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Course Project Option #2
LLED 3461H

I was initially quite nervous about mentoring at Classic City High School. There were many things about the experience that made me feel uneasy- the fact that I'd be working in a math class even though I'm an English education major, what role would the teacher be expecting me to play in his or her classroom, and how would the students react to me being in their classroom. Despite these initial fears, the time that I spent at CCHS was extremely rewarding and eye opening. It was fascinating to witness the different components of the school at work and to interact with the wide variety of students that attend the school. I was able to work in a two different classrooms during my time at CCHS, which gave me the opportunity to work with different teachers and different students.

When looking at CCHS as an overall institution, it certainly hits the mark on most major requirements for a successful school- nice classrooms, clean bathrooms, decent security, and sufficient technology. After reading The Bully Society by Jessie Kein for my book club (a book all about the dangers of bullying and how it sometimes leads to school shootings), I was a little uneasy going back to CCHS. However, I never felt unsafe at CCHS. While the security at CCHS was adequate, there are certain necessities that CCHS fails to provide its students. The most noticeable flaw in CCHS's system is its attendance policy. After spending the last several months going to CCHS on a weekly basis, I am still unaware if the institution has any concrete attendance policies. Students appeared to come and go from classes as they please and suffer no disciplinary consequences if they are late to class. This lack of structure is one of the main sources of dysfunction at the school. Another resource that CCHS fails to supply its students with is options for afterschool activities. On multiple occasions during my time at CCHS,

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students expressed to me their extreme disappointment with lack of athletic programs offered to the students. Not only does the institution not offer any sort of sport teams for its students to join, but the physical education classes are offered online. Since many of CCHS's students either go to part time jobs after school or go home to their couches, a significant number of students end up spending nearly the entire day without hardly ever going outside. Athletic programs help students keep in shape, give them something productive to do with their time, and teach students many useful life skills. By not offering the outlet of sports, CCHS is doing a disservice to its students. CCHS does have satisfactory technology for its students to use. There are multiple, functioning computers in nearly every classroom and many students appeared to have school laptop.

While volunteering at CCHS, I had the chance to work with a couple of different teachers and it was interesting to witnessing their various teaching styles. Most of my time was spent in a math class working with a very kind, advanced algebra teacher. I witnessed many incidents that would've driven many teachers into a frenzy, but this teacher always kept a level head. She was also very keen as to when she should back up and review material if it was evident that the students were failing to grasp the concepts. This teacher was very caring, but sometimes this caused her to be a bit of a pushover. Students would sometimes take advantage of her kindness by doing things such as asking to go to the bathroom and not returning until the end of class. The teacher also struggled with getting her students to put away their technology. Phones were a grave problem in the classroom. Students would often spend the entire class period on social media, listening to music, or watching videos. This not only effected their education, but was a

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distraction to the students around them as well. Cellphones were not only a problem in the advanced algebra class that I worked in, but in other classes as well. It seems cellphones have become a sort of epidemic at CCHS that the teachers can't figure out how to cure.

Being a tutor in an advanced algebra class as an English major had its difficulties. I recognized most of the material being covered; however, I didn't always have a firm grasp on it. Luckily, the student I worked with the most was bright and eager to learn, which made my job a lot easier. I consider myself lucky that I got to work with primarily one student at CCHS. Many of my peers bounced around from student to student, so no real bonds were formed. While I, on the other hand, got to learn about my student's likes, dislikes, thoughts, and beliefs. In between lessons, we would often discuss music and our favorite musicians. One of our biggest topics of conversation were our mutual love and respect for Beyoncé. During one class period, I told him that I love Taylor Swift's music and he looked around the room to make sure no one was listening, and then whispered to me that he listens to her music all the time. We also discussed his plans after high school. He was recently accepted to the University of North Georgia where he plans to attend in the fall. He would get very excited whenever we'd discuss college. He wanted to know everything I could tell him about living in dorms, eating in dining halls, and taking class. Everything about college excited him. Working with this student was an absolute pleasure, because his desire to learn was evident. He was very intelligent, so he really only needed me to assist him when things got really complex. His biggest problem in the classroom was poor vision, so my often my main job would be to help him read the board and occasionally copy down problems for him. After reading the book Limbo by Alfred Lubrano (a story about

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people from different backgrounds interacting), I was more acutely aware of the differences between this student and myself. Him being African American, male, and from what some might consider a “lower class” family, while I’m white, female and considered to be from a “middle class” family; however, these differences never got in the way of me helping him expand his education or the friendship that came from being his peer mentor.

Anytime I work with kids (be it tutoring, babysitting, working as a camp counselor, etc.), I always want to leave some sort of impression on them. One of my biggest fears of volunteering at CCHS was that I wouldn’t be able to reach the students on any sort of level; fortunately, this was not the case. I was worried that the students would refuse to accept help from someone only a few years older than them, but just about every student I worked with seemed to leave the lesson with a better understanding of the material. It could be challenging at times trying to find a balance between being a tutor, while also attempting to build a relationship as a mentor. Though it helped that the students clearly want to be friends with the mentors. They would often make jokes with me and ask me questions about my life. At the beginning of the semester the students didn’t really take the mentor’s role in the class very seriously. It was almost as if they saw the mentors as simply older students. But as the weeks progressed, the students became more accustomed to the role that I as played in their class. They would accept my help without question, but would still make jokes and have fun with me. It took some time, but I managed to find a nice balance between tutor and mentor. This was good practice for the future when I’ll have to learn to establish that balance in my own classroom. Finding that equilibrium of warmth and structure can be tricky, but it is imperative

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to the success of a classroom. The very first book my book club read is entitled Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies by Mary P. Sheidan-Rabideau. This book was about a club that empowered young girls to be strong individuals, independent thinkers, and to believe that they have the power to achieve anything they set their minds to. That is the kind of mentality I want to have as a future teacher. I want to challenge my students with material that will push them without overwhelming them and try to get them excited about learning. I met a few teachers like that during my time at CCHS and it was a privilege to watch them work.