The Resegregation of Suburban Schools

A Hidden Crisis in American Education

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Holding the Borderline

School District Responsiveness to Demographic Change in Orange County, California

LORRIE FRASURE-YOKLEY

Orange County, California, is known for its history of political conservatism, affluent coastal beach communities, and its tourist attractions, such as Disneyland. During the last decade, the county became famous, or rather infamous, for the profligate lifestyles portrayed in the popular television series *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, *The O.C.*, and *Laguna Beach*, featuring predominantly white, upper-income suburbanites. However, these depictions of a county deeply segregated by race, ethnicity, and class are far removed from the reality of the internal and external pressures facing this majority-minority county, particularly its public school system.

This case study examines how an Orange County public school district, Azalea Unified (a pseudonym), conceptualized and responded to an increase in low-income, minority, and recently arrived immigrant students; internal pressures related to the collapse of the housing and job markets and nearly $40 million in districtwide budget cuts in less than a decade; and the external pressures of several state and federal mandates.¹ Using data from thirty-four face-to-face, in-depth interviews with county, district, and school officials, as well as U.S. Census and California Department of Education (DataQuest) data, this chapter argues that despite some of its efforts, the combination of fiscal crisis and state and federal mandates made it more difficult for Azalea Unified to respond to demographic change and to adequately address the needs of an increasingly racially/ethnically and economically diverse student population.²
The chapter begins with a brief overview of the development of post–World War II Orange County and the state and federal mandates affecting public school education in the county. It then examines the community demographics of the Azalea Unified School District compared with those of Orange County as a whole, and discusses how the community conceptualized demographic changes in the student population in recent years. It next explores how fiscal crisis, coupled with state and federal mandates, influenced how Azalea Unified responded to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population as the district transitioned to majority-minority status in the last few years and also examines the extent to which these actions sought to confront the long-standing racial imbalance in the schools and to create greater opportunities for its minority and low-income students. It concludes with the finding that while some policies, such as targeted magnet programs, indirectly addressed racial/ethnic and class concentration and modestly increased diversity and greater opportunities for students in some schools, none of these policy shifts made a significant impact on racial integration in the Azalea Unified school district, which remains largely stratified by race and class.

POST–WORLD WAR II ORANGE COUNTY AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

During the post–World War II era, Orange County experienced vast economic growth as a result of aerospace and manufacturing moves to the region. Specifically, the county benefited from federal government subsidies and tax breaks that helped to create “military-related suburbs” whose postwar local economy was underpinned by the defense-related manufacturing sector. The simultaneous growth in manufacturing and racially/ethnically restricted suburban housing developments produced a predominantly white-middle- to upper-class population in Orange County, a contrast to the more diverse (but still highly segregated) communities of neighboring Los Angeles County. Orange County attracted its “high-value residents” in part by boasting of safe and prosperous school districts with high test scores as well as high graduation and college admission rates. However, the spatial development of the county and subsequent racial and class segregation, largely between whites and Latinos, aided by restrictive covenants and exclusionary zoning laws, reinforced an ethos of privacy, individualism, gated communities, and private property rights. Latino families, including generations working in the agricultural and citrus farming industries, have long resided in Orange County. By 1950 there
EXHIBIT 4.1

Azalea School District

Percentage change of Los Angeles suburban ring and Azalea Unified School District

Racial and poverty composition of Los Angeles metropolitan statistical area, Azalea Unified School District, and district first grade, 2009–10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% Asian</th>
<th>% Latino</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% English language learners</th>
<th>% Free and reduced-price lunch</th>
<th>Total enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total MSA</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>2,908,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal cities</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>1,608,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>1,299,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>25,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,835</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were reportedly as many as forty predominantly Mexican-American communities in the county. Many of those early settlements still exist today, and most remain ethnically and economically segregated from the neighborhoods predominantly populated by whites and Asians.

The county was the national home of the extreme right-wing John Birch Society, which campaigned to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren (who authored the decision that declared school segregation unconstitutional) in the 1960s and helped advance the political careers of former Republican presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, both of whom undermined integration efforts. Many conservatives in Orange County gained their start in

Azalea School District (continued)

Racial composition of school attended by a typical student, based on racial and ethnic background, in Azalea Unified School District, 2009–10

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe.
politics through their struggle for power in the Orange County public school system. In the 1960s and '70s, these power struggles “awakened the sleeping giant of right-wing conservatism,” resulting in authoritarian tactics and unconstitutional actions such as banning open discussions of religion in the classroom, and allowing school administrators to request teachers to reveal all past political affiliations. Liberal members of the county school board were often removed and replaced with conservatives.

In the late 1970s, the racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and employment sector demographics of Orange County began to shift rapidly as growing fiscal austerity at the state and national levels created upheaval in California public schools. Following the statewide funding equalization decision in 1971 (Serrano v. Priest) and the passage of the property tax referendum, Proposition 13, in 1978, the state has supplied the largest share of school funding in California. Proposition 13 shifted the support for schools from local property taxes to state general funds. The measure rolled back market values to those of 1975–76 and then restricted real estate tax assessments to 1 percent of a property’s purchase price. It also limited annual property tax increases to no more than 2 percent yearly for continuing owners and a full reassessed value of the property for new owners. These factors drastically reduced the ability of local governments to raise revenue from property taxes. Since property taxation is traditionally the largest source for local education spending, California public schools were hit the hardest; the state fell from a reported seventh in the country in the 1970s to twenty-seventh in per-pupil spending by 2009.

Scholars trace the struggle to desegregate Orange County Public Schools back to the landmark 1947 Mendez v. Westminster case, which ended de jure segregation in California public schools. However, de facto school segregation has persisted for decades, aided by a series of state mandates that have made dismantling the barriers to school integration more challenging. Proposition 1, a state constitutional amendment designed to end mandatory busing, passed in 1979 with nearly 70 percent of the vote. This measure mandated that state courts could not order mandatory pupil assignment or transportation (busing) unless a federal court would do so to remedy a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection clause. In 1982, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the lower courts that Proposition 1 was constitutional. The Court’s decision added further confusion and complexity to efforts by administrators, teachers, and community leaders to desegregate California suburban public school districts. As Orange County
THE RESEGREGATION OF SUBURBAN SCHOOLS

becomes increasingly diverse but remains segregated by race and class, trans-
portation remains an important factor in providing all students opportuni-
ties and access to schools outside of their suburban neighborhood. In 1996, Proposition 209 dismantled affirmative action in the state and affected K–12 education by prohibiting public school districts from explicitly considering race/ethnicity in drawing school zone boundaries. The mandate further complicated districts’ decisions regarding the implementation and funding for programs and policies for at-risk student populations, who are disproportionately minority and low-income. In 1998, Proposition 227 dismantled bilingual education in California. While California public schools were already overwhelmed by “low achievement by [English language learner (ELL)] students, confused and frustrated educators, and lack of a consistent curriculum” the federal government issued a further mandate under NCLB, signed into law in 2002.

Despite Orange County’s pockets of affluence, many of its school dis-
tricts were in dire financial crisis, facing continued furloughs, layoffs, and the threat of school closures by the close of the 1980s. In the early 1990s, it became clear that there were long-standing, often hidden, financial problems in the county when its treasurer gambled away $1.7 billion of taxpayer dollars in a Wall Street securities scheme, with the result that, in 1994, Orange County became the largest county in U.S. history to declare bankruptcy. By the early 2000s Orange County faced internal fiscal pressures as families were pushed out of the county’s housing market to neighboring counties in search of affordable housing and job opportunities. The subsequent declining school enrollments resulted in staggering losses in revenue. For example, in 2008 the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) reported a loss in revenue countywide due to declining student enrollment from $2,125,187 in 2003–04 to a cumulative loss of over $89 million by 2007–08 school year. The Great Recession of 2008 and the collapse of the housing market hit California much harder than the nation as a whole. Following the recession, pockets of growing poverty in the county were further exacerbated by both the housing market collapse and an unstable job market. These factors are coupled with a rise in recently arrived low-income, immigrant populations to the county, residing in rental homes or apartments, often with multiple families to one dwelling.

These internal and external factors underscore the need to examine the responsiveness of borderline school districts (those just transitioning to majority-minority) like Azalea Unified, which for years after Orange County became
majority-minority, remained on the whole majority-white. The district only recently transitioned to majority-minority in the last few years. At just 50 percent non-Latino white in 2009, the racial/ethnic demographics of Azalea Unified inevitably tipped to majority-minority status by the close of the decade. Between 1997 and 2010 the white student population in the district decreased by 17 percent, from 63 to 46 percent, respectively; the Latino population increased from 25 percent to 37 percent; and the Asian population increased from 8 percent to 11 percent. Black student enrollment remained around 2 percent (see also exhibit 4.1). By 2010 one-quarter of students in the district were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL), but this figure varied greatly by school, as some schools served a population with over 50 percent FRL. The next section further examines demographic changes in the county and Azalea Unified and discuss how the Azalea community has conceptualized demographic changes in the student population in recent years.

**CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE**

The demographics of Orange County have shifted as greater numbers of Latinos and Asians moved into the area. As shown in table 4.1, in 1980 Asians and Latinos comprised only 5 and 15 percent of the Orange County population, respectively. By 2010, the populations of Asians and Latinos increased to about 18 percent and 34 percent, respectively. Overall one-third of the county was foreign-born by 2010, including one-half of all Latinos and over 70 percent of all Asians in Orange County. The growth of the African American population in Orange County remained low, rising from only 1.26 percent in 1980 to about 2.0 percent by 2010.

**TABLE 4.1**

*Racial and ethnic demographics in Orange County, 1980–2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several districts in the OCDE remain among the most segregated suburban school districts in the country. Increased districtwide diversity does not necessarily translate to greater levels of integration in suburban school districts, or exposure to non-Latino white students, particularly if these students do not attend the same schools. As suburban school districts become more diverse, such demographic shifts may not trickle down to the school level because of deep-seated racial/ethnic and economic segregation in the housing market, which is often reflected in the prototypical model of the suburban neighborhood school.

Nearly one-third of Latino students in Orange County attend intensely segregated schools. Although Latino students comprise 46 percent of the county’s public school enrollment, the typical Latino student attends a school that is 69 percent Latino. Latino students in the county also attend schools where, on average, 65 percent of students are poor, as indicated by the percentage of students receiving FRL; nearly two-thirds of these FRL students are Latino. Black students make up less than 2 percent of the student population. However, they attend schools where two in five students are poor. Southern California’s largest concentrations of Asian schoolchildren live in the county. However, just 2 percent of Asian students attend intensely segregated minority schools. White and Asian students in the county are least likely to attend schools with large shares of poor students.

In Azalea Unified, both district- and school-level respondents provided conflicting descriptions of the district’s demographic composition, and some differed in the extent to which Azalea was shifting demographically at all. Census data from 2010 underscores persistent disparities between Laneview and Orchard, the two main suburbs that make up the Azalea Unified District: Orchard, in the north, remains homogenously white and middle-upper income, while Laneview, in the South remains more racially mixed with a long-standing Latino and low-income population. Table 4.2 illustrates these socioeconomic and demographic characteristics as compared with Orange County. Some respondents underscored the racial, ethnic, and class-based segregation in the district between Orchard and Laneview. Orchard’s Latino population makes up only 14 percent of its total population, while Laneview’s Latino population is 36 percent (as compared with 34 percent in the county). Orchard’s income, home value, and home ownership rates are higher than both Orange County and Laneview, while its poverty rates and percentage of female-headed households are significantly lower. Orchard’s
demographic composition is more homogenous and more affluent than both Orange County and Laneview.

The principal of the Allenson High School in Laneview, who has served as an educator in the district for over thirty years, explained that multiple generations of low-income Latino families in Laneview have attended the same schools for decades and proudly return to teach at their former schools. However, increased immigration, largely from Mexico, in the 1990s raised student enrollment numbers at some schools, including
Allenson High School and its feeder elementary schools. Subsequently, as English language learner population numbers increased during the 1990s, test scores at schools in Laneview began to decline rapidly. Moreover, as the number of Mexican immigrant students increased, the long-standing negative stereotypes associated with Allenson High School (and its feeder schools) as low-performing, unsafe, and gang-infested were further exacerbated. In contrast, at the same time that schools like Allenson are struggling to fund desperately needed programs for at-risk high school students, some schools in Orchard are able to plan elaborate eighth-grade "prom-type" dances, supported largely through fundraising, and provide “tolerance training” through antibullying seminars.

Azalea Unified’s district superintendent of over twelve years describes his district as diverse but suggests that when it comes to district curriculum, programs, and resources within the Azalea Unified Schools, inequality is not an issue:

I would describe it [the district] to cover the whole range socioeconomically and ethnically, and it’s not a segregated school district in [that] you might view some schools this way, but in other ways they’re vastly different . . . About one-fourth of our schools would be Title I . . . These would be lower socioeconomic [areas] and there’d be a fairly high percentage of Latino, very few African Americans . . . But there isn’t a sense of the haves and have-nots—certainly not the schools . . . No one in our school district would say there’s a different kind of program for certain kids . . . They won’t say that the facilities are different and they won’t say that the teachers are different . . . you won’t hear that. You won’t hear it from parents.24

However, a district administrator in educational services with over thirty years of service to Orange County Public Schools has a different view:

This district is a district of haves and have-nots, and they are very—as all of Orange County is . . . segregated. It’s unbelievable. I mean, the lines of demarcation could not be clearer . . . In the old days, when this was an orange-growing area, you had the landowners over here and then you had the workers that worked over there, the more Hispanic workers that worked over there, and those lines are clear as day still . . . Well, the Latinos are very carefully put in the one area . . . But that’s not unusual; all of our demographics, all of our ethnic groups all go to Allenson High School . . . It’s the poor high school. The people from Orchard wouldn’t have their kids
go there . . . This is a very segregated community. Very, very segregated community . . . The poor kids go to the poor schools. The other kids go to the other schools. It’s the way it goes . . . That’s where all the diversity is. All of it is—it goes to one high school.25

While this respondent points to persistent segregation in the district, underscoring a clear distinction between long-standing wealthy neighborhoods to the north and low-income neighborhoods to the south, the district is also facing pressure from demographic changes in former solid middle-class neighborhoods experiencing a recent arrival of low-income immigrant students resulting in growing numbers of ELLs and impoverished families in schools that did not traditionally hold these populations in sizable numbers.

Langston Elementary School, located in the middle of the district, provides an example of such a community facing three emerging demographic changes: increasing numbers of low socioeconomic status (SES) students and ELLs; and a decline in overall enrollment, which in turn decreases the average daily attendance and subsequently per-pupil funding to the school. Langston experienced one of the most dramatic changes of racial and ethnic composition of all Azalea Unified District schools. The white population declined from 69 percent in 1997 to 36 percent in 2010, while the Latino population increased from 21 percent in 1997 to 48 percent in 2010. In 1997, only 5 percent of the student population were ELLs, and 15 percent of students received free or reduced-price lunch. By 2010, these figures rose to 13 percent and 22 percent, respectively.

Administrators and teachers at Langston Elementary describe it as the “middle child” of the district, caught between the affluent schools and the Title I schools. A teacher at Langston explains this widely shared sentiment: “I think with the way the budget is in the state, it’s sad. Because I think Langston is one of those schools . . . we’re not like View Vista, where we have a lot of parents with a lot of money, and we’re not like a Parkview . . . a Title I [school]. We’re just kind of in between, so we don’t get anything from any direction.”26 The dramatic growth in the number of ELLs in the area may be, in part, a result of shifts in the housing market. The number of homes for sale has declined, while the number of homes for rent has increased. This increase of access to rentals has made the community more accessible to low-income families who previously could not afford to live in the neighborhood.

“Middle of the road” schools like Langston are understaffed and underresourced to handle the burgeoning low-income and Limited English
Proficient population. Despite its shifting demographics, the school struggles to provide for the growing ELL population, which has not yet reached a level that would qualify the school to receive Title I funds. It also no longer holds a stable middle-income population to rely on for discretionary funds to fill the gap in resources. The principal further describes the overall demographic shifts at his school and its impact on students in the last ten years.

I would say we had about 70 percent . . . [of parents with] some sort of formal education that went along with having that job. And about 30 percent were minimum-wage, unskilled labor. And that demographic has almost shifted. I would say that [now] we’re probably looking at 50 to 60 percent unskilled or semiskilled labor [in] the community, so that shift in demographics has been a challenge for us and particularly [for] staff members that have never worked with families that are economically struggling. The thought that you can’t ask for money anymore for a field trip because they don’t have it to give you . . . [that] parents that can’t help kids in the intermediate grades because they don’t understand the math—those types of things are occurring here that did not when I first got here.27

These respondents present a broad picture of the Azalea United District. The picture of a suburban school district serving a white, affluent population has been replaced by a description of long-standing suburban racial and class stratification. The persistent disparities between the two main communities served by Azalea underscore the need to examine how district, school, and community leaders in borderline or recently transitioned districts conceptualize and frame issues related to increasing diversity, and how local educators respond to this trend, particularly when faced with a fiscal crisis and the pressures of state and federal mandates.

**DISTRICT RESPONSIVENESS TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE**

Students are assigned within their local school boundaries on the basis of place of residence. Those riding school buses must pay transportation fees as set forth by the Azalea board of education, with the exception of students receiving special education services and families qualifying for free or reduced-cost transportation. Transportation fees apply to the first three children in the family, at about $400 annually (both ways) for the first and second child and about $200 for the third child.28 Transportation for the fourth child and beyond is free. Students can transfer out of their assigned
attendance boundaries through an “open enrollment” period through inter-district transfer during the designated transfer periods and upon available space. When the number of transfer requests exceeds the space available, transfers are granted by a lottery selection process. The district’s public school choice option, part of NCLB, gives parents the option to transfer their children to another Azalea Unified school that is not in Program Improvement under NCLB, depending on space availability. While transportation for interdistrict transfer students is the responsibility of the parent/guardian, the district provides paid transportation for public school choice transfer students to their new school as long as the student’s home school remains in Program Improvement.  

Azalea Unified has long struggled with school integration concerns, particularly at the high school level, and the extent to which these concerns could be addressed through changes in school attendance boundaries. However, despite a series of proposals from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to desegregate Allenson High School and its feeder middle schools, the demographics of these schools remained largely unchanged during the 1990s. Efforts to integrate schools in the district became especially difficult after California passed Proposition 209 in 1996, which prohibits public institutions from considering race, sex, or ethnicity in deciding which schools students will attend. This may prevent busing or the creation of school boundaries in order to change the racial/ethnic makeup of the schools.  

In Azalea Unified, boundary issues reemerged in 2009 and resulted in a missed opportunity to create a greater racial/ethnic balance in the district high schools. The impending opening of a new high school, Orchard High, located in the wealthy, majority-white Orchard suburb forced the district to redraw attendance boundaries for all district high schools. However, the resulting dispute over school boundaries was seemingly not waged on racial imbalance grounds. In fact, reports in the local and regional newspapers included little to no discussion of racial/ethnic integration concerns. Those we interviewed who discussed the boundary debate did not mention the issue either. The two proposals considered by the board largely affected students from the new high school’s two feeder middle schools, both with overwhelmingly white student populations. The proposal that was adopted sent all middle school students from one of the feeder schools and just over half of the students from the other to the new high school. The remaining students, who were also predominantly white and lived south of a major thoroughfare, would attend the same predominantly white school, Salazar High, that most
students from the two feeder schools previously attended. Under the transfer policy, the district received hundreds of transfer requests and subsequently held a lottery to fill fewer than 150 remaining slots at the new high school.

Opponents of the adopted boundaries, who brought two lawsuits against the district, were made up of largely white and middle-upper-income parents and community groups whose children were not selected to attend Orchard High. The lawsuits contended that the superintendent had violated procedural rules during the school board vote on the boundary proposals and that the district failed to properly consider environmental and traffic impacts when drawing the boundaries. Ostensibly, parents who argued against the adopted boundaries wanted their children to move on to high school with their friends from middle school and contended that the new school boundaries divided Orchard families and their children. According to some parents, children not selected to attend the new high school were ostracized by those children who had been selected. In 2010, both suits against the district were struck down by an Orange County Superior Court judge. The new high school’s entering freshman class was predominantly white, and reflected the overwhelmingly white population in Orchard. In the 2010–11 school year, enrollment was 66 percent white, 10 percent Latino, 13 percent Asian, and 1.3 percent black, with only six total ELL students.31

Following the opening of the new high school, the demographics of its neighboring Salazar High also remained largely the same at 68 percent white, 17 percent Latino, 10 percent Asian and 2 percent black. Arguably, this was a missed opportunity for the district to ease the racial imbalance among the four main high schools in the district, in part due to the restrictive mandate of Proposition 209, the district’s reliance on attendance boundaries based on place of residence, and a lack of affordable and available transportation services.32 For example, in contrast to Orchard and Salazar, Allenson High School continued to house the largest Latino population of all the high schools in the district, at 59 percent, followed by Asians at 13 percent, whites at 25 percent, and blacks at 2 percent. Approximately 25 percent of students were classified as Limited English Proficient and 54 percent were eligible for the FRL program.

Targeted Placement of GATE/Magnet Academies and Special Programs
My research suggests that the district did little to directly promote racial/ethnic balance and integration in the district. Instead, the district’s actions sought to indirectly decrease racial/ethnic concentration by strategically
placing magnet academies, including Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, at some Title I schools or schools with the most diverse student populations. District officials believed this measure could address racial/ethnic and class concentrations while also raising test scores and halting declining white and Asian student enrollment that resulted when these students transferred to a neighboring district that offered magnet programs that Azalea had previously not provided.

This district policy may not seem revolutionary; yet it did manage to target resources toward some minority and low-income schools despite Azalea’s conservative ethos; its long-standing racial, ethnic, and economic stratification; and the restrictive state mandates. One of the assistant district superintendents discussed how the placement of GATE/magnet programs sought to increase diversity and opportunity for all students:

\[
\text{It would be easy to say, “I don’t want my kids to go to that school because there’s too many English learners, there’s . . . too much diversity and I like my kids to be over here.” And we said, no, this is where it belongs. One, it gives all kids access to this school. And then our IB and Allen Tech programs, we put at Allenson High School, which is our most diverse school. Those are two programs that attract students of very high academic rigor. And again, it would be easy to say, “I don’t want my kids to go.” But if you look, the programs continue to grow and it’s created a much more diverse school. And so I think [it says] to our parents, we value all kids in this district. And we believe that the more diverse the school is, the more it replicates what’s out there in our community, the better [the chances that] kids are going to go out and be successful in the world because there’s no reality of a white school. The more diverse the school is, the better. And I think had we placed those programs at one of our higher socioeconomic schools, we would’ve missed out on a very powerful opportunity. And there probably still are people who choose not to go there for that very reason.33}
\]

GATE/magnet eligible students typically attend the magnet school within their feeder school system.34 However, as discussed above, California has an interdistrict and public school choice transfer policy under NCLB. If space is available and if parents can provide their own transportation, students within the district can attend a program outside of their school boundary and students from outside of the district can apply to transfer into any program in the district. Unfortunately, the district’s transfer policies fail to adequately promote greater levels of diversity in GATE/magnet programs, since
busing is not provided for students who wish to participate in programs outside of their designated school boundary. As noted, parents must pay out of pocket for school transportation services, with exceptions for parents with children transferring from schools rated in Program Improvement under the NCLB act, as well as special education and students qualifying for free and reduced-cost transportation. Even then, bus services for those exempted students only transport students within their school boundary and do not necessarily help to increase student enrollment in the targeted GATE/magnet programs. Additionally, the state legislature continues to reduce funding for home-to-school busing; in 2011, it cut the district’s transportation budget by nearly 25 percent, resulting in even fewer stops and available buses.

At the high school level, in order to indirectly increase diversity in the student population, circumvent largely white and Asian high school student flight from the district, and raise overall test scores, in the early 2000s the district selected Allenson High School to house the district’s only IB program. Allenson High School continues to fight the persistent negative stereotypes associated with its large Latino student population and the stigmas associated with high poverty—crime, gangs, and drugs. Although Asians only account for 13 percent of the student population, they make up over half of the IB students. Allenson’s principal suggested that an increasing number of Asian families are attracted to Allenson because of its rigorous curriculum, contending that Asian students and parents have established a “comfort zone” at Allenson where they feel welcomed, accepted, and supported.

The principal was aware of some claims that while Allenson’s IB program attracts a more diverse student population, it potentially creates a “school within a school.” Recognizing the need to monitor student enrollment in all academic programs, in 2010 the school administered what it called the Program Participation Study to better understand the number of students in academic programs at Allenson. The study focused on academic programs offered as part of a student’s schedule and did not include participation in the number of clubs on campus; it showed that 88 percent of Allenson students are enrolled in at least one or more of the fourteen academic programs offered at the school.

Moreover, in recent years Allenson has allocated resources for special programs though collaborations with the business community, in many cases without funding support from the district. Some of these programs were developed to break the cycle of poverty in Laneview and to provide low-income students with better opportunities after high school. In collaboration
with the Building Industry Association of Orange County, Allenson was one of the schools that established the Building Industry Technology Academy (BITA) program in the mid-2000s, a four-year program for students in which students can learn the skills needed to excel in the residential construction trade while reinforcing math, science, and language skills.

Allenson also became the only high school in the district to adopt the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, designed for first-generation college-bound students. Most of the participants are minority and low-income students who have the potential to get into the four-year university, but do not have the support at home or a family member who attended college. AVID starts in middle school and is designed to be a six-year program; thus the feeder elementary schools to Allenson High School also participate in the program. Students take a one-period course that prepares them for different aspects of the college prep process, from SAT prep courses to filling out fee waivers and scholarship and college applications. Interestingly, the district does not fund this program. Allenson receives its funding from the principal’s budget as well as through dedicated fundraising efforts.

However, the placement of specialized GATE/magnet programs and programs for at-risk students does little to affect change at the middle-of-the-road schools in the district, like Langston Elementary. These schools are neither Title I nor high SES, yet they are experiencing unprecedented growth in the low-income and ELL populations. The budget crisis, as well as the legal and political environment in the state and county, makes it unlikely that programs for at-risk populations will be funded by the district on a large scale.

**Restructuring of Bilingual Education Under Proposition 227**

Proposition 227, passed in 1998, ended bilingual education programs in California. With some exceptions, bilingual education was replaced by a one-year Structured English Immersion program model. Under the new model, ELLs are instructed in English in a special class for one year, after which they are mainstreamed into regular classes and in some cases given extra support. The implementation of this law was uneven, and school districts throughout California struggled to implement the law. One of its provisions, referred to as a “waiver loophole,” allowed parents, after mainstreaming to apply for waivers that would allow their children to return to learning in their native language, if parents of more than twenty students in the school requested the service.
Following passage of the law, Azalea Unified still received among the largest number of waiver requests in the county and the state, despite having a comparatively smaller ELL population. In a newspaper interview in 2003, the superintendent stated that of the district’s students who are not fluent in English, one-third were being taught in Spanish (statewide, the rate was 10 percent). For nearly a decade following the passage of Prop 227, the district’s reclassification rate and the academic success of its ELLs consistently ranked below the state and county levels, which led to the restructuring of services for ELLs in the district.

Arguably, the waiver loophole made it more difficult to meet state (California’s Academic Performance Index, or API) and federal (NCLB) testing and accountability standards. Faced with issues of compliance with Prop 227 as well as the risk of state and federal sanctions, including a greater number of schools placed in Program Improvement under NCLB, Azalea’s superintendent sought to curb the waiver system by significantly rolling back the number of waivers granted in the district and to rapidly move a greater number of ELL students toward reclassification and increasing the academic achievement scores of ELL students. Within a year, the number of bilingual kindergarten classes in the district declined from twelve to four. This move sparked objections from Latino parents, advocacy groups, and some teachers, who staged protests at school board meetings. The superintendent discussed his experiences during his first year at Azalea and learning that his district was not compliant with the state law:

I walked into those classrooms and for the first year . . . I was confused because I saw teachers teaching in Spanish. And I go in the first- or second-grade classroom, third-grade classroom, and then I go the middle school and I’d see that we had kids who were still in ELD [English language development] classes because they hadn’t learned English, and [the same applied for students at] the high school. So I was asking about that and they said, “Well, in our district we do the alternative program,” which meant that parents signed a waiver so the kids could stay in a bilingual or alternative classroom. So I started to go a little deeper and we found out that these kids were never transitioning out, that the teachers were teaching Spanish . . .

And in the SABE [Spanish Assessment of Basic Education] these kids are brilliant, they were doing really well because they were being tested in Spanish—the SABE test. We don’t do that anymore. But in all of the state tests . . . they weren’t doing very well at all. So I asked what the question
is and they said, “Well, [in] bilingual education, you teach this percentage at first grade, then you do a little more, then second grade, then the third grade, and by the time you get to third or fourth grade, now they’re bilingual and they’ve transitioned to partial teaching in Spanish to all English.” I said, “Really?” . . . So all hell broke loose. I mean, we had Hispanic people coming, the parents coming, board meeting after board meeting, but we just stuck to it.

Outraged Latino parents spoke out at school board meetings, pushing the district to reverse its decision to curb the use of waivers. ELL parents expressed the need for their children to understand what they are learning, to maintain their cultural heritage, and to be able to communicate at home as well as in school. They argued that essentially they knew what was best for their children.

To address some of the parents’ concerns, the district established District English Language Advocacy Committees (DELAC) designed to allow parents an outlet to meet, monitor, and give feedback to the schools regarding the district ELD program. Based on parent feedback, the district restructured DELAC meetings so that topics are presented with simultaneous audio and visual translation. Although academic support for ELLs is now available at all district schools, parents in low-incidence schools, where there are fewer than twenty-one ELL students, are not sufficiently targeted for DELAC participation and feedback. Some Asian and South Asian families, for example, are described as intimidated or otherwise ambivalent about the value in participating in DELAC on their children’s behalf. These findings suggest that the district should monitor the participation of parents at low-incidence schools and increase their campaign to reach out to these parents.

In addition to revamping ELD, since 2006 the district has also instituted additional programs to support ELLs and their families. Moreover, all district teachers who work with ELLs hold a Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development credential or the equivalent. Reclassification rates now far exceed both the county and state levels. However, district data from 2011 show mixed results in its efforts to meet the government’s Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives. Azalea Unified’s English language learners did not meet the state target for the 2010–11 school year, which measures the percent of ELLs making annual progress in learning English as measured by the California English Language Development Test. However district data shows there has been improvement in the reclassification rate for
the district’s ELLs. The reclassification rate for 2010–11 was 13.6 percent.40
District data also shows a trend toward improved academic achievement in
English language arts for ELLs, from 17.5 in 2000–01 to 38.9 in 2010–11.

An interview with an ELL program coordinator in the district suggested
need to focus not only on the statistics related to ELLs reclassification and
testing performance, but also the district’s culture and perceptions of ELL stu-
dents. However, she also expressed strong opinions about the types of teach-
ers who teach ELL students and their perceptions of the ELL population:

[We should] value teaching ELD as you value teaching GATE, and make
it a privilege . . . They don’t assign our EL kids to the best teachers on
staff, and that I think bothered me. And I think that also bred some of that
animosity . . . it was almost like either it was a new teacher and it would
burn out a new teacher if he didn’t have the skills and the background or
an incompetent teacher they would give the EL students to . . . I would
want them to treat our EL students as if they were the most precious things
in the whole wide world, that they don’t have a deficit. The deficit isn’t the
children. The deficit [is] the lack of education that our professionals have; it’s
not a deficit to have a second language, and they treat our kids that way.41

Some district officials observed that minority parents do not seem to be
prominent players in the overwhelmingly white power structure of the dis-
trict. The Allenson High School principal emphasized that, despite the siz-
able Latino student population, a Latino community member is yet to hold
an elected or appointed position on the Azalea school board. He discussed
what he perceived as the changing relationship of the Latino middle class to
the district, suggesting that for the first time the district is receiving demands
from the middle-class Latino population:

I’ve got a significant Hispanic population, the largest part of my Hispanic
population that are second, third, fourth generation, and they are middle-
class and they are educated and the thing that the district is having a tough
time with is they never had demands from Hispanic community, and they
are getting demands from the Hispanic community and I applaud them . . .
What they really need to do is they need to organize and get a board
member. But you know it’s not like it was twenty or thirty years ago, where
you have these timid individuals who speak broken English, they don’t have
any money, they can’t communicate, they’re embarrassed to communicate,
they don’t understand the system . . . I think they are much more vocal,
they’re not afraid to call the district office, they’re not afraid to go to a board meeting, they’re not afraid to demand the same things that the kids have at the other high schools.

This quote underscores the need for sustained efforts in the minority community to put pressure on the administration to address the concerns of a student population that is no longer majority-white, but remains racially and economically segregated in the district.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined how Azalea Unified, faced with nearly $40 million in budget cuts and the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, as well as the pressures of several state and federal mandates, responded to an out-migration of the white student population and a subsequent in-migration of low-income, minority, and recently arrived immigrant students to some district schools. Several policy shifts occurred, including the targeted placement of GATE/magnet programs in select Title I schools or schools in low SES neighborhoods; the allocation of resources, albeit uneven, to select programs for at-risk students such as the Building Industry Technology Academy (BITA) program; and the restructuring of ELL programs. While some actions indirectly addressed racial/ethnic and class concentration by modestly increasing diversity in minority and low-income schools such as Allenson High School, none of these measures made a significant impact on the racial, ethnic, and class imbalance in the Azalea Unified District. These responses were intended to adhere to state and federal mandates, which made it more difficult for Azalea Unified to respond effectively to demographic change and to adequately address to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. State mandates also prohibited targeted spending in the area’s transportation services, which are critical for the success of targeted magnet programs designed to attract a diverse group of students from across and outside of the district; magnet schools that provide free transportation tend to be more racially integrated than those that do not.42

This research also underscores the complexity of issues facing school districts with borderline or recently transitioned to majority-minority status, highlighting the many ways in which these districts are far from autonomous institutional actors in suburbia. Instead, counties and their school
districts operate under conditions of scare resources and amid internal and external pressures that cut off educational opportunities to shifting populations of students. As more historically white suburban school districts change in demographic composition, this research also underscores the need to address the “middle of the road” schools, which are neither Title I nor high SES, but in need of resources and support for an emerging minority and low-income population.
38. Interview with school principal, February 26, 2010.
43. Interview with school counselor, March 5, 2010.
46. Interview with school district administrator, March 26, 2010.
47. Interview with school district administrator, January 26, 2010.
48. Interview with school board member, March 26, 2010.
49. Interview with school principal, February 19, 2010.

Chapter 4

The author gratefully acknowledges the research assistance of Carrie LeVan and Stacey Greene.

1. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. Pseudonyms are used for the names of district, schools, and geographic locations in this chapter.
2. DataQuest is developed and maintained by the California Department of Education (CDE). This online research tool provides statistical reports about California’s schools and school districts. It contains a wide variety of information, including school performance indicators; student and staff demographics; expulsion, suspension, and truancy information; and a variety of test results; www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/ch/dataquest.asp.
7. Ibid.
8. This measure also required a two-thirds vote for legislative revenue increases and made any local government tax increase subject to a two-thirds approval of the local voters. See William H. Oakland, “Proposition 13—Genesis and Consequences,” Economic Review [publication of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco] (Winter 1979): 7–24.


10. On Feb. 18, 1946, federal court judge Paul J. McCormick ruled that segregated schools violated the 14th Amendment. The decision was upheld by the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 1947, making California the first state to desegregate schools. On June 14, 1947, California Governor and later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren signed the Anderson Bill repealing the remaining school segregation statutes in the California Education Code, including those allowing for segregation of “children of Chinese, Japanese or Mongolian parentage.” Mendez v. Westminster 161 U.S. 774 (1947) was later cited in the historic 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka 347 U.S. 483 (1954) case that ended legal segregation nationally, for which Chief Justice Warren wrote the unanimous decision holding “separate but equal” schools to be unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause.


18. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Interview with Allenson High School (AHS) principal, May 21, 2010. All quotes from this principal are derived from this interview.
24. Interview with district superintendent, March 17, 2010. All quotes from the district superintendent are derived from this interview.
25. Interview with district administrator, April 6, 2010. All quotes from this district administrator are derived from this interview.
26. Interview with Langston Elementary teacher, June 8, 2010. All quotes from this Langston Elementary teacher are derived from this interview.
27. Interview with Langston Elementary principal, May 21, 2010. All quotes from this principal are derived from this interview.
28. Discounted prices apply for annual and semester one-way bus services.
29. According to district records, a small number of students have elected to participate in the Public School choice (transfer) program: in 2007–08, 9 students out of 2,667 eligible; 2008–09, 10 students out of 2,150 eligible; 2000–10, 2 students out of 2,079 eligible; and 2010–11, 5 students out of 2,760 eligible.
30. In 2006, an Orange County Superior Court rejected an anti-integration lawsuit in its entirety which would have prohibited another district, Capistrano Unified, ability to consider race to avoid segregation in its schools policy when drawing school attendance boundaries, ruling that such actions were constitutional under Prop 209 (ACLU News Release 2006 https://www.aclu-sc.org/releases/view/102024). However, the 2007 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* together with *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*) struck down some types of race-conscious voluntary desegregation in public schools. In a narrow 5-4 ruling the Supreme Court rejected the use of race as a criterion for assigning students for different schools. See *Preserving Integration Options for Latino Children: A Manual for Educators, Civil Rights Leaders, and the Community* (Los Angeles: MALDEF and The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA, 2008), www.maldef.org/assets/pdf/6.1.3_Integration.Options.Manual.pdf.
31. More research is under way to examine the implications and aftermath of the school boundaries debate, interdistrict transfer policies, and any efforts on behalf of parent groups to promote voluntary desegregation.
32. There are also three alternative or independent high schools in the district.
33. Interview with an assistant district superintendent, March 17, 2010. All quotes from this assistant district superintendent are derived from this interview.
34. Students are identified for GATE programs beginning in the third grade and are placed in fourth grade. In fourth grade, they can attend one of three elementary magnet schools.
that have classes specifically set for GATE students, with both an accelerated and enriched curriculum. If parents do not want their children to travel to the GATE magnet school but to instead stay within their home school, the district offers GATE "cluster programs," where the administration will cluster those kids in their home school for part of their day for academic instruction at their ability level. These students are mixed in with a heterogeneous group of non-GATE kids rather than attending a GATE school where they are with fellow GATE kids throughout the day.


37. Ibid.

38. The state’s accountability program is based on closing the gap between the school’s API score and the target of 800 by 5 percent per year. NCLB is based on meeting an established target of 100 percent of students’ scores at “proficient” or “advanced” on the California Standards Tests or CAHSEE in English/language arts and math by 2014.

39. Some of these programs include School Readiness, Even Start, Project INSPIRE parent education, and the Community-Based English Tutoring (CBET) program.

40. A new state board of education system of reporting was approved in 2009–10. This system includes splitting the cohort into those students enrolled in US schools for less than five years, and those enrolled for five years or more. District data shows that Azalea Unified English language learners classified as ELL for fewer than five years exceed their AMAO target. However, those classified as ELL more than five years did not meet their AMAO target. District officials suggest that this cohort of long-term ELLs will be their focus in the coming year.

41. Interview with ELL program coordinator, March 29, 2010. All quotes from this ELL program coordinator are derived from this interview.

42. Tefera et al., *Integrating Suburban Schools*, 17.