

# Cook School District

"Committed to achieving academic potential"

## A Document for Teachers New to the District

### *Welcome to Cook School District*

#### Who We Are

##### Our Community

Cookvale is a medium sized community near the geographic center of the state. The town was named for its most distinguished citizen, an early settler and first president of the local regional college, Dr. Norman E. Cook.

The population of Cookvale is 45,000 people. Though it is still heavily influenced by agricultural interests, it is within ten miles of the state's largest metropolitan area. As such, it serves two worlds. First, it is the hub for regional food processing and shipping as well as agricultural equipment sales. Second, because one of the state's regional universities is housed in Cookvale and because many other residents reside here but work in the metropolitan area, the town has a sizable professional community. Many of the community members work in manufacturing plants and in the three national corporate offices housed in the metropolitan area.



There is a fair amount of racial and socioeconomic diversity within the town's residents. The professional community is predominantly white, middle to upper class, though an ever increasing number of Hispanic, Asian, and African-American families are part of that group. The blue collar community, often agricultural and service workers, includes a high proportion of African-American and Hispanic families.

Cookvale's population dispersion is likely tied to its history. In the early 1800s Congregationalist church members sought a new area in which to settle. The early settlers platted the town and included sites for schools, parks, city buildings, and a religious "academy" which became, many years later, the state supported regional university. Most early Cookvale settlers, such as the family of Dr. Cook, were of German or Irish descent. Many became farmers or started businesses. Those roots are still easily traced in Cookvale families. Later immigrants to Cookvale often came seeking work in local farms and businesses. This group, much more racially diverse than

Cookvale's earliest settlers, has begun to produce its own middle and upper economic class families.

The community, in general, provides its school district with consistent support, both financially and emotionally. In the last election, 61.8% of the voters supported a measure to increase school taxes a moderate amount. School activities are often the only function that brings all community groups together and most are very well attended. Surveys taken just before elections indicate that two groups are typically less supportive; they are the burgeoning senior citizen community and those new to Cookvale. The latter group, typically farm workers or industrial employees, is quite large.

### Community Values and the Economy

The community is quite supportive of Cook High School. The parents' booster club provides several thousand dollars to support, predominantly, sports, though all clubs and extra curricular activities regularly receive varying amounts of financial aid. The club also provides six small scholarships for college-bound students. Parent-teacher conferences are better attended than other schools in the Prince Valley Athletic League though there are still too many parents who choose not to participate. The community believes it supports the district's schools well and, correspondingly, expects the students, teachers, administrators, and coaches to be productive.

Such community support is very apparent and widespread in Cookvale. Last year the Chamber of Commerce selected as its top priority revitalizing the city parks and recreation program. Already, an extensive money-raising campaign is underway for new parks and a recreation director has been hired to develop plans. The second Chamber priority is an effort to entice new businesses to town. As agriculture becomes less central to Cookvale's economy, a broader business base is necessary. Several attributes of Cookvale will help ensure achievement of that goal:

- Cookvale's proximity to the interstate highway;
- A recently remodeled airport;
- Railroad lines developed years ago to support agriculture;
- A growing and vibrant university; and
- Proximity to the state's metropolitan center.

The chamber's task of enticing new businesses to locate here should result in success.



The local newspaper, "Cookvale Clarion", focuses on community events. It provides extensive coverage of the school sports and extracurricular activities such as plays and concerts as well as special programs and assemblies. Because of Cookvale's long history in agriculture, the paper tends to take a conservative stance. The "Times Union" is published in the state capital and is a state-wide newspaper. Because of its metropolitan setting, the paper

historically has taken a more liberal approach to societal issues. Local citizens often subscribe to only one of the papers depending on their personal political views though many in the community regularly read both.

There is one radio station which plays music and provides limited political coverage. If Cookvale High has a playoff game, the station will often broadcast it. No TV stations are located in Cookvale though most citizens seem to feel well served by the several stations from the nearby state capital.

Cook School District includes six elementary schools, two middle, and two high schools. The two oldest facilities in the district are Cook Elementary and Cook High schools.

### *The Schools*

#### Cook Elementary

Cook Elementary School is housed in a 95 year-old, three story building. It houses 18 classrooms, three for each of the grades K-5. The building contains a multi-purpose room which serves as a gym, cafeteria, and auditorium. The building also contains a library and small rooms for the special education teachers, health nurse, and counselor. A small keyed elevator exists for those who find use of the stairs difficult. The main office is where the principal and two secretaries, plus office equipment, are located. One of the secretaries serves as the school's receptionist as well as providing services for the counselor and two special education teachers.



The north boundary of the school grounds butts against a city park making for a spacious play area.

The school is centrally located in Cookvale. It is only seven blocks from exit 78 on I405. With its proximity to the regional airport and Cookvale's well maintained bus service, Cook Elementary is convenient for its students, employees, and visitors.

Two years ago, the teaching staff devised a new mission statement. The lead sentence, "It is the mission of Cook Elementary faculty and administrators to provide our students the finest academic program in the state", captures the general tone of the school's goals. The mission statement was given a unanimous vote of approval by both the Parents' Club as well as by the district's school board.

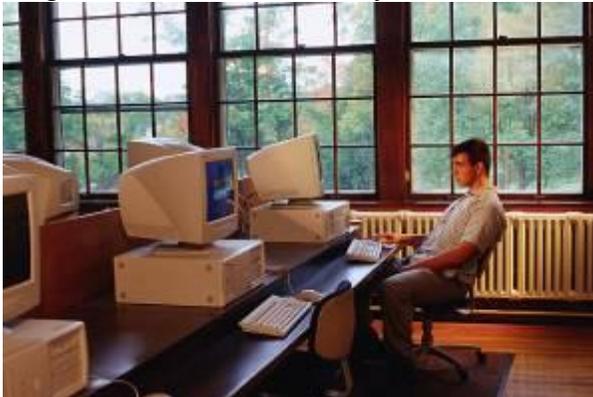
A recent analysis of the 411 member student body of Cook Elementary shows the following racial groups represented within the school:

- 60.3% Caucasian
- 21.8% Hispanic
- 12.4% African-American
- 2.4% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 0.9% American Indian
- 2.2% Other or multi-racial

Only 17.3% of the student body is on "free or reduced" lunch programs. Special education services, including a talented and gifted program, are provided to 14.7% of the pupils. Nearly 21% of the current first-through-fifth graders attended a school elsewhere last year. This constant turn-over within the student body has been something of a barrier to bringing about academic progress for the student body.

### Cook High School

Cook High School is located in a building constructed in 1957 shortly after the previous building burned down. The present building contains 24 standard-sized and configured classrooms, a library, cafeteria, sizable computer lab, and several offices for administrators, health workers, counselors, and special education professionals.



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The school is close to its maximum service limit with an average daily attendance of 708 students. Cook High is, nevertheless, considered to be a small to moderate sized school within the large school Prince Valley Athletic League (known

as P-VAL to local sports fans). Cook provides a fairly wide offering of athletic teams as well as most traditional extra-curricular and elective courses. A police officer is assigned to the building 30 hours per week to help provide security and occasional topical instruction to the students. The school also houses two gymnasias (one for physical education and one for athletics), a weight room, and three shops--one each for agriculture, metal/auto, and woodworking. The single floor building is attractive and accessible to all.

The school is located within a block of the local freeway I405. As a matter of fact, sometime ago it was decided to construct the athletic fields in sight of the freeway to serve as a constant reminder to the citizens that their tax dollars had constructed something of which they could be proud. Recently, the State Department of Transportation asked that a visual barrier be placed between the freeway and the fields because a few accidents had occurred as travelers slowed to get a glimpse of "the action". A row of trees was planted and they have begun to hinder observation sufficiently that the accident rate has dropped.

### 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Extra Curricular Offerings

Art fair  
Clubs—Spanish and chess  
Concerts  
    Band  
    Choir  
Intramural sports—several  
Leadership—school government  
Plays--each trimester  
School paper  
School support  
    Cheer leader  
    Dance team  
    Pep club  
Science fair  
Talent night—includes Art, Band, and Choir presentations  
Volunteers—community and school service  
Yearbook

### 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Elective Courses

Art  
Band  
Choir  
Foreign language—French, German, Spanish  
Home economics  
Science--Electricity  
Office aide  
Shop—principally wood working  
Year book

### 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Athletic Teams

Basketball (g & b)  
Cross country (g & b)  
Football (b)  
Soccer (g & b)  
Softball (g)  
Track (g & b)  
    Volleyball (g)  
Wrestling (b)

### Daily Schedule

The bell schedule for Cook High School is:

8:00 Warning  
8:05 Home room  
8:30 Class #1  
9:30 Class #2  
10:30 Class #3  
11:30 Lunch  
12:10 Warning  
12:15 Class #4  
1:15 Class #5  
2:15 Class #6  
3:15 Dismissal  
3:40 Buses leave; athletic practice; after-school activities begin

### Mission Statement

Last year, the faculty, with the help of two central office administrators, revised and updated Cook High's mission statement. The new mission statement, which is quite thorough, has as its central feature the sentence:

*"All Cook High School students will achieve their academic potential."*

Both the school board and the PAC (Parental Advisory Committee) were very supportive of the full mission statement. This year, faculty groups within departments are revising course descriptions and materials to bring them into alignment with the mission statement.

With the benefits of its racial diversity, wide-spread community support, and the availability of recreational pursuits most of the district's teachers have been here, or plan to be here, a long time.

### The Classrooms and Related Resources

Academic classrooms of the ten Cookvale schools in the District are larger than those found in most typical schools. In particular, Cook Elementary and Cook High are spacious. They have many large windows and are well-lighted settings. Space and furniture allow for students to have their own work stations in almost every room. At the high school, the physical education gym is shared so the boys' and girls' class groupings (when needed) rotate between the gym, wrestling room, and weight room.

In both schools there is some help available to teachers from a small cadre of parent/community volunteers and student and paid aides. Most faculty do not, however, build their instructional plans around such support. For a short period, one to two weeks, an aide or volunteer can usually be assigned to a teacher full-time if sufficient

warning is given. Providing more aides for the instructional staff is a goal the faculty hope the school board will adopt this year.

The school board has authorized funds to replace all the district's science texts next year. This year, new math texts were purchased, as were 48 new student-use computers (scattered across the district). Several thousand dollars were also made available for new library acquisitions. The latter funds were prorated to the district's ten school libraries on a per/student basis.

### Our Students

Student racial diversity is apparent in most academic and career oriented courses in the middle and high schools. Some courses, such as home economics, still have limited gender diversity, though most shop and artistic courses approach a balanced enrollment.

It is still difficult within all our schools for some students to progress at a rate consistent with their potential because of the relatively high turn-over rate compared to other districts within the state. In some classrooms, across the September-June time period, more than half the students have transferred in or out.



Most of the Cookvale students would be described as "dressing appropriately". A few come to school in unclean clothes or wearing apparel that is in a state of disrepair. A small number of students, particularly at our high schools, attempt to flaunt the school's dress code. The faculty in the elementary schools have taken upon themselves the task of teaching all children basic personal hygiene skills. They report their efforts have reduced the number of children who are embarrassed by peer comments about their body odor or clothing choices, for example.

Many of our students are involved in a wide range of after-school recreational activities. Swimming, visiting the arcade in the city's largest malls, playing in our parks, and participating in organized community and/or school sports are among the most common recreational activities.

The majority of our secondary students hold plans for education past their graduation. Common aspirations include attendance at a university, community college, or technical school. A smaller number want to join a branch of the military though several aspire to move directly into the work force. A goodly number of the latter group espouse an interest in furthering their education or training at some later point.

The district's drop-out rate across K-12 was 5.8% last year which is among the lowest within the state. Cook High's rate across grades 9-12 is 6.8%, down from 8.3%

just five years ago. The district's student body is not unlike that of the rest of the nation's children in terms of evidence of variety in learning styles, developmental delays, need for special education services, those for whom English is a second language, or physical disabilities. We do seem to have at least our share of students, at all levels, whom teachers have described as being unusually demanding, particularly in terms of emotional needs.

Most of our district faculty and administrators find the students and their families who make up Cook School District as people they have come to cherish.