



SMART Reading NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025

Hi friends,

I hope this finds you well and enjoying the sunshine and the company of some good books! As we come to the end of SMART Reading's 33rd year of service, I am immensely proud of what we have accomplished.

Through 306 programs in 89 communities, SMART brought **3,800 Oregonians** together to volunteer, united around a shared goal of creating a strong foundation of literacy skills for kids. More than **10,700 kids** benefitted from weekly reading support and an additional **11,300** were served by our Book Bank. In all, we put more than **189,000 books** into the hands of kids and families!

Whether it was with a book enjoyed side-by-side with a SMART volunteer or at home with family, kids deepened their understanding of the world, developed empathy and compassion, and honed a skill that is critical for their success in school and beyond. We know that the reading foundation built in these early years quite literally shapes a child's entire educational trajectory.

Equally important are the many relationships that formed over the shared joy of reading a story with a child or restoring used books with fellow volunteers. In coffee shops and grocery stores across Oregon, you'll find SMART volunteers who've become invested advocates for their students and local schools – because when you read with a child week after week, you become part of their story, and they become part of yours.

I truly believe that the relationships formed between all the people served by SMART are building stronger communities and a stronger future for Oregon. In a time

when digital interaction is increasingly prevalent, SMART brings us face-to-face to share in one of life's great joys: reading.

With service in 30 of Oregon's 36 counties and three Tribal Nations, we're committed to being here for the long haul. This is a tenuous time for many nonprofits who've experienced funding cuts, and SMART is grateful to have long-standing support as a community-funded organization. **If you believe in the power of our work, I urge you to consider doubling down on your commitment in the coming year.**

We're looking to the future with optimism and a huge sense of gratitude. The scope, scale, and longevity of SMART's impact has been possible because of deep and unyielding community support – and the future holds some exciting milestones! In a few short months, our 5 millionth book will make it into the hands of a child somewhere in Oregon, and in 2026 we'll kick off our 35th year of bringing books and reading support to kids.

Thank you for standing with us to empower the next generation of readers. It takes a village, and I'm grateful to be in yours.

With gratitude,



Jessica Bowersox
Executive Director

Charting the Future: SMART's 2025-2028 Strategic Plan

This year marks the successful end of a two-year strategic plan. Following a period of significant organizational change, including the pandemic, this plan was laser focused on achieving greater stability through rebuilding our volunteer community, re-establishing in-person programs, improving volunteer training, and balancing our budget.

Over the last six months, SMART staff, leadership, and Board of Directors have engaged in a process to craft SMART's next strategic plan, and incorporated input from our robust community of families, educators, and volunteers along the way. In June, SMART's Board of Directors voted to adopt our new three-year strategic plan, a time period that will bring an exciting organizational milestone: we'll celebrate our 35th year of serving Oregon's kids! The new plan builds on its predecessor's work, focusing on improved processes, greater impact, and financial stability to help SMART adapt to community needs and thrive in its 35th year and beyond. Key priorities named in the plan include:

1 Increasing programmatic impact through continued focus on quality and process improvements and in-depth volunteer training

2 Broadening our reach by expanding the Book Bank and out-of-school time programming

3 Diversifying funding streams through expanding earned revenue and public funding

Read the full strategic plan on our website: www.SMARTReading.org/strategic-plan.

Expanding Book Access Through New Programming

Three years ago, following our merger with the Children's Book Bank, we began laying the groundwork to offer Book Bank programming in communities across the state. The model, which involves collecting, restoring, and rehoming donated children's books, aligns with SMART's long-standing focus on providing free books to kids, and offers an exciting avenue to expand our impact.

While setting up full-service Book Banks outside of Portland is a longer-term goal, we're already making big strides in training our staff and offering limited Book Bank programming in multiple regions. This year alone, we held successful book drives in Astoria, Bend, Burns, Coos Bay, Eugene, Newberg, Redmond, Salem, and Springfield, as well as volunteer book cleaning sessions and book fairs in many of these communities.

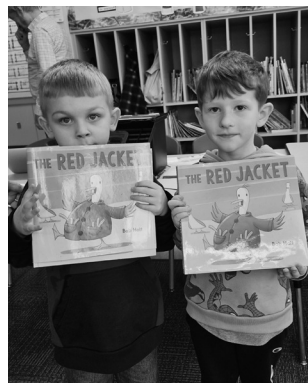
To learn more about our Book Bank model, visit www.SMARTReading.org/book-bank/.



Pictured: Volunteers clean and restore books at SMART's Bend office.

Oregon Kids Crown Book Award Winner

This spring, SMART Reading students across the state participated in the 24th annual Book Award, avidly reading five nominated titles and casting their ballots for their favorite. A heartwarming story of friendship (and french fries!), *The Red Jacket* by Bob Holt, won kids' stamp of approval this year.



*Pictured: Kids hold up *The Red Jacket* at Ardenwald Elementary in Milwaukie.*



Pictured: Staff and volunteers give away books during the Free Book Fair at Grant Community School in Salem.



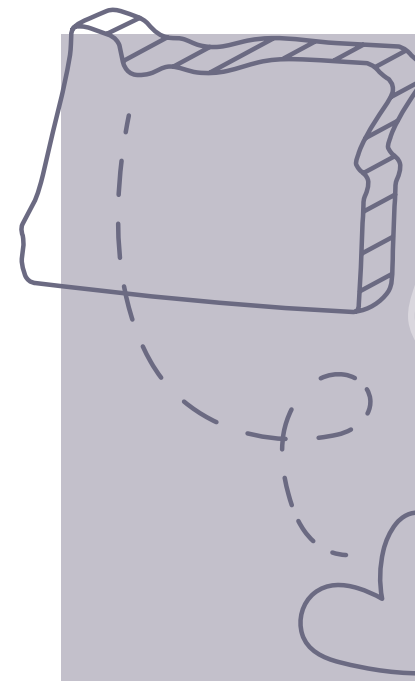
Pictured: Umpqua Bank employees clean books for SMART as part of United Way of Lane County's Days of Caring.

Leave A Legacy of Readers

My estate planning included SMART Reading because I want every child in Oregon to learn to read well, which is necessary in order to continue to learn throughout life. The children of today will be making decisions for the world tomorrow."

– Legacy Society Member

Please consider naming SMART Reading a beneficiary in your will, trust, donor advised fund, life insurance, or retirement plan. Your future gift will ensure the next generation of young readers become leaders. For more information, visit www.SMARTReading.org/simple-ways-support-smart/.



In the Words of Oregon's Principal of the Year

"SMART Reading contributed to our kinders' literacy success by providing weekly, caring volunteers to read with students, building meaningful relationships, and reinforcing the Science of Reading strategies our teachers are implementing."



Kara Davidson,
Eastside School Principal,
Coos Bay

Davidson was named the **2025 Oregon Elementary Principal of the Year** by the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA). Under Davidson's direction, Eastside School became a beacon for the Science of Reading, dramatically improving student reading proficiency. Her team's work reduced kindergarten reading deficiencies from 78% at the start of the school year to only 19% by year-end.

New Volunteer Trainings Are Deepening Impact

Our statewide cadre of volunteers gained access to more robust learning opportunities this year when we launched a series of four online trainings. The first, SMART Essentials, provides an in-depth overview of how SMART works. The subsequent trainings delve into specific topics: science-based reading strategies, trauma-informed practices for working with students, and the importance of representation in children's books.

These trainings were well-received with 93% of attendees reporting that they gained new knowledge to apply during reading sessions. Here's what one volunteer had to say: *"This was excellent information delivered in an excellent way! I have been a Reader for many years and this is the best info I have ever heard for describing our SMART mission."*

We'll continue to build upon our learnings and reach more volunteers with these trainings in the years ahead!



SMARTie Party!

SMART staff from around the state gathered in Springfield for an annual retreat to gear up for another great year of inspiring young readers!

2024-25 Statewide Impact



306
Sites



3,817
Volunteers



74,039
Volunteer Hours



189,212
Books Given



22,107
Kids Served