

I. Setting and Context

Standards 5, 8

CULTURE AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Fort Collins, Colorado is a town of roughly 137,000 people situated just east of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, an hour's drive north of Denver. Fort Collins is home to many high-tech industries—most notably, HP (Hewlett-Packard), which employs a significant chunk of the city's population. Poudre School District serves the city of Fort Collins as well as incorporated communities adjacent to the city, including LaPorte, Wellington, and parts of Windsor.

Fort Collins is home to Colorado State University, a land-grant university that serves approximately 25,000 students from in and out of state. The university attracts students, staff, and faculty from around the country and, indeed, throughout the world. Fort Collins is also home to Front Range Community College, Larimer Campus.

Fossil Ridge High School is the newest of four comprehensive high schools in the district. The facility was opened in 2004, and is located in the far southeast corner of Fort Collins. The building is 290,000 square feet, and was designed to serve 1450-1700 students. The student enrollment this year is approximately 1000 students, and has grown and continues to grow rapidly since its opening.

The building and facilities are optimal, providing for spacious rooms flooded with natural light. The building includes extensive access to theatres, common areas, gymnasiums, a weight room, media facilities, a 600-seat auditorium, six general computer labs and a mobile computer lab in each of the three wings. The school was designed to be an environmentally friendly facility, and employs sensor-driven lighting and solar power, among other "green" features.

Fossil Ridge's philosophy relies heavily on the Smaller Learning Communities model, which seeks to help students (and staff) interact on a community level with a smaller group than the student body at large. To aide in this goal, the school is divided into three wings, each of which has its own students, classrooms, lockers, teachers, counselors, and administrators. Students participate

in a once-a-week advisory period in which they maintain contact with a group of approximately 20 of their peers and a single teacher throughout their high school career. Teachers work together extensively on common-course, departmental, and inter-disciplinary teams.

EXISTING SUPPORT STRUCTURE

Parents, community members, and other volunteers have multiple opportunities to become involved at Fossil Ridge. They may choose to serve on the School Improvement Team, a committee whose purpose is to set and work towards goals for the school's scholastic achievement. Parents may also choose to become involved in the Parent Advisory Council or the PSD District Advisory Board. Additionally, parents and community members may elect to get involved at the classroom level or with particular programs within the school by volunteering to assist in various activities during the school day or after school.

On the whole, parent participation and volunteer support is high at Fossil Ridge. By all accounts, parents of Fossil Ridge students are typically deeply involved in their students' academic and extra-curricular exploits, and generally are a source of support rather than contention when contacted regarding their students' participation in school.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Fossil Ridge, located in an area of burgeoning affluent and sometimes extravagant housing developments, serves much of the wealthiest of Fort Collins families. However, the student population is far from homogenous in this respect. There are students at Fossil Ridge who work to support their families, who do not own a car and must rely on bus transportation to and from school, who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Collectively, though, Fossil Ridge's students are of higher socioeconomic status than their peers throughout the district.

The student population is more ethnically homogenous than the district as a whole. 90% of the students are white (not Hispanic), 5% are Hispanic, 0.5% are Black (not Hispanic), 2.5% are Asian/Pacific islander, 1% are American Indian/Alaskan native, and 1% are undeclared. Despite their collective ethnic homogeneity, Fossil Ridge does house students who were born in, have lived, and/or have traveled in places throughout the world, though the student population is predominantly white. Furthermore, the school serves as temporary home to several exchange students from throughout the world—this year, there are students at Fossil Ridge from Lebanon, Germany, Brazil, and Italy, among others.

Fossil Ridge serves as the designated high school site for the district's autism program; additionally, it provides services for students with mild, moderate, and high needs. Many mainstream classes at Fossil Ridge include students with mild and moderate needs, as well as autistic students.

SCHOOL POLICIES

The newest of Fossil Ridge's policies (and the one most prominently featured in beginning-of-the-year staff meetings) is a revised attendance policy meant to address the school's low attendance rate (relative to other schools in the district). As of the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year, students who miss 6 or more days of a class—whether through excused or unexcused absences—may be dropped from that class. This policy is a dramatic change from the virtually nonexistent attendance policy of years past, and will surely have an impact on the junior- and senior-level students at the school.

Fossil Ridge provides many services for students with special needs, including the district's autism program, resource support for mild needs special education students, a moderate needs program for students with various disability conditions (motor, cognitive, processing, language, etc.),

and adaptive and life skills classes for students with moderate to high special education needs. The school follows the policy of inclusion, and works to mainstream as many special needs students into as many regular education classes as is possible, as long as that mainstreaming is seen as beneficial for the students being served.

Disciplinary problems are largely dealt with on a preventative basis; students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities and to generally take pride in their school and their academic success. When disciplinary problems do arise, students may be dismissed from a class, suspended, placed on a remedial disciplinary plan, or eventually expelled. Poudre School District has detailed expectations for parental and student notification throughout this process, and emphasizes the need for communication throughout the disciplinary process between teachers, students, administrators, and parents. For a detailed explanation of the district's disciplinary policies, see the Poudre School District Student Rights & Code of Conduct, located at www.psdschools.org.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

There are 25 sophomores enrolled in the 5th period World Literature and Composition class that will be the subject of this Teacher Work Sample. The students come to the class with a wide range of abilities in reading and writing, and represent, relative to the school population, a diverse group. There are 13 females and 12 males in the class, and the class includes students from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds: Native American, Latin American, Japanese American, Indian American, English, and Irish. Furthermore, there are students in the class who, while born in this country, have lived and/or spent extensive time in other countries throughout their life. There are five students with special needs enrolled in the class; three come to us from the resource program, and two from the moderate needs program. A support staff member works with the moderate needs and resource students during class time. Mrs. Stewart and I work with this staff member as well as

the students' individual case managers to determine appropriate modifications and accommodations for each student.

Comparative to the other World Lit and Comp class that Mrs. Stewart teaches, the fifth period class is lively and vibrant, with most students consistently engaged in the class. Students are, on the whole, respectful of one another and of Mrs. Stewart and I; discipline problems are minimal and usually stem from students getting off track during group or individual work, as this particular class is a very social one. Most of the students came from the same junior high (Preston) and have known each other for years. The biggest management and motivation challenge for this group is to focus their energies on producing quality work in group and individual settings; they readily engage in large-group activities and discussions, but need encouragement to stay on task in more individualized contexts.

Classroom policies for behavior are predominantly preventative in nature. Mrs. Stewart does not address consequences for disruptive behavior directly, but rather works to structure classroom time and environment to prevent disruptions and discipline issues. Students are seated according to a seating chart that is adjusted to address behavior issues as well as to give students the opportunity to work with students they may not normally interact with. Classroom time is likewise structured so as to minimize disruptions; students are not given many "idle" opportunities during class, and we work to find ways to give students clear directions and specific tasks during class to help them focus on the work at hand.