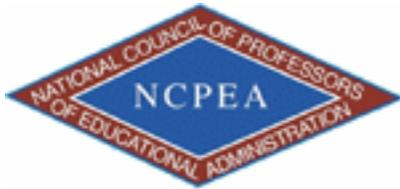# Comparison of the Mission Statements of Predominantly Hispanic and Predominantly[*]

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1 Introduction

Holding schools accountable for student and teacher performance has been a major social priority since *A
Nation at Risk* (1984) was published. In spite of a quarter of a century of school reform, and passage of
major pieces of legislation such as No Child Left Behind (2002), many students continue to be under served
by the public school system (Planty et al., 2009). Standardized test scores of Hispanic students indicate
that, as a group, this population is the most under served population in the United States (Chronicle of
Higher Education, 2003). For example, the high school graduation rate is only 24.7% among first generation

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Hispanics who are born in this country. Among successive generations of Hispanics the graduation rate is only 39.2% for the second generation, 58.5% for the third generation, and 49.4% for the fourth generation (Huntington, 2004). These statistics indicate that the problems confronted by Hispanic students are not caused merely by recent immigration. Representing roughly 15% of the population, Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in the United States (U. S. Census Bureau, 2006). Hispanic students will comprise roughly 50% of the *baby boom* echo expected in the next decade (Roach, 2001). Thus, given the need for a minimum of a high school education to obtain gainful employment, the low high school graduation rates of Hispanic students, along with the low high school graduation rates of African American students, constitute a major social problem in the United States (Cohen, 1998; Dempsey, 2005).

As part of school reform efforts, many schools have developed and/or rewritten mission statements to guide policy development, procedures, and the daily activities of school personnel (Bafile, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Mission statements are viewed as important to school reform efforts because, according to organizational theory, mission statements have a profound effect on the health of organizations. Properly written mission statements act as a compass to keep the organization on course and help it adapt to change (Malott, 2003). When written properly, a mission statement can direct the energies of all stakeholders toward the success of the school (Foley, 1994; Malott, 2003).

A well-written mission statement is a clear, concise articulation of the central purposes and goals of a school that expresses the school's uniqueness (Foley, 1994; Malott, 2003). Once written, we contend that mission statements need to be adjusted over time in response to changes in the educational environment of the school. One question, not examined in this study, that needs to be addressed in the literature is the extent to which the mission statement is actually followed.

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) documented that colleges and universities with effective educational programs were mission driven with clearly stated, living missions. Slate, Jones, Weisman, Alexander, and Saenz (2008) recently reported the presence of consistent differences between the mission statements of high performing and low performing elementary schools. Mission statements of high performing schools were more likely to include themes related to academic success and challenge, citizenship, empowerment, partnership, and social development than were the mission statements of low performing schools. Similar results were reported in a very recent publication by Craft, Slate, and Bustamante (2009).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purposes in conducting this study were threefold: (a) To extend the research on school mission statements previously conducted at the elementary school level (Slate et al., 2008) and at the college levels (Wang, Gibson, Solis, Selinas, & Slate, 2007) to the high school level; (b) To begin exploration of the ways in which school mission statements differ as a function of the demographic composition (e.g., student characteristics) of the schools; and (c) To identify differences between the mission statements of predominantly Hispanic schools and predominantly White schools to determine whether differences in academic achievement might be related to differences in espoused missions. To accomplish these purposes, we examined the mission statements of large Texas high schools that were comprised of either predominantly Hispanic students or predominantly White students using a multi-stage mixed analysis. This analysis allowed us to describe the characteristic themes in the school mission statements and identify similarities and dissimilarities related to student body composition. A single state was analyzed to prevent confounding by geographical variables. Texas was selected in particular because its sizable Hispanic population allowed identification of a sufficient number of high schools predominantly comprised of Hispanic students for analysis.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed: (a) What are the themes that can be identified in the mission statements of high schools comprised of predominantly Hispanic students and in the mission statements of high schools comprised of predominantly White students? and (b) What are the similarities and dissimilarities in the mission statement themes of high schools comprised of predominantly Hispanic students and in the mission statement themes of high schools comprised of predominantly White students??

2 Method

2.1 Procedure

The largest high schools in the State of Texas receive a 5A designation indicating a minimum enrollment of 1,985 students (University Interscholastic League, 2007). Individual campus information on the White and Hispanic populations of all 247 5A high schools in Texas was obtained through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). Once each high school was identified as being comprised either of predominantly Hispanic students (i.e., more than 50% of the student enrollment being Hispanic) or of predominantly White students (i.e., more than 50% of the student enrollment being White), a search was conducted for the website of each school. Once each school's website was identified, the mission statements of each school were identified.

Initially 163 5A high schools were identified as meeting the criteria as being comprised either of predominantly Hispanic students or of predominantly White students. Out of this list, 90 high schools, 43 White and 47 Hispanic, had mission statements that were readily located on the schools' websites. Once located, the mission statement of each of these high schools was printed and placed into a notebook for analysis. Each mission statement was read by the first three researchers and the presence of words and/or phrases related to the central purpose or goals for the high school were coded. This coding process identified 127 such words and phrases used in the mission statements. These words and phrases were reviewed for consistencies using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Following the method of constant comparison, these 127 words and phrases were determined to fit into 17 themes. For all 17 themes, researchers reached 100% agreement.

3 Results

3.1 Qualitative Findings

Seventeen dominant themes were identified by the constant comparison analysis. Each of these themes is listed below with key words describing the theme and examples of representative statements from mission statements.

Theme 1 Achievement. Achievement was coded when wording related to *academically competent* or *academic effectiveness* was included in a mission statement. For example, Simon Rivera High School's mission statement specified that the school will "develop individuals who are academically competent." Similarly, Round Rock High School's mission statement specified that the school provides "a strong foundation for future academic achievement."

Theme 2 Citizenship. Citizenship was coded when wording related to *promoting citizenship* was included in a mission statement. This theme included statements about having the duties, rights, and privileges of citizenship status. For example, Harlingen High School's mission statement specified that, "Educators must teach the six pillars of character," with citizenship being listed as one of these six pillars. Similarly, the mission statement of Sam Houston High School included the statement that it graduates "well informed citizens prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century."

Theme 3 Collaborative. The theme of Collaboration was noted to be present when wording related to *collaborative* or *partnership* was used in a mission statement in the context of joint interest or association. For example, Kingwood High School included a statement that their purpose was to "create a collaborative learning environment." Similarly, Magnolia High School asserted the school was a "partnership with the home" and that it was a "richly diverse community."

Theme 4 Commitment. When words such as *committed* or *commitment* were used in a mission statement, the theme of Commitment was noted as being present. For example, Keller High School included a statement that the school mission was to inspire students to have "the commitment to serve." Similarly, Klein Collins High School stated that it was "committed to provide all students educational opportunities."

Theme 5 Develop. The theme ofDevelop was coded when the words such as *develop* or *make stronger* were used in a mission statement. That is, Mary Carroll High School stated that the school provides a

comprehensive curriculum to "develop students' abilities." Similarly, Americas High School stated that the school "exists to develop within students the[ir] individual promise."

Theme 6 Educate. When words such as *teach*, *show*, *guide*, and *instill* were used in a mission statement, the theme of Educate was recorded. For example, Weatherford High School indicated that the school had "a team of qualified, dedicated, passionate educators" whose job "is to teach." Similarly, Johnny G. Economedes High School is committed to "instilling a sense of student self-worth."

Theme 7 Excellence. Excellence was coded when words such as *excellence* or *excel* were used in a mission statement, or when the words *superior*, *transcend*, *high-quality*, or *outstanding* were used. For example, Moises E. Molina High School used the phrase "Pride and Excellence in Education." Similarly, Winston Churchill High School stated that it would "challenge and encourage each student to achieve and demonstrate academic excellence."

Theme 8 High Expectations. High Expectations was noted to be present when words such as *challenge*, *difficulty*, *demanding task*, *extreme hardship*, or *rigor* were used in a mission statement. For example, Martin Raymond and Tirza Martin High School stated that it would provide a course of study that "challenges students to develop problem solving, and decision-making skills." Similarly, Spring Woods High School expressed this as "engaging students in a rigorous curriculum."

Theme 9 Life-Long Learners. When the words *life-long learner* or *life-long learning* were used in a mission statement, the theme of Life-Long Learners was used. For example, McNeil High School stated that its purpose was to develop students who "pursue life-long academic, cultural, and physical learning." Similarly, Flower Mound High School indicated that it would "empower all students to become life-long learners."

Theme 10 Nurturing. Nurturing was noted to be present when mission statements contained words such as *nurture*, *care*, *attend*, or *support*. For example, San Marcos High School specified that it "would support each student in academics." Similarly, Bryan Adams High School specified that they "Prepare, Attend, Work, Succeed."

Theme 11 Positive. The theme of Positive was coded when words such as *solid*, *guaranteeing*, and *insuring* were used in a mission statement with the meaning to make a definite contribution. For example, James Pace High School stated that it would "provide its students with a solid educational foundation to insure that the individual becomes a self-sufficient, productive member of society." Similarly, San Benito High School stated that it would prepare "graduates who are life-long learners by guaranteeing a quality education."

Theme 12 Prepare. When phrases such as *to make ready* or *to equip with necessary provisions* were used in mission statements, the theme of Prepare was noted. As described above, Bryan Adams High School indicated that it would "Prepare, Attend, Work, Succeed." Similarly, the Rowlett High School mentioned that it "will prepare students to lead a successful life."

Theme 13 Productive. Productive was coded when mission statements contained words such as *productive* or *productivity*. For example, United South High School mentioned that its mission included "enhancing their [students'] ability to become productive members of society." Similarly, Katy High School stated that the school "seeks academic excellence for each student to pursue a productive and fulfilling life."

Theme 14 Provide. In cases where mission statements contained words such as *provide*, *contribute*, or *enrich*, the theme of Provide was noted to be present. For example, Woodlands High School specified that it "is dedicated to providing a safe environment." Similarly, Plano West Senior High School included in its mission statement that it prepares students to "contribute with compassion and integrity to a diverse society."

Theme 15 Responsible. Responsible was noted to be present when words such as *responsible* or *responsibility* were used in a mission statement. For example, Joseph W. Nixon High School stated that "teachers, administrators, parents and students must assume responsibility for the educational purpose." Similarly, Georgetown High School mentioned that students should "develop academically, normally, and socially as responsible citizens in a changing society."

Theme 16 Safe and Secure. The theme of Safe and Secure was noted to be present when mission statements contained words such as *safe*, *secure*, or *safe environment*. For example, Simon Rivera High School specified that their mission was to assist students in "a safe and secure environment." Similarly, John B. Alexander High School stated that "our school must provide a positive and safe climate."

Theme 17 Succeed. Succeed was coded when words such as *engaging, fulfill,* or *acquire* were used in a mission statement to suggest achievement or accomplishing something planned. For example, Dr. Leo Gonzalez Cigarroa High School stated that its mission was to enable students "to fulfill their academic potential and learn for life." Similarly, Bel Air High School stated that it will "prepare students to become engaged and productive members of our community."

3.2 Sequential Mixed Data Analysis

Once the 17 themes were identified a sequential mixed analysis was conducted to integrate qualitative and quantitative analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Data were entered into an Excel file for analysis with the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (Version 13.1). An inter-respondent matrix (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie) was created with rows constituting schools and columns constituting mission statement themes. Dummy variables were created by assigning a value of 1 when the theme was present for a particular school and a value of 0 when the theme was not present for a particular school. In this sequential mixed analysis, qualitative data were analyzed first yielding the 17 themes already described. This procedure was followed by quantitative analyses that built upon the qualitative analysis. As such, five of the seven stages mixed data analysis process were used: data reduction, data display, data transformation, data correlation, and data integration (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie).

Frequencies, calculated from the inter-respondent matrix for all 17 themes, are displayed in Table 1. The theme of Provide was the most frequent theme appearing in 45.6% of the mission statements. Life-Long Learning was the second most frequent theme appearing in 25.5% of the mission statements, followed by Develop which appeared in 24.4% of these statements. The themes of Educate and Excellence appeared least frequently being mentioned in only 11.1% of the mission statements.

Themes Identified in Mission Statements of Predominantly Hispanic and of Predominantly

White Schools Combined

	Theme Present in Mission Statement	
Theme	n	Percent
Provide	41	45.5%
Life-Long Learning	23	25.6%
Develop	22	24.4%
Prepare	19	21.1%
Productive	19	21.1%
High Expectations	19	21.1%
Succeed	18	20.0%
Collaborative	16	17.8%
Achievement	15	16.7%
Responsible	15	16.7%
Nurturing	15	16.7%
Safe and Secure	13	14.4%
Positive	12	13.3%
Citizenship	11	12.2%
Committed	11	12.2%
Excellence	10	11.1%
Educate	10	11.1%

Table 1

Next, the database was split by group membership, predominantly Hispanic schools versus predominantly White schools, and the frequency of each theme was calculated separately for each group. Table 2 depicts the frequency of the themes by group membership. Provide was the most frequently appearing theme in both groups, appearing in the mission statements of 46.8% of the predominantly Hispanic high schools and 44.2% of the predominantly White high schools. The Citizenship theme appeared in 23.4% of the mission statements of the predominantly Hispanic schools but did not appear in the mission statement of any of the predominantly White schools.

Themes Identified in Mission Statements Reported Separately for Predominantly Hispanic

and for Predominantly White Schools

	Theme Present in Mission Statement	
Theme	Hispanic($n = 47$)	White($n = 43$)
Provide	22 (46.8%)	19 (44.2%)
Life-Long Learning	10 (21.3%)	13 (30.2%)
Develop	12 (25.5%)	10 (23.3%)
Prepare	12 (25.5%)	7 (16.35)
Productive	8 (17.0%)	11 (25.6%)
High Expectations	13 (27.7%)	6 (13.9%)
Succeed	10 (21.3%)	8 (18.6%)
Collaborative	8 (17.0%)	8 (18.6%)
Achievement	5 (10.6%)	10 (23.3%)
Responsible	4 (8.5%)	11 (25.6%)
Nurturing	7 (14.9%)	8 (18.6%)
Safe and Secure	7 (14.9%)	6 (13.9%)
Positive	6 (12.8%)	6 (13.9%)
Citizenship	11 (23.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Committed	5 (10.6%)	6 (13.9%)
Excellence	5 (10.6%)	5 (11.6%)
Educate	5 (10.6%)	5 (11.6%)

Table 2

To determine whether the themes identified in the mission statements could differentiate between predominantly Hispanic schools and predominantly White schools, an *all possible subsets* (APS) canonical discriminant analysis was conducted. Due to difficulties with the stepwise discriminant procedure created by the way variables are selected for entry into the equation, researchers have been strongly advised to use the APS procedure rather than the stepwise procedure (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003). In the APS procedure, the optimal combination of themes that discriminate between school types is determined by examining all possible models of the thematic variables. This process is accomplished by computing separate discriminant functions for all the variables by themselves, then in pairs, in triples, and so on until the best subset of thematic variables is identified.

The APS discriminant analysis revealed a statistically significant discriminant function, $\chi2(4) = 21.35$, $p < .001$, that accounted for 22% of the between-groups variance (canonical $R = .47$). The group centroids were -0.50 for predominantly Hispanic schools and 0.55 for predominantly White schools. An examination of the standardized coefficients using a cutoff loading of 0.3 for inclusion in the analysis (Lambert & Durand, 1975), revealed four themes that made an important contribution to the discriminant function. The coefficient for Citizenship was negative (-0.80) indicating that this theme was associated with predominantly Hispanic high schools. The coefficients were positive for Achievement (0.47), Responsible (0.45), and Life-Long Learning (0.38) indicating that these themes were associated with predominantly White high schools.

Finally, the number of themes present in each school's mission statement was calculated by summing the 1s and 0s across the inter-respondent matrix. The average number of themes present in the mission statements of predominantly Hispanic high schools was 3.19 ($SD = 2.09$), compared with an average of 3.23

($SD = 1.92$) for predominantly White high schools. An Analysis of Variance indicated that the two types of high schools did not differ in the number of themes present in their mission statements, $F(1, 88) = 0.009$, $p = .923$. Thus, differences in the thematic content of the mission statements of predominantly Hispanic and predominantly White high schools could not have been due to differences in the length of these statements.

4 Discussion

In this study, qualitative analysis identified 17 themes in the mission statements of large, predominantly Hispanic and predominantly White high schools in the State of Texas. Quantitative analysis of these themes revealed a high degree of diversity in the stated missions of these schools. Although all of the schools were public high schools in the same state, no one theme was included in the mission statement of a majority of the high schools. That is, with the explicitly stated goal of academic achievement, certainly as delineated in the No Child Left Behind Act, it is surprising that the theme of Achievement was not present in a majority of the high school mission statements. The theme Provide was the most frequent theme but it was included in only 45.6% of the mission statements. This theme which included words such as *provide*, *contribute*, or *enrich* reflects an emphasis on being a service provider. Unfortunately, the schools were less focused on what the content of that service should be, thereby leaving it to each reader to make their own determination of the meaning of service. On a positive note, Life-Long Learning (25.5%) was the second most frequent theme. Still, readers should note that this theme was only present in a fourth of these schools' mission statements. Sadly, in our opinion, the theme of Educate was tied for last with the theme of Excellence (11.1%).

As a whole, the results of the qualitative analysis of mission statement themes reflect the high degree of diversity that comes from control by local school boards. Very little consistency was present in the perceived mission of schools across the high schools examined in this study. Only two themes appeared in the mission statement of more than one quarter of the schools. Although this local control and diversity could be seen as a virtue in a democratic society, too much diversity in perceived missions could also hinder school reform by diffusing the implementation of government mandates for educational reform.

The potential problems caused by the high degree of diversity in the mission statements are likely compounded by the lack of emphasis on providing a high quality education. Life-Long Learning was mentioned in only 25.6% of the mission statements, Achievement in only 16.7% of the statements, and Educate in only 11.1%. These findings mean, at best, that educational goals were included in the mission statements of fewer than 54% of the schools. In addition, High Expectations was mentioned in only 21.1% of the mission statements and Excellence in only 11.1% of these statements. Thus, the mission statement of fewer than one third of the schools were focused on striving for academic excellence. This finding is disturbing because Slate et al. (2008) reported that high performing elementary schools had mission statements focused on providing a challenging academic environment. In addition, to the extent that perceived mission impacts the way school reform efforts are translated at the local level, the mission statements of the high schools examined in this study appear likely to weaken the impact of school reform efforts. That is, given the lack of focus on academic excellence in the mission statements, the constituents of many schools in the present study may be more likely to perceive government efforts to increase academic achievement as outside intrusions than as efforts to help the school.

The most striking finding of the comparison of the predominantly Hispanic high schools and the predominantly White high schools was that nearly one quarter of the predominantly Hispanic high schools included Citizenship in their mission statements whereas this theme was completely absent from the predominantly White high schools. One possible explanation for this difference may be the large influx of students who have migrated from Mexico into the United States. Predominantly Hispanic high schools may see a greater need to promote the theme of Citizenship to create a campus climate of unity and acceptance, and to acculturate the children of recent immigrants to the United States.

Although the theme of Citizenship was associated with higher performing elementary schools in the Slate et al. (2008) study, the fact that Achievement and Life-long Learning were even less common in predominantly Hispanic high schools (10.6% and 21.3% respectively) than in predominantly White high schools (23.3% and 30.2% respectively) raises serious concerns. Not only do Hispanic students show lower

levels of academic attainment than do White students (Huntington, 2004), but Hispanic parents are more likely than White parents to believe their children's education is solely the responsibility of the school (Caravantes, 2006). Thus, predominantly Hispanic schools need to place a particularly strong emphasis on providing a high quality educational experience for their students.

Readers should be cautious about generalizing their interpretations beyond large, predominantly Hispanic and large, predominantly White high schools in the State of Texas. For example, additional research will be needed to examine the themes in the mission statements of predominantly Black high schools, and in high schools in other states. In addition, further research is needed to examine the relationships between the mission statements of high schools and school performance. Two lines of research seem particularly promising. First, there is a need to correlate mission statement themes to performance measures, such as accountability rankings (Slate et al., 2008), to determine if the lack of emphasis on academic themes may be inhibiting the academic achievement of students. Second, there is a need to examine the extent to which high school mission statements affect the reactions of school constituents to governmentally imposed school reform efforts. We strongly believe that, given the ubiquitous nature of mission statements across schools and businesses, that their use merits serious study.

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