

Illegal immigrants flood into Brownsville ISD

Schools say immigrants strain budgets, crowd campuses

The Associated Press

BROWNSVILLE — Almost half of all students enrolled in Brownsville high schools are illegal immigrants, a statistic that school officials say is straining their budget and crowding their campuses.

Brownsville Independent School District figures show that 10,644 students entered the district from 1989 to 1993. Forty-seven percent were illegal immigrants from Mexico, The Brownsville Herald reported in Sunday editions.

"These children are coming in without a mainstream U.S. education and that creates a gap in our educational system," school board President Philip Cowen said. "We have to close that gap. That is the burden we have to face."

From Aug. 16 to Sept. 15 of this year, 836 new students entered school. Of those, 447 — or 53 percent — were illegal Mexican immigrants.

U.S. citizens, legal Mexican immigrants and legal immigrants from other countries comprise 17 percent; the remaining students, including the illegal Mexican immigrants, were listed as "impacting the district," the newspaper reported.

The school district has a total of 39,400 students.

School board member Eddie Gonzalez said Mexican children have crossed the border to attend

U.S. schools since the founding of the city along the Rio Grande.

"This has become important lately because we can see that the city is feeling the stress from the number of students," Gonzalez said. "This is a poor community, which can't afford to deal with this alone."

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a decision several years ago by U.S. District Court Judge Filemon Vela of Brownsville ordering BISD to educate all children in its jurisdiction regardless of immigration status.

"Nobody questions the right of these children to an education, but I do question who should pay for it."

—Eddie Gonzalez, school board member

Gonzalez contends the federal government should provide the district, and all schools along the border, with emergency funds for that education.

"Nobody questions the right of these children to an education," Gonzalez said. "But I do question who should pay for it."

Cowen, who believes there are no more than 2,000 Mexican im-

migrants in the school system, said the figures can be misleading because not all of those students stay in Brownsville schools.

"This is a very mobile population," Cowen said.

The enrollment figures do not allow for students who drop out, graduate or leave the district.

Superintendent Esperanza Zendejas said the families of illegal immigrants are paying their share of property taxes because they must prove that they live in the district to enroll their children in school.

Those students also bring additional state and federal funds that go toward bilingual programs, economic disadvantaged assistance programs and academic tutorial programs that benefit all students, she said.

But Zendejas concedes that immigrants crowd the district's 40 schools.

"That is a borderwide problem from here to San Diego," she said. "The state and federal governments have not been able to fully provide the funds we need to build the facilities we need. The state and federal governments need take responsibility to provide that."

Circuit Court Judge Linda Reyna Yanez, one of the attorneys who took BISD to court to get the district to admit illegal immigrants, said she was bothered that the district keeps such records.



A young man helps an older woman illegally wade between Matamoros, Mexico and Brownsville across the shallow waters of the Rio Grande River crossing the Gateway International Bridge earlier this month.

"This doesn't further the educational objectives of the state," she said. "All it does is create negative emotional feelings from the public." Yanez said BISD should con-

centrate instead on making sure registered students actually live in the district rather than trying to "label" them.

Gonzalez disagreed, saying the

district must know those numbers to better handle the problem.

"What you must consider is that we are being impacted," Gonzalez said. "The number is awesome."

HAIR-RAISING JUSTICE

Justice of the peace takes unusual tactics with teens

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — A Harris County justice of the peace is offering to snip some time off his sentences if juvenile offenders will snip something of their own — their hair.

Tony Polumbo, who serves the county's third precinct, is buying pigtails and long locks from some teen-age offenders in exchange for reduced sentences.

"The purpose is to give these kids a different mind-set or image, try to get them away from the subculture and into the mainstream again," Polumbo said. "About 80 percent accept my offer."

In the case of a Baytown 13-year-old with a tail that hung from his otherwise close-cropped head, Polumbo fined the teen-ager \$430 after he admitted assaulting a youth as part of a gang initiation rite. The youth agreed to convert the fine to 80 community service hours and then sold his wispy ponytail for 15 of those.

"It was worth it," the unidentified teen-ager said after his haircut.

However, two other teens opted to keep their locks. "It looks better long this way," explained one, a 16-year-old gang member sentenced to 144 community service hours for abusive language and disorderly conduct at school.

Polumbo left his 16-year-old state representative seat to become a justice of the peace three years ago. He prides himself on being unconventional.

"When you deal with youngsters, you can't deal with normal," he said. "Our goal is to connect. Most kids are used to being beat on and using their unfortunate situations to act ugly. I try something different."

The haircuts are not his only answer to rising crime among youths. Other unusual sentences include:

- As signing teens who speed to attend five funerals.
 - Sending juvenile offenders to work in nursing homes or with the disabled.
 - Assigning offenders community service projects that have to be completed with each other, instead of an individual assignment.
- "We've seen some troubled kids make big changes," said court clerk Elvia Sanchez. "Sometimes the judge just brings those kids into his office to let them tell their problems. Many are just looking for attention."

Murder victim's mother sues parole board

Suit claims agency failed to check on paroled rapist

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Three-time convicted rapist Jerry "Animal" McFadden wanted a job.

Tyler-based Smith Tank & Equipment Co. gave him one in 1985, upon his release from prison.

Five months after McFadden was fired, he was wanted for three East Texas slayings. He was convicted in the murder of Suzanne Harrison, an 18-year-old high school cheerleader.

Now, Harrison's mother is suing the Texas parole board. She claims the agency's failure to check in with McFadden's employer once he was fired resulted in her daughter's death.

McFadden was hired as a welder in 1985 by Jim Blair of Smith Tank.

Blair says he had no idea the new employee was a thrice-convicted rapist when he hired McFadden. Now Blair wonders why state parole authorities never warned him he'd hired a man who once kidnapped a co-worker, raped her repeatedly and choked her into unconsciousness.

Mary Ann Harrison Hester intends to prove — through her lawsuit — that the parole board was negligent and could have prevented her daughter's death.

McFadden, 45, is now on death row awaiting lethal injection for Harrison's death.

The lawsuit claims the ex-con's parole officers were supposed to follow agency rules requiring them to make visits to their charges' workplaces, says Ed Blizzard, a Houston lawyer representing Hester.

"My position is, if they can't do it, then they have a rule saying they have to do it? They either need to change the rule ... and eliminate the rule from the parole manual, or they need to follow it," Blizzard said.

Parole board legal counsel, William "Rusty" Hubbarth, refused to discuss specifics of the lawsuit.

Prison authorities released McFadden in July 1985 to East Texas, where he found a job with Blair's company.

One evening in late August 1985, McFadden drove to the trailer park where a co-worker lived

and made a grab for her 13-year-old daughter. The next day, he was reprimanded by Blair.

Eventually, Blair fired McFadden for missing work and showing up drunk.

Five months later, on the evening of May 1985, McFadden drove to Lake Hawkins and pulled a gun on a Tyler couple. He demanded money, but they had none. So he settled for a beer.

About 7 p.m., Suzanne Harrison and her friend, Gena Turner, 20, joined their friend, 18-year-old Bryan Boone, for a drive around the lake in his pickup truck. Authorities found Boone's truck a few hours later at the lake.

Harrison's body was found the next afternoon at a roadside park about 20 miles from the lake. She had been raped, beaten and strangled.

The day after her body was found, police arrested McFadden near Mineola, accusing him of the gunpoint robbery of the couple, Lake Hawkins.

Four days later, authorities found the bodies of Turner and Boone in a ditch near City. Both had been shot to death with a .38-caliber pistol. McFadden, a suspect in those slayings, has never been tried for them.

Chinese street signs spark war in Houston neighborhoods

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Chinese street signs have become a point of controversy in this city where 4 percent of the city's 1.6 million population is Asian.

For some, the street signs are evidence of neighborhood pride.

For others, the idea of placing Chinese street signs above the regular English signs is ridiculous and a waste of city money.

Eight years ago, Chinese language street signs were posted in the old Chinatown section of downtown Houston.

But now, miles away in southwest Houston, there are new pockets of Chinese neighborhoods. At the request of the Taiwanese and Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the city added the Chinese language signs to 22 intersections in and around Bellaire Boulevard at a cost of \$1,350 to taxpayers.

That area, referred to as "Little Taipei," has become a bustling center where business signs are often in Chinese instead of English.

"A lot of my friends' parents or newcomers to that area don't speak any English," said Jackson Chang, a Houston businessman who has helped promote the street sign campaign.

"It's very difficult for them to read English signs. By putting in the Chinese signs, it's a great plus

to them," Chang said.

But Jerry Weber, who lives in an houses center from one of the signs, isn't so supportive.

"Nobody ever asked me. My body came by with a petition. It's an insult to me," Weber said.

"I didn't move here to live in China or Vietnam. I'm an American. If I wanted to live the way, I'd go to China or Vietnam. But they came to my country and they need to adopt our ways," he said.

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