



Time to Make High School Graduation 3
Share your story 4
Strategies for Ensuring Students...PreK-20 Transitions 5

Focus: School Holding Power

Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2010-11 High School Attrition Continues Downward Trend – Universal High School Graduation is Still a Quarter of a Century Away

by Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

Long-term trend assessments of attrition data in Texas show mixed results for school holding power. Attrition rates continue to decline in Texas public high schools, but the rate is slow and persistent gaps among racial and ethnic groups statewide remain greater than in 1986.

For the second time in its 26-year history of reporting trends in dropout and attrition rates in Texas public schools, IDRA's latest study shows that less than 30 percent of students were lost from public school enrollment prior to graduation with a high school diploma. In its most recent annual attrition study that examines school holding power in Texas public high schools, IDRA found that 27 percent of the freshman class of 2007-08 left school prior to graduating in the 2010-11 school year. This is six percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33 percent found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study.

For each racial and ethnic group, the study found that current attrition rates were lower than rates found in the 1985-86 study. However, the gaps between the attrition rates of White students and Hispanic students and White and Black students are higher than 26 years ago. Between White and Hispanic students, the attrition rate gap has increased from 18 percentage points in 1985-86 to 23 percentage points in 2010-11. The attrition gap between White and Black students has increased from 7 percentage points in 1985-86 to 16 percentage points in 2010-11. Additional research is needed to

address the reasons for the decline in overall attrition rates and the widened disparity in attrition rates between racial and ethnic groups.

Since 1986, IDRA has conducted an annual attrition study to track the number and percent of students in Texas who are lost from public school enrollment prior to graduation from high school. IDRA was credited with conducting the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas when it released its initial study in October 1986. This 2010-11 attrition study is the 26th study conducted by IDRA and the latest in a series of reports that began in the 1985-86 school year. Historical statewide attrition rates and numbers of students lost to attrition are categorized by race-ethnicity and by gender. County-level data also are provided. In addition to statewide information, trend data by county are available on IDRA's web site at www.idra.org.

A supplemental analysis using linear regression models predicts that Texas will reach an attrition rate of zero in the year 2037, down from a prediction of the year 2040 estimated last year. At this pace, the state will lose an additional 1.6 million to 4.1 million students. (Montes, 2011)

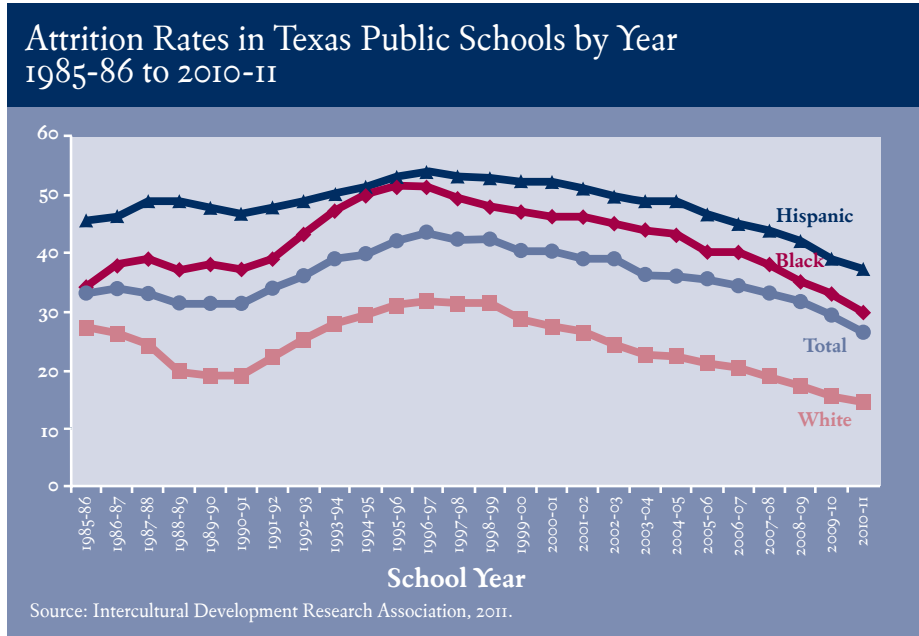
Key findings of the latest study include the following:

- The overall attrition rate declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 27 percent in 2010-11.
- (cont. on Page 2)

“Seeing the state’s attrition going down is encouraging. We have witnessed some exciting initiatives by schools and entire districts that are producing results. We cannot ease up. Texas public schools are still failing to graduate one out of every four students.”

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

(Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2010-11, continued from Page 1)



Attrition Rates in Texas Public Schools by Year 1985-86 to 2010-11

Year	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
1985-86	34	27	45	33
1986-87	38	26	46	34
1987-88	39	24	49	33
1988-89	37	20	48	31
1989-90	38	19	48	31
1990-91	37	19	47	31
1991-92	39	22	48	34
1992-93	43	25	49	36
1993-94	47	28	50	39
1994-95	50	30	51	40
1995-96	51	31	53	42
1996-97	51	32	54	43
1997-98	49	31	53	42
1998-99	48	31	53	42
1999-00	47	28	52	40
2000-01	46	27	52	40
2001-02	46	26	51	39
2002-03	45	24	50	38
2003-04	44	22	49	36
2004-05	43	22	48	36
2005-06	40	21	47	35
2006-07	40	20	45	34
2007-08	38	18	44	33
2008-09	35	17	42	31
2009-10	33	15	39	29
2010-11	30	14	37	27

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2011.

- Texas public schools are failing to graduate more than one out of every four students.
- At this rate, Texas will not reach universal high school education for another quarter of a century in 2037.
- Numerically, 110,804 students were lost from public high school enrollment in 2010-11 compared to 86,276 in 1985-86.
- Since 1986, Texas schools have lost a cumulative total of more than 3.1 million students from our public high schools.
- Since the first study, attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 18 percent (from 45 percent to 37 percent). Attrition rates of Black students declined by 12 percent (from 34 percent to 30 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 48 percent (from 27 percent to 14 percent).
- The racial-ethnic gaps are dramatically higher than 26 years ago. The gap between White students and Hispanic students increased by 28 percent. The gap between White students and Black students increased by 129 percent.
- For the class of 2010-11, Hispanic students and Black students are about two times more likely to leave school without graduating than White students.
- The attrition rates of males have been higher than those of females. In the class of 2010-11, males were 1.3 times more likely to leave school without graduating with a diploma than females.
- From 1985-86 to 2010-11, attrition rates of male students declined by 11 percent (from 35 percent to 31 percent), while the attrition rates of female (cont. on Page 7)

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Publication offices:
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101
San Antonio, Texas 78228
210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714
www.idra.org | contact@idra.org

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

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

Sarah H. Aleman
Secretary
Newsletter Layout



Time to Make High School Graduation the New Minimum

by María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

*Editor's Note: The following is adapted from *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework™*, edited by María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., and Christie L. Goodman, APR, and released by IDRA in 2010.*

On October 31, 1986, IDRA completed and published the Texas School Dropout Survey Project. The seven-volume work, commissioned by the State of Texas, was the first statewide study of dropouts and was released in Austin at a gathering of educators, policymakers and community members.

As principal investigator for the study, I provided the gathering with key findings: many, many young people were dropping out of Texas schools, most schools reported no plans to address the fact that one out of three students were leaving school before obtaining a high school diploma, and the costs of undereducation to dropouts, their families and the state were enormous.

The cost analyses conducted as part of that study indicated that education is a good investment: every dollar invested in education resulted in a nine-dollar return. (Cárdenas, Robledo & Supik, 1986)

The 1986 study had an immediate effect on policy and practice. State policy requiring dropout data collection and reporting was passed in April 1987. As a result, data collection systems were put into place at the Texas Education Agency. The first report by TEA (1988) pointed to a statewide longitudinal dropout rate of 34 percent. Also, as a result of new state policy and regulation following the IDRA study, most school districts identified dropout prevention coordinators and developed dropout plans.

However, focused resources and productive actions attendant to assuring that schools in Texas increase their ability to hold students through to high school graduation were short-lived. Instead, resources and actions went to explaining away the problem

by blaming students or families and by lowering the dropout counts through changes in dropout definitions. The results are evident.

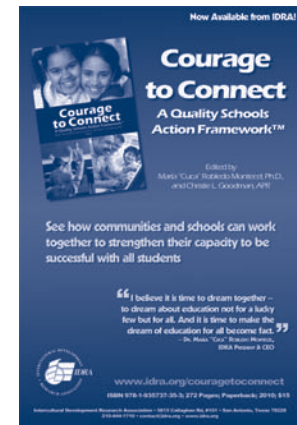
Our latest attrition study indicates that 110,804 Texas students, or 27 percent of the freshman class of 2007-08, left school before graduating in the 2010-11 school year. Since the first study 26 years ago, the racial-ethnic attrition rate gap has widened. At the same time, minority youngsters have become the majority of the school-aged population in Texas schools. (For more information on IDRA's October 1986 Texas School Dropout Survey Project, the latest attrition study results, and trends in yearly attrition data over the last 26 years, see <http://www.idra.org/Research/Attrition/>.)

These statistics are not new to the many educators and community members who are committed to equity and excellence for all students. What is new is a palpable sense of public awareness of the dropout problem in Texas and the nation, and a growing political will to address it.

To produce results, it is important to learn from the past as we engage citizens, develop public policy and promote truly accountable schooling (see “From ‘Dropping Out’ to ‘Holding On’ – Seven Lessons from Texas,” by Robledo Montecel).

It is also important to work from what we know about schools. To graduate students who are prepared for later life, IDRA research indicates that schools must have: (1) competent caring teachers who are paid well and are supported in their work, (2) consistent ways to partner with parents and engage the local communities to whom they account, (3) ways to really know students and have students know that they belong, and (4) high quality, enriched and accessible curriculum (Robledo Montecel, 2005).

Schools and the communities to which they belong need consistent, credible data sets that *(cont. on Page 4)*



available from IDRA

IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

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

funded by the U.S. Department of Education

(Time to Make High School Graduation the New Minimum, continued from Page 3)

assess graduation data in relationship to quality teaching, parent-community engagement, student engagement and high quality curriculum.

To respond to this need for actionable knowledge at the local level, IDRA has developed a web-based portal that can be used by community-school partners as they craft a shared vision; assess local needs and assets; identify proven practices that strengthen school holding power; develop ways to implement, monitor and evaluate local actions plans; and build inclusive enduring partnerships to sustain momentum and action. (www.idra.org/OurSchool and, in Spanish, www.idra.org/OurSchoolsp)

Losing children, particularly poor and minority children, from our school systems before high school graduation has been and is today a defining feature of education in the United States. The feature and its assumption that fewer students will graduate than started in the ninth grade and even fewer children will graduate than started in kindergarten is built into teacher hiring practices, into ways in which schools deal with parents and communities, into whether and how schools connect with kids, and into curriculum decisions

about which courses will be offered and to whom. Student attrition is built into facilities planning and funding decisions. It is time to change.

Not too long ago, it seemed unreasonable to think that this country would have universal education through elementary school. It is now time that we make high school graduation and college readiness the new minimum. The economics of undereducation demand it. Our children deserve no less.

Resources

- Cárdenas, J.A., and M. del Refugio Robledo, J.D. Supik. *Texas School Dropout Survey Project* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1986).
- Robledo Montecel, M. "From 'Dropping Out' to 'Holding On' – Seven Lessons from Texas," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, April 2004).
- 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).
- Robledo Montecel, M. "From 'Dropping Out' to 'Holding On' – Seven Lessons from Texas," *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework™* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010).

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

María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., is the President and CEO of IDRA. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Share your story...

How are funding cuts affecting your school?

Last spring... Texas lawmakers **cut \$6.4 billion** for public education. They left the rainy day fund untapped.

This summer... **12,000 teachers** got pink slips.

This fall... our children went to school with more **crowded classrooms**. Qualified college students **lost scholarship funds**.

What have funding cuts to Texas public education meant for you?

schoolfunding.crowdmap.com



An initiative of the Intercultural Development Research Association

Get fliers and graphics to help you take action!

The Fair Funding Now! website has handouts about key points, ideas for action, infographics on the funding gap and Texas' low ranking, a sample resolution for school boards and civic groups, and background info.

In English and Spanish!

<http://budurl.com/IDRAfairfund>

See a Google map of funding cuts by Texas county & school district

Get a quick look at the unnecessary cuts affecting schools in your area.

<http://budurl.com/IDRAfairfund>

Strategies for Ensuring Students Make Key PreK-20 Transitions

by Josie D. Cortez, M.A.

A few years ago, I wrote about an incident when parents put their children on a cross-country flight to visit their grandparents. When the flight arrived, the grandparents waited eagerly to greet their grandchildren. Everyone got off the airplane, but no children were to be found. The grandparents were frantic. How could the airline have lost their grandchildren?

Quickly, the flight crew and airline agents mobilized to find those children, and in what seemed like an eternity the children were found in another airport. The airline president accepted responsibility, apologized and promised to find out what had happened and to change the system so that a child would never be lost again.

Texas schools lose a student every four minutes. That's more than one out of four (27 percent) students lost. Close to one out of seven (14 percent) are White, two out of five (37 percent) are Hispanic and one out of three (30 percent) are African American. Since IDRA's first comprehensive study of Texas dropouts in 1986, schools in this state have lost 3.1 million high school students at a cumulative cost of \$976 billion in lost earnings and taxes.

Of those who do graduate from high school, only two out of five (41 percent) enroll in a two- or four-year public college or university the following fall. Of those, about one out of six (16.9 percent) earned a degree or certificate after six years. By ethnicity, one out of four White students earned a degree or certificate, compared to one out of 10 African American students and Hispanic students. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010)

It is no longer disputed that many students never reach their final destination. Even worse, no one is looking for them. Many even refuse to acknowledge the students are gone. Those who do admit they lost students usually blame the students or their families for the loss.

Imagine if the airline president had said that their young charges had not arrived because they were

minority or because their parents were economically disadvantaged or because their children were "unmotivated."

Instead, everyone with that airline took responsibility for ensuring safe passage for those young passengers. The same must be true of our schools, colleges and universities. They, too, must take more responsibility for ensuring safe passage for our children – they must hold on to them from the beginning of their journey at prekindergarten to their final destination of college and career.

What needs to be done?

Reframe the discourse: From "Deficit" to "Valuing"

Re-form the school culture by changing the paradigm from *dropout prevention* to *graduation* – where every student is known and valued, and where losing even one student is not an option.

Ensure better preparation beginning at preK levels to ensure students' success during middle and high school transitions.

There are key transition points along the preK-20 pipeline where a student's safe passage can become perilous. Preparation and support of everyone in the educational process are critical in these junctures of preK to kindergarten, elementary to middle school (or junior high), eighth grade to ninth, and high school to college. Students don't suddenly drop out in the 10th grade, that's just the tipping point. There is a long dysfunctional process that begins early in the pipeline of some students being seen as a burden, of being told they don't belong, that they're not smart enough, that their parents don't value education, or that they lack a "college-going culture."

The challenge with an integrated systemic approach is that everything is connected and interrelated. One person or event can have negative effects far beyond an isolated incident, as in a teacher telling a first grader he is destined to drop out of school and sending him to a disciplinary alternative education
(cont. on Page 6)

It is no longer disputed that many students never reach their final destination. Even worse, no one is looking for them. Many even refuse to acknowledge the students are gone. Those who do admit they lost students usually blame the students or their families for the loss.

(Strategies for Ensuring Students Make Key PreK-20 Transitions, continued from Page 5)

program for being a bit disruptive.

The good news about an integrated systemic approach is that one person or event can have a stabilizing and positive influence, such as a teacher believing that every child is valuable, none is expendable, and working to ensure that all of her first graders are college and career ready. Yes, first graders. Because just as there are tipping points for leaving school, there are tipping points for succeeding.

Engage at a systemic level

IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework™ provides a model for assessing a school's conditions and outcomes, for identifying leverage points for improvement, and for informing action. Using this model, levers of change can be pinpointed, as can change strategies that involve community, coalition and school capacity building. (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010)

Get actionable knowledge and use data across transition points

While there is a great deal of data available from the Texas Education Agency, what the data actually mean to a parent or a community member or even some school staff often remains a mystery. It is even more of a mystery trying to look at the entire educational pipeline – from prekindergarten through college.

Through IDRA's OurSchool Portal, educators, students, parents and community members can find out how well their high school campus is preparing and graduating students, what factors may be weakening school holding power and what they can do to address them.

Develop better processes to verify school status

Schools must account for every student in our public school system. And just like the airline company, they must take responsibility for students they have lost, find out what happened when they lose a student and change the system so that no one will ever be lost again.

IDRA can help schools change, but we must all start with the facts. We cannot continue to play the "leaver code" shell game. The stakes are too high for us not to face facts.

Once schools and communities account for every student enrolled, and every student lost, then we can begin to find out what happened in those

schools that lost students along the way. We can change those systems to match the characteristics of all students and contributions that students and their families bring.

Provide resources to ensure quality schools

Schools must have the effective training and resources needed to support their administrators, teachers and support staff. There are many dedicated and committed educators and families who are meaningfully working together to improve the system. There are success stories that hold promise and give hope that the system can change so students succeed.

What will make a difference is changing schools so that everyone believes that holding on to students from the beginning of their journey all the way to college and career is expected and demanded. Nothing less will be acceptable for the children of our state.

Resources

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. High School to College Linkages website (Austin, Texas: THECB, 2010).

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

Josie D. Cortez, M.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.

Get More Online at the IDRA Newsletter Plus

- Latest attrition study and other resources
- OurSchool data portal in English and Spanish
- *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* book web site with the framework, detailed table of contents, book excerpt, podcasts and more
- Classnotes podcasts on dropout prevention
- Graphs showing attrition rates over time by Texas county

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IDRA Attrition Study & Resources Online



2011 Study:
Texas Public School
Attrition Study, 2010-11



Look Up Your County:
See attrition
rates and
numbers over
the last 10 years



Tool:
Quality School
Holding Power
Checklist



Stay Connected:
Graduation for All
e-Letter

Get ideas for taking action
www.idra.org/Research/Attrition

(Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2010-11, continued from Page 2)

students declined by 28 percent (from 32 percent to 23 percent).

The full study is available on IDRA's web site at www.idra.org. It includes methodology, historical statewide attrition rates and numbers of students lost to attrition categorized by race-ethnicity and by gender, the supplemental analysis for reaching a rate of zero, a county-level data map, a county-level attrition rate table, trend data by county, and historical county-level numbers of students lost to attrition. The study also looks at the latest dropout studies released by the Texas Education Agency and the National Center for Education Statistics.

IDRA has developed a number of products to guide communities and schools in improving school holding power in schools in Texas and across the nation. In its book, **Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework™**, IDRA shows how communities and schools can work together to strengthen school success in a number of areas including graduation outcomes. The book's web page (<http://www.idra.org/couragetocconnect>) provides a table of contents, excerpts, related podcasts and other resources.

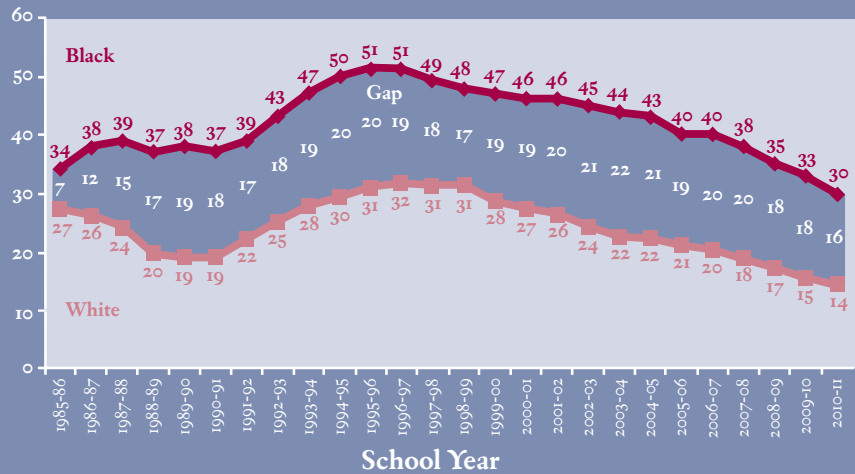
IDRA's online **OurSchool data portal** helps community and school partners examine their school data and plan joint actions to improve school holding power. The portal can be accessed free at <http://www.idra.org/OurSchool> (also in Spanish: <http://www.idra.org/OurSchoolsp>).

IDRA's one-page **Quality School Holding Power Checklist** provides a set of criteria for assessing and selecting effective dropout prevention strategies.

IDRA president and CEO, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, stated: "Seeing the state's attrition going down is encouraging. And we have witnessed some exciting initiatives by schools and entire districts that are producing results. Our research and decades of experience show clearly that students are far more likely to succeed and graduate when they have the chance to work with highly qualified, committed teachers, using effective, accessible curricula, when schools partner with parents and communities, and when students themselves feel engaged."

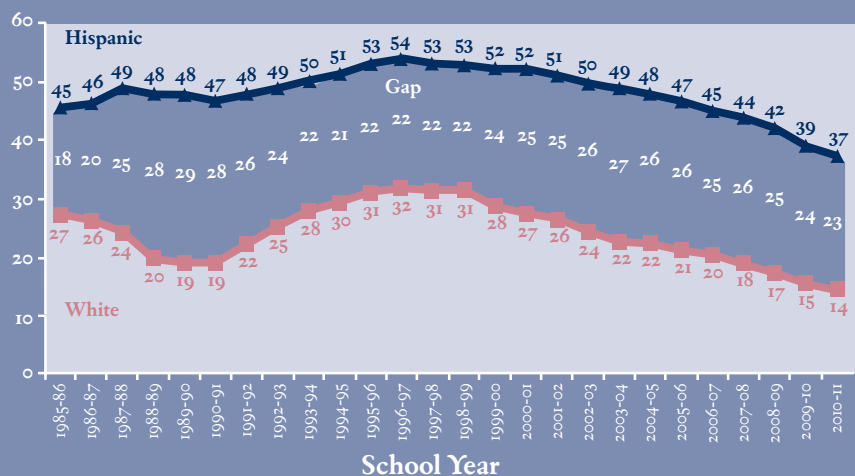
At this time, IDRA is deeply concerned about the effects of the state's cuts in education funding, the effects of inequitable funding and the effects

Trend in Black-White Attrition Rates



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2011.

Trend in Hispanic-White Attrition Rates



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2011.

of lower expectations that are now in place with the state's ending of required high level math and science for all students and its return to tracking of many students into non-rigorous courses. These actions will likely impact the ability of schools to hold on to their students and graduate them ready for college and career.

Resources

Cárdenas, J.A., M. Robledo Montecel, and J. Supik. *Texas Dropout Survey Project* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1986).

Johnson, R. *More than 3 Million Students Have Been Lost from Texas High Schools Since 1986*, published online only (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2010).

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Roy L. Johnson, M.S., is director of IDRA Support Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
5815 CALLAGHAN ROAD, SUITE 101
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78228

Non-Profit Organization

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Focus: School Holding Power

“Losing children, particularly poor and minority children, from our school systems before high school graduation has been and is today a defining feature of education in the United States...It is time to change.”

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

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