

Woodbridge Elementary School

P.O. Box G, Governors Ave.
Greenwood, DE 19950
Principal: Jason Cameron

Woodbridge Elementary is a pre-K–4th grade Positive Behavior Support (PBS) School, which teaches schoolwide rules and positively reinforces their use. It has been named a “Superior” School for three years by the state of Delaware, recognized as a Title I Distinguished School in 2010, and awarded the honor of being named a 2010 Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

The staff and community of Woodbridge Elementary School believe that “every child is a unique and special individual who can learn” (2010 Blue Ribbon Schools Program Application). Teachers align instruction across subject areas with state standards and implement arts-infused activities. The school highlights student success through Honor Roll assemblies, schoolwide recognition announcements, and the PBS Hall of Fame, which displays the names and photos of students recognized for exhibiting excellent behavior who can be a model for others.

Woodbridge uses the Reading First approach supplemented with a variety of comprehension strategies, including: explicit explanation of comprehension strategies and how to use them, read-alouds, leveled reader independent work, and teaching common structures of narrative and informational texts. Teachers work together to adapt the core reading curriculum to meet students’ needs. In 2010, for example, teachers added more nonfiction texts in their reading program.

To maintain students’ year-round interest in reading, administrators and teachers provide exciting classroom lessons and schoolwide events. For example, Woodbridge hosts a schoolwide reading challenge. Students receive points for completing a comprehension assessment for each book they read. If they reach the schoolwide point goal, students vote on a “dare” for the administrators to fulfill. In the past, challenges have included male administrators wearing dresses and the administration being duct-taped to a wall. In addition, if the goal is met, students also get to have “Raiderpalooza” as a day to celebrate all the hard work done during the school year.

Creating excited and successful readers goes beyond implementing fun schoolwide challenges. “To really engage students, teachers must be knowledgeable about the content and reading strategy,” explains principal Jason Cameron. During walk-throughs, Cameron looks to see if students are actively engaged in the literature. For instance, students are encouraged to highlight text to track their reading and to use Post-it notes for self-connection writing. He also sees himself as a “master motivator” for teachers.

- ◆ Elementary (Pre-K–4)
- ◆ 52% White
- ◆ 29% Black
- ◆ 18% Hispanic
- ◆ 1% Asian
- ◆ 1% Native American
- ◆ 72% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 16% English Language Learners
- ◆ 10% Special Education

Cameron performs three types of classroom walk-throughs. During “drop-ins,” he spends about ten minutes observing instructional strategies in use and how the lesson fits the district’s eight-component teacher model. Cameron also conducts walk-throughs with the math specialist or reading coach to give immediate reinforcement and feedback. This ensures curriculum fidelity and that all grade-level teachers implement the same essential questions, for example. The newest type of walk-through takes place during “interactive read-alouds.” During this time, Cameron observes teachers’ adherence to a ten-item checklist introduced during professional development.

The reading coaches for K–first grade and second–third grade are integral in working with teachers to select texts appropriate to instructional purposes and students’ reading levels. During the text selection process, teachers reflect on the purpose of their lesson and how it will be taught. Teachers find it valuable to select text through their reading program anthology. Whole-group instruction focuses on developing students’ comprehension and vocabulary skills, so teachers select a higher-level text since the lesson will be teacher-guided. During small-group instruction, however, the reading coach works with the teacher to identify text that will help support the specific skills and strategies being emphasized in that group. In a kindergarten class, teachers start the year using books with lots of pictures and simple messages. As students move ahead, the curriculum gets “bumped up” so students are prepared for what they are eventually expected to do on their own.

At Woodbridge, instruction is more teacher-guided than teacher-delivered. This creates opportunities for teachers to model and ask probing questions to the whole class while still giving students time to reflect and make connections. For example, at the start of a read-aloud, teachers review previous vocabulary and reading strategies. Throughout the read-aloud activity, teachers may stop and give students a chance to pair up and practice strategies like predicting and summarizing. This creates opportunities for students to see themselves as successful readers.

One way teachers encourage students to be active learners is through partner-sharing activities and small-group discussions. This student-to-student interaction begins in kindergarten and is expected in every class to lay a foundation for future work. In this cooperative, non-threatening environment, students learn to express their thoughts and to listen to their peers’ ideas. Students also develop independence during center time, where they select their own texts and engage in partner reading and text discussion. This discussion time also provides teachers opportunities to conduct informal assessments to see if students understood the text and appropriately applied the strategies taught. The goal is for students to be able to make their own connections, predictions, and summaries, as well as make appropriate use of other reading strategies.