# The Role of School Governance Efficacy in Building an Equity Context for School Reform

## by Bradley Scott, Ph.D.

Much has been written on the need for school governance efficacy for school reform to result in high student achievement. But the research has been thin concerning the effect of school boards on student achievement. We must consider the importance of governance efficacy as one of the essential drivers for creating an equity context through which school reform occurs.

This article examines ways in which school governance can guide the creation and maintenance of an equity context within which reform can occur to create quality schools that appropriately educate, graduate and prepare all students for college and life.

In his confirmation hearing before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, the then designee for Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, testified: "Quality education… is the civil rights issue of our generation. It is the only path out of poverty, the only road to a more equal, just and fair society. In fact, I believe the fight for quality education is about much

more than education. It's a fight for social justice. I come to this work with three deeply held beliefs. First, that every child from every background absolutely can be successful. Rural, suburban, urban, gifted, special education, English language learner, poor, minority – it simply doesn't matter… When we as adults do our job and give them opportunities to succeed, all of our children can be extraordinarily successful. Second, when we fail to properly educate children we, as educators, perpetuate poverty and perpetuate social failure… And third, our children have one chance – one chance at a quality education, so we must work with an extraordinary sense of urgency. Simply put, we cannot wait because they cannot wait." (The Washington Post, 2009)

Secretary Duncan also noted in a presentation to the House budget committee: "There's a lot I don't like about *No Child Left Behind*, but I will always give it credit for exposing our nation's dreadful achievement gaps. It changed American education forever and forced us to take responsibility for every single child regardless of race, background or ability." (Nagel, 2009)

The notion of "taking responsibility for every child" has to become something more than a slogan or a phrase. It must become a rallying call for every school district to galvanize action across sector, race and circumstance to lead to transformation so that all students are successful.

Dr. María Robledo Montecel, IDRA president, has presented a way communities can take responsibility by examining "contextual and moderating factors that may impede or accelerate school system change" (2005). She presented the Quality Schools Action Framework as "a model for assessing school conditions and outcomes, identifying leverage points for improvement, and informing action." The framework poses five key questions: (1) What do we need? (2) How do we make change happen? (3) Which fundamentals must be secured? (4) Where do we focus systems change? and (5) What outcomes will result?" (See graphic on Page 3.)

Dr. Robledo Montecel named two fundamentals as critical to creating

## Quality schools that support high student achievement, school graduation, college attendance, and life success for all diverse learners can only occur in a context of educational equity.

student success – fair funding and governance efficacy – "the resources to effectively serve all students and good governance that facilitates academic achievement and success." She said, "Governance efficacy strengthens school holding power when administrative and supervisory personnel have the capacity to deliver quality educational services to all students, along with the policymaking and pro-active support of a school board to hold on to every student." (2005)

### Governance Efficacy Defined

It is important then to define governance efficacy in detail. For the sake of this article, *governance efficacy* is defined as the power of school boards, among others, to change the face of education in their communities through positive and appropriate policymaking, equitable resource allocation and transparent accountability for all stakeholders. This definition is an expansion of a discussion of school board accountability offered by Dr. Abelardo Villarreal (2007). Dr. Albert Cortez and Dr. Villarreal (2006) also described policy attributes that positively impact access and success for students using a framework originally developed by Dr. Rosana Rodríguez and Dr. Villarreal (Cortez and Villarreal, 2006).

Authors Griffin and Carter Ward identified five characteristics of an effective school board that also help define governance efficacy. According

## In This Issue...

# Governance Efficacy

## Dear reader,

Students are far more likely to graduate and succeed when they are taught by good teachers who expect them to succeed, when courses are challenging and accessible, when parents and community are a meaningful part of schooling, and when young people feel that they belong in school. And quality teaching, rigorous curricula, and parent and student engagement depend on governance efficacy.

Strong governance efficacy means that school leaders – at all levels – have the commitment and the capacity to deliver quality educational services to all students. And it means that school boards, school policies, and school procedures support graduation and success for every student.

This is why IDRA has partnered with thousands of educators and community members across the country to help build effective governance structures and processes that are based on knowledge, action, partnership and commitment. At a fundamental level, effective governance requires developing a habit of vision that is shared by educators, board members and community. Effective governance begins and ends with the expectation that all students will achieve to high standards. Effective governance also requires a willingness to be held accountable and to hold others accountable to the result of excellence and equity for all students, without exception.

In this issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*, Dr. Bradley Scott in his article, "The Role of School Governance Efficacy in Building an Equity Context for School Reform," discusses how school governance looks through an equity and excellence lens. Dr. Rogelio López del Bosque outlines practical approaches for school principals to create a supportive culture for teachers in "Creating a Campus Culture of Teacher High Expectations and Support." And José Rodríguez shares a story of how teacher perceptions of students were transformed in the classroom in his article, "Changing Teacher Perceptions of Students through Coaching and Mentoring – Using an Asset Rather Than a Deficit Lens."

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.

*María Robledo Montecel*



**Quality Schools Action Framework**
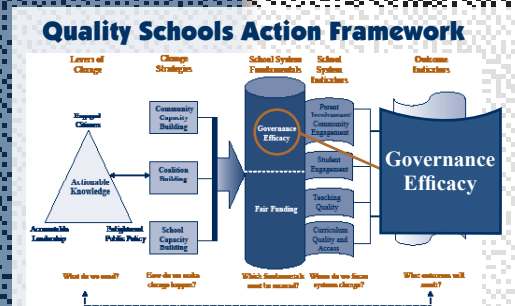
# Creating a Campus Culture of Teacher High Expectations and Support

## by Rogelio López del Bosque, Ed.D.

Teachers are currently under pressure to have a measurable positive impact on student academic achievement. Creating an environment that mitigates this pressure becomes a huge responsibility of a campus principal and administrative team. This type of environment requires that teachers have high expectations of themselves and of their students and feel that they are supported and valued for their contributions.

This article provides some insights from a former principal of a successful high school with students who are traditionally underserved and that defied widespread myths and attitudes about certain student populations.

If we are to make schools work for all children and be accountable, we must also provide the needed support, understanding, valuing and validation of our teachers. As administrators, this is perhaps one place where we can take the first steps to reform and transformation.

Rick DuFour states: "Humans have a fundamental longing to believe we are successful in what we do – our need to achieve. Educators are typically denied this sense of success. Bombarded with too many state, national and district standards for students to master, teachers are often unclear as to what they are supposed to accomplish" (Villarreal and Scott, 2008).

So what can we all do to help support all of our teachers? When teachers are valued, understood, appreciated and supported to do what they are supposed to do – to teach – they respond positively, feeling respected and involved in moving the school vision forward. Teachers, then, support each other and work collaboratively to support the school, students and parents. They feel empowered and are able to create a caring and nurturing family atmosphere where they value each other. They can overcome many of their hardships by focusing on what is best for the individual students. They develop high expectations and in turn value the students for their knowledge, culture and values.

As a high school principal, I worked hard at creating an environment that valued everyone on staff and the students, parents and community members. It was always my policy to understand the teachers first, treat them as professionals and support them at all times. In five years, the school moved from a state *acceptable* school to an *exemplary* campus.

We need to continue to support our teachers at all times. We need to change the paradigm to one of respect for the knowledge and experience they have and for all the effort that goes into their daily work. We can no longer blame the teachers, parents, students or anyone else for that matter. There is not enough time. We must move forward in providing our children with the best education possible as guaranteed by the federal guidelines.

So let's move from blaming to shared responsibility for educating our children, and we can certainly start by providing the necessary support so they can focus on really teaching the children.

The following are very effective, practical approaches to help maintain a supportive culture for teachers in creating a successful school.

## Be Accessible and Advocate

- Be pro-active in making yourself visible as much as possible around the school. Let it be known that you are there to support and be of service to the teaching staff.
- "Seek to understand" and be a good listener to teachers. Help resolve issues or problems with students or content or, in some cases, personal issues in their lives.
- Keep an open door policy for your teachers. Teachers have urgent and immediate needs and require a response from you as an administrator. There should be no barriers preventing teachers from talking to you when they need you. If we want teachers to teach, then support them, listen to understand and get them what they need so that they can carry on with their teaching.
- Do not keep your teachers waiting to talk to you. Always respond to questions or concerns they have communicated with you via e-mail with concrete examples and suggestions they can apply in the classroom.
- Advocate for teachers when they are faced with non-constructive criticism. Work with teachers, other staff, students and community people to hear and resolve concerns in a way that is best for students.
- Attend community functions where you can talk about the work your teachers are doing and their dedication.

## Create a Culture of Support that Builds Teachers' High Expectations

- Teachers need to *know*, not just *believe*, that you support them in meeting their top priority: to teach. Teachers are at the forefront each day before every period, and there

is little time to waste. In essence, they need all the support possible. Limit the classroom interruptions from the office or the PA system. Limit interruptions to emergencies only or very urgent matters.
- Support your teachers on discipline issues. Teachers cannot teach when there are constant disruptions. Deal with the discipline problem and do not send the student back to the classroom right away. Get the assignment from the teacher and place the student in the vicinity of your office. Take the time to have a good talk with the student and contact the parents if necessary. Teachers need to know that you will support them.
- Give office staff very specific directives to provide assistance to teachers when they need it. Time is precious to teachers, and they occasionally need things immediately. Telling a teacher that the copier is broken or that the office does not have time to prepare materials is not acceptable. Set up some back-up systems to meet the teacher's immediate needs. Remember, teachers should be in the classroom teaching and not having to worry about their materials being prepared or available in time. There is no time for office politics when our focus is children.
- Clerical, custodial and office staff must understand that they are support personnel to the teachers and must provide immediate assistance. They should be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

## Acknowledge Teachers and Personalize Support

- Prepare cards, in your own handwriting for a personalized touch for special occasions, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Teachers appreciate this very much.
- Call teachers at home when they are out ill. Did you ever get a call from your principal just to inquire about how you were feeling and to be assured that things would be taken care of in your absence? They need to know that you are calling because you are concerned about their health rather than just asking when they will return.
- Acknowledge and reward teachers at least once a month. Always have coffee, hot water for tea, and filtered

**When teachers are valued, understood, appreciated and supported to do what they are supposed to do – to teach – then they respond positively, feeling respected and involved in moving the school vision forward.**

or bottled water. Bring some goodies, such as fruit and granola bars. If you have a parent-teacher organization, ask members to help you sponsor a luncheon every six or nine weeks for recognition of your teachers. It is not that expensive, and it goes a long, long way.

## Build Supportive Leadership Among Administrative Staff

- Be a role model and mentor to all teachers and staff, in particular, the newer ones and ACP teachers who need coaching, mentoring and validation. Even your veteran teachers need mentoring and coaching on occasion.
- Trust teachers and make them feel like the professionals they are. Many have great ideas, abilities and talents that you may not know about. Many demonstrate great leadership with

new and refreshing ideas that can certainly contribute to the school culture. This also enables them to buy in to a process, especially when the ideas come from them.

- Provide opportunities for leadership among teachers. Rotate department heads, assign projects to certain teachers, give additional tasks to those working on an advanced degree, but make sure that you support them in all phases.
- Allow all teachers an opportunity to participate in the hiring of other new teachers and staff, specifically when it is in their department.
- Provide information on the latest research. Ask teachers working on an advanced degree to share new information or findings they have come across in their studies, especially as it relates to the issues your school is currently working through.
- Provide teachers and staff with all possible data available about your school. Be the leader, and show them how to use the information so they can get true pictures of strengths and weaknesses.
- Teachers in site-based management should be involved in true decision making and should be kept abreast of what is going on in the school.
- Continue developing your professional learning community teams so that learning can be shared among staff. Practice the principles and support them as they themselves develop the process by providing the time to meet. It is also critical that administration attend as many of these meetings as possible.
- Be an advocate for professional development and allow your teachers to attend professional development of their choice. Allow some each year to attend national or state conferences.
- Do not keep teachers for training after school. If you are providing

them with the support they need, they are teaching and working hard all day. At the end of the day, they are tired and need to take care of their personal lives. Saturday's are days that can be used for training, but sparingly. Don't forget that teachers have families and other obligations.

## Build Parent and Community Support

- Be a role model in valuing parents. Create a parent engagement and involvement process that supports the school, students and teachers.
- Teachers need to know that parents also value their efforts in teaching their children and that they will support the teacher as an additional partner while working with their child.
- Have parents become active participants in your site-based committee. They can become great leaders and advocates for your school and staff. You want them as partners in education not just as fundraisers.
- Make the schools parent friendly and do more than posting signs in other languages. Train your office staff to welcome parents respectfully at all times.
- Provide immediate assistance to parents. This means do not keep them waiting, have someone available to speak their language, and if they wish to see a teacher, set up an appointment with the teacher first. Interruptions in the middle of the class period are not acceptable.

Although some standards are personal and self-initiated, teachers have school and district goals to meet. Passing the state-mandated exams and meeting annual yearly progress creates high levels of stress for everyone. Teachers are probably the most affected. Many are also haunted by the thoughts and possible threats of

having their school disestablished and then having to seek another position with an attached stigma.

The current economic crisis has only escalated these levels of anxiety. We are not always aware of the detrimental affect it may be having on their personal lives, families and surroundings. This can be very counter productive if we are to move forward to transform schools. Regardless of whether or not the pressure and anxiety is self imposed, teachers are having a difficult time dealing with so many demands and are in dire need of our support as administrators.

The tone and transformation process of a school is set by the principal and administration. Valuing and supporting our teachers is an important start in this transformation to make the school work for all your children.

## Resources

Villarreal, A., and B. Scott. "IDRA's Community of Learners Approach to Instructional Quality – Three Critical Questions that are Rarely Asked in a Curriculum Audit," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2008).

Rogelio López del Bosque, Ed.D., is a senor education associate in IDRA's Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

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- Podcasts on school leadership
- IDRA's coaching and mentoring model
- Resources for creating a family friendly school

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# The Role of a Family Friendly Principal

IDRA has previously published the principles underlying our Family Leadership in Education model, as well as how those principles apply directly to a school principal (see resources below). The article on Page 4 by Dr. Rogelio Lopez del Bósque on "Creating a Campus Culture of Teacher High Expectations and Support" includes some information about parent engagement. He was an excellent model of IDRA's family leadership principles during his five-year role as principal of Eastwood Academy in the Houston Independent School District. Below are highlights of principal behaviors like his that are congruent with IDRA's family leadership principles.

**The family friendly principal creates a campus that is welcoming, warm and accepting of all families.** He or she models, expects all staff to emulate, and demands, respect and excellent customer service to all who enter the campus with a very special focus on the families of the students who are enrolled at the school.

**The family friendly principal operates from a "valuing" perspective about children and their families.** All students and their families, regardless of social class, educational background or language spoken, are seen as having great merit, intelligence and many gifts to offer.

**The family friendly principal sees parents and families as key resources for understanding the children and as partners in seeking the best way to teach the children.** Parents receive critical educational information in a language and vocabulary that is comprehensible to them. They are seen as a key resource on information about the students. Conversations, dialogue and many forms of two-way communication are the norm, and all parents' ideas, concerns and suggestions are taken seriously.

**The family friendly principal considers family input important in all aspects of the educational enterprise.** Conversations about budget, curricula and instruction are conducted with parents in meetings and one-on-one. Special efforts are made to explain jargon and complex educational concepts in ways understandable to those who are lay persons in relation to education.

**The family friendly principal is creative in finding connections, collaborations and partnerships with families.** Parents participate in a variety of ways, although traditional volunteerism is replaced with more critical participation. Parents' educational and participatory needs are considered, and relevant classes, events and participation opportunities are offered.

The family friendly principal not only says the words that are congruent with IDRA's principles but walks the talk. Each principle is validated by the actual context of the school.

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**Articles and podcasts for more information…**
Go to the IDRA Newsletter Plus for quick links.

- IDRA **Texas Parent Information and Resource Center** web site http://www.idra.org/Texas_IDRA_PIRC.htm/

- **IDRA Family Leadership in Education – Principles,** *IDRA Newsletter* (April 2008)

- **"IDRA's Family Leadership Principles,"** article by A.M. Montemayor, *IDRA Newsletter* (September 2007)

- **"Creating Culturally Responsive Parent Engagement – Principal Shares Strategies for Success,"** article by R.G. Rodríguez, R. López del Bosque, and A. Villarreal, *IDRA* Newsletter (November-December 2008)

- **"Family Friendly at the School Door"** – Classnotes Podcast #55, with Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed.

- **"Families and Teachers Communicating"** – Classnotes Podcast #43, with Dr. Rogelio López del Bosque

- **"Valuing Families in Children's Education"** – Classnotes Podcast #11, with Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed.

**Visit the Parent Information and Resource Center online:**
**http://www.idra.org/Texas_IDRA_PIRC**

# Changing Teacher Perceptions of Students through Coaching and Mentoring
## Using an Asset Rather Than a Deficit Lens

by José L. Rodríguez, M.A.

The demands to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) have administrators and teachers looking for specific panaceas to solve problems associated with the lack of success in meeting student needs, particularly within diverse student populations.

Research tells us that students who value themselves and who feel valued and respected by their teachers are more likely to become academically engaged and successful in school. This article describes how IDRA's coaching and mentoring approach can transform teacher expectations.

Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, Christine Cziko and Lori Hurwitz's (1999) "Dimensions of Classroom Life Supporting Reading Apprenticeship" provides a framework, in this case, to define mentoring activities. Each of these dimensions must be strengthened to embody the importance of valuing and respecting cultural and linguistic differences in a diverse classroom.

Staff at IDRA have developed a metacognitive mapping tool (see Page 10) specifically designed to help English language learners focus on the use of graphics, key vocabulary, and thinking processes needed to decipher text or test questions.

For several months, an IDRA

> **Research tells us that students who value themselves and who feel valued and respected by their teachers are more prone to become academically engaged and successful in school.**

consultant served as coach and mentor for one particular cohort of content area teachers. IDRA's coaching and mentoring includes co-planning and co-teaching. Over time, the consultant established a relationship with the students and teachers. A safe environment was established. Students knew that, when the consultant was teaching, the class and everyone would be engaged in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

As the state testing dates come closer, it appears that teachers must think only about the test, leading them to focus on strategies to pass benchmark after benchmark to the exclusion of a rigorous curriculum.

For one particular school visit, the IDRA consultant prepared by completing a released version of the state test to experience what the students go through while taking the exam. The consultant – an English language learner himself – then analyzed and

reflected on the questions. It had been a difficult task. Not only did students have to read and understand the question, they also viewed the illustrations with many questions and had to understand the images as well. There were several trouble spots that the consultant encountered. During the school visit, the consultant went into a classroom led by a teacher who had practically given up. She resisted trying new ideas. In her mind, only a few of her students would succeed anyway. The consultant relied on IDRA's set of pedagogical principles, that permeate all IDRA activities, and particularly focused on IDRA's Engagement-Based Sheltered Instruction (EBSI) model, to create a mentoring strategy.

## Social Dimension of Classroom Life

According Schoenbach, et al. (1999), the *social dimension* is established by the teacher and students by creating an environment that is safe and conducive to learning. The social dimension enables students to practice what they are learning and to feel secure enough to make mistakes and struggle with the confusion that comes from not being able to understand the texts.

Teachers need to differentiate instruction by making modifications to ensure that their English language

learners are actively engaged throughout the lesson regardless of their English language proficiency level (Villarreal, 2009).

In the classrooms at this particular school, the social dimension has been in place, and the students feel comfortable with everyone, including the IDRA consultant. No one is left out, and everyone participates in the lesson. Dr. Abelardo Villarreal (2009) states, "English language learners should be fully integrated into regular classroom instruction for at least 75 percent of the time." At first, there were some students who did not want to participate. The consultant immediately identified them and assigned a role for them.

On the day of the site visit, students worked in small groups of three to four students each. Each group received a concept map and a picture from the sample state test. The students first were to list as many key words related to the picture that they could write down in two minutes. Students reviewed the list and identified the key concept or the big idea related to the key vocabulary. Each group then presented the key concept and the list to the rest of the class.

It is during these presentations that students get to experience and

practice active listening. The IDRA consultant then asked the students to generate questions related to the key concept and the picture that they thought might be good test questions. One student stated, "We never get opportunities to write questions for a test, we only answer them."

## Personal Dimension of Classroom Life

The *personal dimension* described by Schoenbach, et al. (1999) enables students to use a wide range of metacognitive and cognitive strategies to make sense of the text.

The students felt empowered to write down their questions and

to stand up in front of the class and explain why they generated such a question and give an answer with confidence and a sense of pride. The IDRA consultant then took the sample test questions and had the students read the questions that corresponded to their pictures. The students were amazed that the test questions were very similar to the questions they came up with. During the process of generating questions, the students were using a variety of cognitive strategies that they had already learned from past experiences.

The third dimension of the model described below focuses on adding cognitive strategies to their expanding repertoire. The metacognitive concept map that the IDRA consultant provided for the students is another tool to use while taking a test or in general learning. Students can jot down the steps of the map on the margins or on a piece of scrap paper.

One student pointed out that now she would have to "really pay close attention to the pictures in the test because they can be tricky."

## Cognitive Dimension of Classroom Life

The *cognitive dimension* enables

students to use different strategies to skim through the text or simply view a picture and identify the big idea or key concept being taught. Students and the teacher monitor for comprehension to see if learning is occurring by having students paraphrase or summarize what has been taught.

It was gratifying to see the teacher glance over and smile at the IDRA consultant as if saying, "I've taught them well!" It was interesting to observe the students' problem solving to ensure that their questions captured the essence of the picture and that the questions would match the objective being taught.
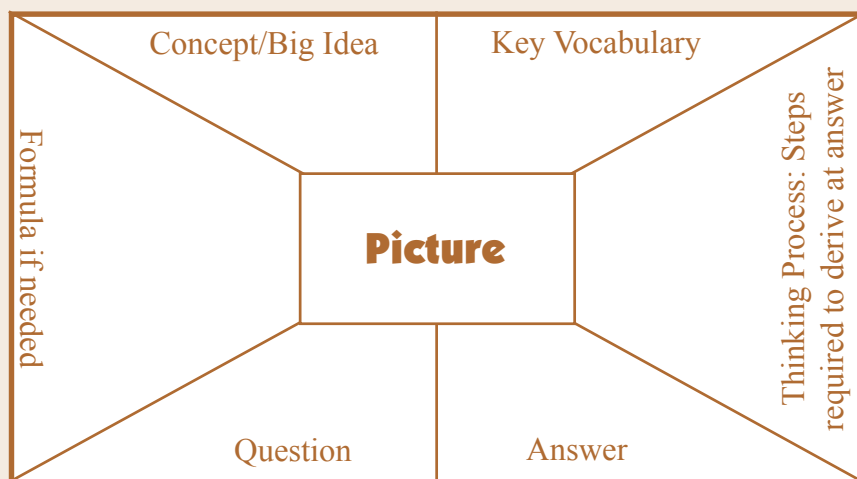
Students were successfully engaged in the activity. Josie Danini Cortez states: "Successful engagement means there is no escape, no excuse, no exit for any student. It means that as a teacher, administrator, faculty member or counselor, it is your job to convince each and every student that he or she matters, that they have something valuable to contribute to their school and their community" (2009).

After the activity, the students felt as if they had contributed to their own education and to the instruction.

## Knowledge-building Dimension of Classroom Life

The fourth dimension is the *knowledge-building dimension* where the students build their understanding of the content and expand their schemata. Through the activity that the IDRA consultant was conducting, the students were using their prior knowledge to participate in meaningful conversations that were relevant and helped them understand the world around them. The students were now able to understand their text because they were helping each other and contributing to their own knowledge rather than depending on a teacher-led lecture.

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## Metacognitive Mapping Tool

| | Concept/Big Idea | Key Vocabulary | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Formula if needed | | Picture | | Thinking Process: Steps required to derive at answer |
| | Question | Answer | |

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association.

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## Metacognitive Dimension of Classroom Life

The fifth dimension is the heart of the model. All of the other dimensions are tied together with the *metacognitive conversation dimension*, "an ongoing conversation in which teacher and student think about and discuss their personal relationships to reading, the social environment and resources of the classroom, their cognitive activity, and the kinds of knowledge required to make sense of the text" (Schoenbach, et al., 1999).

The "Dimensions of Classroom Life Supporting Reading Apprenticeship" model was clearly observable in the classroom demonstration lesson. The combination of the model coupled with the EBSI model are beneficial for language development in sheltered instruction classrooms.

After the demonstration lesson, the teachers met with the IDRA consultant for a debriefing meeting. They were impressed at how much the students knew about the content. The teachers agreed that they learned that they must allow their students to contribute to their own knowledge by encouraging more meaningful conversations in their classrooms.

The English language learners were able to practice their second language in a safe environment. Their teachers had an opportunity to see that their English language learners do know and understand the concepts being taught. They just need an opportunity to use the language they are acquiring in a meaningful manner that is safe for them.

## Resources

Cortez, J.D. "Engaging Ourselves to Engage Our Students," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2009).

Schoenbach, R., and C. Greenleaf, C. Cziko, L. Hurwitz. *Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Improving Reading in Middle and High School Classrooms* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

Villarreal, A. "Ten Principles that Guide the Development of an Effective Educational Plan for English Language Learners at the Secondary Level – Part II," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2009).

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José L. Rodríguez, M.A., is a former education associate in the IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

# Student Voices

English language learner students in a South Texas school district were surveyed by IDRA in 2008 about their science learning. Below is a sample of their responses.

**What are some things teachers do that really help you learn science?**
- They make themselves available after class for tutoring, and they give us good strategies.
- Explain what the work is about.
- Do experiments and help us a lot in anything we have a problem with.
- Do experiments in the form of games.
- Show you steps to remember the importance of what we are studying about.
- They give examples that have to do with your life.
- The teacher translates the class.
- Explaining with something related to what we already know.

**What advice would you give to teachers and the school to help you be successful in science?**
- I guess make it simple, and try not to scare the students.
- To have fun with the students while teaching.
- The same thing as every class, to really explain to us carefully each problem.

- Help students with the instructions.
- To make experiments or other activities so we can understand.
- Do experiments, and also do a lot of vocabulary.
- Use pictures and key words.

**When did you enjoy learning science the most? Why?**
- By having projects, I learn things that I didn't learn before.
- When the teacher explains and shows demonstrations like videos or whatever.
- When we start doing experiments, we pay more attention.
- When I learn something that I never can forget, and always I can do that work.
- I don't remember enjoying science.
- Because you can see everything that happens with the animals, planets, earth.
- Because I like learning about life, how it works and stuff like that.

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*Role of School* – continued from Page 2

to them, effective school boards: focus on student achievement as the number one job; allocate resources to support students based upon their differing characteristics and needs; watch return on investment and report to the communities they serve with transparency and accountability; use good data to inform policymaking to support student success, and engage the communities they serve in providing real opportunities to give input into policymaking process (2006).

In a similar manner, the National School Boards Association defined the "Key Work of School Boards" by identifying a framework of eight interrelated actions that school boards should undertake to engage their communities and

improve student achievement through effective governance. The actions involve work in the areas of: vision, standards, assessment, accountability, alignment, climate, collaboration and community engagement, and continuous improvement. (See a detailed discussion of each of these actions at the NSBA web site at www.nsba.org/MainMenu/Governance/KeyWork.aspx).

There is one critical piece that is missing that seems to be strongly suggested by Secretary Duncan's comments above. Quality schools that support high student achievement, school graduation, college attendance, and life success for all diverse learners can only occur in a context of *educational equity,* such as where the Goals of Educational Equity

and School Reform (Scott, 1999; Scott, 2000) create a high equity context for action, transformation and school reform. While it appears to be implied in the research and work of the authors cited, it is clear to this writer that the goal of equity must be specifically stated – not merely implied – and it must be fore-front in any work that seriously embraces "quality education as the civil rights issue of our generation."

I have previously described *systemic equity* as, "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, personal and social responsibility, and self sufficiency for school and for life" (2000).

Strategic and focused implementation of the Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform is critical to the creation of systemic equity.

## The Equity Context

The systems and structures a school district puts into place to ensure that no learner is denied the fair and equitable benefit of a quality, sound educational experience afforded to all other students regardless of race, gender, national origin, economic level and handicap is the lens through which all of the business of the organization is filtered. This *is* the work of school boards. It is the challenge of governance efficacy to create a culture that is a high equity context where systemic equity and the Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform become the regular practice of a district's operation (Scott, 2001).

The following questions must be posed and answered before an organization can say that it has employed an equity lens to serve all students regardless of their differing characteristics:

- How does this practice impact all learners?
- What policies, resources and/or other supports are needed to create equitability across different populations?
- What might create a negative or adverse impact on any identifiable population?
- How might that adverse impact be avoided?
- What precautions should we take as we move forward?
- How do we monitor our work to ensure comparable high outcomes for all students?

The Iowa Lighthouse Project supports this notion of a culture of equity.

The project is a 10-year study of the relationship between school board leadership and student learning. The original study was commissioned by the Iowa Association of School Boards in 1998. Over the 10 years since the original study, various phases of the implementation of the findings reveal that school boards make a difference in the creation of high student achievement (IASB, 2001). The study revealed that boards in high achieving school districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs about students and education from low-achieving districts.

The actions of school districts with high achieving students operated in five critically different ways. The school boards:

- Consistently expressed the belief that all students can learn and that schools can teach all students. This "no excuses" belief system resulted in high standards for students and an ongoing dedication to improvement.
- Were far more knowledgeable about teaching and learning issues, including school improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development. They were able to clearly describe the purposes and processes of school and identify the board's role in supporting those efforts.
- Used data and other information on student needs and results to make policy decisions.
- Created a supportive workplace for the staff, including regular professional development, support for more effective, shared leadership and decision making, and regularly expressed appreciation to the staff.
- Identified how they connected with and listened to their communities and focused on involving parents in education.

## Six Goals of Education Equity

Public schools can do what they choose to educate their students within certain limits and parameters, but they are accountable for educating all learners to high academic standards and outcomes regardless of differing characteristics of those learners. Bradley Scott, Ph.D., (director of the equity assistance center at IDRA) has developed the following six goals of education equity as a framework for school districts.

**Goal 1:** Comparably high academic achievement and other student outcomes

**Goal 2:** Equitable access and inclusion

**Goal 3:** Equitable treatment

**Goal 4:** Equitable opportunity to learn

**Goal 5:** Equitable resources

**Goal 6:** Accountability

For more information see: http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity/Six_Goals_of_Education_Equity/

Boards in high achieving school districts focused on policies supporting changes in the conditions and the environment, i.e., the context of practice. In other words, these boards used their authority, power and decision making capacity to promulgate policy that led to a transformation of the culture of schooling that ultimately improved achievement for all students.

This research describes an example of high equity context. The lens for increased student achievement reflects a push for the sustained implementation of systemic equity where the Goals of Educational Equity are used to impact policy, administrative action, instructional practice, professional and human development, community and parent engagement and involvement, accountability by all stakeholders, and continual monitoring toward improvement to support high achievement for all diverse students.

Each element of the Quality Schools Action Framework developed by Dr. Robledo Montecel requires equity to be effective. With this framework as the starting point, boards would have to determine how high or low their equity context is. They would have to use their power to create and implement policy and provide the necessary leadership to raise the equity context if reform is to occur and be sustained to lead to increased achievement for all.

## The Final Challenge

Secretary Duncan presented a challenge when he stated: "The biggest barrier, the only remaining barrier in my mind is: do we have the courage? It takes courage to expose our weaknesses with a truly transparent data system. It takes courage to admit our flaws and take steps to address them. It takes courage to always do the right thing by our children, but ultimately we all answer to the truth. Reforming public education is not just a moral obligation.

It absolutely is an economic imperative. It is the foundation for a strong future and a strong society. Education is the civil rights issue of our generation. The fight for quality education is about so much more than education, It's a fight for social justice. It is the only way to achieve the equality that inspired our democracy, that inspired women to stand up for theirs, and then inspired minorities to demand their fair share of the American promise, and it inspires every child to dream." (The Washington Post, 2009)

Finally, it is important to close by noting that every educational institution has an obligation and is challenged to filter its business in support of student success through a lens of educational equity. This lens helps to protect the civil rights of every learner under the law, to guarantee equitable educational opportunity for every learner regardless of his or her differing characteristics, and to provide the appropriate educational supports for school success, post secondary school attendance and completion and life success supported by the necessary resources to make that success possible.

Governance efficacy is critical for creating and sustaining the high equity context for the reform that is needed, and education stakeholders must hold themselves and all others responsible for these outcomes.

## Resources

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Bradley Scott, Ph.D., is director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

# IDRA Receives Spirit of Education Award

In May 2009, the Mexican American Unity Council, Inc., presented to IDRA the "Spirit of Education" award, during its Lifetime Achievement and Scholarship Awards Gala. Dr. María Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO, accepted the award stating: "Tonight, this Spirit of Education award recognizes the hundreds of thousands of people who have worked with us at IDRA over the last 36 years… Since our founding by Dr. Jose Angel Cárdenas, much progress has been made on behalf of children and



Pictured above are staff members who were present (left to right): Leticia Rodríguez, Ed.M.; Adela Solís, Ph.D.; Veronica Betancourt, M.A.; José L. Rodríguez, M.A.; María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.; Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.; Juanita C. García, Ph.D.; Frances M. Guzmán, M.Ed.; Felix Montes, Ph.D.; and Sulema Carreón-Sánchez, M.A.

young people; but much remains to be done… You can count on IDRA to keep faith with the past and to keep step with the present as we continue the fight for a future in which all children have access to excellent neighborhood public schools."

# Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In April, IDRA worked with **8,822** teachers, administrators, parents and higher education personnel through **57** training and technical assistance activities and **155** program sites in **13** states plus Brazil. Topics included:

◆ Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – Anniversary Celebration
◆ Math and Science Classroom Observations
◆ Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Parent Institute
◆ Science Smart!

Participating agencies and school districts included:

◇ Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) Program
◇ Fort Worth Independent School District (ISD), Texas
◇ San Antonio Area Association for Bilingual Education
◇ Mesa Public Schools, Arizona

## Activity Snapshot

Four high school campuses across Texas were experiencing the same problem: Low scores in science. IDRA provided assistance during the school year using its Science Smart! model that focuses on increasing access to science for all students through authentic, inquiry-based situational learning. Levels of implementation were based on each campus' need, and the model is designed cater to the specific equity issues that these campuses face, such as equitable resources, greater access to science opportunities for minorities and females, and the transformation of teaching practices to serve a growing population of English language learners. It also tied in to the curricula that teachers were using and interwove technology and assessment tools. By the end of the school year, 51 teachers were served impacting 6,700 students. Results showed improvement at all of the schools, including double-digit gains on standardized tests at a San Antonio school, a 25 percentage point gain in a west Texas school's exit-level science scores.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

◆ public school teachers
◆ parents
◆ administrators
◆ other decision makers in public education

Services include:

◇ training and technical assistance
◇ evaluation
◇ serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
◇ publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

*For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210-444-1710.*

# Ways IDRA Can Help Your School District…

## Build capacity, turn around low performing campuses, improve teacher effectiveness and increase student achievement with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds

Below are samples of IDRA products and models based on what works for all students, especially English language learners. Details of IDRA technical assistance are available on the IDRA web site by topic area.

### Coaching and Mentoring

**Smart Coaches** – Teacher coaching for success in the content areas.

### Contextual Analysis Toolkit for Setting Baseline and Getting High Impact Results

- Good Schools for Children Learning English – Rubric
- Teacher and Student Efficacy Surveys
- Classroom Observation Analysis
- State-mandated Tests and Benchmarking Analysis
- Teacher Quality Assessment
- Student Engagement Survey
- Key Stakeholder Focus Group Interviews

### Dropout Prevention

- **Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program,** which keeps 98 percent of at-risk students in school.
- **School Holding Power Portal,** an online database of individual school conditions for school and community action.

### Instructional Leadership – Intensive language-across-the-curriculum program created through sustained and intensive campus-based professional development.

### Family Leadership – Meaningful school-home engagement for student success (Spanish and English).

### Professional Learning Community and Mentoring – Peer support for individual student success.

### Math Smart! – Teacher training for dynamic diverse student learning in mathematics in elementary and secondary grades.

### Science Smart! – Teacher training to strengthen science curriculum and pedagogy to engage diverse learners.

### Engagement-Based Sheltered Instruction

– Effective engagement strategies for English language learners across the content areas.

### Integrating Technology in the Classroom

– Program that translates students' technology expertise and teachers' knowledge of what works into effective practice that infuses technology into content areas, leading to solid and sustainable student achievement.

### WOW Workshop on Workshops – Train the trainer program to transform school capacity to leverage and sustain campus leadership and professional development by providing practical, research-based tools for campus mentors, coaches and support staff that results in a self-renewing process for adult learning.

**Contact IDRA to explore individualized contracted technical assistance in these or other areas.**

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*Creating schools that work for all children*
*through research • materials development • training • technical assistance • evaluation • information dissemination*

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### Intercultural Development Research Association
## Classnotes Podcast

Twice monthly, award-winning podcast for people who care about excellent and equitable education for all children.

**This award-winning podcast series for teachers and administrators explores issues facing U.S. education today and strategies to better serve every student.**

### Online Now

**"Family Friendly at the School Door"** IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 55 – Aurelio Montemayor , M.Ed., director of the IDRA Texas Parent Information and Resource Center, talks about his customer service training with a school district that began by validating all staff positions as important to the success of students and extended to staff members building ways to support each other in actively welcoming families and communities.

**"Student Voices on Being Valued"** IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 54 – Following a national essay contest among tutors in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, Linda Cantu, Ph.D., director of this dropout prevention program, shares examples of student's stories of how the program helped them do better in school and how they had helped their tutees to do better.

**"School Change Strategies"** IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 53 – In the third of a set of podcast episodes on this topic, IDRA president and CEO, María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., describes how IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework identifies three strategies for changing schools: capacity of the community to influence schools, building coalitions, and building the capacity of the schools themselves.

**"Fundamentals for School Change"** IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 52 – In the second of a set of podcast episodes on this topic, IDRA president and CEO, María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., describes the two school change fundamentals of governance efficacy and funding equity in the Quality Schools Action Framework that are required for school success.

## www.idra.org/podcasts

A podcast is an audio file that can de downloaded to your computer for listening immediately or at a later time. Podcasts may be listened to directly from your computer by downloading them onto a Mp3 player (like an iPod) for listening at a later date. The IDRA Classnotes podcasts are available at no charge through the IDRA web site and through the Apple iTunes Music Store. You can also subscribe to Classnotes through iTunes or other podcast directories to automatically receive each new podcast in the series when it is released. Classnotes is free of charge.