

Fulfilling the Promise of Brown vs. Board of Education

by María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

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- ❖ **Improving education of Latino students**



Editor's Note: The following are opening remarks of one of the events commemorating the 50th anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education.

We have a powerful purpose – to reaffirm a promise. In issuing the unanimous *Brown* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.”

Almost 50 years later, the promise of *Brown* remains unmet. In fact, the promise of *Brown* may be slipping further out of reach.

According to the Harvard Civil Rights Project, public schools in the United States are resegregating. As we began the new millennium, 40 percent of Black students attended schools that were 90 percent to 100 percent Black. This is up from 32 percent in 1988. In nine out of 10 of these schools the majority of children were poor. This is not the promise of *Brown* (IDRA, 2003).

Latino children are the most segregated, and they attend the poorest schools. They receive the poorest

preparation by the least trained teachers and have little access to rigorous curriculum that would prepare them for college. This is not the promise of *Brown*.

Seventy-five percent of the 4.5 million students who speak a language other than English have a seat in the classroom but are left out of the class because of English-only policies that are concerned with politics instead of learning (Kindler, 2002). This is not the promise of *Brown*, of *Mendez*, of *Lau*, or of *Plylar*. This is not the promise we have made to children.

So, how do we make good on this promise? It seems to me that we must secure three foundations: We must keep the public in public education; we must press for accountable schools; and we must fund schools for the common good.

Public Schools Must Stay Public

Americans support public schools. Poll after poll shows overwhelming support for public schools. But there has always been a vocal minority that has fought the integration that comes with public schools.

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As public education was first conceived and began to take shape in our country, various groups raised opposition: Why did everyone need to go to school? Why did they need an education? Wouldn't ex-slaves and their children be more comfortable in their own schools? Why spend money on immigrants who didn't even speak English? Well... OK... maybe spend a little bit of money, but only enough to keep them out of the streets. But surely, those children were not going to attend school with our children. And so it went.

After the *Brown* decision, in the Jim Crow south, White institutions dragged their feet, and private White academies became commonplace. Separate but equal would, in this way, stay in place. Today, private schools funded by public sources are a reality in some states.

We seem to be moving from dual schools to dual systems, one public, one private – with our public money diverted to privatizing through vouchers, private charters, home schools, virtual

Texas does not have Robin Hood, Texas has fair funding for the common good.

schools and tax credits.

At the same time, I see an emerging pattern of large private foundation dollars going into public schools not to encourage innovation and bold action but to replace diminishing public dollars.

Many countries already have dual systems – one well-funded private system for children of the rich, the privileged and the few deserving poor, and another separate government system for the poor, the disenfranchised, and anyone who cannot get their children out of public schools. We should not follow their lead.

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

It is not OK to turn our public schools into poorly-funded government

schools; public schools belong to all of us. It is not OK to turn our public schools into private schools, accountable to private boards; public schools are accountable to all of us. It is not OK to turn our public schools into charity schools; public schools are civic institutions, a central part of our social contract.

So, as we move forward, keeping the *public* in public schools is essential. To work in the public interest, a system must be responsive and responsible to the public it serves. This brings us to the second foundation: we must press for accountable schools.

Schools Must be Accountable

There is much discussion today about whether the accountability required by the *No Child Left Behind Act* is about responsibility or about
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The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

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Dr. Henry Cisneros, American CityVista (left) and John Stevens, Texas Business and Education Coalition, participate in the summit's business roundtable.

Latino Pursuit for Excellence and Equity in U.S. Public Schools

On May 17, 1954, at 12:52 p.m. the U.S. Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision that sending children to separate public schools for no reason other than race was unconstitutional and violated the 14th Amendment. *Brown vs. Board of Education* changed education in this country.

Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas struck down the philosophical notion of separate but equal public institutions. It meant that to separate people by race in public institutions or deny them access to those institutions because of race was unconstitutional.

Eight years before the Brown decision, Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez were fighting for a place for Latino children in California classrooms. In *Mendez vs. Westminster*, the court ruled that “a paramount requisite in the American system of education is social equality,” a decision that would lay the groundwork for *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

Earl Warren was governor of California at the time. He signed legislation prohibiting segregation in the state, giving equal rights to all students. He would later become chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court in time to hear the *Brown* case.

Thurgood Marshall was the prosecuting attorney in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. He filed briefs in the *Mendez* case for the NAACP. Briefs were also filed by the American Jewish Congress, the National Lawyer’s Guild, and the Japanese American Citizens League.

These two landmark decisions serve as a basis for the challenges our nation continues to face to ensure that every child receives the best education possible no matter who, when or whatever circumstances may affect their lives.

This year begins preparation for the 50th anniversary of that ruling. The President has established the *Brown vs. Board of Education* 50th Anniversary Commission to

commemorate this event by raising public awareness. Several national programs are being held around the United States to highlight critical aspects of the impact of *Brown* on this nation.

In October, the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), co-sponsored a summit of key stakeholders in the education of Latino youth in the United States. Other sponsors were the commission and the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research.

The summit theme was “The Latino Pursuit for Excellence and Equity in U.S. Public Schools: *Mendez* (1946) and *Brown* (1954) – Today and Beyond.” The goal of the event was to create a dialog on the implications of *Brown vs. Board of Education* for Latino students in the public schools of the United States that will catalyze a national action agenda for reform.

Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director, presented opening remarks. She

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Listening in to the Latino Pursuit for Excellence and Equity in U.S. Public Schools: Mendez and Brown – Today and Beyond

"There needs to be common discourse on the proper ends of education. One not based exclusively on economics, but one based on what forms a good and just society and balances both individual and community interests."

– Dr. Tessa Martínez-Palack, university presidents roundtable

"In 1954 on *Brown*, the Supreme Court stated, 'Today education is perhaps the most important function of state and local government.' Fifty years later, that is still true, that is still important, that is still of utmost concern. Twenty years after the *Brown* decision, in *San Antonio ISD vs. Rodríguez*, we lost a fundamental issue, and that is to get the United States to understand and declare education as a fundamental right... That is our first issue, to go back and make sure that education in the United States is declared a fundamental right."

– Dr. Reynaldo Valencia, civil rights lawyers roundtable

"Business has a major role in guiding what schools provide. If we set expectations low in the community, if wages are low then there will not be inherent motivation for young people to excel. Business can set an ethic even within their own firms of skills, development and self-improvement. Business can insist on better schools. They represent a credible voice of leadership in the community and can be influential... Business should care because the future markets which are driven by the earning power of our people define business success over the long run. Finally, globalization requires competitiveness and language skills, and business recognizes the importance of diversity."

– Dr. Henry Cisneros, business leaders roundtable

"My own sense has always proceeded from the notion that we have to take our own destiny into our own hands, and that we have the access even in the face of very scarce resources to change things, if we are strategic...if we are tenacious, and if we are persistent."

– Dr. Blarinda "Bambi" Cárdenas, synthesis and summation

"We will oppose vigorously any retreat from equity. Equity is a civil rights issue. We need to create an expectation and a dialogue among the business community, civic community, education, and media – everyone – that any retreat from equity is not acceptable."

– Mr. John Stevers, business leaders roundtable



(Left to Right) Mr. Albert Kaufman, Civil Rights Project – Harvard University • Ms. María Antonieta Benicabal, community member • Dr. María "Cuer" Robledo Montecel, executive director, Intercultural Development Research Association • Mr. Marty Bera, principal, Brackernridge High School • Dr. Felipe Alanis, educational consultant and former Texas Commissioner of Education • Mr. Taylor August, director, Office for Civil Rights, Dallas • Ms. Jan Lawes Jackson • Dr. Blarinda "Bambi" Cárdenas, dean, College of Education and Human Development, University of Texas at San Antonio • Mr. Joseph Delaine Jr., *Brown vs. Board of Education* 50th Anniversary Commission • Dr. Miguel Nevárez, president, University of Texas Pan American • Ms. Mary Esther Bernal, school board member, San Antonio Independent School District • Ms. Viola García, school board member, San Antonio Independent School District
 (Above) Ms. Cheryl Brown Henderson, commissioner, The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research

Circles of Engagement

A Different Take on Parent Involvement

by Pam McCollum, Ph.D.

Imagine a middle school or high school where parents are invited to speak to teachers about their feelings and experiences as their children's first teachers. Imagine also that teachers listen to parents and are able to respond directly in a comfortable environment. Teachers have the opportunity to get a broader picture of students by learning about their interests and abilities from their parents and from the students themselves as they engage in enjoyable conversations. And teachers who do not speak the language of the family's home can communicate with ease. Sound farfetched? Read on.

This is possible when educators are willing to approach parent involvement from a different perspective – one that values parents and reverses the roles of parents and teachers in traditional parent involvement efforts. Instead of “training” parents on parenting skills, educators assume the role of conversational partners who *listen* to parents and their children as they respond to focused questions about themselves, their children, and their concerns regarding schooling.

These conversations, or circles of engagement, with parents have great potential for promoting parental support for learning and strengthening the

home-school connection.

Circles of engagement is a technique for fostering communication between educators and families. It is being used in the ExCELS (Educators x Communities = English Language learners Success) project. ExCELS is an innovative professional development program that creates learning communities comprised of schools, families and communities for English language learners' academic success.

This Intercultural Development Research Association project works with two secondary schools in San Antonio and is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Circles of Engagement Activity

Recently, teachers in ExCELS planned a parent involvement event that differed from traditional “culture nights” with English as a second language (ESL) parents. They invited parents and their children to attend, *Conversaciones con Padres*, where they participated in circles of engagement with teachers and IDRA staff.

Sixty parents and children attended a dinner followed by the circles of engagement activity. Participants divided into small groups comprised of parents, students, teachers and IDRA staff. Each group was asked to name

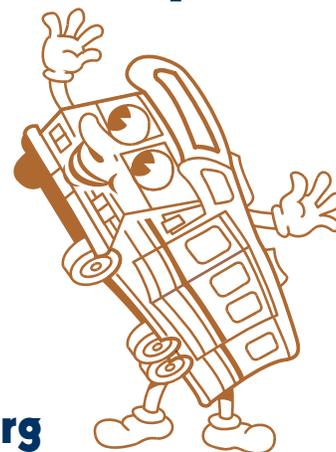
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- ✦ Find extensive useful Internet links
- ✦ Use IDRA's topical index to find what you are looking for

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a person who would provide translation services, if needed, and another who would be the recorder of the conversations.

The groups were given a series of questions for parents, students, and teachers that were developed by the ExCELS project teachers. The questions (in both Spanish and English) were crafted to bring out positive aspects of each group (valuing perspective) that would be beneficial for student academic success. The questions were asked in rounds, for example, a parent question, student question, and teacher question in each round.

Round One questions dealt with interests and preferences; Round Two dealt with needs and concerns; and Round Three explored expectations (see box on next page). The strategy was to get participants comfortable interacting with each other before asking the difficult questions.

Small group conversations were shared with the whole group through a report from the recorder who could be either a parent or student and could be delivered in either Spanish or English. Translations were supplied for the group.

The response to the circles of engagement activity was extremely positive. The participant evaluations indicate their satisfaction with this approach and their eagerness to repeat the experience. Selected responses from the evaluations demonstrate the novelty of this parent involvement activity. Parents were flattered that teachers thought they could learn something from them and were eager to enjoy the experience. Examination of parents', students' and teachers' responses to the question, "What did you like about tonight's meeting?" illustrate the main characteristics and benefits of circles of engagement.

IDRA's approach to parent involvement is based on an approach that values families and their communities and views them from an assets-based perspective.

A Valuing Approach toward Parents and Students

IDRA's approach to parent involvement is based on an approach that values families and their communities and views them from an assets-based perspective (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Montemayor and Romero, June-July 2000).

Many schools' parent involvement programs are unwittingly organized around a deficit perspective that views families as lacking in parenting knowledge and skills and, as a consequence, puts parents and families in a passive role as learners. Such programs set out to "fix" parents before engaging them as partners in their children's learning.

The premise of activities such as circles of engagement is that parents and teachers are taken out of their normal roles and given the opportunity to communicate with each other as equals. In this context, parents and students speak to teachers who listen to them in a specially structured activity.

By virtue of listening to parents' interests and concerns, teachers send the message that the school values them and their contributions. The following selected evaluation responses highlight the affirmative nature of circles of engagement.

One parent responded: "*Lo que mas me gusto de esta reunion fue la atención que nos brindaron por nosotros y nos tomaron en cuenta. Estamos agradecidos. Una gran*

comunicación entre padres y maestros. [What I liked best about this meeting was the attention that was offered to us and that they paid attention to us. We are very grateful. Great communication between parents and teachers.]"

Another stated: "*Me gustaría que hubieran mas reuniones como estas. Mas seguidas porque creo que los estudiantes lo necesitan y nosotros también.* [I would like to have more meetings like these more often because the students need it, and we do too.]"

A student responded: "*Que están dispuestos a escuchar lo que decimos. Me gustaría que hubieran mas reuniones como estas. Y que nos escucharon y nos quieren ayudar.* [That they are willing to listen to what we said. I would like more meetings like these. And that they listened to us and want to help us.]"

A second student responded: "*De que tuvimos tiempo de compartir con los padres y los maestros y aprender mucho sobre los demás.* [That we had time to share with parents and teachers and learn a lot about everyone.]"

A Context and Resources that Facilitate Direct Communication with Teachers

Parents of children in secondary schools who wish to speak to their child's teachers can be overwhelmed by the size and organization of a secondary campus. It is difficult to negotiate large unfamiliar buildings and complicated class schedules to find a time when teachers are at liberty to speak to parents. The seeming inaccessibility of teachers is magnified for parents who do not speak English or do not feel comfortable speaking it.

The circles of engagement activity provides a comfortable context with

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the express purpose of having teachers listen to parents and students. Communication is facilitated by how questions are framed and by having bilingual students and teachers translate.

Having a context that facilitated communication was a key ingredient in the success of this activity. Parent and student responses demonstrate the type of direct communication that occurred in the circles of engagement was novel and productive.

A parent responded: “*Me gusto tener la comunicación directa con los maestros, y con los compañeros del grupo en especial el interés que tienen porque los niños aprovechen lo mejor de los estudios.* [I liked having direct communication with the teachers and with colleagues in the group especially the interest they have because the children need to take advantage of their studies.]”

A student responded: “I think that our parents should talk to our teachers like they did tonight so that they know each other and talk about how the students are.”

A teacher said: “Parents were able to express themselves without hesitation. It was a very comfortable environment.”

Another said: “[I liked] the chance to get together in a relaxed environment with parents and students.”

A Structure that Equalizes Power Relationships and Promotes Open Conversation

Questions such as “As your child’s first teacher, what did you enjoy teaching them to do?” allow parents to draw on personal experience rather than school learning or experience with a culture they are in the process of learning. This take-away from the normal course shows that parents’ opinions are valued and serves to

ExCELS Circles of Engagement Questions

Three rounds of conversations take place in small groups, each comprised of parents, students and teachers.

Round One (Interests and Preferences)

Parents: As your child’s first teacher, what did you enjoy teaching them to do?”

Students: What activity do you participate in that would surprise people at school?”

Teachers: What part of teaching do you like the best?

Round Two (Needs and Concerns)

Parents: Do you have concerns about your child’s education?

Students: What do you need to make your school experience successful?

Teachers: What are your main concerns regarding teaching?

Round Three (Expectations for School)

Parents: What do you expect from your child’s teachers?

Students: Are your needs being met at school?

Teachers: What would you like your connections to parents to be?

For more information on the IDRA ExCELS project, contact IDRA at 210-444-1710, contact@idra.org, or visit the IDRA web site at www.idra.org.

equalize power relationships between parents and teachers.

In this situation, opinions and information are openly exchanged and provide a mechanism for getting to know persons as individuals. This focus also takes parents out of a passive role as listeners and gives them an opportunity to become active participants in a dialogue about their child’s learning.

A similar type of question to students, “What activity do you participate in that would surprise people at school?” puts them in a different situation, where unlike in school, there are no right or wrong answers.

In response to the previous question, a father prompted his daughter to tell about herself. After initially being reluctant to answer, she expounded at length on her love of fishing which in turn prompted a teacher in the group to volunteer (through an interpreter) that she too had a life-long passion for fishing. Eventually, everyone in the group exchanged fishing stories,

recommendations on the best baits and lakes for catching certain kinds of fish.

In this series of exchanges, more was offered than valuable information on fishing. At the human level, all parties involved demonstrated they were capable of relating to the others in the group as individuals and were interested in what they did and how they felt.

Once this level of interaction and trust was established around personal topics, participants (parents, students, and teachers) spoke more readily about children’s learning and their expectations for school. The evaluation comments below regarding what participants liked about the circle of engagement activity show a shift in attitude occurred as a result of their interactions with others in the group.

A parent responded: “*Que pudimos conocer a algunos de los maestros que tienen que ver con la educación de nuestros hijos y darme cuenta que al igual que yo tambien*

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tienen las mismas metas de educar bien y correctamente a mi hija. [“We were able to meet some of the teachers that are involved with the education of our children and realize that they have the same goals of educating my daughter well and correctly.”]

A student stated: “*Que los maestros después de todo no son tan estrictos como yo pensaba. Saber que puedo tener un amigo maestro.* [That the teachers all are not as strict as I had thought. To know that I can have a teacher as a friend.]”

A teacher responded: “Tonight opened hearts and minds.”

Another responded: “We need to make this a regular part of all we do. Coming together like this helps

everyone.”

The unimaginable ideal of family involvement described in the opening vignette was created through the use of circles of engagement in Project ExCELS *Conversaciones con Padres* event last spring. ExCELS teachers analyzed and reflected upon the evaluation data at two meetings after the event. They feel this approach of engaging families and communities has the potential to strengthen the home-school connection in their schools to improve the academic success of English language learners.

They are excited to explore avenues for repeating and sustaining the initial success of this effort in this academic year. Two more *Conversaciones con Padres* are

scheduled for this academic year. This is a work in progress.

Resources

Kretzmann, J.P., and J.L. McKnight. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Evanston, Ill.: Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993).

Montemayor, A.M., and A.A. Romero. “Valued Parent Partnership,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, June-July 2000).

Pam McCollum, Ph.D., is a senior associate in the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In September, IDRA worked with **9,058** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **55** training and technical assistance activities and **278** program sites in **14** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ The Language and Culture of Young Children
- ◆ Using Video Effectively in Presentations
- ◆ Strategic Planning for Equity
- ◆ Four Dimensions of Parent Participation
- ◆ Sheltered Instruction

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ Helena Public Schools, Arkansas
- ◆ Mesa Public Schools, Arizona
- ◆ Midland Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◆ Mississippi Department of Education

Activity Snapshot

Because of the severe shortage of qualified bilingual teachers in the state and nation, IDRA has implemented Project Texas – Teacher Excellence for All Students (T-TEXAS). Project T-TEXAS is a five-year project to increase the number of bilingual and English as a second language teachers in Texas districts with high numbers of limited-English-proficient students. Project T-TEXAS is a statewide partnership comprised of IDRA and six school districts. The project is collaborating with three institutions of higher education to provide high-quality coursework for bilingual education and teacher certification.

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.

Community and Public Engagement in Education

Opportunity and Challenge

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

Because education is a complex and diverse process, quality education for all children requires multi-sectorial strategies that are integral to overall development and success. Many partners must join in with education institutions, teachers, and faculty in developing practices and policies that make access to quality education the responsibility of the entire society.

This implies the active involvement of a wide range of partners – families, teachers, communities, private enterprises, and government and non-governmental organizations in planning, managing and evaluating the success.

Good schools cannot be regarded as a branch of bureaucracy. Instead, they are subsystems, highly interactive with all other parts of the social whole. The point is to give students, parents and teachers responsibility over their learning and provide a framework for shared accountability for success. This assumption of responsibility must embrace two indispensable areas: (1) participation in the decision-making process; and (2) regular and structured involvement, with evaluation and feedback.

For this to occur, we must unleash

“Engagement is a reciprocal relationship in which institutions and communities form lasting relationships that influence, shape, and promote success in both spheres.”

– W.K. Kellogg Foundation,
2002

the energies of people to make education a concern of the whole community. We must create conditions and institutional environments for people to articulate their goals for education and to make their contribution to educational development.

Family and community participation is a *sine qua non* in education. It must engage people widely and actively as both beneficiaries and contributors. Education development must be seen as the business of families and communities. Engaging communities in education needs to be recognized as a basic principle of action within an overall development strategy.

As principles that guide this action, specific values must be recognized, such as:

- Accepting democratic practices and values as central to education;
- Giving family and community a prominent role to participate in

events and processes that shape education for their children;

- Valuing and liberating the energy, creativity and spirit of family and community in the learning process; and
- Providing equitable access to opportunities for an excellent education for all children.

What does participation and engagement mean? To *participate* means being part of something. There are several ways to be a part of this: (1) use a particular service; (2) contribute resources, materials and labor; (3) attend; (4) be consulted on a particular issue; (5) get involved in the delivery of the service; (6) take part in the implementation of delegated powers; and (7) take part in decision-making.

It has been argued that the participation issue in education is not so much a problem of degree or *quantity* but rather of the *quality* of such participation (Coraggio, 1991). Therefore, participation of community in education is “not only an agreement to follow, but an action decision to assume responsibility in considering the rationale, implications and potential outcomes of any particular process” (Shaeffer, 1992).

Community and family engagement in education, if understood as an empowering and formative experience, enables people to gain knowledge,

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awareness and democratic experience, as well as self-confidence, self-reliance, pride and autonomy. They can take action in the resolution of problems. It also enables them to share in the responsibility and accountability over the outcome of a process – in this case, an excellent and equitable education for *all* children.

In the context of education, engagement and participation is an expression of the overall development strategy of recognizing the critical role of people's collective action in a democratic society, which includes political, social and economic arenas.

Engagement must have a sense of urgency about achieving a common goal – student access and success along the continuum of education from pre-kindergarten through college graduation. Through the expression of collective commitment to that goal, schools, universities and communities can formulate strategies to achieve results and engage families, students, business leaders, community-based organizations, policymakers and others in coordinated and effective actions.

This type of engagement implies a shared accountability for positive results. Shared accountability requires new paradigms that include learners and communities in the process of change, not as passive beneficiaries, but as active agents of change within educational systems. Students cannot be seen as passive listeners, faculty cannot be seen as passive executors of predetermined curricula, and parents cannot be seen as passive receivers of complaints and results.

Shared accountability means that schools and universities must become catalysts for engagement and create spaces and opportunities for public debate and consensus-building around educational priorities, targets, strategies and performance. It means teachers are given support and responsibility. It also means that parents and students

are given opportunities to contribute to the process of education and that learners are seen as legitimate educational partners.

How Communities Can Engage Meaningfully in Education

Participation and engagement are access. It is the role of institutions of education to make this access available to communities for their meaningful and active participation. This requires schools and universities to view the assets that communities can bring to the educational process.

The community's involvement in education implies both enhancing the resources for education and taking part in defining and guiding educational programs at the community level. Following are some ways for this to occur.

- Parents and family members can work with teachers to help guide children.
- Community organizations can encourage all potential learners to participate in learning activities.
- Communities can help learning activities work in a mutually supportive way, responding to the total learning needs of the community.
- Schools and universities can recognize and value the funds of knowledge that can be found within the family and community.

Students constitute a vital human resource that is often overlooked as important partners in the educational change process. Young people are not only open to new ideas and change, but also are enthusiastic innovators when provided the right conditions and support. Youth can also help revitalize and renovate education and revitalize themselves as emerging leaders in the process (Torres, 1985).

Given the opportunity, young learners themselves can teach their families and neighbors what they learn

in school and help change parental and community perceptions and attitudes toward education. "Child-to-child" projects in many countries are living examples of children's active involvement in promoting health, education and children's rights (Hawes and Scotchmer, 1993).

Interestingly, in several other countries, the involvement of community in education is not only valued but also a formalized process in learning. For example, parent and community involvement in the development of curriculum has been incorporated into the educational laws of Indonesia, and schools for orienting and preparing parents for their role in school affairs and in guiding their children's education is a standard feature in Chinese primary education (Hawes and Scotchmer, 1993).

Factors for Success

A substantial body of experience has emerged on community participation in education in emerging countries that can be considered useful for the U.S. context. To make this work, factors for success are being identified, including the following.

A clearly articulated goal and vision – Providing learners with the support they need to stay in school and graduate college-ready needs to be the shared vision of community, schools and parents locally as well as nationally.

High profile and frequent monitoring – Monitoring for success that is based on indicators of school as well as student performance should include indicators that are clearly defined and reported regularly and publicly in order to review progress and decide on necessary course corrections.

Visibility on the national agenda – When the expectation is that the whole of society participate in and mobilize around education, benefits of such involvement are clearly understood

as a shared societal concern. These benefits include better health, labor productivity, greater democratic participation, enhanced competitiveness in the global market, protection of the environment, etc.

Building local consensus – Participation and mobilization on a lasting basis can be promoted and sustained only when there is a foundation on the major goals and priorities for education, as well as strategies for achieving them. Consensus building is an ongoing process that needs to be nurtured and requires access to information and *shared* accountability.

Identifying and sharing success stories – Nothing is better than building on success. Successful models need to be studied further and adapted for wider application among communities.

Shared responsibility and accountability – A system of planning, managing, monitoring and supporting the success of every student needs to be the shared responsibility of school, home, community and society, including teachers, parents, students, policymakers, and education specialists.

Building on existing good practice – It is important to identify the strengths and weaknesses of educational institutions and practices, build on the strengths and finding ways to address the weaknesses of these institutions to create climates where excellence and learning are accessible for *all* students.

Effective use of communication – Mass media cannot substitute for effective leadership, however interactive communication helps foster the vision and action of educational institutions across all sectors so that these are widely shared and people's voices are expressed. This leads to a collective sense of educational mission and direction. Progress reports, as well

Did You Know?

Hispanic Americans are now the largest minority group in the nation. The nation's Hispanic American population totals more than 37 million and increased 4.7 percent from April 2000 to July 2001.

– *President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, March 2003*

One of every three Hispanic American students fails to complete high school.

– *President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, March 2003*

The high school completion rate for Hispanic citizens born in the United States is 81 percent, compared to 40 percent for foreign-born non-citizen Hispanics in the same age group.

– *President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, March 2003*

There are 4.5 million students with limited English proficiency, and only about one-fourth are being served in classrooms that incorporate their home language.

– *National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2002*

More than 10 percent of all Latino high school graduates – some 1.2 million students – are enrolled in college. That is a higher enrollment rate than for White students and is second only to Asian students. But, Latino high school graduates lag every other population group in attaining college degrees.

– *Pew Hispanic Center, 2002*



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

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as information on obstacles and unexpected situations should be available for public information and feedback.

Public Engagement vs. Parent Involvement

In an article by Heather Voke, "Engaging the Public in Its Schools," public engagement in education is described as "willingness on the part of

citizens to invest not only the financial resources but also the time and energy necessary to support a system of quality public schools that are accessible to all children" (Kleinz, 2000).

Thus, the distinction is made between public engagement and parent involvement. The former is motivated by a commitment to secure a quality education for *all* children, rather than

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for one's own child solely.

Public engagement lies fundamentally upon the notion of shared accountability and the relationship between the public and its schools. It implies a recognition of the role of public schools in preparing children for the political and social roles they will have as adults who are meaningfully involved in a civil society. When children are not prepared for these roles, society feels the consequences (Center on National Education Policy, 1996).

Schools need to recognize that public engagement increases their capacity to provide excellent education for *all* students. According to David Mathews, author of *Is There a Public for the Public Schools?*, broad public engagement encourages teachers and students to work harder by sending the message that people recognize the importance of what they do (1996).

Community engagement also supports innovation and efforts to improve schools. There is a long record of research showing that “when families and communities are involved in education, students learn more and schools improve” (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Education reformers have also recognized that many of problems that schools face extend outside the school and cannot be successfully solved by schools alone (Mathews and Nielson, 1999).

Many people recognize the importance of community engagement and want to be more involved in what is happening in their schools. More than half would like to see more opportunities for community involvement in schools (Rose and Gallup, 1998).

Organizations such as the Annenberg Institute, the Center for Education Policy, and the Kettering Foundation believe that it is essential to give citizens “a voice in defining the values and goals for the schools in their

districts” (Kleinz, 2000).

Arnett and others believe that schools must reach out to the diverse communities of citizens to engage them in deliberating dialogue about the issues facing their schools and to make collective decisions about which course of action to pursue (Kleinz, 2000; Jennings, 1997; Mathews, 1996).

Some foundations, such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, have outlined dimensions of effective engagement or partnerships between schools, higher education and communities (2002). These characteristics of effective engagement include the following:

- Partners see their present and future well-being inextricably linked.
- Partners collaboratively plan and design mutually beneficial programs and outcomes.
- Partners engage in reciprocal learning.
- Partners respect the language, history, culture, knowledge and wisdom of the other.
- Partners create structures that promote open communication and equity with one another.
- Partners have high expectations for their performance and involvement with one another.
- Partners value and promote diversity.
- Partners regularly conduct a joint assessment of their partnership and report results.

In 1998, the Annenberg Institute identified four traits of effective initiatives on engagement, they are:

- They were inclusive and dialogue-driven.
- They sought meaningful and long-term improvements in schools.
- They attempted to establish common ground and broad consensus around complex and controversial issues.
- They featured an atmosphere of candor and trust.

Some Lessons Learned

Some lessons emerging from those who have used public dialogue as

a means of developing greater public engagement offer the following advice to those who are interested in replicating these efforts in their own communities.

- Be wary of using public engagement to sell reforms to the public – those who are guiding the process need to remain neutral and open to the input and outcomes generated (Kleinz, 2000).
- Realize that it takes time to build trust (Kleinz, 2000).
- Make deliberate and sustained efforts to ensure that representatives of *all* constituencies in the community have opportunities to engage. Schools must take steps to ensure that linguistically, culturally and racially diverse populations are included.
- Be sure that teachers and students are involved in engagement efforts. Both play a vital role. Students have a unique perspective on life in a community's school, yet they are often excluded (Annenberg, 1998).

It is impossible to achieve the dream of quality education for all children unless we engage in a shared vision with shared action and shared accountability for access and success for each child. Educators and communities need to work more closely together to ensure that all of our youth are provided with an excellent education that prepares them for the world of work and active civic participation. Our schools deserve and need to foster greater community engagement, not only for the sake of the communities they serve, but for their own.

Resources

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Public Engagement – continued from Page 12

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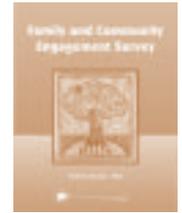
Community Engagement Toolkit

Improving Educational Impact Through Family Engagement – A Review and Planning Guide



This tool helps to foster meaningful and lasting educational impact through mechanisms for engagement with parents and families. It provides helpful ideas to address the most significant barriers to parent involvement that have been reported in the literature in K-12 programs. The guide gives ideas for each barrier to achieve a greater vision of engagement and offers planning guides to see how your school is addressing each barrier and what can be done for the future. It can be used with school personnel in conjunction with parents. (No ISBN; 15 Pages, 2002) \$6 or free online at www.idra.org. Also available in Spanish.

Family and Community Engagement Survey



This survey can be used by teachers, administrators and parents to assess a school’s effectiveness in partnering with families and communities. It is a useful tool for planning strategies that are clustered around four domains: (a) student achievement; (b) access and equity; (c) organizational support; and (d) quality of interaction. The questions and ideas used in the guide are gleaned from the literature on effective partnering with communities and families. (No ISBN; 12 Pages, 2002) \$5 or free online at www.idra.org. Also available in Spanish.

To order these or other books in this toolkit call 210-444-1710 or visit www.idra.org

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Latino Pursuit – continued from Page 3

discussed three critical foundations to make good on the promise of *Brown, Mendez, Lau* and *Plylar*: keep the public in public education, press for accountable schools, and fund schools for the common good. See the text of her presentation on Page 1.

Roundtables were used to engage education stakeholders in discussions about key issues and challenges in realizing the spirit of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. Education stakeholders were divided into eight roundtables depending on their role in the community: school

board members, superintendents, educators, community representatives, university presidents, civil rights lawyers, business leaders, and members of the media. A summary of their discussions is in the box on Page 15.

More than 200 people participated representing these sectors and perspectives. This is essential since a school is, at heart, a community institution. To build on the promise of *Mendez* and *Brown*, we must be sure that a community is at the table. For those who are not yet at the table, it is IDRA’s intention to extend the dialogue outward.

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blame. Many have suggested that the pressure put on schools is causing more problems than it is solving.

There are two important things to remember: The first is that in an environment of blame, nothing gets done. The second is that accountability pressures have not caused high dropout rates or low achievement.

In fact, before accountability ruled the day, Latino and African American children were systematically pushed out of schools and consistently undereducated to an even greater extent than today.

The bottom line is: schools are responsible for the education of children – for all children, be they Black, Brown, White, poor, rich, female, male, disabled, non-disabled, English-speaking or not.

Many schools throughout the country, some represented in this room, have demonstrated that a “no excuses,” “all children can learn” approach produces results. Tests can play an important role in this kind of school accountability system – one that accepts the responsibility that schools have toward children and communities.

But school accountability should not and need not mean that high-stakes decisions in children’s lives are made on the basis of tests nor that tests dictate what children learn.

Current federal policy requires that 95 percent of children be tested. This was intended to assure that groups of children are not systematically excluded from the tests in order to make schools look good. This is not a bad thing.

In Texas, as a matter of fact, the disaggregation of data by racial and ethnic group did much to emphasize that schools *are* responsible for educating Black and Latino children. However, these provisions also encourage using tests to punish children who are not being taught.

When water quality experts test

a river, they do it with just a sampling of drops. States could continue to measure their schools’ ability to educate different groups of children and could do it more efficiently and inexpensively by testing a stratified sample of students.

This is not allowable under current federal policy, but it is the right direction, and one we should pursue.

Accountability, then, is a foundation of quality schools that work for all children. Accountability encourages and ensures public support.

Schools Must be Funded Equitably

A third and last foundation that we must secure to make good on our promise to children is to fund schools for the common good. In this time of budget deficits, budget shortfalls and fiscal austerity, the way we fund schools is once again cast into the limelight.

IDRA was formed 30 years ago in order to address this critical issue. Working closely with Al Kaufmann, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, a small group of school districts, and others who believed as we did, we successfully changed school funding in Texas.

Before 1995, some of the wealthiest school systems in Texas spent \$10,000 per student and had low school tax rates. Poorer systems could only spend \$3,000 per pupil and had much higher taxes. This meant that the neighborhood in which you happened to live dictated the quality of your child’s schooling (IDRA, 2002).

In Texas, we have progressed from having one of the most unequal funding systems in the nation to a funding system that is considered one of the most equitable.

Still, there are those who want to turn the clock back on equity and return to the “good old days” – the days of “haves” and “have nots.”

People sometimes mistakenly call Texas’ recapture program, “Robin



Dr. Robledo Montecel, executive director of IDRA, presents opening remarks at the October summit.

Hood.” Unfortunately, the “Robin Hood” label has stuck, encouraging stereotypes of needy Mexicans and Blacks benefiting from what rightfully belongs to others.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The truth is that recapture helps 95 percent of school districts in the state. If recapture had been eliminated during the last legislative session, 867 school districts would have immediately lost more than \$940 million in funding or about a \$230 loss per student.

By contrast, the 116 wealthiest districts in the state would have received \$1,969 per student. Texas does not have Robin Hood, Texas has fair funding for the common good.

Today, the Highland Park school district has a property wealth per weighted student of \$1,042,419 compared to only \$11,735 for the Boles school district in East Texas.

If the Texas Legislature, in the special session planned for this spring, eliminates the recapture provisions of the Texas school finance system, a wealthy minority of districts will profit, while the majority of school districts, 888 to be exact, and the majority of children, more than 90 percent of Texas students, will suffer.

In many states today there is a move afoot to address questions of *adequacy* rather than *equity* of funding. I am afraid that it will again be

Fulfilling the Promise – continued on Page 16

The Latino Pursuit for Excellence and Equity in U.S. Public Schools: Mendez (1946) and Brown (1954) – Today and Beyond

Conference Roundtable Discussions Summary

The following is a synthesis of the notes presented to the whole group by each roundtable and the themes that emerged from the roundtable discussions.

Advocacy and Coalition Building

- Organize to join forces with other advocacy groups.
- Create a coalition of all professional education associations.
- Expand on the efforts of school board associations like the Mexican American School Boards Association.
- Build a meaningful grassroots engagement campaign scaffolded on relevant campaigns being developed across the nation among community members, educators, businesses, and parents.
- Position the voice of business leadership to speak up for education quality, equity, and growth. Business summits should be held regarding school finance and importance of equity. Alliances should be built across school districts.
- Engage business, government and community organizations in education for a global society.
- Partner with non-profit organizations and business communities.
- Empower internal and external communities to partner with schools to provide a quality education for all students.
- Create a possible business advisory structure where businesses can register specific concerns and meet with superintendents and school boards. There should be systematic periodic surveys and measures to decipher the needs of the business community.

Fair Funding

- Provide fair, equitable and excellent facilities for all districts.
- Provide funding for language acquisition programs that meet the demands of our global society and promote the benefits of diversity.
- Provide access to quality education beginning with early childhood education funding.
- Monitor and take action on those initiatives that value education.

K-16 Alignment

- Ensure greater alignment with K-12 institutions and higher education institutions that impacts teacher and administrative education.
- Systematize teaching and learning, pre-kindergarten to grade 16 in best practices, i.e., constructivist model\ dual language.

Teacher Training

- Work on alternative certification for lay people. Connect the classroom to the real world. Teacher credentialing should present persons with talents – mathematicians, engineers, and retired military.
- Continue at all levels to believe in the importance of teachers and to champion investment in teacher education and in teachers as professionals.
- Provide equitable professional development.

School Accountability

- Ensure accountability is based on multiple indicators that can include assessment.
- Maintain focus on accountability and its original purpose and ensure that no segment of the school population is penalized unfairly.
- Explain that accountability is necessary and that its application must be useful and appropriate rather than punitive and mechanistic.
- Institutionalize accountability that is culturally sensitive.

Information Dissemination

- Have education stakeholders create awareness in the community.
- Reach out to the community and equip the community to speak and shape media coverage.
- Touch more people with information.
- Work with the media to the benefit of the community.
- Share ideas, programs and successes beyond school districts.

This event was sponsored by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) along with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* 50th Anniversary Commission, and the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research on October 9-10, 2003.

Latinos and minorities who will be educated at minimally adequate levels, while the rich and privileged can again tax themselves at lower rates and generate and keep substantial revenues.

Recently, an appellate court in New York ruled (and was later reversed) that the state constitution only obligates the government to offer a modest level of education to its children (Gehring, 2002; Karlin, 2002).

Therefore, this thinking goes, it is OK for minority children in New York City to receive a minimal education with minimally adequate funding, while non-minority children in Upstate New York receive more funding and a more than adequate education.

Justice Lerner wrote: “The skills required to enable a person to obtain employment, vote and serve on a jury are imparted between grades eight and nine.”

He went on to write that “society needs workers in all levels of jobs, the majority of which may be very low-level.” High school graduation, he concluded, was therefore unnecessary for everyone.

So adequacy is a dead end, it is not a path to equity. We need fair funding for the common good.

Keeping the Promise of Brown

How can we together create a future in which the color of a child’s skin, the language a child speaks and the side of town that a child comes from are no longer barriers to a great education and a good life?

I believe that we can make good on the promise to children by building on these foundations: keeping the public in public education, pressing for accountable schools, and funding schools for the common good.

Why is this so important? Two years ago, on September 11 we were jolted for a brief moment into a profound and unmistakable sense of “we.” People reached for each other across color lines, language barriers, and class boundaries.

Public schools as civic institutions that work for everyone may yet make permanent that which felt so right.

Resources

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Adapted from the speech presented at the conference, “The Latino Pursuit for Excellence and Equity in U.S. Public Schools: Mendez (1946) and Brown (1954) – Today and Beyond,” held in San Antonio in October. Focusing on education of Latino students, the event was sponsored by Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), the Brown vs. Board of Education 50th Anniversary Commission, and the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research. See Page 3 for more information.

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