

supplemental services to match our staffing. The local option and desegregation funds are also gone. We will have only one educational assistant, who will be shared at the Kindergarten level. The members of our staff who worked in that capacity provided both direct instruction and classroom support in the primary grades. They will be missed! At this point there will be no music and only a half-time drama program at Ball next year.

What would you like to say to end this interview?

Fielding: Even if we had 100 percent of our children meeting benchmarks in first grade, we would still continue to work on fluency, comprehension, and strengthening language skills. Because meeting benchmarks is not enough, is it? Children need to be challenged and they need to be provided with the skills to excel.

What we've done at Ball—as our Principal, Tamala Newsome says—is put children first. We expect every child without exception and without excuse to make progress and to make good progress.

Jane Fielding has a Masters of Science in Education and Administrators certificate from Portland State University. Jane has been teaching for 25 years in elementary education beginning her career as a para-professional (educational assistant). Jane has worked several positions in special education including, one year as a Teacher on Special Assignment for special education administration, a self-contained classroom special ed. resource center, and as a Consulting Teacher.



The present Hosford was built in 1924 replacing the 1916 Hosford school, originally known as Madone Heights School. It was designed by architect Edward A. Miller. It was named for the Rev. Chauncey O Hosford (1820-1911). He was a Methodist minister and school teacher who owned 200 acres on what is now Mount Tabor.

Rigorous Curriculum at All Levels

Hosford Middle School

An interview with Melissa Sandven, Principal
Interviewed by Jay Hutchins, Executive Editor

Hosford Middle School in SE Portland was recently recognized by the Oregon Department of Education as one of fifteen schools showing progress toward closing the achievement gap. What unique approach has Hosford used that has made a difference?

Sandven: Our most recent state assessment, just completed this spring, is our best yet. Around 80 percent of our students are meeting benchmarks. The main reason for our recognition is that our at-risk groups are doing much better than the state average

Who are the at-risk groups?

► **Sandven:** There are different groups of students who traditionally do not perform as well as the majority of our population on standardized tests. These groups are referred to as subgroups under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. Examples are economically disadvantaged kids, English language learners (ELL), Hispanics, African-American, and learning disabled. Our ELL students include Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Ukrainian students—there are up to 15 different languages

spoken in the homes of our students. As you know, to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards under NCLB, test scores for all of our kids are included. The reason that some schools around the state don't meet AYP is due to the progress of their at-risk groups. All this is important because traditionally schools have not had the same level of expectations for these groups of students.

AYP is based on each individual state's standards and the state benchmarks or grade standards determine whether or not you've met the federal AYP?

Sandven: Right, the aggregated data from the state assessments look at how the different subgroups at each school are doing. We need to have a certain number of students meet the benchmark and then have a certain percentage of each subgroup meet the benchmark. Oregon's standards tend to be high and the bar tends to go up a little bit every year.

Who determines the state benchmarks?

Sandven: There are national standards, and then each state has a set of standards usually based upon these. In Oregon, standards are approved by the Department of Education. Around 1996, the Oregon Department of Education collaborated with school districts to pull together committees of teachers and other professionals within certain content areas. They formulated standards, for instance in math, based on both National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards and the framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This group of stakeholders agreed on the things all our kids should know by the time they finish 8th grade math. The same process took place for reading as well as other subjects. These standards are now part of the NCLB law and the legislation that follows it, including AYP.

How do these standards and AYP affect educators?

Sandven: Frankly, we're frustrated. We believe AYP should also be based on individual gain. For example, a special education student or an ELL student may make impressive gains in one year—even improve by several grade levels—but still not meet their grade level benchmark. AYP does not recognize that kind of progress, because it is focused on the percentage of students who meet a standard. Another example is that we might have a child from Mexico who, as a newcomer, doesn't take the state assessments but takes the assessments in his second year and does not do well. The third year, even if he shows remarkable gains but doesn't meet benchmark, we are penalized.

It just doesn't seem fair that AYP doesn't take this gain into consideration when penalizing a school because students in this situation do not meet benchmarks.

And that affects your AYP overall?

►The reason that some schools around the state don't meet AYP is due to the progress of their at-risk groups. All this is important because traditionally schools have not had the same level of expectations for these groups of students.

Sandven: Yes, individual students may do extremely well, and the school has served them very well, but there is no acknowledgment of that.

What happens if the school doesn't meet AYP?

Sandven: Then we have to build an Action Plan for meeting AYP and the state keeps an eye on us. Some schools that haven't shown adequate progress over a year or two have been reconstituted. Because we have wanted to add support for students who are not meeting benchmark for math and to address the fact that we may have a subgroup that did not meet benchmark this year, we will be scheduling these students with an additional math support class.

What is this waiver I have heard about for moving kids to other schools?

Sandven: When a school doesn't meet AYP then students can have an AYP transfer to attend another school. They would also get higher preference than students who are requesting transfers from schools that meet AYP.

Hosford Middle School is not in that position, because you are doing really well. Do you have a way of attributing those gains

over the last three, four, and five years to anything specific?

Sandven: There are many pieces to the picture. The ones most discussed are our literacy instruction and our immersion program. We have a seven-period academic day, with two of those periods spent with one teacher doing literacy—reading and writing.

The first thing that made a difference was having 90-minute blocks that focus on literacy each day. Math class is the regular 45-minute period—although we hope to offer double math periods to our students who fall way below benchmark next school year.

One of the unique things you do is level the literacy classes as well as the math. What does this mean?

Sandven: It means that we serve students by their ability level, not their grade level. The leveling applies across 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. That makes it easier for teachers to teach, because they don't have the typical middle school classroom where one student is reading at the 3rd grade level and one student is reading at the 11th grade level. Most schools have students who are significantly behind sitting with others who can read Tolstoy or literature in a second language. This range in reading is really difficult for a teacher. We level the classes so that there is less of a range in all the language arts classes, and make it easier for teachers to deliver rigorous, ability-level instruction.

So a high performing 6th grader my end up in a language arts or math class with 8th graders?

Sandven: Exactly, but don't confuse leveling in language arts with how we do our Immersion Program. We have two language immersion programs that are not leveled and those students get additional literacy instruction in these classes. For example, our Spanish immersion students also have Spanish language arts, and our Mandarin immersion students also have Mandarin language arts, so in a sense they have three periods a day focused on reading and writing.

How comprehensive is the immersion program? Do students take other subjects in their second language?

Sandven: Immersion students take their literacy block with all the other students. They take social studies and their language class (either Spanish or Mandarin) via the Immersion program.

►Students also have the option to take an elective in the language immersion program. We also have many students enrolled in our Spanish program as an elective. So, we have some students who study both Spanish and Mandarin. We have probably 300 of our 420 students studying a second language. Research indicates that studying a second language reinforces a student's skills in their first language. So our emphasis on studying a second language has also impacted how well our students do in reading.

How have people reacted to the leveling across all three grades at Hosford for language arts and math?

Sandven: People really like it. Parents, particularly of some of the high-achieving students, really appreciate it because it allows us to deliver a much more rigorous curriculum. A wider range of abilities in the class leads to a more watered-down curriculum; you know you start teaching to the middle and the lower achieving get lost in the shuffle and kids with higher aptitudes become disinterested.

In science and social studies where we are not leveling, we are helping teachers differentiate their instruction in the same class so that they can enrich instruction for their more highly skilled kids, but also keep their lower skilled kids moving along, feeling included.

In the language arts program, almost 80 percent of your students are meeting benchmarks in reading? Are you using the Rewards program developed by Anita Archer and other educators?

Sandven: Yes. Our language arts teachers have been really pleased with the Rewards program. It promotes fluency and the kids enjoy it. It seems to be really motivating.

Why does that program motivate the kids more than some other program?

Sandven: They can compete against themselves. They time themselves in fluency, and our experience is that fluency drills are good for kids—this is good for their improvement in reading—and they enjoy it. They just seem

really motivated because they can see progress pretty easily.

So, the Rewards program involves testing? I've heard other people say that testing does not really promote learning. I understand the issue is complex, and may be complicated by just a smattering of politics and ideology. How does testing work at Hosford?

Sandven: My philosophy—and I think this is the philosophy of most of our teachers—is that assessment is part of the learning process. It's not just about determining where the student is, I also want testing to be an educational experience for the student, something that reinforces their learning, a worthwhile practice opportunity that complements a learning objective. That's where we want to be. We are also really pushing our teachers to use testing results to drive their instruction.

Another aspect is our online test system. I think we are one of the only Portland schools that tested all of our students online in the fall. Our students got some really good practice testing online which prepares them for the spring testing, which is the test that that really counts. The spring scores are typically their highest scores.

►**Research indicates that studying a second language reinforces a student's skills in their first language.**

Why is online testing so important?

Sandven: Online—which is very different from pencil and paper—is a totally different ballgame. We want these tests to be a true reflection of our students' ability. The fact that they had a first run will help to make the last run a less stressful, more authentic testing experience for them

What do you mean when you say "authentic"?

Sandven: It means that we're really getting

a sense of what kids know. In the old days, if someone was doing a pencil and paper test, maybe the educational assistant or the teacher leaned over and subtly helped their student with part of it, or taught to the test too much. The test loses its authenticity because if the student hadn't been helped they wouldn't have known the answer.

One of the things I hear you saying is that the assessment is only useful if the kids are participating in the assessment process and learning from it as well.

►**Sandven:** An assessment can be useful in itself, but it takes time to assess, and we constantly encourage teachers to do short, in-room or interim assessments all the time. These do not take a lot of time but can give a teacher a quick gauge of where students are. Because instructional time is so precious, ideally you want assessment to be an educational experience for the kids by designing assessment that includes learning.

For example, at the end of a class, we can do a writing assessment that we have prepared for the kids that day—and then the next day come back and have students reflect—talk about the assessment—correct the assessment, and have students do some self-evaluation. What do I need to work on? Then, direct the instruction around the areas that kids have trouble with. A week later, or two weeks later, we can do a similar assessment, and again the whole process is an opportunity to practice writing, but the kids also are thinking about what they need to be working on and how to show improvement in their writing.

How did all of this come about?

Sandven: Well, there are several pieces to the picture. One is support by the Federal Government.

About 56 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-cost lunch. That percentage makes us eligible for a Federal program known as school wide Title I. Those funds are really helpful and pay for staff and several other educational assistants who are in the classrooms where we have kids who need extra help. We also had access to some grant monies that bought us technology, professional development, and materials—that's a huge piece.

We also received a three-year, Federal Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant.

► Because instructional time is so precious, ideally you want assessment to be an educational experience for the kids by designing assessment that includes learning.

In Oregon, schools that receive a low or unacceptable rating on the Oregon Report Card are eligible to apply for a CSR grant through the state. We also had an Excel grant, which is a technology grant, through the University of Oregon. We bought laptops with the Excel grant. I bought a whole new personal computer lab with the CSR, including a tech support position. For the first time in this building, we have a full-time person to support technology, and that's been huge. So technology is going to be playing a role this year in our scores, and we will continue to see it because I believe that the role of technology is one of the key pieces we will have to prepare kids for the future. There is not going to be one job—by the time they get out there—where they won't need to know how to use a computer.

People complain that not a lot of resources are going into education. But, it seems that things are going really well here and that you do have a lot of resources, and the approaches you are using seem to be very effective.

Sandven: Yes, there has been a lot of talk about inequity from school to school. For example, when schools lost kids, and there was a decline in enrollment, their full time equivalent (FTE) hours remained. In simpler language, this means the number of teachers and their hours allocated to teaching didn't change, even though their enrollment did.

Can you further define FTE?

Sandven: Teacher power—money for teachers—basically staff. A teacher contract day is 8:30 to 4:00, with 30-minute, duty-free lunch, and a 40-minute, duty-free preparation period. Hosford teachers teach six classes in a 7-period class schedule.

Dr. Phillips, our new superintendent, who visited with all of Portland's public schools, has put together a formula to improve equity. The formula is based on how many students each school has, whether or not a school qualifies as a Title I school. The new

formula has worked to our advantage. We have not lost any staff or any programs. Some of the high schools lost up to 8 full time positions, maybe even more. Most of the middle schools lost around 3 or 4 teachers. I'm not judging the formula one way or the other—it just happened to work to our advantage.

What is your student-teacher ratio?

Sandven: Ours varies from about 10 to 32 or 33. We have a couple of our higher level language arts classes that accidentally got as big as 32 or 33, and some people don't even think that's big, but that's big for us. If you walk around the building, the typical class size is probably about 25 or 26.

When classes are large, it is much easier for the teacher if their students are at a similar level. But, you know, as I have already mentioned, science is not leveled—we have some science classes that are about 30, those are tough classes, but we think that the cooperative leaning in science is really important. And we hope that we will be able to bring down our class size in science next year. We actually expect to add some math and science FTE, so we will be able to offer one or two more sections.

Whose leadership originally initiated the successful changes made at Hosford?

Sandven: This is a challenging question for me—I need to be tactful but want to be clear. Our literacy strategies and the immersion programs started several years before I arrived in the building.

Julie Kassner, who was key to launching the turnaround, retired at the end of 2002-03. Tom Pickett, who was very committed to leveled instruction, became interim principal.

During this period, many decisions were put on hold, for one reason or another, until I came on board. There were some systemic issues in the school that needed a very visible, proactive, and hands-on principal. As we have gotten a handle on some of the “management” pieces, our instructional prac-

tices have improved.

I believe that there are other factors that figure significantly in improved student achievement. Our size of 420 students is a manageable number, so that we can really develop relationships with our students and fewer students fall through the cracks. We have a Triage Team in place which meets twice a month and involves two outside agencies. The Triage Team strategy allows us to respond to crisis and student needs and to delegate support by a menu of services inside and out of school. We are able to respond effectively to students and/or their families in crisis so that kids stay in school and keep learning.

Are any other changes coming up?

Sandven: Yes, we are starting some real Certificate of Advance Mastery (CAM) work, integration of technology, some special clubs, and such things as lunchtime seminars on career options.

Well I want to congratulate you and the teachers and students at Hosford for your success. Thank you for talking with me.



Melissa Sandven received her teaching certification from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA. Her MA in Latin American Studies is from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Her Education Specialist Degree—Educational Administration—is from the University of New Mexico. She taught for 8 years at middle and high school level as a social studies and Spanish teacher. Previously she was assistant principal at Sam Barlow High School in Gresham and has been principal at Hosford Middle School for one year. Melissa speaks Spanish fluently. She has a husband and two little boys.