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Intercultural Development Research Association IDRA

Learning Goes On

A COVID-19 Resource for Education

May 8, 2020 Edition

Across the country, elementary, secondary and postsecondary schools have closed as part of the effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. Each week, IDRA issues an update on the impact of COVID-19-related policies on schools, students and families.

More resources and trainings for teachers, school administrators, families and communities are on our **Learning Goes On website**. See the **Spanish version** of this edition.

IN THIS ISSUE

* **Policy Update: COVID-19 Worsens Systemic Educational Inequity**

* **Next Free Webinar: Teaching Science in Virtual Learning Environments**

* **More Webinars on Equitable Practices for Online Learning**

* **IDRA Provides Bilingual Books to Young Learners in San Antonio School Districts to Diminish Digital Divide Effects Exacerbated by COVID-19**

Policy Update

COVID-19 Worsens Systemic Educational Inequity

We must swiftly and decisively address the new challenges COVID-19 has brought to schools and families. But the deeper challenges are old, entrenched and have been obvious to impacted communities for generations. The heart of the problem is not simply the virus itself, but the pre-existing barriers to opportunities for English learners, students of color, students living in poverty and others.

Systemic inequities are woven into our education, healthcare, economic, housing, legal and other systems. They disproportionately harm people based on characteristics like race, national origin, linguistic background, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation. They are driven by discriminatory policies and practices. And they are evidenced by data and the experiences of people impacted by them who - through no fault of personal or cultural characteristics - suffer the harmful impacts.

Students of color, students with disabilities, English learners and students from families with limited incomes struggle the most under the new reality of at-home learning and social isolation, which is exacerbating systemic education inequities. Here are a few examples:

* **Digital Divide:** Even before COVID-19, systemic factors restricted the online participation of marginalized communities. Those factors include income and wealth differences, limited access to relevant technology coursework, and the monopolization and geographic concentration of internet services. Now, digital learning expectations due to COVID-19 further highlight the lack of access to the devices, internet and knowledge critical to participating successfully in our online modern world.

* **College Access:** Despite their obligation to educate all students, states have a long history of underfunding schools that serve communities of color and families living in poverty and of failing to provide equitable access to the high-quality coursework that prepares all students for college. Now, during the COVID-19-induced economic downturn, families with limited incomes and without college degrees are having particular difficulty weathering the economic storm.

* **Language Barriers:** English learners and their families face difficulties getting information and coursework from schools. English learners have always had significant challenges accessing excellent educational opportunities, even with protections under federal law. English learner programs often are underfunded and lack high-quality books and certified teachers. And, schools serving English learners may not communicate adequately with families. Policy decisions that limit access for English learners have long cost them opportunities and are now creating more challenges for at-home learning.

A Recent Study on Staggering Systemic Inequities

Just as COVID-19 worsens inequities in education systems it also has a disproportionate and negative impact on the health of communities of color. Researchers recently evaluated reported COVID-19 infections and deaths in the United States and examined emerging evidence that the virus disproportionately impacts Black people.

Most COVID-19 data reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by state health departments have not been disaggregated by race, so the researchers examined county population data. They compared infection and death rates in counties with populations of Black people higher than the national proportion (13%) to counties with

average or below average populations of Black people.

The researchers controlled for several factors, including: (1) the length of time the virus was known to be present in the county; (2) environmental factors, like air pollution that can worsen respiratory illnesses and is more prevalent in communities with higher populations of Black people; and (3) co-existing health conditions, like hypertension and diabetes, that can worsen outcomes for people with COVID-19 and are more prevalent in Black communities.

Although only one in five counties has a higher-than-average Black population (representing 35% of the U.S. population), the data showed that those counties account for almost half of all COVID-19 cases and 58% of deaths. Those counties (91%) are concentrated in the South.

The researchers stressed that "structural factors, including health care access, density of households, unemployment, pervasive discrimination and others, drive these disparities, not intrinsic characteristics of Black communities or individual-level factors." This is critical. The researchers point to the systems - buttressed by decades of discriminatory policy - as the drivers of the disparities. Policymakers decide where refineries are located, who has access to quality healthcare, and how to design cities and transportation systems. They often base these decisions on ignorance, indifference, or the value they place on the people impacted. And, too often, lawmakers make decisions without the involvement of impacted communities.

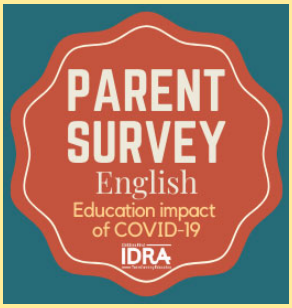
How Do We Address Systemic Inequities in Education?

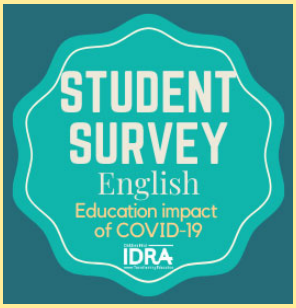
Systemic inequities are caused by discriminatory, uninformed or apathetic policy decisions, so they must be addressed by fair, data-driven and intentional policy decisions. Alerted to the disproportionate impacts of the virus, policymakers must enact targeted protective measures. But to reach the roots of the problems, they should also take a similar informed and systemic approach in addressing longer-term educational needs by:

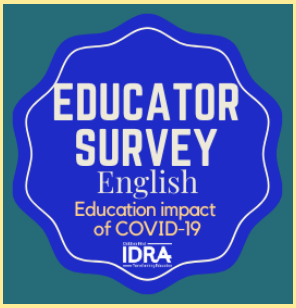
- Collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by characteristics like race, wealth and gender so they can target responses and funds to the communities most impacted.
- Taking a systems approach to a COVID-19 policy response, recognizing the impact that racism, wealth discrimination, housing and school segregation, and other systemic inequities have on the creation of excellent and equitable schools for all students.
- Including impacted communities in all policymaking conversations. It is critical that the communities affected by decisions are part of the decision-making processes that have long-ignored their important perspectives, research and policy recommendations.

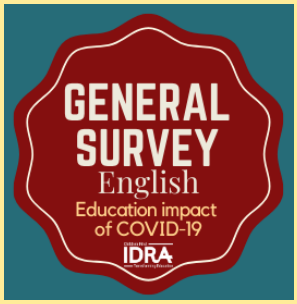
(citations below)

We need your help! To ensure strong community partnership in our work, please take a moment to fill out a survey, linked below.









Parent Survey **Student Survey** **Educator Survey** **General Survey**

See our survey site for the surveys in Spanish and for printable versions for dissemination of paper copies.

Free Educator Webinars

Teaching Science in Virtual Learning Environments

Tuesday, May 12, 2020, at 2:00 PM (cdt)

Explore how to leverage online platforms to make high-quality science learning interactive and hands-on from home. Dr. Stephanie Garcia and Michelle Vega will showcase four online platforms for teaching science concepts virtually: Educreations, Explain Everything, Quizlet and Padlet.

They'll demonstrate how to use these tools through an online learning module template focused on Newton's Laws of Motion, a middle school science concept.

REGISTER NOW

More Webinars on Equitable Practices for Online Learning

These free webinar recordings are available for viewing at your convenience.

Equitable Practices for Teaching Online

Digital Divide: Connectivity, Infrastructure and Devices

Tools & Tips to Alleviate the Homework Gap

Facilitating Online Math Sessions

PBL at Home & Across the Curriculum

ELAR Series

* **Journal Writing About the Present for the Future - ELAR Webinar Part 1**
* **From Journaling to Personal Narratives - ELAR Webinar Part 2**
* **From Journaling and Personal Narratives to Letter Writing - ELAR Webinar Part 3**

Chief Science Officer Students Determined to Promote STEM Despite School Closures

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News

IDRA Provides Bilingual Books to Young Learners in San Antonio School Districts to Diminish Digital Divide Effects Exacerbated by COVID-19

For many years before the COVID-19 outbreak, IDRA has worked with schools and communities to close the digital divide for the most vulnerable students. With assistance from the San Antonio Area Foundation and the United Way of San Antonio this week, IDRA will provide its popular Semillitas de Aprendizaje bilingual storybooks to families who have no access to online education.

According to the Digital Inclusion Alliance San Antonio, one in four households in San Antonio does not have internet access. Students of all ages from low-income households without devices or connectivity are most at risk for interruption of their schooling that will have a long-lasting impact on their future. Nowhere is this most worrisome than with pre-K and kindergarten students who thrive on solid educational practices and culturally-sustaining resources.

"IDRA knows from our research on best practices in early childhood education that hard-copy books and interactive learning best build solid literacy foundations for young learners," said IDRA President & CEO Celina Moreno. "We are proud to partner with the San Antonio Area Foundation to counter the devastating digital divide that has left this vulnerable population with little to no access to books or resources as schools scramble to find solutions."

"We celebrate the important role parents are playing to make distance learning work for children," Moreno added. IDRA will provide over 1,000 sets of its Semillitas de Aprendizaje bilingual books to families in the Southwest and Edgewood school districts through the districts' food distribution, communication and paper-lesson delivery systems. IDRA also will provide webinars, classroom sets and teacher's editions to districts for use with students once school commences in the fall.

KEEP READING

Meet the Semillitas de Aprendizaje Characters

Machaca is an ostrich who one day feels lonely because she has no one to talk to.

Margarita is a young girl whose artisan family teaches her the *chaquira*, the fine art of intricate beadwork.

Camelia learns about numbers and counting in a collection of verses and couplets about animals throughout her house.

Jesusita is terrified of spiders until her sister comforts her by reading a book with her.

Juanito is astonished when he believes he is visiting the circus for a second time and the animals are all mixed up.

Twin sisters, **Clara and Carla,** creatively complete their geometry homework assignment at home.

Esperanza learns about the seasons while visiting the zoo with her mom.

Pancho, a bear, and his friend Paz, a bunny, learn about first aid kits.

Tomás and his family travel to visit his grandmother in the country.

Jorge is a miner who discovers a brilliant and very valuable gold nugget.

Semillitas de Aprendizaje offers a unique bilingual set of early childhood materials.The classroom set includes

- Teacher Guide (Manual de Maestro)
- 10 Big Books (abridged)
- 10 Storybooks (unabridged)
- 15 Math Books
- 20 Cartitas - Letters Home, with activities related the Semillitas de Aprendizaje stories
- Storytelling & Storyreading Videos DVD

Learn more about IDRA's Semillitas de Aprendizaje curriculum

www.semillitasdeaprendizaje.com

We welcome donations to support education during this COVID-19 crisis.

PayPal Donate

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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent private non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring educational opportunity for every child. 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.