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## Don't Repeat Past Wrongs in Texas Education

### Insufficient Attention and Lack of Investment in Education Helped Put Texas Where it Is

*Statement by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO – February 9, 2011*

Education is not a luxury that can be taken away when times are hard. Some of the proposed statewide education cuts are irresponsible and shortsighted. They would cut roughly one third of the budget for schools. We already know that this would bring about disastrous results for our youth, for our families, our economy and for our state as a whole.

For example, the proposals would cut or eliminate programs for 4- and 5-year-olds and get rid of up to 100,000 teachers in the classroom. Such cuts would result in more young people leaving school for lack of attention and quality teachers. This would quickly lead to fewer university enrollments at a time when we need more. The Texas Grant program that helps families cover college tuition would be decimated.

One thing we expect of our children is that they pay attention in class. But there are some grown-ups who have not been paying attention to the importance of education. And we are all paying the price.

- In 2002, IDRA determined that the state's lack of attention to the dropout problem had cost us \$488 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenues and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs. But the lack of attention and investment continued. And since 1984, when Texas began counting dropouts, we have **lost more than 3 million students**. Today, the **cumulative cost is \$927 billion**.
- In 2003, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board calculated the cost-benefit of enrolling an additional 500,000 students in Texas higher education, finding that **the investment would produce more than a 13-fold return**. Yet enrollment rates by percentage of the population have **not even gone up by 1 percentage point** between 2000 and 2009.
- Over a decade ago, then state demographer Steve Murdoch warned Texans that the state would on average be less educated and have lower levels of family income if we did not address projected levels of under-education found among our emerging populations. Today, **proposed cuts will contribute to continuing the under-education of Texas youth**, resulting in diminished earning power, thus assuring decreased median income for Texas in the decades to come.
- As education faces critical funding needs, the **proposed solutions** for the state's school funding system **must be equitable and fair**. The improvement in Texas student achievement on national tests in 2008 was fueled in part by the 12-year span of improved and equitable funding that was provided to all Texas schools. But, the state abandoned that improvement in recent years. So today, a classroom of 25 students in the Texas Rio Grande Valley has 250,000 fewer dollars for the education of its children than does a district in a high wealth area of the state.

These are indeed difficult times, times that call us to create a better world for our children and for our children's children. This means that certain things are just not OK.

- It is not OK to continue funding gaps that harm our children's chances of going to college.
- It is not OK to put our children in over-crowded classes and to plan school budgets that assume many children will drop out of school.
- It is not OK to dumb down the curriculum and track our kids into vocational classes.
- It is not OK to slash college financial aid and funnel a few dollars to the so-called "deserving poor."
- It is not OK to make a college education beyond the reach of working families and young people who have worked hard for an opportunity to learn.
- It is not OK to release schools from their responsibility to provide an excellent education for every child.

It is not OK to mess with Texas' young people.

Every dollar that we invest in education yields a \$9 return in productivity and greater sources of income for the community and the state. We know from experience that the proposed cuts in education would be disastrous for the economy. We already know that Texas can't compete in the global marketplace if we do not get serious about creating top quality schooling for all students.

Our state is in a financial and revenue crisis. But defaulting on the state's responsibility to educate our students is not a solution. All available options must be considered, including new revenue, tapping the Rainy Day Fund, delaying the August payment, and considering the structure of the Franchise Tax. It is imperative that we have excellent and equitable education for all Texas school children. We call on policymakers to have the courage to do what it takes to invest in our state's children. The future of us all depends on it. It is not OK to mess with Texas.

## Online Resources

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[The Status of School Finance Equity in Texas – A 2009 Update](#)  
[See related news release](#)

[Flip-book: School Finance Reform in Texas – IDRA Perspectives on Funding Changes Adopted by the 2009 Texas Legislature.](#)

[Podcast: "Implications of Inequitable School Funding" IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 68 with Encarnación Garza, Jr., assistant professor at UTSA.](#)

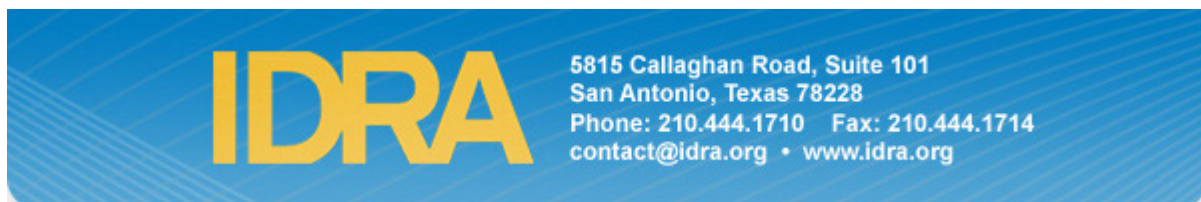
[IDRA website section: Fair Funding for the Common Good](#)

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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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