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Ways to Improve Teacher Preparation, Retention and Shortages in the State of Texas

Teacher Preparation, Retention, and Shortages Joint Interim Charge, Testimony of IDRA – Presented by David Hinojosa, J.D., IDRA National Policy Director, before the Texas Senate Education and Higher Education Committees, March 29, 2016

Thank you for allowing the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) the opportunity to provide written and oral testimony on teacher preparation, retention and shortages in Texas. Our testimony today focuses on three areas: (1) factors impacting teacher shortage areas in Texas, particularly for bilingual/English as a second language (ESL) teachers; (2) analysis of teacher preparation programs, including Teach for America; and (3) research showing effective methods to grow and retain a stable, high quality teaching force and recommendations from IDRA.

Founded in 1973, IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization that is dedicated to assuring educational opportunity for every child. Throughout its history, IDRA has been a vocal advocate for the right of every student to equal educational opportunity and has conducted extensive research and analysis on a range of Texas and national educational issues impacting public school children, including teacher and teaching quality and bilingual/ESL programs.

I. Conditions of Teaching Impacting Teacher Shortage Areas in Texas

As the Joint Committee is likely aware, Texas has a growing population of students (approximately 80,000 new students each year), and with that comes an increasing demand for teachers. The student growth includes an increasing number of low-income and English learner (EL) students. Although these student groups show great promise, oftentimes they are seen as burdensome by ill-prepared teachers and school leaders, who typically view the underserved students through a deficit lens.

As experts from IDRA have found: "Research correlates low expectations held by teachers to low achievement and performance of students. How he or she is treated, respected and valued by important others, including administrators, teachers and other education personnel, has a domino effect on a student's self-concept, self-efficacy and persistence that immensely contributes to the level of success that he or she will attain in school."¹

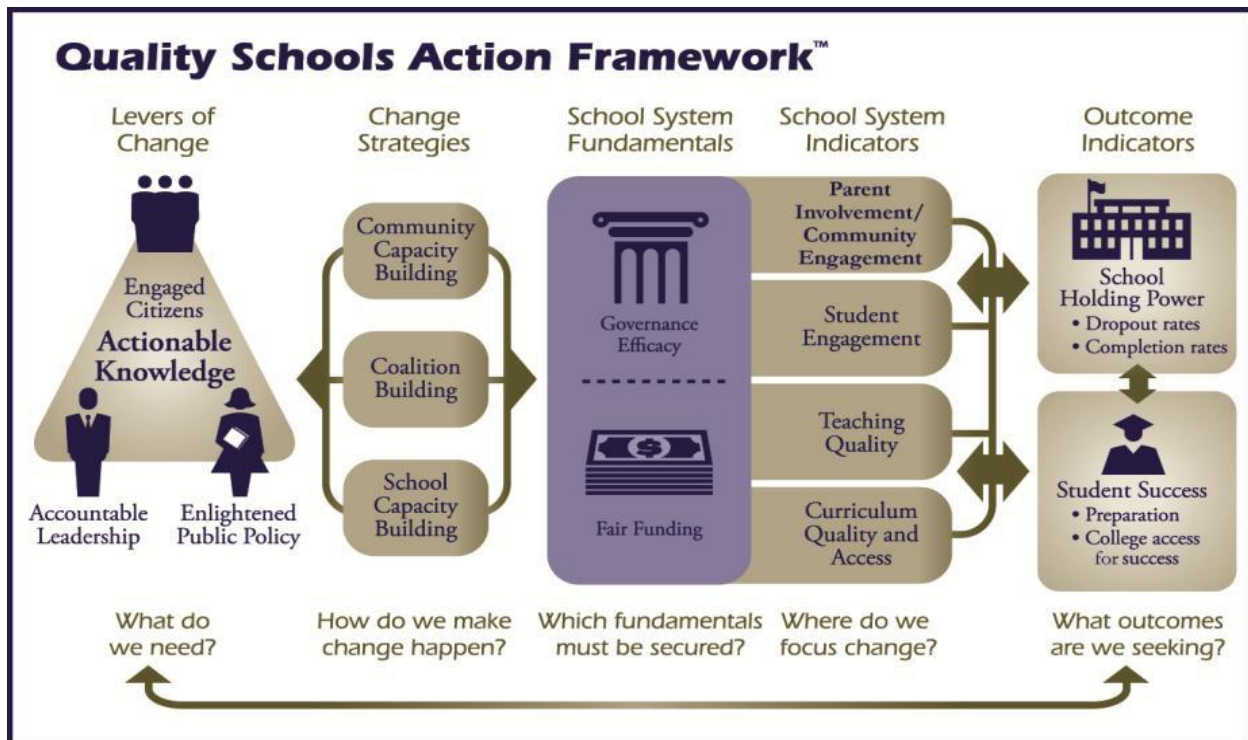
Misperceiving the capabilities of underserved student populations, combined with high-stakes testing requirements, teacher evaluations incorporating student performance value-added measures, low teacher pay, poor teacher preparation programs, competition in the private sector for specialized skills, and under-resourced schools (among other factors), create a difficult environment for teacher recruitment and retention. These conditions are exasperated for teachers of EL students. For the last several years, the State of Texas has experienced a

¹ Villarreal, A., & Scott, B. (2010). "IDRA's Community of Learners Approach to Instructional Quality – Three Critical Questions that are Rarely Asked in a Curriculum Audit," in Robledo Montecel, M., & Goodman, C.L. (eds). *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association). <http://www.idra.org/couragetconnect/>

shortage of bilingual and ESL certified teachers, while the population of EL students continues to grow – nearly 1 million students in 2014-15.

Instead of designing and engaging a comprehensive plan to address the teacher shortage, the State of Texas continues to consider and at times adopt several reforms that take the state in the other direction and deprive Texas students of a high quality teaching force – particularly for EL students, low-income students and students of color.

Below is the Quality Schools Action Framework™ developed by IDRA² that may assist the Legislature in drafting future laws that could help the state achieve its public education mission of “ensur[ing] that all Texas children have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation” (Tex. Educ. Code § 4.001). Teaching Quality is a key school system indicator in creating successful schools for all children, but importantly, the framework enables policymakers and school leaders to see the other interrelated indicators, change strategies and fundamentals that should be considered.



² Robledo Montecel, M., & Goodman, C.L. (eds). *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association). <http://www.idra.org/couragetoconnect/>

II. Teacher Quality and Teacher Preparation Programs

Texas must not only expand its teaching force to address teacher shortage areas, but it also must ensure that it does not compromise the quality of those teachers prepared, recruited and retained to serve Texas students, and it must ensure that those teachers recruited intend to remain in the profession. IDRA researchers have noted that teacher quality accounts for up to 40 percent of the variance in student test scores in reading and math.³

Factors that have been found to be among the strongest in affecting teacher quality include experience beyond two years of schooling and certification in the subject being taught. Segregated schools with high numbers of students of color and low-income students typically have less access to experienced teachers and teachers certified in the subject.

Instead of ensuring underserved students and students of color have access to strong, experienced teachers, the State of Texas has made it easier for teachers to become certified through alternative programs. According to experts testifying in the school finance case, “A generation ago, about 80 percent of teachers in Texas possessed traditional certification, meaning that they had progressed through a traditional teacher education program as a post-secondary student. Today, that proportion stands at 45 percent... In some recent years, alternatively certified teachers have accounted for more than 40 percent of new entrants into the profession.”⁴

The range in the quality of these alternative certification programs varies greatly and may not only affect the quality of teaching but may also affect teacher retention.⁵ Some university and private non-profit alternative certification programs have targeted shortage areas and yielded great results. IDRA’s research-based Transition to Teaching alternative certification programs, for example, have trained hundreds of teachers and provided mentoring and other teacher support for bilingual/ESL teachers, secondary math and science teachers with ESL certification and optional special education certification.⁶ The impact of these programs, however, has been limited by the support of minimal federal dollars.

The state has provided several million dollars to other programs, including Teach for America (TFA). The research on the impact of TFA is mixed, at best, with some studies showing minor improvements in student achievement and others showing no impact. However, the research on teacher attrition rates for TFA shows poor results, with only 28 percent of TFA teachers remaining public school teachers after two years, compared with 50 percent of non-TFA teachers.⁷

And the cost to taxpayers appears to be quite substantial. According to Dr. Vasquez Heilig’s research, a comparison of the pecuniary cost to society for 100 teachers after five years (including overhead, salary and attrition costs, and professional development, mentoring and education) was \$8.1 million for TFA compared to \$2.1 million for non-TFA – *a difference of \$6 million*.

The legislature should study the quality of the various programs out there to ensure that its return on investing in alternative certification programs is yielding the appropriate results and

³ Villarreal, A. (2003, April). “Quality Teaching: A School Reform Dilemma,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association). http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/April_2003_Self_Renewing_Schools_Teaching_Quality/Quality_Teaching_A_School_Reform_Dilemma/

⁴ *Texas Taxpayer & Student Fairness Coalition v. Williams*, FOF 533

⁵ Solis, A. (2004, June-July). “The Range of Mentoring in Teacher Quality,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association). http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/June_-_July_2004%3A_Self-Renewing_Schools%E2%80%A6Leadership/The_Role_of_Mentoring_in_Teacher_Quality_and_Retention/

⁶ See more at <http://budurl.com/IDRAAtt>

⁷ Vasquez Heilig, J., & Jez, S.J. (2014). *Teach For America: A Return to the Evidence* (Boulder, Colo.: National Education Policy Center). <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/teach-for-america-return>

whether the programs are turning out quality teachers who are remaining in the profession, especially in key shortage areas.

III. Creating a Plan to Recruit and Retain High Quality Educators in Shortage Areas

IDRA's asset-based framework for teaching quality guides our professional development, alternative teacher certification program, mentoring and coaching work. The following set of understandings and values underlying our framework⁸ include:

- All students bring assets to the learning environment that must be used as their educational foundation;
- All teachers also bring assets to the learning environment that must be used as a base to enhance professional growth and skills;
- Professional development and/or mentoring and coaching is best done by building a community of learners where all stakeholders collaborate, create and initiate changes; and
- The guiding vision of student engagement encompasses the classroom, the school, the family and the community.

This framework, or a similar framework, should be embedded into policy to ensure that all teachers are prepared to teach all learners. In addition, the State should consider the following⁹:

1. Recruiting well-prepared high-need teachers who stay in teaching.
2. Supporting high quality mentoring of new teachers.
3. Creating, where necessary, and supporting high quality teacher education programs in high-need areas.
4. Providing scholarships for entering teachers, with special focus on high-need fields and locations.
5. Providing resources to support recruitment incentives for expert, experienced teachers to teach in high-need schools.
6. Supporting increased teacher pay and benefits.
7. Supporting struggling teachers and principals with strong, research-based professional development and mentoring.
8. Requiring all teacher training programs (traditional and otherwise) to train teachers on cultural competency, inclusive communities, and ESL strategies.
9. Studying teacher attrition rates and examining factors that could improve teacher retention, especially for low income students and communities of color.

IDRA thanks this committee for the opportunity to testify and stands ready as a resource. If you have any questions, please contact IDRA's National Director of Policy, David Hinojosa, at david.hinojosa@idra.org.

The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization, led by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

⁸ Grayson, K. (2009, February). "Defining Teacher Quality Beyond the Certificate," IDRA Newsletter (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association). http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/February_2009_Teaching_Quality/Defining_Teaching_Quality_Beyond_the_Certificate/

⁹ Various IDRA sources and Darling-Hammond, L. (2011). Recruiting and Retaining Teachers: What Matters Most and What Can Government Do? (Stewart, Ohio: The Forum on Education and Democracy). <http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Darling-Hammond.pdf>