IDRA NEWSLETTER

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Focus: College Access and Success

Higher Education Success – Key System Strategies

by María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

At IDRA we are committed to making equal educational opportunity a reality in our lifetime. The challenge we face as a nation – and the imperative – is to make sure that all students, of all colors and incomes, have the skills and education necessary to compete in a global economy.

Demographics alone demand we educate underserved groups. Nationally, more than 40 percent of all students in K-12 schools are minorities. This is double what it was three decades ago. By 2023, in a short 11 years, minority children will become the majority in our nation's schools. (USA Today, 2009)

The demographics tell us one other thing. It is no longer viable for our schools to continue to see Hispanic youth as outsiders. According to the U.S. Census, almost 85 percent of Hispanic public school students are born in the United States, and nine in 10 of Hispanic kindergartners in U.S. public schools are born in the United States. In Texas, for example, Hispanic children are already the outright majority in first grade classrooms.

It is clear that Hispanic children will have the greatest say in the future success of this country. It is also clear that the fate of all of us is intertwined and related. We – you and I, young and old, rich and poor, and those who are White, Brown, Black and any color, those who speak English and those who do not, those who are immigrants and those who are not – we are in the same boat. And the boat either sinks or sails.

Interestingly, the most recent *Measuring Up* report concludes that if all ethnic groups in Texas had the same educational attainment and earnings as Whites, total personal income in Texas would be about $31.4 billion higher, and the state would realize an estimated $11 billion in additional revenues.

We also know a lot about where and how to invest to produce educational success. We know a lot about how to make sure that minority students do not continue to be relegated to the margins of education, income and productivity.

For the last several years, IDRA has utilized our Quality Schools Action Framework™ to guide our work in educational reform. In 2010, we brought together what we know about educational change efforts in a book titled, *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010). The framework featured in the book is empirical, experiential, practical and tied to educational outcomes at many levels including college.

The framework is oriented toward results. It tracks expected outcomes both on student metrics of success at many levels including college, and

(cont. on Page 2)

"Higher education institutions that are producing results do not give up on students. They engage them, track them, support them and graduate them."

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

(Higher Education Success – Key System Strategies, continued from Page 1)

school metrics of success focused on the ability of the educational institution to keep students in school and learning through graduation.

The framework also focuses on *actionable knowledge*, information, evidence and outcome data not only as rear-mirror assessments but as integral to present and future strategy that includes an engaged public and accountable leaders and policymakers.

In this framework, *change strategies* derive from individual and collective capacity within and outside of educational institutions. Cross-sector coalitions that reflect our full commitment to educational quality and educational opportunity are a key part of making change happen. So are the fundamentals of *good governance* and *fair funding*.

The Quality Schools Action Framework focuses change on what research and experience say matters: *parents as partners* involved in consistent and meaningful ways; *engaged students* who know they belong in schools and are supported by caring adults; competent, caring *educators* who are well-paid and supported in their work; and *high quality curriculum* that prepares students for 21st century opportunities.

A number of our partner schools and coalition organizations have used the framework and the companion OurSchool portal (available through www.idra.org/OurSchool) to drive local changes. In South Texas, for example, the first PTA Comunitario in the nation was begun with IDRA support by the women leaders of ARISE, a community-based organization in the colonias working to make sure their children get a good education in their neighborhood public schools.

In our work at the higher education level and with institutions of higher education, we are finding that proven strategies for increasing college completion parallel the Quality Schools Action Framework.

On the *actionable knowledge* part of the framework, for example, research is showing that knowledge-driven practices and useful data are a key strategy to increased college completion rates. Student level data, available early in the semester, used quickly to support students and faculty during the first few weeks, can markedly increase persistence. At the institutional level, data can inform student engagement, coursework and policies. And at the policy level, aligned data systems across K-12 and higher education are needed but are rather non-existent.

At the *governance level*, we know it works when college and university administration and trustees emphasize student success as a priority of the institution with clear accountability for success.

Higher education institutions that are producing results do not give up on students. They engage them, track them, support them and graduate them. Higher education institutions that are producing results also involve and keep parents as partners because they know from research that this matters to many Hispanics. Thus, *student engagement* and *parent and community engagement* are other important parts of the framework for action.

In the area of *curriculum quality and access*, the framework suggests that if colleges are losing a lot of students in particular courses, then they should redesign the courses. If it is not working, change it. If, as one example, developmental courses are not adequately moving students onto college-level courses (and very many are not) then re-design those courses, change the paradigm, increase instructional quality and put an accelerated developmental curriculum in place. A number of Texas institutions – the El Paso Community College is one example – are demonstrating that an early focus on college readiness and high quality accelerated developmental courses keep students on track to completion.

One final example in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo illustrates the importance of thoughtful, data-based, coherent plans that connect K-12 with higher education and community to improve educational opportunities. Looking at dropout data, the PSJA school district found out that 40 percent of kids dropping out of PSJA were doing so in their senior year. Under Superintendent Dr. Daniel King's leadership, the district undertook to bring students back to school by knocking on doors and talking to parents. Before doing so, though, the district created the College, Career

(cont. on Page 7)

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/

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College Access and Graduation

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

The perceived value of access to education has changed as the needs of our country's economy have evolved. This article explores this progression along with what is needed if we are to achieve the ambitious new goals that have been set before the country.

The Evolution of Educational Expectations

In the early days of the republic, education was not seen as essential quality for most of the population, with a few prosperous landed gentry entrusted to provide the leadership in all areas of American political, economic and social spheres. Though some form of literacy was seen as important for the creation of an informed electorate, even this basic skill was not afforded to all groups in the United States, with African Americans actually being prohibited in some regions from learning to read and write.

As the country moved from an agrarian economy to one based on industry and manufacturing, people began to encourage citizens to obtain at least an elementary education. Over time, job skill requirements involved ever-increasing levels of literacy, and the needs increased to completion of at least a high school education. The post-World War II era and its accompanying G.I. bill provided hundreds of thousands of returning veterans who had finished high school to, for the first time, enroll in and graduate from college. Evolving work skill demands had also expanded the need for a larger pool of applicants with a post-high school education.

In more recent years, spurred by an economic sector that now considers some post-high school educational preparation as a pre-requisite to entry into the contemporary job market, more and more states have increased standards to encourage high school students to graduate "college ready," meaning sufficiently prepared to enroll in some post-secondary institution to enable them a further honing of job and/or career skills.

Concern about More Equitable Access

A commensurate concern emerged, born of egalitarian social movements that peaked in the 1960s and 70s, that such access should be available equitably to all students without regard to race, ethnicity or economic background. The importance of such goals is reflected in a newly-completed report funded by Houston Endowment Inc., which boldly asserts: "The opportunity of a rewarding future largely depends upon completing a certificate or degree following high school. National employment and earnings statistics bear this out" (NCHEMS, 2012). In this ground-breaking document, the authors propose a new measure of combined kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) to post-secondary education accountability based on the percentage of eighth grade students who go on to complete a post-high school one or two-year certificate or a two-year associate degree. (NCHEMS, 2012)

This new standard is below that advocated by others who call for completion of a four-year college degree for varying percentages of the U.S. population. Proponents of the four-year degree standard offer evidence that the United States has lagged behind other countries in the number of college educated citizens, putting it at a distinct disadvantage in markets that are increasingly subject to global competition. Whether advocating for a two-year or a four-year post-secondary credential, it is clear that K-12 and post-secondary education institutions are far from achieving the desired outcomes.

Trends in Post-Secondary Enrollment

Given historical demographics, White students have long constituted the majority of college enrollment in states around the country. Even in states with sizable minority populations, minority student enrollment in post-secondary education has lagged behind that of White students. As the *(cont. on Page 4)*

If colleges and universities are to reflect what is a much more diverse population it will be imperative for all interested parties to adjust their efforts to adapt to new students.

(College Access and Graduation, continued from Page 3)

nation's demographics have changed, however, we see a trend where Hispanic populations have increased by significant numbers, from 35.3 million in 2000 to 50.7 million in 2010, an increase of 43 percent in a single decade. By comparison, the White population also increased, but at notably lower rates, from 194.5 million to 196.9 million (or 1.2 percent), reflecting the lower birthrates of that population. The population of Blacks increased in the last decade from 33.7 million to 37.9 million, an increase of 12.5 percent. (Motel, 2012)

The sizable growth in the Hispanic population is particularly noteworthy because it has not occurred in states where Hispanics have been historically concentrated (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois), but has instead reflected significant growth where they are new arrivals, including Nebraska where the Hispanic population increased by 129 percent in the last decade; South Carolina by 112.9 percent; Connecticut by 105.2 percent; and Oklahoma by 144.9 percent. (Patten, 2012).

With changing demographics, one would expect to see some improvement in the numbers of minority, and particularly Hispanic, students enrolling in higher education. According to recent research examining this issue, there is some good news. Richard Frey of the Pew Hispanic Center found that Hispanic students and Black students did reflect a notable increase in the number and percentages of students enrolling in post-secondary education (Frey, 2011). According the Frey, the growth in Hispanic student college enrollment reflects a "surge" that exceeded the growth in the group's overall population. The number of Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college increased by 349,000 students, Black student enrollment increased by 88,000 students, while White enrollment decreased by 320,000 from 1997 to 2009. Population growth accounts for some of the improvement, but the overall college enrollment gains for Hispanics outstrip those population trends. (Frey, 2011)

Encouraging as these new data may be, the gaps in the post-secondary enrollment and completion levels among different groups also has been found to have persisted. According to Pew, Asian students continue to far out-pace all ethnic groups with a 62.2 percent college enrollment rate among 18- to 24-year-olds. White student enrollment is at 38 percent. And Hispanic students – the fastest growing population in the country – coming in at 31.9 percent.

Despite improvements in college enrollment, we continue to see vast differences in the number and percentage of minority college graduates compared with their White counterparts. Of individuals between the ages of 25 to 29, only 13 percent of Hispanics had a college degree (20 percent among native born Hispanics). This compares to 39 percent of White and 19 percent of Black young adults who have completed a four-year college degree. (Frey, 2011)

Changing Realities – Changing Policies

Whatever the short-term struggles, changing population trends suggest that the face of higher education in most states will be very different in future decades from what it is at present. If colleges and universities are to reflect what is a much more diverse population it will be imperative for all interested parties to adjust their efforts to adapt to new students. At the K-12 level, this means that the historic under-achievement of Hispanic students and Black students can no longer be accepted, and schools must step up efforts to improve academic preparation and graduation rates for all students, especially historically under-served minorities.

At the post-secondary levels, institutions of higher education will need to increase their recruitment, student support services, overall graduation rates – especially minority student graduation rates – if they hope to reflect the increasing diversity of the U.S population. Failing this, they will become institutions that will serve as one pundit framed it "the old America" in a nation whose workforce, voters and taxpayers will reflect the new one.

As noted by IDRA's president, Dr. María Robledo Montecel, in a recent address quoting Martin Luther King: "We are all 'caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny'" (2003).

Steve Murdoch, the Texas state demographer, and one-time head of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and his colleagues had written that, given demographic trends, states like Texas had a window of opportunity to address the challenges created by a changing population. They warned that if current education trends were not altered in ways that improved the graduation and college-going rates of minorities, the state would be less educated and less economically viable by the year 2030 (Murdoch, et al., 2003). In the last decade, we have seen some improvement, but at a pace that will create major problems for all populations, in all states around the country.

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- Dr. Robledo Montecel Univision interview
- Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework™ website with related resources
- New reports by the Lumina Foundation, PEW Hispanic Center, Houston Endowment, and others
- FTIC Study by IDRA
- Interview with Dr. King, PSJA superintendant

Visit www.idra.org for more information.

Resources

Frey, R. *Hispanic College Enrollment Spikes, Narrowing Gaps with Other Groups* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, August 25, 2011).

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Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is director of policy at IDRA. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Describing the First-Year Experience for First-Time-in-College Students at a Major Community College

by Josie Danini Cortez, M.A., and Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

There are memorable "firsts" in a child's life: their first step, first word, first day in school. For a parent, every "first" is both celebrated and dreaded. You want them to have "firsts," but you also want to protect them from harm. Above all else, you want your children to be happy and successful. These are fundamental beliefs and values.

Yet somewhere along the way, some educators, researchers and policymakers have come to believe that lower income, minority parents and families don't share these beliefs and values, that they somehow want less for their own children. We see the manifestation of this myth in statements such as "*They* don't see the value of an education," and "*They* want their children to go to work if and when they graduate from high school," or "*They* get in the way of their children's future by insisting they not leave their hometown when they attend college."

Our experience is that most parents – regardless of background – want the same things for all their children, at a minimum to be healthy, happy and successful at whatever they aspire to be, and, in many cases, to be better off than they themselves may have been. And education is almost always seen as the path to success – it's the "one thing they can't take away from you." For children who are the first from their families to attend college – any college – the path is a very different one than those who have others in their families who have made that journey.

But many students, however, never make it out of high school. National studies indicate that, of those who enroll in college, many fail to graduate, and first-time-in-college (FTIC) students drop out in disproportionate numbers. IDRA recently researched the FTIC experience in a major urban community college and found that the reasons for non-completion lay primarily with the dissonance and incompatibilities between the institution and the student.

IDRA's research is firmly grounded in our Quality Schools Action Framework, which shifts the focus from access and success for only a few to access and success for all students; shifts away from a culture of blaming to a culture of shared accountability for student success; and shifts away from isolated efforts in PK-12, higher education and communities to interconnected support for Hispanic success in prekindergarten through graduate school. These shifts are significant in the solutions that are sought and found – not in trying to "fix" students and their families, but rather in strengthening institutions, informed by students and their families and the assets they bring with them – assets such as a strong work ethic, a value of family and commitment, and a determination to succeed.

IDRA used a research design and mixed method approach that is based on the philosophical tenet that FTIC students have resources and assets that have yet to be tapped, and institutions of higher education need to adapt, align and coordinate their programs and services to ensure access and success for these students. Below are some of the study's key findings and recommendations for FTIC success.

Key Findings

- The "typical" FTIC is a young (22 years or younger) non-transfer Hispanic female.
- The FTIC experience at community college almost always includes taking one or more developmental courses. FTICs in general are more likely to receive a productive grade (C or better) in English if they are over the age of 30. Everyone else has a one in two chance. The greatest percentage of FTIC students (about three out of four) are referred to a math developmental course. Slightly more men than women enroll in developmental math courses, but women tend to complete the courses more often than men and they earn Cs or better more often.

  "About 98 percent need some form of remediation, usually math but some need all three levels. Students are coming out of high schools less prepared for what they need in

(cont. on Page 6)

First-time-in-college students have resources and assets that have yet to be tapped, and institutions of higher education need to adapt, align and coordinate their programs and services to ensure access and success for these students.

(Describing the First-Year Experience for First-Time-in-College Students at a Major Community College, continued from Page 5)

college... So here we call it Grade 13."
– FTIC Support Program Coordinators

- FTIC programs at the community college had some indicators of student success, but they tend to be program specific, non-uniform and do not distinguish FTIC and non-FTIC performance, nor are they readily available or routinely used to inform programmatic or institutional efforts.

"There is no way to know... no way to really measure that what you are doing is really working."
– FTIC Support Program Coordinators

Recommendations

Here are some of IDRA recommendations for college administrators and program coordinators as they work toward academic success for FTIC students.

- **Create a positive "FTIC" identity** for students that is recognizable to all. Identify FTIC students from the beginning and throughout their enrollment at the community college so that programs, services and faculty are all aware of these students and their unique attributes so they can serve them more appropriately.
- **Create a common understanding of the diverse FTIC subgroupings** and their unique characteristics. It is important to understand what those differences are and what is needed to ensure student success.
- **Create a comprehensive and centralized inventory** of programs and services for FTIC students that is universally available, deeply understood by all faculty and staff, and regularly used by all staff and faculty serving FTIC students.
- **Create a structure and process that integrates** programs and services with academics. FTIC students need a seamless system of support that bridges institutional services (such as financial aid) with programs and academics. FTIC support programs working in tandem can improve institutional efforts to improve persistence, course completion, productive grades, and graduation. But efforts will be more successful with active faculty engagement and coordination.
- **Regularly evaluate the use of technology** to ensure that it is supporting FTIC students rather than creating barriers. Don't assume that using technology automatically results in efficiency or effectiveness. Often, human connections transcend the benefits of technology used in isolation.
- **Create a uniform set of indicators of success** for FTIC students that is created, understood and used by all program and administrative staff and faculty.
- **Assess program effectiveness** using both quantitative and qualitative data that are reliable, valid and can withstand the scrutiny of an internal or external examination.
- **Create institutional tracking mechanisms** that will identify FTIC students throughout their enrollment at the community college, including key information about the programs and services they have received from recruitment to graduation.

The study provided the community college with new information on the FTIC experience and has since been used to inform institutional reform strategies for improving the FTIC experience and their graduation rates. Learn more about this study in IDRA's Newsletter Plus.

Josie Danini Cortez, M.A., is a senior education associate in IDRA Field Services. Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is director of policy at IDRA. Comments and questions may be directed to them via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

IDRA OurSchool Portal to Add College Data

with Support from TG

In Texas, developmental courses have become another hurdle that students must overcome. Upon entering, college students must prove that they are college-ready by taking an assessment chosen by the college. If students score below a certain threshold, they must enroll in developmental courses, for which no college credit is earned. The rates of success in developmental course for students in Texas are discouraging. In math over a two-year period, only 14.2 percent of students who took developmental classes are able to meet the criteria needed to begin earning college credit. This means that after two years of developmental courses, only one in 10 students began earning courses with college credit. These statistics alone bear out the need to inform parents early on of potential challenges to the college-going future they envision for their children.

In order to inform families and communities about these issues, IDRA and TG have embarked on a project that will expand IDRA's OurSchool portal to include college information. The OurSchool portal is one way IDRA delivers meaningful data to all educational partners to spur action that create equal and excellent educational opportunities for all children. IDRA has outlined the three following objectives associated with college success and data dissemination.

- Compel meaningful action by creating and providing convincing clear messages, data, models and stories that make the case for equal and excellent educational opportunity;
- Expand utilization of IDRA's OurSchool portal by educators, policymakers, community leaders and families; and
- Promote partnerships among educators, parents and students (pre-K-20) that prepare and graduate minority and ELL students from high school and college (IDRA's 2011-2012 Strategic Plan, 2010).

TG awarded IDRA this one-year grant in the fall of 2011 to achieve these objectives. The soft launch of the expanded OurSchool portal is scheduled for this summer.

(Higher Education Success – Key System Strategies, continued from Page 2)

and Technology Academy in partnership with South Texas College. The students were then encouraged to come back – not to the same schools and conditions that had them drop out in the first place but rather to come back and finish high school and at the same time begin college coursework. Many did. The district has reduced its dropout rate by 75 percent in two years, and PSJA has become a leader in connecting high school students to college with more than 1,500 students participating in dual college credit courses during the last school year.

You notice that there is no deficit thinking and that there are no excuses in this approach: no "students cannot learn" or "parents don't care" or "they do not speak English" or "we can't do it; we have too many minorities," or "they are not worth it."

I don't know about you, but I always get suspicious when someone says "college is not for everyone" and "we don't have any money." Have you noticed that when someone says "college is not for everyone" they are almost never talking about their own children? Instead of clinging to old stereotypes and deficit assumptions, we need to know what is really going on, know what's working and get on with providing high quality education not to the privileged few but to all our children.

We must do everything we can to live up to our children's expectations for a great education and a good life. At IDRA, we stand ready to work with you to make equal educational opportunity a reality in our lifetime. Your voice matters. Our young people matter and educational opportunity matters.

Adapted from a keynote address presented at the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education conference, February 1, 2011.

Resources

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María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., is IDRA president and CEO. Comments and questions may be directed to her via at comment@idra.org.

Dr. Robledo Montecel was asked by Univision's Teresa Rodriguez to discuss the role that families can play in advocating for their children. "Los padres deben ayudar a sus hijos a terminar sus estudios," was aired in a segment, "Estudios Superiores a tu Alcance" (Postsecondary Studies Within Reach) on March 24, 2012, as part of Univision's *Es el Momento* (The Moment is Now) education campaign. This national one-hour education special highlighted the difficulties Hispanic Americans face in closing the higher education gap and identified resources available for students to complete graduate studies while controlling costs. See IDRA's Newsletter Plus to view the video clip.

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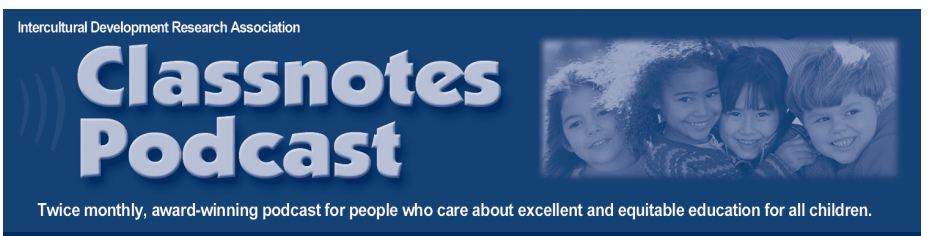
Focus: College Access and Success

"It is now time that we make high school graduation and college readiness the new minimum. The economics of undereducation demand it. Our children deserve no less."

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



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