



HB 2615 Would Disproportionally Target Marginalized Students to Pursue Vocational Education Pathways

IDRA Testimony against House Bill 2615, submitted by Steve Kemgang to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 20, 2023

Dear Chair Buckley, Vice-Chair Allen and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Steve Kemgang, and I have the honor of serving as an education policy fellow at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

IDRA strongly opposes HB 2615, which seeks to create vocational education pathways as an alternative option for eligible high school students. Vocational education leaves students unprepared for college or advanced careers. Historically-marginalized students, including Black and Latino students and students in low-income households, have been academically tracked away from college-ready pathways or advanced coursework (Kohli, 2014; San Miguel 2020). This legislation will perpetuate a tracking model that could target marginalized students into pursuing vocational tracks instead of college-ready pathways.

Texas already has racial disparities in college readiness rates: 53% of Texas students graduate college-ready overall, but 49% of Latino students graduate college-ready, and only 35% of Black students graduate college-ready. And 44% of students in low-income households graduate ready for college (see IDRA, 2023). These students often face financial barriers. Leading them toward vocational education could saddle them with years of expensive remedial education to further their seek post-secondary education for their careers or education.

The bill relies on counselors to inform students about the consequences of enrolling in the vocational education program. IDRA's research with Texas counselors concluded that they had insufficient training in advising students about their full college and career choices in early grades, struggled with large caseloads, and often had insufficient time for all counseling duties (Bojorquez, 2019).

This is consequential for students' high school options and lifetime opportunities. Greater educational attainment is correlated with much greater lifetime earnings, upwards of \$22,000 a year (New York Fed, 2022) and hundreds of thousands of dollars over time (Vasquez, 2020). This is significant for students, particularly those from first generation, economically-disadvantaged backgrounds.

Once students elect enrollment in vocational pathways, their opportunities in pursuing higher education degrees are greatly limited. In order to give high school students opportunities to be as successful as possible, we should not go back to vocational education and instead ensure Texas provides every student a high-quality education, which means graduating prepared for college.

We should not go back to vocational education and instead expand dual credit opportunities and college preparation programs, as those have shown to students' successes in higher education regardless of their backgrounds.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, contact Steve Kemgang at steve.kemgang@idra.org.

Resources

Bojorquez, H. (May 2019). School Counselors Express Concerns about College and Career Advising in Texas. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/nlMay19a>

Federal Reserve Bank of New York. (February 10, 2022). The Labor Market for recent College Graduates. <https://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market/index.html#/overview>

IDRA. (2023). 5 Data Snacks – Infographic. <https://idra.news/5TxDataSnacks>

Kohli, S. (November 18, 2014). Modern-Day Segregation in Public Schools. The Atlantic <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/11/modern-day-segregation-in-public-schools/382846/>

San Miguel, G. (April 8, 2020). Mexican Americans and Education. Handbook of Texas Online. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mexican-americans-and-education>

Vasquez, B. (October 2020). College Degrees Are Worth It – People with Bachelor's Degrees Have Lower Poverty Rates. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/nlOct20b>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. 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. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by leading policy analyses and advocacy; dynamic teacher training and principal coaching; useful research, evaluation and frameworks for action; and innovative student, family and community engagement.