

SUMMARY OF A REPORT BY THE  
U. S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS  
MEXICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION STUDY

REPORT I: ETHNIC ISOLATION OF MEXICAN AMERICANS  
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF THE SOUTHWEST

September 1970

## U. S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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The U. S. Commission on Civil Rights is a temporary, independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957 and directed to:

Investigate complaints alleging that citizens are being deprived of their right to vote by reason of their race, color, religion, or national origin, or by reason of fraudulent practices;

Study and collect information concerning legal developments constituting a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution;

Appraise Federal laws and policies with respect to equal protection of the laws;

Serve as a national clearinghouse for information in respect to denials of equal protection of the laws; and

Submit reports, findings, and recommendations to the President and the Congress.

## Introduction

During recent years the United States Commission on Civil Rights has become increasingly aware of the educational problems faced by Mexican Americans, or persons of Mexican, Hispanic, or Indo-Hispanic descent. Information obtained at Commission hearings in San Francisco and San Antonio and at meetings of the Commission's State Advisory Committees in Los Angeles, Calif.; Clovis, N. Mex.; Corpus Christi and Rio Grande City, Tex. have brought these problems into sharp focus. It has pointed up the fact that a growing number of Mexican Americans, particularly in the five Southwestern States of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas are dissatisfied with the quality of education afforded them and are seeking changes in educational institutions which will ensure them equal educational opportunity.

Because few hard facts concerning educational opportunities for the majority of Mexican Americans are available, the Commission has undertaken the Mexican American Education Study. The purpose of this study is to make a comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of educational opportunities for Mexican Americans in the public schools of the Southwest. To accomplish this goal the study has been designed to answer three basic questions:

1. What current practices in Southwestern schools appear significantly to affect educational opportunities for Mexican Americans?
2. What current conditions in Southwestern schools appear significantly to affect educational opportunities for Mexican Americans?
3. What are the significant relationships between practices and

conditions and the educational outcomes for Mexican Americans?

The results of the Commission's Mexican American Education Study are being published in a series of reports. The first report examines (1) the size and distribution of the Mexican American enrollment, educational staff, and school board membership; (2) the extent of isolation of Mexican American students; and (3) the location of Mexican American educators in terms of the ethnic composition of schools and districts in which they are found. The first report is based on data drawn from the Commission's Spring 1969 mail survey conducted in districts of the Southwest that have an enrollment which is 10 percent or more, Mexican American. The Commission has also utilized data from the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) Fall 1968 Elementary and Secondary School Survey, which included the same districts surveyed by the Commission as well as those that have an enrollment less than 10 percent Mexican American.

Three basic findings emerge from the first report:

(1) Mexican American public school pupils are severely isolated by school district and by schools within individual districts;

(2) for the most part, Mexican Americans are underrepresented on school and district professional staffs and on boards of education; i.e., they constitute a substantially lower proportion of both staff and board membership than they do of enrollment; and

(3) the majority of Mexican American staffs and school board members are found in predominantly Mexican American schools or districts.

Size and Distribution of the Mexican American and Spanish Surname Enrollment

There are about two million Spanish surname students, including Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Latin Americans, in the public schools of the continental United States. The second largest minority group in the public schools, they constitute about 5 percent of the total U. S. school population.

Approximately 1.4 million, or 70 percent of the Spanish surname pupils, attend school in the five Southwestern States of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. Almost all of these pupils are Mexican Americans. The largest minority group in the schools of the region, they comprise 17 percent of the total enrollment. More than four-fifths are in two States, California and Texas, with nearly 50 percent in California alone. However, Mexican Americans constitute more of the enrollment (38 percent) in New Mexico than in any other State.

<u>State</u>	<u>Total Number of Pupils</u>	<u>Number of Mexican American Pupils</u>	<u>Percent of Total Enrollment That Is Mexican American</u>
Arizona	366,459	71,748	19.6
California	4,477,381	646,282	14.4
Colorado	519,092	71,348	13.7
New Mexico	271,040	102,994	38.0
Texas	<u>2,510,358</u>	<u>505,214</u>	<u>20.1</u>
Southwest	8,144,330	1,397,586	17.2

Source: Fall 1968 HEW Survey

The Mexican American school population is primarily urban. The majority of Mexican American pupils attend school in large urban districts that have enrollments of 10,000 or more. In each State, one or more of the large urban districts contain a significant proportion of the Mexican American enrollment: Los Angeles, Calif., San Antonio, El Paso, and Houston, Tex., Denver, Colo., Albuquerque, N. Mex., and Tucson, Ariz.

Within each of these States, the Mexican American school population is concentrated in a few specific regions or geographic areas. In Texas nearly two-thirds of all Mexican American pupils attend school in the counties located on or near the Mexican border. In this area, about three of every five students are Mexican American. To a lesser extent, Mexican Americans also are concentrated in the counties of north-central New Mexico, southern Colorado, southern Arizona, and in the agricultural valleys and southern coastal areas of California.

#### Ethnic Isolation of Mexican American Pupils by School and District

While Mexican American pupils are unevenly distributed among the States and concentrated in specific geographic areas within each State, they are also concentrated or isolated in districts and schools of the Southwest. About 404,000 Mexican American pupils, or 30 percent of this ethnic group's enrollment in the Southwest, attend schools in approximately 200 predominantly 75 percent or more 7 Mexican American districts in the region.

The largest number of predominantly Mexican American districts is in Texas. Ninety-four predominantly Mexican American districts, almost all of which are located in the southern part of the State, contain nearly 60 percent of the State's total Mexican American enrollment. About 20 percent of Texas' Mexican American enrollment attend school in 31 districts which are nearly all- 80 percent or more 7 Mexican American.

Most of the other predominantly Mexican American districts are in California and New Mexico. Together, these States contain as many predominantly Mexican American districts as Texas [about 90]; however, the total Mexican American school population of these districts is much smaller. They include only about 94,000 Mexican American pupils [55,000 in California and 39,000 in New Mexico].

The isolation of Mexican American pupils in predominantly Mexican American districts results in part from their concentration in specific geographic areas of each State. However, many of these students are isolated in districts which are contiguous to predominantly Anglo districts. In San Antonio, five districts located in the heart of the city are predominantly Mexican American and contain 90 percent of all Mexican Americans in the area. Well over one-half of the Anglo public school enrollment is in eight predominantly Anglo districts which surround the core city. Each of the five predominantly Mexican American districts borders on one or more of the Anglo districts.

A large proportion of the Mexican American enrollment in the Southwest also tends to be concentrated in a comparatively small number of schools. Approximately 1,500 schools [12 percent] are predominantly Mexican American. They house about 635,000 pupils, or 45 percent of the total Mexican American enrollment in the Southwest. (See Table 1.) Nearly 300,000 pupils, or more than 20 percent, are in schools which have between an 80 and 100 percent Mexican American student body. These pupils are most severely isolated in schools in Texas and New Mexico. In these States, two-thirds of all

Table 1. Distribution of Schools and Mexican American Enrollment by Percent of Mexican American Pupils in the Schools.\*

Percent Mexican American	Total Number of Schools	Percent of Schools	Total Mexican American Enrollment	Percent of Mexican American Students
<u>California</u>				
95-100	17	0.3	17,601	2.7
80-94	80	1.2	46,702	7.2
50-79	<u>315</u>	<u>4.8</u>	<u>113,964</u>	<u>17.6</u>
Subtotal	,412	6.3	178,267	27.5
35-49	374	5.7	100,776	15.6
20-34	779	11.8	133,476	20.6
0-19	<u>5,025</u>	<u>76.3</u>	<u>233,763</u>	<u>36.2</u>
Subtotal	<u>6,178</u>	<u>93.8</u>	<u>468,015</u>	<u>72.4</u>
TOTAL	6,590	100.0	646,282	100.0
<u>Texas</u>				
95-100	193	4.4	104,081	20.6
80-94	179	4.0	97,794	19.4
50-79	<u>357</u>	<u>8.1</u>	<u>133,455</u>	<u>26.4</u>
Subtotal	729	16.5	335,330	66.4
35-49	231	5.2	45,570	9.0
20-34	373	8.4	50,236	9.9
0-19	<u>3,097</u>	<u>69.9</u>	<u>74,080</u>	<u>14.7</u>
Subtotal	<u>3,701</u>	<u>83.5</u>	<u>169,886</u>	<u>33.6</u>
TOTAL	4,430	100.0	505,214	100.0
<u>New Mexico</u>				
95-100	35	6.0	6,579	6.4
80-94	55	9.4	15,207	14.8
50-79	<u>161</u>	<u>27.6</u>	<u>46,654</u>	<u>45.3</u>
Subtotal	251	43.0	68,440	66.5
35-49	59	10.1	14,248	13.8
20-34	71	12.2	9,995	9.7
0-19	<u>202</u>	<u>34.6</u>	<u>10,310</u>	<u>10.0</u>
Subtotal	<u>332</u>	<u>56.9</u>	<u>34,553</u>	<u>33.5</u>
TOTAL	583	100.0	102,994	100.0

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Table 1. Distribution of Schools and Mexican American Enrollment  
by Percent of Mexican American Pupils in the Schools.\*  
(cont'd.)

Percent Mexican American	Total Number of Schools	Percent of Schools	Total Mexican American Enrollment	Percent of Mexican American Students
<u>Arizona</u>				
95-100	5	1.0	2,151	3.0
80-94	14	2.7	5,400	7.5
50-79	59	11.4	21,811	30.4
Subtotal	78	15.1	29,362	40.9
35-49	48	9.2	11,767	16.4
20-34	94	18.1	17,625	24.6
0-19	299	57.6	12,997	18.1
Subtotal	441	84.9	42,389	59.1
TOTAL	519	100.0	71,748	100.0
<u>Colorado</u>				
95-100	3	0.3	373	0.5
80-94	16	1.5	3,726	5.2
50-79	74	7.0	19,165	26.9
Subtotal	93	8.8	23,264	32.6
35-49	45	4.3	9,120	12.8
20-34	129	12.2	16,545	23.2
0-19	787	74.6	22,422	31.4
Subtotal	961	91.1	48,087	67.4
TOTAL	1,054	100.0	71,348	100.0
<u>Southwest</u>				
95-100	254	1.9	130,785	9.4
80-94	344	2.6	168,829	12.1
50-79	972	7.3	335,048	24.0
Subtotal	1,570	11.8	634,662	45.5

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Table 1. Distribution of Schools and Mexican American Enrollment by Percent of Mexican American Pupils in the Schools.\*  
(cont'd.)

Percent Mexican American	Total Number of Schools	Percent of Schools	Total Mexican American Enrollment	Percent of Mexican American Students
<u>Southwest (cont'd.)</u>				
35-49	759	5.7	181,479	13.0
20-34	1,455	11.0	227,878	16.3
0-19	<u>9,415</u>	<u>71.4</u>	<u>353,570</u>	<u>25.3</u>
Subtotal	<u>11,629</u>	<u>88.1</u>	<u>762,927</u>	<u>54.6</u>
TOTAL	13,199	100.0	1,397,586	100.0

Source: Fall 1968 HEW Survey

\*Minute differences between the sum of the numbers and totals are due to computer rounding.

Mexican American students attend predominantly Mexican American schools. In Texas about 40 percent are in schools nearly all-Mexican American. Students of this minority group are least isolated in California, where less than 30 percent of them are found in predominantly Mexican American schools.

At the elementary school level, Mexican Americans experience the greatest degree of ethnic isolation. One-half of the Mexican American elementary students attend predominantly Mexican American schools, while about 35 percent of their secondary school enrollment is in predominantly Mexican American schools.

#### Ethnic Imbalance

A major aspect of the Commission's investigation was directed to ascertaining the extent to which the Mexican American composition of schools does not closely resemble that of the districts in which they are located. Schools with a Mexican American enrollment significantly at variance with the school population of the district were considered to be ethnically imbalanced.

In applying the concept of ethnic imbalance to the Mexican American enrollment in the schools, a 15 percent standard of deviation was permitted. Thus, schools are categorized as imbalanced only if the Mexican American composition is more than 15 percent greater or less than the composition of the district.

Three facets of ethnic imbalance were examined: (1) its presence throughout the Southwest; (2) its presence in both large and small districts; and (3) its presence in both predominantly Mexican American and Anglo districts.

Several important findings emerge when the Mexican American composition of the schools in the Southwest is compared to that of the districts in which they are located:

(1) A considerable proportion of Mexican American students in the Southwest attend ethnically imbalanced schools. About 30 percent are in schools that have a Mexican American enrollment in excess of the 15 percent standard of deviation. Three percent are in schools that have a disproportionately low Mexican American enrollment below the 15 percent deviation. Two-thirds attend ethnically balanced schools.

(2) The extent of ethnic imbalance does not differ sharply among the five States. Even in New Mexico and Texas the extent of imbalance does not vary appreciably from that in other States although in each of these two States two-thirds of the Mexican American pupils are isolated in predominantly Mexican American schools. Many of these schools fall within the 15 percent deviation and are ethnically balanced.

(3) Four of the largest school districts in the Southwest account for a significant percentage of the Mexican American students who are in schools that have a disproportionately high Mexican American enrollment. Each of these districts - Los Angeles, Denver, Albuquerque, and Tucson - contain proportionately more of the students in these imbalanced schools than their share of the total Mexican American enrollment in each respective State.

(4) Although these four large districts account for much of the imbalance in their States, ethnic imbalance is not necessarily contingent on the size of district. There is considerable ethnic imbalance in small or medium sized districts as well.

(5) The extent of imbalance is not influenced by the ethnic composition of the district. Imbalanced schools can be found in both predominantly Mexican American and predominantly Anglo districts.

For example, in Harlandale Independent School District, a large district located in the south-central part of the city of San Antonio, about half of the Mexican American students attend schools that have a disproportionately high Mexican American enrollment. In two small predominantly Mexican American districts in south and west Texas, there is nearly complete segregation of Mexican American and Anglo pupils at the elementary school level. In the Tucson School District, which is predominantly Anglo, three-fourths of the Mexican Americans are in schools that have a disproportionately high Mexican American enrollment. In two small predominantly Anglo districts - one in northern Colorado and the other in the central coastal area of California - about 90 percent and 50 percent, respectively, of the Mexican American students are in schools that have a high Mexican American enrollment.

California, alone, of the five Southwestern States has taken action to eliminate ethnic imbalance in its schools. This State has enacted a law to eliminate and prevent the growth of segregation in the schools caused by patterns of residential segregation. The law declares a school to be imbalanced "if the percentage of pupils of one or more racial or ethnic groups differs by more than fifteen percentage points from that in all schools of the district." <sup>1/</sup> It also requires districts having imbalanced schools to study and consider alternative plans to correct such imbalance.

1/ California State Department of Education. California Laws and Policies Relating to Equal Opportunities in Education. Sacramento: 1969, p. 3.

Utilizing information gathered in October 1968 and applying the 15 percent measure of racial and ethnic imbalance, the California State Department of Education has determined that 222 of the State's 1,138 school districts have imbalanced schools. These districts contain approximately 1,800 imbalanced schools or slightly more than one-fourth of the 6,600 schools in the State. According to the California procedure for measuring imbalance, 46 percent of the Mexican American enrollment in the State is in ethnically imbalanced schools. <sup>2/</sup> In December 1969, these districts were requested to file notice with the State department of education of their intent to study and consider possible alternative plans for preventing and eliminating racial and ethnic imbalance. Twenty-five districts have been removed from the list of those maintaining imbalanced schools. The overwhelming majority of the remaining districts [189] have stated their intention of studying plans to eliminate imbalanced schools. Only eight districts have declined to state such an intention.

#### Size and Assignment of School Staff

The Commission's report also examines the representation and school assignment of Mexican Americans holding the following school positions:

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<sup>2/</sup> This figure includes Mexican American pupils who are in imbalanced schools in which either too few or too many students of one or more of the racial and ethnic groups are represented. It is higher than the percentage of Mexican Americans which the Commission estimates to be in imbalanced schools. This discrepancy results, in part, from the fact that the Commission has counted only those pupils in schools that have an imbalanced Mexican American composition while the California department has also included those students in schools whose composition of other racial and ethnic groups is disproportionate to that of the district.

classroom teachers, school principals, assistant or vice principals, counselors, librarians, other professional nonteaching school staff, secretaries, custodians, and teachers' aides. Except for those in the positions of custodian or teachers' aide, Mexican Americans comprise substantially less of school staff than they do of enrollment. Also, with the exception of counselors and custodians, Mexican Americans on school staffs are more likely to be found in predominantly Mexican Americans schools than are students.

Mexican Americans are grossly underrepresented among teachers in the Southwest. Of approximately 325,000 teachers, only about 12,000 or 4 percent, are Mexican American, while about 17 percent of the enrollment is Mexican American. In contrast, proportionately more teachers than pupils are Anglo. Furthermore, Negro teachers, although they are also underrepresented, outnumber Mexican American teachers by almost two to one. School systems in Texas and California employ three-fourths of all Mexican American teachers. Most of the other Mexican American teachers 15 percent are found in New Mexico.

Proportionately more Mexican American teachers 55 percent than pupils 45 percent are found in predominantly Mexican American schools. One-third of the teachers are in schools whose enrollments are 80 percent or more Mexican American. Although the larger number of Mexican American teachers are assigned to predominantly Mexican American schools, they still constitute a very low percentage of teachers in these schools, mainly because so few persons of this ethnic group are employed as teachers.

A much higher percentage of Mexican American teachers in Texas than in California are in predominantly Mexican American schools. More than 80 percent of all Mexican American teachers in Texas are assigned to schools that have at least a 50 percent Mexican American enrollment; more than 60 percent of Mexican American teachers are in schools with an enrollment that is at least 80 percent Mexican American. The distribution of Mexican American teachers in California is roughly the reverse of that in Texas. In California more than 80 percent of all Mexican American teachers are assigned to schools in which pupils of this ethnic group do not constitute the majority of the enrollment. Two-thirds of Mexican American teachers are in schools in which less than 25 percent of the enrollment is Mexican American.

An even smaller proportion of principals than teachers is Mexican American. Of approximately 12,000 school principals in the Southwest, less than 400 [or 3 percent] are Mexican American. More than 90 percent of all Mexican American principals are employed in Texas, California, and New Mexico. As with teachers, proportionately more principals than students are Anglo. Further, Mexican American principals are outnumbered by black principals.

Mexican American principals are even more likely than either pupils or classroom teachers to be assigned to predominantly Mexican American schools. Nearly 65 percent of Mexican American school principals are found in schools in which Mexican American pupils form the majority of the enrollment. More than 40 percent are in schools in which from 80 to 100



percent of the pupils are Mexican American. However, Mexican Americans represent a very low proportion of all principals assigned to predominantly Mexican American schools. This is true primarily because so few Mexican Americans are employed as principals.

Employment and school assignment patterns for Mexican Americans in other nonteaching professional positions, such as assistant principals, counselors, and librarians, are similar to that of Mexican American teachers and principals. Very few occupy such positions, and those who do are, for the most part, assigned to schools that are predominantly Mexican American. To a greater extent, Mexican Americans are employed as teachers' aides or as nonprofessionals, especially custodians, than as professionals.

School District Administrators and School Board Members

In the area of the Southwest surveyed by the Commission, 3/ approximately 480, or about 7 percent of more than 6,750 professionals employed in school district offices, are Mexican American. About 50 of the 480 are superintendents or associate or assistant superintendents. The majority of Mexican Americans holding these positions is in New Mexico. Most Mexican Americans in other district level professional positions are in Texas and California. Mexican Americans constitute a smaller proportion of total district professional staff than they do of enrollment. Generally, they occupy a larger proportion of the work force in the positions of social worker, attendance officer, Federal programs director, and community relations specialist than they do in other district level staff positions. Almost half of the Mexican Americans in the survey area who hold staff positions in district offices are employed by districts that are predominantly Mexican American. More than 70 percent of the 235 so situated are in Texas. The

3/ District 10 percent or more Mexican American.

majority of those employed by districts not having a predominantly Mexican American enrollment are found in California.

Mexican Americans are also underrepresented on local boards of education. Of approximately 4,600 school board members in the Commission's survey area only about 470, or 10 percent, are Mexican American. Slightly more than two-thirds of these Mexican Americans serve on boards in Texas and New Mexico. Nearly 70 percent of the 470 Mexican American board members are found in predominantly Mexican American districts. However, even in predominantly Mexican American communities, this ethnic group is generally underrepresented on the board of education. About 175 Mexican American board members, or 55 percent of the 320 who are in predominantly Mexican American districts, serve on a school board in which they constitute the majority of members. Nearly all 113 of those serving on predominantly Mexican American boards are in districts that are 80 to 100 percent Mexican American in school population.