Focus: School Leadership

Strategies for School Leaders to Melt the Chilling Effects of Bad Education Policy

by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D.

School leaders are no strangers to high-pressure situations. But over the past several years, schools have been the hotbed for political pressure from responding to immigration policy to teaching curriculum about race and racism and creating safe spaces for transgender students. While many educational policies come with mandates and enforcement protocols, some extend their influence into schools through a powerful chilling effect.

A political chilling effect occurs when a policy creates fear, confusion or uncertainty about its implementation, especially when the policy language is vague and left open to interpretation but carries high-stakes consequences or penalties.

The danger of these policies is that they can cause enough fear to discourage people from engaging in completely lawful behaviors. In schools, they can prevent school officials from feeling empowered to protect the rights of teachers, students and families.

Policies with a chilling effect can undo school policies and practices that promote equitable learning for students and are often designed to do just that. However, school leaders can be equipped with strategies to melt the political chilling effects and educate students equitably and uphold their civil rights.

Recent Laws with Chilling Effects

Several major policies in recent years include chilling effects that crept into classrooms. For instance, anti-immigrant policies from the federal and state governments in 2017 created fear in school communities about the rights of students, regardless of citizenship, to attend public schools (Burkett & Hayes, 2018). While those rights were never overturned, reports of immigration enforcement occurring near school districts to target parents quickly sent a chilling effect to students, families and teachers. School leaders faced drops in attendance, spikes in students' stress levels, and even withdrawals from enrollment as families feared that schools would become hotbeds for immigration enforcement (Dee & Murphy, 2019; Martínez, 2019).

Some districts combated this chilling effect by passing affirming policies, hosting "Know Your Rights" trainings, and offering community resources, such as counseling services (Sikes, 2020).

Similarly, classroom censorship bills that have taken over news media and state legislatures impose a chilling effect on teachers' and school leaders' teaching of race, racism and racial history. For example, the newest classroom censorship law in Texas does not include specific penalties for teachers or districts and does include a section

Chilling effects from bad policy can seriously harm students and schools. But strong school leadership can melt their icy impact in favor of warming, welcoming and culturally-sustaining school practices.

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to protect teachers from being privately sued for discussing racial concepts outlined in the bill.

Yet, the bill is having an undeniable chilling effect on how teachers believe they can teach, discuss or be trained on issues related to race, on how school districts can offer experience-based civics education (Kao, 2021), and on how school leaders like principals can provide an honest curriculum about U.S. racial history. For instance, recent incidents involved guidance to teach a supportive view of the Holocaust in Carroll ISD (Hixenbaugh & Hylton, 2021), a cancelled visit from a book author and banned books in Katy ISD (Saavedra, 2021), and disputes over diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in Eanes ISD (Hooks, 2021).

Additionally, recent legislation concerning trans students' ability to participate in school sports carries a chilling effect for safe school climates for students. Bills that exclude trans students from participating in the school sport consistent with their gender identity have been discussed across the country (Freedom for All Americans, 2021) especially in Southern states. This type of legislation creates hostile school climates for trans students and spurs a chilling effect on safe school spaces that promote inclusivity, anti-bullying and LGBTQ+ allyship and support (GLSEN, 2020).

Whether or not these bills are reasonably enforceable by school staff, the high-profile debate and passage already have a chilling effect on students' ability to express their gender identity to educators and to engage safely in their school settings even outside of sports.
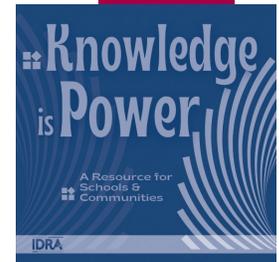
School Leaders Can Take Steps to Melt Chilling Effects

School leaders can refuse to be cooled by the chilling effects of bad policy. Leaders at the campus and district level can take a system-wide ap-

IDRA's Knowledge is Power –
A free bilingual resource for combating classroom censorship

Recent Stories
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- Get Involved in Changes to the Texas Social Studies Standards
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- Podcast interview: Students Want Schools to Teach Inclusive Truth

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proach to develop safe, sustaining schools that benefit all students, especially those most marginalized by a particular chilling effect.

Importantly, chilling effects often rely on misinformation, confusion and fear of consequences or retribution to quell an activity. School leaders can shed light by spreading evidence-based information about school policies and practices, by engaging with community members to educate them on policies and the district's approach, and by publicly resisting the chilling pressures of state and federal policymakers.

Policies and Practices for School Leaders to Create Warmer Schools

Leaders in education have the duty to uphold students' civil rights and provide truthful, evidence-based information to students and families. Since chilling effects often depend on misinformation to spread fear and cool people's behavior or actions, leaders are in the unique role to educate and enlighten their school communities to halt a chilling effect's influence. For example, during immigration enforcement raids near schools, some schools spread truthful information about students' legal rights to attend public schools (IDRA, 2021) re-

gardless of their or their families' citizenship status.

Authentic family and community engagement strategies also provide a key strategy to melt chilling effects (Montemayor, 2019). Some political chilling effects arise when small groups of parents or other community members rally around the effect to spread fear and demand consequences. By authentically engaging families and school communities, leaders can counter those demands from a few that may not be in the best interest or desires of the broader school community. Moreover, school leaders and families can develop a network of support to counteract the chilling effect, providing greater strength to resisting political pressures (Crawford, 2017). This includes centering the voices and experiences of students and families most negatively impacted by the chilling effect in any district or leadership actions.

Sometimes, leaders must publicly resist policies that rely on chilling effects and other methods of enforcement to spread bad policies in schools. For instance, when the chilling effect of recent

Preview of IDRA's 36th Annual Texas Public School Attrition Study –

A First Look at the Pandemic's Effect on Attrition Rates

by Roy Johnson, M.S.

Conclusive evidence of the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on attrition and dropout rates is still scant. Stakeholders from every segment of society (legislators, educators, researchers, parents, community members and students) express concerns about how closures and learning disruptions were exacerbated by inequities in access to digital and remote learning.

IDRA's analyses of attrition rate data for the 2020-21 school year based on fall 2020 enrollment data show that the overall attrition rate declined by 1 percentage point from 2019-20.

This year's study is the 36th in a series of annual reports on trends in dropout and attrition rates in Texas public high schools. IDRA's latest study found that 19% of the freshman class of 2017-18 left school prior to graduating in the 2020-21 school year.

Almost four decades ago, IDRA conducted the first-ever comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas. IDRA developed a now industrywide attrition methodology to calculate the number and percent of high school students leaving school prior to graduating with a high school diploma. This made it possible to measure a class of students over time, since schools lose a number of students before their senior year. The 2020-21 statewide attrition rate of 19% is 14 percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33% found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study.

COVID-19 Impact on School Enrollment and Attendance

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted students' school attendance, engagement, participation and learning. In March 2020 most schools in Texas shifted from in-person instruction to remote learning for the 2019-20 school year. The shift to remote learning in its variety of forms brought attention to digital divide and access to education technologies (*i.e.*, home Internet access) particularly for economically-disadvantaged, special education and emergent bilingual populations. Debates on school reopening continued the next school year as the virus surged and receded.

Strong evidence is not yet available to assess the full impact of COVID-19 on attrition and school dropout rates, particularly since the crisis is still not over. Some researchers speculate that the school closures and instruction disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may have some serious implications for school dropout rates (Klein, 2020; Margolius, et al., 2020; De La Rosa, 2020).

In a national study for America's Promise Alliance, Margolius, et al., found that the pandemic had a negative impact on learning time, emotional health and social connection. The study found that over one quarter of student respondents reported that they felt disconnected to school adults (29%), classmates (23%) and their school community (22%).

During the summer and fall of 2020, IDRA worked with four high school and college students as they led a participatory action research project. The study showed that three out of four students reported struggling with mental wellness issues (Campos, et al., 2021).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has conducted intermediatory data collection to better understand the COVID-19 impact on student enrollment trends. In March 2021, TEA released summary data of school enrollment by grade for October 2019 (pre-COVID-19), October 2020 and January 2021 (during COVID-19). These summaries show that overall enrollment was lower in January 2021 than in October 2019, but enrollment increased between October 2020 and January 2021.

The grades with the highest decreases from October 2019 to October 2020 were at the early

> *IDRA's latest study found that 19% of the freshman class of 2017-18 left school prior to graduating in the 2020-21 school year... There is little doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted students' school attendance, engagement, participation and learning.*

(Preview of IDRA's 36th Annual Texas Public School Attrition Study, continued from Page 3)

grades. At the high school grade levels, only ninth grade had a decline in enrollment across the three periods. Enrollment in 10th through 12th grades had increased enrollments from October 2019 to October 2020 and January 2021.

IDRA Study Highlights

Key findings from IDRA's latest attrition study include the following:

- The overall Texas public school attrition rates have steadily declined over the past two decades, usually a 1 percentage point decrease annually.

- Strong evidence is not yet available to assess the full impact of COVID-19 on attrition and school dropout rates.

- The attrition rates of all race-ethnicity groups have declined from the initial study to the latest.

- The attrition gap between white students and students of color still persists.

IDRA will publish the full 2020-21 study online in January 2022.

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Change in Texas High School Attrition Rates by Race-Ethnicity

Group	First Study 1985-86 Rate	Pre-COVID-19 2017-18 Rate	Pre-COVID-19 2018-19 Rate	Pre-COVID-19 2019-20 Rate	Full-Year COVID-19 2020-21 Rate	Change Since 3 Decades Ago	Change Since Last Year
All Students	33	22	21	20	19	↓	↓
Native American	45	21	20	22	19	↓	↓
Asian/Pacific Islander*	33	13	12	11	7	↓	↓
Black	34	24	24	23	23	↓	↔
White	27	13	12	12	10	↓	↓
Latino	45	27	25	25	23	↓	↓

*Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander   2021, Intercultural Development Research Association

Change in Texas High School Enrollment Rates by Grade

Grade Level	Pre-COVID-19 October 2019 Enrollment	Full-Year COVID-19 October 2020 Enrollment	Full-Year COVID-19 January 2021 Enrollment	Number Change 2020 to 2019	Percent Change 2020 to 2019	Number Change 2021 to 2019	Percent Change 2021 to 2019
Early Ed	25,883	20,100	17,807	-5,783	-22%	-8,076	-31%
Pre-K	249,226	194,137	198,697	-55,089	-22%	-50,529	-20%
Kinder	384,110	359,999	360,724	-24,111	-6%	-23,386	-6%
1st Grade	391,443	379,875	381,515	-11,568	-3%	-9,928	-3%
2nd Grade	388,670	378,797	380,549	-9,873	-3%	-8,121	-2%
3rd Grade	391,789	378,999	380,993	-12,790	-3%	-10,796	-3%
4th Grade	400,106	383,199	384,932	-16,907	-4%	-15,174	-4%
5th Grade	417,433	393,457	395,025	-23,976	-6%	-22,408	-5%
6th Grade	422,722	412,117	412,676	-10,605	-3%	-10,046	-2%
7th Grade	423,528	418,725	419,505	-4,803	-1%	-4,023	-1%
8th Grade	411,253	420,381	420,284	9,128	2%	9,031	2%
9th Grade	449,099	433,099	431,853	-16,000	-4%	-17,246	-4%
10th Grade	407,018	417,106	414,571	10,088	2%	7,553	2%
11th Grade	377,192	385,173	380,273	7,981	2%	3,081	1%
12th Grade	354,298	362,010	360,569	7,712	2%	6,271	2%
No Grade	0	0	135	0			
Total	**5,493,770**	**5,337,174**	**5,340,108**	**-156,596**	**-3%**	**-153,662**	**-3%**

2021, Intercultural Development Research Association

Priorities and Recommendations for the 2022 Georgia Legislative Session

by Terrence Wilson, J.D., & Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed.

IDRA works throughout the U.S. South to achieve education equity for every child through strong public schools. Building on the long history of policy advocacy and community engagement, IDRA's Southern Education Equity Network will train and assist communities in improving education policy and practice across the South. Georgia is our next expansion state for this network to connect communities of students, parents, caregivers and educators to promote the following policies and recommendations in Georgia.

Provide Fair and Full Funding for Public Schools

Since Georgia's passage of the *Quality Basic Education Act* in 1985, public education has been subject to hundreds of millions of dollars in budget cuts nearly every year. Every public school should have the resources to provide high quality education to students. To accomplish this goal, Georgia legislators should adopt the following policies.

- Commission a long-overdue comprehensive study of education to understand the needs of a diverse Georgia student population. If a cost study cannot be commissioned, leaders should adopt student-based funding recommendations made under former Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission (Knapp, 2015).

- Protect the state budget from continuous cuts, identify additional sources of tax revenue that may fund public schools and establish new funding streams to alleviate property tax pressures and disparities. Since 2003, Georgia has underfunded education by over $10 billion (Owens, 2021).

- Update the funding formula weights to provide additional funding for students who come from families with limited economic resources. Georgia is one of only eight states that fail to provide such additional funding (McKillip & Farrie, 2019).

- Fully fund categorical and other non-QBE (Quality Basic Education) grants, such as sparsity grants that support rural districts and communities with lower wealth. Rural districts in Georgia face additional challenges for educating their students. Georgia is ranked in the bottom 10 for rural student achievement and has one of the lowest rates of per pupil spending in rural districts (Showalter, et al., 2019).

- Repeal current voucher programs and reinvest those funds into public schools to ensure that the needs of all students, particularly students with disabilities, can be met. Georgia uses vouchers to divert public money into privately-run programs that have less accountability and oversight than public schools.

- Require public participation in school budget planning processes. In order to receive federal funding over the past year, state education leaders were required to solicit feedback for how public money should be invested in education and take that input into account (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Create Safe Schools and Culturally-Sustaining Educational Environments

Georgian students should have access to safe and culturally-sustaining environments. Georgian legislators can facilitate these environments by focusing on the resources and support that protect and sustain students' racial and cultural identities.

- Eliminate the state's reliance on harmful, unnecessary exclusionary discipline practices inside schools and maintain mechanisms to track incidents and their impact on school climate ratings. Students of color, particularly Black students, are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline practices (Craven, 2020).

- Prohibit the use of corporal punishment on any student by repealing GA Code §§ 20-2-730-732. Georgia is in the minority of states that still allow corporal punishment, which has been shown to be harmful and disproportionately applied to students of color and students with

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disabilities (SPLC & CCRR, 2019; Craven, 2021).

- End the regular presence of police inside schools while also collecting and publishing comprehensive and disaggregated policing data from schools that have a continued police presence. Studies have shown that school police are harmful for student environments and are associated with higher amounts of arrests, suspensions, and expulsions, outcomes borne out disproportionately by Black students (Homer, 2020; Fisher & Hennessy, 2016).

- Ensure school safety and foster positive school climates by providing critical funds for school-based professionals, like counselors and social workers, while expanding implementation of safer research-based programs, such as restorative practices and social-emotional learning programs. The recommended ratio of students-to-counselors is 250:1 (ASCA, 2017), but the current ratio in Georgia is nearly twice that at 480:1. Across the country, 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker (Whitaker, et al., 2019).

- Reject any attempts to censor learning for students and instead adopt culturally-sustaining curricula and pedagogical approaches that affirm students. Over the past year, policymakers throughout the South, including Georgia's own State School Board, have enacted policies aimed at censoring what students can learn and what educators can teach (Wilson, 2021).

Provide Excellent Education for Emergent Bilingual Students

Emergent bilingual students have the civil right to access excellent educational opportunities that ensure English mastery while honoring and supporting their home languages and cultures.

- Celebrate the diversity of languages spoken by Georgia's students and repeal Georgia's English-only official language law. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, people of color are among the fastest-growing populations in Georgia, and unsurprisingly Georgia's English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program has grown 3.5 times the national average (Owens, 2020).

- Update Georgia statutory language from *English learner students* to *emergent bilingual students*. Georgia's reference to students as *English learners* and the corresponding program for educating these students as ESOL does not reflect students' asset-based potential for bilingualism (García, 2021).

- Support paraprofessional pipeline and grow-your-own programs to encourage individuals to become bilingual education teachers in their communities. Analyses of Georgia spending for emergent bilingual student educators shows a lack of full staffing for educators in these positions (Owens, 2020). Georgia legislators should support districts to identify ways to address teacher shortages for emergent bilingual students.

- Expand Georgia's statewide assessments to be offered in students' home language. Georgia is one of 19 states that do not provide state assessments in languages other than English (Tabaku, et al., 2018).

- Expand the Georgia Department of Education's reporting dashboard to include seal of biliteracy attainment and ensure that the seal is accessible to emergent bilingual students. Georgia is one of many states that offer students the seal of biliteracy, but IDRA analysis of seal recipients shows that the seal designation may be inaccessible to emergent bilingual students.

For policy updates and to get involved in our advocacy work, sign up for our email alerts and follow us on social media (www.idra.org).

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The Art of Reflection for School Leaders

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.

Reflection is part of the learning process by engaging the mind in exploring and examining our understandings, observations, experiences and interactions. It helps us increase awareness to create meaning to move forward with our actions. In other words, reflection affords us the opportunity to have internal check-ins that help us think clearly to grow.

In our personal growth, our life advances when we take time regularly to examine our thoughts, beliefs, feelings and actions. The same is true for our professional growth among educators and instructional leaders.

Through IDRA's School TurnAround and Re-energizing for Success (STAARS) Leaders project, we worked with a school district to overcome persistent hurdles in a set of turnaround campuses. After implementing these school leadership coaching best practices for three years, each of the schools succeeded in obtaining full state accreditation for meeting state standards (Avilés, 2020). Reflection was one of the best practices used in the project, and thus we carried it forward into our new Re-energizing Leadership to Achieve Greater Student Success project with two other school districts.

When you engage in self-reflection, it clears your brain from unnecessary thoughts and feelings, and it highlights what essentially adds value to our life or career tasks. It gives you the opportunity to dive deeper into who you are. There are certain factors to consider when reflecting:

- Think of a different perspective. If you are stuck with a particular frame of mind try to internally seek other perspectives.

- Keep your focus on the big picture. Do not worry about insignificant details but ensure that what you are thinking and doing is aligned to your vision and broad goals.

- Pinpoint self-awareness. The more you know about yourself and your priorities, the more you understand what you are all about and what you want others to see in you.

- Be prepared to uncover your fears, predispositions or implicit biases. You want to be true and challenge yourself and enable yourself to be liberated from negative thoughts or mental constructs that may hurt you or others. You want to be able to inspire yourself and motivate those around you.

- Make conscious and healthier decisions with a clear mind. Reflections give the mind the opportunity to approach situations with better and with well-defined perspectives.

Self-reflection is essential for leaders in their path toward continuous growth and improvement. Through the process of reflection, leaders can reinforce the school's vision and core values. Leaders gain insights about their practices that can foster enhancement of leadership skillsets and competencies that can transform the school.

Leaders influence the behaviors, attitudes and beliefs of the people around them. Everyone benefits when leaders practice self-reflection. When engaging in reflection, there are questions to ask yourself to grow personally and professionally:

- How do I represent myself, and how do others see me?

- What are my core values, beliefs, goals and expectations?

- Am I doing things regularly that are adding value to my life – personally and professionally?

- What are key areas I need to work on to grow personally and professionally?

- Are there any beliefs or conscious and unconscious thoughts that are limiting me?

- Where do I see myself in a few years?

- What are three things or skills that I need to learn to be at my best?

- What impression do I wish to create as a leader?

- What impact do I wish to make as a leader in my community of practice?

One suggestion for school leaders is to schedule time intentionally and regularly for individual and collective reflection. Put it on your calendar to create opportunities for thinking and reflection by scheduling protected time for it. Use 30- to 40-minute walks to reflect or read articles or books for personal contemplation. Some people even do their best thinking over a cup of coffee in a quiet space.

You also may benefit from dialogue with a trusted partner and discuss questions, observations, concerns and challenges to gain insights. Or in addition to the questions above, you can reflect in writing or in conversation using these three questions: What was the situation and the outcome? Why was the outcome significant? What are the next steps I need to take?

Reflection is a useful tool for deeper learning and self-discovery. Find true meaning in your personal and professional life as there is strength and value to be found in reflection.

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censorship bills extended to the Little Elm ISD school board in a discussion to revoke the ethnic studies program it had just passed several months prior, a school board member clearly and publicly spoke to the political motivation of the proposal (Gravley, 2021). Dallas ISD passed a resolution earlier this year affirming racial equity efforts in the district in response to censorship legislation as well (Dallas ISD, 2021). Public resistance may be much easier for school leaders if they have effectively engaged local families and community members on the issue and distributed truthful information that negates the chilling effect.

Chilling effects from bad policy can seriously harm students and schools. But strong school leadership can melt their icy impact in favor of warming, welcoming and culturally-sustaining school practices.

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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