Students Deserve to Read Diverse Books – Texas Policymakers Should Help

by Rebekah Skelton

For years, students and advocates have been calling for schools to diversify their reading lists to include books outside of the traditional high school canon. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has been tasked with compiling a list of books required to be taught at each grade level in public schools.

Increased diversity in the children’s publishing industry can help give teachers the tools they need to build inclusive English language arts classrooms.

But classroom censorship targeting diverse conversations and titles is on the rise with the Texas Legislature’s 2021 Senate Bill 3 and the recent HB 900. If TEA uses these censorship laws to restrict diverse voices in the classroom, it will profoundly harm student learning.

Instead, TEA and the Texas State Board of Education should safeguard affirming and engaging books that inspire literacy and learning for students of all racial, ethnic and gender identities.
Digital Equity Not a Luxury for Students

by Michelle Martínez Vega & Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, M.Ed.

In the spring of 2020, over 600,000 Texas public school students could not be reached by school communications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though devices were given to students in need, pre-existing broadband access limitations resulted in millions of students missing out on two to three years of instruction, disproportionately impacting students of color.

Digital equity recognizes that access to the Internet and technology is a necessity in the 21st century for education, employment, health care and social connection. IDRA shared its research on the digital divide and digital equity with the Texas Legislature and urged it to invest in sustainable broadband infrastructure, continue the distribution of reliable digital devices, invest in digital skills training and support for educational stakeholders, and invest in robust community engagement programs for strengthening school district capacity to assess their students’ technological needs. IDRA remains committed to overcoming the evolving challenges related to navigating our digital world and ensuring that students are prepared for success.

Teens Win 2023 National Essay Contest Awards
IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Tutors Share Stories of the Program’s Impact on Their Lives

“The thing that gets me up in the morning is the kids. Every morning I get up because I know I have to tutor them, and they depend on me to help them with their work... I think that’s what makes the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership amazing.”

– eighth grader Brianna Garza

Six students received prizes in a national competition among participants in the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership program, a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program. The VYP tutors wrote about how the program helped them do better in school and how they had helped their tutees to do better.

This story shares highlights from the students' essays.

Keep reading VYP Essays article

Learn more about the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Program

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is a research-based, internationally-recognized dropout prevention and student leadership program that has kept 98% of its tutors in school.

Visit our VYP website to see how the program operates, its research base and how to bring it to your school.

And get a factsheet on how VYP transforms student socio-emotional learning and relationships with school. The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership directly addresses socio-emotional factors that are essential to reconnecting and re-engaging with students.

You can also see the read the full text of the six winning essays.

IDRA Evaluation of USDA Program to Cultivate Diverse Food and Agriculture Professionals

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in July 2023 launched an innovative program to train a diverse group of future food, natural resources, human sciences and agriculture professionals. This program, funded by President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act, seeks to lower costs, expand market access, and strengthen U.S. supply chains while fostering a clean energy economy.

IDRA will serve as the meta-evaluator to monitor and report on the benefits and impact of the program “NextGen.”

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, announced the NextGen program at an event in Washington, D.C., attended by [l-r] Joanna Sánchez, Ph.D., IDRA senior policy researcher; Dr. Manjit Misra, director of the USDA National Institute of
Paving the Way for Educational Justice – IDRA 50th Anniversary Archives Donation Reception

On November 16, the University of Texas at Austin welcomes IDRA for its celebration of 50 years of advocating equal educational opportunity across the nation and leading today’s fight for educational justice. Come see highlights of IDRA’s historic archives!

Hear from students and community leaders on the importance of connecting past social justice movements with the current struggle to protect our histories and civil rights.

Get details and register

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