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## **Dallas Diversity and Inclusion Study**

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**Dallas Diversity and Inclusion Study**  
**Patricia Gándara and Gary Orfield**  
**Civil Rights Project, UCLA**

Dallas, one of the nation's largest central cities in its most rapidly growing metropolitan areas, has had a shrinking school district in the midst of major housing development. A surge in housing costs since the Great Recession has led to the return of middle class and white families to a number of communities but that has not been reflected in the student population. In response to the challenge of closing more schools and losing out to expanding charters, the DISD leadership decided to create some new schools and restart some older ones with programs designed both to attract new and non-public school families and to offer new choices to the families of color and low income families already in the system. This commitment to quality and diversity is still relatively modest but could hold real promise for both the city's schools and as a national example of creative leadership. Because of our long-term interest in integration and quality schooling for all students we decided to work with colleagues at SMU Mission Foods Texas-Mexico Center to do a case study of several of the schools produced by this effort. While the effort is very much a work in progress, this report shows that it can succeed with the right programs and leadership and it deserves further investment by the city, private foundations, and the state and federal governments.

## **Setting the Dallas Context**

### **Population, housing and enrollment changes**

Dallas was part of the old South and has long had a substantial black population, almost a fifth (19%) back in 1960 with 129,000 black residents. The population then was 81% white. Less than 4% of the residents then had Spanish surnames (which was the way the Census counted Hispanics at the time). The black share of the overall population reached its peak in 1980, 29 percent, and has declined gradually as a share of a growing city. The big story in the composition of Dallas over the last 40 years has been the decline of the white share and the very rapid growth of the Latino population which reached an eighth of the total in 1980,

became a fifth by 1990 and was a third by 2000. It went over a half million and 40 percent of total residents in the next two decades. There was both a sharp drop in birth rates of whites and massive suburbanization that transformed Dallas Public Schools into overwhelming nonwhite institutions, like many other American cities. In 2017, white and black childbearing was significantly below the reproduction level while the Hispanic rate was modestly above.<sup>1</sup> Given that the Hispanic population is younger and that is being reinforced by immigration, the Hispanic share is likely to grow.

In 1969, before any significant desegregation began, the school district was already almost half nonwhite. From 1969 to 1992 the white enrollment dropped from 96,000 to 21,000. Although the changes had often been blamed on the school desegregation order, the trend was present before the plan and the trend continued long after the limited plan was lifted. In other words, whatever the short term impact was, it is fundamentally a story of white suburbanization and declining birth rates, housing segregation, and a very large immigration of Latinos. Although the desegregation order was lifted in 1994<sup>2</sup> the white enrollment in the district continued to decline, reaching a low of less than 4,000 in recent years. The Dallas ISD like some of the nation's other largest central city districts had a virtual disappearance of white students although the metro area still had millions. The driving force was an enormous growth of the city and the district's Latino population.

In contrast to many of the nation's large central cities, Dallas has grown rapidly. It is a key center of a huge and growing metropolis, with an increase of 1.1 million persons since 2000.<sup>3</sup> The state of Texas has been booming, gaining 3.7

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<sup>1</sup> National Vital Statistics Reports Volume 68, Number 1 January 10, 2019 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Health Statistics National Vital Statistics System NCHS reports can be downloaded from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/index.htm>. Total Fertility Rates by State and Race and Hispanic Origin: United States, 2017 by T.J. Mathews, M.S., and Brady E. Hamilton, Ph

<sup>2</sup> *Tasby v. Woolery*, N.D. TX, civil action NO. 3-4211-H, July 2, 1994

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, "New Census Bureau Estimates Show Counties in the South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth," CB19-55, April 23, 2019.

million people between 2000 and 2018.<sup>4</sup> It is also a state with a good deal of mobility with about a sixth of the residents changing their residence each year.<sup>5</sup> One of metro Dallas' great advantages has been a relatively affordable housing market compared to coastal cities, which has helped spur the surge of population. With very rapid population growth and in spite of active construction, the housing demand drove a rapid surge of prices after the Great Recession ended in 2009. The average gain was about 70% from 2009-2019. Prices are about 50% higher than they had been in the boom before the Great Recession even though the rate of gains was slowing by 2019 (Brown, 2019). When housing prices surge much faster than household incomes, buyers have a strong incentive to consider areas that might not previously have been of interest, increasing the interest of middle class families to live in these parts of the city.

### **The Rise of Gentrification and Charter Schools**

Within the city of Dallas there are still many areas of economic decline, which have experienced dramatic loss of white residents and gains in Latino residents in the period between 2000 and 2016, according to research at the Institute for Metropolitan Opportunity at the Univ. of Minnesota. Areas of strong economic decline in the city lost 43,000 whites, almost a third (31%) of their 2000 population, while gaining 64,000 Latinos (and losing 14,000 Blacks). Dallas is not yet a major center of gentrification but the housing affordability problem has clearly made some city areas attractive to buyers who would not have considered them earlier. A huge change in housing prices in an area without high middle class incomes creates a large incentive for families to consider alternatives, and the city council has been working on a comprehensive housing plan. Those are the conditions under which gentrification is most likely to occur. Dallas areas of strong economic expansion, by contrast, had gained 17,000 whites and areas with modest economic expansion 23,000 more by 2016. The large majority of the newcomers in these areas were college graduates.

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Quick Facts, Texas, downloaded, July 8, 2009

<sup>5</sup> Ibid..

These gentrifying areas were experiencing significant loss of Latinos and families living in poverty and small gains of African Americans.<sup>6</sup> They have seen rapid increase in new homes and rental units, pricing out former residents. From a school system perspective, it means that in those areas of gentrification and population loss, the group of students formerly most likely to enroll, Hispanics, is declining and the local schools must either attract newcomers or decline and face possible closure. In 2014-2016 school years an average of 67% of the school age population within the district attended Dallas Public Schools as charter school enrollment grew from 11.7% to 14.3% or 33,000 students and private school enrollment dropped from 9.2% to 8.3%.<sup>7</sup> During this two year period, the public school enrollment fell by almost 3,000.<sup>8</sup> In 2018 the district was facing the possibility of closing as many as 30 schools to adjust to long-term enrollment declines.<sup>9</sup>

### **Dallas Segregation**

Schools in Texas, as in the rest of the nation, have become increasingly re-segregated since the civil rights period of the 1960s and early 1970s. Texas is the fifth most segregated state in the nation for black students with respect to the likelihood of having white students in their schools, and the second most segregated for Latino students (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Racial segregation tends to be very closely related to economic segregation: nationally 67.9% of students in schools attended by black and Latino students are low income (Orfield et al, 2016). It is well documented that attending a school with a high percentage of low-income students generally yields far poorer academic outcomes and many fewer life opportunities (Orfield & Lee, 2005). To the extent that low income Latino and black students can have access to middle class

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<sup>6</sup> University of Minnesota Law School, Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, “Dallas Region,” [https://www.law.umn.edu/sites/.../dallas\\_incomechange\\_report.pdf](https://www.law.umn.edu/sites/.../dallas_incomechange_report.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> National Vital Statistics Reports Volume 68, Number 1 January 10, 2019 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Health Statistics National Vital Statistics System NCHS reports can be downloaded from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/index.htm>. Total Fertility Rates by State and Race and Hispanic Origin: United States, 2017 by T.J. Mathews, M.S., and Brady E. Hamilton, p. 6

<sup>8</sup>Dallas Joint Education Task Force, *Da, llas ISD and Charter Schools*, May 22, 2018, p.11.

<sup>9</sup> Jill Ament, “Shrinking Student Population Means Dallas ISD Faces Mass School Closures,” *Texas Standard*, Oct. 5, 2018.

integrated schools their achievement and chances for graduation and college completion rise (Johnson, 2019).

Following on the civil rights period, educators seemingly adopted the position that equalizing—and sometimes augmenting—funding for low-income schools could equalize opportunity for low income and students of color. Unfortunately, decades of experimentation with funding equalization have not produced equal outcomes for majority and minority populations. Even major investments by philanthropy in some heavily segregated districts have barely moved the needle on achievement gaps (Russakoff, 2015). Moreover, the intense segregation of the schools has reinforced segregation in civic life. Middle class white students and black and brown low-income students rarely encounter each other and so each is vulnerable to developing stereotypes about the other—a bad omen for a society that aspires to be a fair and just democracy and in which these students will need to know how to live and work together.

For Latino students, who comprise more than half of the school age population of Texas, school segregation can occur along three dimensions: by race/ethnicity, poverty, and language (Gándara, 2017). This linguistic isolation – where no one in the family speaks English as a first language-- means that these students not only lack consistent exposure to English, but that they also lack basic information about opportunity in the society because typical means of communicating this information do not reach their homes or neighborhoods. For example, while Latino parents want their children to succeed in school and go to college (Lopez, 2009) they frequently have no idea how to help make this happen, or how to pay for a college education. Where schools succeed in attracting and holding middle class families they create information networks among parents and students and also build broader public support for public schools and help persuade young professional families to make long-term commitments to the city schools.

Unfortunately, most urban school districts have largely given up on systematic attempts to create more inclusive schools. There is a small percent of white students left in many central city districts and nothing is being done to increase the number of truly diverse schools of choice even where gentrification can make it possible. The Civil Rights Project recently did a national magnet study for the U.S. Dept. of Education and found that many magnets are not very “magnetic” because their initial impetus – to desegregate the

schools—has been forgotten or at least downplayed (Ayscue, Levy, Siegel-Hawley & Woodward, 2017).

### **Dallas Takes Up the Challenge**

An important exception to this pattern is the Dallas Independent School District. DISD is one of the nation's largest districts with more than 155,000 students in 239 schools. It is also one of the most segregated, with 92% of its students black or Latino and overwhelmingly low-income. Only 5% of students are white and a little more than 1% are Asian. DISD has lost between 15,000 and 20,000 students to private and charter schools over the last five years. Although Dallas is projected to add 46,000 new housing units in the near future, most of these new residents are not expected to enroll their children in DISD unless previous patterns change. Most of the housing will be expensive and cater to individuals unlikely to consider the public schools. This would be a serious loss for the school district's future. But DISD has been proactive in meeting the challenge and identified new ways to hold and attract new students.

The Office of Transformation and Innovation (OTI) was established under Superintendent Mike Miles by Mike Koprowski and Mohammed Choudury with the goal of desegregating Dallas' schools. Choudury took on the design of the school models while Koprowski focused on the broader issues of housing and community segregation and convincing Dallasites that everyone would benefit from integrating communities through both housing policy and school choice. Solar Prep would be the primary test case of this vision and Koprowski is featured in a video introduction to Solar Prep in which he explains the critical importance and benefits of socio-economically desegregated schooling (in which students of different races are prominently featured). Koprowski also notes the goal is "not just academic success on tests" and that for the first time in district history admission is by lottery with half the seats reserved for low income students. It was clear at this point that the district was committing to both racial and socioeconomic desegregation through its Transformation and Innovation schools. But the housing piece remains a tall order in Dallas.

The basic idea is to create new schools and give new missions to some of the old schools that would appeal to highly educated and demanding parents while offering

important new opportunities to students of color. DISD is a leader in offering bilingual and dual language instruction that incorporates both primary English and primary Spanish speakers—breaking down linguistic isolation and offering the advantage of a second language to monolingual English speakers. And it is now also taking on the challenge of creating more inclusive schools by offering innovative programs and providing transportation to a more diverse student body. The DISD has been explicit in its goals of providing dual language and inclusive education for its students and has dedicated both attention and resources to these goals. For this reason, we were anxious to study Dallas' efforts and learn from its experience.

DISD has created two new types of inclusive schools: **Transformation** schools are created “from the ground up” in neighborhoods that have an underutilized school site. These schools are closed and re-opened with a specific program geared to attract new students. Transportation is provided for students wishing to attend from outside the immediate area. **Innovation** schools are existing schools that adopt a new curriculum, such as dual language immersion or single sex, also with the objective of attracting new audiences. While sometimes competitive for admission, with lengthy wait lists, these two types of schools do not require students to take or pass a test to gain admission. DISD also offers magnet schools with attractive curricula that require students to have minimum grade averages in various subjects and also take and pass an entrance exam. Magnet schools were initially created under court orders in the city's federal desegregation case and had explicit desegregation goals and policies but those were discontinued and the schools became far more selective. In a sense the new efforts represent a return to some of the successful diversity policies of the initial magnet period. The absence of an entrance exam and grade criteria encourages diversity in the Transformation and Innovation classrooms. The district is hoping to attract new enrollees from private and charter schools and other bordering districts. We were interested in studying both Transformation and Innovation schools, understanding that the initiative is young and some or all of the chosen schools would be in their early stages of development.

The DISD Board of Education passed a racial equity resolution in 2017 that resulted in the organization of an Office of Racial Equity under the leadership of Leslie Williams in mid-2018. This office was fledgling during the time of our study and did not



come to our attention until we had completed data collection. However, it suggests a deepening to the commitment of diversity and inclusion. The goals of this office are to identify areas of racial inequity in programs and policies and address them as well as to ensure a robust multicultural curriculum in all schools. The school board president told us that the district is supporting the ORE with “tons of money.”

## **Study Method**

The Civil Rights Project proposed to study at least one Transformation and one Innovation school, with at least one also including a two way dual language program, to understand how these schools operate, how effective they were in attracting students, especially a diversity of students, and what kinds of challenges they face. Hopefully, we could learn from these schools and pass this knowledge on to other districts facing similar challenges. To this end, we:

- (1) First conducted a telephone interview with the superintendent and Associate superintendent to explain our interest and seek the permission of the superintendent to come into the district. This call resulted in an enthusiastic response and an agreement to proceed with a formal proposal.
- (2) We next set up a meeting with the upper administration of the DISD, including the head of Research Board (Larry Featherston), two Deputy Superintendents, Yvonne Durant and Nicky Mouton, both involved in special programs, and Mitch Morgan, head of Gifted and Talented Education. All expressed a strong interest in supporting Gifted and Talented education with the belief that DISD students both deserved and required this type of programming. However, they also shared that there were currently 25 Transformation and Innovation schools and while they appear to be slowly attracting a more diverse population, at less than 10% of the district’s schools, they have not yet made a major impact on district demographics. The administrators shared that the Superintendent Hinojosa’s plan is to open at least one Innovation and one Transformation school each year with the objective of attracting 50% low income students and 50% middle and upper income students. The Superintendent’s goals are 3-fold:

1. Improving the enrollment;

2. Improving academic achievement;
3. Creating more inclusive schools with respect to race/ethnicity and socio-economic status. (However, the language used is almost always about socio-economic status only.)

In this meeting we also discussed our research proposal, clarified district requirements to conduct a study and reviewed potential schools to study.

Subsequent to this meeting we submitted a research proposal, which was approved.

(3) In consultation with our colleagues at the SMU Mission Foods Texas-Mexico Center, who had done a thorough review of Transformation and Innovation schools, we selected 3 schools for study:

- a. Eduardo Mata Montessori: Transformation
- b. Rogers Elementary: Innovation
- c. Solar Prep Elementary for Girls: Transformation

(4) After selecting schools for study, our SMU colleagues selected 3 students to help us gather background information on the schools and communities and we sent a list of questions that we hoped to answer through the study that provided a context for the study and could help guide the collection of background data. These included some district level questions:

- a. Does the Board of Education have a policy about creating more inclusive schools? Does it have a strategy?
- b. What is the composition and general political tendency of the Board?
- c. Has the district worked with the City planners to consider housing/school policy?
- d. Does the district have any partners in the community for integrating the schools? (include realtors; fair housing organization)
- e. How are/were the Innovation and Transformation schools selected?
- f. Are there Journalists that focus on DISD?

And questions that were more specific to the case study schools:

- a. How was this school chosen to be a Transformation or Innovation School?
- b. What is your general philosophy of education?
- c. What type of program is being offered?
- d. What is the composition of the student body and has this changed over time?
- e. How much demand is there for this school? Is there a wait list? How do you select students from the wait list? Is diversity a factor?
- f. What do you consider to be indicators of success for the school?

- g. How do you outreach to the community? How do parents find out about this school?
- h. Are there any challenges that you face?

It turned out to be difficult to supervise the students from a distance, although they did provide some generally useful background information on the schools and the general socio-economic context of the neighborhoods.

- (5) Visitations were set up in early 2019 at each of the target schools, where we interviewed principals, and informally some teachers and students, and observed in classrooms.
- (6) After visiting the schools and clarifying our remaining questions, we scheduled interviews with Deputy Superintendent Durant, the Board of Education President at the time, Edwin Flores, Director of Office of Transformation and Innovation (by telephone) Angela Gaylord, Ex City Councilman Rick Callahan, Ex Director of Transformation and Innovation (by telephone) Mohammed Choudury, two local realtors, and two parents.
- (7) At the conclusion of all data collection, we transcribed and reviewed all interviews, discussed and analyzed the information gathered both at the district level and the school sites and drew up case study findings. What follows are our case study summaries and reflections on what we learned at the district level. We conclude with a few recommendations.

### **Dan D. Rogers Elementary**

Dan D. Rogers is an Innovation school located in a strongly middle class area of Northeastern Dallas, but over the years a relatively small percentage of the families in the area have sent their children to Rogers. Most attended private or charter schools. The principal contends, however, that most children in the neighborhood now attend Rogers. The reason that so many of the students (about three-quarters) are low-income is that the immediate neighborhood is aging out and there are relatively few children left in the immediate neighborhood. Gentrification is now occurring with unknown repercussions for the school.

Rogers became an Innovation school in 2015, after applying in 2013 and preparing in 2014, however the data show that a modest decline in low SES students and a modest increase in white students had already begun. The shift to an Innovation school appears to have accelerated that trend. Becoming an Innovation school meant that the district invested more funds in the school to buy programs, provide for some busing for students from out of the area and training teachers in the district's Personalized Learning Curriculum, which includes a significant reliance on technology to allow students to gear "learning to their strengths." The principal of Rogers is a "principal of the year" for Dallas and generally gets high marks from staff and parents for maintaining high standards and a cohesive faculty. She turned over almost two-thirds of her teaching staff in the years that she has been there, ensuring that she had a faculty that was willing to "get with program." As with the other schools we observed the faculty is diverse. In 2018-19 42% of teachers were white and 42% were Latino, with about 12% African American. Since research shows that diverse faculty can have a positive effect on learning for students of color (Dee, 2018), we saw the faculty diversity as an important aspect of the education offered.

Rogers was the recipient of a \$2.5 million Gates Foundation grant and has benefited from a number of different streams of funding from the district. The principal attributes this to a staff that puts in the extra effort to seek out new sources of funding. We were able to chat with several faculty who were clearly happy to be at the school and who professed to strong camaraderie with fellow teachers. One of the things that makes faculty happy is the fact that many are receiving relatively high salaries as a result of receiving salary points for things like students' test scores and student surveys. Teachers with only a few years seniority can earn up to \$80,000.

An online search of housing in the area shows that realtors actually entice home buyers and renters by noting the homes are in the Dan D. Rogers neighborhood, something that is not the norm for Dallas realtors.

Test scores at Rogers are increasing every year and are considerably higher than the district and state averages, particularly considering that the school has a high percentage of low-income students. The test scores were highly touted by the principal, faculty and even the students. When children were asked by the researchers to show us what they were studying or doing, in virtually every case the students showed us their test score cards.

They were tracking closely on these scores and were anxious to share them. Nonetheless, the TEA ranks Dan D. Rogers as a “B” school. The lower ranking appears to be in part due to the only C level evidence of closing achievement gaps, meaning that some groups of students are outperforming.

Table 1. Dan D. Rogers Elementary Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & SES, 2010- 2018

Year	Enrollment	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Economically Disadvantaged
2010	452	14%	3%	77%	5%	93.14%
2011	453	14%	2%	75%	7%	91.39%
2012	497	13%	2%	74%	10%	92.35%
2013	498	13%	3%	73%	10%	89.56%
2014	488	13%	4%	73%	9%	88.52%
2015	502	15%	2%	70%	11%	89.04%
2016	503	14%	4%	66%	14%	85.29%
2017	504	15%	4%	62%	17%	78.57%
2018	495	13.3%	6.9%	60.8%	17.2%	72.9%
2019	502	15.7%	7%	58.0%	14.7%	75.1%

### Summary

Rogers strongly reflects the state’s emphasis on testing and technology. Rogers is obviously a very successful school and is particularly attractive with respect to producing relatively strong test scores for many students who are disproportionately low income and black and Latino. The school is well-organized with a cohesive and diverse staff that meets by grade levels weekly. The school appears to be making slow but steady inroads in diversity, or desegregation. Most of the middle class students in the school are “returnees” from charters. One concern that we noted and that the principal alluded to in our conversation is that the focus on individualization through the use of technology (and the hyper focus on test scores) could result in a limiting educational experience for some students. Moreover, a question remains if other schools in Dallas that are not located in

relatively affluent areas and that have not seen an infusion of millions of dollars and a very savvy principal of the year can replicate this kind of success.

### **Eduardo Mata Montessori pre-K-8**

Eduardo Mata school is located in the northeast sector of the DISD, an area that is relatively affluent. The school is named after the former Music Director and Conductor Emeritus of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. He is a major celebrity in Dallas and all children at Mata receive music education and a partnership with the symphony allows some of the musicians to work individually with some of the orchestra students. Mata opened as a K-3 Montessori school in 2014 at the same time it was making application for an Innovation grant. It opened as an Innovation Montessori in 2015. It is now in its 4<sup>th</sup> year as an Innovation school having added four more grade levels. In addition to Montessori it provides a two-way dual language program for about one-third of the students, and there is extensive art and drama programming and about a dozen school clubs are advertised. The students produce two musicals each year and art work is on display everywhere. The language program, however, is secondary to the Montessori and, in fact, it's hard to find information about the language program in the Mata brochure. The principal notes that parents express a strong desire for Montessori and the language program is a "nice add on." The dual language program appears to be an outgrowth of the bilingual program focusing on English learners as students are expected to exit the program in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, as per Texas bilingual policy. English speakers have the option of enrolling in it. It begins in the pre-K with a 70-30 Spanish-English model. Art and music are viewed as part of the Montessori model.

Admission is by lottery with priorities for different areas that are meant to increase the school's socio-economic and racial diversity. The district pays to bus about one-third of the students to the school. It also pays \$6500 per year for Montessori training for its teachers. In addition to this infusion of funds from the district, the PTA raises between \$50,000 and \$60,000 each year through its annual auction in support of the school (an indicator of the presence of relatively affluent parents). These funds are used for such things as materials and field trips. The principal also notes that the school enjoys considerable parent volunteerism. A group of Spanish speaking mothers called the "Mata

Moms” comes each week to help tutor students in Spanish. While there are currently 28% white students, and about 40% non-low SES, it appears that these numbers would likely be much higher if not for the lottery. A high percentage of the students at Mata today have come in from outside the district or charter schools. The principal notes that some realtors do try to sell prospective home buyers on proximity to the school, but this can cause confusion because the lottery doesn’t allow anyone a guaranteed spot in the school. There are long wait lists to get into the school with more than four applicants for each seat.

Mata is a joyful school. There is much hub-bub, with students excitedly working on group projects in classrooms and evidence of artistic activity everywhere. Interestingly, the TEA only ranks the school as a “C” school, with significant portions of the students not meeting some or all academic standards, although all white students meet standards. (TEA gives it low marks for failing to narrow achievement gaps.) Twenty percent of students at Mata are identified as TAG, about five percentage points above the average for the district as a whole. Yet the school appears to emphasize whole child growth and creativity rather than a laser focus on test scores. This emphasis appears to be very attractive to the parents who choose this school. Of course, even leading testing experts concede that there are very important goals of education that are not measured by standardized tests (Koretz 2019) and some of those are obviously attracting parents to this school.

Table 2. Eduardo Mata Montessori Student Demographics, 2010-2012; 2015-2018

Year	Enrollment	African American	Asian	Latino	White	Low SES
2010	290	2.1%	0%	95.9%	1.4%	95.2%
2011	296	3%	0%	95.3%	1.4%	97%
2012	289	3.8%	.3%	92.4%	1.7%	96.2%
2015**	374	6.4%	.8%	67.9%	22.7%	72%
2016	400	5.3%	2.3%	59.3%	31.3%	54%
2017	487	5.5%	1.6%	63%	27.3%	55.6%
2018	532	5%	.5%	66%	25%	59%
2019	598	5.2%	1.0%	66.4%	22.1%	55.9%

1. \*\*Data collection for 2013 and 2014 was inconsistent and so not listed; data for 2018 are reported somewhat inconsistently with respect to grade levels.

The change in school composition between the years prior to becoming an Innovation school (with two years immediately prior not listed because of data inconsistencies) and 2015 when Mata officially became an Innovation Montessori were dramatic. The percent Latino declined sharply while the white enrollment surged. The percent low SES declined so much that the principal registered a concern that they were vigilant that the percentage not drop below 51%. She also mentioned that Montessori is not equally attractive across all population subgroups, presenting a challenge in recruitment. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is so much demand for the program among other groups. Interestingly, the faculty at Mata is also diverse. White teachers comprise just 42.5%, Hispanics are 40% and African Americans are 12.5% of the teachers.

### **Summary**

Mata Montessori has a strong pull for some parents. There is high demand for seats in the school, though not from all communities. Middle class parents with a strong interest in developing creativity and a whole child approach appear to be especially drawn to this school. Many extracurricular activities are also offered with a focus on creative expression. The popularity of the school has led the district to open other Montessori schools in other parts of Dallas. We do not know to what extent they share Mata's popularity. Mata's test scores are middling and it gets rather low marks for closing achievement gaps. However, there does not appear to be a laser focus on test scores and the school exudes a joy and love of learning that is impossible to not notice. The challenge appears to reside in whether the school can both attract and do well by all groups of students and thereby sustain a diverse population.

### **Solar Preparatory for Girls**

Solar Prep opened its doors in the former James B. Bonham school in fall 2016 as a "socio-economically diverse" STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) K-2 school. It is located in north Dallas in a strong middle class community that is in transition and becoming more upper income. It has added a grade level each year so that today it is a



K-5 school with aspirations to become a K-8. It is notable that Mike Koprowski, former DISD administrator who spearheaded the movement to integrated schools in Dallas is featured in an online video made for opening day of Solar Prep that also features prominently many African American students in this school that has attracted many white and middle class families. In fact, today there are four middle and upper income parents seeking admission for their children for every available seat and two lower income students for each seat. There is continuing high demand for admission across socio-economic and racial and ethnic lines and the principal is very upfront with parents about “who the classmates will be.” The principal notes that keeping the 50/50 socioeconomic balance is challenging, but she and her staff were trained under Koprowski and his partner Mohammed Choudury who spurred the entire effort, and she is very committed to the model. In fact, the dual language program was initiated to attract more English learner students, though this, too, has been a challenge, with only one in five students beginning school with a non-English language.

The dual language program might be referred to as “dual language light”, with about a third of the students participating in it, and Spanish offered in two non-academic classes to expose the students to a second language but not really immerse them in it. In fact, it appears to function more in the realm of socio-emotional learning, for which the school also touts an emphasis, and learning Spanish is described as contributing to greater empathy among students.

Even though there was not a heavy emphasis on testing in our conversations with administrators at the school, Solar Prep receives an “A” academic rating from TEA, hitting high marks in every area. But it is notable that it has had the lowest percentage of low income students of all three schools observed and the principal was very focused on attempting to maintain the 50/50 middle versus low income ratio. It is also worth recalling that it is an all girls school. At Solar Prep 35% of the students are identified as TAG, an extraordinarily high proportion.

Most Solar Prep students are either just beginning school in DISD or new to the district from private and charter schools. Another measure of the popularity of the school is the fact that a new Solar Prep for Boys is opening in the district in 2019-20 with great enthusiasm in Dallas as a result of the strong reputation of Solar Prep for girls. Solar Prep

reflects the kind of highly successful science oriented magnets that were open in many cities in the 1970s.

Table 3. Solar Preparatory for Girls Student Demographics

Year	Enrollment	African Am	Latino	White	Asian	Low SES
2016	193	22.3%	50.8%	21.2	2.1	49.7
2017	292	17.8	48.6	26.0	2.4	43.2
2018	455	21.6	46.8	23.8	3.1	49.0
2019	561	17.6	49.7	21.2	3.0	50.1

Like other transformation and innovation schools, the faculty is also very diverse. In 2017-18, the last year for which we have data, 21% of teachers were African American, 42% were Latino, and 31.6% were White. The principal commented that making diversity work among teaching staff also required considerable attention.

### Summary

Solar Prep is quite obviously the crown jewel of the Transformation and Innovation efforts of the district. It adheres closely to the philosophy of inclusion and providing a racially and socio-economically balanced student body, though its very popularity could undermine these efforts. Nonetheless, it is a proof point for the vision of a racially and socioeconomically integrated school. It has shown that it is possible to have a very integrated school in which all students meet high benchmarks. The high achieving students drawn to the school have not been deterred by its intentional diversity. Research over a half century has shown that substantially integrated schools raise the average success of students of color with no negative impacts on white students, something the parents here seem to recognize. (Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012). It has been written about in popular press, including the *New York Times*, and has now spawned a Solar Prep for Boys, which aspires to the same success as the girls' school but has faced some challenges in getting off the ground. Its primary challenge may be its own success.

## **The View from the Top**

Given that those who initiated this effort, Mike Miles, the former superintendent, and his team, Mike Koprowski and Mohammed Choudury, had left the district shortly after the initial launch of the inclusion plan and opening the Office of Transformation and Innovation, it wasn't clear what the commitment was within the district to moving forward with the plan or if it continued to receive priority funding. The district had made a strong commitment to Innovation schools through its support of transportation to allow students outside the immediate neighborhood to attend these schools. The district also provided startup funds for the new schools. The Director of the OTI largely put that question to rest by her recounting of her personal experience with racial justice and her assurances that the financial commitment was still there and that the district had recently opened an Office of Racial Equity that was charged with ensuring that all students would feel welcome in district schools.

In speaking with the former City Councilman, with a long real estate career, about the potential for desegregating Dallas, he explained that gentrification was underway in Dallas, with an increasingly tight housing market in the more coveted areas of the city and educated, middle class individuals and families beginning to buy into what was once a blighted and segregated area in south Dallas. The councilman articulated the benefits of creating more inclusive communities, but he did not initially connect the dots between more integrated housing and more desegregated schools. When asked about the schooling options for the children of these new homeowners, he only named private or charter schools. Thus his failure to view DISD as an option or the access to Innovation or Transformation schools was consistent with other realtors: it was not on his radar screen.

With respect to the Board of Education, we came to know that board members did not always operate with a single voice, and that differences tended to occur along racial and ethnic lines. The Board President was proud of the Transformation and Innovation schools but was reluctant to cast them as promoting racial integration; he didn't "see it as attempting to draw more diverse populations is the goal. I see it as providing great options for families." The Board president went on to explain that not all Innovation and Transformation schools have the goal of diversity and that all of the applicants for these schools have been approved by the Board whether or not they have a diversity goal. This

was not what Koprowski and Choudury had envisioned. And the president made clear that he understood this. “If we had stayed with his (Kaprowski’s) path we wouldn’t have 37 innovation and transformation schools until 2037 because he wanted to do one a year. Last year we did 5. And I am hoping next year we do five or six.”

In a discussion of bilingual and dual language programs, the Board president was enthusiastic about the hiring the district had done of bilingual teachers and the commitment the district had to biliteracy, certain that this was also contributing to the growth in academic performance of DISD students. It was somewhat surprising to hear, however, that the district had difficulty recruiting non-Spanish speaking students to these programs (of any race or ethnicity) so the programs were mostly one-way bilingual, not adding to diversity in the schools where they operate. Across the country there is a major surge in demand by English speaking parents to enroll their monolingual English speaking children in these two way programs, which can promote diversity and inclusion (Gándara & Slater, 2019). It is interesting that this demand does not appear to be as strong in Dallas. Nonetheless, the President did feel that DISD had a comparative advantage to the private schools in providing some two-way programs: “. . .I’ll go up against the private schools, because none of the private schools have two-way dual language.”

We noted that two of the three schools we observed had a fairly high percentage of TAG students compared to the state average of 8% and the district average of 14%. The district, in part due to the persistence of the Deputy Superintendent, was focused on identifying talented and gifted students. She holds a deep belief in the importance of signaling that these mostly Latino students are just as smart and talented as any other students. As such, there appears to be an emphasis in the schools we observed to identify large numbers of TAG students. It is not clear to what extent parents find this to be an important reason to enroll their children in the schools, or if it promotes diversity. It can signal that the school has high aspirations for its students and that Latino students are also high performers, or it could also backfire and make the parents of non-identified students wary that their children may not have access to the same resources as the TAG identified students. It would be interesting to know parents’ perceptions.

There is clearly a tension in DISD over whether the goal of Innovation and Transformation schools is to increase diversity, or simply to stem the loss of students and

hopefully increase enrollments. And we do not know to what extent the rest of the Board shares the views of its president who describes the Board as being comprised of two Republicans and seven “liberals.” However, since those who can afford to leave the district but choose to stay and those who would choose to leave private and charter schools to enroll in the district are likely in both cases to be more affluent families, it may not matter which goal is the priority since the goals are highly compatible. Diversity is likely to follow at least in areas with significant gentrification and strong principals welcoming all families. And DISD has proven that it is possible to have both—diverse and high performing schools that attract different groups. But diversity at the school level is not a given. Without a plan to diversify at the school level, DISD could increase its overall diversity while still creating more segregated schools.

### **The View from the Community**

We spoke with two well-educated, upper middle class parents who were anxious to share their experience of enrolling their two children in DISD. Although their children were currently enrolled in a private school, they were anxious for them to have a public schooling experience as they valued that this would “be more like what they will encounter in their adult lives.” The parents felt public school was good preparation for life in a multi-cultural nation. They did, however, feel that both the absence of easy access to information about the offerings in DISD, and the arduous process of getting into the lottery were potential barriers for a lot of parents. They wondered aloud how less savvy parents might navigate the process. They had stumbled across the Innovation schools they were applying to and had felt that there was insufficient support for parents trying to move from the private to the public sphere.

The attitudes of realtors and the absence of discussion about the role of realtors in “selling” DISD were notable. One realtor who sold mostly expensive homes in northeast Dallas offered that “I would never recommend a school in Dallas public schools. My clients always send their kids to private schools.” She was even taken aback by the question, rifling through her memory to see if she could remember ever having sold a home to someone who sent their child to a public school. The other realtor was not necessarily opposed to the idea of DISD but simply didn’t think about it as an option. Certainly we

heard from people in the schools that realtors sometimes mentioned their highly coveted schools as a selling point, but it was clear that the message wasn't get out broadly enough that DISD had many attractive options, and at a price that couldn't be beat!

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The schools we observed in DISD were offering quite different but very attractive options for parents, which is resulting in attracting people that previously had not considered enrolling their children in a public school. In spite of the rather large differences among the schools, they all had in common the fact that it had taken a great deal of energy, time and collaboration to design these schools and apply to be an Innovation or Transformation school. The process itself attracts go-getters. And, not surprisingly they all also sought out funding and partnerships beyond the OTI's core funding. This added to the programs the schools were able to offer. So, simply becoming one of these schools had the effect of pumping more resources of all kinds into the schools and thus becoming more attractive options.

However, there is evidently no requirement that these schools cite the goal of attaining and maintaining greater (racial) diversity. Everyone seemed to see this as a good thing, but not necessarily a top concern, except at Solar Prep. If these schools continue multiplying and enjoying success, the district may well attract more racially and socioeconomically diverse students and stem the decline in enrollment. But there is no guarantee that individual schools will be able to offer the benefits of a desegregated campus in which all students are succeeding. The district administration, the Board of Education, and the community need to decide how important diversity at the school level is, and create policies accordingly.

One of the largely unmentioned successes of the schools we visited, and the district as a whole, is the great diversity of the faculty. This is certainly to be celebrated and touted. Across the nation lack of faculty diversity is considered a major challenge. And for good reason, as research has shown that this is an important factor in the academic achievement of students, especially those students from marginalized communities (Dee, 2004). We did not discover this fact until we started looking into the district data. Dallas should share the news of this success more widely so that others might follow their practices.

DISD should be proud of creating some new schools that are very attractive to both existing students and people who would not have otherwise considered the system. So far these changes are only a ripple in a large lake but they are hopeful and, with the right leadership and support, it should be possible to expand them so that they reach a growing share of the district's students and stem the tide of declining enrollment. This modest case study is not a systemic review of the effort and we encourage further work by our colleagues and others in the region. The schools are, very much, a work in progress but our experience tells us that where there are strong educational ideas, good leaders and cooperating diverse faculties, a serious commitment to diversity, and parents lining up to get in, the ingredients are there for a promising future.

As this effort expands, the district should avoid the temptation to simply mass produce new schools without making the needed investments in identifying leaders and faculty committed to the effort and the ongoing professional development that leads to continuous improvement. It is real quality that attracts parents and helps students and that quality must be maintained and evaluated as the expansion occurs. To do this authentically on growing scale there must be ongoing involvement with top leadership.

Having much experience in school integration we know that clarity about goals and processes are crucial to long-term success. Without that clarity the district could be creating schools that either deepen community fears about gentrification and stratification or create very desirable and long-lasting diverse schools that make it central to their mission to serve all groups of children together in positive, welcoming settings. An explicit commitment to voluntary lasting integration as a basic goal in a diverse city would send important signals to all communities, and further the view that DISD is at the cutting edge of turning around the increasing segregation of urban schools.

Over the years the Dallas schools, like those in most central cities, have developed negative images in the minds of many white and middle class families. Part of changing the future trajectory must be challenging those stereotypes with powerful messages and images of schools every family would want to consider. Again, although there are wait lists for some of these schools the district should not believe that information dissemination and application processes are optimal. We observed that parents with children in private

schools may have never heard of these options or how to navigate the process of applying. Greater investment in information dissemination and a more user-friendly application process may garner more enrollees. This will take a sustained effort including powerful public service ads on major media in both English and Spanish and a continuous public relations efforts. We are sure there are major firms in Dallas that would want to help.

We believe that it is important to tap the resources of the region's colleges and universities and to consider collaborations in creating more remarkable schools and evaluating their progress independently as part of the effort to build confidence and change perceptions. It would also be important in evaluating the schools to include measurement of things other than test scores. Each of the schools we observed had programs that were clearly valued by parents above and beyond the test scores. Touting the benefits of these programs for student engagement, attachment to school, and agency would be important in providing a well-rounded view of these schools.

Realtors must be partners in this effort. Although the schools we visited all had wait lists, this is clearly not the case for all Transformation and Innovation schools, and it was apparent that the district needs to do a better job of working with realtors to sell the schools. Regular events for realtors hosted by the district would be a good place to start. Local fair housing groups and agencies can be engaged to train realtors about including the public school options in their ads and showings, something that could only expand the attractiveness of housing in the city.

Finally, a widely advertised Parent Information Center, easily accessed by both public and private transportation, that is staffed with knowledgeable individuals and that is open at hours that working parents can be available (e.g., Saturday and one night a week) would help to attract more parents. If they can complete the lottery and application forms at the same place and time this is optimal. We have learned that most parents want person to person information and counseling about best options for their children. Low income parents especially often find on-line information intimidating and of little use. Such a center would certainly signal a strong commitment to attracting new constituents for the DISD.



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