

Abbott Middle School

Abbott Middle School is a suburban grade 6, 7, and 8 facility that houses 779 students (268 6th graders, 253 7th graders, and 258 8th graders). There are 388 enrolled females, and 369 enrolled males. It has a moderate amount of diversity. 557 of the students are white, 123 are black, 48 Asian, 24 Hispanic, and 5 American Indian/Alaskans. Asian students at Abbott have the highest combined reading and math proficiency of any ethnicity at 97%. Whites have an 86.5% proficiency rating, multiracial at 67.4%, and blacks at 63.6%. Female proficiency in reading and math is slightly above male proficiency. Economically disadvantaged students are 65% proficient, while students with disabilities have a 39% proficiency rating. Although the average household income in West Bloomfield is over \$91,000, 79 students are eligible for a free lunch and 28 students are eligible for a reduced-price lunch.

There are 41 teachers at Abbott Middle School, making the student to teacher ratio 19. Teachers are generally paid well, averaging \$61,319 per year. 96.8% of households have an adult with at least a high school diploma, and 61% of households have an adult with at least a bachelor's degree.

The physical environment of Abbott Middle School is conducive to learning. Although it is in the rougher part of West Bloomfield and there is a gun shop directly across the street from the school, it is still in a safe environment. Down the road is a Maserati and Ferrari dealership that shows some of the wealth of the community. The actual school is a modestly sized brick building without any obvious need of repair. At the main entrance is an atrium with skylights to let natural light in. Most of the building

besides the entrance and gymnasium are carpeted. Each student has a locker and there are enough lockers for everybody. Classrooms are spacious and most are outfitted with a television, multiple computers, blackboard and overhead projector. There is talk from some of the teachers about getting Smartboards in the rooms to incorporate the use of more technology and facilitate learning. The classrooms are ascetically pleasing and well decorated. There is a nice balance of subject specific materials on the walls as well as motivational posters encouraging excellence. Almost every classroom has windows and is a generally appealing place to study. Showcases in the hallway display student work in class and extracurricular activities. One showcase currently displays African masks made by students in a social studies unit on Africa. Another shows the schools tradition of excellence in cross country over the past few years.

The school has ample room for dance, drama, and athletic activities. Abbott's dance room stands out as one of the unique things about the school. It has a polished wooden floor with mirrors on all the walls and a large television. The drama room has a nice studio for stage and costume construction.

Abbott Middle School generally has new textbooks. For example, most of the social studies books are three years old while most of the science books are brand new. In the social studies department, each student has a textbooks for school as well as the option to bring another textbooks home. The textbook they bring home can either be a physical textbook or the electronic version on CD. The science department has the resources to do dissecting projects. The school also provides the resources for students to take Cornell notes in all of their classes. Cornell notes are lined sheets printed up for students with space for questions and space for notes.

Students at Abbott voluntarily separate themselves by gender. Most students in the hall way walk with students of the same gender and pair up in class with students of the same gender. Racial makeup does not seem to play a big of a part in defining social groups. More accurately, students do not seem socially segregated based on their race. Perhaps this is because of a large effort by teachers to always mix groups up. Teachers at Abbott almost always choose the groups for academic work rather than let the students separate themselves.

Although Abbott has many racially diverse students, there does not appear to be many non English speaking students. There is, though, some diversity in the dialects of English spoken. African American dialect as well as the dialects of some immigrant groups can be heard. The school culture praises diversity and participation in extracurricular events. Some teachers, especially those in the social studies curriculum, make diversity one of the center points of their class. Teachers and the administration also give praise to those in after school events. The morning announcements, for example, often praise the work of the students in the play, musical, or contest the night before. Teachers often attend these events and complement the students on their work.

Religious diversity is also a big topic at Abbott. The school has vacation on major Jewish and Christian holidays. School sponsored programs give students the chance to take field trips and observe local mosques, synagogues, churches and other places of worship to promote religious tolerance. The administration, through programs like these and through a physically appealing building, promote a safe place for students to learn.

Abbott middle school is a racially diverse school with generous resources. The physical environment is conducive for learning and the school provides many chances for students to get involved in extracurricular activities. Social groups are generally divided along the lines of gender, but usually not race and seemingly not social status or wealth. The administration encourages these cross racial interactions by emphasizing diversity in the curriculum and mixing student groups up in academic settings. But the school may have a silent culture of power that privileges whites over other groups. The teaching staff at Abbott is not nearly as diverse as the student body. The vast majority of teachers are white. Because these teachers control the curriculum, the values that they hold are the ones that become valued in the classroom. Though there are no open displays of racism from the teachers, the culture may be of racism without racists, or institutional racism as Delpit identifies it. This plays out in the classroom as uninterested black students who are not engaged with the material. Most of the white teachers seem to put the blame on that student because he or she is seen as lazy, and they do not, as Delpit predicted, like to acknowledge problems with their curriculum.

While the underlying culture at Abbott may be a culture of power, its visible culture has much in common with the culture of West Bloomfield. The school has a field trip for students to visit Michigan State, so students can begin setting goals for themselves concerning higher education. West Bloomfield's professional affluent culture has much in common with school's goal of promoting education past high school. The school also blends with the diverse nature of the community. Both have large sections of Jewish, European, and African-American people. The school and the community both lack a large Hispanic population. The school, though, does not completely mesh with the

affluent, professional culture of West Bloomfield. It emphasizes art, dance, and theater to a large extent. Many students actually choose Abbott over the neighboring Orchard Lake Middle School because it has such a nice arts program. It seems that Abbott Middle School regards the arts as a worthy career path, although most careers in the arts make very meager wages.

Abbott's culture does not, for the most part, blend with all strands of mainstream American culture. Its culture is probably typical of many suburbs. The general optimistic attitude of students and teachers about the future and the "I can" attitude seen in the posters on the walls mesh well with the suburban achievement culture. The spirit of racial harmony seen in the school is also similar to some suburban ideals. But, Abbott's culture is starkly different from an inner city or rural culture. There is no sign that toughness (or "tuffness" from *The Outsiders*) is valued in the classroom. The many visible cross racial friendships also goes against the grain of some mainstream culture. Students also see benefits in cross cultural friendships that would be viewed as taboo in some regions and cultures.

Regarding literacy, Abbott Middle School has much in common with the affluent professional school described by Anyon. The curriculum at Abbott is as much skill based as it is knowledge based. For instance, the social studies curriculum emphasizes the ability to read maps as much as it emphasizes knowing the geography of an area. This allows students to believe that they can create knowledge. The process of figuring out a problem with reasoning rather than looking to authoritative sources is strongly emphasized across the disciplines. Abbott, like the affluent professional school described by Anyon, also places a big emphasis on answering questions with questions. One of the

programs for struggling students, Advancement Via Individual Determination, has coaches that the students can ask homework questions to. These coaches are usually college students or other volunteers in the community. Since often times the coaches are not specialized in everything the students are studying, they are supposed to answer questions with questions to get the student to reason them out. Like Anyon's affluent professional school, Abbott values procedural thinking over coming up with the "correct" answer in the humanities, but does require correct answers in math and science classes.