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Focus: School Holding Power

Building College Readiness for All Students

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.

How much longer can our country afford to be emaciated by the loss of its vast human potential? Research shows that all students should be considered “college material” and can become college ready if presented with opportunities to learn in an equitable learning environment (Conley, 2010). The pervasive myth that low-income and minority students are not college material has perpetuated discrimination and tracking of students into water-downed courses and graduation paths that steer them away from college.

Our society has been erroneously concerned only with select students who are deemed college material instead of expanding college readiness efforts that prepare more students for college. We should instead focus our energy on how education systems can better prepare all students to meet the demands of academia and the workforce. This article shares strategies schools can use to provide curriculum and instructional equity for all students.

What Loss of Human Potential Means to the United States

The lack of college readiness has a direct relation to our future with demographic changes that will see minorities – specifically Hispanics – as the majority population group in a few decades (Glover Blackwell, et al., 2010). A high school diploma alone is no longer enough. By 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require some form

of post-secondary education (Lumina Foundation, 2013). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2011), young adults (ages 25-34) had a college attainment rate of 42 percent, placing the United States 13th among developed nations.

Given the lower high school and college attainment rates for minority students, there is a danger that the majority of the population will not be equipped with necessary skills to perform jobs, leaving us at a financial risk (Glover Blackwell, et al., 2010). The attitudes, beliefs and mental blocks of people within systems are part of the problem as they deny critical college information to some groups of students and parents. Often, when students do not meet school standards, blame is charged to students and parents. However, education systems that lack quality teaching and equitable resources to provide an education of excellence are set up to generate unsuccessful outcomes.

We must improve academic achievement for marginalized student populations, develop more equitable practices, and implement social justice within the PreK-20 educational context through well-planned actions, effective reform structures, equitable finances, successful program implementation structures, and resources that are needed to close the academic achievement gap between minority and non-minority students.

(cont. on Page 2)

“We need a new commitment to high school graduation for all – and ‘all’ must mean ‘all’ – high school with a path to higher education. Investment in change clearly must go beyond discrete dropout prevention programs. It must reflect our full commitment to quality public schools in all neighborhoods for children of all backgrounds.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

(Building College Readiness for All Students, continued from Page 1)

Strategies Schools Can Use to Build College Readiness

Every student is college material the minute he or she enters the educational pipeline. There is an innate curiosity in children to know more about their world. Families and educators play an important role in promoting this natural wonder. We can develop children's strong intellectual capacity by asking questions that cultivate the imagination, creating a thirst for learning new ways to see the world and its possibilities. In schools, it is everyone's responsibility to value students and the knowledge they bring to school. As educators, we must engage and build upon their curiosity to learn. The education system must ensure students are prepared academically, socially and emotionally with competencies and skills needed to become successful in school, college and life (Wagner, 2010). Every child must understand that he or she is college material and has a right to be prepared for college.

IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework shows that teaching quality, curriculum quality and access, student engagement, and parent and community engagement are four key indicators, along with fair funding and governance efficacy, of schools that lead to graduation and college readiness (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010).

When these are in place and teachers are supported, they can help students develop their intellectual capacity (Hopkins, 2010; Kirkpatrick, et al., 2008; Kuh, et al., 2005). Following are some strategies teachers can use to assist students.

- Ask questions, such as Why? Why not? How come? What if? How might?, to foster critical thinking.
- Guide students to examine things and ideas in

more detail.

- Provide experiential learning through internships or service learning where students can put into practice what they learn in real-life activities.
- Offer opportunities for collaboration in school and out of school, communicating with others from different backgrounds, participating in self and group reflections, participating in peer tutoring, developing teamwork and active learning.
- Seek and probe additional information from students, such as Tell me more about..., How can I find more about...?
- Create classroom-based problems and have students seek solutions.
- Arrange possibilities for students to compare and make connections between different disciplines and content areas (Why should we know this? How does this apply to the world around us?).
- Provide time and be available to develop relationships with students, parents and teachers.
- Celebrate successes and provide caring support to build confidence, creativity and excitement.
- Model enthusiasm by verbal and non-verbal communication.

It is important to find out how students learn best and what will spark intellectual capacity. The beginning of the logical and analytical processes that develop cognition must be integrated through lesson delivery to trigger the formulations of ideas and investigations. Managing ideas and making connections among the different content disciplines allows for scaffolding and building on content knowledge. Students need

to manage substantial amounts of information, be organized and regulate their time effectively. Students must be able to



study independently and in groups, know which questions to ask, how to seek help and receive academic support, and maximize the support services that are provided. Schools, in collaboration with parents, must ensure students maintain well-balanced life experiences between the academic, social and emotional worlds.

Planning lessons that are engaging is the first step. Exposing students to problem-solving opportunities through effective instructional learning strategies where they apply prior knowledge and content skills to seek new knowledge is critical in the learning process. In addition, cooperative structures facilitate maximum student interaction where students teach and learn from each other.

Learning may be difficult at times, and the innate joy for learning may begin to fade. As educators, we know that the unique gift of intellectual capacity is restored quickly through the engage- (cont. on Page 4)

IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

For more information about the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

Additional resources are available online at http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity/

funded by the U.S. Department of Education

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2012) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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Portions of the contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.

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Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2012-13

High School Attrition Rates Continue Downward Trends

by Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

Recent trends in attrition rates for Texas public high schools continue to show a seeming positive outlook for the number and percent of students who continue their school enrollment through graduation. IDRA's latest annual attrition study shows that the overall attrition rate declined from 29 percent in 2009-10 to 27 percent in 2010-11 to 26 percent in 2011-12 to 25 percent in 2012-13. For the fourth time in the 28-year history of reporting trends in dropout and attrition rates in Texas public schools, this latest study shows that fewer than 30 percent of students were lost from public enrollment prior to graduation with a diploma.

IDRA's annual attrition study released this month builds on a series of studies that track the number and percent of students in Texas who are lost from public school enrollment prior to graduation. IDRA conducted the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas, which was released in October 1986 (Cárdenas, et al., 1986). In that study, IDRA found that the attrition rate was 33 percent.

Over the last decade, attrition rates have been on a steady decline by 1 or 2 percentage points each year. Though this implies improvement in schools' abilities to hold on to their students until they graduate, long-term trend assessments also suggest that this seeming rosy picture is blurred by the persistent gaps among racial and ethnic groups, along with the fact that schools still are losing one out of every four students.

In the most recent annual attrition study that examines school holding power in Texas public high schools, IDRA found that 25 percent of the freshman class of 2009-10 left school prior to graduating in the 2012-13 school year. The current statewide attrition rate of 25 percent is 7 percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33 percent found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study. The attrition rate in Texas is 24 percent lower than the 1985-86 rate.

For each racial and ethnic group, the study found that current attrition rates were lower than in the first study. However, the gaps between the

attrition rates of White students and Hispanic students and of White students and Black students are higher than 28 years ago. Between White students and Hispanic students, the attrition rate gap has increased from 18 percentage points in 1985-86 to 19 percentage points in 2012-13. The attrition rate gap between White students and Black students has almost doubled from 7 percentage points in 1985-86 to 12 percentage points in 2012-13. For the periods of 2011-12 and 2012-13,*

The full study is available on IDRA's web site at www.idra.org and includes methodology, historical statewide attrition rates and numbers of students lost to attrition categorized by race-ethnicity and by gender, a county-level data map, a county-level attrition rate table, trend data by county, and historical county-level numbers of students lost to attrition.

Key findings of the latest study include the following.

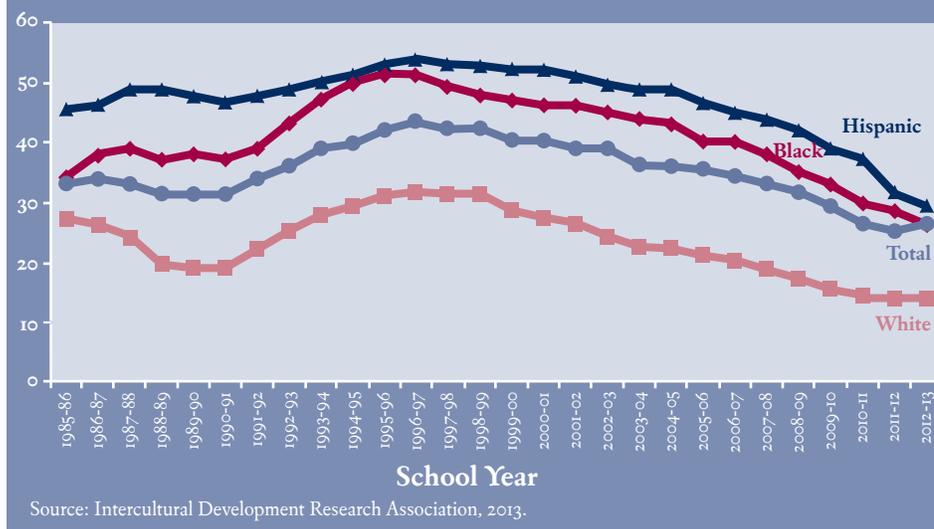
- The overall attrition rate declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 25 percent in 2012-13.
- The overall attrition rate was less than 30 percent in the last four study years: 29 percent in 2009-10, 27 percent in 2010-11, 26 percent in 2011-12, and 25 percent in 2012-13.
- One out of every four students (25 percent) from the freshman class of 2009-10 left school prior to graduating with a high school diploma – meaning, Texas public schools still are failing to graduate one out of every four students.
- 99,575 students from the 2009-10 freshman class were lost from public high school enrollment in 2012-13 compared to 86,276 in 1985-86.
- From 1985-86 to 2012-13, attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 27 percent (from 45 percent to 33 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 18 percent (from 34 percent to 26 percent). Attrition rates of White

(cont. on Page 4)

Though this implies improvement in schools' abilities to hold on to their students until they graduate, long-term trend assessments also suggest that this seeming rosy picture is blurred by the persistent gaps among racial and ethnic groups, along with the fact that schools still are losing one out of every four students.

(Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2012-13 – High School Attrition Rates Continue Downward Trends, continued from Page 3)

Attrition Rates in Texas Public Schools by Year 1985-86 to 2010-11



models predicts that at the current pace Texas will reach an attrition rate of zero until over two decades from this year.

IDRA is currently conducting additional research to explore the attrition rate trends and the disparity in attrition rates between racial and ethnic groups. IDRA is continuing to urge communities to come together to review issues surrounding school dropouts and to take action for the benefit of children and the future of Texas. IDRA's online OurSchool data portal helps community and school partners examine their school data and plan joint actions to improve school holding power. The portal can be accessed free of charge at www.idra.org/OurSchool. IDRA's one-page Quality School Holding Power Checklist provides a set of criteria for assessing and selecting effective dropout prevention strategies. These and other resources are available at www.idra.org/Research/Attrition.

*Note: This paragraph was revised in the online version on October 21, 2013.

Resources

Robledo Montecel, M. (principal investigator). *Texas School Dropout Survey Project*, seven volumes: Vol 1: *Magnitude of the Problem – Census Analysis*; Vol 2: *Magnitude of the Problem – Attrition Analyses*; Vol 3: *Magnitude of the Problem – School District Research and Procedures*; Vol 4: *Magnitude of the Problem – School District Research and Procedures*; Vol 5: *Benefit-Cost Impact of the Dropout Program*; Vol 6: *Program Responses – Their Nature and Effectiveness*; Vol 7: *Study Methods and Procedures*; plus *A Summary of the Findings* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 1986).

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students declined by 48 percent (from 27 percent to 14 percent).*

- The gaps between the attrition rates of White students and Hispanic students and between White students and Black students are dramatically higher than 28 years ago. The gap between White students and Hispanic students increased by 6 percent from 1985-86 to 2012-13, and the attrition gap between White students and Black students increased by 71 percent from 1985-86 to 2012-13.*
- For the class of 2012-13, Hispanic students and Black students are about two times more likely to leave school without graduating than White students.

- Since 1986, Texas schools have lost a cumulative total of more than 3.3 million students from public high school enrollment prior to graduation.*
- The attrition rates for males have been higher than those of females. In the class of 2012-13, males were 1.3 times more likely to leave school without graduating with a diploma than females.
- From 1985-86 to 2012-13, attrition rates of male students declined by 20 percent (from 35 percent to 28 percent) while the attrition rates of female students declined by 31 percent (from 32 percent to 22 percent).

A supplemental analysis using linear regression

(Building College Readiness for All Students, continued from Page 2)

ment of meaningful lessons, keeping students' minds active, expecting and anticipating ideas, and exploring and discovering other possibilities and undertakings. It is important for teachers to constantly enhance and kindle the flames of curiosity, providing students with classroom opportunities for them to inquire, explore, construct knowledge, improve memory and develop love for learning (Kirkpatrick, et al., 2008).

College-ready students are immersed in a quality comprehensive preparation program, have a solid academic foundation, know when and how to register for college exams, how to conduct research to find the right college fit, apply, fulfill financial demands and develop a

circle of emotional support. Students must know that intellectual curiosity is a valuable resource because it produces inquisitive citizens for an informed global society.

Resources

- Conley, D. *College and Career Ready: Helping All Students Succeed Beyond High School*, first edition (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2010).
- Hopkins, K. "Developing Curiosity: Teach Them How to Wonder." Jossey-Bass Education blog post (May 20, 2010).
- Glover Blackwell, A., & S. Kwoh, M. Pastor. *Uncommon Common Ground: Race and America's Future* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).
- Kirkpatrick, P., & B. Taylor. "Building Intellectual Capacity." PowerPoint presentation (Austin, Texas: The Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin, 2008).
- Kuh, G.D., & J. Kinzie, J.H. Schuch, E.J. Whitt and Associ-

- ates. *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, first edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).
- Lumina Foundation. *A Stronger Nation through Higher Education*, annual report (Indianapolis, Ind.: Lumina Foundation for Education, Inc., 2013).
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. *Education at a Glance 2011* (France: OECD Publishing, 2011).
- Robledo Montecel, M., & C.L. Goodman (eds). *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework™* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).
- Wagner, T. *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need – and What We Can Do About It* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2010).

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Resources Online www.idra.org

Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2012-13

Look Up Your County – See attrition rates and numbers over the last 10 years

Tool – Quality School Holding Power Checklist

OurSchool data portal – see district- and high school-level data (in English and Spanish)

Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework

Overview of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, which keeps 98 percent of students in school

Ideas and Strategies for Action

Set of principles for policymakers and school leaders

Classnotes Podcast: “Counting Dropouts”

Graduation for All E-letter (English/Spanish)

Frequently Asked Questions

Taking Action to Hold on to Students

Communities and their neighborhood public schools can turn the tide. We must guarantee that every child graduates from high school ready for college and the world of work.

Get informed

See IDRA's **latest attrition study** online at: <http://www.idra.org/Research/Attrition/>

Get the attrition rate for **your county** over the last 10 years at: <http://www.idra.org/Research/Attrition>

Receive IDRA's **Graduation for All free monthly e-letter** (bilingual: Spanish/English) to get up-to-date information to make a difference in your school and community. Sign up online at: <http://www.idra.org>.

Listen to IDRA's **Classnotes podcast** to hear strategies for student success.

Get connected

Create a **community-school action team** to examine the factors that must be addressed to strengthen your school's holding power – its ability to hold on to students through to graduation. Use IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework™.

IDRA's book, **Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework™** shows how communities and schools can work together to be successful with all of their students. The book's web page (<http://www.idra.org/couragetconnect>) has an excerpt, related podcasts, images of the framework and other resources.

Use IDRA's **OurSchool data website** (<http://www.idra.org/OurSchool>) to provide community-school partners with actionable knowledge on:

- Student Engagement
- Teaching Quality
- Governance Efficacy
- Parent and Community Engagement
- Curriculum Quality and Access
- Funding Equity

Get results

Use IDRA's one-page **School Holding Power Checklist** that has a set of criteria for assessing and selecting effective dropout prevention strategies and for making sure your school is a quality school. It is free online: <http://www.idra.org/Research/Attrition>

Develop a **two-pronged strategy** that reaches students who are at immediate risk of dropping out and addresses the underlying factors that give rise to attrition in the first place. For a dropout prevention program to be successful, ensure that these components are in place:

- All students are valued.
- There is at least one educator in a student's life who is totally committed to the success of that student.
- Students, parents and teachers have extensive, consistent support that allows students to learn, teachers to teach and parents to be involved.
- Excellence is never achieved at the cost of equity.
- Solutions are institution-based with family and community participation and embrace the contributions that students and their families bring.



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The Impact of the Coca-Cola Valued Program on Students and Schools in the United States and Brazil

by Felix Montes, Ph.D., and Linda Cantú, Ph.D.

In 2014, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program will celebrate 30 years of positively impacting the lives of thousands of youth who were at risk of dropping out. Created by IDRA, this dropout prevention program began in San Antonio in 1984 and has operated in more than 550 schools throughout the continental United States, Puerto Rico, Brazil and the United Kingdom. In Brazil it operated from 1999 to 2011 in 46 schools in 21 cities and seven states at its peak.

Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO, states, “In the past three decades, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has maintained a less than 2 percent dropout rate, which is an incredible legacy.” The program’s success stems from its basis on the creed: All students are valuable, none is expendable.

The voice of one parent about her daughter says it all: “When she entered high school, she began skipping classes. I demanded that she complete homework. I emailed teachers daily until they apparently got tired of them and would no longer respond. They would tell me that she [never] turned in homework, so she was failing. By this time, I was at my wit’s end. She really was on the very tip of dropping out... I was at the end of my rope... That is when the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was implemented [at her school].

“The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program gave my daughter a new reason for living. She has formed bonds with her tutees that will last a lifetime. She is aspiring to be an elementary teacher. She has found her youthful dreams and goals again. She has been accepted to college, and she is so excited by this new beginning.”

IDRA’s Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program works by identifying middle and high school students who are in at-risk situations and enlisting them as tutors for elementary school youngsters who also are struggling in school. The secondary students who participate may be struggling with reading, writing, math, and English language skills. While

tutoring in the core subject areas with younger students who have, at least, a four year grade level difference, the tutors begin to strengthen their own academic skills.

One of the most relevant program virtues is its continuous assessment by every stakeholder – school personnel, parents, tutors and IDRA staff. Through evaluations, these stakeholders frequently report extraordinary effects the program has on the tutors in terms of improved discipline, self-concept, dedication to their educational goals, and renewing their outlook about life and the future. In Brazil, for example, parents credited the program with saving their children from the perils of the streets and instilling in them a renewed commitment to their education, families and society.

In the United States, 17,604 tutors and 52,722 tutees participated in the program since its inception in 1984. During its 13 years in Brazil, 9,561 tutors and 26,975 tutees participated in the program. Overall, more than 106,000 students have been directly impacted by the program in both countries. The key statistic in the program is the dropout rate. With a historic dropout rates of 1.0 percent and 2.2 percent, in the United States and Brazil, respectively, the program is successful in keeping students in school. This compares favorably with attrition figures in Texas of 25 percent to 43 percent and dropout rates in Brazil ranging from 6.9 percent to 13 percent.

Schools can gain great benefit from the program as well, which depends on the willingness of the schools to change. The heart of the program is the concept of valuing youth. Participating schools see the re-incorporation of students considered at risk of dropping out into the educational track as a worthwhile effort and are willing to value them to the point of engaging them with a degree of responsibility.

An elementary school principal summarized: (cont. on Page 7)



“If you provide young people with an opportunity to contribute – to themselves, their families, their communities – they will.”

(Coca-Cola Valued Program – Impact on Students and Schools in the United States and Brazil, continued from Page 6)

“Sometimes, all it takes is that one person to say: ‘You know what? No, I am not related to you, but I care. I care that in the end you will be a productive member of society and in the end you can contribute.’”

In 2009, IDRA examined the previous 25 years of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program to glean key lessons for improving the quality of education for all students. The lessons were captured in a publication, *Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program* (Robledo Montecel, 2009), with the voices of youth, teachers, family members and program leaders on why valuing youth is at the heart of school transformation: “If you provide young people with an opportunity to contribute – to themselves, their families, their communities – they will.”

Of course, this willingness is a demonstration of school leadership. This is not a new discovery. IDRA has found this to be the case in different contexts, including implementation of bilingual educational programs, effectiveness of school reforms and also in the success of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Another one of the lessons revealed by the program is “to squarely take on attrition, school leaders must inspire innovation, embody engagement, and incorporate actionable knowledge” (Robledo Montecel, 2009).

And one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the need for a program such as the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has been how the tutors’ relationships with their teacher coordinators have flourished. It is clear that these students need an adult in the school setting who will listen to them, support their aspirations, and orient them toward solving daily problems. In the United States, recent surveys have indicated that about half of the students felt chronically disengaged from school (Robledo Montecel, 2009).

By giving students responsibilities, such as helping other students succeed, and providing them with a mentoring relationship with a qualified adult (the teacher coordinator), the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has redefined the school as an essential place for these students to attend to their emotional growth and achieve their educational goals. As a result, schools regain their original role as a place that fosters young people’s intellectual, psychological and educational development, where the new genera-

IDRA 40th Anniversary

Among IDRA’s powerful research studies was the first comprehensive statewide study of school dropouts in Texas in 1986. Prior to the early 1980s, the state of Texas practically ignored the fact that a significant percentage of its school-age population was dropping out of school. But changes in economic trends and employee skill requirements led to interest in the dropout problem as the state moved into a technological- and service-oriented labor market. The Texas Department of Community Affairs and the Texas Education Agency

contracted IDRA to lead the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas with Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, now IDRA President & CEO, serving as principal investigator. IDRA’s report in October 1986 stirred controversy with schools based on the key finding that 33 percent of Texas students were dropping out of school during their high school years, and that the dropout percentages for students in minority groups were much higher than for White students. IDRA’s findings and recommendations served to inform the development of HB 1010, a bill that set policy for ameliorating the dropout problem in Texas. And with that study, IDRA developed an enrollment-based methodology that has become the foundation for dropout counting methods by other researchers across the country. Today, with the work of other independent researchers, from the Harvard Civil Rights Project to the Urban Institute, there is a convergence of data that irrefutably points to a huge dropout problem. And IDRA has kept a focus on the issue in the State by releasing annual attrition rates for Texas and its counties, by working with policymakers to ensure dropout counting and reporting procedures are appropriate and accurate, and by working with school leaders to provide high quality education that leads students to graduation and college readiness.



Pausing during the busy 1988 conference at the Ford Foundation Urban Dropout Prevention Collaboratives in San Antonio are (l-r) Aurelio M. Montemayor; Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel; Dr. Edward J. Meade, Jr.; and then IDRA Executive Director, Dr. José A. Cárdenas.

tion acquires the skills to become responsible, engaged adults in a rapidly changing and more complex society.

“My [Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program] teacher coordinator never gave up on me,” explains one tutor. “She kept up her support of me through the bad times as well as the good times. She had faith in me, and I began to have faith in myself. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to her... and my mom for always being there to lift me up every time I fell. In the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program I showed responsibility by getting up each day to go to school just to attend the program.”

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has had a remarkable impact improving the educa-

tional environment in both the United States and Brazil, as it helped retain more youth in the school system and rekindled hope for a better society. Clearly, the program has represented a turning point for these tutors, their families and the schools.

More information about the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is available online at www.idra.org or at IDRA (210-444-1710).

Resources

Robledo Montecel, M. *Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2009).

Felix Montes, Ph.D., is an education associate in IDRA Support Services. Linda Cantú, Ph.D., is the project director of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Comments and questions may be directed to them via email at comment@idra.org.



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Focus: School Holding Power

IDRA Attrition Study & Resources Online



2013 Study:
 Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2012-13



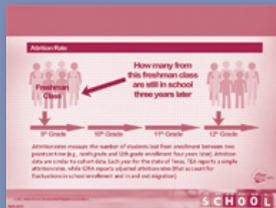
Stay Connected:
 Sign up for our Graduation for All e-Letter

Look Up Your County:

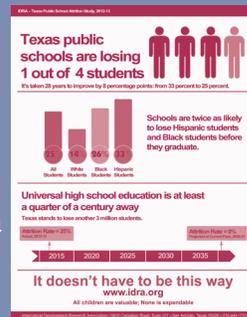
See attrition rates and numbers over the last 10 years



Tool:
 Quality School Holding Power Checklist



eBook:
 Types of Dropout Data Defined



Infographic:
 Quick visual look at the data

Get ideas for taking action
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