

School Environment Analysis --Internal Cultural Audit

Angela B. Burgess

Kennesaw State University, EDL 7100

**Description of School and Community**

Lambert High School is located in Suwanee, Georgia. It is the southernmost high school in the Forsyth County School district. Lambert High School opened in 2009, has always met the criteria for Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), and was awarded the State of Georgia Silver Award for Excellence in 2010-2011 (FCS Public Information and Communications Department, 2011). The Lambert High School population is predominantly White (approximately 77% of the student body identifies as White) and affluent, with less than 7% of the population qualifying for free or reduced lunch (Forsyth County Schools, 2013). The teacher population is similar in that the vast majority of the faculty is White with few minorities, unless one looks at the staff members that make up the custodial or cafeteria staff.

**Description of Teachers/Administrators**

The teachers and administrators that responded to my query for information are all White and middle-class, mirroring the school population. Three of the respondents are female and two are male. Teachers and administrators that provided information for the report hold degrees ranging from bachelor to specialist degrees. They have been involved in education for 3 to 23 years. Respondent ages span mid-thirties to late-forties. All respondents are Christian, American, and heterosexual. Of the five respondents, two are from the English Department, two are from the Social Studies Department, and one is the school Instructional Technology Specialist.

**Data Collection**

This report was written during the summer of 2013. Due to school not being in session, information was collected via email. I sent a list of questions to 17 teachers

and administrators from a variety of departments across Lambert High School that I thought would be likely to check their school email during the summer vacation. As a result, I received five replies from two departments, plus one administrator.

### **Summary of Findings**

Based on answers received and personal experience at Lambert High School, teachers and administrators do meet together regularly for the purpose of professional collaboration. However, different members of the school faculty see the results of those meetings in different ways. One teacher felt that only 25-30% of collaboration teams are working well together, while another felt that most meetings tended to be simply for information distribution before becoming social gatherings. Other responses indicated that their individual experiences had been positive and productive.

When discussing relationships, however, all agreed that those working at Lambert enjoy working together, that the environment is supportive, and that teachers feel valued. One respondent replied that the faculty is “a family.” There are always exceptions, as mentioned by many of the respondents, and there are teachers who do not “get along with others” and teams that do not support each other. Overall, the view of the school internally is a strong faculty that supports one another both professionally and personally.

In regards to efficacy, responses were unanimously affirmative that teachers and administrators are at Lambert because they want to be there. However, in the second part of the question, when discussing self-determination, responses indicated that despite the overwhelmingly positive attitude of teachers about being part of the faculty at LHS, many still feel lost and unheard. Lambert is a large school with more than 2300

students and more than 100 teachers, in addition to administrative and support staff. As a result, one respondent said that many teachers view themselves as both sides of the coin, as “professionals inside of a large uncaring bureaucracy.” Another said that there are many who see themselves as victims of either the school or the system. In this teacher’s view, they are “waiting to be told what to do next, and resisting that because they assured [sic] that something new will come along anyway to replace this new fad in education.”

Lastly, when discussing diversity, there is a consistent feeling that diversity at Lambert High School is “ignored and tolerated.” Because neither the student population nor the teacher population is very diverse, it is not an area of great conversation. Students do tend to self-segregate by race and ethnicity, while teachers tend to associate themselves with their department. However, as one teacher mentioned, while diversity is not addressed directly by the school, it has also not been an area of contention. Teachers do feel that there should be more professional development on working with subgroups, including racial subgroups, economically disadvantaged students, and students in the as-yet-unrecognized subgroup of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

### **Recommendations on Professional Collaboration**

Based upon the responses of my colleagues, I would recommend that Lambert High School first maintain what it does well, which is to allow for common planning time for members of content teams. As several respondents mentioned, collaboration takes place by department, subject, and content area. However, this collaboration could be improved by holding monthly school-wide collaboration that would allow teachers to

discuss and refine overarching goals for students at all levels. To move content teams out of the “copy and paste” mode mentioned by one respondent, content teams should set clearly defined goals for their collaboration at the beginning of the year. These goals should be achievable while still pushing teams towards greater collaboration with the ultimate goal of raising student engagement and achievement. Lastly, to help teachers that are new to the field of education or new to the school, there should be a defined mentoring program that provides a forum for teachers to meet and to collaborate.

### **Recommendations on Congenial Relationships**

One thing that Lambert High School does very well is building congenial relationships. The danger still exists nonetheless that it will be taken for granted rather than nurtured. As such, the administration and faculty at Lambert High School should make a concerted effort to continue to foster the connectedness of the staff.

Additionally, while there are occasional social gatherings, these tend to happen on a departmental basis rather than interdepartmental or school-wide. As such, the leadership team should work together to plan school-wide events that are social rather than social. This would help to bring teachers together and to build relationships that might otherwise flounder.

Next, a feeling of being overworked can put a strain on even the best relationships. To prevent this from happening at Lambert, the administration and leadership should put forth the effort to ensure that the workload is spread equally among those on staff. Lastly, there should be more levels of teacher recognition. As one teacher mentioned, there is a monthly recognition program for students where

teachers recognize students for a variety of reasons each month. While there is a Teacher of the Month program that leads to the Teacher of the Year nomination, this program could be modified or added to so that more teachers were recognized for their efforts. Examples of recognition could be a teacher who went the extra mile for a student, the teacher who worked the most hours in the previous month, or the teacher who implemented a project generating the most student buzz.

### **Recommendations on Efficacy**

In addition to building relationships, teachers and administrators feel that Lambert High School performs well in matters pertaining to efficacy and self-determination. As such, the school should continue its commitment to protect what teachers value. For example, most teachers currently teach five of the seven periods in the school day, with two periods of planning. This should remain a priority to ensure that teachers continue to have the time needed to collaborate with content teams and to do what they do best, which is teach and build relationships with students. Additionally, many teachers at Lambert would like to build their leadership skills but have no avenue to do so outside of the classroom. As a school can be measured not only by its leaders but also by the leaders it develops, there should be an administrative focus on providing real leadership positions for those teachers who are not part of the leadership team. Now in the state of Georgia, the emphasis for both teachers and students is achievement on a test. There is no requirement or inducement for teachers to continue their professional learning. However, if we are to move forward and achieve greater success, the state must reinstitute the requirement for and emphasis on professional learning for teachers. The state must also refocus on skills needed by students in order

to be successful outside of the classroom rather than how to succeed on a multiple-choice test.

### **Recommendations on Valuing Diversity**

The area in which Lambert High School needs improvement the most is in that of valuing diversity. This is because the school has very little diversity present in either the student or the teacher population. However, with approximately 11% of the population falling under the umbrella of Asian ethnicity, there is room for improvement. With the Asian population consisting of students from China, Korea, Japan, and India, there is a need for staff training in the arena of cultural diversity and competence. Additionally, because these students come from a variety of religious backgrounds, this training should also address religious diversity and competence. After the staff has been trained, the school should make an effort to be willing to open the eyes of both staff and students to the cultural, social, and religious diversity that is present at Lambert High School and in the world around them. Lastly, it is most important that a concerted effort be made to value diversity of all kinds. This includes sexual orientation, which is an unrepresented minority in the world of education today, but one that cannot be denied.

## REFERENCES

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