Interview Summary

The interview was very revealing, it was candid, and she was open to any question and answered with honesty. She explained that the principal at Harris was all in and goes above and beyond. She explained how there were instances in where the principal would pay out of her own pocket for after school programs, or when she bought clothes for several students. The principal is also very active when it comes to aligning the community resources with the school. Harris was one of two winners, city wide, to win the Andy Roddick Foundation grant, which helped pay for after school programs and school resources. As great as it sounded, having teachers collaborate together for after school programs, it was not a big happy picture. Mrs. Rodriguez explained that half of the 60 staff members go above-and-beyond and are fully invested in the students; however, the other half do the bare minimum. The small group of teachers that do great bring the community together and have a really strong relationship with the parents. Most of the administration has been working at the campus for several years and have built that strong bond with the community. Nonetheless, Harris is losing students at a high rate. The cost of living is has risen so much that families cannot afford to live there and they are losing students to charter schools or to the suburbs. Harris is also receiving a high influx of refugee students, however, she explained, they only stay about 3 months and then leave –due to cost of living. Economics plays a major role at the school because as Harris loses students, they are also forced to cut back on teachers. Mrs. Rodriguez explained that they lost a 3rd grade teacher last year and that increased class sizes to almost 30 students per teacher. With huge class sizes, student behavior got worse. When I asked her if she has seen any prejudice when it came to student discipline and the color of their skin, she revealed, “Yes. The teachers punish the African- American boys much harsher and don’t want to deal with them. They all talk amongst each other so the kids have a reputation following them and they are already on a short lease, even though they haven’t done anything.” She believes that with more funding, they could hire more teachers to have smaller classes, but most importantly, the funding would buy more technology. They are in desperate need of computers and the ones they have breakdown easily. It was a very insightful interview and it showed just how much the school, and the families that attend Harris, are struggling, even in a neighborhood that has some of the highest salaries and highest home value averages in Austin.