School Culture Essay

Tallmadge Middle School of Tallmadge, Ohio (Summit County) is nestled nicely in Tallmadge’s downtown area. The middle school is clustered with the high school and the city’s two elementary schools. Only a few blocks separate the four schools. One of the town’s most popular locations—the Tallmadge Recreation Center— sits on the corner between the schools. The physical closeness of the schools of the city represents the emotional closeness of the community. I’m currently an outsider to those involved, but even I can feel the tight-knit relationship that exists between community members. The city of Tallmadge is very much suburban. There’s a decent amount of industry in the heart of Tallmadge, especially right around the very large (and at first, very confusing) traffic circle that acts as the center of the city. There are also very quiet areas within Tallmadge where the majority of the homes are located. This mix of hustle and bustle and quiet and relaxing says a lot about the community. They value growth and prosperity, but still believe in traditional family matters. This mix is important to keep in mind when working at the school. Students are expected to learn and grow so that they can contribute to the society, but they still need to appreciate family and community ties.

1. The 644 average daily students at TMS consist of the following make up: 1.8% black, non-Hispanic; 2% Hispanic; 5.2% multi-racial; and 89.3% white, non-Hispanic. 23.8% of students are economically disadvantaged, and 11.3% of students are considered students with disabilities (ODE 2010-2011 school year report card). The categories of “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Asian or Pacific Islander,” “Limited English Proficient,” and “Migrant” were not calculated by the ODE because there are fewer than 10 students per group. I do know personally, though, that within the three classes I will be teaching there are two students from Bosnia, two students from China, one student from India, and one student from Hawaii (which, yes, is still America, but the culture is much different than ours in Ohio.) I’m fascinated and excited to have this diversity in my classrooms. Considering 89% of students at Tallmadge are white Americans, there can be much benefit gained from interaction with kids from other cultures. My teaching must capitalize on these different cultures because of the lacking in diversity within the make-up of the student population at TMS.

Tallmadge has a graduation rate of 93.8%, and from talking with students in my classes, I can see that over half plan on going on to college. That means that my teaching needs to be at a high enough level to challenge students. If they plan on graduating and going on to college (which I plan on teaching ALL of my students as if this is the case) then their thinking and learning needs to be at a level that will enable them to be successful at a post-secondary institution. I should also consider taking initial steps toward readying my students at Tallmadge for their future academic and professional careers. They’re in eighth grade and will be making decisions in the near future regarding class scheduling for high school. Are they aware that there is a college prep track? Do they know which classes to take to prepare them for whatever it is they are interested in doing after high school? Tallmadge hosts a career fair of sorts for eighth graders every year. The students will first take tests to give them an idea of what interests them and what jobs will suit their personalities best. Students also have the chance to meet with professionals in a range of different fields. As their teacher, I should prepare students for this experience. My cooperating teacher usually has them complete a research-type paper where students research careers and choose 2-3 to present in a paper. I like this idea and will probably implement something similar during my student teaching.

2/3. The city of Tallmadge has a population of 17, 473, according to the July 2011 census. This is a relatively small population, and so creates a small-town feel within the school and community. For example, Friday night football is a huge deal at Tallmadge. The whole city comes to life, and school spirit transforms the community. This, to me, is always the stereotypical idea of a small suburban community. It also shows the close connection between the community and the school. I interviewed the assistant principal at TMS, and he reported that the school has great community support. Parents are highly involved in the school work of their children. Expectations are high when it comes to school, sports, and extra-curricular activities. Being in Tallmadge, especially within the schools, one can feel the effects that this close-knit relationship between school and community has on the school.

This will affect my teaching greatly. For starters, I need to build rapport not only with my students, but with their parents as well. Open house, parent-teacher conferences, and school/community events are all very big deals at Tallmadge. Parents care about their children’s work and want to see them succeed. I must work together with parents to help my students reach their highest potential. Teachers currently send notes/letters home to parents quite frequently to fill them in. I will need to do this as well. I will also need to remember to get parental permission if a subject being studied in class could potentially be controversial (i.e.: students writing on blogs, reading a controversial text, or being videotaped/having their picture taken for a particular assignment). Good teaching should account for all of these things anyway, but my case is especially sensitive given the small-town environment and the attachment between parents and school.