A Quality Schools Action Framework
Framing Systems Change for Student Success

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

The pipeline, or path, from pre-kindergarten to high school graduation and success in higher education, is marked by cracks and disjunctures. IDRA's InterAction forums in late 2004 and early 2005 reaffirmed that, in many cases, students experience no connection between early education and secondary school, much less between high school graduation and higher education (see article Page 3).

Without strong connections in the education pipeline, too few Texas students transition from secondary schools to four-year universities; fewer still are prepared to go on to earn bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees. As an indispensable conduit to college, graduation with a diploma, backed by an excellent education, must be a focal point for systems change. It also must be central to any efforts for reform, as the problem of student attrition is not only longstanding, but growing.

IDRA released its 19th statewide attrition study for Texas this past October, using the same methodology developed for its inaugural baseline study in 1986. The study reveals a grim picture. The latest attrition rate of 36 percent is higher than the original rate of 33 percent that alarmed so many community and education leaders almost two decades ago. IDRA's latest attrition study shows that Texas high schools lose one out of every three students before they graduate. Since 1986, schools in Texas have lost a total of more than 2.2 million students. In sum, one student in Texas is lost to attrition every four minutes (see October 2005 issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*).

Attrition rates among Hispanic students were higher in 1986 than they were for any other group and have increased over the last 19 years, from 45 percent to 49 percent – one student out of two. During this same period, the attrition rates for Black students have increased even more, from 34 percent to 44 percent.

This is not to suggest that for White students attrition should go unnoticed. While attrition rates of White students have declined from 27 percent to 22 percent, this rate still represents roughly one White student

in five who does not graduate.

At these rates, Texas and other states are not only leaving children behind, but, as the Harvard Civil Rights Project has said in a recent report on dropouts, we are "losing our future" (Orfield, et al., 2004).

For those students who do graduate, only one out of five enrolls in a Texas public university the following fall. Thirteen out of 19 public universities in Texas graduate less than half of their students; six graduate less than a third. This picture is not very different across the country.

If Texas continues on this course, education cannot fulfill its promise as a path to opportunity for all; instead it represents a vanishing future (See figure on Page 4).

A Framework for Action

Clearly, to achieve different results, we must envision a dramatically different process and undertake a new strategy. IDRA has begun to outline one such process, a Quality Schools Action Framework (see figure on

Page 9), described in this article. We are examining its usefulness through IDRA's ongoing collaboration with communities and schools to assure that all children have access to quality neighborhood public schools.

The Quality Schools Action Framework is based on experience and empirical evidence that emerges from existing theories of change. These models suggest that because schools operate as complex, dynamic systems, lasting systems change depends on sustained action within and outside of those systems. Research on best practices of high performing schools, for example, has examined the links among a constellation of indicators (e.g., teaching quality and effective

school governance; parent engagement and student success). Less examined, however, are the contextual and moderating factors that may impede or accelerate school system change. The Quality Schools Action Framework aims to bridge this gap.

The framework offers a model for assessing school conditions and outcomes, identifying leverage points for improvement, and informing action. In essence, the framework poses five key questions: (1) What do we need? (2) How do we make change happen? (3) Which fundamentals must be secured? (4) Where do we focus systems change? and (5) What outcomes will result?

The framework draws on both

> **"We must do whatever it takes to ensure equity and excellence in our schools. Our children, our public school system, our democracy, cannot survive without both. Excellence without equity is impossible. And equity without excellence is unacceptable. Schools cannot continue to work for some and not for others."**
> **– Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director, 1997**

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"InterAction" Needed from All Sectors to Support College Access and Success

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

Editor's Note: IDRA recently convened a series of policy action forums to create reform solutions that address disparities in higher education access and success of Latino students. The InterAction forums, supported by the Houston Endowment, brought together K-12 educators, college and university leaders, and community and business advocates from urban, rural and border communities in Texas. Thirty-one policy solutions generated from InterAction were presented at a statewide seminar in February 2005 and are available online at www.idra. org. Below is a portion of the keynote presented by IDRA executive director, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel at the opening forum.

InterAction is an initiative that we intend to be a vehicle for increasing Latino college access and success in the state of Texas. Let us look a little bit at this word "InterAction." *Inter*- implies, of course, interconnectedness, interdependence and interrelatedness of purposes, of people and of systems. Each of you brings to this forum a set of particulars that come from what you do, be it at a university or a community college, in schools or in the community or a

> **"We must create persistent, accountable institutions...with the resources, holding power and staying power to guide our young people from student to citizen, learner to leader."**
> – Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Executive Director, Intercultural Development Research Association

business entity, and those particulars that you bring are very important. The perspective and the insights from those three sectors – higher education, elementary and secondary education, and community – are very essential to this gathering.

At the same time, there is an opportunity to look at the challenge of Latino college access and success from a broad and big platform. One that creates not only common ground but common cause. One that examines not only state level policies, but also institutional and system policies. 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*. It is not enough to deplore the facts. Most of us are painfully aware of the loud drumbeat of statistics that paint a dismal picture of education opportunity for Latinos in Texas. Many of us in fact, myself included, are convinced that hard hitting, valid, credible statistics are necessary in order to create the public will, the accountability mechanisms and the fair funding that is going to produce lasting results. There are indeed a lot of facts to explore.

Facts are Telling

Here is a little bit of what we do know from the facts: IDRA's research shows that the Texas high schools lose one-third of their students before graduation. Of the total who graduate with a high school diploma, one of two is White, one of three is Hispanic and one of six is Black. And of those students, only one of five enrolls in a Texas public university the following fall.

Close to one of four enrolls in a two-year college, but more than half of high school graduates will not enroll at all. We know that students have the best chance of returning for a second year if they continue as full-time students. This seems to be a more important factor than the type of diploma they earn in high school. But full-time college status is difficult given that one of four high school students

is economically disadvantaged and that there is a dearth of needs-based financial aid.

It is especially difficult for Latinos given that one of two Latino students in the state of Texas is poor, compared to one in 10 White students. We also know that Texas colleges and universities are being priced out of the market for most Texas families. Texas earned a "D" in affordability in a recent study state report card. The study called "Measuring Up," and I know many of you are familiar with it, indicates that the cost of a public four-year education for low- and middle-income students is equivalent to 40 percent of the family's income, 40 percent (NCPPHE, 2004). For a community college education, it is at 30 percent of the annual family income.

Regrettably, the steepest increases in public college tuition have been imposed during times of the greatest economic hardship for the state and for the country. Over the past 10 years, tuition in Texas public two-year institutions increased 29 percent, and tuition in Texas public four-year institutions increased 63 percent. During this same period, the median Texas family income increased only 8 percent.

But tuition isn't the only

Higher education, elementary and secondary education, community, Latino, African American, White, the government sector, the for-profit sector, nonprofit sector, rich to middle class and poor, we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And so the name "InterAction."

problem. Below is a graphic of the vanishing future for Texas education. In Texas, the feigned 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.

So, there are many facts to deplore; but clearly we must act. We must act now; and we must act with what is so, today. But take action around what? Well, obviously around a vision.

Survival Requires Interconnectedness

"Every Texan educated to the level necessary to achieve his or her dreams. No one is left behind. Each can pursue higher education. Colleges and universities focus on the recruitment and the success of students and in all levels of education. The business community and the public are constant partners in recruiting and preparing students and faculty who will meet the state workforce and research needs" (THECB, 2000).

You may have recognized this statement as the vision statement of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in the "Closing the Gaps" effort. Dr. Ed Apodaca said that this statement is not a vision statement; that it is, in fact, for the state of Texas, a *survival* statement.

Many would agree that in order to survive, the state of Texas must increase the current 5 percent participation rate in higher education and that the current 3.7 participation rate for Hispanic students in higher education affects not only themselves but everyone.

So, what do we do? How do we interact? IDRA has developed a particular framework that may begin to create common cause and to frame common cause. Those areas are:
• preparing students,

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

Entering Kindergarten

Graduating High School

Earning Bachelor's Degree in Six Years

Earning Doctoral Degree

All Students

Non-Latino Students

Latino Students

Entering Four-Year College

Source: *InterAction – The Initiative: A Call to Action* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2005).

Leadership for Transforming Schools
Sowing the Seeds of Change

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., and Anna Alicia Romero

The opportunities and challenges of working in the Texas border region for school reform can yield rich lessons for those seeking to encourage greater collaboration between schools and communities. This article shares some of the learnings from an IDRA project funded by the Edward W. Hazen Foundation that targeted the El Paso, Texas, region.

The goals of the project were to:

- Strengthen organizing capabilities of community-based organizations, families, parents and educators.
- Build and strengthen local grassroots leadership among community-based organizations and families to advocate for education reform.
- Support the creation of a local network of community-based organizations, families and educators.
- Engage families, educators and institutions in the change process and expand the local network to include statewide connections of grassroots advocacy organizations.

In accomplishing its goals, IDRA developed a bilingual toolkit of hands-on materials and techniques that were used by grassroots groups, families and individuals to organize for leadership and action for educational equity. Core teams of emerging leaders planned and implemented local conferences that included parents, community members and educators.

Each leadership team, in turn, created a network for advocacy and decision making based on unique needs of the local context and developed a plan of action with measurable results. Through debriefing and self-evaluation, teams conducted internal evaluations and made mid-course adjustments throughout the project.

Ultimately, the leadership teams formed a larger citywide body of advocates who meet at least once a month for broader decision making, action and support. The local network of organizations has presented at other networking events with advocates from other organizations. The materials and process emerging from the project are being disseminated around the state with similar goals.

Mobilizing Local Community Leaders

The project met its objective of creating and mobilizing a group of grassroots parents and leaders, and creating effective bilingual tools for other communities. The ideas and techniques within the toolkit help
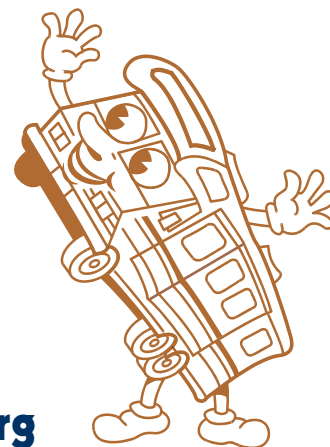
parent leaders become informed and create linkages for student success, organizing for leadership, and taking action on key educational topics. The toolkit also responds to *No Child Left Behind* by providing information about issues of educational equity and parent engagement.

Furthermore, adult leaders were prepared and made presentations locally, at the state level at the Texas Education Agency parent conference and elsewhere. Student leaders were trained. This group of emerging student leaders is now being mentored and supported by the more established leaders in this project.

Highlights of the accomplishments achieved through this project include the following.

Identified community leaders who assumed advocacy roles. Parents presented on the issue of fair funding and advocacy for excellent public schools in collaboration with schools, community-based organizations and other parents at the annual Texas Education Agency parent involvement conference held in El Paso. Their coordinated activities accentuated what so many families do not realize, that all parents have a voice locally and in state policy and can be effective advocates for equitable school funding.

Generated public will toward advocacy for education. Public school reform and community action were identified as essential to a well-functioning community by the community-based organizations involved in the project. Even as the project was nearing its end, the groups asserted their commitment to make education an issue that their respective organizations would continue to address.

Seeded greater collaborations and networks. Other community-based organizations became interested in working across the El Paso community in collaboration for educational

excellence. Many other school districts requested information to develop parent leaders as advocates for excellent educational programs.

Expanded youth leadership development. A highly successful excursion with youth and community members on youth leadership for educational excellence gave the participating community-based organizations an opportunity to focus on creating goals in education working intergenerationally with local leaders. IDRA worked closely with two community-based organizations to address their local commitment to create a network of youth and families around education reform. The groups targeted students in high school. To kick off the summer activities, a weekend youth camp-out was held as an opening event to five weeks of follow-up youth and family activities.

While youth were the focus of the excursion, interactions with adults helped to create an environment of personal reflection, cross-generational communication and cooperation. One outcome of the weekend activity was a mutual commitment by parents and community members to work and mentor youth in their community. Meanwhile, the students stand eager to join with their peers and adults to create a reality for themselves in which they are valued and championed.

Identified multi-sector engagement emerging around key educational issues. Community stakeholders identified the issues of school holding power, access to higher education and fair funding of public education as important topics to pursue with stakeholders in their community. The local organizations engaged parents, students and other community members representing business and education sectors. During the final project year, IDRA support for some of the activities came through IDRA's Parent Information and Resource Center, funded by the U.S. Department

of Education.

Seeds of Change Sown Through the El Paso Project

This project built a strong legacy in the El Paso community.

- Capacity was built for local citizens to collect data regarding their community's assets and needs.
- A process was initiated for cross-generational dialogue and action around key education issues.
- Key information and training was provided around equitable funding for public schools to the public at large, leaving access to current information about funding available to citizens through the Texans for Fair Funding web site.
- Local citizens created a forum for dialogue and action involving local and state elected officials and the media to address funding equity in El Paso public schools.
- Parents and community members were empowered and connected to meet with key statewide networks and to take effective action.
- Local skills and resources of families were valued and leveraged on behalf of their children's education through the IDRA valued parent leadership model.
- A vision of engagement and action was begun in education reform as part of the local agenda for community-based organizations serving a variety of needs.
- Educational access and excellence were seen as an attainable goal that is essential to democracy and the overall health of the community.

Guidelines Creating Positive Impact at the Local Level

Based on the lessons learned and challenges faced by this project, following are key guidelines for creating positive impact at the local

level in working with families and communities.

Greater collaboration at key junctures in the educational pipeline is needed from preschool through college. Parents have the innate desire for a better and brighter future for their children, but higher education is not always seen as accessible or within reach. Far too often, families do not have access to the information needed to consider the path to college as a realistic possibility for their children. It is imperative that schools, communities and colleges work together to overcome the challenges in connecting K-12 with higher education for a more seamless pipeline approach to educational reform.

Networking requires building trust and a common, shared vision among partners over time. When working with community groups, there may be reluctance to collaborate due to histories, competitive or "scarcity vs. abundance" thinking or sense of "territoriality." When funds in the community are scarce, there is an impulse to think of individual sustainability over the long term, shared goals and shared accountability for the future.

Effective use of technology and training can accelerate the reform effort at the grassroots level. The gap in technology know-how as well as in access can create barriers for growth and slow down effective communication among grassroots groups.

Reform efforts must include development of existing and emerging leadership. Lack of broader, shared leadership inhibits movement forward when emerging leaders are not in place. Plans need to be in place for local leaders to have opportunities for growth while at the same time nurturing youth and other emerging leaders. Often cross-generational and cross-sector leadership development can help identify an important cadre of leaders for current and future efforts.

Funders need to invest in training and personnel that will yield long-term results in high-need areas. Community-based organizations respond to training and support that provides staff time for work on education reform issues. While more established organizations may be involved in local issues ranging from health, economic development, housing, or water quality, all stakeholders can acknowledge the pivotal role of an excellent and equitable education to

the long-term sustainability and success of any community. Other immediate needs may require more time for coordination to address longer-term education needs.

Funders need information about local area needs; investments need to be longer term for greater sustainability. Additional funding is needed for community-based organizations due to shrinking resources, lay-offs, competing priorities and lack of economic resources. Most organizations have very small staffs working in high-poverty, high-need areas with few resources to maintain a steady staff size and long-term efforts. In order to avoid hampering the continuity of parent-school-community participation, any reform effort needs a longer-term rather than shorter-term view for strategic planning and resulting action to effectively take place. Investment in education will have positive economic impact for local communities.

Lessons Learned in the Project

Below are several lessons learned from or highlighted by this project.

School Holding Power – Quick Facts

The State of the State

How many children are Texas schools losing?

Since 1986 when IDRA conducted Texas' first comprehensive statewide study of high school dropouts, Texas schools have lost 2.2 million students. That's like losing a student every four minutes.

– Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2005

Has the number of children lost changed over time?

In Texas, almost two decades after the first attrition study by IDRA, rates are higher than the original rate of 33 percent that alarmed many state and community leaders in 1986.

– Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2005

What does this cost Texas?

Weak school holding power has cost Texas citizens almost half a trillion dollars in foregone income, tax revenues, increased welfare, job training, unemployment and criminal justice costs.

– Intercultural Development Research Association, 2003

What is Texas doing to improve school holding power?

In July 2005 governors from 45 states agreed to develop common measures for establishing high school graduation rates. Texas refused.

– National Governors Association, 2005

Systems Change to Strengthen Holding Power

"Improvements in school quality that raise student achievement will also improve completion rates, for succeeding students are more likely to complete school."

– P.E. Barton. One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities, Educational Testing Service, February 2005

Indicators of quality schools include governance efficacy, fair funding, parent involvement/community engagement, student engagement, teaching quality, curriculum quality and access that result in improved school holding power and student success.

Governance Efficacy

"State policies send important signals to students about what they need to know and be able to do, to educators about what is important, and to researchers and policymakers about issues such as student needs."

– A. Venezia, P.M. Callan, J.E. Finney, M.W. Kirst, and M.D. Usdan. The Governance Divide: A Report on a Four-State Study on Improving College Readiness and Success, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, September 2005

Fair Funding

When Texas established its current system of funding education a decade ago, it went from being one of the least equitable to one of the most equitable. As a result of fair funding and other reforms it made possible, students of all kinds across the state are getting a better quality education.

– Texans for Fair Funding, web site, Texas Latino Education Coalition, 2005

Parent Involvement/Community Engagement

Studies of families show that what the family does with its children is more important to student success than family income or the education level of the parents.

– Epstein, 1991; Henderson and Berla, 1994; Liontos, 1992; Reynolds, et al., 1991; Zellman and Waterman, 1998

Student Engagement

In 1989, IDRA found through its Dallas ISD dropout study that having at least one adult (preferably an educator) in a student's life who was totally committed to the success of that student was a powerful predictor of a student staying in school.

– Intercultural Development Research Association. The Answer: Valuing Youth in Schools and Families, 1989

Teaching Quality

"If the number of teachers on permits is split evenly between elementary schools and secondary schools, it means that almost 1 million students were taught by less than well prepared teachers in 2003."

– A. Cortez. "Access to Quality Teaching – Number and Distribution of Emergency Permit Assignments in Texas Public Schools," IDRA Newsletter, May 2005

Curriculum Quality and Access

"The single best predictor of success in college is the quality and intensity of a student's high school curriculum – more significant than test scores or class rank."

– P. Barth. Education Watch: Achievement, Attainment, and Opportunity from Elementary School through College, Texas Key Education Facts and Figures, The Education Trust, Spring 2004

Communities in Action

"Establish community action teams including parents, community members, and business representatives who will regularly and systematically monitor and report on the dropout identification, counting, and reporting process and dropout prevention efforts at their campuses."

– M. Robledo Montecel. Texas Needs Diplomas, Not Delusions, testimony, Intercultural Development Research Association, 2002

Excerpted from "School Holding Power Quick Facts," developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association for the Graduation Guaranteed/ Graduación Garantizada – Statewide Summit on School Holding Power held by IDRA and the League of United Latin American Citizens in November 2005.

Get the full "Quick Facts" online at www.idra.org

current research and knowledge of the field. It also seeks to be intuitive and reflect common sense. It is widely recognized, for example, that students are far more likely to succeed when they have the chance to work with highly qualified, committed teachers, using effective, accessible curricula; when their parents and communities are engaged in their education; and when they, themselves, are engaged in their learning. We also know that effective schools depend on good governance to guide their success and on fair funding to effectively serve all of their students each school day.

What is less well understood is which change strategies and school and community capacities will ensure that schools *as systems* can hold on to all students and secure their success. The Quality Schools Action Framework zeroes in on three key strategies: first, *building community capacity* to strengthen schools; second,

creating coalitions and action networks that amplify parent and community voices, work and impact; and third and essentially, *building school capacity* to ensure that every child receives an excellent education. To have lasting impact, these kinds of strategic action are needed at local, state and federal levels. At every level, powerful levers are the key to initiating change.

In physics, levers apply mechanical force to move or lift heavy objects. Like crowbars, wheelbarrows and pliers, levers give people a "mechanical advantage" to accomplish work that might at first seem far beyond their capacity and strength. *Engaged citizens*, who actively express their concern for the quality of education and are engaged as partners in school improvement, play a critical role. *Accountable leadership* that recognizes that schools belong to the communities they serve and that fully and consistently reports and takes stock of school performance, is an essential lever. *Actionable knowledge*
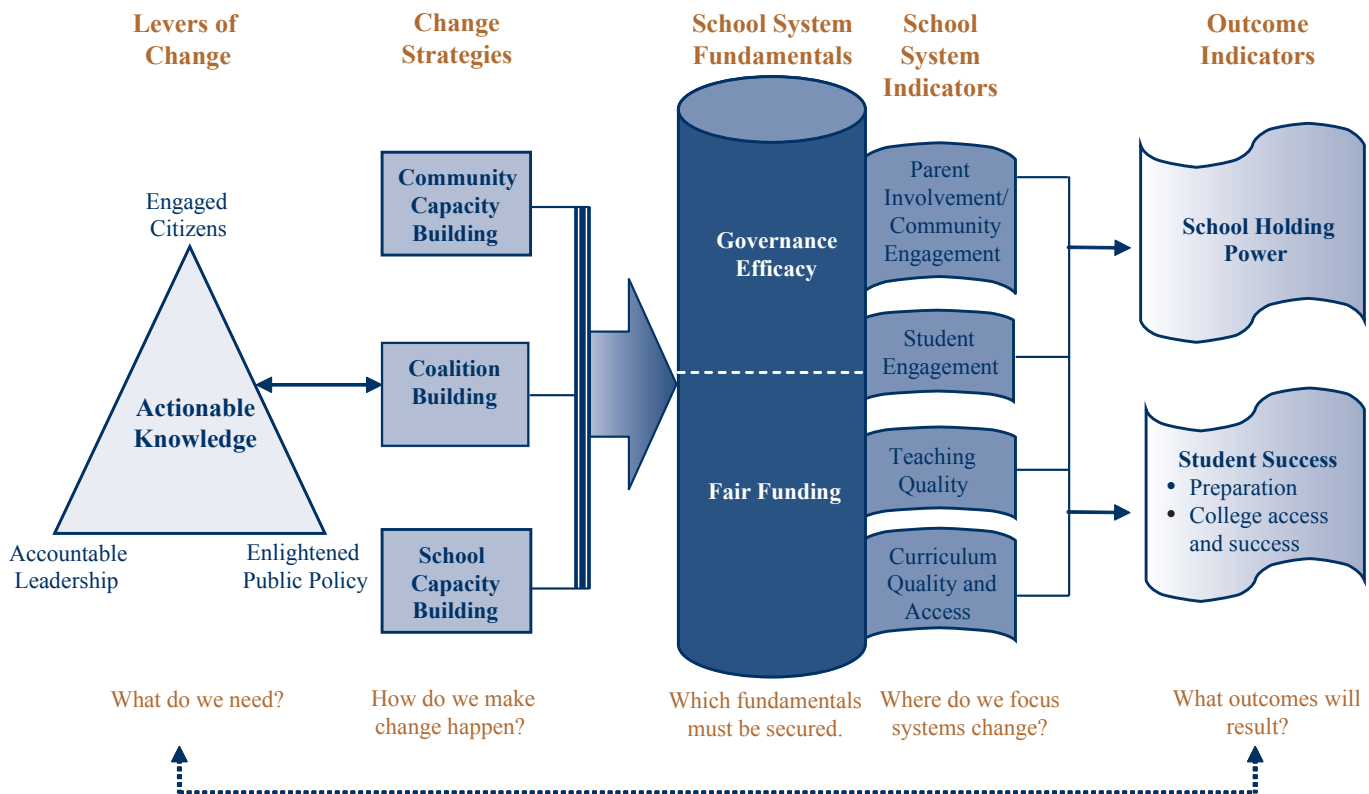
– clear, quality data – gives education and community leaders the information they need to make good decisions about school policy and practice. *Enlightened public policy*, which provides both the appropriate standards and resources schools need to serve all children, is also an indispensable lever for change.

Using the Framework for Increasing School Holding Power

In assessing student outcomes for secondary schools, the Quality Schools Action Framework suggests that we consider two key indicators: school holding power and student success. *School holding power* refers to the ability of schools to guarantee graduation for all students. *Student success* refers to the academic preparation both to graduate with a diploma and to graduate prepared for college access and success. Following

Quality Schools Action Framework

| Levers of Change | Change Strategies | School System Fundamentals | School System Indicators | Outcome Indicators |

Engaged Citizens

Actionable Knowledge

Accountable Leadership — Enlightened Public Policy

Community Capacity Building

Coalition Building

School Capacity Building

Governance Efficacy

Fair Funding

Parent Involvement/ Community Engagement

Student Engagement

Teaching Quality

Curriculum Quality and Access

School Holding Power

Student Success
• Preparation
• College access and success

What do we need? — How do we make change happen? — Which fundamentals must be secured. — Where do we focus systems change? — What outcomes will result?

this approach, any plan to increase school holding power must begin with a review of student outcomes and, if needed, have us redefine our goals.

It has never been the case in the history of this country that most minority students graduated from quality high schools or from any type of high school. It has never been the case that schools prepared every student to succeed in college or in a good job that sustains them, their families and their communities. Further, it has never been the case that all sectors – communities, business owners, public officials and the voters who elect them – demanded a quality education for all students.

To date, the goal of dropout prevention has been damage control. Trying to lower the dropout rate bit by bit is considered the best that can be done. This seems rather reasonable given the fact that Texas, for example, has never even been in the ballpark of the 95 percent graduation rate set by the State Board of Education back in the 1980s.

Not too long ago, however, it seemed unreasonable to think that this country would have universal education through elementary school. It was not until the mid-19th century that states began to enact compulsory attendance legislation, and even these laws only called for children to attend school for three months of the year. Many states did not require that children attend elementary school until the early 20th century.

And the gap between required attendance and available public schooling was great. Until the 1950s, education beyond the third grade was neither expected nor accessible for many children. In less than one hundred years, the nation has come to unquestioningly view elementary school as a universal prerequisite.

High school is the new educational minimum. Why is it unreasonable now to think that Texas and the nation can have universal education through high school? Former U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Alexis Herman has said: "This is a labor market that will be unforgiving to those persons without the necessary skills. To compete in a global marketplace, a high school diploma is *just* the beginning" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003). Half of our nation's 20 fastest-growing occupations require not a high school diploma but an associate or bachelor's degree just to get in the door. In this economy, in this global market, graduation guaranteed – 100 percent graduation – is the only reasonable goal.

Strengthening Schools as Systems

It is obviously not enough just to set a new goal. In Texas, the official 95 percent graduation goal has produced no result. Across the country, despite laudable goals, many children are still left behind. Nationally, the highest poverty schools and schools with the highest concentrations of minority students have nearly double the proportion of inexperienced teachers as schools with the lowest poverty rate (20 percent vs. 11 percent) and the lowest concentration of minority students (21 percent vs. 11 percent) (NCES, 2000).

Segregated minority schools are far more likely to be low wealth schools, characterized by less qualified teachers (Orfield, et al., 2004).

To move from good *intentions* to good *results*, the Quality Schools Action Framework would have us

Action Framework – *continued on Page 11*

The Price of Attrition

The social and economic costs of attrition reverberate throughout communities. Children pay an inestimable price in lost opportunity. They lose not only the path to college access and success but also to good jobs and open futures. The loss is not abstract.

Overall, as reported by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2003, high school dropouts are 72 percent more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates. A high school dropout earns about $260,000 less over a lifetime than a high school graduate.

When individuals have few opportunities, families and communities also suffer. Texas also pays a price, compromising its claim to fair play, diminishing civic life, and weakening its economy. The *Measuring Up* report concludes that if all ethnic groups in Texas 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 Texas revenues.

By losing 2.2 million students to attrition over the last 19 years, Texas loses almost half a trillion dollars in foregone income, lost tax revenues, increased welfare, and increased job training, unemployment and criminal justice costs over the lifetime of these students.

Excerpted from the "State of the State" keynote presented by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director, for the Graduation Guaranteed/Graduación Garantizada – Statewide Summit on School Holding Power held by IDRA and the League of United Latin American Citizens in November 2005.

examine schools as systems and to identify and address system factors, such as these, in need of change.

Dropout prevention programs, even the most effective ones, have never been able to address widespread attrition. While these programs can make a profound difference for the specific students they serve, they are simply not designed to transform school systems. Also ineffective have been approaches that tacitly or directly blame parents, students or their backgrounds for crisis-level attrition. These biases not only further disengage students who might already feel marginalized by educational systems, but discredit a schools' significant capacity to serve a diverse population of students.

Emphasizing school and community capacity building, student, parent and family engagement and a systems-based approach, the Quality Schools Action Framework avoids silver bullet solutions and moves toward a comprehensive approach.

To graduate students who are prepared for later life, schools need competent caring teachers who are well-paid and supported in their work. *Quality teaching* is defined by the preparation of teachers and the placement of teachers in their field of study. Teaching is informed by continual professional development. Quality teaching also refers to the practices that teachers use in the classroom to deliver comprehensible instruction that prepares all students to meet academic goals and ensures that no child is left behind or drops out of school.

To increase holding power, schools need consistent ways in which to partner with parents and engage the communities to which they belong. Effective *parent and community engagement* builds partnerships based on respect and a shared goal of academic success for every child. Engagement depends on the meaningful integration of parents and community members into the decision-making processes of schools.

Student engagement is also integral to any plan to reduce attrition. System-wide, schools need ways to get to know students and in turn, to have students know that they belong. Schools need the capacity to create environments and activities that value students of all backgrounds and to incorporate them into the learning process and other social activities within the school, with academic achievement as a result.

School systems that strengthen holding power depend on a high quality, enriched and accessible curriculum. *Curriculum quality and access* encompasses the educational programs of study, materials and other learning resources – such as technology – and their accessibility. It also relates to the fair and unbiased assessment of students and the degree to which schools take responsibility for the academic success of all students.

To have these basic features, school systems must secure two fundamentals: the resources to effectively serve all students and good governance that facilitates academic achievement and success. *Governance efficacy* strengthens school holding power when administrative and supervisory personnel have the capacity to deliver quality educational services to all students, along with the policymaking and pro-active support of a school board to hold on to every student. *Fair funding* is a lynchpin of school success, as it assures that school districts have equitable resources to support a quality educational program for all students.

Strengthening Community Capacity

But to make anything happen, citizens across diverse sectors must reconnect for reform. To address high school attrition, the Quality Schools Action Framework would have us examine how communities, leaders and policymakers can use *actionable knowledge* on attrition to inform and leverage change. The framework would have us examine how to reconnect communities and strengthen coalitions for reform.

Parents and communities have played vital roles in every school reform effort – from fighting for fair funding to making sure that students are not ignored or punished because of the language they speak. As partners in education and catalysts for education policy and funding reform, their role can be critical to helping local neighborhood schools turn the tide of student attrition.

If students are to reach the halls and classrooms of colleges and universities, stakeholders must consider schools as systems and reforms must span the education pipeline. Looking back one length in this line, if students are to enter and succeed in institutions of higher learning, they must be well-prepared and graduating with a diploma from high school. The Quality Schools Action Framework can be used to make sure that schools are places where all children can and do succeed.

Resources

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

- college access,
- institutional persistence,
- affordability,
- institutional resources,
- graduation, and
- graduate and professional studies.

I invite you to remember as we move forward that in the words of Martin Luther King, "We are all caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality." I believe that the long-term progress in Latino access and success requires acknowledging and building on that mutuality. Higher education, elementary and secondary education, community, Latino, African American, White, the government sector, the for-profit sector, nonprofit sector, rich to middle class and poor, we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And so the name "InterAction."

Shopping List for the Future

There's an interesting fact in the "Measuring Up" report as well that I want to share with you. It concludes that if all ethnic groups in Texas 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 Texas revenues (NCPPHE, 2004).

And what could Texas do with an additional $11 billion in tax revenue? Those of you of who are superintendents, who are presidents of universities, who are involved with policy at many levels, know that with $11 billion a lot could be done.

So, here's my shopping list. We could invest $3.4 billion in kindergarten through grade 12 public education in Texas and reach at least the U.S. average of spending per student. Textbook costs for students next year will total $560 million. With double that amount, we can provide for enough

Tools for

Guarantee Graduation – Inform. Connect. Act.

The statistics are well known to readers of these pages: Our high schools lose more than one third of their students before graduation, and the cumulative impact of attrition affects every community. Almost half of students (48 percent) lost from school enrollment are Hispanic, close to half (43 percent) are African American, and one fifth (22 percent) are White (Johnson, 2005). Since 1986 when IDRA conducted Texas' first comprehensive statewide study of high school dropouts, Texas schools have lost more than 2 million students. That is like losing one student every four minutes.

While dropping out of school is not necessarily the end of formal education for every student, the pathway to postsecondary education and jobs is often far narrower, longer and rockier for students without a high school diploma or with a GED. While high school graduation was once optional, it is now a minimal requirement for most entry-level jobs. Overall, as reported by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2003, high school dropouts are 72 percent more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates (Lehr, 2004).

A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

To address these issues, IDRA has undertaken three decades of research, program implementation and policy education to improve school success and ensure graduation for all students. IDRA's work is based on the recognition that schools can be strengthened to ensure the success of all students and of children's assets as a starting point for learning.

This has been demonstrated by professional development programs that help schools increase their students' academic success. It has been borne out by IDRA's Coca-Cola Youth Program, which, since its inception in 1984, has kept more than 20,000 students in school and learning, young people who were previously considered at risk of dropping out.

A new initiative, Graduation Guaranteed/Graduación Garantizada, builds on this work. IDRA and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) kicked off Graduation Guaranteed/Graduación Garantizada with a joint statewide summit on school holding power, convened in November. The summit brought together community members, educators, policymakers, students and business people to examine the data, build cross-sector partnerships, and identify strategic actions to address the longstanding problem of attrition. Graduation Guaranteed/Graduación Garantizada focuses on three key areas:

- **Accuracy and accountability** – to call for credible, accurate counts of student attrition.

*A*ction

- **Systems change** – to promote good governance, equitable funding, curriculum alignment, and school capacity to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.
- **Community-based actions** – to reclaim and strengthen local, neighborhood public schools.

Each strategy will be informed by quality data on student outcomes and the school system factors that undergird student success.

A strong school is a dynamic and self-renewing institution that ensures the academic success and graduation of every child. Such schools emerge from and are strengthened by an informed and engaged community. A strong neighborhood public school recognizes that its viability and that of the community are inextricably linked.

What You Can Do

Get informed. Learn about dropout rates in your district or region. How are these rates calculated? For more information on the analysis and reporting of dropout data, see **http://www.idra.org/Media/definitions.htm**. How does attrition vary by district, campus, student gender, race, and ethnicity? What is being done to address the issue?

Find out more. Which system factors may be weakening school holding power? Is funding appropriate and equitably distributed to offer an excellent education to every student in your district? Are teachers certified and teaching in their area of expertise? What are your district's student retention policies and practices? What is the quality and accessibility of the curriculum? Is schoolwork comprehensible to all students, no matter what first language they speak? Are students engaged in learning and academic life – do they sense that they are valued and expected to succeed? If not, what must be changed?

Get results. If attrition has persisted for many years in your district and stand-alone dropout prevention programs are the only initiatives underway, devise a plan to augment these programs with systemic changes. For a summary of the key components of school holding power, see: **http://www.idra.org/attrition/components.htm**.

Band together with others who are likely to share your concerns and can join you in initiating change. If no mechanism like a network or coalition exists in your area, consider initiating a community-school partnership to examine the problem and develop an action plan. For more information on strategies that begin in local neighborhoods, see the *Holding Schools Accountable Toolkit* developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation at **www.publicimpact.com/hsat**.

materials for the growing number of English language learners, more library books in the low wealth schools and better equipped computer and science labs. We could provide additional dollars for student financial aid.

The Texas Be On Time Program, which currently costs $388 million to serve a few students based on financial need and contingent on completing four years at a four-year institution or two years at a community college, could create other ways to find means-based assistance. So, let's say that we allocate double the amount that has been allocated so far to the Texas Be On Time Program. That would be $776 million.

And then we could fund technology for teachers and students. A Hewlett Packard Pavilion laptop computer costs $1,229. For Texas' 288,386 teachers, that would amount to $354,426,395. Then we could get a laptop for 2 million of Texas' 4.2 million students, for about half of them, and that would cost $2,458,000,000.

We could invest $31 million in what is needed for Texas to reach the average level of national spending for public transit, and we could spend an additional $983 million to reach the national average for spending on highways and streets.

And then we could do a little bit about health care. We would have the $1.3 billion that is needed for Texas to be on par with the nation's average spending for public health. And then we could restore the health care aid for children and the elderly that was cut in 2003. In Bexar County that would be $21.8 million; in Dallas County, $26.5 million; in Harris County, $43 million; in Travis County, $7 million; about $100 million, rounded out to take care of children and the elderly in the state of Texas.

And then I totaled my list and ended up with $10.5 billion, which

- In building readiness for change, timing is essential in nurturing a cadre of leaders.
- A sense of urgency promotes a shared vision, action and shared accountability among leaders.
- There is readiness on the part of local communities to engage in education issues. This must be coupled with sufficient resources over time and with dedicated local leadership.
- Families living in under-resourced areas are more apt to take on education issues when given sufficient support, opportunities to engage with diverse audiences and basic infrastructure to do so.
- Parents feel valued most when they can act as leaders and take effective action in mobilizing other parents and community members around specific issues that they have identified within the local context.
- Research can be conducted effectively by local citizens of diverse backgrounds.
- Information can be collected, analyzed and shared by local groups. This information can lead to specific action when linked to local needs and tied to specific goals.
- Cross-generation learning enhances local efforts to create positive change in educational access and quality.
- Learning that integrates information across disciplines gives more information and power to local citizens, such as information in health coupled with information about education. For example, a healthy community and excellence in education go hand-in-hand.

Contributing Factors for Success

IDRA's 32-year history working with community-based organizations is noted for its cross-generational, multicultural and collaborative design. In this project, three elements were combined for success and were reinforced as contributing factors for successful work in local communities.

The first is **cross-generational work.** Elder leaders working side-by-side with emerging leaders helps to create a more sustainable effort that builds from the lessons learned in the past and focuses on local issues while building capacity for the future in new leaders.

Second is a **multicultural approach.** Training and materials that are bilingual, culturally relevant and presented within the local context are most effective. This helps build trust and adds both to the richness of the discussions and to the success of the work. Issues such as the importance of history, language and culture in creating social change emerge and are strengthened through diverse groups working together for the greater good.

Finally, there is **local collaboration.** With a trust in the power of their collective action, parents and community members enthusiastically sought out opportunities to come together as a team with the goal of enriching their community and planting seeds that will grow in the future. Hopefully, their harvest will be a better future for their children through equity and access to excellent education programs.

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leaves us about $500 million for good measure. So, that is what $11 billion could buy the students of Texas; but in order to do that, we have to create educational parity for all Texans.

I say that we owe it to ourselves, to our children and to our children's children to find out what educational parity would look like. How might we, you and I here today, and the InterAction initiative as we move forward, interact and interconnect? What might we be able to do? That is what today is about. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and your vision for the future.

Resources

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. *Measuring Up – The State Report Card on Higher Education* (San Jose, California: NCPPHE, 2004).

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

IDRA Community Engagement Toolkit

Free Online!

Hacia Adelante ~ Pathways to College ~ A Guide for Latino Families

Informs parents and students on how to plan together for college. This guide provides basic information on college and a planning workbook that includes steps for choosing high school courses, selecting a college or university, financial planning, and an action calendar. (ISBN: 1-878550-72-1; 46 Pages, 2002) $7 or free online at www.idra.org.
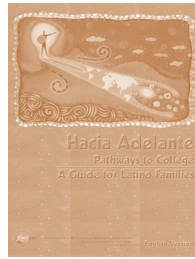
Hacia Adelante ~ Pathways to College ~ Una Guía para Familias Latinas

Spanish-language version of this publication. Informs parents and students on how to plan together for college. This guide includes steps for choosing high school courses, selecting a college or university, financial planning, and an action calendar. (ISBN: 1-878550-72-3; 46 Pages; 2002) $7 or free online at www.idra.org.

To order call 210-444-1710 or visit www.idra.org

These publications developed and distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association. Contact IDRA to place an order. All orders of $30 or less must be prepaid. Purchase orders are accepted.

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In September, IDRA worked with **2,628** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **30** training and technical assistance activities and **134** program sites in **11** states plus Brazil. Topics included:

✦ The Quest for Equality!
✦ International Programs Promoting International Cooperation
✦ Sheltered Instruction for Content Teachers
✦ Math Smart! Institute
✦ National Dropout Prevention Conference

Participating agencies and school districts included:

✧ Atlanta Public Schools, Georgia
✧ Lamar Independent School District, Texas
✧ Philadelphia Public Schools, Pennsylvania

Activity Snapshot

After receiving a number of sexual harassment complaints, administrators in a Louisiana school district requested staff training from the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity (SCCE) on the requirements of the law regarding sexual harassment in schools. The SCCE is the equity assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve schools in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. IDRA provided training in sexual harassment prevention to 120 principals and central office staff. As a result, administrators in the district developed campus level plans to ensure that students are protected from discrimination and adult-student sexual harassment. The plans are being implemented districtwide to prevent sexual harassment.

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.

Texas schools are losing a student every four minutes

Graduation Guaranteed

❖

Graduación Garantizada

This lack of school holding power affects every Texan.

IDRA research shows that during the last two decades, 2.2 million secondary students have been lost from public school enrollment in the state, costing the state over $500 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenues, and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs.

The cost in economic productivity is dwarfed by the cost in life choices for so many Texans.

"Most dropout prevention programs fail either because they are too narrow or because they blame students and parents for the problem. What we know, though, is that schools as systems themselves must change to increase their ability to engage and educate students through to graduation."

– Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director

Parents and communities have played vital roles in every school reform effort – from fighting for fair funding to making sure that students are not ignored or punished because of the language they speak.

To support and catalyze community-school partnerships and leadership that guarantee graduation and student success, the Intercultural Development Research Association and the League of United Latin American Citizens ask you to join our statewide call to increase school holding power. This call was launched at an event at the University of Texas at San Antonio in November 2005. Other partners in the event were the Texas Business and Education Coalition, Texas Alliance of Black School Educators, Texas Latino Education Coalition, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and Mexican American School Board Members Association.

"We must challenge the country to secure the future of our young people and of the United States. The goal of this summit is to gather a strong basis of best practices to increase the much-needed improvement for our Texas schools and spread the anticipated success of the summit to the rest of the nation."

– Hector Flores, LULAC national president

Communities and their neighborhood public schools can turn the tide. Together we can and must guarantee that every child graduates from high school!

Visit www.idra.org to learn more about what you can do!

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