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A Legacy of Collaborative School Leadership: Ima Hogg and The Houston School Board, 1943-1949

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School boards are very powerful entities whose decisions have a significant impact on millions of students in the United States. Since the formation of the first local school boards in Massachusetts in the late 1700s, these groups of local officials have directed public education in their communities (Land, 2000). Throughout the nineteenth century, unpaid members of school boards managed both the daily operations of local schools districts and created policy. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, the increasing school population meant increased responsibilities for school board members as they oversaw increasingly larger and more complex institutions. The management of district infrastructure including facilities, transportation, food, etc. as well as responding to state legislation such as compulsory attendance laws slowly changed the model of school board governance. At first, professional managers (superintendents) were hired to oversee and manage the district's operations and school board members still participated in daily operations through committee oversight. In the latter half of the twentieth century, as both districts and responsibilities grew, increasing numbers of full-time personnel were hired to carry out the daily business of school districts (Gates, 2013; Halik, 2012; Sell, 2005).

In Texas, the 1876 Constitution decreed that any incorporated city could, by a majority vote of the property taxpayers, create and assume exclusive control of an independent public school within its limit (Eby, 1918). By August 1884, sixty-five Texas towns and cities managed school districts (Eby, 1918). However, as the Texas population significantly increased between 1870 and 1920, urban citizens voted to separate school management from municipal control, thereby creating independent school districts. For example, the Houston Independent School District was formed in 1923 and included a Board of Education which was composed of seven members elected from nonpartisan citywide elections, a common practice across the country at that time. For the next two decades, the Houston School Board was responsible for managing the daily operations of the district as well as those of the University of Houston and its affiliated College for Negroes.

Within the context of the Texas educational landscape, this article focuses on one particular local school board member in the mid-twentieth century who, not only played a significant role in the history of the Houston Independent School District,

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but left a legacy of school leadership marked by an emphasis on a collaborative model that is much more representative of twenty-first century school board governance. Ima Hogg (1882-1975), a community leader in Houston, Texas, for five decades, helped establish major cultural institutions such as The Museum of Fine Arts in 1900 and The Houston Symphony in 1913, serving as President of the Symphony Society from 1917-1921, and again from 1946-1956. In 1929, she started the Houston Child Guidance Center to provide mental health services for children and families and was involved in the leadership of this organization for over two decades. In 1940, she established the Hogg Foundation for Mental Hygiene (later Mental Health) at The University of Texas, which continues to provide information, scholarships, community resources, and training for mental health professionals throughout the state. From 1943 to 1949, Ima Hogg served as a member of the Houston School Board and it is that particular experience that is the focus of this article. Qualitative methods of historical analysis were used to examine primary and secondary sources in Texas libraries and archives, particularly the Museum of Fine Arts Archives in Houston and The Center for American History at The University of Texas in Austin which houses the Ima Hogg Papers (IHP).

In 1943, when Ima Hogg ran for the Houston School Board, she was already recognized as "a civic leader who could identify community problems, develop innovative solutions for them, and marshal widespread support in the private sector" (Kirkland, 1998, p. 462). Her strong support for education was evident while working on educational projects as diverse as mental health, music, and the arts. In a speech to the Woman's Club of Houston during her campaign for the Houston School Board in March of 1943, Ima Hogg explained her philosophy of education.

The process of education in the individual is made up through experiences as well as through teaching. Therefore, with the roots of influence beginning in the home, it becomes a many-sided community responsibility in addition to being a school problem. This, I think we cannot overlook when considering a program for the development and education of our youth as future citizens. These are my beliefs, well grounded in me through heritage, training, and an abiding interest in my fellow man. (Box 4W237, Folder 3, IHP)

In a time when women held few elected positions, including on local school boards, Ima Hogg explained her reasons for running for the school board.

My reasons for running for a place on the Houston school board are very simple. First of all, I believe the citizens of Houston are entitled to have two women representatives out of seven on the board of education. The women's point of view on problems of education and policies affecting schools would obviously not be amiss. I do not think the voters of Houston should overlook the justice of this claim. (Box 4W237, Folder 3, Ima Hogg Papers)

She further explained another reason for running for office by describing her belief in public service, particularly during a time of war, when the focus of most citizens was not on education.

The sacrifices which our men and women on the battlefield are making are a challenge to every man, woman, and child on the home front which can be met only through a willingness to serve wherever needed to the utmost of one's capacity, without thought of self. (4W237, Folder 3, IHP)

Public service on the Houston School Board provided Ima Hogg the opportunity to demonstrate a style of collaborative leadership perhaps more characteristic of today's school board members than those of the 1940s. The leadership positions that she held while serving on the Houston School Board included Assistant Secretary from 1944 to 1946, Secretary from September 1946 to May 1947, and Vice-President from 1947 to 1949.

However, after winning election in 1943, Ima Hogg's initial actions were unique for the time period. Although well versed in leading various community organizations, she decided that she lacked the needed information to adequately address the many educational issues facing the Houston School Board and, as she had done in the past, decided to obtain both knowledge and experience by contacting experts in the field and visiting classrooms first hand. Just like her modern counterparts, she lacked a professional background in education as well as in areas of expertise that board members had to address, such as school budgets. While a majority of board members in the twenty-first century report that they have received some training in many of the board operations, board members in the 1940s had not (Hess, 2002). In fact, what is now known from recent studies is that "there is actually a learning curve once a member is elected, takes the oath of office, and is seated on the board" (Halik, 2012, p. 5). The National School Boards Association estimates that without some preservice or orientation program, it is estimated that it will take at least two years of school board service before board members gain the background and confidence to perform effectively and confidently" (2007, p. 24). That is why there is a consensus among school board experts that school board members should obtain training and development to improve board effectiveness (Land, 2002; Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

While current research suggests that many school board members lack the knowledge of their individual role as school board members (Brenner, et al., 2002; Campbell and Green, 1994; gates, 2013), Ima Hogg was well aware of her inexperience when she was elected. Before she took office or ever attended her first meeting, Ima Hogg addressed this issue through a month-long program of self-directed study and training for her role on the Houston School Board, something

that was not the norm for school board members in that period. During this period she gathered information, contacted experts in the field, visited schools, and read extensively on the subject of school governance by school boards (Kirkland, 1998, p. 475). For example, a letter to the Superintendent of Documents in Washington, D.C., dated April 20, 1943, requested several “directories and bulletins about the duties of school personnel and financial matters” (Kirkland, 1998, p.475), including *Know Your School Board*, *Know your Superintendent*, *Know Your School Principal*, and *How Schools are Financed* (4W237, Folder 4, IHP). In a letter setting up a meeting with Dr. Frank O’Brien, Associate Superintendent of Education for the Handicapped of New York Schools, Ima Hogg wrote, “It is going to be very interesting, but I am not unaware of the complex problems which the situation here presents” (4W237, Folder 4, IHP). After visiting classrooms in New York City and meeting Dr. O’Brien, she wrote to him when she returned home. “It was nice to have had the talk with you in New York and I feel you helped me clarify a good many things in my own mind” (4W237, Folder 4, IHP).

During her first year on the board, Ima Hogg was placed on two of the four standing committees, the New School Properties and Future Construction Committee and the Lunch Room Committee, which oversaw all of the operations of all school lunchrooms. While modern scholars decry the policy of micro-managing the daily business of school districts (Blumsak & McCabe, 2014), Ima Hogg, as chair of the Lunch Room Committee, supervised business operations for one hundred cafeterias throughout the district. Kirkland (1998) described the scope of her duties.

The lunchrooms, which provided forty thousand meals each day, received no tax revenues and were expected to support their operations from meal sales. No detail escaped Hogg’s attention: the cost of milk or ice cream, the contract with the meat dealer, absent employees caring for sick children, the cost of gas, health regulations, truck purchases, [and] desirable types of dishwashing machines. (p. 4B1)

Her success in this endeavor was demonstrated by the fact that the lunchroom department operated with a surplus for the first time which Ima Hogg then used to upgrade equipment and increase salaries for employees and still provide low-cost, healthy meals for students (Kirkland, 1998, p. 481). She also pushed for equal salaries for staff members, including African American workers.

Perhaps Ima Hogg’s main accomplishment during her tenure as a board member was her role in helping to re-establish a visiting teacher program for troubled youth. Visiting teachers were what today would be called school social workers. It was her role in this endeavor that, more than any other accomplishment as a board member, marked her skill in collaboration. She demonstrated leadership skills in organizing and networking with both educational professionals and community members, and exemplified what contemporary scholars refer to as the collaborative model.

In examining research about effective school governance, studies by Shannon and Bylsma (2004), Blumsack & McCabe (2014), and Land (2002), as well as recommendations by the National School Boards Association (2014) conclude that effective schools boards are marked by effective communication and collaborative relationships between members, between members and administration, and with various members of the community. Furthermore, in a research brief that examined several studies of school board effectiveness posted by the Center for Public Education in 2011, school boards in high-achieving districts demonstrated that: "Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals" (Center for Public Education, 2011). Ima Hogg, in helping to re-establish and then guide the formation of a visiting Teacher Program in the Houston school district in the mid to late 1940s, did just that.

First, after being appointed to the Visiting Teacher Committee by the Houston School Board in October 1944, Ima Hogg began networking to research and gather the most up-to-date information, this time, not for her own self-directed learning, but to persuade the board to re-establish the visiting teacher program as a regular part of the school program. She sent out letters to districts all over the country and obtained information about visiting programs in cities such as Rochester, New York, Kansas City, El Paso, and New Orleans. She also researched information from the American Association of Visiting Teachers bulletin, *Visiting Teacher Services Today*; the U.S. Office of Education Bulletin 1939, *Clinical Organization for Child Guidance Within the Schools* and from questionnaires sent to various cities by the Houston Council of Social Agencies (4W237, Folder 1, IHP).

Second, she brought the director of the New Orleans school district visiting teacher program, Carmelita Janvier, to Houston, and worked collaboratively with her in making recommendations in her final report to the school board. Kirkland (1998) wrote of Ima's collaborative 'use' of Janvier in the community.

[Ima] arranged meetings and dinners for this expert [Janvier] to share her knowledge of visiting teacher programs with public school staff and representatives from community agencies, with the Board of Education, and with the "Principals to discuss their needs and problems." Significantly, Hogg made sure that all constituencies were exposed to the expert's eloquence. (487)

Next, Ima Hogg used a collaborative model in obtaining information from community resources as well as keeping different constituencies in the school district and in the community informed of the progress of her committee. Kirkland (1998) wrote "she interviewed school administrators and representatives of community agencies to see how a program could be implemented in Houston and

met frequently with the superintendent to formulate recommendations" (487). Sometime late in October or early November 1944, Ima addressed the Houston Teachers Association, a group whose support would be vital in making the visiting Teacher Program a success. In her speech, she covered a range of topics pertaining to a Visiting Teachers Program.

What is a Visiting Teacher? She is an expertly trained psychiatric social worker, or school visitor, or counselor, or social case worker. She has a B.A. degree in social work in the field of psychiatric social work or social case work. So you see she has the point of view of the teacher as educator, and the social case worker with a community perspective. (4W237, Folder 1, IHP)

Next, she described the duties of the Visiting Teacher in relation to the classroom teacher.

She does not teach in the classroom, nor advise teachers concerning techniques of teaching subject matter, but she should have had classroom teaching experience. She is attached to the school, and it is her business to assist the teacher and principal in solving any problems which interfere with the child's progress in any way. Her work is to aid and supplement that of the teacher, or any member of the school personnel who asks for her assistance. (4W237, Folder 1, IHP)

She continued her detailed analysis of a visiting teacher program, listing ten services and duties of visiting teachers and the kinds of problem children that might be referred to a visiting teacher. Next, she explained the process that would happen when a child was referred and the issue of possible salaries for visiting teachers as well as a brief overview of the history of visiting teacher programs in the United States citing information she had received from districts all over the country. She finished the presentation by asking the following three questions. "How many of you are troubled with problems in your schoolroom? Do you feel the need for advice or assistance in adjusting your problems? How many of you have worked in school systems which have Visiting Teachers?" (4W237, Folder 1, IHP).

In the presentation to the Teacher Association, Ima Hogg employed the idea of a collaborative professional relationship between school and community working together, with the visiting teacher as an integral part. In describing the responsibility of schools, she stated "Education is focused on salvaging as much human material as possible, and mobilizing every resource in the community to that end" (4W237, Folder 1, IHP). Later, she described the collaborative nature of schools, "She [the visiting teacher] is only part of a program in which all the personnel and departments in the schools cooperate in helping the individual child use what the school has to offer" (4W237, Folder 1, IHP). Finally, when discussing the services and duties of the visiting teacher she stated that the visiting teacher

would “cooperate with all individuals or agencies concerned with the welfare of children, so that proper recognition is given to the function of other agencies in the community outside the school jurisdiction” (4W237, Folder 1, IHP). As Kirkland (1998) wrote, “After studying curricula from all over the country, Hogg concluded that such programs succeeded only when staff and teachers worked together” (487).

The final report of Ima Hogg and the Committee on Recommendations for a Visiting Teacher Program was entitled “Visiting Teacher Service: An Analysis of Theory and Practice,” and was presented to the Houston School Board at the November 27, 1944, board meeting. Sections of the report included: Functions of the Visiting Teacher, Administrative Relationships, Work Load and Salary, Training and Qualifications, Setting up the Program, two tables of information about visiting teacher programs in twenty-three cities across the country, and Ima Hogg’s four-page report of her activities and her recommendation as chair of the committee. She summarized the need for visiting teachers in the last two paragraphs of the report.

The teacher finds her efforts constantly being impaired by emotional and behavior problems in the classroom, which have a direct bearing upon the individual child’s scholastic achievement. The teacher knows that often the sources of the child’s difficulties lie in the home, or in the community, or perhaps within the child himself; but that the cooperation of a trained social worker, or Visiting Teacher, who has both time and skill, is needed to discover and alleviate the cause of his trouble. (4W237, Folder 1, IHP)

At the same board meeting, the Houston School Board accepted the report and approved a motion to hire a director to set up a visiting teacher program (Kirkland 1998).

During the remainder of her time on the board, Ima Hogg oversaw the work of the Visiting Teacher Program, reviewing applications for director of the program and for each visiting teacher, developing a long-term plan for the program, and, when the program was implemented, reviewing the monthly reports of services provided and the cases of each visiting teacher (4W237, Folder 1, IHP). In 1949, she introduced the idea of hiring a psychologist for the Department of Testing and Special Classes in identifying troubled children (Kirkland 1998). She continued to support the visiting teacher program in Houston ISD even after she was no longer a board member. In an editorial letter to the *Houston Post* in June 1957, she wrote of her concern when she found out that the Houston district was cutting back on the visiting teacher program, describing the impact, she felt, that this would make on the children with behavior problems, “We pay in the long-run, either with our police courts, hospitals, reform schools, or prisons” (Box 3B168, Folder 2, IHP).

Conclusion

From a leadership standpoint, in looking at the role of Ima Hogg as a member of the Houston School Board from 1943 to 1949, her actions exemplified three of the characteristics of effective school boards and school board members as identified by organizations such as the National School Boards Association and the Texas School Board Association: engaging in effective school governance professional development, professional collaboration with educational professionals and community members, and effective communication among these same groups. The process Ima Hogg used is summarized by Kirkland (1998).

In championing the visiting teacher program, Hogg demonstrated an approach to solving problems that had worked in the private sector: study the issue and marshal the facts, seek expert advice, work with other agencies, be sensitive to the natural fears a new project can cause, and make sure the public is supportive. (p. 488)

While contemporary school board members are certainly faced with a multitude of different issues in the first decades of the twenty-first century- increasing accountability based on high-stakes standardized tests, global issue such as educating immigrant students and English language learners, the impact of technology, and global economic forces- using history as a lens to examine the achievements of a former school board member can enrich our knowledge of the process of school governance as well as help remind us of the importance of this educational entity and the role it continues to play in our educational system.

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