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## Focus: Change Strategies

# Family and Community-Led Education Reform

by Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

Imagine a force of families, schools and community-based organizations who come together to influence education policy and practice at local, state, regional and national levels. With support from the Marguerite Casey Foundation and its Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign and from the Kresge Foundation, IDRA is helping to catalyze just such a force. For the past six years, we have partnered with 11 community-based organizations (all Marguerite Casey Foundation grantees), the families they serve, and their neighborhood public schools to change the educational landscape of the lower Rio Grande Valley (RGV) and South Texas. We are doing this by intensifying cross-organizational connections and by sharing knowledge and experience that inform parents and families in ways that affect their child's education.

IDRA does this work knowing that families and communities can play a critical and influential role in changing the status quo, regardless of whether they are wealthy or poor. We know that in the midst of profound poverty and all of the struggles that it brings for families and communities, there is absolutely no poverty of intellect or hope, commitment or capacity in the families and communities themselves. It is this commitment and capacity that IDRA recognizes, supports and strengthens. Nowhere is this alliance for collective impact more urgently needed than in Texas' current educational and socio-political landscape.

### Texas Struggles

The latest *Texas on the Brink* report states: "Without the courage to invest in the minds of our children and steadfast support for great schools, we face a daunting prospect. Those who value tax cuts over children and budget cuts over college have put Texas at risk in her ability to compete and succeed" (Texas Legislative Study Group, 2012).

Texas at times leads the nation but too often in ways that harm its most vulnerable families and communities. Mike Seifert, network weaver for the Equal Voice RGV Network, recently presented some troubling facts to an audience at IDRA's presentation for a W.K. Kellogg Foundation Family Engagement Convening. In that session, he shared that Texas is 47th in tax expenditures per capita, with families earning less than \$29,000 paying the greatest tax burden (56 percent) compared to families earning \$126,000 or more who pay the least (3.6 percent). The state also ranks 43rd in the nation in funding per student (ADA) and 31st in teacher salaries.

Despite Texas' \$1.2 trillion economy, the state has consistently opted for political expediency rather than courageous leadership. In 2011, the state struggled to deal with a projected \$27 billion revenue shortfall, only to find itself in 2013 with a surplus of over \$10 billion – growth sparked (cont. on Page 2)

*“Connections, collaborations and coalitions, established and nurtured, provide a dynamic and strong enough effort to affect the inertia of public educational institutions.”*

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

(Family and Community-Led Education Reform, continued from Page 1)

in large part by multi-billion dollar oil-related expansion in South Texas's gigantic Eagle-Ford Shale deposits. Continued minority population growth, especially in the young Latino population in Texas, coupled with ongoing national and state anti-immigrant hostilities have fueled political polarization leading to voter suppression efforts.

Texas also struggles with a lack of infrastructure in ever-growing numbers of *colonias*, home to many of the families served by the community-based organizations and schools in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and South Texas. These unincorporated areas flourished after the Reconstruction era and continue today with developers selling tracts of land that have no infrastructure: no drainage, sewer or power to the most vulnerable of families. There are close to 2,300 *colonias* with 500,000 residents along the South Texas border. And 1,200 *colonias* are in the lower Rio Grande Valley with: "Men, women and children with dreams no less precious than our own," Seifert added. Foremost in their dreams is that their children will have a better life than their parents have, and they know that education is key.

### Texas' Opportunities – We are the leaders we've been waiting for...

Texas' political and educational struggles could have overwhelmed many, but in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, these struggles have been transformed into new opportunities for families and communities to mobilize for equitable and excellent public schools. IDRA has seized these opportunities serving as a strategic resource organization to local community-based organizations that nurture emerging family leadership and provide actionable knowledge that is making a

difference in local and state policy and practice.

As part of our work with the Marguerite Casey Foundation, IDRA has developed and is piloting an Equal Voice Family Leadership Curriculum to help family leaders have transformative impact. This curriculum is rooted in the context of an existing network of community-based organizations that are already practicing collective leadership and have built a sustainable network. Based on the Equal Voice Network Family Platform (<http://caseygrants.org/equalvoice/>), the curriculum has three facets:

- Energize grassroots advocates by connecting them to the national Equal Voice vision and movement,
- Expand community leaders' policy knowledge and ability to impact the political process, and
- Build on and sustain grassroots advocacy leadership.

Each facet uses proven strategies and activities to: identify key issues; develop materials to support reform efforts; design and implement community-based sessions to inform and mobilize; develop strategies to engage local and state policymakers in reform discussions; design strategies for monitoring action on priority issues; and devise ways to spotlight and celebrate reform achievements.

Specifically, IDRA works with communities to identify key school equity targets, strategies for impacting issues at local and state levels, and ways that the community-based organizations can coordinate with existing advocacy organizations working on critical issues. We help them use IDRA's bilingual Texas OurSchool data portal ([www.idra.org/OurSchool](http://www.idra.org/OurSchool)) that provides focused data on Texas school districts and high

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schools to foster and support family-school-community partnerships to improve schools. Designed around IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework, the portal includes ques- (cont. on Page 6)

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# A Post Session Assessment of Texas Education Policy Changes Considered, Adopted and Rejected in 2013

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

Following the close of the 2013 Texas legislative session in May, IDRA assessed policies adopted, rejected or never given the chance to see the light of day. In contrast to the previous session in 2011 when lawmakers labored to craft a budget and attempt to address major education issues while facing an expected multi-billion dollar shortfall, the 2013 session was more of a struggle to convince policymakers to increase investments in the critical areas of education, healthcare, and water and state infrastructure. As in most sessions, state policy leaders received mixed ratings, achieving relatively high marks in a few areas, mediocre ratings in many, and failing marks on several important issues.

## Fair Funding

The Texas legislature's recent efforts to fund public schools received better marks than did the 2011 session with its record-setting funding cuts. Of the \$5.4 billion total increase in state aid this session, \$3.8 billion was allocated via formulae that adjusts school districts' funding on the basis of their ability to raise local revenue to cover local educational costs (referred to as local property wealth per student). This was accomplished by increasing the basic allotment from \$4,765 per weighted student to \$4,950 for 2013-14 and \$5,040 for 2014-15. Yet, schools are still being funded at close to 2006 school year levels, despite increased operational costs.

The state legislature partially restored funding for the Successful School Schools Initiative (SSI), which received a total of \$50 million, and for early childhood programs, which were provided \$33 million for the next biennium. The allocations for special population programs reinstated only a very small portion of the \$1.2 million that was cut in the previous biennium.

## Private School Vouchers

Senate leaders had vowed to make state funding for vouchers a top priority, but House leaders were uniformly lukewarm to the idea. Budget battles eventually led to an amendment that prohibited

the use of any state funding for vouchers, which was adopted with more than two-thirds of the House. Despite Senate leaders' efforts to incorporate vouchers into other legislative pieces, the House action effectively closed the door on this divisive education issue for 2013 session.

## High-Stakes Testing and Accountability

Public concerns with the state's testing agenda led to a pull-back on state assessments in the 2013 session. The primary target was a reduction in the number of end-of-course exams that Texas high school students will be required to take from the current 12 to five beginning in the next school year. The change means that, rather than three years of end-of-course exams in English, math, science and social studies, students will now be tested only in English I, English II, Algebra I, biology and U.S. history. School districts will have the option of assessing students in English II and Algebra II. While it is critical that the state collect some assessment data to hold schools accountable for student achievement with data disaggregated by major sub-groups, the fact remains that Texas has retained the high-stakes elements of testing where a student's performance on these few assessments is used to determine his or her eligibility for promotion and graduation.

And incredibly, the Texas Education Agency has responded by telling schools that they no longer need to provide accelerated instruction for students who did not pass end-of-course exams in Algebra I, English I, English II, biology and U.S. history this year.

## Student Curriculum and Tracking

Prior to 2011, Texas was among national leaders in requiring that all students graduate college ready by adopting, as its default, high school curriculum that came to be known as the 4-by-4 – meaning four years of high school English, mathematics, science and social studies for all students. In 2011, *(cont. on Page 4)*

*Working together, certain interests succeeded in convincing the majority of Texas policymakers that schools should not be required to provide a high quality education to all students.*

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the rigor of the 4-by-4 requirement was diluted by allowing one of the four required math and one of the required science courses to be taught in what was referred to as “applied manner.” This means that the content of the class could be delivered in a modified approach that, for example, incorporated the math material in building trades class or science material in an applied career focused class. Concerns with the relative academic rigor of “regular” versus “applied” classes led to the placating requirement that teachers leading such classes would meet the same requirements as teachers teaching regular 4-by-4 content classes.

Two years ago, the legislature also established three graduation tracks: *minimum*, *recommended* and *distinguished achievement*. A fourth path, “career and technology,” was interwoven within the recommended program. These tracks represented a step away from rigor and were expected to have the effect of denying some students the opportunity to go to and graduate from college.

Following the 2011 changes, business manufacturing interests continued to complain that too many Texas high school graduates were not sufficiently prepared to go directly into their workplaces. Another faction, who included some educational leaders, never accepted the idea that all students should have the option of attending college after graduation, preferring a return to the era where some students could pursue college prep courses, while others were directed toward vocational or technical classes. Working together, these interests succeeded in convincing the majority of Texas policymakers that schools should not be required to provide a high quality education to all students.

The end result of bitter debates led to the adoption of curriculum reforms this year that substantially dilute the graduation requirements for Texas high school students. Rather than providing a 4-by-4 high quality curriculum, the new default “Foundation Plan” requires four years of English, but only three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies – totaling three fewer advanced core content courses. Rounding out graduation requirements are two years of a foreign language and five electives to include one credit in fine arts and one in physical education.

In addition, students will be required to select an *endorsement*, resulting in all students graduating with 26 total credits. The five possible endorse-

ments (that likely will not be available in all districts) include:

- **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) endorsement** – which requires a student to take additional advanced math, science, technology or engineering courses.
- **Business and industry endorsement** – which adds courses directly related to database management, information technology, communications, accounting, finance, marketing, graphic design, architecture, construction, welding, logistics, automotive technology, agricultural science, and heating, ventilation and air conditioning.
- **Public services endorsement** – which adds courses in health sciences and occupations, education and training law enforcement, and culinary arts and hospitality.
- **Arts and humanities endorsement** – which adds courses related to political science, world languages, cultural studies, English literature, history and fine arts.
- **Multidisciplinary studies endorsement** – which includes the core foundation curriculum and allows a student to:
  - o select courses from the curriculum of each of the other endorsement areas; and
  - o earn credits in a variety of advanced courses from multiple content areas sufficient to complete the distinguished level of achievement under the foundation program.

All entering freshmen in 2014-15 will be required to select an endorsement track. Students who are sophomores or above in that year will be given the option of shifting out of the 4-by-4 into an endorsement track.

Students may continue to earn a distinguished achievement diploma, re-worked as a distinguished achievement designation for the foundation school program. Additionally school districts are instructed to include new “outstanding performance acknowledgements” in high school transcripts and diplomas for outstanding performance in dual credit courses, bilingualism and biliteracy, outstanding performance on college or AP tests or IB examinations, outstanding performance on the PSAT, ACT-Plan, ACT or SAT, or earning a nationally- or internationally-recognized business or industry certification or license.

## Accountability for English Learner Education

Efforts to improve the transparency of the Texas Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) system by requiring that English language learner performance at elementary, middle and high school levels would be reported separately were once again resisted by state education agency representatives and school staff. Since its creation, the PBMAS system has used the aggregated scores for all ELL students in grades K-12 in a school district to determine if it is effectively serving its students. The problem with the approach, which is currently being challenged in federal courts, is that the higher level achievement of the ELL students served in the state’s elementary level programs hides the gross under-achievement of ELL students served at the middle and high school level. The failure to shed more light on programs serving secondary ELLs marks the third straight legislative session where efforts to rectify such misleading reporting have been rejected.

## Charter Schools Expansion

Despite some policymaker reservations about increasing the number of charter schools operating in Texas, the legislature proceeded to expand the cap on charters from 215 to 305, to be increased incrementally over the next five years. Charters also are allowed to be given first option for purchasing school buildings no longer wanted by local school districts. In response to ongoing under-performance and weak financial accountability in some charter schools, the legislature opted to strengthen state oversight, including accelerated closure of under-performing charter schools.

In a related development, a 2013 national study of charter operations found that key features in state oversight of charter schools – particularly initial charter approval, performance management, replication procedures and charter school closures – were major factors in long-term successful charter school operations (CREDO, 2013). This latest study found Texas charters were among the weakest in the country.

## Conclusion

Overall, state policymakers failed to do much to improve education quality in the state. While minimally increasing public school funding, serious pullbacks in its commitment to academic

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# 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 2011 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 2011).

## 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](mailto:education@usdoj.gov), or the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights at 800-421-3481 or [ocr@ed.gov](mailto: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



Listen to IDRA’s Classnotes Podcast episode on “Immigrant Children’s Rights to Attend Public Schools”

[www.idra.org/Podcasts](http://www.idra.org/Podcasts) & iTunes

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tions to promote community conversations and provides a framework that local partners can use to plan joint action for improving school holding power and to create and implement strategies for informing local communities of key issues, reform needs and factors impacting reform possibilities.

IDRA also develops culturally and linguistically appropriate materials that support efforts to inform local community members on key issues and reforms needed, including briefing summaries on issues, talking points that can be used by advocates in meetings with local and state policy-makers, and specific reforms that can be considered in addressing the issues raised. We conduct community-based sessions to inform and mobilize community actions, including actively engaging youth and families, amplifying their voices as powerful advocates for changes in policy and practice.

One example of this was IDRA's leadership work with 50 high school students from Brownsville, Texas, *colonias* served by Proyecto Juan Diego, a Marguerite Casey Foundation grantee. Youth came together to share their ideas and dreams for their families, their neighborhoods and their future. Asked to visualize the "ideal" neighborhoods in Brownsville, youth developed specific projects to make their dreams a reality, ranging from curbing obesity to stopping wage theft.

We help community-based organizations develop strategies to communicate priorities to local and state policy leaders, including superintendents and board members, state legislators and state-level office holders, as well as strategies

to monitor actions taken by educators and policymakers and ways to hold them accountable. The groups find means to spotlight and celebrate organizing and policy advocacy efforts that have achieved results for children, using social media and other technology tools to amplify the voices of families as they inform, organize, mobilize and impact change.

In a fair and just world, people who are impacted by decisions that affect the quality of education available in their communities will have an equal voice in those decisions. Families and community-based organizations should have important roles to play in any major decision affecting the quality of their schools. Our work with the Equal Voice RGV Network demonstrates that given the opportunity and the support, all community members can and do contribute to improving education for all children and youth.

### Resources

- Montemayor, A.M. "PTA Comunitario as a Family Leadership Model – An Investing in Innovation I3 Project," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2103).
- Posner, L. "Our Schools - The Power of Data and Grass-roots Organizing," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, June-July 2013).
- Robledo Montecel, M., & C.L. Goodman (eds). *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework™* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).
- Texas Legislative Study Group. *Texas on the Brink, Sixth Edition* (Austin, Texas: Texas Legislative Study Group, March 2013).

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rigor, reducing the amount of information collected on students' performance in a variety of high school courses, and expanding charter schools without first eliminating the number of low performing charter operations combined demonstrate the lack of state leadership commitment to Texas children and to investing in our state's future. As has often been the case, it likely will again take a court mandate to improve funding equity and greater citizen outcries to ensure that all students across the state have access to high quality teaching and all are prepared to succeed in college.

### Resources

- IDRA. *Tracking, Endorsements and Differentiated Diplomas – When 'Different' Really is Less*, IDRA Policy Note (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, April 2013).
- IDRA. *Why More Charter Schools and School Vouchers Are Not Needed in Texas*, IDRA Policy Brief (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, May 2013).
- CREDO. *National Charter School Study 2013* (Sanford, Calif., Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University, 2013).
- Texas Education Agency. "TEA announces initial assessment requirements under HB 5," news release (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, June 12, 2013).

Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is the IDRA director of policy. Comments and questions may be directed to him via email at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).

## Texas: Profound Poverty in the Midst of a \$1.2 Trillion Economy

4.6 million Texans live in poverty— 18.5 percent of the population.

One in four Texas children live in low-income families – 1.56 million children.

Texas ranks ...

- 35<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of revenue for public K-12 schools from state governments.
- 47<sup>th</sup> in average SAT combined scores.
- 44<sup>th</sup> in the estimated public high school graduation rate.
- 30<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of the population with at least a bachelor's degree.
- 8<sup>th</sup> in percentage enrollment in public higher education.
- 50<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of population who graduated from high school.

In the 2010-11 school year...

- 29% of fourth graders read at or above national average NAEP proficiency levels – 3% below national average.
- 27% of eighth graders read at or above national average NAEP proficiency levels – 5% below national average.
- 31% of full-time teachers in high poverty middle schools were assigned to teach courses outside their field of expertise.
- The Teacher Quality Index (TQI) was much lower for teachers in school with the highest minority enrollment than those in schools with the lowest minority enrollment.
- Only 18% of teachers in high schools with the lowest TQI ratings graduated from high-performing college programs compared to 60 percent from the highest TQI rated high schools.

Source: *Texas on the Brink, Sixth Edition* (Texas Legislative Study Group, March 2013)



## Affirming the Right to Inclusion and Success in Education

### Statement by Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO, on the U.S. Supreme Court Ruling in *Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin* – June 24, 2013

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld its earlier rulings on the use of race and ethnicity as one factor in college admissions. In explaining the ruling, the Supreme Court noted, “*Bakke, Gratz* and *Grutter*, which directly address the question considered here, are taken as given for purposes of deciding this case.” In these earlier rulings, the court had **affirmed that use of race and ethnicity in a narrowly-tailored admissions process designed to increase student diversity is constitutional**. The court has denied those who oppose diversity in higher education a rationale to actively promote the re-segregation and elitism of colleges and universities throughout the country.

First filed in 2008, the *Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin* case involved a student who had not been admitted to the University of Texas at Austin. She then challenged the university’s use of race and ethnicity as one of several criteria to determine some student admissions into its entering freshmen class.

While not reversing itself on its definitive rulings on the issue, the Supreme Court did send the *Fisher* case back to the lower court. The justices state that a “strict scrutiny” standard of judicial review should have been used. This standard requires the state and university to prove that its use of race and ethnicity as one criterion is essential to achieving diversity, which the Supreme Court continues to recognize as a compelling state and institutional interest. The court’s position on strict scrutiny as a standard of review is offered as providing “clarification” of the court’s intent to ensure that the use of race and ethnicity in university admissions is “narrowly tailored” and flexible enough to ensure that each applicant is “evaluated as an individual and not in a way that makes race or ethnicity the defining feature of his or her application.”

In her dissenting opinion on the case, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg rightly disagreed with the majority’s ruling noting: “I have several times explained

why government actors, including state universities, need not be blind to the lingering effects of ‘an overtly discriminatory past’... Accordingly I would not return this case for a second look.” She continues, “As the thorough opinions below show... the university’s admissions policy flexibly considers race only as a ‘factor of factor of a factor’ in the calculus” used to determine admissions.

While not affirming or denying the University of Texas’ admissions policies in sending the case back for additional hearings, **the court does provide UT a unique opportunity to model an admissions process that promotes student diversity while at the same time meeting the court’s more stringent legal standards.**

The country cannot move forward without acknowledging that 200 years of racial and ethnic discrimination cannot be offset by less than three decades of slow, and in many cases half-hearted, attempts to increase diversity on college campuses. In Texas, we have seen that state institutions have crept at a snail’s pace to expand opportunities for all students but are suddenly quick to respond to signals suggesting they can return to exclusionary strategies.

We cannot return to exclusionary strategies. The Lumina Foundation’s report released last week indicates that almost two-thirds of U.S. jobs will require postsecondary education by the year 2020. The report points to the benefits of college graduates on our economy, democracy and communities: “We are all diminished as Americans by an education system that effectively rations postsecondary opportunity based on people’s skin color, income or family status” (2013). The Lumina Foundation reports that Texas’ rate of college attainment is “well below the national average.” Census data show that Texas ranks 30th for adults (25 or older) who have bachelor’s degrees, with 26.1 percent compared to 38.7 percent in the top ranked state (Massachusetts) (Thomas, 2012). Certainly this argues for an expanded, intentional effort to prepare more

students to get into and succeed in college. Some states and communities have demonstrated that using multiple indicators enhances not only racial and ethnic diversity, but also the social and intellectual diversity of their student bodies and faculties (Levine & Ancheta, 2013).

As we noted in IDRA’s statement regarding the *Grutter* case over 10 years ago, **the solutions to ensuring equitable student access lie in changing from a perception of exclusion and failure to a vision of inclusion and success.** Inclusion will lead us in new and innovative directions that create access and success for the benefit of all.

IDRA’s Quality Schools Action Framework™ brings together what is known about how to make sure that all of our students graduate from high school prepared for college success. The framework focuses change on the system indicators that research and experience say matter, including fair funding and high quality curricula that prepares students for 21st century opportunities. A vision of inclusion and success demands that all students of all backgrounds and financial circumstances be prepared to enter and graduate from college. And it demands that our colleges and universities adapt to welcome students and provide the supports needed for them to graduate. Their future is our best legacy.

Resources and references are online at [www.idra.org/Press\\_Room/IDRA\\_e-News/](http://www.idra.org/Press_Room/IDRA_e-News/).

## 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](mailto:contact@idra.org).

Additional resources are available online at [http://www.idra.org/South\\_Central\\_Collaborative\\_for\\_Equity](http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity)

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*Focus: Change Strategies*

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## IDRA 40th Anniversary

IDRA's advocacy for bilingual education and civil rights has helped to shape state and national policy, including SB477 for Texas and the Office for Civil Rights guidelines for limited-English-proficient students. Our history of impact on equal opportunity and civil rights includes key roles in such critical cases as *Rodriguez vs. San Antonio*, *U.S. vs. Texas*, *Keyes vs. Denver*, *Lau vs. Nichols*, *Doe vs. Plylar*, *Rodriguez vs. L.A. USD*, *GI Forum and LULAC vs. Texas*, *West Orange-Cove vs. Neeley*, and *Texas Taxpayer and Student Fairness Coalition vs. Michael Williams, et al.* IDRA's research and expert testimony has helped to assure the civil rights of all children in the United States irrespective of race, sex and national origin.

Further, through our federally-funded equity assistance center, the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity, and other projects, we have helped schools and communities to invigorate those rights for children. For example, IDRA designed a series of cross-race, cross-sector community dialogues that convened African American and Latino community, business and education leaders in various cities throughout the South to address key education issues, including equitable funding, quality schooling, graduation for all, and access to higher education. These local forums provided information about current initiatives and seeded new coalitions among groups to plan positive action for improving education for all children.



*During the "The Latino Pursuit for Excellence and Equity in U.S. Public Schools: Mendez (1946) and Brown (1954) – Today and Beyond" event in 2003, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO, presents opening remarks to roundtables of school board members, superintendents, educators, community representatives, university presidents, civil rights lawyers, business leaders, and members of the media. Participants outlined many ideas for fulfilling the promise of Brown and Mendez.*

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