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TE 803 Case Study

Jefferson Community Student Case Study
“I Know, I Should Do Better”

Guiding Question

As a teacher I believe it is my job to mentor young students to achieving their potential as scholars and successful individual citizens. While creating this drive to accomplish is easy for some students, for others, it is much harder. Based on personal experience and background some students find it difficult to discover their goals for the future. This problem creates a lack of motivation either internal or external, for students in and out of the classroom. In my future profession I would like to continue to push students toward establishing goals and a desire to achieve in school.

Community Background

The Jefferson Community is a very large suburban school district located within 20 minutes of one of the ten largest cities in America, Detroit Michigan. This location creates a community that has a diverse and unique identity. Within the past 50 or so years this community has grown from a rural farm environment into a booming urban center that continues to prosper due to its unique identity. The three Jefferson Community high schools are all located on one central campus combining over 6,500 students from unique backgrounds onto one campus location. The Jefferson community motto is “one park, one school” highlighting a recurring theme of unity and diversity with such a large student population.

Jefferson’s location outside of a large city creates a climate which attracts many different types of families and students. Here people from all different socio-economic backgrounds come together within one campus and central location. Student backgrounds range from jobless parents, as a result of the current economic climate, to rural farming families, to inner city school transfer students, to affluent “upper class”. These differences in backgrounds are portrayed through the appearances and personalities of each student. Parents within the Jefferson Community inhabit a variety of different job occupations. These professions range from factory jobs, private farm owners, personal businesses, city jobs, etc. creating an environment of students from very different family stories. These identities heavily influence the individual lives and experiences of each student within the Jefferson schools creating an environment where students can learn an enormous amount from each other. The diversity within the student body is measured by observation and interpretation of what the students wear and the ideas they express. By observing their behavior and the identity they express a teacher can read a students family background. By making assumptions, not judgments, a teacher can better serve the needs of their classroom and student population. Culturally, this community is also incredibly diverse, attracting people from different ethnic and cultural surroundings. Racially this school mirrors the range people within America and the Detroit area.

Racial/Ethnic District Breakdown

Caucasian	74.2%
Asian	12.1%
African American8%
Hispanic	1.8%
Amer. Indian/Alaska Native04%
Native Hawaiian/Pac. Islander025%
Gender Composition	
Male	50.8%
Female	49.2%

(Information taken from a September 2008 student count) ¹

The reason for this diversity is due to the location of this school district near a huge urban environment. The total population of the Plymouth- Canton Community is around 92,338. ² Immigrants, families seeking job opportunities, families from rural surrounding areas, etc. all come together within this growing community. The total population of Plymouth- Canton has grown from 76,366 to 92,338 over eight years from the 2000 to 2008 United States Census. ³ The combination of so many people from so many different surroundings creates an incredible learning environment as a population continues to expand at a rapid rate creating more diverse learning.

School and Student Body Description

Jefferson High School is one of the largest high schools within the state and continues to grow due to the surrounding developing community. With a population of over 2,500 students within Jefferson High School and over 6,500 students on the three high school campus this community continues to expand. Classroom sizes in Jefferson are roughly 35 students with expectations that these numbers will grow to 40 over the next couple years. Families within the local area are drawn to this school district because of its reputation as a great district with good teachers and a diverse community.

¹ Plymouth-Canton Community Schools 2008-2009 Annual Report

² www.factfinder.census.gov

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=ChangeGeoContext&geo_id=16000US2613110&_geoContext=01000US|04000US26|16000US2665085&_street=&_county=Canton&_cityTown=Canton&_state=04000US26&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=geoSelect&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=ACS_2008_3YR_SAFF&_ci_nbr=null&qr_name=null®=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry=

³ Ibid.

Graduation Rates for Jefferson Community Schools

Subgroup	District	State
All Students	85.69%	75.5%
Male	81.26%	71.21%
Female	89.6%	79.98%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	72.73%	66.28%
Asian	93.41%	87.73%
Black	68.6%	56.29%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	>95%	72%
White	86.42%	81.82%
Hispanic	85.19%	60.33%
Multiracial	>95%	70%
Economically Disadvantaged	73.2%	60.51%
Limited English Proficiency	5%	67.14%
Students with Disabilities	70.44%	57.96%

(Information taken from 2008 Graduation Rates)⁴

This fact explains why this community continues to develop even though the surroundings areas and the greater state of Michigan may be shrinking in numbers.

However with such huge numbers the school district is beginning to face greater problems with classroom sizes. With 35 students and expectations of classes growing to 40 problems of teachers giving individual attention to students will become more difficult. Also, with a housing market that is struggling funding for an increasing student population will become lower which presents problems for teachers and the school district in meeting the needs of such a huge student population. Teachers within the district are beginning to fear funding cuts in school supplies, technology, etc. that will make teaching more difficult. Funding has also been cut for an expanding student community. The district does not have the money to hire more teachers or build more classrooms to support increased class sizes. With these problems present a variety of issues with meeting the needs of a huge student population. Teachers do not have the

⁴ Plymouth-Canton Community Schools 2008-2009 Annual Report

means to give every student the attention and resources they need which will allow students to slip through the cracks, possibly failing when they could succeed.

Jefferson High School itself was built in the 1960's and has been renovated numerous times to update and repair large issues within the building. It is both well maintained and modern appearance creating a positive learning environment. These surroundings help to establish a great "student mindset" of organized learning. This environment is neat and clean inviting students to share in this goal of creating a model student body. The Students of Jefferson have access to an incredible amount of classes and resources which allow students to explore different interests in a variety of areas. Electives such as the culinary arts, music, radio, broadcasting, robotics, and many others are all possibilities for students due to such a large campus environment. Students are encouraged to take classes in any of the three high schools which create almost a college campus environment of diverse experiences and learning.

Case Study Student Description

Mark's problems in school can accurately be described by three words "lack of motivation." Mark is a tall, slender, 16 year old kid who slowly walks from class to class hunched over and alone. He dresses in tight "alternative" clothes reflecting his attitude and sense of style. He is well liked by his small circle of friends but remains quiet most days slowly going about his tasks with a sense of humor. His silence is only broken when he decides to converse with a "rowdy" group of students who are a negative impact on him. When combined with this group they influence him into talking or "messaging" around instead of engaging in class work, which he knows (from our discussions) he should be doing.

Mark's problems are reflected in his eyes, there is a kind of sadness about them that I attribute to depression and lack of motivation. He wears his hair down over his face rarely making eye contact when engaged with a question. From the information I have gathered I strongly believe that much of Mark's issues with motivation stem from his home life. My conversations with him lead me to believe that his parents are not greatly involved in his life. He is often left at home babysitting his sister for hours on end unable to do his homework or leave the house. His parents both work in retail struggling to make ends meet. From his appearance and resources (clothes and school supplies) I strongly believe Mark comes from a relatively unstable home life. I have also determined that Mark does not get along well with his father. In conversation he as eluded to the fact that he "gets into arguments with him all the time." Mark's demeanor and attitude reflect this relationship with his father and I speculate he is sometimes overbearing.

From an entire year of working with Mark I have determined that he struggles in school with internal and external motivation. He has continued to ride the pass-fail line barely gaining credit for his first semester of schooling this year in my class, Political Science and Economic Systems. Overlooking his grade report from previous years he is barely a junior, has a 1.21 GPA, and is 492 out of 513 in class rank. His class rank indicates that he is 21 students from having the worst GPA in his graduating year. Mark's lack of inspiration for education, I believe come from a lack of internal and external motivation. When I discuss his grade with him, outlining that I am concerned that he may fail he responds in a melancholy tone saying "I know, I need to do better..." His general attitude about school reminds me of the *Winnie the Pooh* character "Eeyore" who mopes around depressed and looking for something to make him feel better. In discussing his

plans for the future Mark does not know what he wants to do. From my experience, I believe having some kind of goal for his post high school life would encourage him to work harder. Even if I cannot encourage Mark to improve his grades I would like to push him towards creating plans for after high school so that he is prepared for what awaits him.

Hypotheses for Student Improvement

To help Mark achieve within this classroom and assist him in improving his motivation within school there are a number of steps I will take as a teacher. These hypotheses are aimed at helping Mark gain motivation and a desire to achieve his potential in and out of the classroom. I feel it is my job as a teacher to not only help Mark to become a better student, but also to see that he has to work hard to become a successful individual outside of the classroom.

The most important thing a teacher can do to help Mark succeed is to establish a positive learning environment within my classroom that students want to be a part of. This goal may be hard to achieve for each students, but it should be every teacher's ideal. In practice this environment would mean providing a democratic classroom which students can feel that they enjoy learning and play a part in the teaching process. In other words it is not *my* classroom, but *our* classroom which is based on the principles of student centered learning. Students would be free to express their opinions and beliefs, continuing to enjoy the process of education. As a teacher each assignment, discussion, lesson, and exam should be meaningful. This means providing the students with relevant materials and examples to show them why it is interesting and important for them to

know. In a course like Political and Economic Systems it is easy to create relevant and important assignments so students can gain an understanding of “self.” We continue to relate ideas of politics and economics back to personal beliefs and ideas which allow students to discover themselves and their goals. Through this style of teaching I believe I can help Mark become more engaged and establish motivation in school.

To encourage Mark to engage me as a mentor I will continue to focus on him checking in each day and whenever assignments are due to create a close relationship with him. Not only do I want to be a role model for my student, but also a mentor who can assist them in creating plans for their own achievement. I believe if students to establish the tools to succeed now they will be much more likely to carry that drive onto other aspects of their lives in the future.

To engage Mark in the curriculum of Political and Economic Systems I believe it is important to continue to capture the advantages of a student centered curriculum. By connecting this class to the lives of the students and their understanding of the world I believe we have a greater chance of them taking an interest in school. This will hopefully lead them to being internally motivated to achieve. I believe Mark will also see the benefits from this student centered curriculum leading him to enjoy this class.

One of Mark’s biggest problems is his choice in friends and who he continues to associate with in my class. To encourage him to make the “right” choices I will assign groups for in class activities and remind him of the choices that he is making. If he continues to not finish class work then I will require that he work with other people.

One of my major goals as a teacher is to instill a sense of responsibility in my students, both in completing assignments and achieving good grades. Reinforcing this

ideal of responsible students with Mark through positive reinforcement and continued support will benefit both his self esteem and lack of motivation in school.

While these hypotheses will benefit Mark within school, I am concerned about my inability to control his home environment as a teacher who only sees him one hour of every day. With this limited time drastically changing his self esteem and motivation will be difficult. In order to have a greater impact on Mark's situation I will try to establish connections with his other teachers and counselor who may be able to help both myself and Mark improve his school work.

I know Mark understands that I am interested in seeing him succeed. From our conversations I believe that he has trouble connecting with other teachers and often misunderstood as being a "bad student." My hope is that I can continue to improve our relationship and adapt my strategies as we move through the rest of the year. This is a learning process for both us and seeing Mark succeed would help him and my understanding of how to motivate students.

Student Reaction and Improvement

Mark and I continue to communicate working towards improving his motivation and work ethic within school. While I know he both respects and appreciates me his grades within Political and Economic Systems have not improved. He is currently failing due to missing assignments. While I continue to remind him of his lack of effort he simply responds in a melancholy tone "I know, I need to do better." This unimproved motivation has become frustrating for a teacher who can only do so much to push Mark. Although Mark's grade has not improved his attitude and attentiveness in class has

increased. When engaged in discussion or lecture he frequently offers his opinion on what issues we are discussing. A strategy I feel contributed to his is my decision to move him to the front of the class to keep an eye on him and force him to become involved in the classroom setting. From my experience working with students this year I have found that different individuals work better in different locations around the room.

Over the course of this case study I have tried a variety of different strategies to work with Mark and none of them have increased his grade or work ethic. To start I offered my support in class and after school to help him complete assignments. He only once took up this offer for additional instruction. Discovering that this approach was having no effect I tried to express to Mark my concern about his grade stressing that if he did not graduate with a decent grades that he would regret it. His response to this was similar to what it has always been, "I know, I should do better." Over the past three weeks I have been trying to get Mark to think about what he wants to do after high school. I strongly believe that creating goals however small or big will prepare him for his future. I have discovered from my internship that school is not for everyone, some people would do much better in a trade or another field. Supporting these kids in their decision I believe should be encouraged by teachers' just as much as pursuing higher education.

Future Expectation

Although my time as a student teacher is close to being over in my remaining days I will continue to stress to Mark his need to improve his motivation. However, I do acknowledge from personal experience that it takes some people much longer to find

their “calling” than others. My concern with this situation is that while Mark may eventually find goals for his future it may be too late for him to achieve his potential. Every individual’s high school years are some of the most important of their lives in terms of preparation for the future. If you fail, or barely graduate you severely limit your options of what you can achieve.

References

Plymouth-Canton Community Schools 2008-2009 Annual Report

District numbers on graduation rates and racial/ethnic breakdown provided by the
2008 student population

United States Census Information on the Plymouth-Canton Community

Census years (2000, 2008) www.factfinder.census.gov