



Focus: Push Outs – Children of Color

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Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2015-16 High School Attrition Inches Up to 25 Percent

Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

The overall high school attrition rate in Texas inched up by one percentage point from 24 percent in 2014-15 to 25 percent in 2015-16. IDRA's latest annual attrition study shows that, for the first time since 1995-96 to 1996-97, the overall attrition rate in Texas has increased following 18 years of rates that either declined or held constant from one year to the next. (The overall attrition rate increased from 42 percent in 1995-96 to 43 percent in 1996-97). This year's increase was not unexpected as the forecast models by IDRA's Dr. Felix Montes predicted that the attrition rate would increase to up to 26 percent before resuming its downward trajectory (2015).

This year's study is the 31st in a series of annual reports on trends in dropout and attrition rates in Texas public schools. It shows that high school attrition rates in Texas have declined from 33 percent three decades ago to 25 percent in 2015-16. Despite this one point increase, recent trends in attrition rates for Texas public high schools continue to reflect a positive outlook for the total high school population and for most race-ethnicity and gender groups. Since conducting the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas in 1985-86, IDRA has conducted attrition analyses 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. Along with other dropout measures, attrition rates are useful in studying the magnitude of the dropout

problem and the success of schools in keeping students in school. In simplest terms, attrition is defined as shrinkage in size or number; therefore, an attrition rate is the percent change in grade level between a base year and an end year.

In this year's study that examines school holding power in Texas public high schools through an attrition analysis, IDRA found that 25 percent of the freshman class of 2012-13 left school prior to graduating in the 2015-16 school year. This statewide attrition rate of 25 percent is 8 percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33 percent found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study. The rate is 24 percent lower than the 1985-86 rate.

For each racial and ethnic group, the study found that attrition rates today are lower than in the first study three decades ago. Attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 31 percent (from 45 percent to 31 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 21 percent (from 34 percent to 27 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 44 percent (from 27 percent to 15 percent). Attrition rates of male students declined by 23 percent (from 35 percent to 27 percent), while the attrition rates of female students declined by 31 percent (from 32 percent to 22 percent).

As in recent studies, the positive trends in attrition rates overall are not without some areas of concern. First, the gaps between the attrition rates of White students and Hispanic students and of

(cont. on Page 2)

“One in four freshmen disappear by their senior year. Texas is still losing 12 students every hour. In today's economy, Texas cannot afford to fully educate some students and not others. We just can't.”

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

(Texas Public School Attrition Study, continued from Page 1)

White students and Black students continue to be about the same or higher than 30 years ago. Between White students and Hispanic students, the attrition rate gap was 16 percentage points in 2015-16. The attrition rate gap between White students and Black students almost doubled from 7 percentage points in 1985-86 to 12 percentage points in 2015-16.

Second, some subgroups, including Black students and White students, experienced a one percentage point increase in attrition rates from 2014-15 to 2015-16. Attrition rates of Black students increased from 26 percent in 2014-15 to 27 percent in 2015-16. Attrition rates of White students increased from 14 percent in 2014-15 to 15 percent in 2015-16.

The full study is available on IDRA's web site at www.idra.org and includes methodology, historical statewide attrition rates and numbers of students lost to attrition categorized by race-ethnicity and by gender, a county-level attrition rate table, trend data by county, and historical county-level numbers of students lost to attrition.

Key findings of the latest study include the following.

- Texas public schools still are **failing to graduate one out of every four students**. One out of every four students (25 percent) from the freshman class of 2012-13 left school prior to graduating with a high school diploma.
- A total of 102,610 students from the 2012-13 freshman class were lost from public high school enrollment in 2015-16 compared to 86,276 in 1985-86.
- For the class of 2015-16, **Hispanic students and Black students are about two times more likely to leave school** without graduating than White students.
- In three decades, the overall attrition rate declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 25 percent in 2015-16.
- The overall attrition rate has been less than 30 percent in the last seven study years: 29 percent in 2009-10, 27 percent in 2010-11, 26 percent in 2011-12, 25 percent in 2012-13, 24 percent in both 2013-14 and 2014-15, and 25 percent in 2015-16.
- In three decades, attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 31 percent (from 45 percent to 31 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 21 percent (from 34 percent to 27 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 44 percent (from 27 percent to 15 percent).
- The attrition gap between White students and Hispanic students was 18 percentage points in 1985-86 compared to 16 percentage points in 2015-16.
- The attrition gap between White students and Black students was 7 percentage points in 1985-86 compared to 12 percentage points in 2015-16. The gap between White students and Black students increased by 71 percent from 1985-86 to 2014-15.
- Since 1986, Texas schools have **lost a cumulative total of more than 3.6 million students** from public high school enrollment prior to graduation.
- The attrition rates for males have been higher than those of females. In the class of 2015-16, males were 1.2 times more likely to leave school without graduating with a diploma than females.
- From 1985-86 to 2014-15, attrition rates of male students declined by 23 percent (from 35 percent to 27 percent), while the attrition

rates of female students declined by 31 percent (from 32 percent to 22 percent).

A supplemental analysis by IDRA education associate, Felix Montes, Ph.D., using linear regression models predicts that at the current pace Texas will not reach an attrition rate of zero until the year 2034-35.

In addition to IDRA's attrition analysis, the full report includes an analysis of the TEA's latest dropout report and the latest federal data across states. These and other resources are available at www.idra.org/Research/Attrition.

Resources

- Johnson, R. "Texas High School Attrition Rates Stall," *Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2014-15* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2015).
- Montes, F. "Elusive Zero Attrition Rate is at Least 20 Years Away: Texas Stands to Lose 2 Million More Students," *Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2014-15* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2015).

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In-Grade Retention in the Early Years – What’s Holding Children Back?

by Paula Johnson, M.A.

How willing are you to lose 2 percent of anything? Two cents of a dollar, 32 minutes out of a day. It doesn’t seem like much, does it? Unfortunately, that value takes on quite a different meaning when it represents the percentage of public school students retained during a school year.

And it is even more alarming when it means that 59,294 of the 2,679,569 public school students enrolled in grades K-6 during the 2013-14 school year in Texas were not promoted to the next grade (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Though this article focuses on Texas, the patterns and trends seen here are comparable to those across the country.

The term *dropout* is usually associated with someone who has left high school before earning their diploma or equivalent GED certificate. This month, IDRA released its 31st annual Texas public school attrition study, reporting a 25 percent public high school attrition rate for the 2015-16 school year, representing over 99,000 students lost from grades 9-12 (Johnson, 2016).

Much attention is placed on completion data. And for good reason. We want an educational system that allows students to successfully complete high school with the foundation to become productive citizens. However, research suggests that educators must focus on critical transition points that occur earlier in students’ academic careers in order to develop effective interventions toward reducing dropout rates years later in high school (Jerald, 2006).

Current Rates of Retention in Texas Public Schools

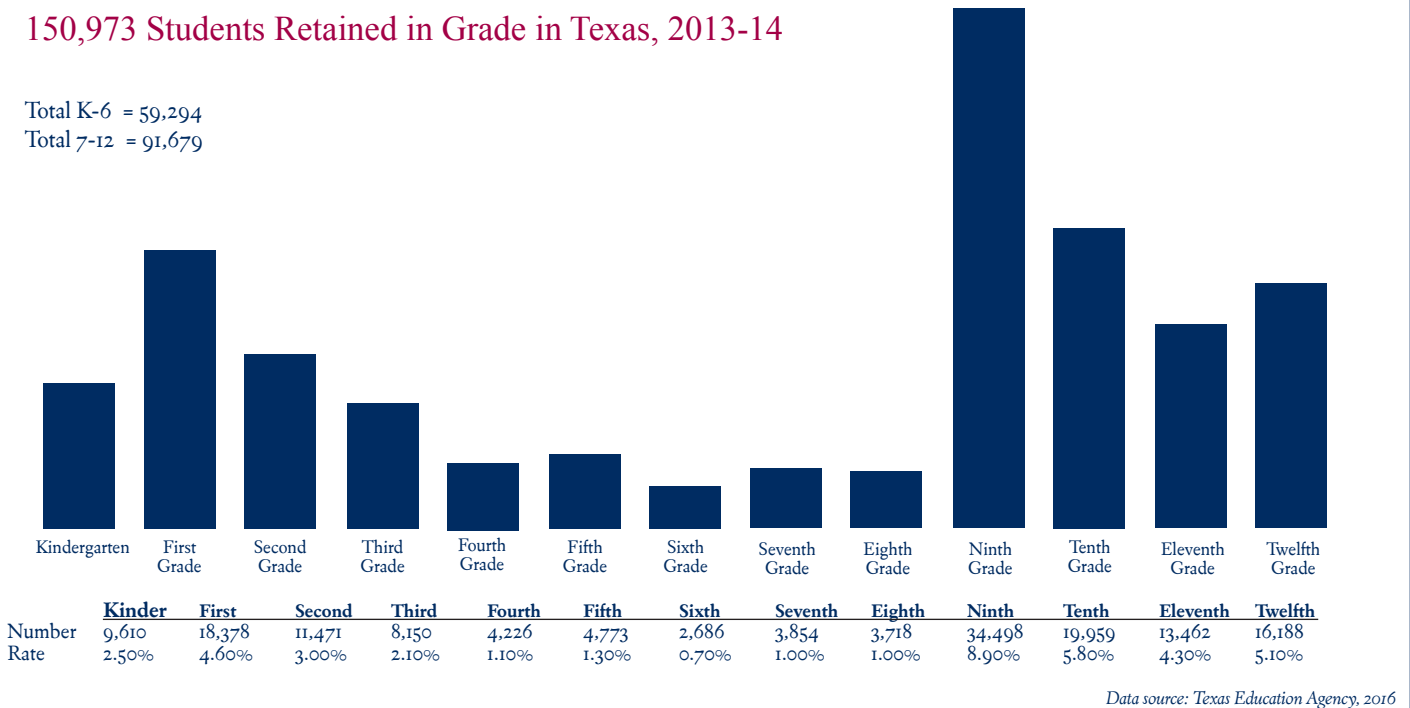
It is important to note that there are other indicators that can influence the decision to hold a child back a grade. These might include “subtle considerations involving ability, maturity and parent involvement that researchers are unable to incorporate into their analyses” (West, 2012).

Nevertheless, student academic performance and school engagement are primary measures related to dropout prevention that must be considered (cont. on Page 4)

Research indicates that early in-grade retention has a negative impact on students’ academic success, and a negative impact on psychological and behavioral engagement once they reach middle school.

150,973 Students Retained in Grade in Texas, 2013-14

Total K-6 = 59,294
Total 7-12 = 91,679



Data source: Texas Education Agency, 2016

(In-Grade Retention in the Early Years, continued from Page 3)

long before students reach middle school. The graph below shows the latest comprehensive record of K-6 in-grade retention rates for Texas public schools during the 2013-14 school year. As we can see, the highest rate of in-grade retention occurred in the first grade, followed by ninth grade.

A longitudinal study completed in 2014 analyzing patterns and trends in grade retention rates in the United States from 1995 to 2010, concluded that this pattern holds among all groups of students and across all geographic areas in the study (Warren, et al., 2014). In addition, student retention rates occur more often among boys than girls, particularly in the later grades; are found to be highest among Black students and Hispanic students; and are higher among immigrant children.

Furthermore, Warren, et al., found that rates are “higher among children of less well-educated parents and among children in the South and Northeast.” One hopeful observation from data collected by TEA from 2003 to 2014 shows a steady decline in retention rates at all grade levels K-6 during that time (TEA, 2014).

The Cost of Retention

The decision to retain a student at any grade is one that teachers do not take lightly. While students in secondary school have the ability to repeat individual courses and potentially catch up to their peers, elementary school children must repeat an entire year of academic material. That is a great personal cost to a child who is 5 to 10 years old.

Research indicates that early in-grade retention has a negative impact on students’ academic success, and a negative impact on psychological and behavioral engagement once they reach middle school. Unless positive and valuing measures are utilized in the following year, students who are retained often suffer from low self-esteem and feel they are being punished, or worse humiliated (McCollum, et al., 1999; West 2012). What was meant to be a positive intervention for success to improve their academic performance turns into a traumatic pre-adolescence experience.

In addition to the impact holding children back has on the lives of the students, retaining a student is a costly educational intervention. The cumulative costs of retaining 546,213 pupils over four years (from 1993-94 to 1996-97) total a staggering \$2.48 billion in expenditures (TEA, 1998).

Today, the average annual cost for a state with a 2.3 percent retention rate exceeds \$12 billion an-

nually. Society is expending these funds “on a practice that research indicates is not only ineffective, but also counterproductive” (West, 2012).

Characteristics of Successful PK-3 Programs

The Reynolds, et al., 2006 review of extended early childhood programs dating back to 1972 revealed several key principles of successful PK-3 programs for children ages 3 to 9.

- **Continuity:** Consistency and time in learning environments
 - School stability or reducing the negative effects of mobility
 - Increased program length for smooth transitions
 - Peer group consistency
- **Organization:** Structural features to increase intensity, length and quality
 - Leadership and coordination
 - Integration of program components within a single site
 - Second preschool year and full-day kindergarten
 - Reduced class sizes
 - Low child to staff ratios
 - Additional instructional and support staff
- **Instruction:** Coordination and integration of curriculum and teaching practices
 - School quality
 - Curriculum alignment
 - Setting common goals
 - Increased collaboration among staff
 - Joint staff development
 - Teacher training and professional development
- **Family Support Services:** Comprehensive services to promote smooth transitions
 - Parent involvement in children’s education
 - Resource mobilization

Understanding *when* and *why* students are disengaging from school can inform policy and practice to increase school holding power. We must look for the warning signs. Furthermore, early childhood programs must employ strategies that are instrumental in supporting learners through their first decade of life (Reynolds, 2006) as they transition through critical grades in school.

Though many students enter the educational system with characteristics (race, gender, lan-

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guage, or family income) that the system considers makes them at-risk of failure, that does not mean schools cannot successfully deliver excellent education for them. Children need the education system to see the value of every child and to develop policies and practices that meet their needs. If we do not make this our goal, if we do not see their worth, we will continue to lose our most precious gifts. And as Robledo Montecel & Goodman warn, the “problem of playing the traditional education game that blames the students and families is perhaps the main reason we have failed to reduce dropout rates” (2010).

Resources

Jerald, C.D. (2006). “Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System – A Dual Agenda of High Standards and High Graduation Rates,” White paper (Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc.).

Johnson, R. (2016). *Public School Attrition Study, 2014-15: Texas High School Attrition Rates Stall* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association).

McCollum, P., & A. Cortez, O.H. Maroney, F. Montes. (1999). *Failing Our Children: Finding Alternatives to In-Grade Retention, A Policy Brief* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association).

Reynolds, A., & K. Magnuson, S.R. Ou. (2006). *PK-3 Education: Programs and Practices that Work in Children’s First Decade* (New York, N.Y.: Foundation for Child Development).

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West, M.R. (2012). *Is Retaining Students in the Early Grades Self-Defeating?*, CCF Brief #49 (Washington, D.C.: Center on Children and Families).

Paula Johnson, M.A., is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at paula.johnson@idra.org.



Instruction for Secondary English Learners – Major Challenges, Solutions and Possibilities

Kristin Grayson, Ph.D.

Simultaneously learning English and academic content can be challenging for any student. The same is true for teachers who are providing this simultaneous instruction. At the secondary level (grades 7–12), language and content are especially challenging because the academic language includes complex grammar (such as the passive voice) and a high number of vocabulary items, including low frequency words (Teach Away, 2012). Effective teachers consider the many variables, such as the age of the learner, prior schooling, previous experiences, and their native language when planning and delivering instruction.

The What Works Clearinghouse has identified strategies, with low to moderate evidence of success, that are associated with quality instruction of English learners (Baker, et al., 2014). Clearly, the research is insufficient, and more is needed to accurately inform policy and instructional practices that lead to improved student outcomes (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). Additionally, research is needed to clarify how to help teachers further develop their complex understandings of how language works, how it varies under different circumstances, and what this means for teacher instructional practice and preparation (Kibler & Valdés, 2016).

This article reviews some of the latest research on secondary English learners and then focuses on programs, professional development and instructional practices that are being used in successful schools with English learners. It also discusses Office for Civil Rights requirements for effective instruction for English learners.

Research

The need for research is especially pressing for “long-term” English learners, those students who have been in U.S. schools and ESL programs for more than seven years without reaching language proficiency (Kim & García, 2014). In a 2016 study of 16,380 students nationwide, Callahan & Shifrer conclude that, despite many legislative and policy mandates, secondary English learners’ trajectory into college-preparatory high school courses can be correlated to their status in

an ESL program. They describe this as an equity gap for students in ESL programs by not having the same access to rigorous academic coursework and activities. Only 51 percent of native English speakers, 44 percent of language-minority students not in ESL, and 19 percent of students enrolled in ESL were enrolled in college preparatory classes.

Callaghan & Humphries (2015) also examine immigrant youth while stating that research indicates an advantage for first and second generation immigrants who are more likely to go to college are native born language-minority (ESL) students. The researchers focus only on immigrant youth and places them into three discrete groups: (1) native English speakers; (2) English learners not in ESL programs; and (3) English learners in ESL programs.

They conclude that the potential achievement of immigrant youth is correlated to their linguistic status. The authors promote more professional development for educators that builds understanding about the strengths English learners bring to the classroom, such as their native language skills and knowledge and previous experiences. Additionally, the authors promote more rigorous content instruction for all English learners.

In June 2015, IDRA released the proceedings report of the IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program symposium and research focusing on education of English learners. The study found no secondary schools in Texas that are consistently exceeding academic benchmarks with ELs. The schools with highest EL achievement expend significantly more general funds than other schools.

English learners make up the fastest growing segment of the student population but they are one of the lowest academically performing groups of students, and the achievement gap widens as students progress through school. The report also provides a set of recommendations useful for poli-

(cont. on Page 6)

English learners make up the fastest growing segment of the student population but they are one of the lowest academically performing groups of students, and the achievement gap widens as students progress through school.

IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

For more information about the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

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

funded by the U.S. Department of Education

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cymakers, educators, community and business leaders and parents.

Together, these studies signal that administrators and educators of secondary English learners need to examine their campus and district data to ensure that quality instruction and the necessary supports are put into place so that all students have equitable opportunities to learn, to succeed academically, and to be college and career ready.

Program Guidance

Programmatically, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* continues the focus on using evidence-based effective language programs to provide an equitable education. This is critical to ensure the civil rights of English learners as detailed in the 2015 Office for Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice joint Dear Colleague letter. The letter emphasizes schools' responsibilities to ensure meaningful participation in all educational programs and services for English learners (Grayson, 2015).

This letter was followed by the release of the ELL Toolkit by the Office of English Language Acquisition that provides many examples of ways to implement effective ESL programs (2015). These are good resources for school administrators to use as a review of their English language programs.

Family engagement also must be a part of a language program. World Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), in 2015, published a guide for family engagement stressing that all parents should to have a voice in their child's education. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education

continues to develop new models of parent and school partnerships for U.S. diverse schools.

IDRA has successfully implemented a new model of family leadership in education that is fully exemplified in IDRA's *Comunitarios* in the Rio Grande Valley. This model has been recognized by the National PTA, and is featured in a recent article, "Liderazgo Familiar Intergeneracional: Intergenerational Family Leadership as a New Paradigm of Family Engagement," by Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., and Dr. Nancy Chafkin that was published by Brown University and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Professional Development

Professional development needs to begin with helping teachers understand the demands of the language needed in schools (academic language) and how this is acquired. Dr. Jim Cummins coined the notion of (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) as compared to Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in 2000. Academic language (both content-specific and complex grammar) is the language learned within the social context of school and is different from conversational language used in everyday interactions. This type of language cannot be directly taught as discrete skills (such as used in traditional reading instruction) but must be used by teachers and students within content-specific contexts so that language is acquired.

Dr. Stephen Krashen explains, "Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their

utterances but with the messages they convey" (2014). Academic language, especially at the secondary level, is complex because of the amount of vocabulary, the complexity of grammar, and the prior knowledge required to understand implicit messages in textbooks and teacher presentations.

Instruction

At the instructional level, one useful resource is the 2014 What Works Clearinghouse publication, *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*, which details four specific recommendations to use with English learners in different content areas to develop academic language: "(1) Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities; (2) Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching; (3) Provide regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills; and (4) Provide small-group instructional intervention to students struggling in areas of literacy and English language development." Although the practice guide is not validated for grades 9-12, it certainly can be used as a starting point in those grades as new research is developed.

In conclusion, more research is needed to further support education of secondary English learners. However, there are steps that educators and administrators can take to help ELs in their schools today. This includes an examination of school and district data for equity issues mentioned in this article. IDRA has developed a rubric specifically for this purpose, *Successful Secondary* (cont. on Page 7)

In Memoriam

Ms. Sarah H. Alemán, friend and colleague, passed away on August 30, 2016, at her home in the company of her family. Her grandmother, sister, nieces, nephew, many cousins and godchildren will miss her deeply. All of us at IDRA extend our condolences.

Sarah was a treasured part of the IDRA family for 32 years. She began her work here on April 16, 1984. She provided support in multiple areas, including layout of the *IDRA Newsletter* and our annual attrition study. She approached her work with the same detail, care and serenity that she shared with her family.

Que en paz descanses, Sarah, y que la luz perpetua brille sobre ti siempre.





Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Winning Essay

Editor's Note: IDRA sponsored a national essay competition among participants in the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program of IDRA. Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors wrote about how the program helps them do better in school and how they help their tutees to do better. Six students received prizes. Below is one of the winning essays. Others are posted on the IDRA website (www.idra.org).



High School First Place

Stefan García
12th grade, Odessa High
School, Ector County
ISD, Texas

First of all I'd like to take this time to thank the school district and my teachers for giving me this wonderful opportunity. Not only have I seen a glimpse of what it's like to be a teacher, I also have been given the chance to help shape a new generation of our nation's youth. Teachers are our nation's backbone. I know the average salary of a teacher is not nearly as much as it should be. This tells me something important, something all students should know. No teacher is in it for the money. The reason they are teachers is because they know the importance of leadership. It takes patience and dedication to be a teacher. Most students do not know this.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has been mainly about being a leader. To be a leader you must guide, care and nurture for the people you are leading. The characteristics of a leader are that of a mother or father. Not only do you have to care for the people you are leading, you must create a bond with each and every one of them. With some people, you will find out you might need a little bit more patience. Some people just understand that being lost is so close to being found. The night is darkest just before the dawn. So when everything seems hopeless, faith is an

essence. The level of faith in a leader will show just how much they are willing to do for the people they are guiding. For an example at the beginning of the year, my tutees would always complain and say how they were going to fail their STAAR exams. On a daily basis, the teacher and I would remind the tutees that everything we do in class will be on the STAAR exam. As their progress improved throughout the year, I noticed they were complaining less and less. The feeling a teacher or tutor gets when they get through to a student and they understand a problem fully is best explained as happiness and a brief feeling of accomplishment.

This past month, my tutee asked the teacher how many questions are on the STAAR exam. She said that there are 50 questions on the exam. Some students, as expected, said how that was too many questions and that they might fail. Then one of my tutees looked at me, then to the teacher and said, "I'm going to pass, because [my tutor] taught me how to do everything."

Another point I wanted to make about being a great leader is that you not only help others with problems, you help build their courage, confidence, intelligence, and as a human being overall. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program opened my mind to better thinking. Also the program reminded me every day that time is limited, not only in class, but in life. I have been given a higher sense of purpose, to that I cannot ignore. I do not know what I want to major for in college, but I do know one thing, whatever I choose, I will help better the world.



Learn more about the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

White House names the program a
Hispanic Ed "Bright Spot"

<http://budurl.com/BrtSptCat>

The program was featured as an "American
Graduate Champion" by PBS KLRN-SA

<http://budurl.com/VYPAmGradDay>

See a video about how the program works

<http://budurl.com/IDRAvypVid1z>

See the program brochure

<http://budurl.com/IDRAvypPDF>

The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program. Since its inception in 1984, the program has kept more than 33,600 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. According to the Valued Youth creed, all students are valuable none is expendable. The lives of more than 646,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program. Contact IDRA for more information.

(Instruction for Secondary English Learners, continued from Page 6)

Schools Serving English Learners. Additionally, the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program provides a way to implement many of the recommendations for instructional practices. And IDRA's guide, *Science Instructional Strategies for English Learners – A Guide for Elementary and Secondary Grades*, is a research-based tool for the classroom. These are only a few of the things that can be done to improve student learning and teacher knowledge while new research and models are being developed for secondary English learners.

Kristin Grayson, Ph.D., is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at kristin.grayson@idra.org.



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www.idra.org/IDRA_NL_current/



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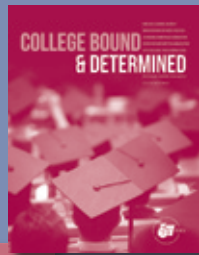
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IDRA Attrition Study & Resources Online



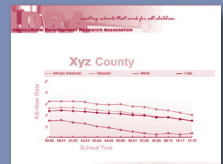
2016 Study:
 Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2014-15



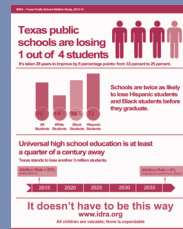
See Results:
 College Bound & Determined

Look Up Your County:

See attrition rates and numbers over the last 10 years



eBook:
 Types of Dropout Data Defined



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achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college