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GUEST OPINION

SUN programs lead to educational success

BY KENAN GINSBERG
, Sep 21, 2007 (2 Reader comments)

This past week students across the nation returned to school. I work in a middle school and as one might expect, I met the challenge with a combination of excitement and nerves. Something interesting happened this year; within just a few days a number of students were mad at me. I was thrilled.

I am a social worker, and I have the pleasure of running the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (or SUN) extended day program at HB Lee Middle School (in the Reynolds School District). Funded through a partnership between Multnomah County, local school districts and a contracted lead agency, SUN programs are now offered in more than 60 schools throughout Multnomah County.

SUN in East County is a program of Metropolitan Family Service. It offers kids a safe place to spend after-school hours and participate in an array of academic and recreational activities. Every SUN program hosts a number of "clubs" designed to support the wonderful variety of cultures like those we have at HB Lee. The Homework Club that helps kids complete homework, a soccer club, a club that teaches Internet Web design, a comic book design club and chess and jewelry making are all part of the offerings, but you get the idea.

After school programs like the SUN are an incredible resource for kids and families. Kids who are strongly and safely supervised in the after-school hours are less likely to be the victims of crime or use drugs and



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alcohol. It is during this same time that parents are most often working and kids can get into the most trouble.

SUN programs give students a safe and exciting alternative to the lures of problem behaviors like gangs, drugs and alcohol. SUN provides a connection to the school and positive adult and peer relationships that are the foundation of an effective learning environment. SUN programs provide an incentive for students to attend school and to achieve academically. With academic guidance and personal support, kids thrive. They not only develop key resiliency skills, through exposure to the arts, cultural activities, sports and civic leadership, but they develop a broader understanding of their community and the world we live in.

So why were the kids at HB Lee mad at me, if the SUN programs are so great? They are mad because they wanted SUN to start now! We need to wait a few weeks to register everyone and manage all the schedules. Kids who are eager to get to school, to stay longer after school – these are good problems to have. These are the conditions that promote student learning, keep kids safe and away from drugs and alcohol.

Keep all our children safe, engaged in school and academically successful. Participate in your school's Open House, visit a SUN extended day program by calling your school and volunteering. To keep our community drug and alcohol free, be a part of the Greater Gresham Area Prevention Partnership – SUN is. Go to <http://www.ggapp.org/> for more information.

Kenan Ginsberg is the SUN coordinator at HB Lee Middle School.

