

United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra

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April 29, 2025

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\$700,000 AmeriCorps funding for Nevada's Most Successful Early Literacy Intervention Program, United Readers, cut effective immediately

RENO, NV, April 29, 2025 – United Readers, an early literacy intervention program of United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS), was forced to dismiss 40 mentors after AmeriCorps cut \$400 million of funding, resulting in a program cut of \$100,000 AmeriCorps grant funding for school year '24-'25 and \$600,000 taken off the table for school year '25-'26

The notice of AmeriCorps grant termination was received early Monday morning, resulting in an emergency meeting being called to tell the mentors later Monday afternoon. The AmeriCorps mentors were given less than 2 weeks' notice of termination, without the possibility of claiming unemployment, due to AmeriCorps ineligibility. In addition, they will not be receiving their full education award or living allowance. Some of the terminated mentors had been with the program for four years, since its inception.

The loss comes at a time when Nevada's children can least afford it. Only 41% of Nevada's third graders are reading at grade level, and just 33% are proficient in math. Research shows that students who aren't proficient by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting access to stable, family-supporting jobs.

United Readers is an essential investment in changing these outcomes. Since launching in 2019, United Readers has served over 2,400 students across 25 elementary schools, providing trained literacy mentors who deliver one-on-one and small-group support focused on building core reading and math skills. Last school year, the program demonstrated an average of 2.5 levels of proficiency growth, with a one level increase in the literacy of 91% of the 643 children served, and an average of 20 hours of free mentoring per student. By most accounts, this is one of the most successful literacy programs in the country.



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In light of the funding loss, UWNNS is asking the community for help in funding the immediate continuity of the program through the end of the current school year and for the continuation of the program into the next school year & beyond. At \$60,000 per school per year, United Readers is one of the most cost-effective early literacy intervention programs available in Nevada.

"The need for strong, targeted intervention has never been greater," said Blake Pang, CEO, President of United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra. "United Readers is not an inefficiency – it's essential for closing the achievement gap and securing a better future for Nevada's children."

"The future of our students – and ultimately, our communities – depends on strong foundational skills in reading and math," added Blake. "We are asking everyone who believes in the power of education to stand with us."

To donate go to uwnns.org/saveunitedreaders.

For media inquiries, more information about United Readers, or to learn how to support the program, please contact Ravyn Smith at ravyn.smith@uwnns.org.

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About United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS):

United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS) is committed to improving lives and building stronger communities across northern Nevada and the area around Lake Tahoe. Since 1942, UWNNS has worked collaboratively with partners, donors, and volunteers to address the region's most pressing needs, with a particular focus on education, financial stability, and health. UWNNS leads initiatives that create lasting change, including programs that support early childhood literacy, community resilience, and disaster recovery. By mobilizing the caring power of our community, UWNNS empowers every individual to thrive. To learn more, visit uwnns.org.

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