IDRA Newsletter

Community-Based Education Reform –
Increasing the Educational Level of Communities as an Integral Part of School Reform

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

The issue of school reform is of common concern for parents, schools, communities, universities, and funders. Yet there are many differences in the approaches to accomplishing education reform. Among the primary differences are the opportunities offered to parents and communities to influence public decisions and otherwise participate in school activities that can lead to positive educational changes for children as well as the for the development and quality of life within local communities.

This article will make the case that: (1) parent and community involvement are essential for accomplishing school reform; (2) eliciting and sustaining family and community participation requires change on the part of schools and universities in order to be more accountable and responsive to their local communities; and (3) coalition building is an effective strategy to bring together parents and community-based organizations that can reflect the variety of needs and interests of local communities in influencing positive educational changes.

Schools and universities tend to focus, appropriately so, on the performance of their students. Yet another important aspect for schools to consider is the impact they can have as catalysts for the well-being of local communities. The type of interaction between schools and universities and their constituent parents and communities has great potential to be a strong positive force for improving the quality of life for local citizens.

Schools and communities are inextricably linked, thus, school reform can and should begin by partnering with families and communities. An educational environment that is supportive of and responsive to the interests of its parents and communities empowers and enables families and community organizations to play active roles in identifying needs and proposing creative solutions.

In considering aspects of education reform that emerge in communities, a range of supports need to be considered. One aspect is generating public will for change and fostering the necessary skills for positive

engagement between parents and educational institutions, i.e. Will+Skill=Change. This equation, though simple, also requires a series of other supports:

- public investment and funding to address equity in access to good schools;
- policy that is supportive of and responsive to the diversity of learners within a community;
- technologies suitable to the possibilities of individuals and organizations having access to them;
- effective schools that view families and communities as important resources; and
- organizations that are informed and operating at various levels to enhance the opportunities for engagement of community members.

Basic Ideas

The debate about education reform seems to be focused on the three first components. Yet, the creation of effective institutions and organizations that are willing to engage

families is indispensable to the change process. Without institutional leadership, commitment and a framework that fosters engagement with communities, effective school reform cannot be built or maintained, and the other components cannot materialize. Ideas and action need to be institutionalized in any educational change process.

These can be forthcoming from parents and the local communities served by schools and universities. When this happens, the concepts of institutionalization, educational reform and sustainability can have similar components with community growth and well-being.

Essential to this process is the concept of equity and access. Education reform cannot have meaning without equity for all children, parents and communities. Growth and change

linked to equity also equates to greater attention paid to the social milieu in which a school or university finds itself.

Schools that value equity respond not only to their students but also to the issues within their local communities that affect the quality of life for their citizens. In so doing, they become effective catalysts for fostering dialogue and action, which is the cornerstone of civil society and the democratic process.

Communities and Systems Change

Development or change in any institution or in any community is always a process. As such, it is dynamic and focused on the betterment of life for all members. Understanding school reform as a developmental process can open the window to understanding

Schools that value equity respond not only to their students but also to the issues within their local communities that affect the quality of life for their citizens.

In This Issue...

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Texas Needs Diplomas, Not Delusions

by María "Cuca" Robledo
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The No Child Left Behind Act *was signed into law in January 2002. The* No Child Left Behind Act *requires that states, school districts and schools to provide annual report cards. One of the markers on the annual report card is graduation rates.*

In the 18 months since the No Child Left Behind Act *was signed, each state has submitted accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education, and each plan has been approved by the department.*

In 1986, IDRA was commissioned to conduct the first statewide study of dropouts in Texas. Dr. María Robledo Montecel was principal investigator and her work informed the first dropout policy in Texas. IDRA has conducted annual studies in this area. The following article is a re-print of testimony Dr. Robledo Montecel presented on September 12, 2002 to the Texas State Board of Education. In addition to making specific policy recommendations, she calls on educators to develop what she terms "school holding power": the ability to keep students

in school and learning through high school graduation.

Since 1986, Texas has lost almost 2 million students from our high schools. This is like losing Austin and Dallas over the course of a decade and a half. These 2 million young people did not do anything to deserve to disappear. Our schools, rather, are not holding on to them through graduation. And our state is looking the other way.

In September of 2000, I appeared before this board to urge the state to address what at the time was an emerging need to have more credible estimates of the Texas dropout rate. Two years later, there is growing

statewide disenchantment with Texas Education Agency dropout counting and reporting procedures. And the credibility gap is approaching a crisis. Major state newspapers, including the *Dallas Morning News*, the *El Paso Times*, the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, and the *San Antonio Express-News*, have criticized the adequacy of the state dropout counting and reporting process and have called for major changes.

Recent studies by the National Center for Education Statistics have emphasized the problem. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education, in reporting state level school statistics,

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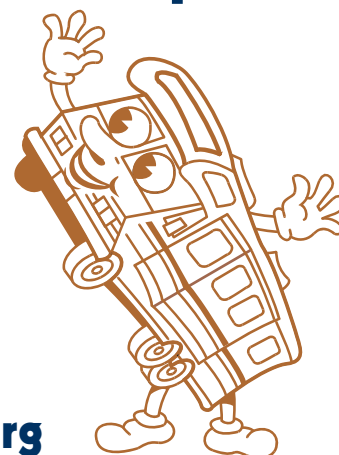
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decided to use its own alternative methods for estimating the Texas dropout rate, due in large measure to concerns with Texas' existing dropout reporting system. Other institutions, like the National Dropout Prevention Network, have raised similar concerns.

In 1986, the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) conducted Texas' first comprehensive statewide study of high school dropouts. Until then, no one knew how many dropouts we had. Using a high school attrition formula, IDRA found that 86,000 students had not graduated from Texas high schools

that year, costing the state $17 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenues, and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs.

By 2001, 16 years later, the estimated cumulative number of Texas high school dropouts had grown to 1.6 million students – with a net loss in revenues and related costs to the state of $441 billion.

The latest IDRA attrition study is being completed in the coming weeks. It reflects that 143,175 more students were lost to attrition in 2001-02. Texas experienced a 39 percent overall attrition rate for the class of 2002.

Following a 16-year trend, Hispanic students had the highest attrition rate at 51 percent, followed by African American students at 46 percent and Native American students at 29 percent. White students had an attrition rate of 26 percent.

IDRA is the only organization to annually compute attrition rates using consistent definitions and calculation methods. In the mid 1980s, IDRA and official TEA estimates of the number and percentage of dropouts were very similar. Unfortunately, over the years, the state has pursued a course of trying to define away the dropout numbers,

Commonalities and Differences in TEA and NCES Dropout Definitions

Characteristics of Students Considered Dropouts	Considered a Dropout	
	TEA	NCES
Graduates	No	No
Transfers to, or withdraws with intent to transfer to, a public or private school	No	No
Is being home schooled	No	No
Enrolls in college	No	No
Dies	No	No
Receives a General Educational Development (GED) certificate by March 1 the following year	No	Yes
Receives a GED certificate by the last Friday in October the following year	Yes	No
Enrolls in an approved adult education GED preparation program	No	Yes
Meets all graduation requirements but does not pass the exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)	No	Yes
Is previously counted as a dropout	No	Yes
Is not eligible for state funding	No	Yes
Is reported as dropout by more than one district and whose last district of attendance cannot be determined	No	Yes
Enrolls at any time before the third week of January of the next school year (returning students)	No	Yes
Except for migrant students, enrolled on the last Friday in October of the next school year (returning students)	Yes	No
Summer dropouts are added to the counts of the school years and grade levels completed (summer dropouts)	Yes	No
Summer dropouts are added to the counts of the school years and grade levels in which they fail to enroll (summer dropouts)	No	Yes
Cumulative enrollment is used as the denominator in dropout rate calculations	Yes	No
Fall enrollment is used as the denominator in dropout rate calculations	No	Yes

Sources: Texas Education Agency Department of Accountability Reporting and Research, Division of Research and Evaluation. Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2000-01 (August 2002). U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics. Documentation to the NCES Common Core of Data, Local Education Agency Universe Dropout File: School Year 1999-00.

TEA Annual Dropout Data, 1997-98 to 2000-01

School Year	Grades 7-12		Grades 9-12	
	Dropouts	Dropout Rate	Dropouts	Dropout Rate
1997-98	27,550	1.6	24,414	2.2
1998-99	27,592	1.6	24,886	2.2
1999-00	23,457	1.3	21,439	1.8
2000-01	17,563	1.0	16,003	1.4

Source: Texas Education Agency, Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2000-01

TEA Longitudinal Completion/Student Status Rates, Class of 1998 to 2001

School Year	Grades 7-12		Grades 9-12	
	Dropouts	Dropout Rate	Dropouts	Dropout Rate
Class of 1998	22,738	9.8	20,226	8.9
Class of 1999	21,779	9.0	20,231	8.5
Class of 2000	19,004	7.7	17,729	7.2
Class of 2001	17,087	6.8	15,551	6.2

Source: Texas Education Agency, Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2000-01

rather than actually decreasing the numbers of dropouts.

As the agency's dropout estimates have declined over the last decade, so has the credibility of its dropout reporting. Few in or outside of Texas believe that the actual Texas dropout rate is anywhere near the 1.6 percent rate reported by TEA in its latest dropout estimates. Despite the claims that the new "school leaver" student accounting system would address these problems, this system as currently implemented only serves to compound rather than resolve the state's dropout credibility problems. IDRA and many others contend that it is time for a major restructuring of the state dropout reporting system. We simply have to know how many students are graduating.

In order to present recommendations to you today, IDRA has examined, as it does regularly, different methodologies that are used. First, let me give you an overview of the differences between TEA and the NCES definitions, collection procedures and methods of calculation, because these differences have led to inconsistencies in the number and percent of students reported as public school dropouts.

Comparison of NCES, TEA Dropout Counting and Calculation Procedures

Definitions and Calculation Methods. TEA currently defines a dropout as "a student who is enrolled in school at some time during the school year, but either leaves school during the school year without an approved excuse or completes the school year and does not return the following year."

NCES, the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing and reporting education data, in 1990 defined a dropout as an individual who: (1) was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year; (2) was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year; (3) has not graduated from high school or completed a state-or district-approved educational program; and (4) does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: (a) transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved educational program, (b) temporary absence due to suspension or school-excused illness, or (c) death.

NCES began collecting dropout data through the Common Core of Data (CCD) in the 1991-92 school year. Dropout statistics are only reported for those states whose dropout counts conform to the CCD dropout definition. Until very recently, the Texas dropout counts have not conformed to this definition. A comparison of the specific areas of agreement and disagreement are outlined in the box on Page 4.

According to an assessment by TEA, annual dropout rates of TEA and NCES differ in several ways, including:
- The situations treated as high school completion;
- The situations when school leavers are considered to be continuing high school elsewhere;
- When dropouts are excluded from the dropout count;
- How duplicate, erroneous, and indeterminate records are handled;
- How summer dropouts are assigned to school years and grades;
- The conditions under which students are considered re-enrolled in the fall; and

Comparison of TEA and NCES Dropout Data, 1999-00

Enrollment					Enrollment			
Grades 7-12	TEA	NCES	Difference		Grades 9-12	TEA	NCES	Difference
7th grade	317,744	303,344	14,400					
8th grade	313,311	298,159	15,152					
9th grade	386,108	357,166	28,942		9th grade	386,108	357,166	28,942
10th grade	290,571	273,371	17,200		10th grade	290,571	273,371	17,200
11th grade	249,146	241,876	7,270		11th grade	249,146	241,876	7,270
12th grade	237,641	216,015	21,626		12th grade	237,641	216,015	21,626
Total	1,794,521	1,689,931	104,590		Total	1,163,466	1,088,428	75,038

Dropouts					Dropouts			
Grades 7-12	TEA	NCES	Difference		Grades 9-12	TEA	NCES	Difference
7th grade	703	1,231	-528					
8th grade	1,315	3,195	-1,880					
9th grade	7,630	15,204	-7,574		9th grade	7,630	15,204	-7,574
10th grade	4,631	13,511	-8,880		10th grade	4,631	13,511	-8,880
11th grade	4,518	11,216	-6,698		11th grade	4,518	11,216	-6,698
12th grade	4,660	14,459	-9,799		12th grade	4,660	14,459	-9,799
Total	23,457	58,816	-35,359		Total	21,439	54,390	-32,951

Dropout Rate					Dropout Rate			
Grades 7-12	TEA	NCES	Difference		Grades 9-12	TEA	NCES	Difference
7th grade	0.2	0.4	-0.2					
8th grade	0.4	1.1	-0.7					
9th grade	2	4.3	-2.3		9th grade	2	4.3	-2.3
10th grade	1.6	4.9	-3.3		10th grade	1.6	4.9	-3.3
11th grade	1.8	4.6	-2.8		11th grade	1.8	4.6	-2.8
12th grade	2	6.7	-4.7		12th grade	2	6.7	-4.7
Total	1.3	3.5	-2.2		Total	1.8	5	-3.2

Source: Texas Education Agency Department of Accountability Reporting and Research, Division of Research and Evaluation. Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2000-01 (August 2002). U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics. Documentation to the NCES Common Core of Data, Local Education Agency Universe Dropout File: School Year 1999-00

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- The denominator.

NCES counts the following groups of students as dropouts while TEA does not:
- Students previously counted as a dropout;
- Students who withdraw to enroll in an approved adult education GED program;
- Seniors who meet all graduation requirements but do not pass the exit-level TAAS;
- Students enrolled but not eligible for state Foundation School Program funding; and
- Dropouts for whom the last district of attendance cannot be determined.

According to TEA, there are two major reasons for these differences. The largest numerical difference is attributable to the count of students who withdraw to enroll in approved adult education GED preparation programs. The second largest numerical difference occurs because NCES counts a student as a dropout if he or she is unaccounted for on the first day of school.

Because of the definitional and procedural issues, NCES has determined that Texas would need to recalculate dropout counts for inclusion

in NCES publications. In its study presented to the 76th Legislature, TEA recommended that it submit dropout rates compatible with the NCES definitions. Results for the state and districts for 1999-00 were submitted to NCES and will be published in August 2002.

Counts. TEA publishes two sets of annual dropout rates – one for grades seven through 12 and one for grades nine through 12 (see box on Page 5). It also publishes a longitudinal completion/status rate and an unadjusted attrition rate (see box on Page 5). The box on Page 6 shows the differences in TEA and NCES dropout data for the 1999-00 school year.

For grades seven through 12 in 1999-00, NCES identified more than 35,000 additional dropouts in Texas. For grades nine through 12, NCES reported a Texas dropout rate of 5 percent, compared to TEA's 1.8 percent. The lag in aligning state and NCES accounting procedures has denied Texas schools access to millions of dollars targeted to dropout prevention.

Another measure of Texas dropouts involves the calculation of an attrition rate, which compares a group of entering freshmen to the number of seniors enrolled three years later, adjusting the latter by the increase or decrease in enrollment in the class for the intermediate years that the class is followed. IDRA uses such an attrition method as a way of providing an alternative measure of Texas schools' holding power and providing a way of triangulating findings from related dropout research.

IDRA Attrition Data

The percent of students lost from public school enrollment has remained relatively unchanged over the past eight years. An estimated 143,175 students from the class of 2002 were lost from enrollment due to attrition.

The cumulative costs of students leaving public high schools prior to graduation with a diploma are continuing to escalate. Between the 1985-86 and 2000-01 school years, the cumulative costs of public school dropouts in the state of Texas were in excess of $441 billion.

What is Needed

In order to make the state dropout counting and reporting system credible, IDRA continues to insist that the dropout counting and calculation procedure must be made simple and clear. Specifically IDRA recommends the following.

Recommendation 1: Put the dropout definition back into the law as follows: "For the purposes of local, district and state dropout reporting, 'dropout' means a student:

- **Who does not hold a high school diploma;**
- **Who is absent from the public school in which the student is enrolled for a period of 30 or more consecutive days; and**
- **Whose attendance within that period at another public school or private or parochial school cannot be verified."**

Rationale: Prior to the re-writing of the Texas Education Code in 1995, a similar definition for dropouts had been included in state statutes, specifically upon the adoption of HB 1010 by the 1989 Texas Legislature. At that time, dropouts were defined as follows: "Section 11.205 Subsection (e) For the purposes of this section 'dropout' means a student:

- Who does not hold a high school diploma or the equivalent;
- Who is absent from the public school in which the student is enrolled for a period of 30 or more consecutive days; and
- Whose attendance within that period at another public school or private or parochial school cannot be evidenced."

Employers know that a GED is not equal to a high school diploma. Therefore it should be included in dropout calculations, thus the exclusion of its "equivalent" in the new proposed wording.

On the question of substituting the terms "cannot be verified" rather than "cannot be evidenced," we propose that *verification* is a clearer, more easily understood term than *evidenced*, which is more suited to legal proceedings.

Recommendation 2: Adopt a new high school dropout counting and dropout rate calculation procedure into state policy that reads as follows: "State, school district, and local school campus dropout counts (DC) and DR (dropout rates) shall be calculated as follows: DC= A+B- (C+D+E+F). Where:

DC = Dropout count

A= students enrolled in ninth grade

B= additional students enrolled in subsequent years that become part of the original ninth grade class

C= students still enrolled in the same school when the ninth grade class enrolls in the 12th grade

D= students who enroll at another parochial or private school that grants a high school diploma, and whose enrollment has been verified by the receiving school

E= students from the original ninth grade who are deceased

F= students from the ninth grade class who graduated early and received a high school diploma.

The dropout rate (DR) shall be calculated as follows:

$$DR= \frac{A+B - (C+D+E+F)}{A+B} \bullet 100$$

Rationale: The current dropout counting procedures and the use of excessive numbers of leaver categories

tends to both complicate and confuse public understanding of the dropout issue in Texas. Use of this shorter, more streamlined approach allows for recognizing those legitimate adjustments to the dropout counts, while at the same time presenting a more accurate picture of the number and percentage of pupils from a freshman class who actually wind up earning a high school diploma.

Recommendation 3: The state should maintain the goal as stated in the Texas Education Code: "Through enhanced dropout prevention efforts, all students will remain in school until they obtain a high school diploma" (TEC Section 4.001).

Rationale: The goal of the state of Texas is simply and clearly that *all* students obtain a high school diploma. In Texas, all must mean all.

Recommendation 4: The state dropout definition should be amended and simplified by defining a dropout as a student whose re-enrollment or graduation from a high school (diploma granting school) has not been verified.

Rationale: Much of the current confusion about actual dropout rates is created by the state's complex process for counting and reporting dropouts.

A streamlined procedure is needed that informs us of whether a student who was formerly enrolled in a Texas school has actually re-enrolled, has graduated, has dropped out, or whose status is in reality unknown due to a lack of verifiable information on actual re-enrollment. Current state reports indicate that the group of "unknown status" students continue to account for over one-half of those reported as non-dropouts. In response to a request for verification of the re-enrollment of approximately 113,000 students whom the school leaver system identified as purportedly "other school leavers," TEA was unable to account for more than 57,000 of those pupils who were

recorded as "intending to enroll in another school." In fact, this number of students who disappeared from Texas schools is actually greater than the 17,000 dropouts "officially" reported by the agency in that year. Emerging data however, suggest that many of those same students actually never re-enroll in any school.

It is this type of discrepancy that weakens the credibility of the Texas dropout reporting system as well as its highly touted school accountability system because the latter incorporates these highly suspect dropout rates into the state's current accountability and school rating system.

Recommendation 5: Modify the state dropout reporting system to include fewer major categories, specifically the numbers of: (a) students actually enrolled in a specified graduating class; (b) students in that class who are still enrolled in any public or private high school (diploma granting institution) or who are verified as home schooled; (c) students known to have dropped out; (d) students who received a GED; and (e) students who completed all requirements but were denied a diploma for not passing the exit level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Rationale: Further confusion and related credibility of the state dropout reporting system can be attributed to the complexity that has been built into it by the state agency. With 43 student leaver codes, separating the number of pupils who actually received a regular high school diploma from the myriad of other reporting categories has rendered the new school leaver reporting system even less useful than the one it is replacing. The cumbersome 43 school leaver codes can be combined into several major categories that would provide a much clearer picture of students' status and enable anyone to calculate rates using these numbers.

These new categories would include:
- students actually enrolled in a specified graduating class;
- students in that class who are still enrolled in any public or private high school (diploma granting institution) or who are verified as home schooled;
- students known to have dropped out (this could include a subcategory of the number of students whose re-enrollment or high school graduation cannot be verified);
- students who received a GED; and
- students who completed all requirements but were denied a diploma for not passing the exit level TAAS.

Much of the insistence to modifying dropout reporting procedures lies in the fact that schools and the state agency continue to oppose reporting – as dropouts – students who have enrolled or indicated an intent to enroll in another public or private school but for whom no actual verification of enrollment is available. The creation of the "unknown" subcategory allows for this distinction – without automatically assuming that these students actually re-enrolled at a subsequent school. Similarly, by accounting for GEDs in a separate category, the public can distinguish those students who get a regular high school diploma from those who completed a GED.

A final category would involve those students who have completed all requirements – but who failed to pass the exit level TAAS. Such students are not reported either as dropouts or as high school graduates in the current reporting system. Like for GED recipients, the new system would account for these students, further allowing for calculating dropout and/or completion rates by combining or disaggregating the various subcategories.

Recommendation 6: Require that each local school district

establish local dropout oversight committee(s) or task force(s) including parent representatives, private sector representatives and school staff. These committees should regularly and systematically monitor the dropout identification, counting, and reporting process and dropout prevention efforts at their campuses and districts. Such efforts should be part of the regular school program involving regular school staff.

Rationale: There is currently no local oversight committee to monitor the local dropout reporting or intervention. Schools and communities must be directly involved in addressing the issue.

School Holding Power

In addition to the more formal state policy recommendations, IDRA is calling on school leaders to focus less on dropouts and more on holding on to students until high school graduation. Rather than blaming the children who are being ill-served by system, the responsibility should be on the adults who run the system. Schools must do whatever it takes to work with students where they are and to keep them in school and learning through graduation. I call this "school holding power."

To support this major shift we propose the following:

1. **Schools should re-examine their practices to increase student academic achievement and strengthen their student holding power.**
   Effective schools that produce high student achievement and keep students in school know what it takes to be truly successful:
   - 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, 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.

2. **Schools must establish the strengthening of their student holding power as a high priority along with the priority assigned to increased student academic achievement.**

3. **Schools must examine student, school and community data in a way that holds the institution accountable for student success and uses it to design their school improvement plans.**

4. **Schools must incorporate into their professional development plans effective teaching strategies that engage students in the educational process and increase the school's holding power.**

5. **Schools must partner with communities and families in an effort to strengthen the educational opportunities of students**.

6. **Schools should implement strategies to truly recover and provide educational opportunities to students who have dropped out of school in their community.**

7. **Schools should re-assess their effectiveness in increasing their student holding power regularly.**

8. **Evaluation must be an integral part of any dropout prevention and recovery program and should**

address three primary questions:
- To what extent is the program being implemented as proposed?
- What is the impact of program activities on participants?
- Is the program working and, if not, what modifications should be made?

Dr. Slavin and Dr. Fashola reported that only two programs in the country designed to increase high school graduation rates of at-risk students actually present rigorous evaluation evidence of success. One of these two dropout prevention programs is the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Developed in Texas by IDRA in 1984, it is now an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has kept 12,000 students in school – middle and high school students previously thought to be at risk of dropping out of school. More than 136,000 students, families and educators have been impacted by the program. The Valued Youth philosophy, "all students are valuable, none is expendable," is helping more than 150 schools in 17 cities keep 98 percent of valued youth in school.

As effective as the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is, it is not a magic bullet. No one program can increase a school's holding power. What is needed are real institutional changes that shift the paradigm from "dropout prevention and recovery" to *graduation*; from "some students at-risk of dropping out" to *all students will graduate from high school*. IDRA stands ready to continue working with schools to significantly increase their holding power.

Closing Comments

IDRA also will continue to compile attrition data for the state. But it is critical that the state upgrade its own dropout reporting process. Whether referred to as "leavers" or "dropouts," far too many Texas students are leaving

our schools without ever earning their high school diplomas. This state can continue to delude itself by resorting to tricks like cumbersome definitions and unwieldy reporting and counting systems, or we can simplify the process so that it is both understandable and believable. Texas needs diplomas, not delusions.

Since the presentation of this testimony, the Texas Legislature adopted new legislation that more closely aligns the state dropout counting procedures to those used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Despite some improvements, the major flaws in the

Texas dropout counting process noted here – including lack of verification of student transfers, inclusion of GEDs as graduates or "completers," and exclusion of pupils who fail the exit level test and therefore do not get a Texas high school diploma – remain problems in the existing dropout counting and reporting systems.

Resources

Fashola, O. and R. Slavin. *Show Me the Evidence! Proven and Promising Programs for America's Schools* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, Inc., 1998).

Texas Education Agency, Department of

Accountability Reporting and Research, Division of Research and Evaluation. *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2000-01* (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, August 2002).

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics. Documentation to the NCES Common Core of Data, Local Education Agency Universe Dropout File: School Year 1999-00 (NCES, 2002).

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

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In April, IDRA worked with **3,345** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **69** training and technical assistance activities and **145** program sites in **11** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

✦ Parent Leadership Training
✦ High Stakes Testing
✦ Spanish Literacy Programs for Pre-K and Kindergarten
✦ Alternative Certification
✦ Interactive Writing in an Early Childhood Two-Way Bilingual Classroom

Participating agencies and school districts included:

✧ Blackwell Public Schools, Oklahoma
✧ Jefferson Parish Schools, Louisiana
✧ Roosevelt School District, Arizona
✧ West Oso Independent School District, Texas

Activity Snapshot

During the *Annual IDRA* La Semana del Niño *Early Childhood Educators Institute*, IDRA hosted a special full-day institute for parents to concentrate on the challenges of early childhood education and how to maximize parent leadership. More than 200 parents participated with a panel of experts on parent leadership and early childhood reading. They then worked together to develop a concrete plan of action for exerting leadership in early childhood education. The institute was co-sponsored by the IDRA *South Central Collaborative for Equity* (the equity assistance center that serves Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas); *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); and RE-CONNECT (the parent information and resource center that serves Texas).

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.

the need for greater engagement of parents and communities as meaningful partners in the process of school reform and academic success for students.

Any type of change also has its own pattern with a direction, pace and duration. In the book *Mastering Change*, Leon Martel makes the distinction between structural and cyclical change (1986). Structural change, he writes, is the fundamental transformation of some activity or institutions from a previous state. This results in a change in the essential quality of the institution. It is irreversible and requires permanent adjustment. Cyclical change is temporary and usually does not cause any alterations in the structure of the institutions or the activities in which they are engaging.

When planning for education reform, one must aim for structural changes in order to enhance the chances of sustainability. When linked to community development, school reform can provide opportunities for people to improve the quality of their lives and take part in a series of articulated actions toward that goal. In order for the changes to be sustainable, new public policies that affect that particular community must also come into play.

There is an important distinction between change as a phenomenon and change as a set of actions (Chin, 1961). Managing change concerns a number of issues, including identifying the destabilizing forces, choosing what to change, selecting the appropriate methods to sue, designing the most effective strategies, implementing effective strategies, and evaluating results. All of these can effectively include community as partners in the change process with education systems.

Connor and Lake write that four elements can be measured regarding change:
• *individual task behavior*, for

instance when people decide to value a particular need or make it a political issue, that requires voluntary work to get organized or to inform policymakers;
• *organizational processes*, for example reframing practices or creating new ones within organizations;
• *strategic directions* for the common benefit, such as recognizing and assigning new roles for communities and organizations to become effective participants in the change process; and
• *cultural change*s, addressing a basic values within organizations, such as valuing parent involvement and participation (1988).

Ideally, all of these aspects of change can be found in community development as well as in the education reform process. All of them lead to the redistribution of power, in which individuals, communities, parents and others can participate in the decision-making process about the teaching-learning process.

When people become "authorized' and recognized to act around their own destiny, schools and universities become more "relevant" and can have major impact on the societies they serve.

Who are the Change Agents

Education reform provides the space for three sectors to work together for social benefit: school, community and government. Government establishes policies and funding that create an enabling environment; schools provide the learning environment and services for its students; and community can contribute with its ideas, its closeness to people, ideas, values, beliefs and markets.

The creation of linkages among these sectors is key to the education reform process. The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) has developed several tools and specific supports to assist educational institutions in their efforts to value and meaningfully engage with parents, families, and communities in creating schools that work for all children.

Networking, coalition building and working together to find solutions to particular problems in one area supplies the opportunity to mobilize the local society, thus bringing together resources

that can be the seed for new undertakings and positive change. As a consequence of this process, room is created for people to get involved in education for the common good, through their ideas, time and talents.

Ultimately this improves the quality of life in communities surrounding schools and universities. Sustainability of positive efforts is also enhanced in this way and lessons learned can be disseminated to other audiences for even broader impact.

Coalition Building

What is required for this to occur? Coalition building among these sectors requires a willingness to set aside personal agendas for a common good, to see the bigger picture involving the total community. In coalition building, sometimes the words *cooperation*, *collaboration* and *coordination* are used interchangeably. However, they have different meanings.

Cooperation is largely an attitude or stance. It recognizes the need to act jointly with another or with others around an issue. It is a state of mind and a pre-requisite to move further, but it is the most basic level of commitment and is often more talk than action.

Collaboration implies actually working together in active partnerships where each partner stays independent in pursuing a common interest.

Coordination suggests a process of defining parameters for taking collaborative action. It is a leap in commitment since it means that a given organization is interdependent and no longer isolated. When coordination is present, there is a conscious decision to make changes as defined by the coalition members for the interest and benefit of students and for society as a whole.

Community-Influenced Education Reform

Education reform requires coordination and shared leadership. School reform, when linked within the context of community, will result in a higher educational level of the entire community. This in turn, can produce movement and change in all systems that in the long-term are in the best interest of *all* citizens.

Inherent in this process is the sharing of information to the broader public and the building of skills to effect change. The benefits of the process are immense for the quality of life surrounding a campus. These can

include:
- Improved student achievement through access to excellent educational programs;
- Economic gains through increased work and opportunities;
- Social benefits in education, health, nutrition, access to public services, etc.;
- Equity in increased assets and access to all citizens in the area; and
- Empowerment and participation in the decision-making process at the local level.
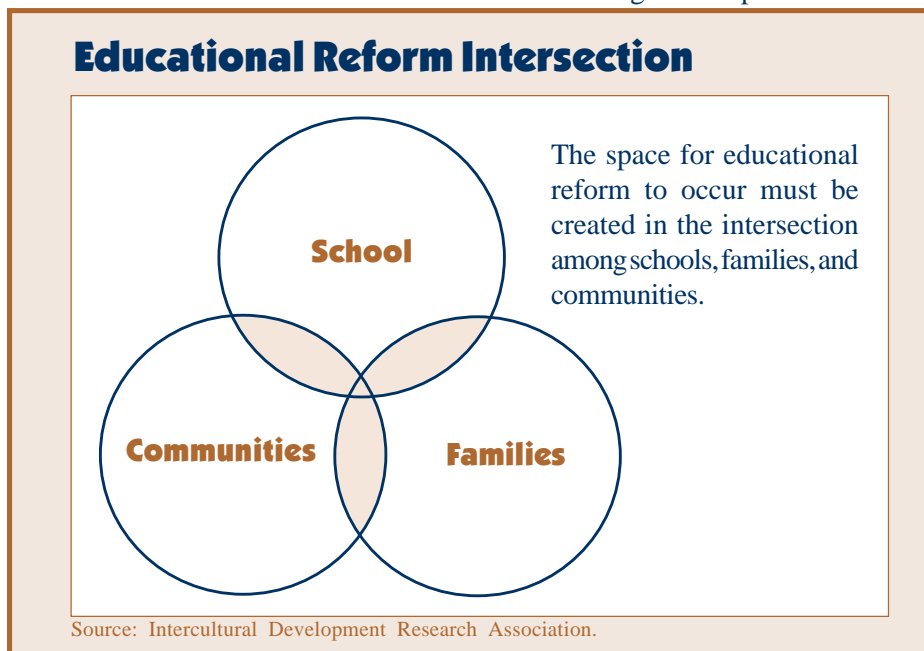
This process starts with the community and schools together setting education goals. These goals must reflect the thinking of parents, families and communities. Accountability processes should be consistent with the individual roles and responsibilities shared by the partners (see box).

Family and community participation can help to create empowered and competent people committed to long-term and responsive education reform. Participation is a means as well as an end in itself, with families and communities recognized as essential resources for change.

Community organizations also play an important role in school reform. Organizations that support school change through advocacy, technical assistance and parent engagement provide an important resource for schools in developing strategies and planning for school improvements. Gold and Simon remark, "The unique role of community organizing in education reform is in building community capacity and linking to school improvement through public accountability" (2002).

Thus, community-influenced education reform includes the following two elements:
- Valuing of families and communities and the recognition that they are capable of initiating and sustaining involvement in educational change;

Educational Reform Intersection

The space for educational reform to occur must be created in the intersection among schools, families, and communities.

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association.

and

- Successful strategies to include broad-based local participation in comprehensive planning and decision-making at the local level as well as at the policy level.

Education leaders who are committed to this process will recognize that they can effectively engage parents and empower people within the local community. There is no question that in this process, certain leadership roles with delegated authority and responsibility are needed. These people include community leaders, parent leaders, school-based leaders, and policy leaders committed to educational reform that will serve the needs of all children.

Working together, these leaders can institutionalize change at the school and community levels, and foster policy changes at the state and national levels. Together, they can provide a vision, motivation and facilitation to make school reform happen, for the betterment of their institutions, their students, for the society and the community as a whole.

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Internet Web Sites for Parents and Communities

Family Literacy and Homework Help

Funbrain: Educational Kids Games www.funbrain.com/index.html
Kid Info – School Subjects www.kidinfo.com/School_Subjects.html
National Center for Family Literacy www.famlit.org
Parents and Children Reading Together Online
   www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/fl/pcto/menu.html

Parenting and Parental Involvement

Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network www.cyfernet.org
Family Education Network www.familyeducation.com
Intercultural Development Research Association www.idra.org
Kids Can Learn www.kidscanlearn.com
KidSource www.kidsource.com
National Parent Information Network www.npin.org
Parent Soup www.parentsoup.com
Positive Parenting Magazine www.positiveparenting.com

For many more Internet resources and links, go to the "Field Trip" on IDRA's web site.
www.idra.org
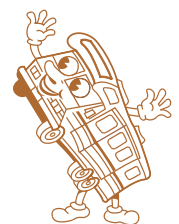
Multicultural Education: A Generation of Advocacy

by José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

This compilation includes 92 articles on multicultural education published during a 25-year period. Dr. José A. Cárdenas is the founder of IDRA, was its executive director for 20 years and now serves as director emeritus of the organization. The book provides an historical overview of his involvement in the most significant issues in multicultural education as a teacher, administrator and an active advocate of children.

Articles are organized into 10 chapters dealing with each of 10 major issues in multicultural education. Each chapter is accompanied by a bibliography and appropriate discussion questions. The book also contains five cumulative indices of authors, court cases, legislation, organizations and topics.

Multicultural Education is a reading imperative for teachers, administrators, teacher trainers and policy formulators interested in providing equal educational opportunity to all segments of the school population.

Topics Included:

- minority education
- bilingual education
- education of undocumented children
- school dropouts
- retentions in grade
- early childhood education
- science, math and technology
- standardized testing
- school reform
- a new educational paradigm
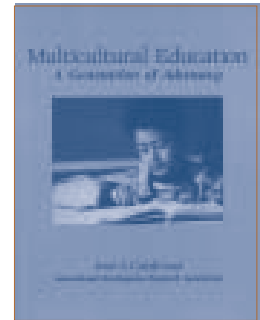
(ISBN 0-536-58760-4; 1995; 134 pages; hardback; $38)

My Spanish-Speaking Left Foot

by José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

José A. Cárdenas (right) and his sister. María de Jesús (left), in Charro and China Poblana costumes. Circa 1938.

It was inevitable that José Angel Cárdenas would spend most of his professional life working in the development of multicultural and bilingual programs. He was born in Laredo, Texas, in 1930 with an extensive number of relatives on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. In his fourth book, Dr. Cárdenas combines laughter and insight as he re-lives his encounters growing up in a multicultural environment. He depicts the cultural influence of Mexico and the Spanish-speaking world on a Mexican American living in the United States.

"I remember sometimes saying that I was born with my right foot in the United States and my left foot in Mexico. I specifically designate my left foot as the Spanish-speaking one because I was taught in the U.S. Army that the left foot always comes first, and Spanish was my first language." – José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

In addition to illustrating his childhood capers and his travels throughout Central and South America, Dr. Cárdenas provides compelling reflections of multicultural topics such as wealth, class, language, religion, education and family. Dr. Cárdenas served more than 50 years as a professional educator and is the founder and director emeritus of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA). IDRA is based in San Antonio and works with schools across the country and internationally to improve education for all children.

(ISBN 1-878550-59-4; 1997; 136 pages; paperback; $9)

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

For each criterion, this guide indicates which specific educational equity goal(s) it reflects:

- ❖ Goal 1: Comparably high academic achievement and other student outcomes;
- ❖ Goal 2: Equitable access and inclusion;
- ❖ Goal 3: Equitable treatment;
- ❖ Goal 4: Equitable opportunity to learn; and
- ❖ Goal 5: Equitable resources.

Characteristic or criterion

Related goal of educational equity

Brief discussion and/ or research-based example of the characteristic

Indicator and four options – users check the box that describes the degree to which each criteria is met, "4"

(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.

The San Antonio Community Education Leadership Program Celebrates 11th Anniversary and Graduation

The 2003 group of the San Antonio Community Education Leadership Program (CELP) recently became the 11th group to graduate from the program. More than 125 emerging and current leaders in the San Antonio community have participated in the CELP. Dr. Blandina Cárdenas, Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Texas at San Antonio, gave the keynote speech during the graduation presentation.

Founded in 1993, CELP is a nine-month training program designed to prepare and support a network of leaders who can work collaboratively and effectively across agency systems to promote and support the cultural, ethnical, and racial diversity in communities and institutions in San Antonio. The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) designs the curriculum for CELP; Mr. Aurelio Montemayor, IDRA lead trainer, provides training and facilitation for each year's CELP group.

From left to right: Mr. Tony Rivera, founding CELP chair; Dr. Blandina Cárdenas, Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Texas at San Antonio; Dr. María Robledo Montecel, executive director of IDRA and former CELP chair; and Ms. Estella Rivera, CELP coordinator.

Mr. Tony Rivera, the founding chair of CELP, said, "The CELP classes are unique because we deal with leaders to confront racism and diversity from A to Z, focusing on how to collaborate and build an infrastructure to benefit communities."

CELP fellows develop skills of cross-cultural collaborative leadership. They move beyond perceived differences, learn how to identify common goals, and begin to form alliances with diverse community constituencies to resolve common problems. They use their community environments as the primary context for examining and discussing community issues. Through participation in a series of on-site training activities (seminars, site visits, skills development workshops, and individual and group projects), fellows gain highly practical knowledge about policies and program strategies for community improvement.

For more information about CELP contact Mr. Aurelio Montemayor at aurelio.montemayor@idra.org or Ms. Estella Rivera at estellacrivera@satx.rr.com.

Creating schools that work for all children,
through research • materials development • training • technical assistance • evaluation • information dissemination