The Growth of Single-Sex Schools:
Federal Policy Meets Local Needs and Interests

Katherine Cumings Mansfield
Virginia Commonwealth University
United States of America

Abstract: Changes to Title IX allowing the growth of single-sex schools have garnered media attention promoting the benefits of separating boys and girls. Alternately, civil rights groups such as the ACLU continue to oppose any type of school segregation. Within this context, a private philanthropy, the Foundation for the Education of Young Women (FEYW) has established public-private partnerships with six Texas school districts to open all-girls' public college prep magnet schools with plans to expand. This multi-year ethno-historical case study explores the meaning making of one community in the FEYW network as it attempts to make sense of federal policy at the local level. The topic is important to the field of education because it is timely: changes to Title IX and the growth in single-sex arrangements pose interesting legal and sociological questions about equity and justice since it links Title IX (an equity-driven policy) with the choice provisions in NCLB (a market-driven policy). The significance of this study lies in the unique use of ethnography as interpretive policy analysis to show how local communities (re)interpret federal policy to better align with their personal values and more adequately address contextual complexities in their attempts to do what they believe is best for students.
Keywords: Title IX; NCLB; single-sex schools; gender equity; school choice; ethnography; interpretive policy analysis; public-private partnerships

El crecimiento de las escuelas separadas por sexo: El encuentro de las políticas federales con las necesidades e intereses locales

Resumen: Los cambios en el programa federal *Título IX* que permite el crecimiento de las escuelas para estudiantes de un solo sexo han llamado la atención los medios de comunicación que están promoviendo los beneficios de la separación de niños y niñas. Alternativamente, los grupos de derechos civiles como la ACLU siguen oponiéndose a cualquier tipo de segregación escolar. Dentro de este contexto, la filantropía privada, la Fundación para la Educación de las Mujeres Jóvenes (FEYW) ha establecido alianzas público-privadas con seis distritos escolares de Texas para abrir escuelas *magnet* para niñas orientadas a la preparación para la universidad pública con planes de expansión. Este estudio de caso etno-histórico explora el significado de lo que una comunidad de la red FEYW generó en su intento de dar sentido a la política federal. El tema es importante para el campo de la educación, ya que los cambios en el programa federal *Título IX* y el crecimiento de las escuelas para estudiantes de un solo sexo plantean interesantes cuestiones jurídicas y sociológicas acerca de la equidad y la justicia , ya que vincula Título IX (una política de equidad) con provisiones de la opción de la ley NCLB (una política impulsada por el mercado). La importancia de este estudio radica en el uso exclusivo de la etnografía para mostrar cómo las comunidades locales (re)interpretan políticas a nivel federal para alinearse mejor con sus valores personales y abordar de manera más adecuada las complejidades contextuales en sus intentos de hacer lo que creen que es mejor para los estudiantes.
Palabras claves: Título IX; NCLB, escuelas para estudiantes de un solo sexo; equidad de género; elección escolar; etnografía; análisis de políticas; asociaciones público –privadas.

O crescimento das escolas divididas por sexo: A reunião de política federal com as necessidades e interesses locais

Resumo: As mudanças no programa federal *Título IX* , que permite o crescimento das escolas para alunos do mesmo sexo têm atraído a atenção da mídia que estão promovendo os benefícios da separação de meninos e meninas. Alternativamente, grupos de direitos civis, como a ACLU permanecem em oposição a qualquer tipo de segregação escolar . Dentro deste contexto, a Fundação para a Educação de Mulheres Jovens (FEYW) filantrópica privada, estabeleceu parcerias público-privadas, com seis distritos escolares no Texas para abrir escolas para meninas orientada a preparação para ingresso a universidade com planos de expansão. Este estudo de caso etno-histórico explora o significado gerado numa comunidade de rede FEYW em uma tentativa de dar sentido a política federal. O estudo é importante para o campo da educação , uma vez que as mudanças no *Título IX* e crescimento das escolas divididas por sexo representam questões jurídicas e sociológicas interessantes sobre a equidade e a justiça , uma vez que vincula *Título IX* (uma política de equidade) com as disposições em NCLB (uma política orientada pelo mercado). A importância deste estudo está no uso exclusivo da etnografia para mostrar como as comunidades locais (re)interpretam a política federal para um melhor alinhamento com seus valores pessoais e mais tratar adequadamente as complexidades contextuais em suas tentativas de fazer o que acha que é melhor para os alunos.
Palavras-chave: Título IX; NCLB; escolas para alunos de um determinado sexo; igualdade de gênero; escolha da escola; etnografia; análise de políticas; parcerias público-privadas.

Introduction

Single-sex schooling garnered attention in the policy environment with changes to Title IX as coupled with amendments to The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Before the 2006 policy changes, separate sex public schools did indeed exist, but they experienced noteworthy growth after Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson of Texas introduced the amendment to NCLB. According to Dee (2006) schools offering gender-separate classrooms increased from four in 1998 to 228 in 2006; with 44 of those schools entirely single-sex. By fall 2007, the number of entirely single-sex public schools had increased to 60 (USDOE, 2008). According to the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE), by the 2011-2012 academic year, 506 public schools offered some type of single-sex schooling arrangement with 390 of those schools remaining coed with single-sex classroom options and 116 schools qualifying solely as single-sex schools. There is a dearth of reporting distinguishing schools that are all male from all female or whether such schools primarily serve racial/ethnic minority students.

Meanwhile, in Texas, a private philanthropy, the Foundation for the Education of Young Women (FEYW) continues public-private partnerships with six urban school districts to open all-girls' public college prep academies with plans to expand. One of the school districts included in the FEYW network, Centro Urbano Independent School District (CUISD)[1], continuously navigates enormous difficulties. Among the various local challenges it faces, CUISD, similar to districts in other major cities, experiences enrollment decline and severe racial and economic isolation of urban students while suburban districts grow and diversify (Hanus, 1999; Students, n.d.; Treviño, 2003; Ustinova, 2007). Other issues include: a high incidence of teen pregnancy (Ayala, 2008); a troubling drop-out rate (Alaya, 2008; Scharrer & LaCoste Caputo, 2007); a leaky college pipeline (Alaya, 2008; Foundation for the Education of Young Women (FEYW), n.d.; Young Women's Leadership School (YWLS), n.d.), and minimal participation in gifted programs and advanced placement coursework (Student Demographics, n.d.). Additionally, lingering fiscal difficulties hamper efforts to improve schools (Budget and Taxes, n.d.; Proposed tax rate requires voter approval, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to show how one local community is using single sex public education to solve local problems beyond legislative intent. The topic is important to the field of education because it is timely: changes to Title IX and the growth in single-sex arrangements pose interesting legal and sociological questions about equity and justice since they link Title IX (an equity-driven policy) with the choice provisions in NCLB (a market-driven policy). In addition, this study adds to the literature by building on prior research that expands upon theoretical and methodological conceptions of how to approach policy studies. I agree with Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer (2002): "Under rubrics that include 'interpretation,' 'cognition,' 'learning,' 'sense-making,' and 'reading'…the ideas that implementing agents come to understand or interpret from policy are an integral, and largely unexplored, component of the implementation process" (p. 392).

A brief literature review on single-sex schooling precedes a description of the theoretical underpinnings and research methods. Thereafter, findings are presented in major and minor themes followed by an interpretive discussion. Finally, the study offers implications for future research.

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[1] Except for "Foundation for the Education of Young Women," all names of places and people are pseudonyms.

Single-sex Schooling

Single sex schools have been utilized throughout history for very different purposes. For example, so-called "first-generation" single-sex schools came into existence as male-only institutions expressly because males were thought to be the sex that was capable and deserving of education (Blount, 2005; Lee, 2002; Meyer, 2008; Riordan, 2002; Salomone, 2003; Tyack & Hansot, 1992). Eventually, all-female academies were born to prove that women, too, were capable of learning and also deserved a share of societal attention in the education sphere (Blount, 2005; Tyack & Hansot, 1992). Regardless of gender, however, most schooling was reserved for the "financially and the intellectually well endowed" (Meyer, 2008, p. 12). It was not until the advent of the Common School Movement that students of the working class and poor were deemed fit for education (Salomone, 2003; Walker, J., 2006). During this era, public schools became co-educational – not for any philosophical reason, but due to efficiency and budgetary concerns stemming from the numerical growth of willing students (Blount, 2005; Lee, 2002; Salomone, 2003; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Hansot, 1992).

Single-sex schools continued, of course, mostly in the form of private institutions that were characteristically bastions for the rich. Single-female private schools were especially important to keep wealthy, white girls in "pristine condition," so to speak, unexposed to working class boys of various ethnicities (Salomone, 2003). In addition to the continuation of private single-sex academies, there was a major growth in parochial schools corresponding with the growth of the Common School Movement (Blount, 2005; Tyack, 1974). Catholics in particular opposed the Common School Movement due to the anti-Catholic messages and overall disdain for immigrant cultures forwarded in media generally and public schools in particular (Tyack, 1974).

Second Generation Single-sex Schools

So-called "second generation" single-sex schools have reinvented themselves to combat the impact of societal prejudices on male and female students alike, not "as a reactive counterweight to exclusion but as an affirmative vehicle for inclusion and an antidote to social disadvantage" (Salomone, 2003, p. 9). For example, Detroit and Milwaukee school districts attempted to establish single-sex academies for boys of African heritage yet met with rigorous resistance. Proponents of the Afrocentric academies cited the "failure of the civil rights agenda to improve the lives of poor inner-city residents" to legitimize the establishment of the all-boys schools (Riordan, 2002, p. 52). Parents of female students rejected the schools due to the legacy of male privilege associated with all-male academies while overall some members of the Black community were alarmed by what they considered a resurgence of racially-segregated schools into the policy debate (Riordan, 2002; Salomone, 2003). The establishment in 1990 of The African American Immersion Schools of Milwaukee was controversial, as well. However, unlike the Detroit schools, the Milwaukee programs continue to be reviewed and renewed regularly.

Later, during the 1990s, attempts to establish single-sex schools for girls also met threats of litigation from civil rights groups. The most famous case was the Young Women's Leadership School in New York City. Besides offering a rigorous academic program, proponents of the New York all-girls school claim to offer a unique atmosphere – impossible to capture in a coeducational setting – that is essential to its success with inner-city girls (Jost, 2002; Meyer, 2008; Salomone, 2003).

The Debate Continues

        While current political will reflects support for expanding parental school choice, current policy discourse often assumes balkanized positions between those believing single-sex schools are a violation of civil rights (*Department of Education's Single-sex Regulations*, 2006; *Title IX at 35*, 2008) and those purporting that such schools represent the healing balm to a host of societal ills (Weil, 2008). Regardless of philosophical stance, researchers agree that the evidence concerning the positive benefits of single-sex schools is mixed with limited support (for additional details, please consult: Bigler & Signorella, 2011; Campbell & Sanders, 2002; Campbell & Wahl, 2002; Cherney & Campbell, 2011; Calce, 2009; Gilson, 2002; Hayes, Pahlke, & Bigler, 2011; Jost, 2002; Mael, Alonso, Gibson, Rogers, & Smith, 2005; Mansfield, 2011, 2013; Patterson & Pahlke, 2011; Riordan, 2002; Salomone, 2003; Sullivan, Joshi, & Leonard, 2010).

        Haag (2002) argued that since single-sex schools have been inspired by many different social, historical, and political contexts, taking a reactionary pro or con stance is disingenuous from a research point of view. One cannot be sure either way that single-sex schools are inherently wrong or right. Rather, the context of the origin of single-sex schools, along with the structure of particular schools and their consequent cultures should be investigated more fully to inform decision-making. Moreover, Haag contended research assessments on a specific single-sex school cannot be determined a success or failure unless the researcher is cognizant of specific stakeholder intentions. Similarly, there is a lack of research reporting what actually goes on inside these schools. Thus, in addition to comparing student achievement data, future research should include long-term qualitative studies that examine not only stakeholder intentions, but also how these intentions play out in terms of elements such as curriculum, pedagogy, and social interactions. Some argue that past attempts to compare achievement scores across disparate contexts, without attention to local stakeholder intentions, were inadequate to properly inform this contested terrain (Campbell & Wahl, 2002; Hubbard & Datnow, 2002; Jost, 2002; Salomone, 2003).

        Whether one views single-sex schooling in positive or negative light, the issue is fraught with challenges as the educational and law communities must now "weave together into a seamless web" many apparently discordant threads of Title IX requirements and court decisions (Salomone, 2003, p. 151). Tested norms include allowing sex classifications if they advance full development of the capacity and competence of students, which entails a deliberate rejection of supposed innate differences between females and males that would otherwise restrict the opportunities of either sex. In other words, single-sex schools that are based on a mission to moderate, rather than protract, traditional gender classifications are allowable (Salomone, 2003; VMI, 1996). In addition to these legal constraints, additional socio-historical considerations and limitations have been forwarded by those in the research community that might be applied to the issue of single-sex schools. For example, Nancy López (2002) urged that the "academic ghettoization" for female racial/ethnic minorities must be addressed using whatever forms available to us, while Pedro Noguera (1996) argued that if race and gender are to be used as variables in the development of programs, safeguards must be in place to ensure that "the young people targeted for such services are actually being helped and not marginalized and isolated by providers who claim to want to help" (p. 224).

Theoretical Approach

        Like others (Crotty, 1998; Fischer, 2003; Yanow, 2000), I came to the research setting with the presupposition that complete neutrality and objectivity are not possible when doing policy research. Rather, human beings live in a social world that involves sensemaking; which, in turn

necessitates interpretation. My epistemological assumptions are embedded in constructionism, the belief that humans create meaning as they interact with objects and the world. Thus, subject and object are "partners in the generation of meaning" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). My belief that human beings co-construct meaning led me to take an interpretive theoretical perspective in approaching this study. Thereafter, interpretivism interacted with my desire to study the meaning making of local stakeholders, which pointed to using qualitative methods to enable the collection of richer, highly contextual data. Not only did this allow the inclusion of multiple voices in the data collection methods, but it fit with the belief that knowledge comes from a variety of sources and that data collection, analysis, and interpretation are not value-free (Crotty, 1998; Fischer, 2003; Yanow, 2000).

Like Spillane, et al. (2002), I also assume that the policy implementation process is closely tied with policy receivers' "prior knowledge, expertise, values, beliefs, and experiences (p. 391) and that stakeholder meaning-making is central to policy appropriation and implementation. Kingdon (2003) described how historical, political, and social events occur independently but then converge at a time when adopting a certain policy just "makes sense" to a stakeholder group. The policy seems to be the "answer" to a variety of complex questions with which a certain constituency has been wrestling. As such, no one current event or historically constituted relationship is singularly decisive to the overall policy process. It is when different streams collide or merge and a compelling problem is linked to a plausible solution that converging streams result in new policy implementation. Kingdon also pointed out that "policy entrepreneurs" play an important role in connecting independent streams. An individual or group may have developed what they deem a solution to an important problem and wait for the political stream to be ready to see their solution as a viable one.

However, it is important to note that, like Kingdon (2003) and Spillane et al. (2002), I do not wish to forward a framework that implies a strict linear process by which stakeholder sensemaking takes place preceding policy adoption and implementation. Rather, sensemaking is a complex and iterative process between prior experiences, policy adoption, and local practice. In other words, it is not the intent to surmise that the start-up of the school I am about to recount could have been predicted or can now be explained in terms of direct cause-effect relationships. Rather, revealing the contextual streams and the meaning making of state and local stakeholders informs our understanding of how policy changes at the federal level were viewed as a viable solution to local problems.

Research Methods

Ethnography was a suitable choice for my study because it enabled me to discover policy development and implementation processes and show how policy is interpreted and enacted by local practitioners (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Troman, 2006a; 2006b) and addresses the call in the research literature for studies that take a long-term, qualitative approach. The flexible and collaborative process that ethnography enables was also an important consideration for me (Lassiter, 2005; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) since I was committed to making my investigation as "responsive and relevant" to research participants as possible (Lassiter, 2005, p. 6).

Site Selection

I selected Centro Urbano's Young Women's Leadership School (YWLS) because it was one of six new single-sex public schools in Texas where I resided the past nine years. Regional news articles reporting the schools' major mission as serving mostly Hispanic and African American female students living in poverty immediately caught my attention. The site was further narrowed to

two cities because they share many of the same characteristics as other large urban centers in the US. I made the final selection after contacting Ms. Santiago, the director of YWLS, who expressed immediate interest in developing a research collaboration.

I did not go into the field with particular hypotheses or research questions. I felt it was important to appreciate the embedded contexts of YWLS and become familiar with the families, students, faculty, staff, neighborhood, and administration; which facilitated an emergent recognition of what various participants deemed important and significant. For the purpose of this article, I focus on just one aspect of this multi-year, multi-layered study and one set of the co-constructed research questions: What contextual (historical, socio-cultural, political) factors led to the founding of an all-girls' public school at this particular time in this particular place? How did state and local stakeholders make sense of these contextual factors and how did their meaning-making, as policy "recipients," help them see and take advantage of new opportunities to act?

Participant Selection

The selection of participants for this study was a combination of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) and convenience sampling (Henry, 1990) because research conducted in a naturalistic setting is limited to willing and able participants. Since this is a qualitative study, people coming forward to be interviewed or displaying an openness to participate upon invitation, are considered legitimate actors in the research process (Henry, 1990). During informal conversations throughout pilot field work the first year, I mentioned to participants my desire to interview them at a later time. All participants reflected a positive attitude and willingness to help with the study in whatever way possible.

Data Collection

Shortly before the school opened, I commenced what Wolcott (2008) referred to as *ethnographic reconnaissance*. Goals during the first year were to: get to know the community; build trusting relationships with community members, and; volunteer/be useful to the community in whatever capacity the participants deemed suitable. The pilot period was useful for gaining an overall awareness of the setting and characters and generating a feeling of breadth to the project.

During the second year of ethnographic field work, I continued my volunteer work and also conducted regular observations. I spoke with teachers, support staff, and parents daily. My questioning became more "probing" as time went on. Concurrently, participants became more verbose in their sharing. I "lost track" of the time I spent at the school. I was there so often that I repeatedly forgot to "sign in" and eventually stopped wearing a visitor's badge.

Participant Observation. In addition to observing teachers and students in classrooms, I also observed interactions that included the central office administration, building level administrators, and teachers via staff meetings, curriculum development workshops, data-based decision-making seminars, personnel hiring interviews, PTA meetings, and board meetings. In addition, I conversed regularly with parents during day-to-day operations, special events, and/or parent education classes over the two-year period.

Archives and Artifacts. Interpretive methods of policy research call for "identifying policy artifacts" (Yanow, 2000), which consist of the language, objects, and acts that are significant carriers of meaning for a given policy issue, as perceived by policy-relevant actors and interpretive communities (p. 22). Thus, to "accesses local knowledge" I examined agency, legislative, and policy documents in addition to observing and speaking with policy communities. I collected over 1,000 artifacts including newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, parent letters, policy documents, letters written by politicians, and photographs.

In addition to collecting cultural artifacts produced at the local and district levels, I explored city and state archives that helped explain the historical, political, and socio-cultural influences that made the geographical area what it is today. In addition, on-site archives housed at CUISD offices were extremely beneficial. Physical policy artifacts also include notes taken during observations as well as transcripts of recorded interviews and public meetings. I kept an observation log and a separate journal for personal meaning making as recommended by methodologists (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Yanow, 2000). At the federal level, policy documents and letters written by agency directors and staff were available on line at the US Department of Education (USDOE).

Interviews. Oral history interviews were important for a number of important reasons. First, this particular all-female public school was new from the "ground up" and had never been studied before. Thus, I was in a unique position to document the emerging culture or community history (Alexander, 2006; Ritchie, 2003). In addition, oral history "helps to interpret and define written records and make sense out of the most obscure decisions and events" (Ritchie, 2003, p. 118). Utilizing archives as a collection tool was important to this project as well since oral history should not stand alone as a single source. While oral history helped fill the gaps of material evidence, the material record was an important source of evidence and essential to achieving the emic-etic tension of this ethno-historic research endeavor (Alexander, 2006; Ritchie, 2003).

Table 1
Adult Participants

n	Pseudonym	Role	Race/Ethnic Background
1	Ms. Alvarez	Support Staff	Latina
2	Ms. Barnes	Teacher	White
3	Mrs. Bennett	Foundation Director	White
4	Ms. Fakhoury	Teacher	Arab-American
5	Mrs. Flores	Teacher	Multi-ethnic
6	Mr. Guzman	School Board	Latino
7	Mrs. Hughes	Central Office Administration	White
8	Mrs. Kelly	Teacher	Bi-racial
9	Mrs. Mendoza	Teacher	Latina
10	Mr. Ortega	Parent	Latino
11	Mrs. Ortega	Parent	Latina
12	Mr. Peña	Parent	Latino
13	Mr. Rios	Parent	Latino
14	Mrs. Rios	Parent	Latina
15	Dr. Salazar	Former Superintendent	Latino
16	Ms. Santiago	Building Principal	Multi-ethnic
17	Ms. Soto	Central Office Administration	Latina

I asked adult participants (see Table 1 above) to partake in an informal interview lasting up to one hour. The date, time, and place were their choice. Approximating Weiss (1995), I refrained from using a fixed set of questions for the conversational interviews, as the process was iterative. Throughout the interviews, I worked to recognize that people's personal knowledge and ways of knowing are critical to social interaction and hence social analysis (Campbell, 2004). Following the advice of Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990), I tried to facilitate interviews that reflected an open, yet focused structure that elicited the personal experiences of people known to have been involved with

the situation. Eliciting subjective experiences was a goal – not a problem to be resolved (Merton, et a., 1990).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

A firm understanding of the historical, geographic, and physical context of the research setting was crucial to this interpretive study. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2002), context and culture are intrinsically linked.

> Context [is] the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do. The context is rich in clues for interpreting the experience of the actors in the setting. We have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context…a rich resource for examining and interpreting behavior, thought, and feeling…" (p.41)

In similar vein, Bate (1997) referred to a "certain frame of mind" or "ethnography as thinking" by which researchers must learn to "think culturally" about a group they are studying: "The core notion is one of culture-as-text, in which the primary tool of understanding is an interpretive *reading* of that text" (p. 1152, emphasis in original). Thus, I would move between macro and micro foci; sometimes focusing on wider social structures, while other times looking at the minute details of people's daily lives (Jeffrey, 2008; Walford, 2008).

It is important to note that description, analysis, and interpretation were not mutually exclusive nor did they necessarily follow this particular order. Similar to Wolcott (1994), I engaged a fluid process of analysis and interpretation, whereby I constantly collected data, made sense of them, and then revisited analysis of data in light of new experiences. This non-linear, circular process proceeded akin to a dialogue between the researcher and the data.

Following a process outlined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), I conducted "open coding," which entailed reading field notes, interview transcripts, copies of documents, and diaries/journals line-by-line to note consistent themes or story lines. I then enlarged the account beyond description by identifying key concepts and their interrelationships focusing on both culture and context. I then implemented "focused coding" that consisted of additional readings of the data to carefully filter initial impressions. I strived to achieve what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2002) called "a balanced tension" between having the confidence to observe, name, and verify patterns in the data while remaining grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. Eventually, key ideas were grouped into broader topics, referred to by Yanow (2000) as "policy frames" and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) as "repetitive refrains." These themes were the strands communities of meaning wrote about, talked about, and acted out.

The Confluence of Forces for a Girls-only School in Centro Urbano, Texas

I narrate the findings of the study in three steps. First, I develop the historical context in which actors related to the new federal policy. Thereafter, I describe the policy environment characterized by recent changes to Title IX and the concurrent development of single-sex public options at the state and local level. After thoroughly contextualizing beliefs and actions of local stakeholders, I delve into the local meaning-making, exploring the rationales and purposes stakeholders had in mind when developing the new single-sex public school in their community.

Historical Context: Economic and Racial Isolation and the Quest for Equal Opportunity

Centro Urbano Independent School District (CUISD) is located in one of the nation's ten largest communities with a 2006 U.S. Census estimate of 1.3 million people. Eight school districts serve city residents, with a total of sixteen independent school districts serving the entire metro area. Currently, CUISD has the capacity to educate 80,000 students though the current enrollment is about 55,000 with an ethnic composition[2] of approximately 90-percent Hispanic, seven-percent African American, almost three-percent White, and less than one-percent Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American. Young Women's Leadership School (YWLS) student demographics are listed as 78-percent Hispanic, 16-percent African-American, and 5-percent White with 81-percent of all students labeled as, "economically disadvantaged" (TEA, 2010). According to a report in Centro Urbano's major newspaper, five high schools in CUISD are considered "dropout factories" (Scharrer and LaCoste Caputo, 2007). CUISD was reported in the news as the only district in the Centro Urbano metroplex with an "Unacceptable" rating after mandatory state test scores were reported for 2010.

According to CUISD archives, the largest enrollment ever experienced was 76,702 students during the 1968-1969 school years. While the Hispanic population hovered around 45,000 students between the years 1969 and 1984, the number of Whites attending CUISD schools during that time strongly indicated the "white flight" phenomenon experienced by most urban centers in the United States during the 1960s through the1980s. For example, in 1969, whites comprised 25-percent of the student population in CUISD. By 1974, that number dropped to just under 17-percent. In 1979, the figures for whites dropped to 12-percent, and by 1984, whites contributed merely eight-percent of the student body. Interestingly, this urban district also experienced what some referred to as "black flight" during the same 15-year period with proportions of Blacks constituting 25% in 1969 and only 8.5% in 1984. Raw numbers relatively constant, the Hispanic population grew proportionately from 60- to almost 78-percent during this time of demographic change.

The 2006 Census data indicated the predominant Hispanic population remained near the city's core and along the Southern and Western borders. As one moves outward from the city center, poverty and population diversity decreases; which positions school districts within either a tax-poor or tax-wealthy geographical area. Since the robustness of the local tax base determines the rate of local taxes, and population decline parallels increases in per-person costs for providing city services, the core areas of Centro Urbano struggle to maintain fiscal capacity, while the exploding northern suburbs and exurbs generate higher wealth. Ironically, the housing boom of the first decade of the 21st century in Centro Urbano coincided with the growing population of working poor families and the subsequent acute shortage of low-income housing that is diminishing at the seventh-fastest rate in the country (Wilson, 2007). A growing number of Centro Urbano residents are suffering "critical housing needs," living in severely distressed housing or spending more than 50 percent of their income on a place to live. Positioned within a property poor area of the metroplex, CUISD has proposed to raise their taxes via several failed bond issues during the first decade of the 21st century (LaCoste-Caputo & De La Rosa, 2007). According to officials at CUISD, the failed bond initiatives caused serious budget shortfalls that required "aggressive staff cuts" and withdrawals from savings accounts to meet financial challenges (Election Day, 2007).

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[2] While I recognize the fluidity of racial and ethnic constructs I have chosen to utilize terms that are currently used by USA/Texas government entities.

According to Valencia (2002), one can trace modern problems with inequitable school financing in Texas to the rise of segregation and the "inferior nature" of schooling students of color[3] in Texas between 1930 and 1960 (Valencia, p. 19). Valencia, Menchaca, and Donato (2002) claim, "racism was a driving force in the segregation of schools and subsequent Chicano school failure" (p. 89). While US schools remained segregated (de jure) until the US Supreme Court decision on the case *Brown v. Board* in 1954, most children of Mexican heritage in the Southwest region continued to be subject to de facto segregation, and in Texas, were usually separated according to "Latin surname" under the assumption that the students could not or would not speak English or assimilate with Anglo populations (Sánchez, G. I., 1948, 1954).

Post-Brown, school choice immediately opened to students of African descent in CUISD. On the Eastside, most of the segregated schools attended by Blacks were in close proximity to the white schools denied them. However, during this time, most students of Mexican descent were still relegated to de facto segregated schools of extremely poor quality. Thus, Chicana/os challenged the de facto segregation and unequal treatment of students of Mexican descent based on the recently affirmed "inherently unequal" status of schools that served black students. However, in 1957, Texas determined that "Mexican-American, Chicano, Latino, and/or Hispanic peoples" were not a "brown" race, but rather, an "other white" race (*Villarreal et al. v. Mathis Independent School District*, 1957). Thus, it became nearly impossible to challenge the prevailing segregation of Hispanic children based on the *Brown* decision alone. Nevertheless, "Chicano communities were resolute in their struggle for educational equality…desegregation lawsuits are testimony to the Chicano's campaign for desegregated schools and equal educational opportunity" (Valencia, Menchaca, and Donato, 2002, p. 89).

Policy Context: Federal Policy Changes, the Development of a Non-profit Philanthropy, and the Expansion of Private-Public Partnerships in Texas

On May 30, 2002, then US Secretary of Education (Secretary) Ron Paige, with Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas), toured one of the few single-sex public schools in the US: Young Women's Leadership School in New York City (USDOE, May 30, 2002). The press release quoted Secretary Paige:

> 'The Harlem Young Women's Leadership School…embodies the principles of No Child Left Behind…Everyone in the school's first senior class graduated. The majority of students are reading above grade level, and their pass rates on local exams are higher than city averages.'

That same month, Secretary Paige issued a Notice of Intent to Regulate (NOIR) and urged public comment on his intention to more easily establish single-sex classes and schools (USDOE, May 30, 2002). Earlier, in 2001, Senator Hutchison had sponsored a provision, backed by Senator Hillary Clinton, in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that authorized local education agencies (LEAs) to use "innovative education funds" provided as part of NCLB to establish same-sex educational opportunities. In addition, Hutchison's amendment included language encouraging the USDOE to publish guidelines for LEAs on how to do so without infringing on existing civil rights laws (USDOE, May 30, 2002). Secretary Paige's latest NOIR statement revealed his intent to amend

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[3] In the case of Texas, so-called racial minorities make up half of all students in the state. When one examines Centro Urbano ISD, Blacks and Latinos presently comprise over 95-percent of the student body. Thus, referring to the segregation and inferior schooling of "students of color," rather than, "minorities," seems more appropriate.

long-established Title IX regulations "to support efforts of school districts to improve education outcomes for children" (USDOE, May 30, 2002; USDOE, June 2002). Secretary Paige believed amendments could both preserve "appropriate safeguards against discrimination" as well as provide public school parents with more choice (USDOE, May 30, 2002; USDOE, June 2002).

Two years later, in March, 2004 Secretary Paige announced newly proposed regulations to provide additional flexibility to school districts offering single-sex schools by "allowing the school district to decide whether the equal education opportunity offered for the excluded sex should be single-sex or co-ed-as long as the opportunities for both sexes are substantially equal" (USDOE, March 3, 2004). Finally, in October, 2006, then Secretary Spellings announced the establishment of the new changes to Title IX that former Secretary Paige had previously proposed. An important change in this 2006 statement is the relaxation of the "substantially equal" standard. Prior amendments required school districts to provide a "comparable singlesex [sic] public school to students of the other sex." However, the new 2006 regulations permitted school districts to offer a coeducational setting rather than a replicable single-sex option.

In January, 2007 Stephanie Monroe, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OCR) addressed a letter to all LEAs to further clarify how the new regulations relate to the general prohibition against single-sex classes and extracurricular activities under Title IX:

> The new regulations establish two important objectives upon which a recipient may base a single-sex class or extracurricular activity. The first important objective is to improve educational achievement of its students…The second important objective is to meet the particular, identified educational needs of a recipient's students…the regulations require that the single-sex nature of the class or extracurricular activity be substantially related to achieving the recipient's important objective. (USDOE, January 31, 2007)

Assistant Secretary Monroe went on to emphasize that the new regulations still required that student enrollment be completely voluntary and that districts continue to provide "a substantially equal coeducational class or extracurricular activity in the same subject or activity… [and] to comply with the requirement to implement its objective in an evenhanded manner" (USDOE, January 31, 2007). In addition, LEAs that provide single-sex options were now required to "conduct periodic self-evaluations of their single-sex classes or extracurricular activities at least every two years" to check whether a "substantial relationship between the single-sex nature of the class or activity and achievement of the important objective" exists and to ensure that their single-sex classes or extracurricular activities are based on genuine justifications and do not rely on overly broad generalizations about the different talents, capacities, or preferences of either sex" (USDOE, January 31, 2007).

Meanwhile, in 2001, prominent Texas businessman, Lee Posey read about a new single-sex public school in New York City, The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem. Founded in 1996 by a private-public partnership, the school had achieved remarkable success, with 100 percent of its graduating classes accepted to four-year colleges and universities. After visiting the school, Lee Posey and his wife, Sally, came back to Texas, inspired to create similar schools in urban centers across the state.

In 2002, Lee and Sally Posey established a non-profit philanthropy, the Foundation for the Education of Young Women (FEYW), and began inviting senior school administrators and community leaders to visit the New York City school to drum up interest in growing similar single-sex public magnet schools in Texas. In 2004, FEYW established its first private-public partnership with a major Texas school district and as of 2012 had begun six all-girls public secondary academies. FEYW Executive Director, Mrs. Bennett explained:

> The foundation started really many, many years ago as a vision of Lee and Sally Posey…It is a foundation that has been in existence just about a decade now. The vision or the mission of the foundation is to establish partnerships with urban school districts in order to establish all girls' public schools, grades 6-12, where a majority of the students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The schools in the state have three values that we propose. That is, college preparation, which is a rigorous curriculum focusing on math, science, and technology. Service leadership, allowing the girls to experience leadership opportunities, study successful leaders. Comprehensive wellness is the third value.

I asked Mrs. Bennett if she attended single-sex schools as a youngster or during her high school and/or college years, she replied:

> I didn't. I am a product of the public school systems here in Texas. But…I have lived through the very inception of this model. Have really seen the value and the results that it can yield. It is a proven model. So, studying it someplace else in the United States and then bringing it back to Texas and implementing it within the Texas public schools system with all the rules and regs and accountability that is associated with Texas [has made me a believer]…

According to Mrs. Bennett, FEYW experienced resistance during early conversations with CUISD representatives. Apparently, the former superintendent and some school board members were doubtful about adding a single-sex option to their current magnet school offerings because they did not have the means to provide a similar school for boys. In 2006, CUISD experienced significant leadership turnover on the school board and central office administration, including the appointment of new superintendent, Dr. Delgado. According to Mrs. Hughes, associate superintendent, her first major responsibility as a new member of the superintendent's cabinet was to contact FEYW director, Mrs. Bennett:

> HUGHES: When the first day that I actually reported to duty on March 1st [Dr. Delgado] called me and said, "Do you know [Mrs. Bennett]? She's head of the Foundation of Education for Young Women in Dallas." [I answer him], "Well yes, I mean I know of her and I've met her. I've always admired her." He said, "Well you need to call her." Something about, "She wants a girls' school."

> AUTHOR: So she had called him first.

> HUGHES: Yes, she had called and [Dr. Delgado] said, "You know, we'd love to do it. But I just don't have anybody to lead that." So that was one of my first tasks. He said, "We need to make this happen." So that's how it all came about…I think they've had their eye on [Centro Urbano], and then when [Dr. Delgado] came in, then they were ready to kind of move forward, and the board at the time was very poised to embrace this concept.

On July 31, 2007, the final Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the [Centro Urbano] Independent School District (CUISD) and the Foundation for the Education of Young Women (FEYW) was approved. The MOU states that the school will open with 75 sixth-graders and 75 seventh-graders and will add one additional secondary grade level per year until the school serves 75 students in each level, grades 6-12, with the first graduating class in 2014. In addition, the MOU outlines the entrance guidelines that are similar to other specialized schools in the district: 1) The

student must have at least a "C" average; 2) The student must have a desire to go to college, and; 3) The student must not have chronic attendance or discipline problems upon admission. In addition, the application process includes an interview with a parent or caregiver to establish adult commitment to supporting the student in her academic efforts. Students are also be given writing and math assessments to determine course placement.

The MOU also articulates the intended nature of the curriculum and pedagogy of the school. For example, the school will "nurture the intellectual curiosity and creativity of young women" as well as "address their developmental needs." In addition, the school will strive to "cultivate dynamic participatory learning, enabling students to experience great academic success at many levels, especially in the fields of math, science and technology." While the school will utilize and implement existing Texas curriculum, the emphases will include: 1) High expectations for responsible decision making; 2) Preparation for high school graduation and college matriculation and graduation; 3) Leadership and wellness skills; and, 4) A particular focus on "results" or "achievement and outcomes."

As a private-public partnership, FEYW agreed to financially support the school with up to $250,000 per year over a four-year period for a total of $1 million. The district might utilize some of the funds for enhancing faculty development or funding a teacher-in-residence program or specific technology training. The MOU encourages supporting summer programs for entering 6th grade students in order to "build good study habits" as well as providing summer STEM camps for grades 7-12 on college campuses. The district might also utilize foundation funds for developing partnerships with cultural institutions and to invite speakers to interact with students "on a monthly basis" to provide "role model leadership." Finally, the MOU outlines terms for termination of the agreement as well as steps for amending the agreement "from time to time as the needs of the School develop and evolve."

State and Local Meaning-making: Equity, Choice, and Accountability

Conversations with state and local stakeholders illumined the various ways the principal, teachers, central office administrators, and school board viewed the challenges of educating students in Centro Urbano as well as the best ways to meet the needs of students. Participants also spoke about how the new policy options enabled them to focus on what they defined as important, such as providing alternative learning environments for students struggling to meet state standards. Others mentioned the need to provide choice to parents as well as using this new school as a means to compete with private schools in the area. Many saw the school as a viable social justice tool to reverse past experiences with discrimination and lack of opportunity.

A Social Justice Tool. Most stakeholders emphasized the complex needs of Centro Urbano students and the implementation of YWLS as a means to address these needs that dovetail with the socio-historical complexities of the region. For example, former school board member, Mr. Guzman discussed his experiences dealing with prejudice growing up in Centro Urbano and how the white population fled the city during the 1960s and 1970s. Mr. Guzman lived in the same region of Centro Urbano his entire life. He graduated high school in 1968 and had a 34-year career as an educator before serving on the Centro Urbano school board. He shared that when he graduated, his high school was "about 75-percent White…and most of the school organizations and the cheerleaders were all White."

> It started to change when I was there. My senior year, the first Hispanic President of the student council was elected. You should've seen the people crying and so upset because of this Hispanic winning the election…but it was a different culture back then. It was very prejudiced…When they passed the Civil Rights Act of '64 and they

> opened housing for everybody – that's when the 'white flight' started up…it was pretty dramatic between '68 and '72 because in '75 when I moved into my house, that's only 8 years after I graduated, it had already completely changed…That's why it was 'white flight' because it was like, '*wham*!'

While former superintendent, Dr. Salazar, also acknowledged prejudice and subsequent "white flight" as a cause for declining enrollment in the past, he was also quick to point out that the "gentrification" process in the inner city over the past decade was pushing families desperate to find affordable housing out of the district:

> The District at one time had upwards of 70,000 students…then as a result of deseg, court ordered busing and so forth, there were the major white flights... [but] I will tell you right off the bat that the reason that there has been a declining enrollment is because of housing— affordable housing in the inner city…they knocked down all of these housing projects that they had and then they replaced them with fewer occupancies, you know, bi-families and so on and so forth. So what happened is that these folks from the inner city…floated out to [inner suburb] or where there were affordable apartment buildings…

Within this context of declining enrollment due to white flight and gentrification are embedded other social justice issues such as a high drop-out rate. A brochure produced by FEYW highlighted some of the contextual complexities with which Texas students struggled, especially for poor, racial/ethnic minority females:

> When it comes to educating our young people, the state of Texas faces a daunting task. Students in low-income families are six times more likely than their higher income peers to drop out of school AND only fifty percent of minority women can be expected to finish high school. There IS hope! Girls are more likely to take courses such as computer science and physics in girls-only schools than in co-ed schools…Since all-girls schools provide a strong focus on academics, teen pregnancy is not a significant issue or challenge… This model has shown that inner-city girls can benefit from an all-girls public school and one hundred percent will go to college if given the opportunity.

The above narrative forwards the equity frame as their central mission while also legitimizing the single-sex option as a proven model of success. Moreover, Mrs. Bennett explained that the purpose of the partnerships was not just to provide "choice" for all parents, but also to more adequately serve students from "economically disadvantaged backgrounds." Mrs. Bennett also spoke about the importance of having the core belief that any child can learn and go on to college and career:

> It is truly a belief system. If you believe that these young women have the capacity to do well in science and technology, engineering, [and] mathematical field[s]…if you really believe that, then you do things...whether it is writing a curriculum, or providing materials, or training staff, or constructing educational experiences for the young women. You know, you kind of live out that belief. We do believe that. As a foundation, non-profit entity, when we partner with the school districts, we share those beliefs. We would never go into a district that did not join hands with us and embrace those beliefs.

Representatives of CUISD also embraced the belief that all students are capable of learning in a rigorous environment, regardless of which "side of the tracks" they lived on. This seemed especially true of the principal, Ms. Santiago, a "local girl" who graduated from an Ivy League School about ten years prior. During one of my first interviews with Ms. Santiago, she stated, "I love these girls. I was these girls." Ms. Santiago grew up in an infamous part of town well-known for its poverty,

violence, and substandard housing and schooling. She chose to return to the community after earning her educator credentials expressly to "pay it forward." She said,

> I think I related to the girls because I grew up in a very similar circumstance. I grew up in poverty and had very little opportunity in terms of school…I saw so many of my friends end up pregnant or just didn't get through school…there were so many people that I saw not progress that were close friends of mine, it was saddening to me to see that…And I think that when I looked at the girls, when I saw what their challenges were, and things that they were facing and also the opportunity to make a difference in that and to change it…it was something that was very personal to me.

Parents expressed appreciation for Ms. Santiago's background and echoed her story about growing up in a city where they faced discrimination and lack of opportunity and they feared this same outcome for their children. Mrs. Ortega believed sending her daughter, Angie, to the all-female public academy would enable Angie to live with less financial stresses than she and other family members have endured for generations. Mrs. Ortega said,

> I just want her to be able to succeed and gain whatever goals she's aiming for…every now and then she'll get kind of down: 'I have so much work and my friends are going to the movies!' And I say, 'you have a choice my love. You tell me what it is you want to do. You want to have a good time right now? And if that's what you want I'll put you in the regular school. And then, you're going to work where I am. Doing what I do. Payday to payday. Or, you sacrifice right now and do what it is you need to do so when you get older you make your money. And you're set. You can actually take real vacations.' I said, 'It's your choice. I can't live your life for you. I'm not the one that's going to struggle.' And she's like, 'No. I'll just stick this out.'"

During an interview, Principal Santiago said, "Let me tell you Natalia's story. It really captures what we're all about." Ms. Santiago described how she received a phone call over the summer from Natalia indicating that she needed some help. Apparently, Natalia had completed all her summer homework, but did not have some of the necessary art materials to complete a few projects. Ms. Santiago offered to bring Natalia the needed materials. It was then that Natalia had to admit that she was homeless. According to Ms. Santiago, Natalia had been living at the bus stop and then riding the bus during the day to stay cool and spending time in the public library to do her summer school work. Ms. Santiago arranged a meeting place to share the necessary materials and facilitated a meeting between Natalia's mother and a social worker in order to get them into a shelter. Ms. Santiago continues:

> Natalia didn't want to stop coming to school with us because, of course, the shelter's not near the campus. But under McKinney-Vento with the "Homeless Act" we can provide a bus. So she gets on the bus at 5:00 every morning to come two districts over to keep coming to school… And I think about her story…that's what it's about…that's the motivation for providing something different…

Parental Choice and Meeting the Competition. Related to social justice concerns, such as white flight and the gentrification process, was the concern – especially voiced by local executive leadership – to use this specialized school as one way to shore up declining enrollment and provide parental choice and competition for student enrollment amongst parochial schools in the area. Parental choice was also mentioned on occasion to stress that the school was optional and not forced upon students and families; thus, fulfilling Title IX provisions that new single-sex public options could never be compulsory. For example, one executive administrator noted,

It is a model of choice. We have never said that it is for every family in each of the school districts where we have our presence…we believe that it should be an option for families if they so desire for their daughters to go to this type of school…

CUISD central office administrator, Ms. Soto and Mr. Guzman, former CUISD school board member, shared similar understandings of the need to offer parents expanded choice in their attempts to provide "the best" available options to their children. Ms. Soto remarked,

We have to recognize that we have parents that we lost to private schools…what other options are available out there? I think we have to begin to evolve out of our traditional models that we offer in school because people do like choice…Part of my work in the past couple of years has been really helping to redesign schools and create choices in schools and market those in the public too. And my face is a face historically of [Centro Urbano], at the district, and in the community. So I am that marketable face…my dad is from Mexico. And we're from a very affluent family. It is part of that culture in Mexico, too. Most families with money go to private schools. They don't go to public schools. So it's that perception that you *give your child the best.*

Recall that former school board member, Mr. Guzman, and former superintendent, Dr. Salazar both acknowledged "white flight" as a major cause for the hemorrhaging of student enrollment. Additionally, although less significantly, both viewed the strong presence of parochial schools in the region as an additional cause for declining enrollment, albeit on a lesser scale. Dr. Salazar understood the presence of parochial schools as another form of competition for student enrollment:

The other thing is that there's always been a close relationship between inner city school districts and Catholic schools in general and private   schools that are non-Catholic or religiously-based in particular. And [Centro Urbano] has always had--it's loaded. It's loaded with Catholic schools…so those were the things that I had to deal with in terms of responding to [declining enrollment].

Mr. Guzman understood implementing the new magnet school as a means to provide choice to parents who could not afford to send their children to private schools:

And so, one of the big concerns of the district at that time was the drop in enrollment. How do you keep kids in the district? One of the ways we were losing kids was that girls were going to private schools like [St. Mary's]…So, this was one way we could keep some of the girls that were going to go to parochial schools…if their parents could afford it, they would send them to a school like [St. Mary's]. But *they don't have money so they don't have choices.* So, this gives them an option…this is like having a [St. Mary's] for our girls; a free [St. Mary's] in our own neighborhood.

When probed further on whether the implementation of YWLS was having a significant impact on declining enrollment, Dr. Salazar answered, "When you look at the number of students in that school – compared to the school district – it may be a drop in the bucket, you know." Dr. Salazar went on to say that he felt the argument that this magnet school was needed to compete with the Catholic school system drew attention from a major advantage: The infusion of $1million of much-needed revenue into a system desperate for both enrollment and funding. While other interviews neither support nor deny Dr. Salazar's contentions, since CUISD does not keep track of students who leave the district for parochial schools, there is no evidence that YWLS has true competitive advantage in this regard. However, other participants did confirm that the $250K per year endowment from FEYW certainly did give the school a competitive edge when communicating to

the public the extra offerings that could be provided students in this particular school in comparison to other magnets and specialized public schools in the region.

Accountability for Student Achievement. Related to social justice concerns such as equal opportunity and access, was discourse surrounding student achievement. Some participants recognized the importance of meeting state accountability standards for student achievement as a reason to consider alternative approaches to traditional educational environments. Beginning with the Foundation for the Educational of Young Women (FEYW), printed promotional materials make the claim that, "Research shows that an all-girls education has a significant effect on the academic achievements of young women." Moreover, the Executive Director of FEYW, Mrs. Bennett, stated in an interview, "All of our schools are rated exemplary with the Texas Education Agency's accountability system. It is kind of hard to argue with results. We feel very positive about it."

Raising student achievement was also a concern of central office administrator, Ms. Soto, who viewed implementing single-sex schools as an important way to "think outside the box" and make a difference in student success. She said, "It's really all delivered by student performance. Do boys do better writing by not being around girls? Do girls do science and math better than when not around boys?" She acknowledged that the research on single-sex schools was mixed, but that CUISD could not afford to wait any longer to try something different.

The principal and teachers also took data very seriously. They were exceptionally conscientious of their accountability responsibilities and highly aware of the bottom line in terms of test scores. So, while their commitment to families and students emanated from a philosophy steeped in equity concerns, they viewed meeting accountability measures as evidence to the outside world that they were doing the right thing. One teacher, Mrs. Flores, said:

> I hate to say it, but the scores are a big thing. That's a driving force because that's what you're held accountable to at the end of the day...Even though I don't feel that TAKS[4] is the whole indicator of student success...That's the only thing that on the outside people see for the school. That's the only legit thing that they look at...At the end of the day, that's a non-negotiable...

An important celebratory event during my second year at the school was the announcement of the Texas Education Agency testing results. Every student passed all state mandated tests. And the school was honored with the coveted, "Exemplary" rating. A banner was immediately hung in the main entrance. I was at the campus when the Principal, Ms. Santiago received the exceptional news that 100 percent of her students passed 100 percent of TAKS.[5] Many parents were in the halls for end-of-the-year festivities. Students and teachers were milling about to-and-fro in the hallways for choir rehearsals and other logistics involved with the passing of another school year. Without exception, teachers, support staff, parents, students, and other visitors, showed their pleasure with cheers and hugs upon hearing the news. I saw Mrs. Flores later in the day and said, "I bet you feel really good now that the test scores have come back." She answered, "I do. More than that – it's just validation that I was doing the right thing."

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[4] TAKS stands for, "Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills," the Texas Education Agency accountability system.

[5] Only three CUISD campuses were rated "Exemplary" without any exceptions or predictive measures of possible passing scores in future retakes. CUISD was the only district in the metro area that was rated, "Academically Unacceptable." The 100% passing rate for YWLS students is true for all subjects: Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies as well as all aggregated groups: African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged. Further, the scores, which earned each student a passing rate, were well above the state average with many students earning individual "commendable" scores (TEA, 2010).

Discussion

By coupling changes to Title IX (equity issues) with NCLB (market issues of parent choice and high stakes testing), the US legislature communicated their intent to use single-sex schooling as a way to shore up failing schools. The USDOE decision to provide an alternative to districts makes sense in light of the political environment of the last two decades, together with the sometimes-negative local press reporting the federal government's (NCLB) lack of responsiveness to community needs. The positive press the Young Women's Leadership School in New York City was getting, coupled with the support of Senators Hutchison and Clinton, paved the way for the legitimization of single-sex public options via NCLB.

Lee and Sally Posey, as policy entrepreneurs (see Kingdon, 2003), had visited the YWLS in New York City, returned to Texas, and immediately established their non-profit philanthropy for the purpose of establishing and supporting single-sex public schools in the state. I infer that the Posey's were able to soften up the policy environment for their proposed private-public partnership in Centro Urbano when the time was right. A newly-elected school board, coupled with a newly-appointed superintendent, was faced with surmounting budget and student achievement deficits. In line with Kingdon's theory, the 2006 policy changes assuaged local questions concerning the earlier policy requirement for a parallel all-boys school. CUISD administration were poised to welcome the Posey proposals.

It appears that local actors, from school board members to central office administration to teachers to principal, interpreted "the problem" differently, but all used a national reform agenda to solve what they interpreted as problems. For some, like Ms. Soto, it was to market the magnet school as a competitor to Catholic schools and as a way to "provide the best" for local students. For Ms. Santiago, it was a way for her to fulfill her mission as an educator hoping to make a difference in students' lives in terms of equal opportunity. Parents viewed the school as a means for their children to climb up and out of poverty. Teachers regarded the school as a safe space for girls to be exposed to a rigorous curriculum that they would otherwise have been denied. Additionally, some administrators viewed the new magnet school as a promising means to combat declining enrollment and repurpose empty school buildings.

On the one hand, there appears to be a disconnect between the ways different actors legitimized the implementation of the school in terms of reconciling issues related to equity, choice, and accountability. But, on the other hand, one can see that these issues are not necessarily in contradiction, but are closely linked. For example, the principal and teachers spoke about their work in principled terms such as "paying it forward" and providing educational opportunities to students regardless of their zip codes. When asked how they reconciled what they saw as their "mission" with that for which they were politically held accountable, teachers spoke about the importance of meeting their personal and professional values within their political realities. They were very much aware that the "bottom line" and "non-negotiables" involved test scores. But they also expressed confidence that their moral mission for "doing the right thing" would automatically support the political mandate of their district to produce results in terms of student achievement and graduation rates. Working within their political constraints was viewed as "just the way it is" and something to work with, rather than against, in their quest for social justice for students. Rather than viewing accountability as a contradiction to social justice concerns, the principal and teachers viewed reaching accountability standards as one way to show they were meeting one of many of their social justice goals. Further, the principal admitted to sharing her own personal story of growing up a poor, underprepared minority female, along with Natalia's "Homeless to Harvard Story" regularly because

she felt these narratives captured not only her personal calling, but also the raison d'être of the school.

Interestingly, the principal and teachers were not the only players who viewed their mission in ethical terms. Members of the non-profit philanthropy also spoke in terms of doing the "right thing by all" students. There was a sense of "paying it forward" amongst members of the FEYW: To those whom have been given much, much is expected. Executive Director, Mrs. Bennett, along with other members of the Board, had led "blessed" lives, while also recognizing that some young women, to no fault of their own, were not afforded opportunities to reach their full potential. But, while they approached their mission with a sense of noblesse oblige, they also purposely coupled their partnership discourse in terms of student achievement and the single-sex option as a "proven model" to attract the attention of school district executives.

Not surprisingly, the discourse of the superintendent's cabinet and central office administration focused more on the school being used as a means to bolster enrollment and student achievement. Since local school districts rely on average daily attendance (ADA) in Texas school finance, any means to shore up declining enrollment and curtail school closures is welcome indeed. While executive administrators seemed to wince when I asked them to comment on the additional $1Million funding provided by the private philanthropy, the common attitude was that the extra funding "sure helped" and was "not going to be turned away." At this level, there also seemed to be a general recognition of the contested nature of single-sex schooling, along with more discussion that highlighted how this school fit within what the law allowed. For example, Mrs. Hughes and Ms. Soto were quick to point out that, unlike districts in Louisiana and Kentucky where lawsuits had been brought forth, they were offering YWLS as an option, not has a mandatory assignment. Also, they were sure their particular school was not being used to resurrect outdated stereotypes, but rather, was working against cultural assumptions concerning ethnic minority females' ability to compete and thrive in academe and STEM fields. There was no mention of anyone seeing a contradiction between the uniformity of testing and the gender specific focus of the curriculum. Rather, the gender focus was seen as a hopeful tool to better meet testing and accountability standards.

Conclusion

While there were some differences between the way actors spoke about the contextual factors that led to the founding of an all-girls' public school and how they made sense of these factors to help them take advantage of new opportunities to act, there were also congruencies that contributed to an overall, integrated weaving of ideas related to choice, equity, civil rights, and accountability. The voices, taken together, paint a picture of a community working in concert to best meet both their political and moral obligations at this particular time, in this specific space. It is important to point out that none of the policy implementers at any level in this particular case seem to take a deficit view of students. The intentions of all stakeholders, whether they emanate from social justice, choice, or accountability purposes, translated into providing a robust, non-sexist learning environment to girls presently living at the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, and class complexities.

Additional research is needed; especially in communities where single-sex options are being created based on the faulty thinking that girls and boys differ so much biologically that they need drastically different classroom practices. Since the USDOE is currently not obliged to approve single-sex public options before implementation, it behooves the research community to investigate and report to the public possibly divergent philosophies and practices and how that translates into

practices that may or may not be in the best interests of individual students and the public at large. These studies could be coupled with those that investigate parental choice issues more fully, such as why parents choose single-sex public options and how their meaning making might differ across contexts in important ways.

There is also a need to continue the current case study to further probe how local implementers are juggling conflicting values. For example, stakeholder discourse at all levels is quick to point out the "success" of this particular school; especially in terms of reaching above and beyond accountability expectations. While attaining "commendable" ratings is nothing to snub, there is also the selectivity issue to tease out more fully. While it is true that the school serves mostly ethnic minority girls living in poverty, the fact remains that the students self-select in to the school and the school personnel further define their student body in the interview process. It would be interesting and helpful to probe further how social-justice minded educators reconcile this version of academic tracking.

Taken together, we should have a more detailed portrait of the legitimacy and efficacy of single-sex public options as well as a greater understanding of the importance of the dialectic that occurs between legislative intent and stakeholder decision-making. This study represents one step toward that goal.

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About the Author

Katherine Cumings Mansfield
Virginia Commonwealth University
kicmansfield@gmail.com
Katherine Cumings Mansfield (PhD, The University of Texas at Austin) is an assistant professor of Educational Leadership and Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University. Mansfield's interdisciplinary scholarship focuses on the social, historical, and political contexts of education and the relationship of class, gender, race/ethnicity, and religion on educational and vocational access and achievement. Mansfield has presented at American Educational Research Association, National Summit on Interdistrict Desegregation at Harvard Law School, Legal and Policy Options for Racially Integrated Education in the South and the Nation at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill School of Law, and University Council for Educational Administration. Mansfield has published in *Educational Administration Quarterly, Journal of Educational Administration*, *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, and *Journal of School Leadership*. In 2012, Mansfield was awarded the "Leadership for Social Justice Dissertation Award," sponsored by AERA's Leadership for Social Justice Special Interest Group and the "Selma Greenberg Outstanding Dissertation Award," sponsored by AERA's Research on Women and Education Special Interest Group for her dissertation entitled, "Troubling Social Justice in a Single-sex Public School: An Ethnography of an Emerging School Culture." Mansfield is a first-generation college graduate with 20 years experience teaching and leading throughout the P-20 pipeline.

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