

SMART Reading's Commitment to Equity & Inclusion



The Bottom Line:

Literacy breaks down barriers for kids and opens the door to opportunity. At SMART Reading, we want to ensure all children have the reading support and books they need to be strong, confident readers.

Equity and inclusion are central to our mission because research shows that kids do better when they have positive, affirming experiences with reading and access to books that reflect their identities and experiences.

More About SMART's Commitment to Equity & Inclusion:

Literacy is a foundational skill that fosters joy and opportunity for children – and right now, far too many Oregon kids are not meeting reading benchmarks, which makes it more challenging for them to succeed in school and beyond. SMART Reading was established to improve reading outcomes for Oregon kids, helping them develop literacy skills, self-confidence, and a love of reading.

All children deserve to be included, safe, accepted and celebrated. They deserve to see their lives and families represented in books. Most of all, every child – regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, family's economic situation, ability, or any other factor – should be able to access the same pathways to learning, happiness and success.

Unfortunately, deeply entrenched [systemic inequities](#) make it harder for some children to succeed. One example of this is the [persistent education gap between white students and students of color](#), as well as gaps that exist for children from low-wealth households and children with disabilities, among others. Yet, while the education gap may be one of the most striking examples, it's not the only one. Racism, 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.

At SMART Reading, we are mission-bound to contribute to building an Oregon where children are strong readers who are prepared to thrive in an interconnected world. Together with our network of over 10,000 volunteers, donors, and supporters statewide and the 20,000+ children we serve annually, we have an opportunity to change the story when it comes to the education gap and other inequities that Oregon kids experience.

We aim to ensure that all kids have a positive, affirming experience at SMART, can see themselves represented in our books, and have access to books that build empathy by providing windows into the lives and experiences of others.

We are committed to prioritizing equity 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 looks like:

- **Programmatic Focuses:**
 - **Inclusive Books:** Our book collections have an intentional focus on mirror books (mirror a child's identity back to them) and window books (provide a window into different identities, cultures, and experiences) so that every child is able to experience the positive affirmation of seeing themselves in a book, as well as the opportunity to learn about the lives and experiences of others. All of our book collections include at least 20 percent mirror/window titles.
 - **Volunteer Training:** All of our volunteers commit to providing a positive, affirming experience for their students. We create and implement volunteer trainings that utilize evidence-based practices to improve

- outcomes for all children. This includes training volunteers on how to facilitate child-guided reading sessions, as well as providing resources on supporting readers with diverse needs, backgrounds, and interests. This is an area that we're continually enhancing and in our 2023-2025 organizational strategic plan, we have a named focus area around developing and implementing statewide training on reading science; diversity, equity and inclusion; and trauma-informed practices.
- **Fundraising and Partnership Focuses:** Our fundraising team is implementing [community-based fundraising practices](#) that seek to center the community, encourage collaboration, and reduce the harm caused by traditional fundraising. We are actively making changes to better honor the kids we serve and donors of all levels such as recognizing all event sponsors equally (regardless of giving amounts) and removing transactional language from our appeals that doesn't take into account the staff and volunteer time (and other resources) needed to deliver our programming.
 - **Cultural Focuses:**
 - **Operationalizing Equity:** Our organization-wide Equity Team (called the JEDI Council) is tasked with considering and implementing matters of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion within the organization and how we work with our children and families, volunteers, community partners, donors, and educators. We've also adopted an equity filter used in organizational decision-making.
 - **Hiring:** We've changed the way we hire for positions, including what we set as non-negotiable requirements (for example, we don't require a college degree when it's not strictly necessary for the position). We also aim to advertise job openings in a variety of venues and with marginalized communities to attract a diverse applicant pool.
 - **Training:** Our staff and Board members regularly engage in training 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. We encourage staff to suggest external learning opportunities to add to a shared calendar of DEI and Community Centric Fundraising trainings.

An Ongoing Process

Above all, our ongoing commitment is to stay true to our mission and our organizational value of Kids First, and to communicate our decisions transparently with our community. We lead with a 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 we aim to provide programs that lift all children up and to examine injustice in its various intersectionalities on an ongoing basis.

This is an ongoing journey for any organization; there is no definitive end-line in sight. We are committed to continued learning, reflection, assessment, course correction, and modification of this work, which includes but is not limited to:

- Providing a safe, welcoming, and positive environment for our staff, students, our volunteers, and our broader community.
- Utilizing an equity lens to examine and update 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 differences.
- Committing time and resources to expand diversity within our staff, Board, volunteers, committees, and other advisory bodies.
- Leading with respect and fostering a culture built on kindness, curiosity, collaboration and accountability. We expect all employees and volunteers to embrace this notion and to express it in workplace interactions and through everyday practices.

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.