

**MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**CURR/EDFD/READ 305: Teaching for Equity and Diversity**

Community Study (UG)--Task Description

The purpose of this assignment is to help you: (a) develop a framework for understanding the relationship between schools, communities, and society; (b) cultivate skills needed to familiarize yourself with diverse communities and their residents; (c) envision ways you can help your future students see connections between their in-school and out-of-school experiences; (d) and promote your ability to work collaboratively with colleagues. The assignment involves an in-depth investigation of a diverse community and its schools. To make the work feasible and to allow you to explore issues of equity in-depth, you are asked to focus your investigation on one of the Target Districts (formerly known as Abbott districts) in the vicinity of MSU. These Target districts are among the poorest in New Jersey and serve diverse student populations. The history of these districts will be studied in the course.

The assignment requires that you investigate one Target district and prepare a report of findings. For this project, you are asked to collaborate with other members of the class (groups should be no larger than four people). The investigation involves the following data gathering activities:

- Visit to the community
- Read local newspapers (to determine educational and other issues/concerns in the target community)
- Analyze information from the Census Bureau
- Analyze information from the Report Card for selected schools in the target community
- Analyze information from the Education Law Center website (for the districts themselves)
- Research the target school district website as well as the website for the city
- Conduct other relevant internet searches
- Visit one agency/organization that provides education-related services to children in the target community to inquire about available services

The project requires that you complete a group report as well as an individual report. A detail outline of both reports follows:

**GROUP REPORT**

The group report has two parts, one focused on the community and the other on the public schools in the community.

I. **The Community:**

1. **The Place:** Conduct an internet search that will allow you to describe the community and its location. (NOTE: In the appendix, include a map that shows the internal geography of the community.) In the body of the report, answer the following questions:

- a. In what county is the target community located? Which communities border with the target community?
- b. How large is the community (square miles)? How does the target community compare with other communities in the county in terms of size?
- c. What is its internal geography (distinctive areas/sections) of the community?

After all group members visit the community, prepare a response that reflects your collective thinking to the following question:

- d. What general impressions did you develop about the community from your visit?
2. **History:** Give a brief history of the community. Make sure you identify salient historical events that have made a significant impact on this community in general and its schools in particular. Information for this section of the report comes from an internet search.
  3. **The People:** Use **Form B** to summarize the salient demographic characteristics of this community. The information needed to complete the form is available from the U.S. Census Bureau at the following website:

<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts>? In the box at the upper right hand corner of the page, insert the name of the target district and select New Jersey. This will take you to the information needed. **NOTE: MAKE SURE YOU USE THE 2000 CENSUS TAB.)**

The completed **Form B** should be included as an appendix to the group report. In the body of the report, respond to the questions below based on the information summarized in **Form B**. (**NOTE:** Answers to the questions should reflect the collective thinking of group members.)

- a. How do residents in this community compare to the average U.S. resident? Your response to this question should include a brief comment for each of the following:
  - *Racial/ethnic makeup:*
  - *Housing:*
  - *Education:*
  - *Disability status:*
  - *Language background:*
- b. How might these demographics influence the schools?

- c. Based on what we have studied in this course, how might you explain the demographic patterns noted above for the target community?
- d. What findings were of most interest to you? Why?

**4. Community Economics:**

- a. How do residents in this community compare with N.J. residents in general regarding the following?
  - Unemployment Rates
  - Median Household Income
  - Population Below Poverty Level
  - Population 17 and under below Poverty Level

**NOTE:** The above information is available from the Education Law Center website: <http://www.edlawcenter.org/>. At this site, go to Abbott Districts/Abbott District Profiles. Find the district of interest (e.g., Union City). Use the information reported on the top portion of the page (Community Context). Make sure to push the (more details link under Community Context). The requested information will be there. The first column reports data for the selected district and the last column reports data for New Jersey as a whole.

- b. Who are the major employers in the target community? What type of employment is available in this community? (This information should come from an internet search and/or your visit to the community.)
- c. If the unemployment rate in the community is higher than the unemployment rate of the state (see response to 4a—first bullet), what do you think accounts for this difference?
- d. How do the prices of basic food items compare in the target community to Montclair or to your own community? What does that tell you about the community? How do prices reflect economic conditions of the community?

After group members review the answers to 4a-d, prepare a response that reflects your collective thinking for the question below:

- e. How might the economic conditions of this community influence the schools?

5. **Community Interests/Concerns:** Responses to the questions below should reflect the collective thinking of group members. These questions should be answered after each group member has individually completed **Form C**.
- a. Based on your individual reading of local newspapers (as reported in **Form C**), what are the salient issues of interest/concern in the community?
    - *Education-related:*
    - *Others:*
  - b. What are some implications of the interests/concerns identified above for the schools?

## II. **Public Schools in the Community**

1. **Demographics of the student population:** Complete **Form E** using the information available from the Education Law Center website. Go to: <http://www.edlawcenter.org/>. Look for the “Abbott Districts” link on the left hand side of the page. Go to “Profile.” Use the link to the target community. Once the page opens, go to the section entitled “Characteristics of K-12 Students.” Make sure you expand the section by pressing the “More Detail” link.

The completed **Form E** should be included as an appendix to the report. In the body of the report, respond to the questions below. (**NOTE: Response to these questions must reflect your collective thinking**).

- a. How do the demographics of the public school student population summarized in **Form E** compare with the demographics of the overall community summarized in **Form B**? In your response, comment on the following:
  - *Racial/ethnic makeup:*
  - *Economic background:*
  - *Disability status:*
  - *Language background:*
- b. How does the student population in the target community compare with the student population in other target districts in general?
- c. How does the student population in the target community compare with the overall student population in New Jersey?
- d. What conclusions do you draw from the above noted similarities/differences?
- e. What findings were of most interest to you? Why?

2. **Student outcomes for selected schools:** Each member of the group is asked to select one school in the target district and report the student outcomes information requested in **Form F**. (**NOTE: MAKE SURE YOU COORDINATE YOUR SELECTIONS SO THAT EACH PERSON FOCUSES ON A DIFFERENT SCHOOL.**) The relevant information is accessible from the following:  
<http://education.state.nj.us/rc/rc06/menu/01.html>

Once on the above website, do the following: (1) Select the county in which your community is located; (2) select the school district of interest from the list on the right; (3) select the school of interest from the list on the right; (4) once at the report card portal for the target school, select the “School profile (local narrative)” link and print the material for your use; and (5) return to the report card portal for the target school and in the “Select a data section,” check the following: Student information and Student performance indicators, then press the “See your data selection” tab. Print the data for your use.

In the body of the report, collectively respond to the questions below based on the information summarized in **Form F**. (**NOTE: Response to these questions must reflect your collective thinking**).

- a. How do the language arts literacy results for students in the target schools compare with the results for the district overall for the latest school year reported?
  - b. How do the mathematics results for students in the target schools compare with the results for the overall district?
  - c. How do other outcomes for students in the target schools (attendance rates, student suspensions, student expulsions) compare with the state average?
  - d. How do student outcomes compare across all the schools selected? Do the characteristics of the student population on this school in the top portion of **Form F** (total school enrollment, % ELLs, % students with disability, student mobility rate) help explain noted differences in student outcomes?
  - e. What conclusions do you draw from the above comparisons?
3. *Involvement of parents/guardians:* What strategies does the school district use to involve parents/guardians? (Information for this section of the report comes from the school district website.)

## **APPENDICES FOR GROUP REPORT**

1. Map of target community
2. The following completed forms should be included as appendices to the Group Report in the order below.
  - B. Community demographics characteristics
  - E. Demographics of student population

### **REMINDERS**

**CITE SOURCES:** In writing your report, make certain that you cite sources used. When using other authors' ideas, make sure you paraphrase their writings. If you use text written by another author, make sure to use quotation marks. Plagiarism is a serious matter with serious consequences.

**TYPE REPORT:** The report and all forms must be typed.

## INDIVIDUAL REPORT

Your individual report consists of responses to the three extension/reflection questions that follow:

1. In what ways does the target community support the intellectual, social, and personal development of children and youngsters? Be detailed and give specific examples to support your conclusions.
2. If you were a teacher in the target community, how might you use what you learned from your study of the target community to create links between the in-school and out-of-school experiences of children in this community? Be detailed and give specific examples. (NOTE: Make sure to review the information you reported in **Form A**.)
3. Select two readings we did in class this semester and explain how what you read helps you understand and/or interpret some aspect(s) of your community study findings.

### Completed Forms

The following completed forms should be included as appendices to the Individual Report in the order below. ALL FORMS ARE ACCESSIBLE FROM BLACKBOARD—(see **COMM STUDY FORMS tab**).

- A. Visit to the community
- C. Reading local newspapers
- D. Agency/organization providing education-related services to children in the target community
- F. Student outcomes information—(for selected school)
- G. Internet searches

**TARGET DISTRICTS**  
(formerly known as Abbott Districts)

<b>County</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Web Site</b>
ATLANTIC	<b>Pleasantville</b>	<a href="http://www.pleasantville.k12.nj.us/main.html">www.pleasantville.k12.nj.us/main.html</a>
BERGEN	<b>Garfield</b>	<a href="http://www.garfield.k12.nj.us">www.garfield.k12.nj.us</a>
BURLINGTON	<b>Burlington City</b>	<a href="http://www.burlington-nj.net">www.burlington-nj.net</a>
BURLINGTON	<b>Pemberton Township</b>	<a href="http://www.pemberton.k12.nj.us">www.pemberton.k12.nj.us</a>
CAMDEN	<b>Camden</b>	<a href="http://www.camden.k12.nj.us">www.camden.k12.nj.us</a>
CAMDEN	<b>Gloucester City</b>	<a href="http://www.ccts-ettc.org/gloucester-city">www.ccts-ettc.org/gloucester-city</a>
CUMBERLAND	<b>Bridgeton</b>	<a href="http://www.bridgeton.k12.nj.us">www.bridgeton.k12.nj.us</a>
CUMBERLAND	<b>Millville</b>	<a href="http://www.millville.org">www.millville.org</a>
CUMBERLAND	<b>Vineland</b>	<a href="http://www.vineland.org">www.vineland.org</a>
ESSEX	<b>East Orange</b>	<a href="http://www.eastorange.k12.nj.us">www.eastorange.k12.nj.us</a>
ESSEX	<b>Irvington</b>	<a href="http://www.irvington.k12.nj.us">www.irvington.k12.nj.us</a>
ESSEX	<b>Newark</b>	<a href="http://www.nps.k12.nj.us">www.nps.k12.nj.us</a>
ESSEX	<b>Orange</b>	<a href="http://www.orange.k12.nj.us/home.asp">www.orange.k12.nj.us/home.asp</a>
HUDSON	<b>Harrison</b>	<a href="http://www.harrison.k12.nj.us">www.harrison.k12.nj.us</a>
HUDSON	<b>Hoboken</b>	<a href="http://www.hobokenk12.powertolean.net">www.hobokenk12.powertolean.net</a>
HUDSON	<b>Jersey City</b>	<a href="http://www.jcboe.org">www.jcboe.org</a>
HUDSON	<b>Union City</b>	<a href="http://www.union-city.k12.nj.us">www.union-city.k12.nj.us</a>
HUDSON	<b>West New York</b>	<a href="http://www.wnyschools.net">www.wnyschools.net</a>
MERCER	<b>Trenton</b>	<a href="http://www.trenton.k12.nj.us">www.trenton.k12.nj.us</a>
MIDDLESEX	<b>New Brunswick</b>	<a href="http://www.nbps.k12.nj.us">www.nbps.k12.nj.us</a>
MIDDLESEX	<b>Perth Amboy</b>	<a href="http://www.perthamboy.k12.nj.us">www.perthamboy.k12.nj.us</a>
MONMOUTH	<b>Asbury Park</b>	<a href="http://www.asburypark.k12.nj.us">www.asburypark.k12.nj.us</a>
MONMOUTH	<b>Keansburg</b>	<a href="http://www.keansburg.k12.nj.us">www.keansburg.k12.nj.us</a>
MONMOUTH	<b>Long Branch</b>	<a href="http://www.longbranch.k12.nj.us">www.longbranch.k12.nj.us</a>
MONMOUTH	<b>Neptune Township</b>	<a href="http://www.neptune.k12.nj.us">www.neptune.k12.nj.us</a>
PASSAIC	<b>Passaic City</b>	<a href="http://www.passaic-city.k12.nj.us/public">www.passaic-city.k12.nj.us/public</a>
PASSAIC	<b>Paterson</b>	<a href="http://www.paterson.k12.nj.us">www.paterson.k12.nj.us</a>
SALEM	<b>Salem City</b>	<a href="http://www.salemnj.org/">www.salemnj.org/</a>
UNION	<b>Elizabeth</b>	<a href="http://www.elizabeth.k12.nj.us">www.elizabeth.k12.nj.us</a>
UNION	<b>Plainfield</b>	<a href="http://www.plainfieldnj.k12.org">www.plainfieldnj.k12.org</a>
WARREN	<b>Phillipsburg</b>	<a href="http://www.pburg.k12.nj.us">www.pburg.k12.nj.us</a>

\*\*These websites will give you specific information about the target districts, their organization, programs and services. For report cards and additional information on specific schools, districts

and the state, you need to go to: <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/> . You will also find data on enrollment (including ethnicity, gender, eligibility for free or reduced lunch, bilingual and English language learners, special needs learners, among others).