

# John H. Wood Charter School

## SAN ANTONIO

Three seemingly simple rules form the backbone of John H. Wood Charter School's educational philosophy—be here, be kind, do your work. Founded in 1997 by sponsoring entity Educational Resource Center, John H. Wood serves a diverse population of at-risk students. Located within the Campbell A. Griffin Residential Treatment Center in San Antonio, the school primarily serves the educational needs of adjudicated, residential students receiving treatment for emotional or behavioral issues. The vision of the school is to “provide the environment in which the students are encouraged to develop their intellectual, linguistic, social, emotional, civic, and physical abilities.” “The ultimate goal,” as stated on the school's Web site, “is the transition and integration of these students into society capable of full participation in the process of family, employment, and community.” For the schools administrators, teachers, and students, the three rules—be here, be kind, do your work—represent important steps to achieving this goal.

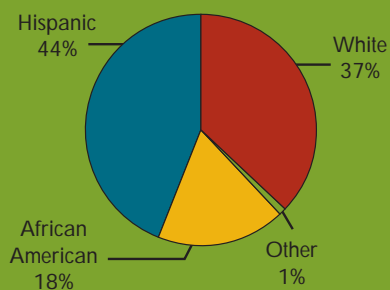
### Student Characteristics

In 2001–02, John H. Wood Charter School enrolled 135 students in grades 6–12. These students represent a variety of ethnicities and life cir-

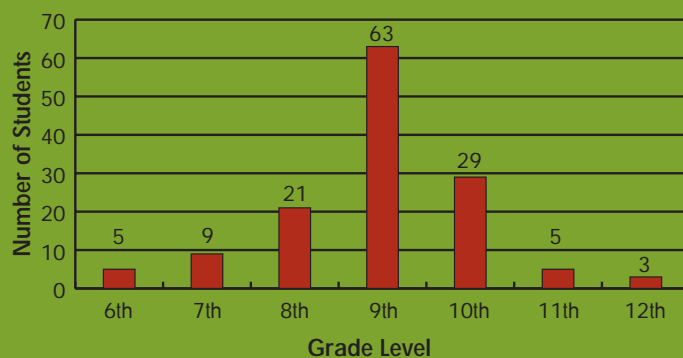
cumstances. Ethnically, the student population closely mirrors state averages with the majority of students being either Hispanic (44 percent) or White (37 percent). The school serves a slightly higher than average percentage of African American students (18 percent) as compared to the state as a whole (14 percent).

The vast majority of John H. Wood students (93 percent) are classified as economically disadvantaged and most (84 percent) qualify for special education services. Because most students enroll in the school upon entering the treatment center and typically only stay six to nine months, the school's mobility rate is very high (93 percent). In addition to economic factors, many students have also experienced other circumstances that put them at risk. Some of these students are ordered into treatment by the court and many have been assigned to child protective services due to abuse or neglect. In short, these students, as the superintendent describes, “Don't trust adults...[they] have no history that suggests that they should.” Complying with the first rule—be here, present, and alert—is a significant accomplishment. The superintendent explains this saying, “To be here, for a child that is depressed and suicidal and would much rather be left alone in a dark space, that's a major rule.” Thus, once in the classroom, students are not allowed to sulk in the corner but must “be here” physically and mentally.

Student race/ethnicity: AEIS 2001–02



Student Enrollment in John H. Wood Charter School: AEIS 2001–02



## School Characteristics

Although located within the treatment center facility, the school operates on a typical 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. schedule. Residential students simply walk downstairs from the facility's living quarters to attend classes. Due to laws related to the treatment center, boys and girls are separated. Classes are based on an accelerated block schedule covering the four core subject areas in nine-week grading periods. The school has a very low dropout rate (0.4 percent), due in part, administrators explain, to a concerted effort to track students who leave the school. In the past two years, the school has been able to track most of the students leaving the school and found that many were enrolled in other schools, explained the superintendent.

John H. Wood Charter School's administrative structure is fairly simple. The superintendent is the primary school leader and is supported by an instructional programs coordinator who offers support and leadership related to any aspect of instruction, including elements such as special education and testing. In addition, a principal provides on-site campus leadership. The director of business development works on issues related to the school's funding sources and purchases.

According to AEIS reports, John H. Wood employs two teachers and 17 educational aides. These two "teachers of record" handle many of the administrative and special education duties while working in the classroom on a limited basis. The 17 "educational aides" work with students on a daily basis, with approximately half being teachers and half working as assistants. Interviews with these teachers indicate



that many are degreed and certified and have experience in traditional public school or alternative school settings.

A variety of professional development activities are made available to John H. Wood teachers throughout the year. Administrators report that early release days and staff development days are incorporated into the school schedule. The superintendent explains that although the teachers regularly participate in professional development needs assessments, many times the assessments identify the same areas teachers have already chosen for staff development. Recent professional development topics mentioned by administrators and teachers include behavior management, differentiated instruction, writing, and crisis intervention. A number of teachers also reported participating in graduate courses or specialized certification courses (e.g., special education) prompted by their experience at the school. Due to the student population the school serves, special emphasis is placed on behavior management strategies. The superintendent described a professional development session led by a leading consultant in behavior management that was particularly effective in helping teachers understand the use of positive affirmation techniques.

### School Characteristics

|                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Founded                 | 1997                |
| Grades                  | 6 to 12             |
| Enrollment              | 135                 |
| Daily schedule          | 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. |
| Days of instruction     | 180                 |
| Student attendance rate | 97%                 |
| Student dropout rate    | 0.4%                |

Source: 2001–02 AEIS report.

### School Staffing

|                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Number of teachers                   | 2            |
| Student-teacher ratio                | not reported |
| Beginning teachers                   | 0%           |
| Teacher average years experience     | 9.5          |
| Teacher turnover rate                | 83%          |
| Teachers with no degree              | 0%           |
| Teachers with advanced degrees       | 100%         |
| Average teacher salary               | \$44,501     |
| Average campus administrator salary  | \$63,000     |
| Average central administrator salary | \$55,000     |

Source: 2001–02 AEIS report.

John H. Wood administrators believe it takes a special kind of teacher to work with the at-risk, emotionally disturbed students that their school serves. The superintendent has primary responsibility for personnel decisions. In describing what he looks for when hiring a new teacher, the school's superintendent explains that there are certain qualities that distinguish some candidates from others:

I'm looking for the person who lowers their voice when everybody else is raising theirs, it's a disposition, it's a very secure person in their own right who doesn't get upset easily and then kind of transmits that calm and serenity to the children...the piece you can't teach is that personality, so that's the first factor that I look for.

Recognizing the unique challenges their teachers may face, school administrators require potential job candidates to observe classes for two days prior to the interview process. Administrators say this process helps candidates experience first-hand the school environment and make an informed decision as to whether they feel suited for a position. Additionally, all new teachers are paired with a more experienced teacher during their first year to introduce them to the school, its procedures, and regulations associated with the treatment center. Not surprisingly, many of the teachers at John H. Wood have previous experience working with at-risk students in a variety of contexts. Several teachers commented that they heard about the school through co-workers or friends and sought out a position because of their desire to work with at-risk students.

## Educational Program

The education program at John H. Wood Charter School is based on a one-room schoolhouse model. Each classroom is composed of approximately 16 students of varying age and grade levels (6–12) and two faculty members (one teacher, one assistant). With the exception of lunch and recreation time, for the most part, students remain in the same classroom with the same teacher each day. This atmosphere, as described by school administrators, is meant to approximate a family environment because most of these students have been separated from their families. Administrators also point out that this atmosphere encourages peer role modeling and tutoring.

A structured environment also plays a key role in John H. Wood's educational program. Administrators and teachers comment that the presence of a regular schedule with reliable expectations is crucial to these students in particular since many have not experienced a safe, predictable environment in the past. Although there are no formal class periods, most teachers establish a regular schedule for their classroom. Teachers describe a typical day as including time for work on assignments, journaling, regular breaks, individual reading (books or newspapers), recreation, and character or social skills activities.

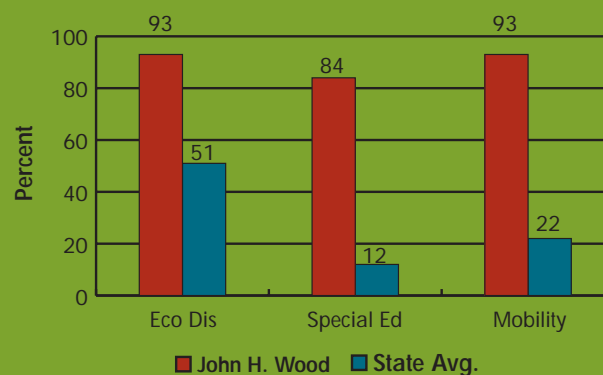
To accommodate the needs of 16 students of varying grade levels, teachers rely primarily on individual instruction. Upon entering the school, each student (regardless of special education status) is assessed and an individualized education plan (IEP) is created. Based on this plan, teachers give

### School Finance

|                           |          |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Per-pupil expenditure     | \$13,305 |
| Per-pupil for instruction | \$6,705  |
| Local revenue             | 0%       |
| State revenue             | 95%      |
| Federal revenue           | 5%       |

Source: Actual financial data for all funds, PEIMS 2001–02.

John H. Wood Charter School Student Characteristic: AEIS 2001–02



each student a set of core content-area assignments in an individualized folder. Students work on assignments of their choice, at their own pace, and there are no scheduled periods for specific subject areas. However, students are required to work on at least one assignment from each core area each day. Although teachers provide a limited amount of whole-group or small-group instruction, students primarily work individually with teachers answering their questions and guiding their progress on a one-on-one basis. Although each teacher sets specific guidelines for their classroom individually, most teachers establish goals for the number of assignments students complete in a day.

Most teachers explained that even though they do not regularly give students tests in the traditional sense, they are constantly monitoring students' progress. Teachers are expected to evaluate students' completed assignments and provide feedback within one day; they then instruct them on how to proceed with assignments. One teacher explained the process she uses: "On a daily basis, they turn their work in and as they turn their work in, I try and get it graded...it's like immediate feedback and what I do is look at each one of their books and I see exactly where they're at."

Teachers also use some formal assessments to monitor students' progress. Because many incoming students have not been enrolled in other schools consistently enough to have recent TAAS scores, the Comprehensive Learner Adapted Scope and Sequence (CLASS) test plays a key role in the school's educational program. Students take the test upon entering and the results inform the development of IEPs. Upon leaving John H. Wood (most students stay only six to nine months), students are assessed again to gauge the progress they

have made. Some teachers also use specific sections of the CLASS test to assess students' understanding of particular objectives or concepts.

Teachers believe that this high level of individual instruction is facilitated by the fact that there are two teachers in every classroom. While one teacher is technically a teaching assistant, the students are not aware of this distinction and are expected to treat them as equals. Teachers say they also collaborate with their assistants as equals. They believe that having two faculty members in the classroom is a great benefit to the students. "The thing I've found," comments one teacher, "is that everybody pretty much backs each other up...everybody's a teacher because everybody has something to bring to the table...where I can't reach one [student], my partner might be able to get to them, so that's what we do." This collaboration also extends outside the classroom. Teachers mentioned working with other classes on specific projects or allowing a student to work in another teacher's classroom if they needed a break from their own classroom.

Teachers also receive a great deal of support from staff members of the Campbell A. Griffin Residential Treatment Center. Treatment center staff members remain in the hallways of the school section to assist teachers with students if necessary. This assistance may range from simply talking with a student so he or she can return to the classroom, to intervening in ways that preclude an unsafe environment when a student is losing control. Additionally, as part of their treatment, most students have regular sessions with a therapist. These therapists, other treatment center staff, and teachers collaborate to reinforce consistent consequences and interactions with students.

*"The teachers are nice...they help you. They explain everything to you. If you don't understand it, they'll keep explaining."*

John H. Wood administrators believe that only when the first two rules—be here, be kind—are accomplished can productive learning in the classroom take place. Thus, in addition to their educational development, teachers also try to guide and support students' social development during their time at the school. Due to a history of abuse, neglect or other issues, many John H. Wood students have not had an opportunity to build positive personal or social interactions in the past. Teachers use programs such as Boy's Town or Character First to impart social skills such as respect, honesty, and integrity. Using videos, role-playing, and quizzes, teachers show students appropriate forms of social interaction that can be used both inside the classroom and in everyday society. The school also relies on a positive affirmation program to encourage appropriate behavior in the classroom. Students are presented with target positive behaviors to practice in the classroom, and the class is rewarded with points that earn incentives such as candy bars or pizza. Administrators and teachers comment that this positive approach, in contrast to more punitive strategies, has been a very successful disciplinary strategy and has encouraged a culture of positive peer pressure in the classroom. Teachers also note that when students are presented with appropriate and meaningful assignments that they can successfully complete, discipline problems tend to be infrequent.

Although they find working with at-risk students challenging, John H. Wood teachers emphasize that their job is also very rewarding. Many feel a great sense of satisfaction in seeing students progress both educationally and socially, despite their challenges or past experiences. "That's what

keeps me coming back," commented one teacher. "You know where these kids have been and yet they're willing to come into a classroom, be productive, even though they know they have all these strikes against them." Although John H. Wood teachers recognize the special needs of their students and the somewhat unique circumstances in which they teach, many see it simply as "just another opportunity to teach." Some teachers view their students' emotional and behavioral problems as an opportunity to grow and learn. Reflecting on this, one teacher said:

They're just children who have had tough lives and they've managed and I look at it this way—some of the things that they confide in you, I don't know if I would have made it as far as they have, so I look at that and to me that's a way to learn another approach, a way to learn another something to do for them, another way to learn a way to exalt them, to push them up so that they can do better.

## Governance

John H. Wood Charter School's governing board is composed of citizens from all walks of life. The current five-member board includes an accountant, a minister, a lawyer, a pediatrician, and a social worker/counselor. Several of the members have experience with at-risk students either through the juvenile justice system or the educational system. The board primarily oversees issues of policy and budgeting.

## Accomplishments

Although neither the setting nor the instructional methods are traditional, John H. Wood Charter School has experienced positive results. In one year, the school went from being classified as Low-Performing to a classification of Commended under Texas' alternative education accountability rating system.

TAAS results also indicate dramatic improvements during the past several years. The percentage of students passing all portions of the TAAS increased from 46 percent to 80 percent between 2000 and 2002. Results for individual subjects and grade levels are unavailable due to the small number of students tested. In addition, due to mobility and special education exemption, a significant number of students do not take the TAAS. For example, in 2002, 66 percent of John H. Wood students were tested and of those, 44 percent took the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA). The same year, 32 percent of students were exempt from testing based on their Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee recommendations.

Equally notable, according to teachers, is the personal and attitudinal progress that students make while at the school. Beyond test scores and passing rates, teachers point out that students leave with a new positive attitude about learning and confidence that they can succeed in school. One teacher described the changes he has seen:

To see some of them [students] come in, who haven't been in school for a year and a half or two years for whatever reasons, been bounced

from this placement to this placement, and to see them get that light in their eyes... 'Wow, I can do this.'

Administrators and teachers believe that this progress is due not only to the school's educational program but also to the safe, stable environment provided for the students. Staff members commented that most students had the academic ability all along but the combination of treatment center activities and the educational program helped to unlock their capabilities.

John H. Wood shows that simplicity can be an effective strategy to help students overcome difficult situations. Based on a foundation of three simple rules, the school relies on individual attention, structure, and caring teachers to help students progress educationally and discover the joy of learning once again. Administrators and staff believe that in experiencing educational success, these students begin to see beyond the difficult experiences that brought them to the school and look with confidence to a brighter future.

### Campus Accountability Rating

|      |                |
|------|----------------|
| 2000 | Low-Performing |
| 2001 | Commended      |
| 2002 | Commended      |

Source: AEIS report.

### TAAS Percent Passing

| TAAS All Tests |       |
|----------------|-------|
| 2000           | 46.2% |
| 2001           | 83.3% |
| 2002           | 80.0% |

Source: AEIS reports.

Combined passing rates for grades 3–8 and 10.