

Gresham High's Credit Recovery Program offers courses required for graduation

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By Special to The Oregonian



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Teacher Mark Jacobsen goes over Jose Sanchez's homework in the after-school geometry class of Gresham High's Credit Recovery Program. The program is part of the SUN Community School.

Gresham High School's dismissal bell rang half an hour ago, but at 3 p.m., 27 students file into a classroom and pull out their geometry books. Ali Stewart, a sophomore, sits near the front. She failed the class in the fall, but has the opportunity to take it again.

"It's definitely easier the second time around," the 16-year-old said.

Stewart and her classmates are participating in Gresham High School's Credit Recovery Program, available because of a **21st Century Community Learning Center** grant that the **Gresham-Barlow School District** received in 2009. Administered by the **Oregon Department of Education**, the federal grant supports enrichment programs that take place during non-school hours.

Gresham High will receive \$500,000 each year for the first three years of the five-year grant, and less the last two years to encourage the district to find local funding.

The Credit Recovery Program is run as part of the **SUN Community School**, and is a partnership of the high school, **Metropolitan Family Services** and **Open Meadow's Step Up Program**.

Throughout the school year, nine courses required for graduation are offered after school, including English, math, science and social studies. Students pay \$25 for a full semester of credit, which is taught in nine weeks. Those who receive free or reduced-price lunch take the classes for free.

Vice Principal Ayesha Freeman, who oversees the Credit Recovery Program, said that in the past, students who failed a class could sign up for summer school at the rate of \$100 for a half credit, or retake the course during the day at the high school.

"In a time of budget reductions, we've unfortunately had to make reductions in our staffing, so we have crowded classes. Now we have roughly 600 kids taking credit recovery after school. Most of our (daytime) classes are still 30 to 38 students, but it would be worse without the after-school program," Freeman said.

Math teacher Mark Jacobsen previously taught online credit recovery classes, but said the current program is much more

successful.

"The relationship (between students and teacher) is key," Jacobsen said in explaining why students do better in a real, rather than a virtual, class. "This is a unique opportunity to help these kids. One of the most rewarding parts of my job is to help the kids who are really credit deficient."

Jacobsen said 84 percent of the students who enroll in his after-school geometry and algebra classes complete them and earn their credits.



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Gresham High School students Ryan Baisden (left), Ali Stewart and Brenna Newman prepare for their after-school geometry class, part of the school's Credit Recovery Program.

In addition to the Credit Recovery Program, Gresham High's SUN Community School offers a free meal to kids after school four days a week, as well as a host of enrichment classes ranging from guitar to baking and break dancing.

Gresham SUN coordinator Linda Kue helps organize programs for parents, including computer and ESL classes, an Eastern European Family Night and a Latino Parent group.

Michael Lindblad has taught history at Gresham High for 11 years. For him, the more personalized attention he's able to give his after-school students makes all the difference.

"I wholeheartedly believe in what this program stands for," Lindblad said. "We give kids a meal, we teach them,

and then we offer them enrichment classes afterward. These kids are really intelligent, but they're failing because they're not attending school or they're lacking a relationship with someone in the building."

Through the Credit Recovery Program, more teachers are able to build those relationships, benefiting students like Stewart.

Stewart said the first time she took geometry, she couldn't get her homework done because there was too much going on at home. Now, with the help of a dedicated teacher and an after-school homework club, she's on track to get the credit she needs.

--Anne Laufé, Special to The Oregonian