



## **IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program Call for Applications**

### **Purpose**

The José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program was established by IDRA to honor the memory of IDRA founder, Dr. José Angel Cárdenas. The goal of the program is to engage the nation's most promising researchers in investigating school finance solutions that secure equity and excellence for all public school students. The José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program will focus on and fund school finance research that builds cross-disciplinary and inter-sector perspectives on equity. IDRA will select one or more fellows per year who will dedicate themselves to a period of intense study and writing in school finance. IDRA will hold a symposium that includes release of the fellow's program paper. The paper and findings will be published in the symposium proceedings and disseminated to the education research and policymaker community.

### **Key Dates\***

March 22, 2019	Applications due
April 2019	Notifications to applicants
May 2019	Formalize agreements and announce selection
Spring-Summer 2019	Fellow, in consultation with IDRA, conducts research and develops initial findings, completes one-month post as Fellow in Residence, and submits research paper
Fall 2019	Fellows paper is finalized and symposium planned.
Spring 2020	IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Symposium is held

### **Total Awards and Length of Appointment**

The José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow will be selected for a defined period beginning in early 2019. Fellows will receive a stipend of up to \$20,000 to include cost of release time, travel and IDRA one-month residency. IDRA will provide office space during the residency.

### **Eligibility and Selection Criteria**

*The IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program is open to all eligible applicants regardless of race, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, or sexual orientation.*

To be eligible, applicants must be:

- Doctoral candidate or completed doctoral training by time of selection, or
- Academic candidate reflecting scholarly experience in conducting school finance or related research, or
- Practitioner with an equivalent level of academic/professional achievement.

Applications will be judged on the applicant's past research record, career trajectory in education research and the quality of the project described in the application. Applications must be made by the individual applying for the fellowship; group applications will not be accepted.

### **Residency Requirement**

The fellow will be required to reside in San Antonio and work directly with IDRA staff for one month during the fellowship program. Costs for travel, meals and housing will be incorporated into the \$20,000 total budgeted for the fellowship. IDRA will provide office space during the residency.

### **Research Questions to be Addressed**

The IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program is designed to inform policy reform in the area of school finance. Based on expert panel recommendations, we are requesting that applicants select from the list of research questions outlined below. Variations of these topics will be considered as will other research questions, provided the applicant offers compelling arguments regarding why their proposed focus topic is a strong alternative.

1. The school privatization movement continues to expand across the nation, especially the proliferation of privately-managed and -operated charter schools. What has been the impact on funding for traditional public schools in the states resulting from the opening of separately-managed charter and private schools? Is the school privatization movement affecting taxpayer equity issues in certain states, for example, those basing funding on property wealth per pupil? Are there any impacts on the overall efficiency of the system, including the opening and closing of new schools? What results are we seeing, in terms of student performance, segregated enrollment patterns by race and/or income, and college access and readiness?
2. In recent school finance litigation, some state courts (e.g., Texas, Connecticut, Florida) have suggested that economically disadvantaged and other underserved groups of children cannot be better served in schools with additional resources because of the several barriers they encounter in the home. How accurate are these portrayals of underserved communities? What family assets can be built on from underserved communities? To what extent are student outcomes related the variance in school funding as opposed to poverty in the home? Other variables may include, but not be limited to, quality and access to a deep curriculum, teaching quality, student engagement, and parent and community involvement, as noted in IDRA's [Quality Schools Action Framework](#).
3. Teacher salaries and benefits make up the lion's share of state education budgets, and logically so because of the sheer number of students in the public education system. State policymakers often see the hefty price tag and offer proposals to try to reduce the budget allocation. These efforts may include increasing class size or pupil-teacher ratios, lowering certification requirements to recruit lesser-qualified people into the field of teaching, or shifting funding priorities to performance-based outcomes. What is the interrelationship between school finance and teaching quality? What other factors may account for the variance in teaching quality between underserved schools and their better-off peer schools? How might the proposed "reform" measures impact teaching

quality and student learning? Is the trade-off worth it, especially in light of the continuing achievement and opportunity gaps between underserved students and other students? What are some equity-based school finance alternatives that states should pursue to ensure all children have access to excellent teachers and schools?

4. Litigation has historically served as an effective strategy to accelerate policy reforms designed to improve educational equity or adequacy. However, courts in California, Florida, Texas and Connecticut have recently turned away advocates, suggesting that these battles on school funding and educational policy reform are more appropriate for the state houses than the court houses. What are important lessons learned from unsuccessful challenges in attempting to translate legal victories into positive state-level policy funding reforms? Have communities prevailed at the trial court level and succeeded in attaining greater funding in the legislature before an unfavorable final state supreme court ruling? How might communities and advocates strategize for improved school finance systems both as a parallel strategy to litigation and as an independent effort to ensure excellent schools for all children, and what resources are available for communities?
5. While much discussion over the years at the state policy level in realizing equal educational opportunities for all has involved the debate over equal and adequate state school finance systems, more recent research turns to closing “opportunity gaps,” such as access to high-quality teaching. What are some of the policy reforms addressing opportunity gaps, and how successful have they been in realizing equal educational opportunities for all? What is the relationship between opportunity gaps and funding mechanisms? How might opportunity gaps close without addressing school funding gaps?

### **Application Process**

To apply, submit the following:

- Completed application form with description of proposed research.
- Curriculum vita
- Three letters of recommendation
- Sample published and/or unpublished writing

Send application materials to:

IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program  
Intercultural Development Research Association  
Attn: Celina Moreno, J.D., Office of the President & CEO  
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101  
San Antonio, Texas 78228

Questions may be directed to Dr. Bricio Vasquez, 210-444-1710, [bricio.vasquez@idra.org](mailto:bricio.vasquez@idra.org).