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Contextual Factors Paper

For this semester, I have been placed at Harnew Elementary School in Oak Lawn, Illinois. Since the first week of September, I have been able to assess and identify the many different factors that seem to have an impact on teaching and learning processes. Throughout the time I have been at Harnew, I have been able to pick up on what the community is like, how the classroom is set up and run, student characteristics, and instructional implications. Even though there are four groups of factors that affect teaching and learning processes mentioned in this paper, there are many more factors that also affect teaching and learning processes.

Community, District, and/or School Factors

As stated above, Harnew Elementary School is located in Oak Lawn, Illinois. It is one of four elementary schools in Ridgeland district 122. Oak Lawn is located around 30 minutes from downtown Chicago. According to World Population Review, Oak Lawn has a collective population of 58,696 people (World Population Review, 2022). Harnew Elementary School has an overall student population of 553 students. The IL School Report Card has a break down of student racial/ethnic diversity consisting of 58.4% of students are White, 34.7% of students are Hispanic, 3.1% of students are Black, and 2.5% of students are Asian (State of Illinois, 2020-2021). The site also states that 79% of students are from low-income families. There is also a population of 34% of students who are English learners. When it comes to staff in the overall district, 91.4% of teachers are female and 8.6% are male. Ethnicities of teachers consist of White (92.5%), Hispanic (5.3%), Asian (0.5%), and Two or more (0.5%).

Classroom Factors

Harnew Elementary School is a bigger elementary school compared to other surrounding cities' elementary schools. The classroom I am currently in has some decorations, but they follow the theme throughout the school which is a sort of movie/Oscar's theme. I believe this theme was chosen to promote success and encouragement within the students telling them that they are all stars. When it comes to technology, each student has a Chromebook that they use individually for activities and some assignments provided by the school. In the classroom, there is also a Promethean Board which acts like a Smartboard used in instruction during class time. This board is used for visual representation along with providing structure giving students the work they need to complete in class and what homework will be. From what I observe, parents are involved and want to participate in activities and events for students which shows me that there is an outside support for the school and overall involvement.

Student Characteristics

As I design instruction and assess learning, I have to keep in mind that Harnew Elementary School is considered to be a Title I school. When it comes to instruction planning and design, I must keep in mind that the students in my placement class are farther behind due to the pandemic. I have to be able to meet them where they are in order for them to learn and be challenged in the correct manner. In the 5th grade class I am in, it seems that there is a pretty even number of boys and girls. There are only 5 students who are regularly leaving the classroom for extended support during language arts, but they do the same activities that are being done in the general classroom, just with further support. According to the IL School Report Card, 16% of students at Harnew have an IEP. It is important to keep that in mind when lesson planning and designing and assessing students because there is a differentiation that needs to take place in

order to best support those students. As stated before, there is 34% of the student population that are English learners which also requires careful consideration and thought when planning and assessing.

Instructional Implications

With the information shared above, it is important to address and acknowledge the larger diversity that exists within Harnew Elementary School. Knowing the break down of the student population, it is important to plan and include activities and lessons that all students are able to find something they can connect with and relate to. According to the district's strategic plan, creating a trauma sensitive school is something that they have been working to accomplish and implement into the curriculum (Ridgeland School District 122, 2018).

One characteristic that a teacher needs to be mindful of in planning for this community is how there is a larger population of English learning students which can signify that there are many families who may not be originally from the United States. This is important to be aware of especially since customs are not the same overseas like they are here. Along with the large EL population, acknowledging that many students in the school are low-income is also important especially since there are possibly students who may only get their meals from the school. This is also important in addressing the privilege that does exist and that teaching needs to acknowledge it and work through it to wear students do not feel less than compared to their peers. I feel that these two characteristics are the most important/evident due to my own observations and the statistics provided.

Conclusion

Overall, it is perceived that Harnew Elementary School cares about their students as a whole. The principal works to create a safe environment and an encouraging one that wants students to succeed. The diversity within the students and some of the staff brings so much more to contribute and celebrate within the school and how students interact with the staff and their own peers. From my personal observations, I can tell that students are generally happy during the day when they are at Harnew. The school carries an overall loving and happy energy which then gets transferred onto the staff and then gets passed onto the students to create a more positive experience.

References

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