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Riding the Yellow School Bus in a Post-*Brown* Era:  
Experiences of Mexican-Origin Students in a Racially Integrated Suburban School Setting

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education

by

Ofelia Huidor

2013

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Riding the Yellow School Bus in a Post-*Brown* Era:  
Experiences of Mexican-Origin Students in a Racially Integrated Suburban School Setting

by

Ofelia Huidor

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Daniel G. Solorzano, Chair

This qualitative study provided an in-depth look at the experiences of Mexican-origin students who participated in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes. In an effort to address the gap in the prevailing literature on desegregation studies, the experiences of their parents was also included. The socio-cultural dimension of schooling was utilized as a framework to examine the social, cultural, and environmental components that impacted the learning of students who participated in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes. The components within the socio-cultural dimension were also examined in conjunction with a framework that considered several critical conditions of schooling in order to position the educational experiences of students as central to the analysis.

Results from the data analysis included the following: (a) the reasons why parents and students opted to participate in the PWT program, (b) the experiences of PWT students and their

parents at or with the receiving school, and (c) the students' and parents' reflections regarding the significance of the PWT program. The participants also offered valuable recommendations that were included as implications for policy with regard to the schooling process. The findings posited the need for further research pertaining to the experiential contributions of the participants; the narratives also illustrated the knowledge to be gained about the impact of voluntary busing programs.

The dissertation of Ofelia Huidor is approved

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2013

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Huidor, O. & Cooper, R. (2010). Examining the Socio-Cultural Dimension of Schooling in a Racially Integrated School. *Education and Urban Society, 42(2), 143-167.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Study**

At the start of my graduate studies I moved from the inner-city to a suburb in Los Angeles County. I had been raised in a mostly Spanish-speaking working-class community where the majority of the population had roots in Mexico or Central America. My socioeconomic background did not resemble the demographics of the predominantly White<sup>1</sup> middle-class suburb. As a new resident I acquainted myself with the neighborhood. My attention was immediately drawn to Diversity High School<sup>2</sup> due to the many yellow school buses arriving with a majority of students of color.<sup>3</sup> As an academic researcher, the topic of educational busing and the experience of students of color who rode the bus on a daily basis captivated my interest. I wanted to investigate the busing process and the academic and social experiences of students of color who left their neighborhood in order to attend Diversity High School (hereafter, DHS).

Given the numerous school buses in transit to and from DHS, I questioned if students were bused in order to alleviate overcrowding from other schools. I speculated if DHS was part of a small school district due to the middle-class residential area and its outlying location from the city of Los Angeles. After some inquiry I learned that it was a public institution of Los Angeles Unified School District (hereafter, LAUSD) that received students under a voluntary busing program called Permits With Transportation (hereafter, PWT).

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<sup>1</sup> White refers to European-descent populations or Caucasian. The term is capitalized to acknowledge a racial group. A predominantly White school or neighborhood refers to the White population as the plurality and/or the majority.

<sup>2</sup> For confidentiality reasons, Diversity High School is a pseudonym.

<sup>3</sup> Students of color refer to non-White populations, with a particular emphasis on African Americans and Latina/os. This definition will also apply to “communities of color” used throughout this study.

As a new resident, I tried to immerse myself with the locals and even sought out the familiar Spanish-speaking people. However, living in a suburban community was a new experience because I was not prepared to take in the realities of such an environment. For instance, the Spanish-speaking folks that I was accustomed to interacting with on a frequent basis were few. Most of the Spanish-speaking people I observed around the suburban community were gardeners and cleaning ladies. Moreover, I did not expect that my dark complexion would represent the minority or to encounter stereotypes about Latina/os<sup>4</sup> when I moved to the area.

Although people were generally cordial with me, there were some awkward moments with individuals who wanted to know what brought me to live to the neighborhood. This was usually followed by curiosity regarding my ethnic background. Without hesitation, I disclosed that I was a first generation Mexican-American. Yet, most of these encounters had a pattern. There were assumptions that my employment was in the domestic sector. However, when I engaged these people in conversation and shared that I was a doctoral student as well as a full-time employee at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), their expressions were usually a simple ‘Oh’ that prompted them to want to know more about me. The truth was that I had moved to the area to assist an elderly person in exchange for renting a room.

Coming from a primarily Latina/o working-class community, the adaptation of living in a suburb with mainly White residents was challenging because I felt like a fish out of water. Being a double minority due to my ethnic background and a minority in numerical terms was not the norm for me. As a researcher, I conjectured about the experiences of Mexican-origin<sup>5</sup> students

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<sup>4</sup> In this study, the term Latina/o is used to acknowledge gender impartiality and refers to Spanish-speaking populations with origins in Mexico and Central America. School or census data pertaining to Latina/os is taken from the Hispanic category and include persons of Mexican, Caribbean, Central American, and South American descent.

<sup>5</sup> In this study, the term Mexican-origin refers to persons having at least one parent of Mexican ancestry.

who were bused to DHS. I speculated if the paradigm of being a double minority was something that they had experienced as a result of being bused to a new school setting. Thus, the impetus for conducting research about Mexican-origin students who were bused from their resident school<sup>6</sup> inadvertently grew out of my own disconnect with the demographics of my new suburban residence. In addition, the topic piqued my interest and induced a series of questions about busing that made me reflect on my own K-12 education in LAUSD. I attended schools that were overcrowded and stigmatized as low performing. I fared well on an academic level, but my K-12 schooling experience did not expose me to a racially and ethnically diverse student body. The majority of my peers were Latina/os, mostly of Mexican-origin, followed by students with a Central American heritage. There were only a handful of African-American students and the White or Asian students were practically nonexistent. Moreover, by the time I entered high school, where exposure to college opportunities was most critical, there were few advanced placement courses that fostered access to higher education.

During my undergraduate years at UCLA, I noticed the disparity of my academic preparation when compared to my classmates who attended public schools in more economically advantaged areas or private schools. In addition, the culture shock of being in a space with so many different nationalities was an eye-opener, yet simultaneously an unfamiliar experience because my local context had been the complete opposite. In retrospect, I could only speculate if riding the yellow school bus to a multicultural school such as DHS would have made a positive difference in my schooling experience. Thus, I decided to focus my dissertation on the topic of voluntary school busing for integration purposes to learn about the experiences of Mexican-origin students who attended a racially and ethnically diverse high school.

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<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this study, the term resident school(s) refers to the school(s) in the urban regions of Los Angeles where Mexican-origin students resided and were bused from.

## **Purpose of Study**

This study examined the high enrollment numbers of Latina/o students in LAUSD and the district's voluntary integration program as a measure to address racial isolation. The purpose of this study was to provide an update on the status of the PWT program and to document the experiences of the participants. Through my research on the subject, I learned that few data existed regarding the status of the PWT program and its goals for integration. Moreover, there was a prominent gap in the busing literature regarding the experiences of Mexican-origin students and the inclusion of their parent's role. Although the student participants were the primary unit of study, the contribution of parents was regarded as a supplementary unit of study that could offer contextual value to this dissertation. Thus, the narratives of Mexican-origin students who participated in the PWT program and their parents comprised the core of this research study. The following section discusses the two research questions for this study.

## **Research Questions**

This dissertation sought to represent the experiences of Mexican-origin students and their parents by examining the details prior, during, and subsequent to participating in a voluntary integration program. Although students were the primary participants of the PWT program, parents were usually involved in the decision-making process to apply to the busing program and throughout the extent of their child's participation in the PWT program. Thus, the input of parents was considered an additive value to this investigation. With this objective, the following two research questions and their respective sub-question guided this dissertation.

- 1) Why are Mexican-origin students voluntarily leaving their neighborhood schools?
  - a) What factors do Mexican-origin students and their parents consider when participating in a busing program that is designed for integration purposes?



The first research question sought to provide background context to the circumstances and reasons that parents considered in their decision to enroll their children in a voluntary busing program. It was important for this study to understand the conditions that led to participation in the PWT program.

2) What are the social and academic experiences that Mexican-origin students and their parents encounter in a diverse school setting?

a) What is the significance that Mexican-origin students and their parents attribute to their participation in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes?

The second research question sought to document what occurred during the course of their participation in the PWT program. Having been involved in the voluntary transfer to a new school for at least four years, the narratives of students and parents yielded insightful perspectives, albeit on different levels, in light of the daily attendance of PWT students at DHS versus the intermittent presence of their parents on campus.

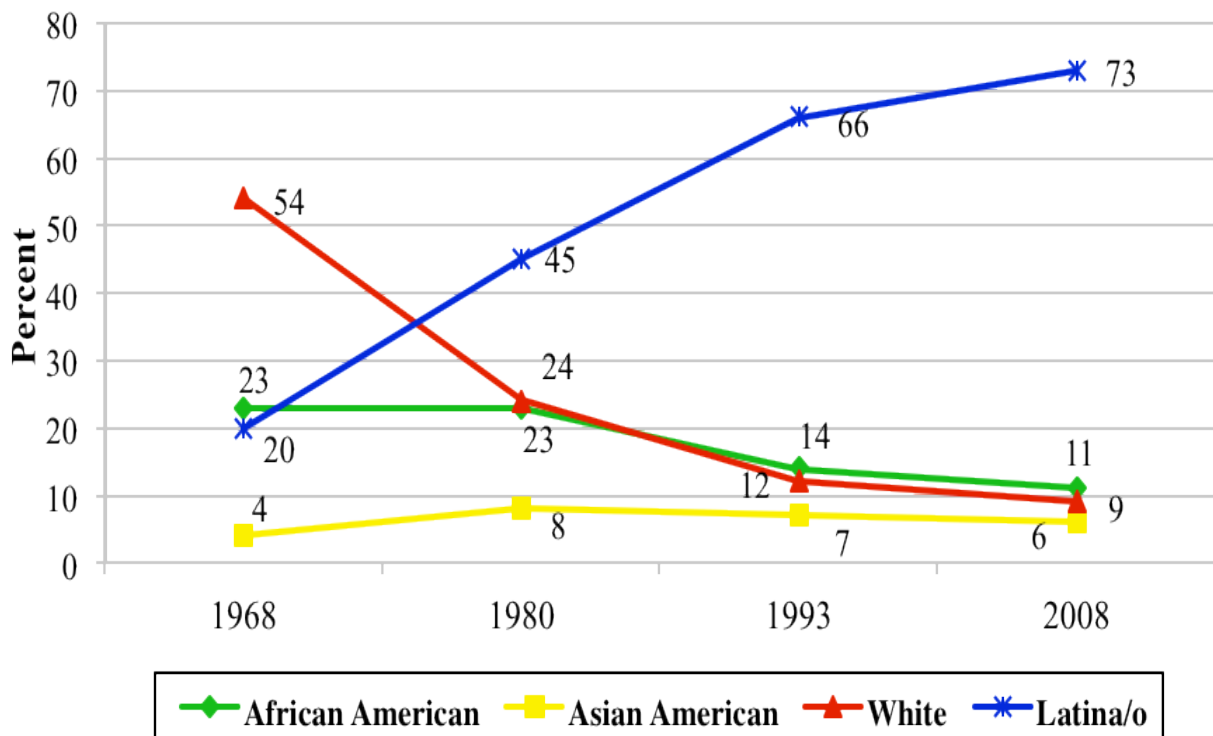
The data obtained contributed to the literature on desegregation studies from the standpoint of Mexican-origin students and their parents regarding a voluntary integration program that is still active in the twenty-first century. Overall, these two research questions provided a foundation to guide the literature review, the design of this study, and served to structure the data analysis with regard to the experiences and perspective of the participants.

### **Significance of Study**

Historically, research on school desegregation efforts has focused on the plight of African American students. Few desegregation studies have been conducted on other communities of color that have also experienced racial oppression and inequalities within schools. With changing demographics and diverse populations in the United States, segregation was no longer an issue

solely between African American and White communities. Orfield and Lee (2006) noted that California was “a national leader in isolation for both blacks and Latinos” where “the average Latino student in California attends a school that is 19 percent white” (p. 26). Furthermore, Orfield and Lee (2006) indicated, “Black students are highly segregated from whites in very high minority schools, but they are typically a relatively small minority of the minority students in those schools, greatly outnumbered, on average, by Latino students” (p. 28). Thus, the significance of this study accentuated the changing face of segregation in California schools as it related to Latina/o students. Figure 1 showcases the increasing enrollment trend for Latina/o students in LAUSD, the largest public school system in the state of California.

**Figure 1.** Percentage of K-12 Students Enrolled in the Los Angeles Unified School District, by Race/Ethnicity, 1968-2008



Source: California Department of Education (selected years).

Note: Percentages of student enrollment have been rounded from decimal numbers to the nearest whole number. The categories do not add up to 100% because only selected racial/ethnic groups are represented.

This dissertation sought to go beyond the Black-White paradigm and discuss the lived experiences of Latina/o students that participated in a voluntary integration program in a post-*Brown v. Board of Education* era. The significance of this study also included the documentation of Mexican-origin students and their parents; a racial and ethnic group whose experiences within integrated school settings have been largely absent from the literature.

Most of the literature regarding desegregation plans has centered on court-mandated busing programs from the 1970s and 1980s. After years of court-ordered implementation, various school districts were released from forced busing programs and had the option to continue voluntary desegregation plans. The PWT program in LAUSD opted to continue voluntary busing beyond the now-concluded mandatory integration program. Thus, this dissertation examined the PWT program in LAUSD and its status as a voluntary integration program active in the twenty-first century. Drawing on the words of Conchas (2006) to articulate the significance of this study seems applicable because research on voluntary busing urges the “need to know why some minority students seek out processes and form supportive institutional relationships, while others do not” (p. 19).

Therefore, the study had the following three objectives, (a) to provide contextual background about why and how Mexican-origin students came to participate in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes, (b) to offer a lens to the experiences of Mexican-origin students and their parents at the new school site, and (c) to document the significance that Mexican-origin students and their parents attributed to their involvement in the PWT program. Furthermore, the study drew upon the socio-cultural dimension of schooling in conjunction with a framework that considered several critical conditions of schooling to examine the experiences of Mexican-origin students in a voluntary integration program.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature. First, legal desegregation cases were included to illustrate the trajectory of discriminatory schooling practices and the role of busing within educational policy. Second, an overview of desegregation studies was presented to highlight the scholarly research regarding court-ordered and voluntary busing programs. Third, research studies with a focus on the experiences of Latina/os in desegregation efforts and busing programs were included. Lastly, the review of the literature presented an overview of the conditions of Latina/os in education.

#### **Legal Desegregation Cases**

Historically, school segregation has a salient link with the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court ruling of “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” The case brought national attention to the racist educational practices and substandard conditions imposed upon students of color, notably the situation of African Americans (Bell, 2004). However, prior to the *Brown* case, the harms of segregation transcended beyond African Americans by including other communities of color that also experienced racial oppression and inequalities within schools. The following legal desegregation cases were seminal in delineating the course to end racial apartheid in American schools that ultimately culminated with the *Brown* decision.

In 1931, a California lawsuit involving Mexican children became the first successful school desegregation court decision in the history of the United States. The case, known as the Lemon Grove Incident, dealt with the Lemon Grove school board’s decision to build a separate school for children of Mexican ancestry without the knowledge of parents (Alvarez, 1986). The judge ruled that children of Mexican lineage could not be segregated under the laws of the state

of California, because they were considered to be of the White race, although de facto not afforded the rights of White citizens. Following the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Census Bureau classified Mexicans and Mexican Americans as “White” because whiteness was a prerequisite for U.S. citizenship, which all persons of Mexican lineage were entitled to under treaty stipulations (Valencia et al. 2004). It is interesting to note that although some Mexicans had full Spanish heritage, most Mexicans were a mixed race with indigenous ancestry that did not correlate with the White racial classification. Yet, the legal recognition of pertaining to the “White” group marked a decisive win for students of Mexican-origin in the Lemon Grove lawsuit.

In 1946, a federal case known as *Mendez v. Westminster* succeeded in demonstrating the peripheral status of Mexican Americans in racially segregated schools in California. The federal ruling declared that the discrimination of Mexican American children to attend separate schools was an unconstitutional denial of equal protection rights (Valencia et al., 2004). Despite the fact that *Mendez v. Westminster* dismantled de jure segregation in California public schools for children of Mexican ancestry, the legal system was flawed by design. The racial categorization of Mexican Americans as “White” allowed school districts to strategically desegregate all Black schools with the presence of Mexican American students since they were considered to be of the White race (Valencia et al. 2004). The *Mendez v. Westminster* decree showcased how the language of desegregation and integration was exploited by school districts in order to prevent White children from mixing with African American and Mexican American students. Nevertheless, the *Mendez* case was pivotal in challenging racial segregation in schools and a precedent to what the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling would achieve in 1954, the elimination of state-sponsored segregation in public schools throughout the United States.

Another notable Supreme Court case decided just days prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling was *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954), which examined the systematic exclusion of persons of Mexican descent from jury service in the state of Texas. Although Mexican Americans were categorically “White,” no jurors with Spanish surnames had served for over two decades. Moreover, the testimony of White residents revealed the different treatment and perception toward “White” persons of Mexican heritage who were not afforded the political or social status of the White community. The legal defense applied the concept of distinction by class to argue that although Mexican Americans were legally “White” they faced discrimination and regarded as “other White” in Texas society. The Supreme Court held that a pervasive bias existed in jury selection and determined that Mexican Americans were treated as a class apart from the “White” group. Thus, *Hernandez v. Texas* was decisive in extending the Equal Protection Clause under the Fourteenth Amendment to other racial groups, including Mexican Americans, an important constitutional right that was only afforded to Black and White populations at that time. The *Hernandez v. Texas* case also proved to be a significant victory toward later judicial proceedings such as *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District* (1970), where “for the first time, a court declared Mexican Americans to be an identifiable ethnic minority group for the purposes of public school desegregation. Further, it [*Cisneros*] was the first circuit court case to hold that the principles enunciated in *Brown* apply to Latinos as well as African Americans” (Contreras & Valverde, 1994, p. 472).

In 1954, the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case laid the foundation for the recognition and unconstitutionality regarding racial segregation in schools; however, it did not declare the process by which desegregation would be implemented. Consequently, another ruling known as *Brown v. Board of Education II* (1955) authorized the federal courts to enact school

desegregation plans “with all deliberate speed” but provided no oversight for immediate implementation. Therefore, the language in *Brown v. Board of Education II* allowed school districts to legally circumvent and postpone desegregation plans.

The 1960s witnessed additional Supreme Court cases (see *Griffin v. County School Board*, 1964 and *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, 1968) that challenged the stagnant process of desegregation. Eventually, the prolonged enactment of *Brown v. Board of Education II* was successfully overridden with *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* (1969) where the Supreme Court determined that it was the responsibility of every school district to take immediate action to dismantle dual segregated schools and to function as integrated schools. Subsequently, the historical legacy of desegregation has had a direct connection with busing as a tactic for racial integration (Bell 2004; Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

*Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (1971) was the first Supreme Court case that declared busing as a strategic means for dismantling segregated schools. Consequently, during the 1970s and 1980s court-ordered busing was utilized to redress racial isolation by creating an exchange program that would allow students of color to attend predominantly White schools and vice versa (Mickelson, 2003). However, retrospective research on busing programs indicated higher numbers of students of color traveling to predominantly White schools than an equal participation from White students (Orfield & Lee, 2006).

The societal response to court mandated busing programs created contested debates. White residents expressed their opposition to busing through organized protests, violent demonstrations, relocation to the suburbs, and private school enrollment for their children (Formisano, 1991; Ogletree, 2004; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Anti-busing sentiment from predominantly White neighborhoods stemmed from beliefs that busing was “an encroachment of

their sense of autonomy and freedom of choice” (Edari, 1979, p. 112). The work of Weatherford (1980) suggested that the ardent opposition to forced busing in the 1970s filtered through public opinion and led to concerns about maintaining the status quo within suburban communities. Therefore, racial integration posed threats beyond racial mixing and included heightened anxieties about the loss of an established residential order and the subsequent decline in properties values within predominantly White neighborhoods.

The controversy over the use of mandated busing reached the Supreme Court in 1974 with the metropolitan Detroit case, *Milliken v. Bradley*. The case dealt with the busing of students across school district boundaries among fifty-three school districts in Detroit. Although the desegregation plan in Detroit attempted to provide students with an integrated schooling experience, the *Milliken v. Bradley* ruling held that racial balances across district lines were not allowed nor justified by the *Brown v. Board of Education* verdict without proof of segregation among multiple school districts. Thus, the *Milliken v. Bradley* decree created a critical caveat for the implementation of the former *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (1971) decision because it exempted suburban districts from participating in the desegregation plans of urban school districts. Moreover, suburban school districts not subject to school busing often represented predominantly White middle-class communities whose housing conditions were treated as income affordability and not White flight. Some scholars have argued that the *Milliken v. Bradley* case protected practices of White residential segregation and consequently exacerbated the schooling disparities between racial groups (Friedman, 2002).

The criteria established by *Milliken v. Bradley* decision for implementing busing changed the dynamics of desegregation programs for districts with racially isolated schools. School districts attempting to desegregate with court-supervised busing continued to meet resistance



from the community. Such was the case in California when *Crawford vs. Board of Education* (1976) determined that the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was obligated under state law to take reasonable and feasible steps to alleviate the harms of segregation. Hence, the district submitted to the Supreme Court the Student Integration Plan, which created programs that granted students access to resources and racially diverse settings by way of mandatory busing. However, in 1979, anti-busing opposition, primarily from a parent's organization called Bustop, redirected the course of desegregation in California schools (Hart-Nibbrig, 1979). Under the arguments that California law should be in accordance with Federal law and follow the Equal Protection Clause, forced busing in LAUSD was challenged with the passage of Proposition 1. Consequently, busing in LAUSD has supported the implementation of student integration plans, such as the PWT and magnet program, on a voluntary basis. The voluntary enrollment in PWT and magnet programs has come to represent a more positive aspect of busing for school communities.

### **Desegregation Studies on Court-Mandated and Voluntary Busing**

Historically, academic research on school desegregation efforts has focused on the experiences of African Americans with court-mandated busing. A desegregation study conducted by Morris and Morris (2002) examined the impact of forced busing in Alabama. Drawing from questionnaire and interview data, the authors documented the experiences of African American students when their segregated neighborhood school closed in 1969 and they were required to attend a desegregated high school across town. The desegregation study included data from 119 former students who attended both the segregated and the desegregated school, as well as data from teachers, administrators and parents. The investigation provided a retroactive analysis of perceptions regarding the quality of education in the segregated school and the desegregated

school. The findings of Morris and Morris (2002) revealed that the segregated neighborhood school had caring teachers, opportunities for leadership development through extracurricular activities, and a receptive school community with active parent involvement. In contrast, the desegregated high school was described as a place where:

The children often didn't feel safe in their new environment, did not feel that it was their school, did not experience a sense of belonging in their new school. In fact, they often felt hostility, not only from students, but worse, from those who were in the position to teach and lead them. (page xi)

Forced busing to the desegregated high school disclosed how “parents and students believed that racial discrimination was practiced by White students in their refusal to sit next to African American students in class and in the practice of ‘accidental/intentional’ bumping and hitting in the hallways” (Morris & Morris, 2002, p. 11). African American students recalled the demeaning astonishment conveyed by their classmates and teachers who considered them atypical because they demonstrated high academic skills; an offensive and racist gesture where they constantly “felt that they had to prove their worth and their abilities while White students did not” (Morris & Morris, 2002, p. 11). The authors concluded that desegregation plans delivered unmet promises because the expectations differed from the actual experiences of integration and instead advocated an ethic of caring that fostered meaningful human relationships in education settings.

Desegregation plans have not been limited to the South, but have also created contentious debates in other parts of the United States. The work of Formisano (1991) examined court-ordered busing in Boston during the mid-1970s when school districts with more than fifty percent of non-White students were required to desegregate under the state's Racial Imbalance Law. The author presented an in-depth look at the community's responses to forced busing, in

particular the fierce opposition exhibited by White residents through organized protests and the racial tension leveled against African Americans. The book detailed how White residents were “filled with anger at being forced to send their children to areas they regarded as dangerous or for having taken away from them the decent schools that they had worked hard to live near” (Formisano, 1991, p. xii).

Similarly, African Americans also voiced concerns about safety for their children who faced animosity and discrimination at the new schools. Accounts about the aggression and hostile environment described how “several school buses carrying black children out of South Boston were bombarded with rocks, bottles, and other missiles” (Formisano, 1991, p. 77). The antibusing movement in Boston adamantly sent a message of dissent and intimidation through organized tactics. Formisano (1991) discussed how “fights and disruptions inside schools did not occur solely according to their own rhythms. ... Some clearly were orchestrated by adults and youths from within the militant antibusing movement. ... The most militant boycotters wanted to show that the schools were unsafe—the more fights, the more parents would keep children out” (p. 38). The author found that the antibusing movement in Boston was rooted in resentment toward the imposition of the court order to desegregate public schools and argued that it served to generate a resegregation of schools through practices of White flight and transfers to parochial schools (Formisano, 1991, p. 96). Amid the civic unrest caused by the court order to desegregate public schools, Boston eventually concluded forced busing and changed to a voluntary desegregation plan.

Few studies have discussed voluntary busing programs and for the most part have focused on African American students. Eaton (2001) explored the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) in Boston, a voluntary desegregation program created in

response to the social disturbance caused by court-ordered busing. The author conducted qualitative interviews with sixty-five former student participants and provided a detailed analysis of the racial politics embedded in the voluntary busing program. In retrospect, the African American students detailed the reasons why they left to distant schools, the gains and issues needed to be resolved as a result of participating in a busing program, and their current status as adults. Moreover, almost all of the former students stated that they would be willing to go through the experience again. Based on the interview data, Eaton (2001) noted, “METCO was an essential part of a plan for maximizing future options” (p. 30).

Research by Miller (1989) looked at African American students participating in a voluntary desegregation program in five Connecticut schools. Using nonparticipant observation and structured interviews, the study examined Black high school youth culture and the extent of racial integration within the desegregated schools. The findings revealed that students experienced different effects depending on the school they were bused to and also identified various coping strategies used by the African American students to adapt to the predominantly White suburban schools. For example, some students reported more positive desegregation experiences than did other students bused to other schools who reported incidents of discrimination and feeling like they did not belong. The study further problematized the extent to which racial integration developed and found that it did not always necessarily occur within schools as desegregation policies had envisioned. As Miller (1989) explained, “offering minorities access to the same educational opportunities as majority students did not ensure high levels of interracial contact or guarantee the quality of race relations” (p. 187).

A case study by Wells and Crain (1997) documented the voluntary desegregation program enacted between school districts in St. Louis, Missouri in 1983. Under the school-

choice plan, African American students from the city were provided with free transportation and the opportunity to attend a majoritarian White suburban public school. The authors interviewed over three hundred individuals involved in the voluntary desegregation program over a five-year period. It was one of the few studies that contextualized the investigation from different perspectives by providing a dual data collection of African American and White experiences. Interviews included the standpoint of African American students and their parents who chose to participate in the desegregation program and those who exited to return to their neighborhood schools. Wells and Crain (1997) also captured the disapproval from White residents and educators of the suburban schools along with the voices of White teachers who supported the goals of the desegregation program. Overall, the authors argued in favor of desegregation plans because of the positive short-term effects, such as improvement in test scores and going to college, and long-term sociological impacts, such as social mobility and life changes on African American students (p. 338). The next section discusses the busing literature and desegregation studies that involved Latina/o students.

### **Desegregation Studies and Busing Literature Inclusive of Latina/os**

Although, Latina/os have been key plaintiffs in legal cases dealing with desegregation measures (see Alvarez, 1986; *Mendez v. Westminster*, 1946; *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi*, 1970), there was a scarcity of literature regarding the involvement of Latina/os. The few studies that documented the experiences of Latina/os included an investigation by Perez, Padilla, and Ramirez (1982). The authors surveyed 150 Mexican American students, ages nine through seventeen, in East Los Angeles about their expectations (and not actual experiences) in a mandatory busing program. The study revealed that students had higher expectations regarding interpersonal relations with White teachers and White students than perceived educational

benefits from participating in a busing program. Furthermore, while students anticipated good rapport with White students, they also acknowledged the potential of interpersonal conflict within a desegregated context. The students also voiced disapproval of school busing. Over 67% of the Mexican American youth reported that busing was not a good idea and 86% would rather not be involved with the busing plan. No qualitative data were included in the study to explain why students opposed busing. Yet, it is important to note that Perez et al. (1982) were some of the few researchers to focus on a Latina/o subgroup, Mexican Americans, and to draw on student input to inform educational policy on the topic of busing.

Another study that incorporated the experiences of Latina/os included an investigation by Ogletree and Mitchell (1983) related to parent perceptions and attitudes about busing programs. Ogletree and Mitchell (1983) conducted a survey in Chicago that included a representation of Latina/o parents (45%) in their sample size. The most significant findings about Latina/o parents' perspective revealed a strong opposition toward desegregation (65%) and busing (82%). According to Ogletree and Mitchell (1983), Latina/o parents felt that "keeping their children in neighborhood schools [was] crucial to the integrity of their culture and family. They felt it would destroy their bilingual education programs, and the cultural climate of the schools and the community" (p. 9). Thus, the authors argued that the Latina/o parents surveyed did not embrace the use of busing programs due to a preference and advocacy for bilingual education. This finding resonated with the work of Contreras and Valverde (1994) regarding the use of bilingual education as a remedy for the educational inequities of Latina/os.

The work of Arias (2005) discussed the experiences of Latina/o students as plaintiffs in the desegregation efforts of *Vasquez v. San Jose Unified School District*. The author reported the disappointing experiences of the Latina/o community with the desegregation plan in San Jose

Unified School District. The desegregation plan consisted of one-way busing which created a disproportionate burden for Latina/o students, drawing them away from their neighborhood schools. The research done by Arias (2005) highlighted the active role of Latina/os as primary participants in the policy-making process of desegregation measures. During the legal proceedings, the Latina/o plaintiffs acknowledged “racially isolated schools as the reality of the new demographics...[and shifted their focus toward an]...opportunity to design desegregation remedies with educational outcomes, educational programs that would address the achievement and access issues pervasive in the community” (p. 1988). Consequently, the court decision also resulted in addressing the cultural and linguistic needs of Latina/os that included programs such as bilingual education, English as a second language, in addition to academic programs for gifted and talented education (GATE).

A review of the literature on desegregation studies pertaining to the PWT program yielded only two studies, which was indicative of critical gap in the available literature. The two investigations were conducted during the 1980s, the early years of the desegregation phase in Los Angeles Unified School District when African Americans represented the majority of the PWT participants. The work of Dorr-Bremme (1982) and Alkin, Atwood, Baker, Doby, and Doherty (1983) collected data from teachers, school staff, and students regarding the status of the PWT program.

Dorr-Bremme conducted an ethnographic study of four receiving schools participating in the PWT program, two elementary and two high schools. The study’s methodology consisted of semi-structured interviews with staff, observations of students and staff, and informal conversations with students and staff. The Dorr-Bremme investigation provided a glimpse into the students' social life and the perception of staff regarding the PWT program. Data indicated

that although there was no overt tension between PWT and local students, each “appeared to associate predominantly with those of their own ethnicities” (p. 66). Another finding that emerged from interviews with staff were the “few schoolwide programs and activities which explicitly took into account the presence of PWT students” (p. 84). The researchers in the Dorr-Bremme investigation observed “a picture of surface phenomena” regarding the students’ social life at the receiving schools and asserted that further research was required to gain a deeper understanding of the feelings and experiences of students (p. 70).

The report by Alkin et al., a quantitative study, drew from random samples of forty-one receiving schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools with feeder patterns. The study also utilized student, teacher, school staff questionnaires, observations, enrollment data by race/ethnicity, standardized test scores, and parent participation data to evaluate program mechanisms, desegregation and integration policies and practices, and schoolwide practices. At the high school level, the research conducted by Alkin et al. revealed that school policies and practices had a minimal role with promoting social interactions among the PWT and local students but rather were determined by the individual student (p. 71). Another finding of the Alkin et al. report was that “in comparison to resident students, PWT students were less prepared for college. On the average they completed fewer college preparatory courses and had significantly lower grades and SAT verbal and math scores” (p. 73).

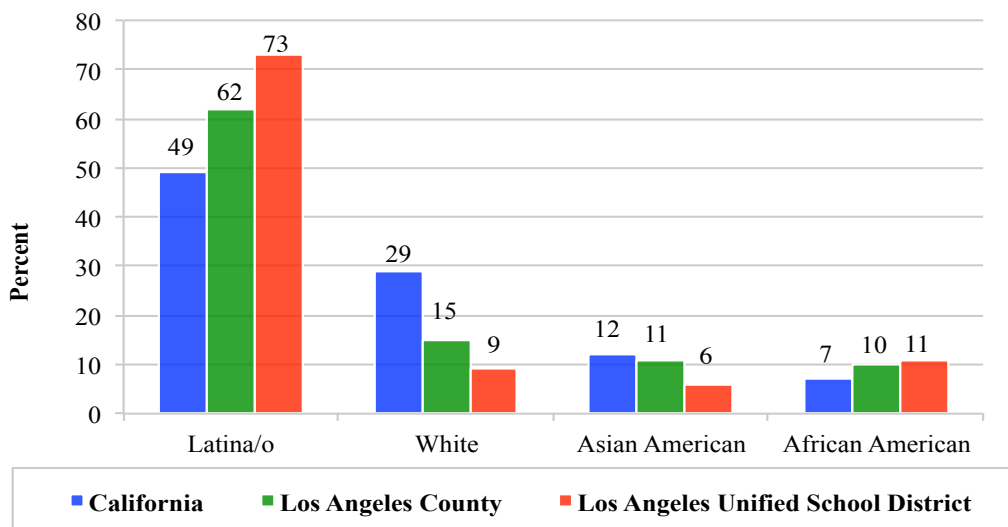
While both the Dorr-Bremme and Alkin et al. studies provided valuable observations about the interaction among students and policies of the PWT program, the reports represented a dated research conducted in the 1980s. This dissertation offers a recent and additive understanding of the voluntary busing program through a qualitative study with interview data from Mexican-origin students and their parents.



## The Conditions of Latina/os in Education

Orfield and Lee (2006) contend that the Southwest is undergoing a "transition from a majority of white students to a complex majority of nonwhite students in which Latinos are by far the largest group" (p. 23). Over the years, such a transition has manifested itself in California schools where Latina/o students have become a prominent plurality. For the 2007-2008 school year, Latina/o students made up over 49% at the state level, persisted as a majority within Los Angeles County schools with 62%, and were represented in LAUSD by almost 73% percent (California Department of Education, 2008). Figure 2 illustrates the enrollment trend by race and ethnicity and reveals the increasing trend of Latina/o students from the state to the county and to the district level, respectively.

**Figure 2.** Percentage of K-12 Student Enrollment in California, Los Angeles County, and Los Angeles Unified School District, by Race/Ethnicity, 2007-2008



Source: California Department of Education (2008).

Note: Percentages of student enrollment have been rounded from decimal numbers to the nearest whole number. The categories do not add up to 100% because only selected racial/ethnic groups are represented.

Data profiles on student enrollment, disaggregated by race and ethnicity at the state, district, and school levels have been used as a measure of diversity in public schools. Educational researchers have focused on disaggregated student data by race and ethnicity to examine the legacy of school desegregation efforts. The work of Orfield and Lee (2006) examined the racial composition of American schools and found increasing numbers of African American and Latina/o students isolated in California K-12 schools. Through their investigation Orfield and Lee (2006) found that “Latinos in California had moved from schools that had, on average, high levels of integration in 1970 to schools that were among the nation’s most segregated by the 1990s” (p. 26). Research data from 2003-2004 revealed that 89% of Latina/o students in California attended majority minority schools, and 47% attended intensely segregated minority schools, where they represented 90% to 100% of the student body (Orfield & Lee, 2006, p. 28). According to Orfield (1996), the overrepresentation of students of color in majority minority schools or intensely segregated schools can be considered a “resegregation” of students within the educational system.

Orfield and Lee (2005) asserted that most of the racial segregation of African American and Latina/o students often involved a link to concentrated poverty where the majority of low-income segregated school communities generally coped with multiple inequalities that curtailed academic achievement. Inequities such as higher turnover staff rates, less experienced teachers, limited rigorous curriculum, and student attendance issues were key contributors to the lower educational outcomes of students (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Data have also indicated that Latina/o students attending overcrowded and segregated schools were often recipients of a low quality education and largely at risk for not graduating high school (Oakes, Mendoza, & Silver, 2004). Consequently, Latina/o students have typically had lower high school graduation rates in

comparison to other racial/ethnic groups. Statistics from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau revealed that only 47 out of 100 Latinas and 44 out of 100 Latinos graduated from high school in comparison with 70 to 84 students from other racial/ethnic groups (Perez Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006). Furthermore, the Mexican subgroup had one of the lowest completion rates within the Latina/o educational pipeline in public schools across the nation (see Perez Huber et al., 2006).

As Orfield and Lee (2006) noted, the location of schools had a strong correlation to the resources and quality of education available. For example, the allocation of funding for public schools in California was previously based on per-pupil expenditures determined by the tax-base of the school district. As a result of tax-based disparities between school districts, the amount of funding favored more affluent communities. In order to bridge the financial gap, lower income districts were required to pay higher tax rates to be on a par with the expenditures of wealthy districts. The case of *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) held that the tax-based disparity among California school districts violated the Equal Protection Clause. Consequently, the allocation of funds to public schools was delegated to the state in 1978 through the passage of Proposition 13.

Even with the changes in school financing, suburban schools have historically provided better facilities and more college preparatory curriculum when compared to inner-city schools (Anyon, 2005). Moreover, suburban schools participating in busing programs have typically been located in middle and upper class neighborhoods with primarily White residents (see Eaton, 2001; Miller, 1989; Wells & Crain, 1997). In the case of the PWT, a voluntary integration program of LAUSD, Latina/o students and other students of color were transported from working-class communities to schools that had a higher enrollment of White students than their resident schools with the intent of receiving a multicultural and integrated schooling experience.

Orfield (1996) posited that integrated schools represented favorable academic opportunities for students of color because predominantly White schools were embedded with college-bound values that increased the success rates of navigating the educational pipeline. Busing programs with integration purposes were meant to provide an opportunity for students of color with access to a diverse school setting, in contrast to their designated resident schools with majority minority students. In LAUSD, Latino/a students represented a great majority and consequently experienced racial isolation in many schools throughout the district. In this context, LAUSD sought to improve the racial isolation of Latino/a students and other students of color through the provision of the PWT program. The goals of the PWT program have been promulgated as a means “to address the court-designated harms of segregation designed to provide students with integrated experiences” (Los Angeles Unified School District, Student Integration Services, 2008). The next chapter discusses the frameworks for the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY

This chapter presents the socio-cultural dimension of schooling as a framework to examine the social, cultural, and environmental components that impacted the learning of students that participated in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes. The components within the socio-cultural dimension were also examined in conjunction with the critical conditions of schooling to position the educational experiences of students as central to the analysis.

#### **Socio-Cultural Dimension of Schooling**

The socio-cultural dimension of schooling represents a distinct focus from the sociocultural theory associated with the work of Vygotsky (1986), which looks at cognitive development, particularly the relationship between language and thinking. The socio-cultural dimension originated from a larger conceptual framework that built upon the work of Oakes (1992) on technical, normative, and political dimensions of schooling. Cooper, Slavin, and Madden (1997) broadened the framework of Oakes to introduce the socio-cultural dimension of schooling to explore “school change from multiple conceptual lenses” (p. v).

The socio-cultural dimension places importance on the social, cultural, and environmental factors that affect schooling. Socio-cultural factors such as poverty, crime, and violence in neighborhoods can impact student learning, which require support systems to ensure success in schools. Factors within the socio-cultural dimension of schooling require further analysis to contribute to student academic achievement and access to higher education. As Cooper et al. (1997) suggested, the “socio-cultural perspective helps us understand not only the interconnection between these factors [but also] the important individual contributions they make

to ensuring that all students are successful” (p. 11). The socio-cultural dimension was considered an appropriate framework to examine the social, cultural, and environmental factors that impacted students participating in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes.

Although the socio-cultural dimension of schooling provided a foundational framework to situate the schooling experiences of students, it did not account for operational definitions for each of the components. As a means to expand the seminal work of Cooper, Slavin, and Madden (1997), this dissertation will furnish working definitions for each of the components within the socio-cultural dimension of schooling framework. The intent of developing working definitions for the socio-cultural dimension of schooling framework was to put into context the educational experiences of busing students in a desegregated high school.

### **Expanding the Socio-Cultural Dimension of Schooling Framework<sup>7</sup>**

Schooling experiences are not static but rather characterized by dynamic processes that can be understood in multiple conceptual ways. Therefore, it was important to understand the depth that various conceptual layers could offer regarding the experiences of Mexican-origin students in a voluntary integration program. The constant interplay of social relations, lived experiences as students of color, and the context of the school environment had worthy implications for research. Given that the students in the busing program were entering and leaving a distant school community on a daily basis suggested a look at various factors. Hence, the socio-cultural dimension of schooling interrogated the extent to which the social, cultural, and environmental factors interacted with the experiences of Mexican-origin students at Diversity High School. Drawing from the fundamental premise of the socio-cultural dimension as developed by Cooper et al. (1997), this dissertation intended to expand the framework further

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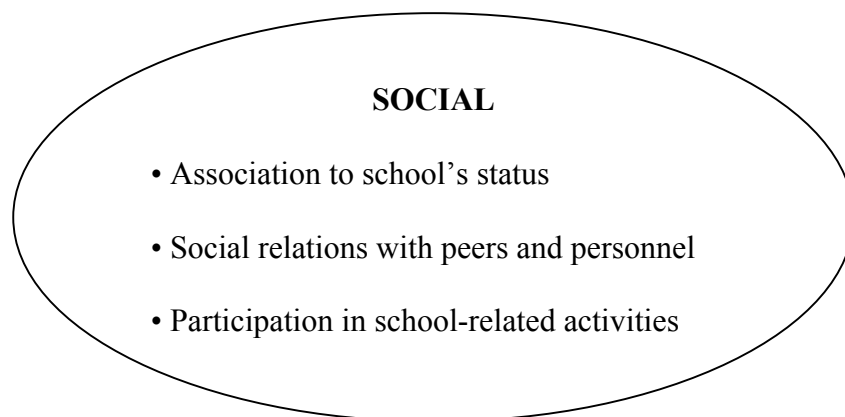
<sup>7</sup> The working definitions for the socio-cultural dimension of schooling framework presented in this section are a revised version of an earlier draft that was published in an academic journal (see Huidor & Cooper, 2010).

by generating working definitions for each of the components of schooling. Thus, the following sections present a conceptual definition for the social, cultural, and environmental factors of the socio-cultural dimension of schooling.

**Social component of schooling.** According to Edari (1979), people have a social stake in particular neighborhoods because they represent a measure of “social status and achievement, as well as the loci of interaction” (p. 112); this includes the availability of good schools. As public institutions, the academic ranking influences the social standing of schools. Therefore, schools with a rigorous curriculum and a prestigious academic status reflect a positive message to their students (Doyle & Feldman, 2006). However, the process of schooling extends beyond academic preparation. Schools represent social organizations that foster relationships within the school community and shape students’ educational experiences (Osterman, 2000).

The social component examined the school-based relations where education was positioned with social status and comprised the following: (a) how students in the PWT program associated themselves in relation to a high performing school (b) the socials relations of the students with their peers and school personnel, and (c) the extent of their participation in academic and extracurricular activities. Figure 3 illustrates the social component of schooling.

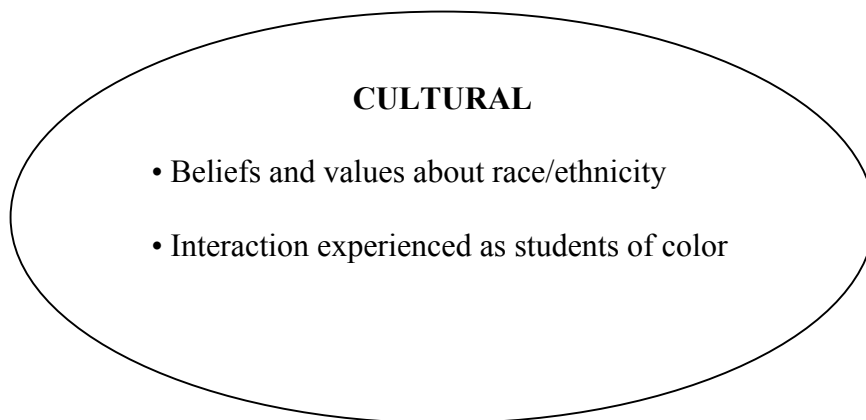
**Figure 3.** The Social Component of Schooling



**Cultural component of schooling.** Culture encompasses the attitudes and characteristics of a particular group of people. Moreover, since society represents a variety of groups, culture is inclusive of racial and ethnic background. As students of Mexican-origin, a racial and ethnic group identified as a minority, it was critical to take into account race and ethnicity in the definition of culture. Also, of importance was the multicultural campus climate that students attending DHS would be exposed to. Therefore, in developing a conceptual definition for the cultural component it was important to consider the experiences of Mexican-origin students by acknowledging their status as students of color in a diverse school setting.

Thus, the variables of race and ethnicity were relevant to the cultural component with regard to: (a) the beliefs and values attached to certain groups of people based on race and ethnicity, and (b) the social interaction experienced by students identified as a racial and ethnic minority. Figure 4 displays the cultural component of schooling.

**Figure 4.** The Cultural Component of Schooling



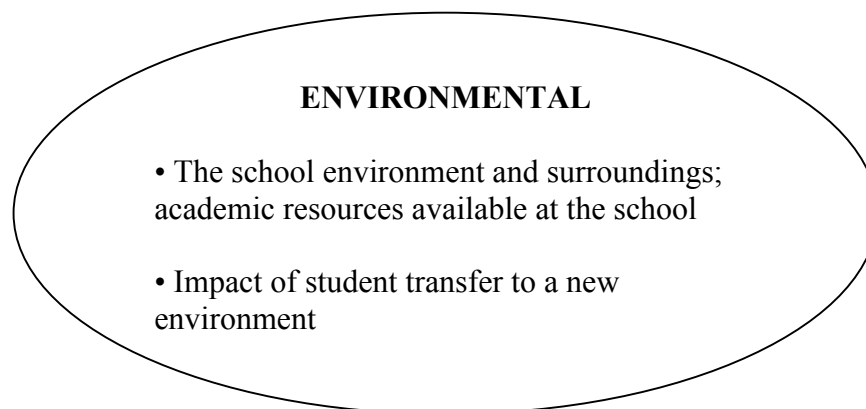


**Environmental component of schooling.** The location of schools has a strong correlation to the resources and quality of education available. Public schools are not equitable as evidenced by the funding and resources that distinguish some schools from others even within the same district. Although the state funds all public schools according to enrollment and per-pupil expenditure is leveled, school financing remains variable due to community decision-making. In particular, a great majority of financing depends on school improvement bonds approved by voters within the district (McCormack, 2004).

Typically schools in the suburbs have had greater access to additional funding due to the school associations and foundations supported by middle-class parents (McCormack, 2004). Fundraisers, sponsorships, and donations represent some of the ways that parents have utilized their socioeconomic status to increase their local school's financing. Meanwhile, urban schools have consistently suffered from under funding and inadequate educational resources (Anyon, 2005). The pairing of location and quality of schools has historically relegated students of color in urban low performing schools while Whites have increasingly been represented in the competitive suburban schools (Orfield & Lee, 2006). Voluntary integration programs transfer students of color to suburban environments that starkly contrast their neighborhoods. Residents of suburban schools consider their institutions "refuges from the disorder and social collapse they see endemic to America's urban school districts" (Greene & Forster, 2004, p. 1). Ideologies have dichotomized schooling environments as some "parents believe that suburban public schools provide children with safer, more orderly, and more wholesome environments than their urban counterparts" (Greene & Forster, 2004, p. 1). The environmental factors of DHS suggested implications for the schooling experience of students of color in the PWT program. The component of the environment explored the setting, surroundings, and facilities of the school.

Given that the school was situated in a suburban environment, the intersection with socioeconomic class was also examined and included the following: (a) the school environment and surroundings; academic resources available at the school, and (b) the impact of student transfer to a new environment. These data were relevant to the study because they elucidated the impact of the school environment and the material provisions available on the schooling experience of students. In addition, the environmental component of schooling examined the effect of student transfer to a new setting, with consideration of the impact of riding the school bus to a distant school. Figure 5 shows the cultural component of schooling.

**Figure 5.** The Environmental Component of Schooling



The social, cultural, and environmental factors within the socio-cultural dimension of school suggest an explanatory framework to understand the experiences of Mexican-origin students participating in a voluntary busing program for integrative purposes.

## **Examining the Socio-Cultural Dimension with Critical Conditions of Schooling**

The social, cultural, and environmental components that impact schooling suggested an interplay with the critical conditions of schooling as proposed by Oakes, Mendoza, and Silver (2004). The critical conditions of schooling offered a lens into key issues that impacted the learning of students and access to educational opportunities. Examining each of the components within the socio-cultural dimension with the critical conditions of schooling served to address the research questions by positioning the educational experiences of students as central to the analysis. Oakes et al. (2004) outlined the following seven critical conditions for increasing equity in achievement and college going rates for all students.

- *Safe and Adequate School Facilities*: institutions of learning where parents can have the peace of mind that their children will be safe from violence; conducive sites with resources where students can focus on their education.
- *College-Going School Culture*: illustrates a campus climate that fosters learning with the goal of pursuing a college education.
- *Rigorous Academic Curriculum*: represents a program of study that challenges students to produce quality academic work.
- *Qualified Teachers*: qualified teachers who have the strategies, resources, and tools required to meet the learning needs of a diverse group of students.
- *Intensive Academic and Social Supports*: the provision of information by teachers and counselors regarding the necessary steps for academic success and college access.
- *Opportunities to Develop a Multi-Cultural College-Going Identity*: school climate that puts into perspective the reality of a heterogeneous society and prepares students to situate themselves as scholars.

- *Family-Neighborhood-School Connections*: partnerships between families and schools as a means to build on the contributions that parents and neighborhood connections can make for the education of their children.

This dissertation study will focus on four of the seven critical conditions – safe and adequate school facilities, a college-going school culture, rigorous academic curriculum, and opportunities to develop a multi-cultural college-going identity. The next chapter introduces the methodology used to answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the methods used for the dissertation. The methodology consisted of a qualitative approach with interviews as the primary source of data. The following sections discuss a pilot study, the participants, the receiving school and the sending resident schools, data collection, interview protocol, data analysis, and limitations to this study.

#### **Pilot Study**

In 2006, a pilot study was conducted at DHS in collaboration with Dr. Robert Cooper, UCLA Associate Professor, as an attempt to explore the process of conducting qualitative research about the topic of busing. With assistance from the PWT coordinator and another administrator, a questionnaire was administered to twenty students of color that comprised Latina/os and African Americans. Although the questionnaire yielded valuable information (see Huidor & Cooper, 2010), several responses suggested further research. For example, the students' responses indicated that their parent(s) had requested their involvement in the PWT program, starting as early as the sixth grade. Thus, the inclusion of parents in this dissertation was incorporated as an essential component to contextualize how access was gained into the voluntary busing program. Another example was the lack of reference to racial integration as a reason for students' participation in the PWT program coupled with remarks about quasi-integrated racial and ethnic groups at DHS.

These comments raised questions about the extent that students were experiencing a racially integrated schooling experience. The results from the pilot study suggested further research to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Mexican-origin students participating in the PWT program. Therefore, this dissertation intended to build upon

the preliminary findings of the pilot study by conducting individual interviews with students and parents. A description of the participants is provided in the next section.

### **The Participants**

The study consisted of twenty students and twenty parents, thus a total of forty participants. The student participants included ten female and ten male students. The technique of snowball sampling was used as a strategy to recruit student participants. I sought the assistance of the administrators who helped me with the pilot study to inquire about potential participants. The qualitative interviews also included one focal parent. Students were asked to suggest which parent was responsible for overseeing their overall participation in the busing program. Most students identified their mothers as the parent who would participate in the interview. However, there were four students who stated that both their parents had been involved in the PWT process and thus both of them would be present for the interview. As a gesture for their time, students and parents were each compensated with a gift certificate.

The criteria to participate in the study included the following: to be of Mexican-origin, to have been in the PWT program and attended DHS since ninth grade, to currently be seniors at DHS. The twenty student participants identified as Mexican-origin, defined as having at least one parent of Mexican ancestry. With the exception of two parents that had been born in the United States, although they had Mexican-born parents, all other parent participants reported their birthplace as being in Mexico. The majority of students had a mother and father who were both born in Mexico, whereas only three students had one parent born in Mexico and the other in Central America. All student participants met the other criteria of being in the PWT program and attending DHS since the ninth grade, and being in their senior year at DHS. The demographics of the student participants are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Student Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Birthplace	Parents of Mexican-Origin	Resident High School	Years in PWT
Alicia	United States	Both	Belmont	9th-12th grade
Andrea	United States	Mom only	Manual Arts	9th-12th grade
Araceli	Mexico	Both	Los Angeles	6th-12th grade
Claudia	United States	Dad only	Belmont	6th-12th grade
Corina	United States	Both	Los Angeles	6th-12th grade
David	United States	Both	Manual Arts	6th-12th grade
Edgar	United States	Both	Los Angeles	6th-12th grade
Felipe	United States	Both	Belmont	6th-12th grade
Fernando	United States	Both	Belmont	6th-12th grade
Gabriela	Mexico	Both	Los Angeles	6th-12th grade
Gilberto	United States	Both	Belmont	9th-12th grade
Ivan	United States	Both	Manual Arts	6th-12th grade
Juan	Mexico	Both	Belmont	8th-12th grade
Leticia	Mexico	Both	Manual Arts	6th-12th grade
Lorenzo	United States	Both	Manual Arts	6th-12th grade
Manuel	United States	Mom only	Belmont	9th-12th grade
Monica	United States	Both	Manual Arts	6th-12th grade
Ramon	United States	Both	Los Angeles	6th-12th grade
Sandra	Mexico	Both	Los Angeles	6th-12th grade
Yesenia	United States	Both	Los Angeles	6th-12th grade

All participants were given the option to have their interview conducted in English or Spanish. Student participants indicated that they spoke both English and Spanish, speaking mostly Spanish at home with their parents. The 20 students chose to be interviewed in English. All parents spoke Spanish as a primary language, and even the indigenous language of Zapotec from Oaxaca, Mexico was spoken in some families. English fluency varied among the parents. The two parents who were born in the United States were first-generation Chicanas and were more comfortable speaking English since they had attended schools in Los Angeles. These two mothers were the only two parents who elected to have their interview conducted in English. Although several other parents indicated that they knew some English, they stated that they used English mostly when absolutely necessary and at their work sites. Thus, the remaining 18 parents voiced a preference to be interviewed in Spanish because they felt more at ease with comprehension and fluency in their primary language. The majority of interviews were conducted at the participant's home; a few were conducted over the phone in order to accommodate the parent's work schedule. For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms were used instead of participant's names. A description of the resident home school communities and the receiving school site is provided in the next section.

### **The Resident School Communities and the Receiving School**

The 20 student participants identified the resident high school that they were supposed to attend had they not participated in the PWT program. The following three resident schools were named during the interviews: Belmont High School, Los Angeles High School, and Manual Arts High School. Having gone to the participant's home to conduct the interviews, first-hand knowledge about the neighborhoods was gathered. Apartment buildings with barred windows surrounded by small business stores were the common pattern. The socioeconomic status of the



participants was determined by asking the parent participants to state their occupation and their housing status, whether they owned or rented. With the exception of two mothers, all parents worked in the blue-collar sector. Several parents even had two sources of employment. The majority of participants lived in humble rental apartments where many families maximized their space by utilizing the living room as sleeping rooms. Only four families lived in houses, which they owned.

DHS was located in Diversity City,<sup>8</sup> an affluent area of Los Angeles County. In comparison to the working-class urban communities where the participants resided, Diversity City would be considered a suburban location of middle or upper class due to property values exceeding more than one million dollars (Zillow, 2008). The following quote from a PWT student illustrated the contrast of the school communities.

I had to stay after school to work on a project and two of my classmates dropped me off since the school bus had already left. I told them I lived in Koreatown, so one girl asked, “Where are all the lights?” They thought it was going to be like Japan or New York. The other girl said, “There’s a lot of apartments.” They’re not used to seeing apartments around DHS because over there it mostly really nice houses.

In order to learn more about the three resident schools and the receiving school, demographic data was used to compare the school communities. Demographic data included socioeconomic variables such as income, poverty level, and graduation rates. The number of students receiving free and reduced price meals was also included because the data accentuated the low socioeconomic status of families. Socioeconomic variables were pertinent to this study because they provided context that was relevant for the environmental component of schooling, in particular the implications of the setting, surroundings, and academic resources of the school. Table 2 shows a comparison of demographic data pertaining to the resident school neighborhoods and the receiving school site.

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<sup>8</sup> Diversity City is a pseudonym for the city where DHS was located.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Demographic Data, by School Community

	Median Family Income	Families Below Poverty Level	Free or Reduced Price Meals	High School Graduate or Higher*
Belmont	\$44,633	18%	83%	70%
Los Angeles	\$42,373	17%	67%	73%
Manual Arts	\$29,522	36%	76%	45%
Diversity	\$98,183	4%	21%	96%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2007-2011), Selected Economic Characteristics; U.S. Census Bureau (2007-2011), Selected Social Characteristics; California Department of Education (2008).

Note: The demographic data for each of the schools represents the residential area where the school is located. Percentages have been rounded from decimal numbers to the nearest whole number.

\* The data represents a population that is 25 years and older.

The residential area of DHS had the highest median family income (\$98,183), the lowest percentage of families living below poverty level (4%), the smallest percentage of students receiving free or reduced price meals (21%), and the highest population of 25 years and older with at least a high school diploma (96%). The three resident school communities participating in this study shared similarities among them, but projected a stark contrast with the DHS demographic data.

As the receiving school, DHS participated in the PWT program that allowed a majority of students of color from others district schools to attend its campus. The students came primarily from inner-city schools where Whites were rarely represented in the student body. Therefore, school enrollment data by race and ethnicity was also reviewed to determine the racial makeup of the neighborhood schools that students were being bused from in comparison to DHS.

The exposure index (Orfield, 1996), the ratio of contact with other racial and ethnic groups as indicated by student enrollment, was utilized to compare the racial composition of the school communities that bused students with the enrollment data from DHS (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Percentage of Student Enrollment at the School Site, by Race/Ethnicity

	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	Latina/o	White
Belmont	2.2%	6.5%	90.1%	0.4%
Los Angeles	9.5%	11.6%	77.1%	0.8%
Manual Arts	18.5%	0.1%	80.8%	0.1%
Diversity	6.6%	14.2%	24.5%	53.1%

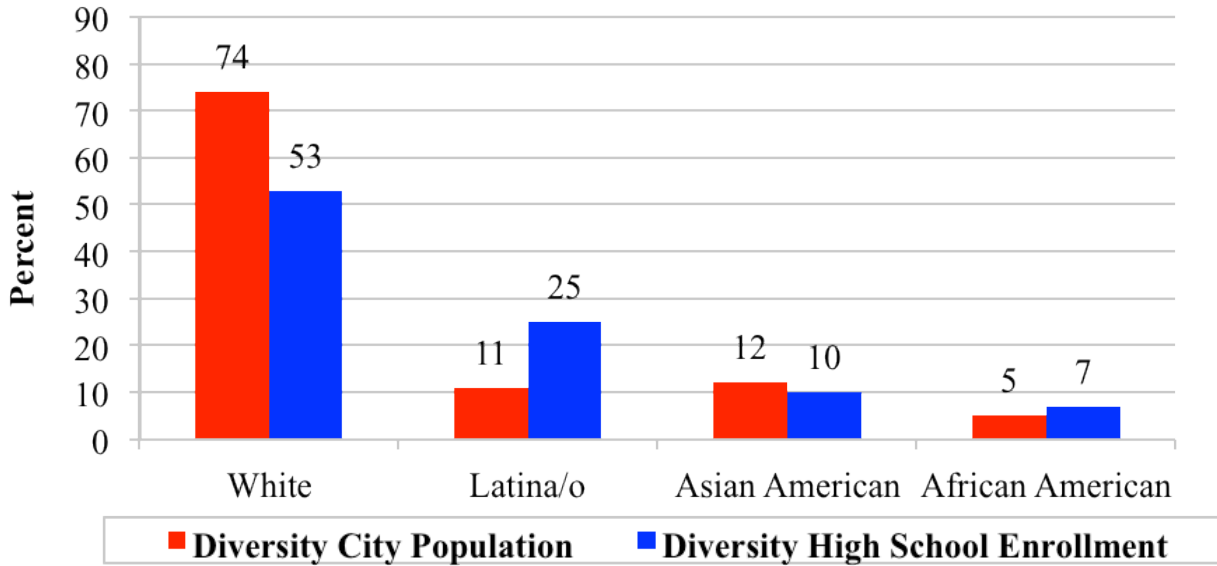
Source: Los Angeles Unified School District (2008).

Note: The categories do not add up to 100% because only selected racial/ethnic groups are represented.

As Table 3 indicates, the PWT students involved in this study resided within school zones of 77% to 90% Latina/o enrollment with minimal opportunity to interact with other racial and ethnic groups, including the presence of less than one percent of White students. The racial composition of student enrollment was pertinent to the study because it provided context to the shift experienced by Latina/o students, from overrepresentation in their neighborhood home schools to becoming a numerical minority within DHS, a predominantly White school.

The study also considered the demographics of Diversity City, where the receiving school was located, and the student enrollment at DHS. In comparison to the predominantly White population of the city where DHS was located, the voluntary busing program allowed for greater racial and ethnic representation at DHS, with a two-fold increase for Latina/o students (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Percentage of Diversity City Population and Diversity High School Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010); California Department of Education (2008).

Note: Percentages of student enrollment have been rounded from decimal numbers to the nearest whole number. The categories do not add up to 100% because only selected racial/ethnic groups are represented.

Thus, as Figure 6 shows, the PWT program allowed for a more diverse student body at DHS and in turn counterbalanced the predominant White population of the city demographics.

**Data Collection**

Individual qualitative interviews were administered with each student and their respective parent(s) during the spring of 2008. The interviews provided a lens to learn about the experiences of Latina/os students and their parents as it related to the voluntary busing program. According to Patton (1990), the purpose of qualitative interviewing is “to access the perspective of the person being interviewed [and to learn] how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world” (p. 278). A qualitative interview approach was preferable because of the “coherence, depth, and density of the material each respondent provides...[that cannot be obtained] by brief answers to survey items ” (Weiss, 1995, p. 3).

The most effective interviewing strategy for the participants was the semi-structured interview because I wanted the students and parents to feel at ease during the interview process. As stated by Patton (1990), the semi-structured interview allows the researcher “to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style – but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined” (p. 283). As the interviewer, I wanted to be able to rephrase the questions when needed for clarity and not be bound to a scripted question. In order to maximize the depth of the data collection, all communication was conducted in English and/or Spanish, as preferred by the participants. Interviews were audio recorded to “transform those spoken words into text to study” (Seidman, 2006, p. 114). Audio recording the interviews provided a method to preserve the original data that could be reviewed for accuracy during the data transcription process. The interview data was transcribed and translated by the researcher. The next section details the interview protocol for this dissertation.

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol for this study consisted of one interview per participant. Therefore, the sample size of 40 participants (20 students and 20 parents) generated a total of 40 interviews. Each interview was conducted in one visit and lasted about 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted at the end of students’ senior year or immediately after graduation during the months of May and June of 2008. The socio-cultural dimension of schooling and critical conditions of schooling were used to frame the questions for the interviews, in particular to focus the interview conversations in ways that might illustrate how these frameworks impacted the experiences of the participants.

Borrowing from the work of Seidman (2006), a three-component interview that focused on contextual background, contemporary experience, and reflection on meaning was used for the

participant interviews. The first component of the interview consisted of questions that focused on contextual background. It was important to understand the circumstances that led students to participate in the PWT program. These questions will provide a glimpse into the decision of parents to enroll their children in voluntary busing program. The second component of the interview asked participants to discuss the range of their experiences at or with DHS. These questions will provide a look at the educational and social encounters of participants at DHS. The third component of the interview allowed the participants to reflect on what it meant to participate in the PWT program and attend a racially integrated school setting.

The data obtained will contribute to the literature on desegregation studies from the standpoint of Mexican-origin students and parents in a twenty-first century voluntary integration program. Furthermore, the data sought to offer needed answers in a current political climate that opposes the use of race to assign students to voluntary busing programs (see *Parents v. Seattle*, 2007). The following section discusses the data analysis procedure for the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for the qualitative interviews began with a read-through of the transcriptions and manual coding. Open coding was used to sift through the data by making notations of key categories in the margins of the text (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In order to preserve the integrity of the participants' interview data, the transcripts were read "with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). The categories served to identify patterns and thematic connections within and among the participants' responses. To further the data analysis, the emerging categories that reflected themes related to the socio-cultural dimension of schooling (the social, cultural, and environmental factors) and the critical conditions of Oakes et al. (2004) were also noted. To

facilitate the coding process a thesaurus and index was created (Seidman, 2006). The thesaurus was used to identify the categories and their respective code, and provided a definition to recognize the category within the text. The index complemented the thesaurus by providing access to the notation system by referencing the location of the categories in the transcript.

The analysis of thematic connections that resulted from the identified categories included the most salient topics that resonated among the participants. The data analysis also considered any common threads that emerged related to the frameworks guiding this study. Important to the data analysis of the study was to acknowledge the voices of the participants, thus the findings chapters presented the interview data through text-embedded quotes (Creswell, 1994). Quotes were included in both English and Spanish; translations were provided for original Spanish interview data. The following section discusses the limitations of the study.

### **Limitations to the Study**

There were some limitations to this dissertation. First, the study only focused on Mexican-origin students who were currently participating in the PWT program and did not include students from other racial and ethnic groups within the PWT program or residential students from the surrounding area of DHS. Second, the sample size of 40 participants (20 students and 20 parents) represented only a small portion of the greater number of students involved in the PWT program. There were about 600 students who were bused to DHS. However, the sample size presented an opportunity to capture depth (as opposed to breadth) by conducting individual interviews with the participants. In addition, by selecting 20 students that included 10 female students and 10 male students, the study sought to include a group of participants with a balanced representation of gender.

The following three chapters present a discussion of the findings for the study. Chapter five discusses the reasons why parents and students opted to participate in the PWT program. Chapter six explores the experiences of PWT students and their parents. Chapter seven describes the students' and parents' reflections regarding the significance of the PWT program and offers policy implications for the schooling process.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CONDITIONS THAT LED TO PARTICIPATION IN THE PWT PROGRAM

This chapter will discuss the conditions that led the Mexican-origin students in this study to participate in the PWT program. Of importance was the role that parents carried out in enrolling their children in PWT, in particular the process to access the program and the reasons to apply. As the primary decision makers, the perspective of parents was significant to understand the reasons why Mexican-origin parents decided to register their children in a voluntary busing program. In order to fully comprehend the factors that led parents to select the PWT program as an educational alternative for their children, it was also important to learn about the process by which parents sought enrollment for their children. This chapter will present interview data as shared by the parent and student participants that aims to answer the following research question:

- 1) Why are Mexican-origin students voluntarily leaving their neighborhood schools?
  - a) What factors do Mexican-origin parents consider when opting to have their children participate in a busing program that is designed for integration purposes?

#### **Understanding the Process and Reasons to Apply to the PWT Program**

The process and reasons to participate in the PWT program will be discussed from the vantage point of the parents as well as the students. The data from the parent interviews will be presented first, followed by the student's responses. The findings from this study revealed that 17 of the 20 students began their involvement in the PWT program during their middle school years. At the time of the application process, many of the student participants were too young to understand the scope of the PWT program. Consequently, the decision to apply was generally made by the parents. Nevertheless, the student participants also offered valuable data regarding

their recollection of the process and the reasons why their parents chose to register them in a voluntary busing program. It is also important to note that in certain cases, it was the student who first learned about PWT program and requested their parents to provide consent for their participation. Based on these atypical situations, the input of students was even more valuable to understand the decision making of parents.

### **From the Parent's Point of View: Access to the PWT Program**

In researching the various ways that parents came to have access to PWT, the extent of what was formerly known about the voluntary busing program and the receiving school was probed. What role did prior knowledge about PWT and the receiving school play in granting access to parents? The data revealed the breadth and depth of parent's understanding as well as the information that was available to them regarding the PWT.

**Parent's prior knowledge of the PWT program.** In order to assess their knowledge base, parents were asked about their understanding and their support of the objectives regarding the PWT program. The following is LAUSD's definition of the voluntary busing program as provided by the Office of Student Integration Services (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2008)

The PWT Program provides transportation for students voluntarily attending schools other than resident schools. To address the Court-designated harms of segregation, the PWT Program is designed to provide students with integrated experiences by placing Hispanic, Black, Asian and Other Non-Anglo students in integrated settings while providing opportunities for Other White (OW) students to attend Predominantly Hispanic, Black, Asian and Other Non-Anglo (PHBAO) schools. School assignments for PWT applicants are the responsibility of the District.

Although, the premise of the PWT program was associated with desegregation efforts, most parents did not account for racial and ethnic diversity as being an incentive for getting their children involved in the PWT program. As a matter of fact, most parents did not learn about this

aspect of the program until after their children began attending the receiving school. Corina's mother conceded:

Having different races is a good thing because that way a person can interact with everyone. But that was not the reason why I enrolled her in the program because I did not know about that aspect of PWT until afterward. When I became aware of it, my thinking was that she would meet different people. And that was fine with me and I would tell her, "Color does not matter, you speak to everyone. Don't belittle people."

*[Eso de diferentes razas está bien porque así convive uno con todos. Pero esa no fue la razón por que la metí al programa porque yo no sabía eso del programa hasta después. Cuando supe, mi idea fue que conociera a gente diferente. Y eso estuvo bien y yo le decía a ella, "No importa el color, tú háblale a todos. No hagas menos a la gente."]*

Only four parents mentioned the intended diversity goals of the PWT program as being influential in their decision to enroll their children in a voluntary busing program. The demographics of their home school brought students into contact with a majority of other Latino students, mostly of Mexican and Central American origin, followed by a presence of African American students. These four parents knew that their children would be exposed to non-Latino groups, including White students. Moreover, these four parents had a particular knowledge and understanding of the PWT program as it related to racial and ethnic diversity that was viewed as a valuable opportunity for their children's educational trajectory. What comprehension did the remaining 16 parents have regarding the PWT program? The following paragraphs provide data regarding the other parent participant's understanding of the voluntary busing program.

The majority of parents gained access to the PWT program through incidental means. Some parents learned about the busing program when searching for other schools where they could send their children. In the course of seeking information, parents came across advice from either a family member or a neighbor who had children in the program. With the exception of two mothers who had been born in the United States and had completed their K-12 education in LAUSD, most parents had received their education in Mexico. For the greater number of parents,

the knowledge base with regard to the educational system of the United States and LAUSD was unfamiliar territory. Thereby, access to information pertaining to the PWT program was not an automatic course of action when considering an alternative school site. On the contrary, parents had to inquire and stumble upon this information by self-initiative or word of mouth. Juan's mother discussed the process:

I had to gain access to the school as a volunteer. There I learned about a lot of programs...for my needs, I felt that I was in the path, in the struggle, but even so I was still in need, but the moment arrived in which asking among people I was able to learn about and fill out the Choices brochure. I had gotten it before, but I had not been attentive to its content. It took me a while to learn how the system in this country worked and more than anything the schools.

*[Me tuve que meter en la escuela como voluntaria. De allí aprendí de muchos programas...para mis necesidades, yo sentía que estaba en la guía, estaba en la lucha, pero aún así todavía me faltaba, pero llegó el momento en que preguntando entre la gente fue como pude instruirme y llenar el libro de Opciones. Ya me había llegado antes, pero no le había puesto atención. Me tardo mucho para aprender como era el sistema aquí de este país y más que nada de las escuelas.]*

Another means of learning about the PWT program came by way of recommendations from teachers that saw academic potential in the student and encouraged the parent to apply. What does this piece of information reflect about the role that teachers play in academic improvement and their vision for quality education? While the extent of this research does not delve into the impact of teachers, it is worth noting that it is an area of investigation that would offer insightful information regarding the educational experiences of students pursuing alternative schooling.

The parents were also asked how materials about the program were made accessible to them. All parents remarked that the district primarily disseminated information through the "Choices" brochure that was mailed annually to their homes. The Choices brochure was published in English and Spanish and provided information regarding the Magnet Program,

Public School Choice, and the PWT program. A list of participating schools was provided as well as application details regarding the admission process. Parents chose which program they had a preference for, but the district determined the school selection.

Most parents admitted that in former years, prior to their child's participation in the PWT program, they had received the Choices brochure but had not paid close attention to the contents of the brochure. The most frequent explanation given regarding the oversight of the Choices brochure included not having any background knowledge of its purpose and provision of educational programs. Edgar's parents explained it this way,

Many times when the Choices brochure arrived, before he began participating, we had not taken it into account because we did not even know what it was for. But then when he was approaching fifth grade, then I had information...I had asked several people to which school their children went. I asked about the Choices brochure...then a person who worked at the school told me that if a parent did not like the school where their child was studying, that they may go to another school...to choose...if a parent wanted their child to go to school outside the area...and the school personnel told me how to fill out the application...and the district designated which area they were assigned to.

*[Muchas veces cuando llegaba el folleto Choices antes de que él participará no lo tomamos en cuenta porque no sabíamos ni para que era. Pero ya conforme cuando él fue llegando a quinto año, entonces ya me informe...a varias personas yo les preguntaba a cual escuela iban sus hijos. Yo pregunté sobre el folleto Choices...entonces una persona que trabaja allí mismo en la escuela me informo que eso era para si a uno no le gustaba la escuela donde está estudiando, se fuera a otra escuela...como para escoger...si uno quiere que vaya fuera del área...y me dijo como llenar la aplicación...y el distrito escoge que área les toca.]*

Thus, it was a common pattern for parents not to have any prior awareness about the Choices brochure or how it was relevant to their children's education. However, once parents had heard about the PWT program through conversations with neighbors or family members, probing questions were asked in the school office about the Choices brochure. Parents sought assistance about the expected arrival date of the Choices brochure and how to fill out the application. After the application was submitted to request participation in the PWT program, a letter was sent

notifying them of admission with details about the bus schedule as well as the receiving school. Parents also commented that they used their experience with the Choices brochure to share information about the PWT program and application process with other uninformed parents, thereby adding to the word of mouth circulation of knowledge within the community. Most of the siblings of the student participants were also involved in the PWT program, making their participation a family affair.

With regard to which parent was the decision-maker, the mother had taken the primary responsibility to obtain information and carry out the application process. Of the twenty parents interviewed, only four mothers mentioned that their husbands had been somewhat involved in the process to gather information and apply to the PWT program. Coincidentally, these were the same fathers who had made themselves available to be present with their wives during the interview for this research study. The remaining mothers stated that they had assumed complete responsibility for finding out and enrolling their children in the voluntary busing program. Subsequently, mothers also shared that compared to their respective husband; they were the most involved throughout their children's PWT trajectory. Thereby, the mothers were not only homemakers and even wage earners, but frequently took on the duties relating to school as well. As one mother put it, "I was the one who was in charge of enrolling my child in the program, but my husband was in agreement." [*Yo fui la que se encargó de registrarlo en el programa, pero mi esposo estuvo de acuerdo.*] Although the role of mothers as decision makers in their children's schooling is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the data gleaned suggested an area of research for further analysis.

**Parent's prior knowledge of the receiving school.** Due to the considerable mileage involved to travel to DHS, and all the more challenging without the use of a personal vehicle,

some parents did not have a concrete acquaintance with the receiving school prior to the application process. The main source of information about the receiving school came by word of mouth. Nevertheless, what little knowledge they had gathered through others was sufficiently positive to convince parents that the PWT program was a good fit for their children. When questioned about prior knowledge about the receiving school, a parent remarked, “I knew that it was a good school because some of the neighbors had gone there, but that is all. Before they sent the Choices brochure, I did not know anything about that school.” [*Sabía que era una buena escuela porque unas vecinas de aquí fueron también allí, pero nomás eso. Antes de que mandaran el libro Choices, yo no sabía nada de esa escuela.*] For the parents whose children were bused as of the sixth grade, the receiving middle school, DMS, was the automatic feeder into DHS. However, there were no guarantees that their children would be admitted into DMS and then transitioned to DHS. If the student lived in a PWT sending area, it was likely to be the same school assignment that other neighborhood children in the busing program attended.

Sandra’s mother explained it this way:

They had told me, “The school will send you an application and you will request transportation. It is very likely that the student will be accepted.” The majority of times when transportation was requested, in most cases the same school was assigned. Later I received the notice of the date that I had to show up with my daughter to visit the school...the uniforms, everything.

[*Me habían dicho, “Te mandan una aplicación y ahí vas a pedir transportación. Es muy probable que el estudiante sea aceptado.” La mayoría de veces cuando uno pedía transportación casi siempre nos daban la misma escuela. Después me llegó el aviso de que día tenía que presentarme con la niña para conocer la escuela....los uniformes, todo.*]

Upon notification of admission into the PWT program, parents and students were invited to orientation on the school campus. Tours and information were provided at DMS for those students who started PWT in the sixth grade as well as at DHS for those students continuing or

beginning PWT for the first time. This was the initial opportunity for many parents to visit the school community where their children would receive their education, including the four years of high school that would culminate in graduation. During this time came the realization that multiple ethnic and racial groups comprised the school population; a fact regarded as a positive feature by all parents. Edgar's mother described her first impression as such:

I thought that there would be more Hispanics, but no. When we went to visit the school, it was then that we became aware that there were many students of different nationalities.

*[Pensé que allí era también como más Hispanos, pero no. Cuando fuimos para conocer la escuela entonces fue que nos dimos cuenta que había demasiados alumnos de diferentes nacionalidades.]*

The norm of going to school with predominantly Latina/o students was dispelled when parents (and students) discerned the new student body that PWT participants would be exposed to.

Important to note is that the students also had their experiences to share with respect to what they knew about PWT and the receiving school prior to their educational journey in a new school environment. The following section explores these details.

### **From the Student's Point of View: Access to the PWT Program**

As the main participants of the PWT program, the perspective of the students was imperative to this study. Just as the parents had a vital role in undertaking and learning about the busing program, the students also had to immerse themselves in understanding the journey they were about to embark on. For these students, the journey of their PWT involvement would not only mean relocation to a distant school but also be representative of forthcoming experiences that were narrowly understood. The next two subsections explore the students' presumptions and prior knowledge about the PWT program and the receiving school.

**Student's prior knowledge of the PWT program.** Of the 20 students, 17 reported that their parent's had found out about PWT and made the decision to enroll them. Yet, for the other



three students, they had been the ones to learn about the PWT program and Choices application through the suggestion of teachers or friends who had siblings in the program. Due to the fact that students were minors, parental consent was required to apply for the voluntary busing program. Alicia, a student who started the PWT program in the ninth grade disclosed the following details:

A girl told me and another friend that there was a program called PWT where our parents would not waste time driving us, we would not waste money on a bus pass and we would have a yellow school bus picking us up. So my friend and I got into PWT. I thought I had two options, "I could go to a school I do not know anything about or go to Belmont." So I decided to go to Belmont and stay in my home area. I went the first day and it got to me...like how the people talk to each other, their low vocabulary...I have low vocabulary, but these kids used slang that I did not understand. The students told me that I could not sit in that chair because the wall was rotten and it was going to fall on me. I thought they were being funny but they were serious. After that I thought, "I don't need this. I have an opportunity at a new school far away from here." I still had my space in the PWT program because classes had not started yet.

While Alicia had actually attended her home school before finally deciding to attend DHS, other students based their decision to pursue the PWT program due to the conditions of their local schools. Viewpoints derived from personal impressions and comments from community members influenced the students' perception of their home schools. Araceli who had been riding the yellow school bus since the sixth grade explained how she became acquainted with the voluntary busing program:

I did not want to go to Berendo because we took a fieldtrip when we were in elementary and we got to see the school. I honestly did not like the school. It looked all messed up with graffiti everywhere. I went to the bathroom and they were all dirty. It seemed that nobody really cared how it was. So I was like, "Why would I want to come here?" I just cared about my education and I did not want to go to a bad school. I heard so many rumors about that school...a lot of bad rumors. I told my mom that I did not want to go to Berendo. When I was in elementary, I heard about DMS and the teachers said it was a really good school so I wanted to check it out. They sent me a paper of all these magnet schools. There was the PWT program and I chose it. I did not know that I was going to be sent me to DMS, then to DHS.

Another student, Yesenia, decided upon finishing elementary school that her home school was

not the institution she wanted to attend. Yesenia, who was a fifth grader at the time, recalled her introduction to the PWT program:

I told my mom that I did not want to go to the local school. She went to see the school and said that she did not like it either. She started talking to a couple of her friends at work. Just when she found out about the PWT program, I found out about it too. I just knew it was a busing program and I told my mom that I would rather go there. So when the Choices application came, I told my mom that we were supposed to fill it out and request the PWT program.

In terms of agency (playing a role in the decision-making), the experiences of these three students were the exception when compared to the other student participants in this study. Yet, the commonality for all twenty students remained the fact that PWT was simply understood as a “busing program” without depth of the program’s objective for racial and ethnic integration. The acquaintance with PWT was uncharted terrain for all the participants. Anecdotal evidence shared by Felipe exemplifies a glimpse of the student’s general understanding of PWT. Felipe recounted the extent of his knowledge about what the PWT program entailed:

I felt a bit scared that I did not know the school I was going to, but pretty sure that it would be better. Before going, I did not know that I would be exposed to different ethnic groups.

The exposure to diversity remained a feature that students, similar to many parents, did not have full knowledge about prior to attending the receiving school. It is important to note that for the three students who approached their parents about the PWT program, this course of action emphasized a need for their own educational benefit. Ultimately, the students were the ones who spent the time in school to know first-hand if they felt supported by the existing conditions and resources. Thus, the input of student data was valuable for understanding the decision-making of parents to apply for the PWT program. Moreover, it was significant to underscore the comments that emerged from the student’s responses, in particular how the dissatisfaction with their neighborhood schools was a main argument used to mobilize the support of their parents. This

topic will be further discussed in the “Reasons to Apply” section in this chapter.

**Student’s prior knowledge of the receiving school.** In conjunction with probing about students’ prior knowledge concerning PWT, data was also collected about student’s prior knowledge of the receiving school. For 16 of the 20 participants, the receiving school turned out to be Diversity Middle School (hereafter, DMS) because they had entered the PWT program as early as the sixth grade (see Table 1 in chapter four). Since DMS was the feeder school into DHS these PWT students were subsequently assigned enrollment at DHS. The remaining students experienced DHS as the receiving school when they began their participation in PWT in the ninth grade. The students shared information about what they knew about both DMS and DHS, as applicable to their prospective attendance at either school.

None of the student participants in this study opposed the idea of traveling to a distant school away from their local community. However, some students were not elated at first with the fact that they would attend a school that was foreign to them and where they did not have any childhood friends. Juan, who have come to the United States during the second grade and began the PWT experience in the eighth grade, had the following concerns:

My mom wanted me to go to a better school. But I didn’t know anything because I had come from Mexico and I didn’t know the language either. I was scared because I had made my friends here and then leaving over there, I had to start over. I thought it was going to be nothing but English and I would have to get used to it. Not like here where people talk to me in Spanish. It would be like starting all over again.

While a student such as Juan was not familiar with the American school system or comfortable with the idea of being bused away from his local community, other students echoed similar concerns. Corina who had participated in the PWT program since the sixth grade stated:

All I knew was that I would be going on the bus to a school that I had never heard of. I did not want to go. I think I started crying and telling my mom that I did not want to go. “Please do not send me there. Why are you sending me that far?” Then I realized that a lot of my friends were riding the bus too. It was a coincidence.

In retrospect, although most students remembered feeling uneasy over the unknown details of the receiving school, they also disclosed that the limited information they had consisted of positive remarks gathered from neighbors and school personnel. As an example, Felipe discussed the extent of what he knew prior to attending both receiving schools, DMS and DHS:

I heard DHS was a good school. Everyone is together, even though it is a big school. For some reason, everyone seems to know almost everyone there. It helps that most people come from DMS and you already know people.

Thus, the concern of making friends was mitigated when students realized that other students from their neighborhood school were also participating in the PWT program, most notable by the presence of their neighborhood peers who had attended DMS, the feeder middle school to DHS.

Overall, the means of gaining access to the PWT program and the limited information known about the receiving school provides a lens to the efforts made by parents and students in hopes for a better education. The following section examines the reasons that prompted involvement in the PWT program. The perspective of parents and students is presented, respectively.

### **From the Parent's Point of View: Reasons to Apply to the PWT Program**

The purpose of this dissertation included learning the reasons that motivated parents to apply to the PWT program. The parent interview data disclosed the primary factors that made the voluntary busing program an attractive alternative with regard to their children's education. Parents highlighted the conditions of their local neighborhoods as being the major reason for enrolling their children in the PWT program. Also, of strong appeal to parents was the no-cost bus transportation that took their children to a school removed from the unfavorable conditions that prevailed in their community. Coincidentally, most parents expressed that their understanding of the PWT program meant that the district provided free bus transportation in

order for their children to attend a school outside their assigned neighborhood. For the majority of parents in this study, the transfer into a diverse racial and ethnic school setting was unknown or vaguely understood at the time of applying for the PWT program.

**Special case of a PWT alumna.** By mere coincidence of the participant sample, an outlier finding emerged during the parent interviews. Two of the student participants were cousins; consequently their mothers were sisters. These two parents were first generation Mexican-Americans who had completed their K-12 education in LAUSD and had direct knowledge of the PWT program. One of the parents shared that she was a PWT alumna. As youth in the late 1970s, their own parents had heard about the PWT program and enrolled several of their siblings. As a result one of these parents as well as two other siblings had been bused to a distant school. The other parent and another sibling did not participate in the program, but rather attended their neighborhood school because they “did not want to get up early.” The parent who had first-hand experience in the voluntary busing program gave a recount of her school years.

When I was growing up here in the area where we now live, maybe six or seven blocks away, we used to live in what you call the “hardcore territory.” I went to Norwood Elementary School and you saw the hardcore *cholos* around. I am talking about 30 years ago. When the PWT program started, they had presented it to us and we had gone on a fieldtrip to look at the other schools. As a sixth grader, I fell in love...going to a valley school. I was bused from sixth grade to middle school and then to high school. There were no gates, no bars, no graffiti, so I liked what I saw and what I experienced. Otherwise, I would have gone to John Adams Middle School, then to Manual Arts High School or Los Angeles High School. I grew up in the area that I currently live in.

The reference to growing up in the “hardcore territory” where *cholos* or gang members had a visible presence accentuated what this parent remembered about her elementary school days prior to being bused. In addition, this parent reminisced about the absence of gates, bars, and graffiti at the new school site as something that she “liked” when contrasted with the gangs that existed in her area. The fact that this parent continued to live in the same community where she

grew up, and subsequently was raising her own children, was indicative of a strong knowledge base about the neighborhood that was grounded in lived experience. Moreover, this parent's retrospective observations of gangs and graffiti could be juxtaposed with contemporary impressions of community conditions to examine if similar issues were of concern today. The issues affecting these neighborhoods and their impact on schooling will be explored in the next section.

Of relevance to this research study was this parent's direct involvement with the PWT program. Furthermore, having been a former PWT student when the program began in the 1970s, this parent had a specific familiarity with what the voluntary busing program entailed, specifically the effect on students. As an adult, she reflected the following with regard to the voluntary busing program:

Throughout the years I have gained a better understanding of the program versus when it was introduced to us 30 years ago. I do remember that we were exposed. We saw the school...seeing a brand new school versus seeing a school here in the community. As a child I was impacted. When I was going to my local elementary school, whatever we would study from our books, it was photocopied. The difference I saw when I was going to the elementary school in the sixth grade, and I still remember, is that we were given brand new books. I noticed the difference in the teachers. I was still learning one syllable words (bat, cat) and reading those books. But when I went to sixth grade it was very difficult for me because the teachers were actually teaching me at a sixth grade level.

The preceding quote speaks to the critical conditions posited by Oakes, Mendoza, and Silver (2004), in particular the research on rigorous academic curriculum and qualified teachers. This parent had a series of experiences with the PWT program that began in the sixth grade and continued through the end of her high school years. Contrary to her exposure at her resident school, she felt challenged by her new teachers whose pedagogical practices were on a par with grade level standards. This parent also commented on the provision of school supplies and classroom instruction; items that made a notable difference for rigorous academic curriculum. As

a PWT alumna and as a parent whose own children had been part of the PWT program, she had a dual perspective. This parent's experience is a special case that underscores the little that is known about the student experience in this long-standing busing program initiated in the 1970s. Although this parent's sister chose not to participate in the busing program, she did enroll her own children as a result of the positive experiences of her sister and other siblings. Thus, special circumstances for these two mothers motivated their decision to have their children be a part of the PWT program. They had experiential knowledge and a history of family involvement, which prompted them to elect a voluntary busing program for their own children's education.

**Neighborhood conditions and their impact on schooling.** Several parents had visited the home schools and have become dissatisfied with the conditions of the educational setting, thereby grounding their reasons to search for an alternative institution. The following is what Andrea's mother considered when foregoing attendance at the neighborhood school:

When my daughter had to go to summer school and I went during the day to get more information when all the kids were outside...and just the dress code, the vocabulary while we were walking in...the profanity that they were using...whoa! It is a different environment. Not that I am putting down my community but unless I am not accustomed to the behavior of youngsters now, but I was afraid of her going to school there...for her safety. She did not go to summer school there...I looked for another school.

Moreover, the findings revealed that the issue of drugs, gangs, and disorder in youth was a serious concern for parents in making the decision to send their children to a school that was approximately thirty miles away. Felipe's mother stressed:

Frequently there are incidents where the police have to come. I think it has to do with drugs or the street violence. We have heard about murders because of gangs...just a block away from here. Young people, usually males. It is like they do not have any desire to continue with their studies...they just stay there.

*[Seguido hay incidentes donde tiene que venir la policía. Yo pienso que son cosas de drogas o la misma violencia de la calle. Hemos escuchados que hay muertos por pandillas...aquí a una cuadra abajo. Personas jóvenes, usualmente varones. Como que no les dan ganas de seguir estudiando...se quedan allí.]*

Felipe's mother also emphasized how the conditions of the neighborhood had filtered into the school site and had directly affected her son:

He had problems at the school with other kids. He would come home with bruises. Other kids with bad influences would beat him up. I complained to the school but there was not much change. I was worried about the safety of my son. That was the most important thing for me. I also wanted the best for him in a good school.

*[Porque él tenía problemas en la escuela con otros niños. Llegaba a la casa con golpes. Otros niños con malas influencias me lo maltrataban. Me quejé con la escuela pero no hubo mucho cambio. A mí me preocupaba la seguridad de mi hijo. Eso era lo más importante. También quería lo mejor para él en una buena escuela.]*

The aforementioned comments provide examples of the environmental dimension of schooling. The external forces that impinged upon the surroundings in which students lived, including the school community, had ramifications for their schooling experience. Notorious factions such as gangs were associated with disturbing the residential order by proliferating gang rivalry and delinquent activities. These incidents did not occur in isolation but rather had an impact at the school level where the well-being of students was undermined. As one parent mentioned, the humble socioeconomic status of their community was not an issue of resentment, but rather the increasing crime in their neighborhood. Moreover, when the business of the streets percolated into the school site, it became one more issue for the institution to contend. To echo what Felipe's mother shared, the school may not always maintain the safety of their children. Despite complaints from parents, the school administration may not address the behavioral or social issues affecting students. Research by Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010) argued that bullying and violence among students can compromise the security of attending school, and thus the ability to learn effectively becomes impaired. For the participants in this study, having experienced first-hand the threat of violence and the frequent presence of police were clear indicators of the curtailing safety in their school and neighborhood. The mother of another male student, Gilberto, shared her thoughts about the growing concern of environmental



factors affecting the schooling experience:

It seems that there is a lot of teen pregnancy; the youth no longer pursue schooling. Some do not even finish high school. There are a lot of drugs here and no supervision on behalf of the teachers and also the parents. The police do patrol around here, but it seems that the youth sell more drugs at the schools. The school is not as strict as others. For me, to send my children away was meant to keep them away from all of this. There are a lot of drugs, a lot of gangs. My own children have not been in gangs, but I have seen the crime.

*[Pues aquí parece que nomás salen embarazadas de niños, los muchachos ya no van a la escuela. Algunos no terminan ni la high school. Mucha droga aquí y nada de vigilancia, de los maestros y los papás también. La policía sí pasa por aquí, pero parece que los muchachos venden más drogas allí en las escuelas. No son tan estrictos como en las otras. Para mí, mandar a mis hijos era para alejarlos de todo esto. Muchas drogas, muchos pandilleros. Mis hijos no han estado en pandillas, pero sí, he visto el crimen.]*

While parents admitted that their own supervision played a major role in abating the incidence of gang involvement, they also recognized the pervasiveness of gangs and drugs around their community. Juan's father emphasized the following:

The gangs, unfortunately they cannot see people or male youth by themselves because they approach them. We have been, until now, a united family that discusses our problems with each other and we have always been seen with our children because we always attend their games or events that they have. Whether it is my wife or I, we are always attentive to them. That has helped to deter the youth that have seen us with our children, including the ones they know...and well, they see that with respect...that they hold them in a positive view.

*[Las pandillas...porque desgraciadamente no pueden ver personas o muchachos solos porque luego se les acercan. Nosotros hemos sido, hasta ahora, una familia unida que nos platicamos nuestros problemas y siempre nos han visto con nuestros hijos porque siempre asistimos a sus juegos o eventos que ellos tienen. Ya sea mi esposa o yo, estamos siempre al pendiente de ellos. Eso ha ayudado a desalentar que cuando los jóvenes nos han visto con ellos, incluso los que conocen...y pues eso lo ven con respeto...que los tengan en un buen concepto.]*

Edgar's father expressed a similar concern about the current social conditions and highlighted the deliberate parental involvement undertaken to curb any negative juvenile behavior.

We hardly ever allowed him to be on his own...to be idle, doing nothing...to roam the streets. We always supervised him because there are many problems with today's youth.

*[No le permitimos casi nunca estar solo...de ocioso, haciendo nada...andar vagando las calles. Siempre lo supervisamos porque hay muchos problemas con la juventud de hoy.]*

During the interviews, parents were straightforward about the aforementioned neighborhood conditions that were considered deterrents for schooling. Although, they recognized that these issues might occur in other communities, the recurring prevalence translated to being on guard as part of the daily survival mode. While these matters accentuated the environmental dimension of schooling, parents also noted the responsibility of taking matters into their own hands. The awareness of schooling incidents, the involvement with their child's education, and the active supervision to stay on track were valuable factors that parents voiced as being critical to their efforts to surpass the community conditions.

**Education as an opportunity to transcend.** The availability of bus transportation through the PWT program provided a means for parents to seek a different educational setting for their children. For some parents the disadvantageous conditions in their community were perceived as a distraction to academic endeavors. Claudia's mother said, "The children who go to school sometimes derail other children into things they are not supposed to do. Nowadays there are so many bad things and I was worried about my daughter, so I opted to send her away." *[Los niños que van a la escuela a veces los meten en otras cosas que no deben de hacer. Ahora hay muchas cosas malas, entonces yo sí tenía preocupación de mi niña, pues mejor la mandé para allá.]* For parents, the harsh reality of social conditions posed a real threat to their children's education. In particular, the completion of schooling was a common theme voiced by parents.

Andrea's mother indicated the following concern:

I was afraid of being a grandmother. The way I see youth in my neighborhood. You see girls 13 or 14 years old that are mothers already. I was looking for a school where my daughter would be happy and be interested in school... finishing and asking for more. She is graduating from high school and has that enthusiasm to continue her education.

Monica's mother concurred:

I saw girls that were my daughter's age that dropped out two or three years into high school because they were pregnant. I did not have confidence in that school, more than anything because of the disorder that prevailed. For me that was not good.

*[Yo vi niñas de la edad de mi hija que salieron a los dos o tres años porque ya estaban embarazadas. No tuve confianza en esa escuela, más que nada por el desorden que había. Para mí no era nada bueno.]*

As parents mentioned, the visibility of early motherhood was a sign of social disorder that they did not want their children exposed to. For parents who had female children, the worry of teen pregnancy was even more pressing. With regard to male students, Ramon's mother stated the following, "Since Berendo, which is the school that my son was assigned to, was really bad in the past, the kids were straying into the wrong path, there were too many gangsters and I decided that it was best that he go all the way to DMS." *[Pero como la Berendo, que es la que le tocaba a él, estaba muy mal en ese entonces...los niños estaban tomando mal camino, había mucho cholo y decidí que mejor él fuera hasta allá (DMS).]* Ivan's parents remarked, "What we noticed is that there were a lot of gangsters, the streets had graffiti, and it was very unsafe." *[Lo que nosotros notamos es que había muchos pandilleros, las calles estaban pintadas, y había mucha inseguridad.]* Edgar's parents added, "The school had a reputation of having a lot of gangs. I did not want my son to be involved with that and I decided to send him away from here. *[La escuela tenía una fama de muchas pandillas. No quise que mi hijo se involucrará en eso y decidí mandarlo fuera del área.]* Thus, the presence of gangs and graffiti in the community presented a menace for parents and their aspirations of a good education for their children. For all parents, school was viewed as having the double function of educating and providing a trusted environment where their children would be safe.

Moreover, the academic aspirations for their children were often linked to their own educational shortcomings. Gabriela's mother commented, "I like that my daughters can learn

more than what we were not able to achieve so that they can make progress with their future. That they be more prepared in what we were not able to achieve.” [*Me gusta que mis hijas aprendan más de lo que nosotros no pudimos para que salgan adelante con su futuro. Que ellas estuvieran más preparadas en los que nosotros no pudimos llegar.*] Thus, it is important to note that parents perceived the PWT program as a path for educational attainment. The following quote from renowned educational scholar and critical supporter of public education, Pedro Noguera (2003, p. 8), spoke to the parent participants’ decision-making:

Given the opportunity, most parents actively seek schools they think have the greatest potential to meet the needs of their children. Whether this occurs in a public, private, or charter school is generally less relevant than whether the school is accessible, affordable, safe, and educationally viable. Defenders of public education who refuse to recognize this reality of parenting undoubtedly will feel betrayed when those who were once their most reliable consumers, namely, poor parents, abandon public schools when provided with options they perceive as superior.

Although the parents in this study were not leaving the public school system, Noguera’s quote highlighted the parents’ vision for a better education desired for their children. The extent of their efforts to gain access to the busing program in conjunction with their motives to participate in the PWT program demonstrated their hope for a quality education.

**Timing of participation in the PWT program.** Parents shed light regarding why they decided to bus their children to a distant school in the midst of their K-12 trajectory. Several of the students had older siblings or cousins who were enrolled in the busing program in prior years. These family members had left the neighborhood school during their secondary years. Due to positive feedback and learning about their experiences, the students interviewed for this dissertation followed in their relative’s PWT footsteps. Hence, 15 of the 20 student participants began their participation in the PWT program as early as the sixth grade, which amounted to a total of seven years of riding the yellow school bus. The parent’s actions were often prompted by

hopes that the years spent in the PWT program would serve to provide schooling opportunities in an environment that did not make the harsh realities of their community a visible distraction. As narrated in the preceding section on neighborhood conditions, the increasing rates of crime and early parenthood observed among youth were unsettling facts that worried parents. The timing of the student's enrollment was also related to the emergence of adolescence, where the exposure to gangs, drugs, and teen pregnancy became viable concerns for parents. Therefore, participation in the PWT program also served as a preventative measure against these social issues.

**A place called home.** Although, differences were mentioned between the suburban and urban environments, none of the parents expressed aversion or hard feelings toward their neighborhood. For example, Juan's mother pointed out an asset, "It is a community where the majority are Latinos, where I can communicate better because of my language and my cultural mores." [*Es una comunidad donde habemos la mayoría de Latinos, donde me puedo comunicar mejor por mi idioma, por mis costumbres.*] Juan's mother also commended the resources available in her community, such as MALDEF.<sup>9</sup>

I would inform myself through organizations, for example, it helped me a lot to take some classes with MALDEF. I am very grateful to them because I honestly felt that was my greatest role. I learned about MALDEF through the school. I was a volunteer at the school for six years. I would create activities for the students, for example, dances for the festive holidays and books for the teachers. We had a special room for parents.

[*Yo me informaba por organizaciones, por ejemplo, me ayudo muchísimo el tomar unas clases con MALDEF. A ellos yo les agradezco porque de verdad que sentí que fue mi función más grande. Me enteré de MALDEF por medio de la escuela. Yo era voluntaria en la escuela por seis años. Hacía actividades para los niños, por ejemplo, bailes para días especiales y libros para los maestros. Teníamos un salón especial para padres.*]

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<sup>9</sup> Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (MALDEF) is a Latino legal civil rights organization that promotes social change through advocacy, communications, community education, and litigation in the areas of education, employment, immigrant rights, and political access.

The high representation of Latinos in their local context facilitated communication between predominantly Spanish-speaking adults. All of the parent participants spoke Spanish, as a primary language while the proficiency of English was minimal for most. Therefore, residing in a community where interaction and daily affairs were accessible in Spanish provided a valuable support system. The parents understood the hard circumstances of their local context, yet considered their community to be their home, a place comprised of cultural wealth and other assets (For more on community cultural wealth,<sup>10</sup> see Yosso, 2005). To supplement the intent of acquiring a good education, the perspective of students is provided in the following section.

### **From the Student's Point of View: Reasons to Apply to the PWT Program**

Although most of the student participants did not have a direct role in requesting their enrollment in the PWT program, there were memories that surfaced regarding their understanding of what compelled their parents to apply. Among the students' awareness, there was unanimous agreement in depicting the realities of their neighborhood. Students understood the harsh conditions that were present in their community, such as gangs, drugs, violence; circumstances that persuaded their parents to seek an alternative school setting. It is important to note that students did not resent nor label their communities through a deficit lens, but rather acknowledged the disparate conditions that had become their norm in coexistence with other forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

**Community conditions.** The decision to have their children attend a distant school was weighed against many factors. Araceli recounted how her mother considered the external circumstances as a deterrent for schooling, "For my mom the positive side that made her sign the PWT application was that I was not going to get involved with gangs, drugs, and violence. Also,

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<sup>10</sup> Community cultural wealth is a model that examines the assets of communities of color and considers various forms of capital that students of color draw from to navigate the educational pipeline.

I was less likely to get pregnant, and get a better education.” The reality of living in neighborhoods with unfavorable conditions was a daily matter in the lives of the study’s participants. Yesenia described the issues most prevalent in her community:

I have lived in this neighborhood all my life. The area is very Hispanic. You see a lot of culture. But, you also see a lot of troublemakers. The street intersection that I live on is not that loud, but there have been several shootings since we moved here...at least ten. Now it feels kind of normal and it is scary when you think about it because there have been several people that have died right here in front of my house. The shootings are gang-related. I seemed to have gotten used to it. I don’t really feel scared now. But now with the time change, I don’t go out after 7:30 P.M. anymore. I am not allowed to anyway. But, I am not that scared. It is kind of normal. I see it all the time.

This student’s statement elucidated the effects that neighborhood crime had on the lives of residents. From a young age Yesenia had been exposed to real-life scenarios including murder, yet she learned to make adjustments to buffer the adversity of her surroundings, such as not being outdoors after nightfall. Yet, what was most intriguing was the mindset that has been adopted to reconcile the recurring crime within the community. Yesenia’s comments about getting “used to it [crime]” and the fact that it seemed “kind of normal” depicted a complicated reality that had become part of her livelihood. Other participants in the study reiterated comparable stories of unsafe community conditions. Edgar described the dynamics of his neighborhood in South Los Angeles:

I would say there is some tension between African Americans and Hispanics at the schools. Sometimes people get jumped...both...it comes back, exchanges between each other at school. I got stopped once, but not jumped, by an African American guy...he jacked me. I was in the tenth grade. I feel safe inside my house, but not outside. Just here in the front, but if I go to the corner, probably not. Since I skate, right now skating is popular, they just jack you for your board. Even if they do not use it, they can jack it and sell it. Sometimes people get shot...innocent people. But, the neighborhood has improved...it has joined together to have less crimes, like gangs. We do it ourselves. A family calls the police. People are less afraid to report crime to the police.

Although young, these students had a clear understanding of the day-to-day issues that affected their local context. The students’ comments were indicative of consciousness and direct exposure

to the challenges that they had learned to adjust to, yet expressed the prevailing assets that sustained the community intact. While precautionary measures were taken to safeguard against theft and other harms, the students voiced the importance of identifying and preserving community cultural wealth. The majority of the students had grown up in the same residential community since their preschool years and echoed the sentiment that the struggles should not overshadow the community's assets and strengths. For example, Juan's comment underscored the provision of neighborhood resources, "The Salvation Army<sup>11</sup> has a Youth and Community Center on the next block and most of the kids go there to play sports because they do not want to get into gangs." Clearly, the services provided by The Salvation Army provided an outlet for youth to participate in extracurricular activities while also creating a buffer zone for students who would otherwise veer off into gang involvement.

It is important to note that not every Latino youth was a gang member. To illustrate the notoriety of gangs, it is applicable to reiterate what Juan's father observed about these organized groups, "The gangs, unfortunately they cannot see people or male youth by themselves because they approach them." [*Las pandillas...porque desgraciadamente no pueden ver personas o muchachos solos porque luego se les acercan.*] As the interview data posited, gang participation was not always a natural inclination but often an act of peer pressure and a survival tactic to navigate the unsafe environment created by rival gangs. These neighborhood conditions exemplified the critical role of the environmental dimension of schooling, which gave prominence to the impact of the location and socioeconomic status of school communities. While community assets such as The Salvation Army were valued, the tenacious grip of gangs and crime was perceived as a hindrance to access life's opportunities, among them, education.

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<sup>11</sup> The Salvation Army is a Christian-based international organization known for its charitable work and disaster relief efforts. Youth centers are also available in various communities.



**Academic opportunities.** Students also highlighted that their parents sought the PWT program in hopes of better educational options. Sandra attributed her parent's selection of the voluntary busing program as such:

I went to DHS because it was a high school where a lot of people graduate from. LAHS doesn't have a high reputation, a lot of people don't graduate and a lot of other stuff goes on around there. DHS has a high reputation for everything...most of their programs. It was my parent's decision. They wanted me to go to a high school where I would be able to graduate.

Another student, Yesenia, also described the academic opportunities and significance of being able to attend a rigorous academic school:

I heard that it (DMS) was a really, really good school and that it was a great opportunity rather than going to Berendo. I heard that there was no tolerance for violence. That is what motivated me to want to go there. Before transferring to DHS, I had heard that it was a good school that was clean with good teachers, advanced classes, and intelligent kids.

The options available at DHS posed a strong indicator of success for these students. The contrastive conditions of their neighborhood signaled a message of potential struggles, such as gangs, that may have sidetracked their educational trajectory. Although, the students acknowledged that academic success was also influenced by personal accountability, the absence of external issues coupled with the focus on academic rigor was an opportunity that afforded them access to graduation and higher education. These reasons were decisive in students' recollection of why they were participating in the PWT program. The next chapter explores the experiences of PWT students and their parents during the four years spent at DHS.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DOCUMENTING THE EXPERIENCES OF PWT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

This chapter will discuss the experiences of students and parents during their involvement with the PWT Program. The narratives of parents and students will be presented, respectively. It is important to note that the extent of parent experiences may differ in large part to the fact that parents had limited contact with PWT events and the receiving school, while students attended on a daily basis. This chapter will provide a better understanding regarding the receiving school's relationship with parents and the schooling experiences of students. This chapter will present interview data as shared by the parent and student participants with the objective to answer the second research question:

- 2) What are the social and academic experiences that Mexican-origin students and their parents encounter in a diverse school setting?

#### **Parent's Impressions About Diversity High School and the PWT Program**

When asked about their impressions regarding DHS and the PWT program, all parents conveyed a high level of satisfaction. Among the benefits discussed were access to a good education and exposure to different groups of people, the academic school calendar, and the bus schedule for pick up and drop off times.

**Access to a good education and interaction with diverse people.** There was a consensus among parents who considered DHS to be an institution of opportunity and exposure. Ivan's father pointed out the advantages he and his wife considered when deciding to enroll their son in the PWT program, "The school is safer and we don't have to worry about his well-being. It's not overcrowded and the education is of higher quality. The school is well known and distinguished in academia." [*La escuela está más segura y no tenemos que preocuparnos por su*

*bienestar. No hay sobrepoblación y la educación es más alta. La escuela es conocida y premiada en lo académico.]* This comment spoke to the critical conditions of *Safe and Adequate School Facilities* and *Rigorous Academic Curriculum* as identified by Oakes et al. (2004). For Ivan's parents, these two critical conditions were key features they associated with DHS during the time that their child was involved with the PWT program. Likewise, all other parents echoed comparable perspectives of the receiving school as a site where students could obtain a quality education and not have deal with violence, overcrowded classrooms, or inadequate resources.

In addition to the opportunity of obtaining a good education and going to college, another promising feature of the busing program was having the chance to interact with other students of different backgrounds. The following quote reflected Yesenia's father's vision of what a good education entailed, including a campus climate that promoted higher education and that gave students a multicultural perspective to succeed in college:

Well more than anything, that she receive the education that we would like, that she put forth a good effort, that she try to learn all she can...that she make the most of all the opportunities the school provides to go to the university. More than anything that she be able to associate with other types of people and not always with the same neighborhood people. This way she has another awareness, another perspective. And when she goes to the university, she will be able to see herself just like everyone else because she has had that social connection.

*[Pues más que nada, que recibiera la educación que a nosotros nos gustaría, que le echará ganas, que tratará de aprender lo más que pudiera...que aprovechará todas las oportunidades que la escuela ofrece para ir a la universidad. Más que nada que se relacione con otro tipo de gente y no con digamos siempre la misma gente del vecindario. Así tiene de otro conocimiento diferente, otra perspectiva. Y cuando ella vaya a la universidad ella se pueda ver como todos los demás porque ha tenido ese roce social].*

For Yesenia's father, the multicultural exposure that his daughter received at DHS would provide her with a heightened awareness not only of other cultures, but also of her self-efficacy as a

student of color; she would be able to position herself on a par with everyone else and not through a deficit lens. Sandra's mother expressed her opinion of the school's heterogeneity:

There isn't only, what you would say, Latinos or Whites. But, I did like the school because with the Whites and other races my daughters can learn different things and for them it would be easier to become well-rounded people in the future.

*[No hay nada más, por decir Latinos o Americanos. Pues, en sí me gustó porque mis hijas a base de los Americanos y de otras razas pueden aprender cosas diferentes y para ellas sería más fácil para desarrollarse en el futuro.]*

The above comments reflected the critical conditions of a *College-Going School Culture* and one aspect of the *Opportunities to Develop a Multi-Cultural College-Going Identity* that Oakes et al. (2004) outlined as being fundamental for enhancing equity and access to higher education for all students.<sup>12</sup> These sentiments were referenced throughout the interviews with the majority of parents. The busing component of the PWT program was regarded as a bridge that would allow their children entry into a school setting that offered opportunities for academic achievement and to interact with a broader group of people that extended beyond their immediate local environment. Since the district provided bus transportation, parents did not have to be concerned with monetary expenses or making the trek to drop off or pick up their children. From the parents' perspective, the provision of free bus transportation was an additive component of the PWT program that gave their children the opportunity of becoming well-rounded individuals, both on an academic and social level.

**Academic school calendar.** As the receiving school, DHS operated on a regular academic calendar, in comparison to the year round academic calendars that most of the resident schools utilized. Resident schools that used the year round calendar typically had three or four tracks alternating with various breaks in instruction in order to accommodate overcrowding. Regular calendars were regarded more traditional academic calendars that were common in

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<sup>12</sup> Oakes et al. also emphasizes the importance of students of color seeing themselves as scholars in their own right.

previous years before overcrowding became an issue in many schools. For some parents, like Gabriela's mother, the regular academic calendar used at DHS was preferable for the following reasons:

Over there at [DHS] it is a regular calendar. There are no tracks. Because when they are on vacation they forget. And here at home all they do is watch television. And that is what I do not like. I want them to learn more, so they can make progress with their future.

*[Porque allá es un calendario regular. No hay carriles. Porque cuando están en vacaciones se les olvida. Y aquí en la casa es puro mirar televisión. Y es lo que no me gusta. Quiero que aprendan más, para que salgan adelante.]*

Yesenia's mother also favored the regular academic school year offered at DHS:

I was already looking for another school because the nearby schools were on year round. It was not a regular academic calendar, thus there were more vacation breaks. So much studying and I would say, "What is she going to do all that time at home? Because I work...she is going to be alone and I want her to be industrious all the time." Afterward the Choices brochure arrived and we requested transportation so that she could go to school over there. Not having interruption during the school year was one of the reasons.

*[Yo ya estaba buscando para que fuera para otra escuela porque las escuelas de alrededor eran calendario redondo. No era calendario regular, entonces había más vacaciones. Tanto de estudiar y yo decía, "¿Que va hacer en la casa todo ese tiempo? porque yo trabajo...va a estar sola y yo quiero que esté activa todo el tiempo." Después llegó Choices a la casa y pedimos transportación para que ella se fuera para allá. Una razón fue esa de no tener interrupciones en el año escolar.]*

Thus, the regular academic calendar allowed for students to have continuous instruction with the same break for all during the summer months, which most parents considered an asset for preserving the momentum of the student's learning.

**Bus pick up and drop off schedule.** Another desirable feature of the PWT program was the convenience of the departure and arrival time. Students had to be at the designated bus stop as early as 6:30 A.M. and arrived home between 5:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M., depending if they left directly after their last class or if they rode the late bus because they stayed for an after school activity. The duration that a student spent riding the bus and at school worked in favor of the

parent's schedule, often coinciding with their own arrival and departure times for their jobs.

Edgar's parents put it this way:

It was an advantage because it provided transportation since driving to drop him off would be difficult. The bus stop was close to where we lived, about 3 blocks. Our thinking was to keep him busy because the idea of being home for 2 months, they begin to get involved in other types of things. We were not home for most of the day and we do not know what he does. However, when he left to school, we would go to work, he would return from school and we would arrive from work. He was never alone.

*[Era una ventaja porque proveía transportación porque ir a dejarlo hasta allá estaría difícil. La parada estaba cerca de donde vivíamos, como a 3 cuadras. La idea de nosotros era mantenerlo ocupado porque eso de estar 2 meses en casa, luego se empiezan a involucrar en otro tipo de cosas. Nosotros estamos todo el día afuera y no sabemos lo que hace él. En cambio cuando él se iba a la escuela, nosotros nos íbamos a trabajar, él regresaba de la escuela y nosotros veníamos de trabajar. Nunca estaba solo.]*

Corina's mother expressed her point of view regarding the bus schedule:

The reason that it was safer was because I worked. I would leave her at the bus stop at 6:00am or 6:30am. So it was convenient for me to leave her early and then leave for work, return to pick her up or have someone pick her up. She had her routine and I knew what time she would come home. And if someone would pick her up, I knew who it was. She was safe during that time. It was convenient for me and for my work schedule. In other words, our schedules coordinated. The program provided transportation and that was a good thing because for the parents who worked it was convenient. The students become more responsible, otherwise the bus would leave them and how would they get back home? By necessity they have to be in sync with the bus schedule.

*[La razón fue que era más seguro porque yo trabajaba. Yo la dejaba ahí en a la parada del autobús a las 6:00am o a las 6:30am. Entonces a mí me convenía dejarla temprano e irme a trabajar, regresar y recogerla o alguien iba a recogerla. Pero ya tenía su rutina y sabía a que hora iba a llegar. Y si me la recogían, yo sabía quien era. Ella estaba segura ahí. A mí me convenía y a mi horario. O sea los horario se coordinaban. El programa provee transportación y eso es bueno porque a los papás que trabajan les conviene. Los estudiantes se hacen más responsables, sino los deja el autobús y ¿cómo se van a regresar? A ley tienen que estar acoplados al horario del autobús.]*

Andrea's mother also had positive comments regarding the schedule under the PWT program:

I look at it more as a positive experience. For example, keeping the child active, busy. She gets up at 5:15 A.M. to get the bus at 6:00 A.M. for an hour drive to school. By the time she comes out of school and gets home, it's almost 6:00 P.M. She only has sufficient time to eat, do homework, and then go to sleep. That would be a positive thing for me because she is always busy at all times.

The PWT program became a viable alternative for parents seeking a more conducive schooling environment that simultaneously offered safety for their children. The articulation of favoring the long hours involved with the PWT program granted parents with a vital component that offered peace of mind in knowing that their children would be less likely to be sidetracked into detrimental activities because the bus schedule positioned students to use their time in productive ways. For some parents, the PWT program operated as an institutional caretaker because students were supervised by school personnel in the morning when they rode the yellow school bus and throughout the day until they were discharged in the early evening. These hours of school supervision often coincided with the work schedule of many parents.

To some extent the itinerary of the PWT program also functioned as a preventive measure against those issues discussed in chapter five such as drugs, gangs, and even teenage pregnancy because the bus schedule did not allow for too much unsupervised time after students left the school grounds. For example, Ramon's mom recounted how the probability of being truant from school would not be a concern given the distance and effort required for students to leave the school's premises. "Since the school was far away, it was not easy to leave campus and come home to hang out. There was less incentive for skipping school." [*Como la escuela estaba lejos, no era fácil venirse a la casa para andar de vago. Había menos motivación para irse de pinta.*] In that capacity, the bus pick up and drop off schedule provided a sense of tranquility for parents because they did not have to worry about their children skipping classes and partaking in negligent activities that would deter their children from acquiring a good education.

### **Student's Initial Impressions About the PWT Program and Diversity High School**

At the outset when parents communicated the news, many students did not understand the distance and time involved in order to attend a school that was located in the suburbs. Waking up

early and having to ride the school bus for approximately thirty miles was a new experience that many students found difficult to adjust to. Yet, students became cognizant that the early morning hours and traveling on the yellow school bus was part of the exchange that came with having access to DHS. Lorenzo summed it up this way:

I had to get up at 5:30 A.M. to get ready for school. My mom drove me to the bus stop. The bus was supposed to pick up students at 6:15 A.M., but sometimes the bus would be late or never come because of mechanical problems. Sometimes I got tired of waking up early and going on the bus. But, I made the best of it. Sometimes the bus was overcrowded and we had to sit three people to a seat.

Alicia shared the following as she recalled her own experience with the busing program:

At some point I did want to just go to my home school considering that I did not like waking up really early every morning. It was just tiring...an hour every morning just to get to school, but then I just thought about it, "I'll just stay here. I think it's the best choice."

Ivan described how the extra time spent on the bus affected his schooling:

There was a point that we had to sit three to a seat for about one month. It was very uncomfortable. It was also dangerous because if the bus driver had to brake hard then the person sitting on the edge would fall off. When I got home I was very exhausted because it was a long bus ride, especially when there was a lot of traffic and I would get home around 5:00 P.M. Sometimes I would try to study on bus but it was hard to concentrate. I got home and would relax for a while and then do my homework. If I didn't have to ride the bus, I think I would have more energy because the routine of waking up early in the morning and getting home late did affect me. Most people I knew that lived by DHS would get home in twenty minutes, do their homework and have time to hang out. And me, I would barely be getting home. So, it was kind of hard. But I never said that I didn't want to continue because I knew that it was a good school so I was going to have to make it work. I didn't think about going to another school. After a while I got used to it...with the bus schedule and everything.

The above comments were indicative of the environmental component of schooling, in particular the impact of transferring students to a new school environment. The routine of waking up very early and coping with the bus ride took students on a journey into a distinct environment. Despite the physical exhaustion, discomforts, and limitations of the long bus hours, all students echoed



similar sentiments of staying the course with the PWT program because DHS was considered a good school.

### **Parental Involvement at the School Site**

During the four years that students attended DHS, parents' relationships with the receiving school was based on back-to-school night, conferences with teachers, and school meetings for parents. The majority of parents conveyed that their involvement at DHS was limited due to scheduling conflicts with employment responsibilities, transportation issues, and barriers with the English language.

**Scheduling conflicts with employment.** With the exception of two mothers who were homemakers, all other parents in the study had a source of employment. Several parents also shared that they had a second job in order to supplement the family income. The timing of the end of their workday and the start of the school activity, such as back-to-school night, often conflicted with each other. Monica's mom stated the challenges of coordinating her work schedule with the school's meetings and having to make decisions about foregoing wages without the certainty that she would be able to get to the meeting on time:

I don't always have a fixed schedule for my job. Sometimes I go in last minute to cover other people's shifts, so I end up working extra hours. I don't want to give the impression that I don't care about my daughter's education, but I have to put food on the table. There have been times that I have thought about going to school meetings, but I wouldn't even make it on time because it's so far away.

*[No siempre tengo un horario fijo para mi trabajo. A veces entro de último momento a cubrir los turnos de otras personas, entonces terminaba trabajando más horas. No quiero dar la impresión de que no me importa la educación de mi hija, pero tengo que poner comida en la mesa. Ha habido veces que he pensado ir a las juntas de la escuela, pero ni llegaría a tiempo porque está muy lejos.]*

For many parents it was very difficult to meet the demands of their work schedule and be present at school activities that were thirty miles away. Time was a critical circumstance because

their work schedules either made them unable to attend or allotted very little time to make the distant trip to DHS.

**Transportation issues.** The majority of parents in the study relied on public transportation, primarily the bus, for commuting to their employment. Several of the parents took at least two buses and spent a minimum of two hours traveling to and from their jobs. When parents needed to visit the school site for conferences with teachers, they took several buses to get there. At times, the district provided school buses for back-to-school night and for school meetings held in the evenings. However, for those parents who were able to attend the school events, the transportation provided by the district was a concern. Juan's mother reflected on her involvement at the school site:

I was not able to participate very much. I wanted to. I called the district at the beginning, but they told me that due to the distance I would not be able to participate because they could not provide transportation. I would have to figure out how to get there and I do not drive. But sometimes, they would provide transportation, like for open house. I have gone to that. Unfortunately, they would give us a time to wait for the bus and it would arrive at a different time or sometimes not at all. For example, if there were 4 or 5 mothers, we had to go to another bus stop of a more distant school to wait for the bus. When one arrives late from work and still has to go all the way to the bus stop, it was very difficult. If the bus stop had been at least where our children waited for the bus it would be better. That is why many parents stopped attending. Not many parents would go to the school events.

*[No pude participar mucho. Yo quise. Al principio yo hablé al distrito, pero me decían que por la distancia no podía participar porque no podían darme transportación. Yo tendría que llegar allá y yo no manejo. Pero en ocasiones sí nos daban transportación, como para open house. Sí he ido a eso. Lamentablemente, nos daban un horario para esperar al autobús y llegaba a otra hora o a veces no llegaba. Si por ejemplo, éramos 4 o 5 mamás teníamos que ir a otra parada de otra escuela más retirada todavía para tomar el autobús. Cuando se llega tarde del trabajo y todavía ir hasta ese lugar, se nos hacía muy difícil. Si hubiera sido por lo menos donde recogían a nuestros hijo sería mejor. Por eso muchos papás dejaron de ir. Ya no íbamos tantos.]*

This parent's experience resonated with many other parents during the interviews for the study.

Not having a personal vehicle or the additional time to use public transportation meant parents

depended on the buses provided by the district to attend events at DHS. Yet, the provision of transportation from the district was not always a smooth process that at times curtailed the participation of parents at the school site.

**Barriers with the English language.** For the majority of parents, Spanish was their first language and few had a solid mastery of English. Most admitted that they knew enough English at the conversational level but felt most comfortable speaking in Spanish. Thus, for most parents the lack of fluency with the English language created a barrier when it came to participating at school events. The communication issue was further compounded when translation services were not available. Edgar's father expressed the following, "There were no translators or audiophones, it was all in English. I think that due to the budget cuts the district did not provide translation. Parents from the PWT program hardly spoke. Maybe because of the English language." [*No había traductores o audífonos, solamente puro inglés. Pienso que por los recortes el distrito no proveía traducción. Los padres de programa PWT casi no hablaban. Quizás por el inglés.*]

Similarly, other parents also attributed the absence of translation services to the minimal participation of PWT parents while acknowledging that English proficiency was a necessity. Corina's mom shared her thoughts on the issue:

There was no translation. It was all in English. That was probably a reason for some people to stop going to the meetings. I think that it's a beautiful thing to preserve our culture, but in my way of thinking, being in this country, one must also learn English because it is a need.

[*No había traducción. Era puro inglés. Quizás eso haya sido razón para algunas personas en dejar de ir a las juntas. Yo pienso que es bonito preservar nuestra cultura, pero en mi forma de pensar, al estar en este país, uno también tiene que aprender el inglés porque es lo que necesita uno aquí.*]

While the need for language interpretation deterred the participation of some PWT parents, others sought to be involved despite the challenges with the English language. Juan's mother

described her experiences with the school personnel at DHS:

The English language became a bit difficult when I tried to communicate over the telephone. Although there were people who could help us at the school, but it was really hard. That was the first factor. Even though, in some ways, the school personnel was willing to help me, it was very difficult because they would tell me ‘go to that office’ and they had me going back and forth.

*[Se me hacía un poquito difícil el idioma inglés cuando era por teléfono. Aunque había personas que nos podían ayudar en la escuela, pero nos cuesta mucho. Eso era el primer factor. Aunque en cierta forma sí se prestaba el personal a ayudarme pero me costaba porque me decían “vaya a esa oficina” y me traían así.]*

This parent’s limited English showcased how daunting it was to communicate with school personnel. The inability to fully comprehend the English language posed a barrier for parents because it complicated matters for developing a productive relationship with the school site.

### **Documenting a Socio-Cultural Dimension of Schooling for Students at the School Site**

All the PWT students in the study attended DHS from the ninth grade to the twelfth grade. During the four years at DHS, students participating in the study encountered social and academic experiences in a diverse school setting. The students’ responses provided references to the socio-cultural dimension of schooling with regard to the environment and resources at DHS, how participating in a busing program had affected their academic experience, and the activities they were involved on campus.

**Documenting the environmental component of schooling for PWT students.** Echoing the environmental component of schooling, Lorenzo described the school’s environment and resources this way:

At first, I was kind of lost because it was such a big school. But my brother showed me around. The school was clean and I felt safe. There were a lot of houses surrounding the school, not a lot of liquor stores and no graffiti. The neighborhood was middle class or upper class. The parents probably donated more money to the school so that made a difference. We always had enough books for all our classes. I thought the students were cool, but I needed to get used to their friendly attitude. Around my neighborhood I was used to seeing kids being more disrespectful and who thought they were tougher.

Feeling safe was often attributed to the socioeconomics of the school's residential area. Students, like Lorenzo, believed that since DHS was situated in an upper middle class neighborhood, this "made a difference" and it was evident in the safety, provision of educational resources and adequate facilities on campus. Gabriela also shared her perspective about the security and DHS:

The school was big, but more secure than the schools over here. DHS had police officers...so do the schools near my house, but I wouldn't feel as safe there because it's out of control. There are too many gangs and other problems. Here I just focus on school.

Of relevance was Gabriela's comment about how the environment at DHS created the opportunity for her to "just focus on school" without having to deal with external factors that put her safety in jeopardy.

**Documenting the social component of schooling for PWT students.** DHS was considered a reputable campus for its enriched academic curriculum. The academic opportunities offered at DHS provided a platform for supporting a college-going culture. PWT students discussed the academic courses and activities they partook in during their four years of high school; these were indicative of the social component of schooling. Araceli recalled the following:

I took regular classes. I didn't take honors or AP because when I was in 9th and 10th grade, I really didn't know anything about the academic programs at DHS. It was in the middle of my junior year when I first heard about all that stuff. I did meet with counselors. I thought about what else I could do to maybe get into a better college. But I figured it was kind of too late because in my 9th and 10th year, I did not do so well...so that kind of held me back.

Others spoke of doing well in school so that they could graduate. Even though students knew about the college bound courses, like Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes, they did not mind that they had regular classes. Fernando said:

I wasn't in any of the advanced classes like enriched or honors. I had regular classes and I did good in them. I got mostly Bs and Cs. When I was in my junior year, I did hear about the college level classes, like AP, but I never thought it was for me. The counselor did not

give me that advice, just to keep getting passing grades. I just wanted to graduate without stressing myself out like some other students did. I didn't want to put that pressure on me, especially when I was getting up so early and coming home late.

During the interviews, a few of the students in the study who were born in Mexico made mention that they received sheltered instruction, which provided grade-level content with a focus on development of the English language. Leticia shared her experience with regular and sheltered classes and her feelings of accomplishment because she had graduated from high school:

Some of my friends had harder classes than me, like the enriched classes. I only took regular classes and some sheltered ones too. A lot of the busing students were in my classes. I really didn't see a lot of Asians or White students in the regular classes. I feel proud to have graduated from high school because I am the first one in my family to get a diploma. I will be going to community college.

Other students recounted that the majority of their courses were regular and some enriched classes. Some indicated that the only AP course they were enrolled in was Spanish language and were not sure how they ended up in the class, although they did well academically. David stated:

I took regular classes and a few enriched classes. I even had AP Spanish. I guess my counselor thought it would be a good class for me since I was Hispanic. I always thought that only the advanced students took AP classes. I am not dumb but I took mostly the regular classes. I did okay in the AP Spanish class. The class had other busing students.

Juan expressed the following on the subject of teacher and counselor support:

I had AP Spanish. No honors classes. I don't know why I didn't take any more classes. If I could go back and change that, I would. If they would have put me in regular classes instead of sheltered classes, like regular English, I think I would have been able to handle it. My teachers were there for me, to help me not mess up. My teachers and my counselor didn't talk to me about taking AP and honors classes. I think the reason they didn't talk to me about that was because I was sheltered. I went to my counselor to see what classes I was taking and he would say, "These are the ones you need to graduate from high school," but he didn't say to me, "You need this one to go to college or to a university." He only focused on graduating high school. He was nice to me, but I don't think everyone got that kind of advice. I did get help from the student counselors in the college office. They gave me basic information about applying to college.

For Juan, being a sheltered student translated into a tacit understanding that his priority needed to be to graduate from high school while college should be a residual focus. He did, however,

receive assistance from student counselors regarding the college application process. Most students reported that teachers were supportive and provided quality instruction. The role of the counselors, although it was not clear if it was an academic counselor or a student counselor, was also mentioned as being informative about the college-going process. Claudia said:

I had some good teachers. I felt motivated to learn in my classes. I took regular and enriched classes, and only one AP class, the Spanish language. I remember how the counselors would always tell me that I should start thinking about applying to community college. Going to college was a big thing at DHS. I think that being a student at DHS was such an advantage because when you graduate, people know that it's a good school.

Students also conveyed that DHS was a school that offered academic assistance to students for different purposes, such as workshops for the graduation exit exam or college entrance tests.

Sandra remembered how she received academic help from the school and a teacher in particular:

The school provides everyone with some type of help. After school, there would be some teachers that would help you study for the high school graduation exit exam or the SAT. I can't complain because there were a lot of opportunities. I did take the SAT exam. I know I did my best. I know that I did not write whatever like some other people did. But maybe I needed a little bit more help because my score could have been better. Maybe it's my fault for not asking my teachers for help.

There was a male teacher who had also been my sister's teacher and he would make pay attention to my academic progress. He would give me support about making it through high school. I think it made a difference because it helped me out a lot. I'm thankful. He talked to me about college. I think that going to DHS increased my chances of graduating high school so that I could go to college. It means that people do get opportunities to go to a better school. I see myself as being able to do more things in the future.

DHS also offered career development classes through the Regional Occupational Program, which provided hands-on preparation, applied academics, and job seeking strategies. Half of the students in the study indicated that they participated in the Regional Occupational Program as an elective course and received academic credit. Leticia spoke about what she learned in the Regional Occupational Program:

It's a one-month class. You are taught the basics of dentistry. We even get to practice what we learn on other students. We did things like clean teeth and check for cavities. The program had a lot of busing students.

Another group of five students took part in an academic program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a college readiness program designed to increase schoolwide learning and performance. Felipe shared how his participation in AVID provided him with the educational tools he needed to be prepared for college:

I was in AVID all four years of high school. It took place during one of the class periods. AVID helped me focus more. They gave me tips on study habit techniques. They told me which classes I should take and what I should study for. They had a study hall period, which actually helped because I could study or do some more notes. I heard about A-G requirements starting in the first year of AVID. I learned about what I needed for college. I did take some honors classes...around 5 or 6 honors classes. All the other classes were regular classes. Being in AVID, at least 2 or 3 of the classes each year were honors.

Part of the social component of schooling included extracurricular activities that allowed for greater social interaction among students during noninstructional hours, such as lunch time or after school hours. DHS offered a variety of activities that students could partake in, such as school clubs and sports. A few of the students in the study reported being members of various student clubs intermittently throughout their high school years. Other students belonged to student clubs that focused on community service or peer mentorship. All these student club meetings and activities took place during lunch time.

Only less than a handful of PWT students had been actively involved in sports, including softball, swimming, and football. Alicia shared the following: "I was in softball during the 10th grade. I used to stay after school and take the late bus. The late bus was only for students who participated in after school activities." Andrea described her involvement as a member of the swim team at DHS:



I was part of the school's swim team for my 11th and 12th grade years. We would swim during zero period. During the fall, we would stay after school to work out our muscles, like run a mile, do push ups, and sit-its. I was the only student on the swim team who rode the bus. I enjoy swimming a lot, but I hated waking up at 4am and asking my mom to drive me to swim practice. I know she would be really tired and then have to get ready to go to work. The district did not provide a bus because it was during a zero period.

For two other students, playing on the football team was how they got involved in extracurricular activities. Lorenzo recounted his participation with the football team:

I played football for the varsity team in the 11th and 12th grade. The football team had students from the busing program. There were like five or six White students. The rest of the football team, about half were Hispanic and half were Black students. During the early practice season there weren't any school buses to bring us back home so the busing students took the MTA. After the regular season started, the school provided a late bus.

Along similar lines, Manuel recalled:

I participated in sports by playing on the football team. We would stay after school to practice. When we have football games we would stay until after the game was over and sometimes we went to other schools to play as the visiting team. We had a late bus that would drop us off. The only thing about being in sports is that I would get home very late. I had less time to study for my classes.

Sandra recounted the circumstances that impacted her participation in student activities:

I never did sports, although I always wanted to try out for track meets. I didn't because maybe I wasn't so fast, so I felt I wasn't going to be able to make it. The bus schedule affected me because as a traveling student if you were to participate in an after school activities, you end up coming home really late...around 8:30 P.M., depending on traffic...and not always have a late bus. I think other students in PWT didn't participate in after school programs because of the same reasons. In a way it makes your experience in high school a little less memorable...but in a way, it doesn't matter any more.

Felipe discussed his frustration with the busing situation, specifically how the bus schedule limited his involvement in school activities:

I participated in a couple of lunch clubs like Key Club. I also went to fun clubs like movie club. There were others clubs that met after school, but I did not go to those because I would have to stay. In some ways the bus scheduled limited my participation because if I lived there and I stayed after school, no big deal. But if I stayed after school, I would have to come on the bus and then get here at around 8:00 P.M, maybe 9:00 P.M. I did stay after school a few times and I would come home at 10:00 P.M. Once for community service, another time because we were having a dance audition. The last time

it was because I was retaking a class to improve my grade. I had to do that for about two months.

I thought about joining an academic club, but the fact that you had to stay after school at least twice a week, I didn't really want to stay after school that much. I do regret not being able to participate in more activities. I actually did want to take some college classes at the community college, to get a head start, but that would require me to stay almost every day after school, something that I did not want to do because I would have less time to study. I didn't do a zero period because I would have to get there too early. I couldn't be there. The school bus didn't pass that early. I don't think it's a fair situation. Not a lot of busing students did a zero period. If other students took a zero period, it's because they lived in the area. It was more convenient for the kids who lived there.

Thus, after all considerations regarding traveling hours and time remaining to study, the extent of students' participation in extracurricular activities was impacted by decisions about how to make the best use of time. Echoing similar sentiments, Yesenia stated:

I wanted to join drama production because I love acting, singing, and dancing. But I wasn't able to do that because they met everyday after school until 6:30 P.M. The late bus left at 6:00 P.M so I missed it by thirty minutes. There was no alternative bus and I couldn't take the bus that was for athletes. There were no PWT students that participated in drama production.

Although late buses were provided for some students electing to stay for after school activities, not all students were guaranteed a bus ride. As Juan suggested, "After school activities, like football, had late buses because there were enough PWT students to fill up a bus to bring them back home." Moreover, early buses were not offered for students who wanted to take a zero period. For those students who had an interest in enrolling in zero period, securing transportation was their own responsibility. The limited availability of buses was a concern for students, however it was a moot point with the district.

School-related activities were an added opportunity to foster social experiences among PWT students and their peers at DHS. As students in the study reflected on their own involvement in school-related activities, the awareness that PWT students were not active participants emerged during a reference to the school yearbook. Speaking on the subject of

inclusion in student activities, Ivan described the visibility of PWT students in the school yearbook and also mentioned the integrative limitations of sheltered students on campus.

I bought the yearbook. It's nice, but expensive. You see some pictures of the busing students but not that many...you don't see a lot of them. Mostly it's the kids from DHS...also some Black kids but I don't know if they rode the bus. A lot of them were in sports, like football and the basketball team. They were kind of popular because people would know them because of the sports. In my opinion, I've seen a lot of Black people hang out with White people. They already know English so it was easier for them to communicate. For Hispanic students that are learning English, it's kind of hard.

Lorenzo recalled his impressions with the senior yearbook and the students who were represented:

The people that are in the yearbook they join activities or clubs. I had my senior portrait and the football team picture. Most of the yearbook pictures were the local kids...White students. Even the principal had a daughter...she was in the yearbook pictures. The busing students were not as included.

For Sandra, she reflected on how student participation in activities influenced the representation of PWT students, including herself, in the yearbook:

I didn't feel like I was part of it. Maybe if I had participated in more activities. I don't know. I just didn't feel like I was included in the yearbook. I didn't see myself in it or a lot of the students from the busing program. I don't remember anyone getting voted for the senior poll. I don't think most people knew who we were. If you know that person, you vote for them. If you don't know them, then what's the point of voting for them.

Recalling the extent of his social experiences at DHS, Edgar conveyed the following:

I never went to football games on Friday nights. I didn't go to prom or grad night. The school never had buses for prom. I remember the teacher saying she'd give extra credit to whoever went to school plays or performances. I asked if there were buses but they said no. It was unfair. They should have buses. I think the bus schedule limited my participation in school activities. Even if I didn't know how to dance, if they had buses for prom, I probably would have gone...just to hang out with friends.

The social component of schooling examined the participation in extracurricular and academic activities. DHS provided a variety of school-related activities, including academic courses and extracurricular activities that offered opportunities for social experiences between PWT students

and their local peers. The provision of these school-related activities was one of the reasons why DHS was perceived as an institution of quality education. However, the busing schedule created limitations for the majority of PWT students to participate in school activities and curtailed opportunities for social experiences between PWT students and their local peers.

**Documenting the interplay between the social and cultural component of schooling for PWT students.** During the data analysis of students' responses, an interplay between the social component and the cultural component of schooling emerged. The extent of the social relations that the PWT students built with their peers was often expressed in relation to the variables of race and culture. The exposure to different races and ethnicities, in particular a majority of White students, was a new experience for most PWT students who were accustomed to living in predominantly Latino communities. Yet, this experience was met with a perspective of opportunity to learn from others and have others learn more about the assets of Latino culture.

There was a general consensus about students being friendly at DHS. Speaking about the social experiences with her peers Gabriela stated:

When I first went to DHS, I was scared because I didn't know anyone. I thought I was going to get treated bad because there were mostly White people. I was not used to being around so many White students. Then I made friends in my classes... Whites, Asians, Blacks. Everyone was friendly. But the students I would hang out with were Hispanic.

Araceli recalled her feelings about attending a multicultural school:

It was my first time being around so many other races because around my neighborhood, it's usually just Hispanics, and some Blacks and Asians. When I came to DHS there was Middle Eastern, White, Asian... a lot of different people. I did feel kind of uncomfortable at first. But, I started to get to know everyone. I feel more comfortable around other races now.

Ivan expressed his views regarding the variety of students on campus:

I didn't know that I was going to a school with so many different races. My first impression was, "Wow, there's a lot of people that I have to meet. I have to talk to everybody and get to know them." Certain people had that preppy attitude. But, I was

pretty comfortable talking to other people. It was cool talking to different people, so I really didn't care what ethnicity they were. People did ask me what I was, if I was Mexican?

Students also disclosed the social experiences and school-based relations encountered with schoolmates and school personnel. A salient theme was the experience of making friends and with whom they socialized during noninstructional time during the school day. Gilberto discussed his experiences with forging friendships at DHS:

In the beginning, it was difficult to make friends...to make that adjustment in a new school. I didn't know at all the other people's ethnicities so it was pretty hard, but then after a while I made friends. Most of my friends were bused. Some were from my neighborhood.

Moreover, Gilberto reflected on how living outside of the local area of DHS complicated matters for hanging out with his peers who were not bused:

It's harder for them to come over here when only I live here. If they had to come over...maybe they would. But in a way they would be worried because of the area. They think it's really bad out here with the gangs...well it is, but it's not like people talk about it over there in DHS. There's more to our community than just crime.

While Gilberto acknowledged that the distance between DHS and his residential area was far, he understood that as a PWT student he was the outlier, especially when the majority of students attending DHS lived in the local vicinity of the school. He was also aware of the perceptions held about his community, in particular the concern with gangs. But nevertheless, his neighborhood was his home, where other attributes existed beyond the negative stereotypes as suggested by his remark, "There's more to our community than just crime."

The majority of students participating in the study reported that their closest friendships were with peers from the PWT program, often times from the same bus route. The added time spent riding the bus allowed for social interaction between the PWT students that extended onto nutrition and lunch time during school hours. Moreover, attending such a diverse school like

DHS also offered PWT students a platform for integrative experiences with other students. For many of the Mexican-origin students in the study, the PWT program provided direct exposure to different racial and ethnic groups that were not the norm in their local community. Lorenzo stated the following regarding friendships and social circles on campus:

Most of my friends were in the PWT program because we were also bused to the same middle school and we already knew each other. Also we spend so much time together riding on the bus that we become friends, so we hang out during nutrition and lunch. Most of my friends were Hispanic. White people would hang out with Black people. Black people would hang out with Whites and Hispanics...some Asians. We were basically just mixed. Sometimes you did see people in their own ethnic group, but other days they could be mixed too. There were random days where they could be mixed together and sometimes they weren't.

Ivan also talked about making friends and socializing among students:

My friends were basically all Latinos. Some of my friends were bused and some lived near DHS. If you look around the school, you see the different kind of groups. There's the group with Black people, the group with White people, the Hispanic group, and sometimes there's a little mix in there. You don't see Asians outside. Mostly they are inside the buildings...studying, I guess. Students didn't mix very much. It's just the way it was. Since I was in the busing program, I kicked it with my friends that were in the busing program. I guess it's also the way that you get to know people. I was more comfortable with the people that I knew from the bus because I've been with them for a long time. So, that's why I stayed in that group with my friends.

Many students in the study echoed similar perspectives; while there was diversity on campus, racial integration was minimal as evidenced by the pockets of homogeneous groups during nutrition and lunch time. The presence of PWT students did not translate into a melting pot at DHS as envisioned by the goals of the busing program, but rather clusters of groups who appeared to be more comfortable with their own race and ethnicity. When asked about the status of racial integration on campus, Sandra put it this way:

There is a pattern for the students that participated in the PWT program because I saw people that rode the bus with people that rode the bus. The people who live around DHS kick it with the people who live around there. There were people who would go on the bus that would kick it with the people who live around there, but it's rare to see that. You usually kick it with people of your own kind. In my situation I would kick it with people

who rode the bus and of my race. I would be friends with other races but more with my race. I think it's because you know your own group. You know who your race is. You know who your friends are. You know how to communicate with your race. And maybe you're just too afraid... sometimes I was afraid to be with Blacks or with Whites because I didn't know how to communicate. Even though people were nice, they said hello, but that was it. We didn't hang out or become close friends. Maybe because I felt like I was different to that person. Maybe it was the communication, in the way of expressing things. Or maybe they didn't want to try hard to get to know me. Also, you spend most of the time away from your neighborhood, riding the bus. You leave early and come home late. They go to school near their house and have more time to hang out with friends.

The sentiment of being comfortable with the people they knew from the bus and the rationale of building friendships because you “know your own group” was shared by other students in the study. While PWT students acknowledged the preference to hang out with students who were bused and often of their same heritage, there was also a tacit understanding that other groups on campus chose to socialize with members of their own race as well. To reiterate what Ivan stated, “Students didn't mix very much. It's just the way it was.” As Sandra referenced in the quote above, there was also the notion of local students not making an effort to get to know the PWT students. Most students did not address this issue, however there were a few comments made by some PWT students that provided insight to the interaction of students on campus. Yesenia shared her views on the inclusion of PWT students by the general student body:

I don't think they really know students from the PWT program. They didn't know that I was in the PWT program. I felt like I was the exception to them. “Oh, you ride the bus and you're smart.” I don't think they really cared to make friends with other students who rode the bus. On the lawn, there are a lot of White people. At the cafeteria, that's where you see all the Hispanic students in the busing program and some of the local Hispanics that hang out with them. The Blacks students had their own area. Most of them were bused too. But, they actually talked more to White people. Maybe because they knew English and weren't sheltered. I noticed that when Hispanics kids spoke in class, they made fun of them if their English was not that well. Some of them weren't born here and they learned the language late and had accents.

From Yesenia's point of view, most of the PWT students did not develop friendships with the local students because there was a lack of interest to reach out to the PWT students. As an

example she alluded to an event she witnessed when sheltered students were ridiculed in class.

Similarly, Alicia referred to an incident where a student was made fun of because of his accent:

When we did class presentations they would pay attention to their own friends or the local kids, but if a kid with a name like Jose would go up, nobody would pay attention or they would laugh at his accent. I would say, "That's messed up. Give them a chance."

Sandra expressed how her sheltered English affected her ability to socialize at DHS:

There were issues with fitting in and making friends because as you can tell, I don't know how to express myself that good in English. I feel like I express myself better in Spanish. I know English. I've been speaking English for a long time, since I was small but I don't know it quite well and my level of English is a little bit low. Sometimes I want to say something in English and I can't. It's hard for me. I want to speak in Spanish but since I have White friends I don't know how to tell them, so I just say, "Never mind. Forget it."

While conducting the interview Sandra gave an articulate account of her experiences.

Nevertheless, she felt that her ability to express herself in English needed improvement, causing her to shy away from interacting with other students.

**Documenting the interplay between the social and environmental component of schooling for PWT students.** During the data analysis of students' responses, an interplay between the social component and the environmental component of schooling surfaced. The extent of the social relations that the PWT students built with their peers and school personnel was often expressed in relation to the impact of riding the bus. The interplay between the social component and the environmental component of schooling was evident when students voiced their perspectives on the term "traveling students." The majority of students in the study did not have an opinion on the descriptor, but recalled hearing school announcements and the staff refer to them as such. However, a few PWT students did not approve of the term "traveling students" because it made them feel like they did not belong to the school community.



Corina voiced her sentiments regarding the label:

I don't think that it is a proper term. PWT students didn't really use that. It was mostly the staff that used the term "traveling students." I think also when they use that term in a way people see us as underprivileged students who needed to be bussed perhaps there was not enough space in the school or whatever the reason might be that they were taking a chance on us like not knowing whether or not we would be good or bad. I would feel excluded because of the fact that you couldn't be part of something that you really want to be a part of just because you didn't live in the area. You were limited to whatever buses were provided for. The term traveling student defeats the purpose of the PWT program which is supposed to be integrated schooling. I would encourage that the school do not use that term.

David shared his point of view regarding the implications of the term "traveling student" and his identity as a student on campus:

When I heard teachers and staff call us traveling students, I felt like they were saying we were not part of the school, like we were only there because they were doing us a favor. I went to school everyday just like everyone else. I wanted to be known by my name at DHS and not as a group of students who were bused. It's hard to explain because even though we were bused I felt like they never really saw us as part of the school. Many of the busing students didn't stay after school and participate in activities because of the busing schedule but we all wanted to get a good education at DHS. I want to tell people that I graduated from a good school.

Although, the term "traveling student" may have been a common way for staff to refer to busing students on campus, for these students the label had connotations of exclusion and marginalization. These narratives had a bearing on the social component of schooling, in particular how students in the PWT program associated themselves in relation to the school. All students had indicated that DHS was a good school with multicultural diversity, yet as Corina stated the "term traveling student defeats the purpose of the PWT program which is supposed to be integrated schooling." David bluntly remarked that the term set them apart as outsiders who "were not part of the school." He saw his student identity on campus like "everyone else," and wanted to be associated as a student of DHS and not a traveling student who came and went everyday.

Yesenia also had some reservations with the term “traveling students” and spoke about how it made her feel when teachers did not understand the experiences of PWT students:

It did bother me. When I was in my AP government class, my teachers didn’t know that I was a traveling student and there were only three of us in the class. She wanted us to do some campaign work. It was mandatory. “You guys can just drive there...and then just drive home.” I said, “I’m sorry, but what should we do because we take the bus.” Then, she said, “Oh, you’re a traveling student?” I don’t know. You just have to go. Don’t you drive?” She just assumed that. I’m not like everyone else. I don’t have a car. The three of us had to do some other work because we couldn’t go to the campaign site.

I think the term is a put down because a lot of the time, even teachers, they don’t understand that we wake up at 5:00 A.M. and we have to be on the bus stop by 6:30 A.M. After school we can’t just go home, eat a sandwich, watch cartoons, and do our homework. We are on the bus for an hour and a half on average, especially with traffic and not to mention the hot weather. When we come home it’s already 5:00 P.M. That time is gone, it’s not there anymore. Another thing that I’ve notice in a lot of the Hispanic communities is that we always have to help out a little bit. You always have to do something and I was always raised like that. After that, you eat dinner and you’re be done with everything around 7:00 P.M. Then you are expected to do four hours of homework. And you’re tired and it’s understandable. A lot of teachers would say, “But you have a lot of time...from 3:15 P.M....that’s a lot of time.” But they would talk in general, just because they were locals. But for us it wasn’t like that.

The assumption that PWT students had their own car and a lot of time to study showcased the advantage of the neighborhood kids and accentuated how teachers were oblivious to the contrastive reality of PWT students. To reiterate Yesenia’s comments: “But for us it wasn’t like that.” Her remarks emphasized the environmental component of schooling, in particular how not living in the area complicated the ability to work on site projects as expected by teachers and how the traveling hours spent riding the bus truncated the time to study.

An objective of this dissertation was to document the experiences of Mexican-origin students and their parents that were largely absent from the literature on desegregations studies. The experiences shared by both parents and students elucidated valuable knowledge that contributed to the literature on desegregations studies. Moreover, the narratives from the participants provided insightful findings regarding the interplay of various factors that impacted

their experiences with the busing program and DHS.

The data generated from the parent interviews provided contextual information that put into perspective the extent of their involvement with the receiving school. The stories shared by the parents also humanized their experience by exposing the realities of their circumstances. Contrary to a lack of interest, the participation of many parents was curtailed due to scheduling conflicts with their employment, transportation issues, and barriers with the English language.

The narrative of students riding the yellow school bus allowed for a window into their daily lives and experiences at DHS. The data from the interviews revealed the contrastive environmental conditions of DHS, the academic courses, and extracurricular activities of PWT students. The data also showcased the limitations and shortcomings of the PWT program. Students voiced dissatisfaction with the provision of buses for after school and zero period, feelings of not belonging or not experiencing full integration with other students, and the lack of school personnel to really understand the daily lives of busing students.

The next chapter describes the students' and parents' reflections regarding the significance of the PWT program and offers policy implications for the schooling process.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PWT PROGRAM

This chapter will discuss the significance of participating in the PWT program as attributed by parents and students. After four years of attending DHS, both parents and students had a particular value to ascribe to the PWT program and the receiving school. The data presented in this chapter will address the sub question of the second research question:

- 2a) What is the significance that Mexican-origin students and their parents attribute to their participation in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes?

The next sections present a discussion on what was most salient to participants, including educational attainment, life opportunities, and a diversified perspective.

#### **Educational Attainment and Life Opportunities**

One of the prominent themes that emerged from the significance associated with being involved in the PWT program was the elevated prospect of graduating high school and going to college. Lorenzo stated how going to DHS improved his chances of completing his education:

Going to DHS was worth it because it helped me a lot. I was safer and it was the best thing for me so that my mom wouldn't have to worry about me. This whole experience was worth it. Like for my mom. It was probably easier for her and the schedule was fine for her. When I got home, she would be home. Now that I've graduated I'm glad that I did all of that. I don't think the result would have been the same if I had gone to Manual Arts because one of my friends that goes to Manual Arts, he used to get into fights for little things like, "Why did you push me?" It's gets pretty stupid.

Students often conveyed a degree of doubt by means of "I don't know" when asked if the results would have been the same had they gone to their resident school. Felipe commented how being part of the PWT program and a student at DHS made a difference to his educational trajectory.

I guess you can consider it a privilege. It's a good thing that I was chosen. I'm pretty lucky to have this opportunity. The help...the teachers and the counselors. They actually help you. They say, "You need to do this to prepare for college." They are always reminding you about things you need to do. We always hear that. If I had gone to Belmont, I don't know about going to college...maybe, maybe not. Maybe, I would have met the wrong people. Maybe I wouldn't have gone to school and just quit. I don't know.

On the topic of academic support related to going to college, Corina contrasted the gains she attained at DHS with the deterrents she might have encountered in her neighborhood school:

I think that I benefited in every way from the fact that I got into a good college and met great teachers that helped in every way possible to get to where I am today. If I had gone to a school in Los Angeles, I don't know, I might have ended up with the wrong crowd like hanging out with gang members or joined either a crew. I might have hung out with girls that did drugs or that were sexually active and ended up pregnant. I think the fact that I was bused did not really give me much time to roam around.

On a similar note, Andrea recounted the following:

If I would have gone to Manual Arts, I think I would have started working first and then thought about going to college. Coming to DHS made me more decisive about going to college...since I got home late, I didn't have time to be in the street or have drugs offered to me. The announcements that the college office made helped me think about college.

Gilberto articulated how the college-going culture at DHS impacted his view regarding access to higher education:

It was a great experience to be in the busing program. I wouldn't have graduated from high school if I would have gone to a school right here in my community because going to DHS I was able to get away from all the bad things and most of the bad people. Those things contribute a lot to drop out rates. In elementary I never thought I would actually go to college. They never mentioned it. They made it seem so hard...everything, the money. Once I got to DHS everything seemed so easy. Everybody was going to college for sure after high school, no matter what. If they were born here or even if they weren't born here. So it changed my thinking. It's a real possibility. It means everything. If you don't have a college education, you can't do anything. You can barely get a job without a degree or with just a high school diploma, so you need a college education.

The majority of students spoke of having increased the odds of graduating from high school as a result of having the opportunity to participate in the PWT program and attend DHS. There was a perceived notion that the dynamics of the busing program and campus climate at DHS allowed

them to focus more on their schooling, instead of hanging out “with the wrong crowd.”

Moreover, most students referenced the college-going culture at DHS as being influential in their plans to pursue a college education after high school. Table 4 illustrates the post-graduation plans of the PWT students in the study.

**Table 4.** Post-Graduation Plans of PWT Student Participants

	University of California	California State University	Community College	Vocational School
Number of Students	1	4	12	3

It is important to note that all twenty students had plans to continue their education after graduating from high school. In particular, the five students who participated in AVID would be attending four-year universities in the University of California and California State University system.

For parents and students alike, the significance associated with graduating from high school was a special and emotional achievement. All parents and students spoke of graduation as a high point in their lives and a memorable moment for the family. Parents expressed a profound sense of pride because graduation was an accomplishment that encompassed their deferred dreams of finishing their own education. For Araceli’s mom graduating from high school meant to transcend and set a precedent of educational promise for her siblings:

She will be the first to graduate high school. For me it has a meaning of deep pride. That she has achieved what I did not achieve...what I was not able to achieve. I am happy and proud of my daughter. If she was able to do it, I know that it is also possible for my other daughters.

*[Ella va ser la primera que se va a graduar. Para mí eso significa mucho orgullo. Que ella sí haya logrado lo que yo no logré...lo que yo no pude. Estoy alegre y orgullosa de mi hija. Si ella lo pudo hacer, sé que también es posible para mis otras hijas.]*

Similarly, Juan's father also conveyed what his son's accomplishment represented for the family, in particular the value of education as a path for life opportunities:

It is a very great satisfaction. One becomes full of joy to see the dream become reality. It's where as a parent, one sees that our efforts are fulfilled too because with them...they are the ones in school...and we tried to do our best, we tried to have the interaction and instilling in them the importance of education, that they prosper, that they find a standard so that they can have a better life. Perhaps in that moment my son did not see it but more than anything it is very important for us we that arrived to an unknown place and that our son was able to graduate...that is a great joy.

*[Es una satisfacción muy grande. Se llena uno de alegría al ver un sueño hecho realidad. Es donde uno como padre ve que sus esfuerzos se realizan también porque junto con ellos...ellos son los que están en la escuela...y uno se esmera tanto, tratamos de tener la convivencia de inculcarles el estudio, que ellos progresen, que encuentren un nivel para una vida mejor para ellos. Tal vez en ese momento me hijo no lo vio, pero más que nada es bien importante para nosotros que llegamos a un lugar desconocido y que nuestro hijo haya logrado graduarse...eso es una alegría grande.]*

Of importance in many of the responses from students was the awareness of their parent's efforts and aspirations. The majority of students acknowledged that they were cognizant of their parent's immigrant experience and the sacrifices they made to provide them with a better life. Students also evoked an understanding of the intent behind their parent's encouraging words regarding the importance of education. Ivan recounted the following:

I felt like the mission was complete. I made it this far. I was excited. This is the end of high school. I'm going to start the real life, going to the adult world. That means a lot of responsibilities. I think that to my parents, my graduation meant happiness. My parents were smiling. I turned around and they had the camera. It was pretty nice. My mom and dad would say that I was in the U.S., the land of opportunities, "You have to fulfill your dreams." Now, I know why my parents said that to me. If I continue to study, that would be good for everybody. That would make my family happy. The fact that they didn't have the chance to finish their education and they had to work at a young age to help support their family.

For Ivan, graduating from high school also meant the beginning of "the real life" and a new set of responsibilities. Likewise, Ramon's perspective on graduation induced a desire "to be somebody" both for his own merit and to make his mother proud.

I want to be somebody. I don't want to be a bum. I want to have a career. I want to have a nice life. I want to be remembered by society. If I didn't graduate I still would have taken classes and finished to get the credits I needed. I would not have just given up, I would have kept going, but I wanted that for my mom. I've been to other graduations and seen how parents get so happy when their kid goes up there and gets the diploma.

Thus, the attainment of a high school diploma represented the culmination of an educational journey and also a critical transition for means of advancement, which included the pursuit of college and prospects of life opportunities.

### **A Diversified Perspective**

An important element of participating in a voluntary busing program designed for integration was the significance attributed to the multicultural experience. Although initially the majority of students were not completely aware of the PWT program's goals, interview data indicated that attending DHS gave them a broader perspective about diverse populations. Ivan stated that he gained knowledge about other races and ethnicities:

I was exposed to different people. I got to know some Jewish people and different cultures. Some are good friends. There were also Persian students. I would have thought they were White. That was something new for me...that not everybody is White and that they come from different places. Sometimes I would mistake others for Latino, like the Armenians students. It was a good experience to get to know different kinds of people.

Speaking about exposure to different groups, Felipe expressed his views regarding the variety of students on campus and how his presence as a Latino contributed to debunking stereotypes:

I learned that there were various people that at first I thought were just White. There were a lot of different ethnicities that went there. It gave me a new perspective. I think it also helped the kids at DHS to be exposed to kids from the busing program. Sometimes people wondered what I was...my ethnic group. They thought I was something else other than Latino. When they realized I was Latino, they were surprised. They would ask, "Where you live, are there really shootings? Do they rob you?" I think it helped them learn that not all Latinos were gang members.



Expressing an attitude of tolerance toward other people, Ramon also touched upon the subject of challenging stereotypes and noted the progress that needed to take place for a more integrative experience at DHS:

I think the PWT program made me better. Greater tolerance of new and different things. I think am a little less prone to reject something because of my experience. I think that's something I got out of it. It's better in the sense that it's easier for us to communicate with somebody that's different. We get to learn from each other...instead of stereotypes. We get to interact, to be with other people. Some local kids had an interest in making friends with the busing students...but during lunch and nutrition, I didn't really see that. There was very little of that. Most people still stuck to their ethnic group. I think it happens because it's something new to them...it's not something they are used to because it means you need to step outside of your comfort zone.

Several students felt that the interaction with their peers at DHS played a role in breaking with their own preconceived notions that “everybody is White” and well as debunking negative stereotypes others had of Latinos; this was regarded as a gain in their educational experience. Hence, the awareness of stereotypes and interaction experienced as students of color were indicative of the relevance the cultural component of schooling had for students in the PWT program. The cultural component of schooling considered the beliefs and values attached to certain groups of people based on race and ethnicity and the social interaction experienced by students identified as a racial and ethnic minority. It was important to consider the experiences of Mexican-origin students by acknowledging their status as students of an ethnic minority group that experienced the shift from overrepresentation in their communities to becoming a numerical minority at DHS.

### **Recommendations for Educational Policy**

During the interview process with parents and students it was learned that neither the school district nor the receiving school had solicited any type of feedback regarding their experiences with the voluntary busing program. This information raised questions about the

methodology used by the district for assessing the effectiveness of the PWT program's goals.

The data gleaned from this dissertation suggested a need for the district to consider the input of the busing participants. Thus, an implication for the district would be to incorporate the experiential contributions of the participants, in light of the fact that they can offer first-hand accounts regarding the integrative goals of the busing program.

This dissertation offers recommendations for policies that if implemented, will improve the integrative experiences of PWT students. The interviews conducted for the study gave the participants a forum to voice their concerns and opinions regarding the PWT program.

Moreover, the data that emerged from the study suggested further discourse on the district's administration of the busing program. To initiate the needed discourse, this dissertation puts forth the following recommendations as provided directly by the parents and students that participated in this study. Juan's parents had the following to say about the district's responsibility to communicate more effectively with parents:

The district is very insulated, with a lot of information that does not get communicated to the parents. It is a mistake of the school district...another error is that of parents because they are content with just taking their kids to school. We do not inform ourselves. The school district has a lot of programs, but the school administration does not make this information known so that parents can be more involved and that way there would be less kids slacking off on the streets. For example, if the district has a program, many times the school administration does not give us that information...that's the problem. The information comes from the district to the school and it just gets forgotten, it stays in the offices. We need better information flow between parents, the school, and the district.

*[El distrito es muy hermético, tiene demasiada información y no la dan a conocer a los padres de familia. Es un error del distrito escolar...otro error es de los padres porque nomás se conforman con llevar los hijos a la escuela. Uno no se informa. El distrito escolar tiene muchos programas, pero la administración de la escuela no dan a conocer la información para que uno se involucre más y así no haya tanto vago en la calle. Por ejemplo, si el distrito escolar pone un programa, pero muchas veces la administración de la escuela no lo dan a saber...ese es el problema. Llega la información del distrito a la escuela y eso allí se queda olvidado, se queda en las oficinas. Necesitamos mejor comunicación entre padres, la escuela, y el distrito.]*

The recommendations voiced by the PWT students had a common thread; have greater opportunities to socialize with students on campus and the provision of school buses for activities. These suggestions spoke to the social component of schooling and the role it played in the educational experience of busing students. For example, David proposed more support from the district and the school in fostering greater interaction among students, as well as buses for PWT students:

More support for students to get involved in school activities. The district and school should promote the PWT program. Maybe something like student committees with busing and local students could create activities for students to hang out with each other. Also, the district should have more buses for students...like for zero period, because I always wanted to take it. Most of the students in the busing program did not take a zero period because there weren't any buses.

Similarly, Alicia had the following recommendations for the school district:

I think the district should have a zero period bus that is available for those students who want to take a zero period. Another thing is that the district should have a late bus so that we could hang out with the students there after school. School finished at 3:15 P.M. and if they gave us about three hours to hang out we would have time to socialize. But because most busing student didn't socialize after school that's why they really didn't get to know other students.

Yesenia also suggested more buses for school activities as a course of action needed from the school district:

We really need the opportunity to socialize with other students and participate in activities. Maybe that way there won't be boundaries because I've noticed that a lot of the Hispanic kids don't socialize with the White students...because they think that's the way it's supposed to be. But I think we need opportunities as well. We need the district to provide more buses so that we can join a sport and be able to stay after school. During the summer they don't have busing for athletics or cheer and that's what I wanted to do. If you wanted to be involved in sports during the summer, you had to provide your own transportation. I think this also affects the opportunity that other people get to know the PWT students.

This study sought to present the perspectives of students and their parents regarding the busing program and the receiving school. In addition, it was considered important to ask the participants how they felt about participating in this research study and what contributions they thought their stories could offer to educational policy. All student and parent participants indicated that they were at ease with the researcher during the interviews, in part because they could identify on an ethnic level and could express themselves in either English or Spanish. Moreover, all participants reported that they were glad to take part in the study and hoped that their experiences would serve to improve education for other students. For example, Felipe believed that his narrative could offer valuable knowledge about the PWT program because it signified more than just a bus ride to school, but rather as he said it was “a bus ride to a better education.”

I think I shared something that is of value. I think people can learn a lot from my experience. That this program does matter. It can make a difference in someone's life. It's not just a bus ride home or to school. It's a bus ride to a better education. I have thought about these things at least once in my life but I didn't really share these thoughts with other students. I talked to my mom about this and sometimes my dad. I wasn't uncomfortable during the interview because as I've said I had thought about these things before. About myself...it made me reflect about the busing program and my education, but it's a good feeling though because that way I won't forget as much. It's a good reminder to keep me going.

For Monica, being a part of this research study gave her an awareness of the possibilities she had as a result of her involvement in the busing program:

The interview questions made me think about my experience. I really hadn't stopped to think about the reasons why I ended going to DHS and all the things I got out of the program. I think my mom was way ahead of me when she decided to enroll me in the busing program. I'm glad that I had a chance to get a better education and meet different people. Being part of this study made me realize that all the sacrifices I made – getting up early and coming home late – gave me opportunities for a better life. I'm the first one in my family to graduate from high school. That's a big deal. Now, I'm ready to go to college. I hope that what I have shared motivates other students to get a good education.

The above comments capture a central theme in the student's experience – a passage of opportunity. The daily journey of riding the yellow school bus was not just a ride from their homes to DHS, but it was a passage (the act of moving on the way from one place to another) on a figurative level. The busing program allowed for a passage of opportunity that gave them access to academic resources and life chances.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study provided an in-depth look at the experiences of Mexican-origin students who participated in a voluntary busing program designed for integration purposes. In an effort to address the gap in the prevailing literature on desegregation studies, the experiences of their parents were also included. The findings provided a lens regarding the following information: (a) the reasons why parents and students opted to participate in the PWT program, (b) the experiences of PWT students and their parents at or with the receiving school, and (c) the students' and parents' reflections regarding the significance of the PWT program. The participants also offered valuable recommendations that were included as implications for policy with regard to the schooling process.

The interviews conducted for the study gave the participants a forum to voice their stories and concerns regarding the PWT program. The dissertation sought to document the experiences of Mexican-origin students and their parents that participated in a voluntary integration program in a post-*Brown v. Board of Education* era. Results from the data analysis offered valuable information to contribute to the discourse that opposes the use of race to assign students to voluntary busing programs. The findings posited the need for further research pertaining to the experiential contributions of the participants; the narratives also illustrated the knowledge to be gained about the impact of voluntary busing programs.

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