

Salome Alvarado
Dr. Newstreet
History of American Education
4/30/20

1 **SA:** Hi Ms. Hernandez, how are you?

2 **MH:** I'm good, how are you?

3 **SA:** I'm good, thank you so much. Thank you so much for...

4 **MH:** I'm sorry about yesterday.

5 **SA:** Oh no problem, no problem! Thank you for meeting with me today, I'm Salome Alvarado
6 um and it is May 10th, I'm sorry *laughs* April 10th, on, at 12:57. I am with Ms. Magda
7 Hernandez in a Zoom meeting and I want to clarify that I am going to record this interview and it
8 will be uploaded to the UD Oral History Repository um, is that alright?

9 **MH:** Yes ma'am.

10 **SA:** Ok, Thank you. So, um my first question for you is aside from your education, what can you
11 share um with me about your background?

12 **MH:** Well, I would say that means something personal about me.

13 *Both laugh*

14 **MH:** Well, you know, I am originally from Monterrey, Mexico. I came to the United States,
15 many, many, many years ago, so I went through my schooling here in Dallas. I do have 3
16 children...

17 **SA:** Mhmm

18 **MH:** Adults, 2 adults, and well 3 adults now...

19 **SA:** *laughs*

20 **MH:** Because the youngest is 18, *clears throat* and before education, I did start working in the
21 banking world...

22 **SA:** Ok

23 **MH:** For a little bit. You know I definitely enjoyed it but was routed back into education very
24 quickly. But you know that's what I can say about my background you know I love where I
25 came from and I absolutely adore my kids... *pauses*

26 **SA:** Awesome

27 **MH:** And grandchildren.

28 **SA:** *chuckles*

29 **SA:** My second question for you is so what was your education like growing up um, if you
30 would care to share about your elementary school, middle school, high school and even college.

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31 **MH:** Well I actually loved, yeah, I loved school. Yeah, I think especially in the field that we
32 chose that education-

33 **SA:** Mhmm

34 **MH:** Is a lifelong learning experience. But I loved my childhood experience, you know although
35 we grew up poor-

36 **SA:** Mhmm

37 **MH:** We didn't have much, but we didn't know, you know, we were rich in values and I was
38 very blessed with alongside my brother...my brothers and sister, that we were able to attend a
39 private Catholic school-

40 **SA:** Ok

41 **MH:** At St. Mary of Caramel in Dallas, in west Dallas...loved it, absolutely loved it. So I went
42 there from kinder all the way through 8th grade because that's what they provided. Then after that
43 I transferred to a public setting and that was sooo different for me. You know because I was
44 scared, it was just a very different setting, you know, in high school I went to LG Pinkston in
45 Dallas, it was a pretty rough school-

46 **SA:** *laughs*

47 **MH:** You know, at the time so but again, I stayed focus, you know, in school and I was there
48 you know, to learn, not to pick fights like many others-

49 **SA:** *laughs*

50 **MH:** Were at that time, so very blessed to have had you know, a great beginning. As far as
51 college, I put college on hold for a little bit because I got married very young, but did return to
52 college and attended North Lake for my under... for my basics and then transferred to Texas
53 Women's University. That... that is where I received my Bachelor of Science with
54 Interdisciplinary Studies in Bilingual education and ESL. I actually considered going to UD-

55 **SA:** Oh ok

56 **MH:** Or going to TWU but at the time, I just couldn't afford it-

57 **SA:** Ok, yeah.

58 **MH:** I couldn't afford it, I was married, I had my 2 boys at the time, but I really loved that it had
59 the theology piece to it and then at the time, it's like well you know, I really don't have time to
60 do another year so I don't regret going to Texas Women's University, great university. So, I did
61 that and then eventually returned to get my master's from TWU in Educational Administration.

62 **SA:** Um, and so tell me more about your beginnings in the field of education.

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63 **MH:** Well, you know I had...I have a...an ex sister in law you know, that would always, she
64 was a teacher back in Mexico and she...when I was working like I said in the banking world, and
65 my boys were young, and she said, "You know you should consider going to...to school you
66 know and work at a school, you'll have your summers off.", and that brought back my memories
67 of when I was a child and wanting to be a teacher. I played school all the time-

68 **SA:** *chuckles*

69 **MH:** So, I actually walked up to a school that was right by the apartment I used to live in and
70 just asked if they were hiring. I definitely had to go through an interview process, I had no idea
71 what it was going to be like and so that's where I been...was fortunate to receive the job of the
72 instructional aide, so I was helping teachers so I started my education career as a
73 paraprofessional and then after that, definitely then returned to school to get my teaching degree.
74 But that's you know, that's how I started. I have loved every single, you know, position that I've
75 ever been in...I've been a para, a teacher, a campus administrator, and then central admin, up to
76 now, superintendent.

77 **SA:** And so, had you been at um, a number of schools when you were a para and then a teacher
78 or has it just been a few number of schools?

79 **MH:** Well actually I started my career in...at John R. Good Elementary in Irving and then I
80 transferred to Townley Elementary to be...to continue on being a teacher at that time. And then
81 that's where I became a campus administrator and then transferred so really just 2 schools in
82 Irving, and then central administration.

83 **SA:** Um and what has your new experience as superintendent been like?

84 **MH:** You know it has been...amazing. I mean many people say, "I don't know how you do your
85 job, superintendent is very difficult, there's no way," You know, "I would do it." But you know,
86 it's just something that you know I always say, "I didn't...I didn't really ask for it." You know,
87 and I know that God does what He does for a reason. I'm definitely very blessed to be in this role
88 and...because I do believe that I'm in it for the right reason. You know, as superintendent I love
89 every minute of it because I have more exposure to the students, you know, in Irving and you
90 know, we have over 33,000 students although I can't touch every single one but I do connect
91 with them as much as possible lots of learning experiences, lots of challenges that I'm sure we'll
92 talk more later but you know even through those challenges I do believe that when we are hit
93 with challenges or opportunities, that God is preparing us for something greater and I so believe
94 that especially with what we're going on...through right now.

95 **SA:** And how long have you been superintendent of Irving?

96 **MH:** I have been the superintendent since December of 2018.

97 **SA:** Wow, so um, still fairly new.

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98 **MH:** Very new, yes. I...I became the active superintendent September of 2018 and then became
99 official December of 2018, which that's where you know I signed my contract so yeah, just a
100 little bit over a year.

101 **SA:** Wow. Um and as the first female uh Latina superintendent, who um is your role model?

102 **MH:** You know, it's very difficult for me to say one specific you know role model but I...I'm
103 just going to have to say this, I believe that I look up to people that truly have a something, and
104 because I've been in different roles in education, I tend to have a pretty good instinct about
105 people but I would definitely have to say that my role model will always, you know, be God
106 because I know that we are leading and doing his work. You know, I've always said, "In
107 everything that we do, we are a reflection of Him, you know in everything that we do", and you
108 know, definitely as new superintendents, we do have to seek out a mentor and I do, I have a male
109 superintendent mentor which you know, I reach out through our monthly meetings but we also
110 have, I'm also part of a group of women superintendents out of 1,000 plus districts, there's only
111 about one hundred and thirty female superintendents.

112 **SA:** Wow

113 **MH:** So, a very small number and eighteen of those are Latinas, so very few. So we really try to
114 inspire each other, you know, through a chat group that we have we actually did have a meeting
115 this week just to kinda see ourselves and you know just talk about what has inspired us through
116 this so definitely, you know, I will always seek out mentors or role models that really lead with a
117 servant heart.

118 **SA:** And um, do you believe that your values help impact the decisions that you make um, for
119 the district?

120 **MH:** Absolutely, you know I've always said, you know like I said, we grew up poor, but we
121 were very rich with our values and our beliefs. The work ethic, you know, that our parents
122 instilled in us, you know, you just treat people the way you want to be treated, you know,
123 and...and I always say that you know, I will never apologize for the students that we serve, I will
124 never apologize for saying, "God led me to this", because many people tend to apologize, you
125 know when they talk about God and not me and I think that is something that the district has
126 valued in me and has seen that, "Oh wow, she's very bold."

127 **SA:** *laughs*

128 **MH:** You know, but because they see that I...that I do walk the talk you know, how if I say I'm
129 going to do something, I'm going to follow through and but definitely you know, staying true to
130 myself that's something that I've always said, just stay true to who you are, be genuine, because
131 if you're not, people can see right through you.

132 **SA:** Right

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133 **MH:** You know, people are going to see and I do believe that is why I have been successful
134 because I never forget where I came from and I'm true to who I am and...and the people that I,
135 you know, that I serve and I think it's very transparent. Many people know and have said that to
136 me, even within minutes of getting to know me, so I value that so much and...and I'm...I'm just
137 blessed.

138 **SA:** And I guess has that helped you I guess as your role as superintendent um to have something
139 to fall back on?

140 **MH:** Yes, you know I always tell the leadership team, you know, "Never think that you're too
141 good at what you're doing now that you wouldn't go back to what you were doing before." You
142 know, so it's like you know with education, which is what we try to instill in our...in our
143 students, you know you have to work on your education and...and you know, think of what you
144 love to do, your passion because you...you're always going to have something that you can fall
145 back to and education as you've heard it, probably many times, is something that no one can take
146 away from you. You're always going to have it, but you always have to have that passion, you
147 know, to continue to learn and never shut down because if we go to sleep at night and you
148 haven't learned something, there's a problem, so I tell our kids, "If"... or even the leadership, I
149 said, "Do not go to sleep without having learned at least one new thing. Whether it's through
150 reading or through the news, or an article, or something." Because I think it's important that we
151 continue to...you know, to grow.

152 **SA:** Um my next question is, so what...where do you gain your strength um and how do you
153 make time for yourself?

154 **MH:** *laughs* I need to work on that.

155 **SA:** *laughs*

156 **MH:** My strength...my strength comes from prayer and my family. I have an incredible family
157 support system that I know sometimes I feel like I neglect their time, because I'm always
158 working and I...I work a lot. Everyone says, "Man you're a superintendent, you do work." I'm
159 like "yes." I definitely, because I love what I do so I...I'm trying to be more intentional
160 with...with finding time with me or for me, but also for my family. You know I try to at least
161 have you know, dinners or lunches or breakfast, brunches, whatever the case may be with the
162 family as much as possible, although right now, we're kind of at a halt...at a halt at it but we still
163 try to do Zoom meetings now virtually just to stay connected and be together but you know,
164 definitely prayer, God, and...and my family who are my support system.

165 **SA:** Umm is there ever a time in the year where you're more busy than other times in the
166 year...because of your job?

167 **MH:** You know what? No. I think when it... when I, when I was working you know in human
168 resources, people would always say, "Oh this is your slow time." We're like, "We never have a
169 slow time." So, I feel that way, you know with the superintendent. You know, while kids have

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170 summers off and teachers, we do not. You know, so we're constantly working, so there to me, I
171 don't say you know, there's...maybe the slow time if I have to pick something would definitely
172 be in the summer when we don't have students, but we're preparing, you know, so we have more
173 time to focus on what the next year is going to be like to roll out you know, new initiatives, or
174 just have a good training...professional development modules, you know for our for our
175 teachers. But you know, if I had to pick something, it would be summer just because you know,
176 teachers aren't there, students aren't there, so we don't have the day to day you know,
177 managerial things that we have to take care of as we do during the year.

178 **SA:** And um, are you still expected to show up to like the administration building in the summer
179 or how does that entirely work during the summers?

180 **MH:** Yes, yes we are...we are still... we are considered year round employees so we're still
181 working you know at central admin, or if we're still doing some sort of professional
182 development, it happens at our campuses as well.

183 **SA:** And um what do you believe is the primary role of a superintendent today and how do you
184 think um that role has evolved over the years?

185 **MH:** You know, I...I...I do believe that back in the old days many people didn't...and I think
186 still to this day, people don't see the superintendent much so I think the role or at least what I'm
187 trying to do, you know I've always said, "if I ever become a superintendent, I want to be the
188 change..." you know "in superintendents." Because I'm very hands on, so as far as for me goes,
189 I think it's evolved in that you know being...being available. Being that type of superintendent
190 that likes to grow through people, I invest a lot of time in professional development and growing
191 our leaders, I'm a huge believer in succession planning. You know, I tell the team, "Tomorrow's
192 not promised, so what if something happens to me? Who's going to be the next leader to step
193 in?" Same thing, you know, from your campus level, how are we preparing the next leader you
194 know to be able to step in? I say that to the students too. You know, investing in them, I meet
195 with our secondary high school...our high school students, I have a
196 superintendent...superintendent advisory council that I meet with them. I try to meet with them,
197 mmm at least 4 to 5 times a year and we do projects together so you know, I think it's, it's more
198 that being the leader that's visible, that's investing in their people, and also making sure that we
199 don't forget to also be visible in the community, because we are the face and the voice of the
200 district and there's so... so many things that the community does for us that we may not be
201 aware so it's very important for me to still make sure that I'm connected with the community,
202 with the city leaders, and you know, all that so we wear you know, a lot of hats, not just
203 instructional, motivational, but also political. You know, which is my least favorite-

204 **SA:** *laughs*

205 **MH:** of all of the politics, but you know we...it is...the job is very political because you know
206 we still have to be out there, with the legislators you know, and all of that, so.

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207 **SA:** And I like how you said that um as your role, you've tried to be more visible even like
208 within the schools and to the community um, and I think that really does make a big difference
209 because when I was growing up and in school, um there were times where I was like "I don't
210 even know who the superintendent is." Because other than like really big district events or
211 something, we never really saw them in the classroom, or um they didn't really show their face
212 that much in the community, so I think what you're doing does really help.

213 **MH:** Gosh, and I'm going to tell you even...I see it a lot in social media so I try to be very active
214 you know, there, and visible as well because when a campus or students post something, they're
215 waiting to see if I'm going to say something but it's those, but it's those...I love it though when
216 I...when I see that. "We knew that" you know, "Ms. Hernandez would be" you know
217 "supporting us." So, you know it's...it's...it's just something I genuinely do. And I'm going to
218 go back to what you were saying about the superintendent. When I was a paraprofessional, and I
219 was going back to you know, college to get my teaching degree, I remember one of the other
220 paras, I think it was another para, maybe the librarian at the time cause we were in the library,
221 she said, "Well watch, we're so proud of you," she said, "You're going to end up being the
222 superintendent one of these days." I didn't even know what a superintendent-

223 **SA:** *laughs*

224 **MH:** Was or...or did because it was not like...what. And...and then you know, now thinking
225 back, it's like "Wow." I mean they were already thinking about it but...but it's true you know,
226 we never saw the superintendents at all unless it was through the news or at a large district event
227 but...but...no...I'm...I'm literally everywhere. But they love that, they love it. Because it's
228 more of a support, also I'm there to see what they need, checking in, you know I want to see
229 instruction, as to... so that we know as to how to work on our curriculum, and not forget that
230 side, that instructional side of me.

231 **SA:** Um so what is a typical day like for you?

232 **MH:** Every day is different. Every day is different. You know, leadership meetings, we have
233 leadership meetings at least twice a week, district events at...in the evenings, community events,
234 campus visits, I've...I'm very intentional about blocking time on my calendar three times a week
235 to visit campuses. First thing in the morning up until 10:30 or 11 because that is my priority, you
236 know, the campuses are my priority and if I don't...ehh if I'm not intentional about blocking that
237 time, it won't happen, cause once if I go to the... to my office at the admin building, that's it
238 'cause everyone needs something, or you know, is wanting time with me. But, very intentional
239 about blocking that time and you know just being...being available for... for whatever meetings
240 I have coming up because I have a lot that's...my days are many, many meetings, but definitely
241 campus visits and evening events with you know, supporting our schools with events that they're
242 doing or sometimes just community events that are...that are happening that are tied to our
243 schools as well.

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244 **SA:** So, at the schools, do you mostly like just drop in to like kinda check in like how
245 everything's going and do you also have meetings there or...?

246 **MH:** No, meetings usually are not you know, at the campuses but there's sometimes I might
247 have a principal that knows that I'm coming and they're like, "Come here I want you to go see
248 my...our PLC'S." You know, or sometimes that's exactly why I go. I want to see what they're
249 you know, what they're talking about, what they're thinking, especially if they're going through
250 a new initiative that they're trying to implement. I want to make sure that I'm you know, I'm
251 listening to see if...if we're guiding them dir...you know, correctly or not and usually I want to
252 go see a specific...like let's say today I'm going to...I really want to go in and see a bilingual
253 education classroom. I want to see what their model is looking like or how they're delivering that
254 instruction, so my visits are intentional. Sometimes it might be, you know, I just want to visit
255 new teachers, I want to see how they're doing, so you know, it varies, but it has to be intentional
256 because if I don't and if I just show up, and sometimes it's just show up say "Hello, how're you
257 doing?" Because they want to talk to me so if I go, eh if it's going to be a twenty, thirty minute
258 drop by, I end up being there about an hour because the principals just want to sit and talk, which
259 is...I mean I love it, I love it because I know they're not afraid, which you know, I don't want
260 them to be afraid-

261 **SA:** *chuckles*

262 **MH:** at all so I want them to have a voice and I think that's one thing that they enjoy that... that
263 they can just talk to me about anything. You know, anything that they're going through or their
264 ideas of what they're thinking about so, you know, again, it...it varies but if I'm not intentional,
265 then it's just going to be a long conversation.

266 **SA:** And um, when they do ask you for help with the PLC's, do they often like look up to you to
267 help like guide them and redirect them for that? Because I know that there's been like some
268 confusion, at least like in my experience with student teaching as to how they should be run and
269 so...

270 **MH:** Yes and we're actually now in Irving we're very committed to being a PLC district so we
271 are constantly training our, our principals and their admin team to make sure that then they go
272 back, you know, on campus and roll it out effective... effectively. Which is then why we at
273 central admin, who are...we really support that model. We have to make sure that we're doing
274 walk throughs to see that it is going, you know, okay and you know, for the most part, I do
275 believe that our teachers and our...and our administrators really feel comfortable with it now,
276 and you know, they...they love it and now they don't see anything else other than a PLC-
277 *laughs* you know, model. So it's...it's actually yes, but if they ask me and that's the thing, if
278 I'm there, they're going to turn to me and they're going to ask me questions, "And what do you
279 think Ms. Hernandez? Do you think?..." So you know it...and again I love being there but more
280 mostly as not telling you what to do but just kind of guiding them and I remember my years
281 in...in the classroom, it's putting it really back to them you know, to see how they're thinking

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282 and asking them the question in a different way you know, or answering them with the question
283 that way they can start you know, thinking and... 'cause then that's how they learn and they most
284 of the time, they know the answer, they just want to get reassurance.

285 **SA:** Right, and so um would you say that these PLC meetings are still fairly new, or how long
286 have they been um done before?

287 **MH:** Oh no, no, I think we're just now being a little bit more... I don't want to use the word
288 aggressive, that's to, you know that's to me, that's a bad word but I would have to say
289 intentional, you know but PLC's, that... that concept started back when I was still on... on
290 campus, back like maybe in 2004? Or 2005, so it's been... it's been around but it hasn't been
291 well thought out or planned out, but now I mean there's huge conferences about professional
292 learning communities so like I said, we've invested this last year in sending all our principals
293 to... to the conference, I myself attended the conference because I wanted you know, I believe
294 in... in if I'm going to have someone do something, I want to do it too. You know, so, but yeah
295 no... no it's not new it's... it's been... it's been around but I think many were trying to
296 figure... figure it out you know, how to best implement it but again, we're... we're trying to be as
297 supportive as... as we can to lead them and guide them through the process.

298 **SA:** Um and so what are some of the hurdles that the district has had to overcome since you have
299 been superintendent?

300 **MH:** Well I think a... actually I really loved the way the transition happened when I moved into
301 the superintendency and I think it helped because I was already in the district so I knew I was a
302 step ahead because I knew what the... what the hurdles were you know and what the challenges
303 were. You know we... the district was in a position where there was a lot of fear you know with
304 the leadership and even trying to make decisions, they couldn't, so I was very open to
305 immediately hearing them out you know I'm like "I want to hear you", you know, "cause you're
306 the ones leading your campuses, you're the ones that know what's happening..." We were going
307 through a rewrite of our curriculum at the time and it was...

308 *both laugh*

309 **MH:** so stressful for teachers. Many wanted to quit, they were like done, it was very scripted, so
310 immediately I said, "Ok there's something not r..., you know, not right with this." So you know,
311 again, we... we had to have a system in place where we would listen, you know, to the teachers
312 and see where can we tweak those... you know those things that are bothering them that they're
313 seeing that we're not seeing and pretty much that you know. I said it was the change, you know I
314 had to do a culture change in where we went from fear to being open, you know and I said,
315 "Nope... there's... I don't want anyone to be fear... fearful I don't lead by intimidation or fear,
316 that's not the way I lead." And it was incredible how that transition just went so smooth because
317 I do believe that the staff felt comfortable with me and they believed, "Ok, she's going to take
318 care of us, she will take care of us" and, and that happened. I mean now, we have no complaints
319 about our curriculum, no complaints about, you know, our culture, and I love it that our... our

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320 principals are, are very open. I mean, they're not afraid to tell me in a meeting what, you know,
321 what they're thinking because I myself ask them. You know it's like ok it's time to do a
322 culture...I do, I call it a culture check in. "How's the culture district wide or at your campus?"
323 You know, cause I do believe that teachers also set the tone you know, in their classroom and it
324 shouldn't just be the expectation that the administrators are always the ones trying to you know,
325 set that culture, but it is important for our teachers to understand that they are leading their
326 classroom and that culture change needs to happen in the classroom as well. So, you know, I
327 believe culture is very important in an organization so that was my primary focus and I knew that
328 I feel that it was not difficult because I knew what needed to happen cause I was already in the
329 system and...but other than getting the curriculum rewrite, everything else just transitioned very
330 well.

331 **SA:** And um do you believe that change that you brought was due to your transparency um and
332 like your openness to the community and the people you worked with?

333 **MH:** I do, I do because I've even seen that change in the community, you know how people say,
334 "Oh my gosh", you know, "we're...", because you know, in the past, there was a...a big a
335 separation you know, when I was hired I told my board, I said, "I want to create unity within the
336 board and within the community." You know, because I was seeing that huge separation and
337 now, you know, the city has a great relationship with us, we have so much community outreach,
338 especially now that we're going through this crisis and you know, I received the President's
339 Award from the Hispanic Chamber-

340 **SA:** Ahh, congratulations!

341 **MH:** this November because *laughs* because they...they said, "She's great in building that
342 community..." you know, "Relationship." I mean you know, like I tell you, I've been blessed
343 and then the BEAM conference which is the bilingual...Bilingual Education Metroplex
344 conference, I don't know if you're familiar with that. They're giving me the Mil Gracias Award
345 also for always supporting bilingual education and you, you know they're unfortunately because
346 of the Coronavirus, they had to cancel the...the reception-

347 **SA:** Oh

348 **MH:** where I was going to be honored but they're having that virtual and I believe the awards
349 are tomorrow so...

350 **SA:** Wow

351 **MH:** You know, I think because...they're, they're seeing it and I've always been the type of
352 leader that I don't like the attention. You know, I like to lead from behind the scenes and I want
353 to give others, you know, the spotlight. It's like, "No, no, no, it's not about me, you know, it's
354 about our kids." It's about...so... I struggle with that, but some people say, "Hey, you just have
355 to do it. So what if they want to honor you for this?"

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356 **SA:** *laughs*

357 **MH:** I'm like "I know, but I just don't...", And I don't like the attention, but you know, cause
358 I...I am very humble and I'm like, "Nope, I don't want it." It's you know, I can...I...I'll...I'll,
359 I'd rather have the kids do that or I'd rather have you know, this person do it but yes, and I do
360 believe it's because of people saying, "You're just very genuine. You're just very authentic.
361 You're just...", you know, I'm like, "No, what I... what you see with me is what you get."

362 **SA:** Ok. And I know that you had mentioned that one of the hurdles was the scripted curriculum
363 so do you think, um, that teaching has improved because the district no longer uses that or what
364 have you seen from that?

365 **MH:** Well, you know, I do believe that we, definitely gave our teachers a little more flexibility
366 with it. There is to some point still, some script, you know, scripted curriculum because it helps
367 our new teachers. So, that's what we discovered, "Ok we can still have scripted for new teachers
368 if they so choose so to do...to do that." But then allowing those that are ready to run with it, be
369 creative because this is what I had told the curriculum department, I said, "You know, when we
370 do that, we're not allowing them to be creative you know, you just have robots, you know, and
371 they're...and I don't want people reading it because we have amazing teachers that can develop
372 and, you know, do their own lessons." So yes, I think the teachers...and we actually were able to
373 see it you know, last year with the growth that we saw in our kids, you know when it came to the
374 accountability system, we grew. I mean by seven percentages, you know, we went from an 80 to
375 an 87 on the accountability and I do believe it's because we allowed, flexibility for our teachers,
376 you know, they're the ones that know the kids better and taken that data to their PLC's and
377 seeing, you know, ok, "Nope, what we saw in the curriculum is not working", "Ok well let us
378 know, so how can we tweak it?" So again, it's...it's just takes everyone working together you
379 know to make it, to make it happen and that's exactly, what we did and I...I do believe it's
380 because of...of you know, what we did with the curriculum that our teachers ran with it.

381 **SA:** Um, and tell me how the district has had to change its course of action due to the
382 Coronavirus?

383 **MH:** Wow, that was like...

384 **SA:** *laughs*

385 **MH:** fast and furious

386 **SA:** *laughs*

387 **MH:** I'm going to tell you, it...it just feels like it's been months and months and it's only been
388 three weeks? And it...it feels...and I think because it was nonstop 24/7, that, you know, I was
389 on...on calls and, and you know, just daily calls with the commissioner but I do remember, the
390 week we were actually fortunate because we...our spring break was the week when everything
391 just happened. So, we were still in session when we started hearing that districts were going to

392 extend, their spring break, so I started talking to...to my cabinet, March 9th, I remember, and I
393 said, "Hey guys, you know, we have to be ready, we have to have at least 2 weeks of, instruction
394 for our kids, just in case, you know, just in case." And I remember someone from the team said,
395 "No, you know, I think we should wait because we don't know." And I'm...and I'm very
396 proactive, you know, I'd rather be proactive than reactive, and I said, "Nope, we're going to do
397 it, we have to be ready just in case, you know, it's not going to hurt us if we send work home
398 with our students before they go on spring break, in the event we have to close, or extend it." So
399 it was just very preliminary, so, by Wednesday...that was on Monday the 9th, by Wednesday the,
400 11th, you know, I asked, "Ok, I want to see, you know, where are we with the curriculum for our
401 children?" So by that day, we met with the curriculum...I met with the curriculum department,
402 they shared with me the plans that they had, you know for secondary and for elementary. Of
403 course, we had some that were saying, "Well, we really want it to be very, rigorous and very...",
404 and I'm like, "Guys, we're not going to go there again... you know, "Let's just plan for 2 weeks,
405 it can be, a review of what they've learned so far, you know, it's just...they just have to have
406 something. And then what about Pre-K? We still can't forget about Pre-K." So, you know, all of
407 that...so then they had a great plan. So, on Thursday, before we went on break, we announced it
408 to the principals that, "This is the expectation, make sure that our kids take their work home,
409 their laptops, teachers, just in case." Well, ehh, and then by Friday, when everyone was out, we
410 were fortunate that we were out that Friday the...the 13th, go figure. Friday the 13th? When
411 everything just happened and we were off so it's like, "Ok, good, kids aren't in school, teachers
412 aren't in school." So, since March 13th, I've been having daily conference calls with the
413 commissioner of education, everyday...Saturday, Sunday. He recently stopped doing Saturday
414 and Sunday, like I have one today at 3 with just a small group of superintendents and him, but
415 it's just been everyday with constant guidance from him as to what's happening, what's the
416 expectation from TEA. So again, you know-

417 *Computer alert noise*

418 **MH:** we were ahead, I feel that we were ahead of the game because we were proactive, but the
419 things that we've had to change definitely you know, distributing devices, you know, this last
420 week for our students that did not, still did not have devices, hotspots, you know, for their Wi-Fi,
421 continuing the online, E learning, and if you look at our website, if you need more information,
422 we have the instructional continuity, you know, plan just for all grades, you know, as to what
423 they're required to do and the curriculum department has done an amazing, job with that so...It
424 definitely has changed, you know even now, the way we look at education. My biggest, I guess,
425 hardest thing to do is having to extend it because our students want...want to be in school. I had
426 a very hard time, you, know, when I had to definitely make the decision based on what the
427 governor, you know, was also saying and the commissioner, about our kids. I struggle with that
428 because our seniors are having a rough time, our children that are less fortunate, and, rather be
429 at...at school, and I worry about those kids that, don't have a good home life, and, were...you
430 know, were just in abusive situations. You know, and...and I just have to tell myself that I can't
431 control, you know, everything because it...it really is wearing on me because as a

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432 superintendent, I want to make sure that everyone is taken care of and that is where I just feel
433 worthless. You know, sometimes it's like, "I can't have them all." You know, and I want them
434 back, but you know, I think it just...it just taught that...it taught us to, you know, think
435 differently but work super-fast and we have done it in...in a matter of days. I mean we... we
436 transformed it in a...in a matter of...of days and it was, pretty incredible work that you know, I
437 think all of us in a leadership role, even the teachers, students, we have made history because of
438 this Coronavirus. I mean, people are going to be more resilient you know, in leading... in leading
439 the way, especially our seniors right now so... Yeah, so we've had a lot, just a lot of moving
440 pieces, it...everything was moving so fast, ehh, everything. Fifteen minutes later, something
441 changed.

442 **SA:** *laughs*

443 **MH:** We're like, "Oh my goodness, now we have to go back and do this. Oh, what about our
444 special ed students? What about?..." You know, I mean, "What about the food? How can we
445 protect them also?" you know, cause they're out in the front line. So just a lot of planning, you
446 know, behind the scenes, and just making sure that, you know, we...we don't miss a beat, or
447 miss anything.

448 **SA:** And so, has it been like a bumpier transition for you than you thought, or what do you think
449 about it?

450 **MH:** Has it been what?

451 **SA:** A bumpier transition for you than you thought because of the Coronavirus?...or how...what
452 are your thoughts?

453 **MH:** You know, I think because we were prepared, you know, we were prepared, ok at least
454 they have something and definitely, we had to reach out to those that were absent, the day, you
455 know, before we went on break to make sure that we had, something. I don't think it was...you
456 know, I think it was just the adjustment, you know, that was hard getting adjusted...adjusted to
457 working from home, it...it...cause we're...nothing replaces human interaction. You know, it's
458 like I had to have a meeting with all the principals, during our spring break just to update them
459 and to check on them, see how, they were, you know, adjusting and making sure that they took a
460 break, you know, if they needed to take a deep breath *laughs* because it's hard. I think all of us
461 have struggled with the working from home and we feel that it's, it's harder. It is harder because
462 having to keep up with, you know, oh my goodness, because I'm...I'm trying to keep my
463 calendar the way it is, you know, still meeting with students, and when I have campus visits on
464 my calendar, checking in with those principals, you know, just to make sure they're ok, we've,
465 you know, still recognizing our teacher of the year finalists. We did a virtual, you know, surprise,
466 you know, to those teachers, so we're still trying again. Thinking...thinking, you know, I told the
467 team, "Let's think as if there were no box, you know, so it's you know, the sky's the limit, even
468 beyond, and we're definitely having to do that now. So, so I think it was just the adjustment just

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469 this week I felt like, “Ok, I’m getting a...a good schedule now. I’m getting comfortable.”, But
470 then something happens and you’re like, “Oh my goodness, here we go again.”

471 **SA:** *laughs*

472 **MH:** You know, but it’s ok, we constantly have to be adjusting and I would say that’s just been
473 the biggest hurdle, just adjusting to this new norm for a while.

474 **SA:** And um, so, for you personally, like how have you had to change your role as a district
475 leader during this time?

476 **MH:** You know, I would say I haven’t because even though we’re all virtual, and I’m trying to
477 still be very visible you know, on social media. Communication has been very important to me.
478 In fact, I had emails, you know, from parents, you know, and teachers, thanking me for
479 communication because they feel good, you know, that we haven’t dropped the communication
480 with them and I’m a huge believer on communication even though I can’t be out there in the
481 community, you know, visi...visibly and in person, but I’m still doing it, you know, virtually.
482 So, you know, I think my role now is even just behind the scenes, definitely, still working with,
483 state, and local officials as to what our closing of the year will look like and start planning for
484 next year. So, I...that’s my focus, you know, right now, that, you know, we still have a job to do,
485 we’re still working so, still planning out our closure, still thinking about our graduation for our
486 seniors, and then what’s our next year, you know, going to look like.

487 **SA:** And what do you guys plan um for the end of the year, or have you guys discussed that in
488 detail yet how you guys plan to close out that year, or...?

489 **MH:** Well, you know, definitely still looking at guidance as you know right now the, stay at
490 home order it is through April 30th, hoping to return to school May 4th. Now what we’ve been
491 told, you know, from the commissioner, is that in order for us to consider reopening we have to
492 consider certain factors. You know, as they’re still community spread and if you know, we’re in
493 Dallas County and Dallas County is the biggest one, you know, that has the most cases. So...so
494 we’ll have to again, reassess and we are reassessing every 2 weeks and definitely
495 staying...staying consistent with what the governor, you know, has... has placed, because there
496 is no way...if I don’t feel like our students or even the community is still safe to come back May
497 4th, I will extend it because I think until this all, you know, settles down, we even heard it from
498 the President that he was hoping that maybe by June 1st everything would be back to normal.
499 Well, June 1st we’re out of school, which to us is like, “Mmm, does that mean that we will have
500 to close, you know, now?” But, you know it’s...I...I some schools and some districts you...you
501 may have seen that they’ve already said, indefinite...closed indefinitely. I just don’t think that
502 that gives our kids, you know, hope of coming back and I wanted...I want our kids to still stay
503 engaged you know, with their teachers, with their school. Like, “Guys, school is still going on,
504 we still want you to be engaged, we still want you to learn.” You know, but, as of right now,
505 we’re sticking to what the governor is saying and then reassess, depending on how it looks, you

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506 know, in 2 weeks from now, it could change. I mean we're praying that this just goes away like
507 out of nowhere.

508 **SA:** *laughs*

509 **MH:** Right, you know, we're just *laughs* being very hopeful. But as of right now, I wish I had
510 more, you know, concrete you know, information but we don't because, you know, every day is
511 changing you know, every day.

512 **SA:** But as the superintendent, you do have a say as to when school can start back up again,
513 or...? Do you...?

514 **MH:** Yes. Yes, definitely I would always, make sure that it...it also falls and is consistent with,
515 you know, the restrictions the social distance restrictions. You know, obviously if, they say no
516 gatherings of 50 or more, then-

517 *computer alert*

518 **MH:** then that just means we can't because, you know, our campuses have more than 600 kids.
519 You know, some have thousands of kids so there's no way we would expose them.

520 **SA:** Um, and what do you envision for the future of Irving ISD?

521 **MH:** I think we're going to look very different, you know, we...we've always...I've always said
522 that we want to be the...the...the best district in the nation. *laughs* So of course we're already
523 having conversations, you know it's like, "Guys, education is not going to look the same." I'm
524 sure the universities are also doing...although universities already have a lot of online, you
525 know, programs. You know, we're thinking that as we're going through this phase that we have
526 a lot of students actually that have enjoyed the virtual much better than being at school because
527 we have those that are...that like to be left alone. "Let me just be on my own, I have this." You
528 know, "I'm going to do that." So, you know, we're thinking, "Hmm, maybe we're going to have
529 a platform you know, that we have, you know, students enroll and they're still our students and
530 we're still providing that, you know, online instruction for a few, you know, for a few cause not
531 everyone is going to like that idea. I know that we have so many that are ready to come back but
532 we're thinking that maybe even the parents, you know, maybe some parents that have considered
533 homeschooling their kids. If we can offer a platform, you know, like that to them at home, where
534 Irving is providing the curriculum and they're doing, you know, the instruction and...or vice
535 versa. So, you know, just a lot to think about but, you know, definitely, I have to continue to also
536 take care of the finances, you know, for the district because, you know, we're afraid that... I
537 mean although the Lieutenant Governor spoke yesterday, at our meeting, that he doesn't see that
538 we're going to be hurt with funding for our you know, school system, but, he...he's...he was just
539 very optimistic. He...he says that we're going to come a whole in this whole situation, but we
540 also have to start thinking of ways, you know, where we strategically abandon things that we
541 don't need...necessarily need, which will be a good opportunity for us to just evaluate
542 everything that we're doing and... and try to be conservative in all our cause. So, you know, a

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543 lot...a lot to think about for the future, but, I think it will continue to be bright, definitely you
544 know, different because it's going to take us time to get back to *laughs* to get back to normal
545 and maybe several are not going to come back and are not going to want to be back to normal but
546 we'll...we'll cross that bridge when we get there.

547 **SA:** Do you believe the teachers are more prepared, I guess, now because of everything that
548 they've had to, um, change in their classrooms...then do you think they would like be even more
549 prepared in the future?

550 **MH:** Oh yeah, oh absolutely. You know, just the incredible, you know, thinking that they've
551 been doing, you know, just, they're...teachers by nature, you know, the majority of them are
552 very creative. But I am going to tell you that some are struggling because they have children of
553 their own that they're having to also watch, you know, while they're having to teach their
554 students so that's a challenge, which I know definitely is like, "Ugh, I would just rather be in my
555 classroom." You know, but as far as, oh yeah, the thinking about how they do their lessons, how
556 they do, you know, their instruction...it is going to be, I think, beyond anyone's expectations, or
557 what we never envisioned it would be like.

558 **SA:** And, um, is there anything else you would wish to add or, say anything?

559 **MH:** You know, no. I just, thank you, you know, for interviewing me, I hope it went well and
560 that you were able to gather, you know, information to help you as you become, you know, a
561 teacher I hope you stay in Irving ISD. *laughs*

562 **SA:** Yes, no, I'm applying in Irving and I've umm-

563 **MH:** Awesome.

564 **SA:** Yeah I'm getting my applications ready, um, but, yes, thank you so much for this interview,
565 I've learned a lot just talking to you right now, and, um, you've helped me to think about things
566 that I didn't think about before, and like more aware of what's actually going on in the school
567 districts because of the Coronavirus and even things that happened before that I wasn't aware of
568 until now. So....

569 **MH:** Well good, I'm glad it was, you know, beneficial to you and you know again, I apologize
570 for the delay-

571 **SA:** Oh no problem.

572 **MH:** yesterday. The job is so big, that it's like, "I'm not trying to put her off but there's so much
573 going on.

574 **SA:** *laughs* No, I totally understand.

575 **MH:** But a...again, I do appreciate you, and I think you know, again, you're going to become a
576 great educator.

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577 **SA:** Thank you.

578 **MH:** You're going to be thinking, you know, of...differently, you know, going in and I'm sure,
579 UD is probably doing the same with you guys. So, I wish you the best.

580 **SA:** Thank you very much.

581 **MH:** I wish you good luck, and I hope to see you around soon.

582 **SA:** Thank you. Yes, and I wish you um, good luck for the rest of the school year.

583 **MH:** Thank you, Salome.

584 **SA:** Thank you, bye.

585 **MH:** Bye-bye.