



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **SMART READING REACHES MAJOR MILESTONE, GIVING AWAY 5 MILLIONTH BOOK**

**An event with Oregon First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson celebrated SMART's statewide impact on childhood literacy and greater book access to under-resourced communities**

Portland, Ore. (March 12, 2026) – Oregon's statewide early childhood literacy nonprofit [SMART Reading](#) gave away its 5 millionth book to a child in Oregon at an event at Hayhurst Elementary on March 12, 2026. This marked a major milestone in the organization's mission to help Oregon students build confidence, improve literacy skills, and develop a lifelong passion for reading. To visually represent this achievement, a stack of 5 million kids' books would be four times taller than Mount Everest!

"We loved celebrating this milestone and our 35-year history of providing free books and reading support to underserved communities," says SMART Reading Executive Director Jessica Bowersox. "Reaching this momentous 5 millionth book goal is especially timely given the state's current literacy crisis and the urgent need to set students up for success in school and beyond – and because of the ripple effects literacy has on our economy and workforce long into the future."

"Congratulations to SMART Reading on this incredible achievement and the statewide commitment to improving literacy rates for Oregon's children, particularly in underserved communities," says Oregon First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson. "This work is an investment in the bright future of our entire state."

SMART Reading merged with the Children's Book Bank in 2022 to extend the organization's mission by getting more books into kids' hands, supporting early

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literacy development for students, and expanding and diversifying volunteer opportunities. Currently, SMART Reading reaches over 22,000 students annually, providing weekly reading support and more than 200,000 books for them to keep, with the help of over 3,000 community volunteers throughout Oregon.

According to SMART Reading alumnus Steven Phan, who attended Portland's Woodmere Elementary School as a first grader in 1994, SMART Reading introduced him to a diverse collection of books and stories. "I grew up speaking Vietnamese at home, and my weekly SMART reading sessions gave me the confidence to succeed in school and inspired my career as a community organizer," he says. "They also gave me a lifelong love of reading."

"Research from the National Literacy Trust shows that providing low-income children with just 10 self-selected books to read can produce comparable levels of reading achievement to their higher-income peers," says Bowersox. "As a statewide leader in book access, we have seen firsthand that the mere presence of books in the home is strongly associated with higher levels of academic success."

### **The Next 5 Million Books**

SMART Reading is partnering with SELCO Community Credit Union for its third annual community book drive. The goal of the book drive is to collect new and gently used children's books, which will be sorted, cleaned, and gifted to local students through SMART's statewide programs. During last year's book drive, community members donated over 2,000 books! The public can drop off books at any SELCO branch locations in Albany, Bend, Burns, Eugene, Portland, Redmond, Salem, and Springfield. The drive will run until March 31, 2026.

### **About SMART Reading**

SMART Reading is a statewide children's literacy nonprofit that serves kids in Oregon's highest-need schools with two ingredients critical for literacy and learning success: shared reading time and access to books. We mobilize volunteers to read with pre-K through third-grade children, building confidence, literacy skills, and a love of reading. Since 1992, we have paired over 157,000 volunteers to read with 334,461 children, and have put 5 million books in the homes of the children we serve. To learn more about SMART Reading or to get involved as a volunteer, visit [SMARTReading.org](http://SMARTReading.org) or call 971-634-1634.

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