



SMART Reading NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2024

Greetings, SMART Community:

I hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the longer, warmer days of summer. For SMART Reading, 2023-24 brought a continued return to in-person services post-pandemic, expanded impact thanks to our 2022 merger with The Children's Book Bank, and ongoing reminders of the importance of our work.

It's not new that Oregon children are struggling with literacy, but interrupted learning from the pandemic and other factors made concerning reading rates even worse. Sixty percent of Oregon third-graders are not meeting reading benchmarks – this matters because the third grade is when children transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Research shows that students who aren't meeting third-grade reading benchmarks are four times less likely to graduate from high school, and that number grows exponentially for students impacted by poverty.

SMART's work to create strong readers is needed now more than ever. I'm proud to share that this last school year, we served 223 sites in 30 counties and three Tribal Nations statewide. We also put 188,000 books into the hands and homes of over 21,000 students, thanks to the help of over 3,400 volunteers who spent time reading with students, coordinating SMART sites and refurbishing donated books for distribution to local kids.

As I read with two second-grade students at Greenway Elementary in Beaverton, I was reminded on a weekly

basis the power of SMART's mission to spark joy and opportunity through the magic of a shared book. The special moments were far too many to count – moments of connection, laughter, joy, and pride as students recognized their own growth and achievement. The delight on book giveaway day, when kids pick a book to keep for their very own, never gets old either.



Looking ahead, I'm excited to deepen our impact for students via more science-based reading strategies, rolling out more in-depth volunteer training, and continuing to expand the Book Bank model to additional communities. It's a time of exciting growth and change as we continue to walk side-by-side with Oregon kids, families and educators in the journey to reading success. I encourage you all to continue to lean in to create better, brighter futures for kids across Oregon. It takes a village.

Your friend in reading,

Jessica Bowersox
Executive Director

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



Pictured: SELCO Community Credit Union employees cleaning donated books in Central Oregon.

Book Bank Reaches New Communities

A 2019 study in the *Journal of Global Health* found that the likelihood of being on track in literacy and numeracy “almost doubled if at least one book was available in a student’s home.” Access to books has always been central to SMART Reading’s mission – and since 1992, we’ve distributed over 4.5 million books!

Two years ago, SMART Reading added a new program under its

umbrella all about getting more books into the hands of kids. Operating out of Portland, the Children’s Book Bank at SMART Reading collects, restores and rehomes community-donated children’s books.

Our long-term goal is to open Book Banks in communities across the state, creating another avenue for ensuring kids have high-interest, inclusive books at their fingertips. While that will be a multi-year process, this year we held successful book drives and volunteer book cleaning sessions in Central Oregon and the Willamette Valley. To learn more about how the Book Bank operates and where the books go, visit www.SMARTReading.org/book-bank

New Trainings Equip Volunteers for Deeper Impact

This fall, volunteers will have access to a new online training in addition to the onsite training they receive each year. This training will provide an overview of how SMART works, and equip volunteers with research-based strategies for building students' literacy skills in a fun, low-pressure environment. Later in the year, SMART will roll out three additional trainings:

- ★ **Science-based Reading:** A deep dive into the fundamental elements of literacy and practical strategies for reinforcing essential skills during a reading session.
- ★ **The Importance of Inclusive Books:** A primer on how kids benefit from access to books that mirror their identities and experiences as well as books that provide a window into the lives of others.
- ★ **Trauma-informed Practices:** A practical, research-based session on supporting all students – especially those impacted by trauma – during SMART Reading.

In Their Own Words: SMART Alumni



This class of first-graders at Roosevelt Elementary in Klamath Falls is all grown up and just completed their freshman year of college. They shared some reflections on the impact SMART had on their lives:

My favorite part of SMART was the opportunity to engage in a different type of reading; a collaborative and conversational style. I was exposed to both new reading but also new readers, voices and perspectives. SMART showed me that reading has a powerful potential to spark conversation and connection."

Sophia Rey, incoming sophomore at Harvard University

SMART was instrumental in cultivating not only our love for reading, but also provided an important avenue to encourage curiosity about topics that were relevant and interesting to us. Books have always been on our nightstands largely because of our participation in the SMART Reading program."

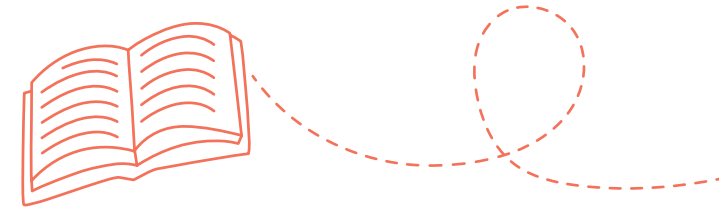
Nathan and Ethan Rink, incoming sophomores at University of Kentucky and University of North Carolina - Asheville

Become a Sustaining SMARTie

"Making a recurring gift to SMART Reading is an easy way to support this incredible mission. It's seamless for me and I love knowing that my monthly donation helps the SMART team focus on getting books and reading support to kids."

- Carol Delmonico, Bend

To join Carol as a Sustaining SMARTie, choose the monthly giving amount that's right for you at www.SMARTReading.org/donate and then select "Yes, automatically repeat this gift every month." You can also give us a call at 877-598-4633.



Ask the Experts: Why Books and Reading Time Are Essential

💡 *"Reading aloud is the **single most important** activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading."* - 2007 study by Reach Out and Read

💡 *"It's difficult to succeed in life if you can't read well. And it's very difficult to get good at reading if you don't have books to practice with at home. There may be **no better way to impact children's overall futures** than by making sure they have a steady supply of quality books to read in their homes."* - 2020 study by Noonan and Fox in the Delaware Journal of Public Health

Oregon Kids Have Spoken



SMART Reading students across Oregon cast their votes in the 23rd annual SMART Book Award this spring. From five nominated titles, a clear winner emerged! *Not a Box* by Antoinette Portis celebrates the power of imagination. While some might see a plain old box, to others it's a spaceship or a tall mountain. To see previous winners of the SMART Book Award, visit www.SMARTReading.org/book-award.

Thank you to our sponsor:



Pictured: A volunteer and student reading Not a Box at Barnes Elementary in Beaverton.

Q&A: Let's Talk About Finances

Q: How is SMART Reading funded?

A: 96% of our funds come from individuals, foundations and businesses that want to make our vision a reality. SMART Reading is free for families and public schools that meet our high-need criteria.

Q: What's the size of your budget?

A: About \$4 million annually.

Q: What's your biggest expense?

A: People! Our small team of 37 staff supports 223 sites, 3,400 volunteers, and 21,000 kids. Our second largest expense is books. We give away over 180,000 books each year!

The generous support of our community is critical to SMART Reading. We hope you'll consider joining us by scanning the QR code to make a gift, returning the enclosed envelope, or calling 877-598-4633. All gifts stay local to your community!



2023-24 Statewide Impact



223 Sites



3,447 Volunteers



71,277 Volunteer Hours



188,064 Books Given



21,746 Students Served