

237 schools throughout Oregon participating in SMART

Nonprofit strengthens volunteer core to focus on early childhood literacy

10 November 2008, Portland, Ore. –This month the SMART reading program opens in hundreds of schools statewide including 11 new schools added this year. Weekly one-on-one reading sessions take place October through May, serving thousands of kindergarten to third grade students throughout Oregon.

"We are delighted to report that SMART is partnering with 237 schools this year," said Terry Shanley, SMART CEO. "The more volunteers we have, the more kids we can serve, so please consider signing on as a site coordinator or reader with a SMART program near you."

SMART is provided at no fee to the school, but it does cost SMART an average of \$300 per child to deliver 28 weeks of one-on-one literacy support and 14 take-home books. Funds go toward training and managing nearly 10,000 SMART volunteers, with 95 percent of donations coming from individuals, businesses and foundations.

"It's a nominal cost, given the long-term effects it has on the lifelong welfare of Oregon's young citizens," said Shanley. "Take Alan, for example--a second grade SMART student in 1998 who scored at the bottom 10 percent for reading ability. This year, as a high school junior, he scored in the top 1 percent on his PSAT. His mother attributes his success to his teachers and to SMART. We are proud to be a partner to schools in this kind of achievement."

The cornerstone of SMART's three-year strategic plan is to expand services to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. This means first strengthening its current corps of volunteers, and making its reading program more flexible and relevant in light of the ever-changing education landscape.

"We know schools are under tremendous pressure to meet benchmarks, and we don't want to get in the way of that," Shanley said. "Integrating SMART into school curriculum means teachers can have more focused, small-group interaction with students, while SMART students receive the personal attention needed for individual growth."

Earlier this year the part-time site coordinator position at each SMART site reverted to being a volunteer position, reducing SMART's operating budget by almost \$1 million. SMART experienced challenges along the way, but in a short six months has transformed into a more sustainable, volunteer-rich organization.

"We knew we needed to step back, assess our strengths, and re-think SMART's delivery model," said Shanley. "Because of the shift, SMART is now capable of reaching more children in need of literacy support."

Read Alan's full story online, and get involved with SMART today, at www.getsmartoregon.org.

About SMART

SMART (Start Making A Reader Today) is a nonprofit that envisions an Oregon where every child can read and is empowered to succeed. We engage community volunteers to read one-on-one with K-3 children who need literacy support. Participating children also receive new books each month to keep and read with their families. Since 1992, thousands of SMART volunteers have been inspiring little readers through storytelling. Together with support from the community, we are building brighter futures for Oregonians big and small. Volunteer or donate today. Visit www.getsmartoregon.org or call 1-877-598-4633.

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