

# Temporary Texas Policy Using Individual Graduation Committee Relieves High-Stakes for 6,000 Students

by David Hinojosa, J.D.

Standardized testing, when valid and reliable, provides important information on how our schools are doing with all of our students. And disaggregated data helps us know where to focus improvement efforts. But children must not be hurt in the process. And students are hurt when Texas policy requires basing promotion and graduation on performance on the state's standardized tests.

Several states have reconsidered the high-stakes consequences attached to state-mandated high school tests. Texas did so in 2015 when its legislature authorized alternative assessments for high school graduation which greatly improved opportunities to graduate, particularly for students of color and lower income students. However, the policy is set to expire in 2017.

Texas currently requires students to pass five exit STAAR exams to graduate high school. With the new policy in SB149, students who have completed all requirements and do not pass one or two of the end-of-course exams may still graduate if approved by an individual graduation committee (IGC). The committee consists of the school principal or designee, the teacher of the course, the teacher's supervisor or department chair, and the parent or designee or student. They review the student's academic record to determine his or her eligibility to graduate.

TEA data for the 2014-15 school year show that the vast majority of IGC graduates failed the two end-of-course exams that are not required for testing by the federal government: English II and U.S. History. Of the 3,684 IGC graduates failing one high school exit exam, the English II and U.S. History exams account for 83 percent of all IGC graduates. In addition, of the 1,991 students

	Number of IGC Graduates	Number of All Graduates	Percent of IGC Graduates	Percent of All Graduates
Total IGC Graduates	6,279	313,387	100%	100%
African American Students	1,121	39,690	18%	13%
American Indian Students	-	<1,400	-	-
Asian American Students	179	13,089	3%	4%
Latino American Students	4,265	148,961	68%	48%
Pacific Islander Students	-	<500	-	-
White Students	645	104,375	10%	33%
Multiracial Students	36	5,451	1%	2%
Economically Disadvantaged Students	4,654	146,375	74%	47%

Intercultural Development Research Association, 2016. Data source: Texas Education Agency, 2014-15

failing two EOC exams, fewer than 1 percent failed a combination of exams that did not include either the English II or U.S. History exam.

According to the latest TEA data released for the 2014-15 school year, there were 12,077 students assigned an individual graduation committee. Of these, 52 percent (6,279) were recommended for graduation (see table).

IGC graduates account for 2 percent of all graduates in Texas. Of these, economically disadvantaged, Latino students and African American students seem to benefit mostly as a result of SB149's newly designed alternative graduation assessments.

IDRA and others have been calling for accountability

that does not misuse testing data for holding students back in grade or preventing them from graduating.\* Reliance on a single measure fails to consider multiple factors that impact student achievement, including the fact that the student has no control over inequitable school resources or the quality of teaching they receive. Texas is on the right track with the addition of the IGC policy and should extend it beyond 2017.

David Hinojosa, J.D., is the IDRA National Director of Policy ([david.hinojosa@idra.org](mailto:david.hinojosa@idra.org)).

\*See for example, "Texas Needs Diplomas, Not Delusions," testimony presented by IDRA President & CEO, María "Cucu" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., in 2002: <http://budurl.com/IDRAtxDelusion>

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**INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**  
MARÍA "CUCA" ROBLEDO MONTECEL, PH.D., PRESIDENT & CEO  
5815 CALLAGHAN ROAD, SUITE 101  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78228  
210.444.1710 • FAX 210.444.1714  
CONTACT@IDRA.ORG • WWW.IDRA.ORG