



## Focus: Authentic Family & Community Engagement

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# Recent Campaigns for “Parents’ Bill of Rights” Designed to Marginalize Majority of Families

by Terrence Wilson, J.D.

All families should be a part of building excellent and equitable schools regardless of racial or ethnic background or level of economic resources. Instead of prioritizing or investing in authentic family engagement with families, politicians across the U.S. South are passing new legislation aimed at appeasing a small set of parents, backed by well-funded interests, who object to school lessons that discuss racism, marginalization or oppression. As a result, education leaders are faced with limiting im-

portant lessons under the guise of responding to “parent rights.”

However, these efforts do not serve the rights of parents and families, particularly of those who have been historically underserved by education and other systems across the U.S. South. In fact, according to a recent nationwide poll, nearly half of the parents of Black students want more teaching and understanding of  
*(cont. on Page 2)*

## Families Must be Centered in Education Policymaking, Not Used as Puppets – IDRA Statement

The expertise and experiences of families, including those of color, those with limited incomes, and immigrant families, is invaluable to building a strong and supportive school community, and it is critical for district and school leaders to ensure their voices are represented regardless of their access to financial means or political influence.

Some groups are now dividing and intentionally pitting families against schools and against each other with the goal of passing legislation that whitewashes our history and current events. These groups, who purport to represent values such as “equality” and “transparency” are distorting information to families about their schools and encouraging them to make harmful demands and violent interventions in school policymaking to advance policies that actually widen inequalities and exclusion. They push their economic, social and political agendas in the name of “parent engagement.”

This is dangerous to a democratic society.

For students to feel a connection to and affinity for this country, they must be taught to grapple with its painful history, see the beauty and value in its ideals and the diversity of its people, and recognize the work still left to make our democracy better. Students, their families and their communities benefit from schools that provide truthful and culturally-sustaining curricula.

IDRA’s principles for family leadership in education give a roadmap for implementing a truly inclusive vision of family engagement in schools that centers traditionally on marginalized families and focuses on building more just, culturally-sustaining schools for all students. We encourage schools and policymakers to use these principles in crafting responses to misinformation and to proactively develop opportunities for meaningful and productive engagement with all families.

(Recent Campaigns for “Parents’ Bill of Rights” Designed to Marginalize Majority of Families, continued from Page 1)

racism and slavery in their students’ schools, not less (Houston, et al., 2022). As described in IDRA’s model, authentic family leadership should serve as the foundation for asserting the right that all families have to excellent and equitable educational opportunities (2022).

### Misleading “Parents’ Bill of Rights” Legislation Proliferates

Parents have traditionally had the right to make decisions for their children’s learning. For example, a 2013 Virginia law codified the common understanding of parent rights by stating that parents have the “fundamental right to make decisions concerning the upbringing, education and care of the parent’s child” (Va. Code §1-240.1, Added by Acts 2013 c. 678, § 1, eff. July 1, 2013). Similarly in Texas since 1995, parents have had the “right to make decisions concerning the child’s education” (Sec. 151.001, Added Acts 2005, 79th Leg., Ch. 924, HB 383, Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2005).

But over the last year, several southern states have proposed and passed new legislation aimed at increasing parent control over schools, particularly to encourage parent objections to “diverse” curricula. These policies set up adversarial systems that limit access to culturally sustaining curricula and create environments where diverse student identities are marginalized.

Similar measures were introduced in 2021 in both the U.S. Senate (S 3218) and U.S. House of Representatives (HR 6056). States across the U.S. South have introduced their own versions. For example, this year, Florida passed HB 1467, which creates additional ways for parents to object to course content despite its pedagogical value or previous approval processes.

Similarly, Georgia passed a “parents’ bill of rights” that sets harsh deadlines for schools to comply with requests from parents to inspect and censor course materials (HB 1178). Politicians passed this legislation in conjunction with Georgia’s classroom censorship bill aimed at giving parents the ability to object to “divisive concepts” being taught in schools (HB 1084).

Parents and guardians already had the ability to access materials for their own students through state laws and federal laws like the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*.

A stark example involves the services that students may receive at school. Florida passed HB 1557, which requires school districts to disclose the nature of mental, emotional or physical health supports sought by students who may need these services in confidence. It allows parents to withhold consent for health services, questionnaires and screenings that a student may seek. Violations of the provisions in this bill lead to school districts being sued and assessed damages and court fees. This bill also prohibits discussions in kindergarten through third grade classrooms about sexual orientation or gender identity and is often referred to by opponents as a “don’t say gay” bill.

Similar ideas have been introduced but not yet passed in Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. These proposals will undoubtedly pit parents directly against other parents, students and school leaders who value diverse, inclusive curricula. Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced a plan to encourage passage of an exclusionary parent “rights” constitutional amendment.

### Policies Should Support All Learners

Instead of policies for a few parents at the expense of other parents, students and educators, IDRA envisions policies that involve parents in leadership activities that promote inclusion and understanding rather than division and marginalization.

Instead of policies that limit discussions about racism, sexism and other methods of marginalization, policies should encourage parents and caregivers to lead in their own role as their children’s teachers and to share how they have combatted marginalization from their own experiences.

Instead of policies that ban students from having conversations about race and marginalization, policies should encourage parents and caregivers to lead as resources to learning to ensure that students receive the information that they need to feel supported in school.

Instead of policies that encourage small groups of parents to dictate the curriculum for every other student, policies should encourage parents and caregivers to lead as collaborative decision makers who can work with educators and other parents to ensure that all students get what they need from the curriculum.

Finally, instead of systems that encourage only certain parents to be involved, policies should encourage parents and caregivers to be leaders and trainers of other families to increase collective action for the benefit of all students.

Authentic family leadership serves as a much stronger foundation for positive school action than this new ploy to use parent rights (cont. on Page 7)

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.

The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2022) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children across the United States.

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# Parents Already Have Rights to Expect an Equitable and Just Education

## Four Ways Schools Can Constructively Engage with Families

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

Current attacks on public education are perversely trumpeting a “parents’ bill of rights” as a tool to actually silence the voices of families who want equity, justice and a full and complete representation of the histories and contributions of heretofore ignored, erased and underserved populations.

Parents of color, families with low incomes and immigrants want all children to receive an excellent education. It dominates their vision of the future. Rather than lobbying at a board meeting to limit what other children can learn, most families want schools to understand their expectations for their children’s education to prepare them for college.

Parents already have rights – often declared in state policy – to influence education for the common good because public schools belong to their families and communities. And public schools regularly seek ways to engage with their families. But a new wave of “parents’ rights” bills aim to do the opposite.

In contrast, IDRA offers four recommendations for schools to strengthen and amplify family voices in public education below.

### Focus on Intergenerational Engagement to Pursue Education Equity

Many of the new parent bill of rights initiatives focus on the rights of a few parents to direct education at the expense of students and most parents, negating the role of the trained educators. This approach does not recognize the rights of other family members, students and the larger community to pursue excellent education. When school districts engage authentically with families, students and communities, they are able to create collaborative spaces where equity goals can be pursued together.

For example, this past year, with support from IDRA as an external resource and supporter, families in one community joined with their school district to organize and hold conferences for families bilingually about topics determined by the families and students. During the events, students presented to the families about beneficial and successful programs, such as a biliteracy program that spans from kindergarten until high school graduation. The families celebrated the district’s support for students to maintain their home language and culture in tandem with full literacy in English (Montemayor & Salazar Gonzalez, 2022).

Purposeful intergenerational engagement can help districts create long-lasting educational equity beyond what is possible if schools only respond to complaints of a few parents or outside interests.

### Create Pathways to Expand Curriculum by Drawing on Families and Their Experiences

Several of the parents’ rights bills explicitly seek to limit or cut entirely what students may learn about topics related to LGBTQ+ and other marginalized groups. School districts should encourage parents to be involved in curriculum changes but in ways that foster broadening the diversity of the curriculum that students may access.

For example, IDRA worked with families in a community who are mostly economically challenged and Spanish speakers to inform the teaching of Mexican American Studies courses. Family members and students documented family histories, ancestries and the contributions of their culture and group (Montemayor, et al., 2022). The family members universally expressed pride at their family stories becoming part of students’ contribution to the class.

(cont. on Page 4)

*Parents already have rights – often declared in state policy – to influence the education for the common good because public schools belong to their families and communities.*



<https://idra.news/Pod226>  
<https://idra.news/Pod227>



## Family Engagement Online Technical Assistance

### Available free!

Few people question the value of parents being involved in schools. But many school leaders labor with traditional strategies that have limited success or sustainability.

Families can be their children's strongest advocates for promoting quality neighborhood schools and to ensure excellent academic instruction – where children are safe, happy, learning and engaged.

The IDRA EAC-South's Family Engagement Online Technical Assistance Package provides educators tools for embracing what, for many, is a new vision for engaging with families and community members.

This web-based package includes literature reviews, articles, podcasts, and five learning chapters, each with a video and supporting resources.



<https://idra.news/webFamEngage>

By incorporating families and communities, curricular options for students can be expanded and enriched for the benefit of the entire school community.

### Leverage Community-Based Organizations to Connect with Families

Because of the buzz of the recent parents' rights bills, school systems may tend to focus only on a subset of stakeholders in the education system: a few loud parents of school-age children. By taking this approach, districts may miss out on the experience and value of other community members who have a vested interest in the success of schools.

For example, IDRA and our Southern Education Equity Network worked this year with a number of community organizations in Georgia to collaborate in speaking for state policies that promote culturally sustaining schooling. Many groups supported students, families and educators to testify in the state general assembly against such proposals as classroom censorship and book bans. The Georgia Youth Justice Coalition, one of IDRA's SEEN partners, was a leader of these efforts. The coalition is a collection of young people ages 14 through 23 across Georgia committed to justice and representation.

In another example, IDRA worked with ARISE Adelante when community members became concerned about the graduation requirements in Texas. With ARISE's help, the schools improved school-home communication about these issues, and the community organizations established an information campaign to ensure all students had access to college preparation.

Community-based organizations often have the pulse of the concerns of the community and can be crucial allies in creating educational change.

### Promote Students' Rights Alongside Parents' Rights

While parents have significant rights to direct the education of young people, students also have rights that should be promoted and protected. IDRA worked with students this year who articulated that they should have the right to learning environments that are free from discrimination, the right to environments that accept and value all aspects of their identity, the right to curriculum that lets them learn about themselves, and the right to the teachers and courses that teach accurate and truthful history (Montemayor, 2022). These rights of students must be balanced with those being asserted by a few parents with political motivations in order to create a fair and just school environment.

IDRA's experiences with families of underserved groups illustrate the power and importance of the family influence and voice to produce education policy and practice that is inclusive and sensitive to the many cultures and histories that make up our communities. Cultivating student, parent, family and community rights to excellent and equitable education should be the goal of further policy and legislative efforts aimed at increasing educational rights in schools.

### Resources

- Bahena, S. (November-December 2015). "Our children could get lost" – Rio Grande Valley Parents Gather to Discuss Policy Implications. *IDRA Newsletter*.
- Montemayor, A.M. (January 2022). Parents Urge Schools to Enrich, Not Exclude. *IDRA Newsletter*.
- Montemayor, A.M., & Salazar Gonzalez, A. (March 2022). Families Celebrate Excellent Bilingual Programs. *IDRA Newsletter*.
- Montemayor, A.M., Carranza, E., Flores, G., Saldana, L., & Peralta de Jesús, J. (2022). Teacher and Family Observations on Ethnic Studies & Tips for Organizing in Support of Ethnic Studies, IDRA EAC-South Power! People! Plan! Building Ecosystems for Equitable Schooling Virtual Convening.

*Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is IDRA's family engagement coordinator and directs the IDRA Education CAFE network. Comments and questions may be directed to him via email at [aurelio.montemayor@idra.org](mailto:aurelio.montemayor@idra.org).*

# IDRA Parent Leadership in Education Model

IDRA's goal is bigger than parent involvement in education; rather it is parent leadership. This model is a vision of all parents as advocates of excellent neighborhood public schools. We consider leadership the culminating set of activities in a spectrum of parent participation. The characteristics we support in the development of leadership are in contrast to some traditional parent leadership models that emphasize individual assertiveness and charismatic advocacy. Our process supports parents in learning to work in groups, planning and carrying out activities, speaking in front of groups, and developing other personal skills and traits that develop the individual. But, our emphasis is on collective action, listening to peers, and revolving leadership roles and tasks.

## Parents as Teachers

Acknowledge families for what they have already contributed to the education of their children. Parents are validated for the informal ways they instruct their children in the home and pass on family values and wisdom.

## Parents as Resources

Recognize that the prime asset parents bring to school is the knowledge and understanding of their child. Parents and primary caretakers are the experts on their children. Families are supported to contribute in the classroom in a variety of ways, including assisting with instructional support.

## Parents as Decision Makers

Facilitate opportunities for parents to participate in groups and make decisions for the improvement and well-being of the school. Parents are supported in learning, planning, assessing options and arriving at collective solutions.

## Parents as Leaders and Trainers

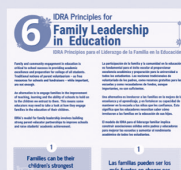
Support leaders as they begin to emerge. A leader is one who brings two or more others to a school conversation, meeting or event. Leadership is reflected in disseminating information, gathering others on school issues and participating in collective action to improve the school.

**IDRA Model of Parent Leadership**



Learn about IDRA's Education CAFE model

<http://budurL.com/IDRAedCAFE>



See our 6 Principles for Family Leadership in Education

<https://idra.news/6PrinciplesFamLeadership>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization. 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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# STEM Ecosystems Foster Community Engagement for a Strong Future

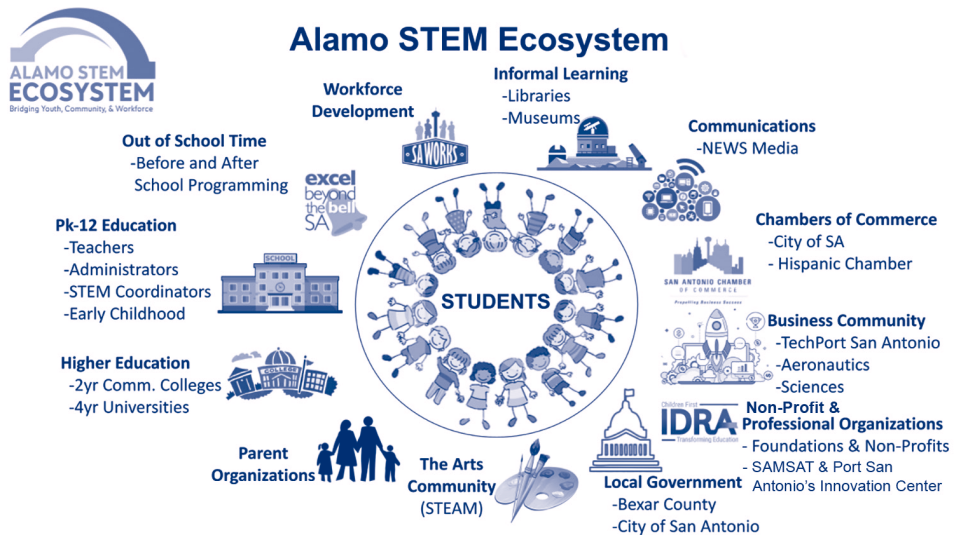
## Partner with a STEM Learning Ecosystem Near You!

by Stephanie García, Ph.D.

A learning ecosystem harnesses unique collaborations in symbiosis to deliver equitable STEM learning for all children. A STEM Learning Ecosystem encompasses schools; community settings, such as after-school and summer programs, science centers and museums; and informal experiences at home and in a variety of environments that together constitute a rich array of learning opportunities for young people. There are designated STEM Learning Ecosystems across the world, with a large presence here in the United States.

Texas has three STEM Learning Ecosystem designations: (1) The Texas EcosySTEM is a statewide network that operates through all 20 Education Service Centers as STEM Hubs, maintained by the Texas Education Agency. (2) The Greater Austin STEM Ecosystem serves as a connector and coordinator, ensuring STEM cohesion and that programming is accessible to all students throughout the Austin area. (3) The Alamo STEM Ecosystem is an active, cross-sector partnership working to bridge youth, community and the workforce in San Antonio and the surrounding region. The image above shows representatives from the cross-sector partnerships and includes the main stakeholders they aim to serve well: students.

IDRA currently leads the Alamo STEM Ecosystem. As IDRA's STEM and gender equity education associate, I bring in IDRA's asset-based philosophy and collaborate with ecosystem community partners to focus on equity and innovation through all current projects and initiatives. We align and connect efforts to strengthen and broaden participation in the local STEM pipeline (from cradle to career), and we center and elevate student and family voices for improving students' access and sense of belonging in informal and formal STEM education.



Industry, educators and students can learn so much from each other. We see this in action at the monthly Alamo STEM Ecosystem networking meetings (open to all) and its annual education conference (the next one is on February 11, 2023). The image below is from a demonstration to a group of STEM educators and professionals who were learning about STEM research, degrees and careers in aviation (drones specifically), computer science, biomedical engineering, structural engineering and mechanical engineering.



As the ecosystem recently led a tour of the St. Mary's University campus, many "light bulb" moments happened, especially regarding ways to bridge youth, community and workforce. Discussion items included summer camps, field trips, guest speakers, student-led projects, competitions, internships and mentors. Participants took multiple action

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(STEM Ecosystems Foster Community Engagement for a Strong Future, continued from Page 6)

items back to their respective organizations and institutions, as well as to Alamo STEM Ecosystem working groups and initiatives.

The Alamo STEM Ecosystem seeks to build stronger connections with students and to support them as they graduate from one STEM program to another. Mentorship, feedback and guidance are crucial for students as they persist through the STEM pipeline (Garcia, 2020). Many partners, like San Antonio's DoSeum, have youth and community engagement as their top priority. Pictured here is a community

conversations event the DoSeum hosts to bring youth and family voices into the development and design of their museum exhibits. The Alamo STEM Ecosystem will continue to strengthen its student and family connection, so stay tuned for its upcoming youth network!



San Antonio is ranked Number 2 in the country for cybersecurity, so its STEM Ecosystem offers relevant formal and informal learning opportunities and experiences for students. For example, Alamo STEM Ecosystem members met recently with the Defense STEM Education Consortium and the Department of Defense STEM to discuss areas of growth at the Palo Alto College STEM Center (pictured below). The consortium shared helpful resources and ideas for potential collaborations.

If you are interested in connecting with the Alamo STEM Ecosystem and being added to its



[Standing L-R] Nicole Racine, Strategic Analysis Incorporated; Dr. Cliff Zintgraff, San Antonio Museum of Science and Technology; Anna Olguin, San Antonio ISD; Erron Gonzalez, Palo Alto College; Ashley Aguilar, Palo Alto College; Dr. Marianne Phillips, Texas A&M University – San Antonio; Julie Stolzer, TIES Ecosystem. [Seated L-R] Rebecca Stanley, RTI International; Vanessa Jimenez, St. Mary's University; Dr. Rudy Reyna, founder of the Alamo STEM Ecosystem; Dr. Stephanie Garcia, IDRA; Javier Uribe, Edgewood ISD.

**Expert panel of students call for more chances for all students to see real opportunities for their future in STEM.**

**ALAMO STEM ECOSYSTEM**  
@AlamoSTEM  
2022 Educator Conference

A panel of students opened the 2022 AlamoSTEM Ecosystem Educator Conference in San Antonio. Below are highlights of their remarks.

**What is your favorite letter in STEM?**

“My favorite letter of STEM is the E because, with engineering, I get to see how things are made and what really goes into it.”  
– Raegan Lindsey, Brentwood STEAM School of Innovation, Edgewood ISD

“My favorite letter of STEM is T because with technology you can code however you want and show yourself through your code.”  
– Owen Balagia, Brentwood STEAM School of Innovation, Edgewood ISD

**How should educators and industry encourage students in STEM?**

“Innovation allows us to reinvent the world. Give us hands-on activities in all classes, not just STEM classes, and have extracurricular clubs, etc. Anything to get students involved.”  
– Elizabeth-Joyce Alexander, Lee High School, Northeast ISD STEM Academy

“Do projects that require creativity to solve problems in the world using skills they have.”  
– Aadishree Jain, Lee High School, Northeast ISD STEM Academy

email list, contact Dr. Stephanie Garcia (stephanie.garcia@idra.org). Learn about events at [AlamoSTEMecosystem.org/Events](https://AlamoSTEMecosystem.org/Events). You can find a STEM Ecosystem in your area at [STEMecosystems.org](https://STEMecosystems.org).

Stephanie Garcia, Ph.D., is IDRA's STEM and gender equity education specialist and directs the IDRA VisionCoders program. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at [stephanie.garcia@idra.org](mailto:stephanie.garcia@idra.org).

(Recent Campaigns, continued from Page 2) measures to attack diversity. Authentic family leadership rather brings education stakeholders together to ensure the rights of all parties to excellent, equitable schools.

### Resources

Dimarco, B. (June 6, 2022). Legislative Tracker: Parent-Rights Bills in the States. FutureEd, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University.

Houston, D., Peterson, P., & West, M. (2022). Parental Anxieties over Student Learning Dissipate as Schools Relax Anti-Covid Measures. Education Next Survey of Public Opinion 2022.

IDRA. (January 20, 2022). Families Must be Centered in Education Policymaking, Not Used as Puppets – IDRA Statement, Knowledge is Power.

IDRA. (2022). IDRA Parent Leadership in Education Model – Infographic. IDRA.

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*Focus: Authentic Family & Community Engagement*

Free Tools for Teachers

**Informed by students, families and educators, this hub provides lesson plans & tools for teaching in a climate of classroom censorship.**



- Lesson Plans
- Teaching Tools
- Policy News
- Advocacy News

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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*