

National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities

Teleseminar Transcript – December 8, 2005



“Increasing School Holding Power for All Students”

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Part 5: Quality Schools Action Framework

DR. MARIA “CUCA” ROBLEDO MONTECEL: If you would look to Page 28 – if you are following along with the materials – let me very briefly point you to what we believe to be a framework that can, in fact, get us from a piecemeal approach to school holding power to one that looks at institutions as a whole, one that takes the important outcomes indicator into account, that looks at school systems both in terms of fundamentals and in terms of other important indicators, that identifies the change strategies that we need to use, and that identifies the levers of change. Where do we push or pull such that we get to where we want to get?

So if you look with me then on Page 28, at the top of that page you’ll see listed two areas of outcome indicators. One has to do with school holding power and another with student success. In the student success we’re looking at outcomes that tell us that students are prepared for what is next for them, and that they have access to college, that they can be successful in college, given the preparation that was provided them in high school. Because, of course, when we talk about keeping kids in high school and having them graduate, you and I know that this is a very, very minimum prerequisite to the kind of lifelong education that is now required in the kind of economy and society that we live in.

At IDRA we are continuing to look at the development of data and metrics on measuring school holding power, by the way. And if you have an interest in this topic, I invite you over the next several months to stay with us on the web site so that we can keep you posted on how we’re doing with building a metric that measures school holding power.

If you, then, look at the next slide, the next, the bottom of that Page 28, you will see four very important school systems indicators. These are those things that we feel are essential and very crucial to focus systems change on these. Now, this is not everything that can be done, but it is everything that we know, based on the research, based on our experience with schools – and we work, by the way, with about 3,000 teachers, other educators, and parents each month at IDRA. These are the key indicators.

Number one, parent involvement and community engagement. There’s a whole body of literature that many of you, I know, are familiar with, including, I know we have someone from the Public Education Network on the line, who’s done a lot of excellent work in looking at this issue of parent involvement and community engagement.

Secondly, student engagement. Back to our findings in the Dallas dropout study. And the literature says this again and again and again coming out on many, many pieces of research – if you do not engage a student with school, then the likelihood that they will drop out is very, very

high. So this engagement of students, as a matter-of-fact, our Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program in Santa Monica, California, is being done in collaboration with the RAND Corporation because RAND is particularly wanting to look at this issue of student engagement, and how the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program speaks to that particular indicator.

Teaching quality. Extremely, extremely important. Again, there is a large body of research that says, well, yes, absolutely, it matters if you have good teachers. It matters if you have teachers who are certified. And it matters that you pay them well, provide ongoing professional development for them, and assure that you allow good teachers to teach.

Lastly, curriculum quality and access. Too many of our kids, too many minority kids, too many kids in inner-city schools are still being put in watered-down classes, connect-the-dot curricula where there is no challenge, and there is no thought required on the part of students. What we have found is that what we need to do is not to dumb down the curriculum, but actually, to accelerate it. And that when you accelerate the curriculum and you provide the necessary support that both students and teachers rise up to the challenge. You can't do any of that, and those of you who are in state departments – I think we have almost 15 state departments participating in this teleseminar – those of you who are in state departments or in school systems know that you can't do anything without money, and you can't do anything without efficacy in the way that you govern. And so those are the two key fundamentals.

I have heard many, many people tell us, we had a statewide hearing on *No Child Left Behind* last year, and we heard from parents, the state department, school teachers, school superintendents, community action groups. And one of the biggest concerns was that at the same time that we are raising the bar for schools, we are also providing fewer of the resources that are necessary. And when we *do* provide resources that are necessary, they tend to go to certain schools and certain kids, and not to poor and minority schools and communities. So that's an important concern.

Were we to address governance efficacy so that we have an efficacious-governing system – local school board, state board, whatever the particular unit we are speaking about, and we had spare funding – and we were successfully able to speak to those indicators and create what works about parent involvement, student engagement, teaching quality, curriculum quality and access, then I think that we could rightly expect that we will be producing results in increasing school holding power and in increasing student success.

Well, how do we do that? How do we affect this kind of change? Move with me to page 29 that has the full quality schools action framework, and you'll see that we have identified three key change strategies – community capacity building, coalition building, and then school capacity building. You'll note that we are asserting in this framework, based on research and experience, that you must build capacity within schools, but that you also must build capacity in the community so that the community is able to own its schools and to participate in the kind of school reform efforts that are necessary.

Finally – and I will finish with this in case there are at least one or two questions that we might include in the timeline – what do we need? What are the levers of change? Well, we certainly need citizens who are engaged. We need accountable leadership, and we need enlightened public

policy. And an important way to get there is to produce knowledge that is actionable, that tells schools, that tells communities how we are doing, but that also provides tools for how we get there so that we can strengthen public schools, we can increase school holding power, and we can assure that all of our kids graduate and succeed.