

## **'This was so cool!' A new take on Baby Shark for Gresham Grade School Kids**

A shark invasion was a welcome respite for a south side Chicago neighborhood that has suffered losses from COVID-19 and gun violence.

The community of Auburn Gresham has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. It is one of the top five hotspots for COVID-19 deaths in the city and so leaders are looking for bright spots.

A STEAM session featuring baby shark dissection for more than a dozen grade school kids at Oglesby Elementary School this week helped shine the light on new, future opportunities for kids who are looking for some much-needed inspiration.

Monique Gaston, school site coordinator at the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation (GAGDC) was happy to overhear kids after they spent nearly an hour dissecting baby sharks. Gaston says she didn't do a formal debriefing but could overhear kids saying, "It was cool, so fun, and different," after the fact.

With their fellow campers, they also shared details about how sharks are vertebrates like humans and have so many similarities, including the same kind of organs and systems.

The idea is to spark an interest in biology and science with a very visceral, hands-on experience. Instructor Shannon Egli (pronounced ee-GLEE) is the anatomical coordinator for OSF [Jump Trading Simulation and Education Center](#). He is also an educator for Jump's Steam classes which have typically been taught at the Jump Center in Peoria, or through online options that began in response to pandemic restrictions.

Egli says, "This experience offers a unique kind of dissection with a creature that holds a fascination for just about everyone. You can see that with annual Shark Week programming."

Additionally, the idea is to spark an interest in science and one day, perhaps a career in medicine.

"We really want to encourage them going into health sciences when they grow up but any science interest is still great. We really want to get them interested in biology and anatomy," Egli stresses.

The Jump STEAM program originated in Peoria, Illinois, and has been offered to underprivileged youth for four years through the generosity of PNC Foundation in the central Illinois region. It can serve as a model for other organizations looking to inspire the next generation of medical providers and allied career professionals.

OSF HealthCare operates Little Company of Mary Medical Center and medical offices in south suburban Evergreen Park, Illinois. It has had a partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) with an OSF Lab based at the university's Innovation Center. The lab, community partners such as GAGDC, and leaders at OSF Little Company of Mary are working to solve health equity and other challenges in underserved communities.