Initial Impression of Needs: Burris Laboratory School

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**Introduction**

Burris Laboratory School is located in Muncie, Indiana and is recognized as the only K-12 school in the state of Indiana. This unique school design in addition to strategic influence by Ball State University allows Burris students to excel and to maximize their full potential through holistic learning approaches. Burris is a public school that admits students based on a lottery system, allowing for a diverse student body to attend the school. Burris is a small school with an average of 614 students in the 2012-2013 school year (Burris School Profile, 2013). The small size of Burris allows for a unique learning experience, more one-on-one teacher-student instruction and opportunities characteristic of small schools. Although Burris has many strengths, many needs exist within the school that need to be addressed to close the achievement gap for all students to receive an equitable education. The School Counselor has a unique position in which they act as a liaison between parents, teachers and students and work to help all students achieve academically, prosper socially and emotionally and succeed in a career. School counselors provide key collaborative efforts that can be utilized in most areas of the school and needs that arise.

**Neighborhood data**

Burris Laboratory School is located across the street from Ball State University and is next to Ball Memorial Hospital. There are many buildings around the school including an administrative building, church and Indiana Academy dormitories. The surrounding areas are very vibrant with common areas used as soccer fields and outdoor recreation. Additionally, MITS bus stops are located along University Avenue that can transfer individuals all over Muncie. A couple blocks away from the school are houses, which are home to college students and Muncie residents. Overall, this area is very safe including street lights, sidewalks and police surveying the area at various times during the day and night.

**Demographics**

Muncie is a post-industrial city located North East of Indianapolis Indiana. The population estimate in 2013 according to the United States Census is 70,316 residents. The demographic breakdown consists of 84.0% White, 10.0% African American or Black, .3% American Indian, 1.2% Asian alone, 2.3% Hispanic or Latino and 2.8% multiracial according to the 2010 census data. Additionally, the median household income from 2008-2012 was 30,366 and 31.5% of persons were below the poverty level. This level of poverty has effects on all of the school systems and does influence student’s access to resources at Burris. Knowledge of the economic climate in this small city is crucial in understanding the needs and unique challenges the students at Burris will face (U.S. Census data, 2013).

The Burris lottery system is designed to admit students of all diverse backgrounds and needs to its school. Over the last several years Burris’ minority population has increased to 24% of the population. The school consists of 76% white, 8% multiracial, 8% African American or Black, 4% Asian, 3% Latino or Hispanic and 1% American Indian students. Burris also has an increasing amount of students with financial need. The rate of students on free and reduced lunch has increased to 27% according to a report by U.S. News. Additionally, 26% of the student population has been identified as being economically disadvantaged. Students who have been historically underserved may need specialized instruction and attention from the school counselor. It is part of our responsibility to close achievement gaps between groups of students. It is important to look at the groups of students who may be underserved currently in the school. Below I will identify areas of strengths and areas for improvement for a variety of populations and academic indicators.

**Strengths**

Burris has many outstanding components to its’ K-12 curriculum. Burris has been rated the 14th best High School in Indiana and excels in most key academic evaluations. According to the School Improvement Plan (2009), attendance rates at Burris were at 96.6% of students attending which is higher than the state average of 95.9%. Additionally, the graduation rate in the 2007-2008 school year was 90.2% this number is significantly higher than the state average of 77.8%. Burris students who were tested on the IRead-3 test all passed during the 2013-2014 school year, which is outstanding as we know reading competency influences academic attainment. According to the Burris School Profile (2012-2013) the S.A.T. Average for critical reading was 536, math was 544, writing was 509 and the total composite score was 1080. Additionally, the average A.C.T. score was 23.5. The above S.A.T. and A.C.T. scores were above the average for all the scored categories. Additionally, Burris has earned an overall school grade of A, stating that they are excelling at meeting standards set by the Department of Education. Another strength of Burris is that the administration, a division of the Teacher’s College at Ball State University, is committed to providing evaluative data for the use of improving instruction. In 2009, the school provided a survey for both parents and students to rate their experiences at Burris at the end of the spring semester. The evaluation allowed students and parents to respond with how they have experienced classes, instruction, and engagement with teachers and support. Although Burris is excelling in many areas, there is room for improvement. This is especially apparent in minority groups that attend Burris and can be identified by disaggregating school data to identify at-risk or in need student populations.

**Needs**

Burris Laboratory School is recognized as an exceptional school for students K-12. Although Burris has many strengths and areas in which students are excelling, there are some groups of students that can benefit from a comprehensive school-counseling program. As part of our pre-service training as counselors we have been taught to place our students in context, by understanding their various identities and the role that their identities play in their educational and academic attainment. By understanding their context we can better serve students and identify interventions that seek to close the achievement gap for all students.

**Standardized Tests**

The utilization of standardized tests as markers of academic competence is ever increasing. Although standardized tests are not reflective of all students’ academic knowledge or competence, the data collected from these tests can be used to guide instruction and identify students that are in need. During the 2012-2013 school year 84.1% of Burris students in grades 3-8 passed ISTEP (both Math and Language Arts). According to the U.S. News and World Report many minority students did not have the same amount of success as many of their white peers. About 50% of black students, 30% of Hispanic students, 21.1% of multiracial students, and 16% of non-English learners did not pass the ISTEP test compared to only 13.4% of white students who did not pass. These statistics are concerning considering the increased amount of students who did not pass that are part of historically underserved populations. Once the standardized test data are disaggregated another need becomes apparent, 28.6% of students on Free/Reduced Price meals did not pass ISTEP compared to the 11.2% of students on Paid meals that did not pass. The shocking disparity between Socio-economic status provides evidence of the need for increased attention and special instruction for the students that are economically disadvantaged in preparation for ISTEP and academic milestones. Lastly, 52.9% of students in special education did not pass ISTEP compared to the 10.3% of students in general education that did not pass (Burris ISTEP Scores, 2013).

**Special Education**

Burris has a low to moderate population of students requiring special education services and consist of rates that are at the state average (17.5% of above) according to the Burris School Improvement Plan (2009). Burris has been stable in the amount of students needed special education services; however there has been an increase of students diagnosed with more significant impairments such as mental and cognitive disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. School counselors can facilitate students in special education through a variety of services. Counselors may be required to provide individual counseling as stated in the students Individualized Education Plan (IEP), they may also need to help students with study skills, career readiness or collaborate with other community mental and physical health providers. As a school counselor I can work to help locate resources for students in special education and I can connect students to service providers based on their needs. As students with more significant impairments are in the mainstream general education classroom there may be an ever-increasing need for prevention efforts to teach students about these impairments. As school counselor classroom guidance lessons provide the opportunity to teach other students about various disorders/disabilities and how they can help and be friends to these students (Kasari, Rotheram-Fuller, Locke & Gulsrud, 2012). Students with disabilities can be successful academically and in life if they are given the right tools and opportunities to do so, as a school counselor I can facilitate this and work to ensure that students at my school succeed regardless of ability status.

**High Ability/Gifted and Talented**

High Ability students made up 38% of the total student population in 2009 as added efforts to increase the amount of Gifted and Talented students admitted to Burris. Although gifted and talented students are perceived to excel within school and social domains many difficulties exist for this population that can be addressed by the school counselor. According to ASCA (2005) the comprehensive school counseling program should focused on accommodating gifted and talented students with proactive, developmentally oriented guidance and responsible services that relate to personal crises. It is important to acknowledge that gifted or talented students are impacted by many changes that occur throughout school-age years, such as parental divorce, relocation, blended families, abuse and neglect, just as other peers are impacted by these changes. Additionally, gifted children may need specialized counseling services to deal with psychological problems related to their giftedness including academic pressures, perfectionism, loneliness, social isolation, depression and distress with sexual orientation (Peterson, 2006). Lastly, students who are gifted and talented may not endorse help-seeking attitudes towards counseling due to the increased pressure to be self-sufficient. Therefore it may be necessary to seek out these students and check in with them regarding their mental health and provide a safe space for them to share vulnerabilities and difficulties.

**Additional data**

Many different forms of data were utilized to create the overall impression of needs for Burris Laboratory School. This included many documents from various sources including U.S. News and World reports, the Indiana Department of Education and the School Improvement Plan compiled by administrators at Burris. Although these provided very in-depth sources of needs for students I believe that more can be provided. The last School Improvement plan was published in 2009, although this document is only 5 years old, many changes have occurred at Burris since this document was published. Many differences in educational attainment, ethnic populations, and socio-economic status exist today that are not accounted for in this 2009 report. In addition it was difficult to find information on Burris on many of the Indiana D.O.E. reports. I am unsure why this is but I plan to talk to the administrators at Burris to find out the reasoning behind it. Additionally, I would like to see discipline data disaggregated by ethnicity, S.E.S. and grade level to determine what additional school counseling interventions are needed to help the respective population of students.

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**Initial Impression of School Needs Evaluation Rubric**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CRITERIA** | A (23-25 Points) | B (20-22 points) | C (18-19 points) |
| **Evidence of Bloom’s Taxonomy Levels** | Evaluate/Create using class materials and concepts | Apply/Analyze using class materials and concepts | Remember / Understand using class materials and concepts |
| **Class material is referenced in each part of question** | Class material **AND EXTRA READINGS** used to support ideas; ideas well cited | Class material **used and cited** to support ideas | Class material loosely/ infrequently used to support ideas; terms not cited |
| **Writing Level** | Advanced, well organized, complex expression | Good, organized | Basic expression, loose organization, no extension |
| **On time** | On time | Late with notification | Late |
| **Correct grammar** | No errors | 1-2 errors | 3+ errors |
| **APA FORMAT** | No errors | 1-2 errors | 3+ errors |
| **Content** | All topics addressed | 1 missing topic | Multiple missing topics |