

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Ken Ma, Director of Media Relations, kenma@pdx.edu, 503-725-8789

PSU's Oregon MESA program improves science and math grades, study finds

(Portland, Ore.) — The [Oregon MESA](#) program in Portland State University's [Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science](#) helped Salem middle school students do better in math and science classes than their peers, a new report shows.

Researchers at [Education Northwest](#) found students who participated in the after-school MESA (Math, Engineering, Science Achievement) program consistently raised their grades above the district average, after starting out behind. They also outperformed a comparable group of students who were not in the program across all demographic groups. Low-income students who are eligible for the federal free lunch program made the biggest strides. [Read the full report on the Oregon MESA website.](#)

With a grant from the Oregon Community Foundation, Oregon MESA expanded its after-school program in four Salem-Keizer middle schools in 2014-15 and 2015-16, aiming to help more underrepresented and low-income students be successful in school, learn leadership skills and go to college.

Tong Zhang, executive director of Oregon MESA, credits the success to hands-on projects that engage students deeply in science and math. Students worked in teams on semester-long invention projects, such as creating products to address problems in developing countries. College students from the Oregon Institute of Technology mentored the teams. The year culminated with a trip to Portland State for MESA Day, an engineering design completion for more than 350 middle and high school students.

“Most MESA students report feeling more confident in their STEM and problem-solving skills after their time in MESA, which may influence their performance in class,” Zhang said.

Alyssa Darnell, a math teacher and MESA adviser at Parrish Middle School, said the program helps students become more invested in their futures.

“The club is seen as a prestigious program,” she said, “so when other teachers notice a student of mine not performing to their potential, they can ask, ‘Wait, aren’t you a MESA student?’ And the student’s pride tends to push them to work harder in those other classes. I can also influence them to improve during the school day by reminding them, ‘You are a MESA student, you have big shoes to fill,’ and they do rise to the occasion.”



Oregon MESA's mission is to provide students underrepresented in the fields of mathematics, engineering, science, and technology with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to develop their talents, explore technology-based careers, enter college, and compete successfully in the workforce. PSU's Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science has hosted and supported the program since it was founded in 1989.

About Portland State University (PSU)

As Oregon's only urban public research university, Portland State offers tremendous opportunity to 27,000 students from all backgrounds. Our mission to "Let Knowledge Serve the City" reflects our dedication to finding creative, sustainable solutions to local and global problems. Our location in the heart of Portland, one of America's most dynamic cities, gives our students unmatched access to career connections and an internationally acclaimed culture scene. "U.S. News & World Report" ranks us among the nation's top 10 most innovative universities.