



Focus: Actionable Knowledge

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Partners and Catalysts

How Communities Are Putting Data to Work to Improve Education

by Laurie Posner, M.P.A.

Joe Medrano and Lourdes Flores are not teachers or school administrators. But they care deeply about how the children of their community – and their neighborhood public schools – are faring.

Mr. Medrano, who works with the non-profit START Center, is chairing an education working group for the community-based Equal Voice Network for the Rio Grande Valley. The group’s mission is to “educate and empower parents and families with the tools and information needed to effect change in their child’s education.”

Ms. Flores, with the faith-based non-profit ARISE, is working with Latina family leaders to form the grassroots PTA Comunitario whose aim is to strengthen education in the colonias of South Texas (see story in the April 2010 issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*).

In working to strengthen schooling from the outside in, Mr. Medrano and Ms. Flores join a growing cadre of grassroots leaders who are forging new family-school-community connections to catalyze school reform.

For community organizers, concern about education is, of course, not new. Long before the civil rights struggles for school desegregation and funding equity in recent decades, our nation saw a history of people’s movements for change. The March of the Mill Children in 1903 declared: “We want to go to school and not the mines,”

and Chicago’s Back of the Yards Council, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, fought for hot lunches and neighborhood programs.

What is relatively new is the convergence of public awareness of education challenges facing the nation; the emergence and maturation of grassroots efforts to promote school reform; laws that call for improved family engagement and data systems, and leaders who strive to make them meaningful; and the web-based resources to support planning, organizing and networking. A new body of literature that examines how community organizing impacts public education is capturing these trends. And this work is finding that clear data – actionable knowledge available to communities, parents and schools at the local level – is essential to achieving any real reform.

Community Organizing: Strategies and Success (Mediratta, et al., 2009), for example, shares findings of a six-year national study of education reform efforts, instigated by more than half a dozen community- and faith-based organizations around the country. From Austin Interfaith and Miami’s People Acting for Community Together, to the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project, and the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, each of these efforts draws on key data to illuminate educational conditions, develop strategies, communicate concerns and mobilize for

(cont. on Page 2)

“At every level, from policy to practice, people need clear, accurate and timely information to assess what is needed to strengthen schooling, take action, and make sure the actions are producing results.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO



“When CBOs are authentically rooted in community life, they can bring to schools a better understanding of the culture and assets of families, as well as resources that schools may lack. As go-betweens, they can build relational bridges between educators and parents and act as catalysts for change.”

— Mark R. Warren, et al., 2009

action. *Community Organizing* opens with a vivid description of public school parents and community organizers in Oakland undertaking the “simple, yet profound, task” of creating a map of educational conditions in their city.

The Oakland map could be the blueprint of many cities: In the wealthy hills, it shows smaller schools and higher performing campuses; in the poorer flatlands, it shows over-crowded classrooms and low rankings. And the act of mapping provided both a tangible tool and a powerful metaphor: It illustrated local disparities in stark and practical terms, and it implied new community ownership of the issues and a new lens through which to understand them.

Calling for justice in the face of educational inequity and engaging families, youth and community leaders in school reform, as Mediratta, et al. (2009), point out, are among the chief contributions that organizing groups can make. “From a community organizing perspective,” the authors note, there is no “lack of social capital in poor communities and communities of color, but rather the lack of democratic control over how economic and cultural resources are distributed and deployed.”

And, in their view, democratization comes not only from the capacity to mobilize large numbers of people but from “members’ knowledge of schooling issues, the strength of their proposed solutions... and the legitimacy of their demands.” It is the kind of

work that requires high quality, accessible data.

This power of “actionable knowledge” is underscored in *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice*, which also examines the role of grassroots organizing and family leadership to improve public schools. In *Learning Power*, Oakes and Rogers use the term “disruptive knowledge” to describe the kind of knowledge that “challenges the facts the people hold... overturns complacency and makes it more likely that the listener will be moved to moral action” (2006).

Oakes and Rogers also caution that “compelling evidence alone [does] not always prevail.” To be effective organizers often must combine actionable knowledge with a host of other strategies, engaging media, drawing on existing civil rights laws, and activating powerful social networks.

Mobilizing Citizens for Better Schools, by Sexton (2004), describes a range of community-based strategies that draw on key data to transform education. This book chronicles the experience of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky, which Sexton directs and helped found in 1980. The committee sought to “bring diverse groups of people together around common concerns” by showing that “educational malnutrition paralleled equally dismal economic and social conditions, and... that something could be done if they would help.”

As a citizen group it achieved credibility, without formal authority, by speaking as citizens (not experts), building alliances and partnering with educators, clearly defining the issues, and promoting solutions (not blame). To accomplish this, the committee has relied heavily on data about the condition of education in Kentucky and has placed this data in the context of focused, strategic and practical solutions (Sexton, 2004).

Melding strategic and practical solutions to leverage change is also a central theme of IDRA’s most recent book, *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework*, edited by María Robledo Montecel and Christie Goodman (see Page 3). *Courage to Connect* shares IDRA’s Quality Schools Action Framework, a change model that family, school and community leaders can use in partnership to assess school conditions and outcomes, develop strategies for improvement, and leverage and build capacity for change.

The Quality Schools Action Framework also is the basis for IDRA’s Texas School Holding Power (cont. on Page 7)

IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

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Additional resources are available online at http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity/

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A Quality Schools Action Framework™

New IDRA Book Frames School Change for Student Success

IDRA has released a new book, *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework*, that shows how communities and schools can work together to strengthen their capacity to be successful with all of their students.

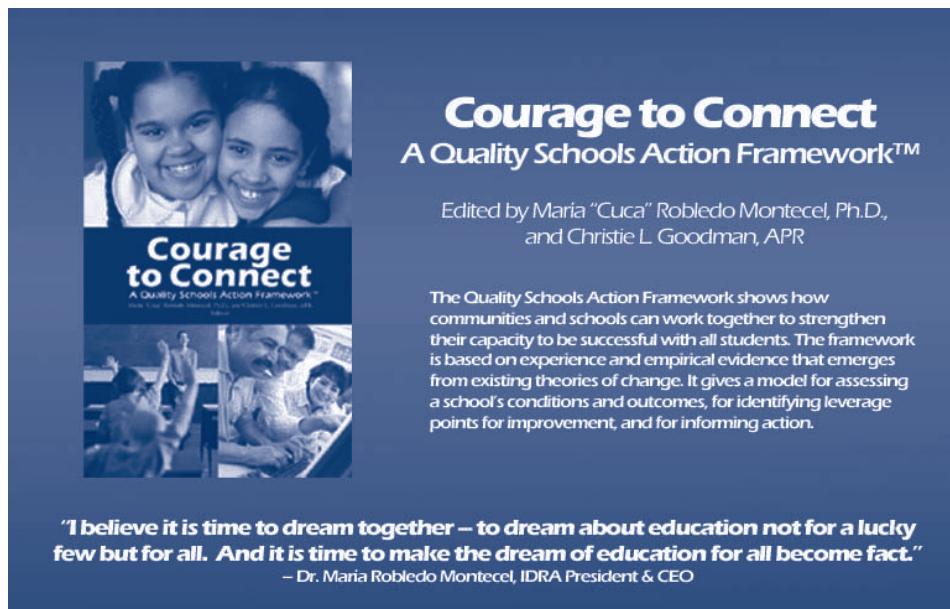
“The Quality Schools Action Framework helps people hone in on what’s important and needed in their local school context,” said Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA president. “A number of our partner schools and coalition organizations have used the framework to assess baselines, plan and implement strategy, and monitor progress in educating all students to high quality.”

The Quality Schools Action Framework™ is based on experience and empirical evidence that emerges from existing theories of change. It gives a model for assessing a school’s conditions and outcomes, for identifying leverage points for improvement, and for informing action.

Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework, gives you a useful tool to:

- Conceive, design and manage sustainable change at the school or district level;
- Encourage thoughtful and coherent selection of transformative practices that are grounded in the reality of the school and its community;
- Focus on particular strategies and/or instructional approaches (e.g., bilingual education) without losing track of the contexts that matter (e.g., teaching quality, school/district leadership, funding);
- Inform evidence-based community collaboration and oversight in productive ways; and
- Inform meaningful comparisons across schools and districts.

In conjunction with the book release, IDRA has upgraded its School Holding Power online portal that helps community and school partners in Texas examine their school data and plan joint action to improve school holding power (www.idra.org/portal). This free portal places accurate, high quality information in the hands of people at the leading edge of systems change. Educators



and community members can find out how well their high school campus is preparing and graduating students, what factors may be weakening school holding power, and what they can do to address them.

“Our future depends on us having an excellent public educational system, where all students graduate from high school prepared for college or the world of work, no matter what the color of their skin, the language they speak, or where they happen to be born,” said Dr. Robledo Montecel. “And this is a goal I believe we can achieve.”

Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework is available for purchase from IDRA (\$15 plus s&h).

Contents Include: Foreword; The Framework; 1 The Framework Explored; 2 Levers of Change – What do we need?; 3 Change Strategies – How do we make change happen?; 4 School System Fundamentals – Which fundamentals must be secured?; 5 School System Indicators – Where do we focus systems change?; 6 Outcome Indicators – What outcomes will result?; 7 Closing – Claiming the Courage to Connect.

To learn more about IDRA’s *Courage to Connect*

– *A Quality Schools Action Framework*, visit www.idra.org/couragetconnect to view the framework, see the detailed table of contents, read an excerpt and listen to related podcasts.

Immigrant Students' Rights to Attend Public Schools

School Opening Alert

In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler vs. Doe* [457 U.S. 202 (1982)] that children of undocumented workers have the same right to attend public primary and secondary schools as do U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Like other students, children of undocumented workers are required under state laws to attend school until they reach a legally mandated age.

As a result of the *Plyler* ruling, public schools may not:

- deny admission to a student during initial enrollment or at any other time on the basis of undocumented status;
- treat a student differently to determine residency;
- engage in any practices to “chill” the right of access to school;

- require students or parents to disclose or document their immigration status;
- make inquiries of students or parents that may expose their undocumented status; or
- require social security numbers from all students, as this may expose undocumented status.

Students without social security numbers should be assigned a number generated by the school. Adults without social security numbers who are applying for a free lunch and/or breakfast program for a student need only state on the application that they do not have a social security number.

Changes in the F-1 (student) Visa Program do not change the *Plyler* rights of undocumented children. These changes apply only to students who apply for a student visa from outside the United States and are

currently in the United States on an F-1 visa.

Also, the *Family Education Rights and Privacy Act* prohibits schools from providing any outside agency – including the Immigration and Naturalization Service – with any information from a child’s school file that would expose the student’s undocumented status without first getting permission from the student’s parents. The only exception is if an agency gets a court order (subpoena) that parents can then challenge. Schools should note that even requesting such permission from parents might act to “chill” a student’s *Plyler* rights.

Finally, school personnel – especially building principals and those involved with student intake activities – should be aware that they have no legal obligation to enforce U.S. immigration laws.

Llamada Urgente al Comienzo del Curso Escolar

En 1982, El Tribunal Supremo de los Estados Unidos dictaminó en el caso *Plyler vs. Doe* [457 U.S. 202] que los niños de padres indocumentados tienen el mismo derecho de asistir a las escuelas públicas primarias y secundarias que tienen sus contrapartes de nacionalidad estadounidense. Al igual que los demás niños, los estudiantes indocumentados están obligados a asistir a la escuela hasta que lleguen a la edad exigida por la ley.

A raíz de la decisión *Plyler*, las escuelas públicas no pueden:

- negarle la matrícula a un estudiante basándose en su situación legal y/o migratoria, ya sea a principios del curso o durante cualquier otro momento del año escolar;
- tratar a un estudiante en forma desigual para verificar su situación de residencia;
- efectuar prácticas cuyo resultado sea obstruir el derecho de acceso a los servicios escolares;

- requerir que un estudiante o sus padres revelen o documenten su situación migratoria;
- hacer interrogatorios a estudiantes o padres que pudieran revelar su situación de indocumentados;
- exigir que un estudiante obtenga un número de seguro social como requisito de admisión a la escuela.

La escuela debe de asignar un número de identificación a los estudiantes que no tienen tarjeta de seguro social. Los adultos sin números de seguro social quienes están solicitando que a un estudiante lo admitan a un programa de almuerzo y/o desayuno gratis, sólo tienen que indicar que no tienen seguro social en el formulario.

Cambios del Programa de Visado F-1 (de estudiantes) no cambiarán las obligaciones antedichas en cuanto a los niños indocumentados. Se aplican sólo a los estudiantes que solicitan del extranjero un visado de estudiantes y que están actualmente en los Estados Unidos en un Visado F-1.

Además, el Acta Familiar de Derechos y Privacidad Escolar (*Family Education Rights and Privacy Act*) le prohíbe a las escuelas proveerle a cualquier agencia externa – incluyendo el Servicio de Inmigración y Naturalización (Immigration and Naturalization Service – INS) – cualquier información del archivo personal de un estudiante que pudiera revelar su estado legal sin haber obtenido permiso de los padres del estudiante. La única excepción es si una agencia obtiene una orden judicial – conocida como una citación o subpoena – que los padres pueden retar. Los oficiales escolares deben estar conscientes de que el mero hecho de pedirle tal permiso a los padres podría impedir los derechos *Plyler* de un estudiante.

Finalmente, el personal escolar – especialmente los directores y otros administradores o personal docente – deben saber que no están bajo ninguna obligación legal de poner en vigor las leyes de inmigración de los EEUU.

For more information or to report incidents of school exclusion or delay, call:

Para más información, o para denunciar incidentes de exclusión escolar o retraso en la admisión a clases, favor de llamar a:

META (Nationwide) 617-628-2226

MALDEF (Los Angeles) 213-629-2512

MALDEF (San Antonio) 210-224-5476

NY Immigration Hotline (Nationwide) 212-419-3737

MALDEF (Chicago) 312-427-0701

MALDEF (Washington, D.C.) 202-293-2828

Please copy and distribute this flier. Favor de copiar y distribuir esta hoja informativa.

How Are the Children?

By Mike Seifert

Editor's Note: Mike Seifert is the Network Weaver/Coordinator for the 10 advocacy organizations that comprise the Equal Voice Network for the Rio Grande Valley funded by the Marguerite Casey Foundation. IDRA provides the individual organizations and the network technical assistance in progress monitoring, impact evaluation, and strategic planning – always building on the organizations' tremendous assets and strengths. The following was originally published on the Musings from Alongside a Border blog on May 19, 2010 (<http://alongsideaborder.blogspot.com/>) and is printed here with permission.

“How are the children?”

I was told last week that this is a traditional greeting amongst the Maasai tribal people in Africa.

I like it very much, as I think that this greeting might be a way to shatter the shrill politics of this American hour.

Instead of saying, “Hi! How are you?” we would smile and greet each other with “How are the children?”

The little reflection that that greeting causes would help us move beyond some of our more self-centered tendencies and toward that which indeed does matter – the children.

“Hi, how are you?” usually elicits, “Fine, thank you,” but that reply just doesn't work always with “How are the children?” at least here along the Texas-Mexico border.

The children here are mostly not fine. Graduations are coming up, for instance, but half of those who went into Brownsville's ninth grades four years ago have dropped out of high school. Around here, even in the year 2010, a high school graduate remains a child of privilege.

“How are the children?” Fine, one might say, if her child has Medicaid. Not so well, if the family has no Medicaid, and the child falls and breaks a bone. Dr. Marsha, the kind pediatrician at the

Brownsville Community Health Clinic talks about starting a fracture fund. She wants to call it “These Bones Won't Heal.” Parents just break down and weep when they learn that the child will need a broken arm cast – a somewhat typical childhood accident is a backbreaker for a family living below the federal poverty line. Dr. Marsha and her clinic allies – social workers, doctors, nurses and medical assistants – move heaven and earth to get that arm in a cast. But it is not an easy task. The mother's anguish is heartbreaking; it does not require a lot of imagination to know how this mother responds to that greeting, for her child is not doing fine.

“How are the children?” Right now, there are 400 of them being held in detention in Cameron County. They are not delinquents, but children – teenagers, and mostly boys but some are infants and toddlers – who made the long trip from Central America and other parts, seeking to reunite with their parents. Some of the children will remain in custody for months, as their cases make their way through the immigration courts. Perhaps they will be reunited with relatives in the USA, or perhaps they will be returned to their home countries. In the meantime, they wait, in a shelter that is a kindly enough place, but they remain alone, separated from family and, this being especially true for the girls, carrying the scars of the horrible things that happen to those immigrants who pass through Mexico. These children are not fine.

I was also told, a couple of weeks ago, that children are resilient, and strong, and many, many of them make do, even with broken bones, a broken education, or broken dreams. I pray and hope that is true, but it seems irresponsible to hope that a child is resilient and will somehow make it through abuse and neglect and remain a whole human being.

A saner response is to work on what can be changed – the way we educate children, the way we heal them, the way we apply immigration laws to them. I have written about this idea of a

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- *Courage to Connect* – A Quality Schools Action Framework book web site with the framework, detailed table of contents, book excerpt, podcasts and more
- School Opening Alert flier regarding education of immigrant children
- Classnotes podcasts on actionable knowledge
- Resources on communities using data to improve schools

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kinder and more compassionate society and have received some embarrassingly horrible comments by people who purport to be Christian Believers. Worse, as this is a small town, I would run into these folks once in a while, and really didn't know what to say to them. I was certainly not interested in talking with them, so I mostly avoided them.

Until now.

Now I know what to say. “Hi! How are the children?” will do for openers.

And now I am free to listen to them, for on this point, I am truly interested in what they have to say. How could you not want to know how the children are doing?



¡YA! Es Tiempo Event Highlights

Securing Educational Excellence and Equity for All Students in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas

On July 13, 2010, IDRA held an event in the Rio Grande Valley that brought together more than 140 cross-sector education stakeholders, including families, community organization leaders, public school educators, foundation representatives and public officials. Juan Sepúlveda, director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, presented findings from the initiative’s national listening tour to gather input on the educational needs of the Hispanic community. A panel of community leaders, school officials, and students described unique education needs and assets of the Rio Grande Valley and how the federal government can help address these needs. And using IDRA’s School Holding Power portal, participants examined data about their schools and developed strategies they will take to improve schools for children and youth in the Rio Grande Valley. ¡YA! Es Tiempo demonstrated how people in different sectors of a community (students, parents, school leaders, community-based organizations, and policymakers) can come together to create strategies for improving their neighborhood public schools to ensure all students graduate ready for college and career. On these pages, we share highlights from the event.



Rebecca Sánchez, principal of Gus Guerra Elementary in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, where the event took place, with María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO

“South Texas – the Rio Grande Valley – is ready to transform itself from a place with a history of educational neglect to a place of high educational quality for all kids... There is a convergence of a number of schools and school districts in the Valley with very good leadership and very good leaders that, in collaboration with communities, are making some significant changes. So we know that change is possible by what is happening here in the Rio Grande Valley.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO

“I’m not really here to talk about me because I am one of those students that graduated from high school... I’m here because our dropout rates here in the Valley are really high. There are a lot of dropouts. It’s not hard for me to put myself in their shoes.”

– Sylvia Tovar, college student

“Tenemos que entender que, como crece la población latina en el grupo minoritario más grande de América, la tasa de deserción escolar entre los latinos no es un problema de América latina, es un problema americano.”

“We need to understand that, as the Latino population grows into the largest minority group in America, the dropout rate among Latinos is not a Latino American problem, it is an American problem.”

– Joe Medrano, community education officer, START Center in San Benito, Texas



Juanita Valdez-Cox, La Unión de Pueblo Entero, with other event participants

“Our Texas Valley is the key to the future of the state. It is a laboratory for resolving problems that will confront the state in the future. Together we can get this done and the time is now.”

– Daniel P. King, Superintendent Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD



Petra Hernández, Arise South Tower; Sergio Narvaez, La Union de Pueblo Entero; Juanita García, IDRA; Eva Carranza, Arise South Tower [left to right]

“There’s the myth that our families don’t want our kids to go to college and that we don’t want them to continue their education. We know that’s a complete lie.”

– Juan Sepúlveda, director, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans



Joe Medrano, community education officer, START Center in San Benito, Texas; and chair, Education Working Group for the Marguerite Casey Equal Voices for America’s Families in the Rio Grande Valley

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Additional resources are available online at www.idra.org/Texas_IDRA_PIRC.htm

funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve the state of Texas

(¡YA! Es Tiempo Event Highlights, continued from Page 6)

“In Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, a classroom of 25 students has \$250,000 fewer dollars for the education of its children than does Highland Park ISD. We cannot wait any longer to demand and get fair funding and to close equity gaps. Ya es tiempo... It is time to close the unacceptable gaps in equity and in opportunity that hinder our children on their way to completing the great education that they deserve.”

- Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel,
IDRA President & CEO



Peter Bloch García, Program Officer, Marguerite Casey Foundation

“I am very impressed and inspired by the member organizations in the Equal Voice Network – Rio Grande Valley because they are creating strategies that are based on their values of empowerment of families, and this will certainly improve the school and have longer-term impact on the community at large. This is the crucial part of other school reform efforts that have failed – Families voices need to be heard. And, that is what is unique and essential in ARISE’s formation of a PTA *Comunitario*.”

- Peter Bloch García, MPA, Program Officer
Marguerite Casey Foundations

“¡YA! Es Tiempo fue evidencia clara que nuestras familias, estudiantes y educadores pueden dialogar críticamente con gran sentido sobre la data actual de las escuelas. El portal de IDRA organiza la información sobre las escuelas en una manera comprensiva y útil. Con esta data comunidades pueden tomar acción para mejorar sus escuelas públicas en nuestras vecindades.”

“¡YA! Es Tiempo was clear proof that families, students and educators can have meaningful, critical conversations about actual school data. The IDRA portal organizes public education information comprehensibly and usefully. With this data, communities can take action to improve neighborhood public schools.”

- Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., director IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center

“We are not so interested in answers from above. But we really are interested in bringing our assets into the White House. The border area has a very special take on the future of education of our children.”

- Mike Seifert, Network Weaver/Coordinator
for the Equal Voice Network

“We know something is breaking down in the system when you have a piece of paper that says you’ve graduated from high school but you’re not ready to go to college... At the early childhood level it’s about making sure [programs] are high quality... making sure students are graduating from high school and that they’re not only getting into college but graduating. Our office has been around since 1990 and one of the challenges is that people don’t know this office existed. We’re trying to first let people know we’re here and let them know people have allies in the White House... but also to get beyond reports to say we as a federal government need to partner with communities.”

- Juan Sepúlveda, director, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans

“At the intersection of two nations, the Rio Grande Valley is a young, vibrant, and growing community of over a million people. The Valley is also a place where rootedness, resourcefulness, and generosity of spirit abound ... this community has taken on big challenges and now it can lead in transforming education.”

- Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel,
IDRA President & CEO



Gloria Casas, board member, La Feria ISD

For more information on the ¡YA! Es Tiempo event, visit:
http://www.idra.org/Ya_Es_Tiempo/

(Partners and Catalysts, continued from Page 2)

portal (www.idra.org/portal). This interactive portal sparks in-depth conversations and supports school-family-community collaboration by providing campus-level outcome data (e.g., college-readiness and college participation) and input data (e.g., on whether students are enrolled in advanced courses and passing college entrance exams). New collaborative features enable portal visitors to conduct campus and community surveys and share findings with other partners.

Courage to Connect and this updated portal were both released at ¡YA! Es Tiempo, an event and call to action convened in South Texas by IDRA this summer (see Pages 6-7). ¡YA! Es Tiempo brought together IDRA’s school partners with community and family leaders, like Joe Medrano and Lourdes Flores, who are promoting efforts across the Rio Grande Valley to strengthen education.

With vision, key partnerships and the power of “actionable knowledge,” these leaders and their counterparts around the country are bridging school-community divides and working at the

leading edge of change.

Resources

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Focus: Actionable Knowledge



IDRA Classnotes Podcast Awarded

IDRA's Classnotes Podcast received an award of distinction in the 2010 Communicator Awards, the leading international awards program honoring creative excellence. The program is sanctioned and judged by the International Academy of the Visual Arts, an invitation-only body consisting of top-tier professionals from acclaimed media, communications, advertising, creative and marketing firms. IAVA members include executives from organizations such as Alloy, Brandweek, Coach, Disney, The Ellen Degeneres Show, Estee Lauder, Fry Hammond Barr, HBO, Monster.com, MTV, Polo Ralph Lauren, Sotheby's Institute of Art, Victoria's Secret, Wired, and Yahoo! This is the fifth award IDRA's Classnotes Podcast has received.

Intercultural Development Research Association

Classnotes Podcast



Twice monthly, award-winning podcast for people who care about excellent and equitable education for all children.

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

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- "Supporting Parents of Preschoolers," featuring Frances Guzmán, M.Ed..
- "Parents as Leaders in Education," featuring Frances Guzmán, M.Ed.
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