

Over the past four years USACE and Kalapuya High School have been partnering to develop a working agreement that will help USACE meet restoration goals and provide KHS students with relevant, real world environmental science curriculum. KHS serves a diverse population of students who have typically not been successful in traditional educational settings. Partnerships such as this help us achieve three primary goals. First, we are able to keep kids in school and on pace for graduation. In addition, students get valuable work experience that they can put on a resume. Finally, kids have the opportunity to develop a stewardship ethic while restoring local natural areas.

Students at Kalapuya face significant hurdles when it comes to graduating high school. Besides generational poverty, family issues and the challenges associated with being the first in a family to graduate, students are generally credit deficient when they arrive as sophomores. As if these realities were not challenging enough, Common Core graduation requirements have increased considerably over the past few years. Despite these challenges, KHS has continued to increase graduation rates. The school's success has been unique to the point that it has garnered media attention several times. Recent stories in the Register Guard, KEZI, and KVAL have documented KHS and Bethel for their ability to buck the tide by increasing graduation rates while districts around the state are seeing declines. Kalapuya has played a central role in fueling these positive trends by reducing dropout rates in the district.

Partnerships such as the one with USACE help us achieve our goals because kids see the work as relevant. They buy into the idea of creating "Legacy Projects" in their local community. They are able to see a future where they can bring their families back to an area they helped restore. They see how the work they complete and skills they acquire through field studies can lead to summer jobs with the Kalapuya Conservation Corps. Perhaps most importantly, teachers are able to take the experiences students have in the field and leverage them in the classroom. Specifically, Common Core writing standards are one of the biggest challenges our students face. When we have them write about experiences they have had in the field we find that their scores consistently exceed those they achieve when writing about any other topic.

One of the central foci of our mission statement at KHS is to not only get kids graduated, but to have them leave our school with skills, knowledge and experience that will have them ready to enter the workforce. To this end, we require each student to complete an internship and college course during their senior year. Students who matriculate through the Kalapuya Conservation Corps are able to add work experience with USACE, Lane County, and Oregon Youth Conservation Corps to their resumes. Long story short, the USACE Task Order helps KHS graduate students who are able to meet modern education standards and be career ready at the same time.

Finally, this working agreement gives students an opportunity to become vested in a legacy project that improves their community. Fern Ridge is a place where many of our students and families spend time. By developing a connection between the community and the land base, our program fosters a meaningful stewardship ethic that has the potential to shape the community now and into the future. When students learn about efforts to restore endangered species such as the Fender's blue butterfly, Bradshaw's lomatium and Kincaid's lupine they are able to see the unique value of the place they live in through a different lens. Through the course of the project we have removed invasives, collected seed, and successfully grown out, replanted, and monitored over 13,000 native plants. Through this work kids learn the struggle that goes into restoration. By following a difficult project through from seed to start, they gain pride in their community.

It would be tough to overstate the value that the USACE partnership has provided our school and district. At an academic level, it has helped us continue to increase graduation rates in the midst of raised standards. It has also helped our students achieve career readiness and a connection to their land base. We are proud of the work we have accomplished so far and we hope that we can continue to develop and improve this program for years to come.

Sincere Thanks,

Calan Taylor (Teacher)      Trisha Alder (Crew Leader)      Kee Zublin (Principal)

The Kalapuya Conservation Corps