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Building STEAM – Changing the Equation for College and Career Readiness for All

by Paula Johnson, M.A.

Students are encouraged for at least 12 years by parents, teachers, and their community to learn all they can in order to build a fulfilling life for themselves. At the heart of the American public education system is the desire for all students to graduate from high school fully prepared for college and to begin a professional career.

When students come to the fork in the road between college and career, we want them “armed and fully loaded” with the requisite knowledge and skills for both. The key question now is how do we create an educational community of practice that welcomes every learner and instills the qualities that will provide a strong foundation for further studies and employment?

Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) have been in the spotlight for some time. In his 2011 state of the union address, President Obama pledged the addition of 100,000 new STEM teachers. He also expressed the desire for the United States to reclaim its leadership in the world with the highest proportion of college graduates by the end of the decade.

Whether you live in a state that has adopted the Common Core standards or one that is paving its own path, the United States continues to focus on building a community of professionals that can uphold and renew our STEM capability. It seems that with the amount of attention focused on this issue, we would have arrived at a solution to that

key question. There is a growing community of educators who are forcing STEM supporters to rethink how we deliver instruction to 21st century learners – by returning to the arts.

STEM to STEAM

While each state continues to determine again what knowledge is crucial to students during their secondary years, a not-so-quiet revolution is taking place that is demanding the attention of STEM educators. There is a movement underway to bring innovation to STEM education through the integration of the arts: STEM + Arts = STEAM.

The common thread of support by STEAM advocates is that the economic prosperity of the United States rests heavily on the incorporation of the arts into STEM education as a means of making stronger connections for all learners.

Championed by the Rhode Island School of Design, STEAM education has the potential to transform the 21st century economy just as science and technology did for the 20th century. There is an untapped source of potential innovation in STEM-related fields by students who have inclinations toward visual arts, music, dance and drama.

Imagine a child who learned fractions by incorporating the foundations of musical notes. Or, fancy

(cont. on Page 2)

“Our future depends on having an excellent public educational system, in which all students graduate from high school prepared for college or the world of work, no matter what the color of their skin, the language they speak, or where they happen to be born. And this is a goal I believe we can achieve.”

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

(Building STEAM – Changing the Equation for College and Career Readiness for All, continued from Page 1)



the student who learns about force of motion through interpretive dance. They are given the tools and opportunity to “see” the big picture, all of its elements, and how they work together as a whole!

Are They Ready?

I was recently asked to join a live radio broadcast discussion surrounding STEM education and Algebra II as a high school requirement. Along with Laurie Posner, our director of civic engagement at IDRA, and the hosts, we engaged in a lively, hour-long discussion on the role high school math plays in students’ future college and career pathways.

The phrase “college and career ready” ambiguously implies that high school standards, curricula, and instruction have prepared students for both. Unfortunately, the expectations of colleges and universities do not always include the so-called “soft skills” in high demand by industry that students should also master before entering the workforce.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2015 Job Outlook survey, the top attributes employers seek on a candidate’s resume include the following: leadership, ability to work in a team structure, written communication, problem-solving skills, and a strong work ethic. Though many would argue that STEM-related courses should solidify these attributes, the majority of classroom instruction remains traditional in its lecture-driven style.

Without teacher-student interaction during the learning process, students are not given space to develop the non-cognitive skills that the business sector is looking for. In many professions, what a candidate *knows* is not as critical as their ability to

learn and adapt to new situations.

Changing the Equation

STEAM lesson delivery provides opportunities for students to negotiate their understanding of the content through a multitude of artistic mediums. Students collaborate with classmates to develop their unique interpretation of the standards being taught. There is a significant departure from the norm when planning a STEAM lesson. Both content objectives are treated as equals. This dual focus encourages learners to demonstrate core content information through an art form they also are studying.

Assessment is based on mastery of both standards. This form of instruction contains an increased amount of students’ written, verbal, and even physical expression enabling teachers to gain a broader sense of each learner’s understanding.

The nation has a vested interest in growing this generation of STEAM graduates and professionals. In order to keep (or some would say, reclaim) our position in the global economy, we must produce high school graduates ready to take on the world in a multitude of fields. Whether on campus or in occupation, all of our children deserve to be armed with the skills they need to embark on their journey toward successful careers and economic health. The problem (pun intended) is that we have to be open to changing the equation of how we go about the business of preparing students for life after high school.

Educators interested in exploring STEAM lessons and activities can find free multidisciplinary resources on sites such as Education-Closet.com, stemtosteam.org, and Edutopia.org.

Resources

- Johnson, P. “STEAM Education for Every Child, Parts 1 & 2,” *IDRA Classnotes Podcast* (June 30, 2015;).
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- NACE. *Job Outlook 2015* (Bethlehem, Penn.: National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2015).
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Paula Johnson, M.A. is an education associate in IDRA’s Department of Education Transformation and Innovation. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at paula.johnson@idra.org.

PODCAST **STEAM Education for Every Child, Parts 1 & 2 – IDRA Classnotes Podcast**
<http://budurl.com/IDRApod152>
<http://budurl.com/IDRApod153>

PODCAST **Should Algebra II be a requirement? KLUP morning radio program – recording**
<http://budurl.com/KLUP051615>

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More Comprehensive Advising Needed in the Aftermath of Changes to Texas High School Curriculum Requirements

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

From 2007 to 2011, all high school students in the state of Texas were required to take four years of English, four years of mathematics, four years of science, and four years of social studies to graduate from high school. This rigorous curriculum (known as the 4-by-4) was designed to prepare all students to enroll in four-year colleges in Texas and around the country.

But some Texas educators felt too challenged to fulfill such “lofty expectations” for all students. After all, some argued, not “all” students should consider college as a real option for themselves. Such assumptions of potential, we suspect, were directed at not one’s own children but rather at other peoples’ children.

Leaders from a sub-set of private sector companies also had no interest in having all students being academically prepared. They were more concerned with having access to a “skilled workforce,” which for some is code often used to rationalize a preference for emphasis on minimal skills needed to run the machines or do the unsophisticated work required in “my company.”

Some educators had low expectations for groups of students, and some short-sighted private sector leaders had no concern with the diminished opportunities that lead to students enrolling in a watered-down high school curriculum with fewer math, science and social studies requirements. Working in tandem, these two forces orchestrated major revisions to the Texas 4-by-4 standards.

In 2013, Texas’ political leadership chose to modify the Texas strong 4-by-4 college readiness curriculum and put in its place a thinly-veiled new system of student tracking. This new system created different “paths” to graduation that were achieved by changing the course combinations different sub-groups of high school students would need to take in order to graduate.

The changes were accompanied by the creation of vague yet alluring labels for the new curriculum

tracks (called “endorsements”): STEM, business and industry, arts and humanities, public service, and multidisciplinary studies. The varying paths were sold as equivalent and promised to lead all students to being college ready (a concept that also was watered down to mean that all students would be prepared to enroll in a two-year college, rather than a four-year college, without needing remedial courses).

The reality is that most of the new tracks require significantly fewer advanced math and science courses. Students who pursue the distinguished level of achievement at least must take Algebra II, which is needed for entrance into a four-year college program. Since even within the tracks there are ways to steer students either toward or away from college, students and families must be vigilant.

Schools were given the task of providing guidance to students and parents on these new curriculum plans. The law, as adopted, requires schools to review graduation plans with incoming ninth graders and their parents and to ensure that parents sign their child’s plan.

Specifically, the law states: “A principal of a high school shall designate a school counselor or school administrator to review personal graduation plan options with each student entering grade nine together with that student’s parent or guardian. The personal graduation plan options reviewed must include the distinguished level of achievement... and the endorsements... Before the conclusion of the school year, the student and the student’s parent or guardian must confirm and sign a personal graduation plan for the student.”

Schools also are required to explain the college-related implications of the revised curriculum requirements with signage, detailed explanations, and written notifications in “plain language.”

On this, the law states: “The board of trustees of
(cont. on Page 4)

Given what we know of the challenges schools have historically faced in communicating with and engaging parents, it is clear that better communication and engagement strategies are needed to ensure all students are on paths to be rigorously prepared for college.

(Need for More Comprehensive Advising Evident in the Aftermath of Changes to Texas High School Curriculum..., continued from Page 3)

a school district and the governing body of each open-enrollment charter school that provides a high school shall require each high school in the district or provided by the charter school, as applicable, to post appropriate signs in each counselor's office, in each principal's office, and in each administrative building indicating the substance of Section 51.803 regarding automatic college admission (Top Ten Percent Plan) and stating the curriculum requirements for financial aid authorized under Title 3. To assist in the dissemination of that [this] information, the [school] district or charter school shall:

1. require that each high school counselor and class advisor be provided a detailed explanation of the substance of Section 51.803 and the curriculum requirements for financial aid authorized under Title 3;
2. provide each district or school student, at the time the student first registers for one or more classes required for high school graduation, with a written notification, including a detailed explanation in plain language, of the substance of Section 51.803, the curriculum requirements for financial aid authorized under Title 3, and the benefits of completing the requirements for that automatic admission and financial aid."

What the state leaders did not provide were uniform guidelines on the specific new information to be provided or in what form or language. Schools were only provided minimal additional resources to deal with all the new requirements associated with advising students and parents.

The result has been a hodgepodge of local school-developed informational materials, inconsistent understanding among middle school and high school staff of what the new curriculum tracks involve, and a lag in data on how the curriculum changes are impacting courses students are now taking and, later, data on how the modified curriculum is impacting enrollment in colleges and universities.

A recent survey of parents in a large number of South Texas communities reveals that nine out of 10 parents still have very little or no information on the content or implications of the new curriculum track options incorporated into the new law. (See story in the June-July issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*). We suspect that a similar poll of parents around the state would produce similar numbers.

Steps for Schools

Given what we know of the challenges schools have historically faced in communication with and engaging parents – let alone parents of middle and high school students – it is clear that better communication and engagement strategies are needed to ensure all students are on paths to be rigorously prepared for college. Our research on effectively engaging parents of minority and low-income students suggests that those efforts need to consider the following.

- Make the 4-by-4 curriculum the default for all students.
- Engage with parents from the beginning of the school year rather than waiting for spring enrollment or waiting to respond to issues that arise.
- Have summary materials on the different curriculum endorsements available at middle schools and high schools with clear information on the impact of those routes on career preparation and on chances for enrolling in a four-year college.
- Provide sufficient time for students and their parents to consider the graduation requirements and the implications of the various endorsement tracks, which may well turn out to be life-altering options facing students as young as 13 and 14 years of age.
- Expand the pools of staff who are advising students on the various curriculum tracks and move away from counselor-student focused approaches that result in 300, 400 and in some cases 500 students per counselor.
- Document, summarize and review the impact of the shift away from the standard 4-by-4 curriculum on the numbers of students selecting each endorsement track to ensure that no disproportionate concentrations in vocational paths compared to college prep paths.
- Monitor the impact of the new curriculum on the number of students enrolling in two- and four-year colleges and set triggers that alert the school to major shifts in post-secondary enrollments.

Though it is too soon to have data on the impact of the new curriculum tracking system, similar schemes in the past in Texas and elsewhere had dismal results. In the meantime, information is needed on how middle and high schools are handling the expanded requirements that they

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inform students and parents about the curriculum endorsement selection process and how this is impacting the decisions being made. It is imperative that schools and communities monitor this new process closely and are ready to take appropriate action if unintended concentrations and drops in college enrollment are identified as early by-products of the new tracking scheme.

Resources

Texas Legislature, House Bill 5 (2013). Sec. 28.026. Notice of Requirements for Automatic College Admission and Financial Aid.

IDRA. *Tracking, Endorsements and Differentiated Diplomas – When 'Different' Really is Less – A Post Session Update*, IDRA Policy Note (San Antonio, Texas: IDRA, October 2013).

Cortez, A. "Texas Endorsement System Threatens to Track Poor and Minority Students – IDRA Calls on Texas State Board of Education to Ensure All Students Have Access to High Quality Curriculum," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: IDRA, November-December, 2013).

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"The Impact of Education on Economic Development in Texas," San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce White Paper, developed in collaboration with IDRA

<http://budurl.com/SAHCCwp14>

Supporting Students and Families for the Transition from High School to College

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.

Today's global economy demands that students perform at rigorous levels. As educators, we must continually review our practices, policies and programs that are designed to improve students' preparation for post-secondary pathways. Of primary importance for school leaders is equipping educators to succeed within the complexities of systemic change in culturally- and linguistically-diverse schools. Consequently, we should open the doors to greater collaboration that better serves our diverse student population.

When our secondary schools, for example, do not successfully prepare all students for college, their students struggle to navigate through the intricate transitions from high school to post-secondary education. Sometimes, the barriers are so overwhelming that even after students have entered college, they find themselves unprepared for the rigors of college-level work (Bangser, 2008).

Unpreparedness is not just about academic skills but includes other factors as well. Deborah Hirsch states, "Those who struggle are more likely to attribute it to bad luck or factors they see as out of their influence" (2010). As noted by Brian Harke (2011), student overconfidence, lack of preparedness and uninformed expectations about college resulted in nearly 34 percent of college students dropping out during their first year.

Mellard & Lancaster (2003) summarize that students' limited success can be exacerbated by institutional issues, how well students are prepared, increasing competition for resources, and interagency collaboration.

Identifying limiters and developing culturally-responsive solutions are paramount if educators are to assist all students to enter and graduate from college. The key is having the mindset and commitment to be involved with the educational success of all the students. Solutions must integrate academic, personal, social and cultural information that directly support student transition, matriculation and retention in college.

Success requires attention from everyone involved in the education process: principals, teachers, counselors, citizens and community leaders, and post-secondary education personnel. It is critical that each understands the role they play in the success of students.

For example, children's vision for going to college should be nurtured at the earliest school age possible. This could include general discussions on careers and what skills the careers require. The frequency, intensity and depth of these discussions about college should then grow as students progress through school. Concurrently, a social support system must be developed.

The middle school level is a critical juncture as student planning for the future begins to become more formalized. This can be supported through school advisories, post-secondary seminars, college transition courses at the seventh and eighth grade levels, college summer academies, coordinated efforts between community agencies and the school, and strong family and community involvement focused on college readiness. Examples include integrating diverse career awareness activities, visiting colleges and universities, creating personalized learning environments, clarifying the elements of financial aid, and preparing for college entrance exams.

The focus in high school should be on aligning the curriculum to the rigor of college courses and making sure all students have access to, and are on a path to, take these courses. Schools can point students to culturally-responsive support services, appropriate uses of technology, and differences between college and high school expectations. It is important for students to identify requirements for the particular career and college or university to which they are applying.

In addition, ensuring student success must include non-cognitive factors, such as self-efficacy and self-regulation strategies. Dweck, et al.,
(cont. on Page 6)

Success requires attention from everyone involved in the education process: principals, teachers, counselors, citizens and community leaders, and post-secondary education personnel.

(Supporting Students and Families for the Transition from High School to College, continued from Page 5)

(2014) state that systemic change occurs through educational interventions and initiatives that transform student experiences into academic, social and emotional improvement. Along these lines, IDRA has developed a professional development process that uses culturally-relevant bilingual scenario cards for use with groups of students and parents. The cards provoke reflection through real situations that inspire solutions with engaging discussions about the college transition process (see right).

One sample scenario for students reads: “Many scientists and inventors did not succeed the first time they tried to do something and they were purposeful and determined to accomplish their mission. Many times they failed but they did not give up. You started taking a challenging class this semester and it seems that things are not going well. During the first progress report you made a D. You want to be able to finish this class and make a good grade as you know it is important for you to keep a high GPA (grade point average). What actions would you take to accomplish your goal? Have you challenged yourself and persisted even though it has been difficult? Should you seek your friends help?”

At several parent and community seminars focused on college preparation, these scenarios have been used to stimulate discussion about helping children’s college transition be more effective. Parents have shared that exposure to these activities have helped them understand how they can help their children.

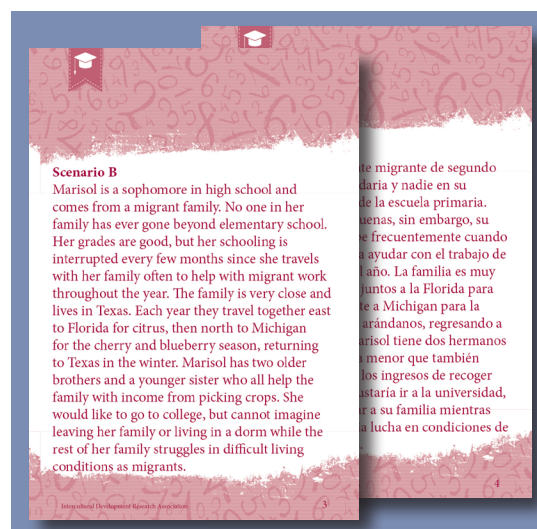
It is essential to ensure that all stakeholders be focused on the same outcome: focusing and developing students’ assets, implementing effective strategies to have a productive transition from high school to college, and increasing student academic success rates at the post-secondary level.

Resources

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- Dweck, C.S., & G.M. Walton, G.L. Cohen. *Academic Tenacity: Mindsets and Skills that Promote Long-Term Learning* (Seattle, Wash.: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).
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- Villarreal, A., & R.G. Rodríguez, N. Avilés, R. López del Bosque. *Partnering with Parents for Student Success – A Guide for Secondary Teachers Administrators* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2013).

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PODCAST A Principal on Supporting Teachers for Student College Readiness – IDRA Classnotes Podcast
<http://budurl.com/IDRApod128>

Meet Dr. Nilka Avilés, IDRA Senior Education Associate

This year, the *IDRA Newsletter* is highlighting our staff’s varied and diverse talents and backgrounds. At IDRA, Dr. Nilka Avilés leads teacher professional development in science education particularly serving English language learners, and in strengthening college access and readiness for underserved and underrepresented students. She also directs IDRA’s new School TurnAround and Reenergizing for Success Leaders project. Before joining IDRA, Dr. Avilés directed the Early College High School initiative at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is a native Puerto Rican and is the first-born daughter of Adolfo and Hilda Avilés, who were educators, principals and executive directors at the Department of Education in Puerto Rico. Her father also was city council manager for many years, and after he retired from the Department of Education, he became the vice-mayor of Nilka’s hometown Guaynabo. Her mother was her first grade teacher when Nilka was 4 years old. Nilka matriculated at the University of Puerto Rico Rio Piedras campus and completed her first semester of her freshmen year at the age of 16. She became a secondary science teacher at the age of 20 and taught at the high school from which she graduated in Guaynabo.



Nilka loves the outdoors. She was a Girl Scout for many years. Her camping skills and experiences were so profound that she has owned travel trailers and goes camping during her spare time. She also loves to dance, especially her salsa and merengue music, even though now she enjoys dancing polkas and country western music. Being raised in la “Isla del Encanto” (Island of Enchantment), Nilka loves the beach, and whenever possible, she goes on vacation back to the beach in Puerto Rico, to Cancún or to the Florida Emerald Coast. Nilka also enjoys travelling to discover the world. While in college along with 95 students and eight professors, she visited Greece, Italy, France, Spain and England during a 45-day trip. She also traveled to Antigua, Martinique, St. John, St. Thomas, Curacao, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Aruba, Trinidad & Tobago, Columbia, Venezuela, Panama, and San Andrés.

Immigrant Students' Rights to Attend Public Schools – School Opening Alert

This alert is a reminder that public schools, by law, must serve all children. The education of undocumented students is guaranteed by the *Plyler vs. Doe* decision, and certain procedures must be followed when registering immigrant children in school to avoid violation of their civil rights.

The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education published in May 2014 a letter advising school officials that activities that deny or discourage students to attend school are unlawful. The letter begins, “Under federal law, state and local educational agencies are required to provide all children with equal access to public education at the elementary and secondary level.”

In *Plyler vs. Doe*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that children of undocumented workers have the same right to attend public primary and secondary schools as do U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Like other students, children of undocumented workers in fact are required under state laws to attend school until they reach a mandated age.

School personnel – especially building principals and those involved with student intake activities – should be aware that they have no legal obligation to enforce U.S. immigration laws.

The Supreme Court arrived at this decision because such practices that deny or discourage immigrant children and families from public schooling:

Victimize innocent children – Children of undocumented workers do not choose the conditions under which they enter the United States. They should not be punished for circumstances they do not control. Children have the right to learn and be useful members of society.

Are counterproductive for the country – Denying children access to education does not eliminate illegal immigration. Instead, it ensures the creation of an underclass. Without public education for children, illiteracy rates will increase and opportunities for workforce and community participation will decrease. Research has proven that for every \$1 spent on the education of children, at least \$9 is returned.

Waste valuable time while losing sight of principal goals of public education – Rather



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than teaching students, school officials would spend their time asking our millions of school children about their citizenship status. States would be forced to spend millions of dollars to do the work of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency.

Promote misinformation – Incorrect assumptions and inappropriate figures have been used to blame immigrants and their children for economic problems.

Encourage racism and discrimination – In turbulent, financially troubled times, immigration often becomes a focal point of public discourse. Many consider a preoccupation with the immigration status of children of undocumented workers to be a form of discrimination and racism.

As a result of the *Plyler* ruling, public schools may not:

- deny admission to a student during initial enrollment or at any other time on the basis of undocumented status;
- treat a student differently to determine residency;
- engage in any practices to “chill” the right of access to school;
- require students or parents to disclose or document their immigration status;
- make inquiries of students or parents intended to expose their undocumented status; or
- require social security numbers from all students, as this may expose undocumented status.

Students without a social security number should be assigned a number generated by the school. Adults without social security numbers who are applying for a free lunch and/or breakfast program for a student need only state on the application that they do not have a social security number.

The *Family Education Rights and Privacy Act* prohibits schools from providing any outside agency

– including the ICE agency – with any information from a child’s school file that would expose the student’s undocumented status. The only exception is if an agency gets a court order (subpoena) that parents can then challenge. Schools should note that even requesting such permission from parents might act to “chill” a student’s *Plyler* rights.

At IDRA, we are working to strengthen schools to work for all children, families and communities. Help us make this goal a reality for every child; we simply cannot afford the alternatives. Denying children of undocumented workers access to an education is unconstitutional and against the law.

You can also visit IDRA’s website for a printable flier in English and Spanish as well as a copy of the letter from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education (May 2014).



Immigrant Children’s Rights to Attend Public Schools – IDRA Classnotes Podcast
<http://budurl.com/IDRApod94>

More Information

For help in ensuring that your programs comply with federal law, contact the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Educational Opportunities Section at 877-292-3804 or education@usdoj.gov, or the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights at 800-421-3481 or ocr@ed.gov. You also can contact the OCR enforcement office that serves your area.

For more information or to report incidents of school exclusion or delay, call:

META (Nationwide) 617- 628-2226

MALDEF (Los Angeles) 213-629-2512

MALDEF (San Antonio) 210-224-5476

NY Immigration Hotline (Nationwide) 212-419-3737

MALDEF (Chicago) 312-427-0701

MALDEF (Washington, D.C.)

202-293-2828



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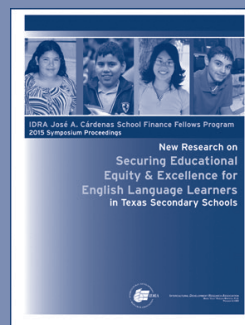
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New Research and Recommendations for Education of English Language Learners

IDRA released the proceedings report of the IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program symposium focusing on education of English language learners. IDRA held the symposium, *New Research on Securing Educational Equity and Excellence for English Language Learners in Texas Secondary Schools*, in February 2015 in partnership with the Office of the President and the Center on Mexican American Studies and Research at Our Lady of the Lake University. The event gathered more than 80 education and community leaders, and experts in law and education research around the critical question of how to improve secondary education quality and access for English learners. We shared findings from new, original research on the status of education and funding equity for ELL students by Dr. Oscar Jimenez-Castellanos, IDRA's inaugural José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow with participants in person and nationally, via webcast, in partnership with NowCast-SA. The proceedings report presents key insights from the research and discussion. The report also provides recommendations useful for policymakers, educators, community and business leaders and parents.



REPORT



ELL Symposium Proceedings Publication

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VIDEO



ELL Symposium Event on YouTube

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*Assuring educational opportunity for every child
through research, materials development, training, technical assistance, evaluation and information dissemination*