



# WOODLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT 50

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Board of Education

Dear Woodland Students, Families and Staff:

As we begin the 2017-18 school year, we would like to take a few moments to welcome you back and wish you well.

This summer, the school board spent valuable time together taking a good long look at our district's strengths and the challenges ahead as we laid the groundwork for a strategic planning process that will form the vision for the future of Woodland Schools. This strategic planning process will feature the voices of multiple stakeholders--from faculty and staff, to families and students, to community members--representing a variety of perspectives, all with a vested interest in helping our schools succeed and our students thrive.

As we all know, we begin this school year in uncertain times with the status of state funding in question, but while our challenges may seem daunting, we believe there are thousands of reasons for hope.

On Monday, 5,792 Woodland students began their school year. They met their teachers and found where they sit. As they waited for class to begin, they looked around the room for smiling faces--they looked for friends. Throughout the day, our students looked at the faces of their classmates, teachers, bus drivers, staff members, and administrators. They looked for reasons to feel safe. They looked for reasons to try. They looked for reasons to care. In each of these faces, our students looked for reasons to hope. That same day, as they put their child on the bus, parents wondered... "Will my son be happy at school? Will my daughter have a best friend in her class? Will he have someone to sit with at lunch? Will she like her teacher?" They, too, looked for reasons to hope.

In a 2015 Gallup poll, more than 75% of the respondents said that "Hope and Engagement" are the most important qualities for measuring a school's effectiveness. More important than standardized test scores or any other measure, the poll's results showed that students who feel "hope for the future" and "engaged at school" are far more likely to earn good grades, graduate, go to college, find a job after school, and feel good about themselves.

But what can we do as a school district to take steps to help students feel more hopeful about their future and engaged at school?

The answer to this question is found in the simple fact that in a district with thousands of students and staff, the most essential factor in our students' education is the relationships they experience along the way. Based on trust, kindness, compassion, high-expectations, and understanding, these relationships between our students and the adults who care for them each day define what "school" means to a child. But, more importantly, they determine how our children define themselves.

Because we understand building relationships requires time, attention, and support on many levels, the school board has shown our commitment to this priority by beginning the process to adopt smaller class sizes for the 2018-19 school year. We believe, and the research has shown, reducing class sizes will help create the conditions for teachers to dedicate more individual attention to their

students and build an environment that prioritizes the time and space for our students to share their experiences, learn from each other, and leverage the benefits of these life defining relationships.

Hope matters. Engagement is essential. Small class sizes build relationships and lead to undeniable benefits in learning and personal growth. But, as we look forward to this school year, we believe that our greatest strength, inherent across our five schools, is our diversity. Again, research has shown that diversity benefits every student in a school by reducing the achievement gap and providing learning experiences that can not be replicated. But the benefits of diversity extend far beyond anything that research can measure.

As the national conversation about race and equality continues, we believe that our schools can serve as beacons of acceptance and achievement. Our Woodland students, families, and staff represent a vibrant cross section of America. Our children's lived experiences, family stories, and cultural heritage are gifts they bring with them, not just on the first day of school, but everywhere they go. As Dr. Martin Luther King once said, "*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.*" We believe that by learning to value one another's personal histories and lived experiences, our students will grow immeasurably as people and help bend the moral arc.

We say--with one strong, clear, unequivocal voice-- we are proud of who we are.


Hate has no place in our schools.

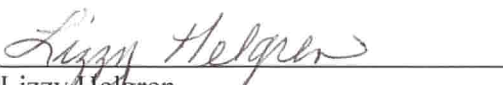
Regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, age, academic ability, physical ability, learning style, or religion, every single one of our students deserves to look around the classroom and find smiling faces and the warm feeling that comes from knowing that they have a special place in our Woodland community. They deserve to know there will be a friendly smile to greet them each day at the door, a teacher who cares about them and wants to help them succeed, and friends who are happy to see them. All of our children deserve to have a reason to try, a reason to care, and a reason to hope for a brighter future.

We thank you for your hard work and commitment to our schools and community, and we wish you well this school year.

Sincerely,  
The Woodland District 50 Board of Education

  
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Carla Little

  
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Joyce Mason

  
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