



Head of School Position Statement

**Woodland School**

Portola Valley, California

July 1, 2020



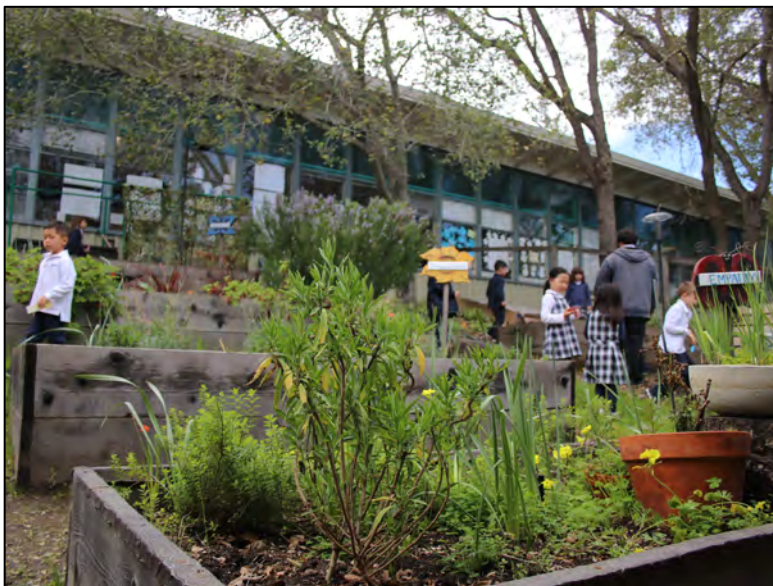
## THE PLACE

Imagine a school in an oak grove, four tiers of classrooms terraced up a hillside, anchored at the bottom by a 90-meter sports field, and topped by a spacious play yard for the school's smallest children. Imagine that and you can visualize Woodland School. Set in a quiet, residential neighborhood, Woodland is a collection of classroom buildings that seem to grow organically right out of the hill. The buildings are models of California school architecture – all have ample natural light and all open to the outside. Between the tiers is landscaping, much of it maintained by the students – a central feature of which is the Garden of Virtues, where each of the different flower beds is devoted to one of Woodland's essential tenets: Integrity, Stewardship, Curiosity, Resilience, Equity, and Respect.

There are bird houses in the garden along with the flowerbeds, and if you're lucky, you'll be visiting on a Campus Care day when students are deployed to weed the garden, empty the recycling receptacles, pick up trash and neaten up the whole campus so as to let the janitorial staff focus on bigger tasks. This



ethos of care is everywhere evident at Woodland, especially in the way people on campus relate to one another. The only raised voices at Woodland are shouts of glee, triumph, and accomplishment.



Formerly a public elementary school, Woodland's 12-acre campus includes 28 large classrooms (along with science, music, and art rooms), a spacious new gym, and appropriate office areas. Its spaciousness allows for grade-level grouping so that the middle school occupies the lower areas, elementary the middle, and early childhood up top in its own little world. The result is a sensible distribution of faculty, students, and administrators that permits each age group to be master of its realm.





accomplishments of its families. One parent's sentence seems to sum up everyone's feelings: "It's a nice, down-to-earth community." Indeed, one hears that phrase – "down-to-earth" – often during a visit to Woodland, either in those exact words or in approximations: "The school's so inclusive." "Think of Woodland as an adjective. To be Woodland. He's so Woodland. Our teachers are so Woodland." "It's an extended family." "We've generated our friendships through this school."

The teachers join the chorus, too:

"It's an amazing community," says one. "We can do the kind of teaching that we all dreamed of," says another. And when the students sing "Lean on Me" at morning assembly, it's easy to believe that they've caught the bug of this grounded community as well. The supportive environment is palpable at such a time, leading a parent to comment that, "Our 'Velcro kid' now gets up in front of the whole school and speaks or performs."

### THE PEOPLE

The community of Woodland is a reflection of Silicon Valley. Many Woodland parents work in the hi-tech world and a surprising number of families (maybe as many as 70%) include at least one parent born in another country and many are multilingual. Not surprisingly, the school seeks out opportunities to celebrate its many cultures. It is said that there is something indefinable – elusive – about the campus that reminds most parents of their own growing up, regardless of where that took place.

As one would expect in a parent body of engineers, executives, and entrepreneurs, many are financially comfortable, but there is a dress-down ethos at Woodland that militates against ostentation. There is a palpable egalitarianism at the school that belies the success and



With so many Woodland parents making their living in the hi-tech world of Silicon Valley, the decision to choose a school that is not glitzy, where wealth is understated and never flaunted, where modesty is a virtue and ostentation is eschewed, makes sense. They recognize that in the midst of one of the most frenetic, intellectually vibrant places on earth, children need a time to grow up unhurried, at their own pace. And they, too, the parents, need an island of non-competitive calm where they can be “just plain folks,” dropping their kids off in the morning, helping clean up the campus, participating in after-school activities.

Predictably, Woodland students come in various shapes and sizes and ability levels, with interests as varied as themselves. But the school’s core virtues really bind them together. As a teacher new to Woodland recently observed, when she spoke of “cool kids,” her Eighth Grade class corrected her: “We don’t call kids cool here because there are no separate groups. We are all friends.” That same teacher continues: “I find it very authentic that our students are both aware of their privilege and aware of their responsibility. Their commitment to equity that I hear in our discussions, their inclination toward empathy that I witness daily is something that makes Woodland spectacular.”





## THE PROGRAM

Woodland has a comprehensive and aspirational curriculum, which allows teachers a high degree of autonomy and requires significant collaboration across the disciplines. In response to the most recent CAIS Accreditation, each department has written a philosophy statement and set goals for outlining and aligning the curriculum, guided by the Director of Curriculum.

Unifying the three divisions are principles that underpin the academic program and have a profound impact on the school's culture and outcomes. First and foremost, classes are student-centered with hands-on activities that recognize individual student interests and needs. Teachers at Woodland take pride in their high degree of autonomy, the collaborative nature of the faculty, the rigor of the academic program, and the attention given to social-emotional learning that is

woven throughout the curriculum with the goal of having Woodland students become self-aware and responsible people who are socially aware and capable of self-management.

### The Early Childhood Center (ECC)

Cheerful, joyful and enriching, the ECC provides the foundations for Woodland's academic program, its culture of kindness and the strong community of students and adults. Philosophically, the ECC is student-centered, inquiry-driven and Reggio-inspired, which translates into a program that encourages students to explore their environment and develop independence and confidence.

In cross-graded classrooms, children ages three to five move easily from one open-ended learning center to another where they develop a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy. The program is rich in activities that develop verbal skills, build phonemic



## Head of School Search: Woodland School



### Lower School (Grades K-4)

During these foundational years, teachers are committed to a vigorous academic program that focuses on the development of essential skills while encouraging curiosity and valuing individuality. Central to the program is the emphasis on verbal and written skills.

Beginning in the primary grades, students are encouraged to speak up in class, take part in assemblies and make presentations in all classes.

awareness and introduce the Bridges math curriculum adopted by the lower school. This intentional program assures that students have the necessary skills for a successful transition into the lower school.

In keeping with the school's Mission and Virtues and reminiscent of Open-Air Schools, the ECC takes advantage of ample outdoor spaces and considers its "environment the third teacher." From the moment they arrive on campus and throughout the day, students are "engaged with nature and the outdoors authentically" in activities and spaces that allow for building, gardening and crafting.

All aspects of the ECC encourage social and emotional skill development, a cornerstone of Woodland's program and mission. Though their mixed-age environment, children learn to play together, to cooperate and to care about others. The sense of family is further developed by their interactions with the older students who serve as role models.

The Reading and Writing Curriculum follows the Lucy Calkins Model developed at Columbia University. United around this program, the teachers employ a common language and have adopted comprehensive goals that encourage students to find their voices in the writing of narratives, memoirs and poetry. These are students who will be able to sign their names! Counter to today's trends, Woodland continues to teach the physical act of handwriting beginning with printing in primary and cursive in the middle of second grade.





Reading instruction happens in both small groups and individually as the faculty honors the varying degrees of reading readiness in the primary grades. In a balanced program, teachers provide systematic instruction in phonics, reading comprehension and oral reading. In Third and Fourth grades students begin reading nonfiction books on topics of social studies and science that complement their studies in these disciplines.



### **Math**

The lower school has adopted Bridges to form the basis of its math program as it emphasizes hands-on activities, visual modeling and mental mathematics. Whether looking at the morning calendar or determining the patterns of numbers or describing a slope, students express math concepts in language, have daily practice in reasoning, and come to understand concepts that form the basis of algebra and geometry.

### **Middle School (Grades 5-8)**

The comprehensive and enriched academic program in the middle school capitalizes on the energy and inquisitiveness of the age group, builds confident learners and has teachers who identify their students' strengths and support their individual learning.

Parents and teachers appreciate the students' ability to express themselves orally and in writing. In fact, a number of parents credit the Open House presentations by 8th Graders as a motivation for enrolling their own children at Woodland. Students hone their verbal skills in

the Humanities program, through their presentations across disciplines, and in the opportunities to lead and take part in the school's daily assemblies.

In the middle school, teachers work together to help students see connections across the disciplines. Providing but one example is the sixth grade Humanities Class where students "marshal their learning in English/Language Arts, Social Science, Math, Science and Music to create their own original utopia – their challenge is nothing less than the creation of a new civilization...The final presentation includes an illustrated timeline, a demographic created in math, a brochure formally inviting parents to their presentations, a code of laws, a flag with five cultural signifiers, two original idioms, and a map." Ambitious!

The middle school math program builds on Bridges, the basis of instruction in grades K-4. Emphasizing problem-solving skills at each grade level, the middle school math program supports students' individual development as they grow into abstract thinkers. With two

## Head of School Search: Woodland School

levels of math offered per grade, students follow their own developmental timetable based on their readiness for abstract mathematical concepts.

### Hallmarks of the Middle School

**Capstone program:** Another way in which Woodland develops creative thinkers and problem-solvers is through the Eighth Grade's Capstone Program, based on the principles of Stanford's Design Thinking. This year-long, ungraded research project explores a topic of significance as exemplified by past projects on topics ranging from immigration to river restoration. In the course of their investigations, students need to consider action steps that would lead to change and to present their work to the Woodland Community.

**Outdoor Education:** The entire middle school takes part in outdoor education in age-appropriate outings that include camping, canoeing and hiking – all with the goals of developing independence, appreciating the California environment, and building bonds through shared experiences.

**International Travel:** In the spring of the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, students travel internationally where they are immersed in the culture and find ways of being of service. These travel programs are aligned with the school's program and mission as well as its curriculum. Students have assisted in building a school in Ecuador and studied how to provide clean water to villages in Nicaragua as part of service-learning trips in developing nations.

### K-8 Program

Social Studies, Science, and Spanish all contribute to the overall strength of the Woodland program and allow for challenge and activities. In Social Studies, the courses evolve from essential questions about history and







culture; Science capitalizes on students' interest in the natural world and the twelve-acre campus; and in Spanish, a course that will be taught in 2019-20 in Grades K-8, students develop language skills and cultural awareness.

Music and Art are everywhere at Woodland. In the lower school students become acquainted with musical notation by learning to play the xylophone and recorder and lead to the middle school jazz band and music ensembles. Displayed on walls, in offices and showcased in annual exhibits, students' art reflects the influences of an annual study of five or six artists.

Taking advantage of a new gymnasium, outdoor courts and fields, students at Woodland have physical activity both

structured and in free play. The no-cut athletic program fields teams that compete with neighboring schools in soccer, cross country, volleyball, basketball, and track and field.

A hallmark of Woodland that predates Harry Potter is the school's K-8 House System. Upon entering Kindergarten, students are assigned to one of four houses where they remain until graduation: Cypress, Maple, Oak, and Pine. This longstanding tradition contributes to Woodland's family feel and supports the school's emphasis on serving a greater community. Each of the houses takes part in selecting a project, introducing it to the community, and supporting its chosen cause. Thus a healthy sense of competition is fostered and rewarded.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

- Faculty turnover has been an issue at Woodland in recent years. The reasons are many but fortunately the replacement hires have been good ones. Still, there is no gainsaying the cost of living in the Bay Area, the tendency of young teachers to seek further education, or the lure of higher-paying positions at other schools in Silicon Valley. Bringing stability to the ranks of faculty will be a major focus of the next Head;
- Enrollment is an issue at most Northern California independent schools and so it is at Woodland. High incomes lead to high real estate values which keep many families with young children from moving in, which means a declining school-age population so, while Woodland is robustly enrolled at 265 students, full enrollment remains elusive;
- Tuitions and fees are also issues at many schools, but less so at Woodland, where the range of \$24,500 to \$29,800 lags the market. The upside to this is that parents find the school affordable; the downside is that salaries aren't where they might be;
- Fundraising at Woodland has been on the rise, but is nowhere near where it might be, given the parent body's potential;
- It's time for Woodland's outreach and marketing to become more aggressive. Being a "hidden gem" isn't worth what a real gem should be, and Woodland's a real gem. The outside world needs to learn about the atmosphere, the sense of community, the high-achieving students, the lower stress environment, and the strong academic program that leads to outstanding secondary school placement;
- The school needs to continue the programmatic work noted in the most recent CAIS Accreditation report by identifying, aligning and then articulating a PreK-8 curriculum which will address the questions about the intersection of tradition and innovation at Woodland;
- Part of the outreach should be a conscious focus on the Core Virtues. These are real. They are alive and well in the student body and the faculty. Run with them!





## THE NEXT HEAD OF SCHOOL most likely will...

- Have experience as an administrator in an independent school, preferably at the PK-8 level;
- Be adept at forming and leading an administrative team;
- Understand current pedagogical practices and program;
- Demonstrate a willingness to embrace the entire school community;
- Radiate calm, provide stability, and inspire young and old alike;
- Speak confidently and compellingly in public;
- Understand school finance and be able to explain the operating budget to faculty and staff;
- Be a good listener and consider the opinions and wisdom of others before making a decision;
- Have an open-door policy insofar as possible;
- Enjoy collaborating with faculty and parents;
- Set an example of fairness and honesty in all matters;
- Enjoy fundraising;
- Live the Woodland values: Stewardship, Integrity, Curiosity, Resilience, Equity, and Respect;
- Be excited to lead Woodland forward for 7+ years on its continued upward trajectory among Bay Area PK-8 schools, while retaining the “down to earth” nature of the community.



## THE SEARCH PROCESS

Woodland has retained Resource Group 175 to assist in the search. The **deadline for applications** is **August 15, 2019**.

To apply, candidates have two choices:

1. Online at:  
<https://rg175.com/candidate/login>

OR

2. Email a cover letter, complete resume, and a writing sample in a single PDF to both:

Debbie Reed  
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and

Tom Hudnut  
[tom@tomhudnut.com](mailto:tom@tomhudnut.com)