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## **A Historical Snapshot on the Progression of Educational and Social Opportunities for Mexican American Students in the San Benito Public School System, 1909-2009**

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A HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT ON THE PROGRESSION OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE SAN BENITO  
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM 1909-2009

A Dissertation

by

MARCO ANTONIO LARA, JR.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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MARCO ANTONIO LARA, JR.

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May 2013



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## ABSTRACT

Lara, Marco Antonio Jr., A Historical Snapshot on the Progression of Educational and Social Opportunities of Mexican American Students in the San Benito Public School System 1909 to 2009. Doctor of Education (Ed. D.), May, 2013, 153 pp., 19 tables, references, 61 titles, 8 appendices.

This study investigates the barriers Mexican American students encountered in educational and social opportunities within the San Benito Public School System from 1909 to 2009. This qualitative research study was organized chronologically by collecting information on the city, school district, and students who attended the San Benito Public School System. Personal and telephone interviews, as well as emailed questionnaires/surveys were used to gather firsthand information from former students, and current/former teachers, administrators, and board member of the district. A review of school board minutes, high school yearbooks, newspaper articles, books, and other related materials were also included for use in this study. A school district that was once dominated by Anglo's in student population and governance has witnessed monumental change, as now the dominant force is Mexican American. As the school district progressed over the last one hundred years, the opportunities for Mexican American students to prepare for college or career, as well as opportunities in social engagement are many.





## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work first and foremost to God.

I thank my family for their continued support over the years for providing me the resources needed to complete this monumental journey. I thank my wife, Juanita Maribel (Molly) Toscano-Lara who has been the cornerstone of our family, encouraging me and acting in many capacities allowing me to grow in this new profession for the last nineteen years. To my eldest son Marco Antonio (Marc) Lara III, who challenged at birth with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, I thank you for reminding me that as difficult as life can be at times, there is always a reason to smile. To my son Jonathan Myles Lara, I thank you for your patience and understanding in allowing me to complete this challenge while you were growing from a young boy into the young man that you are today.

I also want to thank my parents, Marco Antonio Lara, Sr. and Marie Helen Lara who provide the love and support in my life, and are my role models. Thank you for instilling in me the importance of education. To my Grandparents who watch from above, thank you for teaching your grandson the importance of honor, pride, integrity, family, and service.

To my extended family, I thank you for your support and encouragement and for all the help you provided me in keeping my focus on completing this chapter in my life.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wonderful committee for the patience, guidance, and encouragement, Thank You!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the State of Texas of 1845, Article 7, Section 1 declares, “A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislature of this State to make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of public schools.”<sup>1</sup> The intent of this clause in the Texas Constitution still stands firm today; however, in the early development of our great state, opportunities for a state supported education were not necessarily equitable to all Texas citizens.

Through legislative revisions, the Texas constitution evolved to meet the current demands of a changing society. Now, language in the Texas Constitution, Education Code, Title 1. General Provisions Chapter 1, Sec. 1.002. EQUAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES OR OPPORTUNITIES. subsection (a), states, “An educational institution undertaking to provide education, services, or activities to any individual within the jurisdiction or geographical boundaries of the educational institution shall provide equal opportunities to all Individual’s within its jurisdiction or geographical boundaries pursuant to this code.”<sup>2</sup>

The Texas Constitution further defines the mission under Title 2. Public Education, Subtitle A. General Provisions, Chapter 4, Section 4.001. PUBLIC EDUCATION MISSION

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Constitution, Article 7, Section 1, available from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Index.aspx> (accessed September 24, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Texas Statutes, Title 1, Chapter 1, Section 1.002, available from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Index.aspx> (accessed September 24, 2011).

AND OBJECTIVES, subsection (a), by stating, “The mission of the public education system of this state is to ensure that all Texas children have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation. That mission is grounded on the conviction that a general diffusion of knowledge is essential for the welfare of this state and for the preservation of the liberties and rights of citizens. It is further grounded on the conviction that a successful public education system is directly related to a strong, dedicated, and supportive family and that parental involvement in the school is essential for the maximum educational achievement of a child.”<sup>3</sup>

The goal of the Texas public education system to afford a free and appropriate education to all residents, regardless of race, gender, class, or citizenship, was born with ambitious intent. Unfortunately, actions to achieve this goal were not always applied equally as will be seen in this research study on the San Benito, Texas public school system through snapshots of the period, 1909 to 2009.

### **San Benito CISD**

The San Benito Consolidated Independent School District (SBCISD) is located in deep South Texas. Its western boundaries are close to Mexico and in some instances, only the Rio Grande River separates San Benito from Mexico. Currently, the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District is comprised of 2 high schools, 3 middle schools, and 11 elementary campuses and includes 3 alternative schools for a total of 19 campuses.<sup>4</sup> Demographic information for the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District, obtained through the

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<sup>3</sup> Texas Statutes, Title 2, Chapter 4, Section 4.001, available from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Index.aspx> (accessed September 24, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System 2008-2009 District Performance, available from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2009/index.html> (accessed April 7, 2011).

Texas Education Agency (TEA) Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report for 2010, showed that the school district's student population was 10,983, of which 98% were Hispanic. SBCISD employed a staff of 1,622 people of which 83.7% were Hispanic.<sup>5</sup> The demographic data for SBCISD was quite different in the early years of the school system.

During the inception of the schools in San Benito, the majority of students attending the schools and the teaching staff of the schools were Anglo or White non-Hispanic. This did not necessarily mirror the town's demographics in the early years of the development of the San Benito community.<sup>6</sup> The town had unofficial, self-imposed boundaries that divided it into segregated sections, with the central part of town occupied by White non-Hispanic citizens and the other part by Mexican American citizens<sup>7</sup>. The White non-Hispanic citizens of San Benito were considered the upper class of the community; they had majority control of the events and operations in city and school governance. The Mexican Americans had little to no voice in either city or school business.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While opportunities for Mexican American students have evolved throughout the last century, it is important that the citizens of this educational community understand the barriers that once hindered the Mexican American student. This historical snapshot of San Benito Consolidated Independent School District is derived from researched information on the city and school, including published historical documents, newspaper articles from the *San Benito News* and the *Valley Morning Star*, *Brownsville Herald*, government records, interviews and electronic

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<sup>5</sup> Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System 2008-2009 District Performance available from [www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us) (accessed April 7, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> San Benito Historical Society, *Images of America: San Benito* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



questionnaires/surveys with former students, current and former teachers, administrators, and board members, all reflective of the time period of this study, 1909 to 2009.

While an abundance of information exists, it has not been organized into a coherent presentation. Information derived from these sources must be organized in order to tell the story of the challenges in educational and social arenas that Mexican American students experienced from 1909 to 2009.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study provides an understanding of the educational and social barriers that affected Mexican American students in San Benito, Texas during the hundred-year period between 1909 and 2009. This study will examine data, collected through snapshots of the years ending in 9 for each decade. The focus of this study was on issues as they relate to the school district generally and the education of Mexican American students specifically. The study began with an examination of historical information for the city of San Benito during this one hundred year period. Next, was an in depth look at the inception and growth of the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District for this same time period occurred.

Identifying Mexican American student participation in sports activities as well as membership in service organizations and academic clubs constituted one measure of the barriers to opportunities experienced by these students. This information was identified through the review of published materials including newspaper articles, books, and San Benito High School yearbooks, and was organized in ten-year intervals from 1909 to 2009, reviewing the ninth year of each decade. Information obtained through personal and telephone interviews and/or electronic questionnaires/surveys with community members, former students, teachers, administrators, and board members were a viable source of information as well. Recorded

minutes from past school board meetings were also reviewed in ten-year intervals from 1909 to 2009, with a snapshot of the ninth year of each decade, for the purpose of identifying decisions by the decision makers of the school district that affected Mexican American students. Lastly, emerging themes were identified from the information gathered and presented.

### **Research Questions**

The questions used to guide this research study are:

1. What educational barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009?
2. What social barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009?

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study included the amount of and access to historical records as they relate to the school district. The focus of this study is a snapshot, looking at archived information from the ninth year of each decade, and oral and written historical records from interviewed sources. Additionally, the study was limited to a single school district in South Texas, which historically has had a majority enrollment of Anglo students, shifting to majority Mexican American students in years that are more recent. The study also relied on the memory of the participants being interviewed and the accuracy of their recollection of accounts. And finally, the information on only one particular school district located in deep South Texas cannot be generalized to any other situations.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this study and have relevance to the research:

**Mexican American.** In this study, Mexican American refers to an American of Mexican descent.

**Hispanic.** For the purpose of this study, Hispanic is a Spanish-speaking person of Latin American origin who lives in the United States.

**White/Anglo.** White/Anglo is a term used to describe a White person who lives in the U.S. and is not Hispanic.

**Rio Grande Valley.** Rio Grande Valley refers to the lower region of South Texas that encompasses the counties of Cameron, Willacy, Hidalgo, and Starr.

**Magic Valley.** Magic Valley is a term used to describe the Rio Grande Valley, which was used as a marketing tool to attract investors and settlers to the Rio Grande Valley.

**Resaca City.** In this study, Resaca City is another name for San Benito, as it references the large body of water (resaca) that flows through the city that is its main canal of a large irrigation system.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB 2001).** For the purpose of this study, NCLB refers to an educational reform policy that became federal law under President George W. Bush in 2001.

**Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).** In this study, AEIS refers to a report that displays a wide range of student performance data for Texas schools.

**High Stakes Testing.** This term refers to the testing process for meeting graduation and promotion requirements for students in public schools.

**State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR).** For the purpose of this study, STAAR refers to a series of assessments for students in grades 3-8, and 9-12, beginning 2012, that will help educators measure the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum standards, which replaced Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

**Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).** This term refers to state assessments designed to measure the extent to which a student has learned and is able to apply the defined knowledge and skills at each tested grade levels 3-11.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study should provide a rich historical view of how educational and social opportunities for Mexican American students have evolved over the last ten decades in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District. This study could potentially have a significant impact on Mexican Americans as they learn of the inequities of past generations in the San Benito public school system. This study will add to the literature regarding past inequities for

Mexican American students as well. Since there have been a relatively small number of studies regarding Mexican American culture, particularly in South Texas, it is important to share this information as it will add to the literature available for past, current, and future generations of community members of the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District, as well as the general public.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historically, Mexican American students have endured challenges in many different arenas. There have been very few studies conducted regarding Mexican Americans students in the Rio Grande Valley until recently. Within the last few years, Jose Richard Rivera in 2008 and Beatrice De Leon Edwards in 2011 conducted historical research studies that addressed issues of inequity in public education for Mexican American students in Weslaco, TX ISD and Mercedes, TX ISD respectively. This study will add to this growing knowledge base regarding the educational and social achievement of Mexican American students in the Rio Grande Valley. This study in particular will provide a historical perspective based on the educational and social barriers for Mexican American students in the San Benito school system, and will access information from sources such as board minutes, high school yearbooks, and interviews with former alumni, staff, and board members, in an effort to expand the literature currently available and promote awareness to school and community members.

#### **Setting the Context**

The Texas Constitution of 1845 established a framework to provide for public education for all citizens of the state.<sup>8</sup> While public schools have been in existence since then, they did not necessarily include Mexican American students. As a result, private schools like “Escuela

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<sup>8</sup> *Texas Constitution and Statutes*. available from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Index.aspx> (accessed September 24, 2011).

Guadalupe” in San Benito Texas were established to provide an education to Mexican American students.<sup>9</sup> These types of segregated schools were the only option for Mexican Americans. Generally, these schools provided only a very basic foundation of education and were limited to only a few grade levels. It was not until the formation of civil rights organizations and the influence they had on implementing change that educational opportunities would occur for Mexican Americans at the national and state level.

In the 1920s groups like San Antonio's *Orden Hijos de América* (Order of the Sons of America), one of the first Mexican-American civil rights organizations, organized Latino workers in an effort to raise awareness of civil rights issues including education, fair wages, and housing.<sup>10</sup> The Orden Hijos de America was founded on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1921 by 37 men at the barbershop of Ramon H. Carvajal in San Antonio Texas; other chapters soon followed in Corpus Christi, Kingsville, Alice, and Beeville in the latter part of the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of this organization was to use its influence to ensure that Mexican Americans enjoyed all of the rights guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution.

Within that same decade, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC 1928) was formed and organized to fight against discrimination and segregation and promote education among Latinos.<sup>12</sup> The Mission of the League of United Latin American Citizens was to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, housing, health, and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.<sup>13</sup> Founded in 1929, LULAC is the oldest civil rights organization in the nation for Mexican Americans.

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<sup>9</sup> “Firsts” of the SBCISD, San Benito Consolidated Independent School District available from [http://www.sanbenitohistory.com/projects/San\\_benito/Pages/Schools\\_Page.html](http://www.sanbenitohistory.com/projects/San_benito/Pages/Schools_Page.html), (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Cynthia E. Orozco, "ORDER OF SONS OF AMERICA," *Handbook of Texas Online*, available from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/veotu>, (accessed February 20, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *League of United Latin American Citizens*, available from <http://lulac.org/> (accessed February 20, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

The 1930s Mexican Repatriation Act, authorized by then President Herbert Hoover, created a mass deportation of Mexican workers, including those who were citizens of the U.S. in an effort to provide jobs for Americans during the depression years.<sup>14</sup> The Immigration and Naturalization Service targeted Mexicans for deportation based on their physical characteristics, proximity to the border of Mexico, and the easily identifiable areas (barrios) in which they lived. It is estimated that approximately one million Mexicans were deported from Texas, California, Colorado, Michigan, and Illinois as a result of this act.<sup>15</sup>

In 1942, the Bracero Program created under a joint U.S.-Mexico agreement was implemented which temporarily allowed for Mexicans to come to the United States of America for the purpose of low cost labor in the growers industry.<sup>16</sup> From 1942-1964 an estimated 4 million plus Mexican nationals participated in this program. The braceros labor on American soil had a significant impact on the American economy; however, in the 1960s due to the development of mechanical machinery, like the cotton harvester, the braceros would no longer be in such demand. The program came to end in 1964.<sup>17</sup>

In 1945 Latinos returned home after serving in World War II and enjoyed the benefits provided by the GI Bill, which was signed in to law in June 1944. The GI Bill would allow for all servicemen, including Latinos, to enroll in college, receive job training, and assist with low

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<sup>14</sup> Robert R. McKay, "MEXICAN AMERICANS AND REPATRIATION," *Handbook of Texas Online*, available from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pqmyk>, (accessed February 18, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Edward Harrison. "Mexican Repatriation: The Great Depression and Immigration Policy." *Credit Writedowns*. June 29, 2010, available from <http://www.creditwritedowns.com/2010/06/mexican-repatriation-the-great-depression-and-immigration-policy.html> (accessed February 22, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> "Mexican Immigrant Labor History" available from <http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/17.html> (accessed February 21, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Carlos Marentes. "Los Braceros." *The Farmworkers Website*. 1997, available from <http://www.farmworkers.org/bracerop.html> (accessed February 22, 2012).

interest and no money down mortgage loans for home purchases. The G.I. Bill was considered to have created what we know today as the American middle class.<sup>18</sup>

In 1948, the American GI Forum was organized by Dr. Hector P. Garcia in Corpus Christi Texas to battle issues of discrimination of Hispanics in Texas.<sup>19</sup> An Army veteran medical doctor, Garcia witnessed wide spread discrimination of Hispanic servicemen across the country upon their return from World War II. Garcia made it his mission to create an organization that would help to break down barriers of prejudice and injustice for these Hispanic servicemen.<sup>20</sup>

A landmark battle ensued in 1948 through the court system in the form of *Delgado v. Bastrop*. Through the combined efforts of LULAC, Attorney Gus Garcia, and the American G.I. Forum of Texas, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of Minerva Delgado on the basis that Mexican American students were being segregated from other white races and therefore a violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. A decision by District Court Judge Ben Rice ruled that segregation of Mexican American students was not authorized by Texas Law and therefore school districts could not continue this practice of segregation of Mexican American students.<sup>21</sup>

The next decade would witness a landmark legal battle in the highest court of the land, as *Hernandez v. Texas* was the first case civil rights case to go before the U.S. Supreme Court in which the argument was for discrimination based on ethnicity and class; this was in 1954.<sup>22</sup> This particular case involved Peter Hernandez, a young 21-year-old Mexican American who was indicted in 1951 for the murder of Joe Espinosa in a bar in Edna Texas. His attorneys Gustavo

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<sup>18</sup> *U.S. Department of Education*, available from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/lau1970.html> (accessed February 22, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> *American GI Forum*, available from <http://www.agifusa.org/history> (accessed February 22, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> "Civics Resources for Texas Students and Teachers." n.d. available from <http://www.texasbar.com/civics/High%20School%20cases/delgado-v-bastrop.htm> (April 19, 2012)

<sup>22</sup> Orozco.



C. Garcia, Carlos Cadena, James DeAnda, Cris Aldrete, and John J. Herrera, argued before the United States Supreme Court that while there were Mexican persons qualified to serve on a jury, there were none on this jury or any other jury panel in the last 25 years, and therefore deprived Hernandez of the right to equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment of our Constitution. The Supreme Court agreed and overturned the conviction.<sup>23</sup>

The 1960s would continue to see organizations form in the defense of the Mexican Americans. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) was established in a fight to protect the rights of Mexican Americans.<sup>24</sup> MALDEF's mission was to "implement programs that bring Latinos into the mainstream of American political and socio-economic life; providing better educational opportunities; encouraging participation in all aspects of society; and offering a positive vision for the future."<sup>25</sup> MALDEF has prevailed in the legal arena with landmark cases like *Plyler v. Doe*, a U.S. Supreme Court case that abolished a Texas law that allowed school districts to charge tuition to parents of undocumented children. MALDEF continues to work with issues such as voting rights, redistricting, and other civil rights actions that affect Latinos.

In 1971, the United States Supreme Court orders the Commissioner of Education for Texas, and the Texas Education Agency, to monitor against segregation in public schools, particularly in the areas of student transfers, student transportation, curriculum, changes to district boundaries, extracurricular activities, faculty and staff, and compensatory education.<sup>26</sup>

The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare made a bold statement in 1974

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<sup>23</sup> State Bar of Texas, available from [http://www.texasbar.com/civics/High %20School%20cases/hernandez-v-texas.html](http://www.texasbar.com/civics/High%20School%20cases/hernandez-v-texas.html) (accessed February 22, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Mexican American Legal Defense and Educaiton Fund, available from [www.maldef.org](http://www.maldef.org) (accessed February 22, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> UNITED STATES OF AMERICA V. STATE OF TEXAS, ET AL. available from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/pmi/eo/5281.html> (accessed February 21, 2012).

by stating that students cannot be denied access to education because of their inability speak English.<sup>27</sup> In a stern memorandum to certain school districts, J. Stanley Pottinger, the Director for the Office for Civil Rights, made it clear that school districts had the responsibility to provide equal education to students who were deficient in the English language. He cited Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that requires that there be no discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any operations that receive federal funding.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after, in 1974, the *Lau v. Nichols* case presented before the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed the position of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare that prohibits discrimination against students who cannot read or speak English from access to educational programs. Lau, a Chinese American student in San Francisco, California, claimed that the school was in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by not providing the aid needed due to the students' inability to speak English, therefore denying them equal educational opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

In 1974, Congress passed the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, a civil rights statute that prohibits states from denying equal educational opportunities to students based on race, color, sex, or national origin. Congress proceeded to clarify the law even further to include language that defined the responsibility of education agencies to enforce the Equal Educational Opportunity Act to help students overcome language barriers.<sup>30</sup> This act was the beginning for the requirement of school districts to address services required for the Spanish speaking children.

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<sup>27</sup> Teaching Tolerance, n.d. available from <http://www.tolerance.org/latino-civil-rights-timeline> (accessed September 15, 2012 ).

<sup>28</sup> Stanley J. Pottinger. Memorandum to school districts, May 25, 1970, available from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/lau1970.html> (accessed February 22, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563, available from <http://cases.laws.com/lau-v-nichols> (1974) (accessed February 12, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> "U.S. Department of Education." n.d. available from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/lau1970.html> (accessed February 22, 2012)

Actions and events like the ones mentioned above, initiated through civil rights organizations or legal actions, were the foundation for the ability of Mexican Americans to enjoy access to the freedoms that they have today.

With this context established, the remainder of this literature review focuses on the development of the city and schools in San Benito, Texas. Additionally, information regarding the Mexican American culture, the role of academic assessment and accountability at the state and national levels, and selected Texas legal cases, will help explain the struggles of the Mexican American students in their battle for educational equity and equality.

### **Development of the City of San Benito Texas**

Sam Robertson, skilled in railway construction and engineering, came to the Rio Grande Valley in 1903 at the age of 36. He was under contract with Gulf Coast Lines to create a railway system that would connect Corpus Christi to Brownsville.<sup>31</sup> While working in the valley, Robertson purchased 10,000 acres of land along the Los Fresnos Resaca, and began to influence the development of what is now San Benito. Considered the founder of San Benito, Samuel Arthur Robertson had a vision of developing this dry, brush-ridden ranch land into a prosperous irrigated land with railway transportation that would attract settlers from across the country.

Sam Robertson, in partnership with Benjamin Hicks and James Landrum, formed the San Benito Land and Water Company in 1907. They acquired approximately 45,000 acres of a parcel of land from the Concepcion de Carricitos land grant from the estate of Stephen Powers, who happened to be Benjamin Hicks's father-in-law.<sup>32</sup> In 1907 the San Benito Land and Water Company subdivided this tract of land, creating town lots for sale to the general public, and

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<sup>31</sup> Marjorie Johnson "City of San Benito." In *Historic Rio Grande Valley: An Illustrated History* (San Antonio, TX: Historical Publishing Network, . 2001), 236.

<sup>32</sup> Charles M. Robinson III, "SAN BENITO, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* available from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hes01> (accessed February 18, 2012).

forming the framework to begin the development of a town. It was not until June 1907 that a municipal-style government with elected officials, a mayor and two council members, was presented to the voters for approval.

Rafael Moreno, an employee of Hicks, concocted the name “San Benito”. Moreno was said to have fondly referred to Benjamin Hicks as “Don Benito”, and combined Sam Robertson’s name “San” for Sam, and the results of this was the town’s name of “San Benito”.<sup>33</sup> The town had two short-lived names prior to being officially named San Benito in 1907. It was first named Diaz, after Porfirio Diaz, who was the President of Mexico at that time. It was then changed to “Bessie” after the daughter of Benjamin Franklin Yoakum, a financial broker of the St. Louis, Brownsville, Mexico Railway and contributor to the establishment of the town.<sup>34</sup>

Robertson was responsible for building the railway system that connected valley towns; locally the rail system was referred to as “the spiderweb” and “Sam Robertson’s Backdoor Railroad.”<sup>35</sup> He founded the San Benito Land and Irrigation Company that resulted in the creation of the irrigation districts, irrigation canals, and drainage systems, which promoted farming in the valley. Along with these impressive accomplishments, Robertson saw the need for producing ice for the transportation of produce to other markets and in 1910 established an ice plant in San Benito.<sup>36</sup> Among his many contributions to San Benito, Robertson also served as the first postmaster of San Benito in 1907, and was elected as Cameron County Sheriff in 1922 and reelected 1926.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Johnson, 236.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid..

<sup>36</sup> Verna J. McKenna, "Robertson, Samuel Arthur," *Handbook of Texas Online*, available from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fro32> (accessed February 18, 2012).

Robertson's visionary leadership helped promote the area that we now call the "Rio Grande Valley," and as a result of this, turned a small desolate village into what is now the city of San Benito.

Amid the Mexican Revolution of 1910, San Benito continued to develop, due primarily to the creation of irrigation systems, railroads, and an influx of northern Anglo Americans to the area.<sup>37</sup> The Mexican Revolution was fought for the next decade and brought about hardships for the people of San Benito. The revolution would incite violence that would sometimes spill across the border into San Benito. Mexican bandits would raid the nearby farms and ranches taking cattle, food, and other items of value, sometimes inflicting injury or death upon the inhabitants of this community.

San Benito had now grown in population from a small village occupied by northern immigrants and local resident workers who began the town's infrastructure to a prospering community with population growth and new commerce. This was all brought about by the innovative leadership of a group of pioneers from the northern states, like Sam Robertson, Benjamin Hicks, Benjamin Franklin Yoakum, and James Landrum, who made initial investments of time and money to develop the town. San Benito established a Charter Commission to develop a city charter that would establish a body corporate with full power of self-government by the name and style of CITY OF SAN BENITO.<sup>38</sup> The city, under charter, would establish a local government that consisted of a mayor and two council members.<sup>39</sup> The members of this Charter Commission were W. G. B. Morrison, Sam'l Spears, A.V. Logan, C. M. Robards, F. N. Booth, W.F. Greenslade, Asa S. Agar, S. S. Dodds, F. H. Wedegartner, J. C. Mertz, C. E. Burke, F. W. Roberts, Frank T. Phillips, A E. Stephenson, and E. L Barmore. There was no Mexican

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<sup>37</sup>Johnson, 237.

<sup>38</sup> City of San Benito Charter 1920. 1.

<sup>39</sup> City of San Benito Charter 1920, 2.

American representation on this committee.<sup>40</sup> On June 27, 1911, San Benito held a successful election that allowed for incorporation of the town; the incorporation became official on July 3, 1911.<sup>41</sup> Incorporation allowed for San Benito to be recognized by the State of Texas as a City, with John M. Breem, as its first mayor.<sup>42</sup>

In 1920 San Benito was included in the U.S. Census for the first time with an estimated population of approximately 4,070 residents.<sup>43</sup> The next several decades would see steady growth in population, with 13,271 in the 1950s, approximately 16,422 in the 1960s, and increasing to 17,436 residents in 1975.<sup>44</sup> The population increase continued for the next couple of decades, and it is estimated that today San Benito has approximately 26,000 residents.<sup>45</sup> Currently, the population of the City of San Benito is predominately Hispanic with 89%, and White non-Hispanic at 10.7%.<sup>46</sup>

### **Evolution of the San Benito School District**

As the town of San Benito began to prosper, the newly arrived Northern Anglo settlers developed the infrastructure for the town. They perceived the need for establishing a system of education as crucial in an attempt to attract more Northern Anglo settlers to the area. The system of education in San Benito was established in the early years through small surrounding ranch and farm communities like Highland, El Ranchito, La Encantada, Los Indios, La Paloma, and Rangerville. These ranch communities were the first to establish small one-room school houses where privately hired teachers were brought in to staff these schools for the children of these

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<sup>40</sup> City of San Benito Charter 1920. 44.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Robinson III. *A History of San Benito*. (Franklinville, NJ: Sand Dollar Publishing, 1982), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "San Benito, Texas." In *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San\\_Benito,\\_Texas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Benito,_Texas) (accessed October 10, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "San Benito, Texas" (2011). In City-Data.com, available from <http://www.city-data.com/city/San-Benito-Texas.html> (accessed October 8, 2011).

surrounding ranches.<sup>47</sup> This would be the foundation for the beginning of the San Benito school system. The very first school in San Benito was established in December of 1907.<sup>48</sup> This school was called the “Ward School” and was a one-room school that only operated for a six month term.<sup>49</sup> A total of 48 students from different nationalities, including Americans, Spaniards, Germans, Bohemians, and Mexicans attended the Ward School<sup>50</sup> It was discovered through an oral interview of Margaret Brown by Felicia A. Brown, that Mrs. Scott Brown (Purvis) was the very first teacher of this one room school house.<sup>51</sup> In April of 1909 the school district was first incorporated.<sup>52</sup>

A parochial school for the Spanish speaking children called the “Escuela Guadalupe” was opened in 1912 by Mrs. Carmen Martinez.<sup>53</sup> This particular school was in existence until 1978 and served many of the Mexican American children of the San Benito community for more than 65 years.<sup>54</sup>

Very little information has been published regarding the early history of the San Benito public school system. The literature currently available today would show that during the next several decades the school system would continue to grow from 48 students in 1907 to the current enrollment of more than 10,000 students in 2012.<sup>55</sup>

### **Effect of Culture on the Mexican American Student**

When the transmission of culture and its effects are considered, all major human culture systems contain certain elements that are common to one another. According to Spindler, if

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<sup>47</sup> Johnson, 236.

<sup>48</sup> “Firsts” of the SBCISD. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, 236.

<sup>50</sup> “Firsts” of the SBCISD, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System 2008-2009 District Performance.

religion, magic, morals, recreation, education, and even mating are considered, as common elements in every culture, the way in which the content in these categories differ and the way in which they are used together, as reflected in how we raise and educate our children, must be considered<sup>56</sup> In the Hispanic culture, the traditional Hispanic family values close extended family relationships, portrays the role of the male as the respected family provider and the authoritative figure, the female as the trusted, nurturing mother, and the children as completely obedient.<sup>57</sup>

A society's culture operates by providing the things a person needs to know in order to be accepted within that culture. Viewed in a larger context, the culture contains elements such as language, social patterns, diet, dress, and ethnicity, and basically whatever a person needs to know in order to be accepted.<sup>58</sup>

Researcher Valenzuela refers to "Subtractive Schooling" as the process by which Mexican American students lose their culture and language through the process of assimilation that removes their social and cultural resources and makes them more susceptible to academic failure. Valenzuela believes that schools are organized in ways that subtract resources from Mexican American students.<sup>59</sup>

A "Culture of Poverty" as described by Lewis, can also be associated with Mexican Americans of low socioeconomic status in that they create a culture that develops strong feelings of helplessness, of dependency, of marginality, and a feeling of not belonging. Such a feeling

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<sup>56</sup> George D. Spindler. *Education and Cultural Process Anthropological Approaches* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1997), 276.

<sup>57</sup> Diaz-Loving, Rolando. "Practive and Policy Lecture Series." August 29, 2008, available from <http://lectureseries.oucpr.org/?p=183> (accessed February 23, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Olivia N Saracho and Frances Martinez-Hancock. "The Culture of Mexican-Americans: Its Importance for Early Childhood Educators ." *Multicultural Perspectives*, 2007: 43-50.

<sup>59</sup> Angela Valenzuela. *Subtractive Schooling U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Polictics of Caring*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 10.



perpetuates itself in generations and greatly increases the possibility of failure of these students in their education.<sup>60</sup>

### **Educational Assessment of the Mexican American Student**

The practice of assessing students is not unique to our time. In the later part of the nineteenth century, our nation became fascinated with the concept of measuring and comparing student performance.<sup>61</sup> It was in the early twentieth century that a U. S. Foundation for the Science of Testing and Measurement was established and would base their work on that of Alfred Binet, a French scientist known for his work in developing intelligence tests.<sup>62</sup>

Binet's work had reached the United States and was the focus of expansion by psychologists H. H. Goddard, Lewis Terman, and R. M. Yerkes.<sup>63</sup> The three psychologists, Gooddard, Terman, and Yerkes, began work on expanding the use of the Hereditarian Theory of IQ, which uses genetics as the basis for which individual differences in human beings can be accounted. This team of psychologists soon convinced the U. S. Army to test all recruits during World War I, using the newly developed Army Alpha and Beta intelligence tests. The Alpha was a written test and the Beta an oral administered test; they were used in determining placement or leadership abilities of the recruits. Thus, the era of mass testing had begun.<sup>64</sup>

The 1930s saw the introduction of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, developed by Carl Brigham, of Princeton University.<sup>65</sup> This assessment was considered a pure intelligence test, and was used to determine an individual's capacity for college level work.<sup>66</sup> Psychologists and educators were convinced that this assessment was a way to measure true intelligence; soon it

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<sup>60</sup> George D. Spindler. *Education and Cultural Process Anthropological Approaches* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1997), 276.

<sup>61</sup> Tony W. Johnson. *Historical Documents in American Education*. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2002), 218.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 218-219.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 219)

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 220)

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

replaced the essay tests as the measure for college admission.<sup>67</sup> As a manner in which to perfect the use of large scale testing, the SAT was administered to 300,000 people nationally on a single day during the World War II era. This was the beginning of the organization we now know as Educational Testing Service (ETS); James Bryant Conant, President of Harvard University, and Henry Chauncey, a pioneer in the field of mental testing founded ETS.<sup>68</sup> Requiring the SAT as the assessment for college admission created obstacles for those of low socioeconomic status. Many minorities including Mexican American students did not have the resources to pay the fee for the test.<sup>69</sup>

Assessments continue to be used today in measuring the masses of students throughout our nation's K-12 educational programs and many believe that they still contain some discriminatory elements for certain classes of students that are minority and/or of low socioeconomic status. While assessment may be important to determine the effectiveness of educational programs, the instrument itself along with its results may sometimes be used to discriminate against others.<sup>70</sup>

### **The National View of Assessment**

The *National Teaching and Learning Forum* defines assessment as,

...an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Tom Angelo. "The National View of Assessment." *American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation*, 1995: 7-9.

Considering the intent of assessment from the national perspective, we have moved into the era of what we now refer to as “high stakes” testing, which is associated with the national educational reform movement that No Child Left Behind brought about. NCLB has shifted power and control from the local education agencies and state education agencies toward the direction of political and corporate leaders at both the state and federal levels. The rationale behind this reform (NCLB) was to assist in the reduction of educational inequality for students, increase assessment objectivity, and prepare students for success in a more global economy.<sup>72</sup>

The passage of the “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) Act in 2001 and signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002 initiated the most ambitious attempt at education reform at the national level.<sup>73</sup> The concept behind NCLB was that it would close the achievement gap between high and low achieving students and implement stringent assessment requirements with potentially severe consequences for students, campuses, districts, and states that did not meet expectations.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Evolution of Assessment in Texas**

Texas began a series of attempts at education reform, and in 1979, the beginning of “high stakes” testing and accountability surfaced. The 66<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature would now require testing in the areas of mathematics, reading, and writing for students in grades 3, 5, and 9, through the use of survey-type assessment, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS).<sup>75</sup> Ninth grade students had to demonstrate appropriate competencies in each of the three subject areas of mathematics,

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<sup>72</sup> David Hursh. “Assessing No Child Left Behind and the Rise of Neoliberal Education Policies.” *American Educational Research Journal* September 2007. available from [http://ewasteschools.pbworks.com/w/file/etch/45926975/Hursh\\_David\\_2007\\_nclb\\_neoliberalism.pdf](http://ewasteschools.pbworks.com/w/file/etch/45926975/Hursh_David_2007_nclb_neoliberalism.pdf) (accessed February 22, 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Scott Franklin Abernathy. *No Child Left Behind and the Public Schools* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> Haney, Walt. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, available from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n41/part2.htm> (accessed April 21, 2011).

reading, and writing, by successfully performing on the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills, or TABS Test. While TABS did not prohibit promotion, or graduation of high school students, it did require that 9<sup>th</sup> graders, who did not successfully meet the minimum requirements for passing, re-take the test every year until they passed or at least, while they were still in high school.

As part of the education reform movement of 1984, the Texas Legislature, through House Bill 72 (HB72), enacted major mandates for the public school system. Among these measures were improvements in student academic achievement, pay raises for teachers, and adjusting the public school finance system in an effort to increase revenue for property-poor school districts.<sup>76</sup> HB72, would revamp prior efforts in the area of student assessment, increase the number of grade levels having to test, and also introduced a new assessment instrument, beginning in the 1985-1986 school year.<sup>77</sup> The Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) would begin to be administered to students in grades 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 where previously with TABS, only students in grades 3, 5, and 9 had to be tested. This new assessment would test for an understanding of “minimum skills” as opposed to the previous assessment that measured “basic skills”. Unlike the consequences for high school students taking TABS, in 1987, 11<sup>th</sup> graders taking the “exit level” TEAMS test had to pass as a requirement for graduation.<sup>78</sup>

Changes would continue to occur. The new focus on academic assessment would be a “criterion-referenced” test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), which measured academic skills, and would replace TEAMS, an assessment that measured a student’s acquisition of “minimum skills.” TAAS would assess students in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11

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<sup>76</sup> "The History of Public Education in Texas." *Texas Education Agency*, available from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/tea/historyoverview.html> (accessed April 21, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> "Timeline of Testing in Texas." *Texas Education Agency*, available from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/studies/testingtimeline.pdf> (accessed April 20, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

(exit level) and would target students' ability for higher order thinking and problem solving. As a result of higher expectations from the TAAS test, the assessment affected not only the students, but the campus and district levels as well.

In the academic year of 1992-1993, student assessment would move from a fall testing timeline to the spring timeline. Another major change was to include all grade levels from 3-8, inclusive of 11<sup>th</sup> grade, exit level testing. The results of the student performance on TAAS would have greater impact on students, campuses, and districts, as now these results would become a part of a statewide accountability system that would include rating categories for both the campus and the district that would be made public.

TAAS testing requirements would undergo yet another revision in 1995 when two more subject areas, science and social studies, were included along with math, reading, and writing.

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) replaced TAAS, in 1999. The 76<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature focused on creating a more rigorous testing instrument that would be aligned to the state mandated curriculum, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). With this new mandate came new requirements for students. Now, students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade had to demonstrate proficiency on the new state assessment in order for grade level advancement to occur. The 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were required to pass the reading test and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders had to pass both math and reading. The challenge for 11<sup>th</sup> graders testing was made more stringent; they would need to pass all subject areas, reading, writing, math, science, and social studies, at this exit level, in order to graduate.

In 2011, a state of transition in the educational assessment and accountability standards occurred as preparations were made for the challenge of moving from TAKS to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for grades 3-8, and End-of-Course Exams

for grades 9-12. These assessments begin in 2012, and have even higher academic expectations and more accountability for everyone beginning in 2013.

### **The National Impact of Legal Reform on Mexican American Students**

The United States continues to evolve in the concept that an education is of vital importance for all citizens in order for society to prosper. John F. Kennedy, the Thirty-Fifth President of the United States, once referred to the progress as a nation being no swifter than the progress in our system of education. Kennedy further stated that the human mind is man's fundamental resource. Throughout history, many key leaders with good intentions fought for educational access and equality, sometimes successfully and sometime not. Nevertheless, over time our national and state judicial systems have had to intervene and decide issues of equity and equality in our public education system. Previous case history must be reviewed in order to understand the succession of major events in the courts if there is to be an understanding of where society is today regarding the effect of discrimination on students, especially minority students.

When looking back to 1896, in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which addressed the doctrine of "separate but equal", one finds that during this era, the highest court in the land upheld segregation as an allowable practice. Plessy, a Black man, was removed from the all White railroad coach of a train and was arrested for violation of state law which prohibited people from using facilities not designated for their race. The court decided "separate but equal" would suffice as long as Black people had equal access to public transportation.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy and Thomas, *Public School Law: Teachers' and Students' Rights* (Boston: Perason Education Inc., 2004) 174.

More than 50 years after *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the nation's highest court was once again faced with a challenge of the "separate but equal" doctrine. This time it was a new case, *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, 1954. *Brown v. Board of Education* was a consolidation of several different cases from Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia, and Kansas. The case involved several black children who sought admission to public schools that either required or permitted segregation based on race. The plaintiffs alleged that segregation was unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In a major turn of events, the Supreme Court reversed *Plessy v. Ferguson* "separate but equal" doctrine and ruled that segregation was unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Justice Warren further commented that education was the most important function of state and local governments.<sup>80</sup> The court declared that no person should be denied equal protection of the laws, and that public education is a right that must be available to all, and under equal terms. The court also declared that state imposed racial classifications would further impact a student's ability to learn.<sup>81</sup>

*Plyler v. Doe*, a 1982 case brought before the U. S. Supreme Court, addressed the sensitive issue of legal citizenship and the right to public education. A group of immigrant students were denied an education by the state because of their immigration status in the U. S., saying that they were not considered "persons" under the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. The court ruled that regardless of their immigration status, these students are protected under the definition of "persons", as prescribed by the Fourteenth Amendment, and therefore cannot be

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<sup>80</sup> *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) (USSC+). available from <http://www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> 2006 *Deskbook Encyclopedia of American School Law*. (Malvern PA: Center for Education and Employment Law, 2005) 145

denied an education.<sup>82</sup> The Supreme Court stated that this Texas law would create an undue hardship on a specific class of citizen, that had no control over their residency status.<sup>83</sup>

### **The Impact of Legal Reform at the State Level**

At the state level, public school finance, as it relates to equity, has been an issue that separates the “haves” and “have nots.” Through the course of time, Texas has had much debate through the court system in trying to reach a level of equity that all could agree upon. When one examines legal cases such as the 1971 case of *Rodriguez v. San Antonio ISD*, you will find that the plaintiff Demetrio Rodriguez, filed suit claiming their school district could not raise as much money to educate their children as other districts could due to their low tax base; therefore, it could not generate the same funding as districts with higher tax bases. The plaintiffs argued that this system created underprivileged students because of the disparity between districts’ tax bases, which was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause.<sup>84</sup> The courts decided that the Texas finance system was unconstitutional, and the state appealed. The result of this appeal was *San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez*, 1973. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that education was not an “interest” in the U.S. Constitution, but was a matter to be resolved by the state. As a result, the Texas Legislature was urged to equalize funding. HB72 (1984) attempted to do this using a “minimum educational threshold” and claimed that adequate education was sufficient.

In 1971, Texas was subject to an order by the United States Supreme Court to bring an end to segregation in Texas Public Schools, and charges the State Commissioner of Education, J. W. Edgar, and the Texas Education Agency to monitor school district activities in the areas of

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 147-148.

<sup>84</sup> SAN ANTONIO SCHOOL DISTRICT v. RODRIGUEZ, 411 U.S. 1 (1973). available from <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/sanantoniovrodriguez.html> (accessed October 10, 2012).



student transfers, student transportation, curriculum, compensatory education, extracurricular activities, faculty and staff, student assignment, and changes in school district boundaries.<sup>85</sup>

The Texas Legislature in 1984 passes the most comprehensive educational reform law in House Bill 72. HB72 would create an incentive pay system for teachers, through the career ladder system, cap class sizes at 22:1 teacher to student ration in grades 1 thru 4, provide more funding to property poor school districts, and attempt to improve the overall system of academic achievement of students.

*Edgewood v. Kirby*, a case concerning public school finance, came before the Texas Supreme Court in 1989. The Plaintiffs argued that the current methodology of funding the Texas public school system was in violation of the Texas Constitution, which obligates the State to provide financial support for public schools. The Texas Supreme Court ruled that the finance system was a violation of “equal rights” in Texas Constitution. The Texas Legislature was once again ordered to pass legislation that would address these inequities. The Texas Senate passed Senate Bill 1, which provided equal access to enough funds to provide quality education for all, but did nothing to modify the funding methodology for Texas public schools. The Texas Supreme Court (1991) struck down this attempt by the legislature citing the fact that it did not restructure the current system whatsoever. Another attempt by the legislature to rectify the issue came through the form of Senate Bill 7 (1993). This new piece of legislation was also known as the Robin Hood Plan. SB7 was an attempt to equalize funding between property-wealthy districts and property-poor school districts by “recapture”, which was a method of taking local property taxes from wealthier districts to attempt to equalize funding for all.

*West Orange Cove v. Neely* 2004 once again claimed that the Texas school finance system was unconstitutional because current formulas did not allow for a district to raise enough

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<sup>85</sup> UNITED STATES OF AMERICA V. STATE OF TEXAS, ET AL.

revenue to provide an “adequate” education; therefore, it violated the “adequacy clause” of the Texas Constitution. The District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, but was overturned by the Texas Supreme Court who decided that the present school finance system was adequate. The court further defined “adequate” as sufficing a minimum standard in comparison to equity that is defined as “equal treatment of equals”.

Over time, the arguments presented before our judicial system have helped to shape where we are today in providing minority students like the Mexican American students of the San Benito school system a degree of equity, and possibly adequacy, over the time period of this study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the educational and social barriers impacting Mexican American students of the San Benito, Texas school district from the inception of the district in 1909 to the year 2009, covering 100 years of existence. The review of literature details those events that created a context, which in turn affected the Mexican American student; these events included civil rights movements, landmark legal cases, assessment and accountability, and laws affecting education.

During a time of discrimination and segregation in our country, the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas was not immune to such actions and behaviors. The Mexican American student has had to adjust to the educational and social changes for the last century in the San Benito public school system.

### **The Role of Federal Education Policy**

Federal education policy has played a crucial role in what has happened in American classrooms throughout the nation, inclusive of those classrooms here in South Texas. Considering the impact these policies had on Mexican American students in South Texas, the

educational opportunities might have been quite differently for this population. The intent of these major pieces of legislative reform are aimed at recognizing the diversity of the students served in public schools. While the constitution states it is the responsibility of the State and local education agency to provide educational opportunities, it is recognized that the role of the federal government has had an impact on providing students with diverse needs educational opportunities.

### **Bilingual Education Policy**

The primary goal of the Bilingual Education Act was to provide equity in all classrooms through the assistance of federal reform that would help bring to an end the inequities in American education for this particular population. The main focus of this law was aimed at the discrimination students faced in various contexts, including socioeconomic disadvantages or language acquisition. As seen in later decades, inequities in these areas have shifted to closing the achievement gaps between all students from all backgrounds, including subgroups and special populations.<sup>86</sup> Following the landmark case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed by Congress, prohibiting discrimination based on age, race, creed, color, or national origin. in any federally funded program or activity.<sup>87</sup> The dynamic and complex change throughout this era in the development of federal educational policy has affected American students, including citizens, historians, commentators, and policy makers. Important questions have risen in regards to state actions and coalitions, with other states, in response to federal education policy.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> “Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009.” *Archives.nysed.gov*. November 2007. available from [http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/altformats/ed\\_background\\_overview\\_essay.pdf](http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/altformats/ed_background_overview_essay.pdf) (accessed August 23, 2012).

<sup>87</sup> “LawHigherEducation.com.” *Education Law*. December 21, 2010. available from <http://lawhighereducation.com/52-equal-educational-opportunities-act-eeoa.html> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>88</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

On April 11, 1965, President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into law, which amended P.L. 81-874 of 1950. This previous law known as the Lanham Act offered federal aid to nursery schools and provided day care for mothers that were involved in the war effort. The Act provided funding for pre-school education as a justifiable concern of the federal government.<sup>89</sup> The emphasis of the federal government on equality led to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which created assistance to educational agencies for schoolchildren of low-income families, through Title 1. While this Act benefited many inner city students, it did not target children who suffered from language barriers<sup>90</sup> The ESEA focused primarily on improving educational opportunities and outcomes for the poorest students in the nation. This law emphasized allocation of financial resources in the area of instruction.<sup>91</sup>

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was the first official national recognition of meeting needs of children with the challenge of acquiring a second language.<sup>92</sup> In 1968, the Johnson administration embraced the idea of providing support to bilingual programs to serve non-English speaking recent immigrant students; therefore, financial assistance was allocated to support this need.<sup>93</sup> The Bilingual Education Act provided funding through a competitive grant process. School districts used the allocated funds for educational program resources, training for teacher and teacher assistants, developing and dissemination of appropriate materials, and parental involvement projects.<sup>94</sup> The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 had allowed unprecedented numbers of Asian and Latin American immigrants to enter the country. By the

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<sup>89</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>90</sup> "The Bilingual Act: Twenty Years Later 1988." available from [http://www.ncela.gov.edu/files/red/BE021037/Fall88\\_6.pdf](http://www.ncela.gov.edu/files/red/BE021037/Fall88_6.pdf) (accessed October 20, 2012).

<sup>91</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>92</sup> The Bilingual Act: Twenty Years Later 1988.

<sup>93</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>94</sup> The Bilingual Act: Twenty Years Later 1988.

mid 1960s, states such as Texas, Florida, New Mexico, and Arizona had begun to experiment with bilingual programs locally, and in 1967, Congress began hearings on the possibility of providing federal assistance toward these bilingual programs<sup>95</sup> A concern at the time was the feeling that this instability will lead to the fear of the unknown and the insistence of using the language of the status quo.<sup>96</sup> At the end of 1967, Congress included Title VII. Title VII was the Bilingual Education Act to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The purpose of this Act was to provide a solution to the problem of economically disadvantaged students who were unable to speak English or whose English was limited.<sup>97</sup> Congress set a minimum standard for education of language minority students with Title VII.<sup>98</sup> Title VII was the first recognition that English Language Learners have special educational needs and that in the best interest of equal educational opportunity; the bilingual programs must be federally funded. It was seen at the time as a remedy for civil rights violations, but later it was formally recognized that ethnic minorities could look for differentiated services for additional reasons other than for segregation or racial discrimination. Furthermore, it allowed for instruction in other than English to promote cultural awareness.<sup>99</sup>

In 1975, Title I distributed over \$1.8 billion and Title VII distributed money for non-English speaking students. Grants were then distributed to bilingual students regardless of family income. This same principle also applied to disabled students, which included students that were mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and physically handicapped. One of the most

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<sup>95</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Wiese and Garcia.

<sup>97</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Wiese and Garcia.

<sup>99</sup> The Bilingual Act: Twenty Years Later 1988.

significant changes during this era was the addition of including non-poverty related eligibility to poverty-related criteria.<sup>100</sup>

During this time, the federal government mandated federal laws upon the states without providing for the costs of bilingual education and court-order desegregation. The government required these services but it did not take the responsibility for paying them.<sup>101</sup> Since its adoption in 1968, the Act has undergone four different reauthorizations in order to reflect the changing needs of these school children.<sup>102</sup>

The Bilingual Act of 1984 increased the flexibility in the implementation of the various programs for Limited English Proficient students and allowed the school districts more choices in deciding how these students were to be served. The school districts were given the opportunity to use the funds to use various types of programs and different teaching strategies.<sup>103</sup>

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act has undergone several major changes in order to meet the needs of the limited English learner in the United States. Throughout the years, the Bilingual Education Act has evolved from offering basic guidelines to ensuring that more concrete regulations and a greater local control of program curriculum. Changes in bilingual education legislation reflect public opinion across the nation, particularly how it accommodates the needs of recent immigrants and learning a second language.<sup>104</sup> U. S. Congress on six occasions passed legislation related to education language for minority students beginning in 1968, 1974, 1978, 1984, 1988, and 1994.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> The Bilingual Act: Twenty Years Later 1988.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

<sup>104</sup> Ibid

<sup>105</sup> Wiese and Garcia 1998.

In 1994, the long-standing tension over equity in education was independent of linguistic and cultural attributes. Ethnic pride and linguistic maintenance hide undercurrent concerns, which included discrimination, economic and social fragmentation, and re-segregation. These concerns could erode the nation's way of life and the efforts to maintain and achieve a harmonious society of cultural, racial, and linguistic differences. This concern would be of no personal or social consequence.<sup>106</sup>

Presidential administrations throughout the years have cast different characters in executive and legislative positions involving education, which in turn have created change, redirection, or elimination of educational related entities. The national political leadership transition has provided an appropriate structure in the political process for which changes of educational policy formation can be viewed.<sup>107</sup>

Education is primarily the legal and financial responsibility of both state and local entities. In the past several years, the federal role in schools, throughout the nation, has grown exponentially since the mid-twentieth century. State and federal interactions in educational policy have become increasingly complex as well.<sup>108</sup> The intent of federal educational policy is to promote the national goals for language minority students, while the responsibility remains with the local education agencies. The local education agency is in control of both the design and the implementation of programs and is the entity eligible for securing the different grants available to implement this national initiative.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ann M. Wiese and Eugene E. Garcia. "The Bilingual Education Act: Language Minority Students and Equal Educational Opportunity." *Bilingual Research Journal*, v22 n1 p1-18 Winter 1998.

## Special Education Policy

During the 1950s and 1960s, initial federal response was targeted toward providing support to families with children who had disabilities. Advocacy groups and strong support family associations began to develop practices for children with disabilities and established foundations for the implementation of effective programs, early intervention services, and special education, at both the state and local levels.<sup>110</sup> There existed legal mandates which were unfunded by the federal government, requiring schools to provide special education services for students emotionally, physically, and mentally handicapped.<sup>111</sup>

Since the Kennedy administration, special education for disabled children had begun to receive attention in Congress. In 1967, Congress passed P.L. 90-31 and P.L. 90-170, laws that targeted Mental Health and Mental Retardation, specifically written to serve mentally handicapped students. The following year, Congress passed a requirement that all campuses eliminate all architectural barriers that made it difficult for children with physical handicaps and passed the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act (P.L. 90-538). This Act included assistance for handicapped children, beginning at age three.<sup>112</sup> Astonishingly, in 1970 only one of five students with disabilities was being educated in U.S. public schools. At the time, there were many states with laws excluding students who were blind, emotionally disturbed, deaf, or mentally retarded.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> "Archived: A 25 Year History of the IDEA." Ed.Gov. 2007. available from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history.html> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>111</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Archived: A 25 Year History of the IDEA 2007.



The pace for legislation affecting disabled children increased during the 1970s. In 1974, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act allocated federal aid to special education.<sup>114</sup>

The passage of the landmark Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (P.L. 94-142) dramatically increased the commitment of categorical aid for special education. By the time this law came into effect, special education referrals had increased. The numbers of these students needing special services doubled after the law was passed. The idea behind the “zero-rejection” clause was that all handicapped students, regardless of their extent of disability were entitled to placement and were not to be denied the services that he or she was entitled.<sup>115</sup>

Before EHA was law, children with special needs were being excluded entirely from the public school system. Over one million disabled children were left with no access to public education.<sup>116</sup> In 1975, the United States Congress enacted the Education for Handicapped Children Act (EHA), which ensured that handicapped children attending public schools would get one free meal for each school day and would have just access to education. It was further stipulated in law that all campuses accepting federal funding would be required to provide services to special education children.<sup>117</sup> Before the enactment of P.L. 94-142, the fate of many children with disabilities was gloomy. Many of these individuals lived in state institutions for persons with mental illness or mental retardation.<sup>118</sup>

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act defined the qualifications to be considered a disabled student, which included both mental and physical disabilities. This Act

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<sup>114</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>115</sup> Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 2009.

<sup>116</sup> “EHA-Education for All Handicapped Children Act .” *Special Education News*. 2012. available from <http://www.specialednews.com/special-education-dictionary/eha---education-for-all-handicapped-children-act.htm> (accessed August 10, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Archived: A 25 Year History of the IDEA 2007.

also required that lesson plans be created for the different disabilities with the main goal of creating lesson plans similar to those students that were able minded and able bodied.<sup>119</sup> EHA also required that school districts establish an official division that would hear parent complaints of students with disabilities. This administrative division was to ensure that the education of these students was being provided in a fair manner. This system was to be in place for parents in order to help resolve complaints.<sup>120</sup>

This Act eventually evolved to what is now titled Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It was designed to provide parents with the exclusive method to inquire about remedies for any obstacles in the fair education of their disabled child.<sup>121</sup> The updates to this Act included the scope of early intervention and the services provided to children in special education and with disabilities. IDEA was a legal remedy for states and the school districts offering education remedies for children from the early childhood to high school. This law evolved from the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, looking at how the federal system attempted to find solutions on how public schools would provide students with disabilities similar opportunities to those of regular students.<sup>122</sup> IDEA has supported the provision of instruction that is culturally relevant to diverse learners, mainstreamed in the educational setting, and has supported the development and validation of culturally relevant intervention practices and assessments.<sup>123</sup>

More amendments to IDEA have evolved within the law. The details and terms were included in the Code of Federal Regulations. Congress provided detailed intentions of the amendments and stipulated that each student with a disability be provided a Free and

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Archived: A 25 Year History of the IDEA 2007.

Appropriate Education that would provide them the opportunity to become employed and lead a self-sufficient life.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> EHA-Education for All Handicapped Children Act 2012.

CHAPTER III  
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

**Introduction**

This study was designed to provide an understanding of the social and educational barriers that affected Mexican American students in San Benito, Texas during the hundred-year period, taking a snapshot of the ninth year of each decade between 1909 and 2009. This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have defined qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to self.

At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena, in terms of the meanings people bring to them.<sup>125</sup>

Creswell also offers his definition of qualitative research by saying, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”<sup>126</sup> These researchers offer definitions based on their views on the reality of what

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<sup>125</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Third Edition* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005).

<sup>126</sup> John W. Creswell. *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc., 2007) 37.

individuals interacting in their social worlds perceive to be true.<sup>127</sup> This study takes into account not only archived historical information, but also the perceived realities of interviewed participants. The review of recorded information including board minutes and high school yearbooks will also be important in addressing the research questions. Researchers in qualitative studies in education, “simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved.”<sup>128</sup> More recently, historical studies relative to the residents of the Rio Grande Valley have been conducted by Fridie (2006), Rivera (2008), and DeLeon Edwards (2011). These studies sought to uncover inequities that existed for minority students.

### **Research Questions**

An interest in knowing if Mexican American students had equal access to all school related opportunities during the existence of the San Benito School District drives this research to answer the questions below. The questions used to guide this qualitative research study were:

1. What educational barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009?
2. What social barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009?

### **Research Design**

The purpose of historical research is to help the reader understand a particular event in time by providing them with an in-depth description of the data as well as an interpretation of this same data.<sup>129</sup> Gay and Airasian (2003) define historical research as “studying,

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<sup>127</sup> Sharan B. Merriam. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 6 .

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>129</sup> L. R. Gay and Peter Airasian. *Educational Research Competencies for Analysis and*

understanding, and interpreting past events.”<sup>130</sup> This research study is a historical case study design. The historical case study contains primary and secondary source materials used to describe programs, practices, or institutions, as they evolved over a period of time.<sup>131</sup> Primary sources of data include the use of original documents and persons who have firsthand accounts of the information, while secondary sources are providers of information that is through intermediary or information that is interpreted by someone other than a primary source.<sup>132</sup> Like all qualitative approaches, historical research requires the researcher to do more than simply gather and present data; it also requires the researcher to interpret the information.<sup>133</sup>

### **Data Sources and Collection**

Data for this study was collected from a variety of sources. The researcher used oral interviews and email questionnaires/surveys with adult participants, over the age of 18, as one source of data gathering. The individuals interviewed in person, via telephone, or by email were former students, staff, or board members of San Benito CISD. A review of the high school yearbooks assisted to identify potential participants to interview. Random Purposive Sampling was used in this study. This procedure is typically used with small samples and to interview those who are best suited to answer the research questions. Gay and Airasian (2003) explain that a qualitative researcher’s insights help guide the selection of participants, which is generally small, purposive samples.<sup>134</sup> The researcher identified students, teachers, administrators, and board members who were a part of the school district using Purposive Sampling. This method

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*Applications* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003), 173.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>131</sup> Merriam, 35.

<sup>132</sup> Gay and Airasian, 2003, 15.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 117.

also enabled the researcher to review high school yearbooks to identify potential participants for this study.

The researcher prepared a set of interview questions specific to the role of the participant in this study, as a former alumni, or school official (See Appendix A). Audio recordings as well as emailed questionnaires/surveys assisted the researcher in collecting and maintaining the data, were transcribed by the researcher for analysis and identification of themes. Prior to any data collections, the proposed study was submitted for approval to the IRB of UTPA. Once IRB approval was received, the participants were contacted by telephone, email, general mail, or in person, to set an appointment to conduct the interview.

Several archived collections in the San Benito school district were accessed for collection and analysis of data. Among these archived collections were the minutes from previous school board meetings. This data was reviewed for information about decisions made by school district leadership regarding the education of Mexican American students in snapshots of ten year intervals, beginning with 1909, 1919, 1929...2009. The high school yearbook, "El Sendero", was accessed as part of the data collection process for viewing and analyzing the participation of Mexican American students in sports, service clubs, and academic clubs in ten year intervals as well, beginning with the year 1909, 1919, 1929, and continuing in ten year intervals ending in 2009. Any publications, books, newspapers including the *San Benito News*, *Brownsville Herald*, *Valley Morning Star*, and photographs, all which pertained to the study, were also reviewed for consideration of relevancy to the research and use in the study.

Websites of the San Benito school district, including Alumni databases, Texas Education Agency, and Texas History Online were also used in obtaining historical recounts of events that

occurred in the early years, as well as the current times, including retrieval of demographic information that might be available on the city and school district.

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (1998) defines data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data...and is the process of making meaning.”<sup>135</sup> Merriam (1998) also assists the researcher by further identifying the forms of qualitative data analysis, which include themes, concepts, theory, categories, typologies, and tentative hypothesis.<sup>136</sup> The researcher collected relevant information through interviews conducted in person, by telephone, or through emailed questionnaires/surveys, using a series of prepared questions. The oral interviews were audio taped and then transcribed by the researcher. The emailed interviews were included with the transcribed data for analysis and inclusion with the audio recorded transcriptions and were analyzed to identify emerging themes for further analysis and organization.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study include the amount of and access to historical records as they related to the school district. Additionally, the study was limited to a single school district in South Texas, which until the mid 1950s had a majority enrollment of Mexican American students. And finally, the information on only one particular school district located in deep South Texas cannot be generalized to any other situations.

### **Strategies for Validating Findings**

Ensuring the credibility of any research study assumes the study was conducted in a valid, reliable, ethical manner, and that the researcher is accountable for these attributes.<sup>137</sup> Internal validity plays an important role in qualitative research. Merriam (1998) asks a series of

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<sup>135</sup> Merriam, 178.

<sup>136</sup> *ibid*, 7-8.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 198.



important questions when discussing internal validity, such as “how congruent are the findings with reality,” and “are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring.”<sup>138</sup> It is therefore crucial that the researcher understand the importance of these strategies in validation by careful listening and by creating accurate recordings of the information obtained during the interviews along with checking for understanding of the questions posed to the interviewees. Providing transcribed copies of the interview to the participants for validation of content and accuracy is equally important. Triangulation, as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) in validating qualitative research may include different data sources such as interviews, census data, documents, and other methods in an effort to validate the findings.<sup>139</sup> The researcher used triangulation to strengthen this qualitative research study, and used multiple data sources such as data from board minutes, yearbooks, books, and newspapers, as well as data from the interviews, all of which supported this research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The behavior of the researcher in conducting the research study in an ethical manner was always a major concern. Merriam (1998) addresses the issue by saying that in qualitative studies, “ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings.”<sup>140</sup> While this may be true, Gay and Airasian (2003) also address the issue of ethics by describing circumstances that can add to this dilemma, such as the fact that qualitative studies tend to change and evolve over time as the researcher becomes more involved and engrossed in the study, and the relationship between the researcher and subject tends to become stronger, increasing the possibility of bias.<sup>141</sup> Having respect for oneself and one’s

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>139</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, 963.

<sup>140</sup> Merriam, 213.

<sup>141</sup> Gay and Airasian, 84-85.

participants is a manner in which the researcher maintained integrity for himself, his participants, and his study.<sup>142</sup>

The researcher assured ethical conduct by taking specific measures. The research began by acquiring permission from the participants prior to conducting the interview. Interviews were conducted in an environment in which the participants felt an adequate level of comfort. Such environments included being interviewed at their own residence or at a public location of choice. The researcher checked for understanding when asking the interview questions. The researcher also provided accurate recording and reporting of information obtained by careful transcription of the interview and verification of said information by the interviewee. The researcher remained objective by paying careful attention to the detail of the information obtained from both oral interviews and transcribed records, and by verifying validation and accuracy with the interviewed participants.

### **Timeline**

The researcher submitted Chapters 1-3 to committee co-chairs during the third week in April 2012 for consideration of a dissertation proposal defense during the month of May 2012. Upon successful completion of the dissertation proposal defense, the researcher sought to complete all requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Texas Pan American. Upon approval of the study by the IRB, and completion of the IRB requirements, data collection began in August 2012. Immediately following approval of the IRB, a request for public information was sent to the superintendent of schools for the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District, asking for access to the recorded minutes of prior board meetings and high school yearbooks, for the period 1909-2009.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 85.

As part of the research, data collection on students, staff members, and board members, who were a part of the San Benito school district for the same time period 1909-2009, were identified for the purpose of conducting interviews, in person, by telephone, and/or through emailed questionnaires/surveys.

Interviews began in August 2012, and information was transcribed by the researcher. Upon completion of the interview transcriptions and collection of questionnaires/surveys, the researcher proceeded to code, identify emergent themes, and analyze data. Data was analyzed during the early part of December 2012 for completion of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of this research study.

The researcher completed data analysis in early February 2013 and submitted Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 in mid-February 2013. This was to secure a final dissertation defense in early April 2013, and thus successfully completing the requirements for graduation from the Educational Leadership Program of the University of Texas-Pan American with a doctoral degree.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

While there have been research studies that focus on minority populations all over the United States, the focus of this particular study is only of South Texas, specifically Mexican American students in the San Benito School District in San Benito, Texas. This study examined specific snapshots in time for each decade, the progression of educational and social opportunities over a one hundred year period in the San Benito School District. Sources accessed to conduct this study included, but were not limited to, school district board minutes, high school yearbooks, alumni databases, newspaper articles, publications, and personal accounts from former students, and former and current teachers, administrators, and board members of the district, through interviews and/or questionnaires/surveys.

Qualitative by design, this study analyzed information on the San Benito School District using recorded minutes from district board meetings and high school yearbooks, all in ten year intervals, specifically the ninth year of each decade. In an attempt to provide a better foundation of understanding how the school district began, the first three years of board minutes were analyzed and included in this study. In circumstances where a yearbook might not have been published or available to access, data from the prior year or following year was used for inclusion in this study. Themes were identified through personal accounts obtained by interviews conducted in person, by telephone, or by emailed questionnaires/surveys of former Mexican American high school students, as well as former or current school district teachers,

administrators, or board members who were identified through high school yearbooks or alumni databases.

### **Archived Findings**

A comprehensive review of the school board minutes for the meetings of the San Benito School District Board of Trustees was reviewed, analyzed, and summarized in intervals of the ninth year of each decade for the periods 1909 to 2009, as a means to view the actions taken by the board as it affected students. A look at the school district leadership inclusive of the board of trustees, superintendents, and principals was also included for review and analysis in order to disclose the decisions these top level of executive decision makers made on behalf of the San Benito School District over this time period. Along with a look at the board minutes and leadership of the district, information on students from San Benito High School yearbooks was also reviewed and presented in summary form for the same time periods in intervals of ten years, selecting the ninth year of each decade for analysis.

### **School Board Minutes**

A review of the minutes from the San Benito Independent School District Board of Trustee meetings reflected the changes that occurred over the last ten decades, and how the school district evolved over time. The impact that decisions from this top executive level of decision makers had on students was also revealed. The minutes from the board meetings were summarized in intervals of ten years, particularly the ninth year of each decade, beginning with 1909 and ending in 2009, identifying those actions that affected educational and social opportunities for students. However, minutes from 1910 and 1911 board meetings were analyzed and included as well in order to expand the review of decisions affecting the educational institution at its inception. This information was organized by tables, for

corresponding years, with a summary of the actions taken by the board that followed each time period presented. A brief introduction of events related to public education at the state and national level prefaced the analysis of the school board meeting minutes to help set the context for decisions the school board made. Consider the information presented regarding state and national decisions on education, it was important to note that the summary of local actions were just a snapshot from that particular decade and may not directly reflect these same actions, which may have been reflected in other years throughout that same decade.

### **1900s**

As was mentioned earlier in this study, the Texas Constitution of 1845 advocated for public education. The public school system was initially funded by setting aside 2 million of the 10 million dollars that Texas received in 1850 for relinquishing rights to land north and west of its present boundaries. The Texas legislature continued to work diligently to identify other tax revenues that would help fund public education. The summary of the minutes from the first school board meeting in 1909, describe how the board took the necessary actions to create the school district, as well as actions to help fund it. The board called for an election to levy taxes, thus creating financial support for establishing and maintaining the school district. The board employed their first superintendent who was not only responsible for student academics, but was also acting as their Assessor & Collector. These initial actions were all in accordance with the Texas Constitution and necessary for the creation and operation of this newly created school district.

Between 1900 and 1919, Texas continued to show progress toward improving education in the state, and records show that in 1900, 526 independent school districts existed in the

state.<sup>143</sup> In an attempt to provide consistency and accuracy of instructional materials, a state textbook selection board was created that was responsible for selecting textbooks used in public schools. However, the state did not fund textbooks and believed it was the responsibility of the parents to acquire them. It wasn't until 1918 that a constitutional amendment was passed that declared ad valorem state taxes to be used for schools to provide free textbooks to their students.<sup>144</sup>

Texas was moving forward in the area of education and in an effort to improve this process, called for a major statewide conference on education that would bring about the transformation of rural schools throughout the state.<sup>145</sup>

What was found in the summary of events for 1910, 1911 and 1919, as San Benito worked to establish their own school district were that the minutes for these early years reflected actions by the board that would be considered normal in conducting business required to establish and operate a new school district.

Table 1 provides an overview of the actions in the very first meeting of the board of trustees for the newly created San Benito Independent School District, with a summary that follows.

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<sup>143</sup> Texas Education Agency n.d. available from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=148> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>144</sup> *Texas Public Schools 1854-1954: Centennial Handbook* available from [www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=6509](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=6509) (accessed October 9, 2012).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid

Table 1 School Board Agenda Items 1909

April 17, 1909	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first meeting of the San Benito Independent School District was called to order.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor R. F. Woodward is selected as the Assessor and Collector for the district, as well as the principal and superintendent.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor Woodward is directed by the board to find suitable teachers for the district.</li> <li>• Board conducts an election to levy taxes</li> <li>• A special meeting is called as A. E. Purvis resigns his position on the board, and John T. Lomax is appointed for the remainder of his term.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B. McKennon was offered a contract to build a school that was to be 24 X 90 feet in size and to rent the same for a 9 month period at a rate of \$50.00 per month.</li> <li>• A previous offer of employment to teach was declined by Mrs. D. P. Holt, at which time the board extended an offer to Miss Hamilton at \$70.00 per month.</li> <li>• Mrs. Sizemore also resigned her position as teacher and the board engaged Miss Lastingen at a salary of \$60.00 per month for a nine month period.</li> <li>• The board meets to adopt the courses for the high school.</li> <li>• The board considers charging tuition for students not living within the district boundaries.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special meeting to award the district depository contract, which was awarded to the State Bank of San Benito.</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• F. C. Van Ness resigns as Secretary of the Board and John T. Lomax is appointed.</li> <li>• November 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> are designated as school holidays in observance of Thanksgiving.</li> <li>• Heaters are being considered for each school.</li> <li>• Meetings are scheduled to be held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month, unless the 10<sup>th</sup> falls on a legal holiday. If so, meetings move to the 11<sup>th</sup>.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T. H. Sherer is employed as a teacher at \$65.00 a month for the remainder of the year.</li> <li>• School is to be dismissed for two weeks, beginning December 17, 1909 through January 2, 1910.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited



## **1909 Organizing the San Benito School District**

Action to create an Independent School District in the city of San Benito for the children of the community came about for the first time in April of 1909. Under the leadership of a newly elected Board of Trustees, consisting of Charles E. Barber (President), F. C. Van Ness (Secretary), W. B. Hinkley (Treasurer), and members Col. Alba Heywood, R. McChesney, A. E. Purvis, and C. M. McCormick, the San Benito Independent School District was born. One of the first orders of business for this board was to select an educational leader for the district. The board selected Professor R. F. Woodward to act as superintendent, principal and assessor collector for the district. Professor Woodward was to be compensated at a monthly salary of \$125.00 for a nine-month period.

In July, the board conducted a successful election to levy taxes at 50 cents per \$100 of property value for district property owners. This election was held for the purpose of purchasing land, and to construct and equip two public schools. These two schools were to be constructed of brick material.

Architect B. McKennon was offered a contract in September to build a structure that was to be 24 ft. X 90 ft. in size that would be rented to the school district at a rate of \$50 per month, for a nine month period.

Teacher employment issues were considered by the board, as Mrs. D. P. Holt had declined an offer of employment and Mrs. Sizemore resigned her teaching position. The board extended a teaching position to Miss Hamilton at \$70.00 per month for a nine-month period as well as Miss Lastingen at \$60.00 per month for nine months.

The Board of Trustees met to adopt required courses for the high school. A decision was made that all first year high school students would enroll in English, ancient history, Latin,

algebra, arithmetic, and spelling. Second year students would continue with course work in English, medieval & modern history, Latin, geometry, German, French or Spanish, and spelling. Textbooks are purchased with the understanding that they are to be considered property of the district.

The board also established tuition for those students not living within the boundaries of the school district. It was determined that a fee of \$1.00 per month would be assessed for students in the primary grade levels, \$1.25 for those students in the intermediate grade levels, and \$1.50 per month for students at the high school grade level.

November's meeting found the board designating November 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> as holidays in observance of Thanksgiving. The board also considered the purchase of heaters for each of the schools. It was decided that meetings of the Board of Trustees for the San Benito Independent School District would be regularly scheduled for the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month.

The board also decided in December that school was to be dismissed for a two week period beginning December 17, 2009, ending January 2, 1910, for Christmas.

Table 2 School Board Agenda Items 1910

January 1910	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district purchases land from the San Benito Land &amp; Water Co. for \$1,500.00.</li> <li>• Alba Heywood resigns his position from the board.</li> <li>• The First State Bank of San Benito is awarded the contract for the district depository of funds.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R. Beford is appointed to fill the recent vacancy by Alba Heywood.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issue of Small Pox is discussed and preventative measures as safety precautions.</li> <li>• The call for a May 7<sup>th</sup> election for the board is ordered, and S. B. Householder is appointed presiding judge and allowed to appoint 2 clerks to assist him.</li> <li>• Board orders the board secretary to inform M. Sherer and Miss Gladys Lestinger to be more prompt in their attendance.</li> <li>• Mr. W. B. Hinkly resigns as assessor collector and board appoints J. R. Collins.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The results of the May 7<sup>th</sup> election are presented.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1910 Progress Continues**

January began with the Board of Trustees for the San Benito Independent School District purchasing land from the San Benito Land and Water Co. for the construction of school buildings for a sum of \$1,500.00. The board also accepted the bid from the First State Bank of San Benito to act as the depository of funds for the San Benito Independent School District.

An epidemic of Small Pox became the major topic in April for the board, as they discussed safety precautions and preventative measures of this outbreak. The board ordered the principal to require all students that had, or were suspected to have been exposed to small pox refrain from coming to class until further notice by the board. Teachers and students were required to be cleared by physician prior to their return. Once cleared, they could return to school on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Board declared that students living on the East side of the canal attend East side schools, and that students living on the West side of the canal attend West side schools. Furthermore, the board requires that non-compliance of these directives be reported directly to them.

Teachers M. Sherer and Miss Gladys Lestinger were directed by the board in an April meeting to be more prompt in their attendance. The canvassing of the May election results placed John T. Lomax, F. C. Van Ness, R. Bedford, and John M. Breen on the San Benito Independent School District Board of Trustees. Professor Woodward was once again elected as principal and superintendent by the board of trustees. Teachers K. Purvis, E. Johnson, G. Lestinger, N. Hohnson, N. Kiringtinson, and Nora K. were also elected for the following school year.

June was a big month with the board approving plans for the construction of two new school buildings at a cost of \$20,500 for both. The Mexican School had a new principal elected

in July. E. E. Shirar is offered a salary of \$75.00 per month. Miss Lestingier resigned her teaching position.

In August, the board ordered schools to open on October 3, 1910 and asked that all students and teachers report to their school on that day. The board also directs the Building Committee to inquire about the addition of toilets to the school buildings. Fire Insurance was also to be acquired for the two schools, in the amount of \$8,000 for the high school, and \$2,000 for the Mexican school.

Table 3 School Board Agenda Items 1911

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher is hired.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board allows Mexican School for Church Services.</li> <li>• Board declares a holiday.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delinquent Tax List Published</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board hears a discipline issue.</li> <li>• Boy's Band to use auditorium.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers elected for the upcoming year.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board member resigns.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1911 School Operations Progress**

The year continued with regular board decisions regarding normal district operations. January began with Professor Woodward employing one teacher for the year, Miss Cowgill at a salary of \$60.00 for a nine-month period.

In March, the board considered a request from W. A. Ross to use the Mexican School to conduct Sunday school and for preaching services. Professor Shirar was to meet with Mr. Ross to make arrangements for the use of this facility. The board also declared March a holiday that is to be used for clean up.

A student found himself before the board in May, as E. E. was ordered to make a public apology for disobeying the instructions of his teacher or to receive a whipping, prior to him being considered for reinstatement to school. The board also permitted the Boys Band use of the auditorium for practice. The board asked for estimated costs of lighting and janitorial services to be provided.

The remainder of the summer was business as usual as the board considered teachers for the upcoming school year for a nine month period at a salary of \$60.00 per month. School board Trustee F. C. Van Ness resigned and the board appointed Frank Parr. The principal resigned as well. A contract with the Texas Seating Co. was approved for the purchase of seats.

Table 4 School Board Agenda Items 1919

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lateral “T” School is ordered to be closed due to small attendance.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Depository of Funds for the district is the San Benito Bank &amp; Trust</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent J. H. Head attends National Education Association meeting.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

### **1919 Not Much Happening**

There was not much out of the ordinary happening in the District as far as the few board minutes recorded for the year revealed. The superintendent reported on his attendance at the National Education Association meeting and presented a list of teachers for employment.

The bid for the school district depository was awarded to the San Benito Bank & Trust in September 1919 and the board made the decision to close the Lateral “T” school due to attendance.

### **1920s**

The 1920s continued to show progress toward improving education for students. The Texas legislature ordered the first school survey in 1923 to be conducted on Texas public schools by experts from out of state in an effort to improve education. Also in 1923, the state superintendent of public instruction convinced the legislature to a 35 percent increase in per capita for financial support of public schools and also asked the legislatures to consider establishing a state board of education comprised of laymen, which they did. However, in 1928

the law changed to include a nine member board appointed by the governor with approval of the Senate.<sup>146</sup>

While Table 5 may not necessarily reflect the actions at the state level, it reflects a variety of actions by the board including the recognition of minority students in the district.

Table 5 School Board Agenda Items 1929

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board approves a bill for payment to Dr. Brown for services to a Mexican boy who got hurt on the playground be paid.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board elects Phelps &amp; Dewees as architects of the Building Program.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching staff is discussed with Superintendent Yoe.</li> <li>• Board authorized Superintendent Yoe to employ a high school principal.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board elects teaching staff for the Senior High, Junior High, South Ward, and Mexiquita Schools.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board sets school start date for September 9<sup>th</sup>.</li> <li>• Resignation of Coach W. E. Morrison accepted</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of the Negro School Building is considered</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Band Instruments are considered.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fires Drills are ordered to be organized.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent Yoe provides board with comprehensive report on the district operations.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

<sup>146</sup> “Handbook of Texas Online” n.d. available from [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/MM/fma51.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/MM/fma51.html) (accessed March 11, 2013).



## **1929 Minority Students Acknowledged**

For the first time in this study Mexican American and Negro Students were considered in the board minutes of 1929. A bill from a local physician for services to a “Mexican boy”, for an injury sustained on the playground was presented for payment. The board continued to recognize construction needs of the district and acquired the architectural services of Phelps & Dewees in March to work with the Building Committee.

Superintendent Yoe was authorized to employ a high school principal for a salary not to exceed \$2,600.00 per year. In April, the board elected teachers for the senior high, junior high, South Ward, and Mexiquita Schools. During the July meeting, the board asked for a study to be conducted on school attendance for the previous five to six years. The board also asked for a study to be conducted on the Negro School Building to expand it to a capacity of forty pupils and to also consider the possibility of connecting the toilet to the sewer.

Band instruments were the topic during September’s meeting, when the board authorized the President to look into acquiring band instruments for the school “gratis”. The President was also directed to purchase a bass drum and bass horn if need be. Mr. H. H. Livingston was awarded \$25.00 per month for instructing the band.

Superintendent Yoe provided the board with a comprehensive report on enrollment, attendance and curriculum of the district. The enrollment for the schools was as follows: Senior High enrollment 230, Junior High enrollment at 283, South Ward at 495, Mexiquita at 706, and the Colored school at 26.

## **1930s**

In the 1930s, Texas was rapidly increasing in the number of school districts throughout the state. In 1935 the State Board of Education, commissioned a study on school district

consolidation.<sup>147</sup> Three years later, in 1938, the results of this study were revealed which were quickly opposed by conservative elements that delayed the systematic implementation of a radical consolidation plan.<sup>148</sup> In 1936, the Department of Agriculture began providing schools with surplus from farm commodities for school lunches.<sup>149</sup>

Again, the recap of the board minutes for 1939 may not have necessarily reflected these actions at the state level, but it was important to know what was happening in education on a larger scale.

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<sup>147</sup> “Texas Education Timeline,” available from [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&ved=0CDsQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tea.state.tx.us%2FWorkArea%2Flinkit.aspx%3FLinkIdentifier%3Ddid%26ItemID%3D6509&ei=kplIUufq1E-WAiwL6lIDoAg&usg=AFQjCNEmsQuvvqfIaqTOACB9Ez\\_Bq7ZkYA&sig2=tiPIKOPY1nNSXfH\\_cBXRhA&bvm=bv.44442042,d.cGE](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&ved=0CDsQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tea.state.tx.us%2FWorkArea%2Flinkit.aspx%3FLinkIdentifier%3Ddid%26ItemID%3D6509&ei=kplIUufq1E-WAiwL6lIDoAg&usg=AFQjCNEmsQuvvqfIaqTOACB9Ez_Bq7ZkYA&sig2=tiPIKOPY1nNSXfH_cBXRhA&bvm=bv.44442042,d.cGE) (accessed March 12, 2013).

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

Table 6 School Board Agenda Items 1939

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational Education Program is discussed.</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charro Days is designated as a holiday.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special board meeting to consider an ROTC Program.</li> <li>• New superintendent elected.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special board meeting to discuss superintendent position.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers are elected for the upcoming school year.</li> <li>• A new Nurse is elected upon resignation of Miss Lambert.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board meets to discuss budget for upcoming school year.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition for students in outlying districts is considered.</li> <li>• Budget hearing conducted.</li> <li>• Tentative calendar discussed.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board approves the purchase of a moving picture projector for school purposes only.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absences for Teachers due to family deaths are discussed.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy regarding the use of school facilities is modified.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

### **1939 A New Era**

In 1939, the district seemed to be moving forward in their progress. The board began the year with a discussion regarding their Vocational Education Program, and the requirements of having such a program. It seemed that the Vocational Education Program was in jeopardy of losing state funding on February 1, 1939, and decisions regarding the reassignment of the teacher to Fred Booth School would have to be made.

It was a year for “firsts” in the school district, as the board discussed the Charro Days Celebration in Brownsville, electing to designate that day as a holiday for teachers and students.

For the first time, the board considered an application by the local Legion Post to establish an ROTC program in the San Benito Schools.

The position of superintendent was offered to Mr. F. C. McConnell in March, with a contract for a two-year period beginning July 1, 1939, at a yearly salary of \$3,600.00, pending release from the Weslaco School District. During the April meeting, the board received notice from Mr. F. C. McConnell by telegram, that he would withdraw his name from consideration, as he had accepted a similar offer in Gladewater. The board followed by inviting Mr. Grady St. Clair, Dean of the Brownsville Junior College, to join them in a conversation about employment with the San Benito Independent School District as their superintendent. Upon agreement, the board offered the position to Mr. St. Clair who later accepted.

Tuition was once again considered by the board. The board agreed that the outlying districts pay tuition for their students to attend high school, or the students would not be enrolled.

Policy was the topic for the October meeting. The board agreed that absences for teachers, due to a death in their immediate family, would not be considered for payroll deduction.

In the December meeting, the board discussed the Policy that addresses the use of school facilities. Modifications were made to policy to include the use of facilities for social functions and include the use of the gymnasium or cafeteria for invitational affairs. The board ordered that the use of all facilities be approved by the superintendent. The board further required that there be no smoking in these facilities and a curfew of 12 o'clock be enforced.

The remainder of the year continued with business as usual. Teachers were elected, the school nurse was replaced due to resignation and the board adopted a budget for the following school year.

## 1940s

Major education reform would occur in 1947 with the formation of the Gilmer Akin Committee by the Texas Legislature for the purpose of major reform to the way public schools were financed. The report would be issued in 1948 titled, “To Have What We Must” and would outline proposals for school district reorganization.<sup>150</sup> 1948 would be a year in which a major impact on Mexican American students would occur, as the district court judge rules against segregation of Mexican American students in public schools in the case Delgado vs. Bastrop ISD

The Gilmer-Akin Law of 1949 would have major reform on education. It created the Texas Education Agency and amended the State Board of Education membership from 9 members appointed by the governor, to 21 members elected by popular vote. The 21 members would appoint a commissioner of education for a four year term, as well as create the state’s first minimum salary schedule for teachers.<sup>151</sup>

The summary of board minutes for the year 1949 reflected actions based on the local needs of the district and not necessarily as a result of statewide actions. Nevertheless, major events occurred at the state level such as the ruling against segregation of Mexican American students.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Table 7 School Board Agenda Items 1949

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Fred Booth School Building is being considered for revision of its facilities.</li> <li>• Col. Ed Downs donates a four acre tract of land.</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All principals were appointed as Census Trustees.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board appoints members to serve on select committees.</li> <li>• Teachers were recommended for employment by principals.</li> <li>• W. M. Jordan elected as junior high principal.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drivers Education was discussed.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition is once again considered.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighting for the football field is considered.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board considers moving the Negro School and making necessary repairs.</li> <li>• A new head of the Athletic Department is named.</li> <li>• Board agrees to pay for part of the costs to pave Rose Street.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board enters into negotiations for lots for the Negro School. Board sets a maximum purchase of \$2,300.00.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent Pritchett is asked to ensure that all teachers are certified.</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Payday is set to the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month for teachers.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1949 Business as Usual**

The Board of Trustees had a typical year of items that could be considered “business as usual”. The year began in January with the board taking into consideration plans for revisions to the Fred Booth Elementary building. Col. Ed Downs presented a four-acre tract of land to be donated on his behalf to the school district. The Board accepted the gift from Col. Downs and further stipulated that a new school be constructed within a three year period and be named Ed Downs Ward School.

In February, the principals of all campuses were assigned the additional duty of Census Trustees. Superintendent Neely presented recommendations for the employment of teachers, a \$500.00 expense for the athletic field, and the purchase of tests for the elementary schools.

The board took further action in April to appoint members of the board to serve on committees, including Building, Finance, and Representative Athletic Council. They also employed a new Athletic Director, Jim Barnes, as well as a new junior high principal, W. M. Jordan.

Leading into the summer months, the board considered a Driver’s Education Program for the high school students for the 1949-1950 academic years. Tuition was once again a topic of discussion and a new fee of \$108.00 was approved.

August brought about a discussion regarding the Negro School and consideration to moving it was discussed, as well as consideration to making necessary repairs to the building. The board agreed later in September to proceed with negotiations to purchase lots for the Negro School with a maximum purchase allowance of \$2,300.00.

As the new school year started, the board directed Superintendent Pritchett to ensure that all teachers were certified. The board discussed the newly proposed budget, and the pay day was set for the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month.

## **1950s**

In the 1950s, major issues regarding segregation came to light and an era of change began. A milestone at the national level in the landmark case, *Brown vs. Board of Education in Topeka* occurred. It banned racial segregation in public schools in 1954 affecting the entire nation. In 1958, the National Defense Education Act was passed in response to Sputnik and funds were to be used to target specific areas including science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages. Texas witnessed the first State Commissioner of Education, J. W. Edgar, sworn in to office, and J. W. Edgar served in this position until 1974.<sup>152</sup>

In 1959, school board minutes reflected actions to address local needs were priority. Additional actions later in the year addressed the area of science, a national initiative of the time. An action addressing the integration of White and Negro students was also an item on the board agenda.

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<sup>152</sup> *ibid*, 26.



Table 8 School Board Agenda Items 1959

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board and Welch Chevrolet enter into an agreement for the use of a pickup for FFA.</li> <li>• School Patrons ask board to pave an “all weather” road for school bus use.</li> <li>• Land purchase to be considered by board.</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidewalks to be constructed at North and South Fred Booth Elementary.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom addition approved at Dr. Cash Elementary.</li> <li>• Teachers elected for the school year.</li> <li>• Tentative calendar approved.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High School tennis courts to be resurfaced.</li> <li>• Board issues Revenue Bonds for stadium facilities.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board directs superintendent to apply for funding for science equipment.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welch Chevrolet and SBCISD enter into an agreement for a vehicle for the Drivers Education Program.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stadium bids were considered.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boy Scouts approved to use bus.</li> <li>• Board meets in special meeting to secure loan for August payroll.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L. T. Boswell and SBCISD agreement for use of pickup truck for FFA program.</li> <li>• Resolution for integration of Colored Students with White Students presented for consideration.</li> <li>• Appointment of physicians to the Medical Advisory Committee.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy regarding Pregnancy discussed.</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board agrees to purchase additional lots for Frank Roberts Elementary.</li> <li>• Board meets in a special called meeting to approve annual financial audit.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repairs to high school auditorium were approved.</li> <li>• Board directs Building Committee to contact Catholic Church for use of their facilities for “trainable” children.</li> </ul>
January 1960	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special meeting of the board. To consider resolution for a dual system of education for White and Negro students.</li> </ul>

Source: Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1959 A Sensitive Time**

The years 1959 and 1960 were years in which sensitive issues regarding students and employees came before the board for action. Two major issues involving students were considered, allowing the integration of White and Negro students in school and the housing of “trainable” students at a Catholic Church facility.

The board was to consider adopting a Resolution that sent to the voters the issue of integration of White students with colored students who had attended Callandret Colored School, which was an all colored school. If approved, the action would take place effective September 1, 1960. At a special called board meeting, the board considered and approved a resolution that called for an election on the proposition of whether or not the dual system for White and Negro students be abolished and whether or not the school system should integrate the White and Negro students. The resolution further called for the election to take place on January 23, 1960. The proposition read, “Shall the Board of Trustees of San Benito Consolidated Independent School District be authorized to abolish the dual school system for White and Negro students as it now exists and integrate the school system for the White and Negro students.”

The other sensitive student issue of the time was the direction of the board to the Building Committee that was instructed to contact Father Joe Sammon with regard to the use of the Catholic Church for trainable children.

As it related to employees, the board also heard a complaint from Y. Garza who appeared before the board to ask that the policy regarding pregnancy be waived, and that the board allow her to teach through the first semester. The board agreed to make this policy effective January 15, 1960, but cautioned Y. Garza that should any complaints arise from parents regarding her condition, she would have to resign and leave.

Board approved construction projects continued throughout the year, including projects to repair the high school parking lot, six new classrooms for North Fred Booth, and the clearing of Lots 1 to 8, Block 15, Fourth Addition. The board approved the resurfacing of three old tennis courts at the high school. The board also approved the issuance of \$25,000.00 in Revenue Bonds for the construction of a stadium and related facilities at the high school Athletic Field. Stadium bids were also considered, but all 4 bids were rejected due to varying qualities of the redwood to be used in the stadium seating.

The board also considered regular agenda items in the usual course of business that included the approval of the annual financial audit, a tentative academic calendar for 1959-60, the election of teacher for the next school year, and the adoption of a budget.

## **1960s**

The 1960s witnessed monumental activity at both the state and national levels. In 1961 the State Board of Education was allowed to invest Permanent School Funds in securities including corporate bonds and common stock. The Vocational Act of 1963 provided for expansion of vocational training, including office and health occupations, agriculture, homemaking, distribution, and industrial education. The Head Start Program was created in 1964 to help disadvantage preschool children in Texas and the first bilingual program was implemented in the Laredo School District during that same year. In 1967, the state created regional service centers to act as state media libraries and instructional materials resource centers. The Texas school finance system was challenged in court through Rodriguez vs. Edgewood in which the district court ruled the state finance system unconstitutional, while the

U.S. Supreme Court reversed the district court decision to find the Texas funding system constitutional.<sup>153</sup>

At the national level, in 1965, Congress passed the largest ever appropriation to education through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) providing funding to public schools through title programs. Title 1 provided funding for underprivileged children, Title II for Libraries, textbooks and media support, Title III for Supplementary education center, Title IV for the area of education research and Title V for the State Department of Education.<sup>154</sup>

Through the analysis of the board minutes for the year 1969, there were more items of discussion as they related to the activities at both the state and national level.

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<sup>153</sup> *ibid*, 26.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid*, 27.

Table 9 School Board Agenda Items 1969

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High School expansion project report.</li> <li>• Adult Basic Education Program approved.</li> <li>• Free and Reduced meals for students adopted.</li> <li>• Expulsion Hearing Continues</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athletic budget approved.</li> <li>• Principal's assignments approved.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic calendar approved.</li> <li>• Bus use by Sunny Glen Children's Home approved.</li> <li>• Teacher contracts approved.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head Start budget approved.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welch Chevrolet agreement for Drivers Education approved.</li> <li>• Tuition set at \$150.00 for students outside the district.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Minimum Salary Schedule adopted.</li> <li>• Student Disciplinary regulations presented.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L. T. Boswell agreement with FFA for use of pickup truck approved.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Organizations concession applications approved.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom additions for Junior High approved.</li> <li>• Stipend criteria and pay approved.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board agrees to review current district policies.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1969 A Year for Secondary Students**

The year began with major considerations for expansion project of the high school to include making classrooms of the auditorium, a gymnasium, science, homemaking, and cafeteria. Board approved budget amendments to purchase steel lockers, Universal Gym Machine, and an aerator. Travel for the high school and junior high Band Directors to travel to Texas Music Educators Association Conference was approved. The board approved a budget for an Adult Basic Education Learning Center that included salaries for clerical, janitorial, teaching, supervisory staff, as well as operating expenses. Mayor of the City of San Benito, Chas T. Adams, Jr. asked the board to appoint a committee to consider a request from the Riverside School District to send their students to the San Benito High School. Board again approved agreement with Welch Chevrolet for the use of a vehicle for Driver's Education Instruction and an agreement for the use of a pickup truck for FFA with L.T. Boswell.

The biggest issue that occurred in January was a continuation of a prior act that occurred in November 1968. The board expelled a student for her participation in the use of marijuana, along with approximately 25 other students. N.T. was expelled for admitting to the use of marijuana. Her attorney claimed that the Board of Trustees did not have the legal authority to expel N.T. for more than one term of the scholastic school year because she was sixteen and compelled to attend school. They did not allow her the right to be represented by legal counsel, and the expulsion was carried out with the lack of due process. January was the 6<sup>th</sup> attempt by the board to meet with the parents and legal counsel for N.T.

Changes to Disciplinary Regulations were presented and approved by the board. Teacher salary schedules were approved for 1969-70. Board approved Supplemental Pay (stipends) in an amount not less than \$100 per teacher, nor more than \$1,000, for services performed in the

regular classroom during regular instructional time. Eligibility criteria were established to guide supplemental pay awards.

The board agreed to review and study current district policies. Principals Luther W. Archibald, for Dr. Cash Elementary & Ed Downs Elementary, and Kenneth N. Woods, Rangerville schools were approved, and Lucille Bandy was employed as the Director of Special Education. The State Minimum Salary Schedule was adopted for teachers.

### **1970s**

Major decisions at both the state level, as well as at the national level were extensive during the 1970s, as they related to public education. The State Board of Education set the minimum number of instructional days for students at 180. Senate Bill 121 in 1973 had a major impact on English Language Learners, as schools with 20 or more limited English speaking children in the same grade were required to have bilingual programs. 1975 also was a year that witnessed a major event in the implementation of House Bill 1126 which was the first state compensatory fund created to provide equalization aid to poor districts. Senate Bill 1, 1977, also sought to equalize funding for poor school districts. Increases in state funding continued in 1979 through Senate Bill 350, which provided for major increases in state funding, and established criterion referenced tests to assess students' minimum skills in the core content areas.<sup>155</sup>

At the national level, our Supreme Court ruled in *Serrano vs. Priest*, that the quality of a child's education should not depend of the wealth of a local school district, which sparked a series of lawsuits regarding public school funding.<sup>156</sup>

In the case, *United States vs. Texas*, the court ordered that the Texas Education Agency be responsible for desegregating schools and recognized Mexican Americans as a minority group

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

that was discriminated against, tying it to the *Browns vs. Board* case, and thus ruling it unconstitutional. In 1971, a major ruling by the Supreme Court was announced, Civil Action 5281. This ruling ordered by J. W. Edgar, who was the Commissioner of Education for the State of Texas, and the Texas Education Agency, to monitor student transfers, student transportation, changes to district boundaries, faculty and staff, extracurricular activities, curriculum, and compensatory education all in an effort to end segregation in Texas Public Schools.<sup>157</sup>

There were changes in the 1970s that were of major significance to public education at both the state and national level, thus impacting the operation of school districts across Texas. Table 10 reflects some of the actions taken at the state and national level.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.



Table 10 School Board Agenda Items 1979

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction approved for elementary campus.</li> <li>• Applications for concessions on school campus approved.</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced Meals for students approved.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security system for the new high school approved.</li> <li>• Church groups prohibited from using school buildings.</li> <li>• Drug Awareness program approved.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent Hall authorized to obtain plans for athletic programs.</li> <li>• Classrooms to be added at La Encantada Elementary.</li> <li>• Security Officer to be employed for high school.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board purchases new band uniforms.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agenda Item to reassign principals is withdrawn.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board to secure loan to cover deficit.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction at Fred Booth Elementary discussed.</li> <li>• Policy Update approved.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board submits letter to TASB President regarding insensitivity to students in South Texas.</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisions to the Employment Policy considered.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remodeling of Fred Booth Cafeteria approved.</li> <li>• Board receives report from the Long Range Planning Committee.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1979 Facility Improvement Projects Awarded**

Several decisions impacting student facilities were approved by the board, including four additional classrooms at the Dr. Cash Elementary school and a reduction in the price of reduced meals from 20 cents to 10 cents. The board authorized superintendent Hall to obtain plans for a new track and baseball field complete with lights for the new high school. Four new classrooms at La Encantada School were considered for approval. A daytime security officer was approved for the high school and the Board purchases 200 new band uniforms for the high school.

Upon the Board of Trustees return from a state convention, they voted to take action and submit to the President of the Texas Association of School Boards a letter regarding the organizations insensitivity toward South Texas students.

The board took action on items that affect their employees such as a decision to amend their Blue Cross Blue Shield Insurance Policy to reflect changes to the Pregnant Disability Act, and guidelines for the selection of Teacher and Teacher Aid of the Year were presented and approved.

## **1980s**

Texas continued to address education reform in 1984 and the legislature passes House Bill 72, an act of major reform in the Texas public school system. HB72 established a 22:1 teacher to student ratio cap, provided teachers with a career ladder pay plan, established a “no pass, no play” rule for students, revamped the public school finance system to provide property poor school districts with more money, and looked at ways to improve the overall student academic achievement. A new student assessment was created in 1985, as well as a new

requirement for graduating seniors to pass an exit level assessment in order to receive their diploma.<sup>158</sup>

Again, some of these decisions at state and national levels may have impacted the decisions at the local level, as is evident in the minutes from 1989.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 29.

Table 11 School Board Agenda Items 1989

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy changes are approved by the board</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board considers a new law firm to represent them.</li> <li>• Certified Public Accounting Firm considered for financial audit.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent Gomez reports on a recent accreditation visit by the Texas Education Agency.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent Gomez reports to the board on correspondence received from several educational organizations.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer School Program approved.</li> <li>• Summer Recreation Program approved.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy modifications in several areas were presented.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiscal Requirements were presented and approved by the Board.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board requires all positions above teacher level be advertised.</li> <li>• New Secondary course offerings are approved.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent submits reports to board</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District Dyslexia Program approved.</li> <li>• Purchases considered.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheltered English Program for Recent Immigrants approved.</li> <li>• TEA Grant accepted.</li> <li>• Board joins Region One Purchasing Cooperative.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1989 Compliance Issues Dominate the Year**

The year began with the board approving several changes to policies that included DEC(L) Compensation and Benefits; EEJA and EEJA(L) Individualized Learning, Credit by Exam; EEJD and EEJD(L) Individualized Learning, Advanced Placement Exam; and FDD(L) Admission and Attendance, Absences and Excuses. Also considered that year were updates to policy DOAA(Local) Term Contracts: Resignations; EIC(Local) Academic Achievement: Class Rankings. The board approved a Hurricane Preparedness Plan Revision.

Superintendent Gomez's evaluation took place during the month of January, and the Board of Trustees issued a statement of confidence in Gomez. Superintendent Gomez also reported to the board the findings of the recent Accreditation visit by the Texas Education Agency. Other information reported by Superintendent Gomez included several items from educational organizations including the Rio Grande Valley School Board Association, Texas Association of School Boards, Texas Education Agency, Texas Association of School Administrator's, and the National Hispanic Leadership Conference. The superintendent also reported on tutorial information, Open House, Teacher Career Ladder Requirements, and Student Enrollment.

As the year came to an end, the Board approved a Sheltered English Program for Recent Immigrants along with a \$75,000.00 Grant from the Texas Education Agency for the purpose of a School-Community Guidance Center Project. Board also took action on requiring all positions above teacher level be advertised at all campuses, local newspapers and out of Valley newspapers. Attendance policies were brought current with new legal requirements, seven new secondary course offerings were approved and the Teacher Appraisal Calendar was also approved along with Teacher Appraisers.

## 1990s

The state continued to address public school finance throughout the 1990's as lawsuits were filed and rulings by the highest court in the state recognized the system to be inequitable and unconstitutional. More than 500 superintendents throughout the state gathered for the first time to address the finance issue with the Senate Education Committee. Senate Bill 7 was created in an attempt to revise the state funding system, which later was found unconstitutional by the Texas Supreme Court. Texas public education laws also received attention, as revisions to the laws were passed, thus allowing for more local control. Facilities were also a topic addressed in the 1990s as funding was provided to help equalize conditions of facilities for poor districts. This was also the result of supreme court actions forcing the state legislature to enact the Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) in 1997 and Existing Debt Allotment (EDA) in 1999. These laws were specific to helping poor districts with facility funding.<sup>159</sup>

As demonstrated in Table 12, facility expansions were mentioned in the agenda as well as changes to course offerings, which might have been brought about by major decisions at the state level.

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

Table 12 School Board Agenda Items 1999

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Board Recognition Ceremony.</li> <li>• New Course Work for High School approved.</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Recognition by board.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High School organizations recognized.</li> <li>• Personnel issues are presented for discussion and approval.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miller Jordan Middles School construction of additional classrooms.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Update 60 presented.</li> <li>• New board members sworn in to office.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board renames Positive Redirection Center (PRC)</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussions on rule changes for the Pregnancy Related Services Program were presented.</li> <li>• 1999-2000 Parent Workshop schedule presented to the board.</li> <li>• Agreement with Neighbors In Need of Services (NINOS) was approved.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board hires new law firm.</li> <li>• Board meeting to approve financial budget.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board met to engage in a “Team of 8” exercise with superintendent.</li> <li>• Recognition of academic achievement for campuses.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants approved.</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board recognizes students for attending the Migrant Conference</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Financial Audit findings were presented and approved.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **1999 Good Things Happening for Students**

Students recognized the board members for their contributions to the District, as January was designated as Texas School Board Recognition month. The Board of Trustees also acknowledged students for their accomplishments in events like the San Benito Fire Prevention Poster Contest, the High School Choir Contest, the Tip-O-Tex Prospect Show, High Five Students, Girls/Boys Basketball, Wrestling, and Band.

Construction continued in the district with approval of the addition of 10 classrooms to Miller Jordan Middle School. The board renamed the Positive Redirection Center (PRC) to Positive Redirection Center at Callandret.

Gear Up Grants were presented and approved, as well as the Even Start Grant, and the World of Work (WOW) course for the middle school was also approved. Discussions on rule changes to the “Pregnancy Related Services Program” were presented to the board for approval. An agreement with Neighbors In Need Of Services (NINOS) was approved as well.

In routine district business, the 1999-2000 school calendar was approved. Teacher contracts were extended. The Financial Audit for the fiscal year 1999 was approved for submission to TEA. The board approved the District and Campus Performance Objectives for the academic year, 1999-2000. School campuses were congratulated for their academic achievement.

## **2000s**

The state continued to address public school finance and issues related to property tax rates set by the districts, and the legislature ordered a comprehensive study to be conducted on the system used to fund public schools. For the first time, Texas created a school safety center in response to violent incidents occurring in schools throughout the nation. Governor Perry



approved Senate Bill 218, which created a system of financial accountability for public schools.<sup>160</sup>

At the national level, No Child Left Behind was signed in to law by President Bush, which proved to be the most challenging federal reform in education since Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. These new changes brought about challenges and caused local districts to reexamine the way they did business.<sup>161</sup>

Changes continued to occur at state and national level. The affects of these changes had an impact on local districts such as the San Benito School District.

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<sup>160</sup> *ibid*, 32.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid*, 33.

Table 13 School Board Agenda Items 2009

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• January celebrates the work of School Boards in Texas.</li> <li>• Renovations to High School are approved</li> <li>• Career &amp; Technology Department receives a 1 ton truck.</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovations to several elementary school HVAC systems.</li> <li>• Cross Country Team recognized.</li> <li>• Superintendent Limon undergoes summative evaluation.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle School Abstinence Program approved.</li> <li>• Athletics is discussed.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High School Clubs recognized for their achievements.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible Literacy Course for high school approved.</li> <li>• New courses approved for high school.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several schools are recognized for participation in UIL.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landrum Elementary renovation contract approved.</li> <li>• Shared Service Arrangements with the Brownsville Regional Day School Program for the Deaf is approved.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee Compensation Plans reviewed and approved.</li> <li>• Year End and New Year Fiscal items discussed and approved.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction approved for Veterans Memorial Academy.</li> <li>• Bilingual/ESL Program Guidelines approved.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic Ratings of schools are presented.</li> <li>• Board “Team of 8” conducted.</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belle Officers approved to attend Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Update 86 is approved.</li> <li>• Lawsuit with Deacon Construction settled.</li> <li>• Board Member required hours of training reported.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Data retrieved from the Board Minutes for the years cited

## **2009 Positive Growth Continues for Students**

The San Benito School District enjoyed growth in multiple areas throughout the year, such as construction projects and academic programs for students. The board continued to approve construction projects, such as the renovations to the High School Science Wing-C, as well as a major renovation project on several HVAC systems at several elementary schools, a classroom wing addition to Veterans Memorial Academy, and classroom renovations at Landrum Elementary.

Student recognition was prevalent in the district as several student athletic programs and academic clubs were congratulated for their accomplishments, which include the Cross Country Team, the Boys Wrestling Team, the Power Lifting Team, the Business Professionals of America, the Public Relations Team, the Chess Team, Skills USA Team and students who participated in the Rio Grande Livestock Show.

The board approved an abstinence program for their middle schools. The District Bilingual and ESL Program guidelines were also presented and approved. A new Bible Literacy course was approved for high school, as well as Sports Medicine I & II, Introduction to Electrical/Electronics Careers, Plumbing I & II.

The Board of Trustees and Superintendent Limon engaged in a “Team of 8”, team building exercise in compliance with their requirement for improving board/superintendent relations. The board announced in December the number of training hours each of the board members has acquired throughout the year.

### **Summary of a One Hundred Year Snapshot of Board Minutes**

During the course of this one hundred year period of existence of the San Benito Independent School District, the Board of Trustees took actions that impacted students of the

district. As the top executive level of decision makers, these boards had the responsibility for the creation and formation of this educational institution. An examination of the earliest three years began with decisions that became the foundation for the creation of this educational community. A Board of Trustees was organized in April of 1909, as the district was formed. Immediately the board sought out to employ a qualified superintendent that also served as a principal and tax assessor collector. The superintendent was instructed to hire qualified teaching staff to serve in the schools. Over the next several years as the district was forming, a business as usual routine continued. The board took action on items such as the election of teachers, the hiring of an architect, they discussed the construction of educational facilities, payment of district bills, assessment of taxes on district residents, the adoption of course work for students, dealt with an epidemic of small pox, and other routine business. During this early time period, there were also several changes of the board membership as resignations occurred and appointments were made. The makeup of the board began primarily as Anglo-American, and remained such until it changed in the late 1970s to a majority of Mexican American board members.

Between 1919 and 1949, mention was made of Mexican American students and the “Mexiquita” school that served this population. Again the normal order of school district business continued with personnel decisions occurring throughout the course of these decades. Construction projects continued as the district grew. Col. Ed Downs donated a 4 acre tract of land for a school to be constructed. The Negro School facility was considered for relocation and repairs. These years also witnessed the investment in programs for students such as band, vocational education, athletics, driver’s education, and ROTC. Personnel decisions were also addressed, as the superintendent position was vacated in 1939. The vacated nursing position was

filled, teacher absences for family deaths were approved, and payday for teaching staff was moved to the first day of each month.

From 1959 to 1979, a shift in agenda items became evident and focused on the construction projects involving the construction of a new high school, renovations and additions to existing campuses, and the paving of roads for bus routes. The most controversial item of the late 1950s and early 1960s was that of integrating the schools with Anglo and Negro students, and the decision to send it to the voters for approval. A delicate decision by the board was also made in the 1970s that church groups would not be allowed to use school district facilities. 1968-1969 witnessed a major occurrence in the district, as approximately 25 students were expelled for the use and sale of marijuana. The 1970s also saw the beginning of the shift of the board to a majority Mexican American membership.

The next three decades, 1989 to 2009, recognized students for their accomplishments and extended opportunities in academic, athletic and social arenas. Student programs were approved for the district including a Sheltered English Program, a Dyslexia Program, Bilingual/ESL guidelines, Abstinence Program, and a Bible Literacy Course. The opportunity for involvement with school activities were increased tremendously. Students participating in athletic competition, academic and club events were consistently honored at the board meetings.

Over the last decade, the district had evolved in many areas in addressing the issues and needs of the time as it pertained to students, staff, and the educational community.

### **San Benito School District Board of Trustees**

The data in Table 14 identifies the membership of the San Benito Independent School District Board of Trustees and clearly reveals the dominant ethnicity of these top policy making leaders throughout the period of this study. As was indicated earlier in this study, the makeup of

the leadership of the City of San Benito and local commerce were predominately Anglo. As can be seen from the table, this holds true for the creation of the San Benito Independent School District as well.

For the first time since the inception of the San Benito School District, a Mexican American was elected by popular vote to the Board of Trustees in 1951 and remained in office until 1959. Other Mexican Americans were elected to the board beginning in 1960 and continued having sparse representation on the board until 1973 when the majority membership shifted to Mexican Americans, as seen in Table 14.

Table 14 San Benito School District Board of Trustees

Year	President Member	Vice President Member	Secretary Member	Treasurer
1909	Charles E. Barber Col. Alba Heywood	A. E. Purvis	F. C. Van Ness R. McChesney	W. B. Hinkley C. McCormick
1919	Frank W. Roberts L. A. Young Joe G. Ballenger	I. G. Adamson	Kent S. Manning Fred N. Booth	J. C. Mertz
1929	Fred N. Booth Sam Sparks	Kent S. Manning H. B. Livingston	I. R. Gilbert W. B. Haines	M. J. Dodson
1939	C. W. Sullivan M. H. Cline	Jesse A. Welch I. R. Gilbert	Claude R. Dodson A. M. Hervey	Joe G. Ballenger
1949	Charles C. Ferguson T. M. Dodson Tom Marchbanks, Jr	H. C. Aldridge R. G. Goolsby	W. W. Tenney	Kenneth L. Lake
1959	John Benson Jack Lomax	Jesse E. Fox, Jr. W. D. Todd	Ray Gomez Clovis D. Echols	Joe M. Spears, Jr.
1969	W. D. Todd John Benson	Dr. William F. Ross William N. Kennedy	Gene Moody Richard H. Welch	Pedro G. Fonseca
1979	Maria Louisa Garcia Carl Otsuki	Dr. Cecil Simmons Oscar De La Fuente	Serapio De La Rosa Roberto Garcia	Juan S. Martinez
1989	David A. Garza Dr. Raul Garza, Jr.	Victor Trevino Pete Claudio	Esiquio Luna Willie Wells	Ronnie Garcia
1999	Oscar De La Fuente, Jr. Mario Silva	Hector G. Leal Leonel Ramirez	Joe G. Gonzalez Gilbert Montalvo	Manuel Gonzales, Jr.
2009	Joe G. Gonzalez Bob Tumberlinson	Oscar Medrano Oscar De La Fuente	Manuel Gonzalez, Jr. Yliana G. Rodriguez	Hector G. Leal

*Source:* Data from the San Benito School District Board Minutes for the years cited.

## **San Benito School District Superintendents and Principals**

Table 15, which was defined by intervals of ten years for the one hundred year period of this study, clearly demonstrates the majority district leadership by Anglo Americans. The first recorded Mexican American superintendent for the district was Ruben Rodriguez in 1985, followed by Dr. Manuel Gomez, Dr. Miguel De los Santos, Hector J. Ybarra, Felipe Alaniz, Joe D. Gonzalez, and currently is Antonio Limon.

Table 15 clearly reveals that the high school campus leadership was governed by Anglo-American principals. The first Mexican American high school principal was Roy Cano in 1999. Since his time in 1999, Cano was followed by Delia Weaver who is currently the top administrator of San Benito High School.

Through the years where the superintendent position was occupied by Mexican Americans, there were still Anglo-American principals in charge of the high school. During the one hundred year span of this study, Anglo Americans were in top positions of leadership, both at the superintendent position as well as the position of high school principal.

Since the early years, social clubs, academic organizations, and athletics had always been available to some extent to Mexican American students within the San Benito Independent School District. As the District evolved over the last one hundred years, Table 16 shows the progression of Mexican American students' involvement in these types of activities.



Table 15 San Benito School District Superintendents and Principals

Year	Superintendent	High School Principal
1909	J. Scott Brown/R. F. Woodward	R. F. Woodward/ J. J. Callaway
1919	J. H. Head	Miss Lois Spears/R. K. Farrar
1929	T. G. Harris/Thomas J. Yoe	H. O. Smith/ D. D. Shiflett
1939	O. L. Davis/Grady St. Clair	S. V. Neely
1949	S. V. Neely/E. L. Pritchett	H. V. Gordon/Gerald F. Nichols
1959	John Barron	Marshal Storey
1969	John Barron	Marshal Storey
1979	Jack Hall	Burel Block/Faustino Guetzow
1989	Manuel Gomez/Dr. Miguel De los Santos	Bob Tumberlinson
1999	Joe D. Gonzalez	Roy Cano
2009	Antonio Limon	Delia Weaver

*Source:* Data from the San Benito School District Board Minutes for the years cited.

## **Membership in Athletics, Clubs, and Organizations by Ethnicity**

Table 16 identifies the numerous athletic activities, as well as clubs and organizations that were available for students at the high school. During the early years, from 1909 to the 1970s, a shift began to occur in the majority participation of the two ethnicities, Anglos and Mexican Americans. In the 1950s, there were more Mexican Americans participating in athletic activities than Anglos.

The activities identified for comparison were those that seem to have had consistent participation throughout the years. Although, due to the limited resources, there may have been particular years for which there was no data available for that particular activity.

For comparison purposes, sports that included football, baseball, basketball, and tennis, were identified. Also studied was participation in school organizations such as the pep squad, band, and choir. Also reviewed were school clubs like National Honor Society, student council, yearbook, Greyhound Growls, Future Farmers of America, and Future Homemakers of America.

Athletic sports competition had always been a big part of high schools extracurricular offerings. The first evidence of such was found in the high school yearbook of 1912 that listed several sports teams including tennis, baseball, boys basketball, and girls basketball. The 1912 high school yearbook also listed the General Science Club, Boys Corn Club, Olympian Club, and the Tripod Club. Evidence of a football team was listed for the first time in the 1913 yearbook.

Other clubs evolved in the early years as identified in the high school yearbooks for 1915 and 1917 included the Domestic Science Club, Choral Club, Diotimian Society, Beowulf Club, Rotary Club, Erisophian Club, Junior Literary Club, S. D. Social Club, and Agriculture Class.

During this same time period, the San Benito Corps of Cadets became an established organization at the high school as well.

At first glance, participation in athletics, clubs and organizations of the San Benito High School were predominately Anglo students. It wasn't until the late 1920s that the first Mexican American student participated in football. During the 1930s, there was slightly more participation by Mexican American students in football, basketball and choir. In the 1940s through the 1960s, athletic activities were still dominated by Anglo students, but the gap was beginning to narrow. From the 1970s forward into 2009, a major shift occurred as the majority participants in high school athletics are now Mexican American students. There is an overwhelming majority of Mexican American students involved in football, baseball and basketball today.

A review of other school clubs and organizations presented similar patterns to those identified in athletic participation. The pep squad/Belles, band, choir, yearbook, Greyhound Growls, Future Farmers of America, Future Homemakers of America, National Honor Society, and student council were also found to have a large concentration of Anglo membership until the 1970s, when the influx of Mexican American student participation occurred.

The Anglo student population totally dominated the clubs and organizations from 1909 to approximately the 1950s. The only organization that seemed to have a majority population of Mexican American students in the 1940s was the Future Homemakers of America, which continued to reflect the same pattern through 2009. The yearbook staff, responsible for producing *El Sendero* showed Anglo dominance until the 1970s.

Moving forward to 2009, the *El Sendero* yearbook revealed an astonishing discovery as it related to the evolution of opportunities for Mexican American students involved in sports,

clubs, and organizations of the San Benito High School. There were now additional athletic events available to students such as wrestling, power lifting, cross-country, soccer, and golf. There has been an increase in clubs and organizations that now include Media Technology, Animation Club, Conjunto & Mariachi, STEMS, Health Occupations Students of America, Health Science Technology, Robotics, auto body, auto mechanics, Blue Knights, Termites, Diversified Career Prep, Business Professionals of America, and Family Career & Community Leaders of America.

Without a doubt, the Mexican American student population involved in sports, clubs, and organizations in the high school grew to the extent that in 2009, the Mexican American student population of the high school was at 98%, with Anglo students only accounting for 1.4% of the entire student body.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System 2008-2009 District Performance.

Table 16 Student Membership in Athletics, Clubs, and Organizations by Ethnicity

Activity Ethnicity	Year										
	1909	1920	1929	1939	1949	1959	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009
<b>Football-Varsity</b>											
Anglo	0	12	18	22	14	21	7	1	3	4	3
Mex-American	0	0	1	1	10	9	14	30	49	47	58
<b>Baseball-Varsity</b>											
Anglo-American	9	16	13	9	0	15	9	2		0	2
Mex-American	0	0	0	4	0	3	4	13		21	16
<b>Basketball-Boys Varsity</b>											
Anglo-American	11	7	9	10	5	7	2	1	1	2	0
Mex-American	0	0	0	1	7	3	5	8	9	10	12
<b>Tennis-Boys/Girls</b>											
Anglo-American	14	32	4	15	17	15	12	10	3	1	5
Mex-American	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	13	3	13	12
<b>Pep Squad/Belles</b>											
Anglo-American	0	0	0	37	6	0	0	5	1	0	0
Mex-American	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	19	25	24
<b>Band</b>											
Anglo-American	0	0	0	47	0	40	23	0	11	3	3
Mex-American	0	0	0	0	0	9	24	0	96	69	31
<b>Choir/Acapella/Mixed Choros</b>											
Anglo-American	0	0	0	44	77	0	31	3	2	0	2
Mex-American	0	0	0	1	9	0	33	41	24	0	21
<b>Future Farmers of America</b>											
Anglo-American	16	0	0	0	19	16	17	21	12	1	1
Mex-American	0	0	0	0	8	12	7	29	85	5	16
<b>Future Homemakers of America</b>											
Anglo-American	0	0	0	0	37	15	10	0	1	0	0
Mex-American	0	0	0	0	54	11	35	0	29	45	0
<b>Yearbook</b>											
Anglo-American	0	14	20	0	6	0	11	1	1	0	1
Mex-American	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8	12	15	4
<b>Greyhound Growles</b>											
Anglo-American	0	0	0	69	32	21	16	2	0	2	0
Mex-American	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	13	0	10	4
<b>National Honor Society</b>											
Anglo-American	0	0	0	14	17	10	14	18	5	0	2
Mex-American	0	0	0	0	2	0	8	26	8	15	21
<b>Student Council</b>											
Anglo-American	0	0	0	0	21	24	5	6	5	1	2
Mex-American	0	0	0	0	4	3	13	21	24	13	8

### **San Benito High School Senior Class Population by Ethnicity**

Table 17 clearly defines the population of the senior class throughout this study. It is obvious that the majority of the senior class for the first fifty years of this school district's existence was primarily composed of Anglo students. During the 1960s, the senior class shifted from a predominately Anglo senior class to a dominate Mexican American population of high school seniors.

**Table 17 San Benito High School Senior Class Population by Ethnicity**

Year	Total Population	Anglo-American	Mexican American
1909	0	0	0
1919	23	22	01
1929	63	59	04
1939	38	32	06
1949	95	59	36
1959	119	52	67
1969	280	118	152
1979	253	34	219
1989	312	32	289
1999	338	10	328
2009	355	19	336

*Source:* Data from the San Benito High School yearbooks for the years cited.

## **Interview Findings**

This study gained additional insight from those who had firsthand knowledge of the accounts of the San Benito School District. High school yearbooks, alumni databases, and board minutes were methods used to select potential participants for these interviews. The use of both personal and telephone interviews, email questionnaires and surveys of former students and current/former staff, administrators, and board members were methods for gathering this information. Respondents were provided consent information, either written or verbal, which explained their rights as participants (See Appendix A). Participants were made aware that the information obtained would be reported in this study under pseudonyms and would not disclose their identity. Two different questionnaires were used which were designed according to whether the participants interviewed were former students, or a current/former staff member, administrator, or board member (See Appendix B). Approximately thirty eight participants were interviewed using either of the described methods, thus providing the substance for the identification of emerging themes. Data was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in stages in order to accurately identify the reoccurrence of information stated multiple times throughout the process.

The following themes were identified from participant responses and are presented in two categories. One category revealed student responses, while the second revealed responses from teachers, administrators, and board members. The responses were coded in order to keep the identity of the interviewees anonymous in accordance with IRB requirements. Alumni responses were labeled with an “A” and a numeric code, while School Officials, such as teachers, administrators, and board members were labeled with a “SO” and a numeric code. A table will further explain the coding system in each respective section of themes.

## **Emerging Themes**

The information gathered from interviews, both personal and via telephone, as well as information from email questionnaires/surveys was analyzed to identify themes, concepts, theory, categories, typologies, and tentative hypothesis. This information was then sorted and reported in two categories. The first section contained themes based on alumni responses and the second section contained responses from school officials.

Table 18 explains the coding system and provides non-identifiable personal information, which will help understand more about the diverse background of alumni participating in the study. The coding for information presented from former students begins with an A followed by the number of the interview, their gender, and the year of graduation at the end. All of the alumni interviewed in this study were Mexican American. An example of the coding system for the first participant is as follows. A1F08 signifies they were a student, first to be interviewed in this study, female, and graduated in 2008.



Table 18 San Benito High School Alumni Coding Methodology

Category "A"-Alumni	Interview Number	Gender Male/Female	Year Graduated	Race MA/A
A	1	Female	2008	MA
A	2	Female	2000	MA
A	3	Male	1980	MA
A	4	Female	1981	MA
A	5	Female	1980	MA
A	6	Female	1957	MA
A	7	Male	1975	MA
A	8	Female	1993	MA
A	9	Male	1954	MA
A	10	Female	1968	MA
A	11	Female	1984	MA
A	12	Female	1958	MA
A	13	Male	1956	MA
A	14	Male	1967	MA
A	15	Female	1980	MA
A	16	Female	1980	MA
A	17	Female	1980	MA
A	18	Male	1956	MA

*Source:* Data from San Benito High School Alumni Interviews.

### Alumni Themes

A review of alumni data identified the following themes. There were five in total that emerged and are presented in the following sections; Education as an Equalizer, My Family Cared, Our School Facilities Are Much Better Now, I Belonged, and A Challenging Journey.

#### Education as an Equalizer

The Mexican American student responses were mixed when it came to the question of whether or not they felt they were encouraged to excel in their high school education and graduate, and then to seek post secondary opportunities. The responses indicate that in the earlier years of the school district, the majority of Mexican American students were offered optional educational paths that did not necessarily encourage attending college, but focused on vocational tracts. In more recent years, quite the opposite occurs, as college was promoted to more Mexican American students.

A9M54 stated “While in high school, I never saw or met my counselor. My sister & I started college on our own.”<sup>163</sup> A strong indication from this student was they received no assistance from the school system in promoting opportunities for higher education.

Student A6F57 recalled their experience being quite the same as the previous student’s recollection and adds the fact that there were different educational tracts for those who were and were not going to college, as well as a lack of encouragement for college opportunities. “The schools did not seem to push higher learning. They simply offered three career paths: one for those who knew they were not going to peruse a college education, one for those who knew they were going to college and a path for those who were not sure. I was not sure because I did not know where the money would come from, so I chose the middle path. Although I considered myself intelligent, enjoyed learning, and made good grades, nobody tried to encourage me to go to college and certainly nobody offered any information about scholarships, student loans, etc.”<sup>164</sup>

A13M56 recalled experiencing similar situations of helplessness as it relates to education and a lack of exposure to the possibility of higher education. “During my San Benito CISD schooling from 1st. through 8th grade students were made to feel that we were treated differently. No one came to our rescue.”<sup>165</sup>

A14M67 stated “My educational experience right off the bat, counselors were leading me not towards continued ed, but to labor field. Instead of regular courses I was directed to industrial arts. This is what they called it, but it was simply common labor. Shop was another subject. We never did anything or learned anything. Agriculture was

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 21, 2012.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 11, 2012.

one that I did enjoy simply because I learned something.”<sup>166</sup> The comments by A14M67 simply mirrored others as it pertains to a lack of encouragement to post secondary educational opportunities and more toward workforce related education.

A10F68 recalled, “school officials originally placed me in a vocational track because I was entering from a parochial school. One counselor did suggest that I should not be thinking of college as an option.”<sup>167</sup>

Another alumni, A17F80 recollected, “I had no encouragement, assistance, support or direction from school to attend college I was not encouraged by anyone in the educational system to attend college.”<sup>168</sup>

In a similar situation, A4F81 stated, “No, I never had any teachers, counselors, administrators to advise me to go to college. The only time I spoke to a counselor was to change my class in middle school and high school.”<sup>169</sup>

A11F84 clearly remembered talking with the counselor who discouraged college. A11F84 recalls the situation clearly. “I went to a counselor in High School and told her what career and she told me I would never make it in that field. Will never forget that!”<sup>170</sup>

A1F08 stated, “I had a great experience. I also excelled in my education by earning the salutatorian spot for my graduating class. I was always motivated by my teachers, counselors, parents, etc.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 10, 2012.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 15, 2012.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 8, 2012.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 15, 2012.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, December 8, 2012.

A8F93 didn't have such a positive experience of the counselor by saying, "I think it would have been nice if the counselors at our school had given us information on application deadlines, financial aid assistance, etc."<sup>172</sup>

A2F00 credited their counselor and remembered "my counselor always encouraged me to continue my education. She always pushed me and made me feel confident with myself. We were taken to see a university and had to fill out applications."<sup>173</sup>

### **My Family Cared**

One very important aspect of this study was the involvement of family in the student's education. Similar stories were told regarding the structure of the family support system and the rationale behind providing such support. Former student A9M54 described their situation by saying, "My mother and my father always encouraged my two sisters, younger brother, and me to do our best in school and in life. While in high school, I never saw or met my counselor. My sister and I started college on our own."<sup>174</sup>

A6F57 credited their parents and siblings for being the first in their family to earn a college degree. "To this day I do not know how I came to follow the path of higher education. My parents and my siblings were very supportive of my endeavors, and once I got started together we managed to finance my education. I was the first in my family to get a degree, but I am glad to say that an older sister later got her degree and all my nephews and nieces have also earned their degrees."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 23, 2012.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, December 22, 2012.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 21, 2012.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

A10F68 stated, “Our family migrated every year to California for the grape harvest. My father made sure we returned on time for the start of the school year but he did not think college was a possibility for us. He encouraged education as a means of improving our lives. I succeeded because of the love and encouragement of my father, stepmother and a loving aunt who raised me...”<sup>176</sup>

Others, like student A7M75, described their expectation as “for me I just knew that if was expected from me by my parents and never gave it much thought. When I got to that point, I knew that was my next step and planned accordingly.”<sup>177</sup>

The strong willed mother of student A17F80 was described as “My mother's orders finish high school, go to college and get a good job. Mission accomplished.”<sup>178</sup>

Immediate family as well as extended family was equally important in the education of student A5F80 who credited them by saying, “My family with the support of two of my first cousins always pushed me to continue my education. I always looked up to them and wanted to follow their footsteps. I always believed that I had the opportunity to succeed in reaching my goals because of the support of my family, and being Mexican-American I always tried more and gave it all I had. To believe and stay on the right track.”<sup>179</sup>

Student A4F81 presented a little different story in the expectations of education from their parents. “My parents would encourage us to finish school but then to work.

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<sup>176</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 15, 2012.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 24, 2012.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 8, 2012.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

We were a low income family and my mother wanted us to work. College was not a discussion. I know I chose to finish high school because I did want to go to college.”<sup>180</sup>

Parental involvement and communication with the school was important for student A11F84, who was quoted as saying, “Yes lots of communication. My dad served with the PTA and City Council PTA for many years. My parents were very vocal when it came to their children. They stood up for what was right. Not by what color my skin was.”<sup>181</sup>

Student A8F93 described how the support of a sibling, and not the parent motivated them to continue their education. “Honestly, no. I don't remember it being so instilled in us like it is now or at least how I see my children being informed as to the importance of college...I guess I was lucky because my older sister went to college and she just showed me what I needed to do otherwise, I may not have gone to college.”<sup>182</sup>

As can be seen from the comments provided by these former students, the support of the family in some instances made all the difference in the world for them in their educational journey.

### **Our School Facilities Are Much Better Now**

School facilities improved over time and the comforts afforded to students in the San Benito School District, such as climate controlled learning environments, state of the art athletic and recreational facilities, and improved food service facilities evolved throughout the one hundred year span of this study, as described by students themselves. In the early years of the school district, former student A13M56 described changes in the schools as follows. “The changes that I have seen through the years are that the school

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<sup>180</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 15, 2012.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 23, 2012.

has air condition, modern buildings, modern equipment...”<sup>183</sup> Another student, A12F58, provided a detailed description of the conditions of their school facilities. “Our schools had no air condition. We had one fan in the front of the classroom and then we had opened windows. I remember there being many gnats on those hot days. During winter, we were cold. My elementary school was an old two story building. Our cafeteria was not connected to the main building. It was in the back of the school. It was an old long barrack type building. Our playground had very little equipment, and it was mostly dirt. I remember there being a few trees but they were along the edge of the street and provided very little shade. Many schools have been built or brought up to standards. They all have air condition.”<sup>184</sup> Student A7M75 had fonder memories of school and recalled, “I remember all of my schools being clean, safe facilities and do not remember having any air conditioning! I remember school as being a fun place to be free of distractions.”<sup>185</sup>

A4F81 described the school facilities from earliest memories by saying “My Elementary school was very old. I remember when it was hot, we had windows open to cool off room and had this big wall fans that sometimes they did not work. Oh and really bad when hot and little bugs all over your face. When it was cold, same thing. At times the heaters would not work, so lucky you, if you had a coat on. When I went to middle school it was a similar situation but they had begun a remodeling and installing new a/c for all classrooms as well as heaters. When I go to High School was the best because I got to enter a brand new High School everything was new.”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 11, 2012.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 12, 2012.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 24, 2012.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

A8F93 claimed, “I don't recall having too many complaints from the schools I attended by no means were they as nice as they are today but I don't think I ever minded so long as I was able to have time to hang around with my friends. We did have portables in just about every campus though now that I think about it.”<sup>187</sup>

Throughout the history of the school district, facilities continued to improve. School buildings that were not air conditioned or heated properly evolved to more sophisticated climate controlled environments. Athletic, recreational, and food service facilities also improved in their conditions, which made their use more enjoyable and comfortable for students.

### **I Belonged**

Participation of Mexican American students in social and athletic clubs was sparse as represented by this recorded information. The following details provide a history of Mexican American students' limited participation in these types of organizations.

A9M54 recalled, “I was a member of the FFA Club as a member only.”<sup>188</sup>

Student A13M56 claimed, “The organizations that I belonged during my school years were secretary of the student body at the JR. High and Future Farmers of America at the High School.”<sup>189</sup> An active student, A12F58, was quoted as saying, “I belonged to Future Teachers of America and I was secretary. I also belonged to the Pan American Student Forum and I was also the secretary. I was in band and Girl Scouts and had good friends who enjoyed the same things I did.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 23, 2012.

<sup>188</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 21, 2012.

<sup>189</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 11, 2012.

<sup>190</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 12, 2012.



A10F68 who was more involved in activities described their participation in various clubs and organizations. “I was president of my junior class; vice-president of my senior class; business manager of the yearbook; member of student council and an officer of Future Homemakers of America. My father did not like my being involved in school activities and so these experiences were limited.”<sup>191</sup>

A7M75 recalled limited participation in activities. “Other than athletics, I was involved in the Future Farmers of America program in high school.”<sup>192</sup>

A sign of changing times, A5F80 described involvement in multiple organizations. A580 claimed, “I joined the band when I was in the 6th grade, Jr. High School, and finally the High School. I was also a member of Future Homemakers of America, Student Council, Executive Council, Future Teachers of America, 4- H, band officer, Keywanetts, and church club member.”<sup>193</sup>

Early, in their educational experience, A4F81 recalled, “I enjoyed elementary because I was active in different activities such as playing baseball, cheerleader and we even got to plant a garden. My 6th grade through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I went to Miller Jordan Middle School. I enjoyed being able to take electives and I was in Choir and Cheer leading. I learned to read music and really liked singing still do. My 9th thru 12 were at San Benito High School. I joined the choir and Drill Team.”<sup>194</sup>

Ambitious student A1F08 claimed, “I always found the proper extracurricular activities and clubs to participate in. I participated in numerous clubs and organizations. I

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 15, 2012.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 6, 2011.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

<sup>194</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

was Class President, a Student Council member, DECA President, a chess member, an athlete, and an officer and member of a few other clubs.”<sup>195</sup>

Over the time span of this study, it seemed that Mexican American students participated in many of the same organizations early on. Future Farmers of America, Future Homemakers of America, and Future Teachers of America seemed to be ones that Mexican American students participated in more frequently. As the population of the high school increased over time, there were more opportunities for students to participate in social or athletic organizations.

### **A Challenging Journey**

Mexican American students endured many challenges in their journey for educational equality throughout their educational history at San Benito. It’s imperative to include firsthand information from the students that attended the San Benito School District be shared. Through information gathered from former students, they described challenges they encountered, particularly the treatment they endured from staff, students, and even family.

One student in the mid 1900s described their experience in the school system as follows. A18M56 commented “During my San Benito CISD schooling from 1st. through 8th. grade students were made to feel that we were made to feel that we were treated differently. No one came to our rescue.”<sup>196</sup>

Another Mexican American student in the school system, A13M56, supported the

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<sup>195</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, December 23, 2012.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 8, 2012.

prior comment of knowing where they stood in the school system by saying, “Once again, being Hispanic, we knew our place (sort of speak). Our parents were just happy that we were in school. They didn't want to make any waves.”<sup>197</sup>

Friends also seemed to play a part in the educational challenge of Mexican American students. Friends could either be encouraging and supportive, or just quite the opposite, as described by A5F80 who said “The challenge to stay away from friends that would not believe in you, and to know that even if no one cared or believed in you , you would keep your head straight and look forward to go to college.”<sup>198</sup>

A4F81 described family challenges that influenced her need to complete her high school education when describing a situation with a sibling and her father, and the affect they had on helping her to see the importance of education. After all, she did not want to be in a situation like his. A4F81 described the following situation. “My oldest brother had begun the wrong direction of his life and gave my mom and dad many problems. I knew I didn't want that for myself, so I decided to take the three year plan, so I graduated a year before my class. We were a low income family and my mother wanted us to work. My dad use to drink so much he wouldn't get home until real late. My mom worked so she made sure we did homework and as long as we were passing and no calls from teachers, everything was okay for my mom.”<sup>199</sup>

As told by the students, they were challenged with various obstacles that included situations caused at school by other students, as well as circumstances at home between family members, as well as adverse effects the influence of friends could sometimes have on one another.

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<sup>197</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 11, 2012.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with a San Benito Alumni, October 25, 2012.

## **Summary of Alumni Interviews**

On further analyzing the responses of the students by decade, it was noted that students in the 1950s did not have the quality facilities of today, and were subjected to enduring the conditions of the weather. Students of this decade were certainly not encouraged to attend college, or given guidance to those opportunities, but were directed toward workforce related course work and activities. Segregation was still prevalent during this era, and parents were almost nonexistent when it came to supporting their child's education. Opportunities for participation in social and academic clubs and athletic sports were limited for Mexican Americans in the 1950s, possibly due to social class or responsibilities to their families of employment or work at home.

The 1960s showed some progress toward inclusion of Mexican American students as they became more involved in sports and clubs. The 1960s witnessed more opportunities for students, as they began to narrow the ratio of Mexican American students to Anglo students in the high school.

Mexican American students in the 1970s clearly began to dominate the enrollment in the high school and were more active in sports and clubs, primarily participating in those academic clubs they were once nonexistent in. Students were now attending college, not necessarily because they were encouraged to do so by school officials, but more due to the necessity to succeed. The schools that they attended were still not climate controlled or new, but were maintained adequately.

Clearly the 1980s brought about significant changes and Mexican American students continued to outnumber Anglo students in enrollment, including participation in social, academic and sport clubs. Larger numbers of students are attending college than

before, but in comparison to the Anglo students, they are still quite low. The teaching staff and administrators is still primarily Anglo.

The 1990s continue the same pattern of dominance in the high school by Mexican American students and students receive more guidance from school officials about post-secondary opportunities. Clubs, academic and social, as well as all sports activities continue to be dominated by Mexican American students as well. Facilities are much improved as new facilities are being built and renovations to older facilities are taking place.

The 2000s was a decade in which more Mexican American students were attending colleges and universities after graduation, participating in dual and concurrent enrollment with post secondary institutions while in high school, and receiving guidance for this through their counselors. The high school provided more clubs and sports activities than ever before, allowing Mexican American students to belong. Parents, who were once silent, played a more active role in their children's education, encouraging their children to seek out opportunities for advancement. And, the high school staff, including counselors and administrators, is primarily Mexican American.

The students participating in this study have brought to life the conditions that they endured, whether they were positive or negative, their accounts of their time at San Benito High School over the decades have provided rich information to reflect on.

### **School Officials Themes**

The methodology used to report the data collected from school officials was described below. The coding begins with "SO" for school official and is followed by the number of the interview along with the letter that identifies them in a position of administration or teaching, and

the length of their career in education. As an example, SO1MA30 can be described as a school official, first to be interviewed, male, an administrator, with 30 years of experience in education.

It is important to know that all of the school officials interviewed were Mexican American.

Table 19 San Benito School Officials Coding Methodology

Category "SO" School Official	Interview Number	Gender M/F	Teacher/ Administrator	Years in Education	Ethnicity A/MA
SO	1	Male	A	30	MA
SO	2	Male	T	43	MA
SO	3	Female	A	36	MA
SO	4	Female	A	30	MA
SO	5	Female	T	27	MA
SO	6	Female	T	38	MA
SO	7	Female	T	08	MA
SO	8	Female	A	28	MA
SO	9	Female	T	26	MA
SO	10	Male	T	33	MA
SO	11	Female	T	27	MA
SO	12	Male	A	28	MA
SO	13	Female	T	21	MA
SO	14	Female	A	36	MA
SO	15	Female	A	30	MA
SO	16	Female	T	32	MA
SO	17	Male	T	27	MA
SO	18	Female	T	21	MA
SO	19	Female	A	34	MA
SO	20	Male	A	23	MA

*Source:* Data from San Benito School Official Interviews.

The responses collected from school officials of the San Benito School District were collected, organized, and categorized into themes. This information was separated into the following themes for presentation. The identified themes included, A Cordial Situation, Where Are the Parents?, I Make A Difference, and Funding is Priority.

## **A Cordial Situation**

Teachers and Administrators participating in this study recall that the majority population of the school district was Mexican American. While these demographics hold true today, it was not the case during the early years. Nevertheless, the situation as recalled by several of the interviewees described the relationships as cordial.

SO12MA26 provided a summary of his accounts by saying, “The Hispanic population was always the majority and for many years the Anglo appeared to have the leadership roles. Over time this changed and more Hispanics were going into leadership positions but this changed with the make-up of the school boards. The relationship from what I could see was always one of cordial. I never saw any racial issues. Everyone worked well together.”<sup>200</sup>

A more comprehensive description by SO19FA34 stated, “Before the 1960s students attended schools that were either entirely Mexican-American or Anglos according to where they lived.”<sup>201</sup> Later the district began assigning students to schools in the zone that was designated for them. So this began the end of a student population that was more diverse. There was still much to be done in integration of students within the classrooms. Until the 1970s there were students and teachers in what were known as high, medium and low achieving classrooms. Newly hired teachers were given low achieving classes. The introduction of Bilingual Education saw changes in manner in which students were grouped and taught. Although there was improvement in relationship between racial lines there is still underlying issues that need to be addressed.”

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<sup>200</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 15, 2012.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 11, 2012.

“When I was in elementary, junior high, and high school the relationship between Anglos and Mexican American were about half A / MA,” recalled SO2MT43.<sup>202</sup>

Others like SO12MA26 described their recollection of the district as, “Population is heavily populated by Mexican Americans. A few Anglo population. The relation between the two is good. I didn’t notice anything that could be considered crucial.”<sup>203</sup>

The student demographics, as presented by SO7FT08, identified the major shift toward a majority Mexican American population. “San Benito High School is predominately Hispanic. I would estimate that the school is 98% Hispanic with Anglo and African Americans at 2% of the population combined. This is not a very diverse community and is reflected in the school's population.”<sup>204</sup>

Overall, SO20MA23 had a very positive outlook on the situation when he presented his view of the situation. “Our population is predominately Hispanic with a small mixture of Anglo's. I really have never seen where the races do not mix. I see the students be friends without any prejudice.”<sup>205</sup>

Throughout the study, the demographics of the San Benito School District have changed dramatically over this one hundred year period. What began as a school district heavily populated by Anglo Americans, is now quite the opposite, as the majority population of this school district is now Mexican American in both students and staff.

### **Where are the Parents?**

The responses from the teachers and administrators shared their perceptions of the role the parents played in the education of their children. SO1MA30 described it as an “Parents

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<sup>202</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 26, 2012.

<sup>203</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 15, 2012.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 17, 2012.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 11, 2012.



scared to partner and participate in their child's education and the strong sense of Hispanic culture stopping their children from enrolling in universities. The poverty was such that the parent's expectations for their children were to graduate and find a job and support the family. We had a very hard time convincing parents to let go of their children and have them enroll in higher education. It took many years to break that trend.”<sup>206</sup>

“One of the most critical issues facing our schools today, in my opinion, was the lack of parental involvement. Many students here come from broken homes or their parents work so much that the children are left alone to figure things out on their own. It is a challenge to teach when the support is not given first in the home environment. When a student receives the support at home, no matter how rich or poor, the student excels in class and strives to seek knowledge. I have had students on both ends of this spectrum and have seen how important it is to have at least one parent/relative who cares about the student and encourages the student to set goals,” described SO7FT08.<sup>207</sup>

Lack of education on the parent's part seems to be a factor. SO8FA28 stated, “I believe that the most critical issues that SBCISD students and parents face is the lack of schooling by many parents of our students. Due to this lack of schooling, they sometimes feel as if they are not equipped to deal with the needs of their school aged children. This sometimes leads to their lack of participation in school activities.”<sup>208</sup>

SO10MT33 believed that, “The role parents play in the school district, getting involved with their children on their performance in the classroom,” is a factor to be considered.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 27, 2012.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 17, 2012.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 25, 2012.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 15, 2012.

Language is another consideration when identifying potential obstacles as SO10MT33 believed, “The problem stems from the fact that many Mexican American parents do not speak English at home and the students find little incentive to learn conversational English. Most concentrate on getting by on memorization of key words.”<sup>210</sup>

A strong belief by the parents that their children should stay close to home was described by SO6FT38. “Based on the Hispanic culture I still feel that parents in general do not want their kids to leave home to go to college. It has improved over time but in general this is still an issue with Hispanic culture.”<sup>211</sup>

Finally, SO12MA28s said, “The challenges that I face as a teacher is that of the students mentality that they feel that they need to help their parents out financially. The parents themselves need to see that their child’s education should be first. They see the money coming in and choose to ignore the student’s long term need of getting educated first because it’s about their child’s life as an adult.”<sup>212</sup>

The information from the interviews identified several issues regarding the role and support of the parent in the education of their child. What was discovered is that the ability of the parent to help their children is due to a lack of the parent’s education, which is constantly noted throughout the responses provided. The other notable factor was the expectation that the children contributed to the family financially. And lastly, the complacency on the part of the parent to be involved in their child’s education with the schools teachers and administrators also became evident.

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<sup>210</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 15, 2012.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 19, 2012.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 15, 2012.

## **I Make a Difference**

Teachers, administrators, and board members of the San Benito School District were united regarding the importance of educating students. They all had very similar responses and felt that in their opinion, they had made a difference in the education of students through their contributions and efforts. SO1MA30 described their role in supporting student's education by saying, "I worked at hiring the best possible highly qualified teachers/administrators. We focused on grants and brought millions of dollars to provide access to students, parents, and the community. We built a sense of confidence in the students and staff that SUCCESS was possible given conditions and a strong sense of support."<sup>213</sup>

SO6FT38 stated, "I bring life experiences into my classroom from my work on school and city boards and organizations. I am actively involved in many organizations and use that involvement to promote my students. How have I contributed? I don't lower my standards."<sup>214</sup> This is a very powerful statement from SO6FT38.

Real life experiences were what SO7FT08 felt made her contribution important.

I'm lucky that I get to teach a subject that I once made a career out of. When I teach, it is because I have real world experience and I can give the students a unique perspective. Many of my students have gone on to study communications/journalism in college. I still keep in touch with them, often proof read and/or brainstorm ideas with them for their college work. The opportunities they now have in college and career are because they took my classes and now have experience in publishing, writing, editing, designing, and photography. I am always writing recommendation letters for these students. Some are writing for magazines, taking pictures for city newspapers, teaching in foreign countries.<sup>215</sup>

SO8FA28 felt that a coordination of services and programs helped her to impact her students.

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<sup>213</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 27, 2012.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 19, 2012.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 17, 2012.

I am able to reach a variety of students through my current position and help them speak to counselors and social workers to help them prepare for their future educational opportunities. I am fortunate to work on a TTIPS campus where we have a social worker and a career counselor to help make students aware of educational opportunities. We also have a GEAR-Up coordinator that gives them information about post-secondary education. I also speak to parents on an ongoing basis to help them prepare for their child's future college plans.<sup>216</sup>

Most importantly for SO20MA23 was understanding the students and being able to relate to them. SO20MA33 said, “I treat all students with respect. I understand and accept each student individually. I am empathetic to their concerns, problems, etc. I make them realize, that they control their own destiny and they need to build on their positive experiences and learn from their mistakes.”<sup>217</sup>

Teachers, administrators, and board members had the ability to directly impact the education of students. There was such a sense of pride that each of them had for the way that they contributed to providing students with educational opportunities. Not for one moment did any of these participants relate to their efforts in a negative manner.

### **Funding Is Priority**

Recently, funding of public education has been a serious topic of consideration by the Texas Legislature. While this subject can directly affect students, the responses obtained describe the seriousness of the matter and a sense of urgency to find financial resources.

SO1MA30 believed, “The biggest challenge as a principal was maximizing the funds allocated to the campus. As superintendent, politics was the biggest and most time consuming issue I faced in my 9 yrs as superintendent of schools.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 15, 2012.

<sup>217</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 11, 2012.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 27, 2012.

Funding again was identified by SO7FT08 as a major challenge along with a few others related to school community. “The challenges we face right now as teachers are the lack of funds for departments, teaching a FOMO (fear of missing out) generation, and getting parents/community to focus on the academic achievement of this generation.”<sup>219</sup>

The ability to hire staff according to SO8FA28 was also directly related to the lack of funding. SO8FA28 commented, “Before this year, I think one of the challenges was having funds on the campus to get the necessary support personnel available to counsel students as well as parents. TTIPS has helped us hire additional staff that deals with college readiness and awareness.”<sup>220</sup>

A sign of the current times, SO18FT21 reflected on the situation by saying, “The district has faced many challenges, but the most pressing one at this time is related to budgetary issues and concerns due to state funding.”<sup>221</sup>

The challenge to fund public schools is not new to Texas. School officials, including teachers, administrators, and board members have all identified funding as a challenge for the students of the San Benito School District.

### **Summary of School Officials Interviews**

The responses from the school personnel interviewed were valuable in helping us to understand their perspective of how they feel they impacted the education of Mexican American students in San Benito High School. Those interviewed varied in years of experience, from 8 years to 43. The school officials with more years of experience in education recalled having to deal with issues involving discrimination of Mexican Americans by adults and sometimes

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<sup>219</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 17, 2012.

<sup>220</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 15, 2012.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with a San Benito School Official, October 12, 2012.

students. They remember a predominately Anglo leadership in the district. They also commented on how school facilities were not as comfortable and appealing as they are today. They talked about the lack of parental involvement in the students education and how this became a significant factor in students seeking opportunities for higher education.

As time evolved, many of these same teachers now comment on how they enjoy the comforts of the new facilities. They feel as if the change in demographics to a very dominate Mexican American student body, faculty, and administration has helped these groups relate more closely than ever before. Many of these school officials were proud about how they positively impacted students through their various positions. However, the concern regarding parental involvement has not changed, and many school officials feel there is still a significant lack of participation on the parents' part. Another major concern that surfaced through these interviews was a lack of adequate funding for our public school system and how the negative impact on their budgets directly affects students.

The commentary derived from these interviews is very helpful to understand the level of commitment these school officials have toward their profession. They realize there have always been obstacles, some have passed and others remain, but nevertheless, they remain committed to providing students with quality education.

### **Research Questions**

The focus of this qualitative study on the San Benito School District was to discover through research from firsthand accounts of former students, as well as former/current teachers, administrators, and board members, the barriers that affect the educational and social opportunities of Mexican American students. Secondary resources were also considered in the study such as newspaper publications, yearbooks, and board minutes. The researcher found

answers to the following questions: 1) What educational barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009? 2) What social barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009? The questions are answered based on the information obtained.

### **Research Question 1**

What educational barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009?

The information provided by both the students, as well as the teachers, administrators, and board members participating in this study, as identified in Table 18 and Table 19, revealed several factors that contributed to educational barriers for Mexican American students. A close examination of the data revealed parental involvement, educational opportunities, and school leadership as barriers. Examining of the role of the parent in supporting their child's education, it was apparent that most families encouraged their children to finish their high school education, but did not necessarily promote continuation of their education in an institution of higher education. In some cases, students were encouraged to complete their high school diploma and seek employment so that they could become financial contributors for the family. This was also evident in the support school personnel provided Mexican American students. Mexican American students were placed in an educational track that encouraged exposure toward manual or office related skills and not toward college preparation. In some cases, families migrated to other states to find work in the area of agriculture. This yearly process took students out of school in late spring and they returned in the fall, causing them to miss several months of school.

Parents also had issues communicating with school personnel due to language barriers and levels of education. These issues prevented them from having effective lines of communication with school personnel and at times with their own children. Parents with limited English language found it difficult, as well as embarrassing, to communicate with their children's teachers and school administrators, and therefore generally removed themselves from participation in school functions or events. Their limited educational levels also contributed to this barrier, as this hindered their ability to assist their children with their school work at home and made them feel a sense of humiliation as they were not as educated as school personnel. They respected the decisions of the teachers and administrators, which may not have the best decisions for their children.

The level of support from the school's teachers, counselors, and administration in providing opportunities for quality education, preparation for attendance at institutions of higher learning, and general concern for the Mexican American students can also be considered a barrier toward furthering their education. Students recall the impact school counselors had on their educational career. For most, a visit to the counselor during their high school years generally involved a schedule change. Most students reflect on the fact that they never received encouragement or advice from counselors, teachers or administrators. In fact, some students refer to the fact that they felt as if they were treated differently and encouraged to take an educational path that would lead them toward blue-collar jobs. It seems that students were also segregated within the schools, and placed in classes that were entirely Mexican American. The use of the Spanish language in schools was also discouraged. Students also recall that the new teachers were placed in classrooms for low achieving students. The feeling of helplessness was apparent throughout the responses from the students. At times, students refer to their



environment as prejudice toward them. They felt that no one was coming to their rescue. The leadership of the district was Anglo for many years and there was no representation for Mexican American students until recent years.

## **Research Question 2**

What social barriers affected Mexican American students in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District between 1909 and 2009?

As discovered through the data in Table 16, opportunities for Mexican American students to participate in social organizations within the school district evolved significantly over time. Competitive sports have evolved since 1909 and include more opportunities for both male and female athletes. Social and academic clubs have also expanded their offerings throughout the time span of this study, providing more options for students to become engaged in extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

However, barriers for Mexican American students in these types of social settings have been affected by obstacles such as parental encouragement and support, academic restrictions, and social prejudice. Students recall obstacles such as having to provide support to the family unit, through the assignment of chores at the home, or by being required to be an employed wage earner. It was the expectation by the parents that their children contribute financially. Therefore, involvement in athletics or clubs would require students to have to remain after school for participation and practice, taking time away from responsibilities at home or work.

In the early years, academic and social clubs were much more limited than today. Mexican American students were restricted or excluded due to academic performance and social status, which were certainly barriers for Mexican American students. Interestingly, Mexican American students dominated clubs geared toward vocational settings such as Future Farmers of

America and Future Homemakers of America, while Anglo students dominated academic and social clubs such as National Honor Society, student council, and yearbook. Anglo students participated in sports related activities like tennis, basketball, football, and cheerleading, while there was little participation by Mexican American students until the late 1960s early 1970s.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Summary**

The inclusion of Mexican American students in educational and social opportunities in the San Benito School District has improved significantly over the last century. Considering how the school district has evolved, and the growing pains endured by this educational community, a remarkable change can be noticed.

A review of the board minutes, yearbooks, and interviews clearly reveal the dominant Anglo student body as well as the Anglo leadership of the school district, inclusive of the board of trustees, superintendent, administrators, and teaching staff, since its inception in 1909. It was not until the 1960s that Mexican American representation on the Board of Trustees began. It was even much later that the first Mexican American superintendent was employed in the 1980s. The high school saw its first Mexican American principal in the 1990s.

For the first time in 1910, mention is made in the board minutes of the “Mexican” school, as they employed a principal for that campus. Again, in March of 1911, the “Mexican” school was mentioned as the board considered allowing it to be used to conduct Sunday school and for services by a local religious congregation. In 1929, mention was made once again in a report to the school board of a Mexican student that was injured on the playground at the “Mexiquita” school. In a report to the board on December of 1929, the superintendent reported on enrollment of the schools, for which “Mexiquita” had a student enrollment almost double that of the other schools. These records clearly indicated educational facilities did exist for Mexican American

students since the inception of the school district, but what it did not provide us with was detailed information on access to quality education, conditions of facilities, and social opportunities for Mexican American students.

Moving forward from the 1930s to the late 1950s, the culture of the school district began to shift. Again, what started as a predominately Anglo dominated school district, both in student population and school district leadership, was now showing signs of a growing Mexican American student population, with the inclusion of a Mexican American serving on the school board .

The 1960s began with a large influx of Mexican American students in the San Benito Public Schools. The enrollment of the senior class was now slightly more than half Mexican American, participation in athletic sports were now dominated by Mexican American students, and social clubs began to see an increase of Mexican Americans students as well.

Since the turn of the century, Mexican American students clearly dominated the student population of the high school, inclusive of sports, social clubs, and academic clubs. The top decision making positions, school board and superintendent, were also occupied by a Mexican American majority.

This study was intended to serve as a written document for the educational community as well as the community of the city of San Benito, Texas, to be used to reflect on past issues affecting Mexican American students' educational and social opportunities in the public school system. The success of the San Benito School District is contingent upon the foresight of the educational community, inclusive of its leadership, to prepare students for college and career opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

The study sought to identify factors that prohibited Mexican American students in the San Benito School District from participating in educational and social opportunities over the one hundred year span of this study. While Mexican Americans were participating in the educational system of the school district, there was limited information about the conditions this student population was subjected to, or the degree of social acceptance. Not only were there negative factors created by the school system that affected the Mexican American student population, such as poor facilities, teacher quality, and limited curriculum, but there were social factors as well, such as segregation and prejudice. In some instances, it was found that the parents played a role in hindering their children's education, due to the need for their children to be financial contributors for the family. This minimized opportunities for them to participate in social activities such as athletics, academic clubs, and other organizations within the school system.

Two similar research studies, conducted in school districts close to San Benito CISD and within the same time period, found many of the same obstacles for Mexican American students. Rivera (2008) concluded that Mexican American students suffered issues of prejudice and discrimination in their education, inclusive of curriculum, facilities, and post secondary opportunities. Rivera (2008) also concluded that many of the problems students endured were the same for most other school districts, including closing the achievement gap between Anglo and Mexican American students, high stakes testing, and accountability. De Leon Edwards (2011) conducted a research study on Mexican American students and found that much like the students in San Benito and in Rivera's study, there was division of the Anglos and Mexican Americans, in the city and school communities. The students in DeLeon-Edward's study also

suffered prejudice and discrimination in their educational opportunities. The lack of parental involvement was also evident in these studies as parents were reluctant to participate in their children's education because of their inability to communicate effectively with school officials in English.

These three studies were conducted in similar geographic locations and time spans, and show many similarities to the challenges in educational and social opportunities for Mexican American students in the Rio Grande Valley. The studies also reveal that over time, as education reform happened through the creation of national and state laws, opportunities began to evolve to what we have today.

As the educational system has evolved, Mexican American students have been provided more opportunities. This particular population has become a more dominant population. Laws have been enacted to create equal opportunities for minorities such as Mexican Americans, and as a class of people, Mexican Americans have become more accepted in society. The challenges to prepare students to become college or career ready have also been instrumental in providing increased opportunities. The high schools are finding more ways to reach students in educational opportunities and social arenas. The San Benito High School has more than forty different clubs and sports activities for students to choose from, as shown in Table 16, therefore providing a wider range of possibilities for student involvement and interaction with others.

Dr. Steve Murdock has served as the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau and State Demographer of Texas, and now is the founding Director of the Hobby Center for the Study of Texas, located at Rice University. Dr. Murdock indicates that during the middle of this century, the State of Texas, and soon the nation, will begin to mirror the demographics of South Texas, which is predominately Hispanic.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the finding from this qualitative study. This study intended to tell the story of the progress the San Benito School District has made in the last century in the areas of educational and social opportunities for Mexican American students. There are several possibilities for future studies, including the potential for others to conduct similar studies on a particular school district of interest to them. A study on the effects Mexican American students from differing socio-economic classes may have in educational and social opportunities might be considered as well. Recent immigrants might be another area of study, looking at how these opportunities affect their education. Furthermore, educational leaders may consider viewing this study as a basis by which they might expand their knowledge of how educational and social opportunities evolved for Mexican American students of this one school district located in deep South Texas. Additionally, opportunities for further research may reveal more insight to the social climate of the community and potential effects on the students of the school district. A focus on a more narrowed time frame might also provide a basis for a supporting research study. History teachers in the San Benito School District might consider using this study to develop teaching modules for students to become more informed. The local historical society and the San Benito News might consider promoting this information as a means of public awareness. And finally, further research might reveal other barriers that might have also had an adverse effect on Mexican American students.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVED INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Single Person Interview

Telephone Interview Script

E-Mail Correspondence Interview

University of Texas – Pan American

Approved by: UTPA IRB

Expires: 7/26/2013

IRB# 2012-067-06

Informed Consent Form – Telephone Interview Consent Script

A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System For a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009.

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to this telephone interview today.

The title of the study being conducted is "A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System for a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009."

I will be asking you questions relating to your experiences with the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District as a former student or school official. Although I have specific questions to ask you, I may also ask you to clarify your response or to elaborate on your response.

Before we start the interview, there is some important information that I must give you. Please listen carefully and feel free to stop me at any time to ask me to repeat the information or to clarify it for you.

This research survey is being conducted by Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr. from the University of Texas – Pan American/UTPA, under the supervision of Dr. Velma Menchaca. We are conducting a research study about the history of the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District with a focus on the challenges of educational and social opportunities faced by Mexican American students in this school district in the twentieth century. As part of this study, we are interested in the views of persons who attended and/or graduated from San Benito CISD schools and/or who have a relationship with the San Benito CISD as former students, and former or current teachers, administrators, or school board members.

This telephone interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes. Your individual responses will be treated confidentially. Your participation is completely

voluntary; although you have shown interest in participating in this study, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and can choose not to answer specific questions.

Please know that this study has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools and participation in this study will not adversely affect elected school officials, or current or future employment with the district.



The University of Texas – Pan American

Approved by: UTPA IRB

Expires: 7/26/2013

IRB# 2012-067-06

Informed Consent Form – Interview Consent Script

A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System For a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009.

This research survey is being conducted by Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr. from the University of Texas – Pan American/UTPA, under the supervision of Dr. Velma Menchaca. We are conducting a research study about the history of the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District with a focus on the challenges in educational and social opportunities faced by Mexican American students in this school district in the twentieth century. As part of this study, we are interested in the views of persons who attended and/or graduated from San Benito CISD schools and/or who have a relationship with the San Benito CISD as former students, or current or former teachers, administrators, or school board members.

We have invited you here today so that we can conduct an interview about issues related to this topic. The interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes. Your individual responses will be treated confidentially. Your participation is completely voluntary; although you have shown interest in participating in this study, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and can choose not to answer specific questions.

In order to ensure the accuracy of recorded statements, we will be recording the session on audio tape and later transcribing the tapes. The tapes will not be marked with your names and will be securely stored at UTPA. The recordings themselves will only be used for research purposes and will not be given to anyone not directly involved in the research. Audio tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the transcription.

Your responses may be quoted in whole or in part in publications or presentations based on this research. If quotes are used, your real name will be replaced by a made up name (pseudonym) and any additional information that might directly identify you will be excluded, unless you give the researcher permission to use your real name and identifying information.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research. If you are under 18, please let the researcher know before the session begins.

Please know that this study has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools and participation in this study will not adversely affect elected school officials, or current or future employment with the district.

Researcher contact information:      Name: Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr.  
Dept: Educational Leadership  
The University of Texas-Pan American  
Phone: 956-536-7300, Email: [tonylarajr@gmail.com](mailto:tonylarajr@gmail.com)

Faculty Advisor Name:                Dr. Velma Menchaca  
Contact information:                Dept: Educational Leadership  
The University of Texas-Pan American  
Phone: 956-665-2943, Email: [menchaca@utpa.edu](mailto:menchaca@utpa.edu)

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at **956-665-2889** or [irb@utpa.edu](mailto:irb@utpa.edu). You are also invited to provide anonymous feedback to the IRB by visiting [www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback](http://www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback)

Please keep this sheet for your reference.

The University of Texas – Pan American

Approved by: UTPA IRB

Expires: 7/26/2013

IRB# 2012-067-06

Informed Consent Form – Telephone Interview Consent Script

A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System For a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009.

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to this telephone interview today.

The title of the study being conducted is "A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System for a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009."

I will be asking you questions relating to your experiences with the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District as a former student or current or former school official. Although I have specific questions to ask you, I may also ask you to clarify your response, or to extend it for more information.

Before we start the interview, there is some important information that I must give you. Please listen closely and feel free to stop me at any time to ask me to repeat the information or clarify it for you.

This research survey is being conducted by Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr. from the University of Texas – Pan American/UTPA, under the supervision of Dr. Velma Menchaca. We are conducting a research study about the history of the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District with a focus on the challenges in educational and social opportunities faced by Mexican American students in this school district in the twentieth century. As part of this study, we are interested in the views of persons who attended and/or graduated from San Benito CISD schools and/or who have a relationship with the San Benito CISD as a former student, or current or former teacher, administrator, or school board member.

This telephone interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes. Your individual responses will be treated confidentially. Your participation is completely voluntary; although you have shown interest in participating in this study, you are

free to withdraw from the interview at any time and can choose not to answer specific questions.

In order to ensure the accuracy of recorded statements, we may be recording the session on audio tape and later transcribing the tapes. The tapes will not be marked with your names and will be securely stored at UTPA. The recordings themselves will only be used for research purposes and will not be given to anyone not directly involved in the research. Audio tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the transcription.

Your responses may be quoted in whole or in part in publications or presentations based on this research. If quotes are used, your real name will be replaced by a made up name (pseudonym) and any additional information that might directly identify you will be excluded, unless you give the researcher permission to use your real name and identifying information.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research. Are you at least 18 years old?

Researcher: I would also like to provide you with important contact information.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the researcher Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr. by telephone at 956-536-7300; or if you prefer, you may email the researcher at [tonylarajr@gmail.com](mailto:tonylarajr@gmail.com).

You may also contact the faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Velma Menchaca, for any questions on this research at the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Texas-Pan American. Her number there is 956-665-2943; or if you prefer, you may also email her at [menchaca@utpa.edu](mailto:menchaca@utpa.edu).

I also want you to let you know that this study has been reviewed by our the University's Human Subjects Ethics Committee, called the IRB. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or want to voice any concerns about the way this research was conducted, you can contact the IRB directly at 956-665-2889. You may also email the IRB at [irb@utpa.edu](mailto:irb@utpa.edu).

Please know that this study has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools and participation in this study will not adversely affect elected school officials, or current or future employment with the district.

Let me know if you have any questions regarding the information I have given you so far. Is there anything you would like me to repeat?

*Researcher will proceed to ask the following questions. Interviewee may expand upon the answer as he/she wishes, but will be guided back to the questions if he/she digresses.*

The University of Texas – Pan American

Approved by: UTPA IRB

Expires: 7/26/2013

IRB# 2012-067-06

Informed Consent Form – E-Mail Correspondence Interview

A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System For a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009

Email used for recruitment (letter of introduction):

Greetings:

My name is Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr. and I am currently conducting a research study (doctoral dissertation) titled: A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System For a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the San Benito CISD during the twentieth century with a focus on the challenges in educational and social opportunities encountered by Mexican American students who were served by the school district. As a former student and/or graduate of the San Benito CISD schools, I believe that your educational experiences with the San Benito CISD would greatly assist me in completing this study [alternate sentence: As a former teacher, administrator, or school board member in the San Benito CISD, I believe that your experiences with the school district would greatly assist me in completing this study].

I would like to invite you to participate in this study through an email “interview” correspondence where I send you via email, a list of questions and you may respond to the best of your recollection.

Please know that this study has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools and participation in this study will not adversely affect elected school officials, or current or future employment with the district.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email. If you wish, you may also call me at 956-536-7300 (cell phone) for additional information on the study.

Sincerely,

Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr.

Email correspondence upon acceptance by the participant to participate:

Greetings:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study (doctoral dissertation) titled: A Historical Study on the Progression of the Inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social Opportunities in the San Benito Public School System For a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909 - 2009.

As previously explained, the purpose of the study is to investigate the educational history of the San Benito CISD during the twentieth century with a focus on the educational and social opportunities for Mexican American students served by the school district.

Through email correspondence, I will be asking you questions relating to your experiences with the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District as a former student or school official.

Although I have specific questions to ask you, I may also ask you later to clarify your response, or to extend it for more information.

Before we begin, there is some important information that I must give you.

Your email responses will be treated confidentially; however, you should know that we cannot guarantee the security of e-mail transmissions. Your participation is completely voluntary; although you have shown interest in participating in this study, you are free to withdraw from the e-mail correspondence interview at any time and can choose not to answer specific questions.

Your e-mail response printouts will not be marked with your name and will be securely stored at UTPA. The e-mail response printouts will only be used for research purposes and will not be given to anyone not directly involved in the research. After the data from the e-mail responses have been recorded, the emails will be deleted.

Your e-mail responses may be quoted in whole or in part in publications or presentations based on this research. If quotes are used, your real name will be replaced by a made up name (pseudonym) and any additional information that might directly identify you will be excluded, unless you give the researcher permission to use your real name and identifying information.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research. If you are under 18, please let me know before we begin this e-mail correspondence interview.

Please know that this study has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools and participation in this study will not adversely affect elected school officials, or current or future employment with the district.

I would also like to provide you with the following important contact information. If you have any questions about the research, you may contact the following persons:

Researcher contact information:      Name: Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr.  
Dept: Educational Leadership  
The University of Texas-Pan American  
Phone: 956-536-7300, Email: [tonylarajr@gmail.com](mailto:tonylarajr@gmail.com)

Faculty Advisor Name:                Dr. Velma Menchaca  
Contact information:                Dept: Educational Leadership  
The University of Texas-Pan American  
Phone: 956-665-2943, Email: [menchaca@utpa.edu](mailto:menchaca@utpa.edu)

You should also know that this research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956-665-2889 or [irb@utpa.edu](mailto:irb@utpa.edu). You are also invited to provide anonymous feedback to the IRB by visiting [www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback](http://www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback). Please keep this email for your reference.

Please answer as many of the following questions as you can. Feel free to give extensive details on each, but remember that you may also choose not to answer specific questions.

1. State your name and provide some general biographical information about yourself (where you lived in San Benito, and your current career information)
2. Tell about your educational experiences in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District (which schools you attended, who your teachers were, what subjects you studied, who were some of your classmates, when did you graduate or leave school)
3. Describe for me what you remember about the schools that you attended in San Benito (physical conditions of facilities and school climate).
4. Were you encouraged by your teachers, counselors, administrators, parents to continue your education and attend college?
5. Was there every any communication between you, your parents, and school officials (counselors or administrators)?
6. Did you ever belong to a school sponsored organization or club, and if so, were you ever an officer in either of these?
7. What changes have you seen in San Benito schools over the years?
8. Did you feel that you were given extra opportunities or preparation in school to further your education?
9. Did you feel that you had to overcome challenges in school to further your education?

10. Did you feel that you were treated differently from other students by the teachers, counselors or administrators in your school? If so, how did you or your parents respond to you being treated differently?

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. Your responses will assist me greatly in completing the research study and expanding the body of knowledge regarding this topic.

Sincerely,

Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr.



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for San Benito Alumni

Interview Questions for School Officials

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SAN BENITO ALUMNI:

Please answer as many of the following questions as you can. Feel free to give extensive details on each, but remember that you may also choose not to answer specific questions.

1. State your name and provide some general biographical information about yourself (where you lived in San Benito, and your current career information)
2. Tell about your educational experiences in the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District (which schools you attended, who your teachers were, what subjects you studied, who were some of your classmates, when did you graduate or leave school)
3. Describe for me what you remember about the schools that you attended in San Benito (physical conditions of facilities and school climate).
4. Were you encouraged by your teachers, counselors, administrators, parents to continue your education and attend college?
5. Was there every any communication between you, your parents, and school officials (counselors or administrators)?
6. Did you ever belong to a school sponsored organization or club, and if so, were you ever an officer in either of these?
7. What changes have you seen in San Benito schools over the years?
8. Did you feel that you were given extra opportunities or preparation in school to further your education?
9. Did you feel that you had to overcome challenges in school to further your education?
10. Did you feel that you were treated differently from other students by the teachers, counselors or administrators in your school? If so, how did you or your parents respond to you being treated differently?

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. Your responses will assist me greatly in completing the research study and expanding the body of knowledge regarding this topic.

Sincerely,

Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS:

Please answer as many of the following questions as you can. Feel free to give extensive details on each, but remember that you may also choose not to answer specific questions.

1. State your name and provide some general biographical information about yourself (education, career information).
2. Tell about your employment with the San Benito CISD (when employed, length of employment, why you chose to work there, the type of work you did, and co-workers you remember.
3. Describe the make-up of the population of the school district, and the relationship between Anglo and Mexican Americans during this time?
4. What do you feel were the most critical issues that San Benito CISD students, parents and community faced during the time period when you were there?
5. How has San Benito CISD changed since the time you were there? Facilities, district climate/culture, students, parents, community?
6. What do you feel were the most significant problems that Mexican American students faced in their education? Today?
7. How did you affect students through your position as teacher/principal/superintendent/school board trustee in the San Benito CISD?
8. What contributions did you make that helped to increase educational or social opportunities for all students?
9. What challenges did you face as a teacher/administrator/school board trustee?
10. Is there any other information that I did not ask about that you feel is relevant to this topic?

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. Your responses will assist me greatly in completing the research study and expanding the body of knowledge regarding this topic.

Sincerely,

Marco Antonio (Tony) Lara, Jr.

APPENDIX C  
SUPERINTENDENT LETTER OF CONSENT



*San Benito Consolidated Independent School District*

**Antonio G. Limón, Superintendent of Schools**  
240 North Crockett Street • San Benito, TX 78586 • Phone: (956) 361-6110 • FAX: (956) 361-6115

**Superintendent Letter of Consent  
IRB# 2012-067-06 Marco Lara**

**Board of Trustees**

Ylanna G. Rodriguez  
President  
Anna Cruz  
Vice President  
June Aguilera  
Secretary  
Fatima Huerta  
Julian Huerta  
Hector G. Leal  
Oscar Medrano

**Finance Committee**

Anna Cruz  
Chairman  
Hector G. Leal  
Julian Huerta

**Policy Review Committee**

June Aguilera  
Chairman  
Oscar Medrano  
Anna Cruz

**Building Committee**

Julian Huerta  
Chairman  
Fatima Huerta  
June Aguilera

**Curriculum Committee**

Fatima Huerta  
Chairman  
Hector G. Leal  
Anna Cruz

**Marco Antonio Lara, Jr.**  
[tonylarajr@gmail.com](mailto:tonylarajr@gmail.com)

19590 Kilbourn Rd.  
Harlingen, TX 78550  
(956)536-7300

I, **Antonio Limon**, Superintendent of Schools for **San Benito Consolidated Independent School District**, grant permission to Marco Antonio Lara, Jr. to contact School Board Members, Central Office and Campus Administrators, as well as District Teachers, for the purpose of conducting interviews for a research study titled "A Historical Study on the Progression of the inclusion of Mexican American Students in Educational and Social opportunities in the San Benito Public School System for a One Hundred Year Period Beginning 1909-2009.

**Antonio Limon**  
Superintendent of Schools

7-25-12

Date

*It is the policy of the San Benito CISD not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, or disability in its educational and vocational programs, services or activities as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.*

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marco Antonio Lara, Jr. was born on July 16, 1960, in Brownsville, Texas. He attended the San Benito Public School System, 1<sup>st</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade, graduating in May 1978 with his high school diploma. Upon graduation from San Benito High School, he attended Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, where he earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in December of 1982. He worked in the private sector for 12 years in various positions of Business Management before entering the field of Education. Following his Bachelor degree, he completed a Master of Science Degree in Educational Administration in December 2002 from Texas A&M University-Kingsville, and in 2013 a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. He holds certificates in Office Education (Grades 6-12), Principal (Grades EC-12), and Superintendent (Grades EC-12). He has been engaged in public schools for the last nineteen years and has taught business and technology courses at the high school level, served as the Business Manager for a school district, a Superintendent of Schools, and currently the Deputy Director for Administrative Leadership, School, and Community Support for the Region One Education Service Center. He resides with his wife, Juanita Maribel (Molly) Lara, and their two sons, Marco (Marc) Antonio Lara, III, and Jonathan Myles Lara in Harlingen Texas.