

POLICY BRIEF

Dallas Diversity and Inclusion Study

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STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Schools in Texas, as in the rest of the nation, have become increasingly resegregated since the civil rights period of the 1960s and 1970s. An important exception is the Dallas Independent School District. It is one of the nation's largest districts; and also one of the most segregated, with 92% of its students black or Latino and overwhelmingly low-income. DISD has lost between 15,000 and 20,000 students to private and charter schools over the last five years. In response to the challenge of closing more schools and losing out to expanding charters, 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. This project studied two Transformation schools and one Innovation school, one of which includes a two-way dual language program. The purpose of this study was to understand how these schools operate, how effective they are in attracting students, especially a diversity of students, and what types of challenges they face overall.

KEY FINDINGS

- The schools observed in the study were offering quite different but very appealing options for parents, resulting in attracting families that previously had not considered enrolling their children in a public school.
- In spite of the differences between 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.
- Becoming an Innovation or Transformation school had the effect of pumping more resources of all kinds into the schools and thus becoming more attractive options.
- Two of the three schools observed had a fairly high percentage of TAG (Talented and Gifted) students compared to the state average of 8% and the district average of 14%.
- There is no requirement that these schools cite the goal of attaining and maintaining greater diversity.
- DISD has proven that it is possible to have both diverse and high-performing schools that attract different groups.
- One of the largely unmentioned successes of the observed schools, and the district as a whole, is the great diversity of faculty. Research has shown that it is an important factor in the academic achievement of students, especially those from marginalized communities.
- Although there are wait lists for some of these schools, the district should not believe that information dissemination is 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.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Dallas should share the news of this success story more widely so that others might follow their practices.
- The district should avoid simply mass producing new schools without making the needed investments in identifying leaders and faculty committed to the effort and ongoing professional development that leads to continuous improvement.
- 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 increasing segregation of urban schools.
- Greater investment in information dissemination and a more user-friendly application process.
- Include measurements other than test scores. Each school had programs that were valued by parents above and beyond test scores. Touting the benefits of these programs would be important in providing a well-rounded view of these schools.
- A widely advertised Parent Information Center, staffed by knowledgeable individuals that is open at hours that working parents can be available.
- Realtors must be partners in this effort and the district should work with them to sell the schools.

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