

# **A Community Speaks**

## **A Report on Albuquerque's Coalition-Building for Education Blueprint Dialogues for Action**



**Sponsored by  
Intercultural Development Research Association**



*INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION*

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**Mission:** Creating schools that work for *all* children.

**Vision:** IDRA is a vanguard leadership development and research team working with people to create self-renewing schools that value and empower all children, families and communities.

**Functions:**

**POLICY AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT** – IDRA policy and leadership development promotes accountability and responsibility. Using inclusive, cutting-edge and broad-based strategies, we develop leadership within communities, schools and policymaking bodies to create collaborative and enlightened educational policies that work for *all* children.

**RESEARCH AND EVALUATION** – IDRA research and evaluation advance educational policies, programs and practices. Using collaborative and innovative methods, we investigate important questions and provide insights into compelling educational issues. As a national resource, we set standards in the design, analysis, and synthesis of timely and useful research involving diverse populations.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** – IDRA professional development causes people across the country to take action that empowers others. We assist people to create educational solutions through innovative, participatory, and hands-on presentations, workshops, and technical assistance that promotes sustained growth and development.

Our assistance values the needs and cultures of our participants and acknowledges their experiences. We carefully craft training designs that include reflection and application. IDRA professional development causes participants to take a new look at persistent problems and equips them to take action that produces positive outcomes for *all* children.

**PROGRAMS AND MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT** – IDRA programs and materials cause people across the country to improve education for *all* children. Our programs produce results. Our materials are useful and timely; attractive, cost-effective and intuitive; linguistically, culturally and developmentally appropriate.

IDRA pro-actively disseminates cutting-edge information to educators, administrators, decision-makers and policymakers, parents and community leaders.

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## **A Legacy of Civil Rights: A Promise Unfulfilled**

Almost 50 years ago, in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that sending children to separate schools purely on the basis of race was unconstitutional. Seven years earlier, the Ninth Circuit Court ruled in *Mendez vs. Westminster* that Mexican American children in the Westminster school district in California could not be denied access to public schools or denied quality education because they were Mexican American. The *Brown* and *Mendez* court cases, along with others like *Lau* and *Plyler*, transformed the nature of U.S. public education.

Yet, the promise of quality education remains an elusive goal for many children of color. Often, the issues of civil rights in education are viewed in the deficit and limiting terms of “Black vs. White” causing divisions among minority and majority groups to the detriment of our children and the nation’s future.

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

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel,  
IDRA executive director

## **Summit on Civil Rights Implications: A Roadmap for Reform**

On October 10, 2003, the Intercultural Development Research Association convened diverse leaders from various sectors in San Antonio to create dialogue and action on the implications of *Brown vs. Board of Education* for Latino students in U.S. public schools to catalyze a national action agenda for reform. Educators, superintendents, college presidents, journalists, community members and business leaders gathered in roundtable discussions to consider the state of education for children of color through the lenses of landmark civil rights cases and national commitments. This unprecedented gathering was co-sponsored by the *Brown vs. Board of Education* 50th Anniversary Commission and the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research.



## **Cross-Race Dialogue and Partnerships for Action**

Building on the summit’s success, IDRA, with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, conducted five “Blueprint for Action” dialogues in Houston, Tyler, Dallas, Albuquerque and Little Rock.

These Blueprint Dialogues gathered African American and Latino community, business and education leaders in each city to address key education issues in each respective community, including equitable funding, ensuring graduation for all, quality schooling and access to higher education.

These local meetings provided unique opportunities to set aside differences and to work together across sectors and across race. The dialogues were successful in engaging education stakeholders in discussions about key issues and challenges in realizing the spirit of the *Mendez* and *Brown* decisions. They also provided information and began to seed new coalitions among groups that seldom have the opportunity to plan positive action for improving education for all children.

## **A Blueprint for Action in Albuquerque**

On November 17, 2006, IDRA held a dialogue in Albuquerque, New Mexico, that introduced a new dimension – that of student voices. Leading up to this event, IDRA and Critical Exposure worked with local students from Albuquerque public high schools to learn about the landmark cases and to photograph their school realities, in the context of *Mendez* and *Brown*. Students then formally presented their photographs and perspectives to the dialogue participants and their families at the evening reception. The students’

images reveal both progress made in the decades since the *Mendez* and *Brown* decisions and the need for continuing efforts to ensure that all students have access to a high quality education.

The images and stories set the context and tone for what remains to be done and the call to action that faces the Albuquerque community. Here is some of what students captured and shared.



### **“Moldy Ceiling”**

**“This picture is of my government class that has a moldy roof. The mess was caused by a leaky roof, which is a problem in many other rooms and in the hallways. This is a way that the *Brown* and *Mendez* cases aren’t being fulfilled, in that our schools aren’t receiving [the support] they desperately need. I took this picture to show people that even though we set high standards that high standards may not always be fulfilled.”**

– Jazmine Ralph, 12<sup>th</sup> grade

**“My high school is the most diverse in the city, but still certain classes are less diverse and integrated than others... Why are English classes less integrated and diverse than others?... The promises of *Brown-Mendez* are still not completely fulfilled. Yes, there is no longer any segregation throughout our school but I believe that there are still problems involving integration and diversity throughout classes.”**

– Fatimah Martin, 11<sup>th</sup> grade

**“This picture is of a broken fence in the back of my school. I took this picture for a couple of reasons. First of all, the angle I was at was an interesting one, and second I felt that this fence meant something and represented something to me. I saw something very symbolic in the shot and I wanted to capture that. Because the**



### **Broken Fence**

**I felt that the fence looks and appears to be broken, I felt that the fence represented and symbolized the promises desired from the *Brown-Mendez* cases. While they appeared to be fixed on the surface, if you look deeper or beyond the surface there is still much to be changed and fixed. We cannot continue to just attempt to mend those problems of which the cases fought for. We have come a long way but we have still have further to go.”**

– Fatimah Martin, 11<sup>th</sup> grade

**I feel that many students of minority descent feel that AP classes weren’t meant for them... money is restricting the promises of *Brown* and *Mendez* from happening in that economic status can and does separate races.”**

– Jazmine Ralph, 12<sup>th</sup> grade



## Separate Tables



**“These pictures were taken of a photography class. It shows how students are separate – there are tables for White students and other ones for African American students. They don’t interact together in class!”**

– Randa Hussein, 11<sup>th</sup> grade

Within this context, participants focused on exploring key questions.

- ❖ What are the challenges to overcome for access and success for *all* students in Albuquerque?
- ❖ What resources, strengths and assets can be tapped to create a local blueprint for action that will result in access and success for *all* students in Albuquerque?
- ❖ What opportunities can be seized upon to accomplish this goal?
- ❖ What local actions are needed to fulfill the promise of *Mendez* and *Brown* for *all* students?

During the Albuquerque Blueprint for Action meeting, IDRA provided participants with local education and demographic data, facts for fair funding for Albuquerque, local policymaker contact information, summaries of the *Mendez* and *Brown* court cases, and a checklist for the Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform developed

by IDRA. Dissemination of this and other relevant information continues via IDRA’s *Mendez* and *Brown* web site (<http://www.idra.org/mendezbrown>).

## Challenges

Albuquerque dialogue participants cited the following challenges in their community.

- ❖ Professional development that supports all administrators and teachers in promoting high quality, equal access and the value of diversity;
- ❖ The need for culturally responsive pedagogy and bilingual teachers;
- ❖ Students’ limited access to advanced placement, and qualified teachers;
- ❖ Securing more funding for all of the children, including early intervention programs;
- ❖ Openness to all communities, all parents;
- ❖ Greater degree of parent engagement;
- ❖ Meeting time for parent engagement and meeting time for teachers;



- ❖ Need for all of the voices to be heard and valued;
- ❖ Problems with university recruitment, retention of minority students and enrichment (support for students to be successful);
- ❖ Lack of mentors for minority students, especially first-time-in-college students;

- ❖ Alignment of high school and university curricula;
- ❖ Greater communication between the university and schools; and
- ❖ Labeling and low expectations for special education students.



### **Assets, Opportunities for Reform and Action Steps**

The Albuquerque dialogue participants provided the following recommendations for addressing these challenges.

- ❖ The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) needs more quality discussions starting from the top down;
- ❖ APS needs a multicultural department with more than one individual;
- ❖ Tap the community projects for problem-solving such as “Undoing Racism,” and New Mexico Bosses for Children;
- ❖ Use community assets, such as parents, professionals, the university, libraries, faith-based organizations and schools;
- ❖ Create “fertile, culturally-rich community schools that are full service”;
- ❖ Use existing tools and resources for continuing the community dialogues, including the Superintendent’s Council on Equity, the existing multicultural framework, and the articulated philosophies for teachers and parents;
- ❖ Dismantle power and control, open up the leadership responsibilities and flatten the hierarchy;
- ❖ Establish mentor programs and access curricula with clear outcomes;
- ❖ Build healthy communities by accessing the vast database of social support systems that already exist in the state of New Mexico and Albuquerque;
- ❖ Use the United Way directory to create communities of support;
- ❖ Create a common language for developing a unified community;
- ❖ Develop a curriculum that is more inclusive, bringing in ideas, knowledge and skills from communities;
- ❖ Change the funding formula for textbook adoption so that more funds are available to buy resources from someone other than a textbook company, thus leading to greater creativity;
- ❖ Use accountability, not for punishment, but for communicating and marshalling resources more efficiently and for the benefit of student learning;
- ❖ Use community centers for bringing parents and teachers together and be flexible around parent schedules;
- ❖ Raise public awareness for enhancing student success;
- ❖ Provide teacher training that enhances and revitalizes standards and assessment;
- ❖ Identify research-based school-community models that help students succeed;
- ❖ Use data to drive instruction and create new instructional models;



- ❖ Ensure every school has a home-school liaison who advocates for all students;
- ❖ Continue to implement powerful leadership modules for all administrators;
- ❖ Discover the benefit of the three-tier licensure for accountability and inquiry;
- ❖ Build trust in the school, in the classroom, enabling people to feel empowered;
- ❖ Collaborate with the state public education department and the school districts to help leverage resources and provide a uniform or universal scope; and
- ❖ Use the existing community organizations' resources to help young people develop their voice and be able to advocate for themselves and the people they represent.

The primary result of the Albuquerque Blueprints for Action meeting was new and strengthened alliances among groups with local leaders committed to continuing the work through additional local dialogues.

IDRA will continue to support this effort at regional, state and national levels and has identified prerequisites for scale-up efforts that include the following insights.

- ❖ Communities of color need an opportunity, at the local level, to voice concerns regarding access to education.

**“We need to be more culturally sensitive. We need to use culturally responsive pedagogy. We need to be open to all our communities, to all of our parents.”**

– Dialogue participant

**“A lot of times, we leave out the most important expert, and that’s the student... the one that is falling through the cracks, the one you could not make a connection with in the classroom for whatever reason. There may have been an action or a gesture or something that you said that disrupted them, and you may not even realize it.”**

– Dialogue participant



- ❖ People yearn to communicate across groups but do not necessarily know how to do so.

**“Schools and universities need to take active steps to create a culture of engagement for parents and for communities to ensure that linguistically, culturally and racially diverse families are brought in as meaningful partners in decision-making and in planning.”**

– Dr. Rosana Rodríguez, IDRA

- ❖ Communities benefit from a structure to share concerns across communities.

**“The skills and the knowledge that we would like to transmit to our students have them become proficient in is defined, in part, by the community in which it exists.”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ Coalition building must span across disciplines and sectors to improve education.

**“Today is the day that our separate communities can step beyond what has kept us apart, step beyond our individual bias and our personal issues, and see the power and beauty of what the collective good can be for all of our children.”**

– Dr. Bradley Scott, IDRA

**“Build a school district that is racially, culturally, linguistically responsive to provide appropriate education for students’ success locally and globally.”**

– Albuquerque Dialogue Vision Statement

- ❖ Facilitated interaction can yield greater interconnectedness, recognition of assets and an improved will for effective action.

**“PTOs should change the name of their organization to Parent-Teacher Equity Taskforce and keep their focus on equitable education for all students.”**

– Dialogue participant



**“[One] tool would be... collaboration between homes and schools, the superintendent’s Continued Success Committee that has professors... and teachers who work together to align curriculum for the success in higher achievement of our students.”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ When local communities own the process, there is greater commitment for effective action.

**“[Get] a trust fund from a docent for full support of a school. The tools and resources would be planned giving. And operations for leverage would be the multicultural framework that Albuquerque has devised... parents as activists, dismantling power and control, opening up the leadership responsibilities, and a flattened hierarchy.”**

– Dialogue participant

**“...having schools where children, families and communities participate.”**

– Dialogue participant

**“All of our students have mastered a quality education. All of our students compete in a global marketplace with doors open to them around the world, and they have helped our country maintain strength and the ability to continue helping others.”**

– Albuquerque Dialogue Vision Statement

- ❖ Each community needs to know its local context to fulfill the promises of *Mendez* and *Brown*.

**“We need more bilingual teachers... books... better resources in some of the schools... qualified teachers... taxpayers’ money needs to be distributed where it needs to be, in the poor schools, not the richest schools.”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ There is acknowledgment of inequalities in education by communities and parents.

**“We have a school that’s on a [military] base, and our parents who are undocumented can’t get on base. So it’s really hard for them to be part and parcel of the entire school community.”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ There is great readiness by communities and parents to act and to partner with schools.

**“We need to make sure that everybody comes to the table, that all of the voices are heard, that no one is disenfranchised. We need to make sure that our parents are all welcome, that our schools are welcoming.”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ There is complexity and diversity within and among groups that both pose challenges and serve as opportunities for the greater good.

**“Building healthy communities, which for us means access to the vast database of social support systems that exist in the State of New Mexico and in Albuquerque...”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ Accountability is good, must be shared and accomplished through multiple measures, and must not hurt kids.

**“Teachers need to know the power of standards, but at the same time need to know how to engage all students, how to reach all students. All of our students need to be able to see themselves in the curriculum.”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ Education, as a common civic space, can have positive impacts and can be a leverage point for other issues (e.g., health care).

**“Keep schools open to be the hub of learning for the community. Tap retirees and students as mentors and tutors.”**

– Dialogue participant

**“We need to transform our communities so that everyone takes responsibility for the education of our children.”**

– Dialogue participant

- ❖ The histories of *Mendez* and *Brown* are inextricably connected and are powerful linking points for African Americans and Latinos to dialogue and act together.

**“[Our vision is...] in our school, all students have mastered a quality education. All of our students compete in a global marketplace with doors open to them around the world, and they have helped our country maintain strength and the ability to continue helping others.”**

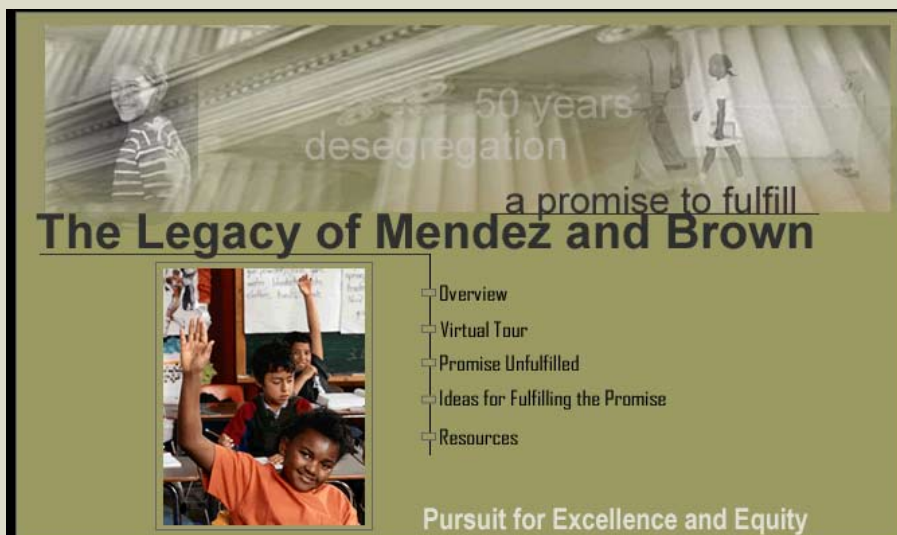
– Dialogue participant

This endeavor has potential for lasting positive impact throughout New Mexico and the nation. Seizing the unique opportunity of changing demographics and given the momentum provided by this year of commemoration of civil rights in the United States, the Albuquerque dialogues have begun to create a legacy of shared leadership, accountability and engaged action to ensure an equitable and excellent education for African American, Latino and Native American students.

**“We have to remember that each child is an individual... and that somewhere someone loves this child, someone somewhere along the way nurtures this child, along with us at the school or administrative level... we have to be able to open our arms and open our hearts.”**

– Dialogue participant

## Web Site for Mendez and Brown Blueprint Dialogues for Action



**Get an overview of the groundbreaking discussions of education equity and civil rights**

**Experience the sights and sounds of the events through videos and speeches**

**Explore the roundtable discussions and what each group recommended**

**Get the guide “Seven Actions to Fulfill the Promise of Brown and Mendez” to use in your community**

**Find out how you can learn and do more to fulfill the promise**

**[www.idra.org/mendezbrown](http://www.idra.org/mendezbrown)**

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