

NEXT GENERATION | SCHOOL NEWS

Woodland Charter School is among Oregon's most improved schools

BY CHRIS CARMIENCEKE

Woodland Charter School is finishing up a thriving 2023-2024 school year!

Now that Woodland has been around for more than 11 years, the hard work of the founders and the commitment of the faculty and families have provided the southern Oregon community and the Applegate Valley a charter school they can be proud of. This year we added a kindergarten class and now have more than 210 students and 25 faculty members in our kindergarten through eighth-grade school. In addition, the campus has never looked more cared for and robust! Thank you to everyone who has had a hand in bringing this Waldorf-inspired education to our local community.

Here are some current highlights about Woodland. First, we have the largest student population to date. In addition, we are finding our school is showcasing academic results that we have never seen before, which is due to the wonderful, committed teachers and faculty who support our students daily. In fact, Woodland has been rated by Public School Review (publicschoolreview.com) as the 48th most improved school in Oregon (out of 740 schools) and is one of the few in southern Oregon to be in the top 50 list of most improved schools. Lastly, we continue to provide students with a hands-on, developmentally appropriate, nature-based education that allows them to be joyful, to experience play, and to dig into thematic-based academics.

Grant funding has been supporting Woodland throughout the school year. We have received several local grants that have been highly beneficial to Woodland. We received a Summer Reading Grant from Dollar General Foundation to add books to our library. We also received a generous grant from the West Family Foundation to furnish our lovely new kindergarten classroom. Also, we were funded by the Pacific Power Foundation to purchase math intervention materials to support students struggling in mathematics. We



Some happy seventh-grade students at recess.



Inside the kindergarten classroom at Woodland Charter School.

deeply appreciate the generous support of these funders for contributing to our school.

The future is bright at Woodland Charter School as we finish this school year. We are proud to be graduating 24 students from the Dragonfly Class and wish them success as they transition into high school. We will be honoring them at Woodland at 6 pm June 5, 2024.

We are also expecting a full school for the 2024-25 school year, while continuing to provide innovative after-school programs, a summer gardening program, and community events for education and entertainment. Please contact me if you would like to know more about our local charter school and its opportunities.

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APWC hosts Applegate Outdoor School at Cantrall Buckley Park

BY CHARLOTTE HYDE

Throughout April and May, Applegate Outdoor School (AOS), run by the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC), hosted approximately 575 sixth graders from Hedrick and Oakdale middle schools in weeklong sessions of inquiry-based learning at Cantrall Buckley Park. Students began their outdoor school experience with a pre-visit in their classroom, followed by four daylong sessions at the park and a final classroom post-visit.

AOS is one of many outdoor school providers in the state and the only one in the Applegate Valley. While there is a long history of outdoor education in the state of Oregon, a major shift occurred in 2016 when Measure 99, known as "Outdoor School for All," was passed. This measure allows state lottery funds to be used to support fifth or sixth graders' outdoor school experiences. As such, schools can apply for Measure 99 funding through Oregon State University Extension Service and receive funding for transportation, food, housing, program fees, and all other expenses associated with outdoor school. Therefore, AOS is of no cost to the families of attending students.

Cantrall Buckley Park is highly suited to hosting an outdoor school. Students can interact safely with the Applegate River, witness restoration in progress in the riparian zones, and examine the array of native trees, such as Pacific madrone, black oak, Douglas fir, and ponderosa pine, which grow throughout the park. Especially in spring, the site is bursting with life. Students have witnessed goslings cross the river with their protective parents and even collected elusive juvenile lampreys during a macroinvertebrate sampling lesson.

The AOS curriculum is place-based, standards-aligned, and heavily geared toward scientific inquiry. On day one, students explore different stations throughout the park, where they plant willow cuttings, model erosion and deposition at an interactive stream table (see photo), learn to take a bearing with a compass, build a soil horizon, and discuss the ecosystem services of riparian zones. Next are five field studies: water quality monitoring, macroinvertebrate sampling, forestry, soil science, and fire ecology. From percolation testing to matchstick forest building to tree mapping, lessons immerse students in scientific inquiry and critical thinking by engaging them in genuine science and data-collection practices. Other activities, such as soil sculpture competitions, a "macroinvertebrate mayhem" tag game, and fire response strategy skits, integrate creativity and play into the learning environment. All the while, the curriculum introduces students to scientific tools from increment borers to clinometers to field microscopes,



AOS students collect and identify benthic macroinvertebrates in the Applegate River. Photo: Charlotte Hyde.



AOS students model weathering, erosion, and deposition with an interactive stream table. Photo: Charlotte Hyde.

allowing them to build real-life skills that can be applied beyond the outdoor school experience.

The importance of outdoor school cannot be understated. In an age when children are more isolated from the outside world than ever before, outdoor school provides an opportunity for students to connect with nature. Further, some students who struggle to focus in the classroom thrive in the outdoor school environment. During AOS post visits, students are asked one thing they learned at outdoor school. The vast majority have enthusiastic responses. Some of the most common include: "willows can root from cuttings," "rivers have lots of bugs in them," "how to measure trees," and "how to use a compass." In addition to this informal survey, students take pre- and post-assessments of their sessions to gauge learning outcomes. The knowledge, skills, and perspective on nature that students gain during outdoor school have the potential to influence their hobbies, academic interests, and even careers.

APWC is planning to construct yurts at Cantrall Buckley Park for future AOS seasons, which will allow students to stay overnight. Overnight experiences draw schools to outdoor school providers and amplify the student experience. Information on our fundraising efforts for yurts at Cantrall Buckley Park can be found on our website at applegatepartnership.org.

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WOODLAND CHARTER SCHOOL

Woodland Charter School is a tuition-free arts-integrated public Waldorf school located in Murphy, Oregon, serving Josephine and Jackson Counties. Please visit our website or contact the office for more information!

ENROLLING GRADES K-8 FOR THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR

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