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School and Community Capacity Building for Collaboration

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

“¿Oye, que sacates?” “¿Y tu pasates?”
[Psst, What d’ju get? An’ you, d’ju Pass?]

Two students whispering across their desks reflect the general concern with the markers of academic achievement. Grades have been with us since formal education began and will not disappear. The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* has been with us since the mid-1960s and, through the *No Child Left Behind Act*, continues to require schools to inform families about the academic status of their children. Additionally, a *school* academic report card is one of a series of mandates that federal dollars require. For the federally-funded network of parent information and resource centers (PIRCs), it is a key piece of information to be transmitted to families whose children attend Title I schools.

Beyond the Report Card

Actionable knowledge is an important ingredient for building the capacity of communities to collaborate with schools. Grades are one piece of data that a community needs to understand, review and compare with other data about the achievement levels, retention, etc.

IDRA has publications and online resources to support actionable knowledge and school accountability. To assess the strengths and weaknesses of a school in Texas and work with others to improve it, see IDRA’s bilingual OurSchool data portal (www.idra.org/OurSchool) or www.idra.org/OurSchoolsp. (See also, Posner

& Bojorquez, 2010).

In addition, IDRA’s new book, *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010) presents IDRA’s framework in which the levers of change are centered on actionable knowledge. The critical change strategy of community capacity building is described in this book.

If Info Disseminated But No One Gets It... (or “It’s in the [e-]mail”)

Disseminating student information through paper reports mailed to the home, telephone messages or electronic transmittal might minimally cover the letter of the law, but these tactics do not support authentic communication or a conversation about the status of students’ learning progress.

There are 32 discrete parent involvement requirements that come with federal Title I dollars. Simply presenting these in print or in PowerPoint slides to families – even when translated and written in lay terms – is clearly not enough. Mailing a document to families has a similar impact as that of weekly fliers and advertisements from businesses, commonly considered junk mail. Families are not really informed by such efforts, and there is no facilitation for them to take action on the data. Even parent-teacher nights rarely provide ample opportunity for in-depth communication between
(cont. on Page 2)

“Cross-sector coalitions that reflect our full commitment to educational quality and educational opportunity are a key part of making change happen.”

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



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school and home.

Authentic Accountability

A truly accountable school has real communication with individual families and provides collective opportunities for conversation about how children are doing academically and socially. For there to be ongoing and sustained change for the better, there must be an ongoing effort to build the capacity of the community to understand and be able to use the school information (Posner, 2010).

The big challenge is how to build the capacity within families to make their schools accountable. It is labor-intensive, but it can be done. Staff and school volunteers can selectively contact families in their homes, inviting them to communicate with the school, giving information in a personal and understandable manner, listening to their opinions and encouraging them to pass information on to their friends.

If personal communication is established as a regular pattern and parents who are willing and able are encouraged to communicate with their peers, a whole new relationship is established among families and between families and the school.

Successes in Outreach & Community Capacity Building

The PIRC resources are focused primarily serving Title I families and their schools. During the last 10 years, IDRA's Texas PIRC has worked in partnership with community leadership and families in very poor South Texas communities building their capacity to hold their schools accountable.

Though hard-pressed to meet the basic needs of their children, these families are vitally interested in their children's educational success. And many of their schools are barely meeting academic

standards, if at all, and are informally labeled as undesirable campuses by teachers and the broader community.

Within this context and from these unincorporated communities (colonias) a grassroots organization, ARISE, comes from and supports families: colonia residents who are equally desirous of seeing their children succeed and be prepared for college.

The outreach and communication approach ARISE uses involves the following:

- Visit and communicate directly and often with the families in an immediate neighborhood.
- Discover and uncover talents, dreams, needs and desires.
- Provide some services but also require in-kind reciprocity.
- As potential leaders emerge, support them and give them more responsibility.

This personalized approach exponentially increases the available human capital over time.

The IDRA Texas PIRC has provided bilingual training and technical assistance, grounded on the assets and wishes documented by ARISE. We have discussed key Title I parent rights and responsibilities in parent-friendly language and connected to their stated expectations through participation and interaction that support critical thinking. School data are integrated into a problem-solving, highly engaging activity.

Bilingual participants are critical to the process when some only understand one of the presentation languages. This is so because the goal is not so much the transfer of information but participant

conversation. Switching between languages challenges the presenter but does not take twice as long to transmit the information, as some expect. The ensuing dialogue actually enables greater retention of key ideas and provides a much more stimulating experience for all involved.

Conversation about the education of their children builds capacity in families for self direction in communicating with school and increased potential for engaging their neighbors for the success of all children. Nurturing the capacity to engage in dialogue among families and with school educators, administrators and other staff expands family leadership. The ability of the community to transform its schools is set in motion.

Resources

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

Posner, L. "Actionable Knowledge – Putting Research to Work for School-Community Action" in Robledo Montecel, M., & C. Goodman (eds), *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural

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IDRA Texas PIRC

For more information about the Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

Additional resources are available online at www.idra.org/Texas_IDRA_PIRC.htm

funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve the state of Texas

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Framing the Context for Fruitful Cross-Race Community Dialogues to Strengthen Local Education

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D.

Our public schools can only be vibrant and resilient by encouraging dialogue and exploring new connections and information that result from cross-race, cross-sector engagement. A healthy system brings in others, considers other perspectives and plans ways to hold itself accountable for educating *all* children.

M. Wheatley and M. Kellner-Rogers explain: “Open and inquiring, such systems become wiser about themselves. They become more aware of their interdependencies. They learn that by reaching out, they become stronger. Their support comes not from unnatural boundaries, but from the inherent strength of wholeness.” (1996)

IDRA’s Fulfilling the Promise *Mendez* and *Brown* initiative, creates opportunities to lift Latino and African American voices as collaborative leaders in strengthening public schools. Using IDRA’s Quality Schools Action Framework as the central organizing guide (Robledo Montecel, 2005; Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010), individuals across race and sector engage in dialogue, deep listening and courageous planning through the construction of blueprints for action to fulfill the promise of the landmark civil rights cases of *Mendez vs. Westminster* and *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

The community dialogue process begins by honoring voices of students sharing their experiences about what is needed to prepare them for graduation and college success. The planning focuses upon four change indicators that signal health for a school district: (1) parent involvement and community engagement; (2) student engagement; (3) teaching quality; and (4) curriculum quality and access.

The initiative reaches U.S. states where demographic shifts parallel a microcosm of our nation, with young and growing Latino populations. Both a public website and a private social media website support local efforts by offering a place where communities can continue to build their action plans while linking to local and national networks and resources.

An example of impact is the Mobile Education

Foundation, which expanded its newly-created educational strategic plan by developing a more significant focus on appropriate educational responses for English learners. In New Orleans, the Blueprint for Action dialogues enabled attendees from the Katrina recovery district to examine the new dynamic of African American and Latino students within the school structure and ways to better support education opportunities for returning families and children post-Katrina. Thus, they expanded opportunities to increase graduation rates for Latino and African American youth.

IDRA launched a new set of online educational materials designed to help communities take on this process themselves and expand the circle of support and leadership (www.idra.org). Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi are primary targets for the effort, funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Other states have participated, including Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Key questions begin the discussions, uncovering beliefs about the purpose of education, not just for a talented elite, but as the foundation of a pluralistic society that opens doors for all. We cannot create equity in public schools without a core of shared beliefs about the purpose of public education.

Wheatley adds: “In the absence of shared beliefs and desires, people are not motivated to seek out one another and develop relationships. They coexist by defining clear boundaries, creating respectful and disrespectful distances, developing self-protective behaviors, and using power politics to get what they want.” (2005)

The realization of common meaning unleashes the co-creative process, inspiring collaborative action uniquely suited to each community as leaders see how they are interconnected across race and sector. The actions that ensue from the discussions are expressions of the collective power to achieve a goal that is important to all: the reshaping of our schools, as we reshape ourselves and our relationships with one another.

(cont. on Page 4)

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IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

For more information about the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

Additional resources are available online at http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity/

funded by the U.S. Department of Education

(Framing the Context for Fruitful Cross-Race Community, continued from Page 3)

Because the work is at the core of our democratic principles, the voices at the table must include educators, parents, communities, grassroots organizations, the business sector, leaders in policy and faith communities, and student voices joining together in the planning process. This work is for all, and each has a unique role to play. What can we do together?

Nurture respect, love and justice through dialogue, listening and joint action. We can make a huge difference by recognizing the value of all children and what they represent for our collective future. We must go beyond our own personal history to break down stereotypes and fear, heal old wounds and move forward together in strengthening public schools.

Teach our children to value diversity and seek out different perspectives. Children educated within an environment that teaches diversity and respect will be more loving and compassionate leaders in the future. The student voices in this initiative are strong and poignant testimonies for the change that is needed, woven from the fabric of their current realities, articulated eloquently in pictures, words and stories.

Recognize the gifts that community and family have to offer and learn from them. Recognizing the knowledge and assets within families and communities is an integral step in valuing cultural and strengthening in our democracy. People within a community care for one another's well being, are concerned with their mutual future and share accountability to ensure strong public schools.

Value and preserve our languages. Just as we become more cognizant of the need to preserve nature and its delicate balance, we must cherish language as human expression. The fear that undergirds the "English only" effort must be replaced by valuing language as culture. We no longer take lightly the extinguishing of a species, yet we think nothing of silencing a child in his or her linguistic expression.

Do no harm. Psychological scars and loss of confidence inflicted upon children, teachers and families in the practice of high-stakes testing are immeasurable and cannot be justified under any circumstance. We must seek other more effective alternatives to measure quality teaching.

Speak with courage; silence is not an option. Inequity in our education system hurts everyone

and damages countless generations to come. We cannot afford silence, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "A time comes when silence is betrayal." When speaking about injustice and racism, passivity is collusion. Much earlier, St. Catherine of Sienna reminded us that we must speak the truth in a million voices. It is silence that kills.

Unite with others. Ask "Who else needs to be here?" and involve everyone who cares. Participation is the only change process that endures, it is a gradual process over time that requires generosity of spirit and patience.

John F. Kennedy said, "Our country cannot afford to be materially rich and spiritually poor." It's time to re-build our schools with renewed sense of purpose through diverse networks, where individuals can think and act together more meaningfully. Our energy and courage will renew when we care deeply about something bigger than ourselves. Together, our human spirit will grow, and we will fulfill a greater promise in education than we could have ever dreamed alone.

Resources

Robledo Montecel, M., & C.L. Goodman, eds. *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).

Robledo Montecel, M. "A Quality Schools Action Framework – Framing Systems Change for Student Success," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, November-December 2005).

Wheatley, M. *Finding Our Way – Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005).

Wheatley, M., and M. Kellner-Rogers. *A Simpler Way* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996).

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Robledo Montecel, M., & C. Goodman (eds). *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).

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- Fulfilling the Promise of Mendez and Brown Blueprint Dialogue website and resources

Visit www.idra.org for more information.

Sowing Seeds of Tolerance and Justice

A Mandate for Educational Equity and Excellence

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: Like others, IDRA is deeply saddened by the tragic events in Tucson and the tone of discourse in recent months. Intolerance and injustice undoubtedly has played a role in where we find ourselves today. These issues are at the core of IDRA's mission. Clearly, there is much more work to be done across the country.

Educators, community and parents must work together to sow seeds of educational equity and excellence in a time when our nation needs more than ever to feel united. We have a great opportunity and a great responsibility to create future leaders who embrace the benefits of diversity and who set an example of justice and democracy within a civil society. We share a commitment to ensure quality teaching, excellence and equity in education as we prepare students to be responsible adults who value diversity and seek a better quality of life for all.

An educated but intolerant populace may appear to increase our standing as a nation economically but will only result in leaders unable to interact effectively with in our interconnected world. We cannot look solely to test scores to measure the quality of education we provide for our children. We must pay close attention to our interactions and look within to eradicate the evils of exclusion and hate that have potential to destroy rather than build up our schools and communities.

This article speaks to partnerships between parents and educators in sowing seeds of collaboration and inclusion for a better life for all children. It is an important topic as we hear about an alarming escalation of bullying and violence and as we see the consequences of lack of attention in preventing these behaviors. Together, we can promote positive social behaviors for a more just and peaceful world through healthy interactions with others who differ from ourselves in race, language, ethnicity or perspective.

MacArthur Prize-winning educator, Vivian Paley, describes one powerful action she took with her kindergarten class to foster more positive social

relations. Paley was concerned about how to keep students from being ignored or isolated by their classmates. So, she instituted a simple rule, "You can't say, 'You can't play.'" She describes how she helped very young children overcome and prevent loneliness and rejection that are often tied to negative or violent behavior as adults.

What are some seeds of tolerance and justice we can sow together at home and school to foster a more civil society? Here are a few to consider.

Sow seeds of curiosity. Teach children to be *curious* rather than *certain* (Wheatley, 2005). There is great benefit in developing a relationship with those we believe are different from ourselves or who we think we cannot understand. Often we are afraid or unwilling to listen to anyone with a different point of view than our own. We cannot be creative without change, often without some inherent confusion involved in change. If we value our own perspective so much that we are unwilling to listen to others, we limit our ability to grow. Teach children to love learning, to be genuinely curious and to be open to new ideas and diverse perspectives.

Sow seeds of justice. Help children develop a sense of justice as fundamental to democracy. Justice does not mean we all need to agree with one another and share the same perspectives. We can join our hearts even if we have very different opinions, views and approaches. Teach children to include rather than exclude, not to fear listening to other ideas, and not to fear speaking about their own perspective even if it differs from others. Show them ways to take a stand for equity and justice.

Sow seeds of patience and listening. Teach children to respectfully listen to others. Sow seeds of patience by teaching that conversation begins with good listening skills. Foster interests in new ideas without thinking immediately that these pose a threat. Respect and peacefulness are grounded in the ability to hear and see others, and recognize
(cont. on Page 6)

We must learn how to adapt our schools and homes by sowing seeds of equity and excellence, learning more about the diverse communities our schools serve, and tapping into the richness in culture and community resources that can improve teaching and learning.

(Sowing Seeds of Tolerance and Justice, continued from Page 5)

that we can learn from everyone, even those we feel are most different from ourselves. Practice active listening by helping children repeat what they have heard the other person say. Teach them to ask clarifying questions without pre-judging and to avoid incendiary or accusatory language that polarizes differences and can escalate into destructive conversation and behaviors. Show children how to listen for areas of disagreement and view these as opportunities to grow and learn.

Sow seeds of tolerance. Expand the worldview of children by exposing them to a wide perspective of cultures, languages and races. The bedrock of democracy is our diversity. Children must be taught that diversity is a treasure that strengthens our nation, not something to be feared but appreciated and valued. In classrooms and at home, this can be done by a variety of books, resources, and use of the Internet with adult guidance. Discuss these together and help children compare and consider perspectives other than their own.

Sow seeds of collaboration. Be mindful of healthy and unhealthy language that is used at school and home. Instruction that reflects the knowledge and appreciation of the students' community is a wonderful start. This begins with an asset-based, valuing approach from teachers and parents. Watch for how you describe the neighborhoods and families of other students (Lindsey, Karns & Myatt, 2010). Evaluate ways in which you are willing to examine your own assumptions about people from low-income, impoverished or diverse communities. Collaboration must be the standard for professional leaders as well as in families. Practice modeling for children of all ages "getting to yes" with others of different views.

We must learn how to adapt our schools and homes by sowing seeds of equity and excellence, learning more about the diverse communities our schools serve, and tapping into the richness in culture and community resources that can improve teaching and learning (see Rodríguez, García & Villarreal, 2010). As Terrell (2009) has said, the journey begins within as we individually explore our own presumptions, prejudice and fear.

Resources

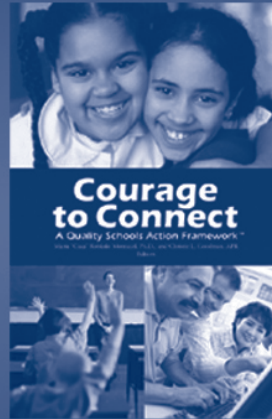
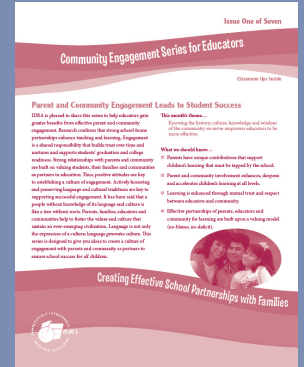
Lindsey, R.B., & M.S. Karns, K. Myatt. *Culturally Proficient Education: An Asset-Based Response to Conditions of Poverty* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, Sage, 2010).
 Paley, V.G. *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).
 Rodríguez, R., & J. García, A. Villarreal. *Community Engagement Series for Educators* (San Antonio, Texas:

Community Engagement Series for Educators

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., Juanita C. García, Ph.D., and Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

This series is designed for educators to give ideas for creating a culture of engagement with parents and community as partners to ensure school success for all children. There are seven issues in the series, one for each month of the school year. Each includes a theme for the month, classroom tips, an equity goal for the month, ideas for breaking down barriers, a self assessment tool, and an action planning guide and resource suggestions.

Available from IDRA for \$15.00 per set plus shipping.
 (No ISBN; 4 Pages per Issue; 7 Issues; 2010)



Courage to Connect A Quality Schools Action Framework™

Edited by María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.,
 and Christie L. Goodman, APR

The Quality Schools Action Framework shows how communities and schools can work together to strengthen their capacity to be successful with all students. The framework is based on experience and empirical evidence that emerges from existing theories of change. It gives a model for assessing a school's conditions and outcomes, for identifying leverage points for improvement, and for informing action.

"I believe it is time to dream together – to dream about education not for a lucky few but for all. And it is time to make the dream of education for all become fact."
 – Dr. María Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO

Available now for purchase from IDRA (\$15 plus s&h)

To learn more about the book, visit www.idra.org/couragetconnect to view the framework, see the detailed table of contents, read an excerpt and listen to related podcasts.

Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).
 Terrell, R.D., & R.B. Lindsey. *Culturally Proficient Leadership: The Personal Journey Begins Within* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, Sage, 2009).
 Wheatley, M. *Finding Our Way—Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005).
 Wheatley, M.J. *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002).
 Wilkins, A. *Yes We Can: Telling Truths and Dispelling Myths about Race and Education in America* (Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2006).

Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., is director of development at IDRA. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Don't Repeat Past Wrongs in Texas Education

Insufficient Attention and Lack of Investment in Education Helped Put Texas Where it Is

A statement by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel

Education is not a luxury that can be taken away when times are hard. Some of the proposed statewide education cuts are irresponsible and shortsighted. They would cut roughly one third of the budget for schools. We already know that this would bring about disastrous results for our youth, for our families, our economy and for our state as a whole.

For example, the proposals would cut or eliminate programs for 4- and 5-year-olds and get rid of up to 100,000 teachers in the classroom. Such cuts would result in more young people leaving school for lack of attention and quality teachers. This would quickly lead to fewer university enrollments at a time when we need more. The Texas Grant program that helps families cover college tuition would be decimated.

One thing we expect of our children is that they pay attention in class. But there are some grown-ups who have not been paying attention to the importance of education. And we are all paying the price.

- In 2002, IDRA determined that the state's lack of attention to the dropout problem had cost us \$488 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenues and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs. But the lack of attention and investment continued. And since 1984, when Texas began counting dropouts, we have lost more than 3 million students. Today, the cumulative cost is \$927 billion.
- In 2003, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board calculated the cost-benefit of enrolling an additional 500,000 students in Texas higher education, finding that the investment would produce more than a 13-fold return. Yet enrollment rates by percentage of the population have not even gone up by 1 percentage point between 2000 and 2009.

- Over a decade ago, then state demographer Steve Murdoch warned Texans that the state would on average be less educated and have lower levels of family income if we did not address projected levels of under-education found among our emerging populations. Today, proposed cuts will contribute to continuing the under-education of Texas youth, resulting in diminished earning power, thus assuring decreased median income for Texas in the decades to come.
- As education faces critical funding needs, the proposed solutions for the state's school funding system must be equitable and fair. The improvement in Texas student achievement on national tests in 2008 was fueled in part by the 12-year span of improved and equitable funding that was provided to all Texas schools. But, the state abandoned that improvement in recent years. So today, a classroom of 25 students in the Texas Rio Grande Valley has 250,000 fewer dollars for the education of its children than does a district in a high wealth area of the state.

These are indeed difficult times, times that call us to create a better world for our children and for our children's children. This means that certain things are just not OK.

It is not OK to continue funding gaps that harm our children's chances of going to college.

It is not OK to put our children in overcrowded classes and to plan school budgets that assume many children will drop out of school.

It is not OK to dumb down the curriculum and track our kids into vocational classes.

It is not OK to slash college financial aid and funnel a few dollars to the so-called "deserving poor."

It is not OK to make a college education

beyond the reach of working families and young people who have worked hard for an opportunity to learn.

It is not OK to release schools from their responsibility to provide an excellent education for every child.

It is not OK to mess with Texas' young people.

Every dollar that we invest in education yields a \$9 return in productivity and greater sources of income for the community and the state. We know from experience that the proposed cuts in education would be disastrous for the economy. We already know that Texas can't compete in the global marketplace if we do not get serious about creating top quality schooling for all students.

Our state is in a financial and revenue crisis. But defaulting on the state's responsibility to educate our students is not a solution. All available options must be considered, including new revenue, tapping the Rainy Day Fund, delaying the August payment, and considering the structure of the Franchise Tax. It is imperative that we have excellent and equitable education for all Texas school children. We call on policymakers to have the courage to do what it takes to invest in our state's children. The future of us all depends on it. It is not OK to mess with Texas.

Online Resources

The Status of School Finance Equity in Texas
– A 2009 Update

Flip-book: *School Finance Reform in Texas*
– IDRA Perspectives on Funding Changes
Adopted by the 2009 Texas Legislature

Podcast: "Implications of Inequitable School Funding" IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 68 with Encarnación Garza, Jr., assistant professor at UTSA

IDRA website section: Fair Funding for the Common Good



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

– *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework, IDRA (2010)*

Intercultural Development Research Association

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- “Bilingual Stories for Young Learners,” featuring Juanita García, Ph.D., and Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.
- “Pitfalls and Promises of Interactive Science Notebooks,” featuring Veronica Betancourt, M.A.
- “Learning Content Learning English,” featuring Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.
- “Creating Dynamic Math Classrooms,” featuring Paula Johnson, M.A.

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