

## IDRA National Policy Issues

IDRA is a non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. For almost 50 years, IDRA has strengthened and transformed public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, data evaluations, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs. IDRA supports students and families to influence educational policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels. Our national policy priorities are as follows.

### Ensure Fair Funding for All Students

Excellent schools are needed for all students – not good schools for a few and mediocre ones for the rest. Unfortunately, many schools do not receive the funding they need to provide an equitable and excellent education to all students. School finance policies that rely on local property values and unstable state revenue streams to fund schools perpetuate a long history of inequitable access to resources. The research is clear: educational resources matter, especially for historically under-resourced schools that serve Black and Latino students, students from families with limited incomes, and emergent bilinguals.

- Federal policies should allocate more funding to the programs that help public schools serve these students and should provide protections and incentives to increase equity in state and local school funding plans.

### End Harmful Discipline to Create Safer Schools

All students deserve to attend safe and welcoming schools. Pushing students out of the classroom through exclusionary discipline and school-based policing results in missed learning and socialization time, stigma and an increased likelihood of in-grade retention, higher dropout rates and justice system involvement. Black and Latino students, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities are unfairly and disproportionately punished in their schools.

- To end discriminatory discipline, build stronger school communities, protect individual student rights, and make schools safer, federal policies and agency guidance must encourage the use of research-based school climate programs, provide training opportunities for educators and other school personnel, expand ethnic studies courses and culturally-sustaining curricula, require frequent and detailed data reporting, and increase the number of school-based counseling and mental health professionals. Federal poli-

cies also should prohibit the presence of law enforcement in school buildings, corporal punishment, weapons, use of force tactics, the assessment of court fines and fees, and other inappropriate and punitive practices.

### Guarantee Opportunities for English Learners and Immigrant Students

English learners (emergent bilinguals) and immigrant students are a large and growing portion of the student population in many states. They have the amazing capacity to be multilingual, multiliterate and contribute to the cultural diversity of schools. Unfortunately, in schools across the country, emergent bilinguals are in inadequate and underfunded language programs that do not rely on best practices for supporting language development in both English and students' home languages. Additionally, shortages of certified teachers and poor data collection limit student outcomes and make it difficult to accurately track the success of emergent bilinguals. Some immigrant students are often excluded from higher education opportunities, including federal financial assistance through Pell grants, work study programs and CARES Act relief.

- Federal policies should allocate more money for Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which supports programs for emergent bilinguals in schools, including teacher preparation, technology and instructional materials, and meaningful family engagement. Additionally, states should be urged to comply with federal data collection requirements, and more resources should be allocated for programs like the equity assistance centers and entities like the Office of English Language Acquisition that provide resources and technical support to schools that serve emergent bilinguals and immigrant students. Federal financial aid should be extended to all immigrant students to ensure they are able to pursue higher education opportunities and programs like DACA must remain in place until there is a pathway to citizenship for all people.

## Keep the Public in Public Education

The best way to strengthen public schools is to ensure public resources are devoted to them. Diverting public money away from traditional public schools is a divestment from our communities, resulting in schools that are ill-equipped to prepare all students for success, reduced oversight of finite resources, fewer opportunities for all, and harmful cycles of poverty.

- Federal policies should invest public resources in traditional public schools, not to further an education privatization agenda through vouchers, tax credit scholarship programs, education savings accounts, charter schools and related schemes that further segregate students and do not result in improved learning.

## Prepare All Students to Succeed in College

Schools must prepare all students to succeed in college. Yet, too often, schools make pre-college decisions on behalf of students, track them into low-level courses that limit career options, or fail to offer the advanced coursework students need to access and succeed in college. Policies and practices that water down graduation requirements and set low achievement expectations perpetuate harmful and discriminatory systems that target Black and Latino students, students from families with limited incomes, and first-generation college students. Financial systems that fail to protect students, regulate tuition and address student debt prevent many well-qualified students from pursuing higher education opportunities.

- Federal policies should allocate more resources to support college preparation programs and access to advanced coursework for students who are disproportionately represented in higher education. Additionally, federal resources should be allocated to address college affordability, control student debt, and support public service loan forgiveness programs, historically Black colleges and universities, and Hispanic-serving institutions.

IDRA's work in policy, research and practice is grounded by the IDRA Quality Schools Action Framework, which is a comprehensive action model for graduating and preparing all students for college. The framework (1) outlines the elements that must be in place to create schools that work for all children, (2) describes strategies that most often lead to change, and (3) shows how people can work together across sectors and around key information to leverage change.

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## Grow and Sustain Healthy School Districts

Healthy school districts are community-led, fairly evaluated, and welcoming to diverse communities. All families, including families with limited incomes, immigrant families, and families of color, should be full partners in education, with their participation supported by programs that encourage community-based problem-solving and promote a shared sense of responsibility for education. States should not rely on limited measures to determine student promotion or graduation or judge the quality of a school or its teachers. Communities should adopt policies and practices to dismantle racial and socioeconomic segregation and isolation.

- Federal policies should discourage testing that harms students and schools, support local school diversity efforts, and send a clear message that diverse schools that center meaningful family and community participation are a critical component of an inclusive, democratic society.

## Respond Equitably to COVID-19

COVID-19 has created new challenges for schools to serve all students equitably. But the pandemic also has exacerbated many existing inequities that marginalized students have experienced for generations.

- Federal stimulus packages and other relief policies must provide school districts, states, colleges, students and families with resources to address a number of needs, including basic supports like food, healthcare, personal protective equipment and mental health care. They must address learning loss during school closures, equitably distribute resources, and close the digital divide, ensuring access to devices, connectivity, and user knowledge to all students and families. Additionally, federal resources should be allocated specifically for states to address budget shortfalls caused by the recession.

