National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities
Teleseminar Transcript – December 8, 2005

"Increasing School Holding Power for All Students"

Presenter: Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, executive director of the Intercultural Development Research Association

The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities presents, "Increasing School Holding Power for All Students," with Dr. Loujeania Williams Bost and Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel.

Dr. Loujeania Williams Bost is the director of the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities. Dr. Bost holds a Ph.D. in special education from Pennsylvania State University, with emphasis in reading comprehension strategies with struggling adolescents with learning disabilities, and translating research into practice. Dr. Bost has an extensive practice in developing state-level systems to meet general supervision requirements under the IDEA, including compliant management, monitoring, and technical assistance. She has an extensive background in serving persons with disabilities and has been a public school teacher, a program administrator for agencies serving adults and adolescents with mental retardation, and a researcher. So, welcome, Dr. Bost.

Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel is the executive director of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), an independent, private, non-profit organization dedicated to equity and excellence in education. A nationally-recognized expert on the prevention and recovery of dropouts, Dr. Robledo Montecel directed the first statewide study of dropouts in Texas. Under her leadership, IDRA's innovative dropout prevention program – the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – has made a visible difference in the lives of more than 416,000 children, families, and educators. Dr. Robledo Montecel has authored and co-authored a number of publications, focusing on effective bilingual education, school holding power, and parent leadership. Dr. Robledo Montecel holds a bachelor of social work degree from Our Lady of the Lake University, and a master's degree in educational evaluation from Antioch College, and she earned a doctorate in research and evaluation from the Urban Education Program at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. She has been named among the top 100 Hispanic influentials by *Hispanic Business Magazine*. So you can see we have a terrific faculty for today's program. We begin today's virtual seminar with Loujeania Williams Bost, who is speaking today from Clemson; so welcome to the program.

DR. LOUJEANIA WILLIAMS BOST: Good afternoon. We welcome our audience from the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, here at Clemson. And today's teleseminar, "School Holding Power," refers to the ability of schools to keep students in school until they achieve the ultimate objective of a high school diploma.

School holding power shifts the focus from the individual to the school's ability to build systems that monitor and support students as they progress through the education system. The ultimate measure, then, is not to assess where the students fail to navigate the system, but how successful

schools are in shepherding students from their entry in school all the way through the point that they receive their high school diploma.

School holding power is an important indicator of a school's measure of success in an era of accountability. School completion rates provide evidence of the extent to which schools engage students in the educational process, and as such, have become measures of school performance. Both *No Child Left Behind* and the *Individuals with Disabilities or Education Improvement Act* have focused attention on the problem of dropout**s** and are a driving force in efforts to increase rates of school completion, especially for students with disabilities. These measures require state and local education agencies to monitor progress of all students, using indicators of adequate yearly progress, measures of academic performance, and rates of dropout and graduation. In addition, both mandates place emphasis on the use of scientific and validated methods and program models to improve educational outcomes for all students.

Schools can increase their holding power by adopting and implementing effective programs that recognize students' inherent value, their contributions, and their potential significance to their communities and society as a whole. This teleseminar will present the framework for increasing school holding power and one effective model developed and implemented for nearly two decades by the Intercultural Research Development Association, our speaker for the day.

Welcome, Dr. Cuca Robledo Montecel.

DR. MARIA "CUCA" ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Good morning. Good morning. I am very pleased that all of you have taken some time to come together this morning, and to talk about this very important issue of school holding power and how to increase it.

It has never been the case, as all of you know, in the history of the United States, that most minority students actually *do* graduate from quality high schools, or from any type of high school for that matter. It has also never been the case that schools actually prepare every student to succeed in college or in a good job that sustains them, their family, and their community. Furthermore, it has never been the case that all sectors – community, business owners, public officials, and the voters who elect them – demand a quality education for all students. It is in that context of what has never been the case that I will be spending a bit of time with you today speaking about what IDRA has done over the last 20 years in this issue of school holding power.

Let me begin by re-emphasizing a comment Dr. Bost made as she was preparing today's context for us. And that is that school holding power is about the ability of the school to engage students, through to graduation, learning, and then be prepared for life. Much of what has not worked in dropout prevention in the past has not worked because of two reasons. One, programs have been designed as very discrete activities that are to motivate students. And, two, programs have been lacking – that are actually systemic – that actually create this ability of the school to hold on to students. So that is the framework for our conversation today.

Let me begin by reviewing our objectives. And those of you that are following along with the materials that were prepared for you, we're going to start on Page 2 at the moment, and review the three objectives that we have for our brief time together today.

The first is, I will review the major research that the Intercultural Development Research Association has conducted over the last 20 years on the issue of dropout prevention. Secondly, we will look at a particular program – the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – which is a proven dropout prevention program. We will look at what it is, what the critical elements are, and the results that it produces. And then, finally, and importantly, I'm very, very excited this morning to have you be among the first group of people that hear about a new framework for transforming schools, one that takes us away from this very sort of discrete, programmatic effort to the kind of institutional change that is required in order to stop this massive hemorrhaging of students out of high schools before they graduate. So we will do those three things.

Let me begin by giving you a brief history of the work that IDRA has done, beginning with a 1986 study called, "The Texas Dropout Survey Project." This project was important in Texas because it was the first statewide study that took a good, in-depth look at the issue. And it is important nationally because it stands as *the* first statewide study of this issue in very particular ways. We asked three research questions back in 1986. And I was privileged at the time to serve as principal investigator and worked with a team of people from the Intercultural Development Research Association and from throughout the state to look at these three research questions.

The first – *How many young people in Texas were dropping out before graduating high school?* The second – *What was the economic impact of young people dropping out of school before graduating on criminal justice costs, human service costs, and other costs?* And then, third, *What kinds of programs were available in Texas at the time* – remember, this was 1986 – *that would serve to keep children in school?* So those were our three questions.

The study was commissioned by the Texas Department of Community Affairs and the Texas Education Agency, our state department here in Texas. It was, as I noted, the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in this state. What did we find? Well, we found that in 1986 Texas did not collect, nor have any systems to collect, any information on the number of students that were dropping out or their characteristics. This, by the way, was not particular to Texas at the time, and was, in fact, the state of the nation in 1986. So there were no definitions, no data, no sense of the magnitude of the problem, and certainly, no sense of the reasons for the problem.

In the absence of other data, IDRA created an attrition methodology. We started with ninth grade enrollment from the state department of education and then looked to see how many of those ninth-graders were enrolled in the 12th grade, and then adjusted statistically for in and out migration, for growth or losses, in the particular population of the school. We did this, as I said, in the absence of any other data available.

We also validated these findings by looking at census data and at direct student interviews. What did we find? We found that in 1986, 86,000 students did not graduate from Texas public schools – that is 33 percent of students in Texas had dropped out during their high school years. What was it costing the state of Texas? $17.2 billion over the lifetime of those students in foregone income, lost tax revenues, increased criminal justice cost, welfare, employment, and job training.

What else did we find with regard to costs? Very important, and other research since then has validated this IDRA information about investment. We found that for every dollar that you invest in dropout prevention – you the schools, you the community, you the taxpayers – that for every dollar that is invested, we get nine dollars back. In any book, that is a very, very good investment, and continues to be so.

Following the study, the first statewide policy was put in place – House Bill 1010 in Texas – that mandated that the state department calculate and report the dropout rate. There have been changes over the years in those ways of dropping out, in those ways in which dropouts are recorded, and we will be talking about that a little more as we go on.

IDRA's attrition formula, this enrollment methodology that I mentioned, has remained the same over the years. We've used the same method. And so we have 19 years utilizing exactly the same methodology of tracing what is happening with this issue in the state of Texas. Other researchers across the country, including the Harvard Civil Rights Project, Gary Orfield there, and Walt Haney, and the National Center for Educational Statistics, have validated this attrition estimate that IDRA developed in the absence of other data.

The national look at graduation rates that has been precipitated by *No Child Left Behind* is now largely being tracked, by the way, with an enrollment methodology that basically parallels the methodology that IDRA developed back in 1986.

What has happened in Texas since then? Well, when you accumulate the data from 1986 to now, you find that 2.2 million students have not graduated from Texas high schools, and that the state has lost $500 billion – if you accumulate that 17.2 billion that I told you about for that first cohort of 86,000, and you add every cohort and every amount since then, the state of Texas has lost more than 2.2 million students – that's like losing Austin and Dallas, completely – and has lost an estimated $500 billion over the life of those students. Texas loses one student every four minutes. In fact, the picture hasn't changed very much. We just completed our last attrition study and released it in November, at the beginning of November, and found that 36 percent of students dropped out of Texas schools before graduating, and that this problem affects not only minority students, by the way. In Texas, as is the case across the country, minority students do have higher rates. But the problem is not insignificant among other groups.

As an example, in Texas, the dropouts are – this past attrition study, the one that we just released and is, by the way, on our website, at www.idra.org – 22 percent White students. Of those who did not graduate, that's one out of five, one out of two are Hispanic, and two out of five are African American. So this is an issue that affects all students, all families, all communities, of all colors. And by the way, also, of both genders, and of all economic status. One in 10 school districts reported having no dropout prevention problem 10 years ago, no dropout prevention *program*, pardon me, in 1986, and nine out of 10 did not have evaluation data, so not very much was being done.

It is the case today, in 2005, that too, too many students are leaving high schools in Texas and everywhere across the country without earning a diploma. Schools are still not effectively evaluating programs, and the state has, at least in the case of Texas, focused more on lowering

the dropout numbers through various numerical feats, rather than on actually lowering the number of dropouts. And I'll talk a little more about that.

A little bit about our Dallas dropout study. About the same time that we did the statewide study, we also did a very in-depth study in the Dallas school district – quasi-experimental, longitudinal study, 30 months – to identify factors that contribute to, or prevent, students from dropping out. We interviewed 200 students who had dropped out, 200 who had stayed in; we interviewed parents of both of those groups to see what made the difference.

What did we find? We found, first of all – and all of you who work directly with students in schools, and those of you who have been looking at this issue for some time – know that students first think about leaving school while they are still in middle school. Most leave – we found this in the Dallas study – between the eighth and ninth grades, and the ninth and 10th grades, at those important transition points. We also found that if a student's mother is foreign born, the student has a *greater* chance of staying in. This, for many, is *counter-intuitive*. This is what our finding was in Dallas, and it has been corroborated in many studies, including one very recent one over the last two weeks that looked, not at dropouts, but at mental health, and found, interestingly, that mental health among Mexican immigrants, children of Mexican immigrants, was much higher than other groups. It'd be interesting to look at those relationships.

Major findings. What factors correlate with dropping out? Students will leave school if they change schools often, if they work more than 15 hours a week, if they're behind in academics, if they're retained, if they are bored, and if they are encouraged by school personnel to leave. They tend to stay in school if they believe and know that there is someone, very specifically, someone, a person, who cares about them and is involved with their school activities. This relates very closely to all of what we know about the importance of student engagement, the big body of literature around that.

One final piece of information I would like to share with you about the study – the research that IDRA has been doing over the last 20 years on this issue – is a study that we did in Arizona, for the Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center. IDRA was commissioned to do this study – by the folks at the University of Arizona – to develop estimates of dropout costs and to identify the dropout prevention programs that were effective. We found that the state of Arizona, at the time, had a rather good, very clear, definition – and less complex, by the way – that was easily understandable by many in the public. We found that 31 percent of students were lost in the 1997 freshman class, and we found that in Arizona, the highest dropout rate was among Native Americans, at 48 percent, followed by Latinos, at 43 percent. We found that in Arizona, as in Texas – and as in all of the country, for everything that I have seen in research and with experience – that very few programs have good research of evaluation data. How might I synthesize all of this in terms of what we have learned at the Intercultural Development Research Association about dropout prevention? What works?

There are five characteristics of good solutions. The first is that all students must be valued. Any program, any activity that you're undertaking, look and see, put yourself in the place of a student, and see if being that student, in that program, or in that institutional shift you would feel valuable. That's a good gauge of whether it would work or not. There must be, as I said before,

at least one educator in the student's life who is totally committed to the student, and there must be extensive, consistent support so that students can learn, so that teachers can teach, and so that parents can be involved.

Importantly as well, programs that produce results focus on both equity and excellence. Excellence without equity is impossible. And equity without excellence is unacceptable. And the schools that are producing results know that they cannot continue to produce schools in which things work for some, and not for others. Solutions have to be institution-based. We will look a little bit more at this in the second part of the program. And solutions must *build* on strengths and contributions rather than try to fix students or families.

A little bit about our Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. It has been around for 20 years. We celebrated 20 years last year. It's a cross-age tutoring program. It's quite simple. Older students become tutors of younger students. They do so during the day, and they do so for course credit. Usually, they walk over from the middle or the high school into the elementary school for one period a day and become tutors. What is the twist, here? The twist is that the students who do the tutoring are the so-called **"**at-risk**"** students. We think, however, that these students are not at risk, but that they are valuable, important, young people. And the fact that they are put as tutors of younger children has them understand and see, at a very gut level, their own importance.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was identified as one of only two dropout prevention programs in the country that meet the very high standards of rigorous evaluation. This was in a study that Slavin and Fashola did at Johns Hopkins. The program maintains less than a two percent dropout rate. It has kept more than 23,000 students in schools, and it has impacted 416,000 children, families, and educators across the United States, in Brazil, and in England, which is also where the program is or has been implemented. The program results in high expectations and academic success. The small stipend that is paid to students helps families with finances, and there's also, quite importantly, belonging and contribution that parents note. There is inclusion of students.

When we celebrated our 20th anniversary, I was very privileged to hear from one student. And I will end my first segment by sharing this story with you. We have a student, a young man now, by the name of Pablo López, who is now a police officer in the city of McAllen in south Texas. Pablo was a tutor in our Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program back when he was in middle school. And he talked to all of us about how the program had shifted how he saw himself, and what a difference the program had made in his life, and spoke about, as a police officer, when he thinks about his commitment to serve and protect others as a police officer. What he remembers from the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and his role as a tutor of younger children, what it means to protect and to serve. It is that kind of opportunity that is providing students in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and one of the reasons why the program affects, not only the students that are a part of it, but many times, the adults in the school who see so-called at-risk students in a new light, and an important light.

In your materials on Page 17, you have an overview of the program elements. And you are welcome to look through those and ask any questions you may have during our Question and Answer period. I would also point to the possible cyber conversation that we can have about the

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, or anything else that you would like to talk about. Between now and December 22 we will have a cyber, online discussion, and you received information about how to do that. So whatever questions we don't get covered today, I will attempt to do those over the next two weeks, as we communicate electronically.

MODERATOR: Well, thank you very much, and at this time, why don't we open things up for questions. If you do have a question or a comment for Dr. Robledo Montecel, all you need to do is press Star 1 on the touch-tone keypad of your telephone. Star, followed by 1. This will place you into our question queue, and when your turn comes up, I'll call on you by your city where you're located, and the first name of the person who registered at your site. Now, if your question is answered while you're in line, pressing the pound key will take you out of the queue. And we do ask that if you're listening on a speaker phone and if at all possible, please pick up the handset when you ask your question. We'll all be able to hear you much better that way. And a reminder that when replacing the handset, remember to press and hold the speaker phone button so that you're not disconnected. However, should that happen, simply dial back in, re-enter your pin, and you'll be immediately reconnected to the program. So, again, I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to engage in an active dialogue on today's topic. Press Star 1 on the touch-tone keypad of your telephone. Pressing the pound key will take you out of the question queue. And you're certainly welcome to submit questions by emailing them to me, and I can present those questions for you. The email address is MODV@krm.com.

And, Dr., we do have one caller in the queue. Let's go to Newton, Massachusetts, at Deb's site. Your line is open. Go ahead with your question.

WOMAN: Yes, I'm just wondering what kind of training and supervision you give to the students who are tutoring, and also how you match them up with the tutees.

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Yes, I would be happy to answer that. First, in terms of training and supervision. There are a number of ways that that is done. The start of the program begins with a two-week period of time in which the students are trained and briefed on the work that they are to do as Coca-Cola Valued Youth tutors. They actually walk over to the elementary school, they sit in the elementary classrooms where they will be tutoring the students, but they don't actually begin tutoring until that training period.

The other is that there is built-in, both training and supervision of the program, through a class. Usually on Fridays, the students go over to do the tutoring during a class period, four days a week, and they remain in their middle school for a fifth day every week, with their teacher, a person that we call a teacher coordinator, who is the person that actively supervises their work, and that actively builds the communication skills, the tutoring skills that are necessary.

So those are two important ways in which that is done. Your other question was how do you link the tutors to the tutees, to the young children at the elementary school level that are tutored. That is usually done by the teacher coordinator – this is their, remember, their middle or high school teacher, their teacher at their campus – in collaboration with the elementary school teachers. And by the way, in some schools we have very long waiting lists because, although this program is targeted at tutors, the effects on the tutees are very substantial, and include individualized

attention to the young people in the elementary school that are being tutored. The tutoring is done on a 1:3 ratio, so it's one tutor to three tutees. This allows for the kind of connecting that needs to be made between tutor and tutee, but it diminishes logistical problems if you have, you know, two tutees absent, and there's only one, or there's none, we found three to be a very workable number. And, basically, the alignment is done between the teachers who know both the middle school students as well as the receiving classrooms and the students who will be tutored.

MODERATOR: And we thank you for your question. And we do have a couple of other callers in the queue from Virginia and from New Jersey. Let's go to Jersey City, New Jersey first, and we go to David's site. Go ahead with your question.

MAN: How do you become involved in the Coca-Cola program. Is that possible? The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: It is very possible to become involved in the program. As a matter-of-fact, Philadelphia began their program not too long ago, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. How you do that, David, is by getting in communication with us here at IDRA. And we will give you all of the information that you need in order to ascertain whether this a program that would produce results in your area. And we would be very happy to do that. And you can do that by going to www.idra.org, or you can reach us by phone at 210-444-1710.

MODERATOR: Okay. Dr., that's similar to a question we had emailed in, asking how do we get the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program in our state. But they also went on to ask what states have the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Yes, let me review those. And, of course, the program, as I noted, has been around for 20 years. The current site includes sites in the states of Texas, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Oregon, California, Florida, Georgia, and Arizona. We are also in 35 cities in Brazil, by the way. We've learned a lot about how this program works in different contexts by agreeing to bring this program to Brazil, as well. But those are the states in the United States in which the program currently operates.

Let me say that some of these programs operate as part of direct support that is provided by the Coca-Cola Foundation. Others operate by support that is provided by the Coca-Cola bottlers or distributors in local communities. Other programs are funded through state or federal funds that align with this program. Other programs are funded by other foundations and other private concerns. And there are a number of ways in which to create a funding package for the program, and for any of you that are interested, we would be very happy, as I said, not only to share everything that we know about the program so that you can determine whether this is a program that might work for you, but also so that we might look with you at putting together a funding package.

The program, by the way, costs $25,000 per year. This is for the 100 students who participate, the 25 tutors, and the 75 tutees. It's a cost-effective program. Those $25,000 include between $12,000 and $15,000 that is actually paid out as a stipend to the students who serve as tutors. And by the way, the stipend is for their work as tutors, not for their participation in the program.

So the stipend is for the time that they actively tutor during the school year. So the $25,000 *includes* that cost, as well. The other costs that are included in that are the training and the technical assistance that IDRA provides and the evaluation that is done of each site. And by the way, any school or district that wants to become part of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program network is asked to make a commitment to be part of a national evaluation so that we, at IDRA, and we, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program network, can continue to hold ourselves accountable for results.

MODERATOR: If you have a question, press Star 1 on the touch-tone telephone, and let's take our next question from Richmond, Virginia, Muriel's location. Go ahead.

WOMAN: Yes, my question was regarding the parent involvement. Can you describe that a little bit?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Yes. Parent involvement within the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program?

WOMAN: Yes.

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Yes. Very importantly, and I would direct you to Page 17, if you want to take a look with me at the program elements. You will see that parent involvement is a part of that support frame that is included in the program element, part of the critical elements of the program. Each site does this a little bit differently. But what we work with sites to do is to assure that parents know about the program, know that their children are contributing to the education of others, and set up periodic meetings.

One of the things – and I know many of you know this to be so – one of the things about parents and their involvement in schools is that, too often, the only time that they hear from the school is if their children are in trouble. And so we have heard many a parent say, "Oh, thank goodness the school didn't call me this year," meaning my child was okay, my child did not get into trouble. We want to turn that on its head, and to assure that there is communication with parents around what is happening in school, around the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. We find, by the way, that since many of the students who participate in the program happen, also, to be poor children that come from poor families, that the stipend that is paid – when we have looked at this issue very particularly – the stipend that is paid is utilized, mostly, to help the family. So that's another contribution that students are able to make. And we find parents to be very, very proud at the end of the year when there is an end-of-year event to acknowledge the contributions that are made by the Coca-Cola Valued Youth tutors who, previously, were the students that the school ignored, or that were seen as problems, or as time bombs ready to go off. In that end-of-school event when there is recognition and parents come in, there are a lot of very, very proud parents. And that's the intention of this component. And as I said, it varies a little bit, from site to site.

Let me say, if I may, as I was speaking about the kinds of students who have participated in the program, over the last 20 years, in the very many different types of schools, of school districts, of communities in which this program has operated, we have had students of all colors, of many

languages, rich and poor, male and female, special education and not, participating in this program. And we find that it produces very good results across groups.

MODERATOR: And Cuca, we have calls from Minnesota and South Carolina. But let's go first to Temple Hills, Maryland, and Joan's location for our next question. Go ahead, your line is open.

WOMAN: Yes, we were wondering, regarding the study in 1986 and your data, does this include students who left high school to go to any GED programs or to any other training programs?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: The 1986 data, as I mentioned, were an enrollment methodology, absent data on particular students, since that was being collected at that time, neither by school districts, nor by the state department. So what we did was to take enrollment figures from the state department, and then put them into a formula that allowed us to compare several years later and look at, estimate the attrition. So I would say in answer to your question that any student that left for any reason would have been included, and is included, in those estimates that are based on enrollment. Now, it is the case that after that initial study was done, you heard me say that then the legislature, based on our study, passed a policy that required the state department to collect dropout data and school districts to collect and submit to the state, based on a particular definition.

Of great concern to us, here at IDRA, has been that as the Texas Education Agency has created methods and definitions of dropouts over the years – and by the way, they have changed quite a bit over the years – that always Texans have been unable to distinguish between those kids who graduate with a high school diploma, and those who graduate with a GED, because everyone was lumped together. And as you know, and as every employer knows, a GED and high school diploma is not the same thing, either in terms of earning power, or options, whether it is in the workforce, or in higher education. So this next year, the state of Texas will begin to follow the federal definition and will disaggregate numbers for GED students who, in other words, students who leave to get a GED, and then students who complete that. And we're happy that that change is finally coming about.

MODERATOR: If you have a question, press Star 1 on your touch-tone telephone. Let's take our next call from Clemson, South Carolina. Mary's site is up next, and go ahead please.

WOMAN: Hello. I have a question about the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Have you done any work on the effect it has on students with disabilities?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: We have not had the program, in any site, focused only on students with disabilities. We have, however, as I mentioned a little bit earlier, had students with disabilities who *have* participated in the program, and who have done very, very well in it. Josie Cortez, who is the director of our dropout program here at IDRA, has an article – by the way if you're sort of interested in sort of this relationship in the NDPC web site – that focuses on issues related to students with disabilities, and links it a bit to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. The *Big Idea* is the electronic newsletter that NDPC has on its web site will give you a little

more information. But the answer to your question is we have had students with disabilities participate in the program. They have done very, very well. And like all other students, the important thing is to assure that there is an alignment between what the tutor is being asked to do and what is possible for that student so that the student doesn't experience more failure, rather than success, in this program.

Related to that, that is one of the reasons in our critical elements, why it is important, whether it is special disabilities or not, to have at least a four grade level difference, between the tutors and the tutees. And that is so that the subject matter of the tutoring is not so advanced for the tutor that this becomes another failure experience for them, rather than one in which they are, yes, stretched, but also successful. And so through experience, we have found that you don't want, for example, to have eighth graders tutoring sixth graders. You want at least a four grade level difference.

MODERATOR: And we thank you for that question. Our next call is from Roseville, Minnesota, Ann Glory's location.

WOMAN: Thank you. It was referenced that there were two dropout prevention programs in the country that met high standards. We wonder if you have any information that could tell us a little bit about the second one.

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: I don't have that information with me, but I would be happy to post it on the web site. How will that be?

WOMAN: That'd be excellent.

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Okay.

WOMAN: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Okay, and again, that web site, is, Cuca?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: The web site is www.idra.org.

MODERATOR: Very good, and that's also where they can find information on participation –

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MODERATOR: …Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: That's where they can find participation concerning the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. You can also find a lot of information related to the dropout issue.

MODERATOR: All right. www.idra.org. If you have a question for Cuca, press Star 1 on your touch-tone telephone. We have a lot of participants today from Alaska. Let's take a call from Ketchekan, Alaska, and we'll go there for our next question. Your line is open.

MAN: Good morning. I just want to ask if the program has been around for 20 years, and if people have been using it, how do you corroborate the data with Texas's dropout rate increasing, actually, in 20 years, and not decreasing?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Yes. Excellent, excellent question. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, as good as it is, and as much as there is documentation at IDRA and from many other places, including by the way, that the program was part of the national diffusion network in which researchers select the program based on empirical data and ascribe to it the fact that it works. As much as that is so, though, the program is limited to the number of students who participate in the program – the 25 students who are tutors, and the good effects that it also has on the tutees. When we are talking about, for example, in the state of Texas, in 1986, 86,000 students not graduating, then, clearly, this program, as good as it is, or any other program, as good as it may be, is not going to produce the scale that is needed in order to really address this issue. And that is, precisely, the reason when I am asked, you know, I have been a part of this program, actually, since its inception and its design, and have seen it from many, many angles, heard many, many people speak about it, heard many, many young people talk about the difference that it has made. Always, I assert – and your question has given me an opportunity to do this today – that the answer to the dropout problem in the United States is not to have half of the students tutoring the other half. We need much more than that.

And that's what is going to be the topic of our second segment, by the way, is what kind of action framework that looks institutionally at schools needs to be put in place such that we stop this? I mean, this is, clearly, not working. This, as I said, hemorrhaging of kids outside before they graduate from schools is clearly, clearly not working, and it's costing a lot of money. It is costing much in individual children's lives and in the lives of their families. And so, as I said, as good as this program is, and as much as it will make a difference for the students that are a part of the program, we can, and we must look for solutions that change our institutions, that shift the way that schooling is for students such that the school increases its own ability to hold students in through to graduation. So a very important question, and that would be my sense of things.

MODERATOR: Let's go to the other side of Alaska to Juneau, and Art's location for our next question. Juneau, Alaska, your line is open.

MAN: Yes. Can you hear me?

MODERATOR: Yes, we can.

MAN: Yes, good morning, and thank you for this. I'd like to ask the question. I wonder, are there early intervention strands in this program? For example, for preschools, or Head Start programs, or elementary schools?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: If your question is about the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, the answer is no, not, generally. Although, in some schools, the tutees, there's much more of a focus on the younger children that are tutored. And in many cases, those are kindergartners and pre-kindergartners, in some cases. But this program was a direct result of our

concern that too many young people were dropping out of school at this key transition point, eighth to ninth grade, ninth to 10th grade. As a matter-of-fact, we began the program in 1984 in high schools. And then because we saw, through our 1986 study and the census data that we looked at, that 50 percent of Latino kids who were going to drop out did so before the ninth grade. Then we decided that we needed to begin the program at the middle school, as well. So that, in relation to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.

That is not to say, though, your question implies – and it's a smart implication – that this is an issue of the entire pipeline, and that the pipeline, or the path from pre-kindergarten, the Head Start, to college graduation and beyond, is marked by a lot of cracks and a lot of disjunctures. And in many cases, students experience absolutely no connection between early education and secondary school, much less between high school graduation and higher education. And so, it is the case that as students experience failure, that there is a cumulative effect over the years, and that if we could begin doing what needs doing at earlier levels, that we would, in fact, affect the dropout issue. There's some data – as a matter-of-fact, some of you may be familiar with – that points to the fact that Head Start and other particular early childhood programs that have been studied over a very long time have, in fact, successfully kept students in schools, graduating, and many going on to college.

So while this program, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, does not do that, many of the programs that IDRA is involved with, including our early reading first project, which is the collaboration that we have with Head Start, is focused directly on building centers of excellence at the early childhood level so that young people begin to experience success, learning, etc., even before they enter public schools. And by the way, for the person who asked about parent involvement, we find that parent involvement in those early programs is as critical as it is at any other level. As a matter-of-fact, some of you may have seen some studies coming out of the Kellogg Foundation that say that for Latino and minority children, even students who are already in college – and this was an unexpected finding – that families play a key role at the higher education level. And so people are looking at parental engagement and parental connection at the higher education level, as well, for those students.

MODERATOR: Cuca, let's take one more call before we get back to the presentation. And that call comes from Jersey City, New Jersey. We go back to David's location.

MAN: The question is, how have school attendance policies affected dropout rates, schools having rigid policies that help to stop kids from dropping out or to help them stay in school?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Well, there's a lot of empirical information that tells us that [background conversation] Can you hear me?

MAN: Yes.

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Okay, that very rigid truancy policies actually are not very helpful in keeping kids in school. Clearly, it's important to have truancy policies. Clearly, it's important to have ages through which kids must stay in school. But, clearly, those two things put together aren't making a big dent in the issue. And so what we have found, actually, is that when

the focus is only on getting kids to school, but nothing in school changes, then students will drop out again. And in a number of communities, we have seen rather big efforts, community-wide, city-wide campaigns in which everyone focuses on bringing kids back to school. And what has happened in some of those, most of those cases, is that there has been no attention to what is it that students come back to. And so if they come back to schools that suffer from the same inability of holding kids in, then what we found is that within a six- to eight-week period, all of the students who came in are back out again.

MODERATOR: All right. And with that, we have no other calls in the queue, but a reminder to our participants to jot down those questions. We will have another opportunity for questions a little bit later on. But, Dr., why don't we continue on with the second part of our presentation today?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: All right. Very well. Well, if you are following along with the materials that were provided you, we are now to Page 26. And in this particular segment, what I would like to do is begin by synthesizing for you what I see as seven important lessons from Texas. Many people around the country think that Texans are obnoxious enough, so I don't want to add to your sense of that if that is so. But we feel really that there's a lot to learn from Texas, for at least a couple of reasons.

One is the very early research that was done on this issue and that I have been sharing with you. The other is that much of the *No Child Left Behind* features are based on the accountability system in Texas, and there is some, I think, direct relationship between the accountability system and the dropout issue. And so for that reason, I think it's important that we share what has gone on in this state. And as I shared in the earlier segment, we are *not* where we need to be. The dropout rate that we shared in November, as a result of our last attrition study, was higher even than the 33 percent attrition rate that caused so much consternation in 1986. So, clearly, something needs to be done in this state. And I think clearly, as well, whatever can be learned across the country from both the what-to-do and what-not-to-do might be important. So it is in that spirit, then, that I would like to begin this segment by reasserting what I did in response to one of the questions.

And that is that dropout programs are not enough. Any program, including the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, which as I said, is so good for those students who do participate, but is not the answer to the massive problem that the United States faces in this regard. So no single program is a magic bullet. And what is needed is to reform the *entire* school. This is the reason to focus on school holding power, and to shift from prevention to graduation, and to shift into a way of doing business in which all students are known and are valuable. And, of course, our position – and I know yours, as well – would be that losing even one student is not acceptable.

Seven lessons from Texas. Lesson number one. Losing children from our school system is a persistent and unacknowledged problem. It is certainly so in Texas, as we have been discussing. It is also the case nationally. Gary Orfield, from the Harvard Civil Rights Project, reports that there is a dangerously high, these are his words, "dangerously high percentage of students" – and, of course, we know these are disproportionately poor and minority – "that disappear from the education pipeline." The Harvard Civil Rights Project states that, nationally, only about 68

percent of all students who went to the ninth grade will graduate on time with a regular diploma. They also say, interestingly, that dropout data misleads the public into thinking that most students are earning diplomas. We find this to be so in Texas and across the country, as well.

The problem is persistent. It's existed for a very, very long time, and I think it would be important to reassert that since every student counts, and we simply must count every student, and that's the reason why we have insisted, for almost 20 years now, on clear and credible counts, which the state of Texas has yet to create.

Lesson number two. Fraud is a red herring, distracting us from the real problem that is before us. Undercounting is the result of institutional intransigence, and not massive fraud. Let me tell you why I say this. There have been many stories in the media coming out of Texas, for example, in Houston, that are very compelling stories of fraud. And that should be addressed, and that should be changed. But what is also very important to know is that even if all those school districts reported data within the letter of the law, there would be a serious undercount of students. That is so in Texas, and according to the Harvard Civil Rights Project, that is so across the country. Some of how that is done is by creating leaver codes. Texas, currently, has 29 of those. And so students who *are* dropouts are not included in the dropout count, even though they never received a high school diploma. As recently as four or five years ago, Texas had as many as 43 leaver codes. So the definition is obscured; the issue is skirted; and, therefore, we need a credible definition. But it is a question of how the dropout methodology counts. It is not, the undercounts are not a result of terrible people in school systems who are trying to obfuscate this problem, or fraud everywhere. It is, in fact, that the actual definitions that are used can very, very definitely change what the numbers look like. And in Texas, the credibility of the numbers that are used has suffered so much from many, many counter pieces of data. Many newspapers have done investigations, etc. The important thing about this is that in Texas and everywhere in the country, as long as knowing the real status of our students is not a state policy reform priority, then thousands of kids will continue to be lost, from school, certainly, but also from tax revenue, and tax bases and everything else that we talked about during the first segment.

Lesson number three. Accountability systems did not create dropouts. This is a, I think, very important and a key lesson. As I talk with people across the country, and visit schools across the country, I find many people who think that the very, very serious and real pressure that is put on school systems by accountability mechanisms, such as those in *No Child Left Behind*, is, in fact, causing the dropout rate to be higher. While that, in fact, may be so – and I have a very big concern about that – it is also so that it is not accountability systems that created the dropout issue to begin with.

Those of you who are either old enough, or have seen or remember the Civil Rights Commission Report from the early 1970s, know that those findings told us that 80, 90 percent dropout rate among Latinos in the southwestern part of the United States were not uncommon. There were no accountability systems at the time. As a matter-of-fact, I know a school district in Texas that had a 95, almost 100 percent dropout rate for Latino students who had very, very high status with the agency, and who never was questioned, in terms of their accreditation. So I think it is important to make this distinction and to remember that losing children from school systems has been a

long, long, long health problem that, unacceptably, high dropout rates pre-date the accountability systems that have been developed over the last several years.

It is possible to create accountability systems that do not hurt children. And when you create accountability systems that do not hurt children, then you will not create dropouts. But in order to do that, you have to decouple high-stakes testing from accountability systems because what is happening right now, of course, is that we do have high-stakes testing; children are being hurt. In Texas they are being retained at the third grade, at the fifth grade level if they do not pass our state-mandated competency test. And we know that retention rate almost doubles the chances of dropping out of school.

Lesson number four began to speak about just a little bit, and that is that high-stakes testing and accountability systems must be uncoupled. All of us know that testing of students to promote school accountability is not a new idea. Students have been tested for decades using many kinds of tests, locally-developed and otherwise. But a new dimension has emerged in the use of a single test to make decisions concerning the students, whether they're promoted, whether they're graduated from high school, etc. The push for using state tests in Texas, and otherwise, as a primary basis for promotion, retention, and graduation decisions is based on this very incorrect assumption that a single test score tells you all you need to know about student achievement. In Texas, we know from very recent research on our minimum competency testing program – the TAAS and now the TAKS – that improvement in state test scores did not simultaneously result in higher test scores on national tests, and that despite rising state test scores. Texas students were not graduating in higher numbers. So school accountability should not mean that high-stakes decisions in children's lives are made on the basis of tests, or that tests dictate what children learn.

I think it is important that Texas and other states continue to measure school performance. My belief – and I have been trying to discuss with as many people as will listen – my belief is that measuring school performance can be done more efficiently and at less expense if we move into a system that tests a sample of students, students from each school, in order to see how each school is performing. And, of course, those of you that know NCLB know that current federal policy does not allow that kind of sample testing for accountability. That doesn't mean we should not do it.

Lesson five. We cannot afford to decide that some kids count. That is, I think, pretty obvious to many people by now; although we haven't seen it in the results, yet, but we are producing – and that is that we cannot afford to decide that some kids don't count. The costs are huge for students, for their families, for their communities. Dropouts, as you know, are more likely to be unemployed. They earn less money if they do get work. In Texas and in other states, the great majority of inmates in prison are high school dropouts. Lots and lots and lots of costs. We can't afford it from an economic perspective. And I think from a moral perspective we cannot afford it. We should not have it be okay to have students losing a chance at life because they happened to be in the wrong school, or they happened to come from the wrong side of town, or they happened to speak the wrong language, or they happened to have the wrong color of skin. I think we cannot morally justify that to ourselves.

Lesson six. Dropout data is not a legitimate reason to give up on public education. I say this because here in Texas and in so many parts of the country, there's a strong push to fix public schools by making them disappear, and by privatizing public education. My sense is that giving up on public education is certainly not going to solve the dropout problem. As a matter-of-fact, we know that already from some empirical data around charter schools in Texas and other parts of the country, graduation rates are not rising. Private schools, I believe, don't have the capacity – when we have looked at this and researched data – don't have the capacity or the capability to absorb large numbers of poor students. And, of course, private schools are not accountable to the public for actions or results. If we distribute public money for private schools, it, of course, takes away money from our communities and results in higher taxes for homeowners and businesses.

Excellent neighborhood public schools are really the foundation of strong communities. And I believe that they are the foundation, actually, of our entire democracy. And, so, I find it rather, disingenuous is the best word that I can find, when people assert that because we have a high dropout rate, we should then abandon public schools, and abandon the neighborhoods that own those public schools. The best way to strengthen public schools is, of course, to strengthen public schools**,** schools that are accountable to all of us.

And then, finally, lesson number seven. It's really time – we've discussed this throughout our time together today – to move from dropping out to holding on. We need the public will; we need the commitment to do what needs doing. And I think, quite importantly, we also need a framework within which we can look at what needs to be done. And so, I would point to now – and this will be sort of the last piece to my seminar remarks today – point you to an action framework that we have developed that brings all of what we know, through both research and experience over the last 30 years. The Intercultural Development Research Association, by the way, has been around for 32 years. Our mission continues to be to create excellent schools for children, and we welcome your collaboration in doing so.

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.

MODERATOR: Well, thank you very much, doctor. And with that, I know that we wanted to allow a little bit of time for closing comments. And let's bring back into the room Dr. Loujenia Williams Bost, and if we can have a quick response, we do have one caller in the queue. Let's go to Jersey City, New Jersey for one quick question. Go ahead, please.

MAN: What specific community involvement activities might we use to bring community involvement into the picture?

DR. ROBLEDO MONTECEL: Well, one thing that I know we *ought* not to continue to use is the kind of community involvement, or parent involvement, that brings in parents as only sort of little helpers, you know? Or as fundraisers. The most effective community involvement actually brings parents together to look at the health of their school systems, to look at data, to collaborate with the schools to make decisions about policy. Those in the literature are the kinds of involvement that matter. It also matters, of course, that individual parents feel a connection to the school regarding their individual child. And that is key, as well, in the whole picture.

MODERATOR: Okay, well thank you. I'm sorry. We are out of time for questions. However, the discussion certainly, continues for the next couple of weeks. And there are instructions on how to participate in an online discussion with Cuca. And that will be found after page 34 in

your printed materials. But let me bring in, for some closing comments, Loujeania Williams Bost.

DR. WILLIAMS BOST: First of all, I'd like to thank Cuca for the wealth of information she's provided us today. And I would also like to thank our listening audience for your participation. You can find additional information about the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program at www.idra.org, and you can also find more in-depth information about the program and its components in our *Big Ideas* newsletter, the January, 2005 issue. That would be Volume One, Issue One, for more information that's synthesized on the program. We'd also like to invite you to join our next teleseminar on February 16, at 12:00 Eastern Standard Time, with Dr. Jose Blackorby from SRI Research Institute in Melino Park, California, "Translating National Data to State and Local Practices." Again, we thank you for your participation today. And have a good holiday and holiday break.

MODERATOR: Well, thank you very much. And that concludes today's program, "Increasing School Holding Power for All Students," with Dr. Loujeania Williams Bost and Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, brought to you by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities.

Our time is up for today's program, but again, if you would like to continue a discussion of today's topic, please see the instructions on the back of your printed materials on how to do that.

You should have an evaluation form as part of your materials for today's program. We encourage you to please fill it out and fax it to the number shown on the bottom of that form. Your comments and suggestions are important in our efforts to bring you quality future programming.

 Thank you very much for joining us today. And enjoy the rest of your day. You may hang up now.

[END OF TAPE]