

The Shadow Project

CHANGING LIVES FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING CHALLENGES

Strategic Plan 2025–2029



The Shadow Project envisions an education system that normalizes and celebrates learning differences, and supports every student to thrive in school.



“We’re building a generation of children who feel pride and strength, instead of shame.”

– Sharon Juenemann,
The Shadow Project
Executive Director

The Shadow Project

envisioning an education system where learning differences are understood, respected, and celebrated. We’re leading the effort to help schools transform and make neuroinclusive education the standard – so every student, regardless of how they learn, has the support they need to thrive.

Our schools and our communities are hungry for this change. Neurodiversity is everywhere. Our schools must evolve to support these capable kids, and we are ready to do the work to make it happen. The Shadow Project is poised to ignite that energy and power a transformation across our state.

Neuroinclusive Education

Educational practices that recognize and support the full range of learning and thinking styles.

Key Student Success Factors

- ▶ Feeling good about being at school
- ▶ Comfortable taking risks and naming emotions
- ▶ Persisting when things are difficult
- ▶ Feeling connected and supported
- ▶ Seeing the results of their efforts
- ▶ Reading regularly

Oregon’s 80,000+ students

in special education are being left behind by a one-size-fits-all system. Many have dyslexia, ADHD, autism, or face challenges like trauma or anxiety. They are creative thinkers, problem-solvers, and resilient learners. But our schools aren’t designed for how they learn. As a result, these capable students face lower graduation rates, higher levels of depression and anxiety, and fewer college and career opportunities.

The Shadow Project exists to change this reality. We’ve spent two decades building a bottom-up, evidence-based approach to neuroinclusive education, partnering with schools to adapt classrooms, equip teachers, and uplift students who learn differently.

Over the next four years, we will drive innovation in schools. We will ensure that thousands more students have the support they need to grow into adults who fully participate in our community and share their gifts to strengthen the vitality and prosperity of our region.

What Success Will Look Like 2025-2029

- ▶ **12,000+** new students experiencing neuroinclusive, affirming education
- ▶ **100+** schools integrating neuroinclusive practices
- ▶ **1,000+** teachers equipped and energized to meet diverse student needs
- ▶ Partner schools become statewide models for success
- ▶ Greater public understanding and support for neurodivergent youth



Strategic Priorities

“ I’m proud of being part of The Shadow Program. I feel like I’m not even the same person. When I look at a hard book I think ‘let’s read!’”

– 6th Grade Student, Reading Mentors



PRIORITY 1

Transformative Neuroinclusive Education

We aim to spread the transformative impact of neuroinclusive educational practices by deepening our reach within current partner schools, adapting program relevance and responsiveness to the ever-evolving needs of students and teachers, and testing program expansion in new communities.

PRIORITY 2

Abundant Community Support

We aim to cultivate abundant community support for the potential of students with learning differences. We will harness the power of collective action by inspiring community members to invest their time, talent, energy, and capital in ways that raise awareness of effective, inclusive, and neurodiversity-affirming education.

PRIORITY 3

Sustainable Long Term Impact

We aim to sustain long-term impact for youth with diverse learning styles by strengthening our organizational capacity and investing in sustainable, intentional, and equity-centered growth.

Our Goals

GOAL 1

Help More Students Build Confidence and Motivation to Learn and Achieve

We will increase by 20% the number of students served by our Goal Setting Program, within existing partner districts.

STRATEGIES

- Partner with at least two educators at each school to increase student access and deepen school-wide impact.
- Adapt program to support students with learning challenges outside of special education, and enroll new educators such as reading specialists, attendance coaches, and mental health specialists.
- Expand summer programming with community partners, like literacy and disability service nonprofits, so kids can continue building skills year-round.

Goal Setting Program

Special education teachers are equipped with a structured system that sets high expectations, and builds confidence by engaging students in setting and meeting academic and social goals.

When engaged with our programs:

▶ **77%** of students are motivated to learn and focus in class.

▶ **72%** of students keep trying when learning/school is hard.



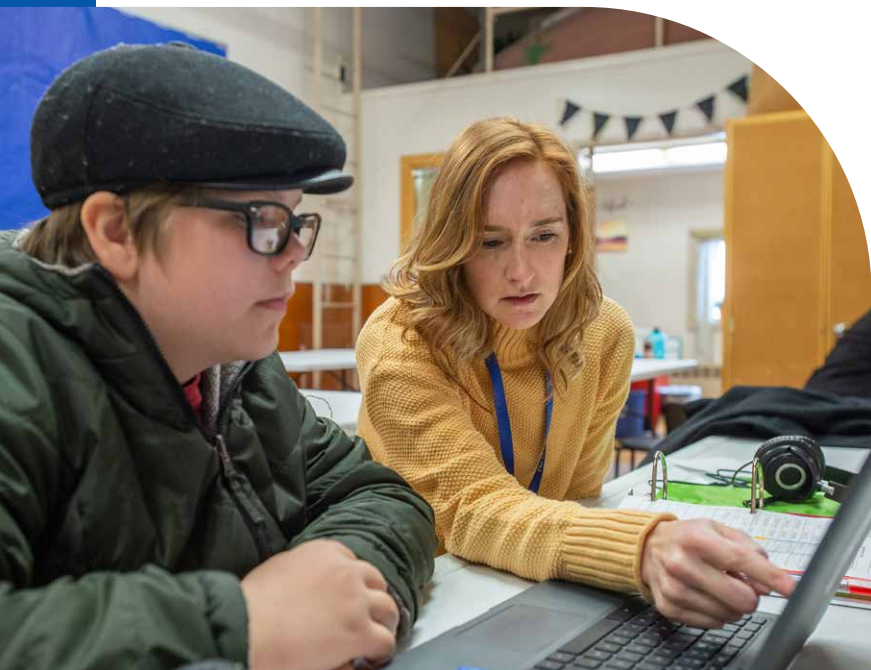
“ Students are celebrated for being who they are while still achieving their goals. It’s not something they always get in other classes.

– Partner Educator, Goal Setting

GOAL 2

Grow 1,000+ Enthusiastic Readers

We will help 1,000+ students become enthusiastic regular readers by increasing access to specialized reading technology, training teachers to integrate literacy technology in the classrooms, and providing mentors to support both.



“There is a student that struggled with attending classes. After [setting goals], the student was able to find things that would help him attend more often and now he is almost always attending classes.”

– School Partner Educator

STRATEGIES

- Increase teacher awareness and use of inclusive reading tools, training 250 teachers by 2029.
- Formalize teacher training and engagement model to ensure broad and equitable student access to Learning Ally and other inclusive literacy tools within partner schools.
- Grow staff and volunteer capacity to mentor students, and normalize use of reading technology in the classrooms.
- Build partnerships with local and regional literacy organizations to raise awareness and usage of inclusive reading tools.

Reading Mentors Program

Brings together assistive reading technology and trained mentors to set reading goals, and celebrate progress with struggling readers who are up to three years behind their peers.

▶ **72%** of mentored students read on their own regularly.

“The SuperSensory Space gave students predictable support. Our staff benefited immensely from the training.”

– Reynolds School District Administrator



GOAL 3

Make Sensory-Friendly Spaces Standard in Schools

We will work to make proactive, sensory-supportive spaces a regular part of every school – so students’ behavior needs are met with support and skill-building, not isolation or punishment.



SuperSensory Spaces Program

This structured social-emotional skills program equips students to cope with stress and master life-long skills of calm and focus, so they can fully engage in learning.

STRATEGIES

- Train 800 school staff on the benefits and effective use of SuperSensory Spaces.
- Improve program materials and teacher training to make the program easy for schools to sustain year-to-year.
- Offer consulting and support to help schools use existing sensory equipment more intentionally and effectively.
- Share our unique model broadly through conferences, community events, and media.

▶ **90%** of teachers say SuperSensory Spaces help students feel like they belong.

▶ **73%** of students have strong and trusting relationships with adults.



“The Shadow Project is giving the kids that are most often overlooked and underserved a huge advantage in schools to feel seen and a part of the community.”

– Partner Educator, Goal Setting

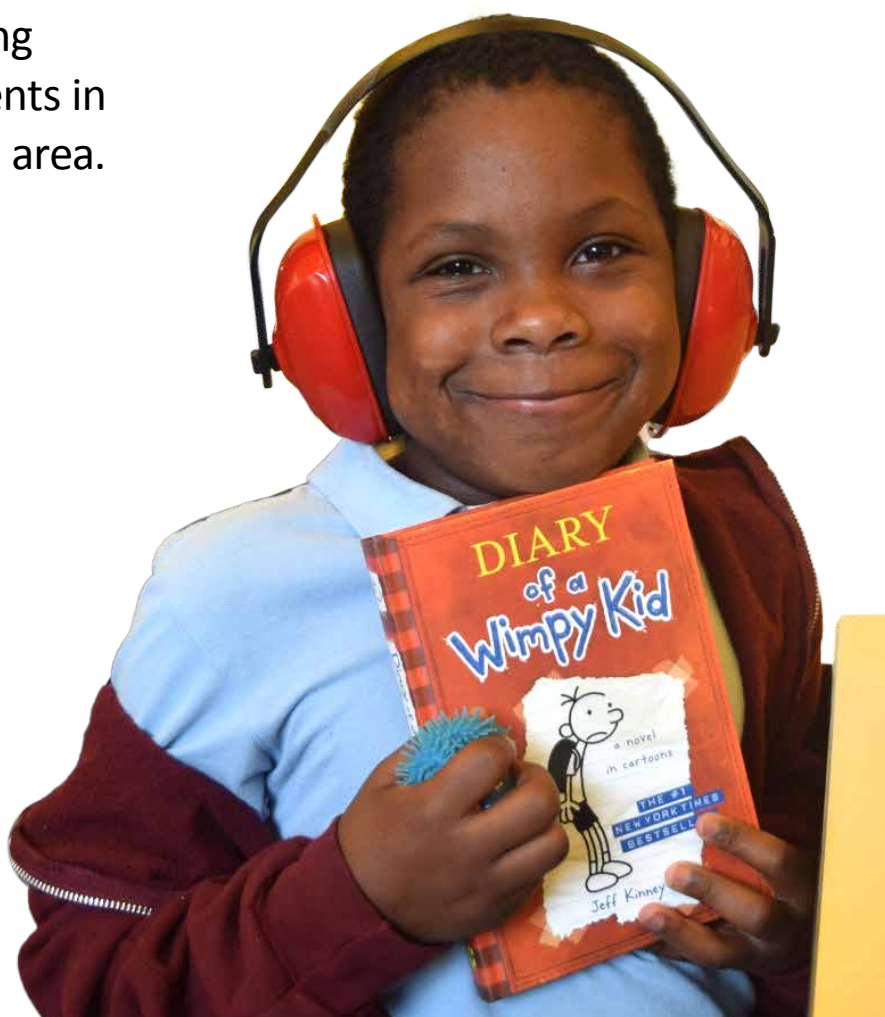
GOAL 4

Expand Our Reach Beyond Portland

We will lay the groundwork to bring our Goal Setting program to students in communities outside the Portland area.

STRATEGIES

- Define what makes a new community ready and right for our work.
- Identify best practices for expansion as informed by our pilot with the Boys and Girls Club of Bend – a test location to help us evaluate our capacity for program delivery outside the Portland metro area.



GOAL 5

Strengthen and Grow What Works

We will evolve our evaluation methods to continuously improve our programs, ensure that they meet the needs of our communities, are poised for sustainable growth, and make a lasting impact.

STRATEGIES

- Learn if – and how – results from the SuperSensory Spaces and Reading Mentors programs differ for students based on race, gender, income, or community services.
- Identify which parts of each Shadow Project program are most important for achieving strong results.
- Launch new methods to share impact with schools and families, and get community input on program design and delivery.



“More of my students than ever are experiencing school refusal ... Students in the Goal Setting program are typically much more likely to attend sessions, and therefore, make progress due to consistency.”

– Partner Educator, Portland Public Schools

“Bodies looked more relaxed, kids were much calmer when it was time to head back [to class].”

— Partner Educator,
SuperSensory Spaces



GOAL 7

Partner with Supporters to Sustain and Grow Our Mission

We will create a more reliable and diverse funding base to ensure every child with learning differences has the chance to succeed – now and in the future.

STRATEGIES

- Grow individual giving by building lasting relationships with supporters, including those who make major charitable investments.
- Increase multiyear commitments from foundations and major donors.
- Launch new donor programs, including planned giving and legacy opportunities.
- Seek public funding and government partnerships to scale our work.



GOAL 6

Strengthen Our Brand and Message to Reach More People

We will ensure our branding and messaging clearly reflect who we are, what we do, and why it matters, so we can deepen our understanding of our mission, grow awareness, and inspire lasting support.

STRATEGIES

- Conduct research to understand how our brand is perceived by different audiences.
- Create messaging that inspires action and reflects the voices of our community.
- Use what we learn to launch a communications strategy that grows our visibility and impact.



“Before Reading Mentors, I didn’t like [school] ... but then when I started to read the book, it was actually really fun. I’m proud of myself ...”

— Tanis, mentored student

“I used to just say, ‘oh, I can’t read.’ Now I say, ‘I can’t read, yet!’ Because I’m slowly improving.”

– Scarlett, mentored student



GOAL 8

Build a Stronger, More Inclusive Team

We will grow and support a diverse, inclusive team that reflects our students and communities – because a healthy, mission-driven staff is key to student success.

STRATEGIES

- Advance accessibility and inclusivity of our office spaces and public events.
- Ensure our compensation and staffing plans promote equity, support employee wellness, and help retain highly capable staff.
- Strengthen operations and technology systems to support long-term growth.

89% of teachers say The Shadow Project helps them create caring and supportive classrooms.

93% of teachers say The Shadow Project helps motivate them to stay in their jobs.



GOAL 9

Strengthen Our Board to Lead Boldly

A well-supported and engaged board will help us grow our impact, raise critical funds, and tell our story more powerfully.

STRATEGIES

- Recruit a diverse board with expertise in education, fundraising, and nonprofit governance.
- Train and support board members to be effective advocates and ambassadors.
- Create leadership pipelines and succession plans.
- Launch new board committees to guide strategy and communications.
- Improve systems for board-staff collaboration and timely decision-making.

“The SuperSensory Space was monumental for the whole school. Kids learned how to name their feelings, and follow up with a solution they felt ownership over.”

– Partner Educator, Centennial School District



“My kids always feel really excited to come and work with me. They’ve gotten much better about making mistakes and not letting that derail them.”

— School Partner Educator



Join us to create an inclusive future for Oregon's kids.

The Shadow Project is leading a statewide movement to transform education for students with learning differences. But we can't do it alone. Here's how you can help:

- **PARTNER WITH US:** Bring our programs to your school or district.
- **ADVOCATE:** Share our work and push for inclusive policy change.
- **DONATE:** Invest in programs that make a lasting difference.
shadow-project.org/give



Key Challenges

We recognize key challenges in our operating environment, including:

- Teacher and staffing shortages
- Government funding instability
- Increased student mental health needs



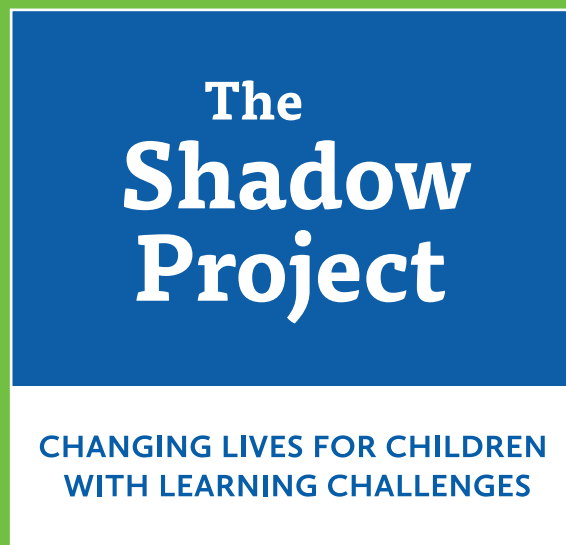
To address these, The Shadow Project will:

- Invest in staff and educator support strategies
- Diversify funding and build reserves
- Adapt programming to meet emerging school needs



Together, we can build a generation of children who feel pride and strength, not shame.

Acknowledgments This plan was created through the contributions of more than 20 community partners, including students, families, educators, staff, and board members. Thank you for your time, insight, and commitment to making Oregon's schools more inclusive for all learners.



The mission of The Shadow Project is to make school more accessible and engaging for children with disabilities, so they can achieve their full potential.

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