

Community Description

The Oakridge School District is located in the center of the Cascade Mountains, 45 minutes east of the Eugene-Springfield area. The district serves the Oakridge-Westfir communities with a population of approximately 5,000. The school district is comprised of three schools - Oakridge Elementary School, Westridge Middle School and Oakridge High School. The district enrollment is approximately 750 with 250 students in grades K-4, 250 students in grades 5-8 and 250 students in grades 9-12.

While Oakridge and Westfir are located in one of the most pristine and beautiful areas of Oregon, the local economy has been in a downturn for several years. When the two lumber mills closed down, many people were forced to relocate or take on government assistance. Our district currently has approximately 65% of students on free or reduced lunch. With continued declining enrollment in our schools, economic recovery is far from certain. Until our community can bring family wage jobs home, Oakridge and Westfir will continue to decline.

School and District Description - Mission Statement

“It is the mission of the Oakridge schools to educate all students so that they may achieve their full potential as competent, productive citizens of our communities.

In the Oakridge schools, learning nurtures the mind and body of all engaged. By building an enriching environment focused on knowledge, skills and attitudes, students will emerge as competent, productive citizens. Students, district personnel, parents and members of our community will be given the opportunity to work together in academic, extra-curricular and technological activities to promote an understanding of the needs and diversity of our community, country and world. In fulfilling this challenge we are committed to - Nurturing all children...for productive global citizenship.”

Source: Oakridge School District Teacher Handbook, 2002.

To address the many different needs of our students, our district has instituted specific programs to assist academic and social achievement. A notable example is at our elementary and middle school. Every day, each student is involved in an intensive ninety minute reading block. Many students are reading below grade level and are grouped according to their reading abilities. While this may help the students while in their reading blocks, the resulting class schedule affects most other classes as well, including my own.

Class Description

Technology and Media class meets twice a week and every other Friday. The students attend PE class on opposite days. Three classes make up the fifth grade and unlike sixth grade, they are NOT grouped according reading ability when they come to my class. This allows for a more heterogeneous group of students that display a variety of skill levels. Most of the students in this class are what we call the "Band Kids." Much of our afternoon scheduling is dependent on who is in band because we share the band teacher with the high school. One undesired problem that occurs is when a student decides to drop out of band. The end result is that their afternoon schedule is completely changed and the ex-band student must then be placed in tech class the period before which is overflowing in terms of numbers. It is a very rigid and inflexible system that is driven by the fact that more and more programs are being cut and students are having less in the way of class choices.

Most of the students in this class are reading at or above their grade level. Specifically, nine students are significantly above grade level. I believe that is a direct result of their involvement in the band program. Music instruction reinforces key elements of literacy including phonemic awareness, spelling patterns, story and sequence and vocabulary (Fisher). Studies correlating musical instruction to reading ability have shown that students who have had music training performed significantly better on reading tests (Nierman). In my classroom, this research plays out on a consistent basis. In general, the top performing students are students who are not only in band but have had music instruction for most of their lives. If students can be comfortable with reading and comprehension, the task at hand becomes more meaningful and less frustrating. Because this class is full of proficient readers, the students are generally receptive to new units of instruction. They readily absorb new information and get less frustrated with the given reading material than students with lower reading abilities.

References

Fisher, Douglas. "The Intersection between Music and Early Literacy Instruction: Listening to Literacy!." Reading Improvement Fall 2001 : 10. ERIC. EBSCO Host. May 28, 2002 <<http://ehostvgw1.epnet.com/ehost1.asp?>>

Nierman, Glenn. Does Music Instruction Affect Reading Development?. National Association for Music Education. May 30, 2002
<http://www.menc.org/networks/genmus/litarticles.html>.

Student Description

AGR = Above Grade Level in Reading

Name	Sex	Notes	Comments
AA	F	IEP	IEP for Reading, Math and Written Language. Friendly and shy, well liked and works reasonably well considering her diagnosed learning disability.
MB	M	AGR	Reading Level: 10+. Very bright when he wants to be but sometimes plays dumb to be a class clown.
PC	M	AGR	Reading Level: 9+. Incredibly astute and creative in thinking. Does not listen very well because he likes to talk... a lot.
KC	F	AGR	Reading Level: 9+. Shy, quiet, diligent worker. Goes the extra mile to make her work shine.
KH	M	IEP, Autistic	IEP for Reading, Math and Written Language. Not a lot of emotion and passion about work. Very high functioning and detail orientated.
JH	M		Probably the most academically average boy in the 5 th grade. Very mature socially. Sympathetic to others.
HH	F	AGR	Reading Level: 7+. Inquisitive mind. Questions many things and has stumped myself on several occasions.
EH	F		Quiet but with a volatile attitude at times. She switched classes several months ago to break up a pack of girls. Much improvement since. Very smart and well liked by her peers.
VJ	F	AGR	Reading Level: 9+. Quiet, shy, diligent worker. Avid reader and writer.
CJ	F	AGR	Reading Level: 9+. One of the sharpest and alert students I have had. She knows it and is very precocious. Sometimes feels she is above class and school rules.
CK	F	AGR	Reading Level: 8+. Likes to read. Well rounded and raised. Model student.
KM	F		Quiet and gets frustrated at times because she doesn't like to ask questions. I have to make a point to visit her at her computer to make sure she stays on task and feels productive.

Name	Sex	Notes	Comments
SM	F		Resourceful. Not afraid to ask any question if she doesn't understand. Knows how to find what she is looking for.
MN	F		Tends to want attention from peers. Very loud talker that is distracting at times. Very smart but gets easily frustrated and animated if she doesn't understand.
AR	F	AGR	Reading Level: 9+. Shy and quiet but slowly coming out of the shell. Not a big reader for leisure but accomplishes her projects very well.
JS	M		Below grade level in reading. Tries hard to complete tasks and generally does good work.
SN	F		Smart and wants to please people. A good helper to the rest of the class, SN applies her knowledge by helping others.
AS	M		Doesn't like school very much. Thinks it is all boring and irrelevant. A challenge to keep on task
SY	M	AGR	Reading Level: 8+. A thinker, SY will ask out in left field questions that don't seem to relate to the subject at hand. However, after speaking with him, I have concluded that many times he is applying his newly learned knowledge to something meaningful and interesting to him.