IDRA NEWSLETTER

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Focus: School Holding Power

Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2013-14

School Holding Power is Improving in Texas – At a Glacial Pace

by Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

High school attrition rates in Texas have declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 24 percent in 2013-14. Recent trends in attrition rates for Texas public high schools continue to reflect a positive outlook for the total high school population and for each race-ethnicity and gender group.

IDRA's latest annual attrition study shows that the overall attrition rate declined by 1 percentage point for the fifth consecutive time in the 29-year trend analyses of dropout and attrition rates in Texas public schools. The 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 to 24 percent in 2013-14. Fewer than 30 percent of students were lost from public enrollment prior to graduation with a diploma after 24 years of rates ranging from 31 percent to 43 percent.

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. Since conducting the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas in 1985-86, IDRA has conducted attrition analyses each year to assess schools' abilities to hold on to their students until they graduate.

Attrition rates are an indicator of a school's holding power or ability to keep students enrolled in school and learning until they graduate. Along with other dropout measures, attrition rates are useful in studying the magnitude of the dropout problem and the success of schools in keeping students in school. In simplest terms, attrition is defined as shrinkage in size or number; therefore, an attrition rate is the percent change in grade level between a base year and an end year.

In the most recent annual attrition study that examines school holding power in Texas public high schools, IDRA found that 24 percent of the freshman class of 2010-11 left school prior to graduating in the 2013-14 school year. The current statewide attrition rate of 24 percent is 9 percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33 percent found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study. The attrition rate in Texas is 27 percent lower than the 1985-86 rates.

For each racial and ethnic group, the study found that current attrition rates are lower than in the first study. Attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 31 percent (from 45 percent to 31 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 26 percent (from 34 percent to 25 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 52 percent (from 27 percent to 13 percent).

Attrition rates of male students declined by 26 percent (from 35 percent to 26 percent) while the attrition rates of female students declined by 34

(cont. on Page 2)

"We cannot settle for incremental improvement in high school graduation rates. The cost is too high. Clearly, to achieve different results, we must envision a dramatically different process and undertake a new strategy."

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

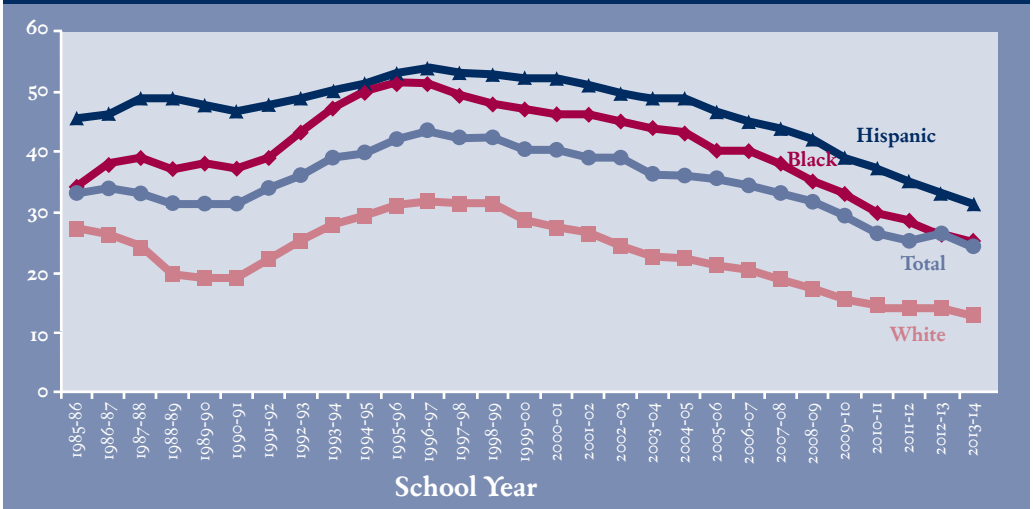
(Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2013-14, continued from Page 1)

percent (from 32 percent to 21 percent).

Despite the positive trends in attrition rates overall, there are still some areas of concern. **The gap between the attrition rates of White students and Hispanic students and of White students and Black students are equal to or higher than 28 years ago.** Between White students and Hispanic students, the attrition rate gap is **back to 18 percentage points** in 1985-86 and 2013-14. The attrition rate gap between White students and Black students almost **doubled from 7 percentage points in 1985-86 to 12 percentage points in 2013-14**.

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.

Attrition Rates in Texas Public Schools by Year



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2014.

Key findings of the latest study include the following:

- One out of every four students (24 percent) from the freshman class of 2010-11 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.
- The overall attrition rate declined by 1 percentage point in the last year, and from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 24 percent in 2013-14.
- The overall attrition rate was less than 30 percent in the last five study years: 29 percent in 2009-10, 27 percent in 2010-11, 26 percent in 2011-12, 25 percent in 2012-13, and 24 percent in 2013-14.
- 94,711 students from the 2010-11 freshman class were lost from public high school enrollment in 2013-14 compared to 86,276 in 1985-86.
- From 1985-86 to 2013-14, attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 31 percent (from 45 percent to 31 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 26 percent (from 34 percent to 25 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 52 percent (from 27 percent to 13 percent).
- The gaps between the attrition rates of White students and Hispanic students and between White students and Black students are equal to or higher than 28 years ago. The gap between White students and Hispanic students is back down to 18 percentage points from 1985-86 to 2013-14, and the attrition gap between White students and Black students increased by 71 percent from 1985-86 to 2013-14.
- For the class of 2013-14, 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 3.4 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 2013-14, males were 1.2 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 26 percent (from 35 percent to 26 percent) while the attrition rates of female students declined by 34 percent

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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.

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Families and School Holding Power – Parent-Led Surveys Present Insights

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

As IDRA publishes its 29th Texas Public School Attrition Study, we remind ourselves how important it is for parents to have that data and, more importantly, understand what it means. Attrition data point to patterns but give no clear reason for the trends. Communities must make sense of the figures through further investigation.

Whether or not a family's children are in school, all families need to know how schools are doing in keeping school-age children in school and succeeding in their studies. Families can use the data to further investigate the why's and wherefores' of the issue. Schools need to know what families think and more importantly how families and schools can partner to meet the challenge.

In 2007-08, we worked with a group of families in El Paso who were very concerned about the mathematics scores of the students in a large high school that was predominantly Latino and poor. They created a questionnaire and surveyed their peers. The information they collected was surprising and useful for the school in modifying intensive professional development for teachers.

Parent's Skills as Teachers? Not in This Approach

Before we explore some questions parents can ask, let us be clear about the domain we are working in. Parenting training is a broad discipline targeted to improving parent's skills in bringing up and educating their children. Within this domain, the conversation is focused on the parent as *teacher.* There is a large body of literature that focuses on parents: their literacy, economic status, education, etc. Our focus is on the institution rather than the family. Rather than attempting to "fix" what is perceived to be broken at home, we choose to focus on what to improve in the school.

We address those aspects of family engagement that highlight parents as *resources* to the school, as *decision makers* about the quality of the education of their children, and as *leaders* in creating schools that work for all children. It is an asset-based, valuing approach – therefore the title "Family Leadership in Education."

Parents as Resources for Quality Education

Parents, families and others in the community can inquire about school without any further preparation than their faith in their children and their desire to have high quality schools. A parent does not need to know the content, the language of instruction or effective teaching pedagogy to judge whether children are learning and succeeding.

Leadership in education emerges when...

- A parent answers critical questions being asked by another parent,
- A parent asks questions of his or her peers,
- Parent surveyors and interviewers make sense of the responses they collect, and
- Action is taken based on the information learned from the family-to-family survey.

Developing and Conducting a Survey

Any school or community parent organization can take the attrition information in IDRA's study and develop a simple questionnaire to survey their neighbors and peers. Following the pattern of the survey developed by the El Paso parents some questions that may be asked are:

- How are your children doing academically?
- Are your children encouraged to ask questions when they don't understand something?
- When your children don't understand a concept, is it re-taught in a different way?
- What helps your children learn in school?
- What blocks your children from learning in school?

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Schools need to know what families think and more importantly how families and schools can partner to meet the challenge.

(Families and School Holding Power – Keeping Students in School and Learning, continued from Page 3)

Additional possible questions include:

- Are rigorous classes available to all students?
- Are the teachers prepared and certified to teach their classes?
- Do any teachers consider college preparation as appropriate only for a select few students?
- Does the school have resources to hire sufficient, highly qualified teachers?

At the elementary level:

- Are any teachers explicitly demonstrating a deficit view of the students or of their own ability to teach?
- How are deficiencies in staff being made up?
- Are the best and brightest teachers reaching the children whose classroom teachers admit to limitations in certain areas?

The survey can be administered by parents with parents in the language of the community. The information gathered can be tabulated and studied by the group conducting the survey. The results then can be reported to the sponsoring organization, the administrators of the schools involved and the teachers.

Families Bonding and Increasing School Holding Power

Without attempting to convert the parents into teachers you nevertheless are giving them a valid and important function in the education of their children. Families can give the school important information that addresses some issues of why children give up on learning, get bored with school and stop seeing education as an important part of their life. Added benefits are the nurturing of stronger bonds and connections among families and with their schools. All this to give substance to their collective dream: that their children get an excellent education and be prepared for college and beyond.

Resources

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Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is a senior education associate in IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via email at comment@idra.org.

IDRA Research for School Holding Power

In 1977, IDRA published *Theory of Incompatibilities*, by IDRA founder, José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D., and Blandina Cárdenas, Ph.D., presenting five areas of incompatibility (poverty, culture, language, mobility, and societal perceptions of Mexican American children) that affect the child's learning. Particularly poignant for today's context is the section on educational philosophies: "Problems in the education of minority children would be eliminated almost overnight if educational institutions would develop and implement positive educational philosophies concerning minority education... Basic philosophies that must be adopted regardless of origin include the following:

1. Minority children can learn, regardless of any characteristic they may exhibit due to economic, cultural, language, social, ethnic or racial background. There is nothing inherent in minority children that is an impediment to learning. Past failures of minority children are the result of inadequate school programs and not the fault of the child and his or her background.
2. Cultural pluralism is a desirable condition in our society...The co-existence of differing lifestyles will allow alternatives that provide the natural variation needed for subsequent selection.
3. Facility to utilize more than one language is a desirable educational goal.
4. The individualization of instruction is an essential element of all instructional programs for all children.
5. Children, all children, are a natural resource of our country.
6. The end result of an educational program for minority children, and for all children, is freedom. Freedom is manifested through freedom of choice...It is incumbent upon the schools to develop in children the necessary skills which make feasible alternatives available to them. Vocational choices, lifestyles, economic levels, etc...should be dependent upon an individual's free choice, and not by accident of birth, parent's economic conditions, geographic location, race, ethnicity, or any of the monolithic cultural constraints now found in social institutions and which lock out people through the absence of alternatives."

Thirty seven years later, IDRA released, *College Bound and Determined*, showing how one school district in south Texas embraced these philosophies and transformed itself from low achievement and low expectations to planning for all students to graduate from high school and college. This transformation went beyond changing sobering graduation rates or even getting graduates into college.

(Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2013-14, continued from Page 2)

(from 32 percent to 21 percent).

In 2014, IDRA conducted additional research to explore reasons for declining attrition rates; this study is expected to be released in early 2015.

A supplemental analysis using linear regression models predicts that, at the current pace, Texas will not reach an attrition rate of zero until the year 2034-35. This analysis is included in the full study online.

In contrast, IDRA released a report in February, *College Bound and Determined*, showing how the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo school district in south Texas doubled its number of graduates, halved the dropout rate and increased college-going rates in just a few years.

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.

Roy L. Johnson, M.S., is director of IDRA Support Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Barriers Hispanic Students Face Graduating from High School

by Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

The reporter's call came late one afternoon: "What does the research say are barriers that Hispanic students face graduating from high school and going on to college?" It was a familiar question.

There is, in fact, a substantial body of research that details the barriers Hispanic students have to overcome, almost all pointing to disadvantages – economic, English learners, poorly prepared, perceived dissonant cultural values – the list goes on and on. It's easy to see why other research is important when you see the statistics. IDRA's attrition rate published on Page 1 shows that the high school attrition rate in Texas remains highest for Hispanic students at 31 percent.

Lower College-Going Rates

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) reports a similarly troubling statistic for college-going Hispanic students. In its 2014 progress report on Closing the Gaps by 2015, Texas' plan to close the college participation gaps, half of Hispanic students who graduated from Texas public high schools in 2013 went directly to Texas colleges and universities the following fall (46.4 percent of Hispanic males; 55.9 percent of Hispanic females). (2014)

Stating it another way, about one out of two Hispanic students who graduated from high school enrolled in higher education the following fall. Keep in mind the "colleges and universities" include public, independent, and career institutions: two-year community colleges, four-year universities, technical schools, and private for-profit colleges. That means that bachelor degrees from the University of Texas at Austin are combined with certificates in skilled trades – an important distinction as it relates to earning power, opportunity and advancement.

Nationally and in Texas, Hispanic students are less likely than White students to enroll in a four-year college or university, much less enroll full-time (Lopez & Fry, 2013; THECB, 2014).

A Pew Research Center study shows that nationally, more Hispanic students enrolled in college in 2011. Unfortunately, Hispanics are less likely to earn a bachelor's degree. In 2012, almost 15 percent of Hispanics 25 years and older had earned a bachelor's degree, a far lower percentage than Asians (51 percent), Whites (34.5 percent), and Blacks (21.2 percent). (Lopez & Fry, 2013)

In Texas, two-year persistence rates for Hispanics at public universities did increase in 2011 from 76.8 percent to 77.9 percent. But the two-year persistence rate at public community colleges remained the same where only about half (50.7 percent) of Hispanic students remained enrolled after two years.

Of the Hispanic students who entered a four-year college or university, only 65.7 percent graduate after six years (THECB, 2014). And more than half of Hispanic students enrolling in Texas' public colleges and universities require remedial coursework.

What Are the Barriers?

So what accounts for the gaps? Why do Hispanic students lag behind their non-Hispanic counterparts? And why does the research show that improvement is painstakingly slow? It seems that for every small step ahead – more Hispanics are enrolling in college – there are two steps back: Hispanic students who do enroll only have a fifty-fifty chance of completing at a two-year community college.

There is no question that barriers exist. But the barriers have nothing to do with a student's ethnicity or their family's economic level or which language they first spoke.

Barriers exist because of pervasive inequities in educational systems – inequities that manifest themselves in school funding, teacher prepara-

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Hispanic students do face barriers every day. And the barriers they face are the poverty of small minds and limited vision, the language of "no" when schools cannot or will not adapt to student characteristics, and the culture of accepting a world of have's and have not's.

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

(Barriers Hispanic Students Face Upon High School Graduation, continued from Page 5)

Texas Education – A Vanishing Future

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2014.

tion, lack of access to quality bilingual education programs, college-ready curriculum and instruction, and a myriad of other indicators as delineated in IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework.

In 1977, the Cárdenas & Cárdenas *Theory of Incompatibilities* was published. It states: "Black, Mexican American and economically disadvantaged children have not enjoyed the same success in school as that of the typical middle-class American because of a lack of compatibility between the characteristics of minority children and the characteristics of a typical instruction program." The fundamental premise of the Theory of Incompatibilities is that it is the institution that must adapt to the students, not the student to the institutions. It is the institutions that must adapt because they control the educational context, and they are ultimately accountable for ensuring that all students succeed. This premise grounds IDRA's framework for all of its work—from the first statewide study of dropouts that led to Texas House Bill 1010 and a statewide accountability system for students, to the dropout study in Dallas that identified school system reforms needed to hold on to students, to IDRA's *Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program*, which outlines seven key lessons for improving the quality of education for all students and to IDRA's *Courage to Connect –A Quality Schools Action Framework* that shows how communities and schools can work together to strengthen their capacity to be successful with all of their students.

IDRA has worked with many schools, such as Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, that have adapted and even transformed themselves into places where all students are succeeding, where families are welcomed, and encouraged to authentically partner with them to ensure their children's success (Bojorquez, 2014). Many of these schools face "incompatibilities" of poverty, culture, language, mobility and societal perceptions. But they have recognized and turned these incompatibilities into assets and opportunities. IDRA's *College Bound and Determined*, released earlier this year, shows how PSJA's vision and actions, were clearly and independently aligned, with IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework™.

Being an "English learner" for example is not a barrier to academic achievement. An English learner is merely on his way to becoming a bilingual-bicultural individual. Rather than forcing students to give up their native language to learn English, schools can provide excellent bilingual education programs that result in fully proficient students who excel in both languages and academic content (Robledo Montecel, et al., 2002). Research has already shown that bilingual people think differently than monolingual speakers, and bilingualism improves memory, diminishes the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's, and improves decision-making (Merritt, 2013).

Bilingualism is also worth more economically, as *The Economist* recently reported. With a starting salary of $45,000, a person who is bilingual earns about a 2 percent "language bonus." With compound interest, that 2 percent language bonus turns into an extra $67,000 (at 2014 value) 40 years later. (R.L.G., 2014)

And just as language is not a barrier to a student's success, neither is poverty. A student's economic status does not determine her intelligence, the quality of her character or her potential for success. It is the incompatibility between a student's economic level and the amount of money that institutions require for enrollment, maintaining attendance and graduation that is the barrier. College tuition rates have increased to such an extent that it takes at least 30 percent to 40 percent of a family's income for a student to attend.

So here is the answer to that reporter. Hispanic students do face barriers every day. And the barriers they face are the poverty of small minds and limited vision, the language of "no" when schools cannot or will not adapt to student characteristics, and the culture of accepting a world of have's and have not's. But Hispanic students also have extraordinary organizations, advocates and activists all taking a stand and fighting on their behalf. For over 40 years, IDRA has fought for every child's right to an excellent and equitable education. And we'll continue until the work is done.

Resources

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Josie Danini Cortez, M.A., is a senior education associate in IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at comment@idra.org.

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Winning Essay

Editor's Note: IDRA sponsored a national essay competition among participants in the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program of IDRA. Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors wrote about how the program helps them do better in school and how they help their tutees to do better. Six students received prizes. Below is one of the winning essays. Others are posted on the IDRA website (www.idra.org).

Middle School First Place

Christian Ortiz

7th grade, Domingo Treviño Middle School, La Joya, Texas

Since I became a tutor…

I am very thankful to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. It changed my behavior, attitude and the way I viewed things immensely. Before I was in this program, I was very ignorant toward my teacher's lessons. Even though they had talks with me about my ignorance in class and my behavior when I interact with my colleagues, the talks really never seemed to get through my head. I also had troubles at home because I was very slothful and irresponsible. I would always argue with my parents because I did not want to do my homework and chores. Deep down, I have always wanted to change, but I had a very weak will and could never better myself – until I found my way into the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. This program helped me in so many unimaginable ways.

Since I became a tutor, I have become a better person, and I never expected this. In the beginning of the year, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program teacher in our school asked me during lunch if I would like to join the program. He explained the process of the program. I immediately agreed after I heard I would be making $120 month. The first day of tutoring came, and I was really nervous. My VYP teacher chose my three tutees (they were from third grade), and I got to work right that day. We went to the library, and I gave them a lesson about the place value chart, which was what they were learning. I saw how they were so quiet and respectful during the lesson. I asked them questions, and they answered them without any trouble.

That first day was when my whole world changed immensely. I never thought that three little 9 year olds could inspire and motivate me in so many ways. That day, I went home and apologized to my mother, told her from now on I would do my homework and chores without having to be told twice, and I also told her about my first day with the tutees. I told her I would give her $50 from my first paycheck for the bills. She told me she was so proud of me and that I should write to my father who is in a federal prison. I went ahead and did that, and two days later I received his letter that said he was proud of me for being the man of the house. When I went to school, I told my teachers that I would catch up on all the work and pay attention to all their lessons. As days went by, teachers, friends and family commented on my change of attitude and behavior.

I think I was destined to be in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. I think that if I had not been in this program there would be no way that I could change the way I was. To this day, I thank my tutees for being my inspiration, and I no longer do it for the money. I do it for the tutees and me. I personally want to thank the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program for giving me this opportunity to change my lifestyle.

The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program. Since its inception in 1984, the program has kept more than 33,000 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. According to the Valued Youth creed, all students are valuable none is expendable. The lives of more than 646,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program. Contact IDRA for more information or visit http://www.idra.org/Coca-Cola_Valued_Youth_Program.html/.

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Focus: School Holding Power

IDRA Attrition Study & Resources Online

2014 Study:
Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2013-14

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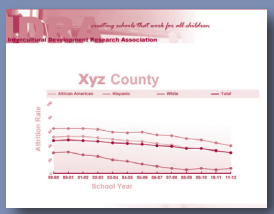
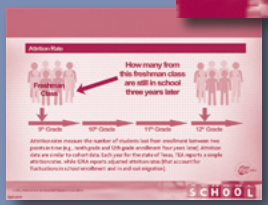
College Bound & Determined

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





eBook:
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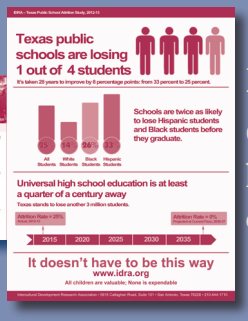

Infographic:
Quick visual look at the data

Tool:
Quality School Holding Power Checklist

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

Get ideas for taking action
www.idra.org/Research/Attrition

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