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An Education of our Own: Designing a Latinx School for San Antonio, Texas

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A Senior Capstone Project in Education Studies

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Abstract

In this capstone project, I will discuss the historical and current state of education for Latinx students in the United States, which has been and continues to be characterized by deep inequalities that have contributed to increasingly segregated schools for Latinx students, especially those from low-income communities, and steep achievement and opportunity gaps between Latinx students and their non-Latinx white peers. In order to address the challenges facing Latinx students in public schools, I propose and design a school specifically for Latinx students in San Antonio, Texas. This school will combine various educational models that have been employed in the education of Latinx students in isolated ways in a single school. I argue that such innovative schools designed specifically for students of color are necessary to grant these students the transformative and self-actualizing educational experiences they rightfully need and deserve.

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Introduction

Latinx children and families living in the United States today reside in a country that has historically and continually harbored an unsafe and unfriendly environment for Latinx people. Latinx communities across the country are continually subjected to existing within the dominant and oppressive systems of white supremacy and racial capitalism that make up the very fabric of this nation. In 2015 at a campaign launch event, Donald Trump infamously said that “when Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best,” proceeding to name Mexican immigrants as rapists, criminals and drug addicts. The eventual election of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States in 2016 signified a national acceptance of his inflammatory and discriminatory rhetoric towards Latinx communities, effectively ushering in a distinct and unparalleled era under which the very lives and livelihoods of Latinx people have been threatened. According to the Pew Research Center, almost 40% of all Latinx individuals living in the United States have indicated increased harassment for their racial and ethnic identities in the Trump era.¹ In 2019, twenty-two Latinx individuals were shot dead in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, representing the deadliest attack on the Latinx community in the history of the United States.² Family separation at the United States-Mexico border captured national attention in the summer of 2018 when the Trump administration’s “zero-tolerance policy” for illegal

¹ Lopez, Mark Hugo, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, and Jens Manuel Krogstad. "More Latinos have serious concerns about their place in America under Trump." *Pew Research Center* (2018).

² Garcia-Navarro, Lulu. “The Media Erased Latinos From the Story.” *The Atlantic*, August 9, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/08/we-must-recognize-hispanics-were-targeted/595783/>.

immigration into the United States directly led to the forcible separation of nearly 3,000 children from their parents, many of whom were families from Central American countries.³ These trends and events from recent history represent simply a few from a long laundry list of the ways in which Latinx communities and their presence in the United States is continually met with racism, discrimination and violence.

The racism and oppression facing Latinx communities today has equally played out in the educational landscape of the United States. In today's schools, Latinx students are amongst the most deeply affected by a national public education problem in which public school systems reproduce the social injustices faced by black and brown people in the United States. The unequal education landscape for Latinx students is apparent in the drastically different levels at which students of color and their white counterparts enroll, attend and graduate from institutions of higher education. In 2015, only 18.5% of all Latinas in the United States had earned a bachelor's degree by the age of 29 while only 14.5% of Latino males had earned a bachelor's degree by the age of 29.⁴ This level of educational attainment in the Latinx community is starkly lower than the 43% of white students, 66% of Asian students and 21% of Black students who graduate from an institution of higher education.⁵ The achievement gap that exists between black and brown students and their peers, but specifically that between Latinx students and their peers,

³ Qiu, Linda. "Fact-Checking Trump's Claim That He Didn't Start Family Separations at Border." *The New York Times*, August 21, 2019, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/us/politics/fact-check-trump-family-separation.html>.

⁴ "The Condition of Education - Population Characteristics and Economic Outcomes - Population Characteristics - Educational Attainment of Young Adults - Indicator May (2019)." https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_caa.asp.

⁵ Ibid.

is not a failure of these students, their families or their communities. It is instead indicative of the ways in which the United States education system acts as a site for the continued oppression of black and brown students and for Latinx students in particular.

The shortcomings of the United States public education system in the education of Latinx communities go far beyond the educational attainment gap that exists between Latinx students and their peers from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. United States public schools have long worked hand in hand with other institutions like the criminal justice system to reproduce the systemic oppression of black and brown students in ways that only further exacerbate ethnic and racial disparities between students. Harsh disciplinary practices like “zero tolerance” policies that are especially common in schools with student populations that are overwhelmingly black and brown directly work to funnel students into the school to prison pipeline, directly aiding in the mass incarceration of black and brown individuals. During the school year, a Latinx public school student is suspended every second seconds in the United States.⁶ School suspensions, by extension, are “the top predictor of contact with the justice system for students who become incarcerated by ninth grade.”⁷ Due to the ways in which Latinx students are disproportionately targeted by unfair disciplinary practices, Latinx students in turn become more likely to drop out of high school, which only ultimately places them at greater risk for becoming incarcerated.⁸

Additionally, undocumented Latinx students face their own unique difficulties in the United States public school system. It is estimated that school-aged children account for 1.8

⁶ Children’s Defense Fund. “Moments in America for Latino Children.” (2009)

⁷ Sallo, Marlene. "School-to-Prison Pipeline: Zero Tolerance for Latino Youth." (2011).

⁸ Seroczynski, Alesha D., and Amy D. Jobst. "Latino youth and the school-to-prison pipeline: Addressing issues and achieving solutions." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 38, no. 4 (2016): 423-445.

million of all undocumented immigrants living in the United States and nearly 80% of these individuals came to the United States from Mexico, Central America or other Latin American countries.^{9,10} Of the school aged undocumented immigrant population, approximately 65,000 of these students graduate from high school every year.¹¹ However, this large community faces extreme difficulty in schools given that “they are not eligible for most scholarships, do not qualify for any form of government sponsored financial assistance, are not eligible to apply for a driver’s license, are legally barred from formal employment, and may be deported at any time.”¹² By extension, this critical subgroup of Latinx students in United States public schools and the risk they face in their everyday lives is only exacerbated by the challenges they face in school.

The oppression of Latinx students in classrooms and schools is not a new phenomenon for the United States public education system has long been complicit in upholding systemic forms of racism. Similarly to Black students who were educated in separate educational facilities on account of their racial difference from white students, Latinx students were also historically educated in separate but unequal contexts, restricted to attending their own schools on the basis of their racial, ethnic and language differences from white students. Some of the earliest court cases that dealt with school segregation concerned the separate and unequal schooling of Mexican students, like *Independent School District vs. Salviatierra* (1930) which upheld the

⁹ Gonzales, Roberto G. “The College Dreams of Undocumented Students,” n.d., 32.

¹⁰ Passel, Jeffrey S. “The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S.,” 2005, 23.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Perez, William, Roberta Espinoza, Karina Ramos, Heidi M. Coronado, and Richard Cortes. “Academic Resilience Among Undocumented Latino Students.” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 31, no. 2 (May 1, 2009): 149–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07399863093333020>.

constitutionality of segregated schooling for Mexican children due to their “language deficiencies” of speaking Spanish.¹³ The outright, *dejure* segregation of Latinx students in their own under-resourced schools for much of this country’s history is indicative of the ways in which the United States public education system has mainly worked to exacerbate the inequalities faced by Latinx communities.

Despite the ways in which the United State public education system has added to the marginalization of Latinx students, classrooms across the country are becoming increasingly composed of students of color, particularly Latinx students. Between the years 2000 and 2015, the percentage of public school students across the country that identified as Latinx nearly doubled with Latinx children accounting for 26% of the entire country’s public school student population in 2015.¹⁴ The representation of the Latinx community in our nation’s schools is only expected to continue increasing in the coming decades. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2017, there are eighteen states and the District of Columbia where Latinx students account for at least one-fifth of all public school kindergarten students, a large increase from only eight states in 2000.¹⁵ Latinx students, by extension, represent a critical group whose increased presence in United States public schools is changing the face of public education.

¹³ Salinas, Guadalupe. "Mexican-Americans and the Desegregation of Schools in the Southwest." *Hous. L. Rev.* 8 (1970): 929.

¹⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. “Indicator 6: Elementary and Secondary Enrollment,” n.d. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rbb.asp.

¹⁵ Krogstad, Jens Manuel. “A View of the Nation’s Future through Kindergarten Demographics.” *Pew Research Center* (blog). <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/31/kindergarten-demographics-in-us/>.

The systemic oppression and marginalization many Latinx communities are experiencing inside and outside the classroom during this current moment in which their numbers only continue to increase begs us to more critically consider the place of Latinx children in our nation's public education system. What are the current educational experiences, educational challenges, and educational outcomes of and for the increasing number of Latinx students in the United States? How are the current educational experiences of Latinx communities falling short? And finally, how can we radically reimagine public education for Latinx students in this country?

It is in this critical moment that we are experiencing in the history of United States public education that this particular project is situated within. In order to critically confront the opportunities we have as a nation to both evaluate how our schools have historically and currently served its students of color and to design new education solutions specifically for these students, I am proposing a new public school for Latinx students in my hometown of San Antonio, Texas. This school, the Emma Tenayuca Community School, will exclusively enroll students of color in order to provide Latinx students in the city of San Antonio with a public education that is intimately aware of their complex ethnic and racial identities and visualizes learning as one of many tools to be used in the fight for racial, economic and social justice.

The Emma Tenayuca Community School will combine various pedagogies that have oftentimes been employed in the education of Latinx students but in isolated contexts: 1) bilingual education, 2) culturally sustaining pedagogy, 3) race and ethnic studies, 4) community-based schooling and 5) ethnic and racial teacher representation. Each of these educational principles and pedagogies have long standing histories in the schooling of Latinx

communities and this project depends deeply on their documented and well-researched successes and shortcomings. To design this school, I researched the challenges and best practices of Latinx education in the United States and identified the above five guiding principles.

The five guiding principles and pedagogies that will serve as the theoretical grounding of the Emma Tenayuca Community School were practices that I experienced at different moments in time throughout my own education. By extension, in addition to researching the challenges and best practices of Latinx education, I utilize the strengths and weaknesses of my own education experiences to identify and rationalize the five guiding principles of ETCS.

As a product of public schools in San Antonio, Texas that served overwhelming majorities of Latinx students from predominantly Mexican and Mexican-American communities, I grew up attending schools that have always resembled the plentiful racial and ethnic diversity that is commonplace in public schools today. As a student at Bonham Elementary in downtown San Antonio, I learned Spanish as a second language in their dual language program from kindergarten to the fifth grade in classrooms that were full with other Mexican and Mexican American students like myself. As a middle and high school student at the Young Women's Leadership Academy, the city of San Antonio's first public all girls school, I received a rigorous college preparatory education that was designed specifically to guide low income women of color in their pursuit of higher education. Throughout my schooling, I felt as if the schools I attended held an intimate knowledge about the communities in which I was raised which worked to radically transform my learning and overall experiences as a student.

By extension, the experiences I've had as a public school student in San Antonio lay at the very heart of this project to evaluate and reimagine Latinx education in my hometown and in

the United States at large. As Paulo Freire writes in his incredibly influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

The pedagogy of the oppressed, which is the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation, has its roots here. And those who recognize, or begin to recognize, themselves as oppressed must be among the developers of this pedagogy. No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.¹⁶

It is in answer to Freire's call that I embark on this project. I recognize myself as a part of the oppressed and position myself as only one student in the growing community of Latinx students in this country. It is my experiences as a student, and the experiences of those who came before me and those who will come after me, that must be used to evaluate and redesign Latinx public education. Centering student experience and agency in the formulation of education innovations and solutions, and regarding such as evidence of the same, if not greater, value as research-derived scholarship, is critical to the reimagination of education itself. It is in making Latinx students like myself the architects of their own schooling and learning that true liberation and educational freedom can be reached for generations of Latinx students to come.

Description and Mission of the Emma Tenayuca Community School

The Emma Tenayuca Community School is born out of my hopes and dreams for students of color in the present day and the future, which go far beyond the reach of the education system as it is currently conceived. While I wish that all Latinx students in this country have the opportunity to graduate high school, to go to college and to get a job, I also wish that their education proves to be meaningful in a more important, lasting way that attempts to reconcile the ways in which Latinx communities have been denied their right to an equal

¹⁶ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury publishing USA, 2018. 53-54.

education. I wish for them an education that teaches them about the most intimate and important parts of themselves, their communities and their identities, an education that realizes within them the tools with which they can critically examine and work to improve the world around them. I wish for them an education that moves closer towards radical self-actualization and freedom from systems of oppression that have only been upheld by the nation's education system thus far.

The mission of the Emma Tenayuca Community School is shaped by the vision that a public education can and should be more than a means towards traditional measures of success, that it holds tremendous power to rectify the racial, economic and social hierarchies of this country (in place of maintaining them) when it is reimagined to advance the ideals of social justice, equity and freedom. Central to this vision is a separatist pedagogy of education that intentionally distances itself from educational equality as it has primarily been conceived thus far through racial integration. The Emma Tenayuca Community School will exclusively enroll and serve Latinx students from the San Antonio area, who are predominantly Mexican and Mexican American and display a wealth of diversity in experience and knowledge. In place of racial integration, a separatist pedagogy of education like this one realizes within a community the power and tools with which they can educate themselves, with their own languages, stories and methods, effectively placing their education outside of the restraints of the current public education system and of the United States society at large and by extension, outside of the racial, economic and social hierarchies that only cause harm to black and brown students.

The Emma Tenayuca Community School is named after Emma Tenayuca, a labor organizer and lifelong educator who was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas and educated in the city's public schools. She is most well known for leading the Pecan Shellers Strike of 1938,

where she at the age of twenty-one led hundreds of pecan shellers in one of the largest successful strikes for better working conditions at that time. She is arguably one of the city of San Antonio's best kept secrets, a local hero who is often forgotten and unrecognized. Her story is not taught in the same schools she attended and later taught at, which represents a critical disservice to her memory and to the large numbers of Latinx students who do not learn that they follow in her legacy. By extension, naming my educational intervention for her is one of many ways that I envision my project reconciling the ways in which injustices have been perpetuated within our nation's public education system as it exists today.

Latinx Education in the United States: Defining the Need for a Latinx School

In the United States, education is often regarded as one of the primary ways for families to achieve social and economic mobility.¹⁷ Students, specifically students of color and students from low-income communities, are often told and wholeheartedly believe that their education is the key to improving the realities of their family's lives. In my own home, my parents have proudly displayed their college diplomas alongside that of my older sister in our living room and talk fondly about the day they will frame and hang my own college diploma as a completion of the multi-generational educational journey of our family. In these moments, the institutions of education and learning are bestowed with a certain uncritical benevolence that does not appropriately reckon with the ways in which the education system in the United States is as equally engaged in the maintenance of systemic structures that harm communities of color as it is in undoing them.

¹⁷ Haveman, Robert, and Timothy Smeeding. "The role of higher education in social mobility." *The Future of children* (2006): 125-150.

In the last hundred years, educators, activists and students alike have fought tirelessly for equal education in the United States, working to implement education reforms to address the achievement and opportunity gaps between students of color and their white counterparts. These normative educational reforms have been varied in both their design and execution, ranging from school integration to increased standardized testing to greater dedication of funds to public school systems. Normative educational reforms like school integration and increased school funding are ultimately insufficient because they fail to reconcile and account for the ways in which the United States public education system has perpetuated the oppression of black and brown students. In order to provide Latinx students with the education that they have a right to and that they have been historically denied, educational solutions must move far beyond working within the defined restraints and limitations of this country's public education system. Moving students into more diverse classrooms or giving all schools more money are educational solutions that will not inherently change or redefine the classrooms that our nation's children sit and learn in everyday, which have been designed in ways that do the most harm to students of color, Black and Latinx students in particular.

The touchstone of this struggle for equal education has long been and continues to be school desegregation and school integration. Since the landmark court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which officially ruled separate- but- equal schools to be inherently unequal, school desegregation continues to be one of the main ways that educators and education researchers envision closing the opportunity and achievement gaps that have persisted between students of color and their white, privileged peers.¹⁸ While school desegregation has never been

¹⁸ Orfield, Gary, and Chungmei Lee. "Why segregation matters: Poverty and educational inequality." *Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (The)* (2005).

fully realized in the United States (the average Latinx student today attends a school that is approximately 57% Latinx while the average Black student attends a school that is 49% Black), school integration and its supposed benefits for students of color and white students alike continues to dominate the literature and education research broadly.¹⁹ Education research in support of integrated schools has found that racially and economically diverse classrooms benefits all students in their academic, social and economic lives in the forms of higher test scores, reduced implicit biases and increased equitable access to resources.²⁰ The logic of school integration ultimately posits that it is the racial, social, cultural and economic identities of students of color that contributes to their “depressed academic performance,” which in turn seems to suggest that whiteness is directly associated with high academic performance.²¹ In addition to having profound negative effects on the educational experiences of students of color, school integration also creates a dangerous precedent that proximity to whiteness is the best or sole way for Latinx students, and other students of color, to access a quality and well-resourced public education.

Another normative educational solution that aims to achieve a more equitable distribution of resources amongst schools that serve students of color and schools that serve white students in the same way that school desegregation does is increased school funding. Increasing school funding is also an important way in which educators and education researchers have conceived

¹⁹ Orfield, Gary, Erica Frankenberg, Jongyeon Ee, and John Kuscera. *Brown at 60: Great progress, a long retreat and an uncertain future*. Civil rights project/Proyecto derechos civiles, 2014.

²⁰ Bergman, Peter. "The effects of school integration: Evidence from a randomized desegregation program." (2016).

²¹ Rothstein, Richard. "Modern Segregation." *Economic Policy Institute* (2014).

of addressing the achievement and opportunity gaps between Latinx students and their peers.

Since the federal government leaves school funding to state and local jurisdiction, states across the country, especially the state of Texas, have historically dedicated insufficient funds to their public school systems, resulting in disparate and inadequate school funding that varies from state to state. In a national report card on the fairness of school funding, the Education Law Center found that the state of Texas, which educates a majority of Latinx public school children, consistently ranked amongst the worst states in terms of school funding fairness and effort.²² The school finance system in Texas, and many other states, continues to be based on property taxes, which generates an inherently unequal amount of school funding for school districts in property-poor neighborhoods. By extension, discussions of school funding reveal the deeply ingrained ties between the education system and residential segregation, the racial wealth gap and other pervasive forms of oppression that require more complex solutions than an increase in school funding for all schools.

Neither a focus on making classrooms more racially diverse nor an increased dedication of resources will adequately solve the deepest and most persistent issues of educational inequity that we currently face in public education. Normative educational solutions like those discussed already do too little to address the ways in which pervasive systems of oppression have created the conditions under which public education in this country began. The public education system was designed to maintain the dominant system of white supremacy, which actively oppresses black and brown communities.

²² Baker, Bruce D., David G. Sciarra, and Danielle Farrie. "Is school funding fair? A national report card." *Education Law Center* (2014).

By extension, normative educational reforms fail to acknowledge the ways in which inequality cannot be untangled from the education system itself. Even if educational solutions like those of school integration and increased school funding were to be realized, the fact would remain that these solutions are not designed with true social, racial and economic equality in mind. School integration and more diverse classrooms still assume whiteness to be the norm in the ways in which it subscribes to socially constructed definitions of race that are born out of white supremacy. Increased school funding and allocating greater resources to all public school districts will not address the ways in which public school finance is tied to the racial wealth gap which structurally keeps black and brown communities from amassing wealth at the same rate as white populations. Attempts at education reform that work within the confines of the education system itself will always be insufficient in addressing the ways in which schools are not doing enough for students of color. The oppressive structures and systems upon which our country was founded deeply pervade our nation's education system and solutions to improve public education must account for the ways in which white supremacy and income inequality infect every aspect of society, especially education.

San Antonio, Texas: Education in a "Minority-Majority" City

San Antonio is among the least educated big cities in the state of Texas. San Antonio has the lowest percentage of residents who hold a bachelor's degree or higher, with only 25.5% of adults older than 25 years having successfully completed at least a four-year degree.²³ Despite having the second highest rate of high school graduation of the four largest cities, San Antonio

²³ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Houston City, Texas."
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/brownsvillecitytexas,mcallencitytexas,sanantoniocitytexas,dallascitytexas,austincitytexas,houstoncitytexas/PST045218>.

adults are less likely to have enrolled in and received a degree from an institution of higher education than adults from Houston and Dallas. Currently, less than half of high school seniors in Bexar County are expected to enroll in a Texas college or university following graduation and even fewer are expected to attend college out of state.²⁴

In addition to its lower levels of educational attainment in comparison to other cities in Texas, San Antonio has historically had and continues to have an educational landscape that is drastically unequal. The city itself is among the most economically segregated cities in the entire country, being home to one of the biggest income gaps between its richest and poorest residents.²⁵ San Antonio also experiences incredibly high levels of residential segregation by income, given that 25% of all of its upper-income households are situated in a census tract in which a majority of all households are also upper income.²⁶ The economic inequality and segregation in San Antonio is reproduced in its public education system since the state of Texas continues to fund its public schools through property taxes. This inherently unequal system ensures that property-poor school districts have a disproportionately unequal amount of school funding in comparison to property-rich school districts.²⁷

²⁴“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Houston City, Texas.” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/brownsvillecitytexas,mcallencitytexas,sanantoniocitytexas,dallascitytexas,austincitytexas,houstoncitytexas/PST045218>.

²⁵ Royall, Emily. “Study: City’s Economic Prosperity Varies Widely by Zip Code.” <https://therivardreport.com/study-citys-economic-prosperity-varies-widely-by-zip-code/>.

²⁶ Taylor, Paul, and Richard Allan Fry. *The rise of residential segregation by income*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2012.

²⁷ Phillips, Camille. “San Antonio High School Seniors Commit to College.” Texas Public Radio. <https://www.tpr.org/post/san-antonio-high-school-seniors-commit-college>.

While education has proven to be contentious and radically unequal in the city of San Antonio itself, the underperformance of students from the city must also be contextualized within the student achievement of Latinx students, especially of Mexican and Mexican American students, across the United States historically and currently. Due to its high concentration of Latinx residents, over 980,000 individuals that constitute nearly 70% of the city's overall population, San Antonio and its public school districts educate overwhelming majorities of Latinx students, which is becoming more common in the state of Texas, in the American Southwest and in the entire United States. It is precisely the large majority of Latinx students in San Antonio, Texas combined with its unequal education landscape and lower educational attainment that makes San Antonio a rich site for a critical education intervention in the form of a school designed specifically for Latinx students.

Towards a Pedagogy of Separate Schools: What Currently Exists

Attempts to reimagine public education and uncover new possibilities for Latinx students have been made, but never without controversy. Efforts to implement race and ethnic studies classes, increase access to bilingual education and other schooling initiatives designed specifically to address the currently unmet needs of Latinx students have been protested, outlawed and banned. The incredibly successful Mexican American studies program in the Tucson Unified School District was infamously shut down in 2012, directly after Arizona's state legislature passed SB 1070 and HB 2281, which allowed for stricter measures to be taken against immigration and banned ethnic studies courses in Arizona public schools.²⁸ Years prior,

²⁸ Phippen, J. Weston. "Amid an Arizona Ban on Mexican American Studies, Teachers Across the U.S. Are Campaigning for Culturally Relevant Education." *The Atlantic*, July 19, 2015.

California passed its Prop 227 in 1998, which effectively eliminated nearly all bilingual education classrooms in the state and was only recently repealed by Prop 58 in 2016.²⁹

While there have been unsuccessful attempts to embed educational solutions that were designed specifically with Latinx students in mind in existing public schools, like bilingual education and race and ethnic studies, Latinx students have also been part of a larger movement of independent, ethnocentric and separatist schooling. Ethnocentric schools or centric schools are schools that cater to a specific homogenous student population. Sarah Rivkin Smoler describes in her article “Centric Charter Schools: When Seperate May be Equal:”

These centric charter schools deliberately attract only members of specific races or cultures, which results in homogenous student bodies and culturally tailored teaching methods. Contrary to history, these intentionally segregated schools do not carry a stigma, but rather are often viewed as a creative solution to a persistent problem. Centric charter schools use segregation as a tool to create a setting where students can flourish.³⁰

Like Rivkin describes, seperatist and ethnocentric education models have been a critical solution that communities have derived for the education of their children outside of the traditional educational settings in which ethnic and racial homogeneity is stigmatized.³¹ Separatist education is not a new concept, however, since it finds its roots in the Black independent school movement that began in the late 1960s and 1970s. The Black independent school movement saw itself as an

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/07/how-one-law-banning-ethnic-studies-led-to-rise/398885/>.

²⁹ Sanchez, Claudio. “Bilingual Education Returns To California. Now What?” NPR.org, November 25, 2016.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/11/25/502904113/bilingual-education-returns-to-california-now-what>.

³⁰ Smoler, Sarah Rivkin. "Centric charter schools: When separate may be equal." *Nw. JL & Soc. Pol'y* 10 (2015): i.

³¹ Ibid.

answer to the educational inequities facing Black students in the era of *dejure* school segregation. since there have been countless successful afrocentric schools that are working to grant Black students an equal education designed specifically with them in mind.³²

One of the only examples of schooling in the United States designed specifically with Latinx students in mind is the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School (PACHS) in Chicago for Puerto Rican students. Founded in 1972 after the Chicago School Board refused to make changes to one of the predominantly Puerto Rican high schools, Roberto Clemente Community Academy, PACHS seeks to “counteract the erasure of Puerto Rican culture in the community and to address community problems.”³³ In his article “This School is My Sanctuary: The Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Alternative High School,” Rene Antrop-Gonzalez describes the ways in which the school was originally named La Escuela Puertorriquena and was born out of “a response to the Euro-centric based curricular and high dropout rates that Puerto Rican students had been experiencing in Chicago’s public high schools.”³⁴ For nearly fifty years, PACHS has served as a city-wide alternative for Latinx students in the city of Chicago, working to educate their students in a way that is both critically caring and geared towards advancing social justice.

³² Shapiro, Eliza. “‘I Love My Skin!’ Why Black Parents Are Turning to Afrocentric Schools.” *The New York Times*, January 9, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/08/nyregion/afrocentric-schools-segregation-brooklyn.html>.

³³ Berry, Patrick W., Alexandra J. Cavallaro, Elaine Vázquez, Carlos R. DeJesús, and Naomi García. “Sustaining Narratives of Hope: Literacy, Multimodality, and the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School.” *English Education* 46, no. 4 (2014): 279–99.

³⁴ Antrop, René. “This school is my sanctuary: The Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos alternative high school.” *Centro Journal* 15, no. 2 (2003): 232-255.

The Guiding Principles of the Emma Tenayuca Community School

Bilingual education

When meeting people for the first time, they are often surprised to learn that Spanish is my second language. Their surprise is deepened when they learn that my parents don't speak Spanish and that the primary language spoken in my home is English. The Spanish that I do speak, which I often qualify as being "not very good" or "out of practice," I learned in school. When it came time to enroll their children in school, my parents made a conscious and intentional decision to send my sisters and I to a dual language immersion program at an elementary school in our zone school district where we would be able to learn in both English and Spanish at differing levels from pre-kindergarten to the fifth grade.

My parents decision to enroll their children in a bilingual education in order to ensure that, unlike them, we could speak Spanish was one that grappled with the language discrimination and loss that generations of Latinx families in the United States have endured. My grandparents, aunts and uncles can all tell stories of times when they were punished for speaking Spanish at school by having their mouths washed with soap. These experiences of being "humiliated, disciplined, or beaten" for speaking Spanish on school grounds are incredibly common amongst Mexican and Mexican-American communities living in the American Southwest.^{35, 36, 37} In the case of my own family, my grandparents eventually decided it would be

³⁵ Cameron, Christopher David Ruiz. "How the García cousins lost their accents: Understanding the language of Title VII decisions approving English-only rules as the product of racial dualism, Latino invisibility, and legal indeterminacy." *Calif. L. Rev.* 85 (1997): 1347.

³⁶ Rangel, Jorge C., and Carlos M. Alcala. "Project report: De jure segregation of Chicanos in Texas schools." *Harv. CR-CLL Rev.* 7 (1972): 307.

better for their children to exclusively speak English so that no one could harm them for speaking their native language. The implementation of bilingual education is an important way in which United States public schools can confront and correct for the role it has played in perpetuating language discrimination and language loss in Latinx families.

The Emma Tenayuca Community School, which aims to provide an education that acknowledges the complicity of United States public education in maintaining harmful ethnic and racial disparities and simultaneously corrects for it by centering social justice and equity in its pedagogy and practice, will, by extension, employ a two-way dual language immersion classroom model. Two-way dual language immersion programs are those that educate two different groups of students in two different languages in a single classroom. Every classroom will welcome the flexible use of both English and Spanish for both instruction and student participation, also known as translanguaging. Translanguaging can be defined as “the multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds.”

³⁸ The marriage of two-way dual language immersion with translanguaging will best produce a classroom environment that mirrors the world in which San Antonio’s Latinx communities exist, a world marked by its inherently seamless duality.³⁹

³⁷ Montoya, Margaret E. "A brief history of Chicana/o school segregation: One rationale for affirmative action." *Berkeley La Raza LJ* 12 (2000): 159.

³⁸ García, Ofelia. *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

³⁹ García-Mateus, Suzanne, and Deborah Palmer. “Translanguaging Pedagogies for Positive Identities in Two-Way Dual Language Bilingual Education.” *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 16, no. 4 (July 4, 2017): 245–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2017.1329016>.

The benefits to be reaped in bilingual education for Latinx students are many. In the late 1960s and 1970s, bilingual education was widely affirmed by educators, scholars, writers and even the United States government as a way to nurture self-esteem and instill cultural pride.^{40, 41,}

⁴² These early architects of bilingual education saw the capacity of bilingual education as lying “within the cognitive and affective domains, rather than the linguistic realm” which would ultimately improve a student’s engagement with their own learning through empowering them “to believe in themselves, in their basic worth as human beings, and in their native capacities.”^{43,}

⁴⁴ These benefits of bilingual education that gesture towards how bilingual education directly translates into bicultural education that values and enriches a student’s cultural identity towards their learning remain to be amongst the touchstones of bilingual education.

It is important to highlight the ways in which a separatist pedagogy of education like that of the Emma Tenayuca Community School will only enhance bilingual education for its students. Bilingual education in the form of two way immersion classrooms can often work to reproduce the privileges enjoyed by native English speakers since the educational model still prioritizes English as the desired language for native non-English speakers while native English

⁴⁰ Flores, Nelson, and Ofelia García. "A critical review of bilingual education in the United States: From basements and pride to boutiques and profit." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 37 (2017): 14-29.

⁴¹ Castaneda, Alfredo. "New Approaches to Bilingual Bicultural Education, No. 1: A New Philosophy of Education." (1974).

⁴² Buto, Kathleen A. "A Better Chance to Learn: Bilingual-Bicultural Education. Clearinghouse Publication No. 51." (1975).

⁴³ Fishman, Joshua A. "Bilingual Education: Current Perspectives. Volume 1.: Social Science." (1977).

⁴⁴ Von Maltitz, Frances Willard. *Living and learning in two languages: Bilingual-bicultural education in the United States*. New York; Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

speakers are given access to new forms of cultural capital.⁴⁵ Educators across the Southwest have voiced their concerns about the possible harmful effects such an education model can have on their native Spanish speaking students—one teacher even going as far to say that “‘si se aprovechan de nosotros en inglés, van a aprovechar de nosotros también en español.’”⁴⁶ What such Latinx educators are touching upon are the ways in which bilingual education alone does not acknowledge and correct for “intergroup relations, the place of the powerful and the powerless in wider society.”⁴⁷ Scholars have also reckoned with the ways in which bilingual education in the United States so far has not appropriately confronted the systemic marginalization of their Latinx students and instead render Latinx children, their language and their culture, as commodities for the benefit of white, middle-class students.⁴⁸ The Emma Tenayuca Community School acknowledges within the Latinx community a unique language diversity that creates an opportunity for Latinx native English speakers and Latinx native Spanish speakers, both which exist in the Mexican and Mexican American communities in the San Antonio area, to learn from one another and be united in their desire to learn, speak, and live in both languages. Combining bilingual education with other educational pedagogies and

⁴⁵ Palmer, Deborah. "Race, power, and equity in a multiethnic urban elementary school with a dual-language “strand” program." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2010): 94-114.

⁴⁶ Valdés, Guadalupe. "Dual-language immersion programs: A cautionary note concerning the education of language-minority students." *Harvard Educational Review* 67, no. 3 (1997): 391-430.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Flores, Nelson, and Ofelia García. "A critical review of bilingual education in the United States: From basements and pride to boutiques and profit." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 37 (2017): 14-29.

practices like that of a separatist model, in turn, maximizes the benefits of bilingual education for Latinx students, instead of reaping those benefits for white students at their expense.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy

The second guiding principle of the Emma Tenayuca Community School will be culturally sustaining pedagogy, also commonly referred to as culturally responsive or culturally relevant pedagogy. As the United States public school student population has continued to become increasingly diverse and multicultural, culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogies have continued to gain both traction and protest in the field of education. Geneva Gay, who is amongst one of most widely cited and influential proponents of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, writes that: “a very different pedagogical paradigm is needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic groups – one that teachers to and through their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities and their prior accomplishments.”⁴⁹ Other scholars like Gloria Ladson-Billings, who was influential in the application of critical race theory in the field of education, developed three central propositions for culturally relevant pedagogy: conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are structured and conceptions of knowledge.⁵⁰ These three central propositions for culturally-relevant pedagogy will be central to the ways in which the Emma Tenayuca Community School employs culturally sustaining pedagogy. Christine Sleeter also writes about the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy for students and teachers in spite of

⁴⁹ Gay, Geneva. *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press, 2018.

⁵⁰ Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy." *American educational research journal* 32, no. 3 (1995): 465-491.

the ways in which culturally relevant pedagogy is often simplified and misunderstood in both research and practice.⁵¹

More recent work concerning the development and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy has attempted to find new importance as the lives of black and brown students have become increasingly neglected in the current political moment. In her book *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Teaching like Our Students' Lives Matter*, Sheryl Taylor discusses the ways in which culturally responsive pedagogy is imperative in asserting the value of black and brown students' lives and education.⁵² Additionally, scholars like Francisco Lopez have worked to conceive of what culturally responsive pedagogy looks like specifically for Latinx students, focusing on the benefits of asset driven classroom education.⁵³ The above research further underscores the importance of culturally sustaining for a school like the Emma Tenayuca Community School which seeks to acknowledge the inherent value of their students in even the smallest of ways.

Race and ethnic studies

Despite the fact that I attended predominantly Latinx schools in the predominantly Latinx city of San Antonio, I never once took a course specifically on Mexican American studies because no such course was offered.

⁵¹ Sleeter, Christine E. "Confronting the Marginalization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy." *Urban Education* 47, no. 3 (May 2012): 562–84.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911431472>

⁵² Taylor, Sheryl V. *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy : Teaching like Our Students' Lives Matter*. Bingley, England: Emerald Group Pub Ltd, c2011.

⁵³ López, Francesca A. *Asset Pedagogies in Latino Youth Identity and Achievement :Nurturing Confianza*. London: imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018

In the years since my own graduation from high school in Texas, the Texas State Board of Education voted to strengthen Mexican American studies in Texas schools by approving an official Mexican American studies course and asking textbook publishers to submit new textbooks on Mexican American history.⁵⁴ This critical move towards implementing race and ethnic studies in K-12 public schools in the state did not come without great controversy however since Mexican American studies, and ethnic studies more broadly, have always been the subject of much political controversy. Efforts to implement race and ethnic studies classes designed specifically to address the needs of Latinx students that are not currently being met have been protested, outlawed and banned. The incredibly successful Mexican American studies program in the Tucson Unified School District was infamously shut down in 2012, directly after Arizona's state legislature passed SB 1070 and HB 2281, which allowed for stricter measures to be taken against immigration and banned ethnic studies courses in Arizona public schools.⁵⁵

Despite the political controversy of Mexican American studies and its implementation in K-12 public schools, the literature largely documents the positive benefits that race and ethnic studies has for students of color. In particular, Christine Sleeter outlines the academic and social value that race and ethnic studies has for students of color in that race and ethnic studies provides students with an "explicit identification of the point of view from which knowledge emanates,"

⁵⁴ Phippen, J. Weston. "The Textbook That Calls Mexicans Lazy." *The Atlantic*, September 9, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/09/mexican-american-studies-texas/498947/>.

⁵⁵ Phippen, J. Weston. "Amid an Arizona Ban on Mexican American Studies, Teachers Across the U.S. Are Campaigning for Culturally Relevant Education." *The Atlantic*, July 19, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/07/how-one-law-banning-ethnic-studies-led-to-rise/398885/>.

an “examination of U.S. colonialism,” an “examination of the historical construction of race and institutional racism,” “probing meanings of collective or communal identities that people hold” and the ability to study “one’s community’s creative and intellectual products.”⁵⁶

Community-based schooling

Growing up, I know my parents always felt welcome at my school. I have memories of walking out of class to see my mom in the hallway putting together elaborate bulletin boards or attending PTA meetings with my dad. Unfortunately, this is not true for all Latinx families living in the United States since there are numerous and tremendous barriers that could keep parents and families from engaging with their student’s school and education including but not limited to time, money, and language barriers. However, developing close knit ties between a school and its surrounding community, which includes their student’s parents, is of the utmost importance to the academic success of its students.

The Emma Tenayuca Community School clearly identifies itself as a community school in its name since its connection and working relationship with the larger San Antonio community is incredibly important to both its pedagogy and practice. In declaring itself a community school, ETCS is acknowledging the ways in which learning is not always contained in a classroom or in other traditionally recognizable forms of schooling, opening its door to other types of knowledge that have not been accepted in the history of public education. Additionally, it honors the ways in which school pride has been indivisible from neighborhood pride in the city of San Antonio.

⁵⁶ Sleeter, Christine E. *The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies: A Research Review*. National Education Association Research Department, 2011. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED521869>.

Community based learning and schooling or place based education is characterized by forming and nurturing strong ties with the outside community. In their book *Place-based Education: Connecting classrooms and communities*, David Sobel defines place-based education as the following:

Place based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhance students' appreciation for the natural world, and create a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens.⁵⁷

A key aspect of this definition is the development of strong ties with the community that surrounds a school, which as Sobel clearly states works to improve a student's academic and social life as well as their civic engagement with their own community.

Other scholarship on community based learning and schooling concerns the ways in which strong ties with the surrounding community is an education strategy that has long been employed in the education of students from low-income communities, in order to centralize the distribution of resources and services that otherwise operate entirely independently.⁵⁸ In their article "Community Schools: What We Know and What We Need to Know," Heers characterizes community schools by their "close cooperation with community resources, the drive to actively

⁵⁷ Sobel, David. *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms & communities*. Orion Society, 2004.

⁵⁸ Heers, Marieke, Chris Van Klaveren, Wim Groot, and Henriëtte Maassen van den Brink. "Community Schools: What We Know and What We Need to Know." *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 4 (December 2016): 1016–51. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315627365>.

involve parents in the educational and socialization processes, and the provision of extracurricular activities.”⁵⁹

Ethnic and racial teacher representation

I can count on one hand the white teachers who taught me during my K-12 education: Mr Richbourg, my middle school technology teacher, Ms. Slote, my AP Environmental Science teacher who was fresh out of college and doing Teach for America before grad school, Mrs. Pullins, my AP Statistics teacher whose daughter was in my grade, Mrs. Groves, my AP Human Geography teacher, and finally a white man whose name I cannot remember but who taught me AP Calculus AB my senior year of high school. All of the other countless teachers I had in elementary, middle and high school were teachers of color, an experience that is highly uncommon in the United States today. It is widely known and documented in the literature that today’s teaching force is dramatically and predominantly white.⁶⁰ In the 2015-2016 school year, 80% of all public school teachers were white.⁶¹

The demographics of the teaching force has considerable implications for the current and future state of United States public education, especially as the student population becomes increasingly diverse. Specifically, white teachers have been documented to reproduce

⁵⁹ Heers, Marieke, Chris Van Klaveren, Wim Groot, and Henriëtte Maassen van den Brink. “Community Schools: What We Know and What We Need to Know.” *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 4 (December 2016): 1016–51. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315627365>.

⁶⁰ Berchini, Christina. “Why Are All the Teachers White? - Education Week Teacher.” <https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2015/04/28/why-are-all-the-teachers-white.html>.

⁶¹ National Center for Education Statistics. “The Condition of Education - Preprimary, Elementary, and Secondary Education - Teachers and Staff - Characteristics of Public School Teachers - Indicator April (2018).” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clr.asp.

constructions of race and by extension, the racial hierarchies and systems of racial oppression and subordination that are created and maintained through these constructions.^{62, 63} In a study conducted with white female teachers in New York City, Picower explains how these teachers often mobilize their hegemonic understandings of race and society and when these understandings are challenged, they utilize “tools of whiteness designed to protect and maintain their dominant and stereotypical understandings of race.”⁶⁴ Other work reveal the limits of teacher education to combat against the racial understandings of white teachers since discussion of white privilege do not directly translate to anti-racist teaching.⁶⁵ By extension, the reproduction of racial hierarchies by white teachers onto students of color showcases the ways in which the large numbers of white teachers in the United States remain unprepared to teach an increasingly diverse public school student population. At worst, white teachers only exacerbate the already radically unequal education landscape for students of color.

By extension, the Emma Tenayuca Community School will exclusively employ teachers of color in an effort to mirror the ethnic and racial diversity of its students and to protect against the ways in which white teachers cause further harm to students of color in the United States

⁶² Sleeter, Christine E. "How white teachers construct race." *Race, identity and representation in education* (1993): 157-171.

⁶³ Picower, Bree. "The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 12, no. 2 (2009): 197-215.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Lensmire, Timothy, Shannon McManimon, Jessica Dockter Tierney, Mary Lee-Nichols, Zachary Casey, Audrey Lensmire, and Bryan Davis. “McIntosh as Synecdoche: How Teacher Education’s Focus on White Privilege Undermines Antiracism.” *Harvard Educational Review* 83, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 410–31. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.83.3.35054h1418230574>.

public education system. ETCS will work to strengthen its pedagogy and practice by delivering instruction through a black and brown teaching force that already carries an intimate understanding of the systemic inequalities their students face for they themselves are engaged in the fight for liberation.

While the limitations of white teachers have been widely documented in the literature, the benefits of teachers of color who reflect the racial, ethnic and cultural identities of their students have also been documented and discussed at length. Studies like that of Cherng, Sebastian and Halpin have documented the importance of teachers of color by investigating student perceptions of their white teachers and their teachers of color.⁶⁶ The study found that students of color have more favorable perceptions of Black and Latino teachers than they do white teachers, which can directly translate to greater academic outcomes.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the experience of seeing yourself reflected in your teachers is one that cannot necessarily be quantified. Students often find role models in their teachers of color, which has extreme influence over both their educational and their overall development. Teachers of color are also known to bring “a critical awareness” to their teaching that directly comes from their understanding of the sociopolitical contexts in which they were educated and in which they are educating their own students.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁶ Cherng, Hua-Yu Sebastian, and Peter F. Halpin. “The Importance of Minority Teachers: Student Perceptions of Minority Versus White Teachers.” *Educational Researcher* 45, no. 7 (October 2016): 407–20. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16671718>.

⁶⁷ Teven, Jason J., and James C. McCroskey. "The relationship of perceived teacher caring with student learning and teacher evaluation." *Communication Education* 46, no. 1 (1997): 1-9.

⁶⁸ Kohli, Rita. "Breaking the cycle of racism in the classroom: Critical race reflections from future teachers of color." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2008): 177-188.

power such ethnic and racial teacher representation has for transforming the education of our nation's students of color is paramount.

Conclusion

The United States public education system as it is currently conceived has only worked to perpetuate and replicate the oppression that Latinx students, their families and their communities, face in their everyday lived experiences. In order to confront this reality of how public schools have maintained white supremacy and systemic racism, it is of critical importance to design and imagine a new kind of education system that instead centers equity, freedom and liberation for its students of color.

This is especially true for the Latinx students living in my hometown of San Antonio, Texas. It is this body of students that inspired me to design the Emma Tenayuca Community School, a school that aims to bring its students and society at large closer to true equality and freedom through a separatist pedagogy and its five guiding principles of 1) bilingual education, 2) culturally sustaining pedagogy, 3) race and ethnic studies, 4) community-based schooling and 5) ethnic and racial teacher representation.

By extension, it is my hope that a school such as this one has the opportunity to one day be realized for the benefit of the very same communities that raised me and for the educational freedom of all.

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