Focus: 50th Anniversary - Year in Review

Envisioning a Bright Future for All Students

by Celina Moreno, J.D.

Editor's Note: The following is the text of remarks by IDRA President & CEO Celina Moreno, J.D., at IDRA’s 50th Anniversary Gala.

Thank you for celebrating with us tonight as we honor the bold legacy of Dr. José Cárdenas. I think about what it must have been like to take such a leap of faith to leave his superintendent position and start an organization from scratch. Such courage! 50 years later, our team is still driven by his vision.

We believe deeply that all young people have the right to graduate from high-quality public schools that are equitable and well-funded and that prepare every single young person to access and succeed in college – without being forced to abandon their language, gender or cultural identities in order to thrive.

We also envision a reality where bilingualism is not just accessible for middle-class students but as a civil right for all students learning English. That’s why, over the last few years, we trained 3,000 bilingual teachers in the U.S. South and crafted laws to improve their education.

We envision a reality where immigrant students are celebrated not just for what they can add to our economy but for what they mean to our communities. That’s why – whether in the Fifth Circuit this year or in the Texas Legislature session after session – IDRA will never stop fighting against attacks on the Texas Dream Act.

We envision a reality where students are not gaslit by classroom censorship policies that seek to prohibit discussions and ban books about race, gender and sexuality. That’s why IDRA has led advocacy coalitions in Texas and Georgia to fight these policies, launched a resource hub for teachers, and worked with partners to file federal complaints to challenge anti-LGBTQ+ school district policies.

We envision a reality where all students feel safe and welcomed in their schools. That’s why Congress has invited IDRA to testify on the harmful impact of exclusionary school discipline and over policing that is especially harmful to Black students.

We envision a reality in which students go to school free from racial bullying. That’s why IDRA engages in “movement lawyering” and teamed up with courageous Black students and their families to hold community forums, co-write legislation and file federal complaints. We are proud the Office for Civil Rights is actively investigating those complaints in Slaton and Lubbock Cooper ISDs.

50 years later, we remain committed to building community power.

We believe deeply that all young people have the right to graduate from high-quality public schools that are equitable and well-funded and that prepare every single young person to access and succeed in college – without being forced to abandon their language, gender or cultural identities in order to thrive.

(cont. on Page 2)
Since the Rodriguez v. San Antonio ISD Supreme Court ruling in 1973 allowed a host of inequities in school funding to continue, IDRA has transformed public education by providing dynamic educator training, actionable research, innovative student and parent leadership programs, and bold policy advocacy in the southern United States and across the nation.

During the last five decades, IDRA helped write the first bilingual education law in the state of Texas, one of the strongest in the nation. IDRA also provides expert testimony to Congress on school safety, discipline, dropout rates and funding. IDRA implements powerful student and family leadership programs that have touched millions of lives. And IDRA has added more than 800 bilingual, science, math, ESL, and bilingual special education teachers to more than 55 school districts. The list of milestones and IDRA real-world impact goes on.

IDRA has been celebrating its 50th anniversary throughout 2023, reflecting on a small group of concerned citizens who in 1973 set out to change the world and defend all students and their right to an excellent and equitable education. Thousands of classroom teachers, school principals, other educators, families, policymakers, community leaders, researchers and, of course, students themselves, have been a part of the IDRA story. As a result, millions of students’ lives have been powerfully affected by dramatically raising educational opportunities for all children.

This year has not just been a celebration of IDRA’s accomplishments over the last 50 years, but also a commitment to the next 50 and beyond – a commitment to equity, access, excellence, and the recognition of the inherent value of every student who steps into a classroom.

IDRA 50th Anniversary Video Gallery

“José would have been proud of what IDRA has become.”
– Laura Cárdenas, wife of the late Dr. José A. Cárdenas (IDRA Founder)

“I don’t know very many organizations that have both the capacity for rigorous policy analysis on the one hand and strong organizing and advocacy chops on the other. It’s the blend of those two things that stands IDRA apart.”
– Kent McGuire, The Williams and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Since its founding in 1973, IDRA has transformed public education by providing dynamic educator training, actionable research, innovative student and parent leadership programs, and bold policy advocacy in southern United States and across the nation. Over the past five decades, IDRA has been an extraordinary force for transformational change in education, both here in our city and across the nation.

San Antonio Mayor’s Congratulatory Video

“Over the past five decades, IDRA has been an extraordinary force for transformational change in education, both here in our city and across the nation.”
– San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg (and former IDRA intern)

Tribute Videos

See our anniversary video gallery for messages from public officials, community leaders and students.

See the highlights video from IDRA’s 50th Anniversary Gala, featuring Dr. Carmen Tafolla, Former State Poet Laureate of Texas.
Highlights of IDRA’s 50th Anniversary Calendar of Events

This year, IDRA held events to both celebrate our anniversary and, importantly, do so with members of the education community, public officials, and longtime supporters. These are people who have been part of IDRA’s story since the beginning and those who are doing the work with us today.

National Youth Summit

We started the year with a national virtual youth summit because IDRA’s reason for being is students. IDRA’s virtual summit was planned by students for others to learn about how they can advocate for safer and more successful learning environments, especially in communities targeted by inequitable policies.

Day of Action at the Texas Capitol

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) held a day of action at the Texas Capitol to lay out the coalition’s priorities for 2023 legislative session. The day included a live-streamed news conference. IDRA convened a group of organizations and individuals in 2001 to found the Texas Latino Education Coalition, which was later renamed the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition. The coalition has had a strong presence in state-level advocacy since its first days.


San Antonio is the place where the battle for fair funding of schools in Texas was born with the Rodríguez v. San Antonio ISD case and the series of Edgewood cases that followed. The community was at the forefront of what turned out to be a hard and often bitter fight that has continued for decades – the fight to assure that children in this and other communities like it would not continue to suffer under a bad and unjust system of financing schools. This case led to IDRA’s founding, also 50 years ago.

On the 50th anniversary of this momentous ruling, IDRA, Trinity University and its Center for Education Leadership, Edgewood ISD and the National Coalition on School Diversity hosted a commemorative event to reflect on the case, its impact, and its legacy of struggle and activism.

IDRA also released a “Law in Education” Classnotes Podcast episode on the history of the case, its impact, the litigation that followed, and how the case led to IDRA’s founding. And, with the National Coalition on School Diversity, we co-hosted a Twitter Chat (#Rodríguez50).


(50th Anniversary Events Highlights, continued from Page 1)

José A. Cárdenas School Finance Symposium

IDRA held a symposium featuring research by two IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows. Dr. Vanessa A. Sansone, presented her study that examined CARES Act funding and spending patterns among Hispanic-serving institutions in Texas. Dr. David Martinez presented his analysis of South Carolina school finance priorities in high-proportion LatinX school districts during COVID-19.

IDRA established the José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program in 2013 to honor the memory of IDRA founder, Dr. José Angel Cárdenas. The program is engaging the nation’s most promising researchers in investigating school finance solutions that secure equity and excellence for all public school students.

During the symposium, we also had a bonus presentation by a team of high school students on the results of their youth participatory action research study. The four students – Josué Peralta de Jesús, 12th grade, San Antonio; Kennedy Moore, 12th grade, Frisco; Manv Peralta de Jesús, 11th grade, Austin – were members of IDRA’s Youth Advocacy Board in 2022.

See video replay and research reports: https://idra.news/Symposium23Reg.

Board Reception Guests [l-r]: IDRA Board Chair Inventiva “Zino” Guerri; Congressman Joaquín Castro; IDRA National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Community Engagement Morgan Craven; IDRA President & CEO Celina Moreno; Congressman Greg Casar

The reception featured a keynote address from U.S. Department of Education Deputy Secretary Cynthia “Cindy” Marten and remarks by Congresswoman Teresa Legar Fernández, Congressman Joaquín Castro, IDRA President & CEO Celina Moreno, and IDRA National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Community Engagement Morgan Craven.

IDRA’s reception was a celebration of 50 years of fighting for and with young people and families for excellent and equitable schools. It was also a call to action to continue that fight through strong partnerships and strategic planning. See video highlights: https://idra.news/50thReceptionDC.

Paving the Way for Educational Justice – IDRA 50th Anniversary Archives Donation Reception

As some state leaders attempt to limit learning and discussions of diversity, our communities will not be silenced. On November 16, the University of Texas at Austin welcomed IDRA – one of the nation’s leading education civil rights organizations – for its 50th anniversary celebration and archives dedication.

Down the street in Austin, the state legislature debated whether to increase school funding or to divert millions for privatization. At the same time, the State Board of Education worked to codify censorship policies that restrict classroom learning about diversity and true history.

At our reception, we discussed the importance of connecting past social justice movements with the current struggle to protect our histories and civil rights. IDRA’s 50-year archive at the LILLAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections provides resources for students and researchers. Participants got a glimpse of IDRA’s impact across the decades in advocating for equal educational opportunity across the nation and leading today’s fight for educational justice.

Co-sponsors were: IDRA; LILLAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections; Center for Mexican American Studies, College of Liberal Arts, UT Austin; College of Education, UT Austin; Department of Mexican American & Latina/o Studies, College of Liberal Arts, UT Austin, Latino Research Institute, College of Liberal Arts, UT Austin, Texas LB School of Public Affairs, UT Austin; and William Wayne Justice Center for Public Interest Law, UT School of Law. See the video replay at: https://idra.news/50thReceptionUT.

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Texas Senate resolution.

Years of Work for Education Equity
Texas Senate Recognizes IDRA’s 50

The evening closed with a toast by Dr. Carmen Sánchez
more dedication to IDRA and its mission.

On November 1, 2023, the San Antonio School Board

IDRA’s 50th Anniversary Gala

In her keynote remarks, Ms. Huerta stated:

Bold Legacy, Bright Future – IDRA’s 50th Anniversary Gala

In November, our anniversary gala brought together over 300 educators, policymakers, re-

The San Antonio Business Journal Honors IDRA
The San Antonio Business Journal recog-
nized IDRA’s community leadership during its non-profit awards ceremony. The event featured IDRA’s new VisionCoders program in eight San Antonio middle schools.

T A B E Advocate Award
The Texas Association for Bilingual Education honored IDRA with the Jose J. Bernal TABE Community Advocate Award. More than ever, IDRA remains committed to supporting bilingual education through policy research, celebrating our emergent bilingual students and supporting our bilingual teachers. The award was particularly special since its namesake, Dr. Bernal, is a former IDRA board member.

Media Coverage Highlights
A number of media outlets featured IDRA and our 50-year legacy. Here are some headlines:

City of San Antonio Declares IDRA Day
In recognition of IDRA’s 50th anniversary gala and concert, the City of San Antonio issued a proclamation declaring November 2, 2023, to be “IDRA Day.” See the proclamation and the video message from Mayor Ron Nirenberg at: https://www.idra.org/50th.

Bexar County Commissioners Court Recognizes IDRA
During IDRA’s 50th anniversary and gala, Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai presented a declaration recognizing the contributions of IDRA for 50 years at the local, state, and federal levels.

Texas Senate Recognizes IDRA’s 50 Years of Work for Education Equity
On March 1, 2023, the Texas Senate adopted Resolution 262 to recognize IDRA’s 50th anniversary in 2023 and celebrate its commitment to education equity and excellence. The resolution was filed by Sen. José Menéndez and co-authored by Sen. Judith Zaffirini and Sen. Roland Gutierrez. See the resolution and video: https://idra.news/50thResSenateResolution.W.

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Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO, and Morgan Craven, J.D., national director of policy, advocacy and community engagement

• 50 Years of Strengthening Education in SA, Nation, by KABB-TV Focus on South Texas
• Podcast: Knowledge is Power: 50 Years of Advancing Education Equity with IDRA, by Scott Atlap, Weekly Witness by Texas Impact
• IDRA 50th Anniversary with host Martha Tijerina, CTSA Catholic Television of San Antonio
• A 50-year-old court case still shapes Texas school funding today, by Camille Phillips, Texas Public Radio
• Latinos in Education, ¡SALUD!, KLRN-TV
• Bridging the Gap – KDRY Radio, San Antonio

• How YOU can impact education policy – Empower-
ing student voices, The Nieńt Nick
• “This is our legacy” — Commemorating 50 years of the fight for school finance equity in Koshigaya vs San Antonio ISD, Texas Public Radio Fronteras

IDRA commissioned an original mariachi music video, “El Padrino,” featuring mariachis from Judson and South San Antonio ISDs. Chuck Curreau, Spurs in-arena host and SeaWorld public relations manager, served as emcee. Dignitaries shared their messages of congratulations. Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai presented a proclamation (see Page 6) and San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg sent a video message (see page 3).

In his opening remarks, the Honorable Juven-
tino “Tino” Guerra, IDRA Board of Directors chair said: “José Cárdenas’ legacy lives on in the countless lives that have been transformed by IDRA’s work. He ignited a flame that has con-
tinued to burn so brightly under the leadership of President Emerita Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel and now President and CEO, Celina Moreno.”

With the support of our sponsors, we wel-
come students representing various areas of our work, including special guest speakers. High school freshman, Kaleb Dunn, spoke about his experience as an inaugural VisionCoders student, “This program really inspired me to go into the technical field.”

University student, James Wilson, added: “IDRA was there for the Georgia Youth Justice Coalition when we started building our advoca-
cy presence, and the backing and promotion that IDRA provided us did more than help us – it legitimized our presence and solidified our standing in Georgia’s advocacy space.”

Celina Moreno announced the new name of IDRA’s Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel Advocacy Award. Dr. Robledo Montecel continued dedication to IDRA and its mission. IDRA was pleased to name Dolores Huerta as the first recipient of that award. She is the founder and president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation and co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America with Cesar Chavez. IDRA commissioned an original mariachi galaxy for Ms. Huerta by artist Paul Hueso Tomás of San Pedro Canones, Oaxaca.

In her keynote remarks, Ms. Huerta stated: “Everything that you’re fighting for…is ab-
solutely crucial. Every single person here des-
erves a quality education…In school, what do we do? We read about history. We talk about history. We write about history. But when we become activists, we make history. That is what you have done. IDRA has made history. We have to expand that to every single person. We can make it happen. Yes, we can!” Then, Ms. Huerta led the audience in a “Si Se Puede” chant.

The evening closed with a toast by Dr. Carmen Tijerina, CTSA Catholic Television of San Antonio. Videos, photos and the event program are available online at: https://idra.news/GalaInfo Videos, photos and the event program are available online at: https://idra.news/GalaInfo
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January 21, 2024 • U.S. Supreme Court Ruling
Lau v. Nichols • 50th Anniversary

The Lau v. Nichols U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1974 defined the right of emergent bilingual students to equal access to meaningful education.

IDRA founder Dr. José Cárdenas testified in the case and then assisted the Office for Civil Rights in the development of the Lau Remedies, the first guide for schools about serving emergent bilingual students.

In January 2024, we will honor the ruling’s anniversary, its impact for students and what it means for today.

IDRA is co-hosting a commemorative webinar via Claremont Graduate University School of Educational Studies
January 22, 2024 • 6:00 pm - 8:30 pm CT

Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO, will speak alongside the Lau plaintiff lawyer, school superintendents, policy experts and academics. They will discuss the policy and practice implications of the ruling through to today.

Co-Sponsors: C Abe • Californians Together • Center for Equity & Biliteracy in Education Research at San Diego State University • Center for Equity for English Learners at Loyola Marymount University • Children’s Equity Project at Arizona State University • IDRA • NABE

https://idra-resource.center/Lau50Event

achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college