>1</sup> Reading Partners, a national literacy nonprofit, is seeking to close this literacy gap by partnering with under-resourced schools and engaging community volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring to elementary school-aged students.

In spring 2016, Reading Partners commissioned Child Trends to conduct an independent evaluation of Reading Partners' California reading centers. This evaluation was designed to build upon the findings of a prior [evaluation](#) conducted by MDRC and included an in-depth examination of how key program implementation characteristics ( e.g., tutoring dosage, fidelity, student-tutor relationships, and AmeriCorps member characteristics) influence children's learning. The goal was to provide actionable information to improve Reading Partners programs, and enhance the experiences and outcomes of the children, volunteer tutors, and AmeriCorps members who participate in Reading Partners.

This brief highlights key themes and findings from the evaluation regarding AmeriCorps member experiences and provides a snapshot of:

- [AmeriCorps members' skills and characteristics](#)
- [AmeriCorps members' satisfaction and efficacy](#)
- [Opportunities to enhance AmeriCorps member experiences](#)

To learn more about the methods used in this evaluation, please refer to the evaluation plan and the fact sheets published in Year 1 of the evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2017). *National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading: Grade 4 National Results*. Retrieved from [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_2017/#/nation/achievement?grade=4](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2017/#/nation/achievement?grade=4)

## Evaluation Methods

To answer questions about AmeriCorps members, researchers used the following data sources:

### [AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey](#)

Each spring we invited all Reading Partners' AmeriCorps members who served in California to complete a survey about their experience. During spring 2017, 82 members (88 percent) responded. In spring 2018, 64 members (71 percent) responded.

### [AmeriCorps Member Interviews](#)

We interviewed 12 AmeriCorps members (three from each region) during spring 2018.

To ensure a balanced sample of respondents, an interview screener collected background information from all AmeriCorps members. Based on their responses to the screener, we selected seven site coordinators (including one regional site coordinator), three volunteer coordinators, and two literacy leads.

## Research Questions

Our research about AmeriCorps member experiences addresses the following evaluation questions:<sup>2</sup>

1. **What characteristics and skills do AmeriCorps members bring to Reading Partners?**
2. **With which aspects of Reading Partners do AmeriCorps members report the highest/lowest levels of satisfaction?**
3. **What factors influence AmeriCorps member satisfaction with their service at Reading Partners?**
4. **What opportunities exist to enhance the experience of AmeriCorps members serving with Reading Partners?**

To answer these questions, we used Reading Partners' administrative data, a survey of AmeriCorps members serving at Reading Partners, tutor fidelity observations, and multiple tutor surveys. These data sources are described in the Evaluation Methods text box above and in greater detail below.

The evaluation included two samples from the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 school years:

- **Full sample:** This included data from students, AmeriCorps members, and volunteer tutors at all California reading centers. Information collected from the full sample included administrative data, the AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey, and the Tutor Experiences Survey.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sub-sample:** This included data from the 11 reading centers in the Los Angeles and Sacramento regions that participated in more intensive data-collection efforts. Data collected from the sub-sample included tutor fidelity observations,<sup>4</sup> Tutor Social-Emotional Learning Survey,<sup>5</sup> and teacher surveys.

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<sup>2</sup> Some evaluation questions have been re-phrased from the original evaluation plan.

<sup>3</sup> The Tutor Experiences Survey was only administered during the 2016–2017 school year. In addition, we administered the survey to all tutors volunteering in California reading centers, but data linking tutors to children were only available for children in the sub-sample.

<sup>4</sup> Tutor fidelity observations were conducted in the 2016–2017 school year only.

<sup>5</sup> The Tutor Social-Emotional Learning Survey was revised between the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 school years to focus more on student-tutor relationships.

## AmeriCorps Member Characteristics

Across the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 program years, more than 120 AmeriCorps members served in California reading centers. The majority of these members served as site coordinators/regional site coordinators (79 percent), playing a critical role managing California reading centers, developing relationships with school partners, coaching volunteer tutors, and serving as needed as tutors to students. The remaining AmeriCorps members serving at Reading Partners worked as literacy leads (11 percent) who provide direct tutoring to students who need the most support, and as volunteer coordinators (10 percent) who led the recruitment and on-boarding of volunteer tutors.

As displayed in [Table 1](#), nearly all AmeriCorps members who served at Reading Partners were female, more than half were ages 22 to 25, and most were white/Caucasian, followed by Hispanic/Latino, black/African American, and Asian. Additionally, the majority were either from or resided near the community in which they served.

AmeriCorps members who served at Reading Partners also were an educated group, with more than 90 percent having earned at least a four-year college degree. Additionally, approximately 80 percent had previously worked in a school and nearly one third had been involved with Reading Partners prior to their latest service, volunteering as either tutors or as literacy intervention tutors (a paid position). Data from interviews conducted with AmeriCorps members who served in the 2017–2018 program year suggest that the AmeriCorps members who previously worked with Reading Partners were motivated to serve by their positive prior experiences with the organization.

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*Nearly a third of AmeriCorps members had previously worked as a tutor at Reading Partners.*

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### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

AmeriCorps members who had served as Reading Partners tutors were motivated to serve again by the positive experiences they previously had at the organization.

*"I applied for this role because I really enjoyed tutoring and I really wanted to do more and help more students .... I definitely would not have found out about this role or even thought about it if I wasn't a tutor [at Reading Partners]." -Site Coordinator*

AmeriCorps member interviews, spring 2018

**Table 1:** AmeriCorps member demographics (N=122)

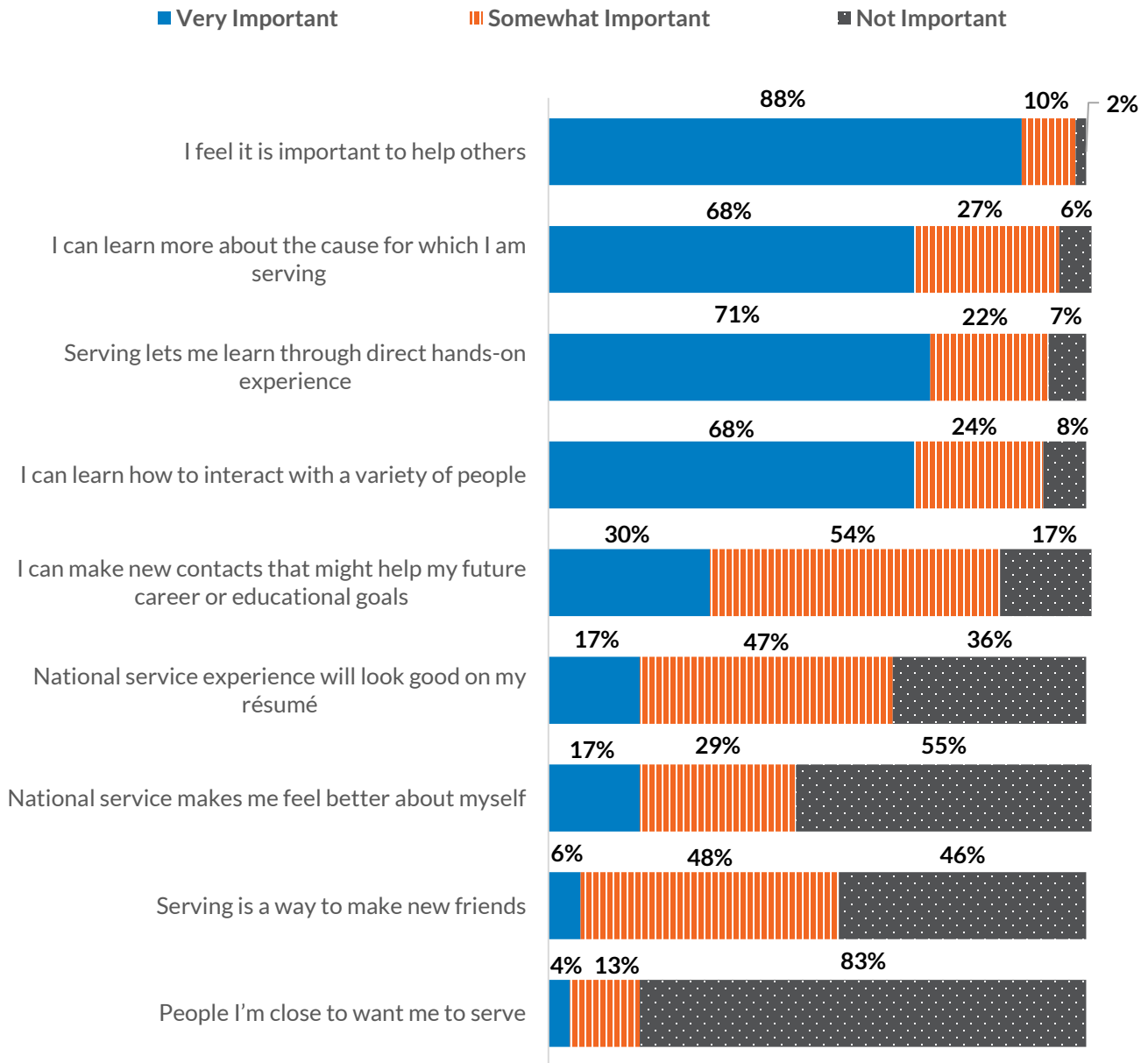
	Demographic Characteristic	Percent
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	48%
	Black/African American (non-Hispanic)	7%
	Asian (non-Hispanic)	13%
	Hispanic (any race)	21%
Gender	Female	88%
	Male	12%
Age	18-21	34%
	22-25	51%
	26-35	13%
	36-45	2%
Region	Los Angeles	26%
	Sacramento	14%
	San Francisco	38%
	Silicon Valley	22%
Education	Some college/two-year college degree	3%
	Two-year college degree	3%
	Four-year college degree	87%
	Some graduate work/graduate degree	8%
Prior Experiences	Previously worked in school setting	81%
	Have teaching credentials	5%
	Previously involved with Reading Partners	32%
	Moved to a new community to serve	28%

Note: Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey, 2016–2018. Some items have missing data

### **AmeriCorps members’ motivation to serve**

Various factors motivated AmeriCorps members to serve with Reading Partners (see [Figure 1](#)). The factors included their desire to help others, learn more about the cause for which they were serving, and learn through hands-on experience. Data from AmeriCorps member interviews reflect this finding. Two thirds of respondents reported that they chose to spend their service year at Reading Partners because of the organization’s mission to improve the educational outcomes of students in under-resourced schools.

**Figure 1: Motivation to serve as an AmeriCorps member (N=119)**



Note Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey, 2016-2018. The “Not Important” category represents a combination of the “Very Unimportant,” “Somewhat Unimportant,” and “Neither Important nor Unimportant” response categories on the survey. Some items have missing data.

## AmeriCorps Member Skills

For the AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey administered each spring, we asked AmeriCorps members to discuss their soft skills in four key areas:



Across both program years, on average, AmeriCorps members reported high levels of civic engagement ( $M= 4.5$  out of 5.0) and social competence ( $M= 4.4$  out of 5.0), and moderately high levels of commitment to community ( $M= 4.1$  out of 5.0) and self-efficacy ( $M= 4.2$  out of 5.0).<sup>6</sup>

To better understand how AmeriCorps members' skills developed over their year of service, in the 2016–2017 program year, researchers administered the AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey in the fall (pre-test) and in the spring (post-test). The results showed AmeriCorps members demonstrated statistically significant growth in civic engagement from fall to spring (see [Figure 2](#)).<sup>7</sup>

### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

The majority (75 percent) of AmeriCorps members stated that they are more likely to be involved in both their community and advocacy as a result of their service with Reading Partners.

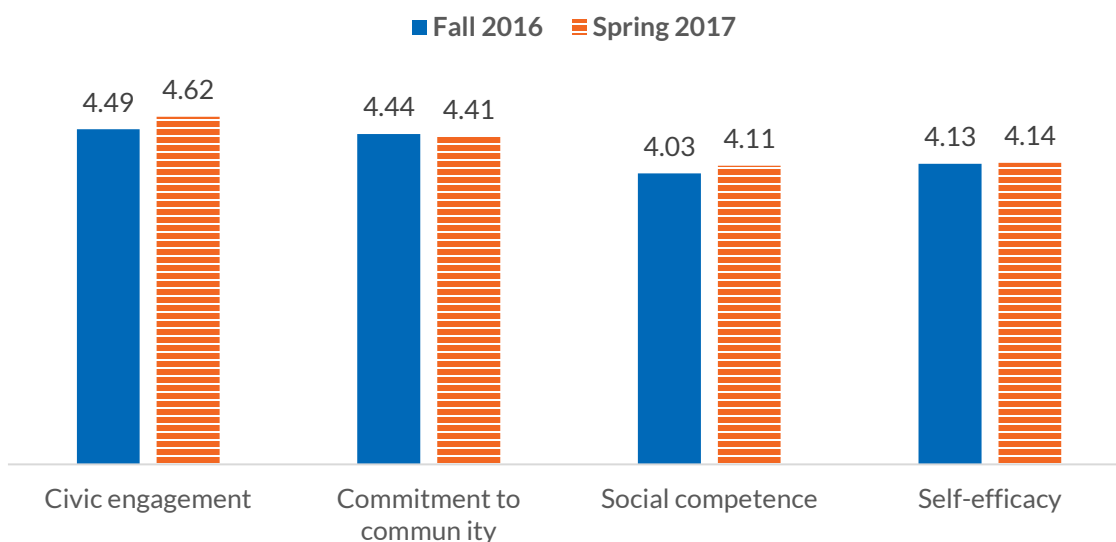
*"It has also just given me another appreciation for service. I was in Peace Corps, but it's a different thing to serve a community that you might try to stay in long-term."* -  
**Volunteer Coordinator**

AmeriCorps member interviews, spring 2018

<sup>6</sup> There were no significant differences in average civic engagement scores (assessed via the spring administration of the survey) between the cohorts of AmeriCorps members who served in the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 program years.

<sup>7</sup>  $t(61)=-2.6, p<.05$

**Figure 2:** AmeriCorps members' skills at pre-test and post-test (N=65)



Note: Items are based upon a 5-point scale (1 = None of the time; 5 = All of the time). These data are based on AmeriCorps members who have matched pre-test and post-test data. Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey, 2016–2017.

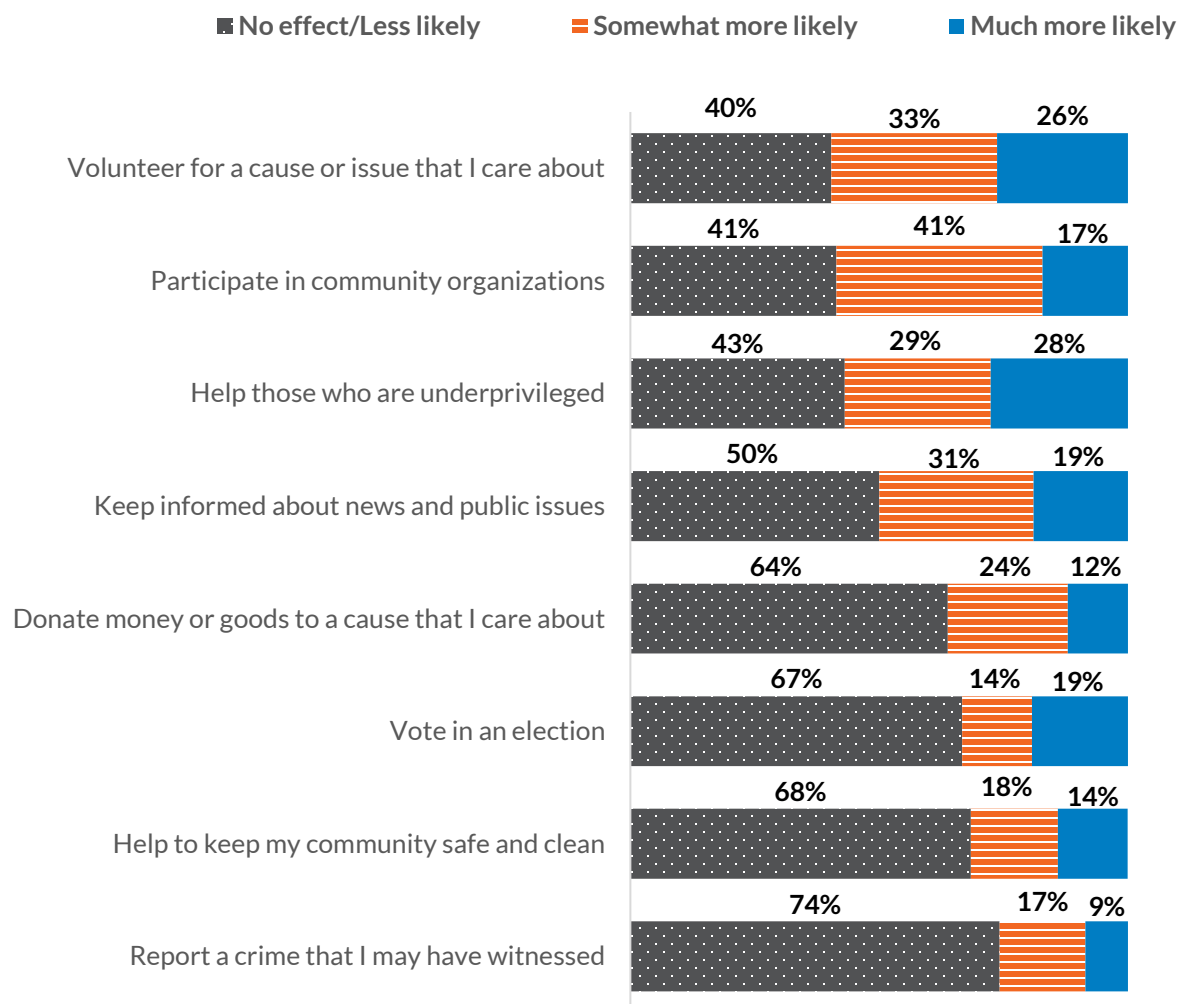
To further explore how AmeriCorps members' civic engagement developed during their service at Reading Partners in spring 2018, we asked them to report how their experiences influenced the likelihood that they would participate in various civic engagement activities such as voting or volunteering for a cause. As noted in [Figure 3](#), AmeriCorps members were most likely to report that their service had made them more likely to volunteer for a cause they cared about, participate in a community organization, or help those who are underprivileged. Findings from the AmeriCorps member interviews lend further support to this notion, with nearly 75 percent of AmeriCorps members reporting that they were more likely to be involved in their communities and engage in advocacy as a result of their service at Reading Partners. These findings are unsurprising given that these types of civic activities are some of the most closely aligned with Reading Partners' mission.

It should be noted, however, that across all items, a sizable proportion of AmeriCorps members indicated that their service had no impact on the likelihood they would participate in civic engagement activities. This might be because those who participate in national service are already highly engaged in civic activities. Data from the fall 2016 (pre-test) administration of the AmeriCorps survey of member experiences support this notion; the majority of AmeriCorps



members said they were either “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to participate in each civic engagement activity at the beginning of their service with Reading Partners

**Figure 3:** Extent to which service at Reading Partners influenced civic engagement (N=59)



Note: Some items have missing data. Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey, 2017–2018.

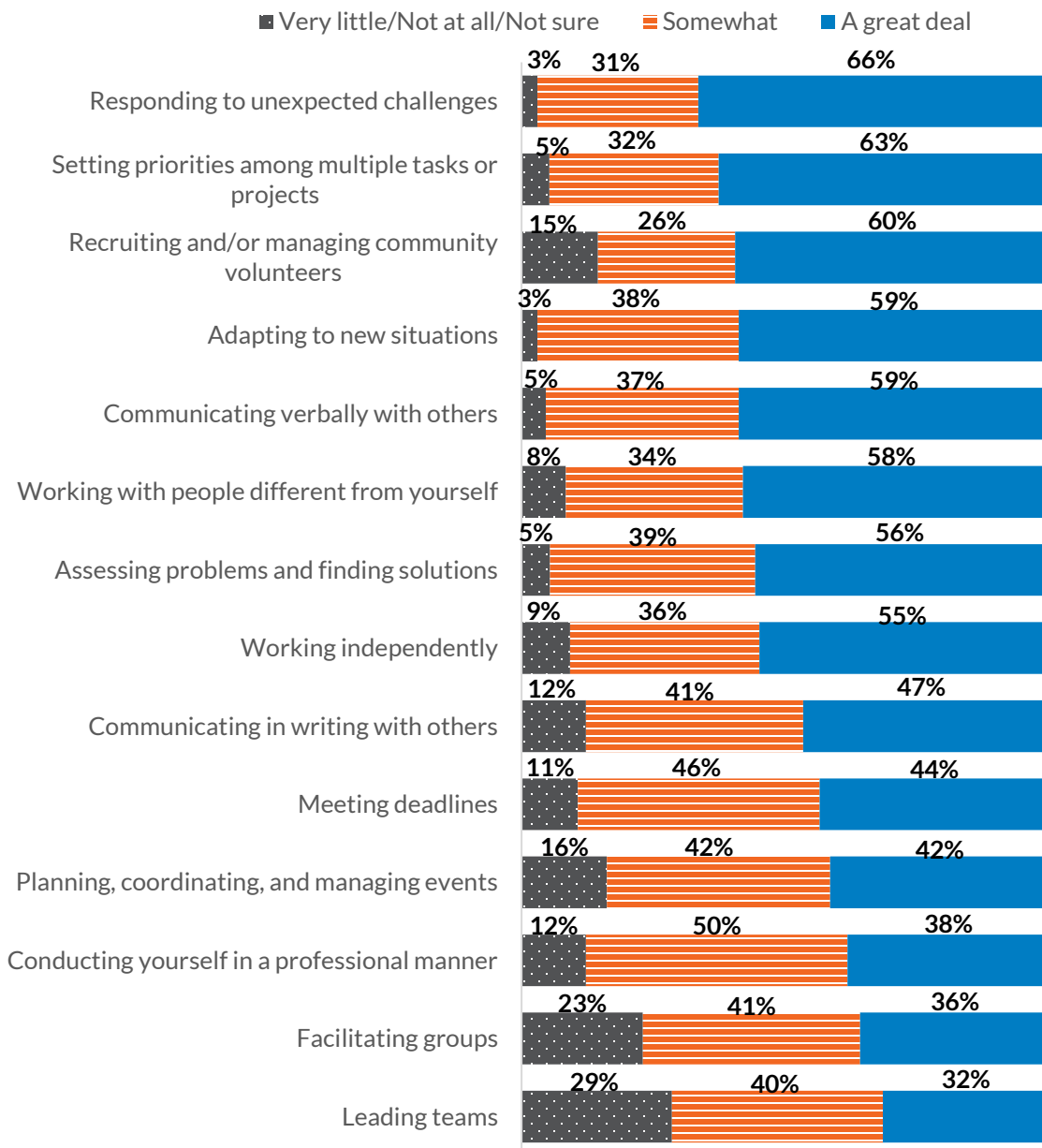
### Professional skill development

We also asked AmeriCorps members to rate the extent to which their service with Reading Partners helped them develop various professional skills. They reported that Reading Partners helped them most to develop the following skills: responding to unexpected challenges, setting priorities among multiple tasks or projects, and adapting to new situations (see [Figure 4](#)). Skills AmeriCorps members report being

*AmeriCorps members reported that their service influenced an array of professional skills.*

developed the least include facilitating groups; leading teams; conducting oneself in a professional manner; and planning, coordinating, and managing events. Many reported that their service at Reading Partners enhanced their ability to recruit and/or manage community volunteers. There was, however, notable variation in members' perceptions of this skill, which is likely related to the fact that certain roles, such as literacy leads, have far fewer opportunities to develop this skill.

**Figure 4:** AmeriCorps members skill development at Reading Partners (N=131)



Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Spring Experiences Survey, 2016–2018.

All AmeriCorps who participated in the spring 2018 interviews reported that their service at Reading Partners helped them develop professionally. Most (67 percent) reported that their service helped them identify their future career path.

## Comparisons with AmeriCorps alumni

Recent studies have documented the long-term outcomes of AmeriCorps alumni.<sup>8, 9</sup> **Figure 5** highlights the proportion of national cohorts of AmeriCorps members who said their service developed their professional skills “a great deal.” These data are based on national samples of

### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

AmeriCorps members reported that their service at Reading Partners developed them professionally, including building skills such as data management and project management as well as enhancing their substantive expertise in education. For example, more than half of AmeriCorps members reported that their service enhanced their management skills.

*“That kind of independence where you are in charge of managing a lot of different people is hard to find for people who are just starting their careers.” -Site Coordinator*

Beyond gaining professional skills, AmeriCorps members emphasized that their service helped shape their career progress—facilitating their ability to advocate for their own professional advancement as well as helping them identify a future career path.

*“[It has helped me realize] that I do not have to be a passenger in my career. I can sit in the driver’s seat and command the things that I want and need.” -Literacy Lead*

*“Reading Partners gives you a chance to really figure out if the education world is for you ... It is a great opportunity for people who want professional development. I think you learn a lot about yourself and what you want to be doing with the rest of your life. For me personally with Reading Partners, I discovered that I am not making as much money as I did before this, but I have learned that the impact that I make, and making a difference in other people’s lives, is essential to my own happiness. So, I feel like this is something I learned that I need to have in a job to be happy.”  
-Volunteer Coordinator*

*“The most important thing is that it really has just proven to me that I really want to work with students in an education setting.” -Site Coordinator*

AmeriCorps Member Interviews, Spring 2018

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<sup>8</sup> Friedman, E., et al. (2016). New Methods for Assessing AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes: Final Survey Technical Report. (Prepared for the Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation). Cambridge, MA: In Abt Associates Inc.

<sup>9</sup> Cardazone, G., et al. (2015). AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Summary Report. Burlingame, CA: JBS International, Inc.

AmeriCorps members who ended their service from 2004 to 2013. Also noted in **Figure 5** is the proportion of Reading Partners' AmeriCorps members who said their service developed their professional skills a "great deal."

As noted in **Figure 5**, based on descriptive comparisons, across nine of the 14 professional skills, a larger proportion of Reading Partners' AmeriCorps members, compared to AmeriCorps members in the national cohorts, reported that their service developed their skills

"a great deal." Some of the largest differences were seen in setting priorities among multiple tasks, recruiting and/or managing community volunteers, and communicating with others in writing. There were only two skills for which the national cohort rated more positively than Reading Partners' AmeriCorps members: leading teams and facilitating groups. However, the latter only differed by one percentage point. Skills such as leading teams and facilitating groups were consistently rated the lowest among the professional skills. Therefore, Reading Partners may want to consider ways to help AmeriCorps members strengthen these skills during their service with the organization.

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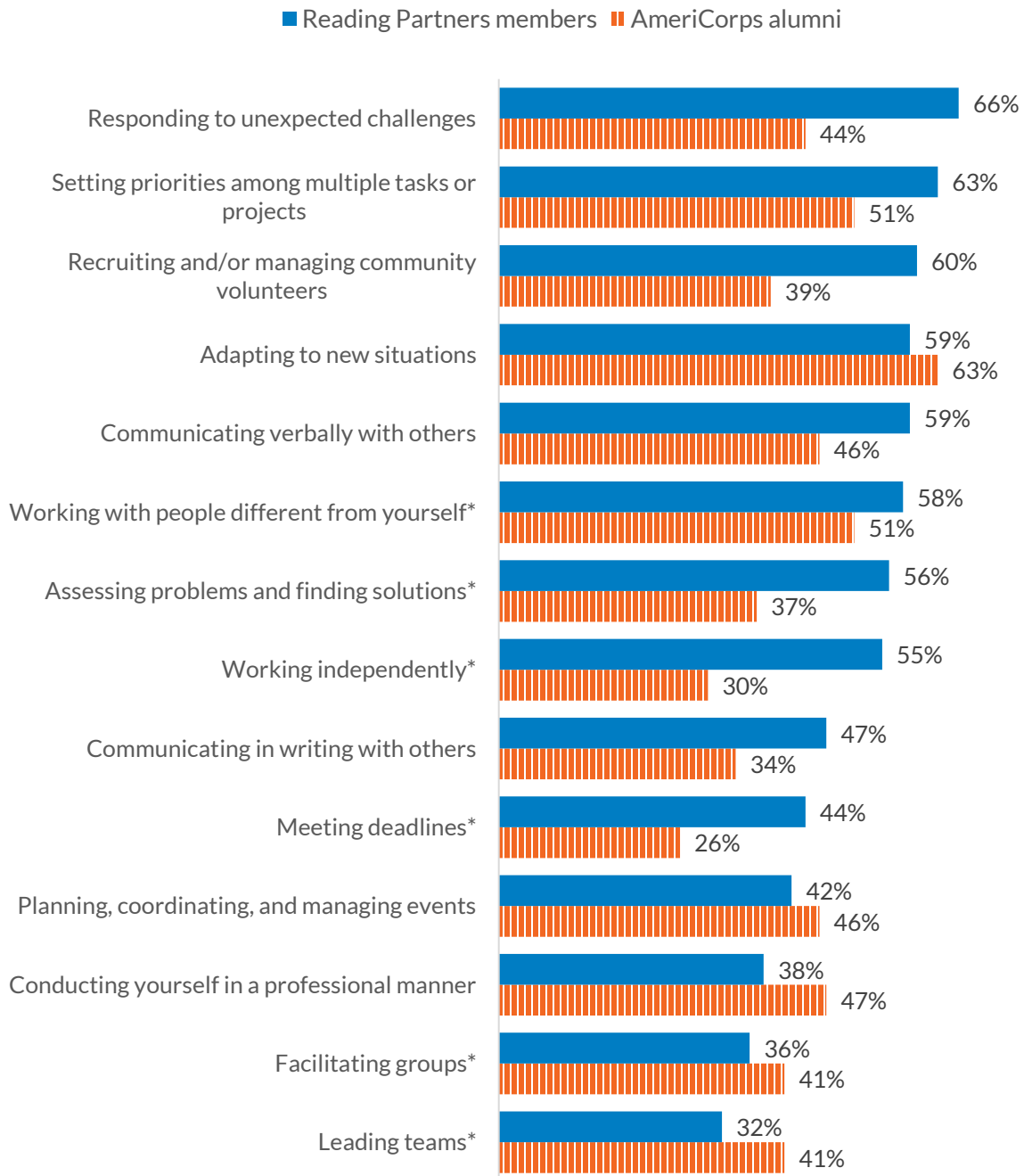
*Across a wide variety of professional skills, AmeriCorps members who served at Reading Partners were more likely than national cohorts of AmeriCorps members to report that their service enhanced their professional skills a "great deal."*

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Photo Credit: Reading Partners

**Figure 5:** AmeriCorps members whose skills were developed a “great deal” through their service: Reading Partners Data Compared to National Data



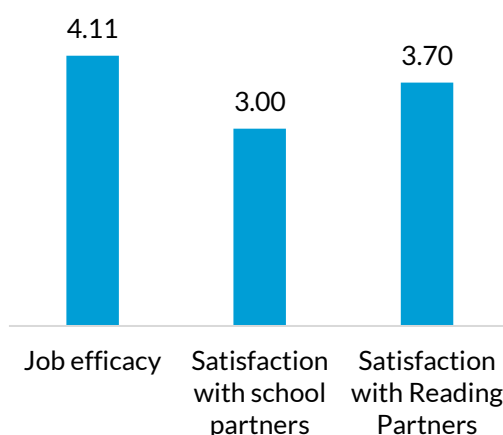
Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Spring Experiences Survey, 2016–2018 (n=131); AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Final Survey Technical Report (Friedman, et al. 2016; n=3772); Statistics with an asterisk are taken from AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Summary Report (Cardazone, et al 2015; n=420)

## AmeriCorps Member Satisfaction and Job Efficacy

A majority of AmeriCorps members at Reading Partners were satisfied with their service. Approximately 44 percent said they were completely satisfied and 45 percent said they were somewhat satisfied. Only 11 percent of said they were not satisfied with their service.

To dive deeper into AmeriCorps members' experiences at Reading Partners, we asked to report on a series of items related to their job efficacy, satisfaction with their school partners, and overall satisfaction with their service at Reading Partners. As **Figure 6** shows, AmeriCorps members reported moderately high satisfaction with their service at Reading Partners and job efficacy. They rated satisfaction with school partners the lowest. AmeriCorps members' ratings on individual items within these scales are detailed below.

**Figure 6:** AmeriCorps member satisfaction (n=124)



*Note:* Items are rated on a 5-point scale (1=*none of the time*; 5=*all of the time*). The satisfaction with school partners scale was only administered to site coordinators (n=109) Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Spring Experiences Survey, 2016-2018.

### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

Child Trends interviewed AmeriCorps members about their levels of satisfaction with aspects of Reading Partners. Half described high levels of satisfaction about their work with students.

*"Being able to work with the students, that's definitely my favorite part of the job. I love being able to be part of their progress in reading ... I also love to kind of encourage them maybe in some other aspect like their confidence and how to navigate different situations."* -**Site Coordinator**

*"What's most satisfying is the actual work with the students ... the more invested you are in your students, the more seeing them succeed makes you feel good."* -**Literacy Lead**

Among site coordinators interviewed, 66 percent expressed satisfaction with professional development opportunities. They cited being able to increase their management skills and the autonomy in running their centers.

*"I am really happy that I get to be in charge of my own center and really have a lot of autonomy and control."* -**Site Coordinator**

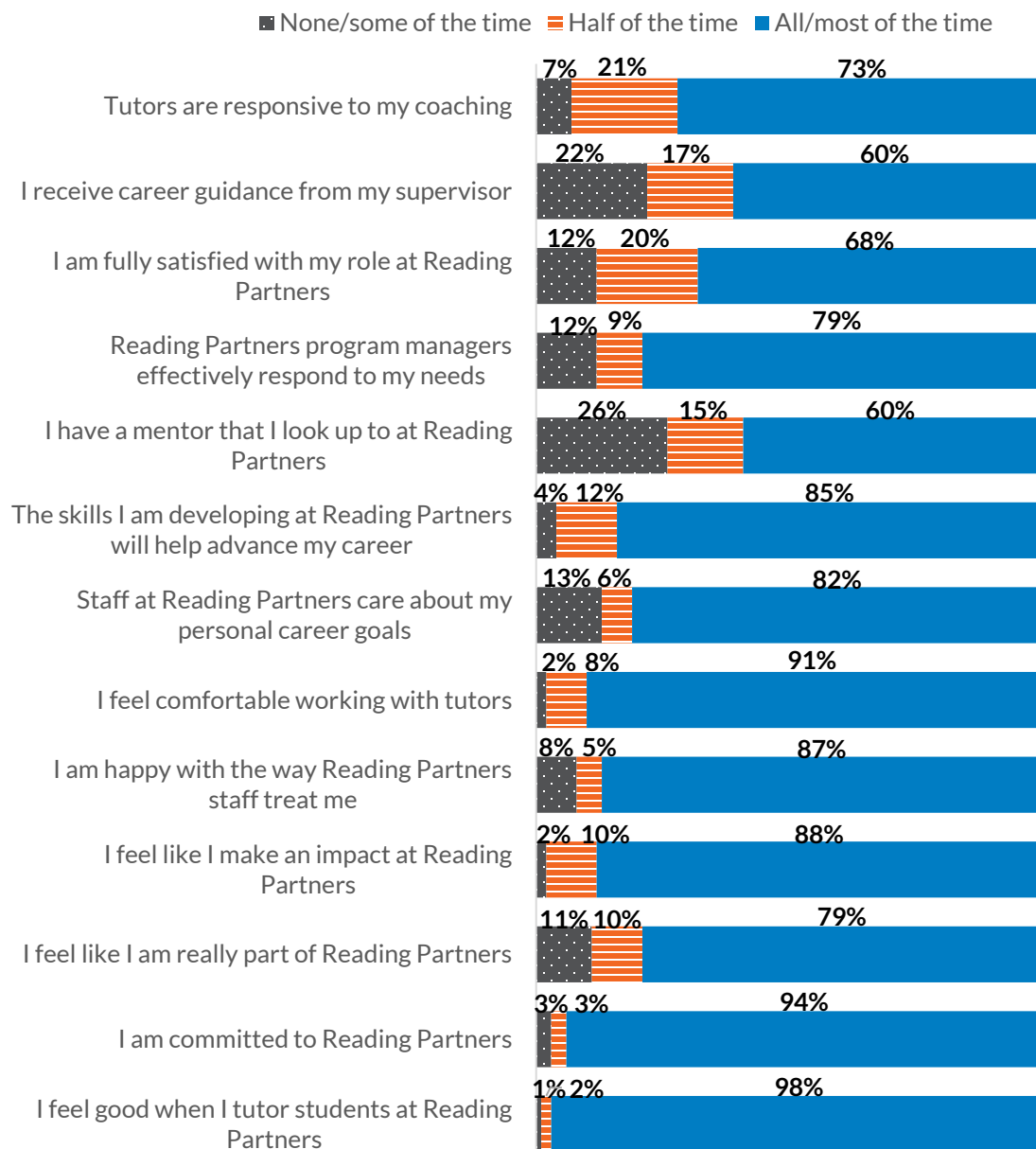
Volunteer coordinators expressed satisfaction with Reading Partners management. For example, one volunteer coordinator discussed organizational changes happening throughout the year and how managers executed a plan to keep everyone from feeling overwhelmed.

AmeriCorps member interviews, spring 2018

## Satisfaction with Reading Partners

As **Figure 7** shows, AmeriCorps members reported that their highest levels of satisfaction with Reading Partners resulted from tutoring students and being committed to and feeling like they were part of the literacy organization. About 10 percent of AmeriCorps members reported feeling like they never received career guidance from their supervisor or had a mentor that they looked up to at Reading Partners.

**Figure 7:** AmeriCorps member satisfaction with Reading Partners (N=122)



Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Spring Survey of Reading Partners AmeriCorps members, 2016–2018. Please note that some of the items above have missing data. Not all percentages add up to 100 percent due to rounding

## Satisfaction with schools

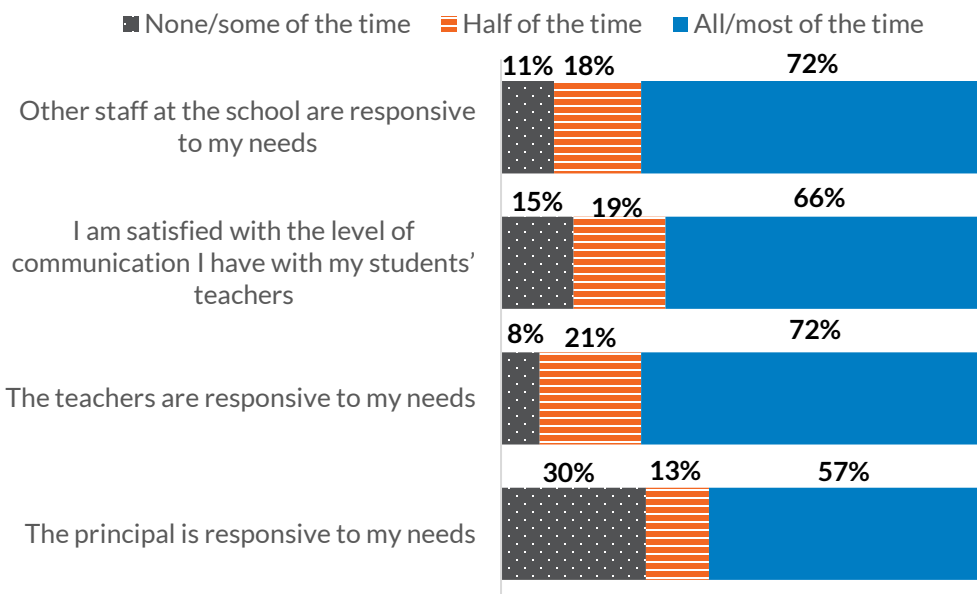
AmeriCorps members rated their satisfaction with their school partners lower than their satisfaction with their overall service at Reading Partners (see [Figure 6](#)). In addition, as shown in [Figure 8](#), there was quite a bit of variability in AmeriCorps members' perceptions that principals at their school sites were responsive to their needs. AmeriCorps members were slightly more satisfied with teachers' responsiveness to their needs "most of the time" (59 percent) than with their principals' responsiveness most of the time (34 percent). Moreover, 11 percent of respondents said their principal was responsive to their needs "none of the time." Thus, AmeriCorps members might benefit from additional support in working and coordinating with school partners, particularly principals.

### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

Those dissatisfied with their career guidance and mentorship opportunities, said their mentor only offered specific career advice for those who plan to work in education.

AmeriCorps member interviews, spring 2018

**Figure 8:** AmeriCorps members' satisfaction with school partners (N=109)



Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Spring Experiences Survey, 2016–2018. Please note that some of the items above have missing data.



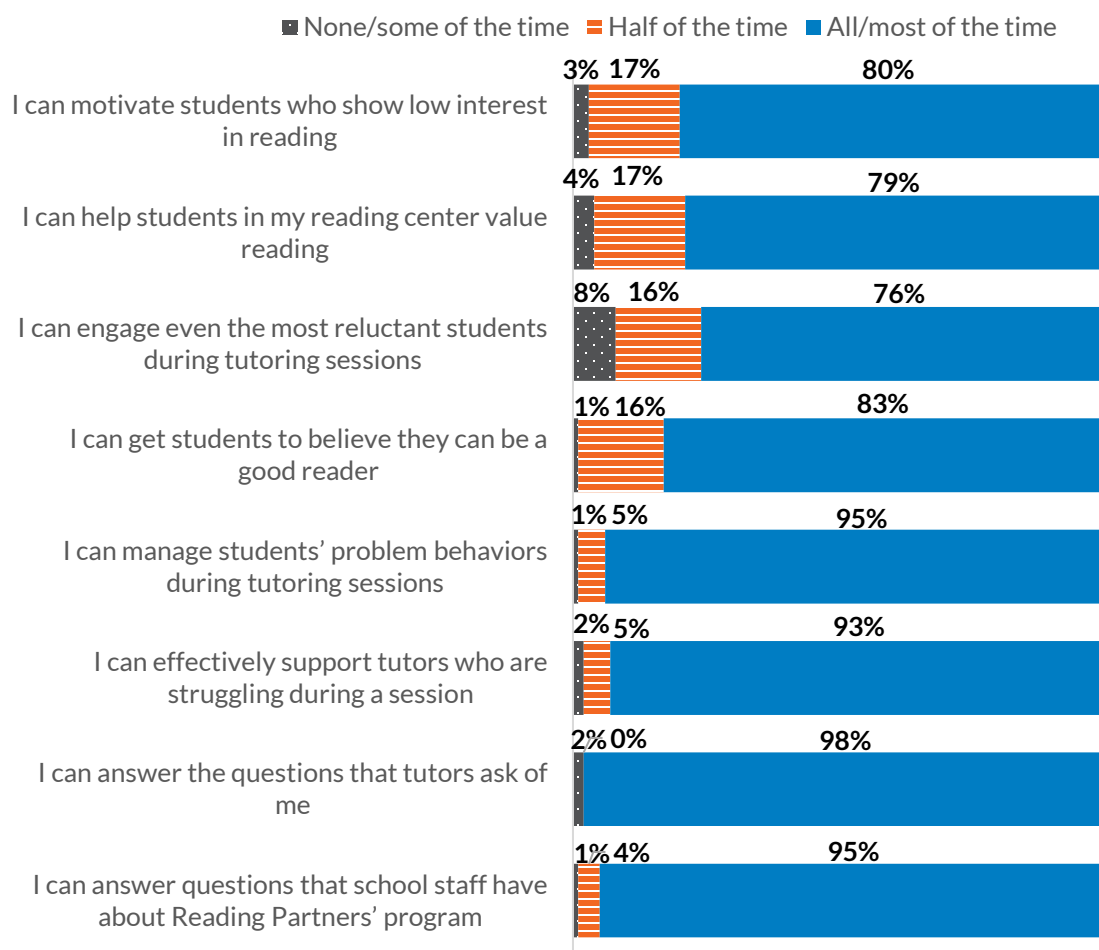
## Job efficacy

AmeriCorps members also reported how often they could effectively manage different aspects of their roles at Reading Partners. As **Figure 9** shows, they generally felt that they were able to complete

different aspects of their job all or most of the time. In fact, no AmeriCorps members felt that there was an aspect of their job that they could never do.

*The majority of AmeriCorps members report they can complete aspects of their jobs "all" or "most of the time."*

**Figure 9:** AmeriCorps members' job efficacy (N=124)



Source: Child Trends/AmeriCorps Member Spring Experiences Survey, 2016–2018. Please note that some of the items above have missing data.

However, as noted in **Figure 9**, AmeriCorps members felt that they could most often answer questions from school staff and teachers, but sometimes had difficulty engaging with students who were reluctant during tutoring sessions, or did not value or showed low interest in reading. AmeriCorps members interviewed also expressed challenges in managing students' behavior in sessions—both in relation to their own one-on-one interactions with students as well as with tutors' interactions with students.

### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

In interviews, site coordinators reported varied levels of satisfaction with their working relationships with school staff. Half were very satisfied but noted that their successful relationships with school staff may be due to past positions at the school or other factors beyond their control.

*"I feel like I really lucked out at this school. The principal is extremely supportive of the program and is an advocate for us. The teachers have also grown to be more flexible when it comes to scheduling and they are very open to communicating on what can be done better." -Site Coordinator*

One third of site coordinators reported that they were less than satisfied with school staff for various reasons.

*"I'm not very satisfied. I'd say that I have a better relationship with some teachers than others, and I definitely don't have a good relationship with the principal and other school staff, which might be my own fault for not getting out there and being more outgoing." -Site Coordinator*

To build positive working relationships with school staff, AmeriCorps members recognized the importance of familiarizing teachers with Reading Partners, communicating, and respecting the teachers' time and schedule.

*"We [AmeriCorps members and Reading Partners staff] enter the school and all of the sudden, we are just like pulling the students out of the classrooms. We don't take the time to sit and help out in the classroom and observe the language that they [the teachers] are using." -Site Coordinator*

Site coordinators and literacy leads reported that it was difficult to work with challenging students and that AmeriCorps members would benefit from additional training in this area.

*"With some I am more capable than with others, or I feel more capable. Especially when it comes to the type of behavior ... if it's deeply rooted emotionally, I have expended a lot of energy in order to adapt to their needs but it's not sustainable, especially if I have four sessions after that. So, I don't necessarily feel like I have the tools to accommodate children with those high needs and still be able to keep up my energy for the rest of the day." -Literacy Lead*

Many AmeriCorps members expressed needing additional support managing the behavior of challenging students.

*"If I were starting this year as a site coordinator and I wasn't a tutor before, I would have a much more difficult time dealing with students because there wasn't much training strategies to help with really challenging students." -Site Coordinator*

AmeriCorps Member Interviews, Spring 2018

Some AmeriCorps members interviewed said the behavioral management training provided by Reading Partners was helpful. But many felt that they needed to rely on training or information obtained from prior experiences (either work or school) to effectively work with challenging students. Others noted that training should include more specific strategies on behavior management. Additionally, a few AmeriCorps members said the training they receive on behavior management and tutor coaching would be more effective if it occurred earlier in the program year. Finally, one AmeriCorps member, who served two terms, said trainings that occurred in reading centers with students were more effective than those based on role-playing with other adults.

## Factors Influencing AmeriCorps Member Satisfaction

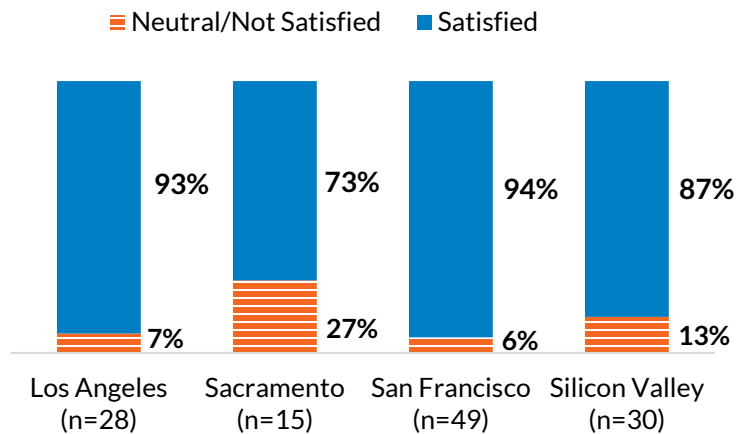
To determine which factors influence AmeriCorps members' satisfaction with Reading Partners, we assessed the extent to which satisfaction varied by members' characteristics (i.e., role, region, and tenure) at Reading Partners. We were unable to conduct statistical tests to assess differences in satisfaction by key characteristics due to unbalanced sample sizes. To address this, however, we examined differences in the proportion of AmeriCorps members who reported they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their service at Reading Partners.

The proportion of AmeriCorps members satisfied with their service at Reading Partners was similar for site coordinators, volunteer coordinators, and literacy leads, and ranged from 89 percent to 93 percent. However, given that the sample size of AmeriCorps members who were literacy leads (n=13) and volunteer coordinators (n=14) was quite small, this finding should be interpreted with some caution.

A few differences in satisfaction by role emerged from the AmeriCorps interviews. Site coordinators and literacy leads identified their interactions with students as the aspect of their service with which they were most satisfied, while volunteer coordinators identified their relationship with their managers. Aspects of service AmeriCorps members were least satisfied with varied even more by positions held. Volunteer coordinators reported that they felt isolated in their roles, site coordinators expressed frustration with tutors and a lack of support from management, and literacy leads said they were frustrated with limited opportunities to develop skills outside of their roles and compensation levels.

As **Figure 10** shows, AmeriCorps members' satisfaction with Reading Partners varied by region, with members in San Francisco and Los Angeles reporting the highest levels of satisfaction, followed by those in Silicon Valley and Sacramento.

**Figure 10: Overall Satisfaction by Region**



Source: Child Trends/AmeriCorps Member Spring Survey of Reading Partners AmeriCorps members, 2016–2018.

### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

Areas of lower satisfaction described during interviews varied by role. For site coordinators, half experienced challenges related to working with tutors, who they described sometimes as being stubborn or lacking commitment. Half of site coordinators also thought that the management team was unorganized or not very supportive.

*“We’re doing all of this surface level work without having the resources to really go in depth. Reading Partners says to utilize the regional site coordinator and the program manager, but they are just helping me through survival mode. Program managers are out of touch with what happens on a day-to-day basis and give very vague answers.” -Site Coordinator*

Volunteer coordinators discussed feeling isolated from the rest of the team, having less time to be creative, and frustration with receiving low pay for the work they do.

*“Because of that sudden change in the size of our team, it left less time for the creative part of being a volunteer coordinator or trying to implement new or different campaigns because we just didn’t have the time to jumpstart something completely new.” -Volunteer Coordinator*

*“It is hard when you all are working really, really hard, but you’re not necessarily getting paid for the amount of work that you are doing.” -Volunteer Coordinator*

One literacy lead expressed a desire for more opportunities to develop skills.

*“I just wish that I had more opportunities to pursue new skillsets outside of my primary responsibilities.” -Literacy Lead*

Overall, one third of AmeriCorps members interviewed accepted these challenges as limitations of the position or felt that Reading Partners was doing the best it could. In addition, 25 percent of AmeriCorps members asked for continued or more managerial support, including more site visits, general guidance, and better communication. Two members mentioned their challenges to their program managers but said they felt like they were forgotten, or the managers were unable to address them.

AmeriCorps member interviews, spring 2018

## Conclusions and Opportunities to Enhance AmeriCorps Member Experiences

Generally, AmeriCorps members at Reading Partners were college graduates and had previous experience working in schools. Their motivation to serve was fueled by a desire to help others and by an interest in learning more about the cause for which they were serving. In addition, nearly one third of AmeriCorps members previously worked as tutors with Reading Partners, and almost two thirds reported living in or near the communities in which they served before they began work with Reading Partners. In interviews, AmeriCorps members talked at length about the importance of serving their communities and helping improve the educational outcomes of students in under-resourced schools.

Together, these results suggest that AmeriCorps members who serve at Reading Partners are a dedicated group of individuals committed to strengthening their communities and improving the outcomes of children.

AmeriCorps members at Reading Partners brought a wide array of professional and soft skills (e.g., civic engagement, social competence) to their jobs, and said their skills had improved during the school year(s) in which they served. Across many professional skills, a larger proportion of AmeriCorps members with Reading Partners than their counterparts in a national cohort of AmeriCorps members reported that their service enhanced their skills “a great deal.” For example, AmeriCorps members who served with Reading Partners reported higher levels of communication skills and stronger abilities to handle unexpected challenges. In addition, AmeriCorps members said their service at Reading Partners helped fortify their expertise in education and enabled them to gain clarity about future career pathways, particularly related to whether

### Insights from AmeriCorps Member Interviews

Most AmeriCorps members found the contributions they made to their communities and students the most rewarding part of their service.

*“The feeling of being useful in a community and feeling as though I’m part of something bigger than myself... I didn’t anticipate how much of an effect that would have on how I see myself in the world or my place in the world, but it has definitely given me a lot of perspective on how I want to spend the rest of my life.” -Literacy Lead*

*“I think I am really surprised at how much we were able to accomplish [and] how many students we [were] able to serve and how valued our program is to the school and to the students that come to Reading Partners.” -Site Coordinator*

AmeriCorps member Interviews, spring 2018

they wanted to pursue roles in education and/or nonprofit management.

Despite these positive developments, AmeriCorps members consistently rated their leadership skills lower than other professional skills, in terms of their overall perceptions of their skill level and their perceptions of how well their service at Reading Partners enhanced those skills. Thus, one recommendation to enhance AmeriCorps members' experiences is to provide additional opportunities to develop leadership skills during their service with Reading Partners.

We also examined AmeriCorps members' overall satisfaction with Reading Partners and their satisfaction with school partners. Survey data show AmeriCorps members reported the lowest levels of satisfaction with school partners. More than one quarter (30 percent) of AmeriCorps members reported that school principals were rarely responsive to their needs. This suggests that AmeriCorps members need more guidance and assistance with effective communication with school partners—especially with forging stronger ties with principals.

To address this challenge, a few AmeriCorps members recommended that they be placed in schools earlier so they have more time to establish rapport with teachers and school leaders before the program year begins. In addition, AmeriCorps members recommended that they be encouraged and trained to engage in more outreach with educators, such as by including teachers on walkthroughs at the reading centers and providing them with more updates on students' reading progress.

AmeriCorps members reported being highly satisfied with their overall experiences at Reading Partners. Many said Reading Partners overwhelmingly helped them strengthen skills that will advance their careers. They also said they were pleased with how staff at Reading Partners treated them.

At the same time, about 10 percent of AmeriCorps members reported feeling like they never received career guidance or had a mentor at Reading Partners. This was especially true for members who were interested in pursuing careers outside of the education field.

In addition, interview data suggest that some AmeriCorps members felt isolated from other AmeriCorps members or, at least, from their counterparts who worked outside of their direct team. This is problematic because 84 percent of AmeriCorps members reported that making new contacts who might help with their future career or educational goals is either an "important" or "very important" motivating factor for serving as an AmeriCorps member. More opportunities for

mentorships, career guidance, and networking with other AmeriCorps members may enhance members' experiences with Reading Partners.

While AmeriCorps members reported being able to complete all aspects of their jobs at Reading Partners, some reported that they would have benefitted from more guidance related to working with students who either lacked an interest in reading or posed other challenges. This might be why literacy leads reported the lowest levels of satisfaction with Reading Partners, as these members spend nearly all of their time working strictly with students, and often focus on seeing challenging students.

Providing additional training and support to help members more effectively engage with these students might be another strategy for Reading Partners to consider.

While an overwhelming majority of AmeriCorps members reported that they benefited from serving at Reading Partners, various opportunities exist to build upon current progress. These include targeted training geared toward communicating with school partners, helping members more effectively meet the needs of students who need the most support, and providing members with more opportunities for career guidance, mentorships, and leadership skill-building.