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Fair Funding is Essential to Having Excellent Schools for All Texas Students

IDRA Statement, by María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., IDRA President

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“When families can’t count on their neighborhood public school to be funded equitably, something has gone deeply wrong with Texas.” - María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., IDRA President

Almost four decades ago, IDRA was founded to defend all children and their right to an excellent and equitable education. At that time, the state of Texas had one of the most inequitable and unfair systems of public school finance in the country. Our policy reform efforts coupled with strategic litigation support led to a major systemic overhaul. After years of struggle by many communities, the state finally reduced funding disparities from thousands of dollars per student to less than \$700. Many schools were beginning to reap the benefits of the state’s earlier commitment to equalize education funding for all of its children. Student achievement improved, taxpayers were more equally sharing the cost of paying for public schools, and businesses were seeing the results of better-prepared graduates.

But those gains have been taken away. Texas is one of the wealthiest states in the country, but it leads the nation in income inequality, and this begins with, and is exacerbated by, inequities in the state’s public education system. Our state operates a public education system marked by inequitable funding, which impacts access to qualified teachers, school leaders, staff, curricula, materials and facilities. Student outcomes reflect these conditions.

For example, two weeks ago, IDRA released our latest annual high school attrition study, showing that Texas public schools are failing to graduate one out of every four students. At the current pace, we could lose as many as 2.8 million more students over the next 25 years.

This past spring, the Texas legislature made matters dramatically worse when it chose to cut education funding in a manner that was neither strategic nor equitable. Texas education has \$6.4 billion less than what would have been provided under previous law. Texas was already ranked 43rd in the country in per-student funding; now we’ll probably fall to the bottom five. Policy decisions were out of step with Texas families, youth and educators, the overwhelming majority of whom (75 percent) felt that education should not be cut.

Texas cannot fail our students and families. We cannot afford an excellent system for some and a minimally adequate system for the rest. Fair funding is essential to assuring that all children have access to quality education. We cannot have excellence without equity.

IDRA has been working with communities across the state to make sure that schools are equipped to guarantee that all children graduate ready for college and career. Through our Fair Funding Now! initiative, we have been holding a series of roundtables this fall in collaboration with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People (NAACP), the Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA) and Texas Center for Educational Policy (TCEP).

Equity advocates are going online to see the level of school funding cuts across districts for every county in Texas and are [sharing their stories](#) of how funding cuts are affecting their schools. Others are convening strategy meetings and engaging families. We know that our next actions must be connected – having us work together as community, school, family, higher education and business leaders. And our actions must be strategic – having the greatest impact on strengthening public education in Texas for all students.

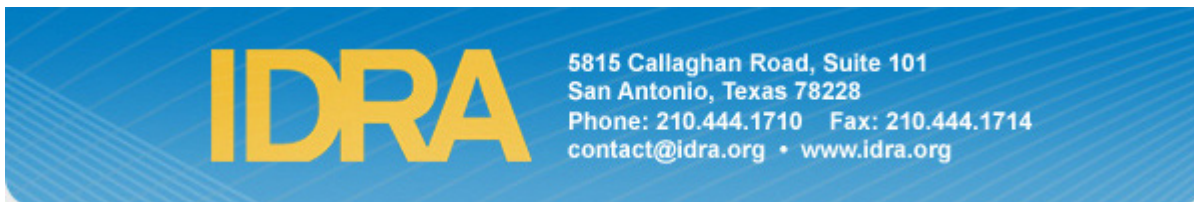
We at IDRA applaud the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund for [filing its lawsuit](#) this week against the state of Texas over school funding on behalf of four property-poor school districts and three parents. The MALDEF case demonstrates that the Texas system of funding public education is both inequitable for all students and inadequate for low-income students and English learner students. (See [two-page factsheet](#) , MALDEF [news release](#) and [media packet](#).)

It is unfortunate – scandalous in fact – that it takes litigation to convince our state leaders to invest in education, to invest in children – all children, to invest in the future of Texas. But we've been down this road before. We will not stop until Texas truly has a strong public school system that provides an excellent education for all children.

The **Intercultural Development Research Association** is an independent private non-profit organization dedicated to realizing the right of every child to a quality education. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.

We are a small organization with a powerful mission: to create schools that work for *all* children.



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