



Texas Students Need an Equitable Approach to Accelerated Programming Learning Committees

IDRA Testimony on House Bill 4545, Presented by Thomas Marshall before the Texas House Public Education Committee on April 6, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton and Honorable Members of the House Public Education Committee:

My name is Thomas Marshall, and I serve as an Education Policy Fellow at IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association). We are an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We respectfully ask that the committee consider an equitable approach to establish accelerated learning committees and direct resources when establishing the strong foundations grant program.

HB 4545 promotes accelerated instruction and promises a “high quality education” experience for students who do not achieve a satisfactory performance on certain assessments. We offer parameters for preserving equity through the accelerated learning committees and how they will assess students’ performance. We also encourage the committee to consider using federal funds as appropriate to fund the strong foundations grant program.

An Equitable Approach to Accelerated Programming

Recent research shows that increased state funding has contributed to both improved student performance and lifetime outcomes, especially for underserved students including Black students, Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds (Jackson, et al., 2016; Lafortune, et al., 2016), and emergent bilingual students (English learners).

We must prioritize these students that have been left behind throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, to address the instructional disruptions of the pandemic, the state must develop a sustainable and long-term plan. An equitable accelerated program should include a long-term plan for beyond the pandemic that addresses systemic inequities that support current students and families and is intergenerational for students in the future.

Students that meet these unsatisfactory goals are often struggling with life outside of instruction and may need a holistic approach to catching up on learning. We respectfully ask that HB 4545 makes sure that students’ basic needs, mental health and digital resources are taken in consideration when working with them to create a plan that is tailored to them.

Recommendations

- Provide the general public with accelerated learning outcomes data disaggregated by race, gender, ethnicity, special education status and English learner status;
- Create a section that ensures that each accelerated committee is diverse in nature and speaks directly to students’ mental health and academic needs;

- Address the digital divide within the bill to allow for students in accelerated programs to have proper access to the Internet if they decide to continue with remote and/or virtual instruction; and
- Ensure the accelerated learning program for these students is culturally sustaining and addresses student social and emotional learning.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resource

- Hinojosa, D. (March 7, 2017). Determining the True Costs of Educating Underserved Students – Cost Study of Bilingual/ESL and Compensatory Education. Invited Testimony of IDRA – Presented by David Hinojosa, J.D., IDRA National Director of Policy before the Texas House Public Education Committee. <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/determining-true-costs-educating-underserved-students-cost-study-bilingual-esl-compensatory-education/>
- Jackson, C.K., & R. Johnson, C. Persico. (2016). The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Academic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 157-218 (Oxford University Press).
- TNTP. (April 2020). Learning Acceleration Guide – Planning for Acceleration in the 2020- 2021 School Year. The New Teacher Project. https://tntp.org/assets/set-resources/TNTP_Learning_Acceleration_Guide_Final.pdf

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. 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. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.