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Texas Endorsement System Threatens to Track Poor and Minority Students

IDRA Calls on Texas State Board of Education to Ensure All Students Have Access to High Quality Curriculum

November 20, 2013

Dr. Albert Cortez, IDRA Director of Policy, presented testimony today to the Texas State Board of Education at its hearing on HB5 and high school graduation requirements. Below are his remarks.



IDRA's full written testimony is [available online](#).

At IDRA, our goal is to assure educational opportunity for every child. We are deeply concerned about the state's move to dilute curriculum for many students. Couched in the language of giving students choices and helping struggling students at least get a minimum diploma, the new system weakens high school curriculum and further institutes tracking of students. It encourages placing students in different paths toward graduation, some college bound and some bound for labor.

IDRA recently released a policy note, "[Tracking, Endorsements and Differentiated Diplomas – When 'Different' Really is Less](#)," that gives an overview of the recent policy changes for curriculum, tracking and graduation plans for Texas schools. I have provided copies for you and it is online as well.

As members of the Texas State Board of Education, you can take steps to make sure Texas does its job of providing an excellent education to all students across the state.

IDRA has three key recommendations.

- 1. Continue to require Algebra II for all students.** For those who later choose to apply for college, this is critical in part because the SAT and ACT require knowledge of Algebra II. Removing the requirement, will mean many students will find out too late that college options have been closed for some, limited for many.
- 2. Make sure the endorsements do not become a dead-end for students, particularly those who are poor or minority.** While the discussions about Algebra II have gotten much attention, it is really just a glimpse of a much larger picture. The state's drift toward connect-the-dot, diluted science and mathematics instead of rigorous courses moves us even further away from ensuring economic competitiveness and universally high expectations and college preparation for all students.
- 3. Set up triggers to be able to take action if the data show disproportionate routing of poor and minority students into non rigorous endorsements and courses, or that indicate that students in "career options" are performing below levels of college bound students.** The

state also should be monitoring performance on end-of-course exams and other assessments by students in regular vs. applied courses and by differing endorsements. Applied courses not producing comparable performance outcomes as college focused courses should be identified and eliminated early in the endorsement selection process. Families must have clarity about which paths and which courses within those endorsements will best prepare students for college. Texas is poised to have many students not being prepared for college, and many more who will need remediation when they enroll in college after taking these watered-down courses.

Less is not better. Weaker is not better. It is not elitist to expect our state to do its job and take responsibility for the academic success of all students, including Latino and poor students who are now the majority of students in Texas schools.

A vital state must have educational parity for all students and not parcel out one set of opportunities for some and minimal expectations for others.

The research and decades of experience behind IDRA's Quality School Action Framework™ show that a high-quality curriculum is essential to success for all students for them to reach a true level of college readiness.

Children have shown that they will rise to the level of expectation that is created for them and to the level of challenge and support that is provided to them. Schools have shown that they can be highly successful by embracing high expectations for all rather than sorting some students into college and others into job training. It is worth noting that before the changes adopted by HB5, 80 percent of all graduating seniors were enrolled in the recommended 4-by-4 program. Why fix what is not broken?

Policymakers and schools should not make pre-college decisions on behalf of students or track them into low-level courses that limit career options. To create true opportunities for all of our children, we must commit to high quality curriculum for all students and full, equitable funding of all our schools, especially those neighborhood public schools in our neediest communities. Our state can do better, our students deserve better, and our future depends on better.

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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.

The logo for IDRA, consisting of the letters 'IDRA' in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font.

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