



# GRADUATION FOR ALL

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- [Don't Slide Back, Step Up to Make the Lone Star State Great](#)
- [#1: Tracking vs. High Quality Education for All Students](#)
- [#2: Courageous Connections: Texas School Leaders on Preparing College-Ready Students](#)
- [#3: The Big Picture: Trends in Education and the Impact on the Future for Children and for the State of Texas](#)
- [#4: What Parents Want to Know about the New Texas Graduation Guidelines](#)
- [#5: Get Math / Get Math Smart!](#)

We welcome your questions, suggestions and input at [gradforall@idra.org](mailto:gradforall@idra.org)  
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## Don't Slide Back, Step Up to Make the Lone Star State Great

"Research on tracking shows that children of color and low income children are far more likely to be under-prepared for advanced courses and steered toward low-level paths. Our state must take responsibility for the academic success of all students. A high-quality curriculum is essential to assuring that all students reach a true level of college readiness. Innovation in education is needed. But we need to make sure that endorsements are not dead ends for students. Clear triggers must be in place so that action can be taken if the data show disproportionate routing of poor and minority students into non-rigorous tracks." - Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

Texas is in the throes of a debate. Now that the legislature has adopted new policies governing diploma plans and endorsements, what will the newly-allowed curricula include? Will Texas fulfill its obligation to assure that all paths equitably prepare young people for the future or will it go backwards?

Models based on preparing one group for college and a second for immediate work are outmoded. Research on 21st century workforce needs indicates that the majority of jobs will require some level of education beyond high school. Employers in turn will need employees who are life-long learners prepared to adapt to the demands of a rapidly changing workplace. Further, schools should not make pre-college decisions on behalf of students or track them into low-level courses that limit career options.

This issue of *Graduation for All* shares resources in five key areas to support your efforts to assure that all children graduate from school and are well-prepared for their future.

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## #1: Tracking vs. High Quality Education for All Students

## Intercultural Development Research Association

María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.,  
President & CEO

## Policy Note: Tracking, Endorsements and

### Differentiated Diplomas - When "Different" Really is Less - A Post Session Update (pdf), IDRA

IDRA Policy Note –  
Updated October 2013



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### Tracking, Endorsements and Differentiated Diplomas – When "Different" Really is Less – A Post Session Update

#### What is Tracking?

Tracking is the practice of grouping students into particular courses of curriculum that lead to different paths when students graduate from high school. Historically, tracking has sometimes resulted from placing students in different courses based on what was commonly called ability grouping. Ability group designations varied among schools but generally included "high," "moderate" and "low" scholastic ability designations or tracks. Student assignments into these tracks tended to begin at the third grade (Sladkey & Zitzeman, 2006) but could happen as early as a student's entry into school.

Once tracked into a group, it was difficult for a student to change tracks – that is, for example, to be re-assigned from a low ability track to a moderate or high ability alternative. This lack of movement across tracks was reinforced by the fact that students in the different tracks were provided different curriculum. Students placed in the high ability group received more challenging college-bound content, while those placed in the low ability track received minimum and often vocational-oriented curriculum.

The practice lost support in the 1960s when it was revealed that tracking disproportionately impacted low-income and minority students, who were assigned to low tracks (Coles, et al., 2012; Wheelock, 1992).

#### What Has Been Learned About the Negative Effects of Tracking?

Over the past several decades, studies were conducted to assess the effects of tracking on school operations and on students subjected to the practice. Some early studies concluded that tracking of students was beneficial in that it was supposed to allow for more efficient grouping of students of similar "ability" levels and thus allow teachers who were assigned whole classes of like students to more

effectively teach and reach all their charges – as opposed to trying to group students of varying levels and splitting time and focus on different groupings over the course of a school day (Heilman, 2004).

Later research however strongly disputed tracking practices, noting that ability grouping did not produce improved instruction and that it tended to permanently and disproportionately force some sub-groups of students (especially low-income and minority pupils) into low ability tracks that resulted in diminished post-secondary options (Burns & Gentry, 2006; Education Rights Center, 2013).

Researchers also found that, too often, tracking of students began in the early elementary grades even before most students had an opportunity to demonstrate academic potential. These early tracking trends were sustained at the middle school and high school level, permanently relegating students to whatever track they were initially assigned.

Additional research found that the criteria used to justify the assigned ability group tracks (intelligence tests, nationally-normed assessments, or teacher judgment, for example) were often flawed or misapplied or racist. The tracks also did not reflect the actual capacity of students' future performance (Valenzuela, 1999; Coles, et al., 2012).

As workforce requirements changed, there was a simultaneous push to increase the rigor of school instruction to a level that would increase the number of U.S. students who would be prepared to enroll and succeed in college. Having recognized that global competitiveness required a better educated populace, states and schools began to ramp up curriculum and student expectations over the last three decades.

October 2013, Intercultural Development Research Association

### Algebra II in All Endorsement Tracks (pdf), TLEC

### Texas Students Need Our Support - Not New Barriers - to Get an Excellent Education (webpage), IDRA

## #2: Courageous Connections: Texas School Leaders on Preparing College-Ready Students

### Interview: A Principal on Supporting Teachers for Student College Readiness (podcast), IDRA Classnotes Podcast



### Interview with Dr. Daniel P. King, superintendent of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) school district (video), IDRA Courageous Connections

## #3: The Big Picture: Trends in Education and the Impact on the Future for Children and for the State of Texas



### Texas' Next Generation of Children of Color

, hosted by The Policy Studies Center in the UTSA College of Public Policy (webcast), in partnership with La Fe Policy Research and Education Center, New America Media and Kidswell, Texas at the UTSA Downtown Campus. Remarks by Dr. Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and

CEO at this event on the future of education for Latino and African American students, **starting at 32:29 min**

(webcast), NowCastSA

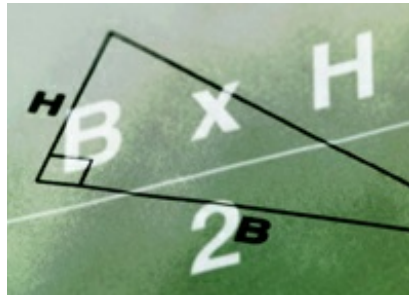
**Early solutions can lower dropout rate: Opinion: San Antonio Express News**

## #4: What Parents Want to Know about the New Texas Graduation Guidelines



**PowerPoint presentation: Texas High School Graduation Requirements ~ *Texas Requisitos de Graduación* (slideshow), IDRA**

## #5: Get Math / Get Math Smart!



**Interview: "Higher Math for All," IDRA Classnotes podcast**

**IDRA Math and Science Smart! Professional Development**

**Keep the Last Step: Why Every High School Graduate Needs the Mathematics Skills of Algebra II (pdf), Michael Marder, University of Texas at Austin**

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