



Program Overview

Children are expected to read independently by third grade. Research shows that children who do not learn to read by third grade are more likely to struggle with reading as adults, drop out of school, and be less successfully employed.

SMART recruits thousands of volunteers to read one-on-one with K-3 children in need of literacy support. Every week for seven months, volunteers read aloud with kids to help them gain confidence in their reading ability. Educators agree this helps reinforce reading and language skills learned in the classroom. Research demonstrates that children who participated in SMART are 60 percent more likely to reach state reading benchmarks.

At its inception in 1992 SMART served 585 children in eight schools in Bend and Portland. The program is now offered statewide and serves thousands of children every year.

The long-term goals of SMART are to:

- Create enthusiastic readers who can read at or above grade level.
- Increase the number of children graduating from high school.
- Provide Oregon with a more productive and literate work force.
- Empower communities to help their children.

Program Concept

Focusing on kindergartners through third graders, SMART reaches children during a crucial time in their development, gets them on the right track for success, and helps them discover the joy of reading in a one-on-one setting.

The program concept is simple: pair an adult volunteer with a child for a 30-minute reading session. That child reads with two different volunteers each week for seven months, totaling 28 hours of individual volunteer attention. Volunteers model the act of reading, while supporting the child's efforts to read independently.

To encourage reading outside the classroom, SMART also gives each child 14 new, take-home books—two per month during the course of the program. Studies show that having a variety of reading materials in the home is a critical piece of a child's literacy development.

The intention of SMART is to provide a literacy experience that entices a child into books and reading, supports the child's efforts to learn to read and celebrates his/her successes. The SMART program compliments reading curriculum and instruction and is intended to build a life-long reader who enjoys reading and uses it as a tool for learning.

School Partnerships

SMART partners primarily with schools that have high populations of children from low income families. This includes schools identified as having a 40 percent or more federal free-or-reduced (FRL) lunch rate, or in communities with other indicators that demonstrate low income student populations. Schools are selected on the basis of community support, information collected from the Oregon Department of Education and interviews with superintendents, principals and teaching staff.

Positive Outcomes

SMART entices a child into books and reading, allowing him/her to:

- Choose books to read with a volunteer.
- Listen to stories read by a volunteer.
- Discuss the story and make observations.
- Take books home that are of interest.

SMART supports a child's efforts to learn to read by:

- Providing him/her with books at a comfortable reading level.
- Stretching him/her to try new words and new books.
- Moving at his/her pace of learning and comprehension.

SMART celebrates a child's successes by:

- Creating a non-threatening atmosphere.
- Providing one-on-one attention.
- Building a home library of books a child can read.

Characteristics of a Successful Program

- Creates enthusiastic readers by providing trained volunteers the opportunity to read with young children in public schools and sites that meet SMART guidelines, e.g. YMCA.
- Meets quality standards by providing a rich and welcoming environment for reading pairs to establish meaningful relationships.
- Involves communities in public education by inviting businesses, organizations and community leaders to participate in SMART.
- Works to include parents and families in the literacy education of their children.

Proven Effectiveness

An independent, longitudinal study conducted by the Eugene Research Institute (ERI) shows that children who participated in SMART are 60 percent more likely to reach state reading benchmarks. The study states, "Even the best instructional environments for first graders in a public school setting, with one expert teacher responsible for teaching 20-30 students, cannot match the educational intensity of a one-to-one interaction."

ERI tested SMART students and a comparison (control) group at the end of first and second grades while the SMART students participated in the program. SMART students achieved significantly higher scores when compared to the control group in Word Identification and Oral Reading Fluency—two measures that most closely reflect what SMART seeks to achieve.

ERI tested again at the end of third grade after the SMART students had been out of the program for one year and found that the students remained strong in the areas of fluency and comprehension. Additionally, Oregon State Benchmark testing in reading conducted at third and fifth grades showed that more SMART students achieved the benchmark than the control group. A complete copy of the ERI study is available on SMART's website or upon request.