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Classic City High School Experience Paper

Classic City High School is an alternative school, and it is nothing like the high school that I went to. For starters, the students at Classic City attend four classes a day and have a lunch break after their second period. This is very different from my high school, as well as other high schools that I am familiar with. At my school, we had seven periods, one of which was just a lunch period. Schools that I know that had a block schedule would attend around four classes a day, but they had more classes that they just didn't attend every day. The students at Classic City only having four classes is nice because it allows them to focus more and dedicate more time to the small number of classes they are in, but it also makes classes longer. Having a small number of classes and a nontraditional block schedule has its pros and cons and could be good for some students but not others. By the end of a period, I noticed that many of the students that I worked with would start to get restless because they had been sitting for so long. Classic City is also very different from my high school because many of the classes are online, and once a student finishes one online class they are almost immediately enrolled in a new one, even if it is almost the end of the school year. One student I worked with finished his online English class and was beginning an online biology class with only a month left in the school year. This was really strange to me when I first heard about it because I wouldn't want to begin a new class in April when school ends in May. I think it's interesting that the students at Classic City don't

necessarily take classes from August to May, but instead, they work at their own pace and start a new class whenever they finish one.

Technology plays a large role in the learning environment at Classic City, and the students here spend a lot of their day on computers which I personally feel makes the periods seem even longer than they already do. Several classes are online, and the students essentially teach themselves the material from watching videos and then taking several tests or quizzes on the information. The students that I worked with often complained about the repetitive structure of their classes. As soon as they finished one quiz, there would oftentimes be another one right after it, and the students did not like that. I don't think this class format is ideal for high school students, especially when classes are an hour and a half. The students that I worked with often got tired of sitting at a computer doing work that they deemed as boring and unimportant, and this caused them to grow distracted and lose focus. I know when I was in high school, there were certain classes that I didn't necessarily like and that I thought were boring, but the format of those classes at least held my attention most of the time. I would much rather take classes where the teacher lectures, we talk in groups or have a whole class discussion, or we do labs or other activities. I can't imagine spending most of the day just sitting at a computer, so the class structure at Classic City High School doesn't seem to be the best idea to me. That being said, I think Classic City's structure is a good alternative for students who struggle or have outside circumstances that prevent them from succeeding in a different school. Classic City has a different learning structure and environment than other schools, but for some students, that is a good thing. The structure is different, but the school still has teachers and administrators, like all other schools, who do a good job creating a positive learning environment for these students.

My main interaction with the staff was with Mrs. Johns because I helped out in her third period class every time I volunteered. Mrs. Johns is a very sweet person, and it is clear that she really cares about her students and wants them to succeed. She talked to her students as people rather than as a superior to an inferior which I really appreciated seeing because I've definitely seen teachers who come across as condescending or patronizing. Mrs. Johns seemed to really know her students and what they struggled with and tried to provide as much help as she could. She was also understanding of students who might not be having the best day which was really great to see. One thing that I think Mrs. Johns did really well in regard to my being there is that she never stated in front of the whole class which students are struggling and could use help. Instead, she always stated to just me and the one student that she wanted me to work with that I could maybe help them with an assignment or quiz. I think this is a really great way of doing things because it does not embarrass the student in front of the whole class or draw any unwanted attention to them. It also lets them know that I was available to help them if they wanted it without making the student feel like they were asking for help which some students don't like doing. Another thing that Mrs. Johns was really good about is that she never forced her students to do anything. She would encourage them to get work done and stay on task, but she also understood that the students may be having a bad day or feeling frustrated and may need a minute before getting back on task. If a student laid their head down for a minute, she never yelled at them to do work. Instead, she gave them time to take a minute and encouraged them to do the work when they were ready. A lot of teachers that I had would not have acted this way in these situations, but I think it is important to recognize that students might not always be in the right mental space to work and Mrs. Johns seemed to understand that. One thing that I think Mrs. Johns could do better is discouraging cell phone use. The class that I was in was a lab class, so

the students worked on computers the entire period. However, there were many times that I was there when students were on their phones for a large part of the period. Mrs. Johns would sometimes say something about putting phones away, but it was never entirely enforced which I thought was strange. Overall, Mrs. Johns seemed to really care about her students and knew how to motivate them to do their work. When I am a teacher one day, I hope to have the same understanding and ability to connect with my students.

I mainly only interacted with Mrs. Johns at the school, but I also saw Mrs. Hamilton a few times. The role of graduation coach and mentor seemed to really work at Classic City. Mrs. Hamilton seemed to know all the students and would smile and wave at them. The students all knew her as well. I like the idea of having one person in a school that everyone knows and can turn to if needed, however, I don't think it would work everywhere. At my high school, my graduating class had close to 700 students, and the other three grade levels at my school had a similar number of students. At my school, having one graduation coach and mentor for everyone is not possible and would not work. At Classic City, though, I think it does work because there is a small enough number of students, and Mrs. Hamilton seems to have a positive impact on the students through her role at the school.

In the class that I worked in, there were six students. Four of these students were black, one was Hispanic, and one was white. Three of the students were girls, and three of the students were boys. All six students had different backgrounds than my own, so it was interesting to get to know them and think about how their lives differed from mine. When I went to volunteer, I would sit with a student or two, answer questions and help when necessary, and motivate them to stay on task. I worked with four of the six students during my time volunteering, and I enjoyed working with and getting to know all of them. All of the students want to do well in their classes

and have the abilities to do so, but they sometimes lack confidence and motivation. The student that I worked with the most usually knew the answers to what he was working on, but he would second guess himself. He would also say he didn't know something and look to me for help, but after me asking him questions and talking to him, he would say the answers and show that he really did know the information. Sometimes, he also wouldn't be very motivated to do his work and would be slow to start tasks, and I think this is also because he lacks confidence in himself and in his abilities. I tried to connect with some of the students by talking about their interests, so I talked with them about their shoes, Apple vs. Samsung, and certain movies. I also talked with one of the students about my own high school experiences because they were asking me questions about whether I had to do the same stuff as them in high school, and I feel like me sharing my experiences was a successful way to connect because it showed that I wasn't completely different from them and can maybe relate to some of their school experiences. The students were all slow to open up, but after a while, they started to show their personalities more and more. Overall, I enjoyed to getting to know this group of students, and they are all bright, funny, sweet kids who have such a high potential, even if not everyone, including themselves, always sees that.

I feel like I had some good conversations with these students, but I don't know how much I really reached them because I only volunteered once a week and wasn't around all the time. Teachers, rather than occasional volunteers, have a better opportunity to reach students because they are there working with the students every day. That being said, I feel like I definitely made progress with my students over the course of the semester. I got some of them to open up, and I helped them with their school work. My main role in the students' academics really was just me encouraging them and motivating them to get their work done. I helped keep them on task,

helped talk through and explain what they didn't know, and tried to get them to be confident about their answers. I can't really say that I made anyone a better student because that wasn't really my role in the class, but I hope that I made them feel better about their assignments and their academic abilities. The main impact this experience had on me as a future educator is that it makes me want to do a variety of activities in my future classroom every day. I don't want my future students to just be sitting all day because I saw how that didn't work at Classic City. I also saw how different the six students I worked with were from one another, and as a future educator, I want to incorporate a variety of activities and learning styles into my class to better help all students. Also, I think it's important to recognize that students can have bad days and become frustrated, so I want to be understanding of that in my future class like the teachers at Classic City were. Finally, I want to be able to connect with my students, and I think I learned some ways to do that by getting to work with these students at Classic City. My time at Classic City was a positive experience for me, and I hope to apply what I learned, both good and bad, into my future classroom.