

# MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SMALL AND MID-SIZED CITIES



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## Work with Schools to Engage Students in City Construction Projects

*Oregon City, Oregon (population 31,859) – Oregon City High School Construction Program*

Since 2003, Oregon City High School has offered an advanced construction class that works on projects throughout the city – particularly at local parks – during class time, after school and on weekends. Students have helped build or refurbish city park bridges and walkways, volleyball courts, stairs at the municipal pool, and an outdoor event center.

The program teaches students new skills and helps them give back to the community as they participate in every stage of the construction process. A teacher guides them in planning the concept and design, creating models of the proposed project, developing a business plan, and leading onsite implementation in partnership with contractors. In addition to obtaining in-kind donations from local architects and engineers, students apply for grant funds to pay for materials and conduct presentations to potential donors, city staff and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. Project ideas originate from both the parks department and students, who choose one major project to complete each year.

The students have completed a number of parks projects that the city might not otherwise have had the funds and capacity to support. Initially, these were small projects such as birdboxes and bench covers, but over the years projects have become increasingly sophisticated, requiring students to seek planning



and building permits. Recently, students helped design and build a large picnic shelter with built-in utilities that has an estimated value of more than \$200,000. Last year, students built a restroom and concession building at a local park.

The city's parks manager works closely with the high school to provide significant staff support and oversight for each project. Councilmembers have also demonstrated support, and a city commission that oversees a community enhancement grant process has provided some of the construction program's funding in recent years. Among the results reported by the city are more people using the parks and a decline in vandalism, not to mention the valuable, practical work experience that students gain from participating. In 2008, the Oregon City High School Construction Program and the teacher who leads it received a Voluntary Service Award from the Oregon Recreation and Park Association.

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