**An Analysis of Thomas G. Harris Elementary and Windsor Park**

Jesse Mondragon

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

October 28, 2016

Dr. Holme

EDA 395J: Poverty & Education Policy

**Abstract**

**An Analysis of Thomas G. Harris Elementary and Windsor Park**

Jesse Mondragon

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Thomas G. Harris Elementary is one of the oldest schools in one of the oldest Austin communities. It is centralized in Austin, making it a very convenient area, not too far from Pflugerville, downtown Austin, or South Austin. The area has gone through major economic and demographical changes, a process most commonly known as gentrification, and although many city planners and realtors like to refer to it as a rejuvenation of the city, this change has had detrimental consequences. To evaluate what the outcomes of the major city change, social explorer was used in this study to analyze population change. Google Maps was used to map out the community and calculate the distance between Harris and the locations around it. This study investigates and analyzes one of the neighborhoods of Windsor Park and how an upcoming community, Mueller Park, has played a major role in the rapid change of demographics and economics and what implications it might have for the students at Harris and the residents of the community.

**Introduction**

Thomas G. Harris is an elementary school located in the 78723 Austin zip code area most commonly known as the Windsor Park community. Just four miles away from downtown Austin, Windsor Park is one of the most known communities in the city. It is a small neighborhood covering about 2.3 square miles northeast of Austin, a side facing a lot of change in the past decade. The change affecting this community has brought a lot of growth to Austin; however, Austinites are the ones paying the price. More specifically, long-time residents in the east side of Austin in communities like Windsor Park are paying the price with the rising cost of living, affecting families with students that attend Harris.

**Windsor Park**

An older community built in the 1950s, Windsor Park takes its name from an area in London (Barnes, 2012; Abrams, et al., 2016). It is mostly made up of older homes, each one unique with its own personality. In the spring time, there is a green blanket that covers the neighborhood and sometimes the homes get lost behind the pecan trees. As you can imagine, there is a carnival of colors in the autumn that parade from house to house and leaves covering the streets like confetti. Indeed, it is a rare site to see in a city usually describe by the words “condominiums” and “traffic.” If you drive down Berkman Drive, starting from Highway 290, you will see where many Harris students live. They live in the apartment complexes that are hidden within the neighborhoods. They are older apartment complexes: grey, cracks outside the structure, dirt covering the landscape, and sometimes trash spewing into the streets—definitely nothing like the new condominiums sprouting around the city. The owners of these complexes don’t do much to maintain them, and many have sold the apartments over and over, tenants have been forced to move out repeatedly. Still, these are much more affordable than the houses surrounding the area that average $390,000, so families have no other choice but to settle with these poor living conditions.

As you keep driving south, you will see a range of older houses; each one more unique from its neighbor. For this part of the analysis, I used Census data from 4 tracts (21.04, 21.05, 21.06, and 21.12) from Social Explorer. The data shows that there were 5,450 houses in Windsor Park in 1990, and 36.64% were family households. Since then, that number has risen; in 2014, the number of residential homes increased to 6,272, and 56.46% were occupied by families. My hypothesis is that the location creates a hub that is convenient for the daily commute.

In the past decade, a younger demographic has moved in and remade the face of the neighborhoods. If you drive down Glencrest Drive, you will see older homes with contemporary finishes: white rocks instead of a traditional lawn, horizontal wooden fences, and vibrant colors. The newly remodeled homes are nice, however, the remodeling has risen the cost of living for long time Austinites. Harris rests a couple of feet from Glencrest Drive. The odd thing about Harris is that if you pay close attention, you will notice how much Windsor Park changes right as you drive down south past the school.

**Community Analysis and Muellerism**

Although it is not technically part of the Winsor Park community, Mueller plays a huge role in how change is affecting the surrounding areas. Before the Mueller Community, Robert Mueller Airport occupied the mass lot. Early complaints to move the airport began as early as 1984, primarily as a response to the plans the city was making to expand the airport ("Windsor Park Branch"). These plans called for a major expansion that would include the demolition of some homes. The neighborhood residents successfully advocated the relocation of Robert Mueller airport to the current location and by 1999 the airport closed. Now with an empty lot, planning for a new use of this vast space began. The Mueller Community plan was finalized and adopted in 2002 by the City Council (Mueller, 2016). The main outcome is the development of a pedestrian friendly, transit-oriented, diverse, economic, and sustainable community that would “enhance the quality of life” for the surrounding neighborhoods (Mueller, 2016; Tepper, 2016). As promising as this plan seems, it has not been as perfect as it was intended, or not, to be.

Right off the bat, the development of Mueller brought frustration with the residents in Windsor Park as the city had to remodel the exit to 51st street creating a detour for residents. As mundane as a detour may sound it symbolized the beginning of the Mueller effect–colloquially known as *Muellerism* (Barnes, 2012). The new street design made the old two lane street into a one lane and incorporated a bicycle lane; this new design has created more congestion in an already over-populated neighborhood.

The Mueller Community possesses heavy political implications. Before the plans to build the massive community, the city did not pay much attention to Windsor Park. There were streets that were run down, very little sidewalk access, and even a lack of traffic lights. Today, the department of transportation has remade the streets, added the much needed sidewalks, new traffic lights, and even reorganized the public transportation route. Much of the political push was to create a new urban design that would reduce the dependency on cars; however, it has not met this goal, if anything it has made it worse ((Tepper, 2016)).

Today, more than a decade after development began, figures demonstrate that the average house listing in Mueller runs between $500,000- $700,000–depending on the style of home you want. Those numbers are well above the average for the city of Austin. The average salary of those living in Mueller is well above the Austin average at $95, 429. If is not alarming enough, over 30% of the household income at Mueller is over $150,000. This is so alarming because the whole point of building Mueller was to have social growth—it was supposed to revitalize the East Austin community, however, what it has done is that it has basically kicked out most of the original population. This kind of effect is happening mostly on the east side of Austin and leaving the west side practically untouched.

**Moving aside for Mueller Park**

As Mueller grew, the demographics in Windsor Park changed. In the past 5 years, there has been a population shift in an area mostly populated by African Americans and Latinos. The drop in the Africa American population has been significant with the numbers dropping yearly. The 2015 numbers gathered from Social Explorer show a mere 1,665 residents in the school boundaries compared to 2,347 in 2012. The numbers for both years are very low, and they reflect how the Windsor Park community has gone from blue collar working families to a younger more affluent population. The Hispanic population still makes up close to half of the population; however, their numbers are dropping rapidly as well. There was a loss of over 2,000 Hispanic families in two years, maybe it correlates with the closure of some of the apartment complexes. As the development continues, the older apartments are being sold and remodeled as new luxury condos. The development has started to hit the area near highway 290, raising the prices of the apartments that the Harris students live in. It has also picked up the poverty rate to with now 64.8% of the population classified as poor. One of the outcomes of the Mueller Community was to integrate and promote prosperity with the other neighborhoods, however, the rise in poverty and decrease in minorities has reflected the negative consequences.

On average, the new, younger population moving in the community has a higher education level. The statistics for people with no high school degree has fallen from 19.1% to 9% in the past 5 years; conversely, the population of people with at least a bachelor’s degree has risen from 39% to 54% in the same amount of years. Many correlate better higher income with higher education, this is greatly reflected in the numbers as each year the percentage of people making over $150,000 a year increases. There is a lot of supply and demand in the Austin house market, and the tech boom is bringing in people that are willing to pay higher prices for housing, in consequence, communities like Windsor Park are rapidly losing residents that cannot afford to live in this economic climate.

**Community Assets**

The farther you go down the southern half, passed Harris, the more resources you will come across. You will even notice the change: no apartment complexes, a library, a pharmacy, a social service building, and Bartholomew Park. The Windsor Park Library Branch has been in the community since the 1950s; originally, situated in the Windsor Village Shopping Center ("Windsor Park Branch"). By the 1990s, it was very outdated, the books were old and the number of computers were limited. Directly behind Harris, it is the source for internet and technology for many students, so having an updated building became crucial. As the area grew in population, lobbying efforts began in the 1960s to build a more adequate building but it fell through. Finally, on July of 2000, the doors were opened to the current library that stands across the street from the old site ("Windsor Park Branch"). The slow response of the city to build a new library just shows how neglected Windsor Park was.

Bartholomew Park is the median between the Mueller Community and Windsor Park. It was an old, outdated park with a wooden playground, two swings and a slide. However, since the growth of Mueller there have been many renovations done to Bartholomew, including a brand new pool and aquatics playground. The Bartholomew, a once lively ground that brought together much of the community, was closed for over a decade before being remodeled and reopened just a couple of years ago. Not all is gloomy, Bartholomew becomes very lively on the weekends. If you ever drive past east 51st street, 9 times out of 10 you will see a bouncing castle, see kids running around, and see birthday celebrations going on all day Saturday and Sunday. It is one of the few remaining spots that bring families in the community together.

Another major road is Cameron road where most of the businesses are located. If you are driving north of I- 35, before 290, and catch a glimpse of a shopping center to your right, you have just passed Capital Plaza. This shopping center is the last of the malls that are left near Windsor Park. There are not many options to shop from, but the thrift stores are a few of the options the residents have, anything else is pretty much in West or the Northside of Austin. The days of locally owned restaurants seem to have passed, most of the food options are fast food commercial chains. Before the super HEB opened in Mueller, there was only one grocery store within a 3-mile radius; and although El Rancho is around the corner, it just recently built as well.

There are no farmer’s markets, no gyms, no vegetarian options.

Nevertheless, there is much more to Windsor Park than homes, apartments, and the few stores that remain. There are churches that hold high rates of attendance, which is something that has remained consistent in the neighborhood. The churches play an important role, because in a community with limited businesses, resources, and recreational space, the churches provide the cohesion that is needed to create a sense of neighborly camaraderie in communities. They provide support to the residents by hosting local food drives and community garage sales, which are much needed but it still cannot make up for the food desert and lack of clothing stores. And there is also Harris Elementary, a place that also brings the community together.

**Harris Elementary**

Harris’ school boundary is made up of half of the area of Windsor Park, more specifically, people living between Reinli St and Highway 290 live within the school’s boundaries. The school’s demographics do not necessarily reflect the communities’ make up. The school is made up of 81% Latino, 9.4% African American, 2.6% White, 5.7% Asian, and .7% classified as other. The school met the 2016 accountability standards and has a passing rate over 50% in all of the subjects, with science leading at 73% ("Harris Elementary School"). It is a one story orange brick building with a curved drive way in the front. As soon as you step into the main building, you have to turn to the right and check in at the main office. A couple of feet into the building will lead you to a sharp left where you will see the cafeteria to the left. The cafeteria ceilings are high, very high. The walls are decorated with student art and projects, covering the white and gray walls. The classrooms are outside and each grade is split by a wing. The nice thing about the school is that there are multiple gardens for just about every grade level. The outside portables reflect the demographics and have murals painted on them with Spanish words.

The school was built in 1954, so it has that unique open concept. If you stay in the main building and walk past the cafeteria, will you come across the library, also on the left hand side. The library has high ceilings as well, and tall walls hidden behind tall bookshelves containing hundreds of books. As the years passed, attendance rates increased drastically and an auxiliary hall was built around 1999 for the higher grades. Right behind the school are two playgrounds, one of the lower grades and one for the big kids. Like all schools in AISD, the playground has a concrete basketball court that is covered by a giant blue tarp.

**Conclusion**

An interesting fact that stood out to me was that construction was ranked as the third most common career in Windsor Park. Windsor Park is home to a large majority of undocumented workers and according to a Austin-American Statesman report, over 400,000 of construction workers are undocumented (Harmon-American-Statesman Staff, 2013). Many contractors can get away with paying lower wages, benefiting from the low wage labor (Harmon-American-Statesman Staff, 2013). The fact that the development is that main cause of rising prices in east Austin and that most of the workers are residents of the local neighborhoods is alarming. It almost like digging yourself into a hole; and it is outrageous because local Austinites are the ones that are being kicked out of their own homes.

The organization of this paper was intended to give a broad outline of the community and bring it in to reflect the contrast of the demographics at Harris. The community data shows an increase in the white population, however, it is not reflected at all in the school attendance. My theory is that it is a mixture of younger people without kids and that those with kids are not sending their kids to the local schools. The implications are of high magnitude because in the next decade, the African American population will disappear and the community will lose all of its longtime residents. Unfortunately, this is a city wide epidemic and in a city that prides itself with diversity, there will be no diversity left. As new development continues, minorities continue to move out of communities like Windsor Park and schools like Harris, losing students and the new families are not enrolling their kids causing a major hemorrhage for the schools

Sources:

1. Mueller Austin (Rep.). (n.d.). Retrieved October 26, 2016, from Catullus website: <http://www.muelleraustin.com/plan/>
2. Barnes, M. (2012, November 12). A new generation rises in Windsor Park. Retrieved October 28, 2016, from <http://www.statesman.com/lifestyles/food--cooking/new-generation-rises-windsor-park/nlJAtwLcBRTrIKeWwymGhN/>
3. Abrams, R., Raney, N., Alarcon, C., Bentley, A., Rainey, M., Turner, P., . . . Floyd, M. (n.d.). How Austin's most iconic neighborhoods got their names. Retrieved October 29, 2016, from <http://austin.culturemap.com/news/city-life/01-22-15-austin-neighborhoods-names-history-how-did-areas-get-names/>
4. Tepper, R. C. (n.d.). Mapping Mueller: A post occupancy evaluation of transportation choices in a new urbanist community in Austin, Texas (Unpublished master's thesis). The University of Texas at Austin.
5. Windsor Park Branch. (n.d.). Retrieved October 29, 2016, from <http://library.austintexas.gov/windsor-park-branch>
6. Harris Elementary School. (n.d.). Retrieved October 29, 2016, from <https://www.austinisd.org/schools/harris>
7. Harmon - American-Statesman Staff, D. (2013, February 21). Report: Half of Texas construction workers undocumented. Retrieved October 29, 2016, from <http://www.mystatesman.com/news/business/economy/report-half-of-texas-construction-workers-undocume/nWWhR/>
8. Construction Worker Salary in Austin, TX. (n.d.). Retrieved October 29, 2016, from http://www.indeed.com/salary/q-Construction-Worker-l-Austin,-TX.html