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10/24/2025

Educational Autobiography

1.) Introduction

Throughout my educational journey I have attended many schools. The school I chose to research for my autobiography is Coolidge High School, in Coolidge, Tx. I will analyze the community school contexts, including the foundation of this independent school district, and the demographics of not just this school but the community. I will discuss what I know through my experience as a student but as an aspiring teacher in hopes to help me further my understanding of these fundamental systems schools deploy.

2.) Community & School Contexts

Coolidge is a tiny town in rural Limestone County, smack dab in Central Texas, with a population of 778 people as of the 2020 census. It's the kind of place where the high school football game is the biggest event of the week and everyone waves at each other on the road. The community makes up in diversity for what it lacks in size. 49% of the community is Hispanic, 29% are White, 19% are African American while the last 3% is made up of 16% mixed race people, 9 Native Americans, and just one person identifying as an Asian American. Most families speak English at home, but Spanish is quite common, especially among multi-generational households. Christianity is the dominant religion, with Baptist and Methodist churches playing a significant role in the community. The town isn't wealthy by any stretch. The median household income is roughly \$24,000. This bleak number translates to roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ people living below poverty level. You'll find parents working in agriculture, construction, trucking, or at local businesses like Dollar General, the "Cool" stop, or the foundry, Frazier & Frazier. The school

district itself is one of the biggest employers, and some people commute to nearby towns like Mexia or Waco for jobs in manufacturing or healthcare. Coolidge Independent School District is definitively rural. The classes are small, the teachers know your whole family, and everyone is at the football game every Friday.

I.) Student Body Profile

Coolidge Junior/Senior High School enrolls roughly 140 students in grades 6–12. The school mirrors the town's demographics, with 54% Hispanic, 29% White, and 15% African American students. An astonishing 73% of students are economically disadvantaged, qualifying for either free or reduced-price lunch, which aligns with the town's median household income of \$24,000 and poverty rate of 24%. The school also supports 9% English Learners, 24% in Special Education, showing a wide range of academic and support needs. While specific data on homeless or mobilized students is limited, the district takes part in the National School Lunch Program and must appoint a McKinney-Vento liaison, though they do not list their name publicly. Academically, Coolidge High School has made strides, earning an "A" accountability rating from the Texas Education Agency for 2024–2025, with a 100% graduation rate for the Class of 2023. However, disappointingly enough, student achievement stays below state averages, with math proficiency at 35–39% and reading proficiency at 45–49%. Truancy affects 10% of students and is highly noticeable in the small classes of 9 students to 1 teacher.

Social Identity in comparison to Community and School contexts.

As a proud hillbilly from East Tennessee, I found myself on the outside looking in at Coolidge. The high school had 9 white people including myself when I was in attendance in 2017. As a poor white kid in a ghetto town I didn't feel as though I stood out, I just tried my best to blend in

with the crowd. I found myself with a large diversity of colleagues. I feel as though I fit into the communities' socioeconomic level, but culturally different. The part of Tennessee/Virginia my family is from is predominantly white. My dad had never even seen a Black person in real life until high school football. I feel like this school's diversity helped me be more accepting and understanding of others. It helped me shift my family's isolated perspective. If I had attended another school, I wouldn't be who I am today, and every school I attended has shaped my unique perspective.

Organizational Structure

Coolidge Independent School District runs two schools: Coolidge Elementary School, which serves grades Pre-K through 5, and Coolidge Junior/Senior High School, which covers grades 6 through 12. The district's total student enrollment is approximately 295 students, with a student-teacher ratio of 10:1, allowing for personalized instruction. Faculty is distributed across grade levels with 1 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in Pre-K, 2 in kindergarten, 15 in elementary grades, and 12 in secondary grades. The district employs 29 classroom teachers and 22 other staff members, including instructional aides, administrative support, and student services personnel. Administrative leadership includes 1 district administrator, 2 school administrators, and 2 district administrative support staff. The district also employs 4 instructional aids, 2 student support service staff, and 9 other support service personnel. While there are no dedicated guidance counselors or librarians listed, the district provides essential services through shared roles and small-scale staffing.

Formal Authority Structure

The formal authority structure of Coolidge Independent School District consists of a seven-member elected Board of Trustees, each serving four-year terms. Trustees are elected by residents during November elections in even-numbered years and must live within the district. The board includes a President (Danny Finley), Vice President (Joyce Bateman), and Secretary (Maria Samaniego), along with four added members. This board holds final authority over district policies, curriculum, budgeting, and the hiring of the superintendent and other key personnel.

The district's central office is modest, reflecting its rural scale. It includes one district administrator, two school administrators, and 2 administrative support staff. These roles manage day-to-day operations, compliance, and instructional leadership across the district's two campuses. While a formal organizational chart isn't publicly posted, the structure emphasizes streamlined governance and close collaboration between board members, administrators, and faculty.

Funding Framework & Teacher Salaries

Coolidge Independent School District operates on a modest budget reflective of its rural setting and small student population. The district's annual revenue totals about \$5.8 million, with 68% coming from state sources, 17% from federal funding, and 15% from local contributions. This breakdown highlights the district's reliance on state and federal support, typical for economically disadvantaged areas. On a per-student basis, CISD spends \$13,546 annually, which covers instruction, support services, and operational costs. Instructional spending alone accounts for \$2.6 million, while support services total \$1.2 million.

Teacher compensation in Coolidge ISD reflects both the district's budget constraints. The average teacher salary is \$57,973, which is about 9% lower than the Texas state average and 17% below the national average. Salaries range from \$45,850 to \$62,040 for most teachers, with the highest reported salary reaching \$75,540. While specific salary scales for new BS or MS teachers and veteran educators (5, 10, 15 years) are not publicly posted, the district does participate in the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) program, which can provide up to \$14,000 in additional compensation for designated teachers in rural districts. This merit-based system rewards effectiveness and supports retention.

Accreditation & Overall Assessment

Although Coolidge ISD's students struggle mightily to reach standard levels in both Math and Reading proficiency, this school is accredited by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and has not faced any sanctions or state intervention about their curriculum and practices.

3.) Personal Autobiographical Experience

I.) Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Experience

Throughout my education, I attended around 15 different schools, including three middle schools, and a new high school each year. Moving so often made building relationships difficult, but it allowed me to meet diverse educational philosophies and conflict resolution approaches. My early home life affected my behavior in elementary school, but supportive teachers helped me improve. Switching schools often gave me opportunities for fresh starts. Despite struggles from 8th grade through sophomore year, including alternative school placements, I eventually chose to distance myself from negative influences. These varied experiences inspire my desire to be a patient, understanding teacher who appreciates cognitive complexity. Good teachers seemed

to instinctively understand me, while others resorted to discipline. I was treated better in middle school than high school, both by faculty and students. Changing schools also affected my placement in advanced classes and meant rebuilding social connections each time.

II.) Favorite Mentors (Least?)

My favorite mentor would be 5/6 Social Studies. Mrs. Nell Kaufman. She was very engaged, and enthusiastic about what she taught. She knew I didn't have the best home life and made school enjoyable even if just for one class period. Mrs. Sumrall is another favorite. She looked like a mother; I purposefully took every class she taught so I could hang out in her class. At one point she even took my brother and I to goodwill to buy us clothes, and new shoes. Looking back, it's embarrassing how poor we were and how oblivious my brother and I were. If I were going to mention one least favorite, it would always be Mrs. Payne. She was my 5th grade science teacher. I took the STAAR test for her in the spring of that year, and she emphasized every pupil to take their time. I finished in 45 minutes out of the 4-hour time given. I vividly remember checking this test making sure I was certain about everything I could. Upon leaving the class after the tests were turned in, she stopped me in the hallway and scolded me. I can still hear her voice in my head. "I hope you fail". I will always hold onto that because I don't ever want to make a student feel the way she made me feel. Just as a side note I passed that test with an 86%.

III.) Extracurricular

My school's extracurricular activities consisted of basic sports, FFA, band, and UIL. Out of the four general extracurriculars I ran track, I played football until I broke my tailbone and never wanted to experience that again. Otherwise, I was a mainstay in the band playing the Alto Sax. I

also took part in UIL annually. It is an academic competition that is mandatory in middle schools throughout several states but is optional once in High School. I took part in things such as listening skills, chess, modern oratory, reading skills, and art. I often won 1st in listening and chess but always came in second in the modern oratory debate. My parents divorced in 2010 so at this point it was just my mother who couldn't take part at all due to working multiple jobs just to feed us. She made us find our own rides to our extracurricular activities. It helped instill my brother and I with independence, albeit at the time it was disappointing never having someone to wave to in the crowd.

IV.) Equity Audit

a. Hidden/Null Curriculum?

The Hidden curriculum in schools is defined as the unwritten, informal teachings that occur in school. In contrast, Null curriculum is defined as everything left out of the explicit curriculum.

b. Examples of this?

At Coolidge High School there were several Hidden Curriculum I can name easily. The first being the dress code not only for woman, but for men as well. Men had to have their hair above their eyebrow, above the middle of the ear, and no longer than their neck. There was a strict policy on facial hair, hoods, and hats as well. The staff would call you out as disrespectful for not taking your hat off as you walk into a building, and they keep disposable razors in the bathroom for men that have the slightest facial hair. This is the school teaching conformity to the culture of the south. The Yes Sir, No Sir culture is highly emphasized as well, you won't necessarily get in trouble, but it is frowned upon and seen as disrespectful to your elders. The other example of

Hidden curriculum is time management, from the bells to the strictness of their tardy policy the teachers had no mercy. In the state of Texas excessive tardiness can result in the failure of a class. Due to this rule, the 10% rule, if you miss 10% of a class the school must not credit you with completion. This occurred to me at Coolidge where I passed Geometry with a high A but was not credited with completion forcing me to retake the class. An example of Null Curriculum would be Critical Race Theory. Although Coolidge High School was a minority majority schools, there were not many classes that emphasized the systematic inequalities these students face. The lessons I've learned through this hidden curriculum are very traditionalist. Respect for your elders, Traditional social norms like a home ec class with all girls, and a woodshop class with all boys. The idea that if you want something you have to earn it, they taught us that through fundraising for field trips. For Band it was tickets to a spaghetti dinner at the school, sell seven tickets and you get to go to Six Flags. If you only sell six and can't pay the difference you don't get to go. Another lesson they taught was that underclassmen were inferior almost to upperclassmen. You have much less privileges as an underclassman, you cannot leave for lunch, cannot go to prom, etc. I believe there was emphasis in my time about the school to prison pipeline. At one point all Texas seniors had to take a course on interacting with police officers. Teaching mostly black students to never reach down or around when the police are walking up to your window, hold your hands on the wheel in sight and tell the officer "Hello Officer, I am reaching for my license and registration" so he doesn't think you're grabbing a gun. It baffled me at the time because I don't think it addresses the root cause of racism in policing but teaches the students to conform to the society instead of emphasizing ways, we can address this as a society.

4.) Conclusion

Looking back on both my personal journey and Coolidge High School, I see how deeply schools reflect the communities they serve—and how those environments shape who we become. From bouncing between campuses and struggling to find stability, to seeing the quiet power of good teachers and the brash lessons of hidden curriculum, I've learned that education is more than just grades and rules. It's about people. It's about understanding where someone's coming from before deciding where they're going. Coolidge taught me that diversity isn't just about race, it's about experience, struggle, and growth. Through all the moves and mentors, I've come to believe that the best educators are the ones who see the whole student, not just the behavior. That's the kind of teacher I want to be because I know what it feels like to be misunderstood, and I know how much it means to be seen.

5.) Works Cited (4 min)

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6.) Appendices

Appendix A: Coolidge High School Demographics Table

Demographic Group	Percentage (%)
Hispanic	54
White	29
African American	15
Other (Mixed, Native, Asian)	2

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2025 School Report Card

Appendix B: Coolidge ISD Teacher Salary Range

Position	Salary Range
Average Teacher	\$57,973
Lowest Salary	\$45,850
Highest Salary	\$75,540

Source: GovSalaries, 2025