



Authentic Family Engagement is Parent Empowerment

IDRA Testimony on House Public Education Committee Interim Charge #3 regarding meaningful parent involvement in public schools, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas House Public Education Committee, July 26, 2022

IDRA is 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. IDRA takes an inclusive, nondiscriminatory approach to family leadership that considers all families inherently good and worthy of being treated with respect, dignity and value (including those who are economically disadvantaged, minority or speak a language other than English).

We see families through a social justice and civil rights lens, and their advocacy to improve their students' educational opportunities, especially for Black, Latino, and emergent bilingual students, as a civil rights issue.

IDRA's Family Leadership Model

For over 45 years, IDRA has engaged communities of Texas parents, grandparents, caregivers, and community members in educational change for their schools. Based on this ample experience in-the-field, we have developed an evidence-based model for authentic family leadership and engagement with schools. IDRA's model values families as advocates for their children and for excellent public schools.

Notably, our model centers on achieving shared goals among families and the school through engaging families as leaders in their children's education. This contrasts with traditional forms of "family engagement" that prioritize a few loud voices over the majority of parents and assume an antagonistic relationship between the school and community. The IDRA model is inclusive of all families, especially families that may be historically marginalized from school engagement and is focused on building strong parent-educator partnerships to improve schools and raise students' academic achievement.

IDRA's Six Principles for Family Leadership in Education

Six principles underpin IDRA's model for family leadership and engagement for strong schools:

1. Families can be their children's strongest advocates;
2. Families of different race, ethnicity, language and socioeconomic class are equally valuable;
3. Families care about their children's education and are to be treated with respect, dignity and value;
4. Within families, many individuals play a role in the children's education;
5. Family leadership is most powerful at improving education for all children when collective efforts create solutions for the common good;
6. Families, schools and communities, when drawn together, become a strong, sustainable voice to protect the rights of all children.

These principles can be incorporated into any number of policies focused on parent-educator partnerships. Families are positioned as experts, advocates and leaders in their children's education, but the education of one child does not outweigh the pursuit for the common good for all school children. Principles 5 and 6 describe families as leaders *in collaboration* with schools as an essential component of school improvement efforts for the entire school community.

Recommendations

To encourage authentic family engagement in schools, the Texas legislature should support policies that continue to build connections and collaboration between schools and families. These policies should uphold the above principles. Some policies that could be implemented or expanded are:

- Full-service community schools that engage families in a range of wraparound services for students and adults;
- Community-based accountability systems for schools that engage local families as leaders in determining what to value, assess and prioritize in their school accountability systems;
- Transparent data reporting mechanisms for schools to regularly share relevant data, including on school discipline, student achievement, district budgeting and expenditures, college readiness initiatives, and other educational programs; and
- Guidance for educational agencies to develop student and family engagement plans that accompany all local and state strategic plans.

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

Resources

IDRA. (2018). IDRA Principles for Family Leadership in Education. <https://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Principles-of-Family-Engagement-IDRA-Infographic-April-2018.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.