



Not-So-Special Session Ends With a Whimper

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

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- ❖ Profiles of teachers who lead
- ❖ Problems with in-grade retention
- ❖ Teacher mentoring



Texas Governor Rick Perry convened the legislature in a fourth special session in April 2004 for state leaders to address school finance and tax related issues left unresolved in its 2003 regular biennial gathering.

As the session opened, there was much uproar about how the system was to be changed dramatically. Some talked about creating a new school finance plan that would “last for decades,” others promised Texas citizens a great reduction in local property taxes, and a few actually proposed that they would achieve both substantive education reform *and* tax “relief.”

The grand promises made at the opening of the special session seemed less plausible as the political leadership began the daunting task of revising the existing school funding system while simultaneously attempting to reduce local property taxes. Those efforts were further confounded by the realization that the achievement of either task required some major changes to the current state taxing system since raising billions of new state tax revenue would

be needed to both increase education funding and provide property tax relief.

Though the governor originally stated that he would delay calling a special session until “consensus was achieved” among the political leadership in the state House of Representatives and the Senate, both chambers experienced some difficulty in arriving at a consensus within their own ranks, much less with leaders in the adjoining chamber. Not only did the leadership in the legislature have differing approaches to the issues, the governor himself took a distinct position on both reform and funding issues.

Despite the known difference in their positions, the governor moved forward with the convening of the special session, hoping that consensus would be achieved during that 30-day period. Those familiar with the extremely difficult task of achieving consensus on school-funding reform, let alone consensus on tax issues, questioned the timing and prospects for consensus in a legislature that was deeply divided from the bitterly partisan debates on congressional re-districting. Lending fuel to skepticism was the ambitious agenda proposed – one that

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would have been extremely difficult to achieve even during a six-month regular session.

Policymakers Face Several Sticking Points

The initial political rhetoric focused on replacing recapture (mis-labeled “Robin Hood”) in the existing system with an alternative revenue-generating mechanism. This political “priority” was created through extensive pressure from the state’s wealthiest school districts due to their vehement opposition to this major equalization feature in Texas’ school funding plan. Recapture generates more than \$1 billion in revenue to fund Texas public education. Its elimination would create a need to provide additional alternative tax revenue sources to replace the \$1 billion that would be lost.

Although the initial priority for many was to “kill Robin Hood” and raise an equivalent amount from other tax sources, other leaders saw the special session as an opportunity to reduce property taxes. Property tax

According to a Center for Public Policy Priorities, nearly half the students who benefit from eliminating recapture live in just five school districts (Austin, Plano, Richardson, Round Rock, and Spring Branch). If recapture were eliminated, half of the money would go to just seven districts (Austin, Carrollton-Farmers Branch, Eanes, Grapevine-Colleyville, Highland Park, Plano, and Richardson).

reduction has always been perceived as a political winner, and particularly beneficial to the party that is in power and can thus take credit for such efforts in future political elections.

Educational leaders saw the special session as an opportunity to increase levels of state funding. To their dismay, the legislative priority quickly focused on decreasing local property taxes, including those charged by local school districts.

As discussions progressed, schools found themselves in a position where any or most new state revenues being considered would be used to reduce local property taxes, rather than to increase school funding. More

troubling was the recognition that if recapture was eliminated, the greatest benefits in prospective tax reductions would be exclusively concentrated in the state’s highest wealth school districts. The education community as a whole obviously would have preferred increased revenues for all school districts.

As education leaders faced the prospects of increased taxes in a variety of areas, with little or no direct benefits for school funding, their enthusiasm for the major state “reform” proposals was understandably lukewarm, at best. On the tax front, what state legislators hoped would be a general receptivity to

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Public School Teachers Who Lead

by Jack Dieckmann, M.A., and Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

During the last 10 minutes of a typical class, students are closing their books and chatting, antsy for the bell. The teacher hurriedly collects homework, erases the board and readies for the next class.

Ms. Dominguez' sixth grade class is different. Her students are not watching the clock, they are explaining in great detail how they solved problems with positive and negative integers in real world settings (e.g., weight loss and gain, saving money, mapping out a trip). They combine illustrations, numbers, logical explanations, and a number line made out of construction paper, and they even use analogies to explain.

Conversations include, "How did you know to move toward the left on the number line?" or "It makes sense the way you solved it, but another way to do it is to..."

One student presents in Spanish, while another translates into English. The learning and dialogue is fluid throughout the language switches. The focus is the validity of the explanation. Students clap for each presenter as Ms. Dominguez quietly observes, sometimes clarifying or probing more.

"What feedback do you have on the presentation?" Volunteers raise

their hands, and the teacher chooses students carefully, strategically.

The bell rings. The students are still explaining. They agree to pick this up the following day. This is Ms. Dominguez' usual teaching rhythm. She is a public school teacher who leads.

A Different Look at Leadership

Central to IDRA's vision of schools that work for all children is the leadership of teachers like Ms. Dominguez. In IDRA's work with teachers across the country, in urban, suburban and rural settings, across grade levels, and teaching experience, we have encountered many who do more than teach in the conventional sense. They are public school teachers who lead.

Beyond effective, quality teaching, IDRA is noticing more than instructional techniques and subject-matter competence, without discounting that these are essential (Dieckmann 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). This article is not about what makes a good math teacher, nor to extol any individual acts of heroism. This article describes some *core characteristics* that reflect the underlying commitment of public school

teachers to create and maintain vibrant learning environments for every student, every day, in every way, often under the bureaucratic pressures of high-stakes testing, rigid curricular fads, and simplistic administrative responses to accountability pressures.

The success of public schooling depends on increasing the number of teachers who share these leadership characteristics.

Identifying Leading Teacher Criteria

IDRA's work with teachers takes many forms supported by the premise of collaborating to create schools that work for all children. IDRA tailors workshops to support teachers in lesson planning; assessing; and sharing knowledge about best practices, second language learning, and other experiences.

These workshops provide hands-on, in-class technical assistance through observation, coaching, co-teaching and modeling instructional strategies. Ongoing support includes follow-up sessions and online discussions. The work can be anything from a few sessions a year to intensive training across several years.

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Teachers Who Lead: A Conversation Guide

	Administrators	Teachers	Parents	Students
Embrace the “public” in public school teaching	How do you support the openness of enrollment and the diversity of the students? How do you support teachers to be this kind of leader?	How do you welcome and integrate all newcomers in your classroom? How do you defend the “public” aspect of schooling?	Share a story of how a teacher has made a difference in the life of your family. How is school supporting your goals for the academic success of our children?	Share a story of how a teacher has helped you succeed in school. What helps you feel welcome and supported in learning?
Value children for who they are – exactly as they are – right now	Identify examples of valuing or mapping the assets of students who were labeled “at-risk” “LEP” “low SES” or “behavior problems”	Think of a time when you helped a student succeed academically and who, by other standards, was destined to fail.	Think of a time when a child who had some negative label was helped to succeed in school.	Think of a time when you were helped to learn something or succeed in school and that you had not thought you could succeed or other teachers had told you that you couldn’t learn.
Relegate curricula, teaching strategies, assessments, and accountability measures to the service of students	When have you observed a teacher who might not follow your dicta perfectly but still had great success in helping the students succeed academically? How have you supported bold thinking from teachers who want more critical thinking work beyond the requirements of mandated tests?	Tell about a time when you marched to a different drummer, resisted some rigid process that was imposed from above, and helped students learn something important or proved to themselves that they could be critical thinkers.	What experiences have you had that support individualizing teaching and adapting instruction to the way students prefer to learn and your children’s interests and personalities?	What experiences have you had with teachers who have been flexible with their teaching and adapted something to your way of learning or your interests and you still did some hard thinking and learned important things?
Reach beyond the classroom to do what’s right and what is needed	How have you supported teachers who see the big picture and are consistently trying to help students beyond the curricular requirements and the confines of their classrooms?	What are some examples of connecting to extracurricular resources or of helping students in areas beyond your subject? How do student needs drive what you do? How do you relate to the broader student body beyond those who you directly teach?	When have you observed a teacher who acts as a counselor, referral resource, problem-solver, connector to college resources or any help beyond the subject he or she teaches?	When has a teacher helped you and other students beyond the teaching in class during the regular class period? In what creative or interesting ways has the teacher connected with students who are not in your class?

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association

The leadership criteria arrived at in this article draw on multiple primary data sources: written and oral evaluations, informal conversations with experienced IDRA professional developers and teachers, teacher interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and conversations with parents and students. Additionally, this article draws on research literature on teacher leadership development and educational equity.

Core Characteristics of Teachers Who Lead

One critical aspect of IDRA's advocacy work is to support a shift in the public conversation about students and the public schools that serve them. One example has been to move the conversation about students who leave school before graduation from focusing on "the dropouts" to the "school's is holding power." IDRA shifts the conversation from a deficit perspective to a valuing of young people and holding the adult institutions accountable (Robledo Montecel, 2002).

IDRA proposes the term, *public*

"The United States is still uniquely committed to one system that prepares us all for living in a great democracy. We should preserve this commitment."

– Dr. María Robledo Montecel, IDRA

school teachers who lead, to distinguish our definition from a traditional *master teacher* or *lead teacher* terminology.

The purposeful distinction is important because the latter tends to imply some form of administrative or supervisory position such as department chair, teacher trainer, peer-teacher coach or curriculum developer. The rigidities and associations that the formal titles bring cause many teachers who lead to resist the term *leadership*. Most prefer to remain in the classroom with no other designation than *teacher*.

In this article, teachers who lead are defined as those who:

- Embrace the "public" in public school

teaching,

- Value children for who they are – exactly as they are – right now,
- Relegate curricula, teaching strategies, assessments and accountability measures to the service of students, and
- Reach beyond the classroom to do what is right and what is needed.

Each core characteristic is illustrated below with a real-life example followed by an elaboration of the principle.

Embrace the "Public" in Public School Teaching

Midyear, Elena, a 10-year-old girl, enrolls in the fourth grade in a rural northern Arkansas school. Elena's family has moved from south Texas to work at the poultry processing plant nearby. She is not yet proficient in English.

On her first day of class, the teacher, Ms. Young, warmly introduces her to classmates in English and in Spanish and invites her to join a group working on a social studies project. She assigns Elena her own cubby and a name card on the class roster. This is

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Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English

Thirty years of research have proven that, when implemented well, bilingual education is the best way to learn English. New research by IDRA has identified the 25 common characteristics of successful schools that contribute to high academic performance of students learning English. This guide is a rubric, designed for people in schools and communities to evaluate five dimensions that are necessary for success:

- ❖ school indicators
- ❖ student outcomes
- ❖ leadership
- ❖ support
- ❖ programmatic and instructional practices



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the eighth new student Ms. Young has received from similar families.

Ms. Young is learning much about English language learners in her professional development and is already sensitive in lowering the “affective filter” and adjusting the linguistic demands of the lessons. She plans to assess Elena’s oral and reading proficiency in both languages.

When some of her colleagues complain about the influx of “those families” and how “behind” the children are, Ms. Young is quick to speak on the students’ behalf and to discuss strategies and share student success stories. She is concerned about all the newcomers, not just those in her class.

As a teacher who leads, Ms. Young does not reject any student. She understands every student has the right to the best education possible.

Teachers like Ms. Young do not have a preference for “good” kids, compliant, English-speaking, middle-class or those who fit some idealized norm. Teachers who lead work to make schools openly and optimistically responsive to the characteristics of the students and their families—especially as our population diversifies.

They understand that when schools fail students, all society is affected. They see diversity as healthy (and more reflective of the outside world) rather than a burden, and they actively seek to expand and improve their *own* competencies.

Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director, states: “The United States is still uniquely committed to one system that prepares us all for living in a great democracy. We should preserve this commitment” (Robledo Montecel, 2003).

Teachers who lead see the close connection between the success of public schools and the economic and social well-being of their communities. They preserve the commitment of a

The phrase “value children” is more than a catch phrase or sentimentality. It constitutes the very lens through which the teacher who leads sees students, their parents and the community.

democracy and see teaching as a valuable service to their diverse community and to future generations (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

Value Children for Who They Are – Exactly as They Are – Right Now

A second-year teacher in San Jose, California, begins his eighth-grade science class every day by addressing his students saying, “Young scientists, today we will...” This simple and consistent greeting reflects the relationship he is cultivating with his students.

He does not say “future scientists.” By identifying them as young scientists *now*, he is acknowledging that each student has the capacity and right to think scientifically, to investigate the physical world through systematic and joint inquiry.

Such bold statements and actions from the teacher encourage students from all levels of preparation and success in school science to begin to see themselves as scientists, and their class behavior follows suit.

The phrase “valuing children” is more than a catch phrase or sentimentality. It constitutes the very lens through which the teacher who leads sees students, their parents and the community.

This deeply-ingrained principle guides the daily actions of teaching. Because of this valuing perspective,

the teacher sees a student’s talent, ability to think, personality, language, experience, and culture as contributions to the individual and group learning.

Teachers who lead do not let institutional labels box-in the students. Such teachers resist the proclivities of schools to classify, stratify and stigmatize—creating the tracks of low-performers, the gifted, the slow, the at-risk and the unmotivated (Darder, 1994). These teachers resist misguided applications of school accountability and high-stakes testing that equate students with their test scores.

Instead, teachers who lead create rich learning experiences requiring multiple competencies, and they overtly identify these competencies within students. They challenge the prevailing idea that only the identified “smart” students have status, and they promote equitable status among students (Cohen and Lotan, 1997). In these classes, nobody feels stupid, and everyone contributes to the learning tasks.

Relegate Curricula, Teaching Strategies, Assessments, and Accountability Measures to the Service of Students

Mr. Hicks teaches algebra in a large high school in north Texas. His principal and his department chair have insisted on daily practice tests as class warm-ups for all math classes, except those exempt from state testing, such as pre-calculus.

Every few months his students take district “benchmark” tests as practice for the state-mandated spring test. Benchmark results are posted, and teachers compare the student passing and failing rates. A large poster in the hall trumpets “85 percent or better mastery in math”—the principal’s target passing rate for the school. All lessons to be taught must be geared toward that goal.



Good for nothing

In-grade Retention

by Lisa M. Kennedy, M.A.

There is no argument that we all care about our children and their future. But for some time now there has been much disagreement over how to best educate our children. Frustration has mounted as many children have not successfully gained minimum competencies.

Amidst this debate and innate desire to care for children lies the issue of retaining children in grade. Some proclaim retention as the champion over social promotion for the solution to kids not learning. But, alternatives to these two polar options are rarely considered. For the sake of our children and their futures, we should look at these alternatives.

The debate has surfaced again. First, in New York, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the city's Panel on Education Policy recently approved a controversial policy to retain third grade students, an estimated 15,000 of the city's 70,000, who do not pass standardized tests began this spring (Hemphill, 2004; Herszenhorn, 2004). And second, in Chicago, the Board of Education voted to ease its strict promotion and retention policies following research that indicates its seven-year effort to end social promotion has not raised test scores or benefited students (Herszenhorn,

2004).

In addition, recent national conversations surrounding education have touted "research-based" practices as the golden ticket. Interestingly retention is one area where the research typically is ignored.

Reams of research have shown that retention does not work (Hemphill, 2004; Hauser, et al., 2000; McCollum, et al., 1999). When adults make the decision to retain a student, the student is harmed socially, academically, and emotionally. Retention places the burden of school reform on the students, not the adults who are responsible for their achievement and growth.

In Texas schools, almost one out

of every 20 students is harmed by in-grade retention; three out of 50 Hispanic and African American students were retained in 2001-02 (TEA, 2004). Still, many school leaders and policymakers support this policy that puts children's well-being at risk.

Retaining Students

What is the difference between social promotion and in-grade retention? *Social promotion* refers to the practice of passing students who have failed to master part or the entire grade-level curriculum on to the next grade with their age-grade peers. *In-grade retention*, on the other hand, requires

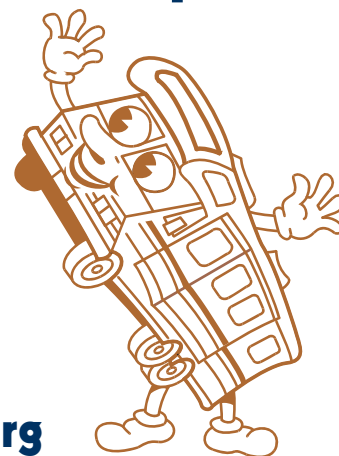
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students to repeat the same grade a second time in order to master what was not learned.

Beginning in the 2003-04 school year, Texas educators became obligated to retain students who do not meet passing requirements of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) through the “Student Success Initiative” that was passed by legislators in 1999.

Data from the Texas Education

kindergarten through six).

African American students and Hispanic students had the highest rates of grade-level retention for all ethnic groups at 6.0 percent and 6.1 percent, respectively. Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American and White students’ rates of retention were 2.0 percent, 4.8 percent, and 2.8 percent, respectively.

Effects of Retention

There are several problems with in-grade retention. Typically, students

Often, this results in punishing children for not learning what they have not been taught or taught well.

The research is very clear: the effects of retention are harmful. As early as the 1930s, studies reported the negative effects of retention on academic achievement. Retention harms students academically and socially. According to retention research, 50 percent of students who repeat a grade do no better the second time, and 25 percent actually do worse (McCollum, 1999; Merrow, 2004).

Retention is also strongly associated with dropping out of school in later years. A student who is retained once is 50 percent more likely to drop out than a non-retained student; two retentions increase that probability to 90 percent.

Students who are retained also show poor attendance rates, have increased behavior problems, suffer lower self-esteem and view retention as a punishment and a stigma, not a positive event to help them improve their academic performance.

In the wake of the *No Child Left Behind Act* nationally and the implementation of a more rigorous state assessment system in Texas, retention is expected to increase dramatically. Beginning in 2002-03, Texas students are required to pass the state reading test to advance to grade four. Students in grades five and eight will have to pass the reading and mathematics tests beginning in 2004-05 and 2007-08, respectively. Students will be given three opportunities to pass the tests. But, these “extra” chances are offered during a two-month period following the receipt of scores from the first round of testing.

Retention at what cost?

In addition to the harmful effects of retention to children, retention hurts in other logistical and financial ways. A large number of retentions results in an

In-grade Retention – continued on Page 19

Students who are retained also show poor attendance rates, have increased behavior problems, suffer lower self-esteem and view retention as a punishment and a stigma, not a positive event to help them improve their academic performance.

Association (TEA) show that 177,340 students (4.6 percent) in kindergarten through grade 12 were retained in 2001-02. This is enough students to fill Texas Stadium more than 2.5 times. Of this number, roughly 59,812 were elementary school students (grades

are retained for low achievement in one or two subjects. But they are required to retake an entire year’s worth of coursework. Plus, they are usually placed in the same environment the second time that did not support their learning the first time around.

Failing Our Children – Finding Alternatives for In-Grade Retention

by Pam McCollum, Ph.D., Albert Cortez, Ph.D., Oanh H. Maroney, M.A., and Felix Montes, Ph.D.

Read this in-depth look at the issue of in-grade retention. This policy brief reviews research that finds this practice to be ineffective and outlines alternatives to both retention and social promotion. Part of a series on key issues in education developed by the IDRA Institute for Policy and Leadership, this brief includes policy recommendations, findings at a glance, the national scene, a look back at Texas, findings examined (including alternatives to retention), and interviews of school personnel.



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The Role of Mentoring in Teacher Quality and Retention

by Adela Solís, Ph.D.

A severe and persistent national shortage of teachers has greatly compromised the quality of teaching in today's schools. This is especially troublesome at a time when students face an ever-growing demand to master challenging standards. Many students are being taught by teachers who are not certified or who are teaching in subjects outside their expertise. As a result, we are seeing the current emphasis on *teacher quality* spear-headed by the federal government and professional organizations.

The Qualified Teacher

The most relevant source for a definition of teacher quality comes from federal law, which focuses on credentials and content expertise. For example, the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires that there be a "highly-qualified" teacher in every classroom by the end of 2005. The act authorizes a number of programs to recruit, certify and place teachers in "high-need" schools (primarily through alternative routes to certification initiatives).

However, given the diversity of student backgrounds in most schools, high-quality teaching also should be about competence to teach diverse student populations.

"The need is less for highly qualified teachers than for teachers who are highly qualified to teach students on both sides of the achievement gap – mainstream students and of cultural, language and racial minorities."

– Roland Tharp, CREDE

Dr. Abelardo Villarreal, director of the IDRA Division of Professional Development, states: "Achievement gaps between minority students and White students are primarily attributed to teacher quality. For example, 40 percent of variance in student test scores in reading and math is attributed to teacher quality" (2003).

Roland Tharp, the director of the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE), states, "The need is less for highly qualified teachers than for teachers who are highly qualified to teach students on both sides of the achievement gap – mainstream students and of cultural, language and racial minorities" (CREDE, 2004).

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development also points out that teacher quality should

be cognizant of the needs of communities with ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged children.

Teacher Quality and Retention

There is no doubt that high quality teaching is influenced by the lack of teachers and by the presence of teachers who are teaching out of their field. In all classrooms, teacher inexperience and lack of accurate pedagogical knowledge make it difficult for students to receive sound instruction. Inexperience and lack of specific knowledge about students' varied cultural backgrounds and languages certainly compromises quality teaching of English language learners.

An additional threat to quality is the inability to retain new teachers in the profession once they are recruited, trained, and placed in schools. Retaining new teachers anywhere is a serious problem. However, keeping teachers who have come to the field through alternative route certification programs, as has occurred for more than 10 years, exacerbates the retention problem.

The typical alternative certification program recruits degreed individuals from other professions and transitions them into teaching through a "fast-track" certification program comprised of about four courses and a concurrent one-year teaching internship (Feistritzer and Chester, 2004).

Role of Mentoring – continued on Page 10

While alternatively-certified teachers have demonstrated content expertise and commitment, there is still a special challenge to keeping them in the profession because the pedagogy critical to being a good teacher is often short-changed by the limited number of courses they have taken and the demand for their immediate on-target classroom performance.

For new teachers of English language learners, the unfamiliarity of the school environment and the demand to simultaneously address the language situation and academic requirements adds to the challenge of retaining these teachers.

Meeting the Challenge of Retaining New Teachers Through Mentoring and Support

Research and practice tell us that supporting new teachers in their first years of teaching is where the focus should be if we want teaching quality and retention. Studies have shown that well-designed mentoring programs lower the attrition rates of new teachers.

John Holloway reports a particular case where 20 percent of mentored teachers taught a second year citing feelings of success as a result of mentoring (2001). He also cites a comparative study of mentored and unmentored new teachers in which there was an attrition rate of 18 percent for unmentored teachers and only 5 percent for mentored teachers.

For a number of years in Texas, the State Board of Educator Certification has supported a *Beginning Educator Support System* initiative intending to reduce a 30 percent teacher attrition occurring during the first five years of teaching. After three years of experience in supporting new teachers, this state agency concludes that an emphasis in

Experience with mentoring in the classroom has demonstrated that this type of new teacher support can promote quality in the new teacher's instruction and also motivation to make teaching a life-long career.

supporting teachers during their first years in the profession should dramatically affect retention (SBEC, 2002).

Experience with mentoring in the classroom has demonstrated that this type of new teacher support can promote quality in the new teacher's instruction and also motivation to make teaching a life-long career.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring occurs any time someone seeks to learn from someone else who has experience in the topic for learning. This means that anyone – pre-service, novice or experienced teachers – can have mentors. However, mentoring in teaching is especially important for new teachers during their induction year (induction is the process of joining a profession; in education it is typically the first year of teaching).

Barry Sweeny defines mentoring during induction as follows: "Mentoring during induction is a complex and developmental process which mentors use to support and guide their protégé through the necessary early career transitions which are part of learning how to be an effective, reflective educator and career-long learner" (2001).

Mentoring for Quality Teaching and Retention in Texas Schools

The Intercultural Development Research Association presently operates two alternative certification projects funded by the Transition to Teaching Program of the U.S. Department of Education. The Bilingual Education Collaborating Alliance

(BECA) and the Texas-Teacher Excellence for All Students (T-TEAS) are designed to increase the number and quality of bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) teachers in Texas schools with high numbers of English language learners.

The projects support certification through accelerated teacher certification routes that provide intensive teacher preparation of about one year in duration and specialized classroom support during the candidate's first two years of teaching. As in other alternative certification programs, these have two components: coursework and a concurrent one-year teaching internship in a bilingual classroom in the school district that has agreed to hire the recruits as first-year teachers.

Recruitment targets both English-dominant and bilingual career-changing professionals, and recent college graduates in fields other than education who want to enter teaching and have a specific interest in bilingual education. The projects, in collaboration with area universities, assist school districts in the south, southeast and central Texas regions. About 200 teacher candidates (or interns) currently are participating, or have recently completed, their programs of certification with BECA and T-TEAS support.

A distinct objective of IDRA's Transition to Teaching projects is to provide specialized support to teacher candidates during their internship year and one year beyond this, specifically to influence their retention as bilingual teachers in the district of employment.

In one participating central Texas school district, BECA and T-TEAS have given teacher support through

Minority Women in Science: Forging the Way

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

A great student-centered tool to support equity in math and science education!

We must ensure that minority girls are not left behind as progress is made toward narrowing gender and racial gaps in math and science education. This is an innovative resource that can be used with all students – girls and boys – to help break down gender stereotypes about scientists.

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- ◆ Profiles of seven minority women scientists who have surmounted barriers to forge the way for themselves and future scientists.
- ◆ Science lessons for the classroom that cover such topics as acid/base chemistry, earth science, wildlife and environmental science, and biology.
- ◆ Life skills lessons for the classroom that cover topics such as getting college information from the school counselor, identifying a support system, reaching goals, knowing self-worth, having community pride, overcoming stereotypes, and linking hobbies with career choices.
- ◆ The opportunity to use this guide to plan with other teachers, from other departments, using the stories of these inspirational women as the basis for cross-curricular lessons for students.



“Being a scientist can open doors to opportunities that you may never have dreamt of or even considered.”

– Patricia Hall, M.S., one of the scientists featured in *Minority Women in Science: Forging the Way*

Student Workbook \$6.50
Teacher’s Guide \$25.00

(Student Workbook ISBN 1-878550-67-5; 2000; 32 pages; paperback; \$6.50)
(Teacher’s Guide ISBN 1-878550-68-3; 2000; 94 pages; paperback; \$25.00)

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Purchase orders for orders totaling more than \$30 are accepted.

Role of Mentoring – continued from Page 10

specific mentoring. This has yielded success in helping teachers manage their first and second years of teaching and in motivating them to make teaching, specifically in bilingual education, their life-long careers. The success of mentoring in this district can be attributed to its well-established new teacher support system that facilitates collaboration between the district and the “teacher preparation partner programs” serving the district, such as BECA and T-TEXAS.

The mentoring and support for teacher candidates of the IDRA projects supplements the new teacher services already provided by the school district. The district’s new teacher support and mentoring program is coordinated through the professional development department. Its services

are geared toward all first-year teachers, whether they are certified via a traditional certification program, emergency certification, or alternative certification.

The program is research-based. Its features reveal an awareness that, to be successful, a mentoring program must have focus and structure (Holloway, 2001). Key features of this sample district’s program include specific mentoring and support structures as follows.

- **Pairing a veteran teacher with a novice teacher.** The veteran teacher in a mentoring role provides support through model lessons, assistance in lesson planning and classroom management, and observation and formative feedback of lessons.
- **Teacher buddy.** Veteran teachers

new to the district are paired with established teachers who help the new teacher understand the district campus culture.

- **New teacher support group.** A lead mentor teacher, with the help of the principal, organizes support groups. Book studies are a creative means of collaborating for new learning.
- **Grade-level team or content-area team.** Grade-level or content-area teachers meet to provide support in ways similar to mentor teachers or instructional coaches.

The BECA and T-TEXAS Mentoring and Support

The design for mentoring and supporting BECA and T-TEXAS teacher candidates provides relevant

Role of Mentoring – continued on Page 12

activities to extend the new teacher services of the school district and, at the same time, promote the specific goals and philosophy of the projects. It capitalizes on the services of experienced bilingual education practitioners, especially retired teachers and instructional leaders, to address the specific needs of the project participants. In delivering services, the projects are guided by the understanding that to create the best bilingual or ESL teachers, it is first and foremost necessary to make them excellent foundation (mainstream) teachers. To that foundation can then be added the competencies of effective bilingual teachers as described by state and national standards.

Mentoring, therefore, focuses on strengthening both of these dimensions of teaching to help new teachers become highly qualified bilingual and ESL teachers. Following are the goals set for mentoring:

- Supplemental mentoring and support for each bilingual teacher intern to provide direct assistance in the classroom;
- Support the teacher in the classroom with minimal or no pull-outs, on a weekly or bi-weekly basis;
- Mentor on how to be an excellent bilingual teacher, focus on teaching challenging content in the two languages; also on typical first year concerns; and
- Provide additional support through *pláticas* (group discussions) to link interns to other bilingual teachers and professionals (such as Alianza, another of IDRA's bilingual teacher preparation programs) as a means of encouragement, guidance and further learning.

Impact of Mentoring and Support

The mentoring and support provided to date by BECA and

English language learners are benefiting by having sufficient numbers of qualified and motivated teachers.

T-TEExAS has had impact on both teaching quality and retention. The impact achieved can be attributed to the combined effort of the BECA and T-TEExAS mentors (retired instructional leaders and teachers), project staff, the school district cadre of professionals in the professional development department, the bilingual education department, and the schools.

For example, new teachers addressed gaps in knowledge and skills relevant to bilingual education. Even though their coursework covered pedagogy in bilingual education, the short duration of courses and an overload in content, left many gaps in the interns' discovery of what is cutting-edge in bilingual education. Through classroom observations, model teaching and sharing of resources, mentors (consultants and IDRA staff) were able to fill these gaps.

The program built on the confidence of the most recent college graduates and foreign-educated teachers. New teachers who very recently graduated from college and/or who are new to the culture of U.S. schools lacked confidence in their classroom management skills and ability to related with students. Through the three-hour block classroom visits and the networking and new learning afforded through *pláticas* series of group discussions, these interns have built confidence in their ability to teach and "work the system" of their respective schools.

Many teachers, particularly bilingual teachers who are native-English speakers, expressed a desire to learn more than their school had to offer in teaching Spanish and culture to

their children. This has been addressed primarily by giving teachers professional development books and web site resources for both teaching and assessing in Spanish.

These projects to expand and improve current educator preparation programs have created both shorter routes to certification and academically rigorous training experiences. By doing this, English language learners are benefiting by having sufficient numbers of qualified and motivated teachers. Ultimately, the impact will be seen in student achievement, particularly among English language learners and minority students.

For more information on BECA and T-TEExAS, contact IDRA (210-444-1710) or visit IDRA's web site (www.idra.org).

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new state taxes turned into major battles over who would assume the increased tax burden.

Attempts to Eliminate the Current Equity Provisions

State leaders found it easy to talk about tax reform. But weeks of bitter battles proved that tax reform is much easier to propose than it is to achieve. Initial discussions focused on ways to replace the revenue that would be lost by eliminating recapture. But most tax proposals increased the total amount to be raised to allow for replacement of local property tax revenue with state money generated from other sources and to provide funding for new “incentive-based” mechanisms in lieu of across-the-board funding increases for schools.

One of the first surprises encountered by state leaders was that recapture benefits the majority of Texas school districts and their students. Many lawmakers had erroneously assumed that recapture funds went exclusively to a few low-wealth school districts. Opponents of recapture came to realize that the \$1.2 billion generated by recapture during the last biennium went into the state fund that goes to all districts eligible for state funding.

Elimination of recapture thus would require either that schools reduce their spending by the amounts they received from recapture revenue or that the state raise an equivalent amount of new tax revenue from alternative sources, which in turn would translate into tax increases in other areas.

Some state legislators understandably balked at the need to vote for a tax increase that would provide no new funding for their public schools.

Compounding the legislators’ dilemma was the fact that data soon surfaced that pointed out that a handful of the wealthiest districts acquired the

Did You Know?

There are 1,041 school districts in Texas with 288,386 teachers. There are 134 high-wealth districts that serve about 500,000 students. The remaining 897 districts educate about 3.7 million students.

Annually, about \$30 billion is spent on public schools in Texas, with about \$12 billion coming from the state, \$1 billion from the federal government and \$17 billion from local taxes.

In 2002, businesses paid about 44 percent of school property taxes, residential properties paid about 49 percent and undeveloped land paid about 7 percent.

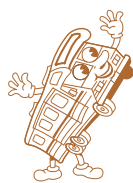
About \$91 billion in property value is lost because of exemptions for timber, agriculture and wildlife management.

About \$238 million is lost through a legal loophole that allows major corporations to avoid paying the franchise tax.

If the current system’s equity provision (recapture) is eliminated, nine of every 10 districts will lose more than a combined \$1 billion in funding.

About \$8 billion in revenue would be lost by cutting school property taxes in half.

Source: Texas Education Agency, AEIS State Report 2002-03; Intercultural Development Research Association, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998; Houston Chronicle, April 2004.



For more facts and statistics, go to the “Field Trip” on IDRA’s web site.

www.idra.org

majority of any funding to be saved by eliminating recapture. Since slightly more than 100 school districts currently contribute to recapture, any elimination or reduction in that contribution would exclusively benefit that group of districts.

According to a Center for Public Policy Priorities, nearly half the students who benefit from eliminating recapture live in just five school districts (Austin, Plano, Richardson, Round Rock, and Spring Branch). If recapture were

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eliminated, half of the money would go to just seven districts (Austin, Carrolton-Farmers Branch, Eanes, Grapevine-Colleyville, Highland Park, Plano, and Richardson).

For school districts that do not receive funding through recapture, the two possibilities would be a trade-off of funding from recapture, to receiving that same level of funding from another tax source, leaving them at their current funding level. Or in a worst-case scenario, they would see recapture eliminated but not replaced with an alternative tax source, causing most districts to lose more than \$230 per weighted pupil.

Attempts to Create Incentives

Not sufficiently challenged by the cost of replacing recapture with alternative taxing sources, political leaders also promised to increase levels of funding for public schools. The extent of revenue required varied with the type of reforms and the level of funding proposed.

The governor took the early lead with a plan that would provide local school districts new state funding based on “incentives” related to increased student performance or attendance, enrollments in advanced placement classes, and reduced dropout rates. Though supported by a few educators, incentive-based approaches were questioned by many concerned with the idea that those schools with the greatest existing advantages would be the primary beneficiaries of such a funding scheme. Educators rightly feared that such incentive funding would ultimately benefit those districts with high property wealth and/or low concentrations of special-needs pupils. Others recognized that proposed incentive funding strategies would exacerbate existing inequities in school funding since wealth was not

incorporated as a factor in the incentive proposals that surfaced.

The \$500 million price tag and no assurance that all local districts would benefit caused many lawmakers to balk at voting for a tax bill to fund this incentive-based funding formula.

Resistance to Proposed Business Taxes

A third sticking point related to the governor’s plan was the resistance by many in the business community to a state tax on business property, which they feared would make the sector more at risk of tax hikes that did not simultaneously impact residential property. Along with private-sector opposition, local school districts realized that creation of a new property tax on businesses would remove a substantial portion of their local property tax base.

This approach would have actually increased the amount of property tax money that would be collected by the state, prompting Comptroller Strayhorn to complain that while the current system was about Robin Hood, the new plan was about “Robbin’ everybody.”

Attempts to Mandate Property Tax Reductions

A final reservation about the governor’s proposal was the inclusion of a constitutional amendment that would redirect future state funding surpluses to mandated property tax reductions. This provision not only was opposed by most local school districts but also concerned many municipalities and county government advocates. These advocates saw serious problems with acquiring future tax revenue if that provision were adopted.

This broad array of concerns and opposition served to prevent Governor Perry’s plan from getting any serious traction during the special session.

Proposals in the House

The House leadership proved no more adept at navigating the treacherous school finance rapids despite the fact that it had the benefits of months of preparatory work conducted by its own select committee on public school finance.

Following the close of the regular session in June 2003, a number of House members convened hearings and heard endless hours of testimony on school funding issues. In its report, the House committee proposed no finance system alternative nor a clear recommendation for how increased funding could be raised at the state level.

A sub-group of the committee however did come to a consensus on a new funding system for Texas public schools. Introduced by Rep. Grusendorf of Arlington (chair of the House Public Education Committee), the House plan called for replacing the current basic allotment with a new accreditation allotment; replacing a weighted pupil approach for special student programs, such as bilingual education, compensatory education, and special education with a set per pupil amount; and incorporating some new incentive-based funding similar to that proposed by Governor Perry.

Grusendorf’s legislation also called for a significant reduction in recapture, limiting it to a handful of districts in the state. The legislation included provisions to ensure that school districts would have revenues comparable to what they had prior to the adoption of the proposed reforms (also known as “hold harmless” or “save harmless” provisions).

Created after weeks of internal negotiations among a small number of representatives, the House plan was extensively dependent on the adoption of a host of new taxes that would, in their totality, generate enough new revenue to finance the new system.

On the eve of presenting the proposal in the Texas House of Representatives, the governor called a news conference to announce his opposition to certain new taxes on business, a linchpin of the House reform package. The governor's opposition led to stripping down the original far-reaching reform package to a bare-bones minimum, referred to as a "shell bill," that Rep. Grusendorf introduced as a strategy to "keep the process moving" and allow time for the development of a compromise.

After hours of debate, the bill was initially rejected by a majority of Texas House members (69 to 77) who opposed it for a wide range of reasons – from concerns with the low level of equity provided by the plan, to reservations on the incentive-based funding, and opposition to the bill's tax implications. After extensive lobbying by the Speaker of the House and other leaders, the legislation was adopted by a vote of 74 to 68, still reflecting the continuing divide on the tax and education reform issues among Texas lawmakers.

Senate Takes the Baton

Following the House action on its plan, the Senate began its own deliberations on school finance. Key senators supported a reform measure originally proposed by Lt. Governor Dewhurst in the 2003 regular legislative session. The cornerstone of the Senate plan was the adoption of a new state property tax on business, along with a number of smaller new taxes and expansion of the state franchise tax to a broader range of businesses.

The Senate Education Committee chair (Sen. Shapiro) drafted a plan that called for the preservation of the existing school funding structure with some modifications.

In the Senate plan, the level of the basic allotment would be increased, limiting the need for supplemental Tier

www.texans4fairfunding.org

Texans for Fair Funding

It took 25 years, several rounds of court cases and many legislative sessions to create equity in the Texas system of financing schools. But it could all be wiped away. Texas policymakers are considering ways to change how Texas schools are funded. The courts are reviewing the current system as well.



Visit <http://www.texans4fairfunding.org> to see how your children's schools are funded, what's at stake, and what you can do about it. Texans for Fair Funding is sponsored by the Texas Latino Education Coalition.

This new user-friendly web site includes interactive features like short Flash presentations to describe the Texas school finance system and its equity provisions. Visitors also can get data about individual Texas school districts, like how much state and local funds the district receives and how much could be lost if the current system of fair funding is eliminated.

Americans agree that a child's future should not depend on his or her heritage, parents' income, or neighborhood. Any new plan that is put in place for funding Texas schools must be equitable, otherwise we will go back to the days of massive unequal funding. School personnel, policymakers, members of the community and business leaders all play a role in making sure our tax dollars are used to fund schools fairly. TLEC has created this web site to encourage community action for fair funding for all children.

You can sign-up to receive updates by visiting the Texans for Fair Funding web site at <http://www.texans4fairfunding.org> and selecting "Receive updates by email."

II (Guaranteed Yield) funding. The weight for underachieving limited-English-proficient pupils would be increased from 0.10 to 0.20, as would be funding for compensatory education. Recapture would not be eliminated, though the number of districts impacted would be reduced by increasing the level of wealth at which recapture kicks in.

As was the case in the House proposal, the major areas of disagreement involved the taxes that would be raised to pay for the array of reforms proposed. While the Senate met as committee of the whole, state political leaders huddled behind closed doors trying to work out an agreement

on the package of tax changes and increases that would provide the money needed to fund the combination of property tax cuts, increase state education funding, and add incentive-based features that were at the heart of most plans proposed.

Running Out the Clock

As it became apparent that no consensus would be reached among the leadership, the Senate spent the last days in May hearing testimony on ways to reform existing funding formulae and assess implications with the range of tax increases that were being proposed in the final days of the

Not-So-Special – continued on Page 16

special session.

Stung by the House rejection of the Senate education plan in the waning days of the 2003 regular legislative session, Senate leaders opted to “run out the clock” on the special session, rather than propose an education reform and tax plan that again could be summarily rejected by the Texas House. A related concern was Senate members’ being put in the position of voting for a tax measure, providing ammunition to political opponents whether or not the Senate tax package were eventually adopted.

Frustration with the lack of progress was reflected in the House’s resolution to close-out its deliberations several days before the official end of

the session. This move prompted the Senate to also adjourn for the remainder of the special session time period.

After much fanfare, the legislature abandoned the effort while state leaders searched for some mechanism to move the process forward sometime in the future. The House Speaker went so far as to recommend that future special sessions be delayed until after the scheduled court hearing on a lawsuit challenging the legitimacy of the current funding plan. The hearing is set to take place this summer.

Predictions of Next Steps

In the aftermath, the governor, the House Speaker and the Lt. Governor announced the creation of

two special committees (one focusing on revenue reforms and the second on education program reforms). These committees would continue to work on the issues over the next few weeks and months in anticipation of a fifth special session promised by the governor.

At this writing, several weeks have passed since the end of the special session, and the committees have continued to meet, with no apparent consensus having emerged.

One school of thought predicts that the governor will reconvene the legislature sometime after the July 4th holiday. Others speculate that the needed consensus on major issues may remain elusive, delaying any special session to a point where it is easier to

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In April, IDRA worked with **10,506** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **65** training and technical assistance activities and **168** program sites in **9** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Development Writing in K-3 Grades
- ◆ Metacognitive Strategies for Elementary Schools
- ◆ Fair Funding and School Holding Power
- ◆ Linking Families and Communities for Ready Children and Ready Schools

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◇ Hays County Independent School District, Texas
- ◇ Jefferson Parish, Louisiana
- ◇ Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute, New Mexico
- ◇ Tempe Elementary School District, Arizona

Activity Snapshot

During IDRA’s 11th Annual La Semana del Niño Early Childhood Educators Institute, more than 400 teachers, administrators and parents participated in a series of information-packed development sessions that were customized to their varied concerns. This institute provides the nation’s only gathering place for teachers and parents concerned with early childhood education of English language learners. The institute participants explored, assessed, and reflected on research-based, effective practices that lead to children’s success. The teachers, administrators and parents attended workshops about creating opportunities for children to develop a love for reading while they are doing mathematics, art, music and science.

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,

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

Not-So-Special – continued from Page 16

wait for the January 2005 regular legislative session. The reluctance of many members to be asked to vote on major state taxes just prior to a November election has also impacted the deliberations.

Given the lack of serious commitment to increasing the level of equity in the funding system, lack of action was seen by many Texans as a partial victory.

Though there is a general consensus that Texas schools need additional state funding to meet growing enrollment and escalating operating costs, state leader's insistence on combining tax reform, property tax reductions, and increased funding for public education will make the adoption

School Teachers – continued from Page 6

Mr. Hicks wants his students to surpass this goal, but he also wants much more for them. He is concerned about short-term and long-term goals for them: passing the course and the state test, graduating from high school and going to college. He knows that in order for his students to succeed in college, they will need math agility.

This agility becomes his focus, whether through group projects, career investigations, interesting math games, well-prepared lectures, or even through the daily practice tests, that students regard as perfunctory but necessary.

Mr. Hicks understands that, despite institutional pressure, no single test score can ever capture the complexity, talent and potential of his students. He wants to support the principal and the school to look good in the newspaper. More importantly, he wants his students to have a successful academic future.

Though such teachers who lead are not shielded from the current testing mania, they confront the challenges of high-stakes testing and narrow accountability with creative and student-supportive teaching (Dieckmann and

of any new funding plan extremely difficult.

If the reforms are limited to a few low-cost options and property tax reductions are minimized if not eliminated, we may yet see a viable plan adopted before the beginning of the next school year.

Whatever happens, many legislators previously unfamiliar with the challenges of reforming public school funding now know what awaits them. Whether the existing political leadership can ever hammer out a plan that will be acceptable to majorities in the Texas House and Senate remains to be seen. Capitol watchers suggest you “stay tuned for future developments.”

The Texas Latino Education

Montemayor, 2004). Such teachers see their accountability being ultimately to the families and community the school serves.

Teachers who lead accept the risk of criticism from peers and administrators for taking different directions when they are required to do something that works in any student's best interests. They hold no dogmatic allegiance to any teaching method or program.

As good as any methods and programs are purported to be, teachers who lead regard these as tools to help students learn and succeed. These teachers eagerly adapt any tool that proves beneficial to student thinking, learning and academic success.

Do What is Needed Beyond the Classroom So That All Students Succeed

In a south Texas town on the U.S.-Mexico border, Ms. Alvarez is tutoring Ismael and Verónica on covalent bonds in high school chemistry. It is December, and most of this material was covered in October.

But Ismael and Verónica were not in school then because they were in

Coalition has set up a new web site that is helping individuals find out what is at stake for them. The web site (www.texans4fairfunding.org) has easy-to-understand information on how school finance works in Texas and information on local tax rates and revenues per pupil. It also enables you to compare your own district to others. Hundreds of individuals have already signed on to the declaration calling for equity and excellence in public education. To find out the latest news about school finance in Texas, and developments since the writing of this article visit the site and sign up for free e-mail updates.

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

Michigan and Illinois as migrant farm workers. While there, they got some schooling, but mostly they were harvesting cherries and lettuce with their families to contribute to their income.

Ismael is in Ms. Alvarez's class, but Verónica comes to Ms. Alvarez's tutoring sessions because of his reputation for patience. Ms. Alvarez knows that these students' schedules are difficult because they leave weeks before school ends and return weeks after school has begun. Their high school transcripts are patchwork quilts of some partial and some local course credits, and there are many gaps in requirements for graduation – much less college entrance.

Ms. Alvarez knows that these students are capable of completing a recommended high school curriculum. And she engineers their enrollment in online local university courses that count toward high school credit. The online courses concurrent with the regular courses realign the students with the recommended graduation plan for college.

Ms. Alvarez further facilitates

School Teachers – continued on Page 18

similar solutions for other students by using the Internet to find five local libraries in both Michigan and Illinois with free Internet access near the camps where these families stay. She even prints out and gives them driving directions to these libraries.

Teachers who lead do not compartmentalize their work or deny responsibility by calling it someone else's job. They ignore artificial barriers and help students who are not on their class roster. Rather than lament the injustices of "the system," they seek solutions and do what needs to be done – reviewing student records, conferring with counselors and the principal, and seeking support with other teachers.

They engage parents and see them as valued partners in the education of children. They understand why many parents find the schools alienating. Such teachers build community linkages with businesses and universities. Rather than wait for tailor-made programs, they solve problems and get the job done. Their commitment affects students and families beyond the four walls of the classroom. These teachers recharge their batteries with student successes.

Though not perfect or always right, these pedagogical leaders are consistent in their commitment to student success. They are constant students themselves, learning from their experiences and from any source that presents practical and optimistic solutions.

They are not characterized by a particular personality type or a particular style of communication. They might be outspoken or quiet; intrusive or diplomatic. Some are seasoned, and others novices to teaching. Though their actions may differ according to the context and the nature of the issue, their commitment is constant, and their belief in students and families is undiminished.

Facilitating a Local Conversation

The accounts described above are based on real people and real events. Some were noticed by peers and others by IDRA staff. Our purpose is not to pay homage to any individual but to illustrate what we hope will be made more noticeable and, eventually, more the norm.

These vignettes simply show the concrete actions that arise from the specific commitments of public school teachers who lead. Though separated by time and distance, the underlying characteristics are shared by them, and many more.

For those who want public school classrooms to work for all children, cultivating many more teachers who lead is a key strategy. Whether to spark a conversation that will inspire new definitions of teaching or to assist in a school improvement plan of action, IDRA offers a structure of open-ended questions around each of the above described characteristics. Using this article as grounding for dialogue, these questions may be used in meetings within and across schools and with educators, parents and students (see box on Page 4).

Strong forces are attacking public education. The public's confidence in its neighborhood public schools is vulnerable to those seeking to dismantle public education and promote the privatization of schools. We must support excellent public schools on many fronts, from providing fair funding for the common good, to attracting the best and the brightest to teach in our public classrooms. Teachers who lead demonstrate through their effect on student success that strengthening public schools is a worthy goal for the public, and it is doable.

Meet Us Online

IDRA invites you to share your conversations about teachers who lead in an IDRA-sponsored online discussion board. This informal forum will initiate a national conversation about the important work of public school teachers who lead. We invite teachers, administrators, parents, students and community members to participate as an activity concurrent with back-to-school events to give the new school year a positive jump-start.

The forum will be available online from July 1 through September 30, 2004, and can be accessed at (<http://www.idra.org/teacherswholead.html>) look forward to hearing from you.

Resources

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School Teachers – continued on Page 19

increased need for teachers. To provide one teacher for every 25 retained students, Texas will need to hire and keep an additional 7,094 teachers. Using the average Texas teacher salary of \$39,232, taxpayers will have to spend an additional \$278 billion as a result of this state mandate.

An increase in retained students and their respective teachers also means more needed classroom space. Texas school systems may have to build an additional 3,296 classrooms to accommodate the students. Though limited state funding is now provided, no extra money is allocated for extra facilities to address the impact of retaining more pupils.

IDRA research estimates that every class of dropouts costs the state more than \$1.2 billion in lost income and support costs over the life of those individuals. This figure will increase with higher numbers of retentions.

What needs to be done?

Local schools, teachers and parents are the ones who best know their students and what academic decisions are best for them. Certainly they would not use a single exam to determine a child's future. That would be like a doctor making a decision for major surgery by only using a single blood test.

Decisions on whether to promote or retain children should be made by those directly involved with that child and should consider all the many indicators that will inform such decisions including grades, school participation, other indicators of academic performance and parent input.

In a recent article in *Education Week*, John Merrow eloquently advocates a re-designing of education, especially early education. He explains that policymakers and educators have attempted "middle-of-the road alternatives" to promotion and retention

but have not come up with something that actually works. He suggests that what can work as a solution is the end of age segregation in the early grades.

"Schools separate children by age because it's convenient for the adults, not because six-year-olds are developmentally different from five-year-olds or seven-year-olds" (Merrow, 2004).

Grouping children by development makes sense and allows involved adults, like teachers and parents, to work together to get students to an agreed-upon goal.

IDRA released a policy brief in 1999, *Failing Our Children – Finding Alternatives to In-Grade Retention*, that describes numerous alternatives to retention. These include special needs testing, tutoring assistance from the teacher, peer tutoring, extended day programs, Saturday tutoring, extended year programs, summer school, parent involvement, and cooperative learning classrooms. (The policy brief is available free online at <http://www.idra.org/Research/ingrade.pdf>.)

IDRA's research showed that the "most effective practices for successful students and schools are those that require that all partners in education – administrators, teachers, parents, community members and students – focus on the academic success and well-being of all students" (McCollum, 1999).

Specific strategies cited in this and other research as effective alternatives to in-grade retention are:

- Enhance the professional development of teachers to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to teach a wider range of students to meet standards.
- Redesign school structures to support more intensive learning.
- Provide students the support and services they need in order to succeed when they are needed.
- Use classroom assessments that

better inform teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Rather than choosing between two policies that are known to not work, why not choose something that makes sense and does not stigmatize a child as a failure.

Resources

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The Voucher Deception

So much of what happens in our neighborhoods revolves around the local public school. It is where we send our children each weekday morning. It is where children gather after school for scouting, sports and other activities. It is where adults go to vote and to be a part of community events, town hall meetings and other forums. Relocating families and business owners consider the neighborhood schools and their perceived quality before choosing a location.

Americans created a system in which education would no longer be in the private domain enjoyed only by those who could afford schooling. Public schooling has become the cornerstone of freedom, democracy and economic opportunity.

In recent years, a handful of special interest groups have tried to shift the country away from this promise. These groups present various compelling – sometimes contradictory – rationales, but their bottom-line goal is the same: to take public money from public schools and divert it to private schools. Certain state leaders have been vocal about their intentions to slip a voucher deal through during this special session.

With high-profile personalities and deep pockets, these groups have managed to lead some state policymakers and concerned individuals to believe there is strong public support for such a radical change. They are mistaken. Voters have repeatedly opposed proposals to support private and religious schools with tax money.

During this summer's deliberations in Texas on school finance, some state leaders have promised to push for private school voucher measures that would divert even more money from

public schools. We cannot allow any voucher proposals that would divert public money to private interests. Community groups across the state have outlined nine key reasons to oppose vouchers.

- Diverting public money for private schools will take money away from our communities resulting in higher taxes for homeowners and businesses in the community.
- Private schools are not accountable to the public for their actions or results.
- The private schools in Texas do not have the capacity or capability to absorb large numbers of poor students.
- Research on vouchers in Chile and other countries show that vouchers would create a dual system of education – separate and unequal.
- The main proponents of vouchers are the same forces that have historically opposed school finance equalization.
- Students already have education options within the public school systems through magnet schools, charter schools, inter-district transfers and intra-district transfers.
- With a voucher program, it is not the parents who have a choice. The private schools have the choice about which students to accept.
- Vouchers would give a new government subsidy to private schools and wealthy parents with children already in private schools.
- Investing in our neighborhood public schools is investing in our community.

The best way to strengthen public schools is to *strengthen* public schools!

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