Greetings, SMART friends and volunteers!

Thanks to your support and generosity, SMART has reached over 9,500 Oregon students this year with one-on-one reading support and more than 86,000 books to keep. Nearly 5,000 Site Coordinators and Readers have made this possible through their weekly volunteer commitment to encouraging students along the path to reading and learning.

I experience daily affirmations of the importance of SMART’s work, whether it’s spending Tuesday mornings reading with Johnny and Gloria at Rosa Parks Elementary, or a recent Portland City Club event where I was invited to speak to a group of high school students engaged in civic leadership – some of whom happened to be former SMART students.

Importantly, research tells us that SMART works: 60 percent of students in the program as first-graders are more likely to reach reading benchmarks in fifth grade than nonparticipants. Among SMART teachers and principals, over 90 percent tell us that their students benefit significantly from the program, and that SMART contributes positively to literacy outcomes at their schools.

In addition to exceeding our goal to reach 9,500 students, the 2014-15 year brought many positive developments:

- SMART received the American Prize in Literacy from the U.S. Library of Congress. This prestigious award served as validation of SMART's impact and a testament to the hard work of thousands of Oregonians who have made it possible.
- We launched two important initiatives that will continually transform and improve our organization and the service we provide to our students, volunteers and communities: Equity and Program Quality Initiatives.
- Ultimately, SMART exists to give children a greater chance at success. With the potential for social, economic and racial inequities to create barriers to success, we have a responsibility to ensure our organization is equitable and culturally inclusive. SMART’s Equity Initiative will influence every aspect of our organization, including how we recruit and train staff and volunteers; how we engage our communities; and how we work with our students. This will be an ongoing journey for SMART and, although it will be challenging and complex, I look forward to the work ahead, as it stands to make SMART even stronger and more effective.
- As you’ll read more about in this newsletter, we are keenly focused on qualitative growth, and launched a Program Quality Initiative to improve efficacy, evaluation, and training, among other outcomes.

I’m continually encouraged and awed by SMART’s upward trajectory, and you are directly to thank for that. We are grateful for your support in creating brighter futures for Oregon kids through reading.

Warmly,

Chris Otis
SMART Executive Director
SMART extends a hearty thank you and congratulations to our Board of Directors and event committee for another successful SMART Gala! Over 450 community leaders helped raise more than $490,000 to bring the joy of reading to Oregon children!

With appreciation to our lead Sponsors:

SPECIAL THANKS TO PRESENTING SPONSOR KNOWLEDGE UNIVERSE FOR GENEROUSLY SUPPORTING SMART’S EFFORTS TO SHARE THE MAGIC OF READING WITH OREGON CHILDREN.

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SMART PROGRAM QUALITY INITIATIVE

By Rachel Lawrence
SMART Program Director

Over the last four years, SMART has grown the number of students served statewide by nearly 40 percent, from 6,800 to over 9,500. In fulfilling our strategic goal of serving more children who most need us with the greatest impact possible, we now shift our focus from quantitative growth to qualitative growth. Our next growth phase is aimed at addressing program quality-related items that will prepare us for future success and ultimately lead to better outcomes for students.

As a first step, SMART worked with researchers from Portland State University to complete a statewide Process Study that solicited feedback from a variety of stakeholders, including volunteers and educators. Results from the Process Study create a clear picture of strengths, focus areas, and opportunities for improvement. We’re excited about these opportunities for program enhancements, which will result in strong program outcomes for all participants.

We have defined four primary components of the Program Quality Initiative to occur over the next three years:

1. Increase program efficacy by implementing more expansive internal accountability controls, and increased support to staff and volunteers. This will include increased and enhanced training, evaluation, accountability systems, and direct field supervision.

2. Continue in-depth program evaluation. We will deepen our understanding of the critical components of SMART and the ways in which we are improving children’s literacy. Issues like service dosage and differences in outcomes based on demographics are aspects of the SMART program we need to better understand.

3. Continue improvements to training for staff and volunteers. Training to be added will include topics like volunteer management, cultural responsiveness and inclusion, Common Core State Standards, and enhanced volunteer screening.

4. Revision of book selection. We will overhaul the book selection process and inventories in light of considerations around Common Core, equity and inclusion. We will establish a defined permanent book collection for each site to ensure children have access to high-quality books that mirror their own cultural identities and provide windows into other cultures.

OREGON LITERACY NONPROFITS AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES BAND TOGETHER TO BUILD SUCCESSFUL FUTURES FOR CHILDREN

SMART has joined with local literacy nonprofits to form the Early Literacy Success Alliance (ELSA). ELSA is a coalition of Oregon nonprofit partners and public libraries that support our state’s public schools in reaching literacy goals. Collectively, we provide coordinated, deliberate, culturally responsive early literacy strategies. SMART is joined in ELSA by six members:

- Black Parent Initiative
- The Children’s Book Bank
- Oregon Public Libraries
- Reach Out and Read Oregon
- Reading Results
- The Shadow Project

To learn more about ELSA, visit www.earlyliteracysuccess.org.

STORIES OF SMART

Cascade Locks: In February, SMART students and teachers at Cascade Locks Elementary made special Valentines for their volunteers. Some of the notes read: “You are really smart. I love SMART,” “You’re awesome. You make my life so much better,” and “You’re the best people ever.”

Milwaukie: A kindergarten teacher at Oak Grove Elementary provided feedback on how her students in SMART had progressed throughout the year:
- “Kevin began school in January with no previous experience in school. He has grown so much and loves being in SMART. Building relationships with adults in a one-on-one setting has been a gift to Kevin.”
- “Cameron loves SMART and hearing stories. I feel the experience has been so good for his confidence and his self-esteem has sky-rocketed.”

SMART has met the Better Business Bureau’s 20 rigorous standards for charity accountability, earning the BBB Charity Seal.

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