



Texas at a Crossroads

Excellent and Equitable Schools – or Merely Adequate

Inside this Issue:

- ❖ Excellence and equity needed in schools
- ❖ Funding bilingual education
- ❖ Sign on to a declaration for fair funding

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

A lot of people are talking about the special session of the Texas Legislature that may be called to focus on school funding. Children and teachers are not the only ones who will be impacted by what is decided there. In fact, all families, taxpayers, business owners, college and university staff, and community leaders will undoubtedly feel the effects of those decisions.

For many, this upcoming debate will be a momentous one that will shape the future of not only Texas, but the entire region. Since Texas is seen as a precursor to many significant demographic trends that will eventually impact much of the country, these decisions may have long-term, profound implications for the nation as a whole.

What's at Stake?

Texas is faced with a choice. One option is to continue our long and difficult struggle to create a public school system that serves all students and communities in a fair and equitable manner. The other option is to retreat in

the face of relentless opposition from those who are committed to less – less opportunity for most children, less equity for most communities, less fairness in tax burdens, and less parity in access to college and academic scholarships.

A few people may scoff at such characterizations and try to diminish the significance of the upcoming battle. But for those who have been at the forefront of the decades-long challenge to make public schools more equitable for all children, the stakes are very clear and very big.

After the smoke has cleared, the Texas system of funding public schools will either be more equitable or less equitable. It either will ensure that all children are subject to the same educational options, or it will revert to a system that provides minimums for most of its children while limiting excellence to a favored few. It either will remain one equalized system, or it will splinter into two segregated systems – one for middle- and low-income families and the other for upper-income families.

Our school funding system is likely to be changed, given the pressure that is forthcoming from opposing camps.

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The outcome of this confrontation may depend on which side makes its case most effectively.

There may be proclaimed “winners” and “losers.” But ultimately, children’s lives will be at play. For their sake as well as our collective sake, the upcoming “game” should be played openly and fairly. Unfortunately, the extent to which that occurs may depend on who chooses to engage in the forthcoming conversations and with what kind of intent.

IDRA has adopted a creed that proposes that, whatever state policymakers and others do regarding children, they should at a minimum *do no harm*. Determining whether any new funding policy hurts any child will be the basis for our assessment of the legislature’s upcoming action on public school finance.

Framing the Debate

Some groups that are pressing for changes in the state’s school funding system represent the interests of a small number of school districts that

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see themselves as somehow “unfairly” impacted by the state’s recapture provisions. Recapture is the part of the funding system that re-allocates state resources that are concentrated in a small number of wealthy districts to help fund the overall cost of public education. Representing less than 8 percent of school systems, these school officials complain that they are “victimized” by such actions that diminish their ability to provide the quality of education that they prefer for their children.

Disregarded in the discussion is the fact that the court’s decision on the *Edgewood* Texas school funding cases criticized the old funding plans for their

failure to fully utilize all the property wealth in the state to finance public schools. Prior to the current plan, 25 percent of the state’s taxable property wealth was available to less than 5 percent of its pupils.

Recognizing that it was the state’s responsibility to fund public education, the court noted that the Texas school funding plan “should utilize all of the state property wealth” regardless of the locale. So if we were to revert to an approach that would once again limit access to 25 percent of the state property wealth to only 5 percent of the state’s pupils (as proposed by those who want to eliminate the recapture

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Insufficient Funding for Bilingual Education in Texas

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

Recently, a couple of state leaders have claimed that Texas schools just need a better finance system, they do not need more money. Texas educators have been quick with their criticism, citing insufficient funds for teachers, buildings and special programs. Funding for teaching English language learners is in the mix of these issues.

Bilingual education teaches English to children and gives them a chance to use it. At the same time, they are taught core subjects like math and science. The facts show that bilingual education is a small investment that pays big dividends for the country in the form of a well-educated work force.

This article focuses on three areas: historical basis for Texas funding for its bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) programs, the evolution of funding formulae for the program, and current issues related to funding for students enrolled in the state's bilingual and ESL programs.

Historical Basis for Funding Bilingual Programs

The Intercultural Development Research Association was involved in the policy deliberations that led to the development of the state's bilingual education and ESL requirements.

IDRA staff served as expert witnesses in the case that led to the state mandated-program and later as technical advisors to legislators who helped craft the current state policies.

We have tracked state funding discussions related to the program over the years including serving in Texas Education Agency accountable cost advisory committees that were periodically convened to assess and provide recommendations related to funding for the state's special population programs.

In *United States vs. Texas* (1981), plaintiffs challenged the state's practice of immersing students in all-English classes with no accommodation

for the fact that some children were not proficient in English. As a result, the court ordered the state to provide specialized instruction for limited-English-proficient (LEP) children.

In an earlier decision in *Lau vs. Nichols* (1974), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that concluded that failure to consider and adapt instruction for children who do not speak English violates federal equal protection requirements.

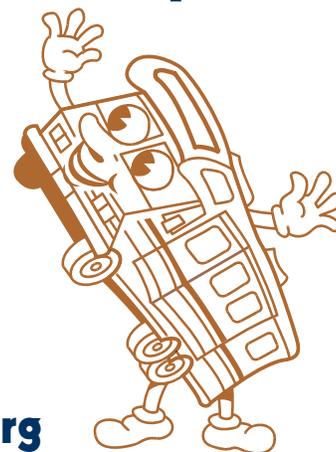
Prior to 1981, Texas provided local school districts the option to implement bilingual or ESL programs. Initially, no state funding was provided. Starting in 1975 with the adoption of

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- ✦ 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



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HB 1126, the state of Texas allocated state funding to support program implementation. The funding mechanism used provided for a per pupil allocation of \$25 multiplied by the number of students who were actually participating in the local bilingual education or ESL program.

In 1981, after the adoption of the state programs required by SB 477, the allocation was increased to \$50 per LEP pupil identified and enrolled in a bilingual education program. This very basic approach to bilingual and ESL program funding was continued until 1984 and the adoption of HB 72.

That major overhaul of the Texas school finance system moved the state of Texas from a system primarily based on personnel unit funding, to one based on students enrolled. One part of this major reform also shifted the way Texas funded programs for what came to be called “special student populations,” or students identified as having special learning-related needs.

In this new funding system, the state moved from arbitrarily setting a per pupil funding amount to an approach that assigned a “weight” to different special needs pupils.

In HB 72, schools were provided additional funding in the state finance formula for LEP students who were enrolled in either a bilingual or ESL program. The weight assigned to bilingual education was then (and still is) 0.10. This weight is multiplied by the adjusted basic allotment for each district to come up with add-on funding that is provided. Like practically all other parts of the state funding system, the actual amount that is provided in state funding is adjusted to account for local district property wealth.

Why Bilingual Education and ESL Costs More

As noted earlier, most educators agree that providing specialized

instruction for children identified as limited English proficient – or English language learners – costs more than educating non-LEP pupils. Personnel costs include specialized teachers who supplement instruction provided by a mainstream teacher and professional development to strengthen the skills of teachers working with LEP students. These require extra outlays in local schools.

Recent research indicates that almost one in three new teachers assigned to work in bilingual and ESL classes are not certified to teach in that area, continuing the need for specialized staff development for those personnel.

As in special education, assessment is used both to identify which students may require special instructional support and to decide when the students are ready to “exit” from the program. The state has designated testing instruments that may be used to identify LEP pupils for program placement and program exiting purposes.

Bilingual and ESL programs also require access to specialized instructional materials. Though the state incorporates some of these in the textbooks and supplementary materials as part of the textbook adoption process, local schools still need and use other “consumable” materials to deliver the specialized instruction needed for LEP students.

Due to the need to monitor program outcomes, bilingual programs also provide for focused evaluation of program implementation and program outcomes adding unique add-on costs for school systems.

Research on Bilingual Education and ESL Program Costs

The method used by the state of Texas to choose to assign a 0.10 weight to bilingual and ESL pupils was rather arbitrary. And the 10 percent add-on

did not provide enough funding to operate these programs. We base this conclusion on cost of bilingual education studies conducted by IDRA in the late 1970s.

According to research IDRA conducted in Texas (1976) and replicated a few years later in Colorado (1978) and Utah (1979), the add-on costs for implementing bilingual education programs ranged from between 0.25 to 0.41, with some of the variation attributable to the higher cost of recruiting bilingual or ESL teachers in more rural communities or regions.

The research method involved having a panel of experts identify the critical elements of an effective program. Among the features that experts identified were the following: specialized personnel costs; specialized instructional materials; specialized assessments; program evaluation expenses; and, in Utah, specifically additional personnel recruitment costs.

On the personnel costs side, we did not add on the cost for a whole new or additional teacher (since these students would have had a teacher provided under the regular program) but only included specialized costs associated with professional development to better prepare teachers to work with children enrolled in bilingual education classes.

Once the critical resource needs were identified, we researched what it actually cost to acquire and implement those features, on average, and then totaled those costs. To arrive at a “weight,” we divided the average per pupil expenditure for regular program pupils by the total add-on cost.

This 0.25 to 0.41 percent add-on weight for bilingual education is *twice* what the state of Texas has provided to its local districts to help offset the cost of providing this specialized type of instruction.

In a national study, Polly Carpenter Huffman and Marta

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Samulon, of the Rand Corporation, conducted case studies of delivery and cost of bilingual education in 1981. In their report, the authors noted that program costs varied by the type of instructional delivery model that was being used in a local school. They noted that “pull-out programs” that required the hiring of extra teachers to deliver supplemental instruction to LEP pupils were the most expensive. On the other hand, programs that used self-contained classrooms where one teacher provided bilingual instruction

were less expensive.

In their analysis, costs for *language assistance instruction* ranged from \$100 to \$500 per pupil. In addition to those expenses, the researchers also noted that other costs should be taken into consideration in computing bilingual education add-on costs. These include program administration, staff development (which can add significant costs) and other functions such as student identification and assessment for program placement (cost items also included in IDRA’s cost analyses

studies).

The total per pupil add-on cost estimate for the Rand study ranged from \$200 to \$700 (in 1981 dollars, an amount that would be significantly higher in 2004). For reasons that are not apparent, the researchers did not convert their data to a weighted pupil amount.

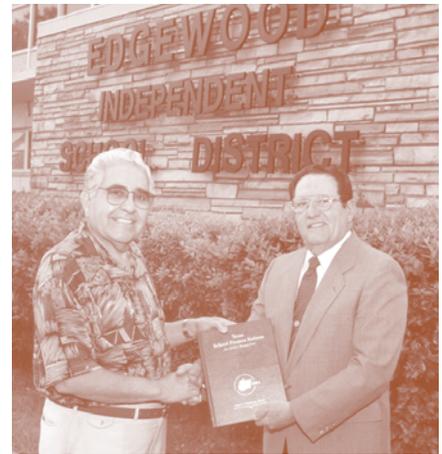
Contextual factors that were found to impact local costs included the instructional approach used to provide instruction to LEP pupils, the numbers of LEP students served, the primary

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Texas School Finance Reform: An IDRA Perspective

by José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

A master story-teller, Dr. José A. Cárdenas offers an insider’s view of the 32-year history of school finance in Texas. Dr. Cárdenas is the founder and director emeritus of IDRA and is the only person who has been actively involved in the entire school finance reform effort since the early days of the *Rodríguez vs. San Antonio ISD* litigation when he was superintendent of the Edgewood Independent School District. More than a history, this book provides a blueprint for persons interested in bringing about future reform in schools and other social institutions. Beginning with a description of the Texas system in 1950, the account covers court cases, legislation, and advocacy efforts and concludes with the status and future of school finance reform. Personal vignettes sprinkled throughout offer glimpses of those special untold moments that impacted history. Much of this volume – including the myths of school finance and lessons learned – relate to reform efforts in other states as well. Dr. James A. Kelly, president of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, provides a foreword, “Fighting the Good Fight,” describing Dr. Cárdenas as a trailblazer and pioneer. As a former program officer for the Ford Foundation, Dr. Kelly coordinated support for school finance reform efforts around the country.



Dr. José A. Cárdenas (right) presents a copy of his book to Demetrio Rodríguez (left), lead litigant in the Rodríguez vs. San Antonio ISD case. Photo credit: Randall Reimes Photography, San Antonio, 1997.

“He worked hard, he played hard. And in doing so, never lost sight of his goal. Because for José school finance reform was never really an end in itself. It remained (and remains) a means to a larger end: to improve teaching and learning for all children; in particular, to improve the life chances of the poor and dispossessed... This book is a testimony to a life lived in pursuit of that dream, one which paid off for all of Texas’ children.”

– Dr. James A. Kelly

Officially released on April 29, 1997 – the 10th anniversary of the *Edgewood* decision by State Superior Judge of Travis County Harley Clark that struck down Texas’ school finance system as unconstitutional.

(ISBN 1-878550-63-2; 1997; 387 pages; hardback; \$30)

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Fax 210/444-1714; e-mail: contact@idra.org. It is IDRA policy that all orders totalling less than \$30 be pre-paid.

Helpful School Finance Online Resources

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

<http://www.cbpp.org/11-7-02sfp2.htm>

Articles and research on fiscal issues affecting low-income families. Includes a detailed article with graphics that presents an overview of education finance.

Center for Public Policy Priorities

Basic information on school finance in Texas.

<http://www.cppp.org/kidscount/education/finance.html>

Texas Kids Count, includes a section on finance, history and per pupil spending by county.

<http://www.cppp.org/products/fastfacts/schoolfinance.html>

Texas – One and Indivisible, informative publication contrasting rich and poor school districts.

Education Commission of the States – Issue Paper

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/28/04/2804.htm>

An ECS position paper discussing the past, present and future of school finance.

Equity Center

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

Provides updates on legislation and litigation as well as background and reference information.

Intercultural Development Research Association

<http://www.idra.org>

Dedicated to educational equity and excellence, IDRA provides articles, research and tools for advocacy. See the policy updates and topical links to information on school finance. Also, get order information for the only comprehensive book on the history of school finance in Texas.

Texans for Fair Funding

<http://www.texans4fairfunding.org>

Provides tools for learning about school finance and for taking action.

Texas Association of School Boards

http://www.tasb.org/news/ed_reporter

Provides the basics of Texas school finance, including a brief history and definitions of terms used in the issue.

Texas Business and Education Coalition

<http://www.tbec.org>

Includes a position statement of the Texas Business and Education Coalition; postings from newspapers around Texas concerning the state of education; public education briefs; and stories of Texas student successes.

Texas Education Agency Finance Web Site

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/school.finance>

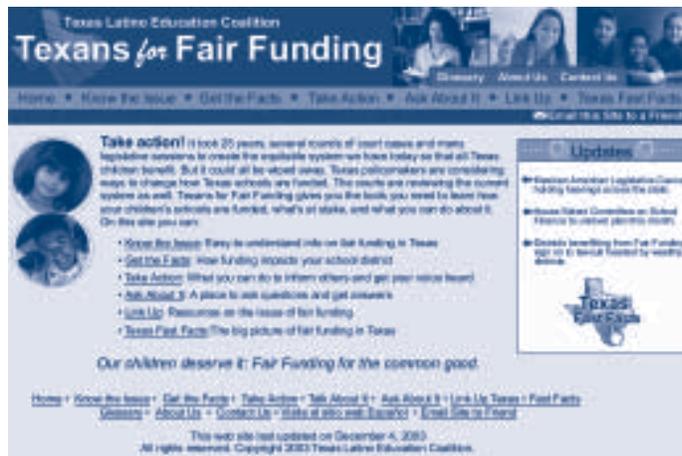
A resource for state funding guidelines, presentations on school finance, public school health insurance, and school-finance related correspondence to school districts.

Visit www.texans4fairfunding.org for more information and resources.

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 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"
on Page 11.*

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).*

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."

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provisions) we would subject the state to new court challenges of its inefficiency.

Misconception that Local Action Creates High Wealth Districts

The contemporary debates about equity and sharing of property tax revenue often overlook the fact that wealthy districts in most cases did not create their own wealth. Above-average wealth in many cases is an accident of location, where mineral wealth was found long after school district boundaries were drawn.

In other communities, wealth was created by the collective efforts of diverse interests that may have included state leaders, county government, and city and local officials. Such was the case in the recruitment of the Dell and Motorola facilities in the Austin area and the upcoming Toyota plant in San Antonio. All taxpayers in the state are footing the bill for such initiatives.

If individual districts did not create their wealth, then it is really the state's resource. And if it is indeed a state resource, then all Texans should benefit from that resource.

The issue, however, is not one of affluent communities vs. less affluent communities. This is a larger question of whether a child's education should be based on the wealth of the area in which he or she happens to reside.

The Basis for the Current Funding System

The current Texas funding plan was created in response to a court ruling that the previous system perpetrated inequality in both local property taxes and local school spending. Differences in districts' ability to subsidize education now are neutralized by state equalization funding, which takes into account local taxable

property wealth and its implications for raising local education funding.

Before equalization, many Texas school systems were not concerned about the overall quality of Texas public education. Since they were able to raise more than enough funding from local taxes, they were not concerned about the quality of schooling in other communities.

Under the existing system, all school systems have a stake in the state funding plan. If the level of support is insufficient for some, all share an interest in increasing the overall level of state support.

Like our highways that serve the state as a whole and are not built based on the wealth of communities they connect, schools should provide equitable education for all students. Students educated in San Antonio may wind up as workers in Austin, Dallas, Houston, El Paso, or find employment in the Panhandle or East Texas. It does not make economic sense to provide differing levels of educational opportunity to a common, shared resource.

As the court ruled, in order to have an equitable funding system, we

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Did You Know?

There are 1,041 school districts in Texas. As of 2003, eliminating the current system of equity would cause 887 school districts to lose more than a billion dollars in funding.

Total funding for Texas schools was \$29.3 billion. Texas education revenues by source:

Local taxes	\$15.2 billion	51.9% of total
State	\$11.8 billion	40.5% of total
Other local and intermediate sources	\$1.2 billion	4.2% of total
Federal	\$1.0 billion	3.5% of total

Texas has one of the largest and fastest growing school-age populations in the nation.

Total number of students enrolled in Texas public schools in 2002-03: 4,239,911

Total number of students enrolled in 1996-97: 3,828,975

Ethnic distribution of student enrollment:

African American:	14.3%
Hispanic:	42.7%
White:	39.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	2.9%
Native American:	0.3%

Visit www.texans4fairfunding.org for more information and district-level information.



For more facts and statistics, go to the "Field Trip" on IDRA's web site.

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must ensure that all schools in all school systems receive similar revenues for similar levels of local tax effort. Though not perfect, the current school funding structure still has the potential to provide the greatest level of educational equity available for all students, schools and taxpayers in Texas' modern era. This level of equity however cannot be sustained without the infusion of additional, equitably-distributed state revenues that benefit all schools.

The Case Against Adequacy

People in East Texas do not complain about having to equitably subsidize the extensive state highway network. No one is clamoring to have *adequate* state roads in some communities and *excellent* state-funded roads in rich communities.

But we are faced with the question of whether we strive for excellence for all students or adequacy for some and excellence for a favored few.

There are those who want to retreat from the ideal of equity and excellence and substitute a system that would ensure merely an *adequate* education for most while at the same time allowing only a few to have more. Rather than one fully equalized system for all Texas children, those proponents support two separate and unequal systems based on economic segregation – one that is adequate for many and excellent for only a few.

These proponents believe that the state should be responsible for funding only an “adequate” level of education. They argue that the state need only fund, and thus equalize, only the minimum that may be required to comply with state education standards.

Toward this end, state leaders have commissioned a study of what it would take to fund an “adequate” education. But how one defines adequate determines what that concept will cost.

State researchers have chosen to

Unequal School Funding is Bad for Everyone

Unequal educational opportunity is bad public policy. It is bad for public schools, bad for businesses, bad for taxpayers, and, most importantly, bad for children.

It is bad for public schools because it creates an education system of haves and have nots. And the haves would refuse to share their wealth. Furthermore, since wealthy schools would not need state funding, they would oppose increasing funding for the overall school funding plan. Without universal support for high quality schools for all, a few would tend to outspend the rest, a condition deemed unconstitutional by the Texas courts.

Unequal educational opportunity is bad for business because, from a workforce viewpoint, it creates very uneven levels of education for different students. This leads to big differences in work readiness in the Texas workforce.

Research on the impact of poor schooling indicates that businesses are forced to spend billions of dollars on employee training when schools do not have enough resources to provide high quality education to local graduates.

Unequal educational opportunity is bad for taxpayers because an unequalized funding system causes some people with homes and businesses of equal value to pay higher local property taxes than others. In fact, it was this inequality in tax burdens that was one of the major factors that caused the Texas school funding system to be considered unconstitutional.

Unequal educational opportunity is bad for children because the quality of a child's education and his or her subsequent chances to attend college and have a better life is compromised from the day he or she first steps through the schoolroom door. This makes the wealth of your family and the neighborhood in which you happen to live the major factor dictating the quality of your neighborhood children's schooling.

Excerpted from *Fair Funding for Texas School Children*, Texas education policy digest series (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2002).

define adequacy based on selected student outcomes – more specifically on the number of students passing tests that were part of the old state testing system, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Though some preferred to use the new state TAKS assessments, the fact that the new test only had one year of data precluded the use of this newer test data.

But an adequate, or minimum,

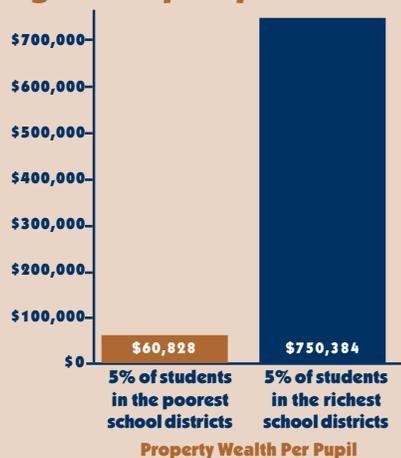
performance on one state-mandated exam is not a suitable indicator of the quality of any student's education. Education experts agree that no single indicator is enough.

The issue of adequacy has not been addressed in earlier court hearings on the school finance issue. Extensive debates can be expected on whether striving for adequacy is a good state

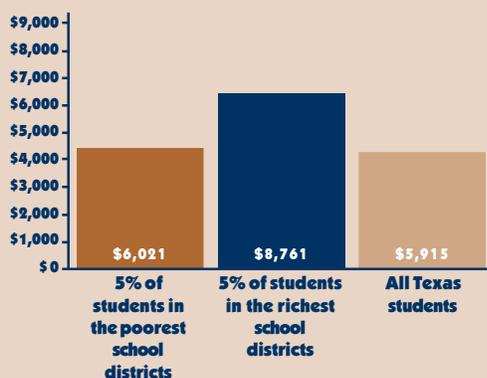
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After Equalization in Texas

Texas school districts still have a great disparity in wealth



But the gap in average per pupil expenditures has narrowed.



In fact, 887 school districts are benefiting from fair funding equalization.

Data source: Snapshot 2001: 2000-01 School District Profiles (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, 2002).

Fair Funding for Texas School Children, Texas education policy digest series (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2002).

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policy objective.

The United States has never settled for being average or minimum, but rather has always strived to be the best – to be excellent.

The state of Texas has never settled for being the minimum at anything – whether it is in football or industry. Imagine a slogan that reads, “Texas, the land of the adequate.”

Texans would not settle for surgery performed by adequate doctors, drive over bridges built by adequate engineers, or fly in adequate planes that are built by adequate workers and flown by adequate pilots. They would not trust their investments to adequate bankers or send their children to schools that strive to be merely adequate. Yet, we may soon be in the midst of deliberations that would provide funding formulas for adequate education.

In debates over how much funding is needed to achieve certain outcomes, it has become increasingly apparent to some state leaders that the issue is mostly about how much money lawmakers are willing to invest in public

education. Adequacy proponents suggest that the state should not be obligated to provide excellent schools when adequate schools will suffice. If that were the case, the only way to be fair would be to limit everyone to the same low expectation.

Press education adequacy proponents and they will acknowledge that after the state meets its funding obligation for adequacy, they would allow limitless local enrichment in wealthy districts to supplement the adequate program that is funded by the state. Thus, a few would still have a lot more.

But unequal local enrichment was the very reason that the Texas system of funding was first found to be unconstitutional. If local schools were to once again provide unequal amounts of local funding that depended on very unequal local district property wealth, the state would regress to a funding plan that resulted in gross inequality in educational opportunity for millions of Texas school children.

In George Orwell’s classic book, *Animal Farm*, the animals overthrow the human overseers. The new political

leadership of animals promotes the slogan that all animals are equal. As they gain more power, the concept changes: “All are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

We do not believe that most parents, businesses or citizens will settle for what is adequate over what is excellent. Excellence without equity is impossible. Equity without excellence is a sham.

Excellence for the few and adequacy for the many violates the promise of America and the proud heritage of Texas.

Whichever road will be taken in the near future will dictate the future of Texas for generations to come. Let us hope that for our sake and the sake of our children, that our political leaders choose the noble highway, rather than the easy path. Texans must let its political leaders know that they must do no harm to a single child.

Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is the director of the IDRA Institute for Policy and Leadership. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., is the IDRA executive director. Comments and questions may be directed to them at comment@idra.org.

Declaration for Educational Excellence

Fair Funding for the Common Good

State leaders have announced their intent to reconvene the Texas Legislature in a special session dedicated to the “reform of the existing school funding plan.” While some aspects of the current funding plan need improvement, many Texans are deeply concerned with the intent voiced by some to totally dismantle the existing public school funding system and replace it with one that would provide only an “adequate” education for our children.

All children deserve an excellent education, and excellence is impossible without equity.

This battle over school funding is about a state at a crossroads – one road offering the possibility of excellent *and* equitable education of all of our state’s children, the other focused on providing only minimum quality to meet minimum standards.

Our children are precious. The future of a child should not depend on that child’s heritage, family income, or neighborhood. The future of Texas should not be limited by excellent education for a few children and minimal educational opportunities for the rest.

We, the undersigned, hereby declare that we will use the following inter-related principles to measure any funding plan proposed in upcoming deliberations.

Principle 1: Funding Equity – Texas must maintain or increase the level of equity found in the existing funding system.

Principle 2: Equal Return for Equal Tax Effort – Texas must specifically provide for equal return for equal tax rates, for all school districts, at all levels of the state permitted tax effort.

Principle 3: Excellent Education – Texas must provide equitable access to excellent education (defined as equitable access to high quality curricula, teaching, support services, and facilities) for all students in all school districts, precluding the need for and thereby prohibiting any local un-equalized enrichment.

Principle 4: Access to Equalized Enrichment – Texas must ensure that, if local supplementation of a state-funded adequate system is allowed, the entire additional local tax effort provides equal yield for equal tax effort, regardless of the local property wealth of individual districts.

Principle 5: Recognizing Special Student Costs – Texas must equitably provide add-on funding based on actual costs of providing appropriate supplemental services to students identified as limited English proficient, low-income, or requiring special education services.

Principle 6: Access to Equalized Facilities Funding – Texas must provide equitable access to funding for school facilities so that all districts have equal access to facilities revenue for equal tax effort. Facilities funding should provide support for updating and maintaining existing facilities, as well as funding for new facilities. Special facilities-related needs for fast growth districts should be recognized in any proposed funding formulae.

Principle 7: Maintaining Levels of State Support – Texas must ensure that the state will fund a minimum of 60 percent of the overall cost of education in the state.

Principle 8: Tax Burden – Texas must base any potential requirement for additional state revenue on adoption of progressive measures of taxation that are based on local school district and/or individuals’ ability to pay taxes, and must not result in a shift of tax burdens from high wealth to all other districts or from more affluent to lower income taxpayers.

We agree to form a unified voice to protect the future of the children of Texas. High quality education is for all. We hereby commit to defend the right of every child in Texas to receive an education that is excellent and equitable.

Sign on to the Declaration for Educational Excellence: Fair Funding for the Common Good!

To sign on, fill out the form below or visit www.texans4fairfunding.org, sponsored by the Texas Latino Education Coalition. Feel free to make copies of this form.

Select one of the following:

I am signing on as an organization.

I am signing on as an individual. (You may or may not print my affiliation for identification purposes only.)

Name _____
Organization/Affiliation _____
Title _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Fax _____
E-mail _____

I would like to receive e-mail updates regarding this issue and Texans for Fair Funding.

A list of those who have signed on to this declaration will be posted on the Texans for Fair Funding web site (www.texans4fairfunding.org) and will be distributed in print on occasion. Individual’s address and phone number will not be made public or provided to a third party.

Send this form to the Texas Latino Education Coalition by fax (210-444-1714) or by mail: TLEC, c/o IDRA, 5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190.

Why Fair Funding

Americans agree that a child's future should not depend on his or her heritage, parents' income or neighborhood. Our sense of justice insists that America be the land of opportunity where all of its citizens are considered equal.

Some people may wonder why funding schools fairly is an issue we need to talk about. They may ask: Aren't schools okay now?

For many years in Texas, many schools were not fine. Based on the wealth of their community, the quality of schools children attended in Texas was vastly different.

Before Fair Funding

There were tremendous differences in the amount of money available to educate children in public schools. Prior to 1995, some of the wealthiest school districts spent \$10,000 for each of their students and had low school tax rates. Poorer school districts could only spend \$3,000 a year for each student and had much higher school taxes. That was a difference of \$7,000. That was the difference between a very basic education and a high quality education.

What did having less money and higher taxes in a school district mean for children? It meant that some children:

- learned in buildings that were unsafe
- had fewer learning opportunities

Excellence without equity is impossible. Equity without excellence is a sham.

– María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel,
IDRA executive director

- tried to learn in overcrowded classrooms
- were taught by under-paid teachers
- were taught by poorly trained teachers

Fair Funding for Education

In 1993, our state policymakers in Austin came up with a new way of funding our schools that is equitable. That means that the funding for all school districts would be fair.

Equity is one of the most important components of our state school funding system. In fact, the equitable support Texas gives its schools is seen as a good example for other states as they change their unfair school systems.

Since fair funding to all schools in Texas (after 1995), more students:

- are receiving a better quality of education
- are learning in fewer unsafe buildings
- have access to more special programs
- have access learning with computers
- are graduating with the courses that will prepare them to go to college.

When our state policymakers

ensure a system of fair funding for schools, it sends the message that indeed every child is capable and is worthy of receiving the best quality education possible. With fair funding everybody benefits by having schools that are excellent. Excellent schools are not just for the families with the greatest financial advantages.

With fair funding:

- Children learn more,
- Schools succeed,
- Colleges grow,
- Communities thrive,
- Taxes are equitable and
- Businesses get a strong workforce.

Texans need to say no to those who want to weaken the system by excusing a few from tax limitations or by allowing a few schools to spend more than anyone else, privileging a few to the detriment of the many. To go back to the old funding system is to go back to an unjust funding system. Texas and its school children deserve better. The future of our state demands better.

Excerpted from www.texans4fairfunding.org, sponsored by the Texas Latino Education Coalition.

For more information on Texans for Fair Funding see Page 7 or visit www.texans4fairfunding.org.

For more information on the Texas Latino Education Coalition visit www.texans4fairfunding.org or call 210-444-1710.

Insufficient Funding – continued from Page 5
languages involved, the extent and intensity of language instruction needed, and the availability of qualified personnel.

Since those early studies were conducted, very little research has been done in this area, and it is evident that new studies may be needed. Whatever happens in the interim however, it is clear from the review of the research that Texas has historically funded its bilingual education programs and that the level of the existing 10 percent weight should be increased.

Resources

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Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1997).

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Cárdenas, J.A., and J. Bernal, W. Kean. *Bilingual Education Cost Analysis* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1976).

Guss-Zamora, M., and R. Zarate, M. Robledo, J.A. Cárdenas. *Utah: Bilingual Education Cost Analysis* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1979).

Huffman, P.C., and M. Samulon. *Case Studies of Delivery and Cost of*

Bilingual Education: A Rand Note (Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, 1981).

McClure, C.K. *State and Federal Programs for Special Populations* (Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States, 1982).

Robledo, M., and R. Zarate, Guss-Zamora, M., J.A. Cárdenas. *Colorado: Bilingual Education Cost Analysis* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1978).

Sosa, A. *Questions and Answers about Bilingual Education* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1993).

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

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In November and December, IDRA worked with **10,526** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **80** training and technical assistance activities and **278** program sites in **14** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Bilingual-Bicultural Education in Early Childhood
- ◆ Parent Leadership Series
- ◆ Sheltered English for Secondary Teachers
- ◆ Diversity Training
- ◆ Integrating a School Wide Project with a Parent Center

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◇ Cleburne Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◇ Española Public Schools, New Mexico
- ◇ Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Texas
- ◇ U.S. Department of Education

Activity Snapshot

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) has been working with several schools to redesign and re-energize their reading programs to be more responsive to the characteristics of their diverse learners. In this three-year IDRA reading program, known as **FLAIR** (Focusing on Language and Academic Instructional Renewal), IDRA provides technical assistance that includes classroom demonstrations and observations of effective teaching strategies, coaching for success, nurturing of innovations, and guidance for finding funding options. FLAIR capitalizes on each school's strengths to increase reading scores, weave reading throughout the curriculum and recapture students' love of reading. The participants have become reinvigorated by this new instructional method that is based on three principles: active involvement, validating students and guidance.

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.

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), and
- 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.

Contact IDRA (210-444-1710) or visit the IDRA web site (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 March 24

- ___ \$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 March 24

- ___ \$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

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

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Mexican American School Board Members Association Recognizes IDRA's 30th Anniversary

More than 200 members of the Mexican American School Board Members Association met at a reception in January to recognize the Intercultural Development Research Association's 30th anniversary. The reception was held during MASBA's annual conference in San Antonio. MASBA president, Viola García praised IDRA's commitment to children and its partnership with school and community organizations. In the early 1970s, IDRA helped found MASBA.

Receiving the anniversary acknowledgment on behalf of IDRA was Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA's executive director. She thanked MASBA members for their past collaboration and pointed to the future, stating that these and other groups must continue to work together to assure that children have access to quality teaching in equitably funded schools that hold children through to

graduation and that prepare them for success in college.

She said: "We must continue to say it is not ok to change the current equitable school finance system into a so-called adequate one. It is not ok to turn our public schools into poorly funded schools, because public schools belong to all of us. It is not ok to turn our public schools into private schools, accountable to private boards, because public schools are accountable to all of us."

The reception marked the first public unveiling of the new Texans for Fair Funding web site (www.texans4fairfunding.org) (see Page 7). The site is sponsored by the Texas Latino Education Coalition, of which both IDRA and MASBA are members.

Headquartered in San Antonio, MASBA's mission is to help attain educational and cultural needs, and opportunities in the public school system



[left to right] Juan Aguilera, MASBA special legal advisor; Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director; Viola García, MASBA president; and José Angel Cárdenas, Ed.D., IDRA founder and director emeritus.

for Mexican American students and other historically underserved or disadvantaged students. MASBA's activities comprise leadership development, public policy analysis, political awareness, parent education and involvement, and community empowerment.



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