

Reading Early for Academic Development Creating Classrooms of Excellence

by José L. Rodríguez, M.A.

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- ✦ Literacy for learning
- ✦ Bilingual early childhood institute for educators and parents
- ✦ Policy solutions for access and success in higher education



Centers of excellence in schools are dynamic places. They are vibrant, active, engaging, interactive spaces where children are being elevated to excellence. At their core, they support students acquiring basic skills and competencies in all aspects of literacy, numeracy, science and technology. Teachers are pivotal to children's success at managing and benefiting from their learning.

Through its project, Project Reading Early for Academic Development (READ), the Intercultural Development Research Association is working with Parent/Child, Inc., to establish a scientific foundation for policy and practice by creating centers of excellence that address diverse children's needs.

This article gives an overview of the project and describes some strategies the teachers are using successfully.

Overview of the Project

Project READ is establishing "classrooms of excellence," collectively forming a "center of

excellence" that ensures reading, cognitive and emotional success for all preschool children through a print rich environment, with appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities. The new centers of excellence have 12 classrooms of excellence at the four participating Head Start centers.

The project is using a rigorous quantitative and qualitative plan to document approaches and strategies, assess their effectiveness, and inform replication opportunities. IDRA is using a multi-tiered comparison group design to make a number of comparisons between participating and non-participating centers' students and teachers.

A classroom of excellence fosters a dynamic teacher, preschool, learner and parent relationship that nurtures appropriate cognitive, early language and early reading ability among other important learning outcomes (National Research Council, 2000). The learner is also nurtured to be emotionally and socially disciplined, psychologically grounded, and physically prepared to be actively, dynamically and joyfully engaged in learning in a way that moves

him or her forward to literacy, academic competency, and upper grade level success.

The classrooms of excellence are dynamic and have, at their center, students who are acquiring basic skills and competencies in oral language development, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness (Schickedanz, 1999).

The environment is rich with a spirit of acceptance and values diversity and cultural difference. It also resonates with the richness of language and print. Teachers encourage communication and language exploration through discussions in both Spanish and English as a basis for learning English. Provocative questions on materials, books, pictures, computer-based resources, and other forms of print are used as a basis for learning.

Children are encouraged through activities they undertake to talk to each other, speculate about the outcomes and inquiry, predict what might happen, and check their speculations against the actual outcomes of their reading.

A classroom of excellence fosters a dynamic teacher, preschool, learner and parent relationship that nurtures appropriate cognitive, early language and early reading ability among other important learning outcomes.

In the library, they explore predictable and non-predictable books to increase their capacity to extract word meaning from the way words are displayed in relation to pictures in books. They examine book characteristics to determine meaning, they practice pronouncing and sounding out letters to create words, and when they do, they stretch their understanding because they learn that words mean something in the real world (Schickedanz, 1999).

These centers were already experiencing success in the education of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and are now transforming into centers of excellence that are used to train staff in the other 80 preschool centers in the San Antonio area.

Project READ did not go into the Head Start centers to remove anything,

but rather to enhance and build on what was already in existence at the centers. The teachers seemed reluctant about the project in the beginning. After they were reassured that their existing curriculums would not be eliminated but rather enhanced, by adding more literacy tools and by the professional development training they would be receiving, they became more receptive to the project.

After a year, the teachers have demonstrated tremendous growth in the area of teaching vocabulary development, oral language development, and reading and writing. The training, along with the coaching and mentoring, has increased the teachers' confidence and validated their own teaching. Project READ coaches

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Success in Literacy isn't a Lie, It Simply isn't the Whole Truth

by **Bradley Scott, Ph.D.**

I wrote about Tres three years ago when he was entering kindergarten. I related an incident in an article entitled, "Reading Right, Reading Well," in the *IDRA Newsletter* (February 2003). Tres, his sister Olivia, and I were having a conversation about the importance of reading and learning to read.

Olivia is now an excellent reader and a top-notch student in the fifth grade. She told Tres that what he thought he was doing really was not reading. Tres was devastated by this admonishment from his big sister.

I came to his rescue by assuring him that what he was doing was "reading" in fact, and that if he kept it up, he would become an excellent reader and would have a wonderful school experience because he could read. I remember the smile of satisfaction he showed when I told him that.

I talked to Tres again a few days ago. He told me something that stopped me in my tracks. As I was unloading my car from work, he ran up to me looking a little dismayed and said: "You know Mr. Bradley, I'm a great reader, but there's some other stuff I can't handle."

I thought to myself, what "stuff"

could a second grade student not handle in school? He went on: "I thought you said school was going to be great when I learned to read. I learned to read, and there's stuff I hate."

Tres gave me an earful. It seems that his teacher had a conversation with his mom and dad suggesting they have him tested and placed in special education because he simply cannot seem to control himself.

I thought this was strange since he always seems self-controlled. He does have a mind of his own, he is adventuresome, he is active and, yes, he gets into trouble. But none of that behavior impressed me as important

enough to have him tested for special education. In every respect he seems to be a normal African American boy doing what children of that age typically do.

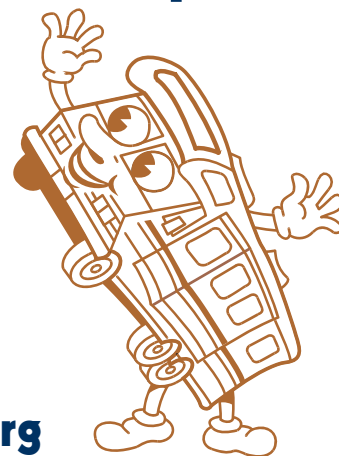
His mother and father saw Tres talking with me and came over to give their version of what had happened. I suggested to his parents that his assessment and placement in special education should be the last option and should only happen after they and the school explored every other possible option. In fact, special education for Tres should only be considered if it is absolutely the only way he can be

Success in Literacy – continued on Page 4

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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



www.idra.org

assisted.

Personally, I think his teacher may have done something that seems to occur too frequently, that being that special education is seen as the *first* measure for dealing with African American, Latino, and other minority boys rather than the *last* option, unless some mental or physical impairment or other special need absolutely demands it. That having been said, I left them as I retreated into my house wishing that I had told Tres something different three years earlier.

What could I have said to him that would have produced that wonderful sense of satisfaction he displayed three years before? First of all, even though I did not mean to, I should not have lied to him. My telling him that if he learned to read, he would have a wonderful school experience was not entirely the truth. It was only partially true. How is that so?

To begin, learning to be a competent reader in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and early elementary school helps students to read for learning beyond third grade. It is for this reason that the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement advised the nation to put reading first (Armbruster, 2001). Being able to read produces its benefits where learning is concerned.

The National Reading Panel clarified that five areas of reading instruction build reading success for young learners: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (2000).

Similarly, the National Black Child Development Institute commented on the importance of the skills in each of these areas as they impact the ability of African American children to become literate and master school curriculum.

Barbarin also challenged schools and homes to acknowledge and confront the literacy gap between White children and Black children by

structuring more powerful partnerships between home and school in supporting specific literacy competencies. This knowledge is not new to the field of education (Bowman, 2002).

Boyer made these same points using statistical data to show that children three to five years old whose parents read to them, told them stories, and taught letters, words or numbers to them graduated from high school and college at significantly higher rates than those whose parents did not.

There is great value in learning to read well, but that is not all there is to it. It was also Boyer who reminded the nation in the early 1990s: “In our search for excellence, *children* have somehow

Billings builds a case for culturally-relevant pedagogy linking schooling and culture that has grown out of her research with excellent teachers of African American students (2002). Armington describes 15 characteristics of a learner-centered classroom, starting with a staff of teachers with passions to share and who enjoy helping children to learn to schools being a community of learners (Armington, 1997).

When Littky laid out the big picture for the real goals of public education, learning to “speak well, write well, read well and work well with numbers” was only one of 14 real goals (2004). He stated: “Over the course of three

Learning to be a competent reader in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and early elementary school helps students to read for learning beyond third grade.

been forgotten... In our search for excellence, children must come first... The focus of our concern must be *children* – not just the schools” (Boyer, 1991).

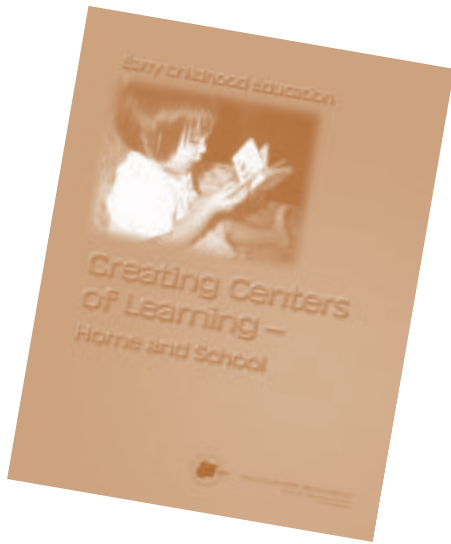
Sagor noted: “Schools have been successful at providing some students with feelings of affiliation and belonging... Unfortunately, a great many other students [non-English proficient, racial and cultural minorities, and poor children] feel rejected by their classmates or experience other factors that make them feel out of place. Is it any wonder that these are the students who demonstrate the least commitment to the expectations of the school, their teachers, and the curricula? No one may be at fault. Teachers do not intend to make students feel alienated. Nevertheless, the consequences of unconscious teaching behavior, when engaged in over and over can do just that” (Sagor, 2003).

To combat this mindless regular behavior of alienation, Gloria Ladson-

decades watching kids walk into my schools, I have decided that I want them to:

- Be lifelong learners
- Be passionate
- Be ready to take risks
- Be able to problem-solve and think critically
- Be able to look at things differently
- Be able to work independently and with others
- Be creative
- Care and want to give back to the community
- Persevere
- Have integrity and self respect
- Have moral courage
- Be able to use the world around them well
- Speak well, write well, read well, and work well with numbers
- Truly enjoy their life and their work” (Littky, 2004).

It has occurred to me that I really should have told Tres as an African



Creating Centers of Learning at Home and School for Early Learners

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

Effective partnerships between home and school pay big dividends in terms of children's learning, beginning at the preschool level and continuing throughout a child's education. Parents are a child's first and most important teachers, and home is that first environment where children begin to understand the world and the people, places and things that make up the world.

Children benefit in countless ways when parents and teachers work together at the preschool level to deliberately structure home and school environments for learning literacy and for general growth and development. When meaningful partnerships for learning are established between home and school, children's self-esteem is enhanced and rates, amounts and depths of learning are improved.

IDRA has developed a guide of targeted activities in two parts to enhance learning: the first part, for parents and families, and the second part, for teachers and staff at the early childhood level. The guide, *Creating Centers of Learning – Home and School*, is a checklist in a quick and easy format that can assist teachers and parents in being intentional in their

interaction and support of children's learning in the early years.

Parents should view the home as the first center of learning. With this in mind, families can arrange a home environment to support learning and promote positive growth and development. Part One of the guide is intended for family use in planning such environments. The guide can assist in determining how supportive the home environment is as a "center of learning" and for planning activities to improve learning in the home.

The guide is intended to assist parents in committing greater efforts and actions that will benefit the child in school and beyond. Part One of the guide also contains ideas in the following areas: expectations, reinforcement of learning in language and math literacy, home environment, relationships within the home, and opportunities outside the home.

Part Two is designed to help teachers at the preschool level create dynamic learning centers where children are elevated to excellence in learning, with emphasis on early language and mathematics skills. Ideally, these "centers of excellence" at schools operate in a way to support

students acquiring basic skills and competencies in all aspects of literacy, numeracy, science and technology. The guide is designed to help teachers reflect upon and evaluate their classrooms and the school learning environments of young learners.

Where the checklist shows that activity is occurring only "sometimes" or "never," clearly steps can be taken to raise the bar to excellence. When teachers are pro-active in partnering with the home and in creating centers of learning at school, children learn, they excel, they achieve and they win. Part Two of the guide also contains ideas in the following areas: staffing, educational equity, accountability, teacher expectations, academic achievement, social maturity, classroom management, and parent engagement.

Honoring and preserving home language and cultural traditions is an essential factor in successful home-school relationships at every level, and particularly in the early years.

It has been said that a people without knowledge of their language and culture is like a tree without roots: it cannot thrive over time. Parents,

Creating Centers – continued on Page 8

Tools for

Excellent Instruction in Early Childhood

Research on brain development in the last decade has confirmed what many parents, educators and community leaders have felt for ages – that a positive, warm, language-rich environment plays a critical role not only in childhood, but throughout a person’s life.

The powerful role of early childhood education is also borne out by statistics: Children who attend high quality pre-kindergarten programs are less likely to be held back a grade, less likely to need special education and more likely to graduate high school (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003).

Since the 1970s, when IDRA developed *AMANECER*, a curriculum that incorporates Spanish language and Latino values and culture, IDRA has upheld a commitment to early childhood education as a key to success for all children. All of our work extends from this basic premise: *Children and families whose first language is not English must have access to quality education at the earliest levels of school.* From research and community engagement that informs leadership development and public policy, IDRA promotes academic success for preschool children while valuing children’s cultural, linguistic, gender and racial uniqueness.

A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

Conducting Research – In its second year of implementing the project, Reading Early for Academic Development (READ), funded by the U.S. Department of Education, IDRA is conducting research on effective curricula and teacher practices that prepare all children – whether Spanish dominant or English dominant – with “English readiness” for kindergarten and beyond. These findings, building on a body of research and practice, will inform both the project and the field.

Developing Leaders – In addition to original research, the READ project alliance has a vision for creating

centers of excellence, classrooms from which all preschool children emerge ready to read and to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. As excellence demands visionary leadership, IDRA has worked closely with Head Start centers, helping teachers to perfect early childhood practices and to engage parents as their children’s first, and most important, teachers. As part of this initiative, IDRA has augmented the Head Start program’s “HeadsUp! Reading” teacher development course with a training component for working effectively with kids whose first language is not English.

The Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute, to take place April 19-21, 2005, in San Antonio, is also a key component in our effort to support the development of visionary leadership and collaboration among parents, school administrators and teachers. Now in its 12th year, the institute is the only early childhood conference to focus on English language learners and leadership development. It attracts participants from as far away as Puerto Rico. The theme of this year’s institute, “**Classrooms of Excellence – Laying the Foundation for Early Reading Success,**” emphasizes training on phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension, alphabetic principle, technology, and policy. For more information, see the IDRA web site (www.idra.org) or call 210-444-1710.

Informing Policy – In 2004-05, IDRA convened InterAction: Higher Education and Latinos in the New Millennium, a series of policy forums designed to build stronger, enduring links among PK-20 classrooms, institutions of higher education, and the community and business sectors to effect meaningful education reform. In promoting linkages from early education to college graduation, InterAction lays a foundation for dialogue and policy recommendations for developing and funding the supports all students need to succeed from Day One. This initiative is funded by Houston Endowment, Inc. (See Page 9.)

Tools for Action continued on next page

Action

Engaging Communities—Parent involvement has long been a central component of the Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute, and this year is no exception. But in addition to annual training on parent leadership and partnerships, IDRA provides ongoing resources, training, information and support to parents of young children through the Texas Parent Information Resource Center. Through the PIRC, IDRA provides comprehensive, multicultural and multilingual parent leadership support to strengthen partnerships between parents and schools for student success.

What You Can Do

Texas and the nation need visionary leadership and collaboration among parents, school administrators and teachers to create quality early education programs that value and capitalize on each student's unique background, language and culture. Three ways that you can ignite leadership and take action are to:

Get informed by learning about early childhood organizations that exist locally in your area, around the state and nationally. You can locate your nearest Head Start program through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration of Youth and Families' search engine at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/hsweb/index.jsp>. More general information on Head Start programs (research, statistics and data) can be found at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/index.html>. You can find local affiliates of the National Black Child Development Institute, a network of parents and professionals dedicated to the well-being of African American children, at <http://www.nbcdi.org/04/affiliates/affiliates.asp>. To learn more about key issues in early childhood education and emerging national policy debates, visit the National Association for the Education of Young Children web site at <http://naeyc.org/policy/>. And visit IDRA's Texas Parent Information Resource Center at <http://www.idra.org/pirc/about.htm> for resources on multicultural, multilingual parent engagement and leadership.

Get involved by joining a national organization such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National Black Child Development Institute, and play an active role in state and national policy and advocacy efforts, ranging from early education funding to research, and from parent involvement to teaching practices and curriculum development. Or, more locally, you can join an organization like the Texas Association for Children Under Six or a local chapter.

Get results by keeping your leaders and policymakers informed about the importance of early childhood education for all children. In an era in which services to children are being cut back, become a local leader and advocate for quality early childhood education. To sharpen your skills, check out NAEYC's *Toolbox for Advocates* at <http://www.naeyc.org/policy/toolbox/pdf/toolkit.pdf>. You can also co-sponsor with IDRA a *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute in your own community, bringing training to your area and building critical leadership in early childhood education.

Additional Research and Resources

- American Library Association (<http://www.ala.org>).
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (<http://www.ascd.org>).
- U.S. Department of Education – Ed.gov publications on early childhood development (<http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/edpicks.jhtml?src=qc>).
- Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI) (<http://www.hippyusa.org>).
- National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (archived information) (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI/index.html>).
- Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc. (<http://www.parentsasteachers.org>).

families and communities help to foster the values and culture that sustain a civilization, and are important partners with schools in helping to create self-esteem and a lifelong love for learning.

Therefore, any effective strategy for engagement between school and home must honor, incorporate and aggressively seek out effective means for parents, family and community participation as a key resource for learning, at all levels, from preschool through college. In maintaining quality bilingual and multicultural preschool environments, the home language should be seen as not only an *expression* of culture, but also, a means

to *create* culture.

IDRA has more than 30 years of shaping new paradigms in designing ways of working with educators and communities to forge strong alliances among schools, colleges and communities. The opportunities and the challenges are there for educational systems and communities to value and empower one another in ways that can result in more inclusive and productive educational settings, increased academic achievement for all students, and positive synergistic relationships that promote growth and well-being across communities. Children thrive and schools gain at every level when they value the role of home and tap into

the assets of the community.

To inquire about additional resources to strengthen home and school engagement, visit the IDRA web site (www.idra.org), find out about IDRA's Community Engagement Toolkit, or call (210-444-1710) to learn more about our training and development opportunities for staff, families and community members.

American boy that reading is a powerful and very important thing to learn to do because it opens the door to so many good things to learn in school. And, I would say there are other things you really need to know to be successful and safe in school. We will talk about those things as well and I will help you to learn them.

This is exactly what my father said to me when I was Tres' age. That was more than 50 years ago.

Tres is not just a good reader. Tres is a whole person who also is becoming an excellent reader. He will do well in school if the system does not get him first. My hope for Tres and all the learners like him regardless of their race, culture, language, economic level, gender and special need was captured more than a decade ago by Lisa Delpit. She stated: "If we are to successfully educate all of our children, we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism [classism, sexism, and ethnocentrism]. We must work to destroy those binders so that it is possible to really see, to really know the students we must teach. I pray for all of us the strength to teach

our children what they must learn, and the humility and wisdom to learn from them so that we might better teach" (1993).

I am going to be more mindful about how I talk to Tres from now on. He listens, and he remembers everything. I am going to support his mother and father to ensure that, to whatever degree I can, he will not be dumped into special education as a substitute for the proper education he deserves.

By the way, if he were to need special education, I would support his mother and father to ensure he would get the proper education he deserved. His successful education and increased life and career options are just that important to me.

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For Things to Change, We Must “Interact”

Improving Access and Success of Latinos in Higher Education

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

Editor’s Note: The Intercultural Development Research Association, supported by Houston Endowment, Inc., convened a statewide seminar in February to address disparities in the college access and success of Latino students. At the statewide event in Austin, leaders from different sectors reviewed policy solutions identified during a series of three InterAction forums in late 2004. Following is an adaptation of the opening remarks prepared by María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., IDRA executive director. See Page 12 for a list of all the policy solutions.

We have all come together from many different places: from Abilene to Bruni, Fort Stockton to Houston, Muleshoe to Brownsville. We even invited an old friend to come all the way from Cambridge, Mass., to join us.

We wear distinct hats. We are teachers, professors, community and business leaders, legislators, school administrators, parents. We play different roles, from helping a child to take their first step, to being at a young adult’s side when they take their first



InterAction statewide seminar participants from left to right: Norma Cantu, professor of education and law at the UT School of Law; Joe Muñoz, assistant to the president at San Angelo State University; and Charles Roeckle, deputy to the president at UT Austin.

stand. And we come together in dialogue, despite some differences.

But we come together with common ideals and a common ground. All of us believe that everyone, regardless of where they come from, should have a fair shot at life.

Latino students, however, do not always get that fair shot. Yet Latinos are the future in Texas as we have all come to realize.

The Texas Workforce Commission recently estimated that between 2026 and 2035, more than 50 percent of the Texas population will be Hispanic. Hispanic children now represent the majority of entrants into Texas public schools. Hispanic youth account for about 40 percent of college-age Texans.

But, many of us also know that

almost half of Latino students in Texas do not graduate from high school. And in the year 2000, only 11 percent of Hispanics 25 years old and older (compared to 28 percent of Whites) had earned a bachelor’s degree.

Today, in 2005, when we look at Latino access and success in higher education, our vision, while achievable, is still very far from being achieved.

We know this not only from hard data, but also from in-depth dialogue, conversations around the state that took place during the three major forums that have led to our work together today.

Seven Key Factors for Success

These InterAction forums examined gains and gaps in higher education, not just by looking at a single indicator, but by examining a combination of inter-related factors that critically impact student participation and success.

This seven-point framework for assessing the status of Latino access and success includes:

- college preparation,
- access to higher education,
- institutional persistence (policies, structures and supports that keep students in college through to

Interact – continued on Page 10

- graduation),
- affordability,
- institutional resources,
- graduation rates, and
- access to and participation in graduate and professional studies.

Texas is Missing the Mark

Measuring our progress against this framework and considering the varying experiences of our urban, rural and border regions, there can be no doubt that in Latino participation in college in Texas, we have missed the mark.

At the same time, there is an opportunity today to look at the challenge of Latino college access and success from a broad platform – one that creates not only common ground but common cause; one that examines state level policies and practices; one that assumes that the future is neither in someone else's hands, nor in our individual hands, but in our connected hands.

We have missed the mark on **college preparation**. Texas high schools lose one third of their students before graduation. Of those who do graduate from high school, only two of five Texas students earn a recommended curriculum diploma; yet only one in three Hispanic students earn this preferred high school credential.

We have missed the mark on **college access**. Of those who graduate from Texas high schools, only one out of five enrolls in a Texas public university the following fall. More than half will not enroll at all.

Although 2005 enrollment targets have been met for Black students and White students, Hispanic student enrollment is not yet on track. In fact, Texas needs to increase Hispanic

college enrollment by an additional 48,041 students to reach the 2005 target. And even those numbers may have to increase based on recent recommended increases to those enrollment targets

We have missed the mark on **institutional persistence**. Colleges do not do enough to help Latino students who get into college stay in or persist all the way through graduation and beyond. We have learned, for example, that first-year college students have the best chance of returning for a second year if they are enrolled full-time. Yet, full-time status is nearly impossible when one in four high school students

is economically disadvantaged. It is especially difficult when one in two Latino students is poor.

We have missed the mark dramatically on **affordability**. Over the past 10 years, tuition at Texas two-year institutions has increased almost 30 percent; four-year institutions increased 63 percent. Meanwhile, median family incomes have increased by only 8 percent. In fact, the sharpest increases in tuition costs have been imposed during the time of greatest economic hardship in the state.

We have missed the mark on **institutional resources**. Across the board, at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, despite years of advocacy, inequity in funding persists. Public schools and institutions of higher education with the greatest

concentrations of poor and minority students still have the least funding in this state.

We have also missed the mark on **college graduation**. Texas has the greatest number of NCAA institutions in the nation and the greatest number of institutions in the bottom 10 percent of graduation rates. Thirteen out of the 19 largest public universities in Texas graduate less than half of their students.

And we have missed the mark on **graduate and professional studies**. The number of doctoral degrees awarded in our state – degrees for our future engineers, researchers, doctors, professors – recently *declined*. The number actually dropped by a quarter of a percent from 2000 to 2003.

The fact is, however, that sometimes, in some areas, we have never set a mark to begin with. For example, Texas is still in the early stages of establishing an **accountability** system for higher education. A system of accountability measures was just mandated in 2004 and is in its infancy.

We miss the mark on accountability as long as we fail to actively pursue minority participation, fail to set appropriate standards, and fail to effectively measure our progress.

More importantly, we know that if we fail to address these disparities in higher education, we continue to short-change not only our young people, but also our communities, our state and our future.

Policy Solutions

There is obviously much work to be done, and much that we can do. No one of us can do all that needs to be done. But for things to change each of us must begin to take some action. We offer 31 policy solutions as one way of

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Texas Education – A Vanishing Future

“In Texas the pre-kindergarten through 20 pipeline is not only clogged at various transition points, it is, in fact, nonexistent. There is no pipeline for Texans. There is no pipeline that moves students from quality early childhood education to college graduation and beyond.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, executive director of IDRA



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association

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focusing that action.

But to act, in this case, must also mean to *inter-act*.

In the earlier forums that have led to our work together today, we have talked a bit about this idea of “interaction.” At IDRA, we are convinced that this principle is so absolutely crucial that I would like to revisit that discussion for a moment today.

Inter implies, of course, interrelatedness, interdependence of purposes, of people and of systems. Each of us brings a set of particulars that come from what we do, be it at a university or a community college, in schools, or in a community or business organization. And those particulars are important. The perspectives and insights that we each bring from the four sectors of higher education, elementary and secondary education, and the community are essential to this gathering.

At the same time, there is an opportunity today to look at the challenge of Latino college access and success from a broad platform – one that creates not only common ground but common cause; one that examines state level policies and practices; one

that assumes that the future is neither in someone else’s hands, nor in our individual hands, but in our connected hands.

Let’s look at the second part of this word interaction: *Action*. Many of us are familiar with the saying, *del dicho al hecho, hay mucho trecho*, there is always a big gap between words and deeds. To produce results, we must move from clear, credible facts to a clear course of action.

As I listened to the many people who shared their ideas and insights during our three policy forums, three consistent themes emerged. These are also the foundations of the policy solutions that we are examining together today.

- **Create Persistent, Accountable Institutions** – This means institutions with the resources, holding power and staying power to guide our young people from student to citizen, from learner to leader.
- **Build Bridges for Action** – Our success absolutely depends on linking early education to college graduation and on linking classrooms, businesses and communities.
- **Invest in Education for the Good of All Texas** – Education is not a

private good for the few, but a public good for all. We must invest wisely and accountably, to ensure that we get the most out of higher education for every student.

Create Persistent, Accountable Institutions

To build institutional persistence at the state level, we must develop a seamless state database stratified by regions and counties to follow students from high school through college. The database would build on the current accountability system that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board implemented this past year.

To build institutional persistence at the undergraduate level, we must keep the 10 Percent Plan to ensure isolated and rural students have access to colleges and universities. The 10 Percent Plan ensures that we not return to the days when a large percentage of freshmen at the state’s two flagship universities came from only 20 feeder schools in the entire state.

The 10 Percent Plan, however, means little to institutions along the U.S.-Mexico border, whose populations are already predominantly Hispanic. To address gaps throughout

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Policy Solutions for Better Latino Access and Success in Higher Education

A group of leaders from across Texas gathered recently in Austin to unveil policy reform solutions to the disparities in higher education access and success for Latino students. The leaders include K-12 educators, college and university leaders, community and business advocates, and policymakers.

The Intercultural Development Research Association, supported by Houston Endowment, Inc., is leading this initiative, titled *InterAction: Higher Education and Latinos in the New Millennium*. It seeks to build stronger, enduring links among K-12, institutions of higher education, and the community and business sectors to effect meaningful education reform.

The 31 policy solutions below follow IDRA's framework that identifies seven distinct areas of opportunities for reform: preparation, access, institutional persistence, affordability, institutional resources, graduation, and graduate/professional studies.

At the statewide event, participants reviewed policy solutions stemming from a series of three *InterAction* forums. Convened this fall, each forum addressed issues facing a specific community of interest – urban, rural or border areas. The forums were hosted by President Max Castillo and the University of Houston-Downtown, President David Watts and the University of Texas-Permian Basin, and President Blandina “Bambi” Cárdenas and the University of Texas-Pan American, respectively. The LULAC State Education Committee and the Texas Latino Education Coalition co-hosted all three forums.

Following are the resulting policy solutions for each of the seven issues that framed the discourse presented on February 2, 2005. Guiding this effort were principles for a new vision and action:

- From access and success for only a *few* to access and success for *all* students.
- From a culture of blaming to a culture of shared accountability for student success.
- From isolated efforts in PK-12, higher education, and communities to interconnected support for Latino student success PK through graduate school.

Preparing Students

IDRA's research shows that Texas high schools lose one third of their students before graduation. Of the

total who survive and graduate with a high school diploma, one of two are White, one of three are Hispanic, and one of six are Black.

Of those who graduate from high school, two of five earn a “recommended or above” degree. Only one of three Hispanic students earn the preferred degree, and half are low-income (only one of 20 Whites with this degree are low-income).

The **policy solutions** are the following.

- Establish and fund a statewide system that aligns public school standards with higher education standards, particularly in composition, reading comprehension and mathematics. This would also align an accelerated curriculum across PK-20.
- Establish and fund a “course ladder” system in which all high school students have a requirement of at least two dual credit courses for graduation. This would bridge colleges and universities with high schools.
- Establish and fund academic summer camps for middle school students to prepare them to enroll in high school accelerated curricula that will prepare them for college.
- Require a half credit high school course that supports transitions from high school to college (“planning for college”) to be taken by all juniors and seniors.
- Increase access to technology in rural areas to facilitate admissions and access to online financial aid applications.
- Establish and fund a statewide grant that reinforces college preparation and enrollment in historically under-represented areas around the state.

College Access

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, of those who graduate from high school, only one of five enroll in a Texas public university the following fall. Close to one of four enroll in a two-year college, but more than half will not enroll at all.

Hispanic student enrollment increased from 23 percent in the fall of 2000 to 25 percent in the fall of 2003 but still falls short of Texas its 2005 target.

The **policy solutions** are the following.

- De-emphasize weight given to standardized test scores in admission policies and merit-based scholarship programs. Use multiple criteria for admissions that

Continued on next page

are more dependent on academic courses, extra-curricular activities, recommendation letters and individual interviews when required.

- Tie higher education accountability with enrollment targets or critical indicators (such as percentage of minority or poor students) using an audit management team for monitoring progress.
- Eliminate duplicative assessment in high school and college (TAKS exit level, SAT/ACT and THEA), in the Texas tradition of not spending money on redundancy.
- Use a formula adjustment in college and university allocation that expands technology in rural areas.
- Increase the allotment for access to instruction via technology.
- Keep the 10 Percent Plan to ensure isolated and rural students have access to colleges and universities.
- Establish financial incentives for institutions to recruit, retain and graduate students from college and graduate schools.

Institutional Persistence

Once enrolled, students have the best chance of returning for a second year if they are full-time students. This is a more important factor than the type of diploma earned in high school.

The THECB states that full-time college status is difficult given that one of four high school students is economically disadvantaged. It is especially difficult for Latino students given that one of two is low-income (compared to less than one out of 10 White students).

The **policy solutions** are the following.

- Develop an “education tracking system,” a seamless state database stratified by regions and counties to follow students from high school through college. The database would build on the current THECB accountability system.
- Establish and fund “college transition community centers” to ease the transition from high school to college and link PK-20 schools with the community and businesses. Using a “learning communities model,” these community-based student and parent outreach and recruitment centers would provide information concerning admissions, financial aid, concurrent enrollment, scholarships and employment opportunities in partnership with high schools, colleges, universities and libraries. They would also serve as “bridge” academies for first generation college students.
- Encourage and fund partnerships with business communities that guarantee internships and

employment opportunities for students in emerging employment areas.

Affordability

According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Texas earns a “D” in affordability in the state report card. Low- and middle-income students have to bear 40 percent of their family’s income for a public four-year college and 30 percent of the annual family income for a community college.

The steepest increases in public college tuition have been imposed during times of greatest economic hardship.

Over the past 10 years, tuition at Texas public two-year institutions increased 29 percent and tuition at Texas public four-year institutions increased 63 percent, while the median family income in Texas increased only 8 percent.

The **policy solutions** are the following.

- Make student funding need-based as well as merit-based.
- Increase state funding for the Texas Work Study program.
- Designate monies specifically for critical shortage areas, such as engineering, science and mathematics in order to increase the number of professionals in those areas (parallel to the National Defense Student Loan).
- Offer free tuition for the first two years of college.

Institutional Resources

The THECB reported recently that Texas has not met its target in total research and development dollars. However, the University of Texas system has the largest endowment in the state with over \$8 billion and is the top fundraiser.

The **policy solutions** are the following.

- Establish a weighted allocation for institutional needs and characteristics, including growth, unique rural and border needs.
- Provide additional institutional resources for first-year students that include targeted funding for smaller class sizes, appropriate coursework and more advisors.

Graduation

More than half of Texas college students (52 percent) take six years to graduate, according to the THECB. Texas has the greatest number of NCAA Division 1 institutions in the nation and the greatest

Continued on next page

number of its institutions in the bottom 10 percent of graduation rates.

Thirteen out of 19 public universities in Texas graduate less than half of their students; six graduate less than a third.

The **policy solutions** are the following.

- Create state college and university graduation rate goals and report annual progress.
- Create loan forgiveness programs for graduates who return to work in the local community.
- Give greater weight to graduation rates (fourth, fifth and sixth year) in the college and university accountability system.

Graduate and Professional Studies

The number of doctoral degrees decreased by 0.25 percent from 2,621 in 2000 to 2,577 in 2003.

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education reports that if all ethnic groups had the same educational attainment and earnings as Whites, total personal income in the state would be about \$31.4 billion higher, and the state would realize an estimated \$11

billion in additional tax revenues.

The **policy solutions** are the following.

- Develop targets for increasing the number and percentage of minority faculty in higher education.
- Create graduate school transition academies with guaranteed funding for students going to medical and law schools. Create articulation academies between undergraduate and graduate schools and two-year and four-year institutions of higher education (example of reverse transfer).
- Expand 10 Percent Plan to include graduate and professional studies.
- Earmark monies that are designated for graduate and professional school recruitment.
- Expand loan forgiveness programs to graduate and postgraduate work.
- Establish “Closing the Gaps” goals for graduate and professional programs.

For more information about the InterAction initiative, contact IDRA, 210-444-1710 or comment@idra.org.

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the state, we must expand institutional persistence and invest in innovative practices that increase not only enrollment, but persistence and college graduation.

Build Bridges for Action

To build bridges for action, Texas must create a pipeline that is connected, well resourced and built on persistent institutions. Our policy solutions for achieving this bridging foundation include the following three items.

First, Texas must establish and fund a statewide system that aligns public school standards with higher education standards, particularly in composition, reading comprehension, and mathematics. This would also align accelerated curricula across PK-20 (pre-kinder through graduate school), reducing the need for duplicative testing required for college entrance and helping to construct a seamless pipeline.

Second, Texas must create and

fund college transition community centers to ease the transition from high school to college and link PK-20 schools with the community and businesses. Right now, if you are thinking about going to college, you must already understand the college admissions process and know what institution you want to attend before you navigate the maze of information. Using a “learning communities” model, community-based student and parent outreach and recruitment centers would provide information concerning admissions, financial aid, concurrent enrollment, and scholarship and employment opportunities – all done in partnership with high schools, colleges and universities, and public libraries. Such centers would foster parent involvement and both symbolically and concretely engage community and business leaders in the shared responsibility of educating our young people.

Third, Texas must require a half-

credit high school transitions (“planning for college”) course to be taken by all juniors and seniors. The current offering of a one- or two-day session in a career-planning center or individual visits to a counselor’s office is insufficient to make high expectations a reality for our Latino public school students. Making “Planning for College” a requirement for all would send a clear message to students that college is not just for a privileged few but rather should be accessible to all. It would encourage students not just to “look for a job” but to “plan a career.” No one is born with an innate sense of how to transition from high school to college, and for many Latino students no family member can provide that insight. This course would provide students with a solid foundation by teaching them how to research colleges and universities; by providing in-person support on how to complete college admission, financial aid and scholarship

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applications; and by helping families to guide students' career planning.

Invest in Education for the Good of All Texas

It is not enough to persist and bridge, if we do not also invest wisely in public and higher education as a public good. Texas will need to locate additional revenue resources to do all that is still needed.

How is it that at a time that state leaders think they can find emergency funding for Texas prisons whenever they need it, they cannot locate the funding for Texas' public education?

We believe that we Texans are a fair-minded and a practical people. It is unlike Texas to create a system that imposes artificial barriers – barriers that prevent our students from maximizing their talents and gifts. Given the workforce needs of our state, it is not only unfair but impractical to prevent a student from going to college because she cannot afford the SAT fees or because he cannot access financial aid or get into the right networks.

But as long as education is under-resourced in Texas, those are the barriers that our young people face. It is unlike us Texans to have a system that keeps hard-working students who happen to come from low wealth school districts from reaching the highest level of achievement that their own hard work earns them.

We all know that investing in public education is not a free ride. It is merely about giving all students a fair shot. To give all our young people a fair shot, Texas must increase "need-based" funding, such as money for the Texas Grant and Work Study Program. Texas grants are critically needed in light of federal cuts, and work-study programs do not just make college

Did You Know?

Texas high schools lose one third of their students before graduation. They lose one half of their Latino students.

One of five high school graduates enrolls in a Texas public university the following fall.

Thirteen of 19 public universities in Texas graduate less than half of their students. Six graduate less than a third.



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

www.idra.org

more affordable, but help connect students with the university and with the community.

Texas must also establish a growth increment for unique institutional needs and characteristics. Weights would take into account, for example, such factors as growth and geographic location. While the University of Texas at Austin is trying to reduce its student enrollment to have a student-to-faculty ratio competitive with other top-tier institutions, enrollment at University of Texas at San Antonio and the University of Texas Pan American is swelling.

State demographers for years have predicted that the highest concentration of growth over the coming decades will be in urban areas and along the Texas-Mexico border. UTSA officials, for example, predict its enrollment of 25,000 students will grow to at least 43,000 by 2030. The state must allocate funds accordingly, providing for a growth increment in higher education funding for hypergrowth institutions such as these and others around the state.

The Benefits of Success

Some may ask us how this state will benefit if we get more Latino students into and through college. Higher education is fundamentally important not only for individual students and families, it is good for our businesses, our communities and the state as a whole.

By addressing disparities in higher education, we are building a stronger workforce and economy. By addressing barriers to higher education today, we are meeting our state's workforce needs for the future. By investing in access and success today, we are building a Texas that can successfully compete in the emerging global marketplace. By investing in education today, we pave paths to higher income, boost Texas' tax base and expand our state resources. By investing in access and success in higher education today, we also build leadership and civic participation.

When Justice Sandra Day O'Connor cast her deciding vote in the Michigan case (*Grutter vs. Bollinger*), her decision hinged on a recognition of

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12th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño*



Early Childhood Educators Institute™

San Antonio, Texas

April 19-21, 2005



The 12th 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 **classrooms of excellence – laying the foundation for early reading success**. Topics include: phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension, alphabetic principle, technology, and policy.

- Learn how to **create “classrooms of excellence”** at your school.
- **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.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

The first day of the institute will focus on pedagogy and curriculum. You will attend sessions on shared and guided reading, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension and writing. These concurrent sessions are presented by highly qualified early childhood educators from throughout the state, including IDRA staff. These sessions will enable you to witness best practices in action and to receive tools that you can immediately use in your classroom.

Features of Quality Early Childhood Education

The environments you create encourage children to explore, experiment, question, wonder, create, and play until they acquire the literacy, numeracy, and operational control to further their own school success, academic achievement, and age-appropriate social, emotional development. On days two and three of the institute, educators and parents, will see the features of a quality early childhood center and how to recognize them. You will receive valuable tools for setting up a center of learning.

Parent Leadership Institute, Thursday, April 21

This interactive, bilingual institute will provide a forum for parents, educators and parent liaisons to discuss the leadership that families exert in literacy development and their partnerships with schools. Parents who would like to participate for the three days will be able to attend concurrent sessions intended for either teachers or parents.

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

- ___ \$200 institute registration, April 19-21, 2005*
- ___ \$15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 21, 2005
- ___ \$75 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 21, 2005

Registration Fees – After March 24

- ___ \$225 institute registration, April 19-21, 2005*
- ___ \$15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 21, 2005
- ___ \$85 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 21, 2005

* *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.

Hotel Information

The institute will be held at the San Antonio Airport Hilton Hotel. The hotel is offering a special rate of \$107 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, 2005. Call 1-877-377-7227 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.

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

Institute Sponsors

The Intercultural Development Research Association is pleased to bring you this 12th 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 IDRA comprehensive regional assistance center that serves Texas).

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.



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have built on the teachers' own knowledge of content and teaching methodology. Following are examples of the transformations we have seen.

Transforming Classroom Environments

Through the use of the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation toolkit, IDRA was able to assess the classroom environment and begin setting up the classrooms of excellence at each of the four PCI centers. The centers were well equipped with the materials that the children needed for learning to occur. But, for example, the ELLCO assessment revealed that each of the classrooms needed many more books of different varieties and the classroom libraries had to be reorganized so that the children would be attracted to them.

A special area in the room was designated as the library with soft toys, pillows and a new assorted collection of books. The classroom libraries had lacked books that reflect the students' culture and language, so more multicultural books were added.

After a few days of setting up the classroom library, the children started to spend more time in the library center looking at books and reading to imaginary children or to dolls. Preschool children can learn to read in a way that is developmentally and culturally appropriate if they are presented with the necessary supports (Scott, 2003).

In addition, an independent writing center was much needed. In this writing center, children are encouraged to write letters to their parents and to other students. The activities that occur in the writing center are purposeful and allow the children to experiment with the writing process. Each of the areas in the classrooms has literacy materials available to the children, such as books, writing pads, pencils and markers.

Teacher Professional Development

While in the learning areas, the children are encouraged to write or draw about their activities. The teachers are receiving professional development training on how to interact with the children, how to promote meaningful conversations and how to encourage writing in the different learning areas.

The following is an example of this process. While in the housekeeping area at one school, the children usually played with the different props available. One day as the children were playing, the IDRA consultant asked the children for something to eat, modeling a strategy from the professional development the classroom teachers were getting. The children looked at the consultant in surprise and then looked at each other and laughed.

The consultant again asked for something to eat or drink. One child brought a cup of pretend coffee and offered it the consultant. The consultant pretended to drink it, commenting on how hot it was. The child explained that if you blow on it, the coffee will cool off and make it better for drinking.

The role-playing began a meaningful conversation that enabled the children to acquire language and also build vocabulary. The consultant then asked the children to take the note pad and the pencil and make a grocery list of items that they would need from the store. The consultant explained to the children that while they made the list, he would go over to the blocks area and see what the children there were constructing.

After a few minutes in the block area, another conversation was begun. The children went from playing with blocks to constructing a bridge for their toy trucks to cross. They drew pictures of their bridges before constructing them, and all the children were involved in the construction.

While this bridge-building activity

was happening, the consultant went back to check on the children who were writing a grocery list. The children were excited about their list that included bananas, milk, cereal, and other products that they would use for dinner.

All of the role-playing is meaningful to the children. They can relate to the activities because many of the children have observed their parents constructing grocery lists or paying bills. Children develop literacy skills by using symbolic representation involved in the role-playing.

The teachers participating in Project READ have made changes in their classroom environments as well as in their teaching techniques. These changes have been measured by the ELLCO and student assessment data.

The teachers stated that they had never before used the assessment data to inform their teaching. When they were presented with the data, they were able to see the diverse cognitive levels their students brought to the classroom. By seeing the data and learning how to implement a scientifically-based research curriculum, teachers are better able to serve all of their children.

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring plays a very important role for the Project READ teachers. A coach/mentor assists the teachers with setting up classrooms of excellence and the delivery of the instruction. The coach visits with the teachers on a weekly basis and provides immediate feedback that will assist the teacher.

One teacher stated that, thanks to the coaching, she was able to arrange her classroom and enhance the environment for her children. The coach is assisting the teachers on how to manage whole group and small group instruction.

Before the project, the teacher was only conducting whole group

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instruction. Now, with the help of the coach, she has learned how to manage her classroom more efficiently. The teacher stated that her children are more settled and can stay engaged in a task for longer periods of time. The teachers are now able to work with smaller groups of children and can differentiate the instruction to meet the needs of their children.

Engaging Families

Project READ is also working with the parents of the children who are enrolled in the Head Start centers. Parents are receiving training on how to read to their children at home and how to engage their children in more meaningful conversations. The families

also are encouraged to build and maintain the family's home language. Family participation is twice as predictive of academic learning as the family's socio-economic status.

Parents who feel welcome in schools are a powerful resource that can better their children's education. When schools and families work together, students succeed and communities are stronger (Montemayor, 2004).

When entering a center of excellence, one sees an interactive learning space where children are being supported to achieve reading competency with a teacher who guides and facilitates the process (Scott, 2004).

These classrooms of excellence are in progress. At the end of three

years, the teachers will be certified educators who will continue to teach students as well as other Head Start teachers in Texas. The project will continue to coach the teachers as well as monitor student success.

Resources

Montemayor, A. "Excellent Bilingual Early Childhood Programs – A Parents Guide," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, May 2004).

National Reading Panel. *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, 2000).

Reading Early – continued on Page 20

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In **January**, IDRA worked with **9,452** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **49** training and technical assistance activities and **166** program sites in **nine** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Developing Hands-On Activities for Early Childhood Education
- ◆ Sheltered English Strategies
- ◆ Training College Professors on English Language Learner Techniques
- ◆ TAKS Reading and Vocabulary Strategies
- ◆ Technology Integration and Education Policy Issues

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ Fort Bend Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◆ Fulton County School System, Georgia
- ◆ Southeastern Louisiana University

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,

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

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Rodríguez, J. "Literature in Early Childhood," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2003).
Schickedanz, J.A. *Much More than the ABC's – The Early Stages of Reading and Writing*

(Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1999).
Scott, B. "The Joy of Preschool Reading," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2004).

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the strong relationship between higher education and leadership. She pointed out, "Universities... represent the training ground for a large number of our nation's leaders." And she emphasized, "In order to cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of our citizenry, it is necessary that the path to leadership be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity."

According to the 2004 *Measuring Up* study, if all ethnic groups in the state had the same educational attainment and earnings as Whites, total personal income in Texas would be about \$31.4 billion higher, and the state would realize an estimated \$11 billion in additional tax revenues. That is \$31.4 billion of personal income pumped into economic vitality for Texas

instead of what some have called "economic anorexia."

To do all this, we must move from isolation to interaction.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "We are all caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." Truly the success of my children, the success of your children, and the future of Texas rest on educational access and success for everyone.

We at IDRA firmly believe that when it comes to expanding institutional persistence, to building bridges and to investing in higher education, the solutions do not come from a single massive program or decree, but from our interactions around the state – from Abilene to Zapata, from kindergarten to graduation, from the boardroom and classroom to the capitol,

from the family to community.

It is time, then, that we interact, but more importantly that we begin to act on what we know is needed. Act now, act strategically, act fairly. Your charge for today is not only to think about the policy solutions that we are recommending, but to consider what actions you can take individually and collectively to move these from abstract ideas to actual and comprehensive reforms.

The future of our young people, our state and our nation is after all in our many, diverse, collective and very capable hands.

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