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## IDRA Newsletter

**This month's focus: Principal Leadership**



This issue of the IDRA Newsletter includes articles on applying social justice principles and school leadership in schools serving English learners along with highlights from IDRA's recent high school attrition stories and resources.

Researchers are identifying an empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement, with the central role resting with the school principal. Effective principal leadership builds a school culture that is dedicated to equity and excellence for the success of all students.

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## Principal Leadership

### Fostering Excellence through Social Justice Principles in Schools Serving English Learners

*By Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.*

The school principal is central to providing an equitable learning experience for all students. Research identifies an empirical correlation between the quality of school leadership and greater student achievement (Bryk, et al., 2010; Fullan, 2016).

Facing challenges to improve teaching and learning in the current context of high-stakes testing and accountability and as they contend with discrimination, inequities and injustices in the status quo, effective school leaders approach their work through a social justice lens. They build a culture dedicated to equity and excellence for all students. Howard (2016) states that school leaders must strive to fight the inequities of implicit and explicit biases and oppressive practices that impact student achievement and support the success of all students.



Educational leaders are most effective when they operate from an asset-based approach of the social, emotional, economic and cognitive conditions of their students (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). In doing so, they lead their staff to carry out instruction that builds on students' unique strengths and is responsive to students' needs. Educators can then work to ensure the educational and psychological support is provided with efficacious cognitive strategies, robust content knowledge, positive relationships and meaningful support...

One of these exemplary leaders is Greg Rivers, M.A., principal of Ball Academy. He spoke with us recently in a new Classnotes podcast interview about his experience with the seven competencies that the district selected to focus on during their participation in the IDRA STAARS Leaders project. - [Keep reading](#)



Listen to the podcast episode: **A Principal on Leadership for a Turnaround School - Part 1**

### School Leadership Transforming Schools with Linguistically Diverse Student Populations

*by Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.*

School leaders have been increasingly facing new challenges with the rapid changing demographics of their schools. Sometimes, the schools they attended as children and then taught in as teachers are no longer the same. The buildings look unchanged on the outside, but a glance inside reveals a significantly more diverse student population.

In some cases, these changes occurred gradually; in others they moved quickly as new families moved into the area to live and to work in an ever changing economy. For example,

the IDRA EAC-South helps small rural districts with fewer than 1,000 students adapt to a student population that is now 40 percent English learners from multiple language groups, and we work with large urban districts that now have majority minority students with 70 percent of students being English learners from multiple language groups.

Challenges school leaders face include presenting appropriate curriculum for English learners who arrive with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; preparing teachers to serve newcomers (under 12 months in the United States); integrating the needs of students who have had interrupted formal schooling or no schooling at all; addressing the needs of students who are refugees from war-torn areas who have experienced unspeakable trauma, as well as students who were born in the United States and have attended other schools but have never acquired proficient academic English; and adopting a social justice perspective that transcends the school vision, culture and instruction.



This article gives recommendations based on IDRA's [change model](#) . - [Keep reading](#)

## Meet Sulema Carreón-Sánchez, Ph.D., Senior Education Associate



Dr. Sulema Carreón-Sánchez was born a fourth generation migrant worker. She and her parents, three brothers, and sister used to travel yearly seeking work in the fields of the Panhandle of Texas. Working hard mostly in the cotton fields taught Sulema to persevere in school as well. All of her siblings graduated from the Edgewood School District in San Antonio - Sulema from Memorial High School. She has been married for 40 years and has three children and four adored grandchildren.

Sulema's 40 years in education include working at the Texas Education Agency, IDRA, and at Edgewood, Somerset, Northside, and San Antonio school districts. Her life's devotion has mostly been in working with at-risk students particularly in the area of bilingual education, helping students who, like her, were second language learners living in poverty. - [Keep reading](#)

## Classnotes Podcasts on Principal Leadership

A Principal on Leadership for a Turnaround School, Part 1 - Episode 168 ~ [Listen](#)

How Principals Can Support their Teachers - Episode 164 ~ [Listen](#)

A Principal on Supporting Teachers for Student College Readiness - Episode 128 ~ [Listen](#)

Principal on Creating a College Going Culture - Episode 86 ~ [Listen](#)

Tool for Building Quality Schools - Episode 81 ~ [Listen](#)





Sign up to receive free e-mail notices when new episodes are available.

### Video

## Contagious College-Going Culture in Elementary School - Principal Rebecca Sánchez

Often, the question posed to students is: Are you going to college? But at Rebecca Sánchez's school, the question is: Where are you going to college? Ms. Sánchez is the principal at Gus Guerra Elementary School in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo school district in South Texas serving a largely economically disadvantaged population, with about half of the students being English learners and a high number of migrant students. In this interview for IDRA's Equity Hub, she describes how her campus has been transformed through a collaboration with IDRA that included classroom demonstrations on effective instructional strategies and student engagement. She also discusses the relationship the school is building with families as well as the introduction of Semillitas de Aprendizaje in early childhood classrooms. Ms. Sánchez is interviewed by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., an IDRA senior education associate. [28:49 min] - See video on [YouTube](#) or in [Vzaar](#)



### Video

## Ensuring High Teaching Quality to Tap Into Students' Strengths - Principal Jean Dalton Encke

In this interview for IDRA's Equity Hub, PS279 principal Jean Dalton Encke in the Bronx talks about how she uses data and systems to monitor teacher effectiveness and student achievement to ensure that students are succeeding. Having grown up in the Bronx herself, she is passionate about using students' strengths to help them learn and prepare for college. She has brought in IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and has a partnership with Lehman College to bolster both literacy learning and exposure to college for students, many of whom may not have seen graduation and college as a possibility. Ms. Dalton Encke is interviewed by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., an IDRA senior education associate. [18:18 min] - See video on [YouTube](#) or in [Vzaar](#)



## High School Attrition Stories and Resources

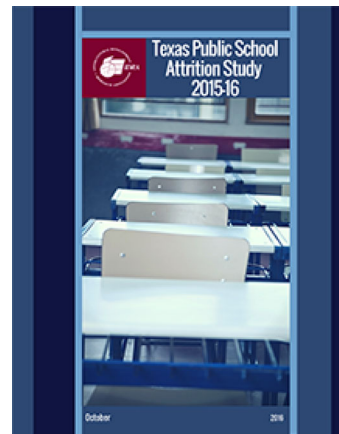
In November and early December, IDRA released a series of reports on high school dropout rates in Texas. The news releases, reports, infographics, eBooks, and other resources are [online](#), and below are quick links.

**Story 1: Despite Graduation Rate Progress, Texas Appears Stuck at Losing One-Fourth of High Schoolers - 31st Annual Texas Public School Attrition Study Released by IDRA**

IDRA's analysis found that the attrition rate in Texas has risen for the first time in 18 years. Though just an increase of 1 percentage point, Texas schools have been losing between 26 percent and 24 percent of high school students annually for the last five years.

#### Resources:

- **News Release** (November 1, 2016): [Despite Graduation Rate Progress, Texas Appears Stuck at Losing One-Fourth of High Schoolers](#)
- **Attrition Study:** [Texas Public School Attrition Study 2015-16](#)
- **Infographic:** [Texas public schools are losing 1 out of 4 students](#)
- **Trend graphs:** [See attrition rates and numbers over the last 17 years](#)
- **County List:** [Which counties had attrition rates go up or down?](#)
- **eBook:** [Types of Dropout Data Defined](#)

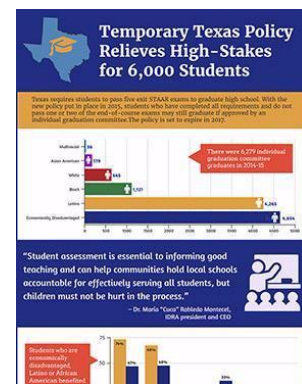


### Story 2: Temporary Policy Relieves High-Stakes for 6,000 Students - Use of Individual Graduation Committees Unlocks Diplomas for Qualified Students

Students who are economically disadvantaged, Latino and African American benefited most from the alternative graduation policy established by the Texas legislature in SB149. The policy is set to expire in 2017.

#### Resources:

- **News Release** (November 14, 2016): [Temporary Policy Relieves High-Stakes for 6,000 Students](#)
- **Infographic:** [Use of individual graduation committees unlocks diplomas for qualified students](#)
- **Factsheet:** [Accountability that Doesn't Hurt Students](#)



### Story 3: Texas High Schools Stand to Lose Over 2 Million Students in Coming Years - At Our Current Pace in Texas, Universal High School Education is Two Decades Away

By the time today's kindergartners are 18, Texas will still not have reached universal high school education. In fact, while today's toddlers play with board books, they cannot count on earning a diploma. IDRA conducted a supplemental analysis finding that Texas will not reach an attrition rate of zero until 2035-36. At this pace, the state will lose more than 2 million students.



#### Resources:

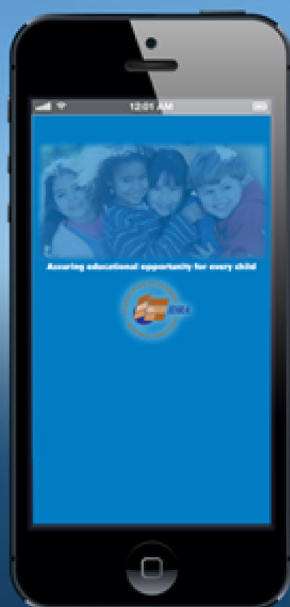
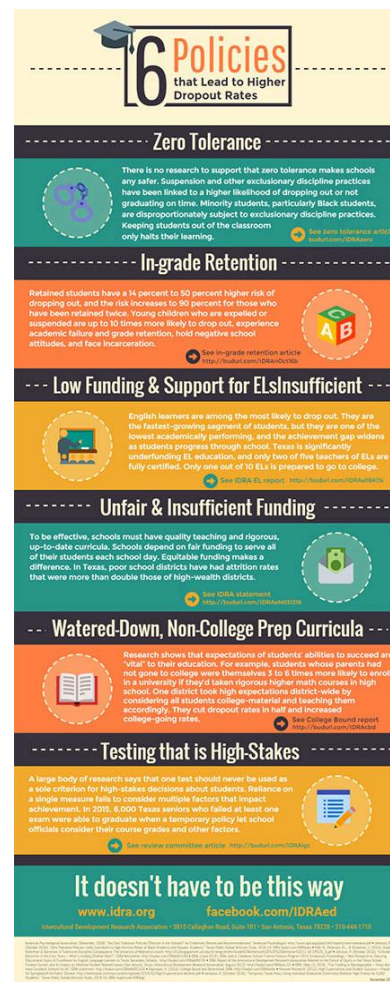
- **News Release** (November 21, 2016): [Texas High Schools Stand to Lose Over 2 Million Students in Coming Years](#)
- **Infographic:** [Texas public schools are losing 1 out of 4 students](#)

## Story 4: Zero Tolerance Policies Push Students Away - High Attrition Rates of Black Students and Hispanic Students Are Linked to Exclusionary Discipline

Zero tolerance policies likely contribute to high attrition rates of Black students and Hispanic students in Texas public schools. IDRA compared the trend lines for attrition rates to those of discipline data for the state of Texas. The historical high attrition rate for each race-ethnicity group parallels the period when zero tolerance policies gained momentum in Texas. Lower attrition rates for each group coincide with Texas' legislative attempts to relax zero tolerance approaches under specific circumstances.

### Resources:

- **News Release** (December 1, 2016): [Zero Tolerance Policies Push Students Away](#)
- **Infographic**: [6 School Policies that Lead to Higher Dropout Rates](#)
- **eBook**: [Resources on Student Discipline Policy and Practice](#)
- **Article**: [In-Grade Retention in the Early Years - What's Holding Children Back?](#)
- **Web Story**: [Zero Tolerance Policies in Texas Push Black Students and Hispanic Students Away from School](#)



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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.