



SMART NEWSLETTER

SUMMER / FALL 2020



Greetings Friends:

I hope this finds you healthy and well in the midst of a very different year than we'd imagined. It's been a challenging time in our state and country to say the least, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to connect with you -- our SMART Reading family.

While the 2019-20 school year came to an unexpected early ending and brought many

unforeseen challenges, we still achieved two very exciting milestones: We served 11,739 students with one-on-one reading and books to keep -- an all-time high in our 28-year history -- and we gave our students 138,169 books to keep, surpassing 3 million books given throughout our history. These accomplishments are worth celebrating!

Importantly, we did all of this thanks to our broad community of supporters -- thousands of volunteers, educators, donors, partners and families across Oregon. Thank you for making it possible for SMART Reading to bring the joy of books and reading to thousands of kids and families.

As we prepare to resume services in late October, we've been working hard to adapt our programming to meet the challenges of our new normal. With a capable team of SMARTies and dedicated family of volunteers, I'm confident in our ability to continue delivering on our mission -- and I'm hard pressed to think of a time when our services were more needed and relevant.

After experiencing interruptions in learning and potentially other traumas related to the pandemic and racial injustice, students may have heightened academic and emotional needs. Educational researchers fear that children won't be able to catch up from the ground they've lost, and the impacts of recent events will last for generations to come. We stand poised and ready to partner with our educators, volunteers and families as a key source of support for Oregon kids.

While much is uncertain, what remains is this: we need each other now more than ever. Our deepest thanks and gratitude for joining us in the charge to spark joy and opportunity through the magic of a shared book.

Here's to a year of good health, good books, hard conversations, and better times ahead.



With appreciation,
Chris Otis, SMART Reading Executive Director

Executive Staff:

- Chris Otis**
Executive Director
- Jessica Bowersox**
Communications Director
- Afrita Davis**
Program Director
- Zack Frey**
Assistant Program Director
- Amanda Green**
Director of Finance and Administration
- Beth Katona**
Director of Development Operations

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2019-20 Statewide Impact



290
Sites



5,144
Volunteers



11,739
Students



138,169
Books Given



105,655
Volunteer Hours



\$2.8 million
Donated Value of
Volunteer Hours

Our Commitment to Racial Justice

In May, the murder of George Floyd sparked international grief, anger and unrest around racial injustice. These recent events and resulting conversations have affirmed our commitment to racial equity and underscore the link between our vision of an Oregon where all children can realize their full potential through reading and the fact that not all children have an equal opportunity at success.

In 1992, our founders recognized this fact and created our model to serve children from low-income communities, knowing that they faced greater barriers to educational success. Our work has continued and deepened over the decades.

In 2014, we began a racial equity journey as an evolution of our mission, rooted in the fact that an alarming education gap exists between white students and students of color. As a result of this equity journey, we've made deliberate strides to advance racial justice in our program, organization and communities. We're poised to learn more and do better, working with our community of supporters, partners and families as we inspire the next generation of readers and learners.

To read more about our work on equity, including a statement from Executive Director Chris Otis and our Board of Directors, please visit www.SMARTReading.org/equity.

A Look Ahead: SMART Reading in 2020-21

The coronavirus pandemic has transformed public education. While physical distancing and limitations on visitors in school buildings make elements of our program impossible, we're determined to adapt to continue serving Oregon children when they need it most.

To re-envision our programming and identify adaptations, we deployed our statewide staff into future planning task forces that explored various models, while keeping volunteer engagement top of mind. Based on our work, feedback from educators and families, and guidance from the Oregon Department of Education, we've identified two viable adaptations for the 2020-21 school year:

- **Book Distribution:** Providing access to books is a crucial way we can support families. We gave away over 33,000 books after schools closed in March and we're building upon what we learned to expand distribution next year. Adaptations include serving full classrooms of students and complementing book giveaways with online read-alouds to support learning and student choice. And, we're mindful of easing the burden on educators and families along the way.

- **Virtual Reading:** In-person reading will not be possible in 2020-21. We will provide virtual reading options for students and volunteers, including pre-recorded and live offerings. While working on the implementation details, we're also factoring in legalities and security considerations and incorporating feedback from educators and families.

While volunteers can support our work this year, **we don't expect to have placements for all 5,000 of our volunteers.** We know this is sad news, and, like you, we look forward to getting back to in-person reading in 2021-22. We will have volunteer opportunities available on a smaller scale, such as supporting book distribution, participating in virtual reading sessions, joining our "Tech Team" of volunteers to support training needs, and staying connected to students via a Pen Pal program. Throughout the year, we'll continue to keep all of our volunteers informed about local opportunities.

For the latest information, visit www.SMARTReading.org/COVID-19.



Celebrating Our Statewide Volunteer of the Year

Congratulations to Apollonia Quale, the Volunteer Site Coordinator at Marysville Elementary in Portland, who was named our 2019-20 Statewide Volunteer of the Year! Apollonia has been involved with SMART Reading for 11 years, and is an incredibly dedicated ambassador for our work. She is active in recruiting volunteers, creating a beautiful and welcoming reading space, following our policies and procedures to a "T" and sharing her passion for books and reading with kids and adults alike. Huge thanks to Apollonia for her many contributions to SMART Reading!

The SMART Bookshelf

We're all about kids' books at SMART Reading, but our staff loves reading books for grown-ups too. Here are a few of the books our team has enjoyed this summer:

- *Dear Teen Me* edited by Miranda Kenneally and E. Kristin Anderson. Recommended by Holly Stork, South Central Area Manager.
- *Stella by Starlight* by Sharon M. Draper. Recommended by Sharon Benson, Senior Development Officer.
- *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn and *Passing* by Nella Larsen. Recommended by Gainell Irving, Metro Area Senior Program Manager.
- *An American Marriage* by Tayari Jones and *The Prettiest Star* by Carter Sickels. Recommended by Amanda Green, Director of Finance & Administration.

Stay SMART

The year ahead will be one filled with new challenges and opportunities. While we adjust to our new reality, adapt to continue fulfilling our mission, and face unknown financial impacts, we encourage our community to stay connected with us. Here are some ways you can stay SMART:

- Join the SMART Book Club by becoming a sustaining donor.
- Sponsor books for kids in your community.
- Leverage your connections. Host a Facebook fundraiser or celebrate a special event with a personal campaign for SMART Reading.

Learn more at www.SMARTReading.org/ways-to-give.

Stoller Helps Us Sip SMART!

SMART Reading and Stoller Family Estate are teaming up to help you wine down at home this fall. Now through October, Stoller will donate 30% of sales from a special co-branded bottle of its Willamette Valley Pinot Noir. You can purchase a special three-bottle package featuring each of our three custom labels, or purchase single bottles. Please visit www.bit.ly/StollerSMART to purchase your bottle(s) today.

Thank you to Stoller for this generosity and support during this uncertain time. Sip safe, sip SMART!



2020 Alphabet Ball Raises Statewide Support for SMART Reading

Our annual statewide fundraiser, the Alphabet Ball, was held on Friday, Feb. 21 at The Nines Hotel in downtown Portland. By all accounts, the event was a great success! Over 300 guests joined us to celebrate books and the powerful ideas they can ignite for kids. Thanks to our generous community, we were able to raise over \$530,000 for SMART Reading operations throughout the state. Thank you to all of our supporters and sponsors, including our presenting sponsor, First Tech Federal Credit Union.



Kid's Corner

Each year, we hold the SMART Book Award giving kids across the state the chance to vote for their favorite from nominated titles. This year's books, all available in English and Spanish, were a huge hit with kids and adults alike!



- *If You Ever Want to Bring an Alligator to School, Don't! / Si piensas traer un cocodrilo a la escuela, no lo hagas!* by Elise Parsley
- *Lucia the Luchadora/Lucía la Luchadora* by Cynthia Leonor Garza
- *Splat the Cat/El gato Splat* by Rob Scotton
- *What if You Had Animal Teeth/¿Y si tuvieras dientes de animal?* by Sandra Markle

When the final votes were tallied, it was a close race but the winner of this year's SMART Book Award is *What if You Had Animal Teeth* by Sandra Markle.

Oregon Reads Aloud: A SMART Read-A-Thon

We held our first virtual read-a-thon on May 16, featuring 12 hours of children's book read-alouds by more than 80 Oregonians from all corners of our state. It included special guest appearances by Gov. Kate Brown, Portland Trail Blazer CJ McCollum, Portland Timbers mascot Timber Joey, and WNBA player Ruthy Hebard. The event was also a fundraiser, raising over \$34,000 to help us provide new books to kids.

Special thanks to our statewide sponsors:

