



Focus: Push Outs – Children of Color

Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2016-17	3
Supporting LGBTQ Students.....	5
Commemoration of Delgado vs. Bastrop Case.....	7

Partnerships, Not Push Outs – Collaboration is Critical to Dealing with Disparities

by Paula Johnson, M.A.

October is National Dropout Prevention Month. Two out of 10 students face the life-changing decision of dropping out of school. Students do not arrive at this predicament overnight. Many factors are influential over time in pushing students out the door. However, there are several points along the way where intervention can prevent a young person from relinquishing his or her right to an equitable and quality education. In this article, we discuss the causes, impact and strategies for reducing practices that push out students in the United States.

Over-policed and Under-educated

The IDRA's 2017 Texas attrition summary reports that almost 100,000 students were lost to attrition during the 2016-17 school year (Johnson, 2017; see story Page 3). Zero tolerance policies in school discipline, unwelcoming or uncaring school environments, and testing that is high-stakes are continuously placing the educational opportunities of millions of children across this country at risk. School push out patterns result from several factors that can ultimately discourage or even prevent youth from staying on course to complete their education. And it is occurring from as young as kindergarten, all the way through high school.

For example, increased policing of students in schools is creating learning environments where minor student infractions, such as tardiness and absences, are bringing students into unwarranted contact with law enforcement through fines and other sanctions (Advancement Project, 2010).

These policies have been associated with achievement gaps among all racial groups (Crenshaw, et al., 2015). Practices such as zero-tolerance lead to out-of-school suspensions, expulsions and ticketing, resulting in additional class time missed for punishment or court appearances.

Disparities in student achievement also can produce negative student outcomes, such as lower rates of graduation, employment and income, and increased probability of students dropping out and future involvement with the juvenile and/or criminal justice system (Hinojosa, 2016; Advancement Project, 2010).

IDRA identified six school policies and practices that lead to higher dropout rates, including exclusionary student discipline: zero tolerance; in-grade retention; low funding and insufficient support for English learners; unfair and insufficient funding; watered-down, non-college prep curricula; and testing that is high-stakes. (See infographic on Page 4.)

Disproportionality in Dropout Rates

There is higher chance of push out for students who have been placed in alternative education settings and the juvenile justice system. Factors such as suspensions, expulsions and systemic inequities have historically resulted in disproportionately higher rates of school pushout for students of color, students from low-income families, and students in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning (LGBTQ)

(cont. on Page 2)

“It is high time that Texas take a new course. Investment in change must go beyond discrete dropout prevention programs. Investment must reflect our full commitment to providing for quality public schools in all neighborhoods for children of all backgrounds.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

(Partnerships, Not Push Outs, continued from Page 1)

community. Additionally, there is a large disparity between dropout rates based on student disability status and recency of immigration.

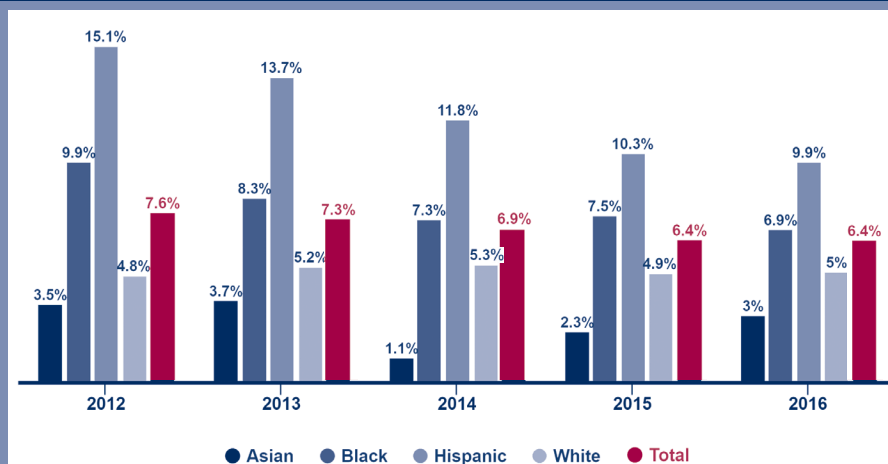
Dropout and graduation rates are not traditionally disaggregated for LGBTQ students and are difficult to find. Still, based on student surveys, the American Psychological Association estimates that LGBTQ students drop out at more than three times the national rate (2012).

Pew Research Center reports that there were an estimated 1.9 million high school dropouts according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 Current Population Survey (see top graph) (Gramlich, 2017). It is important to note that these data reflect all youth ages 14 to 24. The data do not differentiate between students who left school during the school year versus those who have not attended school for two or more years.

Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Gender – The U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2017) reports annually on the *status* dropout rate, which represents the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are no longer enrolled in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential, such as a GED certificate. Though the rates have fallen significantly over the past 60 years, there is a persistent trend of higher rates for minority students.

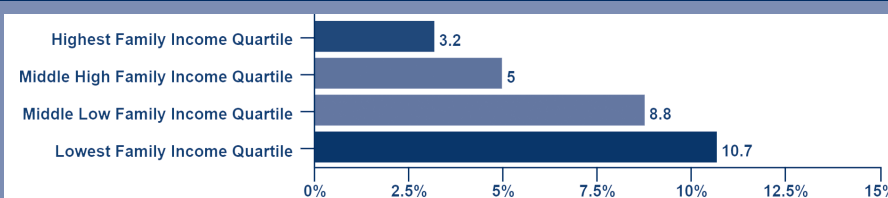
Based on data from the latest Current Population Survey, from 2010 to 2015, the status dropout rate for youth fell from 7.4 to 5.9 percent. Between 2010 and 2015, the male status dropout rate declined from 8.5 percent to 6.3 percent, and the female status dropout rate declined from 6.3 percent to 5.4 percent. While the rate for male youth was 2.2 percentage points higher than the rate for female youth in 2010, the difference between the rates for males and females in 2015 has fallen to below 1 percent.

U.S. High School Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Ages 14-24



Source: Gramlich, J. (September 29, 2017). "Hispanic dropout rate hits new low, college enrollment at new high," *Fact Tank* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center).

National Status Dropout Rates in 2013



Source: 2013 status dropout rates by family income (McFarland, et al., 2016).

Family Income – The 2016 NCES Compendium Report (McFarland, et al., 2016) summary (see lower graph) shows that, at 10.7 percent, youth from low-income families had status dropout rates that were nearly three times as high as the rates for their peers from high-income families. The status dropout rate for students from high-income families was 3.2 percent, while the rates for youth from middle- and low-income families were 5.0 and 8.8 percent, respectively.

There was no statistically significant difference between the status dropout rate for youth from middle-income families and the rate for youth from low-income families.

Disability – In 2013, the status dropout rate for youth with disabilities (14.9 percent) was more than twice as large as the rate for their peers without disabilities (6.4 percent) (McFarland, et al., 2016).

(cont. on Page 7)

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Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2016-17

High School Attrition Returns to 24 Percent After One Year Bump

by Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

Over the past five years, the overall high school attrition rate in Texas has ranged from 24 percent to 25 percent. After inching up by 1 percentage point from 24 percent in 2014-15 to 25 percent in 2015-16, the attrition rate inched back down to 24 percent in 2016-17. Holding constant in this range, the overall attrition rate in Texas was 25 percent in 2012-13, 24 percent in 2013-14, 24 percent in 2014-15, 25 percent in 2015-16, and 24 percent in 2016-17.

This year's study is the 32nd in a series of annual reports on trends in dropout and attrition rates in Texas public schools. Since leading the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas in 1985-86, IDRA has conducted attrition analyses to assess schools' abilities to hold on to their students until they graduate.

Attrition rates are an indicator of a school's holding power or ability to keep students enrolled in school and learning until they graduate. Along with other dropout measures, attrition rates are useful in studying the magnitude of the dropout problem and the success of schools in keeping students in school. In simplest terms, *attrition* is defined as shrinkage in size or number; therefore, an attrition rate is the percent change in grade level between a base year and an end year.

IDRA's latest study being released this month found that 24 percent of the freshman class of 2013-14 left school prior to graduating in the 2016-17 school year. The statewide attrition rate of 24 percent is 9 percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33 percent found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study. The 2016-17 rate is 27 percent lower than the 1985-86 rate showing moderate improvement in school holding power.

Across racial and ethnic groups, the study found that attrition rates today are lower than in the first study three decades ago. Attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 36 percent (from 45 percent to 29 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 24 percent (from 34 percent to 26 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 48 percent (from 27 percent to 14 percent). Attrition rates of male students declined by 26 percent (from 35 percent to 26 percent), while the attrition rates of female students declined by 34 percent (from 32 percent to 21 percent).

Not to be overlooked among the positive trends in attrition rates overall is the concern about the persistent gaps in the attrition rates of White and non-White students. The gaps between the attri-

(cont. on Page 4)

Since 1986, Texas schools have lost a cumulative total of more than 3.7 million students from public high school enrollment prior to graduation.

Change in Texas High School Attrition Rates

Group	1985-86 Rate	2015-16 Rate	2016-17 Rate	Change Since 3 Decades Ago	Change Since Last Year
All Students	33	25	24	↓	↓
Native American	45	20	20	↓	↔
Asian/Pacific Islander	33	12	13	↓	↑
Black	34	27	26	↓	↓
White	27	15	14	↓	↓
Hispanic	45	31	29	↓	↓
Male	35	27	26	↓	↓
Female	32	22	21	↓	↓

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(Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2016-17, continued from Page 3)

tion rates of White students and Hispanic students and of White students and Black students continue to be about the same or higher than they were 32 years ago. Between White students and Hispanic students, the attrition rate gap was 18 percentage points in 1985-86 and 15 percentage points in 2015-16. The attrition rate gap between White students and Black students almost doubled from 7 percentage points in 1985-86 to 12 percentage points in 2016-17.

The full study is available on IDRA's web site at www.idra.org and includes methodology, historical statewide attrition rates and numbers of students lost to attrition categorized by race-ethnicity and by gender, a county-level data map, a county-level attrition rate table, trend data by county, and historical county-level numbers of students lost to attrition.

Key findings of the latest study include the following.

- Texas public schools still are **failing to graduate one out of every four students**. One out of every four students (24 percent) from the freshman class of 2013-14 left school prior to graduating with a high school diploma.
- A total of 99,960 students from the 2013-14 freshman class were lost from public high school enrollment in 2016-17 compared to 86,276 in 1985-86.
- For the class of 2016-17, **Hispanic students and Black students are about two times more likely to leave school** without graduating than White students.
- In three decades, the overall attrition rate declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 24 percent in 2016-17.

- From 1985-86 to 2016-17, attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 36 percent (from 45 percent to 29 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 24 percent (from 34 percent to 26 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 48 percent (from 27 percent to 14 percent).

- The attrition gap between White students and Hispanic students was 18 percentage points in 1985-86 compared to 15 percentage points in 2015-16.

- The attrition gap between White students and Black students was 7 percentage points in 1985-86 compared to 12 percentage points in 2016-17. The gap between White students and Black students increased by 71 percent from 1985-86 to 2016-17.

- Since 1986, Texas schools have lost a **cumulative total of more than 3.7 million students** from public high school enrollment prior to graduation.

- The attrition rates for males have been higher than those of females. In the class of 2016-17, males were 1.2 times more likely to leave school before graduation than females.

- From 1985-86 to 2016-17, attrition rates of male students declined by 26 percent (from 35 percent to 26 percent), while the attrition rates of female students declined by 34 percent (from 32 percent to 21 percent).

A supplemental analysis by IDRA education associate, Felix Montes, Ph.D., using linear regression models predicts that at the current pace Texas will continue to range from 22 percent to 26

6 Policies that Lead to Higher Dropout Rates

- Zero Tolerance**: There is no research to support that zero tolerance makes schools any safer. Suspension and other exclusionary discipline practices have been linked to a higher likelihood of dropping out or not graduating on time. Minority students, particularly Black students, are disproportionately subject to exclusionary discipline practices. Keeping students out of the classroom only hinders their learning.
- In-grade Retention**: Retained students have a 14 percent to 30 percent higher risk of dropping out, and the risk increases to 90 percent for those who have been retained twice. Young children who are expelled or suspended are up to 10 times more likely to drop out, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration.
- Low Funding & Support for ELs/Insufficient**: English learners are among the most likely to drop out. They are the fastest-growing segment of students, but they are one of the lowest academically performing, and the achievement gap widens as students progress through school. Texas is significantly underfunding EL education, and only two of five teachers of ELs are fully certified. Only one out of 10 ELs is prepared to go to college.
- Unfair & Insufficient Funding**: To be effective, schools must have quality teaching and rigorous, up-to-date curricula. Schools depend on fair funding to serve all of their students each school day. Equitable funding makes a difference. In Texas, poor school districts have had attrition rates that were more than double those of high-wealth districts.
- Watered-Down, Non-College Prep Curricula**: Research shows that expectations of students' abilities to succeed are "tied" to their education. For example, students whose parents had not gone to college were themselves 3 to 4 times more likely to enroll in a university if they'd taken rigorous higher math courses in high school. One district took high expectations district-wide by considering all students college-material and teaching them accordingly. They cut dropout rates in half and increased college-going rates.
- Testing that is High-Stakes**: A large body of research says that one test should never be used as a sole criterion for high-stakes decisions about students. Reliance on a single measure fails to consider multiple factors that impact achievement. In 2015, 6,000 Texas seniors who failed at least one exam were able to graduate when a temporary policy let school officials consider their course grades and other factors.

It doesn't have to be this way

See online at: budurl.me/2-IDRA6policies

percent and will not reach an attrition rate of zero until about the year 2035-36.

In addition to IDRA's attrition analysis, the full report includes an analysis of the TEA's latest dropout report and the latest federal data across states. These and other resources are available at budurl.me/IDRAattn17.

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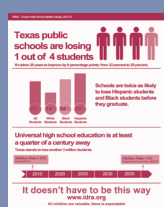
IDRA Attrition Study & Resources Online



2017 Study:
Texas Public
School Attrition
Study, 2016-17



Tool:
Quality School
Holding Power
Checklist



Infographic:
Quick visual look
at the data



eBook:
Types of Dropout
Data Defined



See Results:
College Bound &
Determined



**Look Up Your
County:**
See attrition rates over
the last 10 years

Get ideas for taking action
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Supporting LGBTQ Students Faced with Sexual & Gender Harassment

by Susan Shaffer and Phyllis Lerner

Editor's Note: The IDRA EAC-South provides technical assistance and training to build capacity of local educators to serve their diverse student populations. The IDRA EAC-South is one of four regional equity assistance centers and serves Region II, which covers Washington, D.C., and 11 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. IDRA is working with staff at the Southern Education Foundation and the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium to develop local capacity in the region among the 2,341 school districts and 29,632 schools with over 1 million educators and 16 million students. More information is available at <http://www.idra.org/eac-south/>.

In 1966, The Barbarians, a rock band, released a song that climbed up the U.S. music charts. Titled, “Are you a boy? Or are you a girl?” the lyrics pushed on a premise that long hair, being popularized by British (White and male) music groups, was a gender marker.

Are you a boy? Or are you a girl?
With your long blond hair you look like a girl
Yeah, you look like a girl
You may be a boy, hey, you look like a girl.

Now a half-century later, gender markers are fluid across the full spectrum of racial and ethnic communities. Yet some young people, especially LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) kids, are being pushed out of their homes and also pushed out of safe and secure learning environments in schools.

Now 45 years old, Title IX legislation prohibiting sex-discrimination in federally-funded education programs protects male and female teachers, school staff and students. This includes LGBTQ harassment and assault based on gender stereotypes or gender identity (NCWGE, 2017).

Gender Diversities

In order to effectively protect LGBTQ students, who remain particularly vulnerable, educators must eliminate hostile environments that undermines learning for everyone. We now know that not every child fits easily into a specific male and female category. Because gender is on a spectrum, other descriptors are used across child and adolescent development. Those children who do not fit into a single, discrete category are often referred to as *sexual or gender nonconforming*.

Today's young people, across the gender spectrum, are often aware of their own and their peers' sexual identity, expression and orientation. Their acceptance is aligned with a national, cultural shift for LGBTQ individuals, due in part to the

increasing acceptance of same-sex marriage (64 percent of poll participants) (McCaskill, 2017).

Despite increased awareness of and more positive media attention to gender diversities, LGBTQ youth continue to face many challenges. These challenges include feeling different from peers, feeling shame about sexual orientation, worrying about parents' and other adults' responses, and being rejected and harassed. Many teenagers keep their questions and sexual orientation a secret because coming out in an unwelcome climate can be fatal (Greytak, et al., 2009). Teachers and school leaders, who seek to build important relationships with their students, must adopt the following strategies.

Words That Matter

Language about gender continues to evolve as we gain more awareness and understanding (ODI, n.d.). To comply with Title IX, the educator's initial strategy should be to integrate accurate language with LGBTQ issues. According to the American Psychological Association, awareness about sexual identity starts very young. *Gender identity* refers to one's sense of self as male, female, some combination of male and female, neither male or female or both. When a child's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the person may identify as transsexual or as another transgender category (APA, 2011).

Sexual orientation is different from sexual identity. Sexual orientation refers to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Categories typically include gay or lesbian (homosexuals), straight (heterosexuals) and bisexual. Research suggests that sexual orientation doesn't always appear in such definable categories and, instead, occurs on a continuum and even changes, over time (APA, 2011).

(cont. on Page 6)

Now 45 years old, Title IX legislation prohibiting sex-discrimination in federally-funded education programs protects male and female teachers, school staff and students. This includes LGBTQ harassment and assault based on gender stereotypes or gender identity.

(Supporting LGBTQ Students Faced with Sexual & Gender Harassment, continued from Page 5)

Gender expression refers to the way a person acts to communicate gender within a given culture, through clothing, school behaviors and activities, and social interests (APA, 2011). Some high school seniors have taken self-expression to new gender edges as they dress for their proms. Some children call themselves *gender queer*, and some professionals refer to transgender teens as *gender variant*. Girls and boys who realize they are gender variant often are aware, early on, that they don't fit in, and they're not sure why.

Catherine Hyde, transgender coordinator for PFLAG Columbia–Howard County, Maryland, and regional director of Mid-Atlantic, PFLAG National, asks that we keep the definitions as broad and positive as possible (Shaffer & Gordon, 2015).

Some people are very gender fluid and will move back and forth across the male-to-female spectrum. *Trans girls* are children who were born with male genitals yet identify as girls, and *trans boys* are children who were born with female parts yet identify as boys. Often young boys who enjoy stereotypically girl activities get extra pushback, which creates a greater disconnect for them, whereas we tolerate a little more gender fluidity with girls. So, if girls want to be superheroes and play sports, we are more likely to accept their behavior.

In her article “When Kids Play Across Gender Lines,” Emanuella Grinberg says, “Boys are more likely to get picked on for stepping outside of the box to play with dolls or wear a pink backpack than girls are for playing with cars or wearing jeans” (2012). Because of these stereotypes, girls don't run into opposition as early as boys; they often experience this push-back beginning in puberty.

Awareness of Risks Matter

Some LGBTQ teens exhibit signs of depression, manifested by isolating themselves socially and having lower self-esteem and lower school performance. These signs of distress should not be ignored because LGBTQ youth have more than twice the rate of suicide ideation than straight kids (Adelman, et al., 2013). LGBTQ teens who do not have safe spaces to come out risk being teased mercilessly. Lesbian and gay students (often exacerbated by race, ethnicity, religion and geography) are often forced into isolation at a time when they truly need connection and support.

We need to value attachment as the primary task of human growth for all boys and girls, because without community and closeness, we fail to



thrive as individuals and as members of society, regardless of our social class, race, culture or gender.

Although we have made progress with LGBTQ acceptance and understanding, we find that boys have significant fear of pushing outside the box. Homophobia remains profound; the concept extends to any appearance, emotion or feeling that is considered to be feminine. Being called gay or fag is not just directed at gays and lesbians; it's the most common form of harassment of all teenagers (Kosciw, et al., 2012).

This verbal harassment negatively impacts 85 percent of LGBTQ students. And that's only the beginning, as more than a fourth are physically harassed at school, with 13 percent of LGBTQ kids actually assaulted. And the words and risks follow kids on social media, with almost half (49 percent) being threatened by their peers (NCWGE, 2017).

Providing Safe Supports Matter

A 2010 study by San Francisco State University found that LGBTQ adolescents with accepting parents not only were more confident, but also were at much lower risk of depression and substance abuse (Sadowski, 2010). Teachers can help with this evolution. Allowing children to express their own chosen identity, even at a preschool age, can prevent frustration and anger down the line.

According to Ehrensaft, “It is not a matter of labeling or projecting into the future, but knowing who your child [or student] is right now” (2012). Dr. Lynne Muller, Section Chief of Student Services and School Counseling at the Maryland State Department of Education, confirms this advice: “Go for the ride, just ride with them. It will have ups and downs, like any ride” (Shaffer & Gordon, 2015).

The school community must implement measures to support LGBTQ students:

- Adopt and implement comprehensive bullying/sexual harassment policies that specifically speak to nonconforming gender youth.
- Support student activities and clubs that engage LGBTQ students (for example, Gay-Straight Alliance, Safe Schools Coalition, the

Trevor Project).

- Provide professional development for school staff so they have a better understanding of how to support LGBTQ students, increase their accountability when they see students at risk, or students who are engaging in harassing and bullying behaviors.
- Provide programs and information (e.g., PFLAG [formerly known as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays]), for family and community members so that adults and their LGBTQ children are both protected and encouraged to meet (or exceed) educational expectations.

With these measures in place, all students will have a greater opportunity to learn and be successful in school and beyond.

Educators who are rightfully responsible and parents who are rightfully frightened know the world of school is not always a welcoming place for those who are different. Sound school practices and policies will help students develop the grit and perseverance needed to respond early and effectively to bias, bullying and harassment. Educators must also model, with similar grit and perseverance, strategies that include, accept, and hold dearly every variation of the gendered young people under our care.

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Commemoration of Delgado vs. Bastrop Case that Ended Legal Segregation of Mexican Americans in Texas

IDRA joined former state Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos Jr. and many others recently at the installation of a historical marker to commemorate the 1948 *Delgado vs. Bastrop* case that ended legal segregation of Mexican Americans in Texas. To commemorate this historic event, on September 23, 2017, a Texas Historical Marker was unveiled at the site of the former school, and a city park was dedicated honoring Ms. Delgado and the students of Mina Ward School. Sen. Barrientos, who was instrumental in getting the Texas Historical Commission marker for the former school site, attended Mina Ward in the first grade.



As described in the event program, prior to the 1950s, most Mexican American children in Texas attended segregated public schools. In Bastrop, Texas, they attended the “Mina Ward School.” In 1948, a group of professionals, including future civil rights icons

Attorney Gustavo García, University of Texas Professor George I. Sánchez, and Dr. Hector P. García, filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of a group of Mexican American children attending the racially-segregated schools in four school districts including Bastrop. The American G.I. Forum and LULAC were instrumental in this effort. The desegregation case was named *Delgado et al vs. Bastrop Independent School District* after one of the plaintiffs, Minerva Delgado. Federal Judge Ben H. Rice ruled in their favor, ending legal segregation of Mexican Americans in Texas.



(Partnerships, Not Push Outs, continued from Page 2)

Recency of Immigration – In 2013, U.S.-born Hispanic youth ages 16 to 24 had lower status dropout rates (8.2 percent for “first generation” and 8.3 percent for “second generation or higher”) than Hispanic youth born outside the United States (McFarland, et al., 2016). Nearly 23 percent of Hispanic youth born outside the United States were reported as high school dropouts. In each group, Hispanic youth had higher status dropout rates than non-Hispanic youth.

Reclaiming Our Students’ Futures

Two change strategies identified in the IDRA Quality Schools Action Framework are *school capacity building* and *coalition building* (Bojorquez, 2014). Both strategies support school transformation toward positive student outcomes and welcoming learning environments.

School capacity building can take the form of increased student support services and teacher professional development, or it may require a complete restructuring of campus policies to meet the educational needs of the students. Professional development, such as assistance provided by the IDRA EAC-South, is critical to address the socio-emotional needs of students, restorative justice practices, teaching strategies for diverse populations student, and increasing cultural competency.

Coalition building seeks to form strategic alliances to improve equitable educational outcomes for all students. Partnerships with stakeholders at various levels in the community – such as institutions of higher education, local business leaders and organizations, and state and national policy-makers – provide opportunities to collaborate, share information and design policies toward improving curriculum, teaching quality and equitable funding for schools.

There is no single solution to the nation’s abysmal graduation rates. But, the first step in addressing this issue is to ensure that every child is provided the opportunity to receive a full and equitable education. Educational policies and practices that leave students feeling criminalized must be eliminated.

IDRA’s School Holding Power Checklist (online at <https://budurl.me/IDRAcklist>) has a set of criteria for assessing and selecting effective dropout prevention strategies and for making sure your school is a quality school. And IDRA’s book, *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework* (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010) shows how communities and schools can work together to be successful with all of their students. By investing in our youth – all youth – we are investing in a brighter future for us all.

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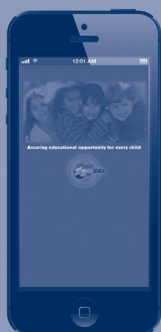
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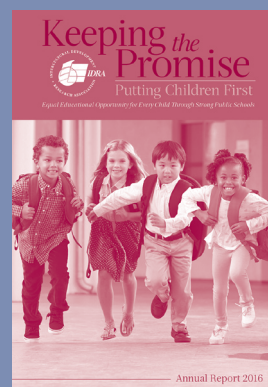
Annual Report Released

Keeping the Promise – Putting Children First

Equal Educational Opportunity for Every Child Through Strong Public Schools

IDRA's 2016 Annual Report, *Keeping the Promise – Putting Children First – Equal Educational Opportunity for Every Child Through Strong Public Schools*, is now available online. Grounded in the promises to children, families and communities that guide our work, the report highlights how IDRA and our partners are building national connections and networks for strong public schools, elevating transformative models for education equality, and crossing borders from research to practice to secure systemic solutions.

The report is online at Issuu at <http://budurl.com/IDRAar16is> and as a PDF at <http://budurl.com/IDRAar16pdf>.



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