

## LEARNING CONTEXT: COMMUNITY

Located in the northwest region of Oregon, Portland straddles the Willamette River just below its confluence with the Columbia River and is surrounded by forests and ancient volcanoes. The Willamette River divides the city into two major districts known as the East Side and the West Side, while Burnside Street bisects the city north and south. Both help to create unique districts and neighborhoods within the city, each with its own ambiance. Portland is Oregon's largest city with a population of 556,000 and the third largest in the Pacific Northwest, only after Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia. Approximately 2 million live in the surrounding metropolitan area.

Portland is flanked by two mountain ranges, the Coast Range to the west and the Cascade Range to the east, both helping to create a mild, but wet climate. Rain falls heaviest between November and March. Winters are generally mild and snow is uncommon. June to September are the driest and warmest months in Portland, and summers are pleasant with abundant sunshine. The average rainfall ranges between approximately 40 to 45 inches per year, making conditions conducive for lush and green parks. Portland is proud of its preservation of natural open spaces and is home to 5,000-acre Forest Park, the largest wilderness park within city limits in the United States. Portland is also home to the major league basketball team, The Trail Blazers, and to a variety of minor league sports teams. Portland has an active art scene and was named by *American Style* magazine as the 10<sup>th</sup> best Big City Arts Destination in the United States (2006). It has also been proclaimed as North America's "Best Big City," according to *Money* magazine and "Best Cycling City in the U.S.," by *Bicycling* magazine.

Portland Public Schools is the largest district in the state and consists of about 100 schools in various combinations grades K through 12. The number of students in the school district is approximately 50,000, although the number appears to be declining due to recent trends of young people moving to the city and more established families with children moving to the suburbs. The district population is ethnically diverse, with most recent statistics reporting students are 10.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 16% African American, 14% Hispanic, 2% Native American, and 55% European American.

Rose City Park Elementary School is currently within Madison and Grant High School attendance boundaries. There are eight other elementary schools and two middle schools that also feed into Madison and Grant. Rose City Park Elementary is scheduled to move to what is now Gregory Heights Middle School and expand to a K-8 model, beginning fall 2007. Currently, Rose City Park Elementary is located in the Rose City Park neighborhood at 2334 NE 57<sup>th</sup> Avenue. With the exception of Sandy Boulevard and a small stretch on NE Halsey Street between 58<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup>, the area is overwhelmingly residential. Tudor, Craftsman Bungalows, and Old Portland homes sit on tree-lined streets and it obvious homeowners take pride in their homes. Public transportation is relatively accessible by Tri-met bus and the MAX train.

Although large and open green spaces exist with Rose City Park Golf Course, Normandale and Fraser Parks nearby, Rose City Park Elementary remains the focus of neighborhood activity and entertainment for children and their families. Many community events, regular festivals, celebrations, showcases, and a host of after-hours events add to the strong sense of community at Rose City Park.

Rose City Park Neighborhood is quite liberal and the majority are registered democrats. Caucasians comprise 83% of the neighborhood's population while only 7% are Asian, 3% are Hispanic, and 2% are African American. A recent home search in the Rose City Park area showed homes for sale from \$219,999 up to \$650,000 and 74% are categorized as homeowners, while 26% are renters. Neighborhood residents are well-educated and primarily middle to upper-middle class.

Crime in the neighborhood is perhaps less prevalent than in other Portland neighborhoods, but does exist. Theft from auto, larceny, and burglary are the most frequent problems at 27%, 26%, and 25%, respectively. Assault, rape, arson, and robbery are fortunately infrequent.

It has been a great pleasure to get to know the Rose City Park community. It is an active community with many dedicated parent and community partner volunteers and advocates. It is obvious that the parents, teachers, staff, families, and partners in the community are dedicated to advancing the wellbeing of all children and families. Their dedication will undoubtedly serve them well in the upcoming transition to a K-8 model at the Gregory Heights site.