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# Valuing Youth with Disabilities

## Educational Outcomes and the Art of Culture

by Laurie Posner, MPA

### Disability Rights – Coming of Age

The 1980s and early 1990s could arguably be considered the most significant periods of progress for disability rights in the United States. In these two decades, many civil rights successes of the 1960s and 1970s, from Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* to *Education of All Handicapped Children* gained traction and achieved impact.

The United Nations declared 1981 as the Year of Disabled Persons. This urged governments around the world to initiate programs that would bring people with disabilities into the social and economic mainstream. In 1984, Ted Kennedy, Jr., raised the issue of disability rights at the Democratic National Convention. That same year, the National Council of the Handicapped became an independent federal agency. In 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. In August of 1995, the First International Symposium on Issues of Women with Disabilities was convened in Beijing, in conjunction with the Fourth World

Conference on Women.

The drive to secure educational quality and access for children with disabilities paralleled the disability rights and independent living movement (Grizzard, 2004). The *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, passed in 1975 and renamed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* in 1990, called for a free and appropriate public education for every child with a disability to be delivered in the least restrictive environment.

With laws in force, the nation had new resources to understand and address the barriers that people with disabilities faced. We learned that only one in three young people with a disability graduated to a job or advanced education (National Council on Disability, 1986), and youth with disabilities were at greater risk of dropping out of school than their non-disabled peers (Kaufman, et al., 1997). Adults with disabilities were three times as likely as people without disabilities to live in households with total incomes of \$15,000 or less (Taylor, 1998).

But beyond identifying specific barriers and seeking new remedies for them, disability leaders recognized

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that if the disability rights movement was to secure lasting change, it must transform basic perceptions of disability and construct a new collective identity. They recognized that casting children as polio *victims* to raise money and to address persistent job discrimination were all of a piece. If a child was a problem to be pitied, how would teachers and employers picture her as a future civic leader, a CEO or an engineer? Pity, advocates saw, strengthened a mainstream belief in the “pathos of disability.” In this formulation, a person is pitied (or feared) in direct proportion to his or her distance from a non-disabled norm.

In *The Second Phase: From Disability Rights to Disability Culture* (1995), historian Paul Longmore chronicles this recognition as a watershed in the movement toward disability rights: “The first phase sought to move disabled people from the margins of society to the mainstream by demanding that discrimination be outlawed and that access and accommodations be mandated. The

## **It is this bold, basic idea – that categorically rejects pity and asserts that it is not enough to tolerate human differences as one tolerates a foul-tasting cough syrup – that shakes off complacency.**

first phase argued for social inclusion. The second phase has asserted the necessity for self-definition. While the first phase rejected the medical model of disability, the second has repudiated the nondisabled majority norms that partly gave rise to the medical model.”

### **Redefining Difference**

Longmore points out that self-definition is an imperative where individuals and their cultures are devalued for inherent differences from others: “In order for people with disabilities to be respected as worthy Americans... they have been instructed that they must perpetually labor to overcome their disabilities. They must display continuous cheerful striving toward some semblance of normality. The evidence of their moral and emotional health, of their quasi-validity as persons and citizens, has

been their exhibition of the desire to become like nondisabled people. This is, of course, by definition, the very thing people with disabilities cannot become” (1995).

Disability rights activists cast light on the link between devaluing perceptions of disability and limited social and economic opportunities and outcomes. With this clarity, a community and culture of disability pride flourished in the 1980s and 1990s. Artists, poets, dancers and choreographers with disabilities founded new organizations like WryCrips, a disability theater group presenting poems, skits and dramatic readings by women with disabilities, and AXIS Dance Company, an integrated disabled/non-disabled company that performed contemporary dance in the United States and abroad. National Public Radio broadcast

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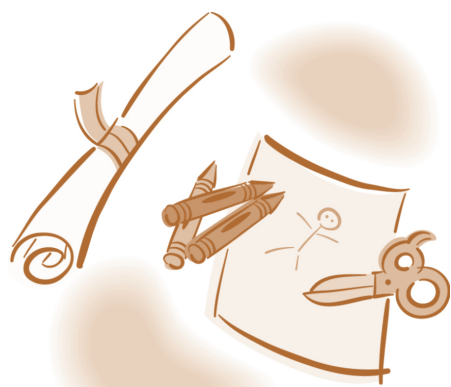
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# Defying Conventions for Policies and Programs Intending to Strengthen School Dropout Prevention

by Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., and Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D.

Some call it an epidemic, others an educational dilemma, and others a national disgrace with significant economic, social and personal consequences for the future of this country. Students are not graduating from high school in shocking proportions (30 to 50 percent). The problem is the worst for our growing populations of minority and low-income students.

Many communities and policymakers continue to ignore this problem and operate as if it was transitory and will automatically resolve itself through existing school reform efforts. The fact is that policy and school reform efforts typically focus entirely on “overhauling” perceived student deficits and have not seriously delved into the contextual factors and their collective impact on student leaving school.

Such school reform efforts shortchange minority and low-income students who, since their enrollment in school, became the prey of inappropriate learning assessments, low expectations, inappropriate instruction and misguided parent involvement

**Our attention must shift from student and parent blame to a shared school responsibility. We must adhere to a philosophy of shared responsibility ingrained in the term, school holding power.**

programs. This article provides some thoughts about present day conventions and assumptions and describes some solutions that defy these conventions.

## **Debunking the Myth: Student Deficit vs. School Deficit**

Students who are most at risk of dropping out go through a gradual process of disengagement, isolationism and indifference. This leads to a loss of self efficacy, self esteem and resiliency. For these students, there is often a long history of academic underachievement, dysfunctional behaviors and eventual physical exiting from the school environment. This gradual process starts manifesting itself through behavioral, emotional and learning

difficulties.

Early research of the 1980s by IDRA (1989) and more recent research by Battin-Pearson, et al., (2000) reveal the major manifestations expressed by students who are at risk of dropping out. These are: chronic cycle of tardiness and absence, failing classes, suspensions, transitions between schools, student disrespect toward self and others, isolationism, and disrespect for law and order. These tend to gradually accumulate creating a problem with serious implications to the individual student, the teacher, the school, the family and the community.

Unfortunately, existing policy and school programs typically do not address the problem of school dropouts from a structural or systemic perspective. Instead, they target students’ dysfunctional behaviors and low academic achievement as the key factors. They neglect school contextual factors that lead to student disengagement and isolation.

The two-pronged challenge for schools is to: (1) tend to the severe damage that has already impaired many

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of our youth; and (2) ensure that school practices that caused this damage for many of our youth immediately change so that more students and their families feel welcomed in school, experience academic success, and eventually graduate and go on to college.

As educators, we must take a step back, reflect and act in ways that defy conventions that contribute to a school lackadaisical attitude. Our attention must shift from student and parent blame to a shared school responsibility. We must adhere to a philosophy of shared responsibility ingrained in the term, *school holding power*.

School holding power is the capacity of a school to keep and graduate students who have reached a threshold where dropping out becomes a serious alternative, and the ability of the school to self-renew and change paradigms toward valuing all students and feeling responsible for the success of every student.

## **Building Strong School Holding Power**

What can schools do? Many school leaders will need to undertake a serious endeavor to change their attitudes and low expectations of students and take greater responsibility for the success or failure of their students. By doing so, their schools will become successful by virtue of their strong school holding power.

Schools with a strong student holding power embody the following practices.

### **Provide High Self Efficacy**

- Promote skill-building, responsibility, supportive relationships and belonging throughout the school's curriculum.
- Implement special programs that promote skill-building, responsibility, supportive relationships and belonging to students who need

additional help.

- Acknowledge achievement.
- Ensure students' participation in extracurricular activities so that all students are supported and have multiple opportunities to excel.
- Support extracurricular activities that build positive youth development and social skills to promote self worth.
- Make special efforts to provide opportunities for students deemed at risk to being viewed instead as "at promise."
- Monitor students' progress in self-esteem and self efficacy through observations and standardized measures.

### **Promote Strong Educator-Student Relationships**

- Promote school board support for programs that strengthen relationships and create school structures to personalize instruction.
- Offer quality instructional programs that create opportunities for graduation and preparation for college and the workplace.
- Use teacher "looping" practices (where students have the same teacher for multiple years) to ensure that continuity and relationship

strengthening offer the potential for academic and social benefits.

- Demonstrate strong and committed leadership that *will not allow* for any student to stay behind.
- Ensure that all students have at least one caring adult in their school lives.
- Teach a core set of social and emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making).
- Create a schoolwide environment in which everyone participates in setting rules and follows the same rules of conduct, recognizing that students do not feel connected in environments that are chaotic and where adults are punitive.
- Support learning approaches, such as service-learning, cooperative learning and noncompetitive games that increase connectedness to school.
- Implement early interventions and intensive interventions that are aimed at children who are having difficulty feeling connected. Samples of these interventions include the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and the AVID program.
- Promote a school climate that ensures school connectedness by

*Defying Conventions* – continued on Page 15

## **Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Featured in At-Risk Student Intervention Implementation Guide**

The *At-Risk Student Intervention Implementation Guide* is a comprehensive resource for identifying programs to help decrease South Carolina's school dropout population. It came about as a result of recent legislation, *The Economic and Education Development Act*. The guide was distributed to each school district, high school and middle school in South Carolina.

IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is featured in the guide as an exemplary program. While designed for schools in South Carolina, the guide is a useful resource for schools in other states.

<http://ed.sc.gov/agency/offices/cate/AtRiskStudentInterventionImplementationGuideDRAFT427.pdf>





# IDRA's Family Leadership Principles

by Aurelio M. Montemayor,  
M.Ed.

When Dr. José A. Cárdenas founded IDRA in the spring of 1973, with a singular focus on equitable funding for all public schools in Texas, he set in motion an organization that, as it approaches its 35<sup>th</sup> year, embraces and carries out action to ensure fair funding for the common good, effective governance of schools, parent involvement and community engagement, student engagement, teaching quality, and curriculum quality and access. We observe and report key outcome indicators for school holding power and student success. Each of our areas of focus has grown over time as we continue our mission of working with others to create public schools that work for all children.

*Family leadership in education* has been one of those strands that has been with us from the beginning but also one that has evolved and grown with experience and knowledge.

## Key Terms in Family Engagement

Each word in *family leadership in education* has special meaning.

**Family** – Parents are just one set of key actors rearing children. There are grandparents, other adult kin and foster families. The individuals in this circle are those who are legally, morally and

**Our neighborhoods need a network of families who continue to support their neighborhood schools as each generation of children flows through them.**

practically responsible for the children and who would most likely be the advocate for the best possible education for the children they rear and most likely want a future filled with many options for those children.

**Leadership** – We, at IDRA, are not as interested in fundraising and free labor for schools as we are in family members who want to be a positive influence on their children, on schools and on the outcomes of student achievement, success and access to higher education. Our volunteerism focuses on families advocating, bringing together, collaborating and joining other families and schools to create excellent and equitable public schools. Within the field of parent involvement in education, some areas, such as parenting, are well documented and explored and have a myriad of resources, training and programs. Parenting is a case in point. Important as it is to help parents to be better at parenting, becoming more adept at preparing them for school and guiding

them through their school years, our leadership focus highlights the critical area of families taking action for improving schools.

**In Education** – Even though there are many good, important and worthwhile causes for families to take leadership in (health insurance for all children, for example), IDRA keeps its focus on neighborhood public schools.

## IDRA Principles for Family Leadership

IDRA recently outlined its principles for family leadership in education that – while evolving over time – have been basis of IDRA's work with families, schools and community groups. Following are these six principles.

**Families can be their children's strongest advocates.** Our first premise draws on the potential that all families have in speaking for, defending and supporting their children. The concept of parents as advocates has been difficult to capture in the research and literature, especially connecting it to student achievement. But it is key to our vision. Our premise is not an unreal, romanticized view of the reality of our families. We do not ignore that there are dysfunctional families in all classes, races and communities. Nevertheless,

*IDRA's Family – continued from Page 6*

just as our principle about children is that all children are valuable; none is expendable, so is our view of families that each must be approached with respect and high expectations.

**Families of different races, ethnicity, language and class are equally valuable.** Each group has assets, traditions and a language that is worthy of respect. Our organizational experience has shown that when this principle is present and evident in the outreach and work done with families, there is a marked increase in the amount and quality of families' engagement with their children's schools and education.

**Families care about their children's education and are to be treated with respect, dignity and value.** Every major survey conducted in the Latino community has placed education as the number one issue of concern or very close to the top. Surveys, interviews and conversations with parents of all races, classes and national origin have reinforced this almost universal concern that families have for their children's education and the desire to be treated with respect.

**Within families, many individuals play a role in children's education.** As stated in the brief explanation of the use of the word *family*, we acknowledge that there are many key caretakers of children who are not genetic parents. The combination of all who live within a home are important influences on children and can be a collective force for creating excellent schools.

**Family leadership is most powerful at improving education for all children when collective efforts create solutions for the common good.** IDRA's organizational experience reinforces the fact that the individualistic, charismatic leader model is too narrow and does not sustain communities, families and excellent schools over time. As wonderful as

## **New Guide for Engaging Parents in Education Highlights Groundbreaking work of the IDRA Texas PIRC**

U.S. Assistant Deputy Secretary Morgan Brown announced the release of a new publication, *Engaging Parents in Education*, at the 2007 National Parental Information and Resource Center Conference in Baltimore, Md. Brown discussed the importance of informing parents and students of their education options under *No Child Left Behind* and engaging parents in decisions about their children's education.

The guide profiles five Parent Information and Resource Centers, including the IDRA Texas PIRC, that are representative of how PIRCs and their partnering organizations can successfully increase parent involvement in education. The centers emphasize the power of strong parent-educator partnerships to improve schools and raise students' academic achievement.

**To view and download *Engaging Parents in Education* visit <http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/parents/parentinvolve/index.html>**

the neighborhood mom in sneakers haranguing the school board about a serious concern is, our neighborhood schools need a network of families, co-supporting and co-creating action that improves schools. Our neighborhoods need a network of families who continue to support their neighborhood schools as each generation of children flows through them. Collective efforts draw on the powerful roots of our democracy and are sustained with peer compassion (child rearing is a difficult and isolating responsibility), cooperation and revolving spokespersons so that when there is individual burnout, others from the network keep up the good effort.

**Families, schools and communities, when drawn together, become a strong, sustainable voice to protect the rights of all children.** Some years ago, when IDRA was participating in Mobilization for Equity, a Ford Foundation-funded effort through the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, we were presented with some research on change in schools. The macro view of the kinds of efforts that led to institutionalized change in schools was summarized in several conclusions. When the change

sought was funded and supported solely within the institution itself, the innovation ended when the money dried up.

From another body of studies, it was found that when the change effort was based solely outside of the institution, as with an activist grassroots organization, over time the effort failed. The external group could not sustain the effort from without in such a way as to ensure that the changes would last.

A third category found that when the change involved the institution internally and brought external pressure to bear, then there was some hope of the innovation being sustained.

Our principles draw on the experience that schools from within, in collaboration and connection with families and with the broader community from without, can become our cherished dream—excellent schools for all children.

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Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed, is an IDRA senior education associate and director of the Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center. He also serves on the national board of PTA. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).



# NCLB Parent Involvement Requirements

## The Belief and Principles that Breathe Life into the Spirit of the Law

by Aurelio M. Montemayor,  
M.Ed.

At the annual conference of Parent Information and Resource Center directors, one of the key presenters was Dr. Karen Mapp, Harvard professor and co-author of the new *Beyond the Bake Sale – The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (2007). Her presentation was structured around four core beliefs. These beliefs are similar to those that have undergirded IDRA's nearly 35 years of advocacy.

Dr. Mapp's core beliefs and IDRA's principles underlying family leadership in education provide a powerful way to give new life to the spirit of the law in *No Child Left Behind Act*, specifically in Title I, Section 1118 that speaks to parent involvement.

Dr. Mapp's core beliefs are:

1. All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
2. All parents have the capacity to support their children's learning.
3. Parents and school staff should be equal partners.
4. The responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

IDRA's principles focus on family

advocacy, value, care for children, multiple roles, collective efforts for the common good, and collaboration for a strong, sustainable voice to protect the rights of children (see article on Page 5). These core beliefs and principles provide an energy for effective and efficacious carrying out of the NCLB parent involvement requirements.

The Texas Education Agency through the Education Service Center, Region 16 published *An Administrator's*

the consultation:

- Written Parent Involvement Policies,
- Written School-Parent Compact,
- Parent-Teacher Conferences (Required at Elementary Schools), and
- School Improvement Plan.

In elaborating on each topic, we are illustrating how the beliefs and principles breathe life into the requirement.

**Rather than being punitive and accusatory, parent involvement policies should be informed by parents' dreams for their children and the realization of parents being the strongest advocates of their children's success.**

*Abbreviated Checklist to NCLB – Parental Involvement* as a practical tool to monitor compliance with the current law. The document identifies about 50 requirements relating to parent involvement across the federal title programs, and it divides the topics into the categories of *notification* and *consultation*.

Notification is generally met through the dissemination and transmission of documents. Consultation implies communicating with and listening to families.

Four topics from the consultation list can illustrate how the above beliefs and principles show up in carrying out

### Written Parent Involvement Policies

The language of the parent involvement policies should be parent friendly and understandable to all families. The documents should be sufficient to transmit essential and required information in a way that informs but does not confuse and that clarifies but does not over-simplify or hide harsh truths. Ideally, these documents will have been the result of dialogues, surveys and meetings where a representative cross-section of families has participated as equals.

*NCLB – continued on Page 8*

A parent-friendly plan explains what the basic school program offers and guides families to appropriate choices, supplementary services and logical and practical steps parents can take to ensure excellent public education for their children. Rather than being punitive and accusatory, parent involvement policies should be informed by parents' dreams for their children and the realization of parents being the strongest advocates of their children's success.

### Written School-Level Compact

Families can participate in a dialogue that includes defining and understanding a compact, listing responsibilities and expectations of families (which include parents, caretakers and students), prioritizing the lists and agreeing on shared responsibilities, and challenging the institution to list its responsibilities. The dialogue could use the structure of a force-field analysis where the participants first describe the ideal school and student achievement context (the golden dream for all involved) and then participants list the forces that are supporting achievement of the dream and those that are restraining or blocking achievement of the ideal.

The compact then could be a document that frames the ideal sought by families, students and school personnel, with a list of agreements based on increasing the assisting forces and reducing the blocking forces. The net result is that the document, called a compact, is a living, organic representation of the collaboration, connection and vision of all concerned.

When families read and sign the compact, they know that it represents a position of value and respect for all parties to the agreement and that it is an appropriate tool for collective action for

# Tools for

## Accountable Leadership is Critical

Building school success for students requires accountable leadership at all levels, including policymakers, school district leaders, community leaders and school personnel. At the campus level, administrative and supervisory personnel must deliver quality educational services to all students. In successful schools, they pride themselves on their ability to hold on to students to graduation. This means being knowledgeable about their diverse student population as well as actively ensuring that all students are well served. Effective school leaders also involve parents in the decisions affecting the quality of education that their children receive.

## A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

**Developing leaders** – Whether mid-career professionals or recent college graduates, new teachers need instructional support to help them provide effective, state-of-the-art instruction to English language learners. IDRA's mentoring and support services for new teachers involves specialized technical assistance focusing on instructional strategy presentations (or *platicas*) addressing effective teaching in bilingual education. This technical assistance also has included two-day institutes to guide the teachers in planning instruction and practicing delivery of lessons in a sheltered environment.

IDRA also has conducted classroom visits to observe new teachers as they deliver instruction in the actual classroom and then working with them side-by-side, in a co-teaching situation, to help them gain confidence and teaching expertise.

**Conducting research** – To expand dropout prevention services for students with disabilities, this year, through a partnership with the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities at Clemson University, IDRA will work with targeted schools to expand inclusion of students with disabilities in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. See Page 12 for more information.

**Informing policy** – IDRA's *Graduation for All: Get Informed. Get Connected. Get Results.* shines a spotlight on opportunities for schools and communities to partner to strengthen school holding power. This e-letter also has been of growing interest to policymakers as they look for solutions to chronically high attrition rates in Texas and in other states. *Graduation for All* is free,

*Tools for Action continued on next page*



# Action

bilingual and published monthly. You can subscribe to Grad4All at the IDRA web site (<http://www.idra.org>).

**Engaging communities**—Recently, IDRA executive director, Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, presented testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives. Among her recommendations was the need to strengthen and support school-level change through local accountability teams at the campus level. “Community oversight is a critical missing ingredient in effective and accountable dropout prevention efforts at the local level,” she stated. “Local accountability teams would review their local dropout and graduation data, disaggregated by subgroups, as well as data on school factors affecting the graduation rate, such as parent involvement, student engagement, curriculum access and teaching quality. Using these data, the team would develop a comprehensive graduation plan of action to include all students.”

## What You Can Do

**Get informed.** Pull together a school team, including parents, to compile school factor data, like the areas listed above. Examine the information in a new light. Look for relationships. Identify what is not working and brainstorm creative solutions based on the data and trends you have found.

**Get involved.** The Texas Education Agency has released its latest version of *An Administrator’s Abbreviated Checklist to NCLB – Parental Involvement*. This is a usable tool that identifies about 50 requirements to parent involvement across the federal title programs. <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/>

**Get results.** Countless studies demonstrate that students with parents actively involved in their education at home and school are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, graduate from high school, and go on to post-secondary education. The book, *Beyond the Bake Sale – The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies, reveals that partnerships among schools, families, and community groups are a necessity. The book shows how to build strong collaborative relationships and offers practical advice for improving interactions between parents and teachers.

*NCLB – continued from Page 8*

the improvement of the school and the ultimate success of all the students.

## Parent-Teacher Conferences

Though required for families whose children are in the elementary grades, parent-teacher conferences are highly recommended for all students. It is a key nexus to demonstrate the ideals of equal partners, the parents’ capacity to understand and support what a child needs to succeed and be happy in school and to provide expert insight into each child.

In contrast to stereotypic notions of parents being primarily a resource to a campus for fundraising and volunteering as a free labor pool, the parent-teacher nexus spotlights the key and most valuable resource that a parent brings to school – being the one who knows his or her child as no one else does.

Even when trained psychologists examine children, their knowledge and understanding of children pales in contrast to the deep, subtle and sophisticated knowledge that parents of all classes have of their children. In fact, a truly expert counselor can comb out the many interwoven strands of knowledge that a parent has of his or her own children.

Even through the subjectivity and bias (which all of us have, with or without professional titles), when asked, a parent can give long disquisitions that reveal the learning style and preferences of the child and the moods, mood swings, personality traits and all other bits of information that a competent educator can find most useful to know how to best teach a child.

The wisdom of parent-teacher conferences has been part of the public school tradition from a distant point that preceded the intervention of federal laws and resources in education. We just have to remember and apply the

*NCLB – continued on Page 10*

# Parents' Observations

## Grist for the School Improvement Plan Mill

Parents can be shrewd observers of systemic regularities of a school that those of us within the structure are unaware of, blind to or immune to. A recent cursory survey by parents interviewing other parents and students about what students are experiencing in high school algebra revealed three situations that the parents were able to judge quite accurately.

*Parent observation:* One algebra class had 35 students.

*Parent recommendation:* Reduce class size.

*Parent observation:* A student was frustrated because when he did not understand something and asked the teacher, the response from the teacher was either to repeat his or her original statement, to tell the student that the concept had already been taught earlier, or to say there was no time to stop because the chapter had

to be covered by the end of the week.

*Parent recommendation:* Have teachers check for understanding and re-teach in ways that increase the possibility of comprehension.

*Parent observation:* A tutoring class after school had 15 students and one tutor. There was little one-on-one help.

*Parent recommendation:* Provide real tutoring with tutors who are creative and use approaches different from those used in class.

These observations and recommendations are valid, practical and important elements to include in a campus improvement plan. And though these come from the common-sense recommendations of parents with limited formal education, there is a body of research to support them.

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beliefs and principles that make these traditions wise.

### School Improvement Plan

Most state agencies have guidelines for development of school improvement plans. Some indicative statements define such a plan as “an explanation of how parents can become involved in addressing the academic issues that led to identification.”

The campus improvement plan must “describe how the campus will provide the parents of each student enrolled with written notice about the campus’ identification for improvement. Second, the plan must specify the strategies that will be used to promote parental involvement. Effective strategies will engage parents as partners with teachers in educating their children and will involve them in meaningful decision-making at the school” (TEA, 2007).

At face value, the language

supports parents’ partnership, worth and critical contributions in the effort to improve the education of all children at a campus. Our beliefs and principles reinforce the critical necessity of engaging them in conversations and decisions of substance.

A seventh-grade English teacher with a deep love for literature and writing can still learn from the parent, who, without a command of the English language, can give insight into the struggles that children are having after school and on weekends as they attempt to do their English tasks. That parent can give important evidence on the effectiveness of the after-school tutoring and on what helps and hinders her child, and other neighborhood children, from becoming proficient in English.

As an English language learner, she might not know much about the literary offerings of her child’s text, but she has a deep and almost desperate understanding of the importance to be

fluent and successful in English to be able to succeed in this country. So she is an invaluable member at the table where the school improvement plan is being formulated. What applies to English is also equally relevant to mathematics, science and all the other critical curricula that all children must master (see sample in box above).

### Children’s Strongest Advocates

The NCLB requirements are for some schools a burden, met through mechanical carrying out of the letter of the law, with minimal engagement of most parents. We took four of them as examples and illustrated how these rules can be an opportunity for meaningful family engagement.

Beliefs and principles based on respecting families can bring out the best in schools and communities to meet the spirit of the mandates.

*NCLB – continued on Page 11*

Neighborhood public schools, to be excellent places that prepare children for a future with real choices, must accept those principles as they partner with families. After all, families can be their children’s strongest advocates.

### Resources

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## Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In June and July, IDRA worked with **20,096** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **38** training and technical assistance activities and **79** program sites in **12** states plus Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Advocacy for Students of Diversity
- ◆ Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program
- ◆ GEAR UP Evaluation
- ◆ Planning and Delivering Effective Instruction
- ◆ Sheltered Instruction Train the Trainer Session

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◇ Education Service Center, Region 6 (Huntsville), Texas
- ◇ Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, California
- ◇ San Antonio College, Texas
- ◇ Marble Falls Independent School District, Texas

### Activity Snapshot

Through a series of mathematics institutes, IDRA delivered professional development training to secondary teachers based on (1) adequate yearly progress reports and accountability ratings, (2) closing the gaps, and (3) increasing student achievement in secondary mathematics. These institutes integrated real-time data collection devices such as Texas Instruments CBL2s, CBRs, graphing calculators and Pasco Probeware; dynamic learning tools such as Geometer’s Sketchpad, Fathom, and online java applets; and computer laptops for demonstrating the integration of computers into mathematics curricula that makes content accessible to all students. Technology integration shifted from integrating technology on a periodic basis, as was often the case according to teacher surveys, to one of integration as an ongoing basis so that mathematics success and access, enrollment and completion of higher-level mathematics courses become a reality for all students.

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.



*Valuing Youth* – continued from Page 2

*Beyond Affliction*, an award-winning series on the culture of disability and the evolution of changing attitudes toward people with disabilities. Marlee Matlin, who is deaf, won an Oscar for her performance in the movie, *Children of a Lesser God*. Mobility International USA promoted international exchange by and for people with disabilities through the National Clearinghouse on Disability Exchange. Jerry's Orphans staged its first annual picket of the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon, and Gallaudet University students succeeded in their demand for a deaf president.

## The Road from Here

Looking back at this legacy, how far have we come in achieving a vision of disability rights and equity in education?

***Students with disabilities are more integrated, but not all students.*** IDEA made a difference. And the efforts of parents, educators, community members and students who advocated for inclusive, nonsegregated learning realized a significant achievement. Thirty years ago, only one in five students with disabilities attended regular schools rather than separate facilities or state institutions. Today, 96 percent of children with disabilities attend regular schools (American Youth

Policy Forum and Center on Education Policy, 2001).

Compared to 1995, far more students with disabilities in 2005 spent the lion's share of their school day in a general classroom. According to NCES, "between 1995 and 2005, the percentage of students with disabilities spending 80 percent or more of the school day in a general classroom showed an overall increase from 45 to 52 percent" (2007).

But White students with disabilities were far more likely to benefit from the press for inclusion than were students of color: "Black students with disabilities were more likely than students of any other race/ethnicity to spend less than 40 percent of their day in a general classroom and were the most likely to receive education in a separate facility for students with disabilities" (NCES, 2007). Also, minority students continue to be over-represented in special education, particularly in the broadest and most subjective categories of disability (e.g., "emotionally disturbed").

***Graduation rates are worse for students with disabilities than any other subgroup. School holding power is weakest for minority students.*** In 2000-01, fewer than one in two students with disabilities (47.6 percent) graduated from school with a standard high school diploma (OSERS, 2005). And 41.1 percent of students with disabilities dropped out. School holding power is generally weakest for minority students with disabilities. In 2000-01, compared to 33.9 percent of White students, schools lost 52.2 percent of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 44.5 percent Black students and 43.5 percent of Hispanic students before their high school graduation (see table on next page).

***Academic outcomes lag. Higher in-grade retention rates predict graduation gaps.*** "On the eighth-grade NAEP reading assessment,

*Valuing Youth* – continued on Page 13



## Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Model and Dropout Prevention for Students with Disabilities – *Coming Soon!*

Centered on a model of valuing youth of all backgrounds, IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has, since 1994, kept more than 25,000 students in school, young people who were previously considered at risk of dropping out. Since its inception, the program has always served students with disabilities. In the last two school years, about one in 10 Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors was also enrolled in special education.

This year, through its partnership with the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities at Clemson University, IDRA is collaborating with selected school sites to expand the recruitment of students with disabilities to specifically assess program design, accommodation needs, services and outcomes for tutors with disabilities. In addition to analyzing outcomes, through this planned variation, IDRA will host a teleconference on inclusion of students with disabilities in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program model and produce a practitioners guide with tools and resources on accommodating students with disabilities as valued youth tutors.



For more information on the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, contact Linda Cantu at IDRA (210-444-1710, [linda.cantu@idra.org](mailto:linda.cantu@idra.org)) or visit the IDRA web site ([www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)).



the proportion of students with IEPs [individualized education plans] who scored at or above basic appears to be less than half of the proportion of students without IEPs who scored at or above basic” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

In-grade retention is highly correlated with student attrition. Based on an analysis of National Education Longitudinal Study data, Lehr and Williams-Bost, report that being held back was “the single biggest predictor of dropping out” (2005). Over one third (36 percent) of students ages 13 through 17 with disabilities are retained in grade at least once (OSERS, 2005).

### Valuing Youth as a Compass-point for Leadership

If the nation is to achieve better educational outcomes, it is time to revisit this notion: equitable outcomes have everything to do with how starkly we see the difference between equity and charity, between value and pity. Excellent outcomes have everything to do with translating these in-the-bones beliefs into practice.

In “Effective Approaches to Increasing Graduation Rates for All Students,” a teleconference on recent findings from best practices research, Lehr and Williams-Bost emphasized: “There needs to be a basic philosophical belief permeating the school: we do persist with all students, we do believe that all students can be successful... There is mounting research evidence showing the importance of caring relationships between teachers and students in terms of keeping them in school” (2005).

Disability culture, which flourished alongside national social and economic gains in equity, can help to point the way. Like other expressions of culture, disability culture has been described as an aim to “create...

## Graduation Rates and Dropout Rates for Students with Disabilities by Race and Ethnicity, 2000-01

Race/Ethnicity	Graduated with a Standard Diploma (percentage)	Dropped Out (percentage)
American Indian/ Alaska Native	41.9	52.2
Black (not Hispanic)	36.5	44.5
Hispanic	47.5	43.5
White (not Hispanic)	56.8	33.9

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2005

positive self-images, and building a society which not only accepts, but also celebrates, diversity” (USIA, 1999). And it is this bold, basic idea – that categorically rejects pity and asserts that it is not enough to *tolerate* human differences as one tolerates a foul-tasting cough syrup – that shakes off complacency.

The disability rights movement and culture were key catalysts in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The questions are equally germane today: Do we believe that good schooling must be a birthright for all, or quietly hold that for some it is a charitable idea, or just a fantasy? Is access to a quality education the promise each generation of adults issues to every child, or only to some?

A valuing perspective demands respect for children’s diversity. It implies that from the earliest years, youth with disabilities are academically, socially and cognitively engaged in learning, that education builds on each child’s strengths, and that school-family-student-community partnerships nourish and reflect a shared vision of each student’s success.

### Resources

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*The Good News and the Work Ahead* (Washington, D.C.: American Youth Policy Forum and Center on Education Policy, 2001) [http://www.aypf.org/publications/special\\_ed.pdf](http://www.aypf.org/publications/special_ed.pdf)

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## Additional Resources

### Dropout Prevention for Students with Disabilities: A Critical Issue for State Education Agencies

<http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/>

### Disability History and Timelines

<http://courses.temple.edu/neighbor/ds/disabilityrightstimeline.htm>

[http://www.disabilityhistory.org/timeline\\_new.html](http://www.disabilityhistory.org/timeline_new.html)

<http://www.museumofdisability.org/>

<http://www.nclld-youth.info/Downloads/DisabilityHistory.doc>

### Education for Disability and Gender Equity

<http://www.disabilityhistory.org/dwa/edge/curriculum/index.htm>

### National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities

<http://www.ndpc-sd.org/>

### Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

This act outlawed the exclusion of otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities from federally-funded programs.

### The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142)

Later named the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), required free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive setting.

## WOW! Workshop on Workshops

### Learn the art of planning and conducting workshops.

The WOW is a challenging, highly participatory two-and-one-half day session that – with a touch of humor – gives practical, research-based tools for preparing and leading a superb workshop with minimal stress.

This experience-based process enables you to identify, assess and enhance the skills needed to become a more effective presenter. Research-based principles underpin context for participants to collaborate in creating informative, practical and engaging presentations. During the WOW, you will:

- Experience a complete process for planning and conducting workshops.
- Review principles of adult learning.
- Contrast needs assessment approaches.
- Write and refine workshop objectives.
- Design innovative activities and use technology to create online products.
- Practice and expand your facilitation skills.
- Network with other professionals. Produce new workshop designs. Share them with all participants as take-home products.



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Sessions can be scheduled by special arrangement.

*Defying Conventions – continued from Page 4*

creating “communities of learners,” including students, teachers, administrators and parents, that meet periodically to set goals, collaboratively develop projects and share accomplishments.

### **Provide for an Authentic, Relevant and Engaging Curriculum**

- Engage students cognitively, physically and emotionally.
- Provide extensive professional development on implementing authentic assessments, curriculum, pedagogy and instruction.
- Use authentic pedagogy that challenges students to understand concepts deeply, find and integrate information, assemble evidence, weigh ideas and develop skills of analysis and expression.
- Use authentic instruction that focuses on active learning in real-world contexts calling for higher-order thinking, consideration of alternatives, extended writing and an audience for student work.
- Implement intensive interventions that supplement and give extensive practice to students who are having difficulty keeping up with the class.
- Promote intellectually challenging work that demands rigorous intellectual work and mirrors that of professionals, e.g., mathematics and science instruction that produces what mathematicians and scientists do.
- Link instruction to student and community experiences that make sense to students.
- Honor students’ home language, history and culture.
- Focus more time on core curriculum, streamline course offerings and allow time for personalized instruction and attention.
- Use project-based instruction that

is multidisciplinary, relevant and challenging.

- Provide for internships with professionals.

### **Effective Family Engagement vs. Neglect and Disregard for Parents**

Engaging parents and extended family members who constitute the student’s “circle of supporters” (parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, close friends) is key to a successful partnership that leads to student success academically, socially and emotionally. Many schools are not seizing the opportunity to engage this most valuable educational resource that can enrich the teaching and learning experience.

This “circle of support” is a treasure of information and can serve as a powerful team that shares responsibility for the academic progress of each student. Schools with a strong student holding power do the following for home-school connections.

- Create a family engagement program where parents and educators discuss implications of a challenging program and the different and mutually supportive roles that educators and parents both play in creating a successful learning environment for the student.
- Provide periodic assessment data on students and school performance in implementing a challenging instructional program.
- Provide assessment data in a manner (and language) that parents can understand, interpret and take action.
- Be a clearinghouse for parents to access educational, social and psychological services for the family and students.
- Provide training and assistance to parents on topics related to strengthening relationships among students, school staff and other

families.

- Provide ongoing training for teachers and staff on positive family engagement practices aimed at student academic success.

### **Summary**

Most young people can bounce back from adversity, stress, trauma, crises and other debilitating issues and can experience success when facilitated by significant others, such as teachers, administrators, parents and friends who have gained their respect and admiration. School personnel can have a direct positive impact on reversing a process that leads to a student’s total disassociation with schools.

Understanding how the problem begins to manifest itself, the factors that contribute to these manifestations, and those research-based practices that schools have used to successfully address these factors is critical to strengthening school holding power. While these lists of practices are by no means exhaustive, they provide a schema of some critical practices, based on research, that are associated with schools with a strong student holding power.

### **Resources**

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**Episode 18 : “U.S. Supreme Court Decision on Race” IDRA Classnotes Podcast** – Bradley Scott, Ph.D., director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity, clarifies the recent court ruling that applies only to voluntary desegregation plans and that race can sometimes be used to achieve diversity for the benefit of children’s effective education.

**Episode 17: “A Conversation about Single Sex Education” IDRA Classnotes Podcast** – Kathy Rigsby, assistant director of the Interwest Equity Assistance Center in Denver, takes a moment during a conference of the Association for Gender Equity Leadership in Education to discuss this issue that has sparked so much dialogue around the country.



**Episode 16: “Five Dimensions of Mathematical Proficiency” IDRA Classnotes Podcast** – Kathryn Brown outlines the five dimensions of mathematical proficiency and provides tips on helping students develop their mathematical thinking.



**Episode 15: “Learnings from the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program” IDRA Classnotes Podcast** – Linda Cantu, Ph.D., and Juanita García, Ph.D., discuss several things they have learned during more than two decades of experience with IDRA’s highly-successful dropout prevention program, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.



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