

I Don't Feel Like Teaching Today

By Sarah Volkmann

The Hammond school system is suffering. Test scores and academic performances in the four Hammond high schools are among the lowest levels in northwest Indiana, far surpassed by the surrounding school districts in Highland, Griffith, and Munster. In 2006 about 50% of students at Hammond's Morton High School passed the GQE (Graduation Qualifying Exam) the first time it was administered to them at the beginning of their sophomore year. The numbers were similar at the three other high schools in the city: Hammond High School, 30%; Gavit High School, 53%; Clark High School, 43%. In comparison, the pass rates at Highland, Griffith, and Munster were 68%, 76%, and 85%, respectively. Graduation rates are lower as well, with Morton at a high point of 74% and Hammond High at the low point of 43%. Compare these graduation rates to Munster, which has the highest percentage of students graduating at 94% (School Data).

Where are the Hammond schools going wrong? Why are the students performing poorly? Why aren't their test scores as high as in the surrounding communities? Why aren't students graduating? And most importantly, what can be done to fix these problems?

Hammond is not one of the most prosperous cities in the area. Businesses have moved out of the city and family incomes are lower than the rest of the area. But just because the students are less well-off than their counterparts in Munster doesn't mean that could not perform at the same level. A child of a blue-collar worker is just as capable of getting good grades as a child of a surgeon. Why are children in Hammond schools not performing at their highest capabilities?

Apathy and laziness are contributing factors to the schools' declining performances. More often than not, the kids in my classes at high school didn't want to do the in-class work, didn't do the homework, and then complained when they did poorly on tests or received a bad grade on a report card. Honors classes are small, and AP classes are even smaller. The only AP courses offered at Morton my senior year were Government, Microeconomics, and US History. AP Composition and Literature had to be dropped, since only seven students signed up for the course and the minimum number of students needed to receive funding is fifteen. Many students also didn't want to get involved in extra-curricular activities and hardly anyone went to athletic events—the apathy isn't contained to the classroom.

I noticed a lot of apathy from the teachers as well as the students at my high school. How can the students be motivated to succeed without someone who *wants* to motivate them? I had a poetry class where we got one small assignment a week. We usually had to read a set of poems and answer questions about them. This could easily be completed in one day. What was I supposed to do when I was finished? Worst of all, I spent my first semester of chemistry with a new teacher who only taught us once a week—the other four days, he said, “I don't feel like teaching today, you guys find something to do.” Maybe I was weird; I actually came to school to learn, and sitting in class with nothing to do got old after awhile and became a huge waste of time. If our teachers aren't teaching, how are we going to learn? If the teachers are frustrated with their students who don't want to learn, then how is giving them what they want ever going to help them succeed?

I believe that the problems in the Hammond schools can be partially attributed to the teachers and the administrations. Of course, part of the problem is parents who don't expect their children to succeed, but I can't write to all of the parents in Hammond and criticize their

parenting skills. The problems that first have to be addressed are the ones in the schools. Teachers need to have higher expectations from their students, and students need to have higher expectations of themselves. A student in Hammond deserves to succeed just as much as a student in Highland, Griffith, or Munster. We need to observe teachers over a period of time and make sure they are providing their students with the appropriate atmosphere for learning. A student will never succeed without a teacher who wants to help.

Works Cited

School Data. December 11, 2007. <<http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/SEARCH/s3.cfm?county=45>>.

December 13, 2007

Dear School City of Hammond,

The Hammond school system is suffering. Test scores and academic performances in the four Hammond high schools are among the lowest levels in northwest Indiana, far surpassed by the surrounding school districts in Highland, Griffith, and Munster. In 2006 about 50% of students at Hammond's Morton High School passed the GQE (Graduation Qualifying Exam) the first time it was administered to them at the beginning of their sophomore year. The numbers were similar at the three other high schools in the city: Hammond High School, 30%; Gavit High School, 53%; Clark High School, 43%. In comparison, the pass rates at Highland, Griffith, and Munster were 68%, 76%, and 85%, respectively. Graduation rates are lower as well, with Morton at a high point of 74% and Hammond High at the low point of 43%. Compare these graduation rates to Munster, which has the highest percentage of students graduating at 94%.

Where are the Hammond schools going wrong? Why are the students performing poorly? Why aren't their test scores as high as in the surrounding communities? Why aren't students graduating? And most importantly, what can be done to fix these problems?

I believe the problems in the schools are a result of both student and teacher apathy. I am a 2007 graduate of Morton High School and have recent experience with this problem. During my four years in high school, I watched the numbers of students in honors and AP classes drop (and watched the number of honors and AP classes offered drop as a result). The only AP classes I could have taken during my time at Morton were Government, Microeconomics, and US History. If I went to school at Munster, I could have filled my entire schedule with AP courses. I walked into class many days, ready to work, only to be disappointed and irritated when the

teacher said we didn't have an assignment that day because he or she "didn't feel like it." For example, I spent my entire first semester of chemistry with a new teacher who only taught us one day a week—the other four days, he actually said, "I don't feel like teaching today, you guys find something else to do." Why don't Hammond students have the same opportunities as students in Highland, Munster, and Griffith, towns that are only five minutes away?

I believe that the problems I have experienced are only the tip of the iceberg. Student apathy is a result of teacher apathy—if the teacher isn't motivated to teach, how can his or her students be motivated to learn? The students in Hammond are very capable of performing as well as the students in Highland, Griffith, or Munster. They deserve the same opportunities. Let's start by making sure their teachers are dedicated to helping them *want* to learn.

Sincerely,

Sarah Volkmann