

Culture and Climate: George Wythe and Huguenot High Schools

in Richmond City Public Schools

Lariza Gregory

Shawn Weisser

Longwood University

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Driving question: What is the staff perception of the culture and climate at Richmond City Public Southside High Schools?

According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, ASCD culture refers to how teachers and staff work together, and climate refers to the school's effect on students. "A positive school climate and school culture promote students' ability to learn." (ASCD, n.d.) Over the last three months, we distributed four surveys to George Wythe and Huguenot High Schools' staff in Richmond City, Virginia, regarding their respective schools' culture and climate. The focus of the surveys were: teacher/staff satisfaction, teacher view's of students relationships with each other, teacher views of school building and materials and, teacher views of students behaviors.

Perception

The survey indicated that more than 80% of the teachers surveyed in both high schools were highly satisfied with their working environments, collaborative relationships, student relationships, and teaching materials. The only area of concern indicated in the survey by teachers and staff was the perceived lack of parental involvement and its effects on student performance and attendance.

Demographics of Southside High Schools

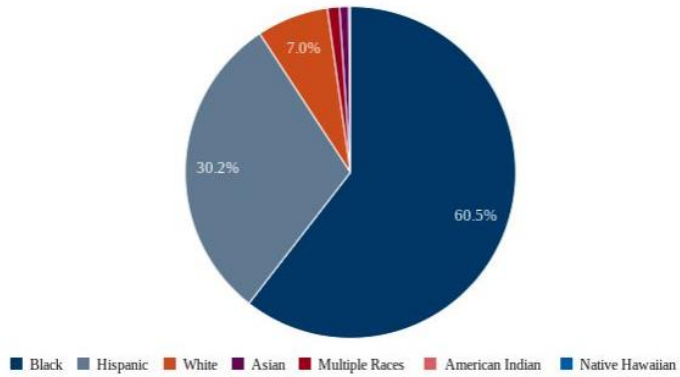
Both high schools are located in the southside area of Richmond, Virginia. George Wythe High School serves 1298 students and Huguenot High School serves 1211 students (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The school enrollment data indicates both schools are predominantly Black and have the highest number of Hispanic students in the district. Data from the Virginia Department of Education also shows that approximately 50% of both schools are economically disadvantaged.

Huguenot High School

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Fall Membership by Subgroups

2020 Fall Membership By Subgroup: Racial and Ethnic Groups

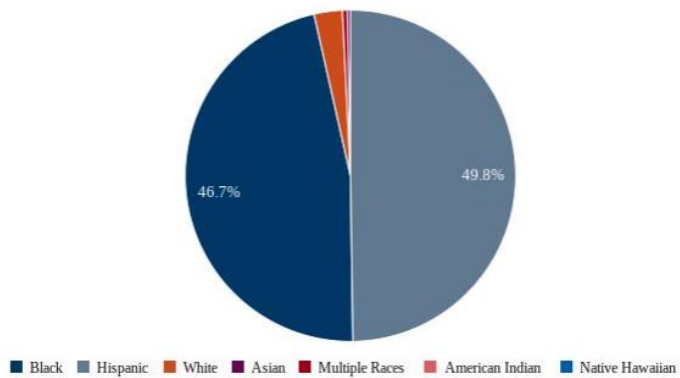


George Wythe High School

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Fall Membership by Subgroups

2020 Fall Membership By Subgroup: Racial and Ethnic Groups



Richmond City School Board reports a dropout rate of 46.9% for George Wythe and 28.9% at Huguenot High School (Richmond Public Schools & Epp, 2020). When looking at individual subgroups, we find the Hispanic population we serve represents 64.6% of the district dropout rate, with ELs reporting a 61% dropout rate, showing an increase from the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years.

Dreams4RPS Goal 2: Graduation			
Dropout Rate by School			
School	2018-19 Dropout Rate	2019-20 Dropout Rate	Change
Armstrong	28.4%	17.9%	-10.5%
Franklin Military Academy	0%	0%	0%
George Wythe	34.7%	46.9%	+12.2%
Huguenot	29.1%	28.9%	-0.2%
John Marshall	8.7%	7.1%	-1.6%
Open	0%	0%	0%
Richmond Community	0%	0%	0%
Thomas Jefferson	8.9%	3.2%	-5.7%
RAS	46.1%	26.3%	-19.8%
Division	24.3%	23.2%	-1.1%

Dreams4RPS Goal 2: Graduation			
Dropout Rate by Subgroup			
Subgroup	2018-19 Dropout Rate	2019-20 Dropout Rate	Change
Black/African-American	17.3%	12.5%	-4.8%
Hispanic/Latino	57.3%	64.6%	+7.3%
White	15.0%	11.6%	-3.4%
Multi-Racial	0%	0%	0%
Economically Disadvantaged	20.0%	12.5%	-7.5%
Students with Disabilities	32.1%	24.6%	-7.5%
English Learners	48.2%	61.5%	+13.3%

The district created and implemented three programs: Secondary Success Center as a dropout recovery program, Secondary Newcomer Academy, and ¡Con Ganas! to alleviate the increasing dropout rate. Both of the latter programs are prevention efforts to address the growing number of dropouts among Hispanic and EL students. The district has plans to add a Newcomer Academy at the primary level and hire additional ESL certified teachers (L. Gregory, personal communication, 2020). The school district’s programs, as designed and implemented, should provide a modicum of success among students who regularly attend classes.

Why Do Hispanic Students Drop Out?

According to the NEA Foundation, “schools fail to engage students and the policy and practice are having a hard time keeping up” (The Urban Institute & Scott, n.d.). In the same article, they quoted a Pew Hispanic Research Study showing “that nearly 75%” of Latino students “stopped attending school ... to help families economically” (Pew Research Center, 2009). There is no student exit interview or survey to discern the exact reason why

Hispanic/Latino students are dropping out of school at George Wythe and Huguenot High Schools. Through student conversations and interactions over the last four years, we have found that most Hispanic/Latino students leave school to enter the workforce to help families pay for day to day expenses and legal expenses. Additionally, many are leaving due to pregnancy and the feeling that they are not part of the educational community. We also find that many of our students do not reside with family members and must pay for room and board.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the data, we find that parental involvement is the key to reducing the dropout and chronic absenteeism rates the schools continue to see a rise. According to an article in Urban Education, “parental involvement plays a significant role in students’ social and academic outcomes” (Berkowitz & Avi Astor, 2017). With this in mind, we propose a plan to improve parental involvement in our district that reflects a deep understanding of our students’ needs. When primary level students possess the support of a culturally traditional family, we see some evidence of a home life that includes; study habits, norms for free time, and access to educational experiences outside of a classroom setting, such as family vacations. In terms of parental presence at the school level, we see parent-teacher conferences, PTA, volunteering for sports events, coaching, or tutoring. Our proposal includes a work-study or cooperative option for students to earn as they learn to address the need for financial support. It is also true when communicating with the school to notify regarding absences and giving input about intervention programs for academic success. These things are clear at an elementary or primary level and even at the middle school.

However, there is no evident representation of parental involvement in either high school, George Wythe, or Huguenot. We do not see an active and present PTA representative in the

activities of the schools. We struggle with communication to all parents about services, student performance, attendance, events, or extracurricular activities. In part because we do not have a set protocol to communicate with parents or guardians of our vulnerable students. We do not have an outreach program that understands the cultural needs of the Hispanic community.

Proposed Action Plan

Previously we mentioned that schools are failing to engage Hispanic/Latino students. We propose the creation of a separate bilingual school with a hybrid balanced calendar. Additionally, we proposed offering both asynchronous and synchronous classes that provide Project Based Learning opportunities and on-campus opportunities for courses that require extensive use of materials, such as CTE and STEM-related classes. This program will provide an environment that meets the students' cultural and educational needs by providing a comprehensive curriculum covering multiple ethnicities. We propose to train current staff or hire new personnel that is fully bilingual and dually certified to facilitate the learning process. We recommend to design and implement a new curriculum that primarily focuses on teaching both Spanish and English as foreign languages.

Our proposal includes a work-study or cooperative option for students to earn as they learn to address the need for financial support. Bilingual students could serve in the library or office as assistants. They could also be placed in internship positions within the community to learn applicable skills to the workforce they choose to enter. In return, they receive a semester-based stipend.

Proposed Parental Involvement Outreach Plan

Many parents of Hispanic/Latino students do not communicate their needs to the schools because of their inability to speak English (Education Week: Teacher & Gonzalez, 2015). To

combat this, we propose an online night school for parents to learn English as a foreign language. These classes could be flexible for working parents' schedules and implemented within both schools after regular business hours or delivered asynchronously. We also propose adding a 24-7 Virtual Parent Liaison Assistance via the schools' website. Both schools have a full-time bilingual parent liaison that could be assigned to receive communications from parents through an online form located on the schools' and district web pages available to parents after school hours and weekends. This form of communication would provide a link for parents to access services available in the community. Richmond City Public Schools currently offers a Family Academy with different virtual learning opportunities, tech support, and family activities (Richmond Public Schools, 2020). However, these activities are not geared towards students and families in our Hispanic/Latino communities.

To make parents aware of these proposed programs, we would like to institute a Hispanic/Latino Parent Outreach program with dedicated staff and volunteers who will provide on-site assistance in community events and within community organizations and churches. For example, we would set up booths at community sports events such as the Flying Squirrels, the Richmond Kickers, or Richmond Strikers to reach out to parents via Hispanic/Latino Nights. We understand that with the nature of the pandemic situation we are currently dealing with, in-person outreach will face difficulties. Thus, it is necessary to understand the cultural needs of the population we are trying to reach. It also demands a level of trust that can only be obtained through in-person conversations and interactions.

Although the district has provided necessary technology to students across the district, many students have been overlooked because of the language barrier and lack of protocols to

verify all students have the required technology to complete necessary coursework successfully (S. Weisser, personal communication, 2020). This disparity is partly because some Hispanic families do not have access to the Internet and cannot receive digital notifications; therefore, personal interactions are necessary to corroborate the student's needs and build trusting relationships with parents. Hence, the need for the protocols mentioned above and the proposals we have outlined above.

Conclusion

We bring a different perspective to the issues as teachers of these students, and we have developed relationships with the targeted students and families. We have first-hand knowledge of the daily troubles our students face because they tell us. Currently, we serve with the understanding that in our professional capacity as teachers, it is mandatory to teach intellectual concepts; even more so, it is crucial to support our students' emotional and cultural needs. As lifelong learners, we think outside the box to address the rapidly changing demands in a politically charged environment where other variables prohibit sustainable programs' complete development. As future administrators, we hope to hone the abilities we possess to have empathy and sympathy for all students and to lay a foundation that will create an environment to foster academic excellence for all students regardless of their challenges. We have experienced a lack of understanding of those involved because policymakers are looking in from the outside instead of the inside out, so these programs do not have the impact we are seeking within the community.

Throwing money into programs that do not have the outcome fully developed and evaluated has created the conditions we find ourselves in today. Some school funding is tied directly to school attendance and graduation rates, which is why schools are searching for a

solution. Our next step is to research funding opportunities to design a comprehensive budget to encompass all of the proposed programs described above to combat the growing number of Hispanic/Latino dropouts. The state mandates that all children between the ages of 5 and 18 must be enrolled in school and receive an education in a program “of high quality” that “is established and continually maintained” (Virginia's Legislative Institution, n.d.). Furthermore, according to Imber, “During the early days of the Republic, proponents of compulsory schooling argued that democratic institutions could not survive without a well-educated citizenry” (Imber et al., 2014, 12). If the state mandates a high-quality education of the children within its borders, we must then fully comply to the best of our ability. Student academic achievement at the highest level is paramount to our society’s survival and evolution. All stakeholders who are part of our citizens’ development must understand the significance of having policies, protocols, and programs that are inclusive, equitable, and effective when educating the most vulnerable of our students. It would be immoral to ignore the plea of a society whose strength lies within its people.

Appendix A

PBL Hours		
Hours	Gregory	Weisser
5.0 each = 10.0 total	Interviews and emails with Dr. Pisani: What do you need help with that I can use as a PBL? His response was climate and culture because he lacked in that area, he felt he needed a softer tone with teachers. Follow-ups with Dr. Pisani regarding the results of the surveys	Interviews with Mr. Olds, Dr. Hines, Mr. Gilstrap regarding the culture and climate of HHS. Discussions on the results focused on communication with staff regarding actual data regarding what is happening in our school: student achievement, ESL, events, behavior, absenteeism, and graduation.
2.0 each = 4.0 total	Discussion with Weisser regarding the PBL and chose climate and culture	
10.0 each = 20.0 total	Created and shared surveys with Gregory. We both chose to send them to staff over the next three months.	
1.0 each = 2.0 total	Created an administrative survey that focuses on their beliefs about school culture and climate, their roles in developing or influencing the culture and climate in their respective schools, and their actual plans to address the culture and climate in their schools.	
14.0 each = 28 total	Meetings with Gregory and Weisser to analyze results, create Google Slides Presentation, Write Paper and Collate data.	
Hours	32	32

Appendix B

Proposed Action Plan	
Student Engagement	
Action Steps	Responsible Stakeholder
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A separate bilingual school with a hybrid schedule which includes: 2. Fully bilingual and dual - certified teachers. 3. Spanish for students whose primary language is Spanish 4. English as foreign language. 5. Hybrid Balanced Calendar 6. Work-Study program or Coop. 	<p>RPS - School Board RPS - Superintendent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RPS- LIEP Instructional Specialist ● RPS - International High School Principal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RPS - International High School Assistant Principal ○ RPS - International High School Coordinator
Parental Involvement	
Action Steps	Responsible Stakeholder
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online night school for parents to teach English as foreign language 2. 24-7 Virtual Parent-Liaison Assistance 3. Parent Outreach in community events 	<p>RPS - Bilingual Night School Coordinator RPS - Director of Student Services RPS - Bilingual Family Engagement and Support Coordinator</p>

Appendix C

Answer Choices: Strongly Disagree - Disagree - Agree - Strongly Agree

Culture and Climate Survey Part 1

1. What is your Position?
2. Years of Work Experience?
3. I feel supported by other teachers at my school.
4. I get along well with other staff members at my school.
5. I feel like I am an important part of my school.
6. I enjoy working in teams (e.g. grade level, content) at my school.
7. I feel like I fit in among other staff members at my school.

Culture and Climate Survey Part 2

1. My school promotes academic success for all students.
2. All students are treated fairly by the adults at my school.
3. Teachers at my school treat students fairly regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture.
4. Teachers at my school work hard to make sure that students do well.
5. I feel safe at my school.
6. I have been concerned about my physical safety at school.
7. If I report unsafe or dangerous behaviors, I can be sure the problem will be taken care of.
8. I feel safe when entering and leaving my school building.

Culture and Climate Survey Part 3

1. My school building is well-maintained.
2. Instructional materials are up to date and in good condition.
3. Teachers at my school keep their classrooms clean and organized.
4. Teachers make an effort to keep the school building and facilities clean.
5. Teachers make an effort to keep the school building and facilities clean.

Climate and Culture Survey Part 4

1. Students at my school would help another student who was being bullied.
2. Students at my school get along well with one another.
3. Students at my school treat each other with respect.
4. Students at my school treat other students fairly regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture.
5. Students at my school show respect to other students regardless of their academic ability.
6. Students at my school demonstrate behaviors that allow teachers to teach, and students to learn.
7. Parents at my school attend PTA meetings or parent/teacher conferences.
8. At this school, parents frequently volunteer to help on special projects.
9. Parents at this school frequently attend school activities.



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Longwood Honor Creed:

“We shall not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do.”

Academic Pledge:

“We, Lariza Gregory and Shawn Weisser, have neither given nor received help on this work, nor are we aware of any infraction of the Honor Code.”