

SMART Reading's Commitment to Equity & Inclusion



Why Equity & Inclusion are Important to SMART Reading

SMART Reading was established to improve reading outcomes for Oregon kids, helping them develop literacy skills, self-confidence, and a love of reading. We believe literacy is a foundational skill that creates joy, opportunities and choices for children; a lack of literacy skills limits those lifelong benefits.

All children deserve to be included. To be accepted and celebrated for who they are. To feel that they belong. To see their lives and families represented in books. And all children – regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, ability, or any other factor – should be able to access the same pathways leading to learning, happiness and success.

Unfortunately, this isn't the way our society works. Deeply entrenched racial, cultural, social and economic inequities make it harder for some children to succeed compared to others. Our country and state perpetuate systemic, institutional, and cultural biases that reinforce inequality – one example of which is the [persistent education gap between white students and students of color](#). Yet, while the education gap may be one of the most striking examples, it's not the only one – inequity and discrimination impact many people, and different forms of identity intersect with one another in a complex system designed to hold certain groups down while lifting others up.

We are deeply committed to inclusion because it is inextricably linked with our ability to fulfill our mission. To be in integrity with our values – kids come first, community, inclusivity, access, and joy – and to attain our vision of an Oregon where all children can realize their full potential through reading, we are morally compelled to address equity.

SMART Reading's Commitment

Together with our network of over 10,000 volunteers, donors and supporters statewide and the 10,000+ children we serve annually, we have an opportunity to change the story when it comes to the education gap and other inequities Oregon kids experience. We have a responsibility to ensure that kids in our program have a joyful and affirming experience, and to examine our organization, systems, and policies for bias and inequities.

Issues of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, class, ability, geography, age, and other forms of bias must be identified and addressed in every aspect of our organization. As a partner in public education and other institutions, it's also our obligation to examine how we're perpetuating – or interrupting – the inequalities and racism inherent in these systems.

Therefore, equity is prioritized in every facet of our organization, impacting:

- The children and families we serve
- The volunteers we recruit, train, and retain
- The staff we hire, train, and support
- The resources and funding we raise and steward
- The partnerships we build
- The communities in which we serve and operate.

Here are some concrete examples of what this has looked like for SMART Reading:

- Programmatic Changes:
 - **Diverse Books:** We expanded our book collections to include mirror (i.e., mirror a child's identity back to them) and window books (i.e., provide a window into different people and cultures), and have instituted a requirement that all of our book collections include at least 15 percent mirror/window titles.
 - **Diverse Volunteers:** We are working to diversify our volunteer base to more closely match the racial and ethnic identity of the students we serve. One strategy is the development of an out-of-school time delivery model to expand our volunteer opportunities to new communities unable to participate during the work day. We have also expanded and improved how we collect data from our students and volunteers in order to have a more accurate picture, and have set clear targets and strategies for creating more diversity in our volunteer pool.

- Cultural Changes:
 - **Operationalizing Equity:** Our organization-wide Equity Team is tasked with considering and implementing matters of diversity, equity and inclusion in the organization and how we work with our children and families, volunteers, community partners, donors, and educators. All staff have an opportunity to participate in E Team sub-committees, including Communications, Culture and Training, and Program and Partnerships.
 - **Hiring:** We've changed the way we hire for positions, what we set as non-negotiable requirements, where we post openings, and we've set a mandatory threshold for the diversity of the qualified applicant pool that must be reached before we move forward to the interview stage.
 - **Training:** Our staff and Board members regularly engage in equity-related trainings and conversations to advance equity and organizational culture. These trainings are led by external experts as needed, and by staff as an opportunity for building internal capacity and facilitation skills.

Moving Forward

We began this journey with an intentional focus on race because racial inequities are generally among the most severe and harmful to children and their educational outcomes. However, we recognize that other forms of inequity and discrimination exist for our children and communities, and commit to examining injustice in its various intersectionalities on an ongoing basis.

We understand that our volunteers and the communities we serve represent many different perspectives, beliefs and opinions. It's inevitable that we won't always agree, and we accept that not everyone in our community will agree with this focus. Still, we are doing what we believe is right and best for the kids we serve.

Finally, we acknowledge that this is a long and complex journey for any organization; there is no definitive end-line in sight. We are committed to continual learning, reflection, and assessment and modification of this work, which includes:

- Acknowledging and dismantling inequities within our policies, systems, programs, and services, and continually updating and reporting organization progress.
- Exploring potential underlying, unquestioned assumptions that interfere with inclusiveness.

- Advocating for and supporting staff and Board-level thinking about how systemic inequities impact our organization's work, and how best to address that in a way that is consistent with our mission.
- Helping to challenge assumptions about what it takes to be a strong leader at our organization, and who is well-positioned to provide leadership.
- Practicing and encouraging transparent communication in all interactions, and openness across difference.
- Committing time and resources to expand diversity within our staff, Board, volunteers, committees, and other advisory bodies.
- Leading with respect and tolerance. We expect all employees and volunteers to embrace this notion and to express it in workplace interactions and through everyday practices.
- Providing a safe, welcoming and positive environment for our staff, students, our volunteers and our broader community.

Mission: To spark joy and opportunity through the magic of a shared book.

Vision: An Oregon where all children can realize their full potential through reading.