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ABSTRACT

This theme issue addresses school reform, focusing on accountability, attrition, public-supported private education, equitable education, and schoolwide reform. "School-Student Performance and Accountability" (Jose A. Cardenas) discusses what constitutes good performance in school; the shifting emphasis among the input, output, and process of achievement measures; the present burden of accountability on the student; and the invalid use of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test as a criterion for high school graduation. "The State of School Dropouts in Texas Public High Schools" (Roy Johnson) presents data on student attrition for Texas high schools, 1997-98. Tables break down data by race/ethnicity and county. "Reflections: Celebrating Teachable Moments" (Art Cole) describes four frameworks for creating a critical teaching moment: access, content of information, knowing the student, teacher self-awareness. "Using Public Money for Private Schooling: A Bad Idea for Children" (Maria Robledo Montecel) sees the use of public and private voucher monies as increasing educational inequality, and concludes that public funding should focus on improving public schools. "Who's at the Table? Or Is There Room Enough for All?" (Bradley Scott) explores the question of truly creating equitable educational opportunities. Systemic change requires four transformations: organizational, pedagogical, political, and social and attitudinal. "Systemic Reform and Opportunities with the Schoolwide Vision" (Joe Vigil) compares the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) program and the Schoolwide Program as the means to achieving higher standards and accountability, and describes a "toolkit" for planning, assessing, and revising schoolwide strategies. (SAS)

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# IDRA Newsletter

ISSN 1069-5672 Volume XXV, No. 9 October 1998

## SCHOOL-STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

Inside this Issue:

- ✦ Latest IDRA attrition analysis results
- ✦ Transforming schools for all students
  - ✦ Teachable moments
- ✦ Speaking against the use of public money for private schooling

what was "thorough and efficient" and to take a pragmatic approach in declaring that whatever "thorough and efficient" was, low wealth school districts were entitled to it. Unfortunately, my advice was not heeded, and the New Jersey courts spent years arguing about the purposes of education, a question that has not been resolved in more than 2,000 years.

In the legal challenge to the TAAS, the court will address the question of "performance." Good performance is determined by success in meeting the goals of education. What are the goals of education? I believe there is consensus that the general goal of education is to bring the student to "maximum self-realization."

Maximum self-realization means bringing the student to the apex of his or her potential in physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual development.

Determining to what extent this goal is met presents some formidable problems. What is the student's potential in each of the five areas? Who determines what that potential is? How is it to be measured? How is the determination that the potential has been met to come about?

In educational measurement there is little relationship between the determination of a student's potential and the extent that it has been realized as a result of schooling. In at least four of the five areas of development, there has been little effort in even addressing the areas. Educational evaluation has mostly focused on the acquisition of skills and knowledge that is only indirectly related to the intellectual development of the child.

For a significant portion of students,  
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In the next few months, I will probably be called upon to present testimony in court concerning the use of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test as a valid measure for high school graduation. A suit filed by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) is challenging state regulations that prescribe that regardless of student performance in the schools, successful performance on the TAAS is required for the granting of a high school diploma.

Being called upon as an "expert" witness demands that I review my knowledge and experience in this area. On the basis of my past expert testimony in almost 100 court cases, I can expect two hours on the hot seat in direct testimony, followed by at least another two hours of cross examination.

What do my 48 years as an educator involved in local, state, national and international education provide me in preparation for this testimony?

The first question that must be addressed is: What constitutes good performance in school? The obvious answer is: Meeting the purposes and goals of the school. Though this may sound simplistic, the sequential question (What are the purposes and goals of the school?) is much more complicated.

My involvement in *Cahill vs. Robinson*, a New Jersey school finance court case, led me to pursue this issue. The New Jersey constitutional provision for a "thorough and efficient" system of education brought up the question of what a "thorough and efficient" system of education is.

After much soul searching, I advised the plaintiffs to stay away from determining

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the goals of education have been modified for social purposes into a substitute goal of having the student adhere to social conventions of behavior, be able to do simple academic tasks, such as reading, writing and arithmetic, and be able to follow orders. Not an impressive list of objectives in a democratic society.

Regardless of the limited idealistic or realistic goals of education being used, measurement of the attainment of these goals is grossly inadequate. In 1982, Texas legislated determinations of teacher pay on the basis of performance. Ironically, Texas adopted such a policy at the same time that other states were already dropping similar policies. Basing teacher pay on teacher performance is idiotic if it is not known what constitutes satisfactory teacher performance or how it is to be measured. At best, satisfactory teacher performance was based on providing a quiet, orderly environment in which it was assumed maximum learning could take place.

### *Achievement Measures*

There has been considerable shifting of emphasis on what constitutes a good effort on the part of the system. During my own tenure as an educator, I have seen the emphasis shift among input (the resources provided), process (the use of resources) and output (the results of the process).

*Input* evaluation focuses on the provision of adequate resources for the instructional program. As a teacher and administrator, I participated in the accreditation process where the determination of appropriate instruction was indicated by an analysis of school inputs. The number of teaching hours, teaching subjects, library books, teacher credentials and other pre-instruction factors were the determinants of adequacy.

Even then, the determinants of input adequacy were not applied as absolutes since the accrediting agency, usually the Texas Education Agency (TEA), made a generous allowance in consideration of the great variance in resources available to different school districts in keeping with the inequitable system of school finance. It is inconceivable that the revelation that over 50 percent of the teachers in the Edgewood Independent School District (ISD) could not meet the minimum standards for certification by the state would lead to loss of accreditation. On the other hand, should the Alamo Heights ISD in another part of San Antonio provide a teaching force where 50 percent of

the staff were ineligible for certification, certification would have been immediately revoked.

There was much flexibility in determining the minimum effort in the inputs of education. In general, what was considered inadequate inputs was dependent on the type of student being taught. What was sauce for the goose in hundreds of poverty school districts like Edgewood was not sauce for the gander in hundreds of high wealth schools districts.

In time, the focus in evaluation shifted from input to process. This transition was exacerbated by the emerging educational, social and legal questions being raised about the gross disparities in input. It is embarrassing to hold school systems responsible for realistic inputs when the state system of school finance makes no pretense of providing equitable or equal resources for acquiring these inputs.

*Process* evaluation based on an analysis of teacher-pupil interaction turned out to be no better than the input evaluation. Observation, of instruction could not lead to valid evaluation if there was a large disparity in opinions as to what constitutes desirable and adequate instruction. Is the very well prepared lecture of a loquacious teacher adequate if the students in the class do not have an inkling of what the teacher is talking about? In many cases, observations in the classroom shifted from the teacher and student interaction, to the environment of the interactions. Were the bulletin boards attractive? Were the students orderly? How high was the noise level in the classroom? On more than one occasion I participated in evaluation training aimed at learning to distinguish between "productive" noise and "non-productive" noise in the classroom.

Determination of quality of instruction was so blurred that when legislation resulting from the Perot task force established pay incentives for "master" teachers, many school districts augmented the state incentive pay for master teachers with local incentive pay for the rest of the staff, so that the school systems reverted to a single salary pay schedule. Process evaluation reverted to input evaluation with master status being determined by teacher training, advanced degrees, years of experience or seniority without any objective observation of the teaching-learning process.

Then emphasis in evaluation shifted from process to *output*. The basic tenet of the current system is that input and process

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# THE STATE OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN TEXAS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

Roy Johnson, M.S.

Four out of every 10 students from the freshman class of 1994-95 left school prior to their 1997-98 graduation from Texas public high schools. Research from the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) shows that 150,965 students (42 percent) of the state's 1994-95 freshman class were lost from public school enrollment by 1997-98.

Longitudinally, the attrition rate (the percent of students lost from enrollment) in Texas public high schools has increased by nine percentage points (27.3 percent) in 12 years from 1985-86 (33 percent) to 1997-98 (42 percent).

The 1985-86 school year marked the initial year that IDRA conducted the state's first comprehensive assessment of the status of the dropout problem in Texas public schools. Twelve years following the release of its first report in October 1986, IDRA continues to document the number and percent of the state's students who leave school prior to graduation.

To follow are the findings of IDRA's 11th annual attrition study, which presents data for the 1997-98 school year by statewide

total, by county, and by race and ethnicity. This article also presents various national and state dropout statistics from such agencies as the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Hispanic Dropout Project.

## The Dropout Problem

We view education as a significant key to the doors of opportunities for the young people of today. It can unlock access to higher learning, better jobs, higher wages and future success. The possession of a high school diploma (or its equivalent) does not ensure easy access to higher education or well-paying jobs, but it does enhance young people's opportunities to obtain them. Research has shown that students who do not graduate from high school make up a larger proportion of those who are unemployed, those who earn lower wages, those who receive public assistance and those who are in prison.

Despite the promise of a high school credential, far too many young people are leaving school prior to graduation, particularly those who are minority, who are eco-

nomically disadvantaged, and who speak a language other than English. High school dropouts face a difficult climb in making the transition from high school to future schooling and financial success. The personal, social and economic costs of dropping out of school have increased in the last few decades in terms of the educational and economic difficulties faced by school dropouts and the society at large. The number of students receiving alternative high school credentials by passing the General Education Development (GED) tests has increased dramatically; however, these alternatives have not been shown to be as effective in opening the doors of opportunity as is a high school diploma.

## Findings of IDRA's Latest Attrition Analyses

The latest IDRA attrition study reveals some alarming facts. Major findings for 1997-98 include the following.

- Four of every 10 students enrolled in the ninth grade in Texas public schools during the 1994-95 school year did not reach the 12th grade in 1997-98. Of the 1994-95 freshman class members, 150,965 students (42 percent) were lost from public school enrollment by 1997-98.
- Racial and ethnic minority group students were more likely than White students to be lost from public school enrollment in 1997-98. Fifty-three percent of Hispanic students and 49 percent of Black students were lost from public school enrollment, compared to 31 percent of White students. Hispanic students were 1.7 times more likely than White students to leave school before graduation, while Black students were 1.6 times more likely than White students to leave school before completing high school.
- More males than females were lost from public high school enrollment. Between 1994-95 and 1997-98, 45 percent of males were lost from public high school enrollment, compared to 38 percent of females.
- The percent of students lost from public high school enrollment has increased by 27.3 percent between the 1985-86 school year (33 percent of students) and the 1997-98 school year (42 percent of students). The number of students lost

*School Dropouts - continued on page 4*

## DID YOU KNOW?

*FOUR OF EVERY 10 STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE NINTH GRADE IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS DURING THE 1994-95 SCHOOL YEAR DID NOT REACH THE 12TH GRADE IN 1997-98.*

– Intercultural Development Research Association, 1998

*53 PERCENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS AND 49 PERCENT OF BLACK STUDENTS WERE LOST FROM PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, COMPARED TO 31 PERCENT OF WHITE STUDENTS BETWEEN 1994-95 AND 1997-98 IN TEXAS.*

– Intercultural Development Research Association, 1998

*NATIONALLY, 5 PERCENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGES 15 THROUGH 24 YEARS DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL IN 1996.*

– National Center for Education Statistics, 1997

*IN OCTOBER 1996, SOME 3.6 MILLION YOUNG ADULTS WERE NOT ENROLLED IN A HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM AND HAD NOT COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL. THESE YOUTH ACCOUNTED FOR 11.1 PERCENT OF THE 32.4 MILLION 16- THROUGH 24-YEAR-OLDS IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1996.*

– National Center for Education Statistics, 1997

*THE DROPOUT RATE AMONG PERSONS 16 TO 24 YEARS OLD HAS FALLEN SLIGHTLY OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS. THE RATES FOR BLACKS AND WHITES HAVE NARROWED. THE DROPOUT RATE FOR HISPANICS HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY UNCHANGED OVER THIS SAME PERIOD.*

– U.S. Department of Education, 1997



## LONGITUDINAL ATTRITION RATES IN TEXAS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS 1985-1986 TO 1996-1997

RACE-ETHNICITY GROUP	1985-1986	1986-1987	1987-1988	1988-1989	1989-1990	1991-1992	1992-1993	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	PERCENT CHANGE* FROM 1985-86 TO 1997-98
Native American	45	39	37	47	39	40	39	42	44	43	42	-7
Asian/Pacific Islander	33	30	28	23	22	21	21	18	18	20	21	-36
Black	34	38	39	37	38	39	43	50	51	51	49	44
White	27	26	24	20	19	22	25	30	31	32	31	15
Hispanic	45	46	49	48	48	48	49	51	53	54	53	18
Total	33	34	33	31	31	34	36	40	42	43	42	27

\* Rounded to nearest whole number.

Figures calculated by IDRA from the Texas Education Agency *Fall Membership Survey* data.

### School Dropouts - continued from page 3

through attrition has increased from about 86,000 in 1985-86 to almost 151,000 in 1997-98.

Longitudinal statewide attrition rates are categorized by race and ethnicity in the box above. Statewide and county attrition rates are presented for the three major race and ethnicity groups on pages 8 and 9.

### Findings of the National Center for Education Statistics

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the principal federal agency responsible for the collection, analysis and reporting of data on the condition of education in the United States. In 1989, NCES released its first annual report on school dropouts under the mandates of the *Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvements Amendment of 1988* (Public Law 100-297). The reporting of dropout statistics is no longer required by law, but NCES continues to track the number and percent of school dropouts among U.S. secondary school students. Dropout data from NCES examines rates within racial and ethnic groups, across gender groups, and across states and geographical regions.

In order to provide a comprehensive perspective of the dropout problem, NCES provides three types of dropout rates: (1) event dropout rates, (2) status dropout rates and (3) cohort dropout rates. Additionally, NCES provides data on high school graduation and completion rates. NCES defines the various types of dropout rates as follows.

**Event rates** describe the proportion of

students who leave school each year without completing a high school program. This type of dropout rate describes the *number and percent of students who drop out of school on an annual basis*.

- **Status rates** provide cumulative data on dropouts among young adults within a specified age range (e.g., 15-24 years of age, 16-24 years of age or 18-24 years of age). These rates, which are higher than event rates because they include all dropouts, reveal the *extent of the dropout problem in the population*.
- **Cohort rates** measure what happens to a cohort of students over a period of time. Furthermore, these rates provide repeated measures of a group of students starting at a specific grade level over time. These rates provide *longitudinal data on a specific group of students*, including background and contextual data.
- **High school completion rates** describe the *proportion of students who receive a high school diploma and/or alternative methods of school completion*, namely the GED certificate.

In December 1997, NCES released its ninth annual report on school dropouts entitled *Dropout Rates in the United States, 1996* (1997). The report provides state and regional dropout data and examines high school completion rates. Major findings of the NCES report are presented below.

### Event (Annual) Dropout Rates

- Five percent of young people ages 15 through 24 years dropped out of school in 1996. This rate is on a par with those reported over the last 10 years.
- A larger percentage of Hispanic students

(9 percent), compared with White students (4.1 percent) and Black students (6.7 percent), leave school short of completing a high school program.

- In 1996, young adults living in families with incomes in the lowest 20 percent of all family incomes were five times as likely as their peers from families in the top 20 percent of the income distribution to drop out of high school.
- Although dropout rates were highest among students age 19 or older, about three-fourths of the current year's dropouts were ages 15 through 18. Moreover, 43 percent of the 1996 dropouts were 15 through 17 years of age.

### Status Dropout Rates

- In October 1996, some 3.6 million young adults were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. These youth accounted for 11.1 percent of the 32.4 million 16-through 24-year-olds in the United States in 1996.
- There are still differences in the levels of the status dropout rates of White young adults (7.3 percent), Black young adults (13 percent) and Hispanic young adults (29.4 percent). However, over the past quarter century the gap between the rates for Black young adults and White young adults has narrowed (see Figure 4).
- Over the last 25 years, close to one-third of the 16- through 24-year-old Hispanic young adults were reported as "out of school" and lacking a high school credential.
- Forty-four percent of Hispanic young adults born outside of the 50 states and

*School Dropouts - continued on page 5*

the District of Columbia are counted as high school dropouts.

- In 1996, youths from families with the lowest incomes were nearly eight times more likely to be dropouts (22.1 percent) than those from families with the highest incomes (2.6 percent).
- The status dropout rates in the South (13.0 percent) and West (13.9 percent) regions of the country are one and one-half times those in the Northeast (8.3 percent) and Midwest (7.7 percent) regions.

### Cohort Dropout Rates

- The cohort dropout rates for the eighth-grade class of 1988 show that by the spring of 1992, 10.8 percent of the 1988 cohort of eighth graders were out of school and had not completed a high school program. By August 1994, 7.2 percent of the cohort remained as dropouts.
- Across race and ethnicity groups, the cohort dropout rates for the 1988 cohort of eighth graders was 17.8 percent for Hispanic students, compared to 9.1 percent for White students and 13.4 percent for Black students. By August 1994, the cohort rate for Hispanic students was 14.3 percent, compared to 5.7 percent for White students and 8.4 percent for Black students.

### High School Completion Rates

- In 1996, about 86 percent of all 18-through 24-year-olds not still enrolled, had completed a high school program.

- White young adults and Black young adults registered increases in high school completion rates during the 1970s and 1980s, with 1996 rates of 91.5 percent for White youths and 83 percent for Black youths. Hispanic young adults have not shared in this improvement, with only about 62 percent reported as having completed high school by 1996.
- Of young adults in families with high incomes, 96.9 percent held high school credentials in 1996, while only about three-quarters of youths from low-income families reached this goal (74.5 percent).
- During the 1990s, the percent of young adults, not still enrolled, holding a high school credential has remained relatively unchanged; however, the percent holding an alternative certification has doubled from 4.9 percent in 1990 to 9.8 percent in 1996.

### Findings in the National Education Goals Report

The 1997 *National Education Goals Report* is the seventh in a series of reports designed to measure the progress made by the nation and states in achieving the eight national education goals (1997). Goal 2: School Completion states, "By the year 2000, the high school completion rate will increase to at least 90 percent." This goal promotes the reduction of the dropout rate by increasing the percent of young adults who complete a high school education. The major findings in this report include the following.

- In 1990, 86 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds had completed a high school credential. By 1996, the overall completion rate had

not increased. The proportion of young adults who completed an alternative credential was twice as large as it was in 1990 (4.2 percent compared to 9.8 percent).

- Disparities in high school completion rates between White and minority adults did not improve between 1990 and 1996. The gap between Hispanic and White 18- to 24-year-olds was 31 percent in 1990 and 30 percent in 1996; the gap between Black and White youths was 6 percent in 1990 and 9 percent in 1996.

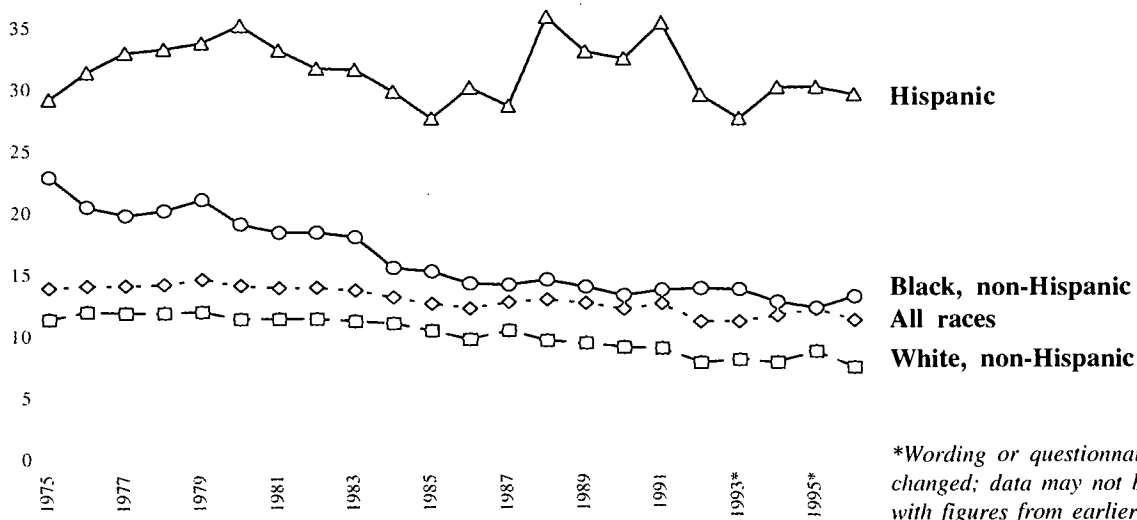
### Findings of the Hispanic Dropout Project

The Hispanic Dropout Project was established by the U.S. Department of Education in September 1995. Its mission was to shed light on the high dropout rates of Hispanic youth and to provide recommendations to reduce the nation's dropout rate among Hispanic students. Major findings from the project's study include the following (1996).

- Hispanics were about one of every 10 Americans in 1990 – and may be one out of every five in 2050.
- Hispanic status dropout rates (31 percent) are highest for foreign-born students (43 percent).
- The dropout rate for Hispanic male and female students is similar.
- The dropout rates of our nation's Hispanic students are diverse: 12 percent for South American students, 14 percent for Cuban American students, 23 percent for Puerto Rican students born in the United States, 26 percent for Dominican American.

*School Dropouts - continued on page 6*

## PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS AMONG PERSONS 16 TO 24 YEARS OLD



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1997.

- can students, 31 percent for Puerto Rican students born in Puerto Rico, 34 percent for Mexican American students and 36 percent for Central American students. The rate for Mexican American students is three times greater than the national average (10.5 percent).
- Hispanic students in the 19- to 20-year-old age group in 1992 had low high school completion rates (65 percent) as compared to Whites (91 percent), Blacks (81 percent), and all race and ethnicities (87 percent).
  - From 1980 to 1986, 36 percent of Hispanic students who dropped out returned and completed high school, compared to 48 percent of White students and 49 percent of Black students.
  - Hispanic students are leaving school early. In 1993, 58 percent of Hispanic status dropouts had less than a 10th grade education.
  - In 1993, Hispanic dropout rates were about

double those of other U.S. youth at every income level.

- The dropout rate for Hispanic students is highest for low-income students.
- Two in five Hispanic children live in poverty – twice the poverty rate for all children.
- Hispanic students and Black students are more likely than White students to cite family-related factors as reasons for dropping out of school.

**Findings of the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation produces the *Kids Count Data Book* as a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the United States (1997). This annual publication measures the educational, social, economic and physical well-being of children through 10 state-level indicators: (1) percent of low-birth-weight babies; (2) infant mortality rates; (3) child death rates; (4) rates of teen deaths by accident,

homicide and suicide; (5) teen birth rates; (6) juvenile violent crime arrest rates; (7) percent of teens who are high school dropouts; (8) percent of teens not attending school and not working; (9) percent of children in poverty; and (10) percent of families with children headed by a single parent. In compiling its report, the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses data from federal sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and NCES. Current and past findings for indicators dealing with school dropouts include some significant statistics featured below.

**Percent of Teens Who Are High School Dropouts**

- School dropouts are about three times more likely to live in poverty than high school graduates. Between 1992 and 1993, 5.1 percent of high school dropouts were living in poverty, compared to 1.8 percent of those youth who had at least a high school diploma.

School Dropouts - continued on page 7

**1994-95 AND 1997-98 ENROLLMENT DATA AND 1997-98 ATTRITION DATA**

Race-Ethnicity and Gender	1994-95 9-12th Grade Enrollment	1997-98 9th Grade Enrollment	1994-95 9-12th Grade Enrollment	1997-98 9th Grade Enrollment	1997-98 Expected 12th Grade Enrollment	Students Lost to Attrition	Attrition Rate
<b>Native American</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>2,162</b>	<b>2,536</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>42</b>
Male	379	245	1,112	1,302	444	199	45
Female	342	249	1,050	1,234	402	153	38
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	<b>6,944</b>	<b>6,354</b>	<b>24,674</b>	<b>28,724</b>	<b>8,084</b>	<b>1,730</b>	<b>21</b>
Male	3,543	3,110	12,562	14,644	4,130	1,020	25
Female	3,401	3,244	12,112	14,080	3,954	710	18
<b>Black</b>	<b>49,611</b>	<b>27,755</b>	<b>133,586</b>	<b>147,215</b>	<b>54,693</b>	<b>26,938</b>	<b>49</b>
Male	25,686	13,094	66,404	73,848	28,565	15,471	54
Female	23,925	14,661	67,182	73,367	26,128	11,467	44
<b>White</b>	<b>146,324</b>	<b>108,196</b>	<b>476,949</b>	<b>512,797</b>	<b>157,331</b>	<b>49,135</b>	<b>31</b>
Male	76,549	54,836	244,556	263,658	82,528	27,692	34
Female	69,775	53,360	232,393	249,139	74,803	21,443	29
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>119,151</b>	<b>63,897</b>	<b>318,078</b>	<b>364,954</b>	<b>136,707</b>	<b>72,810</b>	<b>53</b>
Male	63,209	31,269	163,395	187,341	72,472	41,203	57
Female	55,942	32,628	154,683	177,613	64,235	31,607	49
<b>All Groups</b>	<b>322,751</b>	<b>206,696</b>	<b>955,449</b>	<b>1,056,226</b>	<b>357,661</b>	<b>150,965</b>	<b>42</b>
Male	169,366	102,554	488,029	540,793	188,139	85,585	45
Female	153,385	104,142	467,420	515,433	169,522	65,380	38

Figures calculated by IDRA from the Texas Education Agency Fall Membership Survey data.

- Nationwide, 9 percent of teens ages 16 to 19 were dropouts in 1994, compared to 11 percent in 1985. During this same period, the rate of dropouts rose in eight states and remained constant in eight other states.
- In 1994, the high school dropout rate ranged from a low of 3 percent in Connecticut to a high of 13 percent in Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Texas and West Virginia (see box below).

**Percent of Teens Not Attending School and Not Working**

- Between 1985 (11 percent) and 1994 (9 percent), there was a small decline in the share of 16- to 19-year-olds not attending school and not working.
- In 1994, the percent of teens not in school and not working ranged from a low of 4 percent in Connecticut to a high of 17 percent in West Virginia.

**Findings of the Texas Education Agency**

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is charged with compiling, analyzing and publishing dropout information reported by Texas public school districts. According to the data that TEA has collected from school

districts, the number of dropouts has steadily declined over the last seven years, from 91,307 in 1987-88 to 29,207 in 1995-96 (1997). TEA reports that the dropout rate has declined from 6.7 percent in 1987-88 to 1.8 percent in 1995-96.

**Implications**

The dropout problem is an old problem that still needs to be remedied. Despite the collection and reporting of dropout information, many feel that the rate of attrition in the nation's schools, and in the state of Texas in particular, has not made a satisfactory improvement. Nationally, we hope to increase the graduation rate to 90 percent, but for years we have been stuck on about 86 percent of our students completing high school. Over the past few years, the numbers of students receiving a GED has steadily increased. But a high school diploma holds much more potential for unlocking doors of educational, social and economic success for our students than does a GED.

The vast amount of data continues to tell us that the problem has not been remedied, and the signs are that they will not be solved in the immediate future. We must no longer remain in a state of denial about the severity of the problem and the refusal to

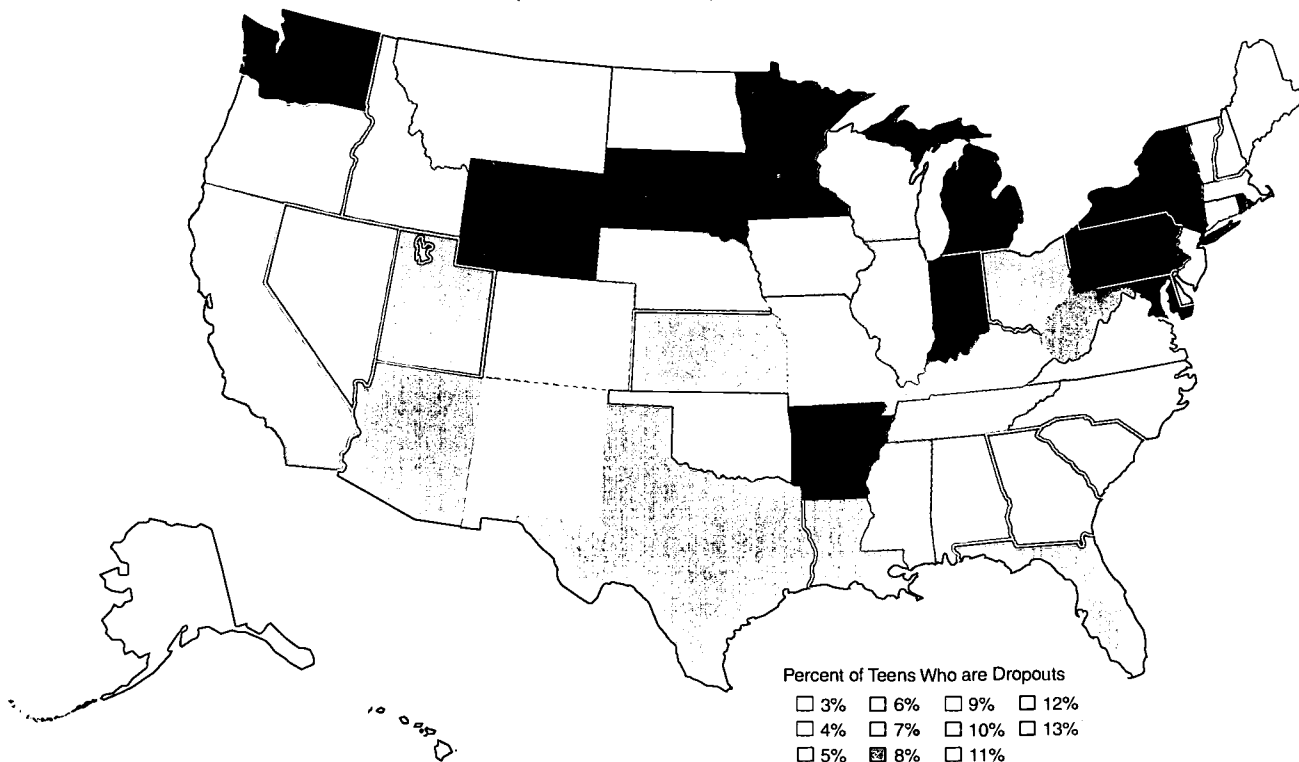
take the actions necessary to reduce the number of students who leave school prior to graduation. We must ensure that we provide quality educational programs for all students and incorporate procedures to identify and recover students who leave school prior to graduation.

**Resources**

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**PERCENT OF TEENS WHO ARE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS  
(AGES 16 TO 19; 1994)**



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997.



# ATTRITION RATES IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: BY RACE-ETHNICITY, 1997-98

COUNTY NAME	ATTRITION RATES <sup>1</sup>				COUNTY NAME	ATTRITION RATES <sup>1</sup>			
	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	TOTAL		BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	TOTAL
ANDERSON	55	30	55	39	DENTON	43	36	57	38
ANDREWS	12	29	39	33	DEWITT	39	17	52	30
ANGELINA	22	28	46	30	DICKENS	40	19	51	27
ARANSAS	69	50	63	52	DIMMIT	65	30	38	38
ARCHER	100	19	56	20	DONLEY	8	16	60	21
ARMSTRONG	.	16	.	17	DUVAL	.	31	29	30
ATASCOSA	89	20	39	33	EASTLAND	**	30	37	30
AUSTIN	41	18	64	31	ECTOR	51	32	52	42
BAILEY	13	13	43	32	EDWARDS	.	31	39	34
BANDERA	.	34	71	42	ELLIS	47	36	59	42
BASTROP	52	29	57	39	EL PASO	45	24	42	40
BAYLOR	27	33	26	32	ERATH	.	27	42	30
BEE	34	32	47	42	FALLS	56	27	44	40
BELL	42	32	49	37	FANNIN	50	26	64	29
BEXAR	47	29	51	44	FAYETTE	38	17	28	21
BLANCO	60	18	38	22	FISHER	100	**	40	13
BORDEN	.	18	25	20	FLOYD	39	23	48	37
BOSQUE	46	25	45	29	FOARD	17	**	44	12
BOWIE	43	26	63	32	FORT BEND	48	32	58	42
BRAZORIA	53	43	61	49	FRANKLIN	55	36	64	39
BRAZOS	53	28	61	41	FREESTONE	12	19	55	19
BREWSTER	.	19	22	21	FRIO	100	8	33	29
BRISCOE	.	26	44	29	GAINES	52	37	47	43
BROOKS	.	5	43	41	GALVESTON	52	32	55	39
BROWN	70	34	52	40	GARZA	4	9	20	14
BURLESON	35	36	43	37	GILLESPIE	100	21	64	32
BURNET	52	39	57	43	GLASSCOCK	.	**	45	16
CALDWELL	27	42	56	47	GOLIAD	39	48	40	45
CALHOUN	71	41	66	52	GONZALES	42	17	42	32
CALLAHAN	.	21	50	23	GRAY	25	22	44	27
CAMERON	54	35	58	56	GRAYSON	42	35	57	37
CAMP	17	28	66	29	GREGG	47	29	66	37
CARSON	.	4	38	6	GRIMES	50	36	55	44
CASS	30	29	68	30	GUADALUPE	56	34	62	47
CASTRO	18	**	31	20	HALE	44	28	54	45
CHAMBERS	40	39	35	39	HALL	13	10	52	30
CHEROKEE	30	29	60	33	HAMILTON	.	19	53	22
CHILDRESS	24	16	44	24	HANSFORD	.	8	50	25
CLAY	.	16	8	16	HARDEMAN	**	**	55	3
COCHRAN	26	25	49	38	HARDIN	41	31	53	33
COKE	97	21	82	51	HARRIS	52	32	59	46
COLEMAN	0	21	22	19	HARRISON	44	30	70	37
COLLIN	42	26	54	29	HARTLEY	.	26	100	31
COLLINGSWORTH	**	0	48	15	HASKELL	**	14	28	17
COLORADO	39	21	58	33	HAYS	62	37	55	45
COMAL	52	29	53	37	HEMPHILL	.	30	61	44
COMANCHE	50	15	48	26	HENDERSON	35	31	62	34
CONCHO	.	20	11	18	HIDALGO	48	26	51	50
CODKE	30	35	78	39	HILL	31	26	58	31
CORYELL	49	32	49	37	HOCKLEY	43	9	49	30
COTTLE	60	**	**	0	HOOO	36	35	54	37
CRANE	15	16	39	27	HOPKINS	34	28	62	31
CROCKETT	.	34	36	35	HOUSTON	48	25	77	37
CROSBY	41	23	37	32	HOWARD	45	24	59	37
CULBERSON	.	11	50	43	HUDSPETH	.	23	35	32
DALLAM	**	17	41	25	HUNT	51	32	60	37
DALLAS	54	33	65	48	HUTCHINSON	2	14	47	19
DAWSON	27	15	41	31	IRION	.	23	38	25
DEAF SMITH	**	7	46	32	JACK	.	26	17	26
DELTA	**	20	**	17	JACKSON	46	18	55	30

<sup>1</sup>Calculated by: (1) dividing the high school enrollment in the end year by the high school enrollment in the base year; (2) multiplying the results from Calculation 1 by the ninth grade enrollment in the base year; (3) subtracting the results from Calculation 2 from the 12th grade enrollment in the end year; and (4) dividing the results of Calculation 3 by the result of Calculation 2. The attrition rate results (percentages) were rounded to the nearest whole number.

\*\* = Attrition rate is less than zero (0).

. = The necessary data are unavailable to calculate the attrition rate.

# ATTRITION RATES IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: BY RACE-ETHNICITY, 1997-98 (CONTINUED)

COUNTY NAME ↓	ATTRITION RATES <sup>1</sup>				COUNTY NAME ↓	ATTRITION RATES <sup>1</sup>			
	BLACK ↓	WHITE ↓	HISPANIC ↓	TOTAL ↓		BLACK ↓	WHITE ↓	HISPANIC ↓	TOTAL ↓
JASPER	22	35	50	32	RAINS	63	33	61	35
JEFF DAVIS	100	46	52	58	RANDALL	56	25	43	27
JEFFERSON	53	30	65	43	REAGAN	**	25	20	21
JIM HOGG	.	29	33	32	REAL	67	33	55	44
JIM WELLS	37	17	40	36	RED RIVER	32	24	79	28
JOHNSON	40	42	56	44	REEVES	44	17	44	40
JONES	22	27	34	28	REFUGIO	25	3	45	27
KARNES	65	25	41	34	ROBERTS	.	**	17	**
KAUFMAN	52	42	65	45	ROBERTSON	43	23	52	34
KENDALL	83	38	65	44	ROCKWALL	39	38	56	40
KENT	80	**	**	**	RUNNELS	0	7	50	23
KERR	33	36	57	41	RUSK	37	34	42	35
KIMBLE	.	29	50	34	SABINE	28	23	60	24
KING	.	15	**	17	SAN AUGUSTINE	29	22	25	25
KINNEY	56	36	23	30	SAN JACINTO	41	47	70	47
KLEBERG	75	10	48	40	SAN PATRICIO	35	36	49	43
KNOX	60	6	55	30	SAN SABA	40	17	64	30
LAMAR	27	32	33	31	SCHLEICHER	.	6	41	23
LAMB	27	12	44	31	SCURRY	29	27	45	34
LAMPASAS	71	33	62	40	SHACKELFORD	.	24	11	23
LA SALLE	.	26	42	43	SHELBY	35	21	45	27
LAVACA	46	14	49	21	SHERMAN	.	2	44	15
LEE	50	30	67	41	SMITH	51	29	66	40
LEON	15	21	31	20	SOMERVELL	.	24	29	24
LIBERTY	34	38	61	40	STARR	0	46	52	52
LIMESTONE	15	22	52	25	STEPHENS	64	31	57	36
LIPSOMB	.	9	44	17	STERLING	.	18	**	11
LIVE OAK	.	21	52	38	STONEWALL	50	24	68	36
LLANO	.	37	39	37	SUTTON	0	**	25	9
LUBBOCK	26	18	41	27	SWISHER	0	24	47	32
LYNN	54	18	43	31	TARRANT	48	33	60	41
MADISON	44	31	71	41	TAYLOR	44	28	57	36
MARION	41	63	.	53	TERRELL	.	**	6	**
MARTIN	**	16	50	30	TERRY	74	14	51	39
MASON	.	7	31	13	THROCKMORTON	.	14	67	19
MATAGORDA	42	32	55	41	TITUS	38	20	63	36
MAVERICK	.	52	41	41	TOM GREEN	50	25	53	37
MCCOLLUCH	21	17	45	27	TRAVIS	61	37	66	52
MCLENNAN	47	32	60	41	TRINITY	38	36	85	40
MCMULLEN	.	13	67	35	TYLER	7	35	**	31
MEDINA	37	27	47	37	UPSHUR	42	32	63	34
MENARD	.	38	45	43	UPTON	43	13	34	22
MIDLAND	46	27	50	35	UVALDE	71	31	40	38
MILAM	43	27	55	37	VAL VERDE	64	40	49	48
MILLS	100	20	61	30	VAN ZANDT	45	33	52	33
MITCHELL	**	21	47	30	VICTORIA	42	32	61	48
MONTAGUE	.	26	59	29	WALKER	40	26	54	34
MONTGOMERY	41	36	59	39	WALLER	44	29	61	39
MOORE	.	23	53	38	WARD	41	30	43	38
MORRIS	36	33	35	33	WASHINGTON	38	17	61	27
MOTLEY	17	16	**	7	WEBB	.	34	40	39
NACOGDOCHES	55	30	66	41	WHARTON	45	18	51	34
NAVARRO	41	24	55	31	WHEELER	**	19	46	22
NEWTON	45	31	63	35	WICHITA	37	33	49	35
NOLAN	59	31	42	37	WILBARGER	31	25	66	36
NUECES	50	32	48	43	WILLACY	100	29	55	53
OCHILTREE	.	41	47	43	WILLIAMSON	49	32	55	37
OLDHAM	.	30	13	24	WILSON	44	24	51	36
ORANGE	42	31	43	33	WINKLER	8	37	36	36
PALO PINTO	22	35	37	35	WISE	36	30	52	33
PANOLA	42	32	56	35	WOOD	14	26	40	26
PARKER	64	43	70	45	YOAKUM	63	21	46	35
PARMER	64	15	37	29	YOUNG	32	22	28	23
PECOS	89	32	48	44	ZAPATA	.	**	25	24
POLK	22	34	57	35	ZAVALA	33	51	43	44
POTTER	61	38	63	47					
PRESIDIO	.	5	52	50	TOTAL	49	31	53	42

## CELEBRATING TEACHABLE MOMENTS

I am pleased that IDRA has chosen compensatory education and school reform as a theme for this issue. After more than 30 years of reform efforts, we must continue to demand that students achieve to high academic standards. There is no question that Title I funds are critical to ensure that this country's students will be the best in the world.

All of our students need clearly defined standards – benchmarks for measuring success. We need adequate resources to ensure that teachers can effectively challenge students to reach high standards. And we need policies at the federal, state and local levels that enable all students to meet their potential for academic success. We all embrace these principles. However, it is easy to forget that beyond the many effective policies, educational theory and significant funding over the years, good quality education remains personal.

What makes education so exciting is the simple notion that each educator can have a profound affect on any one child at any moment.

**WHAT MAKES EDUCATION SO EXCITING IS THE SIMPLE NOTION THAT EACH EDUCATOR CAN HAVE A PROFOUND AFFECT ON ANY ONE CHILD AT ANY MOMENT.**

On this personal level, there are defining moments leading to student success that any teacher can create. Does the act of defining such moments require special skill, exceptional effort or some special type of certification on the part of each teacher? I do not think so.

What makes education so exciting is the simple notion that each educator can have a profound affect on any one child at any moment. Some educators seek out those opportunities, but too many others just fail to recognize the teachable moment that can change the course of a young person's life. Each of us has had one or more of those moments as a student. As teachers, we have experienced many more moments that would affect a student. Look back with me, a member of a large low-income family, as I reflect on a critical moment that a teacher created for me and how profoundly it affected my life. This story is simply about my personal

experience with a critical moment that a teacher created that changed my life.

Access is a word that we often banter about in a casual manner. It means different things to most of us, but it has a special meaning to any young person on the margin of our society. The parents of children from low-income families, members of minority groups, or any child who may be the least bit different from the majority of all students understand the meaning of access. We, as educators, have the power to grant access or take it away, and we often exercise that power. Access shapes our destiny, the schools we attend, the associations we are able to make, and the exposure we have to that big world around us.

In my case, the gateway to higher education would be afforded by having access to a high school that offered the rich academic preparation necessary for acceptance into college. While the high school serving my neighborhood offered what was touted to be an "academic program," history had suggested otherwise for the majority of my junior high school peers. Little did I know at the time that the decision by a junior high school mathematics teacher to offer an enrichment course during lunch period would change the lives of a few boys who were otherwise destined for an inferior high school education.

Mrs. Carey asked in every one of the eighth grade classes: "Who would like to go to Tech High School?" This was the most competitive public high school in the city. I and a handful of others raised our hands and signed on to a year-long challenge. The next nine months were filled with solving difficult problems in mathematics and science that rarely would be touched upon in the regular curriculum.

The entrance exam to Tech High School was competitive. Only about half of us scored high enough to be admitted into this "elite" institution. Few, if any, would have scored as well had it not been for the intervention of a single dedicated teacher who took a personal interest in students achieving to high standards. The success of a few also gave many others that incentive to compete for entrance in subsequent years.

As I reflect on the success of that young faculty at a newly created school and follow their careers, it was an outstanding group. The future superintendent was among that first-year group. An associate superintendent grew out of that group. An outstanding national leader in psychology was also spawned there. A common thread is that many of their students can trace back to at least one critical moment that a faculty member created to shape their careers. This was a team of teachers who repeatedly created these moments for hundreds of young students over the years.

Do we as educators do enough to create critical moments in a child's life? There are at least four frameworks one can look for to begin to create critical moments for academic success.

- The first is access. What moments can we create that expand the horizons of a young person or expose a child to opportunities that may be out of reach without intervention?
- Content of information is an important factor. Are there challenging content areas that shape the minds, plant a seed of interest or form the foundation for a mind-expanding experience for a young person?
- Are we aware of students and how they see themselves in the world? Do we take the time and put forth the effort to understand each individual in sufficient depth to identify that critical moment when it presents itself?
- Are we sufficiently aware of our own behavior to ensure that we can treat each student fairly and with unconditional positive regard?

I will note that these are not necessarily frameworks for achievement. Those are beyond the boundary of standards, curriculum or

*Celebrating Teachable Moments - continued on page 12*

# USING PUBLIC MONEY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLING: A BAD IDEA FOR CHILDREN

*María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.*

This past spring in San Antonio, the Children's Educational Opportunity (CEO) Foundation set up a 10-year \$50 million initiative to provide vouchers to students in the Edgewood Independent School District (ISD) to attend private schools. Funders of the "Horizon" program have made public their intention to urge the state legislature to approve publicly funded vouchers in its upcoming legislative session (Cortez, 1998). In August, a community forum on school vouchers was sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio Office of Extended Education, Southwestern Bell Telephone, San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and West San Antonio Chamber of Commerce. Among the panelists speaking against the use of public money for private schooling was Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, executive director of IDRA. Below is an excerpt of her opening remarks.

Are vouchers funded by private money like the Horizon scholarships available to Edgewood children a bad idea? Is it a bad thing for people who have money to give some of it away so that poor children can attend private and perhaps better schools?

The answer to that is no, it is not a bad thing. So what then is all the fuss about? Why do we not just let the CEO Foundation do their good deed, acknowledge their generosity, and move on?

I believe that the children of Edgewood, and poor and minority children everywhere, deserve more. They deserve more than charity for the few. They deserve – as children in rich neighborhoods have come to expect – the best public schools.

I also have come to understand that, while the privately funded voucher movement may seem like just one more example of corporate philanthropy (like the scholarships and the tutoring programs that businesses sponsor to show good corporate citizenship) privately funded voucher plans are seen by many as what Tom Tancredo (a former U.S. Department of Education official) calls "pump primers" and part of a tactic to build support for publicly funded vouchers (1992).

So what about publicly funded vouchers? What are they? Although they come in many versions, they all involve the payment of public money – state or federal – to the parents of private school children to offset the cost of tuition, books or other expenses. In most cases, these school vouchers would give tuition money to any parent who wants their children to go to a private school (religious or otherwise) and, in some cases, to parents who want to home school their child.

Vouchers are popular in legislative debates. But, in 27 states in the last 20 years, 26 schemes to use public funding to fund parochial schools have failed (Dunn, 1992). In Texas, attempts to pass school

## ***THE BEST WAY TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IS TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS – SCHOOLS THAT ARE ACCOUNTABLE***

voucher legislation have failed by narrow margins, and supporters have vowed to continue their fight. Why are they fighting?

There are many reasons and many scenarios. In the best scenario, people who truly care about poor and minority children have given up on public schools. They are ready to try radical approaches or save a few children from the ruin and hopelessness of some inner city schools.

The problem with this reasoning is pretty obvious – it is the proverbial throwing the baby out with the bath water. All students should have equitable access to excellent neighborhood public schools.

The best way to strengthen public schools is to *strengthen* public schools – schools that are accountable to us all.

For 25 years, we at IDRA have been working for equalized school funding, for early childhood education, for bilingual education and for other programs that would benefit poor and minority children in our public schools. We find it disturbing that many of those pushing for a "voucher" program – supposedly to benefit poor children – are the same people who have opposed every positive program put forward to equalize educational opportunity.

Publicly funded vouchers would simply mean that the children in public schools with the fewest resources would be left behind in public schools that are even poorer and more inadequate. In fact, these vouchers would create, with public tax dollars, a dual system of private and pauper education.

But what about children who need help now? As it stands, people are being led to believe that we cannot wait for public schools to get better and that the only solution is vouchers since they will help children now and will spawn market-type competition that will make everything better.

At the state level, the Texas Public Policy Foundation, directed by Mr. Jeff Judson, published a report that estimates that private schools can accommodate, with the number of immediately available spaces, less than 1 percent of the low-income student population in Texas. The report also states:

The success of any choice program depends heavily on expansion of the capacity at existing private schools and, more important, the willingness of individuals and groups to start new private schools (Dougherty and Becker, 1995).

The notion that parents of Edgewood ISD or any other poor community, once armed with a school voucher, can send children to any private school of their choice is at best naïve and at worst a cynical ruse perpetrated on parents who struggle every day to get the best for their children.

No, in the school voucher scenario, poor communities have to *wait* for private schools to get their public money so they can expand or be created.

We have also heard the argument that free-market competition will enhance public schools because their monopoly on education will be shattered and they will have to compete for students and that parents will vote on their feet and leave weak schools and choose better ones.

First of all, competition among public schools is already possible. Also, unregulated market forces do not always yield good results. The savings and loan deregulation became the most costly financial disaster in



U.S. history.

What about those public schools that relegate poor children, minority children, children who do not speak English and children of immigrants to blighted classrooms with watered-down connect-the-dot curriculum where not much is expected and not much is achieved? Must we wait for them to get better?

I do not think we have to wait. I think we have to work. Some of us and many of you – as parents, as teachers and administrators, and as concerned citizens – have worked to move us closer to a public school system in which *all children* have access to excellent neighborhood public schools.

After a 30-year fight for equity in funding public schools in Texas, the gap between rich and poor is narrower than it has ever been. We have a public accountability system that has begun to give us information about how schools are doing with every group of children in every kind of public school – rich and poor.

We have public schools, like those of the Ysleta school district in El Paso, who do not see their status as a district with 88 percent minority students and 68 percent poor students as a disadvantage. In fact, since 1996 when they opened their doors to students from other districts, Ysleta enrolled 2,000 students from neighboring districts who are impressed with the performance of Ysleta students.

The Texas Education Agency is now studying some bilingual schools for their outstanding success. We have schools with lots of children who do not speak English and who are poor that are producing excellent results with no excuses.

Private school vouchers take the focus away from increasing funds and resources for public schools that are accountable to all of us. Instead they focus favor on spending public monies for private purposes with no accountability to the taxpayer and no mandate – and in some cases no desire – to educate *all* children.

Publicly funded vouchers are in fact

## COCA-COLA VALUED YOUTH PROGRAM RECOGNIZED AS AN EFFECTIVE PROGRAM

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has been identified as a promising program in a new book, *Show Me the Evidence! Proven and Promising Programs for America's Schools*, by Dr. Robert E. Slavin and Dr. Olatokunbo S. Fashola. The authors report that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is one of only two programs designed to increase the high school graduation rates of at-risk students that met the standards of their review:

Ideally, programs emphasized in this review would be those that present rigorous evaluation evidence in comparison to control groups showing significant and long lasting impacts on dropout or related outcomes, have active dissemination programs that have implemented the program in many schools, and have evidence of effectiveness in dissemination sites, ideally from studies conducted by third parties. To require all of these conditions, however, would limit this review to just two programs: Upward Bound and the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program created by IDRA. Since its inception in 1984, the program has kept 5,500 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. The program works by placing junior high and high school students in positions of academic responsibility as tutors to elementary school youngsters. As a result, Valued Youth tutors improve their grades and stay in school.

*Show Me the Evidence! Proven and Promising Programs for America's Schools* was published through Corwin Press, Inc., by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Place At Risk (CRESPAR) at Johns Hopkins University and Howard University.

taxation without representation. "School choice" is precisely that, choice for *schools*. It provides no choice for parents, certainly not poor parents, their children, or their communities. Public funding should focus on improving public education instead of using public money on private school businesses. America needs *all* of its children to be educated, not just a select few.

As Coretta Scott King eloquently stated, "Instead of scrambling for lifeboats let's build great ships of hope that will provide safe passage for all of our young people" (King, 1997). There is hope in public schools. I believe we know how to do it, we can do it, and we *must* do it.

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content. One need not be trained in pedagogy or have mastered a content area to seize upon opportunities for creating critical moments. The frameworks for student success co-exist with the need for students to achieve high standards.

These are simply four examples of opportunities that anyone may use to create a critical moment in the life of a young person. Upon reflection, I have probably let many more opportunities to create a critical moment go by than I have been successful in creating. My challenge to myself is to do better. I hope you also see the challenge.

# WHO'S AT THE TABLE? OR IS THERE ROOM ENOUGH FOR ALL?

Bradley Scott, M.A.



The question was raised in a teleconference held among the directors of the 10 regional desegregation assistance centers: "To what degree have we *really* created equitable educational opportunity for kids in schools?" The question surfaced in relation to the theme of the Improving America's Schools (IAS) conferences. The theme this year is "Schools... Equity... Quality... Together: Connecting the Dots." The conference agendas are in their final stages of planning. They will highlight many efforts throughout the nation where school systems are stepping up to make "all" mean *all*.

We have evidence of programs that – either in part or in their entirety – are working for diverse learners. The greater challenge, however, is to reproduce these successes in a nation full of millions of learners on hundreds of thousands of school campuses in thousands of school districts.

A little more than four short years ago, the educators around the nation began talking about creating schools that work for all children. They spoke about solutions similar to the ones the desegregation assistance centers had been proposing since they published *Resegregation of Public Schools: The Third Generation* (1989). IDRA has advocated this issue throughout its entire history. As we celebrate this 25th anniversary, we are committed to the mission of creating schools that work for all children. I think most educators, citizens and communities are committed to this notion, at least in principle.

What will be important, though, is how we turn the corner from principle to practice, from vision to creation, from talk to action, from inputs to outputs, and from highlights of success to regularities of success for all. I am encouraged because we know things now that we did not know before. We have learned new lessons. There is new hope. We can embrace the potential of the possible.

The book, *Education on the Edge of Possibility*, focuses on learning theory and its application to a changing world-reality (1997). The authors, Renate Caine and Geoffrey Caine, point out: "Education has worked well [at least for some] for over 100 years. Although many people have fallen h the cracks and numerous inequali-

ties have occurred, the model of education has been a good 'fit' for the industrial age." We are leaving behind that particular way of looking at the world and are moving toward a new paradigm where "the ground itself is moving."

For Caine and Caine, there are four ideas that should guide our understanding of this change and the continuing possibilities that are emerging:

- Disequilibrium is everywhere.
- The brain is equipped to deal with a turbulent world.
- The change process is intrinsically transformational.
- To function best in this new environment, we need to embrace a fundamentally different world view and perceptual orientation.

Peter Negroni extended the discussion presented above in some critically important ways. He describes a new imperative for the transformation of U.S. public schools that addresses the issue of educating *all* of our children. Negroni states:

For the first time in this experiment called the American democracy, educators are expected to do something never done before in history: *To educate everyone and to educate everyone to be able to participate in a complex technological world* [author's emphasis]... A great deal of change by all in America, however, is required. Particularly those employed in the public schools – they must change. Key to the transformation of the public schools is an understanding and respect for America's growing diversity by the people who work in those schools. They [educators] must be made to understand that we live in a changing society that can no longer survive with only some of its children being successful. All Americans must be convinced that there are compelling reasons for the

transformation of America's public schools into places that effectively educate all youngsters (1994, 1996).

Negroni describes four transformations that lie at the very root of systemic change. **Organizational transformation** is where schools are "organized so that the needs of the students become the focus of the organizational structure." Additionally, schools "must move to become places where the organizational structure and the pedagogical models stress the importance of producing students who have specific skills" (e.g., higher order cognitive, adaptive, communicative, social, interpersonal and self-management skills that operate at a world-class level).

**Pedagogical transformation** is where a revolution, not an evolution, occurs: "It requires the liberation of the American educators." Negroni suggests that "a growing body of evidence indicates that present instructional delivery models cannot survive if we are to meet the needs of a 21st century world... Educators must combine what we are discovering about teaching and learning with changes in organizational structure to meet new requirements of teaching all children."

**Political transformation** manifests the will to educate those who have traditionally been ignored or who are found in urban centers and who look different than those who control the economics of the urban centers. According to Negroni, the political transformation embraces a fundamental additional issue of equity and excellence. This issue calls for a response to two questions, one that he raises: "Does each child born in America have equal access to an effective and appropriate education?" and one that I raise: "Is there adequate funding to support equitable, excellent education for all learners so that educators can be held accountable for comparable educational outcomes among learners?" Coming from a low-income environment should not automatically sentence a child to an inferior education. Political transformation also involves race relations. For Negroni, it is a political issue that U.S. public schools still "suffer from the practices developed during the slavery period that created different expectations for races... The performance of Black and Hispanic stu-

*Who's at the Table? - continued on page 14*

dents over the last quarter century has conditioned everyone, including parents, that they are able to perform similarly to White, middle-class children."

**Social and attitudinal transformation** is where everyone in the community understands the interdependence of the school and community. Negroni contends that "the social and attitudinal transformation requires the development of child-centered communities where children and families have real value." To that end, there are several additional points that cannot be overlooked:

- U.S. society and its schools must change the expectation of the distribution of results. "People who were traditionally not expected to succeed must now succeed if our economy is to survive," Negroni states.
- "The new paradigm [of education] indicates that it is *what we do in the school* in response to how they come to school that makes the difference and not how they come to school" (emphasis added). This transformation is possibly the most challenging and most difficult for the U.S. public school to make.
- Negroni states that in this country we have struggled with our multicultural and diverse nature. We have met with only limited success. He says, "A new approach taking hold in some schools is inclusive education... [which is a] fundamental belief that considers each person an important, accepted member of the school and community... Inclusion is truly the process through which all children can develop the skills, the attitudes and the experiences [needed] to be fully enfranchised members of the society."

This matter of inclusion has also been more recently addressed by M.A. Faley, et al.:

Inclusion is the opposite of segregation and isolation. Segregated, specialized education creates a permanent underclass of students, with a strong message to these students that they do not "cut the mustard." The growing diversity of our student population is a topic of great debate and concern...

## COMING UP!

In November-December, the  
*IDRA Newsletter*  
focuses on education policy.

Diversity is often spoken about as if it were a plight rather than a wonderful opportunity for learning... about what it is to be human – to be included, to be valued and respected just for who we are in a naturally diverse world (1995).

Faley and his fellow researchers also contend that the need for genuine, inclusive education requires a true restructuring of U.S. education not only to establish meaningful standards, but also to hold educators accountable for accomplishing outcomes. It requires a great commitment.

This commitment means that we must believe each child can learn and succeed, that diversity enriches us all, that students at risk of failure can overcome that risk through involvement in a thoughtful and caring community of learners, that each child has unique contributions to offer to the community of learners, that each child has strengths and needs, and that effective learning results from the collaborative efforts of us all to ensure the success of each student.

We are practically at the new millennium. In public education we are standing at the door of a new century that already presents the possibility that who we will be is very different from who we have been. Congress is preparing to reauthorize the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* in 1999. We are uniquely positioned to look backward and forward almost simultaneously. We can see the United States as the giant during an industrial age in the 20th century, and we can see our country as the world leader in the information and technological age of the 21st century.

I am not a fortune teller, but I can look through the glass and see the possibility of our continued success as a nation, provided we heed the lessons we have learned about the need for us all to be included. *All* can no longer mean *some*. That is old math for an old age. *All* can no longer mean *more*. That is transitional math for a transitional age. *All* must mean *all*. That is transformational math for a transformational age.

This total inclusion is possible. I witnessed a practical example of it in a south Texas school district just last weekend, where I was working with a group of teachers and aides examining racial and gender bias in the curriculum. The training took place in the high school cafeteria. During the lunch break, several people left the training site to get lunch. But, many stayed because we either had brought a lunch from home or purchased a barbecue chicken dinner from the band booster club. I purchased one of

the dinners and was about to proceed to a table away from a group of teachers and aides who were already talking and eating, with their meals spread out before them.

One of them called out to me, "Señor, come on over and join us; It's only us at the table." The unspoken message was "Join us, we've already been here together, working together all day so far anyway."

"Oh," I deferred, "it's full; There's no room at the table." I felt like such an outsider.

"There's plenty of room," one of the aides said to me in a mixture of Spanish and English. Without any apparent cue or signal, they all rose, Hispanic and Anglo, male and female, teachers and aides, able and disabled, and moved another table into the group configuration. She repeated, "There's plenty of room."

I was embarrassed because I had been so shortsighted. You see, I had only focused on the reality of the single table. They, in their wisdom, considered the possibility of the cafeteria and all the resources (tables and space) that were available. What was impossible for me was quite possible for them. They had the vision not only to see it, but to create it as well.

Who is at the table? We all are, or at least, we should be. Is there room enough for all? Absolutely, if we look around and commit ourselves to making room as we stand at the edge of the future and peer into the possible.

### Resources

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# SYSTEMIC REFORM AND OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE SCHOOLWIDE VISION

Joe Vigil, M.S.

Speaking about the subject of schoolwide reform, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley stated, "It is time to reform our nation's poorest schools, and the Title I program can contribute to this effort... particularly through innovative and comprehensive schoolwide projects focused on helping every child meet higher standards" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The schoolwide reform effort supports a framework for change based on: high standards, support for comprehensive planning and continuous development, flexibility to draw on all resources and clear accountability for results.

Two such projects are the comprehensive school reform program and the schoolwide program. A side-by-side comparison of these two projects shows how the newer comprehensive school reform program supports the schoolwide program (see box on next page). When schools shift to a schoolwide approach, they provide increased opportunities for enriching curriculum and instruction throughout the school, accelerating student learning, and achieving district and state performance standards.

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) program, new in 1998, will help raise student achievement by assisting public schools across the country to implement effective, comprehensive school reforms that are based on reliable research and effective practices and that include an emphasis on basic academics and parental involvement. Building upon and leveraging ongoing efforts to connect higher standards with school improvement at the state and local levels through Goals 2000 and Title I, this initiative will help expand the quality and quantity of schoolwide reform efforts that enable all children, particularly low-achieving children, to meet challenging academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Schools that receive Title I funds and have at least 50 percent of their students coming from low-income families can initiate schoolwide programs. In consultation with the school's central office and with support from distinguished educators and school support teams, these schools must initiate a planning to determine how to best

utilize all fiscal resources, facilities and materials to provide high-quality instruction. The instruction must be fully aligned with student strengths and needs and the academic standards established by the state.

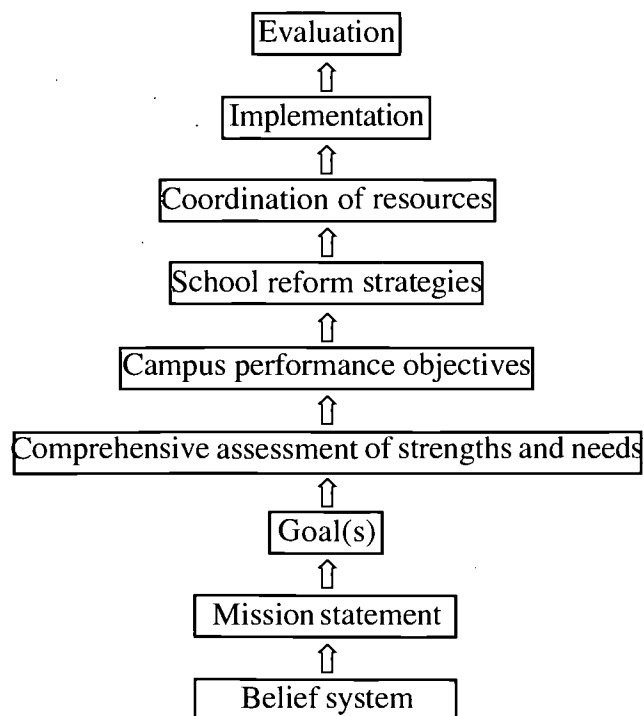
Schools participating in a schoolwide program are not required to identify particular students who are eligible, and they are not required to provide supplemental services. Typically, federal funds must only pay for services that supplement the specific services provided with state and local funds. In a schoolwide program, however, the services provided do not have to be supplemental. Instead, the amount of funding provided must be supplemental (above and beyond the amount that would otherwise be provided). Schoolwide programs can combine Title I resources along with other federal resources to leverage local and state funding and tailor an educational program to the needs of the entire student body, as long as the intent and purposes of the federal programs are met.

Successful schoolwide programs incorporate a comprehensive assessment of strengths and needs, best-practice school improvement strategies and highly qualified instructional staff. Planners lead their schools through a self-study that results in a comprehensive plan for redesigning instruction in order to ensure that every student achieves high standards.

The concept behind the schoolwide program legislation is that special programs will be incorporated into whole school planning and that the federal resources will be used to enhance the educational effort of each campus. The planning process involves key stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, community members and, if appropriate, students. District officials are crucial to the process, as are representatives from local or state technical assistance teams. A comprehensive assessment that identifies the academic, social and emotional strengths and needs of every student

*Systemic Reform - continued on page 16*

## CAMPUS PLANNING MODEL



STAR Center. *A Toolkit for Assessing and Revising the Integrated Campus Improvement and Title I Schoolwide Plan* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1997).



constitutes the starting point for planning teams in their goal-setting efforts.

The STAR Center (the regional comprehensive assistance center serving Texas) has hosted training institutes for such planners cooperation with various regional education service centers throughout Texas. Participants of these schoolwide institutes take with them a planning process that is coordinated with all of the school's programs. The box below depicts a campus planning model that the STAR Center presents at schoolwide institutes in order to lead districts through the planning process. This model is described in the STAR Center's *A Toolkit for Assessing and Revising the Integrated Campus Improvement and Title I Schoolwide Plan* (1997).

This toolkit addresses the eight components required to implement a schoolwide program. Each section includes federal and state requirements, as well as a column for the insertion of local requirements. Key questions are provided in each section to generate reflection and discussion of the contents of the plan and prompt considerations for revision that will enhance the achievement of all students. The eight components are as follows:

- Comprehensive assessment;
- Description of the schoolwide reform strategies that will help all children meet state performance standards;
- Instruction by highly qualified professional staff;
- Professional development for teachers and aides, and where appropriate, pupil services personnel, parents, principals, and other staff to enable all children in the school to meet the state's students performance standards;
- Strategies to increase parent involvement;
- Plans for assisting preschool children in the transition from early childhood programs, such as Head Start, Even Start or a state-run preschool program, to the local elementary school program;
- Strategies for ensuring the involvement of teachers in decisions about the use of additional assessments; and
- Activities to ensure that students who, during the course of the school year, experience difficulty mastering any state academic standards shall be provided with effective, timely, additional assistance.

Making the transition to these programs may require considerable adjustments for schools. But, with commitment and sus-

<b>SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON OF THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM PROGRAM AND THE SCHOOLWIDE PROGRAM</b>	
<b>Components of a Comprehensive</b>	<b>Components of a Schoolwide Program</b>
<b>School Reform Program</b>	
Comprehensive design with aligned components	Comprehensive needs assessment of the entire school, based on student performance in relation to the state content and performance standards.
Effective, research-based methods and strategies	Based on effective means of improving achievement
Professional development	Professional development to help students meet high standards
Measurable goals and benchmarks	State standards, assessment and accountability system as required in Title I includes adequate yearly progress and school profiles*
Support within the school by school faculty, administrators and staff	Support within the school is developed with the involvement of the community to be served and individuals who will carry out the plan
Parental and community involvement	Strategies to increase parental involvement
External technical support and assistance	Support from a state system of support teams*
Evaluation strategies include a plan for evaluation of implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved	Evaluation strategies include state standards, assessment and accountability system as required in Title I includes annual assessments using multiple measures*
Coordination of resources: Identifies how other resources (federal, state, local, private) available to the school will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform	Coordination of resources: Combines almost all federal education money with state and local dollars*
	Plans for assisting preschool children in transition to local elementary schools
* schoolwide law, not one of the schoolwide program components	
** schoolwide component that is related	

STAR Center. *A Toolkit for Assessing and Revising the Integrated Campus Improvement and Title I Schoolwide Plan* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1997).

tained creative effort, these challenges can be overcome for the benefit of all students.

**Resources**

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are relatively meaningless. What is important is the amount that the student learns. This is grossly unfair to the student. The student may have some impact on what is learned, but the student has no impact on input (the adequacy of resources) nor on process (the quality of instruction).

Determining a measure of output, or educational results, proved difficult since standardized achievement tests were based on a national assumption of what students are supposed to be taught in school. This led to the development of an achievement test in Texas based on what students are supposed to be taught in Texas schools. The initial state examination was based solely on reading, writing and arithmetic, possibly assuming that these were the only subjects worth teaching but more probably that these were the only subjects in which learning could be measured. Over the years, learning areas in the state test have been expanded, most noticeably the inclusion of science and social studies in the current TAAS. But no attempt has been made to determine the parameters of education, let alone how success in all fields is to be measured.

Conducting evaluation solely on the basis of output measures in a limited number of fields led to the development of a test-driven curriculum. As the results of student performance in the limited fields were presented in the local and state media, educational instruction focused on the material expected to be tested by the state. The new slogan for Texas schools seemed to be, "If it is not on the TAAS, it is not worth teaching." Schools striving to improve in the limited areas measured by the TAAS gave small consideration to music, art, physical education, socialization, civic responsibility or any other area not included in the state test. Concepts of maximum realization in physical, emotional, social and spiritual development may still be a part of the school goals, but they are seldom formally addressed in instruction.

Even intellectual development appears to have suffered under the current output evaluation. The early state tests addressed the lower forms of learning, so that the higher forms of learning were sacrificed for factual knowledge sure to be found in the state exam. Teachers focused on "who discovered what in what year," rather than addressing the application of the social sciences to the solution of present social problems.

Recent revisions in the state test have led to include the measurement of

higher forms of learning, although an extensive attempt to do so is difficult, not only because the measurement of factual information is still around, but because the measurement of the higher orders of learning is difficult to accomplish in a multiple choice test item.

Since neither input, process nor output have proven to be adequate in evaluating student-teacher performance, where should the focus be placed? The obvious answer is the distribution of evaluation among all three. None of the three can be utilized without consideration of the other two. Past and present failures in evaluation cannot be attributed to the use of any of the three phases. The failure can be attributed to the focus on one of the phases to the exclusion of the other two.

### Accountability

Determinations of student, teacher and system performance serve little purpose if inadequate performance is not to be addressed. *Accountability* is the determination of who is responsible for performance and what is to be done about it. Accountability should be closely related to the reward and punishment system of the operation.

The determination of accountability in education has always been a difficult concept. The teaching-learning process is one that conceivably can be controlled by both participants, the teacher and the student. This accounts for the rare incidence of educational malpractice litigation. The current focus on output (student performance) with little concern for input and process makes the question of accountability even more complex.

The present focus on output evaluation makes accountability a growing issue, particularly since education has become more of an imperative and the number of different, atypical and hard to teach students continues to grow. School systems and professional organizations have developed a line of defense that assumes that resources are adequate, everything done by the school is proper, and if a student fails to learn, the student and only the student must be held accountable. This may not be too different than the position taken in other fields such as medicine, except that the field of medicine has a scientific set of inputs and procedures to validate medical performance. Not only does education not have such a set of validating inputs and procedures, the shift of emphasis to outputs will preclude their development.

Educators are not prone to give attention to educational inputs and processes when it has been so easy to use the students as the scapegoat for educational failure.

### The TAAS and Accountability

The use of the TAAS as a state administered achievement test to measure performance has led to the onus for unsuccessful performance being placed on the student. This was not unexpected. Minority groups and advocates of atypical studies fought hard against the implementation of such a test. A few others bought the concept that once the test was implemented it would be simple to determine unproductive school personnel and either retrain or replace them. This has seldom been the case.

It can be argued that there has been some amount of accountability as a result of the TAAS testing. This may be so, but the amount of accountability has been very limited. It is true that TAAS data has been used to identify underperforming schools, but the practice has had two severe limitations.

First, identification of underperforming schools was initially based on massive underperformance. When TAAS accountability was initiated, a poor performing school was one in which more than 80 percent of the students performed disastrously on one or more sections of the three-area test. I see no great development of educational insights when it is realized that less than 20 percent of a class, a school or a district cannot perform at the lowest level of the TAAS. This is no great breakthrough since performance on all other standardized tests that have been a requirement for decades in the accreditation process already showed such dismal performance.

Second, there have never been any individual sanctions associated with poor performance, nor is there any likelihood that such sanctions are forthcoming. In recent years there has been some unfavorable publicity about poor performance, although the bad publicity is usually directed at "the school" rather than at the staff.

Individual accountability has seldom occurred, and when it has, the penalty has consisted of teacher and administrator transfers, rather than dismissal. Transfers of poorly performing staff is a dysfunctional educational response. At best it is hoped that the incompetence of a large number of staff can be hidden by placement in other school settings so that the collective incompetence is not so visible.

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If anything, TAAS accountability has led to the better performing schools becoming even better. In too few instances have the poor performing schools made a drastic improvement. Even in the few school districts where this has happened, it has been at the expense of outstanding administrators under severe harassment for "moving too fast," "upsetting school staff," "making drastic changes" and "traumatizing the community."

### The TAAS and Graduation

In spite of the limitations of the TAAS, some school systems have found it a convenient way of coping with other problems. A few school districts adopted the TAAS as a requirement for promotion. With complete disregard for the adequacy of school inputs and processes, and an equal disregard for characteristics and needs of children, educators implemented an accountability system that placed the onus for retention-in-grade entirely upon the student and the student's performance on the TAAS. Years of educational research, warnings by test publishers and the advice of educators were set aside by defaulting on professional responsibility and allowing the standardized test to make critical educational decisions instead of using extensive information on what is best for the individual student.

The state did the same thing in requiring successful performance on the TAAS as a condition for graduation. Accountability is based solely on one output measure, student performance, without consideration of input and process.

It is impossible to produce valid measurement of student performance without considering input. Testing consists of a sampling of items taken from the curriculum presented to the student. It is assumed that the only variable on which performance is to be based is whether the student mastered the content and can respond positively to the sampling comprising the test. Any measurement based on content not available to the student is an invalid measurement of student performance. The use of the TAAS as a determinant of student performance must be preceded by assurance that the sampling making up the content of the test is consistent with the content of the curriculum afforded the student.

In Texas, making such an assumption is ridiculous. During the recent litigation on school finance there was an abundance of money presented by plaintiffs and ac-

## IDRA RECEIVES GRANT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

A new *Model Teacher Preparation and Leadership Development* initiative will develop a comprehensive, **binational** and interdisciplinary program for teacher preparation and leadership development. In collaboration with the Mexican and American Solidarity Foundation, IDRA has been awarded the grant by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for a five-year period. More than one-third of the grant will be used for student stipends. The program will serve as an example for **preparing educators to work in bilingual and bicultural environments.**

The number of Latino youth in the southwest United States is increasing. At the same time, there is a critical shortage of people who are prepared and certified to teach students who are learning English. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that one-third of teachers lack college preparation in the main subject areas they teach (and even less have preparation in their subject areas using English as a second language techniques). As a result, only 47 percent of the country's 3.2 million children who are learning English are being served in bilingual or English as a second language programs – and even fewer are enrolled in well-designed, well-implemented bilingual programs taught by a certified teacher who speaks their native language.

"It makes sense to teach children in a language they understand," said Dr. María Robledo Montecel, executive director of IDRA. "It also makes sense to teach them English. This program will **maximize the skills and talents of educators that have so far been overlooked.** We will prepare them to effectively teach students who are learning English," she said.

This binational project will enable **200 teachers to become leaders in bilingual and bicultural settings.** Participating universities will expand their bilingual curricula to include courses of study and practical experiences that will enhance the abilities of teachers, parents, administrators, school board members, and community leaders to collaborate effectively. The project will also enhance the capacity of Latino and non-Latino students and educators to speak Spanish and work in cross-cultural environments – abilities that are essential to success in the 21st century.

This program will target teacher aides who are bilingual, traditional students in teacher-preparation programs in universities and *normalistas* who are legal U.S. residents who were teachers in Mexico. The program will also equip educational systems to prepare teachers and other educators to perform effectively in bilingual, binational and bicultural circumstances. These include universities that offer studies leading to bilingual education certification, schools and communities that offer sites for practical experience, and research and support institutions.

Participating universities include: Arizona State University, California State University at Long Beach, University of Texas – Pan American, University of Texas at San Antonio, and Southwest Texas State University.

cepted by the courts that low wealth schools were unable to provide course work that is used in the TAAS. Analysis of the post-*Edgewood* system of school finance indicates that although substantial improvement has been made, there are still wide disparities in resources available to low and high wealth schools. It is dysfunctional to measure student competence in a subject that was not taught during the years that the student was enrolled in school.

Advocates of student accountability by the use of the TAAS argue that course offerings are immaterial in determining student performance. The state has developed

a minimum standard and each student is expected to meet that standard. This argument is ridiculous. Students denied diplomas because of their inability to pass the TAAS are being held accountable for the insufficiency of inputs in the Texas educational system.

### Graduation

Should Texas continue to use the TAAS test as a criterion for high school graduation? The answer is an emphatic no! The following reasons demand that students who have completed graduation re-

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quirements be allowed to graduate regardless of performance on the TAAS.

- The test was not intended to be used as a measure of the completeness or adequacy of an educational program. It is poorly representative of the complicated comprehensive educational program, and test results must be combined with other factors to determine satisfactory performance.
- The TAAS does not have inherent validity – no test does. The validity of a test is determined by the specific situation in which it is used. Extensive factors influence the results of the test other than student proficiency. Student apprehensiveness, physical or mental disturbances, the environment in which the test is administered, distractions and many other factors may influence student performance.
- The TAAS test, and other psychological measurements, should not be used as a sole criterion for determining success or graduation. In past court cases govern-

ing the use of a test as a sole criterion, Texas has argued that a specific test is not a sole criterion if other requirements must also be met. The common use of the term “sole criterion” in educational literature denotes any criterion as “sole” if it is used in determining a decision regardless of what other criteria must be met. Since the TAAS precludes graduation and the awarding of a diploma regardless of other criteria, it is a sole criterion. A student with perfect attendance, completing all required courses, having the prescribed number of electives, making no grade lower than an “A” in high school, and attaining a perfect score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) cannot graduate and receive a diploma if the TAAS score is below a prescribed level. The TAAS becomes a sole criterion for graduation.

- The TAAS is not a valid measure since there is no way that the content of the test can be adjusted to be representative of the curriculum experienced by the student. The types, amounts and qualities of school instruction for more than 3 million

students are too varied to be represented in a standardized test.

- Considering the limitation of the TAAS and the inability to determine who is responsible for poor performance, the penalty on the student is too severe and too long-lasting. Students having met all graduation requirements other than passing the TAAS may spend the rest of their lives in a form of limbo. Retaking the test is not a solution, especially when a feasible avenue for remediation is difficult, if not impossible.
- The brunt of the penalty for any lack of achievement is borne by the student. Neither adequacy of input nor process figures in the determination of student accountability.

It is regrettable that advocates of students must once again resort to the courts to protect students from unfair and prejudicial educational practice.

*Dr. José A. Cárdenas is the founder and director emeritus of IDRA. Comments and questions may be sent to him via e-mail at: idra@idra.org.*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT IDRA ACTIVITIES

In August, IDRA worked with **7,349** teachers, administrators and parents through **80** training and technical assistance activities and **143** program sites in **nine** states plus the United Kingdom. Topics included:

- ◆ Bilingual and English as a Second Language Resources on the World Wide Web
- ◆ Systemwide Evaluation
- ◆ IDRA *Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program*
- ◆ Conducting Diversity Dialogues

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ San Antonio Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◆ Louisiana Department of Education
- ◆ La Joya ISD, Texas
- ◆ Las Cruces Public Schools, New Mexico
- ◆ Edgewood ISD, Texas
- ◆ Texas Education Service Center, Region III

### Activity Snapshot

The *STAR Center* hosted a highly interactive institute for schools with systemwide and comprehensive projects to share success and collaboratively problem-solve those issues that are barriers to all-out success of these projects. Ninety bilingual directors, principals, Title I directors and teachers attended the three-day event. Participants updated their knowledge base by hearing the latest research on bilingual education and on requirements of a Title VII evaluation. They further developed their leadership skills. Also, representatives of effective projects from across the country presented their designs and evaluation results. The *STAR Center* is the comprehensive regional assistance center that serves Texas. It is a collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- ◆ public school teachers
- ◆ parents
- ◆ administrators
- ◆ other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- ◆ training and technical assistance
- ◆ evaluation
- ◆ serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- ◆ publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210/684-8180.



# CHALLENGES AS WE ENTER A NEW CENTURY: REFORMING SCHOOLS TO VALUE EVERY CHILD

For 25 years IDRA has been a voice for children who have been neglected, ignored and even forgotten by those who were responsible for educating them. Among the forgotten were the students who left school before graduation – the dropouts. Some have blamed children and their families for the dropout problem, but that is akin to forgetting them all over again. Since 1984, IDRA has been changing perceptions of dropouts and their reasons for leaving. IDRA's mission – to create schools that work for *all* children – means creating schools where children will want to stay.

In Texas, IDRA calculates the longitudinal trends of attrition rates. In the last 12 years, the percent of students (all races and ethnicities) lost from public school enrollment has worsened, from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 42 percent in 1997-98. One out of every two Hispanic students drops out of school. When you look at the trend among Hispanic students over time, this number has increased over the past 12 years: from 45 percent of Hispanic students dropping out of school in 1986 to 53 percent in 1998.

IDRA envisions schools where administrators and teachers join together to actively create a place for all students; and that all students begin to see the possibilities of their future by concentrating on their present. To make this vision a reality IDRA has worked in several ways.

Since 1986, IDRA has conducted an annual attrition study to track the number and percent of students in Texas who are lost from public school enrollment prior to graduation from high school. IDRA gained the distinction of conducting the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas when it released its initial study in October 1986 that led to the creation of the state law that requires the state education agency to include dropout data in its accountability system. IDRA has continued its attrition analyses using the same theoretical and mathematical framework to monitor the status of school dropouts in the state of Texas.

IDRA designed and implemented the Coca-Cola Valued Youth

Program, a model dropout prevention program. More than 68,000 students, parents, teachers and administrators have been impacted by the program. It is now in more than 90 schools in the continental United States, Puerto Rico and Great Britain and continues to expand. Since 1987, the program has maintained less than a 2 percent dropout rate.

IDRA has given testimony to state and federal congressional committees and special advisory commissions citing the need for systemic change to address the needs of children in at-risk situations.

A number of initiatives and policies within schools, cities and states have been undertaken. IDRA is committed to supporting efforts to reverse the trend of high dropout rates, and has identified critical characteristics of dropout prevention strategies. Strategies must:

- Impact the *triad* of school, family and community, and student.
- Be based on the understanding of the *heterogeneity* and the need for local adaptation of intervention models.
- Include informed public policy.
- Incorporate ways of increasing the *capacity* of schools, family and community, and students to produce results.
- Provide equity in resources.
- Include mechanisms that hold the schools *accountable* for results.
- Allow for *diffusion* of successful approaches and the development of action networks.

IDRA believes that *all students are valuable; none is expendable*. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is one manifestation of adults connecting with youths considered potential dropouts in a way that is a testament to students' strengths and what they can contribute to their peers, their schools, their families and their communities.



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