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# Our Vision, Policy Direction and the Election Federal Policy Update

By Morgan Craven, J.D.

Over the past several years, IDRA has built on our legacy of influencing federal education policy. We've done so through direct advocacy, deep collaboration with coalition partners, and strategic outreach to federal agencies.

We guide our work in federal spaces by the following set of principles that shapes all aspects of our policy, advocacy, educational practices, research and legal work.

All children are valuable; none is expendable. All public schools should be committed to an asset-based philosophy, support the strengths of the students and families in their schools, and ensure all educators hold high expectations for student achievement.

Public schools must prepare all students to access and succeed in college. To ensure this pathway to higher education, all students must have access to truthful, diverse and accessible curricula; rigorous education programs; high-quality learning materials; prepared and supported educators; and meaningful leadership opportunities in well-funded and equitably-funded schools.

All students must have equal access and inclusion in learning programs and activities. Schools must ensure the full participation of all students in learning programs and activities; comply with civil rights laws that protect access to equal educational opportunities; and create environments that affirm every student's racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, linguistic and other identities.

Public schools must engage authentically with families and communities. This engagement is critical to school success. Families must be part of strengthening education policy and practice in their schools, districts and states.

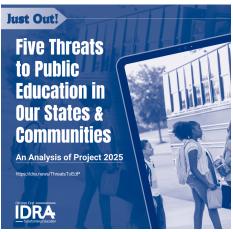
We are all accountable for learner success. Public schools must have the resources to serve all students. Policymakers, families, communities and advocates have key roles to play in ensuring a strong public education system that is fully resourced and held accountable for the academic and social success of every young person.

### The 2024 Election and Public Education Policy

Unfortunately, this country is in a time of division over this vision for a strong public education system that serves all students. And we are confronted with efforts in states and communities to defund, demonize and privatize public schools.

This fall, IDRA released a guide entitled *Threats to Public Education in Our States & Communities: An Analysis of Project 2025* to help communities better understand some of the prominent challenges to a strong public education system. Challenges include Project 2025 and similar policy agendas offered by other organizations that seek to dismantle public schools. (You can find the guide in English and Spanish here: https://idra.news/ThreatsToEdW.) (cont. on Page 2)

This election will impact how schools are funded, how the rights of students are protected, and how the diverse young people in our country are able to access an excellent public education.



Available in English and Spanish https://idra.news/ThreatsToEdW

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(Our Vision, Policy Direction and the Election, continued from Page 1)

The explainer gives an overview of some of the major education policy proposals in Project 2025 and their potential impact on students, states and school districts. Project 2025 and other similar agendas propose to fundamentally reduce and shift federal funding for public education, dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, paralyze civil rights investigation protocols and protections, and challenge long-standing policies that protect access to public schools for all children in this country.

While neither candidate for president has formally adopted Project 2025 as their official policy platform, the writers of the 900-page document describe it as a policy and government staffing guide for the next conservative presidential and state-level administrations.

We are now in the final days leading up to the 2024 presidential election. Voters across the country are selecting the next president and making decisions about local, state and congressional races.

This election will impact how schools are funded, how the rights of students are protected, and how the diverse young people in our country are able to access an excellent public education.

At the time of this writing, our understanding of the specific policy platforms of the major candidates for president is based on what they and their parties have published this election cycle and supported in previous and current elected positions.

Because IDRA is a non-partisan organization, we do not examine candidate platforms to take a position for or against a particular candidate or party. Rather, we share our understanding of

the potential impact of policy proposals from a variety of policymakers to ensure students, families, educators and other members of our community understand how those proposals could impact them and their public schools.

### Republican Party's Education Platform

The Republican party's education policy platform includes proposals to do the following.

- Close the U.S. Department of Education, which currently serves several important functions, including collecting and publishing federal data about how students are faring in school, investigating potential violations of students' and families' rights, and providing funding and other resources to schools, particularly those that serve economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities;
- Implement a federal voucher program by expanding tax benefits for families who homeschool their children or send them to private schools:
- Support zero tolerance discipline practices in schools;
- Defund public schools that they believe are engaged in "political indoctrination" or "critical race theory"; and
- Support prayer and biblical teachings in public schools.

You can read the platform for yourself at https://idra-resource.center/2024GOPPlatform.

#### **Democratic Party's Education Platform**

The Democratic party's education policy platform includes proposals to do the following.

- Oppose school vouchers and other privatization schemes that divert public money from public schools to benefit individual families and private schools;
- Provide free, universal preschool to all 4-year-olds;
- Increase support for social emotional learning and counseling services in schools, particularly to combat chronic absenteeism and post-COVID-19 needs;
- Support intensive tutoring, extended year and school day programs and ensure meaningful accountability for student learning;
- Fully fund the Individuals with *Disabilities* in *Education Act* (IDEA), which is the federal program that supports students with disabilities and the teachers and schools that serve them;
- Increase support for community school programs that provide support and wraparound services to serve students and adults in a school community; and
- Increase support for best practices in STEAM programming in schools, particularly for students who are underrepresented in these fields.

You can read the platform at https://idra-resource.center/24DemocraticPartyPlatform.

### IDRA's Federal Work in 2025 and Beyond

We look forward to continuing our federal advocacy in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress beginning in 2025. We will rely upon our deep expertise in school funding, school discipline, college access, culturally-sustaining curriculum and instructional methods, student leadership and (cont. on Page 6)

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, ©2024) 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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## Schools Struggle to Hold On to Students

#### Preview of IDRA's 38th Annual Texas Public School Attrition Study

By Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, M.Ed., & Joanna Sánchez, Ph.D.

Texas high schools lost 22% of their high school students in 2022-23. This is a key finding of IDRA's 38th annual report on trends in student dropout and attrition from Texas public high schools.

IDRA's latest report presents state and county attrition rates for 2022-23 based on fall student enrollment data by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

This year's report is particularly significant as it marks the first attrition study with a full cohort of students who began high school as freshmen when the COVID-19 pandemic began. It provides critical insights into how the pandemic affected student retention, as this cohort of students faced unprecedented challenges during their high school experience.

In October 1986, IDRA released the first comprehensive study of school dropouts in Texas for the 1985-86 school year, pioneering a now industry-wide standard for measuring high school attrition. Before IDRA's original study, the state did not report data on school dropouts, leaving many students who had already left or were being lost from public schools largely unaccounted for.

This problem prompted IDRA to develop i original attrition methodology to calculate tl number and percent of high school studen leaving school prior to graduating with a his school diploma. IDRA's hallmark study led a new state law that requires the state to repo dropout data each year.

IDRA has since continued to measure stat wide attrition by applying the same theoretic and mathematical framework each year. Attı tion rates are an indicator of schools' holdir power, or the ability to retain students in scho until they graduate.

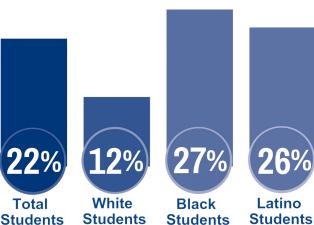
According to IDRA's methodology, attrition is defined as the change in cohort size between the student population's freshman and senior years. Therefore, an attrition rate is the percent change in grade level enrollment between a base year (freshman year) and an end year (senior year) of a class. This methodology facilitates ongoing comparative cohort analyses over time, and it provides insight into students lost during the four years of high school rather than just their senior year.

The 2022-23 statewide attrition rate of 22% is only 11 percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33% found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study.

Overall, attrition has worsened for public high school students in Texas since 2020-21. And while statewide attrition rates across racialethnic student groups decreased since 1985-86, rates for Black, Latino and white students have been on a steady rise since 2020-21. (cont. on Page 4)

Total attrition rates and those of the state's largest groups (Black, Latino, white) are higher than the year before COVID-19.

In 2022-23...



Lost

Schools are twice as likely to lose Latino students and Black students as white students before they graduate.

students and Latino students.

Intercultural Development Research Association, 2024

Lost

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Lost

Lost

#### **IDRA Names New Education Policy Fellows**

# **Shaping the Future of Education Civil Rights with a Powerful Network of Impacted Communities**

After three successful cycles of IDRA's Education Policy Fellows Program, we invite you to meet our four new fellows! They will gain real-world advocacy experience and training during the 2025 Texas and Georgia legislative sessions.

We know state policymakers can make stronger decisions by working with advocates who are connected to impacted diverse communities.

Students of color make up most of the two states' public school population: about 63% in Georgia and 74% in Texas. Yet, diverse advocates are rarely present in the rooms where decisions about the lives and opportunities for students of color are made.

"We are thrilled to introduce our new cycle of IDRA Education Policy Fellows, and we're so proud of the caliber of the incredibly talented applicant pool," said Morgan Craven, J.D., IDRA National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Community Engagement. "The legislative sessions in Texas and Georgia will be particularly challenging, so it is more critical than ever that voices of advocates from diverse communities are centered."





IDRA launched its first Education Policy Fellows Program in 2020 with groundbreaking accomplishments. Our new Education Policy Fellows will work with coalitions, students and families to advance a student-centered education policy agenda and join a network of advocates and policy influencers focused on improving equity in education policymaking spaces.





The 2024-25 cycle of this program is being generously supported by the Trellis Foundation and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Georgia Advocacy Director and former fellow, Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., coordinates the programming for the new cohort of fellows.

#### Learn more! https://idra.news/EdPolicyFellowsBios

(Schools Struggle to Hold On to Students, continued from Page 3)

We did not configure attrition rates for Asian, Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial student groups due to the state's data masking, which prevented IDRA from aggregating across counties to determine a statewide total.

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

- The Texas public school attrition rates increased each year since 2020-21.
- It has taken almost four decades for Texas to reduce the state's attrition rate by a mere 11 points from 33% to 22%.

- Texas schools are failing to graduate more than one of every five high school students from the freshman class of 2019-20.
- Total attrition rates and those of the state's largest groups (Black, Latino, white) are higher than the year before COVID-19.
- For the class of 2023, Latino students and Black students were more than twice as likely to leave school without graduating than white students.
- The attrition rate gap between white students and Black students has more than doubled between 1985-86 and 2022-23.

IDRA will publish the full 2022-23 study online in November 2024. The study includes methodology, historical statewide and county-level attrition rates and numbers of students lost to attrition by race-ethnicity and by sex.

Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, M.Ed., is an IDRA research analyst. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at christina.munoz@idra.org. Joanna Sánchez, Ph.D., is IDRA's senior policy researcher. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at joanna.sanchez@idra.org.

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# State Lawmakers Should Consider High-Quality Bilingual Education as an Early Literacy Strategy

By Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D.

Texas state lawmakers meet every other year in legislative sessions to consider new laws. In between legislative sessions, they consider interim charges, or priority topics for discussion determined by state leadership.

This fall, Texas House and Senate lawmakers on public education committees met to discuss interim charges about how to develop stronger early literacy and numeracy strategies for Texas students in pre-kindergarten through third grades. IDRA submitted research-driven testimony to explain how high-quality bilingual education programs are a key strategy for young students' early literacy (Latham Sikes, 2024).

At 1.2 million, emergent bilingual students (formerly called *English learners* in Texas) comprise a significant proportion of public school students. Among Texas students in Pre-K through third grade, more than one in four are emergent bilingual students (27%) (TEA, 2023).

More than half of emergent bilingual students are in elementary grades, where bilingual education is most frequently offered. Thirty-eight percent of emergent bilingual students are in pre-K to third grades (TEA, 2023).

Unlike English-only instruction, high-quality bilingual programs that focus on bilingualism and biliteracy, such as dual language immersion programs, lead to higher English literacy and test scores for both emergent bilingual students and English proficient students in those programs (*i.e.*, two-way dual language). (See IDRA's Serving Emergent Bilingual Students – Online Technical Assistance Toolkit for information on program types: https://idra.news/ EmergentBilingualEdToolkit.)

In a RAND Corporation study, students in dual language immersion programs scored significantly higher on reading and English assessments than their peers, accounting for the equivalent of about seven months of additional learning (Steele, et al., 2017).

In Texas, students in two-way dual language immersion programs consistently scored higher on STAAR exams in English language arts/reading and sustained stronger academic performance through the COVID-19 pandemic compared to emergent bilingual students in other types of language programs.

Enrollment in dual language programs has increased since 2019 when the Texas Legislature created a separate funding stream in House Bill 3 with a new dual language allotment. However, since only about 22% of emergent bilingual students are in dual language immersion programs, schools serving the other 78% of emergent bilingual students in programs other than dual language are left without vital resources.

Lawmakers can take the following critical steps to support robust, well-resourced bilingual education programs with certified teachers to improve the literacy of young emergent bilingual students in Texas.

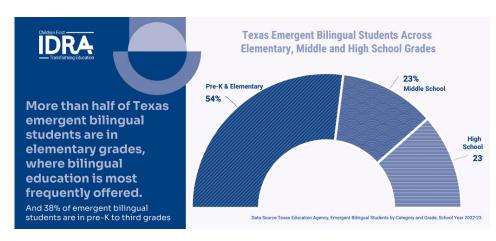
 Implement the legislative recommendations from TEA's Emergent Bilingual Strategic Plan developed in response to Senate Bill 560 in 2021;

(cont. on Page 6)



New Policy Brief Available in English and Spanish

https://idra.news/BiliteracySealBriefW



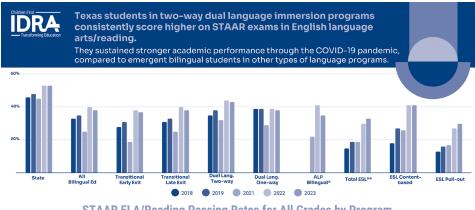
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(State Lawmakers Should Consider High-Quality Bilingual Education as an Early Literacy Strategy, continued from Page 5)

- Advance legislative support for bilingual program monitoring, assistance and educator training for effectively teaching emergent bilingual students, as outlined by House Bill 2164 in 2023;
- · Fund specific educator preparation and residency programs and in-service teacher support to address recruitment and retention of certified bilingual/ESL teachers in the workforce; and
- Expand and improve the Texas performance acknowledgment in bilingualism and biliteracy to meet State Seal of Biliteracy standards and support students to graduate with bilingual and biliterate achievement (see Latham Sikes & Piñón, 2024).

For nearly one in four Texas public school students, high-quality bilingual education is a key literacy strategy. Support for bilingual teachers, programs and students in early grades can set students on track to develop their bilingual and biliteracy skills in middle and high school as well as in more advanced subject material.

Texas can be a leader in graduating bilingual and biliterate students from high school and cultivating a strong bilingual workforce and culture. The pathways to do this start in the early grades of our schools.



STAAR ELA/Reading Passing Rates for All Grades by Program

#### Resources

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family engagement, and educational programs for emergent bilingual (English learner) students to shape our recommendations for the new presidential administration and Congress.

Support legislation to dismantle the schoolto-prison pipeline by ending corporal punishment, shifting federal funding from school police to mental and behavioral health support, and addressing harmful and discriminatory discipline practices in schools.

Increase funding and support legislation to expand opportunities for students that increase access to college, including rigorous coursework, academic counseling, family engagement, STEM programming for diverse students and expansive early college high school models.

Ensure public schools are well-funded and equitably-funded by pushing for increased

federal funding for public schools serving vulnerable children (like Title I) and opposing efforts to create or expand federal and state school privatization schemes, like vouchers.

Address chronic absenteeism by uplifting recommendations that IDRA has developed over three decades of studying attrition in Texas schools. (See Page 3 and IDRA's attrition study work at https://idra.news/AttritionStudy).

Increase funding and technical support for high-quality programs for emergent bilingual students by working with agency partners to identify and uplift best practices in classrooms and develop resources to address the needs of students and families.

Ensure robust protections for diverse students by expanding protections for students who experience identity-based bullying and harassment and by holding accountable federal agencies tasked with protecting students' civil rights.

For information about IDRA's specific policy recommendations in these areas, visit our policy, advocacy and community engagement website at https://idra.news/education-policy.

Please follow our updates and subscribe to our federal policy update listsery at https://idra. news/SignUp for alerts about our upcoming federal work to achieve the following. You can also visit IDRA's SEEN website for advocacy news and resources at https://www.idraseen.

Morgan Craven, J.D., is the IDRA national director of policy, advocacy and community engagement. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at morgan. craven@idra.org.

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# Building Student Leadership in Technology – From IDRA Youth Tekies to TechXperts

By Michelle Martínez Vega & Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

Over two decades ago, the ARISE center at Las Milpas in South Pharr, Texas, and the Edgewood Family Network in San Antonio welcomed similar experiences 250 miles apart. Middle and high school students decided to help their Spanish-speaking families and other adults learn how to use computers. They called themselves IDRA Education Youth Tekies. The south Texas students taught adults in the community how to keyboard and generally connect to the Internet. The San Antonio students helped peers navigate college applications.

The birth of the Tekies was a product of IDRA's enduring commitment to fostering youth leadership in technology, a commitment that has its roots in the highly-successful IDRA Valued Youth Partnership, where secondary students tutor early elementary children.

This asset view of students has now blossomed into a new wave of technology youth leadership programs, like IDRA VisionCoders, IDRA Digital Ambassadors, and now in IDRA Youth TechXperts, which launches in schools next year. Our faith in our future Youth TechXperts students and their technological dexterity will support them to assist educators and fellow studnts in their schools with technology challenges.

Youth TechXperts will develop a help desk in their schools and will be guided in how to help teachers become more proficient with classroom technology integration. With funding from Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation, IDRA will launch the program in Brownsville ISD next year.

Imagine a program that not only equips students with cutting-edge STEM skills but also fosters leadership, inclusivity and realworld experience. IDRA Youth TechXperts is that transformative initiative. It is more than just a program; it is a launchpad into the future of technology and leadership for our youth, especially those from underserved and underrepresented backgrounds.

This is a hands-on, project-based learning initiative where students are the drivers, not just passengers. They won't just learn about technology; they will become the tech gurus of their campus, offering sophisticated tech support and preparing for industry-recognized certifications like CompTIA ITF+ (Information technology fundamentals).

By having these students in these leadership roles, just like in the Value Youth Partnership, teachers will see them in a new way because the project does not select students based on high academic grades or traditional school norms. In the program, secondary students who are considered in at-risk situations will have the ability to prove to their campus community that they are capable of leadership.

We have demonstrated that students perform well when given essential responsibilities and jobs. Through IDRA Youth TechXperts, students will gain public recognition by providing tech support to teachers, building a computing science identity that has been proven to lead to professional success.

We anticipate the outcomes to be striking: enhanced STEM knowledge, improved achievement in reading, and a higher likelihood of pursuing a STEM graduation plan in high school. More than an elective course, this will prove to be a transformative experience that changes how students see themselves and their futures in technology and leadership.

We live in a world that is dependent on technology, which is advancing at light speed, for example, with synthetic media like AI. It has been said that, while AI might not replace you in your job, the person who knows how to leverage it will. Students must be equipped to



IDRA Education Youth Tekies, 2010

not only live in this world but to thrive in it.

Today's fastest-growing careers are tech-driven, from healthcare to telecommunications to aerospace. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 67% of all new jobs in STEM are in computing, and it projects that computer science research jobs alone will increase 19% by 2026 (McEntee 2020).

In the Brownsville area, adult employment trends in computer-related fields fall well below the national average of 7%. In Brownsville, fewer than 1% of adults work in computer-related fields (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

Our participating students will experience real-world help desk activities as well as be trained to earn their CompTIA ITF+ certification. This certification is an essential starting point for anyone new to IT or looking to validate basic technical skills. It introduces fundamental concepts, such as hardware, software, networking, security and databases, making it ideal for those curious about IT or exploring career opportunities in the field.

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For beginners, this certification serves as a confidence booster, showing the ability to grasp foundational technology concepts and prepare people for more advanced certifications like CompTIA A+ or Network+. The CompTIA ITF+ certification offers a practical introduction to IT, validates fundamental skills, and prepares individuals for future specialization, making it an important stepping stone for those pursuing a career in technology.

The IDRA Youth TechXperts course will culminate in a paid summer internship within the school district's IT department. Students will add a helping hand to summer technology deployments or equipment maintenance, such as replacing Chromebook screens or repairing keyboards.

By working directly with IT professionals, students will gain the necessary experience to pursue an entry level technology position and further their education with a solid grasp of what technology pathway they want to learn more about.

Just as with any internship, the valuable learning that occurs can solidify a student's interest in a field or open pathways to other STEM options. The integral component of the program will strengthen students' STEM identity.

Learn more about the IDRA Youth TechXperts program at https://www.idra.org/services/idra-youth-techxperts.

#### Resources

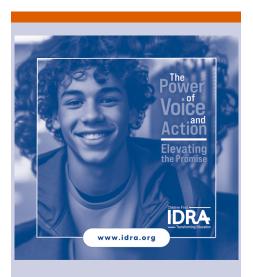
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See IDRA's 2021-2022 Impact Report

> https://idra.news/ ImpactReport2021-2022