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Intercultural Development Research Association IDRA

Learning Goes On

A COVID-19 Resource for Education

December 10, 2020 Edition

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More resources and training for teachers, school administrators, families and communities are on our **Learning Goes On website**.

See **Spanish-language version** of this edition.

Policy Update

Effective School Assessments and Accountability that Does Not Hurt Students

By Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes

Accurate, valid data on student learning provide a crucial metric for how students, educators, and school leadership have navigated learning and instruction during any normal school year. While there is much work to be done to improve our system of assessing learning, the data we get can help to ensure that no group of students is denied equal access to education.

COVID-19 has presented additional challenges to assessing teaching and learning, requiring states across the country to immediately adjust their testing and accountability systems.

Texas uses the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) as the standardized test to assess Texas students' academic performance. STAAR scores for each school campus and across school districts are heavily weighted in the public school accountability system to rate how districts and schools are performing.

STAAR provides the main statewide benchmark for student academic performance and progress. While any single test is an imperfect measure of students' comprehensive learning progress, data that can be compared across years and student groups remains important for assessing students' educational opportunities.

Where We Stand for the Upcoming Texas Legislative Session

In light of an increasingly widening learning gap and the importance of quality, valid data, **IDRA supports canceling the full STAAR in the spring of 2021 in favor of an interim STAAR assessment.** This interim assessment should be given to a representative sample of students based on the same methodology used by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) across an expanded testing time between January and April of 2021.

All interim assessments should be used as formative assessments for diagnostic purposes to determine how students are learning. In addition to sample test data, opportunity-to-learn metrics can provide a more holistic picture of students' learning and schools' educational environments this year.

We similarly support **reducing the number of state end-of-course exams** in Texas by eliminating that English II and U.S. History exams that are not required by federal law (ESSA).

With these changes to student performance data, we urge **suspension of high-stakes consequences for students associated with STAAR performance**, such

as grade promotion and high school graduation. School accountability must not harm students now or ever.

IDRA also has been urging that **no A-F public school accountability ratings be issued**, similar to spring 2020, due to a lack of normal assessment data and drastic changes in schools' enrollment this year. The **Texas Education Agency announced today** that A-F ratings would be paused for 2020-21 school year.

Why We Need Formative Assessments without High-stakes Accountability Sanctions

The global COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible for schools to properly administer the STAAR exam in the spring of 2020. Alarmingly, the COVID-19 virus infection rates have worsened since the first shutdowns last spring and continue to trend upward in Texas. Even with adjustments and additional resources, administering the STAAR remains extremely challenging.

Formative assessments are tests, assignments, or projects that measure how students are learning content and where they need additional support. Summative assessments –such as the STAAR – are designed to measure how much a student has learned of specific content at the time of the test. They do not necessarily indicate new opportunities to support student learning.

Many students attend school remotely or in hybrid learning environments (partially in-person, partially online). Schools have **lost contact with an estimated 250,000 Texas students** this school year. We already know that students are struggling to maintain their grades this year, especially remote learners who are of color and in lower-income households strapped for resources.

What Else We Should Consider as Metrics for Student and School Success

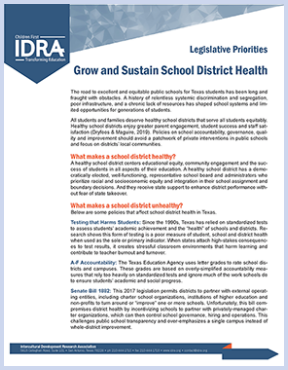
To paint a fuller picture of how students are faring in schools, IDRA advocates the collection of opportunity-to-learn metrics for the 2020-21 school year that are complimentary to interim testing. These metrics would help school districts address chronic absenteeism prevalent in schools during the pandemic. Metrics include:

- State report on the rates of in-person vs. remote student attendance disaggregated by special student population and consideration for chronic absenteeism;
- State report on the number of students "disengaged" (not completing assignments) in the 2020-21 school year;
- State report on educational digital divide (number of students without connectivity and/or devices);
- State report on forms of distance learning provided by school districts in 2020-21;

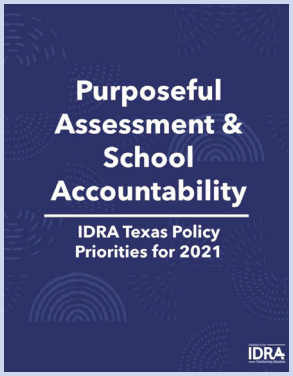
- State report on teacher preparation methods in distance learning instruction and teacher persistence throughout 2020-21 (including substitute teacher rates);
- COVID-19 positivity rate monthly average for districts' counties this school year (since August 2020);
- Discipline data by instructional environment (virtual, hybrid, etc.) and according to discretionary discipline codes; and
- Data on the difference in attendance rates and enrollment averages for school campuses between the 2020-21 year and each of the three preceding school years (2017-18 to 2019-20, pre-pandemic levels).

Student assessment should be meaningful and informative and not lead to punitive consequences for students' learning and graduation. More holistic metrics of students' opportunities-to-learn can provide a complementary picture to how students have fared this year and how schools can support them.

[Learn more at IDRA's Education Policy Website on Growing and Sustaining Healthy School Districts]



[See IDRA's Legislative Priorities Factsheet: Grow and Sustain School District Health (in English & Spanish)]



[See our IDRA Texas Policy Priorities for 2021 Slidedeck]

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Join Our Texas Education CAFE Advocacy Network

IDRA's family leadership in education process, Education CAFE™, supports parents and caregivers to understand and influence public school policy and practice. This January, families in Texas will have various opportunities to

inform legislators and staff about their priorities, needs and hopes for the education of their children, from birth through college graduation.

Due to COVID-19, there likely will be a drastic change in how the general public will be able to interact with policymakers during the Texas legislative session. Now more than ever, policymakers need to hear from the very people their decisions will impact. IDRA is launching a family and community advocacy network focusing on education issues in the Texas legislative session. We invite families and community advocates to join in.

Start by signing up to receive our new email alerts, which will be available in English and Spanish.

Sign up now!

Instructional Tools

Science Comes Alive by Generating Interest and Promoting Inquiry-Based Learning!

by Dr. Stephanie Garcia

Generating interest and promoting inquiry is a major, initial component of project-based learning (PBL). Want to hook students into a new science unit or project? Try introducing a **discrepant event.** These are "attention-getting, thought-provoking events that purposely challenge students' confidence in what they know" (Boss & Krauss, 2018). There are tons of websites and online videos to bring in science demos and discrepant events into your classroom.

A simple example in elementary and middle school science classrooms is a buoyancy or density demonstration. You can ask students the following: "If two 12-ounce cans of soda are dropped into a tub of water, will they sink or float?" Students may predict they both will sink or float, but you will actually get different results with a diet soda and regular soda. The regular soda has more grams of sugar, while the diet soda has less sugar (artificial sweetener). The

regular soda has more density than water, so it sinks. The diet soda has less density than the water, so it floats.

This type of demonstration makes students question: What's the difference in their composition? If they have the same volume, why aren't they both responding the same way? What is the difference between aspartame and regular sugar? What is an example of different objects that have the same volume, but their different masses could make one sink and another float?

Students' interests can also be hooked through role-playing or storytelling events. You can leverage technology easily if students are able to manipulate science simulations in a game-based learning strategy or through (virtual) field trips. **Discovery Education** has a long list of free virtual field trips!

I once worked with a class of seventh graders on an inquiry-based project about our local aquifer and water quality. I posed the problem: "Indicator species are dying!" Through virtual field trips with local geologists suspending into our local aquifer, students realized this was a major problem for their community. They came to their own conclusions right away: If indicator species, such as blind salamanders, living in our aquifer are dying and going extinct, then that could mean something is wrong with our water quality.

Through this interesting, real-life scenario, the students felt they needed to take action. This was the beginning of a wonderful inquiry-based project where students came up with real-life solutions after consulting with professionals and urging our city council to make changes in our community.

You can use other engagement-based strategies throughout PBL and science learning experiences in efforts to sustain interest and inquiry. Mariana Aguilar identifies essential factors for student engagement based on current research (Aguilar, 2020; Aguilar, et al., 2020).

- Whether in distance learning or in-person learning settings, engagement is defined by the design of the system, demands of the content, and the quality of the teacher. All of these factors impact the student's learning experiences.

- A strong classroom culture, online or in person, includes positive and productive relationships. Students are willing to ask questions and go outside their comfort zone. Teachers can use communication tools to help maintain these positive and productive relationships.

- Teachers should activate student's prior knowledge and stay within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). This helps the educator leverage what students know to build on the content and sustain their engagement by staying in their zone of rigor (challenging, but supportive).

- The teaching and learning experiences should be relevant and relatable. Pop culture references help, as well as real-world challenges.

The PBL approach is a perfect solution during these times of distance learning. With varied school schedules and formats, PBL can be extremely successful in virtual settings. It keeps students engaged and challenged, as well as producing high-quality work that demonstrates their understanding. **Contact us** for more information and to schedule a professional development session.

Recursos

4 Essential Factors for Student Engagement Based on Current Research. 10 Minute Teacher Podcast.Aguilar, M. (2020).

2020 State of Engagement Report. GoGuardian. Aguilar, M., Sheldon, K., Ahrens, R., & Janowicz, P. (2020).

Reinventing Project-Based Learning: Your Field Guide to Real-World Projects in the Digital Age. Arlington, Va.: International Society for Technology in Education. Boss, S., & Krauss, J. (2018).

Virtual Field Trips, website. Discovery Education. (2020).

Why You Should Be Using Discrepant Events. The Owl Teacher blog. (2020).

Support IDRA through Amazon Smile

With the holidays coming up, many of us are turning to online shopping to buy gifts for the people we love. And with Amazon Smile, you can shop while raising money for a cause you care about!

Visit **smile.amazon.com** and select IDRA as your charity. Thank you for helping IDRA support teachers & families to ensure that Learning Goes On during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond!

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ELAR Instruction Webinars On-Demand

Science Webinars

Teaching Science in Virtual Learning Environments

Explore how to leverage online platforms to make high-quality science learning interactive and hands-on from home. Dr. Stephanie Garcia and Michelle Vega showcase four online platforms for teaching science concepts virtually: Educreations, Explain Everything, Quizlet and Padlet. They show how to use these tools through an online learning module template focused on Newton's Laws of Motion, a middle school science concept.

Watch Webinar On Demand

Chief Science Officer Students Determined to Promote STEM Despite School Closures

IDRA's Texas Chief Science Officer students have an inspirational message to share about how they have been coping with COVID-19 challenges and distance learning. These youth STEM ambassadors have not stopped their work to enrich a STEM culture despite their school and community closures. Instead, they have insightful perspectives on how they have been navigating these challenges, how they have stayed connected, and how they keep innovating and creating during this time.

See Dr. Stephanie Garcia, director of IDRA's Texas Chief Science Officer program, with special guest students:

- CSO Isela, 12th Grade, McCollum High School, Harlandale ISD
- CSO Shreya, 10th Grade, Keystone School
- CSO Elizabeth, 8th Grade, Northeast ISD STEM Academy (Nimitz MS)

Watch Webinar On Demand

PBL at Home & Across the Curriculum

Project-based learning (PBL) is a powerful approach for educators to use with distance learning because it creates quality home learning experiences. Through hands-on experiences, students can explore, create, engage and connect what they are learning to the real-world. Watch as we explain PBL components of this interdisciplinary and inquiry-based learning approach with an equity lens and discuss applications of PBL across the curriculum.

See Dr. Stephanie Garcia, IDRA's STEM and gender equity education specialist, as she hosts a practical conversation with our guests:

- Ryan Beltrán, Founder, Elequa
- Dr. Carmen Fies, UTSA Associate Professor of STEM Education and Instructional Technologies
- David Padilla, Maestro, Dwight STEM Academy, South San Antonio ISD

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See Webinar Hub

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Reach Out To Us

The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization. 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.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.