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## **Introduction**

My experience at Classic City is one that I will never forget. Classic City High School in Athens, Ga is a non- traditional high school in the Clarke County School District. Students can go to this high school for a variety of reasons. They can go if they want to fast track their graduation date, they can go if they want to go back to high school to finish their credits, they can go if they are low income, etc. The cause alone, I believe is great.

## **The Institution**

Classic City High School is a small school that serves 128 students. In comparison to the two major high schools in Clarke County, Cedar Shoals and Clarke Central High School both have over 1,000 students. At 61% the school serves predominantly African American students. This high school is located less than 2 miles from two different Government Housing locations. Out of 128 students, 92 are eligible for free or reduced lunch, this highlights the poverty levels in the area. The average teacher- student ratio in the classroom is 1:16. There are a lot of incentive programs at the school to promote things such as attendance. I did not see good attendance in the classroom I was in. out of my twelve visits, there was only perfect attendance once and it was only after two of the students showed up over twenty minutes late.

Initially I was unsure about Classic City. When Mrs. MeMe first visited our class I was interested in the type of environment that she was describing. I knew that I had never been exposed to anything like this school before. I went to Oconee County High School just twenty minutes away. Five or so years ago, Oconee County was named one of the wealthiest and best places to live in Georgia. Oconee County High School is a traditional school with over 1,000

students. It has above average testing scores, above average graduation rates, and above average parent involvement. It is quite the opposite of Classic City. Before my experience at Classic City High School, I would have told you that non-traditional high schools aren't beneficial to students. I thought that traditional ways of learning were the only way that students could learn because I had never been exposed to a non-traditional school before. But now, I believe that this school is the best thing for some of the students that attend, and that some students in traditional high schools could benefit greatly from going there. I believe that the teachers and administration at Classic City are truly dedicated to their students and their priority is making sure that they reach their full potential.

### **Teachers and Administrators**

I didn't have much interaction with anyone other than the lady who runs the front desk and my assigned teacher. I never saw any of the administration other than Mrs. MeMe. The lady that runs the front desk is extremely nice, I came to like her a lot throughout my visits. In the hallways I saw other teachers and they always seemed happy with a smile on their face. They welcomed me and it seemed like they are happy that I, and the other UGA mentors were there. My teacher, is extremely nice and very hard working. You can tell that she likes to teach and it is rewarding for her when they really grasp on to what they are learning. She does an excellent job of making sure that each student meets their own personal goals, she doesn't make unrealistic goals for students. You can also see that she gets burnt out on days when she doesn't get much participation. I feel bad for her sometimes during lessons because she is pulling teeth to try and get some of the kids to interact with her. My teacher relied heavily on technology throughout the semester, multiple times when I was there they were taking online

tests or doing online assignments. I also got to sit in on several advising sessions between my teacher and several students. This was very interesting to see because the teacher I work with completely switched from teacher mode to graduation coach mode. She was dedicated to making sure that each student was on the right track and doing what he or she needs to do for their graduation.

### **The Students**

I was there for a third period class, which is right after lunch. There are seven students in the classroom and because of the lunch period before, there was often poor attendance in the class. I often found three students that came on a regular basis. Student 1 is a female and Students 2 and 3 are both male. Out of those three students, student 2 is probably the student that got the most out of class every day. He is the only student that showed up every day that I was there and continually made an effort with the assignments that he was given. He is an extremely smart young man. He talked to me about how much he loved playing basketball and that he was a really big movie buff. I easily connected to him and he was really fun getting to know and watch as he learned a lot in the class. Student 1 is the female who made it to class more often than the other students, she did not enjoy the class and was very open about that. She always came to class but she rarely does any work. Her and the teacher go back and forth every class, and she usually ends up just listening to music and doing her own thing. She would talk to me about her job across the street at the day care facility. She didn't like that either. It was very hard for me to connect to her. She was just a ninth grader and it made me nervous for her future that doing the work was that much of a fight every single day. Student 3 is a male

who showed up late every single day to class. He was very class clown like and was always able to put a smile on the teacher's face. He did his work slowly and surely making sure that everyone was laughing along the way. The teacher sometimes got frustrated with this student because he frequently got students off track. All three of these students that I focused on are African American students. Although the student's academic ability ranged, each student was able to complete work that was on par for them personally. A lot of academic assignments were left undone at the end of each class, but the teacher would allow them to make up unfinished assignments at the end of each lesson topic.

I was in an English class and I was very easy to see that they were very underdeveloped in that specific subject. I was able to do some revisions on some of their essays and it was not high school level material. They sometimes struggled to make three sentences for one paragraph and the essays as a whole were barely five paragraphs. There were a lot of grammar mistakes and they used a lot of slang words. They also struggled a lot with vocabulary. They didn't use the right words or misspelled them repeatedly. It was very difficult for me to be of much help to them because my first instinct was to take the paper and make dramatic changes to it. I had to remember that I was not doing my own work. I had to make sure that I made suggestions that were appropriate for their work. I think that a lot of the material that they were learning was difficult for them because their teacher was very direct. She often moved fast. She required a lot of note taking, which they were not happy about at all.

The school culture was very different than that of a typical high school. I never saw any signs for a sports team or anything like that. I think that is detrimental to the school environment. Half of the reason why I went to class when I was in high school was because I

had something to do with the sports team I was on after school. I also noticed that they canceled prom because of the lack of interest. I think that is extremely odd because one of the most exciting things about high school for most teenagers is going to prom. I think both of these things highlights the nontraditional elements of this particular high school. I think it also highlights the fact that most of the kids that attend this school are not interested in the typical things that high school has to offer. They either don't care about being there or they are just there to get in and get out as quickly and as easily as possible. The students seemed close to each other. I saw a lot of genuine friendships at Classic City.

### **As a Future Educator**

Working in a school like Classic City could potentially be very rewarding. Several times after I left my days at CCHS I called my mom and told her I could see myself working there. I learned a lot about mutual respect with the students. In my opinion, one of the reasons why the teacher wasn't very successful is because she did not respect her students as people. That is all they want. Children really want structure and guidance; at Classic City they still want that they just show it to you differently. The days where she had a fun assignment and the activity was super involving the students were all for it. Even though it is difficult to every single day have something that is extremely exciting, but as a teacher I believe it is your job to get everyone involved at all times. I made connections at CCHS that I think will benefit me in the future. Not every student is the same. I had to take different approaches with Student 1 than with Student 2. It takes time for students to trust you. I was able to build trust with the students and we were able to do really great work when they allowed me to help them. I also realized that the high school might have this stigma that the students are not smart, but the

students that I worked with were so bright and with a little bit of positive reinforcement they were able to show that. I think the teacher's job is to make sure that their students have the right tools and the right path, but the students deserve to take the steps by themselves. If they feel like they are being forced, it is less likely that they will. If they do the work while being forced to do the work, you can almost always assume that it is not their best.

### **Conclusion**

I am very grateful for the opportunity to experience Classic City High School first hand. The school serves such an important role in the community and the continued dedication and hard work from the teachers, administration, and community is admirable. Some students that go to CCHS could potentially be lost to a dropout rate, gangs, teen pregnancy, or so much more. It is such an achievement that Classic City has done so well for so many students. I could see myself working at a place like this because I think that the way that I want to run a classroom someday would really fit in with the environment.