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Focus: College Readiness and Success

Texas School Counselors Point to Troubling State of College Advising

IDRA Studies the Role of Middle School Counselors in Supporting Students' College Readiness

A decade after Texas policymakers weakened graduation requirements, middle school counselors struggle with their role of college and career advising under the 2013 House Bill 5. IDRA released a study recently, *School Counselors on College Advising Constraints – A Ready Texas Study*, about the impact of the law on their work and on students.

The Texas Legislature ended the previous graduation requirements commonly known as the 4x4 that required Texas students to graduate with four courses each in math, English, social studies and science. Students are no longer required to take some of the rigorous courses including Algebra 2 that prepare them for college. The policy also states that students must choose an “endorsement” – in essence, their career path – in eighth grade.

Those changes put middle school counselors in a heightened role of advising young students to make long-term decisions about their educational careers.

“In Texas, the counseling profession stands at a critical juncture in students’ lives,” said Hector Bojorquez, lead researcher for the study and IDRA’s director of operations and educational practice. “Counselors can directly influence how students see their future selves. Unfortunately, there are few policies or widespread practices to support middle school counselors

in providing the best assistance to all students.”

The majority of middle school counselors reported to IDRA that they spend at least 75% of their time performing tasks that have nothing to do with college and career counseling. Nearly all counselors interviewed were skeptical that eighth grade students are developmentally ready to choose a career path. Counselors try to support them with little to no resources. The American School Counselor Association recommends that schools have a counselor-to-student ratio of 1 to 250. In Texas, the average is 1 to 390.

The following recommendations to Texas policymakers reflect our analysis of counselor responses and relevant research:

- Address counseling time and funding so that middle school counselors can better serve students, including reducing counselor-to-student ratios;
- Address issues of equity to prepare middle school and high school counselors to support all students’ college readiness and to address racial-ethnic and socio-economic disparities;
- Provide counselors with data on college readiness, success and endorsement outcomes;

(cont. on Page 2)

The majority of middle school counselors reported to IDRA that they spend at least 75% of their time performing tasks that have nothing to do with college and career counseling.

(Texas School Counselors Raise Concerns about College Advising, continued from Page 1)

- Equip counselors to engage with families in navigating the system for students' college preparation and access and with their community to leverage community resources and knowledge; and
- Prepare all students for college.

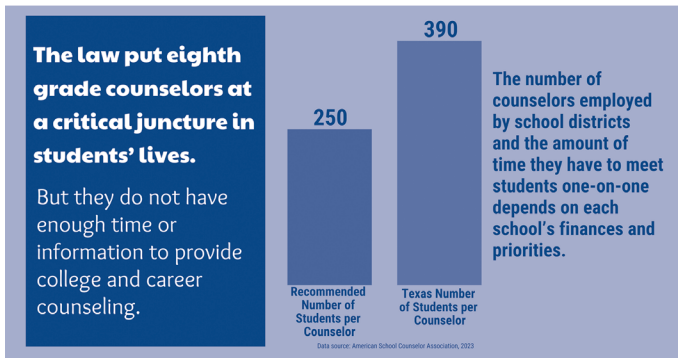
The Greater Texas Foundation funded this study, which follows IDRA's 2018 report, also funded by the foundation, that found rural school districts had a 24% drop in students taking Algebra 2.

Resources

- Bojorquez, H. (2023). School Counselors on College Advising Constraints – A Ready Texas Study. IDRA. <https://idra.news/ReadyTx23p>
- Bojorquez, H. (May 2018). Ready Texas – A Study of the Implementation of HB5 in Texas and Implications for College Readiness. IDRA. <https://idra.news/Ready-Texas18>

More Ready Texas
IDRA study shows counselor concerns about the state's graduation requirements

HB5 In 2013, Texas made the most substantial changes to graduation requirements & school curricula in recent history. House Bill 5 weakened graduation requirements for math, science and social studies and created a system of endorsement specialties for high school students. The policy ended the more rigorous college prep 4x4 plan. With funding from the Greater Texas Foundation, IDRA interviewed eighth grade counselors across the state that serve predominantly students of color and students from families with low-incomes to see how HB 5 is affecting their ability to support students.



The majority of middle school counselors reported to IDRA that they spend at least **75%** of their time performing tasks that have nothing to do with college and career counseling.

Almost all counselors reported not knowing if students followed the career path chosen as an endorsement in eighth grade.

What else did our interviews tell us?

- Many counselors used the word "pressure" to describe the situation where eighth graders must decide their future before they have tried anything.
- Counselors repeatedly stated that they were not sure HB 5 had really helped anything and thought it might be hurting some students.
- The emphasis on career exploration could have the effect of tracking students out of college preparation and into vocational classes.

Ready Texas Study Key Findings

- Endorsement and career exploration methods vary greatly.
- Communication between middle and high school counselors is rare.
- Non-counseling work monopolizes most counselor time.
- HB 5 pressures students to determine their future early.
- HB 5 neglects underrepresented racial and ethnic student groups.
- More school support is needed to help families navigate the HB 5 system.
- COVID-19 limited college counseling.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Texas leaders should...

- 1 Address counseling time and funding so that middle school counselors can better serve students, including reducing counselor-to-teacher ratios.*
 - 2 Address issues of equity to prepare school counselors to support all students' college readiness and to address racial-ethnic and socio-economic disparities.
 - 3 Equip counselors to engage with families in navigating the system for students' college preparation and access and with their community to leverage community resources and knowledge.
 - 4 Provide counselors data on college readiness, success and endorsement outcomes.
- 5 Prepare all students for college! Really!

*In 2021, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 179, which expanded school counselors' capacity to deliver critical counseling services to students. The measure instructs school districts to adopt a policy that requires school counselors to spend at least 80% of their work time on actual counseling to support the academic and emotional needs of the students. The measure did not provide funding for additional counselors.

Key info for students and families

For college, students need rigorous courses: 4 in math, 4 in science, 4 in English, 4 in social studies ("4x4").

This includes Algebra 2!

Students should insist that they be on a path to earn the Distinguish Level of Achievement. Otherwise they are not eligible for the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan for automatic admission to public colleges in the state or for some scholarship and grant funds, thanks to HB 5.

See IDRA's new study

"School Counselors on College Advising Constraints – A Ready Texas Study"

and see our previous study that found rural school districts had a 24% drop in students taking Algebra 2: "Ready Texas - A Study of the Implementation of HB5 in Texas and Implications for College Readiness"

www.idra.org/research_articles/ready-texas

2023

See and share this infographic in color: <https://idra.news/ReadyTxGraphic3>

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. 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.

The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2024) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children across the United States.

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Portions of the contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.

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Texas' Ban on College Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Offices Takes Effect

by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D.

The Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 17 last spring to ban diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) offices in colleges and universities. This new anti-DEI law will have far-reaching consequences for college quality and accessibility in Texas.

DEI offices and initiatives were established to help foster more equitable and inclusive college learning environments for historically marginalized students. They offer targeted resources and support for historically marginalized students, including Black and Latino students, students identifying as LGBTQ+, and students from low-income households, first-generation college students, students who are immigrants and military veterans.

The law took effect officially on January 1, 2024, though universities began reorganizing DEI offices, staff and related on-campus student support centers throughout last year.

Texas is one of at least eight states that passed similar bans last year to undermine diversity in higher education (Martínez-Alvarado & Perez, 2023). Dozens of other states have taken similar steps to ban or limit DEI offices by prohibiting or cutting state funding for them or incorporating restrictions on DEI in hiring and other institutional practices (Insight into Diversity, 2023; Walker, 2023).

Texas' new law bans the establishment, maintenance and state funding for DEI offices at public colleges and universities. The ban extends to required training, such as those on implicit racial or gender bias, and the practice of requesting a diversity statement in hiring faculty and staff.

The law exempts certain practices related to race and gender inclusion from the DEI ban, including classroom instruction, research, student-sponsored campus organizations, and recruitment and admissions programs. However,

broad interpretations of the law could extend to banning or limiting important college outreach, recruitment and admissions programs that specifically support historically marginalized students (Kemgang, 2023).

For example, at the University of Texas at Austin, the Multicultural Engagement Center (MEC) and Monarch Program have both been shut down this school year. The MEC housed multiple student organizations focused on advancing social change (Srivastava, 2024). The Monarch Program served undocumented students, regardless of race or gender (Orosco, 2024). Immigration and citizenship status are not referenced in SB 17.

At the University of Houston, a preemptive closure of the LGBTQ Resource Center in August 2023 rattled students and sowed doubt about recruiting future talented students and faculty who care about LGBTQ campus inclusion (Welch, 2023).

Already, students and faculty report vague understandings of how the exempted activities will be protected from the ban and concerns about the bill's chilling effect on various equity-focused academic and student support initiatives (Culbertson, 2023).

Texas public colleges and universities enroll approximately 1.6 million students, 51% of whom are Black or Latino (NCES, 2021). The Texas Legislative Black Caucus and other state legislative groups representing Black, Latino and LGBTQ+ interests issued a statement on the law's effective date expressing concern about the DEI ban's impact on Texas students: "The absence of dedicated resources for DEI initiatives risks creating a void in addressing systemic inequalities and fostering an inclusive learning environment for all students" (TLBC, 2024).

(cont. on Page 4)

Texas is one of at least eight states that passed similar bans last year to undermine diversity in higher education.

(Texas' Ban on College Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Offices Takes Effect, continued from Page 3)

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) advocated support for DEI offices during the legislative session and prepared a

brief bilingual guide to SB 17 (see infographic on next page or go to <https://idra-resource.center/TxDEIbanInfographic>).

References available online (www.idra.org).

Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., is IDRA's deputy director of policy. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at chloe.sikes@idra.org.



Understanding Texas's DEI Ban at Public Universities

Texas is home to many exceptional higher education institutions. Unfortunately, the state legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 17 last spring, a law that prohibits diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and offices at public universities. It went into effect on January 1, 2024.

This new anti-DEI law introduced changes that will have far-reaching consequences for college quality and accessibility in Texas.

SB 17's broad language invites ambiguities and has sparked concerns about the potential chilling effects on campuses for student support services, centers and outreach programs.

The law also requires universities to certify compliance each year before they can spend any money received from the state for the upcoming year, which comprises a significant portion of their budgets. If universities fail to comply, they will lose state funding and could face legal action.

What SB 17 Affects



DEI offices are banned

DEI offices provide various support services to students, especially from historically marginalized backgrounds and communities (e.g., students of color, LGBTQ+ students, first-generation students, students with disabilities and military veterans, immigrant students).

Universities can no longer maintain DEI offices that promote policies directly related to race, color or ethnicity, with narrow exceptions for compliance with federal law. They cannot conduct activities like training sessions or programs that directly reference race, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation unless they are approved by the university's general counsel and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (b) (1) (A-B)



Hiring boards cannot consider race or sex or require diversity statements

Universities cannot solicit or consider diversity statements in the faculty hiring process. Universities cannot give an applicant preference in hiring based on their race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (b) (1) (C-D)



Mandatory DEI training for staff is not allowed

Universities cannot require staff to complete diversity, equity and inclusion training as a condition of their employment without prior approval*.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (b) (1) (E)



Mandatory DEI training for students is not allowed

Universities cannot require students to complete diversity, equity and inclusion training as a condition of their enrollment without prior approval*.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (b) (1) (E)

* Programs must be created by an attorney and approved by the school's general counsel and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).

What SB 17 Does Not Affect



Federal laws still apply

SB 17 does not supersede any federal law, including Title VI and Title IX, which require institutions take affirmative steps to prevent and remedy discrimination of all kinds, including discrimination on the basis of race and gender.



Classroom instruction can continue

SB 17 does not infringe on an instructor's right to discuss topics like race, color, ethnicity, sex, gender identity and sexuality in relation to the subject matter of their course.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (d) (1)



Academic research and creative works can continue

SB 17 does not restrict a student's or faculty member's ability to conduct academic research or produce creative works (paintings, poetry, essays, music, etc.) focusing on topics related to race, color, ethnicity, sex, gender identity and sexuality.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (d) (2)



Student organization activities can continue

SB 17 does not impact the ability of a university-affiliated student organization to offer activities, training or programs designed to address topics related to race, color, ethnicity, sex, gender identity and sexuality.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (d) (3)



Guest speakers and performers can continue

SB 17 does not impact the selection of guest speakers or performers at a campus, nor the content of their message.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (d) (4)



Student recruitment and admissions initiatives continue

SB 17 does not impact recruitment or admissions initiatives that reference race, color, ethnicity, sex, gender identity and sexuality and that comply with federal law.

Education Code, Section 51.3525 (d) (7)

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) supports inclusive academic programs, research and student activity on college campuses.



@TxTLEEC



<https://idra-resource.center/TLEEC>

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See and share this infographic in color: <https://idra.news/TxDEIban>

Encouraging STEM Pathways through Student and Teacher Experiences

by Stephanie García, Ph.D.

More than ever, there is a global priority of preparing students for STEM college and careers with high-quality experiences that increase career awareness and help cultivate relationships, mentorships and work-based experiences.

In 2023, the Defense STEM Education Consortium (DSEC) named the Alamo STEM Ecosystem (ASE) as one of only four STEM Education Hubs in the nation. IDRA co-leads San Antonio's ASE, which brings together educators, community leaders and industry partners to expand opportunities for K-16 students.

Through this partnership, the Alamo STEM Ecosystem is continuing to provide and scale up meaningful STEM activities for underrepresented students in and around San Antonio and is providing students and educators with exposure to educational and workforce development opportunities as well as awareness about career opportunities in STEM fields.

As part of a consortium, we engage in a national network of partners who seek to advance STEM learning opportunities for historically marginalized students, including students of color, girls, and non-binary students.

Student-Serving STEM Youth Summit (January)

Early this month, we held San Antonio's first school-day STEM Youth Summit. Our inaugural event took place at St. Mary's University and was a collaborative effort from all our Alamo STEM Hub leads and ecosystem partners.

Informed by students themselves, the goals for this event were to increase STEM college and career awareness and offer STEM pathway support, connect middle and high school students to local mentors and opportunities through networking sessions, and provide
(cont. on Page 6)



STEM Youth Summit
January 17, 2024 • San Antonio

ALAMO STEM ECOSYSTEM Bridging Youth, Community & Workforce | SAMSAT | ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY | IDRA 50

"If you're curious about a particular field or industry, embrace that curiosity and explore all you can, whether that's taking classes within the field or any extracurriculars, to really learn if it's the right choice for you."
– Hannah Rosales, high school senior computer science student, president of the Mexican American Studies Student Association, and IDRA intern

The complex block features a blue-themed banner at the top with the event title and date. Below the banner are logos for the Alamo STEM Ecosystem, SAMSAT, St. Mary's University, and IDRA. The main content area contains a quote from Hannah Rosales, a high school senior computer science student, president of the Mexican American Studies Student Association, and IDRA intern. The quote is accompanied by a collage of five photographs: a student speaking at a podium, a student smiling at a podium, a group of students working on laptops, a student using a microscope, and a group of students sitting around a table.

(Encouraging STEM Pathways through Student and Teacher Experiences, continued from Page 5)

hands-on training in leadership development and STEM learning.

Originally, we aimed to serve 200 to 300 students, but with an overwhelming response from area schools and extra support from sponsors, we were able to increase that number to 400 middle and high school underrepresented students in STEM.

Many additional organizations participated to help impact hundreds of students in their STEM pathways included: BEST Robotics, Cafe College, CAST Schools, Cybersecurity Manufacturing Innovation Institute (CyManII) at the University of Texas at San Antonio, CyberTexas, Dee Howard Foundation, Family Service Association, Girls Inc., Greater SATX, H-E-B, Learning Undeclared, NASA, PREP San Antonio, PTECH, SAMSAT, San Antonio International Airport, TX FAME, the University of Incarnate Word's GEMS program, UT Health San Antonio, Wex Foundation (LCATS), and Youth Code Jam.

These local and national partners were integral in the youth STEM leadership development day. They led over 20 engaging breakout sessions to prepare students for college and career pathways and position them for success.

Students participated in STEM-focused sessions, including biomedical research, cybersecurity, computer science and AI, robotics, drone aviation, and advanced mathematics.

Leadership and career-focused sessions helped students learn about public speaking, networking, creating a resume that stands out, college admissions and scholarships, and the value of internships and work- and research-based experiences.

Our partner organizations also hosted tables during the STEM Expo rotation so that each partner could network with all 400 students. Partners each provided a flier outlining important things for students to keep in mind as they persist in the rigorous STEM pathway, deadlines for applications, and links to resources.

Before the event, IDRA interviewed a cohort of students to see what they wanted from the STEM Youth Summit. Their top priority was to have information to take back to their families to discuss what they learned together

and to take advantage of those resources moving forward.

Students also participated in a St. Mary's University tour and information sessions that provided a unique experience where students met university faculty and students to learn more about the STEM programs and degrees. Some of these focused on engineering, E-Sports, virtual reality, Earth science, construction management and computer science.

An innovative aspect of our event was incorporating partners through an outdoor learning experience. We invited partners and student leaders to participate by leading STEM demonstrations and bringing mobile STEM labs and simulators to the event. These focus on a variety of STEM topics, such as aviation, biomedical research, and cybersecurity.

This event was possible thanks to IDRA's DSEC grant and the generosity of St. Mary's University, one of the ASE's higher education partners. Other sponsors included the Alamo AFCEA Education Initiative and the many ASE cross-sector partners who served as presenters, table hosts and mentors.

Educator-Serving STEM Educator Conference (February)

The Alamo STEM Ecosystem Educator Conference will take place on February 3, 2024, at Palo Alto College STEM Center (IDRA and SAMSAT are the leads). This is our annual event for San Antonio teachers and pre-service teachers to provide access to and information about innovative and culturally relevant resources for PK-12 teachers through a free, one-day conference designed for teachers at all career stages.

Calling all pre- and in-service teachers interested in K-12 STEM learning!

February 3, 2024
8:30-2:30 pm CT
Free, 6 CE Hours
Palo Alto College

Your mission, should you choose to accept it:
Defend the Future
Alamo STEM Ecosystem
Educator Conference

ALAMO STEM ECOSYSTEM
ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT
Palo Alto College
Department of Defense
DoDSTEM
Science Technology Engineering Mathematics

TOP SECRET

100% in-person & free!
6 CE hours

SCAN ME

idra-resource.center/RegisterASEconference

This year's theme focuses on STEM and career technology education (CTE) pathways, increasing college and career awareness and real-world connections in classrooms, and sharing best practices to serve emergent bilingual students, students with special needs, and underrepresented students in STEM.

We typically serve over 200 educators from San Antonio and offer around 20 engaging, hands-on breakout sessions led by educators and our Alamo STEM Ecosystem partners.

Stephanie Garcia, Ph.D., is IDRA's STEM and gender equity education specialist and directs the IDRA VisionCoders program. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at stephanie.garcia@idra.org.

IDRA Priorities for the 2024 Georgia General Assembly Session

The Georgia General Assembly opened its 2024 session this month and will operate until the end of March. IDRA has outlined the following policy priorities and recommendations.



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Ensure Fair School Funding for All Students

All students deserve to attend free, high-quality, fully funded schools. However, since Georgia passed the Quality Basic Education Act in 1985, the public education system has been consistently underfunded by more than \$10 billion.

The state's recurring lack of investment, coupled with the systematic diversion of taxpayer funds toward private education, has undermined Georgia's public schools and their ability to support the needs of our most vulnerable students, particularly those students living in poverty and in rural communities. To ensure full and fair funding for Georgia's public schools, IDRA urges the Georgia General Assembly to:

- **Fully fund the Quality Basic Education formula.** The Georgia General Assembly should support local schools by meeting the minimum funding threshold set by the QBE formula, while acknowledging that this formula is outdated and insufficient for meeting the current needs of students. A modern cost study is needed to ensure that every Georgia student has access to an excellent education.
- **Add formula funding for educating students living in poverty.** The Georgia General Assembly should expand the Quality Basic Education formula to allocate dedicated funds to help local schools address the unique needs of educating students from families with limited resources.
- **Oppose all efforts to divert public funding to private education institutions.** The Georgia General Assembly should reject any proposals

that seek to redirect public education funds to private institutions in the form of voucher programs, including educational savings accounts, tax credits or private school scholarships.

End Harmful Discipline in Schools

Georgia's students should have access to safe and supportive learning environments where teachers and school administrators do not rely on harmful exclusionary discipline and policing strategies. Instead, we must invest in research-based strategies that support positive school climates and student success.

The legislature can make sure students have access to safe and welcoming schools. IDRA urges the Georgia General Assembly to:

- **Secure a discipline study committee.** The Georgia education committee should commission a study committee dedicated to reviewing and evaluating existing discipline practices within Georgia's public schools. The committee's findings can inform future policies aimed at promoting a safer and more effective learning environment.
- **Expand Multi-Tiered Systems of Support availability to all students.** The Georgia General Assembly should expand Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to all public PreK-12 students and reduce the maximum threshold to trigger its implementation from five suspension days to zero. Currently these practices, which are designed to address the diverse academic and behavioral needs of students, are only required for PreK through third grade students.

- **Prohibit corporal punishment.** The Georgia General Assembly must ban the use of corporal punishment in schools and emphasize a commitment to non-violent and effective disciplinary methods.

Promote Culturally-Sustaining School Climates that Support All Students

All students deserve to learn in culturally-sustaining school environments that affirm their racial, ethnic, gender and other identities. Culturally-sustaining schools create positive, safe and supportive school climates for all students to receive high-quality educational opportunities to succeed. Recent classroom censorship policies have made schools less safe or supportive for students, especially for students who are Black, Latino and identify as LGBTQ+, and are significantly more likely to experience identity-based discrimination.

The legislature can make sure students attend culturally-sustaining and supportive schools. IDRA urges the Georgia General Assembly to:

- **Expand required topics in the Founding U.S. Philosophy & Principles course.** The Georgia General Assembly should broaden the scope of the Founding U.S. Philosophy and Principles course to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that incorporates a more comprehensive range of topics and perspectives including the contributions of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and Latino Americans throughout U.S. History.

For more information, contact Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., IDRA Georgia Advocacy Director (mikayla.arciaga@idra.org) or Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA Regional Policy and Community Engagement Director (terrence.wilson@idra.org).

Focus: College Readiness and Success

New Classnotes Podcast Episode about IDRA's Youth Leadership Now Project Student Leaders Surprise Teachers

Many programs in public schools take a while to bear fruit. This is not surprising since schools are systems, and positive change requires systemic change. But we have also seen change occur quickly when adults shift their perspective about students, particularly students who don't fit a certain mold.

IDRA is testing such a process through our new Youth Leadership Now project. This field-initiated, research-based program that is federally funded is examining how the program can transform not just participating students but also whole school communities.

We are partnering with the Texas Education Service Center Region 19 to pilot this program in several schools in far West Texas. Youth Leadership Now combines three key strategies. First, it takes key elements from IDRA's highly successful Valued Youth Partnership program and adds mentorship of tutors by eighth grade teachers, who help them prepare to transition into high school. And it incorporates IDRA's family leadership model, Education CAFE, to engage families and tutors in equity action projects.

In this podcast episode, Hector Bojorquez, IDRA's director of operations and educational practice, who conceptualized this project, had a nice conversation with two guests from Fabens Middle School. Ana Luna is the YLN teacher coordinator who has worked 18 years in the districts as a math and technology teacher. Her assistant, Beatriz Nuñez, joins the discussion as they talk about what they have seen in the students' first four weeks as tutors.

