



## Focus: Governance Efficacy

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# School Boards Come of Age with a 21st Century Vision

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., and Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

The increasing diversity of our school population magnifies a key challenge in school governance: how to best engage and represent the interest of school districts' students, parents, families and community. School boards are elected by school district constituencies to ensure that decisions about schools reflect access to quality curriculum, equity and excellence applied consistently within a contextual reality of diversity.

Equity and excellence in education for all are cornerstones of national significance for effective governance in today's society. This article delineates a set of two community advocacy goals that we encourage school boards to pursue in an effort to change patterns of neglect toward minority students to one of inclusivity and high expectations for all students. These goals embody a commitment to educating each student regardless of income, race, ethnicity, gender or orientation. They include new approaches to create changes needed in policy and practice to ensure an equitable and excellent education for all our children.

## A Vision of Inclusivity and High Expectations – An Act of Restoring Hope and Collective Action

If we choose to be meaningfully engaged in working together, we can restore hope for a

quality education that prepares all children for graduation, college readiness and a future filled with promise. In our Fulfilling the Promise Mendez-Brown Initiative, IDRA designed a series of cross-race, cross-sector community-school dialogues that gathered African American and Latino community, business and education leaders in cities throughout the South to address key education issues in each respective community. Student voice was at the heart of the process in these local forums that were successful in providing space to set aside differences and create a common vision, engaging education stakeholders in action planning around key issues. IDRA provided information and a process to seed new coalitions among groups that seldom come together to plan collective action in education. A resource kit was developed to support schools and communities in this process: *Creating Your Education Blueprint for Action: Mendez and Brown Community Dialogues – A Launch Kit* (Rodríguez, et al., 2010).

## Leadership for Student Advocacy –Acts of Courage and Humility

Dialogue and joint action planning takes great courage and humility; both are central to good governance. Dialogue comes from an openness of the heart to hear another person's point of view, to set aside your own agenda temporarily. (cont. on Page 2)

*“Whether at the school board, school administrator or teacher level, effective governance requires developing the shared habit of vision that eschews the tired excuses of the past and creates schools that work for all students.”*

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

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ily and offer human warmth so that together we can co-create something better than before or greater than one can do working alone. This takes tremendous trust and courage because it is necessary to learn how to lower one's defenses and really see or hear another's point of view. It also takes humility to consider we might not have all the answers ourselves, we need the diversity of sectors and voices working together to solve complex educational challenges. In Spanish, the word *gentileza* (gentility) means to be open to another viewpoint, to soften the heart and open the mind. Joint action planning takes courage and *gentileza* to forgive the past and move forward together in building a better future.

If we are serious about promoting graduation and college readiness and really committed to creating successful academic pathways for all children, then we must find the courage to enter into dialogue and catalyze joint action with a broader view of who must be included at the planning and governance table in achieving this together. The following principles for community-school-parent advocacy in action emerged from the Mendez-Brown initiative.

- Coalition building must be inclusive, reflecting the diversity of race, ethnicity in each school community, spanning sectors and disciplines and breaking down traditional barriers and silos to collaborate in action planning.
- Each community context is unique, and specific action must be responsive to the local needs, strengths and solutions emerging from dialogue.
- An education system within a viable democ-

racy must ensure fair and equitable funding for every public school.

- Schools must develop greater holding power to support and prepare all students pre-K through college.
- Educators must be better prepared to teach a diverse student body and partner effectively with students' families.
- Schools must value and meaningfully engage parents and communities in decision-making and action.
- Student voice must be an intrinsic part of any planning and decision-making process in education.

Growing recognition of the importance of family and community engagement as a strategy for school success prompted the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to recently convene thought leaders and project directors from across the nation for site visits and dialogue to explore how to build family engagement within the context and lens of educational equity.

PTA Comunitario parent leaders offered poignant testimony of work being done in the Rio Grande Valley led by community working with schools to create change. Commitment to a collective vision emerging from families in each barrio, supported by neighborhood community-based organizations is the driving force that holds promise for one of the greatest turnarounds in education in the nation.

San Antonio's Mayor Castro has set a target goal of 85 percent graduation rate by 2020. The backbone of this effort consists of parent voices, parent-led discussions and joint leadership in action, collaborating with neighbor-

hood community-based organizations and schools.

Addressing the educational disparities faced by our communities, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics and the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics held a national summit of Hispanic early learning in September, where Undersecretary Martha Kanter; initiative Executive Director Alejandra Ceja; President's Advisory Commission Chair, Dr. Eduardo Padron; and Roberto Rodríguez, Special Assistant to the President for Education, The White House Domestic Policy Council, joined distinguished panelists, researchers and experts. They all reinforced the fact that the future of our nation is inextricably linked to the future of the Hispanic community, pledging their strong support to advance a strategic policy and outreach agenda to work with diverse stakeholders to tackle critical education challenges facing our nation. The urgency of this call to work together across groups, sector and race could not be stronger nor the stakes higher. Only together can we weave a web of support for all our children that is strong, sustainable and vital to our future and our world.

## Resources

Montemayor, A.M. "Stop the Merry-go-Round, Children Might Fall Off! – Parents as Stewards of Governance for School Reform that Supports Educational Equity," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, June-July 2007).

Rodríguez, R.G., & A. Villarreal, J.D. Cortez, B. Scott. *Creating Your Education Blueprint for Action – Mendez and Brown Community Dialogues – A Launch Kit* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).

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Publication offices:  
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101  
San Antonio, Texas 78228  
210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714  
[www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) | [contact@idra.org](mailto:contact@idra.org)

Maria Robledo Montecel, Ph. D.  
IDRA President and CEO  
Newsletter Executive Editor

Christie L. Goodman, APR  
IDRA Communication Manager  
Newsletter Production Editor

Sarah H. Aleman  
Secretary  
Newsletter Layout



## The Challenge of Seeing, Part II – Shaping the Sixth Generation of Civil Rights and Educational Equity

by Bradley Scott, Ph.D.

In an article called, “The Challenge of Seeing” (September 2012), I began to describe a sixth generation of civil rights and educational equity: “The sixth generation is calling us to examine the quality, correctness and suitability of the inputs to produce different outcomes for all learners regardless of their differences to provide them with knowledge, skills and competencies that raise their global competitiveness in this 21st century world.”

We now are in the second decade of the 21st century, and we have walked through discussions of the generations of civil rights and educational equity from the perspective of the federally-funded equity assistance centers. We have understood these generations in the context of key activities that have driven how each generation was approached and described. (Scott, 2012; Scott 2001; Scott 1995).

What are the equity concerns today that are shaping this sixth generation of civil rights and educational equity? What should concern us in this new era that calls for shaping the sixth generation, which captures where civil rights, educational equity and public education are at present and into the future?

This article will comment on the Sixth Generation of Civil Rights and Educational Equity and create a contrast with the fifth generation that we have left behind.

The fifth generation focused on systemic equity (Scott, 2001). I defined systemic equity to be: “The transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every student has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, responsibility and self-sufficiency for school and for life.”

The fifth generation challenged us to look at educational reform in the context of the No

*Child Left Behind Act*. NCLB was not the magic bullet it was intended to be for many reasons. Some schools were successful under it; too many schools were not.

The sixth generation has this same focus, with considerations of the Blueprint for Reform applied, but now also must have a profound commitment to “every student” equaling “all meaning all.” We must guarantee good schools for all. We must guarantee excellent teachers for all. We must assure great leaders for all. We must assure great curriculum that prepares all students for college and for life. When we say *all*, we cannot mean some, or the privileged, or the chosen, or the elite, or the preferred, or the desirable, or the deserving – we must mean all.

I was disappointed when I learned that the run up to the Common Core Standards and the initial presentation of them had not really factored in their application to learners who are below grade level or to English language learners or to those with special needs. Not to have factored these populations into the fullness of conversation and consideration is segregation. No, these populations deserve to have been talked about with all other groups, even though the conversations would have been tough. Either *all* means *all* or it simply does not. And, if it does not, then it is a lie.

To have states receive approvals for the ESEA flexibility waivers and have many of the approved plans still have questions or concerns about English learners and how assessment and flexibility will apply to them is egregious. This is differential treatment and may violate these learners’ civil rights under Title VI and possibly equal protection. Either *all* means *all* or it simply does not. And, if it does not, then it is a lie.

In this sixth generation of civil rights and educational equity, we need to have tough  
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*When we say “all,” we cannot mean some, or the privileged, or the chosen, or the elite, or the preferred, or the desirable, or the deserving – we must mean all.*

### 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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(*The Challenge of Seeing, Part II – Shaping the Sixth Generation of Civil Rights and Educational Equity, continued from Page 3*)

conversations that lead to great possibilities and outcomes for students. Following are some of equity conversations I think we need to have. In considering these concerns, please keep in mind the Goals of Educational Equity, the equity lens, the equity context, and IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework all of which were discussed in Part I of the "Challenge of Seeing."

### Sixth Generation of Civil Rights and Educational Equity – Topics for Conversation and Action

1. Technology equity for management, instruction, creation and development.
2. Heightened educational stakeholder collaboration.
3. Parent involvement and engagement
4. Safe, secure, non-hostile learning environments.
5. Pre-kindergarten through grade 20 education and school completion.
6. Resolution of persistent "gap" issues.
7. Institutionalizing innovations that create comparable high achievement for all diverse learners.
8. Eradicating barriers that block high achievement for all learners.
9. Transformed curriculum that is relevant, meaningful, powerful and dynamic to produce excellent academic and other outcomes.
10. Mastery of English language literacy.
11. Mastery of math, science and other core content areas at a global competence level.
12. Reformed, expanded and targeted professional development, staff renewal and staff support systems.
13. Confronting new and re-emerging discrimination.
14. Confronting all of the "isms" in school, including racism, sexism, classism, ethnocentrism and any other forms of privilege and exclusion.
15. Embracing the historic and emerging civil rights concerns.
16. Creating cultures of positive change.
17. Building 21st century efficacy.
18. Creating good community and school health.
19. Creating a cradle to college and career pipeline.
20. Change the cradle to prison pipeline.
21. ...

The last item (#21) represents other conversations we need to have in states and localities that prevent good education from happening for all – all – students. Each of these conversations should lead to specific, measurable actions that make a difference for learners. It is a challenge of seeing once again, that leads to action that makes a difference for every single learner and his or her life.

In truth, this sixth generation is a monster, no, it's a beast, no, it's our reality, that we must face because the fact of every learner requires that we must. While it may be tough, it is not impossible, and it is impossible only if we act in weak, unimaginative ways.

I think we are better than that. Let's prove each other right, not wrong.

### Resources

- Robledo Montecel, M. "Equal Access to a Quality Education – The Civil Rights Issue of Our Generation New Orleans," keynote address, U.S. Office for Civil Rights national conference (March 29, 2011).
- Robledo Montecel, M. "Fulfilling the Promise of Brown vs. Board of Education," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, November-December 2003).
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- Scott, B. "Coming of Age," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2001).
- Scott, B. "The Fourth Generation of Desegregation and Civil Rights," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, January 1995).

*Bradley Scott, Ph.D., is a senior education associate in Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via email at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).*

## Get More Online at the IDRA Newsletter Plus

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- School board governance efficacy resources
- Podcasts on the generations of civil rights and educational equity

Visit [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) for more information.

## Families – School Board Electors and Partners

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

A few years ago, a group of parents from a newly-organized PTA Comunitario in south Texas posed questions to a panel of school board candidates. It turned out the parents were more knowledgeable about state school policy than the candidates. They were able to actually inform the candidates about new graduation requirements that were critical problems. They pointed out that there was a minimum graduation strand that didn't prepare the student for college, and students from economically disadvantaged families were at risk to be assigned to the minimal and non-college path.

### Informing as Public Action

Most families are not as knowledgeable about school policy as those mentioned above, but it is important that families address those responsible for governance about the education of their children. School board members aren't necessarily experts in all the intricacies of school policy and practice, but they must be aware of those critical policies that have major impact on children in our neighborhood public schools.

IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework lays out a critical path of inter-related and inter-connected elements that include engaged citizens with actionable knowledge, community engagement and governance efficacy. IDRA's work with families is centered on actionable data. One example is IDRA's OurSchool Data Portal (<http://www.idra.org/OurSchool/>).

### Governance at School Board Functions

The school board's central function is to provide each student with an education of the highest quality. Though ultimately responsible for school district operations, the board does not get involved with day-to-day operations. Rather, the board sets the direction and goals, and the administration decides how to get there. Boards have three primary functions: governance, executive and judicial.

Governance functions provides for the board to consider and approve or disapprove matters submitted to it by the superintendent. In order to provide for continuity and comply with laws and regulations, the board establishes policies to govern district activities. Families must address this function collectively on issues that affect all or many students.

### Engaged Citizens with Actionable Knowledge

The families mentioned at the beginning of this article were able to speak clearly and convincingly about school policy because they had experienced a series of information and training sessions on graduation requirements, college preparation and other key education data issues. IDRA has been conducting bilingual sessions on educational policy and practice as part of the PTA Comunitario meetings. These families were ready to address the board in its governance function and even informed board members of issues they had not considered carefully.

Through current data about schools, families can investigate and approach school administrators and board members about how policy is being carried out and how it is affecting the students. If school district policies and practices are having a negative effect on children, it is most appropriate that families address their concerns to their elected officials. If the data show high attrition rates, those who govern should have plans and strategies in place that can increase the holding power of schools, accelerate high school completion rates and ensure that students graduate with the credits and skills necessary to succeed in post-secondary studies. The PTA Comunitario approach focuses on family leadership in education projects that emerge from actionable data and related issues of concern to the families and are opportunities for each individual to practice varied leadership roles.

Some pointers for addressing the school board are:  
(cont. on Page 6)

*If school district policies and practices are having a negative effect on children, it is most appropriate that families address their concerns to their elected officials.*

(Families – School Board Electors and Partners, continued from Page 3)

- Be prepared with strong data rather than anecdotal examples,
- Give possible consequences for students of ignoring the current plea or presentation,
- Be clear on the critical concerns about issues that affect many or all students,
- Speak as partners and allies, and
- Be brief – don't ramble or deviate into personal feelings.

In these times of school closings and public dollars siphoned into private alternate systems, parents becoming bold and active partners with school boards can keep the doors open in excellent neighborhood public schools. The voices of the concerned parents aren't attacks on elected officials but celebratory choruses for creating public schools that succeed for all children.

## Resources

Posner, L., & H. Bojorquez. "Knowledge for Action – Organizing School-Community Partnerships Around Quality Data," in *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework*, Robledo Montecel, M., & C. Goodman (eds) (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).

Cortez, J. "Family and Community-Led Education Reform," *IDRA Newsletter*. (Intercultural Development Research Association, August 2013).

Center for Public Education. *Back to School: How Parent Involvement Affects Student Achievement* (Alexandria, Va.: National School Boards Association, August 2011).

Illinois Association of School Boards. *Your School Board and You – Insights for School Board Candidates and Other Interested Citizens* (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois Association of School Boards, no date).

Uchida, D., & M. Cetron, F. McKenzie. *Preparing Students for the 21st Century* (Lanham, Md.: R&L Education, 1996).

Villarreal, A., & Rodríguez, R.G. "Expanding School Governance through Participatory Community Engagement," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2011).

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

(School Boards, continued from Page 2)

Villarreal, A., & R.G. Rodríguez. "A Guide for School Board Members to Assess District Effectiveness," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, June-July, 2010).

W.K. Kellogg Foundation. "A Shared Responsibility Among Families, Schools and Communities: WKCF's Family Engagement Convening," (May 23, 2013).

Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., is director of development. Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., is chief of operations. Comments and questions may be directed to them via email at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).

## Excellence in Community Service Award

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund presented IDRA President, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel with the Excellence in Community Service Award in September. "She is a person who has committed her life's work to ensuring that every child – especially those born into the most vulnerable of circumstances – has the opportunity to stand on a level playing field when pursuing their education," stated John Quiñones, who served as master of ceremonies at the gala event. "As all of you know, a person's professional success and socioeconomic status are strongly correlated with their early education. Through her tireless work Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel has given, and continues to give, our children a fighting chance at this success by educating community leaders and educators in the areas of bilingual education, school holding power and parent leadership." The video about her from the awards gala is online at [www.idra.org/IDRA\\_NL\\_current/](http://www.idra.org/IDRA_NL_current/).



Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President, with Thomas A. Saenz, MALDEF President and General Counsel.

## IDRA 40th Anniversary

Mathematical literacy is not only important for educational attainment and career choices, but also for future economic participation in this country. IDRA has a vision that all students must have access to quality instruction in math that ensures enrollment, success and enrollment and completion of higher-level mathematics courses. In the 1990s, IDRA developed Engineering, Science, and Math Increases Job Aspirations (MIJA) to expand the opportunities of Hispanic sixth-grade girls by increasing their awareness of science- and math-related careers and by encouraging their enrollment in advanced mathematics courses with an introduction to engineering. The program included curricular, instructional, training and support components along with active parent participation in training and other activities.

That work evolved over time informing IDRA's Math Smart! program that models the development of highly challenging and engaging curricula. Math Smart! integrates the Five Dimensions of Mathematical Proficiency with strategies for engaging students, using dynamic



Dr. Karl Trappe from the University of Texas at Austin's Physics Department and a MIJA student volunteer perform in IDRA's Second Annual AIM Conference Physics Circus in October 1993.

technology tools, supporting English learners, and engaging and valuing parents. Unlike one-size-fits-all programs, these models assess current contexts to design tailored strategies that build on student and school strengths. Each component is grounded in research and best practices on STEM teaching for diverse students. In one district that implemented Math Smart! and its sister, Science Smart!, passing rates increased for African American, Hispanic and White students. And the schools doubled the passing rates of English language learners.



# Texas Endorsement System Threatens to Track Poor and Minority Students

## IDRA Calls on Texas State Board of Education to Ensure All Students Have Access to High Quality Curriculum

*Dr. Albert Cortez, IDRA Director of Policy, presented testimony recently to the Texas State Board of Education at its hearing on HB5 and high school graduation requirements. Below are his remarks. IDRA's full written testimony is available online at [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org).*

At IDRA, our goal is to assure educational opportunity for every child. We are deeply concerned about the state's move to dilute curriculum for many students. Couched in the language of giving students choices and helping struggling students at least get a minimum diploma, the new system weakens high school curriculum and further institutes tracking of students. It encourages placing students in different paths toward graduation, some college bound and some bound for labor.

IDRA recently released a policy note, "Tracking, Endorsements and Differentiated Diplomas – When 'Different' Really is Less," that gives an overview of the recent policy changes for curriculum, tracking and graduation plans for Texas schools. (Available online as well).

As members of the Texas State Board of Education, you can take steps to make sure Texas does its job of providing an excellent education to all students across the state.

IDRA has three key recommendations.

**1. Continue to require Algebra II for all students.** For those who later choose to apply for college, this is critical in part because the SAT and ACT require knowledge of Algebra II. Removing the requirement, will mean many students will find out too late that college options have been closed for some, limited for many.

**2. Make sure the endorsements do not become a dead-end for students, particularly those who are poor or minority.** While the discussions about Algebra II have gotten much attention, it is really just a glimpse

of a much larger picture. The state's drift toward connect-the-dot, diluted science and mathematics instead of rigorous courses moves us even further away from ensuring economic competitiveness and universally high expectations and college preparation for all students.

**3. Set up triggers to be able to take action if the data show disproportionate routing of poor and minority students into non rigorous endorsements and courses, or that indicate that students in "career options" are performing below levels of college bound students.** The state also should be monitoring performance on end-of-course exams and other assessments by students in regular vs. applied courses and by differing endorsements. Applied courses not producing comparable performance outcomes as college focused courses should be identified and eliminated early in the endorsement selection process. Families must have clarity about which paths and which courses within those endorsements will best prepare students for college. Texas is poised to have many students not being prepared for college, and many more who will need remediation when they enroll in college after taking these watered-down courses.

Less is not better. Weaker is not better. It is not elitist to expect our state to do its job and take responsibility for the academic success of all students, including Latino and poor students who are now the majority of students in Texas schools.

A vital state must have educational parity for all students and not parcel out one set of opportunities for some and minimal expectations for others.

The research and decades of experience behind IDRA's Quality School Action Framework™ show that a high-quality curriculum is essential to success for all students for them to reach a true level of college readiness.



Children have shown that they will rise to the level of expectation that is created for them and to the level of challenge and support that is provided to them. Schools have shown that they can be highly successful by embracing high expectations for all rather than sorting some students into college and others into job training. It is worth noting that before the changes adopted by HB5, 80 percent of all graduating seniors were enrolled in the recommended 4-by-4 program. Why fix what is not broken?

Policymakers and schools should not make pre-college decisions on behalf of students or track them into low-level courses that limit career options. To create true opportunities for all of our children, we must commit to high quality curriculum for all students and full, equitable funding of all our schools, especially those neighborhood public schools in our neediest communities. Our state can do better, our students deserve better, and our future depends on better.



**INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**  
5815 CALLAGHAN ROAD, SUITE 101  
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