

Dear Department: This report is meant to convey as much information and broad conclusions as I can from our school visit to Rockville Centre NY, specifically to South Side High School. Much information is simply left for your interpretation, not accompanied by judgment or necessarily a recommendation for implementation in our school. It is simply meant to spur discussion and share what we learned.

Why Rockville?: Rockville is notable for its detracking (inclusion) model of curriculum and classroom instruction and the high results and standards they have demanded from all students while using this model. This was the primary focus of our observations. Data backs up their success and can be shared if desired; all of their students graduate with the NY Regents diploma, 33% graduate with IB diplomas, and another 20% or so graduate with IB certificates (a lesser IB requirement).

Rockville's Demographics: The school district is a K-12 district with approximately 3600 students and about 1100 of those at the high school. Twenty percent of their students are either classified as minorities or low income.

Rockville's Mission: Rockville's administration is guided by the belief that "all means all." It is a clear mission guided by equity that specifically wanted to target lower achieving students and ensure their college readiness and high performance. They guide their hiring process by looking for those teachers who share belief in this mission. They researched the four/five year college graduation rate of their students and found that those with the highest success rates in college were those who had been exposed to higher level classes in high school (it was a stronger correlation than socioeconomic status). So, they made it their goal to get more students exposed to higher level curriculums. Starting in the 1990s, they detracked their math program by having all 8th graders take Algebra 1. That group became a cohort that continued the detracking of the math program through high school. Students all take the same math class at the same level until senior year when there are choices. For English, classes are detracked for the entirety of high school. This means that there are no skills or honors classes; the honors curriculum became the curriculum for all courses and all students take 'English 9', etc. For junior and senior years, all students take IB English, though not all of them have to take the test. For Social Studies, 9th and 10th grade are completely detracked, with only one course offering for all freshman and sophomores (Geography and Global History I and II), and thus all levels of students taking the same course.

How it works: Here's the key: SUPPORT, SUPPORT, SUPPORT. And by support, I mean human support...real live certified teachers, aides, and assistants in classrooms and extra time available for help that is considered part of the teacher's teaching schedule.

Out of every detracked course, there will be certain sections labeled as inclusion sections. For example, let's say out of ten sections of Global History 9 (detracked), about three of those will be labeled as inclusion sections. The 15 students who would have been in a lower level class who have IEPs (the equivalent of our skills/intro class) will be divided into three groups of five and 'pushed in' to the regular/inclusion sections. There will be a special education teacher assigned to those students (they assign special ed teachers students based on age group) that also pushes into that room. That teacher will be there three days a week and two days a week there will be an uncertified teacher assistant. In addition, any student who is assigned an individual aide will have that adult with them too. The minimum number of adults at all times in an inclusion section would be two, but four of the five inclusion classes I went into had three adults. On top of that, scheduling is done intentionally and purposefully to keep other IEP students (who are higher functioning, called resource students) primarily out of those sections and spread into other sections. So seven of the sections of Global History 9 look like 'typical' classes, with higher functioning IEP students, CP level students, and honors/higher achieving students, and three of the classes are inclusion models with extra support for the lower

functioning IEP students as well as having CP level and honors level students in those too. The curriculums and standards of the inclusion classes and other sections are still the same; it is the level of support that is differentiated between the sections. All class sizes are approximately 25.

There are also scheduling features that provide for extra help. Students who are 'inclusion' students are assigned 'support classes' in academic areas where it is needed. Support classes meet two days a week. So this means that an inclusion student might have two days a week when they get two periods of math and another two days a week when they get two periods of English. Any student can take a support class but inclusion students can be required to take them. Support classes are taught by content teachers, only have about ten students, and count as a full teaching section. They provide one on one help and reinforce the curriculum with supplemental teaching. In lieu of support classes, a student could also take an enrichment class. For example they have math or science enrichment which gives extra challenges, labs, or problem solving for high achieving students. If a student selects support or enrichment classes it might be balanced out in their schedule with another class of similar type, a study hall, or another elective that meets only a couple days a week. There is also something called zero period, which is approximately the first 25 minutes of the day. All teachers are required to be in their classrooms and students can go in for extra help. Students who are failing are required to attend for zero period. Otherwise, a student could just hang out in the halls during that time, but it is scheduled time for teacher to student help when all teachers and students are available to each other.

Common planning time is provided to all departments (1 period a day where whole dept has planning) so that the curriculums can be kept consistent across sections. Common assessments in the form of quarterly exams are used for courses. This is to ensure that inclusion sections are not taught differently than other sections and to have a way to measure achievement. I can give you more info on curriculum if you're interested, but their detracked classes were most similar to our World Civ I and II in terms of content; they were using student centered teaching methods and very clearly emphasizing common core type skills. Upper level social studies courses were offered in two levels/tracks (IB and regular) and included courses in US History, government, economics, and psychology.

What all of this means is that it is investment in human resources which provide the support for the inclusion model; multiple adults in a room (including multiple certified teachers in a room), common planning time, assigning teachers to support classes with small class sizes all cost money but this is how Rockville chooses to spend it.

Rockville Isn't Perfect: Ok, I suppose that's obvious, but I don't want anyone thinking that the admin or board has a mission to make us a mini-Rockville. That isn't the case. Some of the imperfect things I saw: teachers doing hall duty, teachers have to submit lesson plans weekly, very little technology for student use (no computers in library, no wifi in building, only a couple computer labs), drab facilities including mis-match paint and small rooms. From our department's point of view, it is also notable how much more student choice in coursework we offer compared to them. I didn't hear anyone in our group celebrating these things, or their 9 period schedule.

So why does LFHS care?: In the debriefing sessions, these were some of the questions that were posed to us. A major takeaway of this experience is to have departments consider and discuss these questions.

1) Can we provide more kids, more success? We want to be self-critical without being negative. We want to consider the courses we are providing for all students, and it is clear that the administration would especially like to reconsider how we provide for our lower functioning special ed students. A subset of this question is looking at the impact of detracking on upper level students. Rockville claims that all their scores went up on regents exams with this model, including those for upper level students.

It was the upper level students' parents who resisted at first but that once they realized their kids were still getting into Ivy League schools and doing well, resistance faded. Today they said there is full community support for their programs.

2) Which do we differentiate: curriculum, instruction, standards? Main idea is that these really shouldn't be differentiated. Exposure to an engaging curriculum, purposeful instruction, and high standards are good for all learners. What has to be differentiated is the level of support given to help students achieve those goals. The theory was supported by Mr. Simeck that it isn't the grade of a learner in these courses that correlates to later success, but exposure to high level courses in the first place that correlates to later success. The idea too is that revisiting a curriculum to provide best practices for an inclusion classroom improves everyone's teaching. **Revision (11/08/13): upon further discussion it was clarified that differentiated *instruction* is necessary and desired to help all learners. Ideally this would be done with intent and purpose, informed by what we know of the best research based methods, perhaps with the help of teacher-leaders/instructional coaches. For the most part, however, standards and curriculum would remain consistent for all the learners in the classroom.**

3) Do we provide a "guaranteed viable curriculum" (Mr. Simeck's words)? If curriculums change widely from teacher to teacher, course to course (within levels), or level to level, then the idea is that we don't. Mr. Simeck thinks we need to.

In Conclusion: We also shared time with our District 67 counterparts so part of the discussion was centered more around elementary and middle school needs. I might be missing something, but what I shared above seemed to be the big ideas to me. Feel free to talk with me more about it or ask questions; I visited many classes and also have some specific answers to share to questions some of you asked me before going. Hopefully we can find some department time to talk more about the questions above!

Random Quotes that are Worth Sharing:

"Equity is at the heart of our school's mission." Rockville Superintendent

"If you've got five tracks now in 2013, God help you. I don't even know what to say about that." Rockville Principal (not referring to anything specific to LFHS, just speaking in general)

"Yea, we've got E-books, but no one uses them." Rockville Student

"Yes, it's true, some of our special ed kids have no electives. But the philosophy of our school is *academics first*." Rockville counselor

"The goal of detracking is to get an academic culture *everywhere*." Rockville Principal

"It isn't the harder teacher who gets better results, it's the more deliberative one." Rockville Principal

"Don't give the teachers a decision if your mind is already made up." Rockville Assistant Principal

"The important end game of our business is the transfer – where kids go and what they do after their 13 years with you." Rockville Superintendent

"It's important to get to the belief system of an individual in an interview. That's something I can't fix." Rockville Superintendent

"I'm struggling with 'all means all' vs. 'one size fits all'." Andrea Lemke, LFHS Math dept.

"Your mission and vision need to be related to something that breaks your heart." Mike Simeck

"Every place is different, but you can't do it overnight." Rockville Principal