

## Summary

The students of Dallas ISD face overwhelming challenges, and the City's future depends on the ability of our students to overcome those challenges. As former Superintendent Linus Wright says, "So goes the public school system, so goes the city."

The success of our schools is inextricably linked with housing, economic development, employment, healthcare, criminal justice and more. This community and its broad base of business, education and civic stakeholders must engage now in meaningful discussion about the state of Dallas ISD. We must work together on best practices to remedy critical needs, with particular focus on the current Superintendent's non-collaborative processes and potential wreckage stemming from poor leadership and termination of so many principals and teachers who cannot possibly be replaced in a short period of time.

What kind of socioeconomic challenges do our students face? A staggering majority – 87% – qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Children from low-income families often arrive at school ill-equipped for the challenges in the classroom, as they have been raised in homes with limited vocabulary and/or literacy skills and have had inadequate access to quality healthcare, housing and other support structures. A full 35% of Dallas ISD's students are English language learners, meaning they speak another language at home and are unable to pass English proficiency tests when enrolling in our schools.

In 2006, under the leadership of then-Superintendent Dr. Michael Hinojosa, the newly formed Dallas Achieves Commission began a five-year process of identifying needs and opportunities in the District, developing a transformation plan, and creating a roadmap for high achievement. The Commission invited discussion across the city, relying on experts, business and civic leaders, educators, parents and students focused on a common goal: To transform Dallas ISD so that every student graduates from high school college- and workforce-ready.

Results were slow but steady. Transformation is a never-ending process of continuous improvement, requiring training, innovation and accountability. Under the plan, graduation rates increased, student achievement ratings increased, and principals showed more effective leadership.

The Dallas Achieves Commission plan has been abandoned and not reconstituted by the new Superintendent Mike Miles during his first year of leadership. In fact, a great deal of community relationship building has been abandoned.

Superintendent Miles has called for "disruptive" change; we fear his processes may instead be destructive. While he has sought support from the business community, Miles appears unwilling to seek advice or listen to counsel from longtime Dallas community leaders, educators and parents who can offer crucial context as well as lessons learned from the past. He has not indicated interest in a public conversation about benchmarks for determining success of individual campuses or principals. District insiders describe a

culture of fear, intimidation and reprisal that makes it difficult to teach and serve, engage and challenge the children of this city.

A change in this culture and practice is needed at Dallas ISD, as well as across the broader political, business, philanthropic and religious communities to support education, jobs, housing, healthcare and other services for Dallas' lower-income fellow citizens – to rebuild and provide opportunity for the human capital of our City.

The following discussion paper was prepared by the Foundation for Community Empowerment to provide context, to share findings of the Dallas Achieves Commission, to update current challenges, and to elicit constructive conversations and actions for the sake of Dallas.

**Discussion Paper on Status of Dallas ISD**  
**By: Foundation for Community Empowerment**

**Context**

We have worked in Dallas' low-income neighborhoods for comprehensive revitalization for nearly 20 years. From this experience, we believe that any discussion of public school transformation must begin with an understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of the students. Dallas ISD has more than 158,000 diverse children, mostly ethnic minorities and mostly low-income.

**Ethnicity:**

Hispanic	69.5%
African American	23.8%
Anglo	4.6%
Asian	1.2%
Others	0.9%

**Languages:** Almost 70 different native languages are spoken by students. 35% are English language learners.

**Overwhelmingly lower-income families:** 87% qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

**Special needs:** Many students have special education or other needs, disabilities, learning differences or other disorders. This group comprises 7.6% of the student population. Unlike private schools and most charter schools, Dallas ISD must accept any student who chooses to enroll.

Dallas ISD's context includes many capable and able students willing to work hard and learn. But it also includes large numbers of children from families who have under-educated parents or do not have the time, interest or capability to prepare and assist their children for academic achievement and advancement. A significant and growing number of students are being raised by grandmothers or aunts who do not have the time or energy to be actively involved in their education. Many upperclassmen at inner-city high schools act as head of household and are raising siblings. Data reveals that students from these conditions are likely to achieve smaller gains in test scores than those from affluent two-parent homes in well-funded schools.

Hence, using test scores as the primary tool to rate these students, teachers or their principals in effect punishes those in greatest need. Over time, teachers tend to avoid such students who may jeopardize their jobs and reputations, which in turn is harmful to the students who most urgently need talented and experienced teachers.

It is fair and appropriate for teachers to be evaluated in part on student achievement and graduation rates. But we believe the proper measurement is not limited to an abstract

standard that applies to students across America or the one currently dominating conversation in Dallas, *i.e.*, STAAR or SAT test scores. Rather, it should be based on year-over-year improvements. If a teacher can help a student gain at least one year of achievement per year, this is significant.

It is inappropriate to base teacher and principal quality primarily on standardized tests, which are useful but not scientific instruments. They are social constructions, and their results are most often contingent on the social, economic and family backgrounds of the students being tested.

Since 1980, Dallas ISD has increasingly become the educational system for poor persons of color – hence, we in Dallas now have a system of economic, class and racial segregation that is self-perpetuating.

The context for Dallas ISD children is further exacerbated by our criminal justice system and sentencing laws/standards (with 5% of the world's population, America has 25% of the world's inmates, and Texas has the highest incarceration rate in America), which assures we will suffer from fatherlessness, and an underclass of broken homes and joblessness. Many states base forecasts on prison population on third-grade reading scores. The average literacy rate in Texas prisons is a fourth-grade education. We have set up a school-to-prison pipeline in low-income neighborhoods through disciplinary policies that unnecessarily expose many of these kids to the criminal justice system. And most Dallas businesses will not hire those formerly incarcerated.

Poverty rates and inequality matter in student achievement. America's poverty rate for children has doubled in the last 30 years, and is higher than any other industrialized nation. America now has the greatest disparity of income and wealth since the late 1920s. UCLA sociologist Mike Rose recently reported that “the rich-poor gap in test scores is about 40% larger now than it was 30 years ago.”

And social mobility rates have declined in America. In other words, the class in which you are born is likely where you will end up. According to research by the Economic Mobility Project of the Pew Charitable Trusts, 65% of Americans born in the bottom fifth stay in the bottom two-fifths.

As noted in the “Coleman Report” decades ago: “The schools bring little to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context.” And we were reminded of this recently by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush in a recent WSJ Op-Ed piece: “Today, the sad reality is that if you're born poor, if your parents didn't go to college, if you don't know your father, if English isn't spoken at home – then the odds are stacked against you. You are more likely to stay poor today than at any other time since World War II.”

In Dallas, low-income children arrive at kindergarten or first grade already two to three years behind higher-income children. As former Superintendent Linus Wright says: “Children who come from culturally and/or economically deprived homes arrive at

school with a limited speaking vocabulary of approximately 300-400 words, already ‘behind’ and unlikely to ‘catch up’; whereas, children from more stable supportive homes arrive at school with a speaking vocabulary of 2,000-4,000 words, with high expectations of quickly learning to read and moving with ease from grade to grade.”

We are not only failing these children and their families. All of us are affected. Of the world’s developed countries, America has the highest rate of income inequality and the lowest level health, social and other conditions of well-being. Talking openly of rising inequality is not, as some say, class warfare. As Warren Buffett said recently, “We already have class warfare, and my class won.”

This context does not excuse low-income students nor their teachers and principals or exempt them from evaluation. But it is imperative that we understand the challenges and dynamics, the complex structures that cannot simply be captured on a PowerPoint, neither quickly understood or evaluated, nor easily changed. For example, the process of our new Superintendent and his Executive Directors making occasional classroom walk-throughs, then using their SPOT observations as overriding evidence in teacher/principal evaluation processes, on its face fails to understand or respect local complexities and conditions, misses the mark of increasing the quality of instruction by causing multiple classroom interruptions, and is insulting to teachers, principals and most importantly to students and their parents. Further, the experience, competence and expertise of this layer of administrators have not been fully vetted. (In one example, an Executive Director previously served for several years as principal at a low-performing school that did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards.)

While the role of public education is vitally important, Dallas needs a community-wide swerve – which includes making long-term investments, not only in after-school and summer programs, and other commitments supporting Dallas ISD students. Dallas is noted for its public and private investments in our physical assets, such as arts venues, museums, hospitals, bridges and parks. As important as these are, our civic responsibility extends to investments in our human capital. The business, philanthropic and religious communities should much more aggressively address the conditions of our lower-income communities, including jobs, fit and affordable housing, health care (and sick care), retail and other services. The Dallas Achieves Commission aggressively advanced that case for a holistic comprehensive approach to transformation with a matrix showing at the center, “High achieving, engaged students,” surrounded by circles of “effective teachers, empowered principals, campus focused central services, engaged parents and guardians, and a supportive community.” It takes all of us!

### **Pedagogy**

There is endless debate across America on how to “fix” our public schools. The Dallas Achieves Commission endeavored to take the complex socioeconomic factors of the District into account, as well as national and best practices data. Parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community organizations gathered at the table for these discussions. There’s certainly no silver bullet – the extremes of over-reliance either on

high stakes testing (i.e. outputs only), on the one hand, and of over-reliance primarily on socialization or socioeconomic or racial accommodations (i.e. inputs only), were rejected.

What we do know from our work over the years, and from national data, is that lower-income children can learn. In Dallas, Texas Instruments invested in research and support for the Margaret Cone Head Start Center in South Dallas, across the street from the Frazier Courts public housing project, for more than 10 years. After providing support for better healthcare, nutrition and home counseling, the students were healthier and better adjusted but academic scores moved little. TI then engaged Nell Carvell of SMU's Education School, who developed and implemented a language-rich curriculum that materially improved reading, grammar and comprehension. Those students fed into Frazier Elementary (closed this year) with an exceptional principal, Rachel George, who understood both how to address the deprived socioeconomic conditions of her students, and how to produce academic gains based on the Head Start foundation.

The result: Frazier was rated Exemplary by the Texas Education Agency from 2001 to 2009, and won many District, state and national awards for student achievement.

Similarly, H.S. Thompson Elementary, near Turner Courts and Rhodes Terrace public housing projects, was rated Academically Unacceptable in 2005. Then Kamalia Cotton was named principal. During the next five years, the school achieved Exemplary ratings from TEA for three years and Recognized for two, and was named a National Blue Ribbon school.

These exceptional principals were known for leadership capacities that held high performance expectations of students and teachers in a "children come first" model, and collaborated with teachers, parents, administrators and the community to build a culture of engaged learning, extracurricular activities and best practice skill-building support for teachers.

Dallas Achieves sought to strike a balance between the District's context and the possibilities for significant progress. The commission developed supports for teachers and principals who met the challenges as well as methods for reporting and reviewing progress – with scorecards, a balanced assessment process and limited compensation incentives geared toward progress.

This seemed to be working to achieve steady (but slow) gains. Those efforts have apparently been abandoned. Instead, Superintendent Miles and his leadership team have substituted a self-described "disruptive" process and punitive approach to teachers and principals.

This process will not work, nor will it allow Dallas ISD to recruit and retain well-qualified educators for our children. Blaming Dallas ISD teachers and principals for the challenges of high-need schools will not produce better results. The results will more likely be more firings, more school closings – or "repurposing or reconstituting" – charter schools or even high-risk reforms such as for-profit educational management firms.

Although some of these types of initiatives have shown success (like Uplift and KIPP here in Dallas), the failures are of equal magnitude and overall the national results do not justify this approach. (For example, in the brave new world of New Orleans, composed almost entirely of charter schools, the Southern Poverty Law Center had to sue because disabled students could not get access to public education.)

Educational redlining is a moral problem, as well as a practical, economic problem: lost wages, lower productivity, increased social burdens and costs for our society, to say nothing of the challenge of meeting the new high-tech jobs of the future.

The competitive market approach to education leaves the most vulnerable children behind (as it does the job market). When schools are closed, their students and families suffer chaos, confusion and transportation issues. The balance should be both to challenge and bring out the best in our capable students and teachers, and to provide appropriate support for children with disabilities and special needs.

A better path forward includes:

- 1 Revisiting the transformation/accountability process begun with Dallas Achieves, building on its strengths and modifying as needed.
- 2 Mandating, strengthening and funding full-day kindergarten and pre-K programs on every campus that provide training, certification or service delivery of developmentally appropriate, language-rich, curriculum-based programming.
- 3 Enhancing reading, grammar and writing (including book clubs, etc.) in elementary schools.
- 4 Focusing on numeracy for better conceptual understanding of mathematics in elementary schools.
- 5 Strengthening math, science and computer science in middle schools (including chess clubs).
- 6 Offering a mix of science, engineering and computer classes, as well as a range of liberal arts that build critical thinking, problem-solving skills, independent learning, creativity, Advanced Placement courses and training, SAT and ACT prep courses, along with the arts and other extracurricular activities.
- 7 Equalizing learning opportunities outside school, such as summer school programs, summer jobs, etc.

Of course, we must continuously update curriculum, instruction methods, tools of learning (such as computer literacy) and assessments to support the evermore complex knowledge and skills needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The GM assembly plant in Arlington now requires more computer science, programming and robotic expertise than human assembly lines. 3-D design and reproduction are examples of the jobs of the technology-driven future.

Dallas ISD cannot do all this alone. It needs a plan that excites and includes input, support and funding from the whole community and taps into additional resources. And that requires a special kind of leadership. Research on student-measured performance indicates that only 10-20% of the variance shown belongs to the classroom (*i.e.*, teachers and teaching) and a similar amount to the school (*i.e.*, school culture, facilities and leadership). Up to two-thirds of what explains student achievement is beyond control of the schools (*i.e.*, family background, motivation to learn and peer pressure). It is therefore critical that parents be engaged rather than ignored and alienated by the District.

This is, of course, a long-term strategy, but it is one more likely to produce enduring and sustainable improvements to public education. In contrast, under the current Superintendent, there is a slash-and-burn, brook-no-dissent formula. Some in Dallas say this is exactly what we need and what the School Board wanted. We disagree, and in any case a wider community conversation is deserved before that decision is made.

The Dallas Regional Chamber and Dallas Citizens Council recently sent a letter to Dallas ISD Trustees “showing our support for the very difficult changes recommended by Superintendent Miles.” It would be helpful for the community to know on what information and evidence that endorsement was based. While the actions that Superintendent Miles is implementing may be “very difficult changes,” the real question is, “Are they the right changes?” Many of the signatories have never been inside Dallas ISD schools and know little of Superintendent Miles’ so-called “reforms” and his management process and how these are playing out in the schools and community. Instead of a support letter for Miles (seen in lower-income communities as another example of the business community’s attempts to stifle dissent), it would be more helpful for business, philanthropic and religious organizations to engage the larger issues of opportunity and conditions for our lower-income fellow citizens.

Of course, we need to improve our public schools and student achievement. But how that is best done deserves a community-wide conversation. And the political, business, religious and philanthropic communities must accept responsibility for their roles in producing a socioeconomic context in which education can flourish. These communities can help by augmenting and supporting programs, but more importantly they can improve economic, housing, healthcare and other conditions in which our lower-income schoolchildren live.

An “all hands on deck” effort is needed immediately for Dallas ISD. The Dallas Achieves model recognized the need for parental and community engagement to partner with schools in improving student achievement and graduation rates. We must all join hands in this common cause in an inclusive and transparent manner. As former Superintendent Linus Wright said, “So goes the public school system, so goes the city.”

### **Dallas Achieves**

In 2006, then-Superintendent Michael Hinojosa convened the Dallas Achieves Commission to provide an objective, external perspective and to make specific,

actionable recommendations to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees. The Commission included more than 60 Dallas leaders from the business, education, civic, and faith-based communities as well as city and state officials, philanthropists, parents, students and grassroots leaders.

The Commission was co-chaired by Arcilia Acosta, Pettis Norman and J. McDonald Williams and supported by a project team that included The Boston Consulting Group, David Osborne's Public Strategies Group, Carol Reed Group, training and facilitating consultants, and loaned executives from Texas Instruments and The Foundation for Community Empowerment.

On March 1, 2007, the Commission overwhelmingly approved a transformation plan. The plan was then presented to Dr. Hinojosa, who approved it, and on to the School Board, which on April 26, 2007, approved the plan by a vote of 6-0, with one abstaining and two not in attendance.

Understanding that a plan, standing alone, does not change anything, the Dallas Achieves Commission began work on a detailed implementation plan, which included Dallas ISD's formation of a Transformation Management Office, to train, provide continuity and ensure momentum and accountability for change. The project team identified various critical work streams, along with timetables and deliverables.

The Commission concluded its work in late 2009. In the less than five years of this process, Dallas ISD improved its academic achievement and graduation rates as follows:

- Graduation rate improved from 57% of entering ninth-graders to 66%.
- Of the six urban districts in Texas, Dallas ISD moved from tied for fifth with San Antonio to a tie for first with Houston.
- 57% of Dallas ISD campuses were rated Exemplary or Recognized out of 228 schools. This compares with 37% in 2007. In particular, two schools that were slated to be closed subsequently improved their ratings from Academically Unacceptable to Recognized.
- Overall performance at the 2,300 College Readiness Standard climbed from 20% to 35%. College Readiness Standards serve as a direct link between what students have learned and what they are ready to learn next.
- Even though 48 schools remained at an Unacceptable rating from the state, this number had steadily trended downward, and the number of Recognized and Exemplary schools had increased from 49 to 127.
- More campuses earned principal empowerment. (These are detailed processes by which a principal can increase control over a campus based on student achievement and other important criteria.) Improvement leaped from 10% to 42% of the campuses.
- Key components that contributed to this positive trend included rethinking of the school culture, improved curriculum, recognition of the importance of continually embedded professional development for all professional staff to ensure sustainability, and the role of parents and community in the process of improved schools.

## Leadership

Whatever the pedagogy, a strong and effective leader is necessary as Superintendent of any school district. How should Superintendent Miles be evaluated for his performance at Dallas ISD? Effective leadership includes not just being firm and purposeful, but creating shared vision and goals, promoting teamwork and collegiality, and frequent constructive and supportive training, monitoring and feedback to achieve long-term, sustainable improvements. And all stakeholders must be engaged.

### Summary: Mike Miles at a glance

Strengths	Challenges
Track record of apparent improvement in Harrison School District 2*	Inexperience in large, urban school district
Identifies need for change	Relying on “disruptive” change that alienates
Acknowledges role of principals in campus success	Fails to seek collaboration among stakeholders within and outside Dallas ISD
Prepares Destination 2020 plan	Has targeted one-third of the District’s principals without transparency or due process
	Has not shown strong advocacy skills for the District in Austin

**\*If one magnet school results are not counted, the student achievement scores declined.**

### Background

Mike Miles is a 56-year-old graduate of West Point, served as an Army Ranger, and later a Foreign Service Officer, primarily stationed in Russia and Poland. He began teaching in high school in 1995 and completed the alternative licensing program at the University of Colorado in 1996.

He was a Broad Foundation fellow, which recruits business, military and other non-education leaders into its programs. Broad Foundation was founded by the wealthy businessman Eli Broad, who has created training programs for urban superintendents, administrators, principals and school boards. Based on the market-based philosophy that schools should be run as efficiently as businesses, Broad Foundation explicitly cites bureaucracy in the education system as the key challenge to improving urban schools. Broad was a significant funder in the reform in the D.C. schools during Michelle Rhee’s tenure as Chancellor (which has recently ended abruptly with the results being questioned).

## **Colorado Springs**

Miles became the Superintendent of Harrison School District 2 in Colorado Springs in fall 2006. The district comprises 22 schools (compared to 223 in Dallas ISD) – any such scale change requires at least a modicum of humility and coalition-building in order to succeed in a sustainable fashion.

A brief review of Miles’ track record in Colorado Springs includes:

### Achievements:

- District removed from academic probation
- Improved graduate rate from 61.5% to 72.4%
- Narrowed the elementary reading gap for English learners from 32% to 19%
- Increased the average ACT Composite score for juniors from 16.1 to 18

### Issues:

- Between 2007 and 2011, college remediation rates rose from 37.1% to 75.5% for students from Harrison High School
- Between 2007 and 2011, college remediation rates rose from 34.5% to 67.6% for students from Sierra High School
- Harrison High School reportedly lost 25% of its students in Miles’ last year due to parents leaving for other school districts
- In 2011, hundreds of students and their parents held demonstrations in support of fired staff
- Students walked out of school, citing that the stress placed on teachers made it difficult for them to learn

A middle school teacher was quoted on a video that Miles’ administration had “so little focus on the kids and their education, and too much focus on policy and political posturing.”

## **Dallas ISD Selection**

Mike Miles was one of five candidates initially considered for the Dallas ISD Superintendent position. The Dallas ISD engaged PROACT to conduct research and background checks, following which Miles was one of three finalists. (PROACT has recently been fired by San Antonio ISD for failure to vet adequately their recently departed Superintendent.)

Consideration of Miles was, by all accounts, vigorous, and the Board apparently had a split vote in closed session. In open session, when Miles emerged as the sole finalist, the Board, on April 2, 2012, voted 8-0 (with one abstention) to confirm Miles as the new Superintendent. The Board expressed reservation with Miles at the time of his selection because he lacked a Superintendent’s certification, as required by Board policy and state law. The Board agreed to a one-year waiver and Miles has since begun his certification work online at Lamar University in Beaumont. The District reported on May 20, 2013, that he has passed the certification exam.

### **Leadership Team**

Miles immediately set about to hire and insert his own leadership team at top salaries (see *Exhibit 1* for the new hires, their salaries and their current status). He kept only one Dallas ISD employee in his leadership cabinet, Shirley Ison-Newsome, and promptly worked out a severance deal to remove her.

From his new leadership team, Jennifer Sprague (Communication Chief), Alan King (Chief of Staff), Marian Hamlett (Finance Director), Rene Barajas (Chief Financial Officer), Eddie Conger (Executive Director over the Thomas Jefferson feeder pattern) and Jovan Grant-Wells (Executive Director over the Madison feeder pattern and several magnet campuses) have already left (in less than nine months), and Charles Glover, Chief of Human Resources, is “exploring options.”

Of course, every new CEO has a right to select his own leadership team, but that so many of his own hires departed so quickly raises questions either of his judgment in their selection or his leadership style in helping make them effective. Neither is acceptable.

There are other troubling leadership questions to address. How has Miles indicated that he understands the socioeconomic challenges of the majority of the District’s students? What initiatives address those deficits, and have they been in place long enough to affect student learning and principal evaluations?

What steps has the current administration taken to fill vacant positions in core subjects, as well as in Advanced Placement and honors courses, with certified teachers? We understand this may be a Title I violation, and a lawsuit has been threatened. What is the current number of full-time certified classroom teacher vacancies? (We hear it numbers between 600 and 1,000.) What is the number of “permanent” substitute teachers being used?

What resources have been provided for PSAT and SAT prep courses, and have they been in place long enough to make a difference in test scores? Has the Superintendent created expectations for campus leadership without offering the resources that make improvement feasible?

On what data is the District determining that the vast majority of Dallas ISD students are not on track to graduate college? Studies have shown that the most accurate determination of college readiness relies on grade-point average, course rigor, class ranking and preparedness for collegiate major. Even The College Board, the company that creates and administers the SAT, warns against using the SAT to determine an individual student’s college readiness and likelihood of success in college.

### **Destination 2020**

Miles introduced Destination 2020, a plan that initially faced scrutiny as its alignment with goals set by the Board of Trustees was called into question. The plan is also remarkably similar to the Destination 2016 plan he enacted in Colorado, not only in content but also in visual presentation. While there is no problem with building upon

one's own ideas, the recycled packaging of Destination 2020 gives the impression that the plan itself is part of a cookie-cutter approach to education reform and, by prescribing before diagnosing, does not fully address Dallas ISD's specific context and challenges.

Nevertheless, there is much to commend in Destination 2020. For example, a central tenet of the Destination 2020 vision is that effective principals are a key necessity to education reform and improving student achievement. The plan promises that Dallas ISD principals will receive "enormous support and professional development," and further states "the entire system will be geared to supporting principals and helping them improve the quality of instruction and raise student achievement."

These are admirable objectives. However, some of Miles' initiatives involving principals appear to have been counterproductive to these aims. For instance, while Destination 2020 promises to provide "enormous support and professional development" to current principals, Miles evidently used \$5 million from the sale of district-owned school buses to begin his Principals Fellows Academy. Instead of providing resources for training current Dallas ISD Principals to be proficient in Miles' new system, he invested in a brand new crop of 60 candidates who were paid \$60,000 each (with some making up to \$85,000) to participate in a year of training under the new program.

Destination 2020 does deliver a warning that "the pressure of change and transformation will be greatest on the principals." It also promised "enormous support" would be provided for principals. Miles should provide more information on these supports, and principals should feel safe to offer feedback and raise questions without fear of intimidation or reprisal. The principle of subsidiarity – *i.e.*, that those closest to the problem should be at the table in solving it – should be applied in the process. To tear down is easy; to rebuild is difficult. In the meantime, many seasoned principals have already left the district or are retiring, being recruited away or intending to leave when this school year ends.

The delivery and implementation of Destination 2020 highlights a lack of transparency within and outside the District. As the improvement plan moves forward, the District needs to be more transparent and invite all DISD stakeholders to participate.

### **Achievements and New Programs**

There are some notable achievements on Superintendent Miles' watch, including the focus on instructional leadership and classroom teaching, improvements in IT systems, continuing growth of the fund balance (although perhaps Internal Board Auditor Alan King deserves credit for much of this) and implementation of the STAR Commission personnel recommendations.

Teachers, however, caution against his tendencies to micromanage, to rely mainly on a few narrow tools, which have the effect of dumbing down teaching and stifling creativity to meet varying student needs and potentials.

In his first few months on the job, Superintendent Miles introduced several new programs, including new principal evaluation metrics based on student performance, and he created the Principal Fellows Academy. The new principal evaluation tool was finalized during the fall semester and gained School Board approval in January 2013. In early March, 68 principals were placed on “growth plans” (which is Dallas ISD’s HR code for preparing for termination). These principals had worked an entire semester without clear expectations or an approved evaluation tool. The growth plans were executed at the height of the standardized testing period. What kind of professional development could take place during student testing? How much time was expected for adequate improvements?

This program has provoked considerable controversy, both within and outside Dallas ISD. The standards and processes for principal evaluation are very important but unclear to us as outsiders. His statement to us that “principals feel supported” by the Education Director, as proved by “... anonymous surveys,” is disputed by a number of principals privately, who moreover doubt the surveys are “anonymous.”

Certainly some principals need to be replaced, and we agree that the principal is the key to school performance. Good principals get and keep good teachers and produce results. (As Tom Luce says, “It’s the principal, stupid.”)

But the rush to judgment seems random and ill-conceived.

Having worked firsthand with many of these schools and principals over many years, we were surprised at some of the names on the list. The most publicized lightning rod seems to be Marian Willard, principal at James Madison High School in South Dallas, located in the lowest income socioeconomic neighborhood in Dallas (demographics comparable to New Orleans Lower Ninth Ward). If firing Willard is an application of an appropriate Principal Evaluation Process, we suggest that either the process is flawed or the decision-maker is making an unsound decision. (See *Exhibit 2* for Willard’s record.)

In the course of interviews and conversations for this discussion paper, three people reported that Superintendent Miles has declared Willard will be gone next year. The statement was repeated by a key member of his leadership team in a recent public meeting.

Perhaps most alarmingly, we hear from teachers and administrators within the District that Superintendent Miles’ new curriculum alignment process is superficial and a “dumbing down” of prior models. Further, we hear his pre-K program has increased class sizes and has dismantled best practices used so successfully in the LEAP curriculum developed by TI and SMU – the use of tactile, kinesthetic experiences with the alphabet and books, which are crucial for children with little background with books, and reading and play time that helps develop social and emotional, as well as cognitive skills. “Pants in the chairs” and “no playground time or naps” are seen to be his motto – and for four year olds? His approach runs counter to accepted best practices for helping low-income

children catch up developmentally. If true, these are not the kind of “reforms” Dallas needs.

### **Decision Making and Communication Skills**

Interviews with insiders and outsiders reveal Superintendent Miles and his leadership team lack effective communication skills and are establishing a culture of fear, intimidation and reprisal led by the Superintendent. A militaristic, absolutist culture, brooking no dissent, is unlikely to lead either to recruiting or retaining the best teachers and principals or to producing the best urban school district in Texas, let alone in America.

Miles has not reached out to key constituents to either listen to or address widespread concerns, nor has he attempted to explain his own views and reasons, nor been willing to collaborate with others. Our chairman wrote him a letter last July, offering to meet with him, both to extend support and discuss the history of Dallas Achieves. The meeting was finally held in late September. Superintendent Miles was briefed on the Dallas Achieves initiative, offered support and urged to reach out to a list of key leaders in Dallas. He did not respond to any of these suggestions, until these last few weeks of public outcry.

Superintendent Miles states he has had more than 300 meetings in the community. There is a vast difference between the relatively easy work of attending a meeting or community activity versus the hard work of collaboration, negotiation and the give and take required in large, complex publicly funded organizations, with so many legitimate stakeholders.

He has a good PowerPoint presentation that is effective in large meetings with business and other leaders who have little working knowledge of Dallas ISD. He has garnered public support of important political and business leaders (but this is always the case in Dallas for new Superintendents – as occurred with Superintendents with troubled tenures, including Waldemar Rojas, Yvonne Gonzalez and Marvin Edwards). That support quickly wanes when plans prove ineffective.

Large public school systems need leaders who can bring public as well as private funding and programs to assist students and staff. As a community, we should be supporting the time-honored profession of teaching by preparing, supporting and paying our teachers more. From conversations with area state legislators we learn that, despite significant legislative public school issues pending (including funding, testing, charter schools, etc.), Miles has not lobbied in Austin on behalf of Dallas ISD nor even sought contact with some of our key legislators. (He has, however, responded to calls from legislators.) He should be out front carrying the banner for Dallas ISD, rather than relying only on hired lobbyists and consultants. We need strong advocacy in Austin. Prior successful Superintendents, from Linus Wright to Mike Moses to Michael Hinojosa, considered this an important part of their job and were effective advocates. Why has Miles neglected these crucial outreach constituencies? Does he feel he doesn't need or care about their engagement or support?

Who is he listening to on these crucial issues that will bear on the success of Dallas ISD? And why is he making speeches outside Dallas (e.g., recently in Colorado Springs) that are heard in Dallas ISD as ridiculing and disparaging our teachers and administrators? To many in Dallas, these behaviors reflect either disrespect for crucial stakeholders or an unwillingness to collaborate, or both. Working together is vital for successful leadership in such a large, complex and public organization. Some in Dallas suspect an even darker motive: i.e., force Dallas ISD to fail, and then reconstitute with a mix of separate districts, or a takeover by charter schools and for-profit education businesses.

For those deeply committed to the success of Dallas ISD, these patterns pose a quandary. Should we support his leadership (as some political and business leaders are calling for) and try to help change or counteract these unproductive behaviors (thereby risking long-term structural damage to the District if he turns out to be the wrong leader), or oppose his leadership and urge he be terminated by the school board (risking embarrassment to Dallas and our ability to recruit a new Superintendent after this experience)?

In all events, Dallas deserves an inclusive, fully vetted public conversation on these issues, including our civic responsibility to improve the socioeconomic context for our public school students. The choice we make is crucial in shaping the futures of individual students as well as the District.

### **Acknowledgements**

In writing this discussion paper, we have relied on available data, numerous interviews and conversations with people on all sides of these issues, both within and outside of the District.

Exhibit 1:  
Departures of Senior Dallas ISD Officials During Mike Miles' First Year

1. Alan King (\$225,000) – Chief Financial Officer and Chief of Staff  
Former CFO under Michael Hinojosa, served as the Interim Superintendent before Mike Miles, then hired on as Mike Miles' Chief of Staff. He left the District and then returned and is currently serving as the Interim Chief of Internal Audit for the District. The Chief of Staff position is currently filled by Jerome Olberton, and the Chief Financial Officer Position is currently vacant (with Jim Terry serving as Interim).
2. Shirley Ison-Newsome (\$170,000) – Assistant Superintendent  
Only veteran Assistant Superintendent that Mike Miles retained upon his assumption of the Superintendent position. However, a severance deal was arranged just two months into the school year. This position is currently vacant.
3. Eddie Conger (\$130,000-\$137,183) – Executive Director for the Jefferson Feeder Pattern  
Left in November to run a charter school. This position is currently vacant per the latest organization chart available from Dallas ISD.
4. Dora Saucedo (\$130,000-\$137,183) – Executive Director for the Pinkston Feeder Pattern  
Resigned in December after being found to have fabricated an invoice for moving expenses. This position is currently vacant per the latest organization chart available from Dallas ISD.
5. Leonardo Caballero (offered \$170,000) – Chief of Staff  
Accepted the position, which would have paid him \$80,000 more than he was earning in his post as the Special Assistant to the President of Lamar University. However, he changed his mind and decided not to come. The Chief of Staff position is currently filled by Jerome Olberton.
6. Jennifer Sprague (\$185,000) – Chief of Communications  
One of several staff members Miles brought with him from Colorado with moving expenses paid. Though her salary was nearly double what she earned in Colorado, she spent only six months in the District. This position is currently filled by Rebecca Rodriguez.
7. Gary Kerbow (\$123,000) – Purchasing Director  
Retired in wake of a mishandled bid for federal funds costing the District a potential of \$10 million in funds for expansion of wireless Internet to campuses.
8. Marian Hamlett (\$153,000) – Finance Director  
Resigned and took a position with Dallas Can Academies.

9. Pam Brown (\$90,000) – Reading Director  
Came to the District from Irving ISD. Does not appear to have left in order to take another job position. This position is currently vacant per the latest organization chart available from Dallas ISD.
10. Miguel Solis (\$64,000) – Special Assistant to the Superintendent  
One of several staff members Miles brought with him from out of state with moving expenses paid. This position is currently filled by Justin Coppedge.
11. Emma Cannon (\$99,000) – Manager of Accounts Payable  
This position is currently vacant per the latest organization chart available from Dallas ISD.
12. Marita Hawkins (\$105,000) – Director of Benefits  
This position is currently vacant per the latest organization chart available from Dallas ISD.
13. Jamal Jenkins (\$150,000) – Executive Director of Human Resources  
This position is currently vacant per the latest organization chart available from Dallas ISD.
14. Rene Barajas (\$199,000 with a \$20,000 potential bonus) – Chief Financial Officer  
Left after 92 days for Garland ISD, where he will be earning \$189,500. This position is currently vacant, with Jim Terry serving as Interim.
15. Steve Korby (\$154,000) – Executive Director for Finance Department  
Korby did not cite a specific reason for his mid-year resignation, and simply informed reporters that “it’s time,” and that he had planned his departure since early fall.
16. Leslie Williams (\$130,000 - \$137,183) – Executive Director for the Carter Feeder Pattern
17. Jovan Grant-Wells (\$130,000 - \$137,183) – Executive Director  
Recently accepted a position with Garland ISD.
18. Tina Patel (\$106,000) – Attorney for Dallas ISD  
Terminated
19. Charles Glover\*\* (\$182,000) – Chief of Human Capital Management  
Superintendent Mike Miles acknowledged to the *Dallas Morning News* that Glover is “exploring options.”

Exhibit 2:  
Marian Willard

Marian Willard, the principal of James Madison High School, was included among the 68 principals placed on a “growth plan” by Dallas ISD, and the Superintendent and administrators have made public statements that she will be terminated at the end of the school year. Reasons for placing Principal Willard on a growth plan and termination are unclear.

We sought the opinion of a widely respected business leader known for his diligent work and investment in improving public school performance. He points out that only eight out of 744 students could be considered college ready over the past five years, and that school enrollment has declined by 35% since 2009.

It must be noted that his definition of “college ready” is based mainly on benchmark SAT and ACT scores, which are defined as 1100 and 24, respectively. We believe over-reliance on this metric fails to consider both context of the students and the significance of improvements in academic performance in a neighborhood of extreme poverty, that always serves as a barrier to student achievement.

Madison ranked third on the 2013 Best Urban Comprehensive High Schools list for North Texas assembled by the non-profit Children at Risk. In 2010, Madison was the top school on the same list. The independent group accounts for poverty and resources in its rankings stating “research has consistently shown that poverty is a predictor of whether or not a student will graduate and achieve post-secondary academic success.”

When Willard was named principal of James Madison High School in 2006, the campus was rated Low Performing, was approaching Stage 3 on the state’s list of Schools in Need of Improvement, and was on the verge of being closed for failure to meet adequate yearly progress. Until her arrival, each year, when new ninth-graders would arrive on campus, a rumble would break out among rival gang members, and about 40 young men would be kicked out (and doomed to a pathway to prison). Willard immediately installed order and security, virtually eliminating such incidents in her years as principal. The result: higher graduation rates, higher academic achievement, and substantial increase in after-school and extracurricular participation (as it was now safe to be on campus).

In every year since 2005, the reading, math, science and other scores steadily climbed. In a recent year, the school was just one or two short of attaining “Recognized” status. The only years of regress came when she agreed to take in the Katrina evacuees who moved to Dallas, and in another case agreed to take in the Spruce High School students (transferred because their school was closed for failure to meet adequate yearly progress). In each case, the school’s academic scores were temporarily impacted, but scores more than recovered after one year.

Willard has always emphasized the importance of college attendance to her students. (Remember, these young people are the poorest of the poor in Dallas.) High expectations are also held by the teachers and supported with opportunities that include campus college fairs, organized college visits, college preparation and resources from nonprofits, and a counseling center. During Willard's tenure, this combination of expectations, emphasis, counseling and resources has resulted in a high college application and acceptance rate for Madison students.

During the 2011-12 school year, of 17 Hispanic students at Madison, 14 took either the SAT or ACT. Out of 107 African American students, 64 students took the SAT or ACT.

A recent report from the Dallas nonprofit Education is Freedom shows that 298 Madison students from 2007-2012 are currently enrolled in college or are in the process of graduating from college.

According to data from the National Student Data Clearinghouse, an organization respected nationally, 64 percent of Madison students enrolled in college.

According to the data from the Apply Texas Application Submissions, an average of 94 percent of Madison students applied to attend college from 2009 to 2011. In the current graduating class of 2013, of the 130 seniors, 129 have applied to at least one college. Of those seniors, more than 50 percent have received an acceptance letter from the college of their choice. Colleges and universities are actively recruiting Madison students with academic and athletic scholarships.

With one of the highest graduation rates and lowest dropout rates in the district, Madison is opening the door for many students to attend college. Reviewing the TEA's Adequate Yearly Progress Campus Data report, Madison's graduation rate was 83.3 percent in 2010 and 93.5 percent in 2011.

This effort should be commended and replicated across Dallas, rather than criticized and marked down by the new Superintendent and the new Executive Director. Support for Willard is neither racial nor a jobs protection plan. Support for Willard reflects respect for exceptional professional leadership and service to those most at risk in the Dallas community.