

Students at King Elementary School in northeast Portland listen to the experiences of Ricardo Lopez, who works to prevent gangs through Catholic Charities.



PHOTOS BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Adriana Lopez-Garcia, a Catholic Charities gang-prevention case manager, encourages Rose Murdock's fifth graders to think about the future.

## Mentors Break the Mold Students gain inspiration

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Many schools across town have been making an extra effort lately to attract roll models that would help students overcome odds.

The endeavors come as leaders locally and nationally have recognized the significance of kids relating with adults of

similar backgrounds. Most of these programs happen through a volunteer effort that garners no direct financial assistance.

Take a classroom at King Elementary School in northeast Portland that is approximately half African-American and half Latino students, for instance. Rose Murdock's 21 fifth graders welcome regular visits from people working in the com-

munity, and the after-school volunteer chess teacher organizes the experiences through his passion for holistic educa-

"It's important that they talk to someone who looks like them and who's been to college," says Ron Popkin, who makes furniture in southwest Portland when he's not playing chess. "We're trying to get

and innovation.

Genuine

them to see that their skin color is not a barrier to achieving anything they want in

Having filled her life with counseling, paper grading and lesson planning, Murdock appreciates some help from the outside to coordinate the hour-long weekly

"The kids need exposure to the differ-

ent things that are out there," she says. "I try to bring in all the people and activities that I would have liked to have had."

On a recent afternoon, three employees from Catholic Charities' Latino Services stopped by as part of their work preventing gangs. Gangs weren't the main topic of conversation, however. The focus stayed on how education broadens the possibilities for comfortable lifestyles.

One of the speakers, Ricardo Lopez, used the dry-erase board to calculate the shortfall a typical worker with a highschool degree would experience while trying to pay for food, transportation, rent and healthcare. Later in the visit, Gang Outreach Specialist Temo Bautista asked students to raise their hands if they were planning to go to college. Not one student kept both hands down.

Bautista then pointed to a "10 ways to be a good student" poster on the classroom wall, and said, "They're providing all the basic information and guidelines you'll need throughout life." The mandates to have materials organized and come to school every day translate into punctuality and planning required for working, he explained.

Lopez, who identifies as half-black, spoke to the Portland Observer beforehand about how kids from gang-affected neighborhoods already know about subjects that constitute their life drama. He spoke to the class about concentrating on education and sports while he was growing up in East Los Angeles.

"Yeah, I get a check for what I do, but the bigger check is knowing that I help people," he told them.

**Buildings Neglected** High workload levels, limited resources and a demoralized workforce negatively affect Portland Public Schools' ability to perform effective and efficient building maintenance, according to new audit. The study found that budget cuts in the maintenance program, coupled with the failure to adjust to a changed funding and staffing environment, have hampered the effectiveness of the maintenance program. However, the audit also noted "reasons for optimism" in recent reforms in maintenance management and called for additional improvements including prioritizing maintenance tasks; increasing work performed by generalists rather than specialist tradesmen and creating a labormanagement committee to build a more

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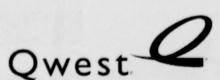




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## Rebates Require Filing Americans will soon receive a check in

Superintendent Carole Smith wrote that budget cuts over many years had forced the district to choose between maintain-

ing teaching staff and maintaining buildings, and conceded that Portland Public Schools has not spent enough to maintain buildings - let alone replace failing build-

cooperative relationship.

ing systems.

the mail from the federal government. It's known as the "stimulus payment", "tax rebate" or "refund."

For many individuals, filing an income tax return is an annual occurrence. However, in some cases, low-income workers, recipients of Social Security or certain veterans may have to file a return for the first time in many years. They have to establish that they have at least \$3,000 of qualifying income to receive the refund.

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