



Focus: Fair & Effective Education Policy

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Community Advocates Push Back as Georgia Legislature Targets Vulnerable Students

by Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed.

The Georgia General Assembly concluded the second session of its biennial term in early April. As in state houses around the country, education was a focal point. Governor Brian Kemp had identified his key action items for this year’s session, including fully funding the state’s education formula, censoring classrooms and banning trans children from school athletics. The following is an overview of IDRA’s work with policymakers and advocates and the results from this legislative session.

Stakeholder Voices Coalesce for Strong Education

Students, educators and advocates expanded the conversation around what constitutes a broad, diverse curriculum. This session saw tremendous engagement and participation among young people in every capacity (Downey, 2022). IDRA supported students who traveled to Atlanta to testify and speak at news conferences, many for their first time (see IDRA’s video gallery of student testimony at idra.news/StudentTestimonyVideos).

IDRA formed the Georgia Coalition Against Classroom Censorship that provided a space for learning and planning for students, educators and other advocates. It will continue to inform future work and collaboration. IDRA also launched the Southern Education Equity Network website for news and advocacy collaboration (www.idraseen.org). (See Page 6.)

Fair and Full Funding of Public Schools Undermined

Georgia leaders took some positive steps toward funding public schools. First, it approved a 2021 amended budget that filled in proposed budget deficits and a 2022 budget that allocates the entire amount of funds required by Georgia’s Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula. This is a weighted formula that dictates the funds allocated to each of the state’s 180 school districts.

Unfortunately, the Georgia legislature has not revised the formula since its passage in 1985 (Owens, 2022), raising concerns that the state is not meeting the actual needs of its public school students. For example, unlike funding for serving emergent bilingual students, the state formula does not include a weight specifically targeted toward serving students living in poverty. According to the Education Commission of the States, Georgia is one of only six states that does not provide necessary additional funding for educating students in families with limited incomes (2021).

Policymakers attempted to address this through two bills. House Bill 10 would have added a weight to the QBE using free and reduced-price lunch program percentages to allocate additional funding to schools, but it was not passed out of committee. Senate Resolution
(cont. on Page 2)



Centering Community as We Mourn for Uvalde

The horrifying school shooting in Uvalde has shaken us all. We are deeply saddened and angry for the young children, teachers, families and community whose lives have been changed in such a devastating way.

Yet again, in the wake of a tragic school shooting, some policymakers are quickly proposing strategies that we know do not make schools safer, like more school police presence, more weapons in classrooms and “hardening” schools to the point that they feel more like prisons than learning environments. We urge everyone to remember what school safety truly looks like and take meaningful steps to address gun violence across the country, ensure children and teachers have the resources and support they need in their schools and invest in strong, relationship-centered learning environments. See resources at <https://idra.news/Safe>.

(Community Advocates Push Back, continued from Page 1)



Georgia students hold news conference to present their statements after testimony was abruptly cut off at the beginning of a hearing.

650 was passed to create a study committee to review the QBE formula in its entirety.

Legislators took a positive step by refusing to pass several bills (HB 60, HB 999, Senate Bill 601) that would have established new vouchers that divert public money to private schools up to \$6,000 per entering child (see IDRA testimony against HB 999 and SB 601 at idra.news/GaAdvocacy).

But the Republican-dominated legislature pushed through HB 517 to increase the cap for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship voucher from \$100 million to \$120 million despite bipartisan opposition detailing the lack of oversight and accountability for this program.

Legislation Creates Hostile Environment for Vulnerable Student Populations

Like in many other southern states, Georgia legislators proposed several bills to censor classrooms and library materials (e.g., SB 226) under the guise of creating increased parent access and transparency. Legislators passed a so-called “parents’ bill of rights” (HB 1178) and a

“divisive concepts” bill (HB 1084) that allow individual parents to restrict curricular materials allowed in classrooms. Students, parents, educators and public school advocates opposed these bills out of a concern that they make it harder for teachers and administrators to protect students’ access to diverse, culturally sustaining learning materials. (see IDRA testimony against SB 226 and HB 1084 at idra.news/GaAdvocacy).

Legislators furthered their efforts to slight marginalized groups by amending the “divisive concepts” bill to include language that would punish schools for allowing transgender athletes to participate on the team that reflects their gender identity. Troublingly, legislators performed this move in the last minutes of the session and did not allow time for others to read or discuss this harmful provision (Luneau, 2022).

The issues of funding and censorship demanded lawmakers’ significant attention throughout the session, leading them to neglect many important issues for students. Policy that would have prohibited corporal punishment statewide never received a hearing. A bill that would have expanded social studies curriculum to broaden the historical contributions of Black Americans did not proceed past a hearing. This was also the case for policies that would serve emergent bilingual populations. Very few bills were filed, let alone passed, that would have served the diverse population of Georgia or increased language access.

Even in this environment, IDRA set the stage to end the use of deficit terminology for emergent bilingual students. In collaboration with our partners, we will continue to advocate this, along with culturally sustaining schools and equal opportunity for every student.

Resources

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The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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Update on Texas Education Policy Priorities – What to Watch and Where to Engage for Educational Equity

by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., Monica Obregon, & Darlissa Villanueva

The Texas Legislature convenes every other year, but Texas leaders and advocates make policies that affect schools and students all year long. Here we review recent updates to IDRA's four policy priorities and opportunities to engage in upcoming policy changes.

Fair School Funding:

Keeping Public Money in Public Schools

Public schools serve all students. They are publicly funded and publicly accountable. Yet, Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared this month that he supports private school vouchers, signaling action in the next legislative session in 2023 to direct public dollars away from public schools and toward private schools.

Publicly funded private school programs generally fall into three types: vouchers, education savings accounts, and scholarship tax credit programs. All three redirect public taxpayer dollars for education out of public schools and into private institutions. Out of the 50 states and Washington, D.C., 19 have scholarship tax credits, 16 have vouchers and six have education savings accounts (ECS, 2021). In the U.S. South, only Texas and Tennessee do not have any publicly funded private school programs.

Previous Texas legislative efforts to create voucher or similar programs have attempted to use students with special needs or from low-income households as an entry point to build support for vouchers with the thinly-veiled intent to later expand. These and other proposals historically fail because private programs do not adequately serve students, academically or financially. Private schools are not required to comply with federal special education protections under *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), nor guarantee admission to students with varied special needs just because a family presents a voucher or similar scholarship (NCLD, 2017).

Moreover, the average private school tuition exceeds the value of publicly funded private school programs, often making them only accessible to wealthy families. In Texas, the average private school tuition rate is over \$10,000 per year (Hanson, 2021), while base funding per pupil is \$6,160 (TEA, 2022a).

At the same time, the loss of students from the public school system to private schools means public schools lose funding but do not have reduced costs (Education Law Center, 2021). This affects every public school student since public schools in Texas have never been fully funded. All students deserve high-quality education, and public funds for all should not be redirected to benefit a few at the expense of everyone else.

College Readiness & Access for All Students:

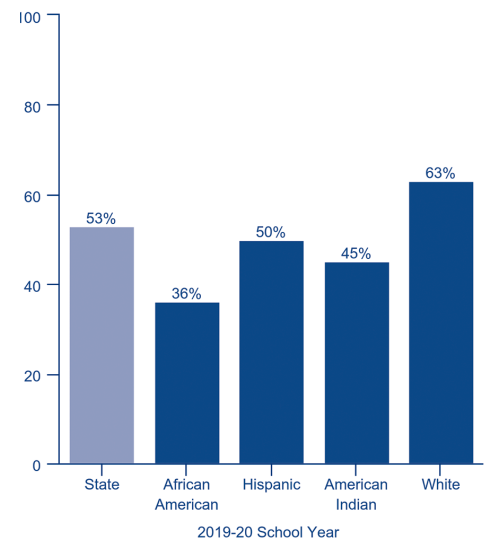
Creating a New Plan for Texas Higher Education

All students deserve a high-quality education that prepares them for college and lifelong success. Texas depends on it. Yet a disparately low percentage of Black, Latino and Indigenous students graduate ready for college compared to their white peers and the state average (TEA, 2020).

Black students graduate college-ready at just over half the rate of white students (36.4% compared to 62.5%), and 17 percentage points below the statewide rate. Latino and Indigenous students graduate more than 10 percentage points below the rate for white students.

Postsecondary education will never be equitable if Texas students of color – the majority of the K-12 school population – are not prepared to access and excel in college. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) recently released an updated strategic plan to address equity in postsecondary outcomes for Texas students. The Building a Talent Strong
(cont. on Page 4)

College Ready Graduates in Texas



Data source: Texas Academic Performance Report, 2020-21 Texas Education Agency. Racial-ethnic labels on chart reflect TEA term usage.

(Update on Texas Education Policy Priorities, continued from Page 3)

Texas plan replaces the previous 60X30TX plan that aimed to equip 60% of Texans between the ages of 25 to 34 years old with a postsecondary credential (four-year or two-year degree, certificate, etc.) by the year 2030 (THECB, 2020).

Progress toward the 60x30 goal lagged pre-pandemic, and college enrollment fell drastically since 2020 (THECB, 2021). The state especially struggled to meet goals for Black and Latino students, students from households with limited incomes, and males.

The new plan builds on past goals with additional strategies for both 25-34 and 35-65 year-olds to achieve a postsecondary credential by 2030, either through first-time postsecondary education or by returning to learn new career skills, or “re-skilling” and “up-skilling” (THECB, 2022).

IDRA is a part of Future Ready San Antonio, with over 85 non-profit organizations, companies, school districts, colleges and civic agencies that are committed to equity in college preparation for all students in Bexar County. Spearheaded by Up Partnership, the initiative launched recently with the goal of having 70% of high school graduates in a degree or credential program by 2030.

A strong K-12 educational foundation with advising and rigorous coursework prepares students to achieve whatever their goals are for college and beyond (Bojorquez, 2019). Advocates can engage in the interim state legislative hearings and in the next legislative session to ensure leaders address equitable college readiness across the education pipeline.

Excellent Educational Opportunities for Emergent Bilingual Students: **Addressing Teacher Shortages**

Building pressures from the pandemic and longstanding stresses on teachers have culminated in widespread teacher turnover. Texas has chronic teacher shortages in bilingual education, special education and STEM. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) recently established a Teacher Vacancy Task Force whose recommendations to address shortages will inform policies in the next legislative session. But when the 28 task force members were first named, only two were teachers. After the outcry of a lack of equitable representation, TEA

Let us know how classroom censorship laws are affecting you!

<https://idra.news/CensorshipStories>

announced it would add more teachers (24 more). The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC), founded and co-convened by IDRA, issued a letter with recommendations for transparency in the task force’s work (IDRA, 2022).

Two new laws address the teacher shortage in bilingual education. House Bill 2256 created a new certification in bilingual special education, and Senate Bill 560 tasked TEA, THECB and Texas Workforce Commission to develop a strategic plan to improve and expand bilingual education (see Garcia, 2021 for more details). IDRA convened teachers, teacher educators and others to provide recommendations for the certification requirements that will have specialized training in differentiating students’ linguistic, cognitive, developmental and other abilities as it relates to their placement in any bilingual and/or special education programs. (see <https://idra.news/EBspecEdrecs>).

Once established, the bilingual special education certification will prepare educators to support students’ full range of linguistic and developmental needs, and it will help address teacher shortages in both bilingual and special education.

The state strategic plan for bilingual education requires a strong teacher workforce to expand high-quality bilingual programs, including dual language immersion programs. As state agencies develop the plan, they will need to align strategies that consider teacher workforce needs, bolster educator preparation and certification programs, and cultivate a more bilingual and biliterate Texas.

TEA released the Texas Effective Dual Language Immersion Framework to guide districts as they initiate or expand their dual language programs (2021). The framework involves five levers for operating an effective dual language program that centers school leadership, family and community empowerment and supports staffing, program models, and pedagogical methods and materials.

Culturally-Sustaining Schools: **Combatting School Censorship to Promote Quality Curriculum**

Culturally sustaining schools create positive and safe school climates for all students to receive high-quality educational opportunities and the support to succeed. But new Texas legislation censors teaching and classroom conversations on racial justice, gender inclusivity, and true accounts of history and current events. Despite these policies, educators, students and community members can still teach the truth and promote culturally sustaining schools (see IDRA’s guide to SB 3: Castillo, et al., 2022).

The Texas State Board of Education is reviewing social studies learning standards this year. IDRA encourages diverse representation in the state learning standards to promote truthful history and culturally sustaining instruction and pedagogies for students to succeed in schools (see IDRA’s testimony idra.news/Testimony051622). Meeting notes and upcoming agendas are posted on the SBOE website. IDRA’s We All Belong – School Resource Hub (www.idraseen.org/hub) has tools for teaching in a climate of classroom censorship.

Further, the Texas House and Senate are holding interim hearings in 2022 on the impact of school censorship legislation as they prepare for the next session (Paxton, 2022). Censorship legislation has led to book bans, sanctions against educators and canceled opportunities for students to participate in civic engagement programs for course credit (Latham Sikes, 2022). IDRA is seeking input on the impact of censorship laws from educators and community members here: <https://idra.news/CensorshipStories>.

Strong, culturally sustaining schools support a high-quality education for all students through truthful and affirming curricula, and social-emotional and restorative justice programs that keep students engaged in school. School censorship laws lower the accuracy, comprehensiveness and quality of education for students.

Resources are available online www.idra.org.

Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., is IDRA’s deputy director of policy. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at chloe.sikes@idra.org. Monica Obregon and Darlissa Villanueva served as IDRA research fellows in spring 2022.

IDRA's Core Principles Influence Federal Advocacy

by Morgan Craven, J.D.

For almost 50 years, IDRA has been at the forefront of research, policy advocacy and educator training focused on building schools that center students' cultures and life experiences in teaching practices and instructional materials. Our support of fair and effective policymaking that promotes this focus rests on core principles that have influenced our state and local advocacy and shape our expanding federal work.

Despite significant progress over the last 50 years, many schools still struggle to support and sustain students' identities through curricula, instructional materials and teaching strategies. And recent policies make that struggle even more difficult.

In 2020, schools across the country began to experience the newest challenge to their commitment to support all students: so-called anti-critical race theory policies (Stout & Wilburn, 2022). These policies attempt to clip the throughlines of a history of systemic discrimination, denying that the many inequities we see in our housing, education, voting, healthcare, transportation and other systems are structural and claiming they should not (and cannot) be addressed through thoughtful and systemic reforms.

These classroom censorship policies are part of larger campaigns designed to target communities of color, LGBTQ+ communities, women and those with intersecting identities, leaving students feeling excluded and teachers struggling to have thoughtful, truthful and important conversations in the classroom (Latham Sikes, 2022).

The same people who attacked truthful lessons in the classroom since 2020 have also pushed for local book bans, unnecessary and deceptive "parental rights" policies, limits to academic freedom in colleges and universities, and policies that target LGBTQ+ youth and their abil-

ity to safely participate in their school communities. The architects of this far-reaching campaign against equity and diversity in our schools are attempting to redefine fundamental civil rights principles in order to eliminate examinations of race-based and other forms of discrimination and the tools we have to address them.

Such attacks are not new, though it often feels that they mark a new low in modern times (Sawchuck, 2022). The beliefs and systems that allow for the current campaign against educational equity also shaped decades-old policies that have resulted in the inequitable funding of public schools, under-resourced programs for emergent bilingual students, the funneling of students away from academic paths that prepare them for college, and pushing out of students of color through punitive discipline and school policing practices.

IDRA began its work five decades ago by challenging fundamentally inequitable school funding systems that limited opportunities for students of color and students living in under resourced communities. Our work expanded to focus on how schools must support emergent bilingual students in schools, how schools must prepare every student to succeed in college, and how schools use research-based strategies for strong, supportive classrooms as we end harmful practices like punitive school discipline and policing (Wilson & Latham Sikes, 2022).

Importantly, a community-centered advocacy strategy is as central to addressing these inequities as the policies themselves (Craven, 2019). As we expand and deepen our federal advocacy, IDRA relies on key principles of community-based advocacy that have shaped our policy recommendations at every level.

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IDRA's federal advocacy approach opens engagement opportunities to young people, families and others who may not be familiar with strategies to influence federal legislative and administrative decisions.

(IDRA's Core Principles Influence Federal Advocacy, continued from Page 5)

Federal Policymaking Spaces Belong to All People

Our responses to educational injustices require a multi-level advocacy approach, rooted in expanding access to decision-making spaces to all. This is true at the federal level, as well as the local and state levels. IDRA's federal advocacy approach opens engagement opportunities to young people, families and others who may not be familiar with strategies to influence federal legislative and administrative decisions.

Through public comments, joint letters, direct outreach to policymakers and other engagement strategies, we work with coalition partners to help connect those most impacted by education policy with the federal decisionmakers. This helps to disrupt a model of policymaking that benefits a small group of people who have access by virtue of resources, proximity or historical privilege.

For example, in our work to stop harmful school discipline, we help to convene a national working group that connects young people and families to federal policymakers to urge them to support policies that end corporal punishment and other punitive discipline practices.

Students and Families Have Valuable Expertise and Perspectives

IDRA's Education CAFE model, which helps community-based organizations identify and organize responses to educational issues in their schools, is expanding across the U.S. South through the Southern Education Equity Network (SEEN). This network uses an online community platform to provide advocacy resources and gathering spaces to partner organizations (check out the work of these incredible advocates at www.idraseen.org). This growing network helps IDRA connect community-based organizations to federal advocacy and to uplift and amplify the needs, best practices and policy solutions of communities across the U.S. South.

Community-centered Advocacy Yields the Best Results

IDRA leads and participates in cross-sector coalitions of student, parent, teacher and other advocacy organizations in Texas and Georgia. We track policy changes in other states across

IDRA Southern Education Equity Network

A community forum and resource hub for advocates of strong inclusive public education

- Get advocacy how-to tools
- Share policy & action updates
- Plan actions with your group

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The banner features a blue background with a blurred image of a group of people. It includes a laptop and a smartphone displaying the IDRA website. The laptop screen shows the text 'Strong Communities. Strong Schools.' and the smartphone screen shows the same text along with a 'Translate' button.

the U.S. South and base our federal research agenda and policy recommendations on a community-centered approach to advocacy.

We have found that this type of approach leads to policies and campaigns that are sustainable, thoughtful, inclusive and effective. Even though we know our advocacy and opposition to harmful policies will sometimes require effort over many years, we have learned to define “winning” in multiple ways, including by centering the work of young people, families and others.

For more information about IDRA's federal policy advocacy, please contact Morgan Craven, J.D., IDRA's national director of policy, advocacy, and community engagement, at morgan.craven@idra.org and sign up for our federal policy updates newsletter (<https://idra.news/SubscribeMe>).

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IDRA and ARISE Adelante Partner to Make Texas School Funding System More Clear to Families

by *Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., & Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.*

Families are strong advocates of their students' education and their public schools. Yet some of the most fundamental policies about how schools operate exclude family input. School finance policies – how schools are funded and where the money goes – are notoriously confusing and complex, even though they deeply impact public schools in ways that families see every day.

To help to pull back the curtain on Texas school finance, IDRA partnered with ARISE Adelante – a community-based organization that supports women and youth in the Texas Rio Grande Valley – to conduct a series of train-the-trainer sessions for volunteers. This article outlines how we worked together to make school finance information accessible and actionable.

A Family Leadership Approach to School Finance Training

IDRA's model of family engagement is based on several core tenets of family leadership in education (IDRA, 2017). Our local advocacy groups, called Education CAFEs, support this approach through authentic community engagement with schools (IDRA, 2020).

In the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley, ARISE Adelante formed the first IDRA Education CAFE over a decade ago and engaged its members to identify pressing issues in schools each year and develop the group's collective response to effect change.

Over the years, ARISE Adelante families have met with school principals, superintendents, and school boards about issues of concern like access to college, teaching quality and digital inclusion. And several provided testimony and comments to the Texas legislature.

Due to IDRA's founding legacy to address issues of inequitable school funding, ARISE Adelante

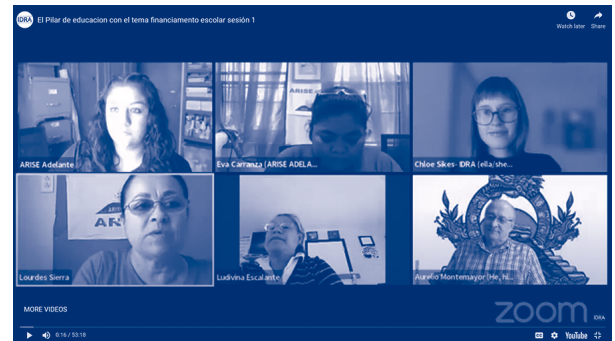
leaders requested a series of training sessions, in Spanish, on the basics of how public schools are financed and the reasons for the imbalance of resources among schools. These sessions were part of a grant-funded technical assistance project between IDRA and RGV FOCUS.

The School Finance 101 Series

In the first session, we reviewed the historical context for Texas school funding and IDRA's engagement over the past 49 years to advocate greater state contribution for public schools. The conversation began by distinguishing the U.S. system of school funding as largely based in state-created systems that blend local and state funding from the mostly federally-funded public education system in Mexico.

IDRA facilitators walked through key court cases that have shaped the school funding system in Texas, including *Salvatierra v. Del Rio*, *Delgado v. Bastrop*, *San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez* and the *Edgewood* cases (Cárdenas, 1997). These cases hinged on redressing racial and socioeconomic discrimination in the school finance system, where districts serving Black and Latino students and students from households with low incomes received far less funding than whiter and more affluent school districts. Participants looked at present-day differences in school districts' state and local funding shares using IDRA's School Finance Dashboard (<https://idra.news/SFdashboard>).

Following the structural overview, the second session examined the sources of inequities in the tax structure for schools. Texas overly relies on local property taxes and, without more substantial state investment, school districts with lower property wealth face a higher tax burden



than their high-wealth neighboring districts.

The third presentation focused on how ARISE Adelante members could track the program expenditures in their local school districts. We shared a comparison website so that participants could train others to look up and understand their districts' expenditures. The website breaks down expenditures by revenue sources (state, local, federal), operational expenses (staffing, food and transportation, academic programs, etc.) and instructional programs (basic education, bilingual programs, etc.) (TEA, 2022).

The fourth session served as an advocacy brainstorming workshop for members to discuss what they had learned and next steps for action. Participants overwhelmingly expressed interest in becoming more involved with their local school boards to advocate greater family engagement in school funding decisions, especially around funding for programs that support bilingual education and college readiness for students.

To extend the train-the-trainer resources on school funding, ARISE Adelante leaders coordinated two additional sessions that offered a digest of the original four-part series. These are viewable online (<https://idra.news/ARIS-Esf101>). The six total sessions support their members to understand Texas school funding, (cont. on Page 8)

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(IDRA and ARISE Adelante Partner to Make Texas School Funding System More Clear to Families, continued from Page 7)

communicate key points to the broader membership and determine how to take action in their local communities and at the state level.

Five Tips for School Funding Training for Family Advocates

Equitable educational policy and advocacy requires that family advocates have the tools to develop their own policy agendas. Based on ARISE Adelante participants' questions, comments and feedback, we present below five tips for school funding training sessions for family advocates.

- **Use a train-the-trainer design.** Participants can then facilitate conversations among the broader membership as they craft their own advocacy agendas together.
- **Keep it clear and accessible.** Graphics and dashboards help participants learn complicated issues and enable them to share with others.

- **Make it relatable.** Use concrete, everyday examples relevant to participants' experiences.
- **Tell the story step-by-step.** Review previous content before diving into new material.
- **Center family advocates to guide the conversation.** Check in regularly to ensure that each session meets the interests and needs of the participants and accounts for feedback from previous sessions.

Throughout the series, IDRA and ARISE Adelante shared the recognition that family and community members are leaders for change in their schools. One participant shared, "*Si no estamos presentes, no estamos enteradas*" ["If we are not present, we are not aware"].

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