

Earl Warren High School Campus/Community Audit Essay

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“All children must learn rigorous higher-order thinking to thrive in the modern world. The only way to do that is by creating a serious intellectual culture in schools, one that kids can sense is real and true.” (Ripley, p. 199, 2013) As school administrators, this must be our mantra. We must work tirelessly to insure that each child that passes through our hallways receives the best education that we can provide to them in the short time that we have the opportunity of working with them. The community in which a school resides has this expectation of the school. This is with the widely-held understanding that a school is the reflection of the community in which it resides. The many offerings of a community can greatly help the school in generating successful students and graduates. It is imperative that school administrators also understand that a community that lacks necessary resources can come to rely on the school and district to make up for this lack of needed resources for students and families in the community. Regardless of the school or the community in which it resides, every child is a ten and must be afforded equal opportunity to reach his or her pinnacle of success. We must not pick certain groups that receive stronger instructors or identify those groups that are more self-sufficient and can therefore navigate through the public schools with minimal support above the norm. We have a responsibility to educate all children that reside in our community. The community from which our students come to us has a great influence on how successful our students can become. Gandara (2010) says that, “students’ environments outside school probably contribute more to schooling outcomes than in-school factors do.” (p. 28). As a school administrator, one must be aware of the make-up of the community that the school serves, where the students cohabitate outside of the school walls, and what the community offers to those who reside in it. This combination information from both the campus and the community which it serves can help to

provide educational leaders with the facts that are needed to make important decisions regarding how programs can be implemented and supported.

After studying campus and district data and taking a closer look at the community, some surprising facts were discovered about Warren High School and the community that is served by this educational institution. Let us first look at the campus equity audit that was compiled using the TAPR report from the Texas Education Agency along with the district PIEMS report. We will also use demographic information about the zip code in which the school resides and information that was gathered through the completion of a community walk-through. We will compile the information garnered from these sources to take a look at programmatic equity, achievement equity and teacher quality equity at Warren High School.

First, we will examine the subject of programmatic equity. In order to do this, we must take a look at the programs offered at Warren and the number of students that are serviced by the programs. Of the 2,939 students enrolled at Warren High School, 73.7% are Hispanic, 12.7% are white, and 8.6% are African American. This is a reflection of the demographics of the community in which the school resides. The Warren community is made up of 51.4% Hispanic, 32% white, 11.3% are African-American and 2.8% are Asian. Of the students at Warren, 47.8% are on the Free and Reduced lunch program and considered to be economically disadvantaged. The percentage of At-Risk students is only slightly lower at 45.9%. The percentages of these two programs seem to be closely aligned, as one would expect, since the economically disadvantaged students have a higher chance of also fitting at least one of the twelve qualifications to be considered at-risk. Of the Warren student population, 1.6% is receiving the

services of the LEP program. Of those students two students are labeled as Bilingual while forty-nine are considered to be ESL. This fits along with the data of the community. In the Warren community 61.8% speak English in the home while 33.3% of the homes are considered to be Spanish speaking homes. While looking at students that require Special Education services one can see that 9.9% of the students at WHS qualify for these services. Gifted and Talented labeled students make up 11.8 % of our student body. Of the students registered for Special Ed services, 73.3% are Hispanic, 13.4% are white, and 9.6% are African-American. For those that are labeled as Gifted and Talented, 67.5% are Hispanic, 18.3% are white, and 6.4% are African-American. These numbers show that the percentage of students of particular ethnicities enrolled in special programs reflect the percentages of the amount of students certain ethnicity enrolled in the school. However, there is a slightly larger number of white students in Gifted in Talented as compared to African American students. All of the numbers seem to accurately represent the populations of both the school and the community according to the zip code search and the community walk-through.

With the current climate of public education in the United States, and more importantly the state of Texas, instructional leaders must take a very close look at the achievement of the students in the school. Achievement equity is another area that must be looked at by educational leaders in order to meet state guidelines that are tied to accountability ratings and funding. We must ensure that all students are being helped to reach their highest level of success. Passing rates on the STAAR exam are of the utmost importance to schools and districts because of the implications of accountability ratings and funding that are tied to the passing rate of these assessments. Those that receive Special Education services must be looked at closely. The data

shows that there is gap between the achievement of students that are placed in regular education compared to those students that receive Special Education services. Of those student that are entitled to Special Ed services 57% passed the STAAR in reading while 56% met the same goal in on the Math STAAR. This level of achievement can be attributed to the services that the campus provides, but also shows that there is much improvement needed in order to raise all Special Ed students to passing on these state assessments.

At Warren High School, 95.9% of students graduated in four years. This rate is above the state and district average. Of those students that graduated 67.2% went on to enroll in a Texas institution of higher education. This number does not account for those that might have chosen to attend a college or university outside of Texas. Considering the Texas Success Initiative, the percentage of College Ready Graduates in English Language Arts is 72 while 74% of the students are College Ready Graduates in Mathematics. The average score of Warren students on the SAT exam is 1382.

The success rates of the students at Warren are in line with studies that suggest that socioeconomic status plays a large role in the learning of students. The majority of our students come from middle-class homes. However, the students in our school come from a fairly wide range of income. The median household income is \$51,780 with the largest percentage, 30%, of homes bringing in \$75,000 to \$99,000. When it comes to the language spoken in the home, 61.8% of homes speak English only while 33.3% speak Spanish while approximately 5% speak a language other than English or Spanish. As a school and a district, we must be concerned about our ELL's and making sure that we are working to provide the best education for this growing

group of students. According to Theoharis and Brooks (2012), “these English language learners are the fastest-growing demographic in public schools in all regions of the United States.” (155.)

One must also take a close look at teacher equity when searching through data about the equity of a school. It is, after all, the teachers who are on the front lines and have day-after-day contact with the students that attend the school. Teacher effectiveness is of great importance when considering the success of a campus. On the Warren campus there are 157.1 teachers. The average number of years of teaching experience is 10.8 years with the largest number of teachers having between 11 and 20 years of experience. According to this data, most teachers at Warren have less than 15 years of experience. I do not see this as an inequity. Years of experience do not an effective teacher make. Good teachers come in all shapes and sizes with various years of experience. While more experience is usually seem as desirable in employees, first-year teachers can provide very valuable ideas that more experienced teachers have not been exposed to. The equity of teachers does not lie in the number of years that the teacher has been teaching, but in how the teacher has been teaching during those years. As an instructional leader I would implement a mentorship plan in which I would require the teachers that have been in the profession for several years to work closely and plan with first-year teachers and teachers that are new to the campus. There is much that can be gained through this type of program. I would do my best to create a schedule that would allow for these teams of teachers to have planning time together and time to observe and collaborate in the classroom. It would take time and money to work out a schedule that would allow for this type of program, but I can see where the benefits far outweigh the loss of time and money. According to Clark, “For mentoring programs to influence novice teacher retention and teacher growth, proper mentoring partnerships need to

be established with time allocated to develop these relationships and for learning to occur.”

(198.) We must work to insure that both our novice and our veteran teachers have the opportunities to learn from one another. I would provide more staff development opportunities to the new teachers to help them in the transition into the professional realm of teaching.

While looking at and sifting through the available data, there were a few things that stuck out to me. The amount of Hispanic students enrolled at Warren is very comparable to the number of students enrolled in both Special Education and Gifted and Talented programs.

Representation for white students is higher in both Special Education and Gifted and Talented programs than the percentage of students in the school. Representation of African-American students is slighted over-represented in Special Ed and slightly under-represented in Gifted and Talented. According to Skrla (2009), when looking for an indicator of equity for Gifted and Talented programs, one should look to see whether students from all groups are served in Gifted and Talented programs in a percentage appropriate to the group's representation in the school. (Skrla, 2009, p. 43) We must work to find out why this group of students is under represented in Gifted and Talented and over represented in Special Education. We must then work to try and rectify this issue. It would become necessary for teachers to identify more African American students that can be nominated and tested for Gifted and Talented services. This must be done in order for all groups to be equally represented in the special programs that offered at Warren High School.

While I was not surprised by most of the findings, I did find a few things interesting about how we provide service for these special programs. I believe that it is interesting that our

campus has nineteen Special Education teachers to serve 9.9% of our population while we have zero teachers to serve the 11.8% that are listed as Gifted and Talented students. This seems to be a huge inequity between the amount of services that are provided for the Special Ed students compared to the Gifted and Talented students. I realize that there are more stringent state laws in place to insure that all services needed for Special Education students are provided by the district and that the services for Gifted and Talented students only need to be available to students. I also see that our ethical responsibility is to help those that learn at a lower level to reach their full potential. Even though, I still feel that we are not doing all that we can to make sure that the students on the other end of spectrum are being challenged and given the educational opportunities that they deserve to reach their full potential. As an instructional leader I will work to find a way to make sure that resources for the Gifted and Talented students are made available to the students that qualify for that special program. While I am aware that state law only requires that services for these students be made available, I feel that this is a great disservice to these children. We must work to make sure that services are not only available, but incorporated into the classroom to enrich the education of those that are labeled as Gifted and Talented. I will work through budgets and work to create and implement ways in which our campus can supply the type of rigorous instruction that is needed to challenge these students to reach their full potential. Haney claims that, "Allocating educational resources to support gifted students promotes efficiency because those students will create strong returns on the public's investment." (299.) While we may view these high-performing students as able to learn through self-guided lessons and projects, it is the district's and school's responsibility to provide this group of students with more than just rigorous work. According to Francoys Gagne of the

University of Quebec at Montreal, “For talent to emerge, causal contributions from many sources are required, among them high natural abilities (called gifts), motivation, perseverance, supporting parents and teachers, as well as long-term investment in learning, training, and practicing. And as a person seeks a higher achievement goal, these contributing factors will need to manifest themselves more intensively.” (Gagne, 2008)

My second plan of action as an instructional leader would be to find a way to close the achievement gap between the regular education students and those students that qualify as Special Education. According to the data, Warren has much room for improvement when it comes to the passing rate of our Special Education students. I would work with the Special Education coordinators and teachers to find an effective way to have each and every teacher on campus work to create equity for this sub-population of students. In the current campus climate there seems to be an attitude of “it’s not my problem” when it comes to these students. I would work to bridge the gap between the regular education teachers and the Special Education teachers. I would supply staff development and planning time to allow these teachers to work together to devise a plan of action that can be followed by each teacher on the campus.

As an administrator I would work to the best of my abilities to close the gap between the inequities that I see on the campus. I would attempt to find funding sources to provide more learning opportunities for our Gifted and Talented students. While hiring more teachers for this group may not be possible, I do not see why I could not work with the Gifted and Talented coordinator to develop curriculum and activities that would push the students enrolled in this program and provide them with enrichment exercises so that they are learning at their full

potential. Just because there are not laws in place to guarantee these services, it would still be my responsibility to find a way to provide them. I would also look at the number of African-American students enrolled in the Gifted and Talented program and concentrate on identifying those students that qualify for the program but may have been overlooked because they did not have an advocate at an earlier age who pushed for them to be tested and placed in the program to receive services.

“There is often an implicit assumption that effective instructional leadership basically looks the same, regardless of the student population’s diversity, idiosyncratic community dynamics, or the dispositions of educators toward their students.” (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012, p. 3). Anyone that works in education today knows that this assumption is true for many. We know that strong educational leaders share many of the same great qualities that make them truly effective in their roles. While one must look at data that pertains to the students that attend the school, I feel that to be a truly effective instructional leader, one must look at the needs of the entire community in order to create a successful school that serves the children of the community to the fullest extent. When looking at the data of Warren High School and that of the Warren community, I can definitely see where our school has help from the community in some areas and where the school must step up in others. Based on the housing trends of our community, I can see why there is such a distinct difference in the test scores of the majority of our students and those that fall under the label of economically disadvantaged. The information gained through the campus equity audit, the community equity audit, and the community walk-through reflect the student population of the school, their achievements, and the areas in which we need to work at a higher level. The information learned gives a visual example of the difference of the

lives of these sub-populations of students. This shows that the school has the responsibility to insure that all kids have the same opportunity to learn, regardless of their back-ground. Creating an equitable environment in which all students have equal access to the necessary tools for him or her to be the most successful student possible must be the top priority for all school districts and campuses. According the Payne, “Resources of students and adults should be analyzed before dispensing advice of seeking solutions to the situation.” (25.) Looking through the necessary data about the campus, the students enrolled in that campus, and the community in which the school resides is paramount in making educated decisions about where more work, better instruction, and more services are needed to help each and every student on that campus as they work to reach their educational goals. Through this process, a few inequities at Warren High School were revealed and a few beginning steps have been suggested to help the school move in a direction in which there is more equity in the programs available to students regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, or the educational label that has been placed upon them. We must continue to work to insure that we are meeting the needs of all students. Until we have reached that goal, we will not be providing all students with the opportunities that they deserve. We will be failing certain students rather than working to send each child out of our doors equipped with the tools to become productive citizens of our community, or any community in which they choose to reside and build their life. We have a responsibility that we must uphold.

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