

# IDRA Priority Policy Issues for Texas in 2019

*The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. For over 45 years, IDRA has strengthened and transformed public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.*

## Fair Funding that Ensures Equity and Excellence for All Students

- All state and local aid made available for public schools should be funded through equalized formulas.
- Efforts to reduce recapture must be done equitably.
- State aid for students served in bilingual education or compensatory education programs should be increased to 40% of regular program costs.

### Why?

The quality of children's education should not be determined by the neighborhood where they happen to live. In the context of global competition, excellent schools are needed for *all* students – not good schools for a few and mediocre ones for the rest. The research is clear: educational resources matter, especially for low-income and English learner (EL) students. Research indicates that compensatory education and EL education costs in Texas average about 40 percent over regular program costs. However, over 35 years ago, the state set funding far below recommended levels for those students, and those funding formulas remain unchanged.

## Fair Discipline that Keeps Children in Safe Schools

- Ensure school safety and foster positive school climates by providing critical funds and supporting research-based programs and school-based professionals, like counselors and social workers.
- Eliminate harmful, unnecessary exclusionary discipline and policing practices inside schools.
- Make sure the same high-quality curriculum is available in all schools to all students, including those removed from their regular classrooms.

### Why?

In Texas, students of color, boys, and students with disabilities are much more likely than their peers to be punished in school and have interactions with school police. In 2017-18, Black Texas students were suspended over four times more than their White classmates, even though Black students are not more likely to misbehave.

Pushing students out of the classroom results in missed learning time and an increased likelihood of justice system involvement. Punitive discipline practices also compromise student success and campus safety. To improve student outcomes and make schools safer, the state must ensure access to research-based school climate programs, provide training opportunities for educators and other school personnel, and increase the number of school-based counseling and mental health professionals.

## Policies that Keep the Public in Public Education

- Public money must have public oversight and must not be diverted to private interests.
- There must be no further expansion of charter schools and limited public funds for facilities should not be siphoned off for charter schools.

### Why?

The best way to strengthen public schools is to strengthen public schools. Diverting public money for private schools and subsidies for the rich takes money away from our communities resulting in higher taxes for homeowners and businesses. More importantly, private school vouchers, education savings accounts (ESAs), charter schools and related schemes further segregate students and do not result in improved learning.

## Effective Accountability that Puts Children First and Supports Schools

- The state's accountability system should be supportive, moving away from rigid, punitive structures.
- The state should collect some valid testing data and other performance measures to enable it to hold schools accountable for student achievement with data disaggregated by sub-groups.
- School accountability should be achieved by sample testing, saving millions of state tax dollars and simultaneously reducing the misuse of tests.
- The state accountability system must contain "opportunity-to-learn metrics," including resource allocation, college preparation and teacher quality.

## Why?

We must make sure our schools are doing an excellent job with all students, and disaggregated data helps us know where to focus improvement efforts. Sample testing makes it unnecessary to test all students to ensure schools produce good results and can prevent misuse of testing data in holding students back or preventing them from graduating. The federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* also gives Texas a chance to focus on improving struggling schools through asset-based approaches rather than punishing them.

Texas should drop its A-F accountability grading system and avoid the creation of a state- or privately-controlled “opportunity school district” that strips local control from communities. Instead, the state should add opportunity-to-learn metrics as part of its accountability system, which will allow the state to focus its resources on areas of need, thereby increasing the efficiency of the system.

## Testing that Doesn't Hurt Children

- No single measure should be used to make high-stakes decisions for promotion or graduation.
- The state should continue to graduate students who prove their well-rounded academic qualifications to independent graduation committees (IGCs).

## Why?

Reliance on a single measure fails to consider factors that impact student achievement, including the fact that students have no control over inequitable school resources or the quality of teaching they receive. More importantly, the use of a single test score ignores other academic achievements, including grades, projects, college readiness measures and teacher recommendations. IGCs remain a viable option.

## Instruction for English Learners that Ensures Success

- Laws requiring bilingual education programs in elementary schools must remain, and exceptions must be strongly discouraged. And ELs in secondary schools must have access to teachers who are trained in EL instruction.
- The state should modify its procedures for monitoring EL performance by disaggregating EL performance data for each level of schooling.
- New immigrant students, including refugees, equally deserve a high-quality education.

## Why?

With their potential for bilingualism, EL students are a great asset that should be nurtured. Research shows that bilingual and dual language education programs are highly effective in helping EL students learn English while also learning their core

subjects. Texas must ensure these programs are properly supported and implemented. But middle and high school EL students, many of whom only get 45-minute ESL classes each day, do poorly on several metrics. That under-achievement is masked by the current practice of data reporting that lumps EL student performance across all grade levels. The state must monitor EL performance by school-level data instead, and it must vastly improve its efforts to support schools identified for intervention. Additionally, the state must ensure access to a strong public education for students, including new immigrant and refugee students, who may require more intensive, comprehensive services.

## Higher Education Access that Expands Opportunities

- Texas' high school curriculum should prepare all students for college with high-quality, rigorous courses.
- Students should not be tracked into low-level courses nor into different diploma routes or graduation plans.
- In-state tuition rates for all Texas students, including undocumented immigrant students, must remain.
- Funding for need-based financial aid, including the Texas Grant Program, must be increased.
- College tuition must be re-regulated, but state aid also must increase to help fill the void.
- Texas should not make changes to its Top 10 Percent Plan.

## Why?

Schools should not make pre-college decisions on behalf of students or track them into low-level courses that limit career options, and 14-year-olds should not be forced to make choices that will impact them the rest of their lives. High schools must ensure all students receive a rigorous course of study that prepares them for college. Research on the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce indicates most jobs will require some level of education beyond high school. Employers need employees who are life-long learners prepared to adapt to a rapidly changing workplace. Models based on preparing one group for college and a second for immediate work are outmoded.

Re-regulation of high tuition rates is desperately needed, but the state should adequately support the state's colleges and students needing assistance. In-state tuition rates for immigrant students and the Top 10 Percent Plan have increased the diversity of students applying for and enrolling in Texas universities and increased the number of high schools sending students to Texas' top schools.

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