

## Woodmere Elementary School, Portland Public Schools

Number of Students: 418  
Minority: 52.3%  
English Language Learners: 33.5%  
Economically Disadvantaged: 78.7%  
Special Ed: 14.4%  
Report Card: Strong

### All Welcome Here

When talk turns to basics at Woodmere Elementary School in Southeast Portland, the conversation may be about reading, writing and arithmetic. Or it may be about finding support for the diverse population that makes up Woodmere. While this diversity enriches the school, it can present challenging obstacles to education.

But you wouldn't know it, based on the academic achievement of Woodmere students. For the second year in a row, and the third time in recent years, Woodmere's kindergarten through fifth-grade students have achieved a level of excellence that would be impressive under any circumstances.

"Our staff is committed to the children and their families; committed to making this an accepting and welcoming school for all," says Penny Clouser, curriculum support staff member. "There are times when our families run into issues that interfere or create a barrier for getting their child to school or being able to study. We do whatever it takes to get these kids to school and help them learn."

This begins with a welcoming atmosphere that embraces the school's extraordinary cultural diversity—more than 26 languages are represented within the school community and more than one-third of the students are English language learners.

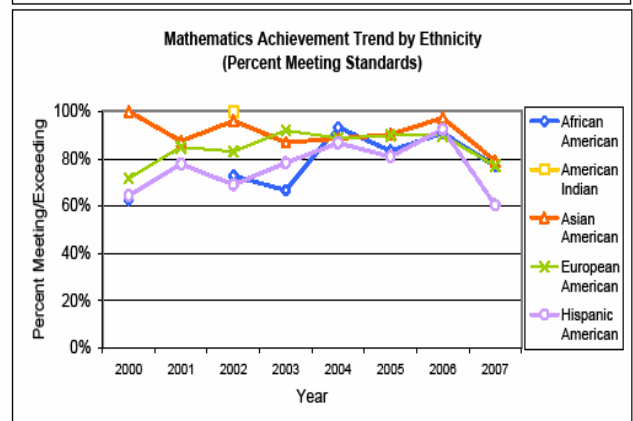
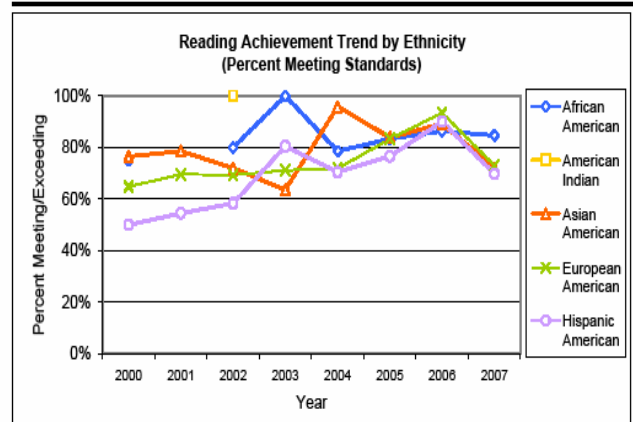
It continues in the way staff support and celebrate learning wherever a child may be on the developmental and academic curve. Teachers collaborate in a continuing way to identify students who need special help and make sure they get it.

The school's instructional program is a blend of tightly structured, coordinated curriculum based on state and district standards. It is tempered by a firm commitment to flexibility that allows teachers to be responsive to changes in the students' developmental and learning needs.

"Typically, when children arrive new to the school, especially non-English-speaking students, they're shy or quiet for a period of time," Principal Heather Hull notes. "But other students are quick to engage them in the language of play, often through movement or music, and that quickly becomes the language of friendship and social acceptance. Once children become comfortable at school, they are more likely to blossom as learners."

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### Woodmere E.S. Grades 3-4-5



Note: Important rule changes have occurred over time, including which student groups are included in test results across the years. Importantly, 2007 saw changes to achievement standards (cut scores), with elementary standards being raised, high school standards being lowered, and middle school standards being some of each. To protect student confidentiality as well as to avoid misinterpretation of the results, data for groups with fewer than 6 students are not reported.

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“The teachers’ ability to differentiate instruction to meet a student ‘where they are’ provides an essential interface between student and curriculum content,” says Clouser. “We figure out where they are in their learning, what would make a comfortable learning environment for them, and what would be developmentally appropriate along with high expectations. High expectations without the support won’t work. We provide the scaffolding so they can unpack what they know.”

The staff is just as deliberate in adapting standard curricula to reflect “Woodmere’s way,” as they half-jokingly refer to the school’s educational philosophy. The curriculum reflects ongoing development, Clouser says. “We just keep building on what we have that we know is successful. Everything is very carefully thought out to provide the right amount of structure and flexibility.”

“The teachers reflect the same attitude toward their own learning. They are committed to professional development, and being flexible and adaptive,” Clouser says. “You can’t be stagnant or static.”

While challenging socioeconomic circumstances make for significant turnover in the student population from year to year, many families make a determined effort to keep their children at Woodmere, even when a move makes it a far way to come. The sense of community continues through the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) program. Run through Multnomah County, SUN provides additional opportunities for academic support and enrichment, and social engagement.

“It’s joyful,” Clouser says.

The vibrant sense of community is expressed in the Woodmere PTA’s longstanding commitment to supporting the school. This year, the organization achieved a goal of its own, capping a long-term fundraising effort to raise about \$40,000 to build a playground. On a harsh winter day, in mud and sleet, PTA members, neighborhood families and friends, staff and the contractor turned out to work together on the project. By the time they were done, they had built not only a playground, but a monument to their community’s shared education vision and purpose.