



*Focus: Cultural  
Connections in Schooling*

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## Join Us for An Extraordinary Evening to Celebrate IDRA’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

Mark your calendar for November 2 in San Antonio. We want you with us as we celebrate the legacy of the IDRA community and look toward the next 50 years of supporting students and public schools across the country.

Catch up with old friends and new ones during our cocktail reception on the lawn. Enjoy fine dining and be inspired by our program featuring special guests touched by IDRA’s work.

We are thrilled to announce our keynote speaker and honoree will be the iconic Dolores Huerta, founder and president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation and co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America with César Chavez. She is a civil rights activist and community organizer, working for labor rights and social justice for over 50 years. Ms. Huerta was also part of IDRA’s Ohtli Encuentro in New Mexico nurturing leadership by women of color.

Please help us get the word out to people you know who are part of IDRA’s story and should be part of its future.

Learn more about tickets and sponsorship opportunities: <https://idra.news/GalaInfo>.

*Gala*  
 IDRA 50th Anniversary  
 Bold Legacy  
 Bright Future

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
 IDRA  
 Supporting Schools

Featured Speaker  
**Dolores Huerta**

November 2, 2023  
 The Red Berry Estate  
 San Antonio  
 6 pm Cocktails · 7 pm Program

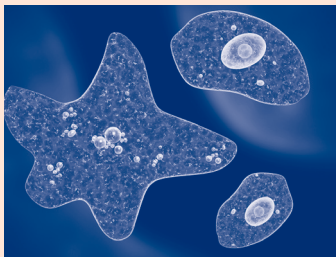
Registration & Sponsorship Info  
[www.idra.org/50th](http://www.idra.org/50th)

Presenting Sponsor  
 WILLIAM + FLORA  
 Hewlett  
 Foundation



## A Defining Moment for IDRA's Founder

Dr. José Angel Cárdenas was working in educational research in the late 1960s, prior to becoming the superintendent of the Edgewood Independent School District in San Antonio and prior to founding IDRA.



He said: “In one powerful moment, it all came together for me. Scientists had experimented with amoebas in a laboratory, and by using their reactions to color and light, they had trained these amoebas to recognize letters of the alphabet.

“And I thought, ‘What if the amoebas had been sent to public schools instead? Then I would be hearing what I always heard about non-readers in our schools: ‘They don’t speak our language!’ ‘They’re amoeba! How can you expect them to learn?’ ‘They come from the wrong side of the pond.’

“What was different and special for those particular amoebas wasn’t their readiness to learn compared with other amoebas, but the context: the laboratory and all the equipment, the skills of the technicians, the elegant process the scientists had designed specifically for amoebas.

“And I was sure that all children could learn if their schools had effective curricula and material and were properly equipped and their teachers were well-trained and exercised every effort to teach them.”

From that moment, Dr. Cárdenas pledged to defend all children and their right to an excellent and equitable education. Children who are immigrant or migrant, students of color, emergent bilingual students and students families with low incomes often have no voice.

The story of IDRA’s founding is relayed in the book, *Texas School Finance Reform: An IDRA Perspective*. In that book, the late Dr. Cárdenas stated: “If students are faltering, failing or leaving school, then their schools – not the students – need to change in fundamental ways.”

IDRA’s next President & CEO, Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, carried forward IDRA’s mission to ensure educational opportunity for every child. “Our dream and our work at IDRA is for a future in which the color of a child’s skin, the language a child speaks and the side of town that a child comes from are no longer considered barriers to a great education and a good life.” For more than two decades, Dr. Robledo Montecel led IDRA as a high-powered, independent organization with constancy of purpose, commitment, principles and courage.

As IDRA’s third President & CEO, Celina Moreno, J.D., is building on IDRA’s powerful legacy to strengthen and transform public education by providing dynamic educator training and actionable research; leading bold policy and legal advocacy; directing powerful student and parent leadership programs; and building people power to create schools that nourish all students.

IDRA remains dedicated to educational justice, innovation and equal opportunity for children. The issues IDRA has framed and the solutions that have been created, by IDRA and our partners, are all firmly grounded in that vision.

## All Pianos Have Keys & Other Stories – Series Re-release

This story is excerpted from “The Analogy of the Amoeba” in IDRA founder Dr. José A. Cárdenas’ popular memoir, *All Pianos Have Keys and Other Stories*.



As we celebrate IDRA’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, we are re-releasing chapters from the book, which is now out of print. Watch our social media accounts and the webpage below for each new release.

Stories released to date:

- All Pianos Have Keys
- Silence of the Lambs
- The Epidemic that Never Was
- Jesus Christ Was Not Bilingual
- The Shape of the World
- One Minute of Silence
- Bilingual Onions
- My Side of the Story
- A Measure of Progress
- The Dining Room Table
- My School: Budget Monitoring At Its Best
- The Road to Indio
- King Antonio’s Exile
- Fiesta San Antonio And Human Rights
- The Fifty Most Memorable Quotes in School Finance

<https://idra.news/AllPianosHaveKeys>

# Students Advocate and Influence Culturally-rich Education in their Schools

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

When students in Houston and San Antonio faced the disheartening cancellation of an ethnic studies class and the reassignment of a cherished teacher, they took action, remarkable action.

The students' efforts are a testament to their determination that these valuable education resources not be lost. In both cases, the students pushed for an education that is connected to their cultural heritage.

## Students Secure Mexican American Studies Course

In San Antonio, IDRA has been cosponsoring a series of *cafecitos*, or coffee hours, for an informal Mexican American Studies (MAS) community of practice, a gathering where teachers and students with a shared interest in MAS converge. Community members are drawn to this initiative as well to offer their support to these crucial classes.

Other *cafecito* cosponsors with IDRA include the MAS Teacher Academy, MASISTA (Mexican American Studies Independent Students Taking Action), and the Race, Ethnicity Gender and Sexuality Studies department at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

On a Saturday morning earlier this year, students facilitated the gathering. The master of ceremonies was a high school senior, and the panel consisted of five students from different high schools in the area.

Some students participating for the first time became intrigued by the discussions. Among them was a high school junior and her aunt. The student approached a senior classmate and asked, "Why don't we have a Mexican American Studies class at our school?"

Back at school, the two students explored further, leading to the discovery that the class had been canceled due to a perceived lack of inter-



est among students and a lack of enthusiasm from faculty members.

Undeterred, the students created a survey to gauge student interest in MAS. The student researchers interviewed over 100 students, a significant portion of the student body.

Astonishingly, the vast majority expressed their desire for MAS classes to be reinstated. The survey results were illuminating: 35 students wanted to enroll in the class if it was offered the following year.

When the students shared their results, school officials listened and placed the class on the schedule for the next year. And student engagement continues to grow.

## Students Secure Mariachi Class

In Houston, a different but equally impactful student-led initiative took shape. A high school had once offered a mariachi class – a celebration of Mexican cultural musical traditions. Unfortunately, this class was discontinued due to budget constraints, the departure of the teacher and a decline in student enrollment.

A group of students, including a young lady who had never played a musical instrument before, felt the loss. During her sophomore year, one determined student began to rally her  
*(cont. on Page 7)*

*Students in a September Cafecito y Mas describe their youth participatory action research project MAS for All, supported by IDRA, to investigate the status of MAS in their school district.*



# IDRA School Resource Hub Provides Tools for Teaching About Race and Gender

by Christie L. Goodman, APR, Fellow PRSA

We were in a gathering of teachers, students and parents talking about ways to give students culturally sustaining schooling. Students presented their advocacy work to get Mexican American Studies offered in their high schools (see Page 3). They described what it had meant for them to learn about the powerful history of their community and to “not feel erased,” as one student stated.

Committed teachers shared how they had to scramble to prepare to teach ethnic students for the first time. They appreciated the chance to share ideas with each other.

Everyone turned their eyes to the screen as someone navigated to a website. With Hispanic Heritage Month coming up, the mouse clicked on a classroom lesson, “Jovita Idar – Educator, Journalist, Suffragist & Civil Rights Activist.”

“Oh yes. My students loved this lesson,” said one experienced teacher.

Jovita Idar was a teacher, journalist, nurse and civil rights activist who grew up in Texas and endeavored to expose segregation, lynching and other injustices endured by Mexican Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Complete with a video, discussion questions, vocabulary, a political cartoon analysis activity and another on the U.S.-Mexico Border, the lesson about Jovita Idar was developed for PBS by Unladylike2020, an IDRA partner. The lesson materials are in English and Spanish.

A teacher described how he used the lesson in his Mexican American Studies class. He said he paused the video a few times as students reflected on what they were seeing and how it connects to their community today.

This resource is one of many on IDRA’s award-winning We All Belong – School Resource Hub ([www.idraseen/hub](http://www.idraseen/hub)). The hub features over 120 lesson plans, instructional best practices

and historical resources to support teachers in delivering culturally-sustaining classroom lessons.

“We designed our School Resource Hub to help educators feel supported in their work to prepare students to be able to think critically so they can succeed in college and beyond,” said Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President and CEO. “Students are not naïve to the world around them, and they want their teachers to help them open their eyes to history and to the world, not whitewash them.”

In today’s climate of classroom censorship, teachers in all grades and subjects still have a job to do to provide accurate and inclusive education for their students. IDRA developed the hub by first listening to teachers and students who want lessons on history and current events about race and gender and to help provide context to discrimination they have experienced.

Within these lessons, IDRA created a set of innovative original classroom lessons using a new “America Is Me” (AIM) framework for teaching intercultural skills: solidarity, social awareness, social-emotional wellness, socio-cultural exchange, and social change. These skills are transferable across academic content areas.

A high school student focus group unanimously praised the lessons and expressed regret they had not had these lessons in school earlier. Feedback from teachers has been overwhelmingly positive. In focus groups, teachers who used AIM lessons in their classrooms validated the framework and praised how the lessons positively engaged and impacted their students.

Teachers can apply the framework to the federal, state and district standards to foster student engagement. Sample AIM lessons include:

*(cont. on Page 7)*

*“The actual [Real World] lesson is the magic... Topics like that engage students because they’re real and relevant.”*

*– Teacher focus group participant*

# IDRA We All Belong School Resource Hub

IDRA's award-winning hub of resources is designed for educators, families and policy advocates, particularly in the U.S. South, who want to make sure students receive a strong, truthful education in our public schools.

- ✓ Get lesson plans & teaching tools
- ✓ Search by topic, grade, etc.
- ✓ See guides for teaching intercultural skills

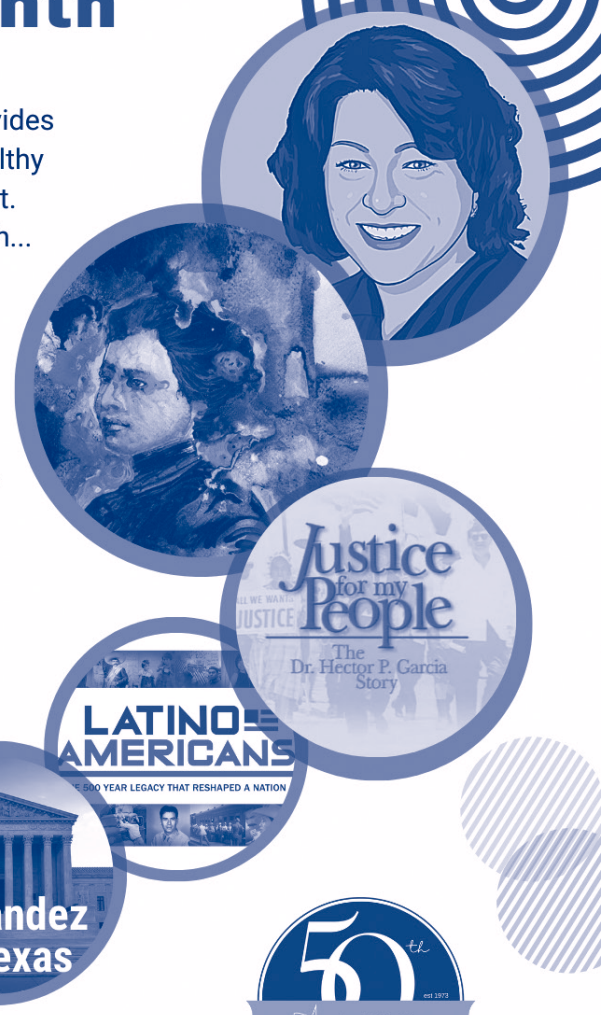
[www.idraseen.org/hub](http://www.idraseen.org/hub)



## Hispanic Heritage Month

Hispanic Heritage Month celebrates prosperity, power and progress. IDRA's **We All Belong – School Resource Hub** provides free lesson plans for culturally sustaining instruction and healthy classroom conversations about this nation's past and present. Here are samples to highlight during Hispanic Heritage Month...

- **Yes, She Can: Justice Sonia Sotomayor** (by IDRA)
- **Ynés Mexía – Accomplished Latina Botanist** (by Unladylike2020)
- **Jovita Idar – Educator, Journalist, Suffragist & Civil Rights Activist** (by Unladylike2020)
- **Justice for My People: The Dr. Hector P. García Story** (by South Texas Public Broadcasting)
- **Organizing the Farm Worker Movement** (by PBS)
- **Latinos and the Fourteenth Amendment: A Primary Document Activity for Hernandez v. Texas** (by Learning for Justice)
- **Rio Grande Valley Civil War Trail: 40 Lesson Plans** (by CHAPS Program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley)
- **And many more!**



Visit the Hub



# Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition Policy and Advocacy in 2023

by Rebekah Skelton

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of more than 30 organizations and individuals working to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial justice. TLEEC advocates educational equity through legislative advocacy and coalition building, particularly during Texas' legislative sessions.

IDRA founded the coalition in 2001 and has co-led TLEEC with Every Texan and fellow founding member MALDEF for more than 20 years. TLEEC collaborates with a broad collective of committee members to inform local- and state-level policy and mobilize Texas communities.

## Recap of 2023 Regular Legislative Session

During the legislative session this spring, TLEEC focused on two main policy priorities: (1) protecting and increasing funding for schools and (2) promoting inclusive P-20+ school climates. Coalition members testified on the discriminatory impact of education savings accounts (Long, 2023), the harmful consequences of private school vouchers (TLEEC, Feb. 2023), the need for ethnic studies courses to fulfill required social studies credits (Wilson, 2023), the concerning prohibition of diversity, equity and inclusion offices on college campuses (TLEEC, May 2023), and harmful classroom censorship policies (TLEEC, March 2023), among other issues.

TLEEC members successfully mounted a strong campaign against private school vouchers – in the form of education savings accounts – in collaboration with legislators and the Coalition for Public Schools. Establishing vouchers was a top priority for the governor and other state leaders this session. Had the legislation passed, it would have diverted taxpayer money away from Texas' already

underfunded public schools, making it harder to keep teachers employed, decreasing transparency and accountability to school communities, and further entrenching segregation and inequity in our public school system, especially for students in bilingual and special education programs.

As private school vouchers will re-emerge as a top priority for legislators in a third called session this October, the coalition remains unwavering in its stance that public funds should remain in public schools.

TLEEC members also advocated inclusive school climates. Our coalition successfully defended against Senate Bill 1515, which would have required teachers to display the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms, and Senate Bill 8, which would have banned instruction or programming regarding sexual orientation or gender identity for every grade level.

## TLEEC Policy Priorities for a Third Special Session

In anticipation of this fall's expected special session regarding education, TLEEC calls on state lawmakers to:

- Fairly and adequately fund public schools:
  - Address the teacher shortage by increasing the basic allotment; and
  - Guard against voucher systems to keep public money in public schools.
- Support high-quality public school programs for bilingual education, special education, and post-secondary access:
  - Provide educator and student support for bilingual and special education in training, materials and classroom management that keeps students in school; and
  - Promote ethnic studies courses and col-

(cont. on Page 7)

## TLEEC Member Organizations

- ARISE Adelante
- Austin Justice Coalition
- Big Thought
- Breakthrough Central Texas
- Coalition of Texans with Disabilities
- Children at Risk
- Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum
- Easterseals Central Texas
- Ethnic Studies Network of Texas
- Every Texan
- Houston Community Voices for Public Education
- IDRA
- MEASURE
- McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership
- Mexican American Civil Rights Institute
- Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- Mexican American School Boards Association
- National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) – Tejas Foco
- San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Texas American Federation of Teachers
- Texas Association for Bilingual Education
- Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education
- Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education
- Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce
- Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas – Austin
- Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
- Texas LULAC
- Texas NAACP
- The Arc of Texas
- The Education Trust in Texas
- TSTA (Texas State Teachers Association)
- UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)



(Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition Policy and Advocacy, continued from Page 6)

lege-preparatory classes in high school that prepare students for college success.

As we look toward the upcoming special session on education, TLEEC stands ready to hold state leaders accountable to Texas communities and defend the right for all students to

have a quality public education. Learn more at: <https://idra-resource.center/TLEEC>.

Citations available online.

Rebekah Skelton is an IDRA intern. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at [rebekah.skelton@idra.org](mailto:rebekah.skelton@idra.org).

### TLEEC by the Numbers

During the 2023 regular session, TLEEC:

- tracked and monitored 177 bills,
- partnered with 35+ organizations,
- testified 11 times on nine bills, and
- hosted two news conferences, one town hall meeting, and one day of action.

(IDRA School Resource Hub Provides Tools for Teaching, continued from Page 4)

- **The Real World: Understanding the Difference Education Makes** – This middle school lesson offers students an opportunity to understand how higher education is linked to higher weekly incomes and how income impacts an individual's quality of life.
- **CulturED Collection #1 – #GotCulture?: A Lesson on How Culture Shapes Us** – In this high school lesson, students are introduced to important elements of culture. They come to understand how culture shapes the way we see ourselves, others and the world.
- **Yes, She Can: Malala Yousafzai** – In this

elementary lesson, students learn about Malala Yousafzai's efforts to ensure young girls have access to education and fair treatment. Students make connections between her work and concerns in their communities and present a one-minute speech about their issues.

Dr. Kelly N. Ferguson and Dr. Marlon C. James, Equality and Equity Group, LLC, developed the AIM framework and lessons for IDRA. And IDRA has created modifications for emergent bilingual learners for each of the AIM lessons.

Development of the We All Belong – School Resource Hub was generously supported by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies. IDRA is continually adding lesson plans and resources to the site. Educators can find them through the hub's search filters by subject, topic, resource type and grade. IDRA also offers training for educators on using the hub and walking through featured lessons. The site includes a Google Translate toggle button and has a comprehensive accessibility feature.

Christie L. Goodman, APR, Fellow PRSA, is IDRA's director of communications. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at [christie.goodman@idra.org](mailto:christie.goodman@idra.org).

(Students Advocate and Influence Culturally-rich Education, continued from Page 3)

peers, and as a junior, she emerged as a leader. She and other students organized after-school mariachi rehearsals, teaching themselves the music since there was no available teacher.

Parents joined the cause and, with IDRA's support, the advocates held virtual meetings to plan and mobilize. The students initiated a survey and created posters to raise awareness. Their mariachi group, named "Mariachi de Los Altos" (Spanish for "The Heights"), held performances, attracting more members to their ranks. This diverse group of students, primarily of Mexican American heritage, included a Black lead singer.

By the end of the academic year, their persistence paid off. The school principal announced that she would hire a teacher and reinstate the mariachi class. This fall, the dream became a reality as the school reintroduced the class with a dedicated teacher.

### Student-Led Advocacy Stresses the Importance of Ethnic and Cultural Education

These two examples of student leadership are extraordinary for several reasons. First, they

were entirely student-driven initiatives, devoid of any external adult pressure or structure. And they highlight the intelligence and assertiveness of students.

Second, it is genuinely unique to witness students advocating passionately for the preservation and reinstatement of specific classes, to the extent of conducting surveys, providing data and leading their peers in support.

Moreover, these initiatives highlight the significance of ethnic and cultural education. Both projects involved strong ethnic and cultural themes. And the impact extended beyond students of a particular background. It was a broader issue to them. Students were keen to learn about the histories and contributions of various cultural groups that shape the United States.


The student actions reinforce an IDRA long-term commitment to support student initiative and leadership especially those led by students whom others may not consider capable of leadership. When organized and empowered, students can effect positive change in their educational environments.

Furthermore, these stories shed light on a growing concern among students: limits on discussions of race and culture in school and book ban expansions. Many students are deeply troubled by these developments and are advocating for the expansion, not reduction, of ethnic studies programs.


These shining examples demonstrate that young individuals are capable of not only identifying gaps in their education but also taking proactive steps to bridge those gaps. The student-led initiatives in Houston and San Antonio remind us that education is not just the responsibility of teachers and administrators; it is a collective effort in which students play a crucial role in shaping their own learning experiences and advocating meaningful change. Students value and seek to learn cultural traditions and ethnic histories.

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

*Focus: Cultural Connections in Schooling*



**Webinar**  
**Cultural  
Chronicles**  
**The Significance of  
Mexican American Studies**  
October 19, 2023 • 3:30–5:00 pm CT



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Join us for an interactive 90-minute panel of educators, researchers and community leaders that delves into the transformative influence of ethnic studies on students and their families. Discover how these programs empower students to connect with their heritage, challenge stereotypes and develop critical thinking skills.

Key discussion points will include:

- **Empowering Identity:** Learn how ethnic studies programs help students of diverse backgrounds develop a strong sense of self-identity and cultural pride.
- **Fostering Inclusivity:** Explore how ethnic studies promotes inclusivity by embracing diverse perspectives and narratives.
- **Academic Excellence:** Discover how ethnic studies can enhance academic performance by engaging students in meaningful and relevant learning experiences.
- **Family Engagement:** Hear how ethnic studies can strengthen family bonds through shared cultural exploration and conversations.
- **Community Impact:** Understand the broader societal benefits of ethnic studies, from promoting empathy to driving social change.

Whether you are an educator, parent, student or community member, don't miss the opportunity to be a part of this important conversation.

<https://idra.news/CulturalChronicles>