IDRA Focus:
Change Strategies

IDRA Newsletter

ISSN 1069-5672 Volume XXXVI, No. 8 September 2009

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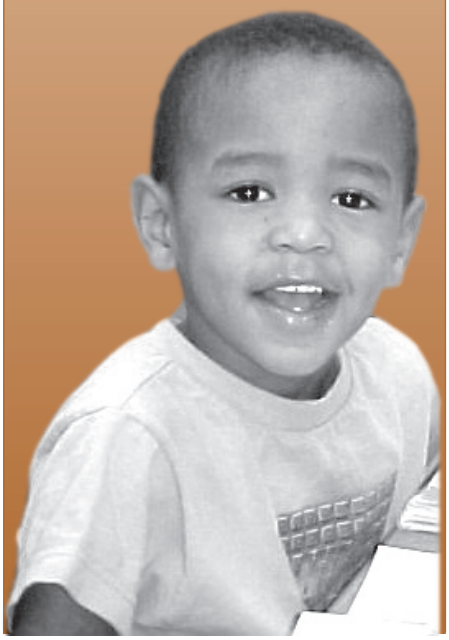

Holding On to the Goal of Quality Education for Every Child

by María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan calls education "the civil rights issue of our generation" and notes that "if we are to emerge from this global recession and ensure the future prosperity of our nation, every school must provide every child with a quality education that offers the path out of poverty and toward equal opportunity" (July 2, 2009). We have a choice. Equal educational opportunity can remain a well-intended but unfulfilled promise or move to becoming the engine of shared prosperity for generations of Americans. Much depends on the clarity and the urgency with which we approach the challenge.

If the past decade is prologue to the next, it is difficult to know if we will have both the clarity and urgency that is needed to do the hard work of sustainable change. On the one hand, the last decade has seen a shift toward an expectation that schools "bring all students to high standards of academic proficiency" (Mosher and Smith, 2009). Also, more Americans now believe that education beyond high school is a necessity, with a large shift toward that belief occurring since the year 2000 (Lumina, 2009).

On the other hand, there is much evidence that the last decade has seen a widening of the economic and education gaps and that the "pressure for reform has increased but is not yet the reality" (Fullan, 2007).

Today and over the next several years, the grip of the economic crisis and the din of competing priorities may put education in a holding pattern that is interrupted only to wish for a return to the good ole days that in reality weren't so good for much of the population; to bemoan the next school, district, state or national report card; or to pine for the next magic silver bullet.

Thankfully, there is another option. We can pursue shared prosperity by keeping our eyes on the goal of quality education for *every* child in *every* school understanding that education matters, community voices matter in education, and much is known about what to do.

Education Matters to Shared Prosperity

Robust research evidence

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indicates that the quality of education affects economic opportunity for individuals and outcomes for society across generations. Data from the Economic Mobility Project (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009) underscore the connection between education and economic opportunity and the key role that educational opportunity plays in getting a fair chance at the American Dream.

There is also strong evidence that education matters to individuals and to society in other critical areas, including health, longevity and the vitality of civic life. *Goals for the Common Good: Exploring the Impact of Education* identifies critical areas linked to educational attainment, synthesizes research findings, and provides links to an online Common Good Forecaster (American Human Development Project, 2009).

However, disparities and gaps in educational opportunity and outcomes continue to divide Americans based on class and color. The average low-income high school senior has the same reading level as the average middle-class eighth grader, and the percentage of high-poverty schools that are high-performing is 1.1 percent compared to 24.2 percent of low-poverty schools that are high-performing (Kahlenberg, 2008). If you are Black or Latino, you are more likely to attend a high-poverty, segregated, under-funded school that is unable to graduate students and is unable to prepare students for college or today's competitive job market (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Alliance for Excellent Education and the College Board, 2009).

We can pursue shared prosperity by keeping our eyes on the goal of quality education for every child in every school understanding that education matters, community voices matter in education, and much is known about what to do.

Community Voices Matter in Education

Education matters to the individual and to society. But the quality of education provided in a *local school system* affects the *local community* in important ways. To examine the impact of educational quality on the local community, RAND researchers focused on a substantial body of literature and found strong evidence of: (1) effects on housing values in the school attendance area with an increase of 1 percent in reading or math scores associated with a 0.5 percent to 1 percent increase in property values; (2) effects on crime rates with a one-year higher educational level in a community associated with a 13 percent to 27 percent lower incidence of murders, assaults, car thefts and arson; and (3) effects on tax revenues with increased earnings and sales, and higher property tax revenues from residences

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In This Issue...

The Intercultural Development Research Association *(IDRA)* is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, © 2009) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

Portions of the contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.

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Change Strategies

Dear reader,

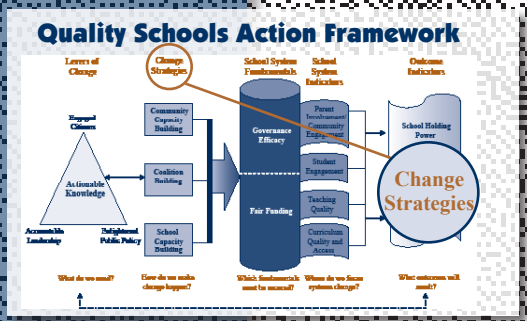
There is no educational silver bullet. So often conversations about improving education tend toward naming "the" solution. Over time, we have seen emphases shift from getting everyone reading, to focusing on math, and then back to reading. We've seen new school schedules, school uniforms, merit pay, and parent fines. While some of these initiatives failed to produce results and others, in combination with other strategies, have borne fruit, none is "the" solution.

Frustrated with complexities, complications and inaction, we've also seen people essentially giving up on quality public education for every child. This is apparent in calls for privatization. But giving up on public education is also not a solution.

The fact is, children are unique. Neighborhood schools are unique. Communities are unique. They each have their own context for building a learning environment. Making changes in education, then, requires looking at the fundamentals and elements that need shoring up in each community in order to ensure all students there are successful.

As important as the question of what changes to make is the question of how do we make change happen? IDRA's Quality School 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.

In "Holding On to the Goal of Quality Education for Every Child," I discuss further that we must not give up on the idea of quality education for every child and that change is something we are capable of creating -- together. In the context of quality teaching specifically in science, Kristin Grayson, M.Ed., describes a process for using contextual data to inform science professional development.



In "Texas Policymakers Live Up to their Own Low Expectations," Dr. Albert Cortez gives an overview of the recent legislative session in Texas and the resulting policies that will affect schools and children. We also have included an update on the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan and how the recent changes will affect today's high school students.

Excellent neighborhood public schools are the foundation of strong communities. And communities must have an active role in transforming and maintaining excellent schools for all children.

María Robledo Montecel

Texas Policymakers Live Up to Their Own Low Expectations

A Post Legislative Session Assessment of Changes Proposed and Reforms Adopted in 2009

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

Editor's note: IDRA policy staff review and monitor policy alternatives that affect schools and children. The article below presents perspectives on the ideas relating to education in the 2009 Texas legislative session. The infusion of close to $2 billion in federal stimulus funding prevented major cuts in many education programs. Yet, overall, it could have been better. But it also could have been worse.

The Texas Legislature gathered for it biennial session in Austin this spring amidst growing clouds resulting from the nation's recession. Though spared some of the worst effects compared to other parts of the country, state leaders were faced with limited revenues and critical issues that had been deferred in earlier sessions.

Among the challenges was the need to improve the state education funding plan, respond to court orders involving secondary language-minority students, respond to growing pressure to revise the state's assessment and accountability systems, and address higher education access issues that included tuition de-regulation and financial aid. In each area, the state made some improvements. Though sometimes, these steps forward were accompanied by a few steps back.

Texas School Finance Reform

During the special legislative session convened in 2006 in response to a Texas Supreme Court ruling, a number of changes were introduced into the state funding system. Foremost among them was the concept of funding some schools on the basis of "target revenue" (rather than the equity formulas), with the amounts for school districts based on 2005 funding levels.

During the 2009 session, responding to school leaders' complaints about the effects of **target revenue** funding, the state eliminated the mechanism.

Unfortunately, carryover effects of prior funding decisions still require the use of **hold harmless** clauses to ensure that many school districts (including a mixture of wealthy and average wealth districts) continue to receive a least as much state and local revenue as was provided in prior sessions, even when those amounts were inequitable.

Changes adopted earlier called for schools to reduce tax efforts from a maximum of $1.50 down to $1.00 by 2009. To ensure that this tax effort compression did not result in reduced funding for schools, the legislature increased the **basic allotment** from $3,218 to $4,765 per student (based on the weighted average daily attendance or WADA) or a greater amount if the state average property wealth per student times 0.0165 produced a larger figure, which is not expected to be the case in 2009. Because state aid is tied to a combination of school district property wealth, the number and types of students educated in a school district, and local district property tax levels, the new allotment produced about the same amount of revenue as before.

This combination of requiring school districts to reduce taxes while increasing the yield per penny of tax effort can be seen as the equivalent of taking 8 ounces of water from a tall, slim glass and pouring that water into a short, wide glass. The containers differ in shape, but both still hold the same 8 ounces of water.

Proponents of reform had hoped the state would actually increase state funding to schools by more significantly increasing the basic allotment. Policymakers were reluctant to alter existing funding levels for most school districts. This led them to continue use of hold harmless funding for high wealth school districts and to reject the idea of providing greater unequalized enrichment proposed by some school districts.

All the proposals to increase the state's **special population programs** – including recognized shortfalls in funding or bilingual education and English as a second language (ESL)

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programs and state compensatory education – were turned away. Instead, a series of state studies on the cost for providing specialized programs will be conducted between 2009 and the 2011 legislative session. The new research is intended to inform the 2011 education funding deliberations on these longstanding issues.

When surplus state revenue was projected to be higher, some equity proponents had hoped that the legislature would provide a substantial infusion of new state revenue into the state funding plan. But policymakers put off increasing **guaranteed yield** funding. Tier IIa funding for the first 6¢ of enrichment tax effort remained tied to the Austin ISD yield level per penny of tax effort (about $57 in 2010) and the per penny yield for Tier 11b, that allows school districts to levy an additional 11¢ of enrichment effort, remained unchanged at $31.95 for each penny of tax effort.

Recapture was reduced because fewer school districts are above the property wealth levels that trigger it, thus reducing the number of actual Chapter 41 school districts to less than 100. This simultaneously required the state to use state-generated revenue to make up for statewide funding that had been supported by recaptured funds.

To ensure that all school districts got some **additional assistance**, each was guaranteed to get a minimum of $120 per student (WADA) in increased funding. For low and average wealth school districts this meant increases in state aid, while high wealth school districts were allowed to retain monies that would have been returned to the state in the form of recapture.

According to an IDRA analysis of state-generated estimates of increased funding resulting from the bill, 756 school districts – almost three out of four – received the minimum increase of $120 per WADA; only 51, or 4.9 percent, received the maximum of $350 (with school district increases capped at that maximum in order to cut the cost of the changes) and the other 218, or 21.6 percent of, school districts received between $121 and $299 per WADA.

Influential teacher groups had pushed for across-the-board increases in **salaries**, even though they had been the beneficiaries of the greatest percentage of new state aid in the preceding biennium. Their persistence was rewarded with an $800 annual increase for teaching staff and selected support personnel. Unfortunately, this across-the-board raise did nothing to decrease the teacher salary disparities between those in poor urban and in rural schools and those employed in the state's more affluent communities.

It was largely acknowledged that the infusion of close to $2 billion new state dollars into the school funding system would be paid from federal stimulus allocations that were to be made to the states. Rather than invest more of available state revenue into a funding system that had provided meager increases over the last few years, state leaders instead chose to pay for most of the teacher pay raise out of federal *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (AARA) stimulus monies. The several hundred million that were therefore made available were in turn used to *supplant* state investments in these areas. The multi-million dollar state surplus was then diverted over to the state's "rainy day" reserve fund, which was originally created to sustain state spending in the event of future funding shortages in education and other state-funded programs.

IDRA director of policy, Dr. Albert Cortez recently received the Champion of Equity Award from the Equity Center in a ceremony in Austin, Texas. The award is given for lifetime contribution, commitment and achievement in advancing the pursuit of equitable educational opportunities for all children. The other award recipient for 2009 was Mr. Demetrio Rodríguez, lead plaintif in the *Rodríguez vs. San Antonio ISD* court case 40 years ago that protested inequitable state funding to Edgewood ISD, where IDRA founder and director emeritus Dr. José A. Cárdenas was then superintendent.

Pictured left to right: Dr. Wayne Pierce, Dr. Albert Cortez, and Dr. Ray Freeman.

Bilingual Education and ESL Program Reforms

In July 2008, Judge William Wayne Justice ruled that the state's

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Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) was insufficient in ensuring that school districts were properly identifying all English language learners. The court found that the state's secondary-level ESL instruction was woefully inadequate in addressing the needs of these students.

The state waited until December 2008 to file a request for a stay of the order requiring it to submit a plan on how it would address the issues raised in the court decision. The stay was granted in the weeks following the opening of the 2009 Texas legislative session. A hearing before the Fifth Circuit was scheduled for early June, the week after the close of the Texas legislative session.

Hopeful that the legislature would initiate some action to address the question and resolve the issues before court intervention, State Senator Judith Zaffirini submitted a plan to the legislature to address the need for improved monitoring of state bilingual and ESL programs in Texas, including the disaggregation of English language learner state testing data at the elementary, middle and high school level.

State Senator Leticia Van de Putte introduced a proposal that was designed to strengthen the operation of the state's ESL programs serving Texas middle and high school limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. Both state leaders worked with bilingual program advocates, who engaged in coordinated efforts to support the plans.

Both plans were given hearings before the Senate Public Education Committee, with witnesses testifying in favor and no observable opposition to the plans surfacing during those sessions. However, bilingual proponents were advised that some of the state's political leadership had reservations about making changes to the state plan in the absence of a court order to do so. Others, including some teacher and administrator groups, voiced quiet opposition. Teachers reported concerns with the professional development that the plans required for content area teachers serving secondary level English language learners. In a similar vein, school administrators expressed some reservations about requiring additional teacher training – though it was noted that some could be provided in lieu of training in other areas.

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One plan would have expanded monitoring requirements that would include review of school district LEP student identification processes and examination of school districts with excessive numbers of parent denials of bilingual or ESL services. State officials complained about staff implications involved and administrators who were not keen on the idea of anyone looking too deeply into local school operations serving English language learners. Attempts to convene discussions with the groups opposing the reform plans were unsuccessful.

Last-minute efforts to append the monitoring and secondary-level programs to other legistation were resisted by state political leaders. Both measures died in the crush of proposals impacted by the voter registration battles that ensued in the last weeks of the session. Given a unique opportunity to address an issue raised in pending litigation, the state's political leadership failed to take even minimal action, setting the stage for the upcoming hearing on the issues at the Fifth Circuit Fifth Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

The appeals court hearing was convened in the summer with both attorneys for the plaintiffs (MALDEF) and the state attorney general. Each was given a few minutes to present oral arguments encapsulating the issues raised in legal briefs that had been submitted. As a result of numerous questions raised by the justices, the oral arguments took a good deal longer than the conventional time provided. Some questions were directed at the district judge's rationale for ruling in the case, others questioned what authority the Texas Education Agency (TEA) had to require school districts to improve local practice.

In unexpected developments, the appeals court requested additional briefs from both parties addressing related issues raised during the questioning of the two attorney's legal arguments. The supplemental briefs were due to the court in mid-July. One judge advised the attorneys not to expect a quick ruling. A ruling may not be forthcoming until some time in the late-fall of 2009.

Accountability Reforms

Responding to a few legislators' insistence on modifying the state accountability and assessment system, a group of influential policymakers developed an accountability reform plan that went well beyond adjusting rating and reporting requirements. It also included changes in high school graduation requirements, in-grade retention policies, assessment procedures, and the state accountability and related sanctions issues.

Approved reforms included controversial changes to state curriculum

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Aligning School-Based Factors for Student Success

Using Contextual Data to Inform Science Professional Development

by Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.

The success of a professional development program for science teachers depends on the interplay of many school factors. Such factors include leadership advocacy and support for the academic success of all students, curriculum quality and accessibility, partnership with parents and community, demographics and history of achievement, a culture of high expectations for teachers and students, and quality of teaching personnel as defined by certification, teaching in fields, knowledge, beliefs, and experience. Consequently, before embarking with professional development in any school district or campus, IDRA conducts a contextual analysis mini-study to inform planning with school administrators.

A contextual analysis is especially important in the area of science because effective science teaching is a critical concern of many public schools today. This concern stems in part from statistical studies that show the United States is behind other countries in student achievement in science. Compounding the issue is the increasing diversity of student demographics in public schools, meaning more and more teachers are called upon to teach diverse student groups in their classrooms (Capps, et al., 2005). Diverse student groups (Hispanic, African American, English language learner) have not achieved at the same levels as White students (IES, 2009). Recently, U.S. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan said to the National Science Teacher Association, "Science education is central to our broader effort to restore American leadership in education worldwide" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

All of the factors concerning teachers and their diverse environments must be considered in order to effectively plan and conduct professional development.

This article discusses ways a contextual analysis of school-based factors can be used to inform the success of a professional development program by citing current research, disclosing experiences, and sharing activities that IDRA has used in conducting a contextual analysis mini-study.

Literature Review about Contextual Analysis

In a literature review of general professional development research, J.K. Klinger (2004) states that all of the factors concerning teachers and their diverse environments must be considered in order to effectively plan and conduct professional development. Klinger concludes that implementation of new practices into the classroom learned in professional development is heightened when the practices learned are flexible enough to fit with the needs of teachers and students and when the support for implementation in the classroom is adapted to the level needed by each teacher. Hence, awareness of the needs of teachers and students is an essential outcome of the IDRA contextual analysis before professional development is initiated.

Research about teacher knowledge, beliefs and practice has been conducted in other studies to inform the course of science professional development interventions. Lee, Lewis, Adamson, Maerten-Rivera and Secada (2007) conducted a five-year study and recapped it in an article titled "Urban Elementary School Teachers' Knowledge and Practices in Teaching Science to English Language Learners." Zohar (2006) stated in another article that by assessing teacher preexisting knowledge and beliefs about teaching, learners, learning and the subject matter, one can begin to understand the context that teachers bring to professional development. Sweeney (2003) supported a methodological approach to analyzing teachers' behaviors and rationales in particular

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as a basis for mentoring within professional development.

Yet despite research such as this, reform efforts often have failed to acknowledge teachers' existing knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, according to Gray and Bryce (2006). IDRA, however, does follow the research and supports using a contextual analysis as an important initial step in professional development.

In determining what teachers need to know, Shulman (1987) describes four areas as essential: general pedagogical knowledge (how to teach), content knowledge (science), pedagogical content knowledge (how to teach science), and disciplinary knowledge (inquiry and scientific processes). In a paper commissioned by the *National Academy of Sciences*, Mark Windschitl defines in more detail what the specific knowledge is in these four areas. Knowing what knowledge teachers possess in these areas, according to Zohar and Schwartzer (2005), affects what teachers will learn during professional development and what they might use in the classroom as a result of the professional development.

Teacher efficacy is an important part of teacher beliefs. Tshannen-Moran, Woolfok, Hoy and Hoy (1998) define teacher efficacy as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context." Higher levels of teacher self-efficacy are well correlated to higher levels of student achievement in education research. This is noted in recent research for mathematics and science (Uekawa, Borman and Lee, 2007).

In an article titled, "Teacher Beliefs and Cultural Models: A Challenge for Science Teacher Preparation Programs," Bryan and Atwater (2002) emphasize that teacher beliefs affect the learning that occurs in the classroom. It is important to be aware of teacher beliefs about student characteristics (race, culture, ethnicity, language, social class), beliefs about external factors that influence student learning, and beliefs about appropriate responses to diversity. It also is important to be aware of how different cultural models might impact a teacher's instruction and interaction with students of diversity.

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Similarly, Saam, Boone and Chase (2000) found an interesting result while comparing the self-efficacy of "local" (mostly White) science teachers with the demographic variables of their students. Teachers' self-efficacies were not dependent on the students' level, geography or ethnicity. However, researchers did find a significant difference between the self-efficacies reported by teachers who mostly had students of middle- and upper-income backgrounds and those who mostly had students of a poverty or low-income background.

IDRA Contextual Analysis for Science Teaching Quality

In conducting a contextual analysis prior to initiating science professional development, IDRA collects data from several sources: assessment of curriculum quality and school culture (high expectations, vision, experience with success, school safety); teacher demographic and certification data; self-assessment survey for proficiency in science content knowledge and pedagogy of diverse student learners, including English language learners; success in partnering with parents and community; survey for science self-efficacy for diverse students; and onsite observations.

In order to assess teacher knowledge and beliefs, IDRA uses and/or modifies a combination of surveys obtained from current research. Using these surveys helps inform the professional development so that specific teacher content knowledge that aligns with state standards, such as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, is targeted and strengthened.

Teacher beliefs and attitudes toward their ability to effectively teach science, especially to diverse students also can guide the professional development process. Numerous studies document the positive correlation of teacher self-efficacy to student achievement. Therefore, during the contextual analysis, IDRA assesses teachers' science self-efficacy for diverse students using the equity lens to ensure that all teachers are prepared in attitudes, knowledge and practice so 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" (Scott, 2009).

When observing science classroom instruction, IDRA uses the *Reformed Teaching Observation Protocol*. This is a science and mathematics classroom observation instrument (Pilburn and Judson, 2002) developed by the Arizona Collaborative for Excellence in the Preparation of Teachers. It details observable features of quality science teaching within categories of lesson design and implementation, content

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Student Success through Capable Communities and Schools

The framework is in place: IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework is a **comprehensive approach** to changing and transforming schools for the success of all students. The framework has several divisions: levers of change, change strategies, school system fundamentals and indicators, and outcome indicators. The final outcomes are that students be kept in school, succeeding academically and preparing for college.

Within that system, a key piece for **families and communities** are the change strategies:

- Community Capacity Building
- Coalition Building and
- School Capacity Building

Community Capacity Building. The Parent Information and Resource Center (Texas IDRA PIRC) mandate to work with families whose children are in Title I schools is congruent with these strategies. One of the three GEPRA measures is school accountability, and a key factor in building the community's capacity is giving families and the broader community the tools to assess how well schools are doing by the children. Accountability applies not just to test scores, but the quality of teaching, attendance, preparation for college and participation in school activities.

Building Coalitions. Along with building the capacity of families to assess and strengthen the academic offerings and instructional effectiveness of their children's schools is the strategy of building coalitions by bringing together of interested constituent groups and developing integrated plans around accountability issues engages the larger community to support the success of the schools. This effort broadens the community will for excellent neighborhood public schools and extends the network of families and organizations united around educational goals.

School Capacity Building. The third strategy is the concurrent effort from within the schools to support holding power, excellent teaching and strong two-way communication with the families. This capacity building can include planning sessions with representation from all stakeholder groups as well as training and professional development on curriculum, instruction, meaningful parent engagement, valuing and high expectations for all students, and efficacy in preparing students for college.

These three change strategies – community capacity building, building coalitions and school capacity building – do not work in isolation. They are concurrent, interconnected and interdependent to transform the neighborhood public school. Families are integrated into the process, and family leadership in education underlies all community efforts. Families are not urged to be antagonists but rather are assisted to become critical friends of the schools. Schools, while not castigated, are nevertheless catalyzed to have a paradigm shift in how students and their families are perceived. The capacity built across school professionals, parents and community organizations is for collaboration and mutual support in achieving distinctly new heights in student success, college access and eventual degree completion. This meets both the letter and the spirit of the Title I federal mandates and goals for public schools that serve the poor families.

Visit the Parent Information and Resource Center online:
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and businesses. There also was evidence that educational quality in the community is associated with greater civic participation in that community, including more voter participation, more tolerance and acceptance of free speech, more involvement in community arts and culture, and higher newspaper readership (Carroll and Scherer, 2008).

Maintaining urgency and clarity in sustainable educational reform depends in large measure on community will and informed engagement at the local community level. Schools, after all, belong to the community, and change is too important to be left to schools alone. Community engagement that is based on active participation by both the school and the community produces results for students (Petrovich, 2008; Mediratta, et al., 2008; Levin, 2008). IDRA work in building and informing school-community teams demonstrates success in these partnerships and coalitions (Rodríguez and Scott, 2007; Montemayor, 2008; IDRA, 2008).

The Harlem Children's Zone has established a cluster of community programs to serve neighborhood families and their children from birth to college graduation (Shulman, 2009). This "unique, holistic approach to rebuilding a community" is generating dramatically improved student achievement and parent engagement as well as positive financial impact to the neighborhood (HCZ web site).

Community buy-in and oversight stemming from shared understandings and data about the why, the how, and the results of school change is a critical but largely untapped change strategy in school reform efforts. For example, community teams can use data about their local dropout and graduation rates, disaggregated by subgroups, and data on the related school factors of parent involvement, student engagement, curriculum access and teaching quality in order to develop comprehensive plans of action to graduate all students (Robledo Montecel, 2007).

Much Is Known About What to Do

There is a growing sense around the country that real, long-lasting change is urgent, indispensable and possible. The U.S. Department of Education is working with others to frame and fund an agenda that includes setting benchmarked standards, developing data systems to track growth and tailor instruction, boosting the quality of teachers and principals, and turning around the lowest-performing schools. Forty-six states have signed on to create benchmarked K-12 standards that prepare students for the 21st Century global knowledge-based economy.

Foundations also are focusing their strategies and leveraging their investments on education reform by setting goals and funding the detailed work that will achieve those goals. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will invest $500 million over the next five years in learning how to improve and measure teacher quality. The Lumina Foundation is focused on assuring that, by 2025, the proportion of Americans with higher education credentials increases to 60 percent from the current 39 percent.

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Unprecedented successes in unexpected places are defying the perception that achievement gaps are inevitable (Chenoweth, 2007). For example, IDRA led a group of middle school teachers, a principal, counselor and social worker to create a small professional learning community, in conjunction with IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, focused on the academic success of students who were considered at risk of dropping out of school. Both teaching quality and student engagement improved, transforming student results (Montemayor and Cortez, 2007).

High-poverty urban schools are improving demonstrably by using additional monies coming to them by court order to good effect. In New Jersey, poor schools that received an infusion of funds as a result of the *Abbott vs. Burke* case are demonstrating improved student achievement (Anrig, 2009). In Texas, student achievement on national tests improved in 2008 due in part to a decade of improved and equitable funding that had been provided to Texas schools (Cortez, 2009).

For the last four years, IDRA has utilized the Quality Schools Action Framework (Robledo Montecel, 2005) as a frame for our work in educational reform (see box on Page 11). The Quality Schools Action Framework brings together what we know about educational change efforts. The framework:

1. is empirical, experiential and practical.
2. is results oriented and tracks expected outcomes both on (a) *student* metrics of success at many levels including college, and (b) *school* metrics of success focused on the school's ability to keep students in school and learning through to graduation.
3. focuses attention and action, singularly and in tandem, on the

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four system indicators that are key to success: parent and community engagement, student engagement, quality teaching, and curriculum quality and access.

4. points to governance efficacy and fair funding as crucial fundamentals that interact with indicators and outcomes.
5. highlights change strategies that build individual and collective capacity within and across school and community.
6. couples capacity-building with active coalitions that have an urgent agenda to produce results for students.
7. positions knowledge-building and utilization as a core feature of accountable leadership, enlightened policy, and engaged citizens.
8. uses knowledge, information, evidence and outcome data not only as "rear mirror" assessments but also as integral to informing present and future strategy.

A number of our partner schools and coalition organizations have used

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Quality Schools Action Framework

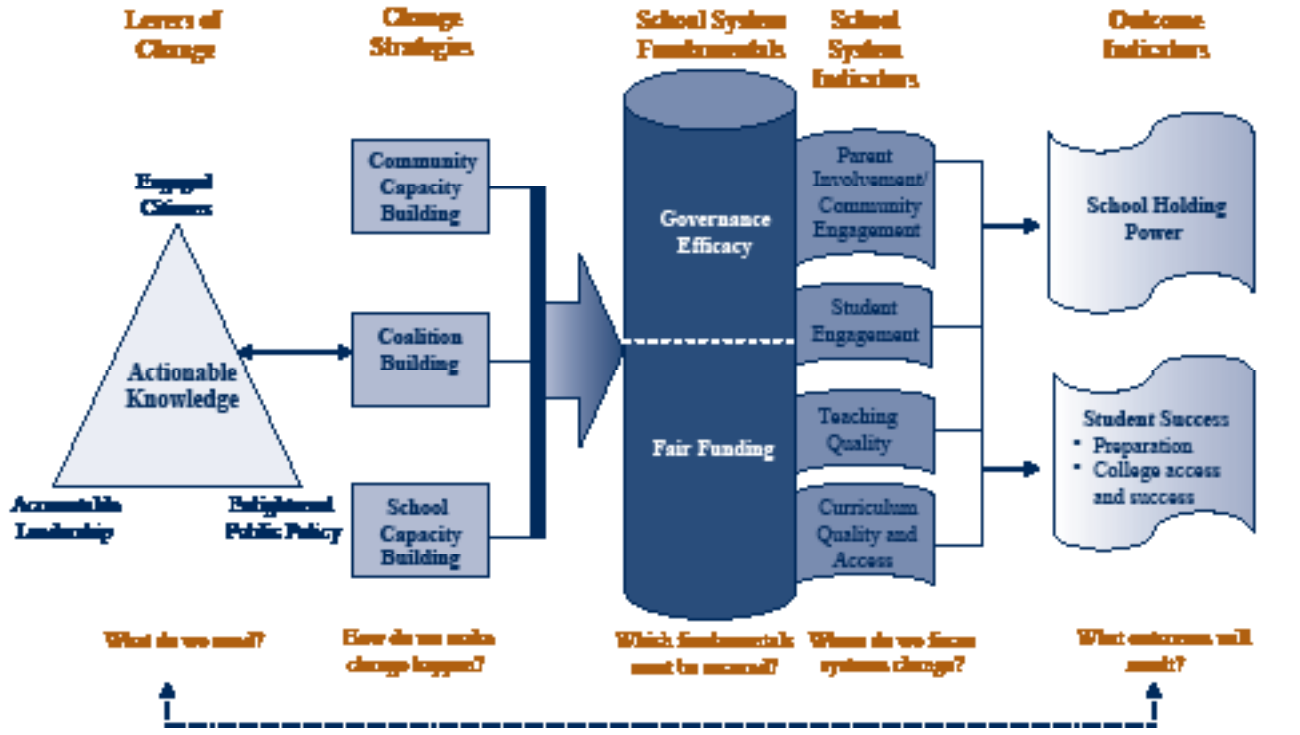
IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework provides a model for strengthening school holding power through informed family-school-community partnerships and enlightened policymaking (Robledo Montecel, 2005). The framework focuses on key school features that must be addressed to improve outcomes for all students (teaching quality, curriculum quality, student engagement and family engagement).

For more information listen to a three-part series of the Classnotes Podcast focusing on the Quality Schools Action Framework:

- Action for School Change - Episode 42
- Fundamentals for School Change - Episode 52
- School Change Strategies – Episode 53

Also read related articles in the IDRA Newsletter (available online at www.idra.org):

- "A Quality Schools Action Framework – Framing Systems Change for Student Success," by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel (November-December 2005)
- "Framing Systems Change for Student Success," by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel (January 2007)



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the framework and the companion online portal to assess baselines, plan and implement strategy, and monitor progress in educating all students to high quality (Posner, 2009).

Our experience with the framework so far is that it is a useful tool in many ways: to conceive, design and manage change at the school or district level; to encourage thoughtful and coherent selection of best practices that are grounded in the reality of the schools and their communities; to focus on particular strategies and/or instructional approaches (e.g., bilingual education) without losing track of the contexts that matter (e.g., teaching quality, school/district leadership, funding); to inform evidence-based community collaboration and oversight in productive ways; and to inform meaningful comparisons across campuses and districts.

As a "change model," the Quality Schools Action Framework also may prove useful in making the link between benchmarked standards and sustainable school reform that ties desired outcomes to indicators of quality at the local level.

Lisbeth Schorr (2009) has eloquently stated that the "search for silver bullets is giving way to an understanding that, to make inroads on big social problems, reformers must mobilize multiple, interacting strategies that take account not only individual needs but also the power of context." It is at the local level, with schools and communities working together, that the power of context can be a source of genuine and long-lasting change that benefits every student in every school with a quality education.

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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.

Student Voices

"Stereotypes about students are never true…the question is: how can we make our schools better?"

– Mississippi high school student, IDRA Community Blueprints for Action Initiative

"[When we're] not challenged by teachers and the curriculum… we enter college unprepared…Some may ask themselves why they should even be there…"

– Oklahoma high school student, IDRA Community Blueprints for Action Initiative

"Since I have been a tutor, the most important thing I learned about myself was that there is someone everyday that helps me wake up in the morning and want to go to school. There's someone waiting for me to arrive and walk through the classroom door, and those people are my three tutees that I take care of so much and help learn."

– Texas middle school tutor, IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

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requirements. **Differentiated curriculum tracks** were created for minimum, college bound, and career-technical students. The "minimum" program is designed for students who have been retained at least once prior to the 10th grade and will require parent approval to opt-out of recommended program requirements. The "college bound" track requires four years of English, math, science and social studies as was previously required for all students. The newly emphasized "career-technical" track diverts students as early as the 11th grade and involves fewer and less stringent courses in math and science in the upper high school grades, with substitution of CTE math and science course, through variants would enable students to meet the 4-by-4 graduation requirements in the college track.

Despite the new labels, the differentiated curricula resembles tracking that previously placed minority and low-income students into vocational curricula, while more affluent students were routed into the college-bound track.

Responding to complaints about state infringement on local decision-making, reform proponents succeeded in removing the tie of **promotion requirements at the third grade** level to performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS). While school districts may develop local promotion criteria, the prohibition against promoting students who fail one or more TAKS exams at the fifth or eighth grade level (unless the local grade placement committee unanimously agrees to promote) remains in place. Efforts to reduce the number of end-of-course exams were rebuffed, but there were minor changes made to the process used to determine if a student has performed at sufficiently high levels on the collection of mandated end-of-course exams required to meet graduation requirements.

Despite the new labels, the differentiated curricula resembles tracking that previously placed minority and low-income students into vocational curricula, while more affluent students were routed into the college-bound track.

Another change created school **progress measures** to be used over three years, as an alternative to one-year performance statistics, to determine a school district's accountability rating. Proponents for the change successfully contended that a one-year snapshot did not give school districts credit for making improvements from one year to the next. Unfortunately, it also has the effect of masking actual annual performance and can delay pressure to make improvements.

More stringent **state interventions** were set up for school districts that are determined to be low performing for several consecutive years. Among the interventions is school reconstitution, which requires extensive school staff turnover.

Policymakers also modified how **state standards** are to be determined, creating a complex process for upgrading curriculum standards based on studies conducted every few years. No doubt that these increasing standards will pose a difficult challenge for many Texas schools in the coming decade, more so because the legislature failed to provide commensurate increases in funding to help schools meet those increasing performance levels.

The more than 100-page accountability plan contained so many modifications that observers noted that even at the end of the session few were thoroughly familiar with all the changes

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that had been incorporated into the measure adopted by the legislature.

Top Ten Percent Plan and Other Higher Education Reforms

Among the more contentious debates that took place in the 2009 session were the deliberations involving proposed **caps to the state's Top Ten Percent Plan**, which guarantees all Texas high school students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their graduating class admission to any state-funded college or university. There had been a combination of loud complaints from wealthy suburbs that had lost their long-standing advantages at the state's top universities and from University of Texas at Austin leaders who claimed that Top Ten Percent students were accounting for "too many" of the freshmen students admitted to that university.

These spurred state policymakers to limit the proportion of Top Ten Percent Plan students admitted to UT Austin to no more than 75 percent of new enrollees for the incoming freshmen class of 2011 (see pages 15 and 16 for details). The 75 percent cap was substantially higher than the 40 percent and 50 percent caps initially proposed by some state policymakers and a far cry from the call to eliminate the plan that had been promoted by some in 2007.

The resulting compromise enables students currently enrolled in high school to anticipate the changes to be made and provides some "relief" to university officials who complained about the loss of their authority to make admission decisions for incoming freshmen.

Recognizing that the University of Texas was the only institution complaining about a large number of Top Ten Percent Plan enrollees, the legislature chose to apply the cap only to UT Austin, thus retaining the automatic admission requirements for all other state-funded institutions. The reforms also called for closely monitoring future enrollments at UT Austin, with provisions for eliminating the cap in 2015.

Despite the success of the Top Ten Percent Plan, recent rapid increases in tuition and fees at state schools created greater financial challenges in covering college costs for students and their families. To help cover increasing expenses, the legislature increased funding for the **Texas Grant Program**, which will serve several thousand more students who had qualified but not been awarded Texas grants due to lack of sufficient funding.

As the window of opportunity narrows, our state continues to be led by a political leadership that insists on idling when we should be accelerating.

While the funding was increased, attempts to convert the Texas grant program from a need-based to a merit based plan were rejected. Proponents of the change proposed that concentrating grant funding on the highest achieving students would ensure a better return, while supporters of need-based funding successfully argued that the Texas grant program had been intended to support students with the greatest financial need. Analyses of the possible impact of proposed changes had indicated that the modification of criteria would have resulted in the re-distribution of the funding from high need to moderate and low-need students.

A third major development in higher education was the legislature's adoption of a plan to expand the number of **top tier universities** from two to eight over the next two decades. Debates on the measure centered on the criteria to be used to identify top tier candidate institutions, which institutions were to be included and timelines for achieving the new targets. A major factor in the deliberations involved assessments of the costs involved in upgrading eligible universities from their current levels to Tier 1 levels. The need to expand the number of options available to students in different parts of the state and the need to upgrade the number of state residents with under-graduate and graduate degrees to remain competitive in a global economy were cited as major factors supporting the significant expansion of Tier I universities in Texas. Leading candidates for eventual Tier I status are Texas Tech University, University of Houston, University of Texas at Dallas, University of North Texas, University of Texas at Arlington, University of Texas at San Antonio, and University of Texas at El Paso.

Conclusions

Compared to past legislative sessions the most recent was not great in the area of education, but not as bad as it could have been. While initial revenue estimates had led some school leaders to hope for a substantive improvement in school funding, this proved overly-optimistic. Rather than adding substantive increases in state aid to schools, the final plan provided a minimum allocation to three quarters of Texas schools. Though teacher salaries were increased by a very modest amount ($800 per year), the provision meant that monies needed to fund increases in all other areas were not available.

Unfortunately, this force choice approach continues a dysfunctional tendency among state leaders to pit education interests against one another for limited funding. IDRA has contended for decades that rather than causing education advocates to fight over small slices of the funding pie, legislators should create a larger pie

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that provides what is needed in all major education areas so that all students are served appropriately.

Compounding matters was the fact that the state relied on one-time stimulus funding from Washington, D.C., to cover the great majority of the cost of increases provided, leaving state leaders with a projected $2 billion shortfall going into the next session just to stay at current funding levels.

The state's failure to address badly-needed improvements in its secondary English language learner programs and the continued masking of low performance in some schools serving English language learners will only come back to haunt schools as future accountability features serve to uncover their under-performance.

Accountability changes that only upgrade standards but fail to provide funding to support the needed improvement in schools will only serve to label more schools as needing improvement, without improving quality of schooling for the majority.

Finally, as the state struggles to improve quality and access in higher education, it may find that the pool of students needed to populate those new programs has not kept pace as the state continues to under-educate the new minority majority that will be the emerging reality in most Texas schools.

More than a decade ago demographer Steve Murdock warned state leaders that unless the educational status quo was substantially improved, Texas faced a crisis where by the year 2050 the mean family income could fall to $3,000 below current levels. As the window of opportunity narrows, our state continues to be led by a political leadership that insists on idling when we should be accelerating, gazing at the pretty views through side windows rather than peering at the challenges on the road ahead.

If one were to assign a grade to our current leaders for their most recent efforts to improve Texas education, one would be hard-pressed to offer anything more than a C-.

Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is the director of Policy. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In June-July, IDRA worked with 8,476 teachers, administrators, parents and higher education personnel through 68 training and technical assistance activities and 155 program sites in 13 states plus Brazil. Topics included:

- Teacher Mentor Training on Culturally Proficient Teaching
- Math and Science Strategies for English Language Learners
- Title IX and Bullying and Harassment
- School District Level Math Alignment

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- Pulaski County Special School District, Arkansas
- Grand Prairie Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- Annual Southern Regional Minority Leadership Conference
- San Marcos Consolidated ISD

Activity Snapshot

IDRA worked with a group of middle school teachers, a principal, counselor and social worker to create a small professional learning community whose only mission is to ensure the academic success of their students. Each of the teachers mentored and advocated for three students who needed an educator in their lives who believes in them and their capacity for learning and success. This emerging professional community met regularly to work together, sharing and exchanging insights about their students, developing strategies for success, and sharing in their responsibility for students. IDRA helped to guide them throughout the year with the best research, the best thinking and the best practices available. The result was a transformation of adults who see youth as valuable and capable and youth who know that someone cares about them and is committed to their success. And the students started with lower scores and reached higher scores in reading than the comparison group.

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.

Update on Texas Top Ten Percent Plan for Your Students

The Texas Legislature recently enacted changes to the Top Ten Percent Plan, which provides for the automatic admission of high-ranking students to any public university in Texas. The changes will slightly limit automatic admissions beginning in the fall of 2011 to UT Austin, but this limit does not apply to other state universities.

The following update explains changes made by the new law, including the mandated notification requirements to high school students by high school counselors. We encourage you to distribute this information to educate parents and students about the law and opportunities to pursue higher education. A camera-ready version is available in PDF format at www.idra.org.

The Top Ten Percent Plan – Essential Facts for Parents, Students, School Administrators and Counselors

What is the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan?
High school students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school class are guaranteed automatic admission to any public university in Texas, including UT Austin and Texas A&M in College Station.

How will students know if they are eligible for automatic admission to a public university, including UT Austin?
The new law states that high schools must provide written notification to all entering high school freshmen and their parents of the Top 10 Percent Plan law. Counselors must explain the requirement of the Top 10 Percent Plan law to high school sophomores and juniors in the top 25 percent of their class.

What changes were made to the Top Ten Percent Plan in the 2009 Texas legislative session?
Few changes were made to the overall Top Ten Percent Plan. Due to the tremendous increase in applications to UT Austin and pressure from UT, the legislature capped the automatic admissions to UT Austin at 75 percent of UT Austin's entering class. The cap begins with the entering class of 2011-12 and only affects admissions at UT Austin. In 2008, UT Austin's total entering class was comprised of 76 percent Top 10 Percent Plan students. The new cap of 75 percent of Texas residents will ensure that roughly the same number of Top 10 Percent Plan students have the opportunity to be admitted to UT Austin.

What is the effect of the changes made to the Top Ten Percent Plan in the 2009 Texas legislative session for all other state colleges and universities?
Every other public university in Texas besides UT Austin is still required by state law to continue to admit all Top 10 Percent Plan applicants from Texas high schools. The Top Ten Percent Plan requirements remain unchanged for all these institutions.

Do the changes made to the Top Ten Percent Plan in the 2009 Texas legislative session take effect immediately?
No, the enrollment cap of Top 10 Percent Plan students at UT Austin will take effect for the entering 2011-12 class. All eligible Top 10 Percent Plan

continued on next page

students who graduate prior to 2011 will remain eligible for automatic admission to UT Austin.

Is the 75 percent cap of Top Ten Percent Plan enrollees at UT Austin a permanent cap?

No, the legislation provided that the cap will remain in effect through 2015 and then the cap will be removed. The Texas legislature will then have to decide whether to reauthorize the cap at UT Austin.

Beginning in 2011, how will UT Austin determine which Top Ten Percent Plan students receive priority should the number of Top 10 Percent Plan applicants exceed the 75 percent cap?

The new law provides that UT Austin accept the highest-ranked students first until the cap is achieved. This means UT Austin will accept all students in the top 1 percent of their class, then all students in the top 2 percent and so on until 75 percent of the university's projected entering class enrollment is comprised of 10 percent students. The remaining Top 10 Percent Plan students would then compete for admission to UT in the non-Top 10 Percent Plan applicant pool utilizing UT Austin's holistic evaluation admissions criteria.

What happens if two students are ranked at the same percentile when the cap is reached?

Officials at UT Austin have publicly committed to accepting all students of the same rank once the cap is reached. This means that if multiple students are ranked in the top 8 percent of their class when UT Austin reaches the 75 percent cap threshold, UT Austin will accept all the applicants that are ranked in the top 8 percent of their class.

Will there be any notice of the class rank percentile necessary to gain automatic admission to attend UT Austin?

Yes, the legislation provides that on September 15 of every year, UT Austin will notify every school district of the anticipated necessary class rank percentile to receive automatic admission for the next school year.

Does this mean UT Austin will no longer consider race and ethnicity or other subjective factors in their admissions criteria?

No, UT Austin will continue to consider a multitude of criteria including race and ethnicity in its non-Top 10 Percent Plan admissions plan. In fact, the new law provides that if UT Austin is no longer permitted to use race or ethnicity as factors in its admissions by court order or by a vote of the Board of Regents, then the 75 percent cap no longer applies and all Top 10 Percent Plan students will receive automatic admission.

What other changes made to the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan will affect automatic admission to public universities in Texas?

The new law also provides that Top 10 Percent Plan students who enter a junior college and complete the core curriculum with a GPA of at least 2.5 may retain their automatic admission to enter UT Austin and other four-year public universities for a maximum of four years after their high school graduation. These students must have been originally accepted for admission to the four-year universities at the time of their high school graduation.

IDRA is pleased to share this update with Texas schools, families, and community members in partnership with a network of organizations committed to improving access to higher education for all Texas students, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Mothers Against Discrimination and Racism in Education and Society, Texas Alliance of Black School Educators, Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education, Texas League of United Latin American Citizens, Texas State Conference of NAACP Branches, and University Leadership Initiative.

For background information on the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan visit the IDRA web site.

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knowledge, and pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge is further divided into propositional knowledge and procedural knowledge. These types of knowledge have to do with teachers not only knowing their content but also being able to promote students' deep conceptual understanding and connections to other subject areas by making predictions, stating hypotheses and reflecting on their own learning. Additionally, student-centered instruction, standards-based, and inquiry focus are key components of quality science teaching within this framework. This framework supports the goals of the four strands of scientific proficiency detailed by the National Academic of Sciences that all learners need to acquire.

The observation protocol has additional indicators included to assess the teachers' use of strategies that engage English language learners, something stressed by language acquisition expert Dr. Jim Cummins. Cummins (2001) emphasizes the importance of teachers engaging English language learners by using a variety of instructional strategies that connect the learning to the students' own experiences or past learning and that develop academic language.

Echevarria, Vogt and Short's research into sheltered instruction emphasizes that teachers must make the academic content comprehensible while using systematic methods to build and practice English language proficiency within the academic language of science. Kinsella (2006) further defines English language learner active engagement and the structuring of academic language. Indicators that reflect these English language learner strategies are included in the observation protocol used by IDRA.

The resulting information about teaching quality along with data collected about other important school-based factors is used by IDRA in conjunction with school districts to inform the plan for transformational change. This contextual analysis provides information about the condition or level of functioning of the various key school-based factors that influence the impact that professional development can have on teacher practices and student achievement. In other words, it provides administrators with information on maintaining or improving the condition of these school-based factors and aligning them to support the teacher and a professional development effort in increasing teaching effectiveness and student success.

For more information about IDRA professional development models that incorporate a contextual analysis component contact IDRA (210-444-1710; contact@idra.org) or visit www.idra.org.

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"Helping Schools Address Issues of Race" IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 57 – Bradley Scott, Ph.D., director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity, describes the kinds of support that the federally-funded equity assistance centers provide to help school leaders and communities address issues of race in order to ensure that all of their students have an equal opportunity for academic achievement.

"The Family Friendly Principal" IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 56 – Rogelio López del Bosque, Ed.D., discusses how he created a family friendly school during his recent five-year term as a high school principal in order to bring families into the conversation of creating a school that achieved success for all students.

"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.

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