

Artifact 14

Knowledge of students and their community is a critical part of planning instruction. The Student Intern is required to conduct some practical research and investigate their students' background and community in the following ways:

Neighborhood:

List the descriptive qualities of the neighborhood.

Community resources:

What resources are offered in this community? City?

Where is the local library? Hours, days, and resources available to students?

What other health and welfare resources are available to students in this area?

Professional community:

Who are the people in the school that govern the professional community?

Who is the superintendent?

Who sits on the governing board of the school district? What key issues are they dealing with?

How is professional development accessed in this district?



Neighborhood

University High School (UHS) at 421 North Arcadia Avenue (Swan Road and 5th Street) in Tucson, Arizona, is the host of my student internship. I am now a penguin in the middle of the desert. The school mascot is only one of many unique characteristics of the school. Although UHS is located in a neighborhood (albeit without a name or neighborhood association), it is not the standard neighborhood school. To begin with, Tucson has a significant degree of school choice so that students are transported throughout the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), often far from their homes, no matter what their nearest school. UHS, however, is different in that it is a special function, college preparatory, public(ly funded) high school. Its students compete for admission based on test scores (Cognitive Abilities and Ravens entrance exams) and middle school grades. This tends to diffuse the distribution of students' homes. To complicate matters, UHS shares a campus with Rincon High School (RHS), a more typical neighborhood school, but with its school choice. There appears to be little

crossover between the two sets of students despite their proximity, and because the school has a locked down, closed campus during the day, students are not free to roam the immediate neighborhood. I therefore situate UHS not at Swan and 5th but in the larger TUSD neighborhood comprising much of the city.

Nevertheless, statistical and demographic data have been collected about the students which may reflect their collective neighborhoods or at least educational community. UHS claims a 100% AIMS pass rate on its web site. SAT scores, National Merit Scholar counts, and college placement numbers are exemplary. According to the district, attendance rates average 96.5% with 1.5% unexcused. No suspensions were recorded in 2007-8. Ethnicity of students is skewed toward White/Anglo (60% White/Anglo, 4% African American, 21% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 15% Asian American) for Tucson, which teaches a substantial Hispanic high school population (37% White/Anglo, 7% African American, 49% Hispanic, 3.5% Native American, and 3% Asian American across all high schools). It can be concluded that UHS students live in a smart (and quite possibly privileged) neighborhood.

Public Community

Tucson as a whole is a hot, dry, sprawling city of approximately 520,000 inhabitants within its boundaries and many more just outside. For seven years the inhabitants have included me, so I am fairly familiar with the Old Pueblo. The phrase "Wild West" comes to mind more quickly than "civilization" when I think of Tucson. Still, a broad range of community services are offered by the city or in it. With a local 20% poverty rate, one can presume that the services are well used.

Beginning close by my home, a nearby elementary school distributes a list of services to students on their first day including TEFAP food box program, infant food box, Value Foods Store, farmers market, food stamps, WIC and Food Plus, school lunch and breakfast, soup kitchens, home delivered meals, and senior meal and food programs. These are available throughout the city regardless of school of enrollment. UHS has its own health and finance offices on site as well as three guidance counselors who can direct students to resources. Further up the hierarchy, the TUSD web site list of special programs includes before and after school programs (YMCA, City Parks and Recreation Department, Community School, etc), clothing bank, summer school, and Opening Minds through the Arts (OMA). Boys and Girls Clubs of Tucson run six clubhouses, some adjacent to schools. For the city's part, its web site provides links to "public services, courts, safety, transportation" and "education, kids, & pets." The community and human services section of the local telephone book includes headings of abuse/victims' services, AIDS/HIV, Children/Youth, community/social/human, counseling, disability, emergency assistance/crisis intervention, family services, health, hot lines/help lines, housing/homeless, information/referral, mental health, self help/support groups, senior citizens, substance abuse, and veterans' services with multiple listings.

Tucson is also the seat of Pima County, so county level services are available. Pima Community College is one example, and many UHS students are jointly enrolled there. The county library system is another instance with special relevance to learning. Some 28 public libraries are spread throughout the area with hours and services detailed at the library system's web site (generally 10am to 5pm). Of particular interest are the homework help (online, by telephone, or in person) and family literacy programs, but computer classes and book clubs are also offered. Of course the library offers more than books on paper. Audio books and digital books are available as well as CDs, DVDs, and videos. For their part, UHS and RHS share a school library and for major research projects, students can potentially visit the University of Arizona library where they have physical access to almost all books and periodicals. They would not have borrowing privileges without special arrangement, but the university library is still a valuable resource. The university offers plenty of other educational and cultural opportunities to the public including museums (e.g., Flandreau, Arizona State Museum, Arizona Historical Society), theaters, galleries, and special science programs.

Professional Community

Jumping from the public community to the professional community and continuing from the top back down the hierarchy, one meets first the superintendent of TUSD, Dr. Elizabeth Celia Fagen. In Artifact 20 I describe the school board meeting of January 2007. The superintendent is new to the position since then, having started this July 1, but judging from the presentation she delivered to district employees at our campus (and verified by her resume), she is no newcomer to educational leadership. She reiterated recommendations that teachers reorder the three Rs, rigor, relationships, and relevance, to place relationships at the fore. Relationships facilitate success better than the currently overemphasized rigorous testing. She is also particularly concerned about 21st century education and how it should differ from the past century's model. The superintendent directs approximately ten officers. UHS and my classroom deals primarily with a Chief Academic Officer for High Schools named Ross Sheard who also oversees Career & Technical Education (CTE), which is where computer courses like mine are typically situated.

TUSD is governed by a board of five elected individuals, presently Alex Rodriguez, Adelita Grijalva, Bruce Burke, Judy Burns, and Joel T. Ireland. The key issue most recently faced was the need to recruit and appoint the new superintendent. Otherwise, board meeting agendas show what I consider many important but routine matters regarding the budget, tax money expenditures, employee relations, public accountability, and school improvement plans under NCLB. Many school construction projects are underway after the passing of a 2004 bond issue and they require board attention. In fact, the board just approved a \$361.7 million maintenance and operations budget for the present school year. TUSD is apparently unique in the state for its Tucson Education Association (TEA), the local branch of the National Education Association (NEA), which represents/governs its professional community members.

The TEA recently supported a complaint by UHS/RHS teachers regarding the Friday advisory period.

Within the school itself are stationed Principal Rosy Beetcher and Assistant Principal Tammy Janik who are analogous to the district superintendent. The University High Site Council is the counterpart to the district governing board. Members of the Site Council include representatives of the school administration, faculty, parents, community, students, and staff. Next in the chain of command are department heads for the school's seven departments, the individual teachers, and, last but not least, me.

Professional development in the district is highly emphasized and monitored, more formally than it has been for any other work I've known. At the teachers meeting of the first service day, numerous forms were distributed. Teachers complete a professional growth year plan and undergo a mid-year benchmark review and an end of year review. Suggested growth options include peer reflection conversations, study group, delivery of workshops/courses, action research, development of instructional materials, audio/video tape analysis, team teaching, writing an analytical or reflective journal, and committee or task force participation. An "other" option is also available. At least four of these are required for this EDU 290 student internship course. In addition, teacher performance is evaluated through formal observation in the classroom. The number of observations depends on the type of teacher: probationary, continuing teacher in "formal" year, and continuing teacher in Professional Growth Year Plan (PGYP). For teachers not on probation, formal and PGYP years follow a published sequence beginning with a larger portion of formal years for new teachers and tapering off to a majority of PGYP years.

Related Web Sites

Links at the sites below lead to the majority of information cited above. Exceptions are the few cases in which I was provided a paper copy myself or witnessed the event in person.

[University High School](#)
[Rincon High School](#)
[Tucson Unified School District](#)
[Boys & Girls Clubs of Tucson](#)
[City of Tucson](#) or [Tucson, Arizona](#)
[Pima County Public Library](#)
[University of Arizona](#)