



A pair of kids celebrate after picking up their bags of books at one of the SMART Reading locations. Photo: Julie Brimble.

SMART Reading provides books for kids

BY JULIE BRIMBLE

Because of COVID-19, SMART Reading programs throughout the state closed their sites early for spring break, and then the schools ended up closing for the rest of the school year. What this means is that children participating in our programs missed out on their give-away books in April and May.

SMART Reading staff is working with school staff to try and distribute these books to kids before the end of June. Here in the Rogue Valley, we had 36 sites participating this year in Jackson and Josephine Counties.

The Ford Family Foundation in Roseburg made emergency funding for books available to us, and because of their generosity we were able to purchase additional books for children in rural areas. Children at Ruch Community Outdoor School will be receiving these books soon—not just those who were

participating in SMART, but all children in Pre-K through third grade!

Looking forward to next year, it is our hope that schools and our SMART programs will continue as they always have. For that we will need volunteers at Ruch and Applegate Elementary Schools. Founded in 1992, SMART Reading is a children's literacy nonprofit that serves kids in Oregon's highest need schools with two ingredients critical for literacy and learning success: one-on-one reading time and access to books.

One thing we at SMART Reading are committed to is children's literacy, sharing books with children, and giving them books to keep as their own.

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Letters to the Editor wanted!

We know you have something to say, and we want to hear about it! Submit 200 words or less to bert@applegater.org. Provide your name, address, and contact info (only your name and location will be published). Deadline for the fall issue is August 1. (See more information on page 19.)

NEXT GENERATION | SCHOOL NEWS

A new way of doing school

BY JULIE BARRY

Until mid-March, every morning at Ruch Outdoor Community School, students, staff, parents, and community members greeted each other with smiles, hugs, high fives, and fellowship that set the tone for the day. We checked in face-to-face, shared stories, read facial expressions, performed silly skits, read poems, danced to music with no thought of “social distancing.” In fact, most of us had never heard of this term. Today, our morning community time is different.

Since schools closed Monday, March 16, our entire school experience has taken on a new, less personal face. Medford School District Anywhere Learning now helps our students learn from their homes. Relationships with peers and teachers are limited to the technology available, and their learning is guided and facilitated through weekly Learning Grids and Healthy Living Grids at the appropriate grade level. Teachers were working hard and discovering creative ways to engage and inspire students. Students were working hard and discovering creative ways to complete their assigned lessons. Parents were working hard to protect their families, sustain their employment, and perform teacher duties to make sure their students did not suffer too much loss of learning while we figured this pandemic out. This was not easy for anyone!

“I just wish that I could be quarantined with my child's fifth-grade teacher,” one Ruch School parent said.

“I miss my friends. I miss my teacher. I miss breakfast and lunch,” said a sixth-grade student.

“Just seeing my students on the computer screen is not enough,” a Ruch School teacher said. “I want to be in the same space, give them a hug, help them with their lessons. I miss being that kind of teacher.”

Each week, students receive a Learning Grid, which includes activities both online and offline for math, language arts, science, and social science. Students may choose activities in each content area according to their internet access and available resources. In addition, they also receive a “Healthy Living” Grid, with activities in physical education, art, music, and social and emotional health. Students can choose from a brief menu in each area. They have a week to complete their chosen activities and provide their teachers with evidence of learning through various digital tools that allow students to “turn in” their homework.

Teachers are responsible to make at least two contacts each week with every child through phone calls, texts, emails, Zoom meetings, etc. This mandate from the Oregon Department of Education makes sure that kids are safe and healthy and alerts teachers to students who need help with lessons on the grids and to families in need of food, hotspots for their devices, or anything else. Ruch Outdoor Community School is committed to making sure that our families and community members have what they need to successfully get through this challenging time.

How long schools will remain closed, how student learning will be affected, and what school will look like in the future are difficult questions to answer at this time. We just do not know. What we do know about our students, their families, local businesses in the Applegate Valley, and



Incoming Ruch Outdoor Community School kindergartner Teddy Bauer lends a hand—two, actually—at McKee Bridge, where free breakfast, lunch, and plants for “Victory Gardens” are offered to children.

Photo: Julie Barry.

supporters of Ruch School, is that together we are turning a very difficult situation into an opportunity to grow stronger and closer and are demonstrating to our youth what the face of empathy should look like.

With generous donations of money, time, effort, and compassion, this community has been able to provide our children with free lunches and breakfasts; seeds and vegetable starts for their own “Victory” Garden; Chromebooks; Wi-Fi hotspots; clothing; groceries for a week at a time; books; and more.

Please join me in thanking a few of our heroes and recognizing their efforts to take care of us in this time of need: Medford School District, Rooted in Hope, SODEXO Food Service, White Oak Farms, United Way, ACCESS, Friends of the Library, ROCS, Code 3 Coffee, A Greater Applegate, Indigo Bar and Grill, Ruch Gardens Nursery, Ruch Country Store, McKee Bridge Historical Society, ALLCARE, Harry and David, Theresa McCormick Center, and all the patrons who “rounded up” their purchases at Ruch Country Store.

I am very humbled to work, live, grow, and be an active member in this community. Here's to a time when we can stand face to face again, hug, share a handshake, share a meal in our favorite restaurant, go to school, and resume our morning community time all together.

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