

Different Kind of Segregation Occurring

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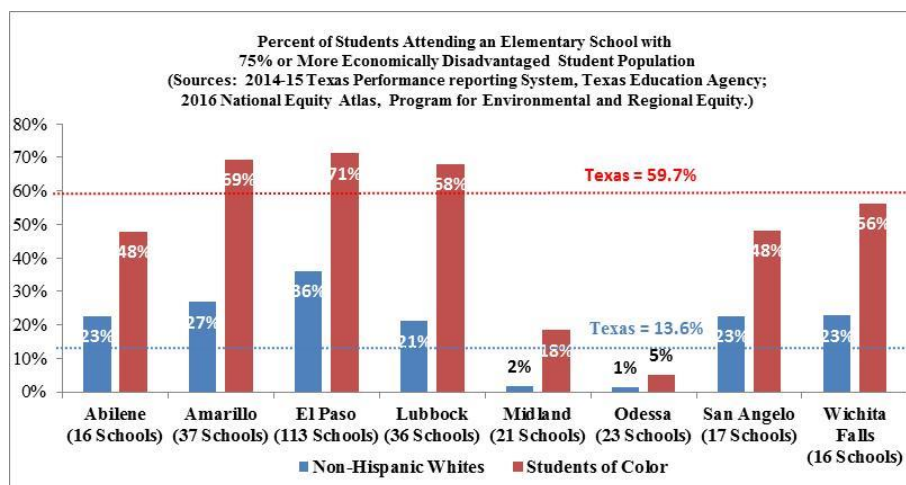
San Angelo's State Representative Drew Darby, speaking at the last Chamber of Commerce luncheon, said one of his priorities for the upcoming legislature is to provide more funding for public education. Recently, a separate analysis of national data by the University of Southern California's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) shows an emerging form of segregation of students of color in the nation's public schools.

Reported in PERE's National Equity Atlas, the emerging pattern is strongest at the primary school level. Texas joins Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia as the four states leading the pack toward school segregation. The PERE data shows 59.7 percent of Texas elementary students of color attend schools where at least 75 percent of their peers live in poor or low-income households. Only 13.6 percent of non-Hispanic white students go to such schools.

The PERE study also shows wide variation across the ten most populous Texas metropolitan areas. Only 32.5 percent of minority elementary students in the Killeen – Temple - Fort Hood metro area attend schools with high levels of economically disadvantaged enrollment. The number is 90.1 percent in Brownsville – Harlingen.

El Paso is the only West Texas urban area included in the PERE study because it covered only the 100 largest US metro areas. We retrieved data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to extend the analysis to Abilene, Amarillo, Lubbock, Midland, Odessa, San Angelo, and Wichita Falls, in addition to El Paso.

Percent of Students Attending Elementary School with Disadvantaged Students



The data cover enrollments in 279 public elementary schools serving the eight core cities of West Texas during the 2014-15 school year. Our statistical results match the PERE study to reveal elementary school segregation in West Texas cities. The results are eye opening.

Amarillo, El Paso, and Lubbock are the largest West Texas cities. Students of color in these cities are heavily concentrated into elementary schools with 75 percent or more enrollment from

low-income families. Between 68 and 71 percent of minority students go to such schools, while non-Hispanic white students attend similar schools at rates ranging from 21 percent (Lubbock) to 36 percent (El Paso). The differences between whites and students of color mirror the statewide numbers from the PERE study.

Midland and Odessa provide a contrast. Booming oil-based economies in these cities have reduced household poverty to low levels. Midland's poverty rate among elementary school aged kids is just eight percent; Odessa's is 15 percent. Segregation based on income is limited in high-flying cities like these as long their booming economies are able to float the lowest families to incomes above the poverty level.

San Angelo, Abilene, and Wichita Falls are cities demonstrating moderate segregation in elementary schools. San Angelo's 48 percent of minority students attending low-income schools is well below the statewide mark. It combines with 23 percent of non-Hispanic whites attending the same schools, which is slightly above the statewide number.

At first blush, uncovering these facts about segregation in West Texas, we wondered what could be going on in schools to cause such a divisive trend. A closer look taught us that public school districts across the region make substantive efforts within their resource limits to work toward integration of students across income levels.

San Angelo ISD's decision to locate a magnet school for elementary level gifted and talented students in the predominantly low-income Fort Concho neighborhood is a particularly effective example of mitigating the potentials for income-based segregation in the district. Today, according to TEA data, economically disadvantaged students comprise 49 percent of Fort Concho School enrollment. Non-Hispanic whites comprise 44 percent of students, 56 percent are students of color, and 38 percent of all students in the school participate in the gifted and talented education program.

The Census Bureau recently touched on something that helps understand community forces that encourage school segregation in places like San Angelo. According to the Bureau, the most recent national income and poverty estimates indicate a 5.2 percent year-over-year growth in median household income. The number was widely reported as big news because it was the first increase since 2007, just before the so-called "great recession."

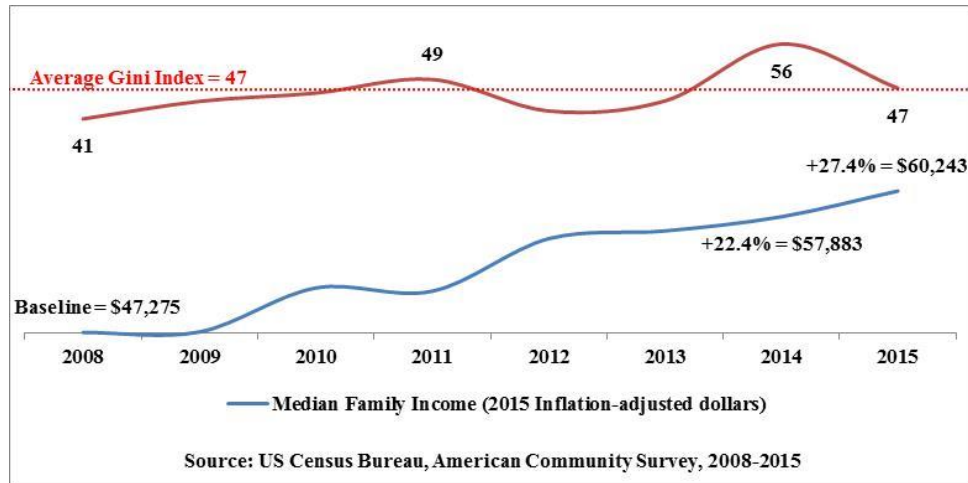
The Bureau announcement of the number of people living in poverty made more big news. That number fell by 3.5 million, lowering the official national poverty rate to 13.5 percent, its lowest level since 2008.

The same Census dataset shows families in San Angelo matched the nationwide five percent income increases by reaching a \$60,243 median level. That number is also 27 percent higher than the \$47,275 median income for local families at the start of the "great recession" back in 2008. Local income gains are impressive compared to the country as a whole. However, there is a spoiler in the San Angelo story.

Unlike the big news for the nation, the poverty rate did not fall in the local community. In fact, it increased by 1.3 percent from 16.1 in 2014 to 17.4 percent in 2015. Poverty among local elementary school aged children is actually higher at 19.3 percent, and a gap of about 10 points separates the 11 percent rate of non-Hispanic white kids from higher poverty levels among Latinos and other children of color.

One of the telltale signs of rising income inequality in a community is when median income growth combines with stagnant or increasing poverty. Furthermore, the Gini Index, the economists' most commonly used metric for household income inequality, confirms the trend in San Angelo.

GINI Index for San Angelo



The Gini Index represent degrees of inequality on a 0 to 100-point scale with lower scores indicating greater equality; higher scores showing more inequality. The Census Bureau's set of annual measures peg San Angelo's Gini Index in 2008 at 41, well below the national score of 47 for that year.

With our own oil boom recovery, however, the local Gini Index climbed to 49 by 2011, spiked at 56 in 2014, and then landed at 47 for 2015. Overall, household income inequality increased by six points on the Gini scale between 2008 and 2015. Over the same years, the Index for both Texas and the nation increased by only one point from 47 to 48.

People are inclined to see these community trends as outcomes of entirely understandable and natural things like the efforts of parents to invest in the best possible education for their children. Nevertheless, there are at least two reasons why it is perilous for community leaders to neglect systemic trends like increasing income inequality and emerging school segregation in places like San Angelo.

First are pure demographics. Today, 52 percent of all students enrolled in Texas schools are Hispanic children, and other students of color make up another 19 percent. Latinos drive 59 percent of San Angelo ISD's enrollment, and another seven percent are other minority students. A majority of San Angelo's total population will soon consist up of Latinos and other people of color. Texas is already a so-called minority-majority state.

The second reason is a growing body of research showing segregation of students into predominantly low-income schools, which leads to many negative effects. Students face scarce resources, long-lasting school achievement problems, failing health, serious skill mismatches while struggling to enter the labor force, and a vicious cycle of increasing public resentment and resistance toward policies to address the problems of low-income schools.

The Honorable Mr. Darby's commitment to provide more funding for public education is encouraging. We hope his colleagues will share his colleagues. We even dare to hope that efforts to keep public school funding up to speed will turn into a state government priority lasting well beyond a single session in the series of biennial legislative meetings.

That kind of commitment is necessary if Texas finally makes good on the promise of education for all its children. Moreover, the future of San Angelo and Texas depends on it.