



Focus: College Readiness and Access

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Highlights of IDRA’s 35th Annual Texas Public School Attrition Study – Pre-COVID-19 Attrition Rate was Down to 20%

by Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

Pre-COVID-19 analyses of attrition rate data in Texas public schools show continued gradual improvement overall but persistent disparities among racial and ethnic student groups. IDRA’s latest attrition study found that 20% of the freshman class of 2016-17 left school prior to graduating in the 2019-20 school year. This year’s study is the 35th in a series of annual reports on trends in dropout and attrition rates in Texas public schools.

IDRA conducted the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas for the 1985-86 school year. Since comprehensive statewide data on school dropouts did not exist, IDRA developed an attrition methodology that has since become a standard method used by education researchers.

IDRA continues to conduct attrition analyses each year to assess schools’ abilities to hold on to their students until they graduate. Attrition rates are an indicator of a school’s holding power, or ability to keep students enrolled in school and learning until they graduate. In simplest terms, attrition is defined as shrinkage in size or number. Therefore, an attrition rate is the percent change in grade level enrollment between a base year and an end year.

The 2019-20 statewide attrition rate of 20% is 13 percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33% found in IDRA’s landmark 1985-86 study and one percentage point lower than last year.

The overall high school attrition rate in Texas has ranged from 20% to 25% over the past eight years.

Across racial and ethnic groups, attrition rates are lower than they were over three decades ago when IDRA conducted the first attrition study. In this year’s study, the attrition rate of each racial/ethnic group declined by one or two percentage points, except for white and Latino students whose rates stayed the same. Key findings of the latest study include the following.

- Texas public schools **fail to graduate one out of every five students**.
- Nearly **87,000 students** from the 2016-17 freshman class were lost from public high school enrollment in 2019-20.
- For the class of 2020, **Latino students and Black students were two times more likely to leave school** without graduating than white students.
- In four decades, the overall attrition rate declined from 33% in 1985-86 to 20% in 2019-20, which is a 39% improvement.
- The attrition rate gap between white students and Latino students decreased by 28% from 18 percentage points in 1985-86 to 13 percentage points in 2019-20.
- The attrition rate gap between white students and Black students increased by 57% from 7 percentage points in 1985-86 to 11 percentage points in 2019-20.

(cont. on Page 2)

School closures and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may have serious implications for this year’s school dropout rates.

(Highlights of IDRA's 35th Annual Texas Public School Attrition Study, continued from Page 1)

Due to the timing that data used in IDRA's attrition studies are available each year from the Texas Education Agency, this year's study does not reflect the effects of COVID-19 on schools.

School closures and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may have serious implications for school dropout rates (Klein, 2020). In a national survey of high school students during COVID-19 pandemic, the America's Promise Alliance (Margolius, et al., 2020) found that the pandemic has had a widespread negative impact on learning time, emotional health and social connection. The study found that over one-quarter of students reported that they felt disconnected to school adults (29%), classmates (23%), and their school community (22%).

According to Shawna De La Rosa in an article published in the Huffington Post (September 2020), some education experts believe that remote learning during COVID-19 places students at higher risk of dropping out of school. Factors include the loss of connection with peers and school support, reduction in educational services and extracurricular activities, and loss of other activities and events that help to motivate students.

IDRA conducts a forecast analysis of the expected year that the attrition rate will equal zero. Last year's analysis – before COVID-19 – predicted that, barring significant improvements in policy and practice, Texas will continue to have attrition rates ranging from 20% to 25% and will not reach an attrition rate of zero until the year 2036-37.

Clearly, there needs to be a new sense of urgency to prevent students from dropping out of school. A review of the research on effective dropout prevention strategies, including IDRA's own research over the past four decades, shows that certain components are vital to successful dropout prevention.

Change in Texas High School Attrition Rates

Group	1985-86 Rate	2016-17 Rate	2017-18 Rate	2018-19 Rate	2019-20 Rate	Change Since 3 Decades Ago	Change Since Last Year
All Students	33	24	22	21	20	↓	↓
Native American	45	20	21	20	22	↓	↑
Asian/Pacific Islander	33	13	13	12	11	↓	↓
Black	34	26	24	24	23	↓	↓
White	27	14	13	12	12	↓	↔
Latino	45	29	27	25	25	↓	↔

2020, Intercultural Development Research Association

- All students must be valued.
- There must be at least one educator in a student's life who is totally committed to the success of that student.
- Families must be valued as partners with the school, all committed to ensuring that equity and excellence are present in a student's life.
- Schools must change and innovate to match the characteristics of their students and embrace the strengths and contributions that students and their families bring.
- School staff, especially teachers, must be equipped with the tools needed to ensure their students' success, including the use of technology, different learning styles and mentoring programs. Effective professional development can help provide these tools.

IDRA will publish the full 2019-20 study online at www.idra.org soon. It will include methodology, historical statewide attrition rates and numbers of students lost to attrition categorized by race and ethnicity and by gender, a county-level attrition rate table, trend data by county, and historical county-level numbers of students lost to

attrition. In the 2020-21 study, IDRA plans to address the impact of COVID-19 on attrition and school dropout rates.

Resources

- De La Rosa, S. (September 21, 2020). Ed experts fear rise in dropouts as remote learning continues. *Education Dive*.
- Klein, R. (September 18, 2020). Experts Predict a Big Increase in High School Dropouts Is On the Horizon. *Huffington Post*.
- Margolius, M., Doyle Lynch, A., Puffall Jones, E. & Hynes, M. (2020). *The State of Young People During COVID-19: Findings from a Nationally Representative Survey of High School Youth*. Americas Promise Alliance.

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College Degrees Are Worth It – People with Bachelor's Degrees Have Lower Poverty Rates

by Bricio Vasquez, Ph.D.

College access is the extent to which a prospective college student can access the knowledge, resources and social capital needed to make the transition from high school to an institution of higher education (Nuñez & Kim, 2012). But some students get conflicting information about the benefits of college or their chances to succeed in college, and many get steered away from enrolling in college by well-meaning teachers, principals and others.

A college degree is all but a prerequisite for social and economic mobility in this country. The data show that investing in a college education pays off. Adults with at least a bachelor's degree earn more income throughout their lives, have stronger protections against unemployment risk, are less likely to experience poverty and are less likely to have health uninsurance.

Bachelor's Degrees Pay More

In terms of earnings alone, there are clear benefits to pursuing a bachelor's degree. In 2019, people with a bachelor's degree earned \$30,468 more than those without a high school diploma, \$24,388 more than those with a high school diploma or equivalent, and \$18,219 more than those with some college or an associate's degree.

And those with less than a bachelor's degree have a lower earnings return on education compared to those with bachelor's degrees. In 2019, people with associate's degrees earned \$12,249 more than people with no high school diploma and \$6,169 more than those with a high school diploma or equivalent.

The graph at right shows earning potentials by educational attainment as the gaps expand even more dramatically over time. People with bachelor's and graduate degrees tend to be promoted and receive larger raises over the course of their working life spans.

Bachelor's Degree Earners Have Lower Unemployment Rates

Earnings are only one protective dimension offered by those with higher education degrees. In 2020, we are experiencing the worst disease outbreak in modern history. The advent of COVID-19 has impacted the U.S. economy and brought financial uncertainty and turmoil to millions of U.S. households. Historic levels of unemployment were seen across the country, but people with college degrees fared better than those without a postsecondary education.

In April 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that individuals with some college or associate's degree, had almost twice the unemployment rates than those with bachelor's degrees. And those with some college or associate's degree did not fare much better than those with only a high school degree: 2.3 percentage points difference in unemployment rates. Having a bachelor's degree or higher provides protection against unemployment risk relative to lower degree attainment levels (see bottom graph on Page 4).

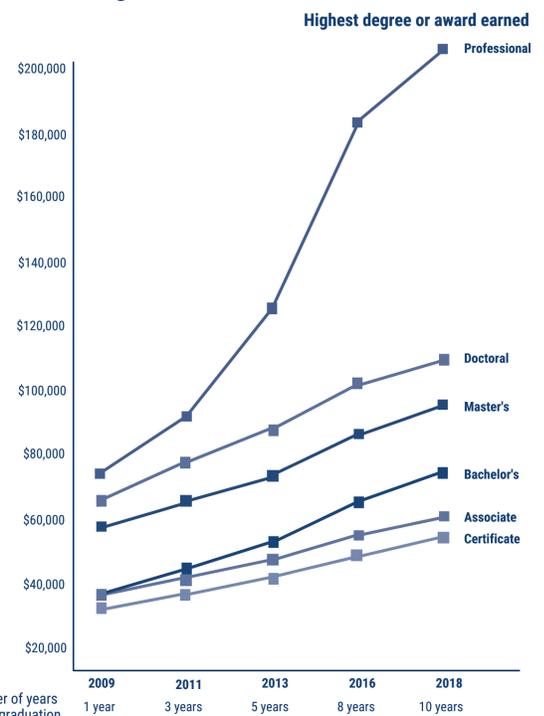
People with Bachelor's or Higher Degrees Have Lower Poverty Rates

Education also provides protection from poverty. In 2019, 10% of the U.S. adult population 25 years and older (roughly 221 million people) reported earnings at or below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Disaggregating the population in poverty illustrates a recurring pattern in the data. Adults with bachelor's degrees or higher experience the lowest levels of poverty compared to other educational attainment levels.

Of those adults who reported being at or below the poverty line in 2019, 26% (cont. on Page 4)

The data show that if you are a teacher, school principal, superintendent, counselor or other school official, it is critical to encourage college enrollment and ensure all students have access to courses that prepare them for college.

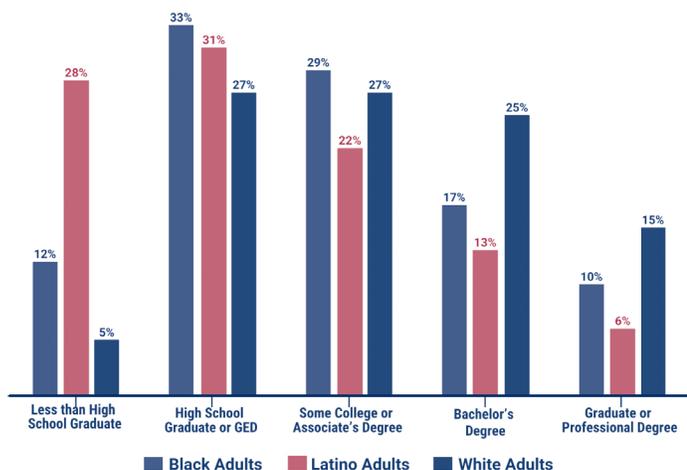
Earnings of 2008 Graduates Over 10 Years



Source: 2020 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac. (Summer 2020). Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

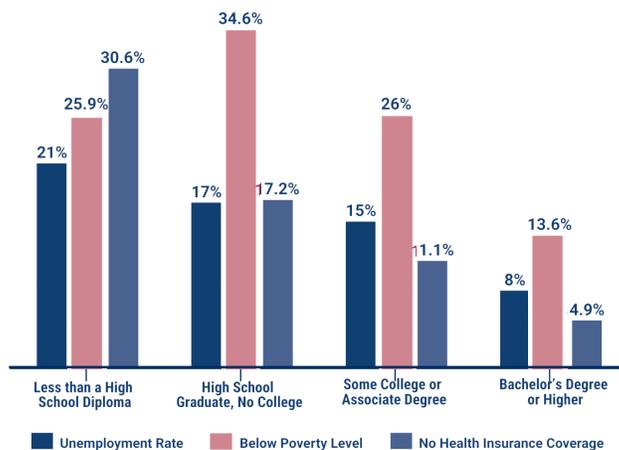
(College Degrees Are Worth It, continued from Page 3)

U.S. Adult Educational Attainment



Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (In 2019 inflation adjusted dollars). American Community Survey.

Unemployment, Poverty & Health Insurance by Educational Attainment



Data sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (April 2020). Current Population Survey. U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). American Community Survey.

have less than a high school diploma, 35% have a high school degree or equivalent, 26% have some college or associate's degree, and 14% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Those with bachelor's degrees or higher represent the smallest group of those living in poverty.

Bachelor's Degree Earners are More Likely to Have Health Insurance

The final outcome examined in this article is the rate of health insurance coverage, which is critical to economic security (among other obvious benefits). Again, those adults who have a bachelor's degree or higher have the lowest rates of non-insurance coverage compared to other education levels. Adults with some college or associate's degrees have twice the rates of no insurance coverage than those with at least a bachelor's degree or higher.

So, What Does This Mean for Educational Practice?

The message is clear: College access is important, and college completion continues to be a powerful driver of social mobility. The difference between education levels are not negligible; in some cases, the differences are orders of magnitude better for those holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

The data show that if you are a teacher, school principal, superintendent, counselor or policymaker, it is critical to encourage college enrollment and ensure all students have access to courses that prepare them for college. Two-year

associate's degrees have value, but there is far more value for students to earn a bachelor's degree. While an associate's degree yields higher earning potential than a high school diploma or not completing high school at all, it does not have the same protective effects from unemployment or career growth as a bachelor's degree.

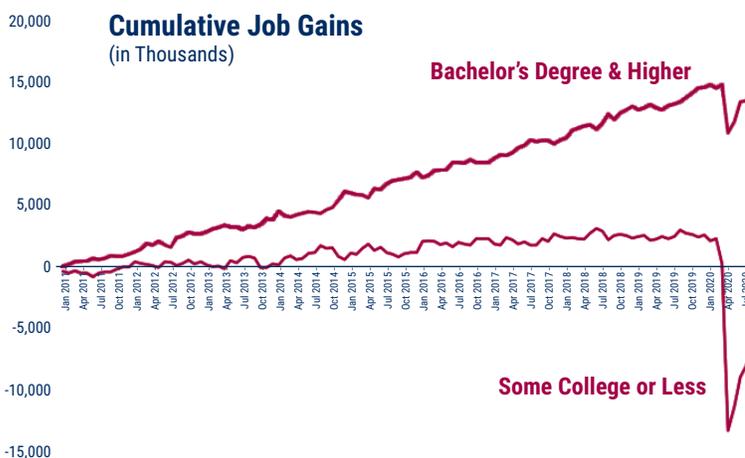
Since community colleges and two-year degree programs are an access point for many minoritized youth, the emphasis should be on strengthening these institutions to provide more streamlined pathways to bachelor's degrees. Obtaining a college education is more important now than it ever has been.

Resources

- Núñez, A., & Kim, D. (2012). Building a Multicontextual Model of Latino College Enrollment: Student, School, and State-Level Effects. *The Review of Higher Education*, 35(2), 237-263.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (April 2020). A-5. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 25 years and over by educational attainment, seasonally adjusted. Current Population Survey.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (In 2019 inflation adjusted dollars); Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Educational Attainment; Health Insurance Coverage Status and Type by Age by Educational Attainment. American Community Survey.

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Since 2010, Job Gains Have Not Been Evenly Distributed



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Avalon Advisors, October 2020

How the IDRA EAC-South Helps School Districts Increase Access to Advanced Courses for Students of Color

by Paula Johnson, Ph.D.

Many long-established testing procedures and selection practices limit equitable access to high level courses and programs for students of color. Enrollment of Black students and Latino students in specialized instructional programs, such as gifted and talented, advanced placement and dual credit, is disproportionately lower than other students. According to the College Board, Black students are the most underrepresented racial group in AP classrooms. And based on its AP Potential data, only three of every 10 qualified Black students take an AP course (Blanchard, 2020).

Oftentimes, disparities are due to structural barriers. For example, among high schools with the highest percentages of Black and Latino students, one in four do not even offer Algebra 2, and one in three do not offer chemistry (Frost & Worthen, 2015). And other types of barriers can be harder to see.

The IDRA EAC-South helps school districts identify and address barriers to higher level courses and advanced programs. We examine key indicators, such as:

- Policies and entrance procedures that may be subjective;
- Instructional supports and academic development for students;
- Strategies, coaching and professional development for teachers; and
- Family engagement for awareness of available academic program opportunities.

The IDRA EAC-South is one of four federally-funded centers that provide technical assistance and training at the request of school districts to build capacity of local educators to ensure a more equitable learning environment for all students. Working in collaboration with several districts across the U.S. South, we assist leaders in making connections between educational policy and instructional practice that prevent entrance into advanced courses and programs for students of color.

For example, school district partners in Alabama and Florida collected, tracked and analyzed data on access, recruitment and enrollment in gifted and higher-level programs and courses. District policymakers then examined data trends with a critical review of practices and policies focusing on racial disparities.

The questions below facilitate discussions and aid in conducting root cause analyses of disparities in student enrollment in specialized programs identified in the data.

1. How does the district assure that the process for identifying and testing students is equitable?
2. What second-chance opportunities are the district providing to identify and enroll underrepresented students?
3. What gateway programs and acceleration courses are available to prepare students of color and other underrepresented groups?
4. How are teachers building instructional rigor to support the diverse learning needs of students?
5. What engagement approaches are teachers using to counter challenges for underrepresented students?
6. How do teachers incorporate differentiated instruction to support the social-emotional learning needs of underserved students?

The IDRA EAC-South also is working with instructional leaders in Florida and Virginia to increase their capacity to ensure equitable access to college and career readiness academic programs and to advise students and their parents in course selection. By conducting

(cont. on Page 7)

Achievement gaps in this country have just as much, if not more, to do with policies, decisions and practices designed and implemented by adults as they do with students' academic abilities.



IDRA EAC-South

Helping school districts protect students' civil rights in public schools

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Meaningful Strategies for Making STEM Accessible

by Stephanie García, Ph.D., and Asmaa Mansour

STEM is the foundation of innovation and discovery. It balances the technical with the creative to transform how we live and imagine our future.

But when it comes to providing access to STEM education, we still have a problem. Many inequities exist, including the underrepresentation of women and people of color in STEM pathways. According to the National Science Foundation (2017), there is a severe underrepresentation of students of color graduating with science and engineering degrees. Women earned only 22% of bachelor's degrees in engineering and only 25% of bachelor's degrees in mathematics and computer sciences in 2017.

These gaps translate to substantial underrepresentation in STEM careers. The National Science and Technology Council reports that, while making up half the population, women comprise less than 30% of the STEM workforce (Vought, 2018). Labor projections indicate that Texas, for example, will have the second-highest proportion of the nation's future STEM job opportunities (TEA, 2020). But the state's Class of 2018 only had 27% STEM graduates.

Many STEM initiatives have become a priority across the nation, such as more STEM programs, federal investments to support STEM education, and support from local and national businesses and professional societies (Vought, 2018).

Inclusion in STEM is a frequent topic of discussion and remedy offered among educators and stakeholders in countries across the world. It is important to understand, however, that *inclusion* alone will not increase STEM equity and access. Increasing inclusivity is often a surface-level response resulting in the “essence of equity” without any true transformation or liberation. It can become a tokenistic approach that is performative and uses women and people of color as props for diversity and equity.

Making STEM truly accessible requires dismantling structures that perpetuate inequities and traumatize and “other” women and people of color. Major shifts can occur in K-12 and postsecondary classrooms, including transforming leadership and pedagogical practices.

See STEM's Cultural Context

One recommendation is to bring “minoritized students of color's political struggles and historical oppression to the present moment inside the classroom” (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2020). This is easy to do because, historically speaking, STEM education has been built on research and methodologies that exploited its “subjects” who often were from marginalized communities. There are many opportunities to study STEM in its “socio-cultural, socio-historical and socio-political contexts” (Moore-Mensah, 2020).

Application Strategy 1: Introduce curricula that incorporate ethnic studies into the STEM areas. A great resource to consider using is “Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by Numbers” (Gutstein & Peterson, 2013). It provides real-world math lessons for multiple grade levels and topics that help “students analyze social problems as they gain essential academic skills.” Try the lesson entitled, “Chicanos Have Math in their Blood” and build in time to discuss the struggles Chicanx communities face and the contributions they have made to the math field.

Honor STEM Belonging

It is important to assert that our female and students of color have a rightful presence and legitimate belonging in STEM fields. Students of color should understand that they do not need to “reconfigure themselves toward the dominate white, patriarchal, English-speaking culture” traditionally found in STEM education (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2020).

(cont. on Page 7)

STEM is often reserved for students with inherent privileges, thus creating monumental barriers for women and students of color.

(Meaningful Strategies for Making STEM Accessible, continued from Page 6)

We can move toward this “rightful presence” in STEM by engaging students in critical dialogue, helping students see through “invisible” injustices, disrupting knowledge and power hierarchies and relations, and positioning students as experts and critics on what they are learning (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2020).

Application Strategy 2: Acknowledge, research, and discuss the stories and contributions from women and people of color in STEM as it relates to the topic of study. Believe it or not, storytelling is effective in every discipline, especially STEM. Students value hearing about the historical and current “hidden figures” who are innovators and trailblazers in the field. Take time to research outside of the traditional canon of scientists and mathematicians so all students can see themselves in the field and relate to their experiences. (Also see IDRA’s infographic: <https://idra.news/IIWomenScientists>.)

Build on Student Experience

STEM educators may need to develop an understanding of their students’ experiences with oppression and see the impact it has on their learning. There are many ways educators can connect STEM content, for example, to students’ home knowledge, identity and the experiences they bring to the classroom (Moore-Mensah, 2020).

Application Strategy 3: Sustain positive relationships with your students by building in opportunities to learn from them. Students’ cultural identities are part of their STEM identities, so continue to foster both in a safe and welcoming space. Consider having students demonstrate their understanding in a way that makes the most sense for them (for example, present in their

Resources & Tools

Learn about the **IDRA Texas Chief Science Officer program** that builds student leadership skills to advocate for STEM among peers.
<https://www.idra.org/texas-chief-science-officers-program>

Get **“Rethinking Mathematics – Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers”** that provides teaching ideas, lesson plans, and reflections by practitioners and math educators.
<https://rethinkingschools.org/books/rethinking-mathematics-second-edition>

See **“Closing the STEM Gap”** by AAUW for strategies and to download STEMpacks with complete lesson guides and materials for hands-on learning.
<https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/the-stem-gap>

Get IDRA’s **“Science Instructional Strategies for English Learners ~ A Guide for Elementary and Secondary Grades”** with research-based strategies and a matrix of techniques for implementation.
<https://idra.news/ELScienceStrategies>

first language or create multi-modal formative assessments).

STEM is often reserved for students with inherent privileges, thus creating monumental barriers for women and students of color. In efforts to change the course of STEM access, we must hold high expectations for all students and support them in getting there (Moore-Mensah, 2020). We must continue to assess behaviors, ideologies and policies that oppress students in STEM spaces and classrooms. We must also consider what sustainable and systematic core changes need to occur to truly change the trajectory of STEM access, broaden participation and increase impact for all students.

Resources

- Calabrese Barton, A., & Tan, E. (2020). Beyond Equity as Inclusion: A Framework of “Rightful Presence” for Guiding Justice-oriented Studies in Teaching and Learning. *Educational Researcher*.
- Moore-Mensah, F. (2020). “A need for anti-racist/abolitionist science teaching,” presentation.
- NSF. (2017). Figure 2-8: Demographic Attributes of S&E Degree Recipients, Higher Education in Science and

- Engineering. National Science Foundation.
- Gutstein, E., & Peterson, B. (2013). *Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers*. Milwaukee, Wisc.: Rethinking Schools.
- TEA. (2020) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education (STEM), website. Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency.
- Vought, R.T. (2018). *Charting a Course for Success: America’s Strategy for STEM Education*. Committee on STEM Education, National Science and Technology Council.

Stephanie Garcia, Ph.D., is IDRA’s STEM and gender equity education specialist and directs the IDRA Texas Chief Science Officers program. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at stephanie.garcia@idra.org. Asmaa Mansour served as an educational practice intern with IDRA in the summer of 2020.

(How the IDRA EAC-South Helps School Districts, continued from Page 5)

a comprehensive educational opportunity assessment of each of its high schools, middle schools and elementary schools, districts can determine if they are providing all students, particularly Black and Latino students, with a rigorous education to prepare them for college and careers.

The districts are using the findings to inform development of action plans to expand educational opportunities for underrepresented students, promote a college and career culture, and increase family engagement at all grade levels. They will conduct surveys to measure the level of effective-

ness of home-school communication practices related to course options and college and career pathways.

Achievement gaps in this country have just as much, if not more, to do with policies, decisions and practices designed and implemented by adults as they do with students’ academic abilities. It is critical to conduct ongoing assessment of these influencing factors when reviewing the performance of students of color in education programs. All students deserve the opportunity to enroll and excel in rigorous and challenging coursework.

For more information on technical assistance services, see www.idraeacsouth.org.

Resources

- Blanchard, M.A. (2020). *Choosing the Gap: Understanding the Advanced Placement Enrollment Choices of Black Students*. The George Washington University.
- Frost, D., & Worthen, M. (November 2015). *Course Access: Providing Equitable Access to High-Quality Learning Opportunities*. International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL).

Paula N. Johnson, Ph.D., directs the IDRA EAC-South. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at paula.johnson@idra.org.

Focus: College Readiness and Access

IDRA Names Four New Fellows

The IDRA Education Policy Fellows Program is generously supported by Trellis Foundation and in partnership with the John Gardner Public Service Fellowship, facilitated by Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service.

Dr. Altheria Caldera

Dr. Altheria Caldera is a scholar, writer and equity activist whose other identities include dog-lover, nature-enthusiast and college football fan. The Alabama native began her professional career as a middle school English teacher. Altheria earned her Ph.D. in education studies from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, she will identify and pursue advocacy opportunities to expand access to and ensure success in postsecondary education spaces, particularly for students of color.



Christina Muñoz

Christina Muñoz is a second-generation, Latina master's student studying quantitative methods in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, she will identify and pursue advocacy opportunities that address both the new and the existing systemic needs that schools, students and families have due to COVID-19.



Thomas Marshall III

Thomas Marshall III is a native of Columbia, South Carolina and received a B.A. in English with a minor in youth development studies from Clemson University. His research interests include the recruitment and retention rate of Black males at predominantly white institutions. He is a student in the master of education (higher education) program at the University of Houston. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, he will execute a strong digital communications and community engagement advocacy program for the Texas legislative session.



Dr. Nino Rodríguez

Dr. Nino Rodríguez received his Ph.D. in education policy, organization and leadership from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As a scholar-practitioner, Nino seeks to use his knowledge, skills and abilities to liberate Black males of maladaptive notions of what it means to be a Black man in the United States. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, Nino will identify and pursue advocacy opportunities that address the harms of school discipline and policing, which disproportionately impact Black students, students with disabilities and LGBTQ students in Texas.

