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## Spiral of Decline or “Beacon of Hope”: Stories of School Choice in a Dual Language School

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**Abstract:** Public schools in some areas of the U.S. are as segregated as they were prior to court-ordered busing, in part due to school choice policies that appear to exacerbate extant segregation. In particular, Latina/o students are increasingly isolated in schools characterized as being in cycles of decline. Our case study of one such school is based on a reanalysis of interview, focus group, and survey data from three research and evaluation projects. We constructed accounts of parents’ decisions to leave and remain at Martinez Elementary, a segregated dual language school experiencing increases in Latina/o and low socio-economic student enrollment and decreasing statewide standardized test scores. Interpreting Latina/o and White parents’ accounts through LatCrit theory, we sought to understand their choices to attend this school as counterstories that illustrate conflicting forces influencing Martinez, including high parent satisfaction and interest

convergence between White and Latina/o parents. These stories depict a more hopeful account of a school resisting decline, yet only the adoption of managed school choice policies may be powerful enough to counter the school's segregation.

**Keywords:** latina/o students; school choice; test score decline; school segregation; bilingual education; dual language schools

### **Espiral de Descenso o “Faro de Esperanza”: Historias de la Elección Escolar en una Escuela Bilingüe**

**Resumen:** Escuelas públicas en algunas áreas de los EE.UU. son tan segregadas como estaban antes de que se impusiera por orden judicial procesos de desegregación a través de transporte escolar, en parte debido a las políticas de elección de escuelas que parecen agravar la segregación existente. En particular, se aíslan cada vez más las escuelas con estudiantes Latinos que parecen caracterizarse por estar en ciclos de decadencia. Nuestro estudio de casos de una de estas escuelas se basa en un nuevo análisis de los datos de tres proyectos de investigación y evaluación. Construimos narrativas de las decisiones de los padres de salir y/o permanecer en una escuela primaria bilingüe que experimentaba aumento en la matrícula de estudiantes Latinos y de con bajo poder socioeconómico y una disminución en los resultados en exámenes estandarizados en todo el estado. Interpretando las narrativas de los padres Latinos y blancos a través de la teoría LatCrit, hemos tratado de entender sus opciones para mandar o retirar sus hijos a esta escuela para ilustran las fuerzas contradictorias que influyen la situación en la escuela, incluyendo niveles de satisfacción altos de los padres y la convergencia de intereses entre padres Latinos y Blancos. Estas historias representan un relato más esperanzador de una escuela que resiste una espiral descendente, sin embargo, sólo la adopción de otras políticas de elección escolar podrían ser lo suficientemente fuertes para contrarrestar las fuerzas de segregación escolar.

**Palabras clave:** estudiantes latinos; elección escolar; segregación escolar; educación bilingüe; programas bilingües de inmersión

### **Espiral Descendente ou “Farol de Esperança”: Histórias de Escolha Escolar em uma Escola Bilíngue**

**Resumo:** As escolas públicas em algumas áreas de os EUA são tão segregado como eram antes de ser imposta por decisão judicial processos de de-segregação através do transporte escolar, em parte devido às políticas de escolha da escola que parecem agravar a segregação existente. Em particular, escolas com estudantes latinos parecem se isolar ainda mais e ser caracterizadas por ciclos de decaimento crescentes. Nosso estudo de caso de uma dessas escolas é baseado em uma nova análise de dados de três pesquisas e avaliações. Nós construimos narrativas com as decisões dos pais para sair ou ficar em uma escola primária bilíngue experimentando um aumento nas matrículas de estudantes latinos e baixo poder socioeconômico e uma diminuição nos resultados dos exames estaduais padronizados. Interpretando as narrativas dos pais latinos e brancos através da teoria LatCrit, tentamos compreender as opções para enviar ou retirar os seus filhos de esta escola e para ilustrar as forças contraditórias que influenciam a situação na escola, incluindo altos níveis de satisfação dos pais e a convergência de interesses entre os pais latinos e brancos. Essas histórias representam uma história mais esperançosa de uma escola que resiste a uma espiral descendente, no entanto, apenas a adoção de outras políticas de escolha escolar poderiam ser o suficiente fortes para neutralizar as forças de segregação escolar.

**Palavras-chave:** estudantes latinos; escolha escolar; segregação escolar; educação bilíngue; programas de imersão bilíngues

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. struggles to provide equitable access to quality schooling for students of marginalized ethnicities, races, and income levels. Schools in many areas of the U.S. are now just as segregated as they were prior to the landmark Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, leaving many minority and low-income students in educational environments similar to those found in the early 1970s (Erickson, 2011; Orfield, Kuscera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Orfield & Lee, 2006). Latina/o segregation is particularly concerning. Overall, Latina/o students are more segregated than African American students and their segregation in high-poverty schools is growing (Berliner, 2013; Fry, 2009; Gándara, 2010; Orfield et al., 2012). Across the U.S., 80% of Latina/o students attend majority non-White schools (Orfield et al., 2012). Segregation is highest in the West where the proportion of Latina/o students in segregated minority schools increased from 12% in the 1960s to 43% in 2009 (Orfield et al., 2012).

Prins (2007) noted that despite Latina/o's important work to pave the way for the *Brown v. Board of Education* legislation (e.g., *Mendez v. Westminster School District*), desegregation remains characterized as a 'Black/White' issue. For example, in *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 1973, the U.S. District court attempted to provide solutions to racial segregation in Denver schools where there were high percentages of Black and Latina/o students by requiring these schools to offer bilingual language programs. In the end, however, racial segregation remained. Four decades later, Black and Latina/o students' overall graduation rates and achievement test scores in Denver continued to be lower than those for White students (Moran, 2013).

School choice is central to the discussion of minority children in public schools. It is a complex policy that can be both a catalyst for desegregation efforts and their undoing (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). Orfield (2013) traced the history of school choice to the Civil Rights movement and to struggles over the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education*, where 'freedom of choice' policies in the South and open enrollment in large Northern and Western cities "maintained unconstitutional segregation" (p. 12). Many contemporary school choice policies appear to exacerbate existing patterns of segregation (e.g. Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2009; Cobb & Glass, 2009; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Garcia, 2008a, 2008b; Prins, 2007; Wells, Warner, & Grzesikowski, 2013). So far only 'controlled' school choice policies seem to work against segregation. Also referred to as 'regulated' or 'meaningful,' these policies involve the oversight of school transfer applications with the aim to encourage transfers that decrease segregation and to block those that increase it (Cobb & Glass, 2009; Koedel, Betts, Rice, & Zau, 2009; Orfield, 2013; Wells et al., 2014). The success of controlled school choice policies depends, in part, on non-discriminatory transfer review procedures (Finnigan & Scarbrough, 2013).

Facing "triple segregation" based on race, income, and language (Orfield et al., 2012, p. xv; see also Heilig & Holme, 2013; Suárez-Orozco, Darbes, Dias, & Sutin, 2011), many Latina/o parents' 'choices' to attend highly segregated schools with low standardized test scores appear counter-intuitive. Yet parents, White and Latina/o, who choose to send their children to these schools, may do so in appreciation of non-academic criteria (Kimmelberg & Billingham, 2013). While research on how parents chose schools for their children examines the reasons parents transferred from 'declining' district schools (e.g., Prins, 2007) and why they chose more thriving magnet schools (e.g., Beal & Hendry, 2012), less is known about the reasons White and Latina/o parents remain or choose to attend segregated and low performing schools.

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<sup>1</sup> The first two authors contributed equally to the manuscript. Order is alphabetical.

This case study explores parental choice by examining White and Latina/o parents' perceptions of Martinez Elementary, a segregated school in decline by conventional indicators (e.g., beginning with the implementation of school choice policies in 1995, Martinez Elementary experienced a decade of increasing Latina/o and low-income student attendance and decreasing statewide standardized test scores). The parent perceptions for our study were from three investigations of Martinez conducted from 2001 to 2005. To ensure the currency of the parents' accounts, we interviewed two Martinez administrators in 2013. These interviews served to validate and inform our interpretations and school choice policy recommendations.

The 2001 to 2005 investigations gathered parents' perceptions as part of externally and internally funded evaluations to improve curriculum and programs at Martinez. Evaluators identified areas of strength (e.g., before and after-school programs, school council meetings) and areas to target for improvement (e.g., safety and transportation) (Dickmann, Miles, & Thompson, 2004; Dickmann, Wolgemuth, & Pearson, 2005a, 2005b). The evaluation reports did not, however, challenge the conventional belief that Martinez was a failing school. Also, because research on parental school choice in Colorado was only just emerging (e.g., Howe, Eisenhart, & Betebener, 2002; Lee, 2006; Theobald, 2005), the evaluators did not interpret the findings in light of the segregating effects of school choice policies.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to reexamine White and Latina/o parents' accounts of parental choice in light of recent school choice models of schools in decline and through a LatCrit theoretical lens. By constructing and interpreting the parent's accounts as counterstories to majoritarian stories, we aimed to offer a more complex view of segregated schools serving Latina/o and low socio-economic students than afforded by conventional indicators (e.g., segregation indices, student composition, test scores) and our previous uncritical accounts. Our reanalysis is timely given the continued adoption of school choice policies; mounting evidence that school choice policies exacerbate extant segregation; and the relative lack of information on why parents choose low performing, segregated schools.

### **Parental Choice, Segregation, and School Decline**

School choice policies take for granted that parents have equal access to information and equal motivation to choose the best schools for their children (Archbald, 2004; James et al., 2010). Yet research indicates that engaging in the process of selecting the 'best' school for one's child is not always equally possible for all parents (Prins, 2007). The cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) of White, middle-class parents makes it easier for them to access social networks and information required to use choice policies to their advantage. Even when districts attempt to remediate segregation by disseminating information about their schools to lower income and minority parents, these parents remain less likely to know about their children's schooling options (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

The ability to exercise choice appears to favor White parents, regardless of whether the choice is within or between school districts. In a study of inter-district school choice, the policy that allows students to choose schools outside of their district, Holme and Richards (2009) found that "relatively higher income" and White students in Colorado were more likely to exercise choice options than lower income and minority students. These students moved to districts with relatively fewer lower income and minority students. Similarly, a GIS analysis found most of the student transfers in Colorado were between relatively high-achieving districts, leading the authors to describe Colorado's interdistrict school choice policy as a "public school voucher program for middle-class and upper-middle-class families" (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011, p. 89). Holme and colleagues (2013) noted a relative lack of research on intradistrict school choice, the open enrollment policy that allows students to choose schools within a district. They summarized that the few intradistrict studies, largely conducted in urban districts (see, for example, Zimmerman & Vaughan, 2013), find

“White families choose Whiter schools, and non-White families choose schools where they are more represented” (p. 115).

In making choices, school choice policies assume parents base their evaluations on school accountability measures – most notably standardized tests (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Bell, 2009; Howe, 2008; James et al., 2010). Yet research suggests parental choice “works in complex ways not necessarily consistent with the basic premises of school choice policy” (Beal & Hendry, 2012, p. 522). Interviews and surveys of parents found factors such as school location (Bell, 2009; Dougherty et al., 2013; Zimmerman & Vaughan, 2013), child’s well-being (Bell, 2009), social ties (Bell, 2009; Prins, 2007), school size (Prins, 2007), school curriculum (Beal & Hendry, 2012), increased enrollment (Beal & Hendry, 2012), school ethnic/racial composition (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Dougherty et al., 2013; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Prins, 2007), socioeconomic composition (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Saporito, 2003), school administration (Bell, 2009), and ‘rumors’ (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Prins, 2007) to be as or more important than standardized test results. Regardless of whether parents choose schools explicitly based on racial and socioeconomic composition, it is clear their participation in school choice and their choices result in increased segregation in many districts. Some school choice theorists argue these policies create thriving and ‘declining’ schools within a district (Gorard, Taylor, & Fitz, 2002; Hotchbein, 2012).

**Models of schools ‘in decline’.** Schools in a “spiral of decline” experience a dramatic increase in the number of low-income students enrolled in the school (Gorard et al., 2002). When the number of low-income students increases, affluent parents are more likely to exercise choice; thereby, reducing enrollment and test scores. As student numbers and test scores decline, more privileged and affluent parents pull their children out of the school and the spiral of decline continues. The downward spiral model begins with a gradual decline that steepens with time (see Hochbein, 2012, for example). As parents opt out of their neighborhood schools for charter, magnet, and private schools, the schools they leave may face even lower test scores, decreased funding, and eventual closure (Garcia, 2008a).

Of concern is that segregated schools in general (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005), and those in which Latina/o students are concentrated in particular (Prins, 2007), appear to be at greater risk of entering a cycle of decline that may be difficult or impossible to escape. In this study we explore parental choice at Martinez Elementary, a school that would seem to fit the model of a school in decline. Over a ten year period (1995-2005) Martinez’ predominately White student body became predominately Latina/o, its percent of free and reduced lunch students increased, and it struggled with decreasing scores on statewide standardized tests.

### **Martinez Elementary School: A School in ‘Decline’**

Martinez Elementary School is located in Mountain City, Colorado in the Mountain School District (MSD).<sup>2</sup> Mountain City is a predominantly White and middle class city with a population of 155,400 people. The median family income is \$76,341, 52% have completed four or more years of college education, and 92 % are White. The largest minority group is Hispanic/Latina/o (8 %). Seventy-four percent of the 26,000 students in the MSD are White, 18% Hispanic/Latina/o, 3% Asian and 1% Black/African American. Thirty-one percent of the district’s students participate in the free or reduced lunch program.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Martinez Elementary, Mountain School District, Mountain City University, and Mountain City are pseudonyms used throughout the manuscript, including references.

<sup>3</sup> The sources for these demographics and other public information about the school presented in the manuscript are withheld to keep the school and district names confidential. Similarly citations for historical information on Martinez are withheld to maintain confidentiality.

In accordance with Colorado State Law, MSD permits parents from within and outside the district to enroll their children in any school they choose on a space available basis (C.R.S. 22-36-101, 1994). Students residing within a school's attendance area are guaranteed enrollment in that school. Schools accept choice students if there is room. Once enrolled, choice students can continue to attend their school of choice without reapplying each year. If there are more applicants than a school can accommodate, student names are entered into an automated lottery based upon priority criteria. Students with siblings enrolled in the school and students who live within the district are given priority. Parents of school of choice students must provide transportation for their children at their own expense.

Most MSD elementary schools have defined attendance areas and some of these have a unique focus. There are three International Baccalaureate schools, a science school, a STEM school, a project-based learning school and two Core Knowledge schools. Two district elementary magnet schools have no geographically defined attendance area and accept choice students from throughout the district. If the number of applicants exceeds enrollment the schools conduct lotteries to determine who attends. There are also three brick and mortar and one virtual charter elementary schools within the district attendance area. Schools vary considerably in their economic and racial/ethnic diversity. Martinez and two other elementary schools enroll 80% or more free and reduced lunch students while some district schools, including one of the charter schools, serve fewer than 10% free or reduced lunch students.

### **A Brief History of Martinez Elementary**

In the 1980s, Martinez served predominately White middle-class students who resided in its attendance area. Most of the students lived within walking distance of the low-slung brick building built in the 1960s. Maturing families and city growth patterns favoring the other side of town led to a decrease in the number of walk-in students during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Because the number of bused students was high compared to other schools and because enrollment was low overall, in the late 1990s, MSD designated Martinez as the future site for a Core Knowledge magnet school. The Martinez community's opposition to the school district's plan was unexpected. Parents and neighbors quickly came to the defense of their neighborhood school. Emotions ran high as the school board considered the decision. The district eventually dropped its plan, choosing another site for the magnet school.

Martinez remained a neighborhood school, but other forces conspired to change its standing within the school district. Although a small number of Latina/os had settled in Mountain City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, their numbers increased significantly in the late teens and early 1920s when local sugar beet companies recruited them for field and factory labor. Many of these immigrants' descendants remained in Mountain City through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, some in Latina/o neighborhoods, while others assimilated into predominately White neighborhoods. A second wave of Latina/o residents began arriving in the early 1990s. Many of these new arrivals had recently emigrated from Mexico. A large number of these new immigrants moved into affordable multiple-family housing distant from Martinez but located within the school's attendance area.

As the children of these immigrants entered school, many needed language assistance, prompting the district to designate Martinez as an English as a Second Language (ESL) school. This designation drew even more Latina/o emergent bilinguals to the school. From 1995 to the present Martinez adopted different programs to serve Spanish-speaking students. Initially the school only provided ESL classes. In 2005-6 Martinez introduced dual language instruction at the kindergarten level and phased the program in a grade level at a time. By 2011, all classrooms were dual language. Prior to 2011, parents of students in grade levels not participating in the dual language program could choose to place their students in English-only classrooms. Students in dual language

classrooms received instruction in both Spanish and English. The school leadership believed emergent bilinguals' academic success was best promoted when their native language was valued, developed, and maintained.

After the state mandated open enrollment in 1994, an increasing number of parents living in the Martinez neighborhood exercised their school of choice option. In 1995, 83 students (18.5%) from the Martinez attendance area attended other public schools within the MSD. By 2005, that number increased to 207 students (45.4%). These patterns were consistent with those of other Colorado schools and districts after school choice was adopted (Howe et al., 2002; Lamb & Wolgemuth, 2007; Theobald, 2005; Wolgemuth & Lamb, 2006). The increase in segregation was particularly pronounced in the highly segregated northern region of Mountain City, where Martinez is located. In a study comparing the demographic composition of schools to their neighborhood attendance areas, the five elementary schools in the northern region were found to be more segregated than the neighborhoods from which they drew students (Lamb & Wolgemuth, 2007; Wolgemuth & Lamb, 2006). The authors concluded that school choice in this region exacerbated extant segregation. Table 1 shows the increasing differences in the percentage of free and reduced lunch and Latina/o students attending Martinez as compared to the surrounding neighborhood beginning in 1995/1996, the year after the MSD adopted school choice.



Table 1

*Martinez Elementary School (S), Attendance Area (AA), Choice In (CI), and Choice Out (CO) Student Free/Reduced Lunch and Ethnicity Counts and Percentages 1995/1996 to 2004/2005*

School Year	F/R Lunch				White				Latina/o			
	S	AA	CI	CO	S	AA	CI	CO	S	AA	CI	CO
1995/1996 (School=348)	61% (n=213)	60% (n=271)	64% (n=30)	58% (n=48)	72% (n=251)	68% (n=304)	68% (n=28)	87% (n=33)	23% (n=80)	27% (n=122)	24% (n=10)	32% (n=27)
1996/1997 (School=323)	65% (n=210)	64% (n=297)	84% (n=38)	58% (n=65)	70% (n=226)	67% (n=311)	51% (n=23)	56% (n=63)	27% (n=87)	28% (n=129)	44% (n=20)	37% (n=42)
1997/1998 (School=321)	66% (n=212)	66% (n=326)	79% (n=38)	61% (n=90)	64% (n=205)	61% (n=302)	56% (n=27)	54% (n=80)	32% (n=103)	38% (n=175)	42% (n=20)	40% (n=59)
1998/1999 (School=319)	68% (n=217)	60% (n=307)	78% (n=38)	55% (n=95)	63% (n=201)	61% (n=310)	65% (n=32)	61% (n=106)	34% (n=108)	35% (n=176)	33% (n=16)	34% (n=59)
1999/2000 (School=335)	67% (n=224)	62% (n=330)	84% (n=130)	49% (n=171)	55% (n=184)	58% (n=307)	41% (n=63)	53% (n=186)	41% (n=137)	37% (n=196)	58% (n=90)	42% (n=147)
2000/2001 (School=345)	72% (n=284)	63% (n=338)	87% (n=154)	67% (n=245)	50% (n=172)	57% (n=303)	34% (n=61)	52% (n=192)	46% (n=159)	38% (n=204)	64% (n=114)	43% (n=158)
2001/2002 (School=335)	74% (n=248)	63% (n=305)	72% (n=55)	32% (n=38)	40% (n=134)	53% (n=254)	30% (n=23)	62% (n=107)	56% (n=188)	44% (n=214)	63% (n=48)	36% (n=61)
2002/2003 (School=329)	81% (n=266)	67% (n=340)	83% (n=52)	52% (n=103)	33% (n=108)	47% (n=239)	25% (n=16)	59% (n=118)	62% (n=204)	47% (n=241)	70% (n=44)	36% (n=72)
2003/2004 (School=393)	86% (n=337)	68% (n=410)	86% (n=78)	50% (n=149)	33% (n=130)	47% (n=283)	31% (n=28)	61% (n=183)	65% (n=255)	49% (n=294)	69% (n=63)	34% (n=101)
2004/2005 (School=294)	87% (n=256)	70% (n=317)	88% (n=77)	50% (n=103)	28% (n=82)	47% (n=215)	22% (n=19)	65% (n=134)	70% (n=207)	50% (n=229)	74% (n=65)	33% (n=68)

As Martinez' demographics changed, its test scores declined. In Colorado, there were five levels of overall academic performance assigned to schools based on statewide standardized test results: unsatisfactory, low, average, high, and excellent. Between the 2000/2001 to the 2004/2005 school years, Martinez was rated "low" and its average student achievement scores decreased annually (Lamb & Wolgemuth, 2006; Wolgemuth & Lamb, 2007).

It is not clear whether test scores, perceptions regarding race, poverty, and culture, family influences, or other factors ultimately led to the exodus of White, middle-class parents from Martinez and the influx of Latina/o parents from other neighborhoods. Some parents cited poor academic achievement, poor reputation, and the high percentage of low-income and Latina/o students in attendance as reasons for choosing other schools (Maier et al., 2006). Other parents listed diversity, programmatic offerings, the opportunity for their child/ren to learn another language, the opportunity for their children to learn in Spanish, and wanting their children to go to school with friends as reasons for choosing Martinez (Maier et al., 2006). Our interest is in how parents' perceptions and choice decisions storied Martinez as an undesirable or desirable school - as a school in decline or as a place for educational opportunity. In seeking out these stories, we drew on LatCrit theory to highlight how Latina/o and White parents' school choice decisions may constitute counternarratives that work against majoritarian stories positioning Martinez as a school in decline.

### **LatCrit**

LatCrit theory, like Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006), holds that racism is a commonplace, permanent, and invisible part of our culture (Lopez, 2003, 2009; Alemán, 2009). LatCrit theory elucidates Latinas/os multidimensional identities and address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Bernal, 2002). Central to LatCrit theory and distinctive from CRT is the role English language competency, language rights, immigration, and citizenship play in Latina/o oppression and exclusion (Quiñones, Ares, Padela, Hopper, & Webster, 2011). English only laws and policies that largely eliminated bilingual education programs are examples of oppression linked to language (Huber, 2011).

Five central elements of LatCrit theory come together to move researchers and educators into spaces of critical practice (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). The first element emphasizes the importance of transdisciplinary approaches and encourages educational researchers to draw on research methods of various disciplines to better understand and to improve the educational experiences of Latina/o students. The second element emphasizes experiential knowledge in order for researchers to embrace the use of counterstories, narratives, testimonios, and oral histories to illuminate the unique experiences of Latinas/os. The third element challenges dominant ideologies and underscores the importance to rethink traditional notions of what counts as knowledge. The fourth element points to the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; thus, the research process must recognize that multiple layers of oppression are followed by multiple forms of resistance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The final element is a commitment to social justice. As a result, research and practice grounded in a LatCrit epistemology seek political and social change on behalf of Latina/o communities (Bernal, 2002).

### **Majoritarian Stories, Counterstories, and Interest Convergence**

In this study we examined the findings using three lenses from LatCrit theory. The first two lenses are necessarily linked - counterstory and majoritarian accounts. The counterstory provides the perspective of a group with clearly defined experiences and interests and is "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32) in societal structures.

Counterstorytelling is a way to challenge and differentiate dominant stories from those of the “majoritarian mindset,” that is, “the bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462). LatCrit encourages counterstorytelling to deconstruct majoritarian stories, as they perpetuate inaccurate constructions of the knowledge and lived experiences of Latina/o children, families, and communities (Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011). Counterstories, that provide non-majoritarian perspectives (Delgado, 1989), are important to tell; however, it is also important to help others to hear and understand the messages contained in counterstories (Bernal, 2002).

The third lens we employed was interest convergence. The theory of interest convergence was advanced by Bell (1980) in a critical review of the effects of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Interest convergence theory states changes in racial policies occur when there is a convergence of interests between the dominant and discriminated groups. LatCrit authors (Delgado, 2006; Urrieta & Villenas, 2013) used interest convergence to explain how policies favoring Latina/o interests gain traction when the interests of White citizens are also served. By revealing where the interests of different groups converge, we hope to offer a new and more complex view of segregated schools (successfully) serving Latina/o and low socio-economic students alongside White middle class students.

## Data Sources and Methods

### Data Sources

Our study reanalyzed parent interview, focus group, and survey data from three separate projects conducted in partnership between Mountain City University and the MSD from 2001 to 2005.

**Study 1.** The first study was a MSD commissioned research project investigating the increasing number of free and reduced lunch students at Martinez (Dickmann et al., 2004). We used two data sources from this project: home-visit interviews with parents conducted by Martinez teachers and telephone interviews conducted by the research team. Martinez teachers conducted home-visit interviews, in Spanish and English, with 181 parents (about 55%) of Martinez students in grades K through 5 that lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. During the interviews, teachers asked parents 5 questions about their perceptions of Martinez and their hopes for their child/ren. Teachers provided hand-written notes of the parents’ responses to the research team for analysis. The telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish with a stratified random sample of parents drawn from a list of all MSD students living in the Martinez boundary area. One hundred names were sampled (20%), 50 parents of children attending Martinez and 50 with children attending another school. The interviews lasted between 5 and 30 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. A total of 65 parents (33 Martinez and 32 another school) completed the phone interview. The parents were 50% Hispanic and 50% White and mostly female ( $n=54$ , 83%)<sup>4</sup>.

**Study 2.** Our second data source was parent focus groups and school climate surveys conducted as part of an ongoing 21st Century Community Learning Community grant evaluation (Maier et al., 2006; Pearson & Wolgemuth, 2005). The aim of the focus groups was to gather parent feedback on school climate, before- and after-school programs, and school governance. Three 60-minute focus groups were held after a School Council meeting, one

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<sup>4</sup> In this case study we describe the parents by race/ethnicity as White and Latina/o. Where different demographic terms appear (Hispanic, English-Speaking, Spanish-speaking) we are using the demographic terms in the original studies, without suggesting language and ethnicity/race are conflated.

English-speaking and two Spanish-speaking. The English-speaking group ( $n=7$  parents, 2 male, 5 female) was facilitated by the school principal and the Spanish-speaking focus groups (Group 1:  $n=15$ , 8 male, 7 female; Group 2:  $n=7$ , 2 male, 5 female) were facilitated by two Spanish proficient staff members. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed by the research team and the Spanish transcriptions were translated into English for analysis by the research team.

The school climate survey included Likert-scale and open-ended items assessing programs, safety, academics, language, and parent involvement. Of the 358 Spanish and English surveys distributed to students at Martinez, 145 parents completed the survey (at least a 40% response rate). Of the 140 parents who responded to the survey, 80 (57%) primarily spoke Spanish, 42 (30%) primarily spoke English and 18 (13%) spoke both Spanish and English in the home.

**Study 3.** Our third data source was a district-wide school choice research project that gathered parents' perceptions of the district's school choice policy (Dickmann et al., 2005). Researchers conducted 217 telephone surveys in English with a stratified random sample of parents whose children attended their neighborhood school ( $n=91$ ), whose children attended non-neighborhood schools ( $n=90$ ), whose children were home schooled ( $n=30$ ), and whose children had returned from a charter school to a district school ( $n=6$ ). The parents were 89% White, 8% Hispanic, and 3% Black, American Indian, or Asian. The phone interviews lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. For the present study we analyzed the interview responses from parents whose children attended Martinez ( $n=11$ ) or who lived in the Martinez attendance area and chose another school ( $n=14$ ).

## Design

We used an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 2008) to explore the parents' accounts of school choice from the interview, focus group, and survey data from the three studies described above. In this way, our "case" is Martinez, a segregated low-income, high Latina/o elementary school situated in a middle- to high-income predominately White district. Through our analysis we sought to construct and convey both the majoritarian tales that kept parents from choosing Martinez and the counterstories, which led them to choose Martinez as the school for their children. Our reanalysis of the parents' accounts was conducted to shed light on the following research questions:

1. What are the majoritarian stories at Martinez?
2. What are the counterstories at Martinez?
3. To what extent do the constructed stories suggest a 'declining' school can resist majoritarian views?

## Analysis

The aim of our analysis was to construct and to compare majoritarian accounts and counterstories from the parent interview, focus group, and survey data. Following Stake (2003), we read the data to identify the emic meanings held by the parents in our case and then combined and recast them as representing elements of a majoritarian or counterstory view (or sometimes both). We drew on both the quantitative (Likert-scale) and qualitative (open-ended response, interview, and focus group) data to construct the parents' accounts. Grounding the parents' accounts in multiple data sources helped us triangulate our findings and highlight differences between White and Latina/o parents and parents who did and did not choose to send their child/ren to Martinez (Stake, 2008). Specifically, we sought accounts that represented a majoritarian view (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993) and their opposing counterstories (Delgado, 1989). We then identified the ethnicity of the parents who constituted the majority of each account. Once an account had been constructed and a representative parent group identified, we returned to the data sources to validate the account and

ensure it continued to ‘ring true.’ In instances where we found discrepancies or contradictions, we either revised the account to encapsulate the additional information or made note of the contradictions, to later be included in the construction of a(nother) counterstory. Finally, we examined the constructed accounts through a LatCrit lens to make sense of the White and Latina/o parents’ choices. In particular, we explored the data through Bell’s (1980) concept of interest convergence, and assessed the extent to which the parents’ accounts could be understood as majoritarian or counterstories that resist majoritarian (and oppressive) accounts (e.g., Delgado, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

### **Follow-up Accounts**

In 2013 we conducted 60 to 90-minute interviews with a Martinez administrator and a long-term staff member. The aim of these interviews was to assess the currency of the accounts we identified in our reanalysis. From these interviews we crafted a follow-up story that concludes our results section.

## **Results**

The results are presented as accounts we constructed from the interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Some of these accounts have their roots in mainstream thought, which we characterize as majoritarian stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Others are counterstories that question widely accepted positions. We begin with the majoritarian story of decline.

### **The Majoritarian Story of Decline**

Many parents expressed concern about low-test scores and an increasing ‘minority’ population at Martinez. Because of its low-test scores Martinez had been required to develop a school improvement plan. Increasingly, community members regarded Martinez as a failed school. For example, when asked in a school climate survey how Martinez could be improved one White parent said, “Improve scores. More discipline. Too much time is devoted to speaking in Spanish. Takes too much time away from English only speakers.” Some Latina/o parents said, “I think the state reports need to go up. They were low this year,” “I would like to see higher test scores,” and “The education level needs to improve.”

Even parents who supported Martinez acknowledged the majoritarian forces with which the school community had to contend. In a focus group one English-speaking parent shared:

Yeah, but I mean, there is so much ear-play given to the CSAP [Colorado Statewide Assessment Program] and the student or the school report and there is no way that anybody doesn’t look at that one little compact chart and see there’s one elementary school that scored low this year and that’s Martinez, for the 2nd and 3rd and 4th year in a row. And so, I mean, we’ve got a big project ahead of us in trying to make sure that the community understands what benefit Martinez is giving to them.

These parents’ comments suggest they bought into the majoritarian view that Martinez was a school in decline. Below we present the accounts of Martinez from five groups of parents; (a) parents who chose others schools, (b) those who grumbled but stayed, (c) English-speaking White parents who chose Martinez, (d) Spanish-speaking Latina/o parents who chose Martinez, and (e) the story of another minority voice. The majoritarian story featured in all of these parents’ accounts of Martinez -- as objective truth in some and deliberately challenged in others.

## The Story of Those Who Chose Other Schools

In 2005, 45.4% ( $n=207$ ) of the 456 students who resided in the Martinez attendance area attended public schools other than Martinez<sup>5</sup>. Some of the children in these families had withdrawn from Martinez, but many had never been enrolled. The students who left Martinez for other schools were predominately White (61%) and most were not eligible for free and reduced lunch (64%) (Wolgemuth & Lamb, 2006). Their parents, on average, had higher levels of academic attainment than the parents of Martinez students (Dickmann et al., 2004).

In phone interviews, parents ( $n=32$ ) cited a number of reasons for leaving or choosing to attend another school. A large number of parents (31%) said they had moved from other school attendance areas and had left their children at their previous schools. Several other parents (34%) said they preferred specific programs offered at other schools. The remaining parents (35%) cited reasons specific to Martinez for leaving. They chose not to send their children to Martinez because they had heard that it “was the worst school in the district.” One White parent said:

We're only a block from Martinez but I haven't felt good about Martinez for a long time. We live in an older neighborhood and poorer.... It seems they are a forgotten school. Look at the playground equipment. I talked to an administrative assistant at Martinez. She sounded so harried and said do you realize we are one of the poorest schools in the district? I felt there was a level of burnout there so not a quality of education I wanted. I hear there are a lot of people moving their kids to other schools.

Some parents specifically mentioned the high number of low-income students at the school and linked these students to behavioral problems, safety issues, and low academic performance. One White parent said:

It started with my oldest. I sent him to kindergarten at Martinez. There was a large number of kids in kindergarten. There are a lot of kids from the trailer park that can come and go—real transient. It's hard for kids to make friends. A lot of kids have a lot of problems at home like alcohol so the teachers have to spend a lot of time with them and not with the other. My kids would have gotten lost in the shuffle.

Another White parent said, “They [my kids] were at Martinez. When Martinez went to Bilingual the curriculum went down. Kids got way behind. The teachers didn't push the Spanish only speakers to reach the standards. The standards went down.”

Finally, two White parents shared their view that there was little diversity at Martinez, explaining that there were mostly low-income or Latina/o students in attendance. One White parent said:

My one daughter attended Martinez through 5th grade and received a great education. When Martinez went bilingual there's no longer a diversity there. I decided to pull my children. I told the principal that my concern was not the bilingual program but the bilingual students who were free and reduced lunch.

## The Story of Those Who Grumbled, but Stayed

We know from open-ended responses on the parent climate surveys that some English-speaking parents who enrolled their children at Martinez were not content with the school's focus on Spanish language and culture. Of the 72 English-speaking parents who completed the school

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<sup>5</sup> This percentage of students who chose schools other than the one in their neighborhood is well above the district average of 27% and would likely be greater if we also knew the number of Martinez attendance area students that chose to attend private schools or were homeschooled.

climate survey, 12 voiced their discontent. “I don’t agree with the emphasis on Spanish,” responded one parent. “We don’t like how many meetings need to be translated,” said another. A parent, unconvinced of the value of language education, wrote, “My child could use the time spent on Spanish learning the subjects he really needs to know.” Similarly, another parent responded, “It is horrible that teachers have to speak both in English and Spanish. They should only have to speak in English.” Stating his or her views quite bluntly, a parent remarked, “Please stop catering to the Hispanics. They need to learn English.” Another English-speaking parent expressed feelings of exclusion:

My family has attended afterschool programs and actually left because only Spanish music was being played and was too loud. I feel English speaking parents should be of equal concern at these events. We felt like minorities and very uncomfortable.

We do not know whether the English-speaking parents who voiced discomfort with the presence of Latina/o students or with the emphasis on Spanish continued to enroll their children at Martinez following our survey. We do know, however, that despite their discontent with the emphasis on Spanish education, these English-speaking parents were satisfied with other aspects of the school experience. On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being “strongly agree”, these parents agreed with positive statements about parent involvement ( $X=3.9$ ,  $SD=.67$ ), school climate ( $X=3.9$ ,  $SD=.67$ ), programs ( $X=3.8$ ,  $SD=.65$ ), safety ( $X=3.8$ ,  $SD=.53$ ), and academics ( $X=3.7$ ,  $SD=.53$ ) at Martinez. While their overall average ratings were somewhat lower than those of English-speaking parents who did not ‘grumble’ (4.5, 4.4, 4.4, 4.2. and 4.3 respectively), it is important to note that there were no other written-in comments that galvanized English-speaking parents’ dissenting opinion on the climate surveys. The Spanish language issue was alone in this regard.

For this reason, it does not make sense to say that this group of English-speaking parents fully embraced the majoritarian perception of Martinez as a school in decline. None of these parents commented on school safety, discipline did not seem to be an issue for them, and there was not a single remark regarding low test scores.

### **The Counterstory of White Parents Who Did Not Leave**

Some highly satisfied White or English-speaking parents found reasons to keep their children at Martinez. On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being “strongly agree”, these parents ( $n=60$ ) agreed with positive statements about parent involvement ( $X=4.6$ ,  $SD=.66$ ), school climate ( $X=4.4$ ,  $SD=.67$ ), programs ( $X=4.4$ ,  $SD=.64$ ), safety ( $X=4.2$ ,  $SD=.66$ ), academics ( $X=4.3$ ,  $SD=.62$ ), and language ( $X=4.2$ ,  $SD=.87$ ). In open-ended responses they noted, “I think every staff member I have ever dealt with has a sincere interest in my child. Martinez has been wonderful for our family,” “I love Martinez, the kids and the teachers and the programs,” and “We love all the programs Martinez offers!” A parent added:

They [Martinez] have a wonderful literacy program so they fill a special need. They have Odyssey of the Mind and the G/T [Gifted and Talented] program and so my child is doing well. Spanish and the diversity are nice. I've always taught my kids to be open minded.

Parents elaborated on their satisfaction in focus groups and interviews. One parent said:

I think you’re [Martinez] an undiscovered resource... I know every time -- I’ve come into the school occasionally for years and I’ve always loved it. But last year I started to think about what Martinez has to offer and I thought ‘this is a resource, this is someplace that people should bring their kids.’ There’s stuff happening here that doesn’t happen anywhere in this city, anywhere in [our area of] Colorado.

Where others saw only declining test scores and an increasing minority presence, these parents saw educational opportunity.

During the focus group session and on satisfaction surveys some White, English-speaking parents expressed a desire for their children to receive sufficient Spanish instruction that would allow them to become competent bilingual speakers. “I like that my children have the chance to learn Spanish too” commented one parent. “I’m very happy to know that my kids have the opportunity to learn Spanish at an early age,” stated another. These could be construed as interest convergence, “What is in it for me?” responses, but other data from our study suggests this was not universally true.

An English-speaking parent commented on the school climate survey, “I like that the school supports immigrants.” “They offer good opportunities for Hispanics,” wrote another. A third offered:

I love Martinez, the kids and the teachers and the programs. We have only been in Mountain City 2 years and Martinez is not like any school my kids have ever attended. I have faith in the power of Martinez to bridge the gap of the Hispanic population and everyone.

These responses suggest altruistic attitudes about the welfare of the Latina/o students and may indicate a true commitment to strongly held beliefs about fairness and justice. Even though these parents were in the racial/ethnic majority of the community at-large, their story qualifies as a counterstory because it rejected the view of Martinez as a failing school.

### **The Counterstory of Satisfied Spanish-Speaking Parents**

The comments from predominately low-income Spanish-speaking parents at Martinez constructed a strong example of a counterstory. Whereas the majoritarian view held that Martinez was a school in decline, these parents described a refuge where they felt welcomed and valued. Although overall satisfaction levels from the parent school climate survey were high, satisfaction levels among Spanish-speaking parents ( $n=141$ ) were higher than those of English-speaking parents ( $n=109$ ). On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being “strongly agree”, Spanish-speaking parents agreed with positive statements about parent involvement ( $X=4.5$ ,  $SD=.57$ ), school climate ( $X=4.5$ ,  $SD=.67$ ), programs ( $X=4.4$ ,  $SD=.64$ ), safety ( $X=4.3$ ,  $SD=.62$ ), academics ( $X=4.3$ ,  $SD=.62$ ), and language ( $X=4.4$ ,  $SD=.61$ ) at Martinez (compared to means of 4.2 or lower on the same questions for the English-speaking parents).

Focus group, home interview, and open-ended comments on school climate surveys indicated this group was happy with the education their children received, satisfied with the school staff, and pleased to be involved in the school governance process. “There are good teachers at this school,” “It is a school that helps Latino families a lot and I am very content with Martinez and the principal and teachers,” and “My children are happy here,” were some of the positive comments from parents who responded in Spanish to the climate survey. During home interviews a Spanish-speaking parent said:

I like the type of help our children receive with English without forgetting their native language, Spanish. I appreciate the help you give my son because I cannot help him with his homework because I do not know English. Please keep helping him.

A parent who participated in the Spanish-speaking focus group said:

My child is comfortable at Martinez. He receives guidance and the teachers are very informative and encouraging. He is paying more attention and receives help before and after school. We think Martinez is a great school with great teachers. There is always communication and we always feel welcome here.



## The Story of another Minority Voice

No group speaks with a single voice, and our school climate survey data confirmed this was the case for Spanish speaking parents at Martinez. Among the predominately positive open-ended comments ( $n=17$ ) praising the school and staff in the climate survey, were a few discontented voices ( $n=7$ ). Their dissatisfaction centered on a single school issue – Spanish language instruction. “I like bilingual education, but they need to learn more English so they are ready for high school” wrote one Spanish-speaking parent. Another wrote, “I’d like to receive more information about my child’s progress in learning English.” Another said, “I would like that my daughter would have more English now that I see she is doing well in Spanish, but in English I see little or no progress.” One Spanish-speaking parent complained, “The school is too confusing because they [the students] should be spoken to in one language.”

## The Follow-up Story: An Arrested Spiral

Because much of our data was collected at least 10 years ago, we were interested in whether Martinez continued to navigate these stories in a school district that maintained the same school choice policy. Over the last ten years Martinez stabilized its scores on the state standardized exam. While its scores were still low relative to other elementary schools in the district, from 2011 to 2013 Martinez met the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) standard for academic growth, by earning 59% or more of the total possible points on four academic performance indicators including reading, mathematics, writing and English Language proficiency (Colorado Department of Education, 2013a). It was also one of few elementary schools in the MSD that consistently met and exceeded standards for closing gaps between minority and non-minority students in reading, mathematics, and writing (Colorado Department of Education, 2013b). This performance was observed despite *no changes* in the percent of free and reduced lunch (approximately 87% in 2005 and 2013; Colorado Department of Education, 2013c) and Latina/o students (approximately 70% in 2005 and 74% in 2014) attending Martinez.

When asked about the parents’ stories, the administrator and staff member confirmed their continued relevancy with two exceptions. Both said the English language issue that informed the stories of the disgruntled White and Spanish-speaking parents was far less, if at all, pronounced in 2013. They cited the school’s efforts to inform parents of the importance of bilingual education for Spanish-speaking students and its benefits for English-speaking students as the likely reason for this change in attitude. They also noted middle-class parents’ growing interest in bilingual education across MSD. Martinez was one of two schools that offered dual language programs, the other being a popular bilingual immersion magnet school. The administrator and staff member noted that some parents unable to enroll their students in the magnet school sometimes chose Martinez as their backup school.

The follow-up accounts depicted Martinez as a school of ‘arrested decline.’ They cited growing middle-class interest in bilingual education, Latino/a parents who felt they were welcome and that their culture was celebrated at the school, sustained before- and after-school programs, redrawing of neighborhood boundaries, heightened services and funding from the school district, and strong advocacy of parents in the school’s neighborhood. Regarding the latter, Martinez was one of the district elementary schools facing closure in 2011 in response to reduced state funding, lower property tax income, and school restructuring. According to one of the follow-up respondents it was, “saved by a coalition of vocal middle-class parents.” She felt that these parents’ actions suggest another counterstory – that of middle-class parents who strongly value their neighborhood public schools. Indeed, the two respondents held out great hope for Martinez, both in terms of its strong connection and service to its neighboring Latina/o families and in what they see as evidence

of shifting middle-class values: from school choice decisions made based on test scores and often negative assumptions about schools that serve high percentages of Latina/o students to decisions based on valuing social justice, bilingual education, and schools that serve local communities. From this perspective, Martinez is better characterized as a “beacon of hope,” rather than a school in (arrested) decline.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Increased Latina/o student enrollment, dynamics of school choice, school accountability and testing, and public perceptions regarding Martinez all came to bear on this case. The accounts we constructed illustrate these forces and help place them in a human context. Some might look at the collision of these forces and see a perfect storm. Others see cause for hope. Our analysis tends to support the more hopeful account, we see Martinez as a school that exemplifies another model of school choice, an arrested decline, in which a school in a spiral of decline, facing increasing segregation and declining enrollment and test scores (Gorard et al., 2002; Hochbein, 2012) draws on its strengths and stops the decline.

Although Martinez remains a school segregated by ethnicity and income and continues to have low, but improving, test scores, it is a place where Latina/o and White parents found satisfaction. The school appears to have valued the parents’ counterstories by offering programs that met their needs (e.g., dual-language and after-school programs) and by promoting these programs within the community.

### The Power of Counterstories

According to Delgado (1989) counterstories serve many functions including community building, challenging the majoritarian mindset, highlighting the experiences and knowledge of marginalized storytellers, and contextualizing the counterstory and reinventing the dominant story. Counterstories may have helped arrest the decline of Martinez by promoting: (a) the school’s role in the local community, (b) the importance of bilingual education, and (c) value of social justice for Latina/o students to White parents.

**Community.** Mountain School District’s choice policy provided many options for parents with the means to transport their children to schools of choice. Without busing, many others remained in the school designated by the address of their residence. Martinez’ boundaries and the flight of White parents conspired to define the demographic character of the school. Yet, the school staff rose to meet the needs of their student body. Declining to view the circumstances at Martinez as obstacles, they aligned themselves with parents and students to create a place where deficit thinking was not practiced (Gonzales, 2012). Through intentional policies such as the adoption of dual-language instruction and afterschool enrichment activities, some parents’ accounts indicated the school was a refuge for Latina/o students, a place where families could escape from the overt and covert oppression they might find in White-dominated schools, a place where they could create their own counterstory.

Martinez also provided a school of choice for parents outside the attendance area. Parents seeking bilingual education noted the bilingual magnet school in MSD was frequently full and used a lottery to accept new enrollees. According to administrator and the staff member we interviewed many parents chose to send their children to Martinez as an alternative to the bilingual magnet school.

**Bilingual education.** The English-speaking parents who chose to send their children to Martinez sought to provide their children with an intensive second language experience; however, they were not alone. We know from interviews and from school choice data that some

Spanish-speaking parents chose Martinez for their children. According to administrator and staff member, some of these parents wanted the language exposure and others did not feel welcome or comfortable in other schools (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). Only two of the elementary schools in MSD have intensive Spanish language instruction. The embrace of dual-language at Martinez suggests another counterstory – that Spanish language instruction can benefit, rather than deter, student learning.

**Social justice values of White parents.** For some White parents enrolling their children at Martinez offered an opportunity for them to express their values about social justice. Recent literature on parental choice suggests a ‘counterstory’ gaining momentum in White, middle-class households, especially in urban settings. Interviews and surveys of these parents consistently found they were disturbed by the segregation that results from school choice policies (Crozier et al., 2008; Cucchiara, 2013; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Roda & Wells, 2013). These White, middle-class, and educated parents who espouse values that could be characterized as anti-racist, anti-homogenous, and multicultural deliberately make the “counterintuitive” choice of sending their children to “ordinary” public schools (James et al., 2010, p. 625).

### Where Interests Converge

Closely linked to the power of counterstories, and a factor in stemming the flight of White parents, is interest convergence. The satisfied English-speaking Martinez parents in our study valued Spanish language exposure for their children, quality school staff, desirable extra curricular activities, and the opportunity to be part of a school community that benefits Latina/o students. These attributes aligned with the characteristics Latina/o parents’ valued at Martinez.

Solórzano and Solórzano (1995) observed that overall Latina/o parents have higher educational hopes for their children than White parents. Other researchers found Latina/o parents strongly believe it is important for their children to learn English in order to ensure their future success in this country (Sheffer, 2003). The comments from Latina/o parents in our study were consistent with both of these observations. Some Spanish-speaking parents expressed concern about the pace with which their children were acquiring the English skills they view as essential to advancement in the U.S.

English-speaking Martinez parents wanted their children to learn Spanish and Spanish-speaking parents were eager to have their children learn English. In this regard the dual-language program offered at the school met both parents’ needs. The groups’ interests converged in another way as well. Latina/o parents valued the school climate at Martinez because teachers treated their children with respect and their children were not singled out because of language differences. Some of the English-speaking parents also commented on the climate of respect, saying they believed the Latina/o children deserved a place to learn and flourish in this community.

Parents who chose Martinez saw value where others saw liability. They rejected the majoritarian narrative and embraced a counterstory consistent with their multicultural and egalitarian values. When English-speaking parents’ interests converged with those of Spanish-speaking parents seeking similar characteristics in a school, we suggest the spiral of decline was arrested.

Martinez is still a segregated school. It remains to be seen whether ‘leveraging counterstories’ and ‘converging interests’ will combine to shift Martinez’s demographics to bring about desegregation. Research and history suggest otherwise. It may be that desegregation will only come about with the implementation of ‘meaningful’ choice in which the transfer of students into and out of Martinez is managed (e.g., Cobb & Glass, 2009; Koedel et al., 2009; Orfield, 2013; Wells et al., 2014).

To this end, we recommend, alongside leveraging counterstories and appealing to converging interests, that the MSD explore the possibilities of managing school choice at Martinez. We make no recommendations as to the ideal demographic composition of Martinez, except to suggest that, at minimum, the school strive for a composition that is representative of the neighborhood from which it draws. While court decisions (e.g., *Parents Involved v. Seattle*) place limits on race-conscious assignment of individual students, Cobb and Glass (2009) noted that school districts are still free to construct “race-conscious assignment schemes” at a general level (p. 274). Examples include redrawing neighborhood boundaries with desegregation in mind, intentionally connecting White and non-White neighborhoods with busing routes, and privileging the approval of transfer applications from geographic areas with less similar socioeconomic compositions than the target school’s (Koedel et al., 2009). In the absence of managed school choice, the account of Martinez’ arrested decline may serve, at the very least, as a “beacon of hope” to schools with similar challenges.

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