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Focus: College Access and Success

### Defining a Schoolwide College-Readiness Culture for All Students An Interview with Roland Toscano, M.S., Principal at East Central High School in San Antonio

Editor's Note: In this "Courageous Connections" feature, IDRA senior education associate, Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., interviews Roland Toscano, M.S., the principal at East Central High School in San Antonio. Mr. Toscano describes how his high school is developing a college-going culture for all of its students rather than for a select few. Below is an excerpt of their conversation, edited for space. The full interview is available through the IDRA Classnotes Podcast (via iTunes or http://www.idra.org/Podcasts/).

East Central High School is a large suburban high school with 2,700 students. In the last 10 years, the school has seen a demographic shift to become majority minority with Hispanic students, White students and African American students. The student population also is about 65 percent economically disadvantaged.

On Creating a College-Going Culture: First, we realized that we had to build some serious relationships with higher education entities and with our community. We needed to be educated by higher education systems on the way they are run and their expectations of us. At the same time, we had to establish really effective lines of communication with our community so that they too could become aware of the expectations and opportunities for students and about our faculty.

We were fortunate to receive a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation seven years ago that allowed us to bring in an Early College High School program and a partnership with the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). The university gave us a liaison, which was of course you, Dr. Avilés, the director of the program. Now, we are building the capacity to expand those opportunities for all of our students. We are going beyond just a small cohort of 400 students to all of the 2,700. We're still learning with a lot of trial and error, but we are persistent.

**On Promoting College Readiness:** We certainly needed to become aware of what college readiness means, and things like the word rigor and the phrase high expectations. These have been thrown around in education, but we all have different understandings of what they mean. So, as a staff, we've tried to get to a point where we share a common frame of reference for what we mean in our organization relative to college readiness, what academic rigor is and what it is not, and what high academic expectations are and what they are not. More often than not, in education in general, the definitions have been exclusionary, punishing, deficit thinking. We began to build a common understanding of what it means to be academically rigorous and what our students need to be prepared for, academically, in terms of content and habits of mind.

We've done this collaboratively. Richard DuFour's work has been a big influence on us. Michael (cont. on Page 2)

"Children rise to the level of expectation that is made of them and to the level of challenge and support that is provided to them."

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

### Focus: Curriculum Quality\_

(Defining a Schoolwide College-Readiness Culture for All Students, continued from Page 1)

### Courageous Connections...

Schmoker's work helped us organize ourselves to be collaborative. We built capacity from within in that way. For example, two teachers worked together to talk openly and honestly about the impact of their decisions relative to curriculum, instruction, assessment and student outcomes. They looked at whether they were really getting the intended outcomes and what decisions they were making in terms of instruction, curriculum and assessment was inhibiting their students from reaching those outcomes. It's a professional learning community, definitely, that is required in order to move forward in this work.

**On Involving Parents and Community:** Certainly communication is huge. We learned from our partnership with UTSA that you have to have regularly scheduled evening meetings where you invite parents with their kids to come to school to talk about upcoming events and deadlines, explain what we are doing and why, and answer any questions they may have. There are many misconceptions out there and, if you rely on the grapevine, you're going to have a lot of misinformation. Ultimately it's *our* system that is not effectively communicating when that happens.

We also realized that the way schools have been organized, including ours, is such that when parents come to the school, they don't always feel welcome. It is somewhat like a prison because of the required safety considerations. Parents don't feel like they have open access to our system and feel like they can't be partners in the process. So we've tried to address that in our security measures and climate to make sure we are giving access and that parents know that they are partners in the process.

**On Listening:** We resisted meaningful conversations with parents in the past because we worried that they were going to be upset



or question us or not agree with things we were doing. But, in reality, we have found that parents have a lot of insight and are way more supportive than we thought and are more willing to partner. Parents actually have a burning desire to partner on behalf of education, regardless of their economic status and ethnicity. It doesn't matter. They all want the best for their kids. They want to do whatever they can to help the school provide that for their kids. We have learned many positive lessons from doing it that way.

### On Meeting the Demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

Yes, that's a hot topic. Everybody understands we need to prepare kids for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and, again, there are a lot of different opinions about what this means. The first thing people think about in 21<sup>st</sup> Century readiness is technology. And we do need to bring technology into the reality as a habit of mind. But another habit of mind is that students have always needed to be career ready, college ready, society ready. Tony Wagner called it "jury ready." I love that description. You know the idea to read and to write and to communicate orally critically, and in doing so to collaboratively work with a wide range of different personalities and to begin developing those kinds of characteristics as a learner and as a person. Those should be our standards.



At ourschool, we are having discussions about how we should be using our curriculum as the content to teach students these habits of mind. These  $21^{st}$ Century skills – of critical reading, critical writing and the ability to communicate orally, to take a position based on many different pieces of literature and stimulate that into your point of view, and to use that to support your point of view or position, individual writing or collaborative work – those should be the standards for measuring. But we use our content and our curriculum as the context to do that.

But education often has it the opposite way. We are so stuck on the content being our standard that we lose sight of these critical thinking skills that students need. And we wonder why, when they have high GPAs, they can't go to college and 47 percent are not ready. That can be true for even (*cont. on Page 7*)

### IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

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

Additional resources are available online at http://www.idra.org/South\_Central\_Collaborative\_ for\_Equity/

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Sarah H. Aleman Secretary Newsletter Layout Ready or Not, Here They Come – Preparing for the Class of 2018

by Laurie Posner, M.P.A.

Today's fifth graders are on a path to graduate from high school in 2018. If the current climate is any guide, they will graduate into a complex, diverse and increasingly interconnected world – one that will demand their agility, creativity and critical thinking. And if forecasts are right, when today's 10 and 11 year olds graduate, their chances of earning a decent living will be even more intertwined with education than it is now. Can we say with confidence that we are doing all that we can to make sure they are ready?

## ...Our Investment in Education Suggests Otherwise

Since 2008, facing severe budget shortfalls, more than 30 states cut funding for K-12 public education; more than 40 states cut funds for public colleges and universities (Johnson, et al., 2011). And many states are contemplating even deeper cuts to public education this year. Just as the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut Pell grant funding, policymakers in Texas, for example, are considering cutting financial aid for more than 50,000 college-bound youth. As it is, about one third of students who meet financial and academic requirements do not receive a Texas grant. And the state already ranks 38<sup>th</sup> in per pupil spending for K-12 education (TLSG, 2011).

Meanwhile, the need to prepare students for a full range of post-secondary options grows ever more urgent. Of the 47 million job openings that our economy will create by 2018, almost two-thirds (63 percent) are expected to require workers to have some college education, with 34 percent of jobs requiring a bachelor's degree or better. Among jobs that demand a high school diploma or less, wages will be "clustered toward the low end of the...scale." (Carnevale, et al., 2010)

This is largely why demographer Steve Murdock is so concerned about Texas' trajectory and proposed budget cuts. As Murdock sees it, a state already facing severe income disparities that persistently shortchanges public education is on a path to

May 2011

"long-term disaster" (Scharrer, 2011).

## ...Our Expectations for Children Suggest Otherwise

The year 2018 is also when Texas' House Bill 3, which went into effect in 2009, is expected to be fully instituted. The legislation creates three classes of high school diplomas: minimum, recommended and distinguished. Only one truly prepares students for four-year college.

Texas isn't alone in adjusting academic standards. A 2009 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that almost a third of all states lowered academic standards, pre-empting sanctions under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. According to a *New York Times* article on the study, "Facing this challenge [of new proficiency requirements], some states redefine proficiency down, allowing a lower score on a state test to qualify as proficient" (Dillon, 2009).

Proponents of HB3 and other efforts to lower standards are likely to find validation in a recent report by researchers at Harvard University that asserts that a "college for all" strategy is failing. But a closer reading should give them pause. For all that is problematic about this report, it does not actually advocate dialing back K-12 preparation or rigor. Education strategies in Finland and Denmark are seen as models, but the authors note that taking these up would "mean that we would have to be willing to abandon our reliance on the various forms of tracking, subtle as well as overt, that pervade much of our education system through the elementary and middle school years." German and Swiss apprenticeship programs also are considered models, but the report notes that students who complete these programs "have qualifications roughly equivalent to Americans who have earned a technical degree from a community college." (Symonds, 2011)

The point is underscored by other new research. *(cont. on Page 4)* 

If we are to help the class of 2018 to achieve and hold on to their accomplishments, inequity – whether in resources, preparation, support or expectations – must be addressed.

## 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

# Focus: Curriculum Quality

PIRC

### Focus: Curriculum Quality\_

(Ready or Not, Here They Come, continued from Page 3)

Asking whether there is a difference in reading and mathematics skills for students to be ready for the workforce vs. college, researchers at ACT found that "whether planning to enter college or workforce training programs after graduation, high school students need to be educated to a comparable level... Graduates need this level of readiness if they are to succeed in college-level courses without remediation and to enter workforce training programs ready to learn job-specific skills." (2006)

## ...Our Support and Preparation of Students Suggests Otherwise

In an article that questions whether high school students know what college demands, James Rosenbaum compares the false expectations given to students about college as "confidence swindles." He rightly concludes that students need a far more realistic sense of what college demands if they are to prepare. But isn't it equally pernicious to rob children of any reason to prepare by telling them early and often that they are inherently "not college material" (Montemayor, 2007) or by speaking on the one hand about our commitment to their future, while at the same time disinvesting in it?

### It Could be Different

When they were younger, the students who took part in IDRA's TECNO 2.0 project in the Edgewood community were not so certain that they were "college material" either. But that was before they became peer guidance counselors and helped more than 600 youth think more deeply about college as a possibility.

Similarly, the young people who were once considered at risk of dropping out but are now engaged as tutors through IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program didnot always have the sense they could make it. An 11th grade tutor expressed the sentiments of many when she wrote: "I never dreamed that I could possibly make a 3.8 grade point average. The feeling of accomplishment is almost too much to hold on to" (IDRA, 2010).

If we are to help the class of 2018 to achieve and hold on to their accomplishments, inequity – whether in resources, preparation, support or expectations – must be addressed.

#### Resources

- ACT. Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different? (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, Inc., 2006).
- Carnevale, A.P., & N. Smith, J. Strohl. Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018

(Washington, D.C.: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010).

- IDRA. "Six Students Win Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program National Essay Contest," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2010).
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- Montemayor, A.M. "Telling the Truth Framing It as We See It or Being Framed," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, August 2007).
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- Texas Legislative Study Group. *Texas on the Brink* (Austin, Texas: Texas Legislative Study Group, February 2011).

Laurie Posner, M.P.A., is a senior education associate in IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

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### Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

### by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

This publication vividly captures seven key lessons for improving the quality of education for all students. It presents the voices of youth, teachers, family members and program leaders and the reasons valuing youth is at the heart of school transformation. It was released on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and in celebration of its success in keeping tens of thousands of students in school and positively impacting more than half a million children, families and educators on three continents.





## Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Alumni Share their Stories

by Linda Cantú, Ph.D.

IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally-recognized, cross-age tutoring program. It works by identifying middle school and high school students who are in at-risk situations and enlists them as tutors of elementary school youngsters who are also struggling in school. Given this role of personal and academic responsibility, the Valued Youth tutors learn self-discipline and develop self-esteem, and schools shift to the philosophy and practices of valuing students considered at-risk.

Results show that tutors stay in school, have increased academic performance, improved school attendance and advanced to higher education and other careers. During the time students participate in the program, 98 percent continue into the next grade.

Since the inception of the program in 1984, more than 32,078 tutors have benefited. This impact has been achieved, in large part, by preserving the program's integrity – keeping true to the program's vision.

The program also provides middle and high school students an opportunity to look at different careers and college opportunities. Participating schools provide college tours and college information to all tutors. Through these local college tours and events, like tutor leadership days, schools introduce a direct, tangible link between high school graduation and post-secondary options, demonstrating in words and actions that graduation and college planning is part of the vision for every student (Posner, 2006).

There are many Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program students who may not initially have thought they would go to college. As they visited college campuses, walked the halls and were encouraged to explore college as an option, many have decided they could go on to college and have done so. Additionally, many of our Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors have moved forward with their careers and their interest in going to college. These are a few stories of where they are now.

### Athena Brown

Athena participated in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program as a senioratCareerCenter/ Virtual High School in the Ector County school district. She graduated in 2008 and now attends Odessa



Community College. Her goal is to transfer to the University of Texas Permian Basin to complete a degree in elementary education.

Athena's school attendance and attitude improved as a result her participation in the program, "It was a turning point in my life." She didn't want to disappointher tutees because they were counting on her: "The tutees were always so disappointed when I was absent and were really happy to see me when I was there." As a result of tutoring, Athena decided she would become an elementary teacher.

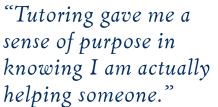
### Anahi Alvarez

Anahi completed her senior year and graduated in 2009 from Career Center/ Virtual High School. Duringher senior year, she became a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued



Youth Program and tutored second graders. She is fluent in both English and Spanish, which was helpful in her tutoring job because her tutees spoke Spanish and were learning English.

Anahi believes the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program helped her continue and complete her high school education because of all the benefits of being in the program. She earned academic credit, received monetary compensation, and experienced (*cont. on Page 6*)



– Andre Merritt Coca-Cola Valued Youth tutor

### Focus: Curriculum Quality\_

### (Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Alumni Share their Stories, continued from Page 5)

being a tutor. Currently, Anahi is working and plans to attend college this upcoming year. In high school, she earned 16 college credits. She plans on becoming a Spanish teacher.

Anahi adds about the program: "It's more than a class. It's a responsibility. You learn responsibility."

#### **Ritter Brown**

In 2010, Ritter also graduated from Career Center/Virtual High School. He had been a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program working with second graders. Ritter believes



the program gave him confidence. He believes he was selected to tutor these specific tutees because they needed extra help. His tutees were very active and energetic. "I tried helping them as best as I could, and because of that, I noticed improvements in them."

For Ritter, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program made him a better student due to the support he received from everyone in the program: "I used to make F's and then moved up to making A's and B's."

Through the program, he realized he wanted to be a teacher because of how good he became at explaining academic material to others. He saw that, all along, he understood school subjects well but was too timid to go in depth with the material. He summarized, "The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program had a huge impact on my life because it helped me finish school and move on to college."

### Andre Merritt

Andre was a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Programat Fuller Performance Learning Center in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He graduated in May 2010. Currently, Andre is in his freshman year



at Fayetteville Technical Community College. He tutored fourth graders in reading comprehension and reading skills.

Andre wants to pursue a career in music performance and production. He also plans to do some kind of

## We are looking for former Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors!

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has been in existence for 27 years, and we have created a free web site for former tutors to network with each other and to support each other in areas such as getting to college and employment. If you know former tutors, have them contact us at 210-444-1710 or Coca-ColaVYP@idra.org



tutoring while he is in college.

Andre's family is proud that, even though he had many adversities in life, he graduated from high school. Andre feels he always struggled at applying himself in school, but because he became a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, he had to be the best student possible in order for the children to look up to him as a role model.

He believes the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was "great" because of the entire concept of giving back to the community: "Tutoring gave me a sense of purpose in knowing I am actually helping someone."

### Stephanie Gutierrez

Stephanie graduated in 2008 from Career Center/Virtual High School. During her senior year, she became a tutor

in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and worked with third and fourth graders from the Newcomers Academy, which serves immigrant students. Stephanie is bilingual, proficient in English and Spanish. She helped her tutees learn English along with reading and writing.

For Stephanie, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program helped her grow: "It helped me discipline myself. It helped me to not only think about myself and not only care about what I did but how it was something that I would do for somebody else. I knew that I was going to be a



Stephanie stated: "It helped me want to succeed more in life. And it helped me see that, if I was that example to my tutees, I would graduate that year and I would go on to college or whatever else we have to do in life. I think that's something that pushed me a little."

Currently, Stephanie is working and has completed one year of college. She plans to become a mathematics teacher. Stephanie says that her family wants her to finish college: "They support me 100 percent. They want me to succeed because I am the first one in my family to graduate, and they want me to keep going. I have a little sister, so I have to be her role model too."

#### Resources

Posner, L. "Coca-Cola Valued Youth College Tours – On the Road to College Success," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, September 2006).

Linda Cantú, Ph.D., is a senior education associate in IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Minority Women

in Science

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### Minority Women in Science: Forging the Way

#### by Keiko E. Suda, Oanh H. Maroney, M.A., Bradley Scott, M.A., and María Aurora Yánez, M.A

This student workbook and teacher guide set is a great student-centered tool to support equity in math and science education. It is an innovative resource that can be used with all students – girls and boys – to help break down gender stereotypes about scientists.

- Profiles of seven minority women scientists who have surmounted barriers to forge the way for themselves and future scientists
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Available from IDRA. Student Workbook \$15, Teacher's Guide \$25, plus shipping

Student Workbook: ISBN 1-878550-67-5; Paperback; 32 Pages; Revised 2010 Teacher's Guide: ISBN 1-878550-68-3; Paperback; 94 Pages; Revised 2010

#### (Defining a Schoolwide College-Readiness Culture for All Students, continued from Page 2)

the highest achieving high school students because we are teaching the wrong thing. We are focusing on the wrong thing.

On Supporting Teachers, Administrators and Staff: It's ongoing professional development. It takes awareness, absolutely. When they are given the opportunity to become aware, educators are open to other possibilities. They really are. They want to do a great job. But they only have a limited frame of reference based on their experiences. If you provide them with other possibilities, other ideas or other resources, they'll adopt them into their practice and their belief systems. So definitely, ongoing professional development, ongoing professional support.

On Seeing Outcomes for Traditionally Underserved Students: There has always been a pervasive belief in our school systems – like in all public education systems – that our responsibility is to provide students the "opportunity to learn." We are going to provide the information you need, but you need to do your part. It's up to you to essentially learn it. We're going to cover it, we're going to present it, we're going to give you the opportunity, but you have to learn.

The reality is that lots of kids are left behind, especially those who are underserved, who didn't have parents to advocate for them, who didn't advocate for themselves, who didn't understand school systems and what they should be providing those students. So our early college partnership allowed us to target a group of underserved students. Over a four-year period, the initial cohort actually achieved on standardized test scores and college assessments as well as or better than our highest achieving students on campus. So that gave everybody an "a-ha" realization that students can achieve when given access to high quality curriculum, the best we've got, the best teachers we've got, a support system and good communication, and education to parents about the higher education system and what they need to do to give their child the opportunity and that there are opportunities even if you can't afford it or you think you can't.

And because of that, there is an open mindedness in our school to any possibility to be considered an option to give more access to more students regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status. When a student is not successful, there now is a greater willingness for our staff to stop and reflect for a minute before we point blame at the student's lack of, or the parents' lack of, or a lack of curriculum, or lack of money, or lack of support. We realize that there is a lot we *can* control in terms of access to curriculum, good teaching and good support systems. There is a lot we can do to educate and inform. And if you do those things, very few kids will be left behind. And, actually, most kids exceed their own expectations and ours.



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Focus: Curriculum Quality

"Curriculum quality and access would have schools make sure that the particular programs of study and materials are available to students of all types so that students are not tracked into lower level courses."

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

## Intercultural Development Research Association Classnotes Podcast



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