

Samuel Gregory

4/28/17

Case Study Option #2

Peter Smagorinskiy

## The Institution

Classic City High School (CCHS) is rather unique in the way its curriculum is designed. Instead of following the traditional six or seven periods a day, the school follows a block schedule pattern. Meaning that students go to class for only four periods a day, but those classes are extremely longer when compared to the average high school's. Personally, having no experience with a block schedule, the setup seemed strange. Of course, the greatest advantage lies in the fact that since students only have four courses, there is a narrower range of knowledge they are required to focus on. Instead of idling sitting in a class they don't understand, the students have more time to work on concepts confusing them, and the teachers are able to help more. It should also be noted that class sizes at CCHS are significantly smaller than the national average class size (at least from the classrooms I saw anyway) with the highest being 16 students in a class at any given moment. Less classes, smaller class sizes, and more time meant that the students were better able to focus on the subject at hand, and teachers did not need to rush through lessons. It should also be noted that the smaller number of classes also reduced the workload on students considerably, and most did not seem as stressed about homework as they did about making it to their jobs on time. As with everything though, there are flaws to this schedule.

Students who accelerated in a subject often found themselves bored in the classroom. While mentoring for Mrs. Stagg's math classroom, I noted several students often quit doing worksheets halfway through. When questioned about it, the most common response was "I know what I'm doing, I don't need to do the rest." The students would then go on to cause distractions (albeit mostly to others who weren't doing work) that sometimes resulted in disrupting other individuals who needed help. The second most common response was "I'm tired, I don't feel like

it,” leading to the second drawback: time. While it’s true that the more time a student has to focus on the subject, the more likely they are to exceed in it, it was exhausting for several of them to sit still in a classroom for over an hour. Those who excelled in the course grew restless and those who were struggling felt the time was taxing on them. This feeling was especially apparent among those who had jobs to work after school. Another drawback from time was the teachers’ attitude towards some of them. Because the teachers knew they had more time to work with students, some felt they should all be at a certain level by a certain point. It is important to have standards for the class, but sometimes when a student did not comprehend the lecture, they received a berating such as “We spent all this time on it, how don’t you know!”. Even when working one-on-one with some students, teachers grew impatient as they felt the extra time they had should have more than made up for any lack of understanding on the students’ part.

CCHS follows a policy that the only technology a student should use is the provided computers. I am unsure of how much this is enforced though, since several students used their phones in Mrs. Stagg’s class, and I noticed a few others in the room across from hers. In fact, several times I noticed the teachers turn a blind eye to them. The few times when the teachers were upset for students using their electronic devices, the teachers merely told them to put them away. They did not confiscate it or punish the student in any way. I believe it was out of sympathy since most of them had received calls into work, or the fact that almost all of them understood the lectures, so they thought it would be fine. As far as technology goes, phones are common in CCHS, though computers are a nightmare to use. The computers were used to assess the student’s progress, and from what I’ve gathered by looking over shoulders or attempting one myself, the computers are somewhat slow and the assessments tend to ask questions that are not part of the curriculum.

Discussing from a personal standpoint, the educational and classroom structure did not change my opinion on the high school much, if at all. Mainly due to the fact that I had never been to a “catch up” school before, so I did not have much expectations to begin with. I knew the style would be different, though I honestly did not think too much on it.

## Teachers and Administrators

My main interaction with any school staff was with Mrs. Stagg, the teacher whose class I mentored for, an Mrs. Knight, a teaching assistant. The two played the role of good cop/bad cop or doting mother/strict father. Mrs. Stagg was encouraging of the students, always walking around and having individual lectures with those who were struggling. The area she lacked in was discipline and teaching to the class. That's where Mrs. Knight picked up for her. Rather than teach one-on-one, Mrs. Knight could teach in a manner that the whole class could understand at once. She was adamant about the students doing their work, but in a manner that a parent is harsh on their child so they can succeed. Both of their styles complimented each other, and through it, almost all students were at a level they did not think they could be. Given it's a math course, it's probably for the best they teach in such a manner, instead of relying on the computers. They reminded me greatly of my own parents (but in a better way) and I remain on good terms with both. I discovered we even have a lot in common.

I did not see much from Mrs. Mimi though. Aside from my initial visit where everything was setup, I had no interaction with her. From that one time though, I noticed several students smile and wave at her. And if I heard her brought up in conversation, there was nothing but good things said about her. She well-liked and highly respected throughout the school, and I believe that allows her function better than otherwise. Being responsible for the seniors graduating cannot be easy, just the thought alone brings stress. But I feel that if she was disliked, she would be miserable at her job, and that would negatively affect her performance. As far as I can tell from her and Mrs. Knight and Mrs. Stagg, the staff at the school does believe the students can graduate on time, and are willing to put in the effort for them.

## The Students

While volunteering at CCHS, I mentored a student named John Smith (alias for his real name), though technically I mentored all the students. John Smith I worked more closely with, since he was falling behind the other students. John is black and comes from a low-income single parent household. He works after school to help his mother. He can be quiet and chill, or loud and boisterous- it really depends on the day. I'd like to believe I'm a bit more consistent on being calm and chill. John is almost opposite of me in terms of personality. While I am introverted about my school life, I openly express my personal world to those around me. John does not talk about his personal life, though he is very nice and funny and is friends with almost everyone at school. He's straight and works hard at his job, though he makes no effort when it comes to school. I could never get him to open up about it, so it's unclear whether it stems from laziness, fatigue, or a personal issue. Truthfully, I can relate to him, as I don't have a good relationship with my family, and the fatigue from work while in high school often overtook me. Perhaps he just dislikes school because he seems to have been labeled as the 'dumb one' in the class. Either way, he clearly does not like school and just goes because he has to. As far as tracking is concerned, it appears he has been tracked to be towards the bottom of his class. His relationships with the teachers are not good, nor does he have a desire to learn math. He refused to do work, whether individual or group, and simply talked to his friend the most of the class. Despite all this, he is by no means a bad person. He listens to authority and gets along well with his peers. He just has no interest in school. Though there were a few times he did make an attempt.

When the students were learning to use the quadratic formula and to use imaginary numbers, John showed noteworthy understanding when compared to other students. He easily grasped the concepts and was one of the first students to finish the practice worksheets for it.

This surprised me, as it revealed to me that he is not as dumb as he likes the school to believe he is. At times when he was having trouble, he sometimes asked for my assistance and then went on to finish a packet before the rest of his peers. I believe this might have happened because I am closer in age to him, and I do not treat him as 'low level'. He is on good terms with the teachers, but it is obvious in his demeanor that he does not appreciate the label they gave him or the condescending manner they speak to him with. I simply speak to him the same way I talk to everyone and I think he feels like I actually treat him like a human. By no means have I gotten through to him, he still doesn't speak much to me, but he does greet me in the hallway and does ask me for help, which he never did with the teachers before.

### Future in Education

It's tough to say whether or not I want to be an educator. Past mentees have told me I'm good at it, but in my mind I'm still deciding on what I want to do. Tutoring at CCHS has definitely had its benefits through life lessons though. For instance, I wouldn't go so far to say I reached John, but I made the effort, which is much more than I've seen some of the teachers do for him. I've slowly begun to see who he is, even though there's still much behind the scenes he does not show. Our current relationship could best be described as mentor/mentee-ish. We're not exactly at that level, but it's the closest comparison. I feel progress was made with John. At the start of the semester he would barely glance my way. Now he actively greets me whenever he sees me. And I have noticed that when I tutor him, his grades improve. He still lacks the motivation which prevents him from getting better grades, but he has improved academically to a certain point. I like John, I think him and I are different yet similar enough that I enjoy helping him when he asks.

I've enjoyed and matured from my time at CCHS. I met several people who come from different backgrounds than me. Before, I would never be willing to talk to those people, as I thought the differences between us were just too great. But now I think I can connect to more people. And if I do decide to go down the path of education, that tool will be invaluable to me. As a possible future educator, I have to take the lessons I learned and apply those to my own classroom. I can't be impatient with students who don't understand the material, nor can I give anybody a label. I need to understand my students may have to work or have issues I do not know about.