

Now Hiring Resident Anthropologists
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A comical theme in the charter school world is that new school titles and positions are created constantly. Utilizing this creative license, in this paper I propose a new position title for all schools, and explain why this position is so critical to the success of schools. Working with current and aspiring principals for 15 months, I've learned that there is a great need for anthropology at the school level. For example, in response to a principal's question, "How can I know my students as more than just a failing test score?," an anthropologist might engage in an ethnographic study of students' experiences outside of school, and suggest possible external reasons for students' struggle on school tests. In a second example, school faculty are concerned that students are not completing their homework, and wonder why parents are not ensuring its completion. An anthropologist would go to the source, opening an investigation of home/community experiences that assist or deter homework completion. In a third example, a mostly white, middle class instructional staff teaches all Black students, and no one talks about the possible tensions, until an anthropologists proposes the issue for intense, honest, and difficult discussion. The work of anthropologists in schools does not appear readily on an Excel spreadsheet, to be handed out at a school results meeting. Nor can it be easily sound-bited for a "shout-out" in a grade-level planning meeting. For these reasons, the hard, long, personal work of asking deep questions about what is going on in schools, homes, and communities, is often neglected at the school level. This work is critical, though, and produces an understanding of who students, faculty, and staff are, and how they make meaning of, and struggle through, their own experiences within a formal education system. Because of the importance of this work, I propose that a Resident Anthropologist be hired at every school.