



## 2021 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

### OVERVIEW

#### 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 focuses on and funds school finance research that builds cross-disciplinary and inter-sector perspectives on equity. IDRA will select one or more fellows in this cycle 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. Additional information about the program and the work of previous fellows is online at: [www.idra.org/research\\_articles/fellows-program](http://www.idra.org/research_articles/fellows-program).

#### Key Dates

July 15, 2021	Applications due
Late August 2021	Notifications to applicants
September 2021	Formalize agreements and announce selection
Fall-Spring 2021	Fellow, in consultation with IDRA, conducts research and develops initial findings, and submits research paper
Late-Spring 2022	Fellows paper finalized and symposium planned.
2022	Hold IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Symposium

#### Total Awards and Length of Appointment

The José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow(s) will be selected for a defined period beginning in 2021. Fellows will receive a stipend of up to \$20,000 to include cost of release time. The awardees will spend the equivalent of one week at the IDRA office engaging in a structured program. IDRA staff will work with fellows to finalize program details.

### 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.

## 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 COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted education across the country as school finance systems were unprepared to fund education activities and technology and broadband access beyond the classroom. Additionally, the pandemic further exposed vulnerabilities among underfunded schools and their students, especially impacting students of color and from families with low incomes. Students and families struggled with accessing reliable broadband connectivity, devices needed to engage with teachers and schools, food insecurity, technical support, and childcare/supervision. Teachers and school leaders also struggled with delivering quality instruction and student support. We welcome research projects aimed at understanding school finance breakdowns during the pandemic. For example, how did school funding systems compromise student learning during the pandemic? How can state and local governments imbed school funding mechanisms that adapt to health, social and economic shocks? The research could examine the structure, disbursement and use of federal relief dollars, including how much was allocated, received and used for education, technology, instruction, emotional support, etc. The research could also explore the funding system across education levels (K-12 and higher education) in one or more states or from a national perspective.
2. 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?
3. 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 or faulty 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 the IDRA [Quality Schools Action Framework](#).
4. Educator salaries and benefits make up the lion's share of state education budgets. 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 more affluent 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?
5. 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?

6. 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.

**Complete application form online:** <https://idra.news/FellowsApplicationForm>

**Attach your curriculum vita reflecting related experience, research and publications.**

**Attach a description of your proposed research** (up to seven pages). Include the following information.

1. Detailed description of the topic to be addressed and its significance in the area of school finance reform.
2. The uniqueness or originality of the proposed effort.
3. The project’s key research question and related hypotheses. (Note the research must address one of the key research questions posed in the Call for Applications or provide compelling evidence for a variance from those options.)
4. Methodology, including key activities, timelines and techniques to be used to analyze data collected.
5. Brief overview of relevant literature in the area to be examined.
6. Relevance of the inquiry to contemporary school finance policy deliberations.
7. Timelines for data collection, analyses and research completion.
8. Budget of up to \$20,000 to include research expenses, cost of release time, travel and one week at IDRA.

**Attach three letters of recommendation** from parties familiar with you and your academic experience.

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

*The [Intercultural Development Research Association](#) is a national 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 technical assistance and dynamic training; useful research, evaluation and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; transformational family engagement and innovative materials and programs.*

5/11/2021