



## Focus: College Opportunity

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# School Counselors Express Concerns about College and Career Advising in Texas

by Hector Bojorquez

“We’re asking kids to make big life decisions in eighth grade?” A middle school counselor recently expressed her strong frustration about having to ask eighth graders to commit to their future career paths. She stated this to IDRA researchers studying effects of Texas’ weakened graduation requirements and new endorsement system. Her feelings illustrate the growing concern among counselors that new policies may adversely affect students’ college readiness.

IDRA is conducting a qualitative study about how counselors see their roles. The study asks them to provide information about how under-represented students fare, the role of parent engagement and effects of the endorsement system on the school counseling profession itself.

The Greater Texas Foundation is funding this study as part of its mission for all Texans to have equal opportunity to access and succeed in post-secondary education. The study follows IDRA’s 2018 report, also funded by the foundation, that provided critical and timely information about the implications of the curricular changes in Texas on college readiness of graduates (Bojorquez, 2018). This article highlights preliminary findings at this half-way point in the current study.

### Endorsements Prompt Career Decisions in Eighth Grade

In 2013, in addition to requiring fewer rigorous courses for graduation, Texas lawmakers created

a system of “endorsements” to serve as college or career pathways for students. Each student’s endorsement makes up four of the required 26 credits, including their fourth math, fourth science and two additional elective credits.

Counselors repeatedly stated that requiring students to choose a college and career pathway in eighth grade can cause students to miss opportunities in high school. For example, students who have difficulties with math in middle school may choose endorsements that do not require higher level math. These students may very well rise to the academic challenges of high school. Yet, because of a decision made in eighth grade, their opportunities will be limited. The law allows for students to change endorsements. But students who make a change after their freshmen year will miss out on STEM opportunities that call for a full four or five years of mathematics.

Other counselors stated that requiring such young students to make long-term decisions about their educational careers is simply inappropriate. Their reasons range from personal observations concerning teenagers to their own career journeys. Several counselors stated that they themselves changed majors in college and/or careers several times throughout their own lives.

### Room for Career Exploration for Some

A few counselors added that, while the endorse-  
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*“What is good for the children of the most powerful in our society must be the expectation we set for all students.”*

– Celina Moreno, J.D.,  
IDRA President and CEO

(School Counselors Express Concerns about College and Career Advising in Texas, continued from Page 1)

ments system is problematic, it can present an opportunity for students to explore different career paths. The counselors who made such comments, however, are in school districts where students are required to take classes, at school or online, that introduce them to a variety of careers. Some of these districts created opportunities for students to experience what it is like to be in the medical field, engineering, etc., through field trips, guest speakers and other career exploration.

However, not all counselors and students have such tools available to them. Also, counselors in our first study stated that endorsements themselves should not be seen as “majors.” They know that graduating with a particular endorsement is essentially not academically meaningful outside of K-12 schools in Texas, and certainly not among colleges.

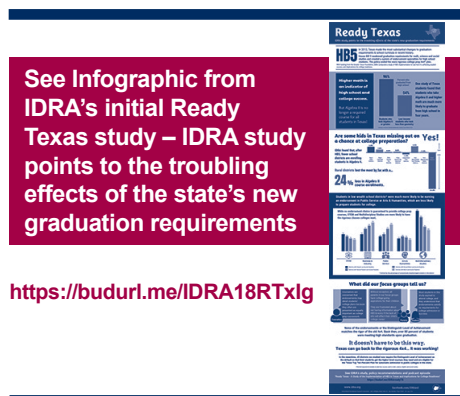
### Time Diverted from Actual Counseling

Overwhelmingly, counselors do not see themselves as having enough time to counsel in any sense of the word. The majority of counselors reported that they spend at least 75% of their time performing tasks that have nothing to do with college and career counseling. They reported dealing with testing and administrative issues for most of their work day.

Also, the majority interviewed felt overwhelmed. Only one reported having more than one professional counselor on campus. The American School Counselor Association (2017) recommends a maximum of one counselor for every 250 students. The average in Texas is almost twice that with one counselor for every 442 students.

### Limited Resources, Limited Ability to Counsel Students

Almost all counselors interviewed expressed a lack of resources in the counseling field itself.



Counselors interviewed stated that there is a severe lack of funding for counselors and counseling resources. Tied with the complexity of the new graduation requirements, this presents an untenable situation.

One counselor expressed that, even under the best of circumstances, it is very difficult to explain what endorsements mean, which careers align with which endorsements, and which classes to take for students' career interest. She added that she and others were trying their best to do this without the necessary resources.

A group of counselors from a rural area expressed a troublesome list of concerns: (1) Over 75% of their time is spent with non-counseling issues; (2) In eighth grade, many students choose an endorsement because they are interested in a subject area at that particular moment without a solid understanding of what they may or may not need for future success; and (3) Counselors are trying to do this with little to no resources.

As IDRA continues to gather data, we present the following preliminary recommendations, drawing from our first study and our current work.

- Schools must prepare all students to graduate with a rigorous curriculum that enables them

to make informed choices about college rather than prompting eighth-grade students to make choices that will affect their entire educational careers.

- Education stakeholders should revise the endorsement structure to comprise career exploration electives rather than isolating career pathways. Too many questions remain surrounding the equity consequences of the current practice. For example, our earlier study found that Algebra II course enrollments dropped by 24 percent in rural districts (Borjorquez, 2018).
- Policy leaders and district officials need to improve the counselor-to-student ratio so that more counselors can help students explore college options, serve as mentors to smaller groups of students, and communicate with parents.

Depending on funding, school districts can adopt these recommendations themselves. But our findings also show there is a need for all stakeholders – families, educators, community members and policymakers – to have regular dialogue, for example:

- Regional conferences on college access and success;
- Hearings on how parents and students navigate graduation requirements and pathways; and
- Online surveys where families and students can report successes and challenges of the system.

By the end of the project, IDRA's research will show how counselors help students navigate graduation requirements and how they provide college and career counseling to underrepresented students. The study also will highlight best practices across the state among school districts that excel at providing opportunities for  
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The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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# Five Best Practices that Add Women to the Equation – Preparing K-12 Girls for Mathematics

by Stephanie Garcia, Ph.D., & Kasia Razynska

Girls' involvement in K-12 mathematics has increased over the last 20 years. These improvements increase girls' math aptitude, which directly relates to college access. Sadly, girls are still less likely to take higher level math courses in high school or choose STEM fields in college. This article reviews current trends in data and best practices for increasing girls' performance and persistence through K-12 math.

Today, women earn 42% of the bachelor's degrees in math. This rate has actually decreased by 4 percentage points in the last two decades. Among women of color, Latinas account for just 3% of math degrees, and Black women account for 2% of math degrees (NSF, 2019). Women make up almost half of the workforce, but only a quarter of women fill well-paid professions requiring math skills.

Females and males take Advanced Placement exams at roughly the same rates in calculus AB, statistics and chemistry (NSF, 2016). But females are less likely to take higher level AP exams, such as calculus BC, physics B and physics C (see graph on the next page). And when they head to college, women are much less likely to enroll in STEM fields. In 2014, only 8% of female high school graduates chose STEM fields in college, compared to 27% of males (NSF, 2016).

What can we do to help promote more female mathematicians? Jane Hutchison, M.P.P., of the Math Brain Lab at Georgetown University suggests removing stereotypes that reinforce negative ideas about girls' capabilities (2018). Other research-based best practices as adapted below from the IES guide, *Encouraging Girls in Math and Science*, can help put girls on a path to math success (2007).

## Teach Students that They Can Expand and Improve their Math Abilities

Sometimes students believe negative things others say about their intelligence or that they will

never be good at math (Delpit, 2012). Schools and parents should encourage an asset-based mindset that expands abilities in math for all students (Johnson, 2014). Math gains in school usually coincide with high levels of student social support. This is true when teachers advocate “for the young people within a system that may not be so caring” (Delpit, 2012).

Students thrive with teachers who maintain high expectations and encourage their abilities in math. Teachers should also encourage students, especially girls of color, that their abilities in math will grow over time. By showing students they can improve, teachers help them build confidence to face difficulties and setbacks.

## Provide Prescriptive, Informational Feedback

Providing timely and specific feedback boosts student success, ownership for learning, and confidence. Moreover, teachers should make sure to fully answer girls' questions when giving feedback. Including specific math strategies within feedback can also support individual or group effort and the overall learning process.

Math teachers should give constructive, meaningful feedback that leads to multiple opportunities for students to revise their work (Krajcik, et al, 2016). For example, including positive comments as students try new things acknowledges their effort and increases self-confidence in their math abilities.

## Expose Girls to Female Role Models Who Have Succeeded in Mathematics

Exposing girls to female role models assists in countering stereotypes and broadening understandings of possible math career pathways and applications. Women who have succeeded can share tips for “persistence, degree completion, and a robust mathematics identity” (Joseph, et al., 2017).

(cont. on Page 4)

*Girls in K-12 mathematics have equal abilities to succeed but need more space to do so. These five practices encourage girls to pursue math professions, thus helping to close the gender gap in math careers.*

## IDRA EAC-South

For more information about the IDRA EAC-South or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or [eacsouth@idra.org](mailto:eacsouth@idra.org). The IDRA EAC-South serves Region II, which includes Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

Additional resources are available online at <http://www.idra.org/eac-south>

*funded by the U.S. Department of Education*



(Five Best Practices that Add Women to the Equation, continued from Page 3)

Parents and other community members can provide such opportunities outside of formal educational settings. Making role models visible helps students reject stereotypes. This holds great weight since negative stereotypes affect student performance and increase anxiety in stressful situations, such as tests (IES, 2007).

### Spark Interest and Foster a Mathematics Identity

To build girls' interest in math, teachers can create ways to leverage their interests, identity and sense of belonging. Math educators should embrace an authentic teaching approach that integrates culturally-relevant and responsive practices in the classroom. According to Joseph, et al. (2017), "A robust mathematics identity" builds persistence in math. This includes ensuring students have a positive self-concept and see how creative and relevant math is in their daily lives (Peart, 2018).

Likewise, educators should center math instruction on children's assets and resources to "elicit the ways children know, use and learn mathematics" (Kalinec-Craig, 2017). Designing engaging classroom activities that include all students creates equitable opportunities that can spark long-term interest in mathematics (Johnson, 2016).

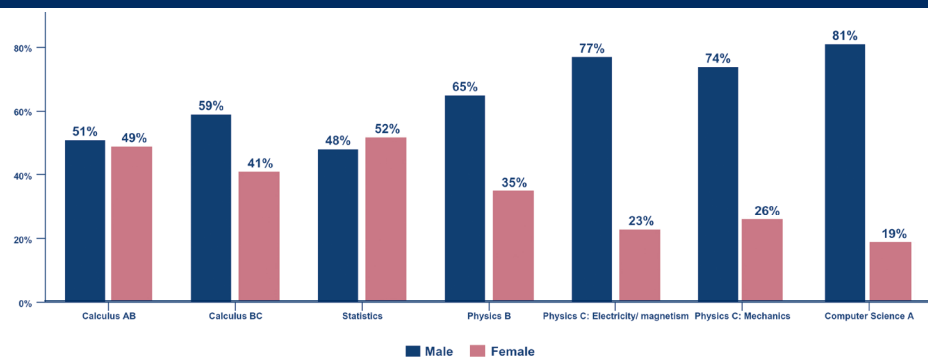
### Connect Specialized Mathematics Skills to Real World Applications

Higher level math usually challenges students, regardless of gender. Students rarely question why they learn to read or write. They do ask why when learning math extends beyond basic arithmetic, unless connections to math's real-world uses beyond the classroom are clear. Students are "caught up in learning standards and then being assessed on them" (Kitchen, et al., 2016).

Schools need to use relevant and rigorous curriculum designed to prepare girls to succeed in math professions. This increases critical thinking through real world problems and engages students in specialized math skills (Hertzog, 2005; Li & Tsai, 2017). Project-based learning approaches encourage students to "apply knowledge learned to transferable domains" (Booker & Hoon Lim, 2018).

Girls in K-12 mathematics have equal abilities to succeed but need more space to do so. These five practices encourage girls to pursue math professions, thus helping to close the gender gap in math careers. They also foster girls' skills and

## AP Test-Taking Rates Drop for Girls in Higher Math and Science Subjects



Public school students in graduating class of 2013 who took AP exams in math and science in high school

Source: The College Board, The 10th Annual AP® Report to the Nation—Subject Supplement, Science and Engineering Indicators 2016

2019, Intercultural Developmental Research Association

beliefs about their own abilities and perceptions about the role of women in these professions. If implemented effectively and consistently, these practices can improve the outcomes for all children regardless of gender, race, language or socio-economic status.

The IDRA EAC-South's capacity-building technical assistance helps schools in the U.S. South address inequities and desegregation issues impacting sex and gender equity. Promoting sex and gender equity can ensure equal access to rigorous coursework, a healthier and safe learning climate, and high quality teaching. More information is available at: <https://www.idraeacsouth.org/gendersex>.

### Resources

- Booker, K.C., & Hoon Lim, J. (2018). Belongingness and Pedagogy: Engaging African American Girls in Middle School Mathematics. *Youth & Society*.
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(School Counselors Express Concerns, continued from Page 2)

underrepresented students. We have scheduled completion of the study for the summer of 2020 and will continue to publish preliminary findings.

### Resources

- American School Counselor Association. (2017). Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio 2016-2017. Factsheet. Alexandria, Va.: ASCA.
- Bojorquez, H. (2018). *Ready Texas – A Study of the Implementation of HB5 in Texas and Implications for College Readiness*. IDRA.

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# Characteristics of College-Focused Schools

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.

The platitude “College is not for everyone” often elicits nods of agreement. Typically— even altruistically – the sentiment refers to certain groups of students and serves as a veiled excuse not to prepare students for college. Underpreparation clearly hurts the students and their families and has broad implications for community well-being.

Schools that take successful steps to overcome old prejudices make the institution the locus of change. Barriers disappear when educators recognize all students as college material and take steps to make it so.

We have strong historical examples of success: With the GI Bill, the Latino community witnessed on a large scale the dispelling of the myth of un-educability. World War II veterans attended college, and their children gained social mobility from the economic benefits of their newly degreed parents. Most of the teachers of these future veterans had not predicted post-secondary success.

Students can succeed when they have support from educators committed to the same goal and who actively prepare students and remove barriers. Some Texas school districts, such as Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD and Roscoe ISD, model the premise that college and post-secondary education is for everyone (Bojorquez, 2014). This article describes key characteristics of college-focused K-12 schools.

## Elements of Success – Expectations and Support

Effective solutions require mindsets that create an environment of high expectations. Transformation comes from recognizing all students as college material. Successful schools shift systematic adaptations toward personalized instruction. They deliver rigor in content through a range

of pedagogical approaches, including genuine support systems.

Real-world career exposures supplement lectures and use of traditional textbook-based instruction. Educators can monitor progress and provide genuine academic, social and emotional support. For each student, there must be an educator who understands the student as a whole person and acts as an advocate to ensure the student’s success.

## Elements of Success – School Culture

A transformed school provides support beyond traditional academic pedagogy. The school culture celebrates diversity, and activities incorporate students’ family cultures and funds of knowledge. Such schools provide classes, workshops and other venues for highlighting the diverse groups represented in the student body.

College-focused teachers integrate socio-cultural supports in classroom assignments, project-based learning activities and schoolwide events. Activities involving home language, history and culture remove barriers and reduce students’ isolation and sense of not-belonging. Creative educators convert traditional activities into rigorous projects that both strengthen students’ self-concepts and expand their academic skills.

## Elements of Success – Counseling and Advising

College-focused K-12 schools deliver authentic counseling. They expand counselor roles and distribute “counselor-mentor” tasks to teachers and other educators. Educators assist each student with college preparation choices, career and professions options, and the practical mechanics of applying to college. In many cases, school leaders must re-program impractical counselor-student ratios so that students receive

(cont. on Page 6)

*Students can succeed when they have support from educators committed to the same goal and who actively prepare students and remove barriers.*

(Characteristics of College-Focused Schools, continued from Page 5)

personal, authentic advising.

### Elements of Success – Instruction

Students perform impressively when their school focuses on developing the cognitive and affective competencies needed to excel. Educators are able to serve the whole student, considering social and emotional learning while also maintaining content rigor so that students acquire the content and skills necessary for college success.

In these schools, teachers teach differently, with a wide array of pedagogical approaches. They arrange their classrooms flexibly and, rather than following textbooks linearly, they open up instruction to project-based learning through real-world experiences. These can include site visits, professional shadowing, role models, demonstrations and job internships. Dynamic, engaged learning replaces the traditional process of reading to answer the questions at the end of the chapter.

Administrators and teachers in college-focused schools intentionally investigate and plan how to deliver curriculum and instruction in ways that ensure rigor, high expectations and college readiness for every student. With mutually-agreed upon action frameworks, teachers can structure

the intended outcomes and delineate accountability. This accountability includes keeping students in school as well as assisting students to succeed academically, socially and emotionally.

As educators modify their teaching, they also tend to expand their communication and outreach methods. Model schools use authentic outreach and personal communication to effectively inform students and families about college preparation and opportunities. And as seen in IDRA's family leadership process, they work in partnership with families and students to develop a college vision for their students (Montemayor, 2016).

### Elements of Success – Post-secondary Connections

Just as secondary schools must modify how they educate and prepare students for college, colleges must change as well. In this new mindset, colleges can work together with secondary schools to facilitate academic preparation, admission procedures and registration processes.

Lecture halls with hundreds of students passively listening to orations by professors or teaching assistants must give way to more personalized and effective pedagogy. Students need individual academic and social support. And financial support is critical to supplementing the income of economically-disadvantaged students so that their work schedules are not barriers to their schoolwork.

Effective colleges develop systems that ensure positive, personal and trusting relationships with students by faculty and staff. As in secondary schools, college staff need to assist students to navigate the system, which is a new and unfamiliar environment, especially for first-time enrollees. Just as extended counseling-mentoring structures are effective in middle and high schools, research shows that college students need the same supports.

Although the challenges might be greater in post-secondary settings, the faculty must build positive relationships with students to support academic success. First-generation college goers often need support specifically for the necessary knowledge, finances, and college processes.

Both public schools and colleges benefit from partnering with local community organizations for needed outreach, family engagement support, mentoring, after-school programming, mental health awareness and future career planning

through conversations with students and their parents.

Federal resources are available, but they are limited. TRIO programs are federally-funded college opportunity programs that support students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their pursuit of a college degree. Although those monies are very limited now, clear evidence shows that such programs address the challenges that post-secondary education presents to students.

Early-college programs specifically have proven effective in supporting students to excel academically to be ready for college and to foster behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion (Avilés & Garza, 2010).

In K-12 schools, the mindset must be: "Every student is college bound." This mindset is alive when each student has access to college-preparation classes with the necessary supports for success. It is alive when each student has a circle of support with at least one designated mentor to navigate course choices, college application and overall success. Educators at all levels support each student along the critical path into college. Once in college, the institution continues to provide comparable support to the students.

The goal is that every public school student graduates prepared for college. With deliberate action, many college-focused schools are already proving that college is for everyone.

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IDRA senior education associate, Dr. Nilka Avilés, facilitated a leadership day event with tutors from San Antonio ISD in the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. The event was held at the University of Texas at San Antonio with college faculty and special activities to help the young students connect with life on a college campus.



# Top Ten Percent Plan – Expanding Access to College in Texas

During the 2019 Texas legislative session, IDRA conducted analysis and produced a number of resources on the positive impact of the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan.

- 🔗 **Policy Brief:** The Texas Top Ten Percent Plan's Legacy in Supporting Equal Access to College
- 🔗 **Infographic:** Top Ten Percent Plan Expands College Access Across Texas
- 🔗 **Op-Ed in the Texas Tribune:** Admissions Scandal Raises Need to Protect Laws like Texas Top 10 Percent Plan That Reward Merit
- 🔗 **Data Graph:** Texas Top Ten Percent Plan at UT-Austin Has Dramatic Impact Within Texas Senate Districts – 2019



See IDRA's Top Ten Percent Plan Resources

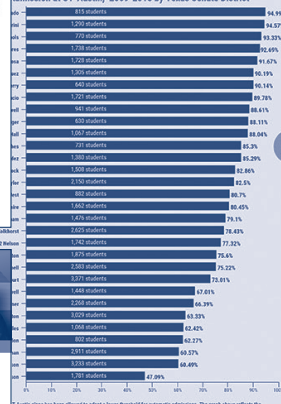
[www.idra.org/education\\_policy/top-ten-percent-plan-texas](http://www.idra.org/education_policy/top-ten-percent-plan-texas)

## Top 10 Percent Plan Expands College Access Across Texas

The Texas Top Ten Percent Plan has opened the doors of Texas' public universities to low-income students, rural communities and communities of color – all groups who were typically denied access to many public universities, including the University of Texas at Austin. IDRA conducted an analysis of the entering freshman class who received automatic admission at UT-Austin during the years 2009 through 2018.

### Expansive Access

Percent of the Entering Freshman Class who Received Automatic Admission at UT-Austin, 2009-2018 by Texas Senate District



### Background

The Texas Legislature adopted the Top Ten Percent Plan in 1997 in response to declining enrollment of students of color at UT-Austin and Texas A&M University. With bipartisan support from policymakers from both rural and urban districts, the plan required Texas' four-year public universities to admit high school students graduating in the top 10 percent of their class. Starting with its 2011 class, UT-Austin alone was allowed to limit those students to 75 percent of the freshman class. In 2018, the top 7 percent of students in each high school graduating class were automatically admitted to UT-Austin.

### Impact

The Top Ten Percent Plan has expanded higher education opportunities for students of color, students from rural communities, students from low-income families, and students whose parents did not attend college.

The plan has helped increase the number of feeder high schools into UT-Austin, from 622 in 1996 to 832 in 2006, to 932 in 2016, to 833 in 2018.\*

Rural schools continue to benefit from the Top Ten Percent Plan, accounting for 84 percent of admitted rural students in 2018.

The plan is the principal admissions driver for Latino, Black and Asian American students into UT-Austin, with 84 percent of admitted Latino students coming from the Top Ten Percent Plan along with 73 percent of Black students and 75 percent of Asian American students in 2018.

The Top Ten Percent Plan accounts for **84%** of admitted rural students at UT-Austin

Students Admitted to UT-Austin through the Top Ten Percent Plan are More Diverse



Latino students are about twice as likely to be admitted through the Top Ten Percent Plan than by outside the plan

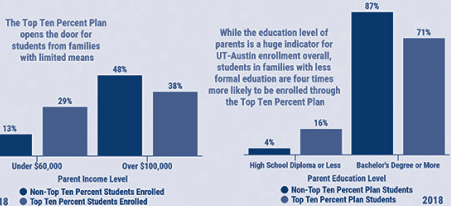
● Non-Top Ten Percent Plan Students  
● Top Ten Percent Plan Students

2018

Total number of students admitted: 15,698

The Top Ten Percent Plan has opened the doors of Texas' flagship universities to students of color, students from rural communities, and students from families with limited means – all groups that have historically been denied access.

The Top Ten Percent Plan is the Best Chance for Students in Families with Limited Means and with Less Formal Education to Get into UT-Austin



● Non-Top Ten Percent Plan Students Enrolled  
● Top Ten Percent Plan Students Enrolled

2018

For more information see <https://idra.news/TTP19>

Data Source: University of Texas at Austin, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, (December 2018). Report to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the Implementation of SB 171.

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March 2019. Interinstitutional Development Research Association (IDRA) 1001 California Street, Suite 200 • San Antonio, Texas 78205 • 210-444-3270

## #IAmTop10Percent

Are you one of the thousands of Texas students admitted to a Texas university through the Top Ten Percent Plan? If you are, please tell us your story about how the Top Ten Percent Plan has impacted your life!

“More than anything, the Top Ten Percent Plan enabled my hard work to be recognized and not limited or set back by things, such as financial hardship or being unjustly put to compete with other students from more privileged communities. Top Ten Percent Plan was not just higher ed admission for me. It was parity that reached all areas of my life where I have been at a disadvantage despite my hard work.”

– #IAmTop10Percent submission



Share your story!  
<https://idra-resource.center/TTPstories>

## Focus: College Opportunity

### IDRA Names Dr. Cristóbal Rodríguez as the 2019 José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow

IDRA has named Howard University professor Dr. Cristóbal Rodríguez as the 2019 IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow. The fellows program honors 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.

"Dr. Cárdenas' life was dedicated to his vision that every child deserves an excellent education, which requires strong instructional programs and school finance equity," said Celina Moreno, IDRA President & CEO. "We are so pleased to name Dr. Rodríguez as our fellow to advance research that informs IDRA's work and honors the legacy of its founder."

Dr. Rodríguez is an associate professor of educational leadership and policy studies and is the director of graduate studies in the School of

Education at Howard University in Washington, D.C. His research centers on diverse demographics and explores how policy and leadership influence equity and access for diverse populations throughout the educational pipeline. He received his Ph.D. in educational policy and planning at the University of Texas at Austin, with an emphasis on education research, evaluation and policy analysis with a social and cultural historical focus.

"It is a distinct honor and blessing to have the opportunity to work with IDRA and the scholars leading this longstanding distinguished research organization that is centered in serving children across multiple communities," Dr. Rodríguez said.

As IDRA's school finance fellow, Dr. Rodríguez will analyze the relationship of school finance policies and practices and their influence on equitable access to college readiness courses. Since its founding in 1973, IDRA has been at the fore-

front of legislative and litigation efforts to achieve equal educational opportunity through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.



IDRA's fellowship was established to fund school finance research that builds cross-disciplinary and inter-sector perspectives on equity. Fellows dedicate themselves to a period of intense study and writing in school finance, culminating in an annual symposium that includes the release of the fellow's research. IDRA will publish the paper and findings in the symposium proceedings and disseminate them to the education research and policymaker community throughout the country.

*achieving equal educational opportunity for every child  
through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college*