

The Status of School Finance Equity in Texas

by **Albert Cortez, Ph.D.**

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schools, and businesses were seeing the results of better-prepared graduates.

Lawsuit Opens the Door to Weaken Funding Equity

The basic structure remained largely unchanged until 2006 after a group of property wealthy districts in 2004 challenged the maintenance and operations tax rate limits (a maximum of \$150 per 100 of property value). To garner support for the litigation, the plaintiffs recruited poor and average wealth school systems in a separate but related challenge charging that the state of Texas did not provide school systems sufficient funding to meet the obligations imposed on them by the state.

In this *West Orange-Cove* case, the Texas Supreme Court ruled in 2005 that the state of Texas did indeed provide funding for an adequate education since almost all systems managed to satisfy the state's accreditation requirements (overlooking the fact that in Texas, if 50 percent of students in a grade level fail one or more of the state's assessments, a district can still be considered accredited).

Conversely, the court ruled that
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In January of 1995, the Texas Supreme Court issued its ruling in the last of the Edgewood school finance equity cases, also known as *Edgewood IV*. Following that court judgment, the state of Texas adopted what became one of the more equitable school funding systems in the country.

The keys for creating that more equitable system included: providing (most) school systems funding on the basis of their taxable property wealth, providing funding based on the average attendance of the number of pupils served, adjusting district allocations on the basis of size and local economic factors, providing some supplemental funding to help cover additional costs of educating students with special needs, and finally collecting excess revenue generated by the state's wealthiest school systems through a process known as recapture.

As a result, Texas was realizing the many benefits from its commitment to equalizing education funding for all of its children. Student achievement improved, taxpayers were more equally sharing the cost of paying for public



once the state had met its minimum obligations to provide for a suitable education, local school systems could be allowed to enrich their programs to some level approved by the state. In other words, a few school districts could have dramatically more money than most others.

Understanding the threat posed by unequalized enrichment (where the amount of money generated by a school district is not equalized by state equalization funding), the court noted that, while some enrichment was permitted, it could not constitute so much of local overall funding that it violated the equal return for equal tax effort it had called for in its original *Edgewood* decision.

New Unequalized Enrichment

The one major structural change to the newest system involved creation of an *unequalized enrichment* portion in the new funding plan. Meeting in special session in 2006, the Texas state legislature created a new funding tier that

Because of great differences in local property wealth among Texas school systems, the amount of extra money that the wealthiest group of districts can generate can amount to hundreds of dollars more per student.

allows school systems to supplement or “enrich” the (Foundation) program beyond the basic level required by the state. Preliminary analyses revealed that lack of any state equalization funding of this new tier would make the system potentially nearly as inequitable as the plan that was declared unconstitutional in 1989. Legislative proponents of low and average wealth systems successfully fought for some state equalization funding of this new enrichment tier.

Specifically, the state created a formula that assures that for every penny of local enrichment tax effort up to 6 cents, every district is guaranteed to have an amount equal to the revenue generated by the Austin school system, which was \$41.00 in 2006-07 and \$46.94 in 2007-08.

Because of the high level of return for local tax effort, these first 6 cents in the enrichment tier are sometimes referred to as “golden pennies.”

In this portion of the Texas system, if the school district tax effort yields less than the guaranteed amount, the state provides additional state funding to make up the difference. For example, if a district’s regular yield from its own property tax base only produces \$20 per penny of tax effort, the state provides that district an additional \$26.94 (in 2007-08) in state funding to bring it up to the Tier IIA guaranteed level of \$46.94.

If all districts were assured equal return for the same tax effort, the system would be considered fully equalized. The concept of *unequalized enrichment*

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Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs in Texas

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D., and
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In 1999, IDRA published its first assessment of disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) in Texas. This article provides an updated assessment of these operations in Texas. A review of available data, related reports compiled by other organizations and discussions with others who have monitored these programs indicates that, while there have been some slight improvements in credentialing and accountability measures, major policy reforms are still needed. An expanded examination of Texas DAEPs will be available in a forthcoming policy report to be released by IDRA.

The Dawning of the DAEP

DAEPs in Texas were created in 1995 to deal with students who had violated the state criminal code. Although originally intended for students with serious violations, such as bringing drugs or firearms to school, DAEPs soon became an option for schools to systematically rid themselves of students who were considered “troublemakers.”

This was bolstered by teacher groups concerned with isolated incidences where teachers were injured or threatened by individual students,

Based on our review of the latest data on Texas DAEPs, IDRA has concluded that DAEP referrals have continued to increase over time, raising serious questions about their effectiveness in improving student discipline.

and others concerned with expulsion of students into unsupervised settings in their communities. These diverse interests successfully lobbied the Texas Legislature to create disciplinary alternative educational settings to deal with “these” students until they were deemed “ready” to return to the traditional campuses.

To facilitate adoption of these new discipline-based centers, proponents of DAEPs originally focused the policy in a way that limited DAEP referrals to the *most serious student offenders* – specifically those students who committed an offense specified in the Texas criminal code. These offenses included drug-related activities, gun violations and assault – all violations that had been punishable by referral to the Texas juvenile justice system. Due to cost factors, not all areas of the state had access to JJAEP facilities, and the new policies were presented as a means for creating options that would remove

serious offenders from all regular school settings, including many smaller or rural communities where no JJAEP facilities existed.

Initially, some administrative groups opposed the requirement that all school districts create a separate discipline-focused setting, in part out of concerns about related facilities costs and the challenge of creating one more separate operation that would require their oversight.

Opposition to the segregation of students with serious discipline problems wilted in the face of overwhelming support from major teacher groups who saw the issue as one of restoring some power to the classroom teacher – seen as having eroded with the adoption of state-mandated curriculum, teacher assessments and related issues.

In the eventual compromise, DAEPs were required to be established. But the state did not require removal of students to separate campuses, leaving physical location of the DAEP to local school officials.

In 1997, however, the DAEP policy was modified to extend the basis for which individual students could be referred to a DAEP. In that policy change, local school systems were allowed to refer students on the basis of violations of *local* codes of conduct that spelled out unacceptable behavior in Texas schools.

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In their early stages, the programs were becoming the concern of many student advocates who viewed the creation of DAEPs as a mechanism for excluding students from regular school settings, while downplaying a review of discipline management and related school-based factors impacting student behavior.

In 1999, IDRA published the first comprehensive analysis of DAEP operations in Texas (Cortez and Robledo Montecel, 1999). In that initial study, IDRA reported that DAEPs were growing rapidly, curriculum requirements were not comparable to those applicable to students on regular school campuses, minority and special education students were over-represented, there was little coordination and communication between sending schools and DAEPs, and these alternative settings were subjected to a watered down evaluation process that differed from that applied to regular school operations.

DAEPs Today

More than a decade after their creation, IDRA conducted a subsequent review of DAEPs. To our disappointment, we found that with a few exceptions the numbers of students referred to DAEPs had grown

93 percent. Concerns raised in IDRA’s 1999 review have remained largely unaddressed.

Based on our review of the latest data on Texas DAEPs, IDRA has concluded that DAEP referrals have continued to increase over time, raising serious questions about their effectiveness in improving student discipline. If one of the purposes of alternative education referral was to discourage students from violating school rules, one would expect a gradual decrease in DAEP referrals.

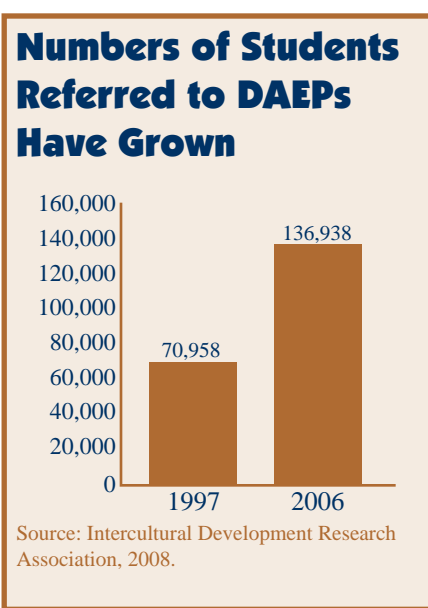
The data indicate that the opposite is true. Almost all of the disciplinary alternative education efforts conducted to date have reflected little, if any, improvements. In 1997, the first year in which data on DAEP referrals were collected, the Texas Education Agency reported that 70,958 students had been referred to a DAEP. Over time, the number of students assigned to DAEPs increased steadily. By 2006, the number of students assigned to DAEPs had increased to 136,938 students, a 93 percent increase in a 10-year span.

In addition, student referrals to Texas DAEPs vary by race, gender, age, family economic status and special education placement, with minority and special education students notably over-represented in the numbers of students referred. African Americans are over-represented in the early elementary years. Hispanic students are over-represented in the secondary school years.

The Texas Appleseed Project recently completed its own comprehensive study of Texas DAEPs and arrives at conclusions that closely align with IDRA’s findings (2007).

IDRA will soon release a full report on the status of DAEPs in Texas with recommendations to reduce the over-utilization of these dysfunctional operations.

Despite early evidence that DAEP sites required expanded local and state monitoring, improved academic



support, more effective counseling to facilitate transitions to the regular campus, and processes to address over-representation of sub-groups of minority, low-income and special education students, little has changed in most DAEP operations, other than notable increases in the number of students being referred.

Texas can do better than this. It is possible to deal with violence and crime in our schools while at the same time ensuring equity and excellence in education for all students.

Resources

Cortez, A., and M. Robledo Montecel. *Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs in Texas – What Is Known; What Is Needed* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1999).

Harvard Civil Rights Project. *Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2000).

Silichenco, O. "State Policies Related to Alternative Education," *ESC StateNotes* [Online] (Denver, Co.: Education Commission of the States, November 2005).

Texas Education Agency. *2005 Comprehensive Biennial Report on Texas Public Schools* (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, 2006).

Texas Appleseed. *Texas School Discipline Policies: A Statistical Overview* (Austin, Texas: Texas Appleseed, 2007). <http://www.texasappleseed.org>.

Get more info online at IDRA Newsletter Plus

IDRA study released this month

Related studies by other organizations

See Page 8 for details

School Holding Power – Policy Principles

In early April, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings stated that she would be proposing rules to “ensure that all states use the same formula to calculate how many students graduate from high school on time.” At the same time, while announcing a plan to hold 100 dropout prevention summits nationwide, Colin Powell, former U.S. secretary of state, called the country’s low graduation rates “a national catastrophe.”

In fact, every year, we are losing more than 1.2 million young people from U.S. schools prior to their graduation. One student is lost from public school enrollment every two minutes. The dropout crisis persists at tremendous cost to individual students, families, communities and the nation.

IDRA uses a set of principles to guide policy and community discussions. Given the renewed debate at the national level, we again have listed these principles below to help in the move from a low and archaic expectation that only some of our country’s students can successfully graduate from high school to a guarantee that all of our students will graduate.

Uncompromising Expectations for Graduating All Students

Principle 1: All students enrolled in U.S. schools should be expected, and must be supported, to graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma in four years.

Principle 2: At the federal level, we must create a credible system to accurately account for the educational status of every pupil who enters the ninth grade in any secondary school, including formal and verifiable student re-enrollments and transfers.

Principle 3: Using student-level longitudinal data, the United States should implement a transparent and simple methodology to count and report on high school graduates.

Principle 4: The creation of high school graduation rate data should not replace calculation and reporting of high school dropout rates that inform and guide prevention and recovery efforts.

Principle 5: Alternative education settings must be subject to the same graduation standards as all other schools.

Principle 6: In addition to using four-year graduation rates, states, school districts and schools should report annual and longitudinal dropout rates; number and percent of students who graduate in five or six years; number of in-grade retentions; number of students receiving

GEDs; and number of students meeting all graduation requirements but not receiving a regular high school diploma because of failure to pass a state-level high-stakes exam.

Principle 7: High school graduation and dropout data should be reported at the federal, state, district and school levels and should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socio-economic and English language learner status.

Principle 8: Exemptions from graduation and dropout counting must be strictly limited and must conform to IDEA provisions.

Principle 9: Reporting should be readily available and easily accessible to the public. Reporting must directly inform communities and parents about status of the issue and progress being made to address it.

Principle 10: State and local progress requirements should be proportional to the graduation rate gap to be closed.

Principle 11: State efforts to address high school graduation rates should recognize systemic issues that affect student graduation, including teaching quality, curriculum quality and access, student engagement, and parent and community engagement.

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Principle 12: Ongoing evaluation of progress must be an integral part of any effort at the federal, state and local levels to address graduation goals.

Principle 13: In ensuring that all students graduate, schools should incorporate pedagogical changes that enable them to better adapt to the needs and strengths of their students.

Principle 14: No single criterion (e.g., high-stakes testing) should be used to make high school graduation decisions for any individual student.

Principle 15: The federal level and states must acknowledge shared accountability for the graduation of all students by investing the personnel and equitable fiscal

resources needed to help schools meet federally-established graduation targets.

Principle 16: All efforts to increase graduation rates must be based on valuing families, educators, communities and students; no response should promote a “deficit model” or blame.

Principle 17: It is vital to recognize that this issue affects students of all races and ethnicities (for example, the largest numbers of dropouts in many states are White students).

Principle 18: Since low graduation rates disproportionately impact racial and ethnic minority students, accelerated efforts to address the issue in these communities is essential.

From “Dropping Out” to “Holding On” Seven Lessons from Texas

Having dealt with this issue of school holding power so closely for so many years, IDRA first offered the following seven lessons from Texas in 2004. Given that the national crisis of students dropping out of school is once again getting national attention, we present these lessons in the hope that many more will take up the call to action.

Lesson One

Losing children from our school systems (“dropouts”) is a persistent, unacknowledged problem.

Lesson Two

Fraud is a red herring – distracting us from the real problem that is before us. Undercounting is the result of institutional intransigence, not massive fraud.

Lesson Three

Accountability systems did not create dropouts.

Lesson Four

High-stakes testing and accountability systems must be uncoupled.

Lesson Five

We cannot afford to decide that some kids do not count.

Lesson Six

Dropout data is not a legitimate reason to give up on public education.

Lesson Seven

It is time to move from dropping out to holding on.



To see the full article that outlines these lessons, visit www.idra.org.



HIPPY USA[®]
TEXAS ★ ★ ★
 Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters



HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) is an internationally-recognized family-based literacy program whose mission is to empower parents to be the primary educators of their 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children.

The Texas HIPPY program integrates the HIPPY program model of parent involvement and school readiness with the AmeriCorps model of community service and civic involvement.

HIPPY is a three-year (90-week) parent involvement and school readiness program in which learning and play go hand-in-hand. Using a structured curriculum, parents encourage their children to recognize shapes and colors, tell stories, follow directions, solve logical problems and acquire other school readiness skills.

HIPPY helps parents empower themselves as their children's first teachers by giving them the tools, skills and confidence they need to work with their children in the home. The program is designed to bring families, organizations and communities together and remove any barriers to participation that may include limited financial resources or lack of education.

The Texas IDRA PIRC is proud to be working with HIPPY in Texas to support families and their children's learning.

Importance of Early Childhood Education

“Children begin learning at birth. Science tells us that 80 percent of brain development happens when a child is less than 3 years old and that 90 percent of brain development happens before a child turns 5. Waiting for a child to turn 4 years old and then offering a part-time, part-year initiative is a day late and a dollar short.”

– National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies

All children, regardless of income, ethnicity or parent education, need effective early learning experiences.

High quality early childhood education programs have long-term, significant positive impacts for children: Higher monthly earnings, levels of school and home ownership as well as fewer arrests and social services needed.

<http://www.unt.edu/hippy>

Key Terms Related to the Spirit of Title I

Parent involvement is the meaningful, respectful engagement of families as partners for the academic success of all children.

A parent leader in education is one who leaves no parent behind; one who is an ally with parents, educators and the broader community to help every child succeed; one who has a following and is focused on creating public schools that work for all children; one who recognizes, creates and uses social capital effectively for school reform.

Social capital involves the connections or networks among individuals and groups and the norms that generate reciprocity and trustworthiness, which, taken all together, make it easier to coordinate and cooperate for mutual benefit.

What Participating Parents Say about HIPPY...

“The program has helped me have more patience with my children. I have also learned to talk to my children more so they can learn better.”

– Yolanda C., Dallas, Texas

“Thanks to this program, my son and I have a very good relationship... My son benefited a lot academically too. He is a grade level ahead in school thanks to the program and to the commitment I have made to work with him one-on-one.”

– Sylvia M., Grand Prairie, Texas

“HIPPY helps me to understand my child's needs. Thank you HIPPY for giving me the opportunity to be my child's first teacher. I now understand educational terminology that I never would have if it hadn't been for HIPPY.”

– Diana A., Irving, Texas

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Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In February, IDRA worked with **5,940** teachers, administrators, parents and higher education personnel through **59** training and technical assistance **97** activities and program sites in **13** states plus Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Meeting Academic and Language Needs of English Language Learners
- ◆ Successful Interviews: Preparing Teacher Candidates to Apply for Employment in High-Need School Districts
- ◆ Team Building and Leadership

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ Lake Hamilton School District, Arkansas
- ◆ Castroville Even Start, Texas
- ◆ Grand Prairie Independent School District, Texas
- ◆ Northwest Vista College, Texas

Activity Snapshot

After receiving a number of sexual harassment complaints, administrators in a Louisiana school district requested staff training from the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity (SCCE) on the requirements of the law regarding sexual harassment in schools. The SCCE is the equity assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve schools in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. IDRA provided training in sexual harassment prevention to 120 principals and central office staff. As a result, administrators in the district developed campus level plans to ensure that students are protected from discrimination and adult-student sexual harassment. The plans were implemented districtwide to prevent sexual harassment.

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 210-444-1710.

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in a previous funding plan was one of the major flaws in the system that caused it to be declared unconstitutional because it did not ensure that all school districts got the same amount of funding for the same tax effort.

In an unequalized enrichment scheme, some school districts are allowed to generate and keep significantly more revenue than other systems. Thus, if a school district yields more than the amount guaranteed by the state for those 6 cents of enrichment, that district gets to keep all of that extra revenue.

Because of great differences in local property wealth among Texas school systems, the amount of extra money that the wealthiest group of districts can generate can amount to hundreds of dollars more per student. It is this portion of the latest Texas public school funding system that contributes greatly to the school funding inequality that has re-surfaced in the state over the last few years.

To date, Texas lawmakers have limited that inequality to the 6 cents. But this disparity could grow if more unequalized enrichment is approved by a future amendment to current law.

School districts have very different views of systemic inequality. Those school districts that are super-wealthy claim that the 6 cents of local tax effort where they are allowed to keep all the revenue it generates is needed to fund their local programs. Some even argue it is not enough to meet all of their needs (whom others may see as wants, as in new athletic equipment or new swimming pools).

Property poor and average wealth school systems on the other hand have to contend with the impact of unequal funding and the resulting unequal competition for teachers, administrators and support staff and other unequal local resources to support students in academics and

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Tools for

Enlightened Public Policy for Equity and Excellence in Education

Enlightened public policy provides both the appropriate standards and the resources schools need to serve all children. This includes ensuring quality teaching and learning that benefits all children as well as the equitable resources that will make this a reality. IDRA promotes not only policymaking that reflects sound, accurate information about schooling, but also policymaking that reflects the voice and will of parents, community members, and educators as leaders in opening paths for all students' futures.

A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

Developing leaders – IDRA's South Central Collaborative for Equity (SCCE) played a key role in the annual conference of the Texas Association of Black School Educators. The SCCE participated in an administrators' institute in collaboration with the McNeil Foundation and conducted an administrator seminar on school reform using the Six Goals of Education Equity, which were developed by IDRA. The conference annually draws more than 400 predominantly African American superintendents and central office and campus-level administrators from across the state to address policy, practice and research as it impacts the performance of African American students in public schools.

Conducting research – IDRA was contracted by a Texas school district to conduct a study to look at the three following dimensions of its high school success as they pertain to English language learners: effective leadership, quality teaching and other student support. This study measured the effectiveness of programs, instructional accommodations and regulatory compliance. IDRA conducted mock-audits of English language learner-related documentation at all levels. The study also reviewed the quality and quantity of documented planning, program implementation, support and leadership at the high school. Upon completion of the study, IDRA presented recommendations to the district.

Informing policy – IDRA has been re-convening bilingual education advocates to develop coordinated strategies to improve instruction for limited-English-proficient students in Texas. Policy priorities include: (1) increasing state funding for bilingual education; (2) strengthening existing requirements related to on-site monitoring; (3) strengthening program requirements for serving LEP students enrolled at the high school level; and (4) coordinating

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Action

efforts to ensure that students who are in the process of learning English have priority in future funding increases, before efforts to expand dual language programs are pursued.

Engaging communities – IDRA recently held its Brown and Mendez Blueprint Dialogues for Action in Oklahoma to foster joint African American and Latino leadership in fulfilling the promise of the *Mendez* and *Brown* rulings for minority students. This dialogue gave the Oklahoma community an opportunity to address educational achievement of Latino and African American learners in public schools by challenging cross-race, cross-sector stakeholders to discuss and plan joint action around what it would take to fulfill the promises of *Brown* and *Mendez* for students. Participants across Oklahoma will likely become more involved in educational changes that benefit African American and Latino students as a result of their participation and use of capacity-building products and technologies.

What You Can Do

Get informed. The Council of Chief State School Officers created a report, *Strengthening Teacher Quality in High-Need Schools: Policy and Practice*, designed for state policymakers, teachers, teacher mentors, professors and deans at teacher preparation programs, and other stakeholders. The report focuses on four challenges presented to teachers in high-need settings: (1) recognizing and enhancing teacher effectiveness; (2) strengthening mathematics and science teacher quality; (3) innovations to provide specialized knowledge and skills needed to teach diverse learners; and (4) the role of leadership on teacher attrition in high-need schools. It also provides state and district examples for addressing these challenges and offers suggestions on state policies that can remove obstacles and facilitate solutions. To access the free report, visit <http://www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=354>.

Get involved. Be willing to reach out to others in your community for support across racial and ethnic communities to build groups and coalitions to secure civil rights for all children.

Get results. Encourage policymakers to support appropriate measures to support fair funding at the state and local levels. The New America Foundation has developed the Federal Education Budget Project, an online database that contains the latest data on federal education financing. To see how your state and/or school district rates in terms of per-pupil spending, student poverty, achievement, school finance equity and more, visit http://www.newamerica.net/programs/education_policy/federal_education_budget_project#.

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extracurricular activities.

IDRA's own analysis notes that the 6 cent supplemental tax effort allowed in the new system generates an average of \$286 extra per "weighted" student (WADA) in the state's poor and average wealth school systems (who have a combined WADA of \$209,751). The average unequalized enrichment available to the 100 wealthiest school systems (with a WADA of 209,000) yields an average of \$450 per pupil. This is \$171 more per WADA than poor and average wealth districts.

The 50 wealthiest districts (who have a combined WADA of 157,901) yield \$736 per WADA, and this provides those schools with an average of \$450 more per WADA than is available to most Texas schools.

The enrichment advantage of the states' 10 wealthiest school systems yields \$1,519 per WADA, an advantage of \$1,232 for their students.

Using the \$4,570 per WADA figure of the top 50 school systems, we estimate that the top 50 wealthiest systems in the state have an average advantage of \$9,000 per classroom of 20 pupils, which converts to a net of \$180,000 in a school of 400.

As a result of this erosion in equity, a few school systems in Texas now spend hundreds of dollars more per student than most school districts in the state of Texas. What one state education leader said several years ago is apparently still felt by others: "I know that all kids are equal, but the system has to take into account that some kids are more equal than others." (Cárdenas, 2005).

Across-the-Board Funding Without Adjusting for Local Property Wealth

Compounding the problems created by the unequalized enrichment portion of the system is a recent

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tendency by the state to provide all school districts with across-the-board unequalized funding that is not adjusted to take into account local property wealth (and the related ability to cover those costs with local revenues).

Over the last two sessions, the Texas legislature provided hundreds of millions of dollars in state unequalized funding for a teacher pay raise and over \$100 million in un-adjusted state aid for a new high school allotment. Continuing to allocate new state funding outside the equalized funding formulae invites new litigation.

Target Revenue Hold Harmless

A final disequalizing feature introduced into the new system was the integration of what is referred to as a school district’s *target revenue*. The target revenue figure was created to ensure that every district in the state would get as much or a bit more in state and local revenue as the amount it was receiving prior to the adoption of the 2006 reforms. The new “adjustment” has evolved into a giant *hold harmless* mechanism that overrides the cumulative impact of all the equalization features still present in the current system.

In fact, more districts receive funding on the basis of their target revenue amount than under the application of existing funding formulae. In some cases, the target revenue limits low and average wealth districts from increasing their revenue over prior year levels, further exacerbating the equity problems.

If the equalization features of the existing systems are to be effective, the state must revise funding levels in a way that decreases and eventually eliminates the need for this hold harmless, backdoor funding of Texas schools. According to data computed by the Equity Center in Austin, the

10 percent of school districts with lowest yields per penny (yet taxing at the same \$1.00 tax rate required to receive their target amounts of funding) receive \$1,527 less per WADA than school districts with the highest yield though both are taxing at the same rate (2007).

The Equity Center notes that, even if the 10 percent of lowest yield school districts adopted the maximum tax rate permitted under current law (\$1.17), they would still generate about \$925 less per pupil than the state’s highest yield school systems can generate at a tax rate of only \$1.00. Clearly that portion of Texas funding system needs some major adjustments.

What is Needed?

Any future increases in state funding must be done in manner that...

- Applies a state equalization formula that adjusts state revenue on the basis of local districts’ property wealth.
- Reduces or eliminates the use of hold harmless mechanisms that override state aid adjustments based on local property wealth per pupil.
- Reduces the amount of unequalized enrichment provided in the Tier IIA (6 cents) portion of the system.
- Provides increased funding to schools that covers the actual costs of providing specialized instruction to special education students, low-income students and students in the process of learning English.
- Allocates reliable, sustainable funding for school instructional facilities.

We cannot accept an unjust funding system. All children in Texas are our children. We all have a shared responsibility for their educational well-being. The future of our state demands it.

Resources

Cárdenas, J.A. “The Fifty Most Memorable Quotes in School Finance,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San

Antonio: Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2005). Cárdenas, J.A. *Texas School Finance Reform – An IDRA Perspective* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1997).

Cortez, A. “Equalizing Funding of Texas School Facilities – A Long-standing, Long-neglected Need,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2007).

Cortez, A. “Perspectives on the Texas Legislature’s Latest School Funding Plan *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, August 2006).

Cortez, A. “A Decision Neither Adequate nor Equitable: The Texas Supreme Court Ruling in West Orange-Cove vs. Neeley,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2006).

Equity Center. “Is the State Abandoning Their Promise of Efficient, Cost-Based Funding in Favor of ‘Snapshot Funding’ and Erratic Property Tax Relief?” *Equity Center News & Notes* (Austin, Texas: Equity Center, December 2007).

Dr. Albert Cortez is director of IDRA Policy. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Get more info online at IDRA Newsletter Plus

Articles on the current Texas system of funding education

Handouts showing the effects of the system

Easy-to-understand resources and tools for you to learn more about the issue

See Page 8 for details

DAEP – continued from Page 4
[net/pdf/School%20Discipline%20Stat%20Report.doc](http://www.idra.org/pdf/School%20Discipline%20Stat%20Report.doc)

Dr. Albert Cortez is director of IDRA Policy. Josie Danini Cortez, M.A. is a senior education associate in IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to them via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Principles for Fair Funding

All children deserve an excellent education, and excellence is impossible without equity. Our children are precious. The future of a child should not depend on that child's heritage, family income or neighborhood. The ongoing battle over school funding is still about a state at a crossroads – one road offering the possibility of excellent and equitable education of all of our state's children, the other focused on providing only minimum quality to meet minimum standards.

The Texas Supreme Court's decision in *West Orange-Cove vs. Neeley* required that the Texas legislature gather for another special session in 2006 dedicated to the reform of the existing school funding plan. Though taxes and who pays them occupied much attention, it was the funding system that the courts targeted for reform. While some

aspects of the funding system did need improvement, many Texans were deeply concerned about the oft noted promise to totally dismantle the existing public school funding system and replace it with one that would provide only an "adequate" education for our children, one that would provide minimums for some and quality schools for a few.

In its haste to say it had acted and thereby satisfied the court's mandates, the legislature created a plan that is less fair, less progressive, less equitable, and that supports mediocrity for most and excellence for a few.

To help focus on the reforms that may be included in the upcoming session, IDRA uses a set of principles to help assess any proposed school funding reform plan. We welcome their adoption and dissemination by all who agree that all children are valuable, and none is expendable.

Principle 1: Funding Equity –

Texas must maintain or increase the level of equity found in the existing funding system.

Principle 2: Equal Return for Equal Tax Effort –

Texas must specifically provide for equal return for equal tax rates, for all school districts, at all levels of the state permitted tax effort.

Principle 3: Excellent Education –

Texas must provide equitable access to excellent education (defined as equitable access to high quality curricula, teaching, support services, and facilities) for all students in all school districts, precluding the need for and thereby prohibiting any local un-equalized enrichment.

Principle 4: Access to Equalized Enrichment –

Texas must ensure that, if local supplementation of a state-funded adequate system is allowed, the entire additional local tax effort provides equal yield for equal tax effort, regardless of the local property wealth of individual districts.

Principle 5: Recognizing Special Student Costs –

Texas must equitably provide add-on funding based on actual costs of providing appropriate supplemental services to students identified as limited English proficient, low-income, or requiring special education services.

Principle 6: Access to Equalized Facilities Funding –

Texas must provide equitable access to funding for school facilities so that all districts have equal access to facilities revenue for equal tax effort. Facilities funding should provide support for updating and maintaining existing facilities, as well as funding for new facilities. Special facilities-related needs for fast growth districts should be recognized in any proposed funding formulae.

Principle 7: Maintaining Levels of State Support –

Texas must ensure that the state will fund a minimum of 60 percent of the overall cost of education in the state.

Principle 8: Tax Burden –

Texas must base any potential requirement for additional state revenue on adoption of progressive measures of taxation that are based on local school district and/or individuals' ability to pay taxes, and must not result in a shift of tax burdens from high wealth to all other districts or from more affluent to lower income taxpayers.

iSUBE!

Success Using Bilingual Education! Effective Approaches for English Language Learners

Bilingual education teaches English to children and gives them a chance to use it, and at the same time they are taught core subjects like math and science. Volumes of research confirm that effective bilingual education deepens comprehension for English language learners and proficiency in English. It also results in above average or exemplary student performance on state-mandated exams.

To maximize instruction and student learning, instructional and administrative staff must be prepared to address:

- ❖ Increasing expectations,
- ❖ Mandatory accountability, and
- ❖ Individual student needs.

Teachers must have access to the best research-based practices to increase their understanding and implementation of effective bilingual strategies that adapt to the unique characteristics and needs of a diverse population. At the same time, it is important to engage parents as meaningful partners in the learning process at all levels. When applied effectively, these practices can help prepare students for successful transitions throughout education from pre-school to college enrollment, and into the world of work and civic engagement.

To make this success a reality, IDRA presents comprehensive, in-depth learning opportunities in the area of bilingual education for instructors that build upon the strengths and knowledge that teachers possess while developing new, scientifically-based research strategies for English language learner success. CPE credit is available.



IDRA Support

IDRA supports all phases of effective bilingual education, from planning through implementation, community engagement and sustainability for student success through training of mentors and coaches. IDRA professional development support combines state-of-the-art technology, hands-on and face-to-face training that helps teachers and districts comply with federal, state and local requirements. The training uses a variety of ways to work with school staff, including workshops, video conferences, classroom demonstrations, on-site observations and problem solving, online discussions and reflections. Participants are supported with research based information and best practice that works.

- ❖ Aligning bilingual strategies to meet state and federal requirements in content areas
- ❖ Addressing the affective, linguistic and cognitive needs of students
- ❖ Ongoing planning, structuring and assessment of effective bilingual programs
- ❖ Meaningful engagement with parents for student success

iSUBE! Will Address Your Specific Needs

Cross-cutting themes that are incorporated into each session include:

- ❖ Helping Teachers Understand and Apply Research-Based Bilingual Best Practices
- ❖ Assessing Language and Academic Proficiency for Effective Classroom Planning
- ❖ Effective Bilingual Instruction for Proficiency and Academic Success in Spanish and English
- ❖ Engaging Parents and Families as Meaningful Partners in the Bilingual Learning Process
- ❖ Balancing Content Areas and Timely Transitions: Planning for Effective Bilingual Programs
- ❖ Integrating Technology to Maximize Bilingual Learning

An example of a model plan that IDRA could use with your district is in the box at right.

more

Benefits and Outcomes

- ❖ Strengthen the belief that all children can learn and become proficient in English using their native language and can increase their achievement in state-mandated exams
- ❖ Use data for planning instruction
- ❖ Value students' experiences as a basis for strengthening their language and content area acquisition and academic performance
- ❖ Maximize effective teaching strategies for learning and supporting peer collegiality among bilingual teachers who are experiencing success
- ❖ Move toward rigor in all content areas for successful transitions by exploring new ways of teaching that maximize language development

Sample iSUBE! Plan Tailored to District Needs

Session Description	Topic	Days Out of School	IDRA Follow-Up
Teachers and Administrators	Bilingual Education: Fundamental and Legal Premises Review of the Rationale, History, Law and Advocacy for Bilingual Teaching		
Mentors and Coaches Face-to-Face Sessions (2 sessions)	Strategies for Effective Classroom Implementation of Bilingual Education Teacher Support Trainer of Trainers/Mentor Guide		2 hours
Online Preparation*	Initial Teacher Needs Assessment and Setting the Climate		2-3 hours
Observations	IDRA Classroom Observations		
Teachers Face-to-Face Session #1	Laying the Foundation for a Strong Bilingual Program: Understanding Language and Academic Principles and Realtime Data Collection, Online Data Sets and Analysis; State and Federal Test Requirements and Assessments	1	
Demonstrations	Classroom Demonstrations		
Online Mentoring & Coaching*	This online component will support teachers in: Creating a Community of Learners: Sharing and Reflecting on Practice through Online Discussions with Peers and Mentors		2-3 hours
Teachers Face-to-Face Sessions #2	Classroom Management Skills; Direct, Explicit Instruction in Effective Reading Comprehension Strategies Increasing Student Literacy in Reading: Comprehension and Fluency Language Proficiency at Academic Level and its Relationship to State Assessments Creating Effective Teacher-Student-Parent Partnerships Technology Tools: Dynamic and Static Strategies for Various Classroom Settings	1	
Online Mentoring & Coaching*	This online component will support teachers in: Meeting Legal Requirements; Creating a Lesson Plan for Classroom Integration; Online Discussion and Reflections; Building Peer Support; and Exploring Online Dynamic Tools and Applets for Primary Language Instruction		2-3 hours
Teachers Face-to-Face Session #3	Increasing Student Literacy in Content Areas and Achievement	1	
Demonstrations	IDRA Classroom Demonstration		
Classroom Observation & Dialogue	Onsite Classroom Prescriptive Evaluation and Problem Solving Transitioning Students to English		
Teachers Face-to-Face Session #4	Knowing the Appropriate Time for Transition Based on a Contrastive Analysis of Both Languages	1	
Impact Evaluation	Evaluating Impact and Learnings		

**All online participation is timed and documented through our portal system.*

Why Is IDRA Unique?

The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, private non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening public schools to work for all children.

We are committed to the IDRA valuing philosophy, respecting the knowledge and skills of the individuals we work with and build on the strengths of the students and parents in their schools.

IDRA's professional staff members...

- ❖ Are fluent and literate in English and Spanish.
- ❖ Have many years of classroom, administrative, research and community engagement experience.
- ❖ Have graduate degrees – master's and doctorates – from respected universities.

Free!



This award-winning podcast series for teachers and administrators explores issues facing U.S. education today and strategies to better serve every student.

Online Now



Episode 33: “Student and Parent Math Conversations” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., director of the IDRA Texas Parent Information and Resource Center, shares how students who have not been succeeding in math have opened a powerful collaborative dialog with parents and educators.



Episode 31: “Latino Parent Engagement in High School Math” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., director of the IDRA Texas Parent Information and Resource Center, tells the story of how a group of parents is affecting student success in math education.



Episode 32: “Early Literacy Development for English Language Learners” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – José L. Rodríguez, M.A., an early childhood expert at IDRA, describes the essential components of reading instruction and how they relate to young English language learners.



Episode 30: “Creating Leadership Opportunities for Students” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – As his school’s teacher coordinator for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, Jerry de la Garza discusses how giving leadership opportunities to students who are considered at risk of dropping out leads to great transformations.

www.idra.org/podcasts

A podcast is an audio file that can be downloaded to your computer for listening immediately or at a later time. Podcasts may be listened to directly from your computer by downloading them onto a Mp3 player (like an iPod) for listening at a later date. The IDRA Classnotes podcasts are available at no charge through the IDRA web site and through the Apple iTunes Music Store. You can also subscribe to Classnotes through iTunes or other podcast directories to automatically receive each new podcast in the series when it is released. Classnotes is free of charge.



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*Creating schools that work for all children,
through research • materials development • training • technical assistance • evaluation • information dissemination*