

Prospective Principals' Perceptions of the Classroom of the Future

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*Abstract: In 1964, singer/songwriter Bob Dylan mused that "the times, they are a-changin'." How right he was, and how right he is, for, over the course of several decades, the times and attitudes have changed on innumerable issues, including those of school classrooms—both what goes on in and what goes into a classroom. Much modern research has looked at designs of future classrooms from the perspective of gadgets, research generated by either product producers and their marketers or from the perspective of students, who, by and large, can be heavily influenced by marketing. During the Spring 2013 semester, a study was done through Texas A&M University Kingsville querying current teachers enrolled in the university's administrator program to ask how, as future administrators, they perceived a classroom of the future. This paper will cover what was asked and how those who will be guiding future schools perceive those schools' future classrooms.*

*Keywords: Future, classroom, administrator, stakeholder, e-text, tablet, iPad, technology, BYOD*

Since the turn of the last century, it would stand to reason that the American school classroom has changed drastically. After all, it has been more than one hundred years since a "lone teacher instructed children of varying ages in courses such as reading, writing, arithmetic and history," while "students sat in uncomfortable wooden benches and screeched out writing onto slate boards" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 10). Yet, despite the lapse of a century, it is unlikely a classroom has genuinely changed all that much.

Granted, contemporary students have “tools and resources available to them that the student of 100 years ago couldn’t begin to imagine” (Kennedy, 1999, p. 11), but there are still the same four walls and the use of traditional texts. As of just shy of a decade ago, “e-textbooks generate[d] less than 1 percent of McGraw-Hill’s higher-ed revenues” (McKenzie, 2002, p. 14), implying traditional textbooks remain the preferred method of delivery for teachers and students alike.

Moore (2011) contends that “a substantial body of research on the impact of school facilities on educational achievement,” (p. 3). School districts take this to task, as evidenced in the finalized Executive Budget Summary for 2011 of North East Independent School District, in San Antonio, Texas. The summary reports bona fide “total project costs” (Sullivan, 2011, n.p.) in excess of \$237 million for the construction of four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school; \$90 million was for just the high school (Sullivan, 2011, n.p.). Back in the Golden State, the Schools of the Future (SOFT) Initiative looks to “[transform] existing school space into 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments” (Moore, 2011, p. 3), with a great emphasis on energy; energy independence or neutrality, in particular. While crucial, a school – or even a classroom – of the future must plan for more than just the energy to assent its operation.

So-called Smart Classrooms –classrooms “that use every type of technology” (Sevindik & Gürol, 2009, p. 615), allowing students to “share all types of data inside or outside the classroom” (Sevindik & Gürol, 2009, p. 615) – offer a glimpse into the potential classrooms of the future, especially when an eye is glanced further into the future with the real possibility of distance learning.

Distance learning has been going on since the late nineteenth century (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek, 2009) and has evolved with changing, improving forms of media to send and receive instruction. Some seven years ago, more than one-third of institutes of higher learning in the United States alone were offering full degree plans online (Santilli & Beck, 2005), and “56% of institutions indicated that online instruction was critical to their long-term plans” (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek, 2009, p. 5). Notwithstanding this trend, a survey of 72 superintendents in the state of Texas (out of 150 who were asked to participate) responded with an indicated “negative perception” (Faulk, 2011, p. 28) where those online degrees went towards the education of prospective teachers. Faulk (2011, p. 28) reported “sixty-four percent of superintendents responded Highly Desirable or Slightly Desirable” when it came to preparing prospects in learning theories and principles (Faulk, 2011, p. 28).

A conundrum, therefore, is created by conflicting views of the value of not just online or distance learning but especially of the classroom of the future. Post-secondary education appears to embrace and is readying themselves for what is to come, while those in the upper echelon responsible for primary and secondary education seem to lack vision – or at least preference. Principals, then, may offer a reasonable middle ground. Leone, Warnimont, and Zimmerman (2009) insist that “[t]he principal of tomorrow must be an active change agent within the school” and to challenge the status quo (p. 92). In order to better serve the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learner, it is imperative that these eventual captains of the ship that is the American school have a shared vision and competent understanding of both what and how the classroom of the future will be.

Advents in technology have ushered in an era where boundaries are broken down; even classroom walls have little meaning apart from archaic fancies. Breaking with tradition, especially in a leadership role, could prove problematic, particularly when what is needed is not wholly known; the need for a shared vision among campus leaders (principals) proves paramount. The problem is that campus leadership may not realize what is involved in creating a classroom of the future.

In order to begin formulating a reasonable response – a viable vision, it is proposed that prospective principals – that is, current teachers currently enrolled in a master's program to become a principal or other administrator – be electronically surveyed (via Survey Monkey or similar – see Appendix 1) in order to ascertain what they consider a classroom of the future to constitute. One potential source for prospects meeting the criteria outlined above is through the administrator master's program at Texas A&M University Kingsville (TAMUK). Given that TAMUK makes use of online instruction, it is presumed that an adequate sampling with usable data may be obtained. Responses from will be grouped separately and divided into categories for primary (K—6) and secondary (7—12) school levels, as each is likely to have its own needs, its own vision for what a classroom of the future should entail. All participants will be current teachers or administrators, which will place all above the age of 18; minors will not be involved in this study.

At its completion, this mixed mode report – containing both quantitative data (“numerical indicators derived from scoring systems or questionnaires” [Sutherland, Goulson, Potts, & Dicks, 2011, p. 1]) via Likert scale (6 questions) and open-ended responses (12 questions) – will have its data assimilated using Microsoft Excel or similar

as charts or graphs. Data obtained from any open-ended responses may require an alternative reporting format, depending on variance of responses. Additional software options are also open to consideration.

Primary questions for guiding the research will be:

1. What do future principals believe a future classroom to look like? (physical & philosophical)
2. What are the constraints to developing and/or implementing a classroom of the future?
3. What efforts do future principals feel are necessary for 100% buy-in from all stakeholders?

Each of the above questions will have a series of sub-questions with some pre-selected options, as well as some open-ended response questions. Examples of open-ended responses will include assorted follow-up questions with special emphasis in the area of bring your own device, better known as BYOD (or bring your own tech, BYOT), where students (or other end-users) provide their own devices, be it laptop, tablet, or smartphone – or a combination of the three.

Before continuing, it is worth presuming that not all prospects will be fully familiar with the technical terminology necessary for participating in this survey. Thus, the following terms and definitions will be made available:

1. BYOD (or BYOT) – “bring-your-own-device” (or bring-your-own-tech) (Raths, 2012, p. 29)
2. Cloud (or cloud computing) – “a technology model is [sic] which any and all resources-application software, processing power, data storage, backup facilities,

- development tools... literally everything-are delivered as a set of services via the Internet” (Aljabre, 2012, p. 235)
3. E-text – “digital e-texts not only include text and images, but pdf files, video, Internet links, and interactive Flash activities organized and delivered in a book format” (Ryan, 2008, p. 98)
  4. IWB – “interactive white board(s); technology made up of a computer connected to both a projector and a touch-sensitive board that presents the pictures projected from the computer, allows for changes, and receives input electronically or by touch” (Manny-Ikan, Dagan, Tikochinski, & Zorman, 2011, p. 250)
  5. Tablet – “a device that sports a touchscreen between 7 in. and 14 in. in size, weighs less than 1.75 lbs., has an eight-hour battery life, and allows always-on operation” (Hamblen, 2012, p. 4)
  6. Technology (or instructional technology or educational technology) – “technologies that improve learning with their visual, easily accessible, and productive features” (Baytak & Akbiyik, 2010, p. 90)

BYOD is a particular trend gaining ground in both the educational and private sectors, and, while it may be easy to see it as a simple fix – students provide their own electronic devices for accessing cheaper e-texts, and the district saves money! – there are additional considerations to be made. Rath (2012) summarized these in an interview with the head of a US-based technology firm specializing in wireless networks for K—12. Before even heading to the drawing board, among the suggestions is to consider the number of devices (not just users) for a specified area (such as an auditorium or other large common area), as well as how each of those devices will be connected to an area of the wireless

network. Further, limiting individual applications or programs (Facebook, YouTube, or other social media) on devices while making use of a school's wireless network certainly warrants contemplation. Also worthy of contemplation is the role a principal plays as the head of a school. Or, the roles a principal plays.

Citing Nelson et al. (2008), Slater (2011) writes that "technical aspects [of a school administrator] varied among principals and included budget, special education law, curriculum and time management. Lack of knowledge in these areas led to mistakes" (p. 223). Technology or literal technically-related aspects of a principal's position did not make the cut in the aforementioned study, so it stands to reason that principals either lack technical expertise or do not see their role as the leader of a school as one of guiding a school's technology resources into the future, which is all but confirmed by Crawford & Cowie (2012), citing Daresh (2002), where principals were seen "as having to navigate the complex landscape of practice by personally bringing together personal and professional knowledge" (p. 176). This study aims to learn just how prospective principals view themselves and their future role as a guiding hand – not just figurehead – of the classroom of the future.

### **Participants**

A total of twelve (12) prospective administrators from post-graduate administrator courses from Texas A&M University Kingsville (TAMUK) responded to the survey over a 2-week period. Of the respondents, eight were female (8), and four were male. Each age category for the survey (18—24, 25—34, 35—44, 45—54, 55—64) was represented, with the 25—34 and 45—54 most heavily represented: five and three, respectively. Of those, only one respondent had been teaching for less than one year, the majority (seven)

teaching more than one but less than ten years. There was one respondent each in the remaining categories of 11—15 years, 16—20 years, 21—25 years, and 30+ years. No candidates taught at the pre-K level; elementary (K—4) was represented by four respondents, intermediate (5—6) had one respondent, middle school (7—8) had three, and high school (9—12) had seven. In spite of the broad distribution of respondents at current teaching levels, for preference in employment as an administrator, five responded with elementary, two with middle school, and five with high school. No respondents considered themselves beginners (“virtually no daily interaction/experience with technology” and no troubleshooting abilities). Four classified themselves novices (no troubleshooting abilities); six, intermediate (basic troubleshooting abilities); two, expert (“guru” status).

**Table 1. Demographic information**

<b>Age</b>	<b>18–24</b>	<b>25–34</b>	<b>35–44</b>	<b>45–54</b>	<b>55+</b>
	1	5	2	3	1
<b>Level</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>K–4</b>	<b>5–6</b>	<b>7–8</b>	<b>9–12</b>
	0	4	1	3	7
<b>Expertise</b>	<b>Beginner</b>	<b>Novice</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Guru</b>	
	0	4	6	2	

**Instrumentation**

A survey was created using Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) consisting of fifteen questions (six open-ended and nine closed response). Most open-ended questions requested but five items in each of the respective areas (features of,

items to be omitted from, and barriers to) in order to limit the respondents, while at the same time offering them the opportunity to list what they felt to be genuinely important. The remaining open-ended questions (thoughts on BYOD and implementation of project-based learning) were truly open-ended; respondents were free to write as little or as much as they liked, providing it fit within the character constraints of Survey Monkey's text box. Unfortunately, there were no qualifiers to the questions; specifically, how far in the future were the respondents supposed to gaze?

### **Procedures**

Once the survey was assembled and posted to Survey Monkey, it was necessary to put it into action with an appropriate testing pool. Since the focus of the study was on future administrators, students enrolled in courses to become administrators at Texas A&M University Kingsville were solicited by emailing the four professors overseeing the course. These are individuals who would have both a vision for a classroom of the future and a potential hand in shaping its formation. The researcher's graduate advisor, Dr. Marybeth Green, supplied the professors' names.

Each professor was emailed at least twice (once, to introduce and supply IRB documentation, and a second time one week later as a courtesy reminder of the survey's closing date; any additional emails were correspondence related to specific questions regarding the survey) requesting their students' participation; there was no direct contact or communication between the researcher and prospective students. The survey was open/available for a period of just shy of two weeks, opening February 12, 2013, and closing February 25.

Results were made available via a PDF report indicating numbers and percentages of respondents to the closed questions, while open-ended responses were exported to a spreadsheet in order to manually review for trends or other pattern indicators.

### **Data Analysis**

The PDF report from Survey Monkey proved useful in skimming through percentages of the closed questions (those with pre-selected responses). Information contained within the spreadsheet, however, was far greater detailed, with the exact responses made to the open-ended questions. The researcher was then able to use experience as an English teacher to glean from the spreadsheet data patterns or other trends contained within. This proved most helpful on Research Question 1, where data was most scattered and least defined, given the variety of responses from survey participants.

For simplified analysis, data from each of the three research questions was copied into separate, individual spreadsheets, where it could be examined in both row and column formats. Similar trends across columns were color coded and named for later reference. Finally, some select data was manually counted and then extracted into a chart or table for display. For example, see Chart 1, below.

## Results

### Research Question 1

For what was deemed the most crucial question, respondents were to identify their top five features of a classroom of the future. Trends among respondents were then categorized as “General” (non-specified features and/or technology), “Mostly General” (some specified features and/or technology), and “Currently Available” (focused exclusively on currently available features and/or technology) in order to ascertain similarities and/or differences. The survey item for Research Question 1 was the open-ended response that was most easily discernible about what was desired from future administrators; wording on the survey appeared to be too general or too vague in order to guide respondents towards a common or otherwise predicted/predictable response on most other questions. In retrospect, questions should have been reworded in order to remain open-ended but more guided in order to glean more useful data.

Respondents in the “General” sub-category reported on features that were less tangible and more philosophical. One respondent focused on the subject areas to be taught (“technology, science, math, arts, engineering”), while others specifically mentioned the continued need for a teacher; teacher requirements for a classroom of the future appear to include being sympathetic, as well as experienced. The same respondent citing the need for an “experienced teacher” remained equally vague on other features in their vision of the classroom of the future, adding “better materials” and “better curriculum”; no qualifiers, apart from “experienced” or “better” were included.

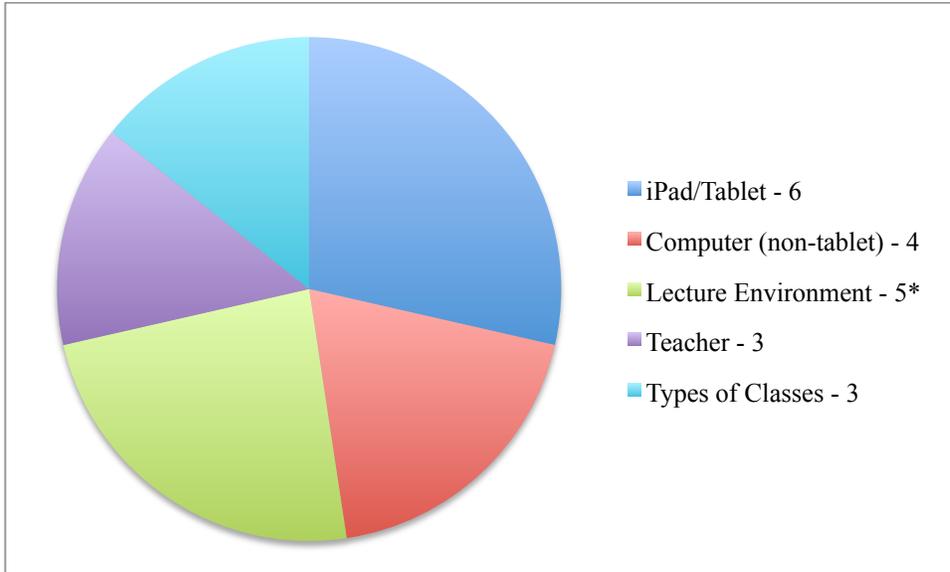
“Mostly General” respondents – three out of the twelve – were a hybrid of the “General” and “Currently Available” categories. “Mostly General” respondents cited

specific features but were mostly general when it came to tech. For example, one respondent mentioned computers in a 1:1 ratio scenario but parenthetically kept open the likelihood that a computer was not necessarily a traditional computer; an iPad was parenthetically referenced.

The five remaining respondents are lumped into the “Currently Available” category, where technology referenced in response to Research Question 1 are all currently available; their vision of the future comes across as clouded by the present. While all refer to specific technology their classroom of the future would contain, one indicated two of the five items an aside of “or similar.” Whether this was done to indicate an openness to other currently available brands of technology (“iPad [or similar],” for example) or to whatever comes along to supplant the iPad was unclear.

Chart 1 provides a visual representation of noteworthy trends observed in Research Question 1. While all 12 respondents mentioned technology in some form or fashion, what is somewhat striking is that only three indicated a teacher as present in the classroom of the future, yet five listed tangibles found in a lecture-based classroom environment (projectors, SmartBoards). The five listing lecture-based environments were the same five in the “Currently Available” subcategory.

**Chart 1. Most common features of a classroom of the future, including number of responses**



### **Research Question 2**

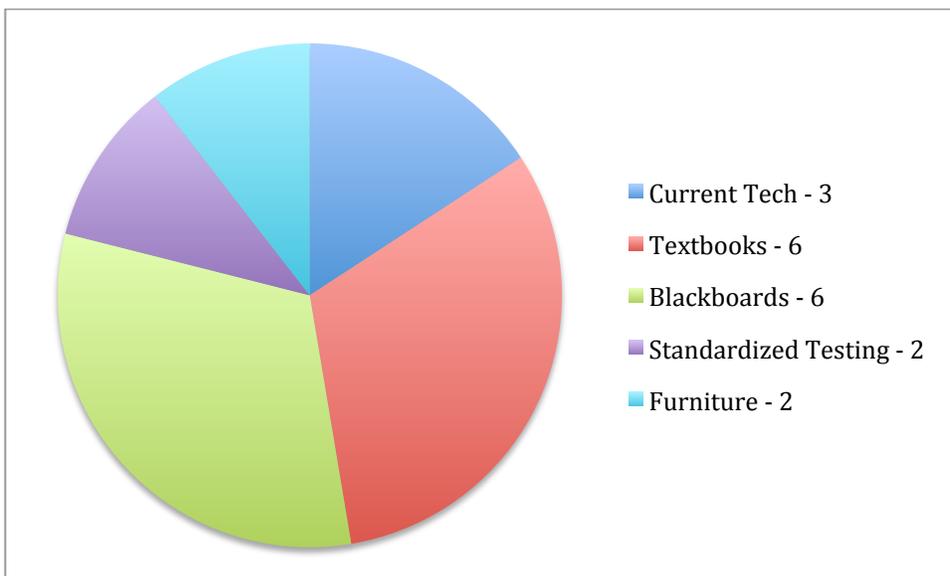
Research Question 2 sought five examples of what future administrators – and current teachers – thought should be eliminated from contemporary classroom setups. Despite all twelve participants identifying the five features requested in Research Question 1, only one respondent identified a total of five items for omission in Research Question 2. Two respondents identified four; three, three; two, two; four, one.

Two items for removal from current classrooms tied for the most responses/mentioning. Six respondents tagged textbooks and blackboards/chalkboards as needing to be cleared from current classroom setups; the latter was honestly surprising as still in use. Three identified current technology items (two named computers, and one named “projectors.” although it was not evident if the respondent meant overhead projectors or digital projectors, and responses from Research Question 1 failed to provide

insight) as necessary for removal, while two each found furniture related items (“carpet” and “paneling” were both named by one respondent, while the other declared desks should be removed in favor of tables; further, walls should be decorated – “most junior high and high school classrooms are bare,” said the respondent) as unnecessary to classrooms of current times. Chart 2 illustrates these recommendations for removal.

The final item was not necessarily a tangible item of the modern classroom, but it is certainly a fixture: Standardized tests. Two respondents noted standardized tests should be removed from classrooms, as should “teaching to the test.” Curiously these two respondents were at opposite ends of the spectrum for Research Question 1: One was classified as “General,” while the other “Currently Available.” More curiously was that the latter listed only “standardized testing” and “teaching to the test” for items necessary for being negated from a classroom. Because “teaching to the test” is focused on the notion of “standardized testing,” these two items were counted as one.

**Chart 2. Most common items future administrators think should be removed from contemporary classrooms**



### **Research Question 3**

Responses to Research Question 3, which examined future administrators' perceptions of what would be necessary to secure buy-in to visions of the classroom of the future from each of the sundry stakeholders, were the most curious. In the survey, stakeholders were identified as School board, Administrators, Faculty, Students, Parents, Businesses in the community. Research Question 3 remained open-ended, but half of the respondents (6/12) opted to either rank the stakeholders in perceived order of importance or express whether or not the *stakeholders* should even have a say in attaining the respective administrator's vision. Remaining respondents replied with what they felt was needed from each of the identified stakeholders.

Unlike the first two research questions, Research Question 3 failed to yield any real trends in terms of what was needed or expected from the stakeholders apart from finances to achieve the technical longings of these would-be administrators. In spite of the mode of years of teaching experience for respondents being "6—10 years," it is the opinion of the researcher that so many of respondents – future administrators themselves – fail to have a realistic concept of the say that stakeholders have in decisions impacting the public school classroom, especially when articles purchased with tax payer dollars are asked to be implemented, regardless of if the classroom is theorized or realized.

### **Discussion**

There are two takeaways from this survey. The first is that current teachers, who are prospective administrators, have somewhat lofty visions of what future classrooms will be like but lack insight on how to go about making what they want into what they have. Fittingly, forty percent of the respondents indicate that a future classroom will

contain technology that is currently available, which many of them likely have. In short, focusing on the appliances of the present is clouding the vision for a valid classroom of the future.

The second takeaway is that the larger vision of the classroom of the future seems to support a model of traditional instruction. Granted, a limited number of respondents specifically mentioned a teacher as part of their vision. However, much of the technology and related items mentioned through response lean towards a teacher/student relationship – even if “straight lecture” and “off the board learning” are undesirables of current classroom items.

### **Contribution to the Literature**

Studies envisioning future classrooms have been done for decades. Recent studies appear to focus more so on the technology likely to be found in the classroom, including studies on adults' perceptions (seen in the abstract of “A Cross-Case Study of the impact of organizational change through the diffusion of the classrooms for the future initiative,” Slamecka, 2011), as well as that of the students' (Rossing, Miller, Cecil, Stamper, 2012). This study will likely contribute little more than to perhaps serve as catalyst for considering more than simply the gadgets that go into education.

### **Recommendations**

The primary recommendation for what could be recommended from this study would be for future researchers to focus less on a particular contraption (or series or type or manufacturer of such) and more on how the classroom itself will change – or if it will even continue to exist as we know it. In 1935, author Upton Sinclair famously quipped, “It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not

understanding it!” Perhaps finding participants who are not financially linked to what goes into or on in a classroom would yield genuinely revolutionary results.

Regardless of who is surveyed or studied, phrasing of all questions – open-ended, in particular – should be as clear, concise, and simple as possible. Those surveyed here are active educators and future administrators, not mind readers. Many of the questions posed were not as refined as they should have been, which could very well be why the results – especially those from Research Question 3 – were not on par with what was expected.

Finally, it is worth noting that the tagline from Kevin Costner’s iconic baseball film, *Field of Dreams* does not necessarily apply when it comes to finding research study participants; just because one builds it, they will not necessarily come.

### **Conclusion**

Regrettably, this qualitative study of future administrators did not reveal much in the way of what future classrooms will look like, nor will there likely be much radical (or even minor) change as a result of its findings. Even future visionary and *Star Trek* creator Gene Rodenberry appeared to have seen classrooms much as they always have been: A physical teacher in the presence of students, the latter dutifully seated at their desks. The tools used to process through the curriculum are all that seem to be in any fluctuation, and that, as demonstrated by six respondents in this study, largely appears determined by marketing.

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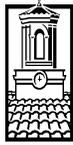
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SEILER: PROSPECTIVE PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CLASSROOM 22  
OF THE FUTURE



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To: Mr. Dale Seiler

From: Thomas A. Fields, Ph.D.   
Chairperson of IRB Committee

Date: February 7, 2013

Re: IRB Proposal Application (Log#2013-021)

Your IRB application submitted entitled "Prospective Principal's Perceptions of the Classroom of the Future," falls under the Expedited Review category as listed in Section VI in the manual of *Policies for Personnel Engaged in Research Involving Human Subjects*, TAMUK.

The approval is good for one year from your original approval date of February 7, 2013. Once the original approval expires, the project will be due for renewal if it is still ongoing.

As Chairman of the IRB, I approve this protocol as authorized under the expedited review procedure.

## Education

M.S. **Texas A&M University Kingsville.** Master of Science in Instructional Technology.  
Graduation date: Summer 2013. GPA: 3.66.

B.A. **The University of Texas at San Antonio. Bachelor of Arts in English.** Graduation:  
Spring 2003. Teacher certification: Spring 2004. GPA: 3.40.

A.A. **Palo Alto Community College. Associate of Arts in English.** Graduation: Winter  
2000. GPA: 3.66.

## Experience

- Byron P. Steele, II High School. English teacher. Technologist. 08/2006—Present  
Swim coach.
- Harlandale Middle School. English teacher. Yearbook sponsor. 06/2004—05/2006
- Altex Computers & Electronics, Ltd. Sales & technical representative. 11/1992—01/2004

## Research Experience

- "Prospective Administrators' Perceptions of the Classroom of the Future." Texas A&M University Kingsville. 07/2012—04/2013

## Affiliations/Memberships

- Texas Computer Education Association 10/2012—Present
- National Council of Teachers of English 08/2004—Present
- USA Triathlon 06/2005—Present

## Interests

- Current events
- The arts
- The human condition
- Technology
- Triathlon