



## From “Dropping Out” to “Holding On” Seven Lessons from Texas

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

### Inside this Issue:

- ✦ **Teaching vocabulary to bilingual students**
- ✦ **Pre-reading strategies**
- ✦ **Laredo community demands equity in school funding**



Eighteen years ago, no one knew how many students in Texas were leaving school without a high school diploma. Then, IDRA was commissioned to conduct the first comprehensive statewide study of high school dropouts in Texas. That pioneering study, conducted for the Texas Department of Community Affairs, answered three questions.

The first question was: How many students are dropping out? The answer was: Many. More than 86,000 students did not graduate that year from Texas high schools.

The second question was: Why are students leaving? The answer was: Students are not connected to the school. Students left for many reasons, but a lack of connection was an underlying theme.

The third question was: What is it costing us? The answer was: \$17.2 billion over the lifetime of those students in foregone income, lost tax base, increased unemployment costs, increased criminal justice costs, and increased welfare costs. In fact, IDRA’s cost benefit analysis indicated

that for every dollar invested in keeping kids in school, nine would be returned (Ramírez and Robledo Montecel, 1987).

That was 1986. At the time, individual student records were not collected. To conduct the study in the absence of student-level numbers, IDRA pioneered an attrition methodology that utilized enrollment data from the Texas Education Agency to develop dropout count estimates. The IDRA study pushed the development of official dropout identification, counting, and reporting policies and procedures.

Now it is 2004. IDRA has conducted a dropout study every year using the same methodology based on enrollments. But progress on accurate counting by the state has been slow and halting. Dropouts in Texas have been systematically under-reported. This has created a false sense of security. By minimizing the problem, the state has promoted inaction.

At the national level, the *No Child Left Behind Act* federal education requirements around graduation rates are casting a national spotlight on the issue of dropouts. Several organizations have created dropout count methodologies that parallel the

enrollment methodology that IDRA pioneered. In Texas, as in the rest of the country, many students drop out, many students are disconnected from schools, and the costs are high.

Fortunately, many educators, parents and students have not waited for the official counts to change. They know there is a problem. They know there are solutions. Around the country, schools and communities, in partnership with IDRA and in a range of other initiatives, have pioneered new ways to turn the tide. Class by class, they have found ways to transform schools from *places that misplace children into settings that hold on to them.*

Having dealt with this issue so closely for so many years, IDRA offers the following seven lessons from Texas in the hope that many more will take up the call to action.

**Lesson One: Losing Children from Our School Systems (“Dropout”) Is a Persistent, Unacknowledged Problem**

Since 1986, when IDRA conducted Texas’ first comprehensive statewide study of high school dropouts, Texas schools have lost close to 2 million students with a net loss to the state of nearly \$500 billion. This is like losing Austin or Dallas over the course of a decade and a half.

And this first lesson can be seen across the country. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University reported earlier this year: “Every year, across the country, a dangerously high percentage of students – disproportionately poor and minority – disappear from the educational pipeline. Nationally, only about 68 percent of all students who enter the ninth grade will graduate ‘on time’ with regular diplomas in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade” (Orfield, 2004).

The Civil Rights Project also reported that “dropout data mislead[s] the public into thinking that most students are earning diplomas” (Orfield, 2004).

The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy reported: “Despite setting a national goal of a high school graduation rate of 90 percent in 1994, only two states,

New Jersey and Wisconsin, met that goal in the academic year 2000-01. Shockingly, there were 24 states with graduation rates of 75 percent or less” (Haney, 2004).

Since every student counts, we simply must count every student.

**Lesson Two: Fraud Is a Red Herring – Distracting Us from The Real Problem That Is Before Us. Undercounting Is the Result of Institutional Intransigence, Not Massive Fraud.**

As compelling as stories of fraud can be, by and large, undercounts have nothing to do with fraud. Even if all Texas school districts reported data within the letter of the law, as the system currently stands, they would seriously undercount lost students.

Texas uses 29 *leaver codes*. This results in a gross undercounting and under-reporting of students who have never received a high school diploma. In the past – as recently as

*Seven Lessons – continued on Page 11*

**In This Issue...**

- 3 Bilingual Word Power**
- 7 Tutoring Reading Valued Youth**
- 9 Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities**
- 10 Texans for Fair Funding Web Site Launched**
- 14 11th Annual IDRA La Semana del Niño**
- 16 Laredo Community... Declare Support**

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

The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, © 2004) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

Permission to reproduce material contained herein is granted provided the article or item is reprinted in its entirety and proper credit is given to IDRA and the author. Please send a copy of the material in its reprinted form to the *IDRA Newsletter* production offices. Editorial submissions, news releases, subscription requests, and change-of-address data should be submitted in writing to the *IDRA Newsletter* production editor. The *IDRA Newsletter* staff welcomes your comments on editorial material.

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

Publication offices:  
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350  
San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190  
210/444-1710; Fax 210/444-1714  
www.idra.org contact@idra.org

*María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.*  
IDRA Executive Director  
Newsletter Executive Editor

*Christie L. Goodman, APR*  
IDRA Communications Manager  
Newsletter Production Editor

*Sarah H. Aleman*  
IDRA Data Entry Clerk  
Newsletter Typesetter



# Bilingual Word Power

## Research-Based Vocabulary Strategies for English Language Learners

by **Laura Chris Green, Ph.D.**

Few things have greater impact on how well one listens, speaks, reads and writes than the depth and breadth of one's vocabulary knowledge. To be *articulate*, whether we are describing a person's oral or written language skills, is to be a person who uses the most accurate and powerful word to express a concept.

Many benefits result from having word power: the ability to better comprehend what is read, the ability to express oneself well when speaking or writing, and, of great interest in today's political climate, the ability to score well on standardized and criterion-referenced tests of many kinds.

It is also clear that acquiring knowledge in all realms of learning – the natural and social sciences, the arts, and mathematics – requires one to master the meanings of the related technical vocabulary terms for that field.

### A Lot of Words to Learn

Estimates of the number of words that the average high school senior knows range from a high of 50,000 to a low of 17,000 (Nagy and Anderson,

1984; D'Anna et al., 1991). This translates to learning 3,000 to 4,000 new words a year for English speakers.

Second language learners have an even greater vocabulary acquisition task in front of them (García, 2003; Hirsh and Nation, 1992).

Students from low-income backgrounds also tend to have limited vocabularies, especially for academic terms. Hart and Risley estimated a 30-million word gap by age three between the average number of words heard by the children of parents on welfare and

those whose parents are professionals (2003).

Oral language does not typically use the rich variety of vocabulary words that written language, especially expository text, does. Hayes and Ahrens analyzed the distributions of words in a variety of oral and written contexts ranging from printed scientific texts to television shows to adult speech (1988).

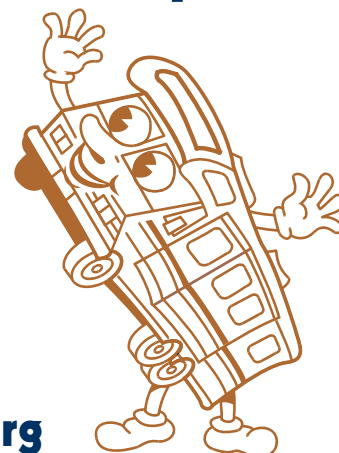
Most speech was found to be lexically impoverished when compared

*Bilingual Word Power – continued on Page 4*

## Take the IDRA Newsletter Field Trip!

### On IDRA's Web Site

- ✦ Read related *IDRA Newsletter* articles from 1996 to the present
- ✦ Access statistics, definitions, etc.
- ✦ Learn about Internet resources
- ✦ Find extensive useful Internet links
- ✦ Use IDRA's topical index to find what you are looking for



[www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)

*Bilingual Word Power* – continued from Page 3  
to written language (See box below). Cunningham and Stanovich noted that the “relative rarity of the words in children’s books is, in fact, greater than that in all of adult conversation, except for... courtroom testimony” (1998).

**Vocabulary Instruction Research**

Because of the large number of words individuals need to learn, direct instruction cannot be used to teach the meaning of all words that students will encounter during their school years. Students must be taught how to acquire word meanings independently, both as they hear new words and as they encounter them in reading. They need to be encouraged to read as widely as possible to be exposed to greater quantity and variety of words.

Wide area reading can mean a dramatic difference in the number of

words students are exposed to every year. Anderson, Wilson and Fielding found that 30 percent of children read less than 90 seconds per day outside of school (1988). This means they read 100,000 or fewer words per year. Compare that exposure to the top 2 percent of readers who read 65 minutes or more per day, reading at least 4,358,000 words a year.

In its comprehensive review and analysis of 30 years of reading research, the National Reading Panel described five main methods of teaching vocabulary:

- explicit instruction, such as providing definitions;
- implicit instruction (exposure as students read widely);
- multimedia methods, such as graphic representations and hypertext;
- capacity methods in which practice is emphasized to make reading automatic; and
- association methods in which

**Thirty percent of children read less than 90 seconds per day outside of school.**

learners draw connections between known and unknown words (2000).

The NRC found that vocabulary knowledge is significantly increased by multiple exposures to words in a variety of rich contexts, making connections with other reading material or oral language, pre-instruction of word meanings before reading, and active engagement of the learner in acquiring and using vocabulary. Computer programs designed to teach vocabulary were also seen as promising as adjuncts to direct vocabulary instruction.

Graves and Watts-Taffe recommend four components to any vocabulary instruction program: wide reading so that implicit learning can occur; teaching individual words; teaching word learning strategies; and fostering word consciousness. The teaching of individual words is “most effective when learners are given both definitional and contextual information, when learners actively process the new word meanings, and when they experience multiple encounters with words” (2002).

Recommended ways to teach word learning strategies include using context, using word parts to unlock the meanings of unknown words, and teaching students how to use the dictionary.

Word consciousness is “awareness of and interest in words and their meanings... and integrates metacognition about words and motivation for learning words.” (McKeown and Beck, in press).

In their study, McKeown and Beck, for example, had teachers keep Word Wizard Charts to encourage students to become more word

**Selected Statistics for Major Sources of Spoken and Written Language (Sample Means)**

	Rare Words per 1000	Rank of Median Word
<b>I. Printed texts</b>		
Abstracts of scientific articles	4389	128.0
Newspapers	1690	68.3
Popular magazines	1399	65.7
Adult books	1058	52.7
Comic books	867	53.5
Children’s books	627	30.9
Preschool books	578	16.3
<b>II. Television texts</b>		
Popular prime-time adult shows	490	22.7
Popular prime-time children’s shows	543	20.2
Cartoon shows	598	30.8
<i>Mr. Rogers and Sesame Street</i>	413	2.0
<b>III. Adult speech</b>		
Expert witness testimony	1008	28.4
College graduates to friends, spouses	496	17.3

Source: Hayes and Ahrens, 1988.

*Bilingual Word Power* – continued on Page 5



conscious. Students were challenged to find outside of class the words they had been taught in class in books, newspapers, radio, television, and adult conversation – and were rewarded for bringing in examples of how the words were used.

McKeown and Beck say that a mature, literate individual’s vocabulary comprises three tiers. Tier One has the most basic words, such as *bed*, *brother*, *sky*, and *run*. Most learners already know the meanings of Tier One words.

Tier Three consists of rare words such as *apogee*, *precinct*, *peninsula* and *ecclesiastical* which tend to be limited to specific domains.

Tier Two, in the middle, consists of words like *compromise*, *scrutinize*, *diligent* and *typical* which are of high frequency for mature users and found across a variety of domains.

The researchers found that instruction directed at Tier Two words is the most productive. Their vocabulary development program helps teachers determine which words to teach and to what depth as well as showing them how to directly teach students to use context efficiently. It incorporates a number of innovative vocabulary development techniques that they call “rich instruction” to produce “deep and facile word knowledge... needed to affect comprehension” including ones called Word Wizard as described above, Overheard Conversations, and Word Lines for Tier Two words.

### Use of Cognates for English Language Learners

Bilingual students whose first language is a Romance language like Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian, are not beginning from ground zero when it comes to vocabulary acquisition in English. According to data from the 2000 Census, the majority of English

## Sample Cognates in English and Spanish

Type of Cognate	Spanish	English
Identical	Hotel Actor	Hotel Actor
Spelled nearly the same	Absurdo Nación	Absurd Nation
Less obvious	Deporte Peligroso	Sport Perilous
Oral cognate	Paz Placer	Peace Pleasure
Cognate for one meaning, but not another	Letra Carta	Letter Letter
False cognate	Embarazada Bigote	Pregnant Moustache

Source: Rodríguez, 2001.

language learners in the United States are Spanish speakers. Texas, for example, has 94 percent of its English language learners who are Spanish speakers.

These students can often call on their knowledge of cognates in their native language to determine the meanings of the words in their second language. The number of cognates they will encounter tends to increase with the grades as they encounter increasing numbers of words with Latinate roots, especially in their science and social studies courses.

Nagy and Nagy, et al. found that not all second language learners automatically recognize and use cognates (1988; 1993). The teachers in their studies were able to teach their students to better use the cognate knowledge that they did possess in their native language, Spanish.

Words have two dimensions, a *label* and the *concept(s)* or meaning(s) behind the label. Often English language learners, especially if they are orally proficient and literate in their first language, already know the equivalent concept for new English words they encounter. In these cases they can be

quickly taught the English label, usually by just translating the English word for them into their native languages. In other cases, they know both the concept and the label in the form of a cognate (see box above).

It should also be noted that some cognates are well known in one language, but not the other. Consider for example, *infirm/enfermo* or *difficult/difícil*. In both cases, the English word is a rare one and the Spanish is the most common label used for the concept.

A teacher does not need, by the way, to be bilingual in order to use cognates for teaching. The teacher can look words up in a bilingual dictionary to see if it is a cognate or ask the students if they know of a similar word in Spanish.

Rodríguez suggests the following steps for teaching Spanish-speaking literates to use cognates and context in reading texts in English (2001).

1. Have students read the text silently or aloud to a partner. Discuss what it means with the partner or in a small group.
2. Discuss the vocabulary with the

Bilingual Word Power – continued on Page 6

whole class. Use cognates and context clues to figure out meanings. Point out spelling patterns, like *-tion* in English becomes *-ción* in Spanish.

3. Discuss grammatical differences between English and Spanish such as word order for nouns and adjectives.
4. Read the text aloud as students follow along. Have students listen for words they recognize orally.
5. Read a similar text with Germanic-based words in place of the cognates. Compare.
6. Clarify and explain words in the texts that cannot be figured out from cognates or context.

### Unique Vocabulary Learning for English Language Learners

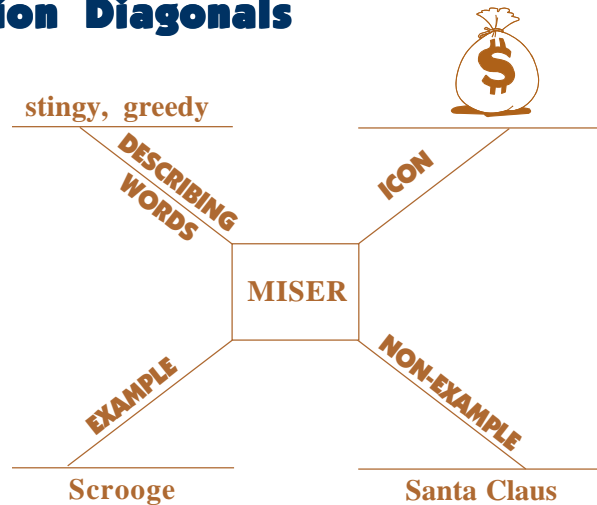
English language learners may bring linguistic knowledge in the area of cognates to their learning of new English words, but they also will have special vocabulary learning needs that English speakers will not.

They need to learn basic, survival words that English speakers begin school knowing, words such as *house*, *school*, *walk*, and *eat*. They also need to learn the multiple meanings of many of these basic words.

English lacks many of the morphemic markers that other languages have that can indicate what part of speech it is. Spanish, for example, has an extensive verb system that indicates person, number, and tense. *Jugaremos* is *we will play*. As a consequence, Spanish speakers have trouble knowing what syntactical function English words play, making it difficult for them to use context to determine word meanings.

*Play*, for example, can be a noun, a verb, or an adjective. Translated into Spanish, a theater *play* is *un drama*, to *play* a game is *jugar*, to play an instrument is *tocar*, and a *play* thing is

## Definition Diagonals



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association. More information on definition diagonals is available online at [www.idra.org/lessons/definitiondiagonals.htm](http://www.idra.org/lessons/definitiondiagonals.htm).

*de juguete*. In addition, many common phrases, expressions, and idioms cannot be translated directly and retain meaning. A *play on words* is not *un juego de palabras*; a *power play* is not *un juego de poder*.

Calderón, et al. (2003) modified the three-tier system devised by McKeown and Beck into four tiers for the bilingual third and fourth graders they studied in El Paso who were transitioning from Spanish into English reading. A vocabulary development component was added to the *Success for All* program they were using based on the four tiers.

Tier One words required little or no instruction and included basic words, cognates and false cognates.

Tier Two words were explicitly taught and included the high-frequency words in the students' readers or listening comprehension texts. This excluded many of the words McKeown and Beck included in Tier Two because they were clear and obvious cognates (e.g., *coincidence/coincidencia*, *absurd/absurdo*) and classified as Tier One.

Words with multiple meanings like *push*, *ring* and *gave*, however, would be classified as Tier One words for English speakers, but it was found

that their multiple meanings had to be directly taught to Spanish speakers and so they were included in Tier Two.

Tier Three words corresponded to Beck's Tier Two words and included cognates that were difficult to recognize (e.g., *tend/atender*, *maintain/mantener*).

Tier Four consisted of primarily the same words as Beck's Tier Three, that is words of low frequency and limited to specific domains. Modest, but consistently positive gains were seen in the experimental students as compared to the controls for both English and Spanish reading.

Carlo, et al. designed a vocabulary intervention for Anglo and Latino fifth graders that also focused on using cognates to infer meaning as well as strategies for using information from context and knowledge about multiple meanings (in press).

The program also focused on learning that word knowledge involves spelling, pronunciation, morphology, and syntax as well as depth of meaning. Beck's Tier Two words were the primary targets of study. The results showed the feasibility of improving comprehension outcomes for English language learners and English speakers

# Tutoring Reading – Valued Youth as Reading Helpers

by **Juanita C. García, M.A.**

The teacher wondered how her group of middle school tutors would react to reading predictable children's books to their elementary "tutees." Would they enjoy the books or would they think they were too mature to do the activities in the lesson? She wondered if the tutors would enjoy being read to as she modeled the dramatic reading of a children's literature book. Would they volunteer to read their books to the rest of the class? And, most important of all, would they read to their tutees in the elementary school?

The tutors were participants in the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program in schools across the United States and Brazil. The program was created by the Intercultural Development Research Association. In the program, secondary school students who are considered at risk of dropping out of school are placed as tutors of elementary school students during one class period each day.

This enables the older students to make a difference in the younger students' lives. With a growing sense of responsibility and pride, the tutors stay and do better in school. The program supports them with positive recognition and instruction.



The teacher was working with the tutors as they planned their upcoming tutoring sessions. She began the lesson by leading a discussion around four questions: Do you ever read to your tutees? Do you ever have trouble getting them to listen and pay attention to the story? How do you prepare them, get them ready for reading? How do you keep them interested in the story?

To her surprise, most of the students said they read to their tutees and were ready to learn different ways of preparing them for reading and keeping them interested in the story. They were so entranced with the dramatic reading of the key literature selection that they began to participate in the repeated readings of the story.

Once she knew she had captured their emotional attention, she explained to them that she would be sharing some techniques for getting their tutees ready for and excited about a story and for

keeping their interest in the story through several readings.

## Tutoring Reading

Beginning readers need to read a story several times before they can read it on their own, but this can seem boring unless we do it creatively.

The most common type of support in reading is tutoring. So, as part of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program curriculum, a basic skills instruction unit on tutoring reading is the focus to help tutors practice techniques designed to get tutees ready to read a book or story, read it with them, and use the story as a model for their own writing.

A big challenge schools face is in ensuring that all children become competent readers. Once young children experience problems in reading, they quickly fall behind their more skilled classmates in their ability to decode and comprehend text. This gap in reading skills can emerge as early as first grade and become stable over time (Stanovich, 1986).

The good news is that students can be explicitly taught to deliver effective tutoring in reading to younger peers. Not only does peer tutoring provide effective reading support, but the tutors also benefit academically from the time spent reviewing and practicing material with their tutees.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth  
*Tutoring Reading – continued on Page 8*

Program curriculum encourages critical and higher-order thinking skills. Organizing material to teach “facilitates long-term retention, as well as aiding in the formation of a more comprehensive and integrated understanding” (Cohen, 1986).

As their tutees improve, tutor’s concept of self improves. Making a meaningful contribution is a powerful experience. Valued Youth tutors stop skipping classes and behaving disruptively after they realize they are role models and are making a difference for their tutees (Supik, 1991).

## **Reading With Younger Children**

The first technique the tutors learn is called *pre-reading questions*. These questions are about topics that are in the story. But they also are about something in the tutee’s own lives so that they can make connections between books and themselves. Some people call them “Have you ever...?” questions because many begin with this phrase.

But a more fun and interesting way to ask these or any questions is called *think-pair-share*. The cooperative learning structure provides everyone with a chance to share an answer after think time (Kagan, 1994).

The next step, after pre-reading questions, is to read the story aloud in a very dramatic way. The tutors should pretend that they are an actor on stage or on television and use their voices, their hands, their bodies, and the pictures in the book to make this first reading one that will bring the story alive.

Like actors, they should rehearse the reading several times. That is, they should get the story before they go to the classroom and practice reading it aloud to the other tutors or their parents or their teachers until they feel confident that they do it well. This is when teacher modeling of the dramatic reading is very critical.

## **According to the National Reading Panel Report, question generation is one of seven strategies that appear to have a firm scientific basis for improving comprehension.**

The third step, after the pre-reading questions and the dramatic read aloud, is to read the story again, stopping at key places to see if the students can supply the right word. In the last reading, tutees are supplied with word cards and expected to stand up and say the appropriate word.

After summarizing the recommended sequence of steps to be used when reading with tutees, each team of four tutors is given a predictable book to read. They write three to five pre-reading questions for it, practice a dramatic reading for it, and create word cards. Predictable stories are those with repeated language patterns that enable children to predict the actions and words coming next.

At the end of the task, each team models a guided reading session for the whole group, having one student play the role of the teacher and the other three the role of the tutees. Assessment of the task involves the rest of the students as they complete a *Guided Reading Assessment Form* when the teams of four model their guided reading session for the whole class. The assessment form is a rubric created to rate how well teams presented their task.

## **Examples of Pre-Reading Questions**

Key literature for the “Reading to Your Tutees” lesson includes *That’s Good! That’s Bad!* by Margery Cuyler. In this story, a little boy has a series of adventures and misadventures with a

bunch of wild animals. The pre-reading questions created for the story are the following: Have you ever been to a zoo? Do any animals scare you? Do you like lions? How do you feel about snakes? Have you ever had a bad day?

These questions were used to model and guide the tutors through the procedures of the lesson. Then the groups were given predictable books to read and to generate their own questions.

Below are examples of the pre-reading questions that the tutors generated for their books. A brief summary of the books is followed by examples of the tutors’ questions.

- *A Peacock Ate My Lunch*, by Craig B. McKee and Margaret Holland – A little girl has many secret animal friends who all come out to play and then they go away. Pre-reading questions are: Do you have secret friends? Have you ever seen a peacock? Where would you find a peacock? Have you ever had a friend who went away?
- *I Want to Learn to Fly!*, by Judy Barron – A young girl imagines all the places she would go if only she could fly. The pre-reading questions are: Has anyone wanted to fly like a bird before? Are you scared of heights? Have you ever dreamed you could fly? Where would you go if you could fly? What kinds of wings would you like?
- *Drummer Hoff*, by Barbara Emberley – This story is a cumulative folk song in which seven soldiers build a magnificent cannon, but Drummer Hoff fires it off. The pre-reading questions are: Have you ever played the drums? Have you ever read a rhyming book? Do you know any rhyming words? What word rhymes with drums?
- *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*, by Laura Numeroff – Chaos is the order of the day when an accommodating little girl tires to keep



up with the whims of a busy little pig. The pre-reading questions are: Do you like pancakes? Have you ever seen a real pig? Do you have pigs at home? Do you like syrup on your pancakes? What would happen if you gave a pig a pancake?

- *Together*, by George Ella Lyon – This is an illustrated poem about friendship and togetherness. The pre-reading questions are: What kinds of friends do you have? Do you learn anything from your friends? Are you a friendly person? What is a friend?

According to the National Reading Panel Report, question generation is one of seven strategies that appear to have a firm scientific basis for improving comprehension.

This strategy helps readers who do not know how to generate questions or inferences learn to generate and answer inferential questions (2000).

The eighth grade tutors learned how to use these strategies like professional teachers. They exceeded expectations. These students in at-risk situations demonstrated a real desire to help their tutees. They participated, interacted with each other, laughed together, and learned together. They truly are Valued Youth.

### Resources

Cohen, J. "Theoretical Considerations of Peer Tutoring," *Peer and Cross-Age Tutoring*, *ERIC Digest*, Number 79 (1986).

Green, C. *Reading to Your Tutees* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural

Development Research Association, 2002).

Kagan, S. *Cooperative Learning* (San Clemente, Calif.: Kagan Cooperative Learning, 1994).

The National Reading Panel Report. *National Institute for Literacy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).

Stanovich, K.E. "Matthew Effects in Reading: Some Consequences of Individual Differences in the Acquisition of Literacy," *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 360-407 (1986).

Supik, J. "Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 1991).

Juanita C. García, M.A., is an education associate in the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions can be directed to her via e-mail at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).

## Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In February, IDRA worked with **13,679** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **71** training and technical assistance activities and **278** program sites in **14** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Spanish Proficiency Training
- ◆ Integrating a School-Wide Project with a Parent Center
- ◆ Graphic Organizers (Science)
- ◆ TAKS Reading and Vocabulary Strategies
- ◆ Early Childhood Instruction

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◇ Arkansas Department of Education
- ◇ Bastrop Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◇ Harlandale ISD, Texas
- ◇ Hays County ISD, Texas
- ◇ Tempe Elementary School District, Arizona
- ◇ University of Oklahoma

### Activity Snapshot

Evaluation is crucial to implementing a program and to making it better as it goes along. IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has a 20-year track record of success that has been supported by rigorous evaluation. Evaluation consists of quantitative and qualitative measures – including school life scores; grades in mathematics, reading and English; achievement test scores; disciplinary action referrals; and absenteeism rates. A pre-test and post-test design measures the program's affect on tutor's perceived self-concept, language proficiency, aspirations and expectations, feelings of belonging in school, and relationships with family members. Data is collected throughout the school year through surveys, formal observations and in-depth interviews. This school year, the program has 108 participating schools. During the summer, IDRA will process more than 25,000 surveys and evaluation forms. End-of-year evaluation reports will be provided to all program sites to inform them of the program's effect on students and to assist them in making any needed improvements in implementation for next year.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- ◆ public school teachers
- ◆ parents
- ◆ administrators
- ◆ other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- ◇ training and technical assistance
- ◇ evaluation
- ◇ serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- ◇ publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

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

## Texans for Fair Funding – Web Site Launched

It took 25 years, several rounds of court cases and many legislative sessions to create the equitable system we have today so that all Texas children benefit. 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.

Texans for Fair Funding is a dynamic web site (<http://www.texans4fairfunding.org>) with tools for advocates of equity and excellence in education. Anyone with Internet access can easily learn how their children's schools are funded, what's at stake, and what they 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.

The key areas of the [www.texans4fairfunding.org](http://www.texans4fairfunding.org) are:

- **Know the Issue:** Easy-to-understand information on fair funding in Texas
- **Get the Facts:** How funding impacts your school district
- **Take Action:** What you can do to inform others and get your voice heard
- **Ask About It:** A place to ask questions and get answers
- **Link Up:** Resources on the issue of fair funding
- **Texas Fast Facts:** Find out about the state of fair funding in Texas

Sign on to the Declaration  
"Fair Funding for the  
Common Good."

TLEC is a collaborative of organizations and individuals who have traditionally advocated the rights of Latinos at the local, state and national levels, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Mexican American School Board Members Association, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the Intercultural Development Research Association. The coalition was organized to focus specifically on critical educational issues in Texas and improve the state of education for Latino students in public schools. These target issues are fair funding, teaching quality, school holding power, and college access and success. *For more information contact Anna Alicia Romero at IDRA (210-444-1710; [aromero@idra.org](mailto:aromero@idra.org)).*

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."

2000-01 – the state has used as many as 43 leaver codes. While a reduction in ways to obscure the dropout count is a step in the right direction, it still skirts the issue.

To be credible, the dropout definition should be simple and clear: *Count as a dropout any student who does not hold a high school diploma.* A GED is never equivalent to a high school diploma – ask any employer, college or university.

More than 150,000 students lacking documented and official transfer status are excluded from Texas' dropout counts every year.

As long as knowing the real status of our students is not a policy reform priority, thousands of students will continue to be lost – not only from schools – but also reflected in losses in tax revenue and income that comes from decreased levels of education among residents.

### **Lesson Three: Accountability Systems Did Not Create Dropouts**

Accountability systems did not create dropouts. Losing children from our school systems has long been a problem. Unacceptably high dropout rates pre-date the accountability systems developed over the last several years in response to the concern about the effect of under-education on the current information-based economy. In fact, dropout rates for Hispanic students in the 1940s have been estimated around 80 percent (Cárdenas, 1995).

Accountability systems that do not hurt children will not create dropouts. High-stakes testing does hurt children and will increase the dropout rate (see Lesson Four).

Diagnostic student assessments are useful to guide instruction. And the use of state assessment measures is one of several necessary factors in

assessing school effectiveness and for holding schools accountable for educating all of our students. Tests can play an important role in this kind of school accountability – one that accepts the responsibility that schools have toward children and communities.

### **Lesson Four: High-stakes Testing and Accountability Systems Must Be Uncoupled**

Testing of students to promote school accountability is not a new idea. Students have been tested for decades using both locally-developed and standardized tests. But a new dimension has emerged in using a single test to make decisions concerning whether a student gets promoted to the next grade or whether a graduating student will receive a diploma.

The push for using state test scores as the primary basis for promotion, retention and graduation decisions is based on the incorrect assumption that a single test score tells you all you need to know about student achievement.

Recent research on the Texas testing program reveals that improvement in state test scores did not simultaneously result in higher test scores on national tests, and that despite rising state test scores, Texas students were not graduating in higher numbers or increasing their enrollment in college. On the other hand, research has shown that students who are retained in grade do no better the next year. In many cases, retention leads students to drop out before they graduate.

School accountability should not mean: (1) that high-stakes decisions in children's lives (e.g., high school graduation) are made on the basis of tests, or (2) that tests dictate what children learn. Texas and other states should continue to measure schools' performance. This can be done more efficiently and at less expense by moving to an assessment system that tests a

sample of students from each school to get a picture of how each school is performing. Current federal policy does not allow sample testing for accountability.

### **Lesson Five: We Cannot Afford to Decide that Some Kids Do Not Count**

Between the 1985-86 and 2002-03 school years, the estimated cumulative costs of public school dropouts in the state of Texas were in excess of \$500 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenues, and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs.

On average, dropouts are more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates and earn less money when they eventually secure work. Two-thirds of inmates in the Texas prison system are high school dropouts. The social and economic costs of the dropout problem have increased by 26 times the initial estimates of \$17 billion in 1986.

Lack of school holding power disproportionately affects minority students. Following a 17-year trend, in 2002-03, Texas Hispanic students had the highest attrition rate at 50 percent, followed by African American students at 45 percent and Native American students at 39 percent. White students had an attrition rate of 24 percent.

### **Lesson Six: Dropout Data Is Not a Legitimate Reason to Give Up On Public Education**

Giving up on public education does not solve the dropout problem. Private schools do not have the capacity or capability to absorb large numbers of poor students. Private schools are not accountable to the public for actions or results. Further, distributing public money for private schools would take



away money from our communities resulting in higher taxes for homeowners and businesses in the community.

Excellent neighborhood public schools are the foundation of strong communities. The best way to strengthen public schools is to *strengthen* public schools – schools that are accountable to us all.

### **Lesson Seven: It Is Time to Move From Dropping Out to Holding On**

We know what is needed to address the problem of dropouts in our schools. What we need is the public will and commitment to carry it out.

IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was begun in Texas and is making a difference in schools across the United States and in Brazil. Programs like this demonstrate how schools can change from giving up on certain students to transforming their schools to hang on to them.

While programs alone are not a magic bullet, they demonstrate which elements must be in place to create schools that promote the success of all our children from kindergarten to graduation.

Research demonstrates that to move *from dropping out to holding on*:

- All students must be valued.
- There must be at least one educator in a student's life who is totally committed to the success of that student.
- Families must be valued as partners with the school, all committed to ensuring that equity and excellence is present in a student's life.
- Schools must change and innovate to match the characteristics of their students and embrace the strengths and contributions that students and their families bring.
- School staff, especially teachers,

## **From “Dropping Out” to “Holding On” Seven Lessons from Texas**

**Lesson One:** Losing children from our school systems (“dropout”) is a persistent, unacknowledged problem.

**Lesson Two:** Fraud is a red herring – distracting us from the real problem that is before us. Undercounting is the result of institutional intransigence, not massive fraud.

**Lesson Three:** Accountability systems did not *create* dropouts.

**Lesson Four:** High-stakes testing and accountability systems must be uncoupled.

**Lesson Five:** We cannot afford to decide that some kids do not count.

**Lesson Six:** Dropout data is not a legitimate reason to give up on public education.

**Lesson Seven:** It is time to move from dropping out to holding on.

Intercultural Development Research Association, 2004.

must be equipped with the tools needed to ensure their students' success, including the use of technology, different learning styles and mentoring programs. *Effective* professional development can help provide these tools.

We know, without a doubt, that the nation faces a huge, untenable problem. But we also know that the problem is *not intractable*. Today, if we re-commit ourselves to schools that work for all children, we can ensure that all children have the opportunity for an excellent education.

Quality education is the key to opportunity, the foundation of democracy, and the heart of a good life. Many have long recognized that all of our children deserve no less.

### **Resources**

- Cárdenas, J.A. *Multicultural Education: A Generation of Advocacy* (Needham Heights, Mass.: Simmon and Schuster Custom Publishing, 1995).
- Haney, W., et al. *The Education Pipeline in the United States, 1970-2000* (Chestnut Hill, Mass.: Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy, Lynch

- School of Education, Boston College, 2004).
- Intercultural Development Research Association. *Fair Funding for Texas School Children*, Texas education policy digest series (San Antonio, Texas: IDRA, 2002).
- Johnson, R.L. “Schools Continue to Lose Students: Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2002-03,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2003).
- Orfield, G., and D. Losen, J. Wald, C. Swanson. *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Contributors: Advocates for Children of New York, The Civil Society Institute, 2004).
- Ramírez, D., and M. Robledo Montecel. “The Economic Impact of the Dropout Problem,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, April 1987).
- Robledo Montecel, M. “Texas Needs Diplomas, Not Delusions,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, September 2002).
- Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 1998.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999.

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



*Bilingual Word Power* – continued from Page 6  
in mixed classrooms by teaching word analysis and vocabulary learning strategies.

The Intercultural Development Research Association has had success for 10 years in bilingual, ESL and regular classrooms at all grade levels using a vocabulary learning strategy we call *definition diagonals* (see box on Page 6). Students are taught how to use a graphic organizer that requires them to come up with at least four “clues to meaning” for each word they are studying.

The Definition Diagonal Clues Menu is used in tandem with the graphic organizer to provide them with ideas for the many kinds of clues they can use on the organizer. A sample definition diagonals lesson is available online at [www.idra.org/lessons/definition-diagonals.htm](http://www.idra.org/lessons/definition-diagonals.htm).

The strategy follows all of the principles that the National Reading

Panel found characterize effective vocabulary instruction: exposure to the word in a variety of contexts, creative usage of the word, and making multiple connections to pictures, personal associations and other words. It also focuses on the oft-recommended structural analysis, Latinate roots (cognates), and translations from first language as well as allowing for the more traditional techniques such as definitions and synonyms.

### Resources

- Anderson, R.C., and P.T. Wilson, L.G. Fielding. “Growth in Reading and How Children Spend their Time Outside of School,” *Reading Research Quarterly* (1988).
- Calderón, M., and D. August, R. Slavin, D. Duran, N. Madden, A. Cheung. *Bringing Words to Life in Classrooms with English Language Learners* (El Paso, Texas: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University, 2003).
- Carlo, M.S., and D. August, B. McLaughlin, C.E. Snow, C. Dressler, D. Lippman, T.

- Lively, C. White. “Closing the Gap: Addressing the Vocabulary Needs of English Language Learners in Bilingual and Mainstream Classrooms,” *Reading Research Quarterly* (in press).
- Cunningham, A., and K.E. Stanovich. “What Reading Does for the Mind,” *American Educator/American Federation of Teachers* (Spring-Summer, 1998).
- D’Anna, C.A., and E.V. Zechmeister, J.W. Hall. “Toward a Meaningful Definition of Vocabulary Size,” *Journal of Reading Behavior* (1991).
- García, G.E. “The Reading Comprehension Development and Instruction of English Language Learners,” *Rethinking Reading Comprehension* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003).
- Graves, M.F., and S.M. Watts-Taffe. “The Place of Word Consciousness in a Research-Based Vocabulary Program,” *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2002).
- Hart, B., and T.R. Risley. “The Early Castrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap,” *American Educator* (Spring 2003).
- Hayes, D.P., and M. Ahrens. “Speaking and Writing: Distinct Patterns of Word Choice,” *Journal of Memory and Language* (1988).
- Hirsh, D., and P. Nation. “What Vocabulary Size is Needed to Read Unsimplified Texts for Pleasure?,” *Reading in a Foreign Language* (1992).
- McKeown, M.G., and I.L. Beck. “Direct and Rich Vocabulary Instruction,” *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice* (New York: Guilford Publications, in press).
- Nagy, W.E., and G.E. García, A. Dyrgunoglu, B. Hancin. “Spanish-English Bilingual Children’s Use and Recognition of Cognates in English Reading,” *Journal of Reading Behavior* (1993).
- Nagy, W.E. *Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension* (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1988).
- Nagy, W.E., and R.C. Anderson. “How Many Words Are There in Printed School English?,” *Reading Research Quarterly* (1984).
- National Reading Panel. *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).
- Rodríguez, T.A. “From the Known to the Unknown: Using Cognates to Teach English and Spanish-speaking Literates,” *The Reading Teacher* (2001).

## Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English

### ❖ A Guide ❖

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

(ISBN 1-878550-69-1; 2002; 64 pages; paperback; \$15)

Developed and distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association  
Contact IDRA to place an order. All orders of \$30 or less must be prepaid.  
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350 San Antonio, Texas 78228; Phone 210-444-1710;  
Fax 210-444-1714; e-mail: [contact@idra.org](mailto:contact@idra.org).



Laura Chris Green, Ph.D., is a senior education associate in the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions can be directed to her via e-mail at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).

# 11th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño*

Early Childhood Educators Institute™

San Antonio, Texas

April 20-22, 2004



The 11th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute offers a valuable series of information-packed professional development concurrent sessions that are customized to value and capitalize on the linguistic and cultural assets brought forth by a diverse student population.

This year's event will focus on **building reading concepts and skills of young English language learners**. Topics include: literacy, technology, social development, curriculum and policy.

- **Visit model early childhood centers.** These visits provide you with the opportunity to share ideas while seeing them in action. You will travel to high-performing, high-minority sites in the San Antonio area that are working effectively with diverse learners.
- **Interact with parents** to discuss ideas to form effective learning partnerships.
- **Learn in workshops** on successful bilingual programs, Spanish literacy, pedagogy and curriculum, policy and curriculum.

The action-packed schedule begins at 8:00 a.m. each morning and continues through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday, and 2:30 p.m. on Thursday. The institute includes luncheon sessions on Tuesday and Thursday.

## Special Activity

**Parent Leadership Institute, Thursday, April 22**

This one-day event will concentrate on the challenges in early childhood education and how to maximize parent leadership. Parents and educators will share ways to focus their leadership to enhance early childhood learning.

## Institute Sponsors

The Intercultural Development Research Association is pleased to bring you this 11th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute. Supporting IDRA projects include:

- IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity (the equity assistance center that serves Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas).
- Texas IDRA PIRC (the parent information resource center).
- Project READ (IDRA's project establishing preschool center classrooms of excellence that collectively form a center of excellence ensuring reading, cognitive, and emotional success for all preschool children).
- STAR Center (the comprehensive regional assistance center that serves Texas via a collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation).

Each of these IDRA projects provides specialized training and technical assistance to schools. Information on how your campus can use these resources to improve instruction and assessment will be available at the institute, by calling IDRA at 210-444-1710, or by visiting IDRA's web site: [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org).

Contact IDRA (210-444-1710) or visit the IDRA web site ([www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)) for details and to register online.



# Registration Form



(Please use one form per person. Feel free to make copies of this form.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Campus \_\_\_\_\_  
School or Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Title/Position \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
\$\_\_\_\_\_ Total enclosed      Check or PO# \_\_\_\_\_

## Registration Fees

### Early Bird Registration Fees – Before April 2

- \_\_\_ \$175 institute registration, April 20-22, 2004\*
- \_\_\_ \$15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 22, 2004
- \_\_\_ \$60 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 22, 2004

### Registration Fees – After April 2

- \_\_\_ \$195 institute registration, April 20-22, 2004\*
- \_\_\_ \$15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 22, 2004
- \_\_\_ \$70 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 22, 2004

\* Includes institute sessions, Tuesday and Thursday luncheons, two school visits [for first paid registrants], and materials.

Make checks payable to: Intercultural Development Research Association. Purchase order numbers may be used to reserve space. Full payment prior to the institute is expected.

Register **Online** with a purchase order number at [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)

**Mail** with a check or purchase order to IDRA at 5835 Callaghan Road, #350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190, Attention: Carol Chávez

**Fax** with a purchase order to IDRA at 210-444-1714, Attention: Carol Chávez

## Hotel Information

The institute will be held at the San Antonio Airport Hilton Hotel. The hotel is offering a special rate of \$101 per night for a single or double room (plus state and local taxes), based on availability. The hotel reservation deadline for the reduced rate is April 9, 2004. Call 1-800-445-8667 to make reservations. Be sure to reference the Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute in order to qualify for the special rate.



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

5835 CALLAGHAN ROAD, SUITE 350  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78228-1190  
210-444-1710 FAX 210-444-1714  
contact@idra.org www.idra.org

# Laredo Community Leaders Declare Support for School Funding Equity

The first in a series of regional forums on fair funding took place in March in Laredo, Texas, bringing together more than 175 education, business and community leaders. Sponsored by the Laredo Independent School District and held at Texas A&M International University, the event focused on the school finance system and what is at stake if equity is lost.

Community leaders declared their support for funding equity, signing the Declaration for Educational Excellence and Equity and outlining next steps they will undertake to promote fair funding.

At a time in our history when an excellent education for all our children is an absolute necessity, the fair and equitable funding of our schools is at stake and its future in grave danger. It is for these reasons that the Laredo ISD board of trustees and Superintendent Dr. R.J. Barber hosted this event. They convened distinguished Texas leaders in the field of public



school finance, all of them recognized for their courageous and expert advocacy of fair funding for all children. Speakers included:

- Sylvia Bruni, Laredo Independent School District (moderator)
- R. Jerry Barber, Superintendent of Schools
- Dennis D. Cantú School Board President
- María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Intercultural Development Research Association
- Scott McCown, Center for Public Policy Priorities
- John Hubbard, Equity Center
- Angela Valenzuela, LULAC State Education Committee
- Nina Perales, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

- Jesús J. Amezcua, Laredo Independent School District
- Don P. Schulte, Laredo Independent School District

Laredo ISD firmly believes that equitable funding for all public schools is everyone’s business and that it merits our full understanding as well as an opportunity to discuss the issue with those who have been actively involved in its defense.

Other communities across the state are planning similar events. To learn more about fair funding and community action, visit the [www.texans4fairfunding.org](http://www.texans4fairfunding.org) web site and sign up to receive email updates. You can also join others in signing on to the Declaration for Educational Excellence and Equity online.



5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350  
San Antonio, TX 78228-1190

Non-Profit Organization

U.S. POSTAGE PAID

Permit No. 3192  
San Antonio, TX 78228

