



**S M A R T**  
START MAKING A READER TODAY®

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# Inspire a child's next chapter.

March 6, 2017

Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education:

SMART is a nationally recognized, statewide nonprofit providing reading support and books for thousands of Oregon children each year. Our model was established to support reading outcomes in Oregon's public schools by providing two key ingredients needed for literacy development: shared reading time and access to books. We do this by pairing volunteers with PreK-3rd grade children for weekly reading sessions throughout the school year, and giving students books to keep. SMART is not just about improving reading outcomes, but about sparking a lifelong love of reading and learning in young hearts and minds throughout our state.

During the 2016-17 school year, SMART will serve 10,500 students with the help of 5,000 volunteers, and will give away over 162,000 books. SMART reaches nearly every corner of our state, serving 300 sites in 28 of Oregon's 36 counties. Over the past 25 years, 125,000 SMART volunteers have read with nearly 200,000 children, and the organization has given these students 2.4 million books to keep.

And, we know the program works. In voluntary annual surveys, educators with SMART in their schools report that 95% of SMART students consistently showed improvement in measures of literacy development, and 87% said that SMART contributed significantly to reading motivation and enjoyment for their students.

In 2014, SMART received national validation for its work when the Library of Congress awarded us the American Prize in Literacy, presented annually to an organization that has made a significant and measureable contribution to increasing literacy levels or the national awareness of the importance of literacy.

While reading in Oregon has been an initiative in past sessions, it has been a mission of SMART for 25 years. We have shown that we can do it right, and we continue to thrive even as state programs ebb and flow. We continue to ask this legislative body to invest, not invent, in what works.

In the past two biennia the Oregon Legislative Assembly has honored our efforts and provided funding to our program. Because we are volunteer-driven, our needs have come in two areas: books for school collections, and books for kids to take home. In 2013-15 we were able to buy 273,700 books for children across Oregon. In 2015-17, we focused on purchasing multicultural books for our permanent and giveaway collections that reflect the lives of our students. **For the 2017-19 biennium, our focus is on poverty – enhancing the school collections in the highest need schools and sending even more books home with children from families who need the help most.**

SMART partners with over 275 low-income schools and Head Start programs to implement free, evidenced-based support to classroom instruction. We ask that you help us grow that effort.

**Please support a continuation of the \$500,000 funding allocation SMART has received in the past two legislative biennia to support our children and services across Oregon. Investing in SMART means investing in a proven strategy helping to narrow the education gap in Oregon.**

Sincerely,

Chris Otis  
SMART Executive Director

# A SMART APPROACH



## 1 WHO WE ARE

SMART is a nationally recognized, statewide nonprofit organization with a network of volunteers, educators, donors and advocates working together to empower Oregon children for more successful futures through books and reading. Since 1992, SMART has engaged more than 125,000 community volunteers to help over 188,000 students build their reading skills and motivation to discover a lifelong love of reading.

Focuses on underserved populations disproportionately affected by low educational outcomes

Provides culturally affirming program through trained volunteers and multicultural books



Engages residents and inspires communities in empowering Oregon children for more successful futures

Builds reading skills, motivation and a love of reading in children who can benefit from additional support

Partners with low-income public schools and early learning centers to provide the cost-free program

*SMART is uniquely positioned to leverage public infrastructure and private dollars to deliver a high quality, research-based program helping children develop the skills they need to read and succeed.*

## 2 HOW IT WORKS

The SMART program is founded upon leading research that proves shared book reading and availability of books in the home are key ingredients in a child's literacy development. Providing one-on-one reading support and access to books are effective strategies in closing the education gap.

In 2016-17, 5,000 SMART volunteers will read with 10,500 students in 300 sites statewide. SMART volunteers read weekly with PreK through third-grade students, providing a fun, culturally affirming, child-guided experience with a goal of increasing reading engagement and motivation.

SMART gives students books to take home and keep – 14 throughout the year, and 2.4 million since our founding.

**SMART is funded nearly 100 percent by private sources – business, foundations and individuals.**

### THE NEED:

According to the 2015-16 Oregon Smarter Balanced Assessment, 53 percent of Oregon third-graders did not meet state reading standards. Research shows that children who do not learn to read by the third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school than their reading-proficient peers, and that number triples for children in low income households.<sup>1</sup>

Sixty percent of low-income families in Oregon don't own any books.<sup>2</sup> Yet, children with access to 25 books at home complete, on average, two more years of school than children from homes without any books.<sup>3</sup>

1. Hernandez, Donald J. Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012.
2. Reach Out and Read: <http://www.reachoutandread.org/media/46483/roronepagerfinal11.18.13.pdf>.
3. Lindsay, Jim: Children's Access to Print Materials and Education-Related Outcomes: Findings from a Meta-Analytic Review. Learning Point Associates & reading is Fundamental, 2010.

### 3 WHO WE SERVE

SMART's service is focused on the lowest-rated 15 percent of Oregon elementary schools. The ratings, determined by the Oregon Department of Education, are based on overall academic achievement, as well as academic improvement for kids in specific populations, including students eligible for free and reduced lunch, students learning English, students with disabilities, and historically underserved races and ethnicities.

Since SMART's founding in 1992, we have sought to deliver our program to economically disadvantaged children. We've done this by focusing service on Title I elementary schools, a designation that is determined at the district level based on percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Additionally, over the past several years, we have developed a partnership with Head Start to serve children under 5 from low-income families. In 2015-16, Title I schools and Head Start programs accounted for nearly 90 percent of SMART's 267 sites statewide.

### 4 WHY IT WORKS

An independent study by the Eugene Research Institute measured short- and long-term impacts of the SMART program, and discovered a wide range of outcomes that demonstrated the program's effectiveness in improving children's reading abilities. Children who participated in SMART as first graders were 60 percent more likely to reach state reading benchmarks in fifth grade than were nonparticipants.

SMART conducts annual surveys of principals and teachers with SMART in their schools, and parents with children in the program. The 2015-16 results revealed:

- 87% of responding educators said SMART contributed significantly to reading motivation and engagement for their students
- 94% of responding parents indicated their children significantly benefited from the SMART program
- Over 95% of SMART students consistently showed improvement in measures of literacy development
- SMART focuses on cultivating reading motivation and enjoyment, and students consistently showed improvement in these measures:
  - 97 percent improved in expressing pleasure in reading or being read to
  - 94 percent improved in exhibiting confidence in reading skills
  - Over two-thirds (69 percent) of SMART students met or exceeded grade-level benchmarks in reading motivation
  - Three-quarters (75 percent) of SMART students improved towards reading motivation benchmarks

### 5 WHAT WE ARE ASKING

SMART is seeking a continuation of the \$500,000 funding allocation we've received in the past two legislative biennia to support SMART children and services across Oregon. An allocation of \$500,000 will support nearly 1,700 students in SMART. Investing in our organization means investing in a proven strategy helping to narrow the education gap in Oregon.

#### SMART ENDORSEMENTS:

SMART is endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse.

The Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy recognized SMART as one of five national K-12 intervention programs yielding positive results in well-designed, randomized, controlled trials.

In 2014, SMART received the American Prize in Literacy from the Library of Congress.

*"Many of my SMART students who did not reach benchmark in the fall have now met that goal. Those who haven't met have gained 30 to 50 more words in their fluency and their love of reading has blossomed. Their confidence has soared and they are having many more successes with academics and making friends."*

*-SMART Educator*

### CONTACT

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