



Teachers Pressing for Quality Teaching

Lessons from Content Teachers of English Language Learners

Inside this Issue:

- ✦ **Texan's testify about NCLB**
- ✦ **Technology opportunities lost by NCLB**
- ✦ **In-grade retentions rise in Texas**

by Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

Two years ago, the *No Child Left Behind Act* became law and is being considered a historic and far-reaching piece of legislation. It is designed to help states address issues of language and cultural differences, inadequate instruction, inadequately prepared teachers, increased accountability and effective parent engagement.

But many are asking whether the NCLB is doing what it should for the 4.1 million English language learners in the nation's public schools.

Title III of NCLB specifically addresses issues related to English language learner education. Politically, the issue is so important that it was assured a special place in the NCLB. The student achievement purposes of the Title III legislation are listed in the box on Page 8. This article outlines the grades the NCLB should receive in several aspects of serving English language learners.

"English language learner" is a generic term used for many hyphenated-Americans who are adding

to or perfecting their use of the English language. Sociological studies point to the fact that the term personifies Americans with a wide range of characteristics and experiences, each with a diverse set of implications for educators and policymakers. Not acknowledging this fact turns NCLB into an opportunity for some and an illusion for others.

An English language learner may be a recent immigrant who arrives in this country well educated, with a strong academic foundation in his or her mother tongue, and economically advantaged.

Or it could be someone with limited academic opportunities in search of the American dream.

An English language learner also may be a third or fourth generation offspring whose ancestors saw the birth of many communities in the United States, have lived here for many generations and have been deprived of the opportunity to part of the American dream. Their parents were denied educational opportunities, were not the recipients of a quality education, are currently facing barriers in achieving the American dream, and are marginally

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exercising their rights as American citizens.

In either case, their challenges when enrolling in our school systems are many, including a new language, the adjustment to a new environment, and a new set of expectations.

NCLB represents an opportunity for the recent immigrant who is on his or her way up the economic ladder of success in this country and an illusion for all the other English language learners. These students are referred to in research literature as “dropouts” or “push-outs.”

An Illusion for Many

Acknowledging the fact of non-education as the United States’ fault line, former President Bill Clinton referred to further neglect in the following manner: “Let’s not forget that we also have an educational deficit. Education is the fault line in America today. Those who have it are doing well in the global economy; those who don’t are not doing well. We cannot walk away from this

The time is now to alter our course. Further neglect will exacerbate the social and educational inequalities and intensify the national and individual consequences that this educational impasse already has and continues to produce.

fundamental fact. The American dream will succeed or fail in the 21st century in direct proportion to our commitment to educate every person in the United States of America” (1995).

In discussing non-education in the United States, Sanchez questioned the educational curricula that “produced so many dropouts and so-called mentally retarded children and so few pupils who finally made it through high school and into colleges and universities” (Clinton, 1995).

Although some improvements have been documented, the fact remains that Mexican Americans, the second largest group among the Hispanic and minority populations, face “a system that has not accepted responsibility for implementing a program compatible with cultural and

learning characteristics” (Cárdenas, 1995).

The Public Education Network and IDRA recently convened a public hearing in Texas about the NCLB as part of a series of such hearings across the country. Students, parents, community advocates and business leaders testified in San Antonio (see Page 3). This article captures insights provided by the presenters and is supplemented by IDRA’s experience around issues associated with the inclusion of English language learners in the NCLB legislation and implementation. The time is now to alter our course. Further neglect will exacerbate the social and educational inequalities and intensify the national and individual consequences that this

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Communities Can Influence the Impact of NCLB

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

Editor’s Note: In September 2004, the Intercultural Development Research Association hosted a public hearing for Texas on the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act. IDRA executive director Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel presented the (adapted) remarks below as a hearing officer. See page 4 for an overview of the hearing.

In our mission to help schools provide a high quality education for children of all backgrounds, IDRA has, like many of you, followed the debates surrounding *No Child Left Behind*. It is a law that promises to close achievement gaps between rich and poor students. The act is one of the most far-reaching education reform efforts since the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that separate is not equal.

NCLB mirrors Texas’ system of accountability in education. It took what was being done in Texas and amplified it, good and bad, to the national stage. Whatever the strengths and shortcomings the system may have carried with it, there is no doubt that more must be done to improve the way in which we serve our children.

In Texas, we have a 38 percent

overall dropout rate and a distressing dropout rate of over 44 percent for African American and Latino students. Close to one in four African American and Latino students cannot read or do math on grade level, compared to one in 10 White students. Surely we can do better.

Texas must also commit to increase funding for public education. Since 1993, the state has reduced its contribution from 60 percent to 38 percent, forcing school districts to either assume a greater share of funding, or cut back their programs for students and teachers. As the state defaults in its responsibility to fund education, most school districts in Texas, especially

property poor districts, are unable to deliver the quality education that all students deserve and that legislation such as NCLB seeks to ensure.

District Court Judge John Dietz, in his decision in the recent Texas school funding case, said: (1) the current underfunded system perpetuates the education gap between rich and poor; (2) in addition to expanding the overall level of support for all students, the state must expand its investment in programs that serve poor and minority students; and (3) unless the state funding issue is resolved and addressed in an equitable manner, Texas, in 2040, will have a population that is “larger, poorer,

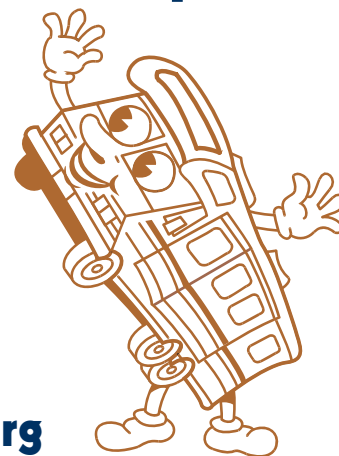
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Texans Testify on NCLB's Impact on Children

Across the country recently, hundreds of people voiced their opinions on the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Parents, students, educators and community members testified in several states before panels of leaders to identify the extent to which NCLB is providing adequate resources, improving teaching and learning, delivering targeted services to students and teachers, and enhancing the public's confidence in its schools and in the nation's system of public education.

As more schools are identified by NCLB as falling short and as debate over the federal law intensifies, the Intercultural Development Research Association hosted a forum in Texas to hear public opinion about children's schooling and the impact of the NCLB education law.

Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director, stated: "For 30 years, IDRA has worked together with parents, educators, and community and business leaders to ensure excellent schools where children are safe, happy, learning and engaged. The community is a powerful force for promoting quality neighborhood public schools. This hearing on NCLB is an opportunity to listen to the community on what is best for our children."

The forum was the sixth in a series of 10 public hearings sponsored by Public Education Network in conjunction with state and regional partners. PEN is a national organization of local education funds

dedicated to improving public schools and building citizen support for quality public education for all children.

More than 60 people participated in the Texas hearing, including 21 panelists and 20 "open-mike" testifiers. Panelists and testifiers were able to contribute in either English or Spanish.

The hearing officers were: Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, executive director of IDRA; Arlinda Marie Arriaga, national youth president of League of United Latin American Citizens; Maria del Rosario "Rosie" Castro, coordinator of Student Support Services at Palo Alto College; William Miles, director of policy initiatives and programs at PEN; and John Wilkerson, partnership advisor of the San Antonio Education Partnership.

The Texas hearing included four panels: student, parent, community and business.

The largest panel at the hearing was the student panel, comprising college students and those from regular, charter, magnet and alternative high schools in different parts of the state. The recurring sentiment from students concerning NCLB was that they knew very little about it.

Representatives on the parent panel expressed concern that they must deal with the stress standardized testing places on their children. Although NCLB mentions parents 240 times, panelists overwhelming felt that the federal government and school districts need to show, through action, that they respect and value parent involvement and contributions.

Representatives from the business community in the state testified

about too much time being spent teaching for testing rather than on critical analysis and reasoning and on delving into other subjects.

Community advocates also raised concerns about high-stakes testing and low funding levels.

Opportunities to provide input on NCLB were not limited to testifying at the hearing. IDRA provided laptops, tape recorders, and paper forms so those who did not wish to testify or who had additional testimony could submit online, written or oral statements.

All of the testimony and input will help determine how federal law affects local communities. It will be incorporated into a national report that will be presented to members of Congress, the media, policymakers and education stakeholders.

Dr. Robledo Montecel summarized: "Beyond information dissemination and reporting, though, I believe this hearing can catalyze dialogue and action regarding NCLB and quality schooling for all children, especially as the act undergoes Congress' review and amendment in 2005."

The Texas hearing was supported by a number of organizations, including: the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of San Antonio; Making Connections—San Antonio, An Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation; Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund; Texas Latino Education Coalition; Texas League of United Latin American Citizens; and Texas State Conference of NAACP Branches.

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less educated, and more needy than today.”

As NCLB enters its third year of implementation, Texas is seeing an increase rather than a decrease in the number of schools failing to meet the accountability standards set by the law almost three years ago.

The Texas Education Agency is notifying an estimated 300 schools in 189 districts that they have failed to achieve standards called “adequate yearly progress” for the second straight year. That means those schools must allow their students to transfer to another school, either public or private, according to NCLB, if they so wish, at the cost of the school district. Incidentally, such costs will come out of Title I funds, leaving fewer monies in the district to educate children.

In order to hold schools accountable, just like we hold all other public institutions, we do not have to, at the same time, punish children for not learning what they have not been taught.

At this hearing, you have told us to what extent you think NCLB has or has not provided adequate resources, improved teaching and learning, delivered targeted services to students and to teachers, and enhanced your confidence in schools and in the nation’s public education system.

For all of us, we can take testimony presented and spread the word to others in the broader community, not as a report of public input, but rather as a starting point for dialogue and for very quick action.

I have been struck by the fervor and commitment I heard in the testimony that was provided. We can certainly build on that as we create

something that *does* work for children.

This hearing focused on input from the community at large, including parent, business and civic leaders. NCLB acknowledges the community’s involvement as a powerful force to promoting quality public schools. In fact, it mentions parents 240 times. It is pretty obvious to me that it does not matter how many times the law mentions them, parents and communities are left out of *No Child Left Behind*. We have to change that.

As NCLB intends to hold schools and students accountable, we must also hold our government accountable with our full participation in these processes. We most look at the benefits and challenges of *No Child Left Behind* and collaborate to strengthen state and federal policy.

When NCLB is open for review and amendment by Congress in 2005, all of us ought to take the lead and present feedback and ideas offered at this hearing and from our discussions. In fact, testimony given at this hearing, along with written testimony submitted online and testimony given orally via cassette recorder, will be compiled into a national report and presented to members of Congress.

I have also been struck by the way in which *No Child Left Behind* has cemented together two issues that are not one in the same. On the one hand, we have the ability or the willingness of schools to educate children, and on the other hand, we have children learning what they are taught. Our leaders seem to have bought hook, line and sinker the notion that those two are inseparable and that in order to hold schools accountable, we have to punish children for not showing up as well as the schools would like. That is the worst kind of accountability. We have to find better ways to hold schools accountable for education of children.

One of the parents today said that even children who do not have parents

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or whose parents do not speak English have the right to be educated in schools. That is what schools are for. That is what educators are for.

On the other hand, in order to hold schools accountable, just like we hold all other public institutions, we do not have to, at the same time, punish children for not learning what they have not been taught.

It’s a little bit like telling you in the hearing this afternoon, “You can provide all the testimony that you want verbally, on the computers in the back, on audio tapes, or in writing.” And then we take from your hand the computer, the paper, the pen and the cassette recorder and say: “Well, you know what? You don’t really care about education, you really didn’t want to provide testimony. Bad, bad, bad.” But we would have taken from you what was necessary for you to contribute.

That is much like what we are doing to children by not fully funding *No Child Left Behind*. That is much like what we are doing to children by penalizing them for not showing up smart enough on tests. And we twist it around and turn it on children.

Together, parents, communities and educators are smart enough to figure out ways in which we can hold public institutions accountable to the public, in which we can press for accountability that does not hurt kids, and in which we can make sure that we have fair funding for the common good. And today, with all of your interest, your caring and your time, I know that we can get that done.

María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., is the IDRA executive director. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org.



The Two Faces of NCLB

by Kathryn Brown

Put aside for a moment the many arguments about how the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) calls for lofty goals but provides inadequate funding – leaving schools scrambling for resources and undermining teacher and student efforts as students fall short of standardized test requirements and schools fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP).

Put aside the fact that the federal government recently cut funding for the NCLB Enhancing Education through Technology (EETT) program by \$200 million on top of another more than \$100 million cut to other federal education grant programs, such as Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology (PT³) Program, Community Technology Centers, and Star Schools.

Instead, bring forward our children. Bring forward their education and visionary ways of teaching our students by enthusiastic teachers who propel students' potential to new heights. Bring forward what is required for *all* our children to succeed and have opportunities before them in a world that requires them to be expert thinkers and complex communicators (Bautz, 2004).

Hold this vision in your mind and do not let it go as we explore the

The standardized testing and the technology integration expectations for students and teachers are in conflict with one another.

conflict that NCLB causes between standardized testing and technology integration into the curricula and ways to resolve this conflict.

New Technology Standards

Many have experienced how powerful a tool technology can be. This is clear when someone is researching a topic online, exploring dynamic sets of data, accessing amazing amounts of information in libraries and databases, and creating masterpieces of work that were unheard-of five years ago. Signed into law in 2001, NCLB recognizes the potential of technology in our children's' education.

This section of NCLB is referred to as the EETT program. Its principal goal is to "improve student academic achievement through the use of technology in elementary and secondary schools."

The EETT program also aims to assist in making every student technologically literate by the end of his or her eighth grade year and ensuring effective technology integration by

teachers who have attended professional development that incorporates research-based instructional models.

This part of NCLB is not a far reach from the Technology Applications Standards for Texas where students and teachers, from grades K-12, must move from the basic uses of technology to in-depth integration for researching and obtaining information in many formats, solving complex problems and communicating complex solutions.

Looking through this angle of the lens, one might think this is a huge improvement from the standards that were required in our parents' or our own K-12 educational experiences. However, this is not so. Removing the gauze and seeing the NCLB and the Texas provisions for what they are reveals otherwise.

Limitations of High-Stakes Testing

Both NCLB and Texas call for standardized testing and holding children accountable for falling short of these "standards" or "expectations." NCLB requires standardized testing for students in grades three through eight. In Texas, the standards are the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and the way of assessing whether or not a child has met these

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standards is by using the measurement tool, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

On one hand, both NCLB and the TEKS expect teachers to infuse technology in ways that guide, empower, and prepare students for our exponentially growing technological world. On the other hand, they limit assessment of student knowledge and acquisition of these skills to a standardized test that reduces solutions to choices A, B, C, or D.

Holding students and teachers to these double standards sends conflicting messages. The standardized testing and the technology integration

In order for our students to be ready for today, where computers have reshaped the job market, we must go beyond the old and limiting ideas of standardized testing and look for ways that value students.

expectations for students and teachers are in conflict with one another. One cannot turn a blind eye to the wonder, creativity, exploration, and revelations that students experience when teachers have integrated various technology tools in their classrooms, by dismissing all this when it comes to a school's AYP.

How can we reduce ourselves and for a moment believe that the wonderful promises that technology tools bring to students in learning and exploring their own ideas and thoughts can be simply assessed by a standardized test? How can we reduce *education* to such simplicity when we know the complex nature of learning itself?

By making education something of a technical, production task, that has a set of rules that include standards, fixed curriculum, lesson plans, and standardized tests, we have stripped it of what a great human endeavor education actually is. Postman coined this notion as *technopoly* (Charles, 2004).

A New Vision

So what is a solution to the conflict in NCLB? Stop the conflict and get real with the harm that standardized tests do to our students and the possibilities abound with technology integration for preparing students for our world. This will result in:

- Valuing the knowledge a student gains and her application of this knowledge to her world, where he or she has used technology to gather and sort through various types of information, and has become an expert thinker and a complex communicator;
- Reducing the inner conflict that teachers feel when faced with high-

stakes testing and the love of teaching and content, no longer feeling like they abandoned teaching of content for teaching the test; and

- Expanding opportunities for parents to see what makes their child truly successful in school and how this prepares them for an enriching life.

One might think that as institutions of higher education are changing student entrance requirements, expanding beyond merely SAT scores, that in PreK-12 education we would employ other methods for assessing student knowledge that is in agreement with how students are learning through the use of technology and applying this knowledge.

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing has drafted a document that "calls on lawmakers to reduce reliance on standardized, one-size-fits-all testing as the principal measure of student and school progress." This petition asks for a variety of assessments that demonstrate student knowledge in more expansive ways

(Murray, 2004).

Today's job market already exhibits this way of thinking in order to meet the ever-changing needs of the market and technological innovations. In order for our students to be ready for today, where computers have reshaped the job market, we must go beyond the old and limiting ideas of standardized testing and look for ways that value students and harvest the possibilities that technology offers.

Resources

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educational impasse already has and continues to produce.

Rating the NCLB's Inclusion of English Language Learners

The NCLB should be the landmark federal legislation that ensures “all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.”

This legislation argues for inclusivity of all children, including English language learners. Below are ratings provided by IDRA as a means of assessing *inclusivity*. IDRA first outlined eight components that define “inclusivity.” Below is the rating scale:

A = Policies and actions provided in NCLB promote the component.

B = Policies and actions provided in NCLB are partially enforced but such neglect does not negatively impact the education of English language learners.

C = Policies and actions provided in NCLB lack enforcement, which has a negative impact on the education of English language learners.

D = Policies and actions provided in NCLB negatively affect the quality of education of English language learners.

F = There is total disregard for a critical factor in the education of English language learners.

Funding is adequate to support an appropriate instructional program = D

Title III of NCLB provides funding for improvement of education opportunities for English language learners. The specific allocation for these students in NCLB is set at \$750 million per year. There are 48.2 million

Goals of the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners

Title III of NCLB specifically addresses issues related to education of English language learners. Politically, the issue is so important that it was assured a special place in the NCLB, commonly known as Title III. The student achievement-related purposes of the Title III legislation are:

- “To help ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet;
- To assist all limited-English-proficient children, including immigrant children and youth, to achieve at high levels in the core academic subjects so that those children can meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet, consistent with section 1111(b)(1); and
- To develop high-quality language instruction educational programs designed to assist state educational agencies, local educational agencies, and schools in teaching limited-English-proficient children and serving immigrant children and youth.”

– *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001*

public school students in the United States. About 4.1 million students, or 8.5 percent, are English language learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Thus, the average entitlement for each English language learner is approximately \$183 per year. This meager amount, when added to the under-funding by the majority of states, moves the minute hand just one notch, but not sufficiently to make a substantial educational difference.

Appropriations, moreover, have not matched the allocation set forth in the legislation. Appropriations for English language learners represent about 3 percent of the overall NCLB appropriations, a 5.5 percent disparity. Furthermore, in 2002, the first appropriation under NCLB for Title III was approximately \$664 million, which is \$86 million less than the original \$750 million. The allocation has since increased to \$684 million, and currently

is at \$681 million.

The intention is good; but the commitment is poor. This amount of funding is not sufficient to make a difference to local educational agencies and schools where needs are greatest.

The definition of English language learners is flexible to embrace the range of instructional demands = C

English language learners are identified for NCLB purposes on the basis of low proficiency in the English language or low academic achievement caused by non-participation and poor engagement in class activities as a result of language incompatibility between the school and the student.

However, Cárdenas and Cárdenas cite language as only one of the incompatibilities that lead to dysfunctional instruction (1977). They list four other factors (poverty, culture, mobility and societal perceptions) that

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contribute to incompatible instruction.

This NCLB definition is not robust enough to be inclusive of the various factors that contribute to the educational condition of English language learners.

Instructional programming is bold, innovative and addresses the real educational issues = C

NCLB clearly describes that to ensure its mission is accomplished it should close “the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.” This mission cannot be met when only cognitive challenges are addressed.

“Literacy deficits” have become the outcome of unresponsive educational and instructional experiences for many English language learners. Without adequate instruction these “literacy deficits” compound pushing many students out and seriously interfering with their academic calling.

Instruction involves more than just cognitive challenges. It also involves the integration of social, emotional and psycho-social realities that affect the learning in the classroom. *Culturally-responsive* and *culturally-relevant* instruction are two terms that have been used to describe a classroom condition where discourse and context for learning are manipulated by the teacher to make new content knowledge and skills meaningful and comprehensible.

In other words, knowledge is socially constructed and applied. The application of knowledge to varying social contexts becomes a skill that must also be learned in the school setting. Such is not the case here. The absence of this language in NCLB is proof of its narrow focus on cognitive challenges. This lack of focus on social

context narrows NCLB’s focus on the “total child” and is a classic example of “neglect by commission.”

Assessment instruments are reliable and valid = C

Assessment plays a significant role in planning, delivering and evaluating the acquisition of language, content knowledge and critical skills. Assessment is crucial to NCLB’s accountability requirements. Because assessment instruments are plagued with validity and reliability issues (content, linguistic and cultural, norming biases) when applied to English language learners, serious problems exist when alternative assessment modalities are ignored.

NCLB promotes the use of standardized testing as the sole assessment instrument. Furthermore, even when states allow for alternative forms of assessment, NCLB expresses disapproval in its accountability system. This shortcoming is a disservice to English language learners who must, many times, be faced with standardized testing with serious reliability and validity problems.

Teachers of English language learners are adequately prepared to address the challenges of a linguistic and culturally-different student population = C

NCLB targets teacher quality as an essential component of any plan to address its mission by ensuring “that all

teachers hired after such day and teaching in a program supported with funds under this part are highly qualified.”

Programs for English language learners require teachers with very specific competencies. A “culturally competent” teacher is one who has the commitment, is compassionate and an advocate of children’s rights, and knows about and has the skills necessary to address the cognitive needs within a social context that mirrors the culture and families of English language learners.

Critical teacher shortages exist in states with high concentrations of English language learners, particularly those states with hyper-growth rates of immigrant students. Among the areas of critical teacher shortages such as mathematics and science teachers of English language learners. NCLB provides funding for teacher preparation and continuing education for teachers of English language learners and supports funding for the alternative certification of bilingual and ESL teachers. Although NCLB does not recognize the importance of “culturally competent” teachers, it does emphasize teacher quality.

Schools articulate a “first priority” status and assume greater responsibility to educate English language learners = B

Tying funds and “providing greater decision making authority and



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flexibility to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance” is a way of persuading schools to make high performance of students a priority. The condition of education of English language learners calls for an “all-out attack” on an escalating problem with catastrophic consequences.

Just like any other educational matter of high importance, an acknowledgment of the issues form the basis for the response to an educational problem and an assignment of priority. By the mere fact that NCLB specifically addresses English language learner issues through Title III and an accountability requirement, it has acknowledged and assigned a high priority to English language learners.

Parents are afforded a “partner” status and participate in student and school goal setting = B

NCLB recognizes the important role of families and parents in the education of their children by “affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.”

Parents play three major roles that define parents as critical “teaching” partners, teachers’ “funds of knowledge,” and educational decision makers. Villarreal and Rodríguez describe “parents as an important resource for teachers because they have valuable information about their children that is essential in planning meaningful educational experiences.” Secondly, parents and educators “share a common goal – to develop children’s social and academic skills to make choices and compete equitably in this society” (2003).

Accountability measures are focused on the education provider and not on the education consumer = C

NCLB recognizes that its mission

Tools for

NCLB Turns Three

During this year’s presidential campaign, public education at times took center stage as candidates debated the merits, outcomes and funding of the *No Child Left Behind* Act. NCLB provisions affect every public school district in our nation. Its requirements and funding have implications for teaching quality, accountability, student achievement, English language learning, supplemental services, technology, and parent and public participation.

Signed into law on January 8, 2001, NCLB has been hailed as a victory for accountability and bipartisanship. But has NCLB been a victory for children? To ensure that communities, parents, educators had the chance to weigh in on this critical question, IDRA joined Public Education Network’s national effort to gather public testimony on NCLB (see Page 3). PEN has received more than 11,000 responses and will summarize these in a national report due early 2005.

IDRA continues to measure NCLB’s progress against a consistent yardstick and four central questions:

- Does NCLB increase school accountability without penalizing children?
- To what extent does NCLB promote quality teaching and learning?
- Does NCLB promote equitable resources and excellent outcomes for *all* children in our public school system?
- How does NCLB affect the public role in public education?

A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

Conducting Research – As one indicator of NCLB performance, the Department of Education requires all states to measure high school graduation rates (HSGR). In 1986, IDRA developed a prototype for examining attrition. This model is now being used nationally to develop graduation estimates. With our partners in Texas and across the country, we are also examining the links between graduation rates and quality teaching, school funding, and college access and success.

Developing Leaders – IDRA has hosted three InterAction forums to create policy solutions to address disparities in higher education access and success of Latino students. The policy solutions stemming from those forums will be presented at a statewide seminar set for February 2, 2005. Invited participants include state policymakers, K-12 educators, university leaders, and community and business advocates (see Page 16).

Informing Policy – School performance under NCLB depends on equitable funding. In conjunction with the Texas Latino Education Coalition, this past

Tools for Action continued on next page

Action

year IDRA launched www.texas4fairfunding.org to keep Texans informed about school finance issues and what is at stake if equity provisions are lost.

Engaging Communities – Through presentations and trainings with parents, IDRA is working to ensure that families are well-informed about NCLB requirements and options.

What You Can Do

With such broad-ranging impact and upcoming congressional review of NCLB in 2005, your view about NCLB's impact and involvement are critical. Here are three things you can do:

Get informed on NCLB implementation. For more information on professional development packages that build on the strengths of all students and parents, see http://www.idra.org/Services/titleiii.htm#titleiii_1.

Get involved in Title I and Title II planning, allocation, and evaluation. Ensure that parents and communities are full participants in your school district, community, and state. For more information, see: *Using NCLB to Improve Student Achievement: An Action Guide for Community and Parent Leaders* (<http://www.publiceducation.org/pdf/NCLBBook.pdf>).

Get results by joining organizations and coalitions like the Texas Latino Education Coalition that press for excellent, equitable public schools (contact IDRA at 201-444-1710 or contact@idra.org).

Additional Research and Resources

- Findings from NCLB public hearings sponsored by PEN (<http://www.publiceducation.org/>). See Page 4 for a summary of the Texas hearing held by IDRA.
- *Listening to Teachers: Classroom Realities and No Child Left Behind*, Harvard Civil Rights Project (http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/articles/NCLB_Survey_Report.pdf).
- *NCLB Teaching Quality Mandates: Findings and Themes from the Field*, Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (<http://www.teachingquality.org>).
- Online research on NCLB compiled by AACTE Education Policy Clearinghouse (<http://www.edpolicy.org/research/nclb/index.php>).
- *Learn. Vote. Act. The Public's Responsibility for Public Education*, a national poll conducted by PEN and *Education Week* (<http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=5094>).

Opportunity or Illusion – continued from Page 10

will be accomplished only when it holds “schools, local educational agencies, and states accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, and identifying and turning around low-performing schools that have failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education.”

The cause for dysfunctional instruction must rest on the existing educational paradigm that fails to acknowledge its faults in serving English language learners. Instead of focusing on the “needs” of the students and addressing the “problem” as one where certain students must be “fixed,” schools must focus on their practices and begin establishing high standards to rate their successes or failures in meeting these challenges.

Although NCLB has shifted the burden to schools and has contributed significantly to school accountability, the fact remains that it does not forcefully regulate states who continue to blame their students for not learning what they have not been taught.

Summary

Although federal funding in general for education has increased over the last four years, funding for Title III has decreased by \$2.5 million. Of great concern is also the fact that states are not spending the funds allocated by the federal government for education and, sadly, are sending funds back to the federal government.

This situation, amid the fact that student achievement for English language learners and low-income students continues to lag behind those of White students, their school dropout rates and student attrition rates are staggering, and their college enrollment and graduation rates are among the lowest, complicates this educational

Opportunity or Illusion – continued on Page 12

Opportunity or Illusion – continued from Page 11
impose even more (Johnson, 2004).

- The conclusions are as follows.
- States and school districts must review their budgetary processes to ensure that funds available to provide educational equity for *all* students are not wasted and are efficiently spent in a manner that best addresses the issues of inequity.
 - Parents and communities should more pro-actively exercise their right to question and their responsibility to participate in the education decision-making that affects the quality of education of their children.
 - Federal, state and local school districts must pro-actively engage researchers, educators, and communities in seeking real solutions to education problems instead of

aligning solutions to political philosophies.

NCLB can be a catalyst for real change with real benefits for *all* children and put our nation on track as the model where diversity, honesty and compassion become the glue that makes our pledge of “one nation, indivisible with liberty and justice for all” hold forever as a model for an ever-restless world of nations.

Resources

- Cárdenas, J.A. *Multicultural Education: A Generation of Advocacy* (Needham Heights, Mass.: Simon and Schuster Custom Publishing, 1995).
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- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Unpublished tabulations compiled from Common Core of Data for 2002-03 School Year (2003).
- Villarreal, A., and R.G. Rodríguez. “The Home as a Significant Source for Developing Language and Study Skills: Fifteen Tips for Families,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2003).

Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., is the director of the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In October, IDRA worked with **13,387** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **64** training and technical assistance activities and **185** program sites in **nine** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Coaching and Mentoring for Teachers
- ◆ Educational Issues in the Community
- ◆ ESL Strategies for Middle School Language Arts
- ◆ TAKS Reading and Vocabulary Strategies for LEP Students

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◇ Corpus Christi Independent School District, Texas
- ◇ Lebanon’s Communities That Care, Oregon
- ◇ National Association for Multicultural Education Conference, Kansas City, Missouri
- ◇ Office of English Language Acquisition, Washington, D.C.

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

Activity Snapshot

The IDRA Texas Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) is a comprehensive, multicultural and multi-lingual parent leadership support program for strengthening partnerships between parents and schools for student success. The project targets critical areas of need in parent involvement throughout the state of Texas. Families with children in schools designated as low-performing and Title I are supported through the activities of this project. The IDRA model of valuing parents as leaders promotes an emerging cadre of parents committed to positive support throughout the educational pipeline from pre-kindergarten through higher education.

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

Retentions in Grade

Continuing Dysfunctional Educational Responses in Texas

by **Albert Cortez, Ph.D., and
Josie D. Cortez, M.A.**

In November 2004, the Texas Education Agency released its annual report on in-grade retention practices in Texas. A part of a continuing series, this latest report provides summary data on in-grade retention levels in Texas for the 2002-03 school year.

The report includes overall in-grade retention rates for the state as a whole, as well as state-level retention numbers broken out by grade levels (kindergarten through grade 10). The document also presents in-grade retention data by ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, language proficiency status, special education and program categories (including career and technology, gifted and talented, and Title I).

The document includes Texas statutory policies related to in-grade retention and the state's related "Student Success Initiative." Also examined are retention and Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) passing rates, and student performance comparing retained and promoted students for grade levels three through 10. The final segment provides district-by-district summary of retention rates.

In-Grade Retention Rises

According to this latest TEA report, school districts in Texas collectively retained 184,214 pupils in grades kindergarten through 12. Using a state average cost per student of \$5,000 per pupil, this translates to an add-on expense of almost \$1 billion (\$921 million) to provide an extra year of instruction to students who were retained.

Retention is expensive. An IDRA study shows, "It is more cost effective to increase educational resources to improve student performance and

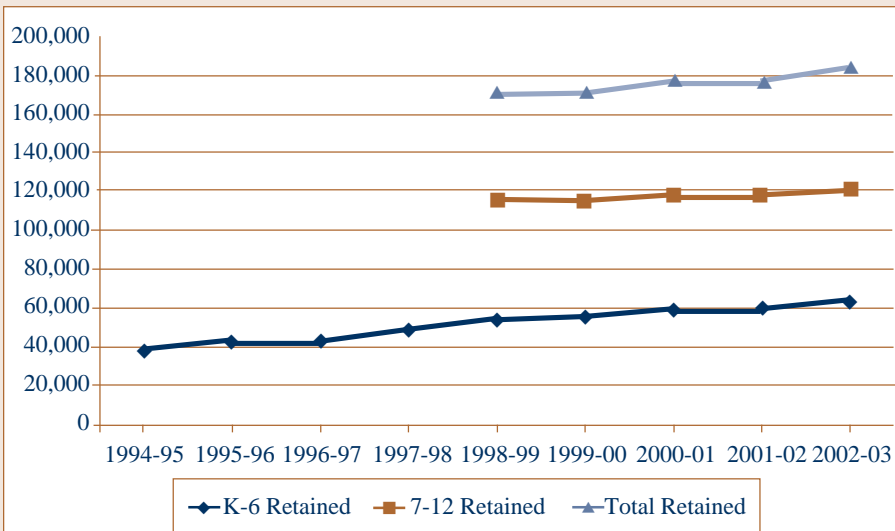
eliminate the need for retention," (McCollum, et al., 1999).

Extensive research has proven that in-grade retention is an ineffective and in many cases a dysfunctional response to student achievement. As reported in IDRA's *Failing Our Children – Finding Alternatives to In-Grade Retention* (Cortez et al., 1999), studies from as early as 1930 have reported the negative effects of retention on academic achievement (Ayer, 1933; Kline, 1933).

A meta-analysis of 63 studies on

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Number of Retentions is Rising in Texas



Source: Texas Education Agency, 2004.

retention found that students retained in grade do not benefit academically or socially (Holmes, 1989; Foster, 1993). In fact, retention is strongly correlated with dropping out of school (Grissom and Shepard, 1989; Roderick, 1995). Students retained for a second time are almost certain to drop out of school (Setenich, 1994).

Between 1990 and 1997, 66 studies were conducted on retention with 65 reporting retention was ineffective or harmful to students. Fifty percent of students who repeat a grade do no better the second time, and 25 percent actually do worse the second time (McCollum, et al., 1999).

Despite such incontrovertible evidence, some state policy leaders and educators continue to insist that students be retained, thus holding them accountable for academic performance, irrespective of the causes, which often include inadequate or inappropriate instruction.

Dr. José A. Cárdenas, IDRA founder and director emeritus, summarizes: “The retention of students is consistent with a student deficit model. It is assumed that the student has total control over the learning situation, and the failure to learn is attributed to student negligence or unwillingness to do so,” (1995).

According to the state’s data, the 184,214 students retained constituted 4.7 percent of the state’s kindergarten through grade 12 enrollment. Analysis of the data however, reveals that in-grade retention is not evenly distributed across grade levels or across the state’s major ethnic groups.

As noted by the agency “across grade levels K-6, the retention rate was much higher in first grade than any other grade” where the 17,299 first-graders retained accounted for roughly 56.3 percent of all kindergarten through sixth grade retainees. By comparison, only 1 percent of all fifth-grade students, 1.4 percent of all sixth-grade students,

and 1.5 percent of all fourth-grade students were retained in Texas schools.

Though the latter is somewhat encouraging, a review of trend data, presented in the box on Page 13 indicates that for all but grade six, the number and percent of students retained in grade in Texas has been increasing since 1995. The number of retainees in grades kindergarten through six increased from 38,500 in 1994-95 to 68,852 in 2002-03. This is a net increase of 25,352 or approximately 65 percent over an eight-year span.

Secondary level (grades seven through 12) in-grade retention rates reflected notably higher rates than those found in most elementary grade levels, with the exception of first grade. According to TEA’s data, ninth grade remains the grade level with the highest number and percentage of in-grade retentions where 57,197 or 16.4 percent of ninth grade students were held back. While seventh- and eighth-grade retentions hover at 2 percent, grade 10 retentions have risen to 8.8 percent; retentions in grades 11 and 12 persisted around the 5.6 to 4.7 range.

The overall 6.9 percent retention rate for grades seven through 12 is almost two and one half times greater than the 2.9 percent in-grade retention rate reported for grades kindergarten through six. Collectively, more than 120,000 students enrolled in secondary schools were retained in 2002-03.

This high number of retentions should be cause for great concern, especially since dropout research has noted that in-grade retention is one of the best predictors for students not remaining enrolled in school until graduation.

Retention by Race-Ethnicity

Summary data broken down by racial-ethnic groups continues to reflect that African American students and Hispanic students in Texas are retained at rates that are substantially greater

than White students. According to the 2002-03 retention report 102,416 (55.6 percent) of the 184,214 students retained in grade were Hispanic; 33,681 (18.9 percent) were African American and 45,482 (24.7 percent) were White.

When calculated as a percent of the racial ethnic group total enrollment, 6.1 percent of Hispanic students, 6.0 percent of African American students, and only 2.8 percent of White students were retained in grade.

Retention by Income Level

The report also notes that 104,666 or 5.8 percent of the state’s 1,851,343 students are disadvantaged. Looking at the same number as a percentage of all retainees however reveals that low-income students constituted 55.6 percent of all Texas in-grade retentions.

Other Alarming Comparisons

Data provided for the 2002-03 report only allows for comparison of kindergarten through grade 12 retentions from 1998-99 to 2002-03 and reveals that the number of retentions increased from 170,534 in grades K-12 in 1998-99 to 184,214 in 2002-03. This is a net increase of 13,680 students or approximately 8 percent over a four-year period.

Review of earlier TEA retention reports, however, reflects that the increase in retentions is even higher when compared to 1991-92 rates. According to the October 1992 TEA retention report, in that year, only 118,886 out of an enrollment of 3,136,093 (3.7 percent) students were retained in grades kindergarten through 12. Comparing the 184,214 retentions in 2003 with the 118,886 retentions reported in 1992 indicates that retention rates increased by 65,328 students, all in areas where Texas was proclaiming great strides in improving student achievement. These data suggest that not all students were equal beneficiaries from Texas reform efforts.

Grade Retention by Racial and Ethnic Group in Texas

	2001-02					2002-03				
	All Students	Number Retained	Percent Retained	As Percentage of All Retained	Percent of Enrollment	All Students	Number Retained	Percent Retained	As Percentage of All Retained	Percent of Enrollment
African American	550,804	33,070	6.0%	18.60%	14.20%	555,949	33,681	6.0%	18.30%	14.10%
Asian/Pacific Islander	108,008	2,191	2.0%	6.60%	2.80%	113,253	2,097	1.90%	1.10%	2.90%
Hispanic	1,591,414	96,665	6.10%	54.50%	41.10%	1,668,099	102,416	6.10%	55.60%	42.20%
Native American	11,483	550	4.80%	0.30%	0.30%	12,085	538	4.50%	0.03%	0.03%
White	1,609,096	44,864	2.80%	25.30%	41.60%	1,601,578	45,482	2.80%	24.70%	4.05%
Total	3,870,805	177,340				3,950,964	184,214			

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2004

Retentions in Grade – continued from Page 14

Comparisons of retention rates by gender reveal that males are retained at greater rates than females at all levels. The most notable difference is in grade nine where male retention percentages are approximately six points higher than that of females.

The retention data also indicate that special education students are retained at slightly higher rates than the overall population. The greatest increase in retention rates for special education students is seen at the ninth-grade level with a retention rate comparable to that noted for all ninth-grade students.

Limitations of the Study

A new analysis incorporated into the 2002-03 retention report tracked the performance of retained students in subsequent years' state assessments. Although the report noted that many prior-year retainees (who had not met passing standards in the year in which they were retained) met state passing standards in their second year at the same grade level in elementary grades, it also stated that the gap in achievement between those students who were retained and those promoted did not

decrease.

Retained students in grades six through 10 did not reflect notable improvement in mathematics scale scores, even after repeating the same math content for a second year.

A caveat in the above analysis is the observation that all promoted students' scores were compared to retained students, thereby tending to increase the scale scores that served as a comparison standard (those promoted). A more insightful comparison would involve contrasting promoted students who scored slightly above the passing standard with those who were retained. Analyses of these data might indicate how more similar students may have been impacted by retention versus promotion.

Alternatives to In-Grade Retention

While the 82-page report provides useful data on the number of retained students by an array of demographics, it does not provide any support that students retained in grade benefit from the mere practice of repeating the same content for a second year.

Some would argue that the retention provides students an

opportunity to acquire specialized support in the repeat year; however, researchers have noted that such specialized support could be provided to students who were promoted with the condition that additional support would be provided in the next grade level.

Other alternatives to retention include:

- Enhancing the professional development of teachers to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to teach a wider range of students to meet standards;
- Using classroom assessment that better informs teaching;
- Identifying as early as possible students who are not achieving at satisfactory levels;
- Establishing a goal for reducing the number of retentions in grade in Texas schools; and
- Re-designing school structures to support more intensive learning, such as multi-age classes where teachers stay with students for more than one year.

Retention policies may make some adults feel better to hold children accountable, but for the students

Retentions in Grade – continued on Page 16

Retentions in Grade – continued from Page 15

directly impacted, it means the loss of an entire year and an increased probability that they will not graduate from high school.

As educators, taxpayers and parents we should challenge the state to do more than count the minds and bodies that are subjected to an outdated and dysfunctional policy. We should demand real alternatives that work.

Resources

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Holmes, C.T. "Grade-Level Retention Effects: A Meta-Analysis of Research Studies." In L.A. Shepard and M.L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking Grades: Research and Policies on Retention* (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Falmer

Initiative Plans for Better College Access for Latino Students

The Intercultural Development Research Association, supported by Houston Endowment, Inc., will convene a statewide seminar to address disparities in the college access and success of Latino students. The Texas initiative, titled InterAction: Higher Education and Latinos in the New Millennium, seeks to build stronger, enduring links among K-12, institutions of higher education and the community and business sectors to effect meaningful education reform. At the statewide event, set for February 2, 2005 in Austin, leaders from each of those sectors will review policy solutions identified during a series of three InterAction forums. Convened this fall, each forum addressed issues facing a specific community of interest – urban, rural or border areas. The forums were hosted by the University of Houston-Downtown, University of Texas-Permian Basin and the University of Texas-Pan American, respectively. Dr. Raymund Paredes, commissioner of higher education, will serve as the featured speaker during lunch.

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