



# SMART NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2023



Dear Friends:

We've closed the book on a momentous year in SMART's history, celebrating our merger with the Children's Book Bank and our return to widespread in-person reading for the first time since

2020. On a personal note, it's also marked the end of my first year as Executive Director, and I want to extend a sincere thank you to this community for welcoming me into the best job I can imagine.

Like many of you, I had missed the in-person connection with kids that has been the central pillar of SMART for over 30 years. It was with immense joy that I – alongside 2,500 fellow Oregonians – returned to the weekly reading sessions we know and love. Sitting down to share stories and jokes with Xander and Chris was a highlight of my week! It was also such a pleasure to get to know the Book Bank's programming more intimately through delivering books to partners and participating in book cleaning sessions. Through a combination of traditional one-on-one reading, our newer Classroom SMART offering, and the Book Bank's sustainable model of distributing new and used books to kids, we reached

over 23,000 students and gave away over 225,000 books – a tremendous accomplishment!

This period of intense change has not been without its challenges. Our staff team shouldered a big lift in returning to in-person programming, integrating two organizations as a result of the merger, and fundraising in this time of economic uncertainty. With rising costs due to inflation and the reality that SMART Reading is urgently needed as kids continue to recover from the effects of the pandemic, we need our circle of supporters more than ever.

Together with our Board of Directors, we've recently finalized our 2023-25 strategic plan, which focuses on uplifting Oregon's children through expanded programmatic impact and organizational stability. You can read an overview of that plan below.

On behalf of the entire SMART Reading team, thank you for your ongoing commitment to children's literacy.

With gratitude,

Jessica Bowersox  
Executive Director

*Pictured: Jessica Bowersox  
reading with Xander at  
Greenway Elementary School.*

## 2023-2025 Strategic Plan

SMART Reading's staff, leadership, and Board of Directors have adopted a new strategic plan to guide the organization through the next two years. The plan balances programmatic expansion with a focus on organizational stability. Focus areas include:

- ▶ Increasing and leveraging internal knowledge and capacity around trauma-informed care and science-based literacy engagement strategies.
- ▶ Broadening our reach by expanding the Children's Book Bank and out-of-school time programming where opportunity allows.
- ▶ Investing in staff by improving compensation plans and retention, and diversifying revenue

through earned and passive channels.

- ▶ Strengthening relationships and establishing new partnerships in our community to diversify our volunteer base and invite more feedback from partners and families.
- ▶ Continuing the evolution of SMART's equity journey both internally and in conversations with our community about the importance of equity and inclusion in early literacy.

Read the full strategic plan on our website here:  
[www.SMARTReading.org/assets/2023-2025-Strategic-Stability-Plan.pdf](http://www.SMARTReading.org/assets/2023-2025-Strategic-Stability-Plan.pdf)

## Celebrating One Year Together: Book Bank and SMART Reading



Just over a year ago, SMART Reading and the Children's Book Bank merged! Located in Multnomah County, the Book Bank restores and rehomes community-

donated children's books through specially curated book bundles and schoolwide free book fairs. This year alone, Book Bank programs provided over 94,000 books to kids! One of the most exciting implications of the merger is the opportunity to

expand the Book Bank to other parts of the state.

This year, we hosted several successful Book Bank "pop-up" sessions in the South Valley area where community members came together to collect and clean gently-used books that we distributed to kids. We also conducted a statewide assessment to understand community needs and potential partnerships to guide our expansion planning.

Expanding the Book Bank model will be a multi-year process, but we're looking forward to seeing where the Book Bank can provide books for local kids next!

*Pictured: Staff from SELCO Community Credit Union cleaning books during a pop-up in South Valley.*

## Realtors Team Up to Fundraise

Throughout August, realtors and their brokerages came together to create an inspiring new fundraising campaign - a virtual book drive to help provide reading support and fund the purchase of books for Oregon's kids.

It's not too late to help us make this inaugural campaign a success by sharing it with realtors in your network! Find more information here: [www.bit.ly/R4R2023](http://www.bit.ly/R4R2023)



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## A Story Like Mine: Increasing Access to Inclusive Books

*"Children need to see themselves in books. [...] Seeing yourself is almost like a message. It's saying, you matter, you are visible, and you're valuable."*

- Author Christian Robinson

Ensuring kids have access to engaging books that represent a wide range of cultures, experiences, and identities is a top priority for SMART. Studies show that children engage more with books when they can see themselves reflected in the pages they read—and books can be an important avenue for learning about other life experiences.

All Book Bank bundles include books that reflect the individual student's identity, and 20% of the books

we purchase for our shared reading programs are inclusive titles. Our community has helped us fund the purchase of these books through campaigns like A Story Like Mine, which raised over \$20,000 this year. To learn more about our books, visit [www.SMARTReading.org/what-we-do/books](http://www.SMARTReading.org/what-we-do/books).



*Pictured: SMART volunteer reading with a student in Multnomah County.*

## 2022-23 Statewide Impact



252 Sites



4,137 Volunteers



49,763 Volunteer Hours

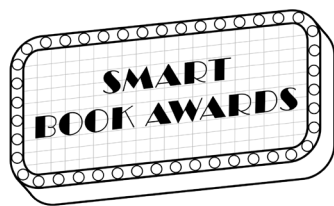


225,623 Books Given



23,815 Students Served

## Oregon Kids Name New Book Award Winner



Each year, kids across Oregon participate in the SMART Book Award, reading a selection of nominated books and voting for their favorite.

After a hiatus during the pandemic, the Book Award was back this year! Kids read *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry; *Yo! Yes?* by Chris Raschka; *Your Fantastic Elastic Brain* by JoAnn Deak; *The Boy Who Loved Math* by Deborah Heiligman; and *Chalk* by Bill Thomson.

For the first time ever, we announced the winning book during a virtual awards ceremony hosted by staff members Cat Hayes and Roland Mechanik.

*Chalk* by Bill Thomson, a beautifully-illustrated wordless picture book, was crowned the winner, and the event raised over \$100,000 for SMART programs statewide. Thanks to everyone who read with kids, attended the celebration, made a gift to help us reach our goal, and to our sponsors:

**First Tech Federal Credit Union | Here is Oregon | Heritage Bank | The Standard | Vernier Science Education | Vista Capital Partners**

## Become A Sustaining Supporter

*"Giving every month helps stabilize the operating budget for SMART so the team can focus on delivering books to thousands of children each year. It's so easy — my credit card gets charged every month and when I see that charge come through, it makes me feel good knowing I'm supporting the development of life-long literacy skills with children in my community."*

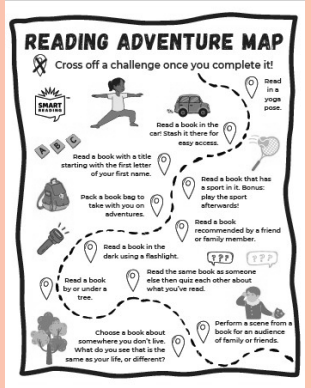
- Beth Daniels, Vice Chair of the SMART Reading Board of Directors

Join Beth and donors across the state as a sustaining supporter at [www.SMARTReading.org/donate](http://www.SMARTReading.org/donate).

## Summer Reading Fun

Looking for ways to keep kids engaged with reading during the final weeks of summer? We have three printable activities in English and Spanish:

- **Reading Adventure Map** - This "map" takes you through adventurous challenges like reading under a tree or performing a scene from a favorite book.



- **Book Scavenger Hunt** - Check off tasks like reading a book that teaches you something about the weather or creating a dictionary of words you learn while reading!
- **Summer Reading Saga** - This comic-style activity sheet is filled with creative reading challenges like reading a book in a silly voice or dressing up as your favorite character.



Scan the QR code or visit [www.SMARTReading.org/reading-matters](http://www.SMARTReading.org/reading-matters) to find these activity sheets and more!