

## **Opportunity YOU at Five Oaks Middle School**

### **By Mally Wyld**

Opportunity YOU was initially proposed by Eric McGuire, a 22-year veteran Social Studies teacher at Southridge High School in Beaverton. The structure and implementation of the program was done by a larger committee of teachers and Shirley Brock, Principal at Five Oaks. Over the past 10 years he has begun to focus on the widening achievement gap within our education system, particularly noticing homework as an area of inequity where those without resources fall farther behind. Opportunity YOU is a homework club plus, started this past fall at Five Oaks Middle School, the highest poverty impacted middle school in Beaverton School District to attempt to reverse the achievement gap by creating opportunities for Five Oaks students.

Opportunity YOU is structured to provide a safe and supportive setting for students to do homework, and access resources that may not be available at home. The other half of the program gives kids exposure to fun and productive experiences outside of the school day. Career Labs, taught by SPARCS (Someone proficient and really cool) classes, and restorative justice circles, modeled from the citizen school model developed in Boston by Eric Schwarz. The SPARC classes offer an opportunity for specialized courses and community member involvement. The restorative justice circles are a proactive forum for students and teachers to talk about what's going on, advocate for themselves, and create shared identity and community through conversation. Any behavioral issues are addressed through this process that asks students to acknowledge how their actions affect everyone around them, although luckily so far there haven't been any major issues.

The program has been going well for its first year, growing by 30 students after winter break. Eric finds it rewarding to see students there every day doing their homework and his belief that every day makes a difference gives him the passion to carry on. Being able to take on an issue he feels passionate about in the way he views most effective is also very fulfilling for him. The program is going very successfully, but Eric feels like he's still working out some of the kinks of Opportunity YOU. One of his goals for the second half of the year is to attract resources and partnerships to the program in order to be able to pay SPARCs and offer more STEM experiences. There are also details that were missed along the programs start that they've had to smooth out along the way, but most of these kinks have been worked out. Eric is currently trying to find a balance between making sure everyone is happy, streamlining the program, and his own work and home life. Right now, he's constantly asking himself if the students will show the growth he's expecting.

One key factor to student success is time and there's a core group that comes every day, but not all the kids take it seriously and attendance isn't mandatory, with the student list changing daily depending on other club involvement. Another way he is working to achieve student engagement is having a group of high school students come in to help with math. So far the community reaction has been positive, parents are happy there kids are somewhere safe and productive and Eric is working with Five Oaks teachers to make sure the program is in line with curriculum. Several teachers even work in the program, running restorative justice circles and serving as homework resources.

It's been a big first couple months for Opportunity YOU and Eric, both newcomers to Five Oaks and the world of afterschool. They're both doing well though, Eric is beginning to make connections both at the school and with other programs and providers and the program's growth speaks for itself. We at OregonASK are excited to watch Opportunity YOU continue to develop and offer equitable opportunity