

TC PRACTICE: GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITIES IT SERVES

What is this practice?

No matter your level of familiarity with your school placement and the communities it serves, knowing communities as a teacher is different. Inquiring into your school and its surrounding neighborhoods from the perspective of a teacher will give you a head start at the beginning of the school year. You can find valuable information from publicly available data, the school's website or other school-related resources, or by visiting and talking with people.



Why is it important?

The work of teaching is strongly influenced by context. Knowing this context will help you do numerous important things—connect with students and colleagues, search for and find resources, contextualize your experiences and other information (like policies and regulations), and more. Most centrally, it will help you make your teaching relevant for your students, as you cannot anticipate how the learners in front of you will respond to ideas or points of view you bring up unless you literally understand “where they are coming from.”

Where to start?

First of all, find out what communities and neighborhoods your school serves. Then think about what you already know about the school and the surrounding area and try to generate “authentic” questions—those that you, students, families, or community members would actually want answered. Next, seek answers! Do you know people who live in the area? Whom could you ask for information or stories? What data are publicly available? Follow your curiosity and the tips below.

Tips for doing this practice effectively

A. Examples of what you can find on the Internet:

- Neighborhoods: Seattle City Clerk's Office Geographic Indexing Atlas: clerk.seattle.gov/~public/nmaps/html/NN-1040S.htm
- Community data: US Census Maps Seattle: <https://www.seattle.gov/opcd/population-and-demographics/geographic-files-and-maps#2010census>
City Data (income, wages, etc.): <http://www.city-data.com/income/income-Seattle-Washington.html>
- Diversity Index of Seattle and Bellevue (pdf): <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OPCD/Demographics/GeographicFilesandMaps/DiversityIndex.pdf>
<http://seattletimes.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/fyi-guy/files/2014/03/fyiguy-bellevuediversity-c.jpg>
- The Seattle Atlas of Student Homelessness: <http://www.icphusa.org/national/the-seattle-atlas-of-student-homelessness/>
- SPS Attendance Area Boundaries and Schools 2018-2019: [SPS Attendance Area Boundaries and Schools 2018-2019 - PDF for display \(ZIP file\)](#)
- Bellevue Attendance Area Boundaries and Schools 2018-2019: <https://bsd405.org/schools/find-your-school/>

- Shoreline Attendance Area Boundaries and Schools 2018-2019: <https://www.shorelineschools.org/domain/58>
- Lake Washington Attendance Area Boundaries and Schools 2018-2019: <https://www.lwsd.org/schools/attendance-areas/school-boundary-maps>
- School data: Washington State Report Card <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us>
- Check out the school website (try to go deeper than just one click...)
- History of your school, e.g., The free online encyclopedia of Washington state history <http://www.historylink.org/>
- Google maps help you to orient you to the area: <https://www.google.com/earth/>

B. What you can find within the school:

- When you walk through the hallways, what do you see? Is there artwork on the walls? What do the murals express, what may they say about past and present school culture? Are there still students' artifacts exhibited? What do they tell you?
- What is the layout of the school (cafeteria, library, gymnasium, classrooms, outside spaces)? How might this influence how students and staff feel and how they interact?
- Find key places you may need. Where are restrooms, copy machines, the maintenance staff's office? What else do you need or want to know?

C. What you can find when you walk around your school:

- Community assets may include services provided by libraries or community-based organizations, as well as local experts, different kinds of shops, transportation opportunities, playgrounds, parks, etc. These help you understand the community as multi-dimensional, with many features you can draw on as educator.
- Math and science features within the school grounds or nearby can spark curiosity and help students see where math and science play a role in their daily lives.
 - *Math suggestions:* These two articles provide good examples what you can do: [Walking the Math Walk](#) or [Mathematical Selfies](#). Ask yourself: Where are interesting mathematical phenomena nearby? Where do aesthetics and math come together? Where can I find math in nature? Where does math already play a role in everyday life in the community?
 - *Science suggestions:* What are puzzling phenomena that could be used for science teaching (e.g., the different noise levels when airplanes are landing)? Where are phenomena I'd like to explore more on my own (e.g. how clean is the water in the lake in the park, is there any restoration work planned)? Where are natural phenomena, beauty, seasonal changes that may be interesting for my students to explore at different points of the school year?

Summing up

- Consider what you already know and what you want to know about your school and the communities it serves—follow your curiosity!
- Make use of multiple sources of information, including what you can find on the Internet and what you find when you walk around the area and talk to community members
- Look for specific local connections to the content you will be teaching