

Education & Workforce

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LEAD YP: Class of 2021

Haley Coates-Huseman

Jorge Garces

Melanie Guthrie-Sanders

Sarah-Michelle Stearns

Team Bios

Haley Coates-Huseman

Haley is the Chief Advancement Officer of Jubilee Park & Community Center, charged with raising \$2.5 million annually to support comprehensive community revitalization and multi-generational enrichment programs in Southeast Dallas/Fair Park. Additionally, she leads the \$6.7 million fundraising campaign to build a community health clinic in the Jubilee Park neighborhood. In her spare time, Haley works to empower women and girls as a letter writer with The Letter Project. She lives in Dallas with her husband, Erik and her Pomeranian, Nate.

Jorge Garces

Jorge is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) in Dallas who has worked at several companies in the area including Ernst & Young, Alcon Labs, Trinity Industries, and Arcosa, where he remains today. Jorge's current role encompasses financial statement compliance, but also focuses on cross-functional shared services and continuous improvement with a focus on industrial manufacturing. In the past, Jorge has volunteered with local students via Junior Achievement, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting. Being raised in Mexico, Jorge and his wife Chantal enjoy Latino cultural events (and the food!).

Melanie Guthrie-Sanders

Melanie is a Social Media Account Supervisor, leading the social media strategy and execution for Lexus, via national advertising agency, Team One. Outside of her full-time career, Melanie owns her own boutique marketing agency centered around full-service marketing and support for businesses of color. Melanie is originally from the Chicagoland area and is Howard University educated. In her spare time, she enjoys volunteering with the Junior League of Dallas, ColorComm, and advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. She resides in Dallas with her husband, Auggie and two pets.

Sarah-Michelle Stearns

Sarah-Michelle is a native of Dallas who loves adventure and wants to see the City of Dallas become the best city in the world. This "swing for the fence" attitude translates to her day job, where Sarah-Michelle is a successful trial lawyer who enjoys advocating for clients in all sorts of industries. Outside of work, she has a broad array of interests. Recently, in no small part due to her love for the outdoors, she started her training to become a Master Naturalist. If you are unable to reach her via email, you can probably find her out pulling up invasive species (particularly Privet) from a local park.

Introduction

The Education and Workforce council of the Dallas Regional Chamber (DRC) oversees the DRC's talent and education vision, and supports the objectives and goals of developing a talent pipeline that meets the needs of business in the region. In reviewing the various areas of attention that are particularly acute following the COVID-19 pandemic, our LEAD Young Professional (LEAD YP) team chose to focus on the impact on education from pre-kindergarten through high school. The main objective is to provide other young professionals in the area various opportunities to get involved at the local level in order to support the council's goals.

The impact from the prolongation of the pandemic throughout the 2020-2021 school year and beyond may be exacerbated for certain groups of the Dallas region. Our LEAD YP group connected with administrative staff at the DRC, the Dallas Independent School District (DISD), and local nonprofit organizations in order to identify the main ongoing concerns for students. Below are the main areas of research:

What age groups have been affected by COVID-19?

The effects of COVID-19 on pre-kindergarten through high school students are pervasive and broad across many different aspects of the lives of children and youth in Dallas. All ages have been affected negatively in the areas of academic standing, attendance, social emotional health and enrollment. These issues are exacerbated in low-income households that are also suffering from food insecurity, financial hardship, the lack of technology and digital connectivity, and the lack of childcare for working parents with little flexibility.

In conversations about the effect of COVID-19 on the entire K-12 system, certain age groups were highlighted with hyper-specific issues that we deemed noteworthy to call out:

- According to the Dallas Morning News, “in the first week of instruction right after Labor Day, Dallas’ pre-k enrollment was down by more than 37% from a year ago.” Due to a combination of factors, from health concerns to stifled outreach tactics, pre-k enrollment is declining across the metroplex.
- For middle school, motivating students to attend classes in person rather than remaining remote has remained a challenge. Children in this age group may not have as much parent involvement, but also may not be as mature to study independently.

- High school students who already signed on for the Dallas Promise program are falling through the cracks due to the necessity of working to support their families.

What are the major areas of concern within the education space?

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a prolonged effect on schooling in the Dallas area throughout 2020 and the beginning of 2021, particularly for public school students. Our group decided to focus on the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) due to the significance of its talent pipeline into higher education and companies that are part of the DRC.

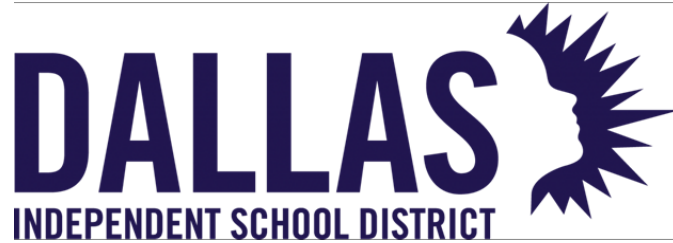
At the beginning of the pandemic in the second quarter of 2020, DISD was able to resolve several of the issues immediately presented, such as connectivity (by [providing laptops and internet hotspots](#)), food insecurity (by [providing go-to meals for pick up at schools](#)), and lower standards/suspension of standardized testing (by [working with the State on alternatives to standardized testing](#)). However, per our interviews and research, challenges remain as the 2020-2021 school year wraps up and families plan for the summer and the 2021-2022 school year. The areas are listed below:

- Finding “lost” students that did not return from the 19-20 school year to the 20-21 sessions, which could potentially [impact state per-pupil funding](#) (up to 5,000 students missing), as well as engaging first-time and returning families to register for the 21-22 school year.
- Ensuring students maintain and/or catch up to their correct grade level across subjects (aka the “COVID slide”).
- Managing discrepancies in State standardized testing requirements across grades ([optional for primary/middle school and mandatory for high school](#)) and technical issues
- Tracking and communicating the different calendars for the 2021-2022 school year ([three calendars were approved](#))

What resources are available for young professionals to get involved?

In the section below, we highlight organizations that provide resources to students in order to meet the aforementioned challenges, as well as ways for young professionals to get involved:

- Dallas Independent School District
- Dallas After School
- City Year
- Big Thought



The Dallas Independent School District (DISD)

DISD serves over 150,000 students in pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade, in 220+ schools across 384 square miles in the cities of Dallas, Cockrell Hill, Seagoville, Addison, Wilmer and parts of Carrollton, Cedar Hill, DeSoto, Duncanville, Farmers Branch, Garland, Grand Prairie, Highland Park, Hutchins, Lancaster and Mesquite. The District is the second-largest public-school district in the state, and the 16th-largest district in the nation.

DISD tirelessly serves students in all age groups and has publicly taken on all the challenges throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The District works through a combination of in-house Departments and outside organizations in order to achieve its goals. Our interviews and research indicated that volunteering, and exercising advocacy, and donating in the education space allows young professionals in the Dallas region, whether or not they have children, to reduce the impact of the ongoing challenges as the pandemic subsides and more residents get vaccinated. Below, we highlight the three categories and resources to get involved directly with DISD or closely related entities:

Volunteer: Dallas Independent School District (DISD)

DISD manages its own volunteering program, in which all residents of the Dallas region can browse from thousands of opportunities to participate. Although it may be suggested to volunteer in areas where the pandemic has had an impact as noted above, volunteer options can be found based on the person's interests, skills, location, or need, and can request their school of choice. Opportunities are classified by various categories on the website for easy browsing.

All interested individuals that express interest in a volunteering opportunity can work directly with the agency to create a volunteer account/application subject to background checks. DISD will work to finalize their placement. Volunteers can then see their impact by browsing results, tracking their hours, and finding more opportunities that match.

[Click here to volunteer with DISD](#)

Advocate- Local Level: Attend DISD Board Meetings

All local residents are invited to attend meetings of the Dallas Independent School District Board of Trustees. The public is encouraged to address their issues and concerns within the limitations set by the Board of Trustees, First Amendment Rights, and by law, all in good faith and with decorum. Board Briefings are held the second Thursday of each month 11:30 AM. Regularly scheduled board meetings are held at 6 PM on the fourth Thursday of each month.

[Click here to see the calendar and agendas of the public DISD board meetings](#)

Advocate- State Level: Sign up with Raise Your Hand Texas

The Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation is a nonprofit organization that supports programmatic initiatives structured to identify, pilot, and scale systemic improvements in public education. Advocacy in this space can be as easy as receiving text messages or as involved as providing assistance for lobbying at the Capitol in Austin.

Individuals can get involved in the following ways: i) Subscribing to the e-newsletter for Texas education news, stories, policy insights, and ways to make a difference (3-6 per month); ii) Signing up to receive text alerts for opportunities to advocate for relevant legislative and policy issues (1-2 per month, more often during the legislative session); and iii) Connecting with the regional advocacy director to get plugged in on the issues one cares about (1-2 per month, may vary depending on regional activity).

[Click here to sign up with Raise Your Hand Texas](#)

Donate: The Dallas Education Foundation (DEF)

DEF is the non-profit, philanthropic partner of DISD that aligns with the District's strategic initiatives and partners with the city's business leaders, residents and philanthropic community to raise funds for programs that enrich the lives of students. The mission of DEF is to inspire community investment to accelerate student success. Their vision is a galvanized community whose resources support the transformative work that makes DISD the preferred choice for families across North Texas. DEF serves all DISD students through the lens of equity, access and inclusion in order to prepare them to be college/ career ready as well as productive, contributing members of the community.

[Click Here to Donate to the DEF](#)



Dallas After School:

[Dallas Afterschool](#) works to level the playing field for children of all races and economic backgrounds by informing community stakeholders, supporting afterschool and summer programs and their staff members, and coordinating community resources. The vision of the organization is a community with the resources and the will to provide impactful learning beyond the school day for all children.

“While most middle-class students have access to safe and enriching activities between the hours of 3 and 6 pm, most low-income students do not. Even before COVID-19 forced the closure of so many programs, Dallas County only had enough free or low-cost afterschool seats to serve 17% of over 100,000 low-income students. For every child in an afterschool program, 3 more children are waiting to get in. Across Texas, the lack of access to quality afterschool programming has direct negative consequences for economic growth, academic success, food security, and public safety.” (DAS Policy Brief)

Dallas Afterschool provides the following programs and services to ensure that children and youth have access to *high-quality* afterschool enrichment:

- **DAS360°** is an online community created by Dallas Afterschool to provide convenient training and continuing education options for Out-of-School Time (OST) professionals. Partners can access safety and quality information, professional development resources, and activities for children.
- **Virtual Roundtables:** We are proud to make VR kits available for check-out through our lending library. This programming enhancement is available to all Dallas Afterschool certified partner sites.
- **Wonder Kits:** Dallas Afterschool created and designed Wonder Kits® to fit the challenges and needs of Out-of-School Time programs. Inspired by curiosity, Wonder

Kits are easy-to-use Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) curriculum kits that only require 10 minutes of prep time. Each box contains materials needed to run a hands-on, engaging activity for up to 25 students and feature easy to follow instructions, a how-to video, and tips to make every project a learning opportunity for both the facilitator and students. Wonder Kits® are offered as a free service to Dallas Afterschool partner programs.

- **Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality Lending Library:** Dallas Afterschool makes VR kits available for checkout through their lending library for all certified partner sites.
- **Advocacy:** Dallas Afterschool partners with local community members, funders, and advocates to bring greater awareness and to support expanded access to Out-of-School Time (OST) programs. We envision a city where all students have access to enriching experiences outside of the traditional school day. Download Dallas Afterschool's Policy Brief [here](#).

Young professionals across Dallas can engage in the efforts to provide quality afterschool programming for all today!

Volunteer individually or with your company: <https://dallasafterschool.org/volunteer/>

Join YPG auxiliary group or the YP Board:

<https://dallasafterschool.org/young-professionals/>

- YPG Requirements: Age range 22-35; Membership Fees - \$50 annual membership or \$250 lifetime membership
- For more info on young professionals programs at Dallas Afterschool, email elewis@dallasafterschool.org

After the Bell Alliance Advocacy:

Young Professionals can advocate for afterschool programs today! Learn more at <https://dallasafterschool.org/advocate-for-afterschool/> and sign up for advocacy alerts [here](#).

Donate to quality afterschool: <https://dallasafterschool.org/donate-now/>

- \$50 could provide social-emotional learning “calm kits” to 2 students
- \$150 can provide STEM activities for 25 students
- \$500 can provide PPE and safety supplies for 2 program sites



City Year

City Year is a nonprofit based in Boston, Massachusetts with offices across the United States, and they are dedicated to helping students and schools succeed. City Year AmeriCorps members serve full-time in high need urban schools, where they partner with teachers and school leaders to provide high-impact students, classrooms, and schools with support to help students stay in school and on track to graduate from high school, and prepare for college and career success.

City Year has a long term Impact strategy, an exciting plan to scale its impact to dramatically increase the urban graduation pipeline and transform the future for thousands of students nationwide. City Year is among the nation's fastest - growing nonprofit social enterprises. The organization's 900 staff and 3,000 AmeriCorps members work and serve in 28 communities across the country, including Boston – where City Year was founded in 1988 and is headquartered – and Baton Rouge, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbia, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Jacksonville, Kansas City, Little Rock, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami, Milwaukee, New Hampshire, New Orleans, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, Providence, Sacramento, San Antonio, San José / Silicon Valley, Seattle / King County, Tulsa, and Washington, D.C. City Year also has international affiliates in South Africa and the United Kingdom.

A proud member of the AmeriCorps national service network, City Year is a public - private partnership, made possible by resources from schools and school districts; local, state, and federal governments; and philanthropic support from corporations, foundations, and individuals. City Year has been recognized by Charity Navigator as a 4-star charity – its highest rating – for 10 consecutive years, placing City Year in the top 1% of non - profits nationwide for fiscal responsibility, financial health, organizational efficiency, and organizational capacity.

The Lead YP team met with Heather Holland, Executive Director for City Year Dallas. With a Masters from SMU in Urban Education and Leadership, and 10 years of experience working for Teach for America and as a principal in lower-income areas through Dallas Independent School District, Heather provided valuable insights and takeaways regarding the effect of Covid-19 on students.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the number one challenge was connectivity. While schools quickly shut down to protect the safety of their students and staff, the challenges that arose were the lack of WIFI hotspots, or the lack of laptops available. City Year partnered with DISD to provide routine virtual check-ins with students, help students get and stay connected, stay motivated and encouraged, provide meals, and help boost morale. These challenges affect students across the various age groups, but it affected Pre-K and high school students the most. As the pandemic continued, the issues affecting the various age groups continued to evolve. Currently, City Year describes the primary challenge as getting students to return to school.

In locations where some in-person instruction is happening, AmeriCorps members provide in-person support, with City Year-provided protection equipment and in accordance with local health and safety protocols. Depending on the location, the health and safety of our corps and staff, and the needs of school partners, City Year will continue to assess the best way to support students and schools.

Currently, the challenge that City Year is facing the most is getting kids to return to school. Many high school students have stopped attending school and are working full-time in an effort to provide for their families due to the increase in job loss that has occurred during the pandemic.

Young professionals can get involved by being a presence in schools. Students need mentors from a variety of fields and that come from different backgrounds.

Learn more about City Year's impact: <https://www.cityyear.org/impact/>



Big Thought = Big Impact

Big Thought is a nonprofit in Dallas that helps close the opportunity gap by “equipping all youth in marginalized communities with the skills and tools they need to imagine and create their best lives and a better world.”^[1] While it is difficult to summarize all of the good work Big Thought accomplishes on behalf of students, parents, and educators throughout the DFW Metroplex, their work can be categorized in three main buckets: programming, mentorship, and advocacy. Big Thought has a huge impact in each of these three areas.

With respect to programming, Big Thought is passionate about making sure everyone in the community is served well—a goal everyone in Dallas can agree upon! For students in elementary, middle, and high school, Big Thought both develops curriculum and helps implement that curriculum through youth programs, working particularly with “communities that have historically been marginalized.”^[2] Notably, Big Thought is able to leverage the multitude of resources available in Dallas by working with an array of community partners, connecting them with communities, and working directly with educators and parents, all of which ensures students can truly “unlock their potential.”^[3] By way of example only, through its unique curriculum efforts, Big Thought provides educators in Dallas with access to field trips that otherwise would not be available to students, at little cost, in order to provide hands-on learning opportunities for students.^[4] Another neat initiative Big Thought has created is its “Artivism” program, which “empowers teens to curate and create visual and performance art consisting of multi-media art forms such as acrylic, charcoal, photography, videography, and spoken word to advance social justice issues.”^[5] In this program, local professional artists partner with Big Thought to guide students in expressing their thoughts through activist art. Some projects so far have included “a large-scale movable mural on fence posts, an original multi-disciplinary theater piece performed at Moody Performance Hall, and a deeply moving storytelling and photography exhibition.”^[6] These are just a taste of what Big Thought has to

offer. All in all, in terms of programming alone, Big Thought serves an impressive 70,489 students annually.^[7]

With respect to mentorship, Big Thought participates in the Dallas County Promise Champions Initiative^[8] by matching adult volunteers with high school seniors so that those students can better navigate the “critical benchmarks to post-graduation,” including the steps required to prepare for, apply, and then enroll in college.^[9] Mentors, or “Champions,” connect with their mentee on a weekly basis to discuss college planning, answer questions about the application process, provide insight into various careers, and give personal encouragement.^[10] With a commitment of a mere 2 hours per month, over a period of 9-12 months, each Champion is able to truly make a difference in the life of their mentee.

With respect to advocacy, Big Thought is currently focused on three issues: (1) deepening the commitment to social and emotional learning in public education, (2) changes in policies for runaway youth, and (3) expanding access to high quality afterschool programming.^[11] What these issues have in common is that they affect youth in marginalized communities, and Big Thought works with elected officials at all levels in Texas to champion legislation that supports and empowers these youths.^[12]

Get Involved

Even the busiest of young professionals can quickly engage with Big Thought in at least three important ways: mentorship, advocacy, and donations.

Mentorship: As discussed above, Big Thought is always looking for young professionals who are willing to donate a mere 1-2 hours per month to mentor a student in the Dallas County Promise Champions Initiative. You start the process here: <https://www.tfaforms.com/4799490>.

Advocacy: Additionally, Big Thought is always encouraging young professionals to start advocating on behalf of youth initiatives now—not just when they are “ready to settle down and have kids,” so-to-speak. You can find out how to learn about the issues and how to get involved by viewing the sections above related to “Advocacy.” *See supra*.

Donation: Finally, if a young professional is unable to donate his or her “time” or “talent,” he or she can certainly donate some “treasure.” Specifically, young professionals can easily and efficiently help close the opportunity gap for students by donating directly to Big Thought here: <https://impact.bightought.org/give/236611/#!/donation/checkout>.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have an impact on education from pre-kindergarten through high school, which in turn may affect the overall talent pipeline to many companies in the Dallas region in the near future. Young professionals in the area can get involved with the school district or nonprofit organizations in order to mitigate the ongoing concerns for students, primarily in the public school space.

Ways to get involved:

- 1) **Volunteer and/or mentor** either directly with Dallas ISD or with other local nonprofit organizations
- 2) **Advocate** on behalf of students through local organizations in order for students to have governmental support and investment
- 3) **Donate** to local nonprofit organizations that have expertise to support students across all age groups and economic conditions

Students across all age groups have had a very difficult school year due to all the challenges posed not only within the education space, but that also affected their personal lives directly or those of their family members. By working together as a community, we can reduce the impact of the pandemic and get back on track to retain the status of the Dallas region as a premier destination for businesses and families.

- [1] See “Who We Are,” available at: <https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/>.
- [2] See “Our Programs,” available at: <https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/>.
- [3] See “Our Programs,” available at: <https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/>.
- [4] See “Learning Partners,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/learning-partners/>.
- [5] See “Artivism,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/artivism/>.
- [6] See “Artivism,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/artivism/>.
- [7] See “Learning Partners,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/learning-partners/>.
- [8] See “The Promise Champion Initiative,” available at:
<https://dallascountypromise.org/champions>.
- [9] See “DCPC Champions,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/dcpchampions/>.
- [10] See “DCPC Champions,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/who-we-are/our-programs/dcpchampions/>.
- [11] See “Empowering Youth Through Legislation and Policy,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/announcements/news-announcements/empowering-youth-through-legislation-and-policy/>.
- [12] See “Empowering Youth Through Legislation and Policy,” available at:
<https://www.bigthought.org/announcements/news-announcements/empowering-youth-through-legislation-and-policy/>.