

Case Study 4

Parkrose High School

Portland, Oregon

Student Population: 1,100

Demographics:

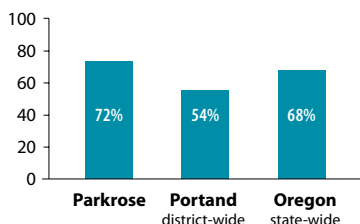
- ▶ 50% Caucasian
- ▶ 18% Asian/Pacific Islander
- ▶ 16% African American
- ▶ 14% Hispanic
- ▶ 2% Native American
- ▶ 12% English Language Learners
- ▶ 61% Free and Reduced Lunch
- ▶ School's mobility rate hovers around 50%
- ▶ 85% of students in SUN programs exhibit one or more academic risk factors

SUN recruits and maintains an ethnically diverse group of staff and partners that reflects the school's diversity—staff speak at least 8 languages other than English.

<http://hs.parkrose.k12.or.us/>

SELECTED RESULTS

Percent of Students Graduating in 2008



www.communityschools.org

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BACKGROUND

When Parkrose High School was rebuilt 12 years ago, it was designed as a community center. Classrooms were modernized and the school received many special use rooms, fully equipped for student and community programming (e.g., arts and media classrooms, a large auditorium, and a pool).

After school and on the weekends, more than half of Parkrose's 1,100 high school students—and hundreds of community adults—are participating in community school programs. As a result, test scores, attendance, and behavior have all improved. The supports and resources making this achievement possible are coordinated by the City of Portland and Multnomah County's Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative and the school's lead agency, Portland Parks and Recreation.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES: Youth Leadership and Academic Enrichment

While SUN Community School (SUN CS) programs and services at Parkrose are open to anyone in the neighborhood, outreach is targeted at minority students and those at risk of academic failure. SUN CS has brought together the resources of more than 32 community agencies, 12 business partners, and hundreds of volunteers to connect Parkrose students and families with the services they need.

Like many community schools, extended-day activities at Parkrose are often student-driven. SUN CS has been particularly effective in creating an environment that fosters youth leadership. When a group of interested students request to start a new program, SUN CS helps find the instructors or agencies to provide support. Culturally specific student groups at Parkrose include M.E.Ch.A (Latino Leadership), N.A.Y.A. (Native American Leadership), the Black Student Union, and a new Pan-Asian Leadership group. Students plan fund raisers and host community-wide cultural celebrations. Trevor Todd, SUN CS site manager for Parkrose, reflects, "This is one of the most important things we've been able to accomplish



at Parkrose. We've given non-traditional kids a voice and an opportunity for leadership."

Parkrose's programs also include culturally specific academic support, mentoring, and college preparation. Oregon Leadership Institute, for example, provides a Latino-specific college readiness and mentorship program. House of Umoja provides a youth gang support group for African-American boys. This group complements other efforts at Parkrose to engage youth at risk of gang involvement through leadership development, constructive conflict resolution, and opportunities for service projects.

SUN CS hires high school students throughout the year to gain career skills and leadership opportunities. Many of these youth are hired during the summer to work with elementary school students as camp coaches and summer school teachers' assistants. Summer programming for high school students focuses on academic, professional, and life-skills activities (e.g. Girls Gateway to Engineering, Event Management Internships, Baristas/Coffee Shop Training, Red Cross Training, and computer courses).

Summer programs also include targeted academic supports. Mt. Hood Community College, for instance, teaches credit-recovery classes at Parkrose. Incoming 9th grade students can participate in Jump Start, a reading and study skills course that helps prepare them for high school achievement. Several dozen middle and high school students attend an intensive summer course for English language learners.

A community advisory board (school staff, parents, students, and partner agency representatives) helps to coordinate, integrate, and manage the many resources at Parkrose. SUN CS maintains daily communication with parents and hosts school-wide parent meetings and activities. The school extends educational opportunities to parents as well, including ESL classes, Home Buyers Workshops, computer courses, and Latino Parent Nights. A school-based health clinic also offers comprehensive services to students and their families.

PARTNERSHIPS: Focus on College Preparation

The College and Career Center at Parkrose is staffed by a full-time, certified counselor who works with students individually and inside classrooms to connect them to the experiences or next steps they need. Through the Center's ASPIRE Program, volunteer

mentors from the community are trained to work one-on-one with youth and help them navigate their way successfully through high school and beyond. A local community college sends volunteers to Parkrose to assist seniors through the college application process. The Center's web site provides ongoing college and career-related resources and opportunities for students and parents. The site's "Alumni Voices" links students to blogs from members of the Parkrose Class of 2008 who were invited to keep an online diary about their college experiences.

LEADERSHIP

Principal Roy Reynolds reflects, "SUN CS provides such a wide variety of services; when I need support for specific subgroups [of students], it's easy for me to connect to the right agency who has those resources. In a traditional high school, it's hard to look outside the school walls. But the whole idea of working outside our silos—that's something that's pretty ingrained here. We figure out what we need and then have to look at our budget and what partners are available so we can provide the best, most efficient services for our kids."

The principal and SUN Community School site manager have worked closely together to integrate these initiatives into a well-coordinated approach to raising student achievement. "I'm a structure guy. But the bottom line is that it's not just what the structure is, but what happens inside the classroom," concludes Reynolds.

RESULTS

In the last several years, Parkrose has seen its dropout rate fall from 8 percent to as low as 2 percent in 2006. Of the 566 students regularly participating in SUN CS activities in 2007-08, 79 percent increased benchmarks in reading and 69 percent increased benchmarks in math. The average daily attendance of SUN CS students is 91 percent. According to teachers, of the students who regularly attended SUN CS activities: 81 percent improved getting homework in on time, 90 percent had a more positive attitude toward school, 81 percent improved classroom participation, and 78 percent improved on finding alternative resolutions to problems. Under Oregon's new graduation formula, 72 percent of Parkrose's 2008 seniors graduated, compared to Portland Public Schools' district-wide rate of 54 percent and the state-wide rate of 68 percent. ❖