



Transforming Education by Putting Children First

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IDRA Newsletter – This Issue's Focus:

Opportunity

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Students Deserve to Read Diverse Books – Texas Policymakers Should Help

by *Rebekah Skelton*

For years, students and advocates have been calling for schools to diversify their reading lists to include books outside of the traditional high school canon. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has been tasked with compiling a list of books required to be taught at each grade level in public schools.



Increased diversity in the children's publishing industry can help give teachers the tools they need to build inclusive English language arts classrooms.

But classroom censorship targeting diverse conversations and titles is on the rise with the Texas Legislature's 2021 Senate Bill 3 and the recent HB 900. If TEA uses these censorship laws to restrict diverse voices in the classroom, it will profoundly harm student learning.

Instead, TEA and the Texas State Board of Education should safeguard affirming and engaging books that inspire literacy and learning for students of all racial, ethnic and gender identities.

Keep reading Students Deserve to Read article

Digital Equity Not a Luxury for Students

by Michelle Martinez Vega & Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, M.Ed.

In the spring of 2020, over 600,000 Texas public school students could not be reached by school communications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though devices were given to students in need, pre-existing broadband access limitations resulted in millions of students missing out on two to three years of instruction, disproportionately impacting students of color.



Digital equity recognizes that access to the Internet and technology is a necessity in the 21st century for education, employment, health care and social connection. IDRA shared its research on the digital divide and digital equity with the Texas Legislature and urged it to invest in sustainable broadband infrastructure, continue the distribution of reliable digital devices, invest in digital skills training and support for educational stakeholders, and invest in robust community engagement programs for strengthening school district capacity to assess their students' technological needs. IDRA remains committed to overcoming the evolving challenges related to navigating our digital world and ensuring that students are prepared for success.

Keep reading Digital Equity article

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Digital Equity

Online Assistance Package



Solutions for bridging the digital divide are more nuanced than simply providing students with devices and troubleshooting connectivity issues. Students, their families and their teachers must also feel confident with navigating the digital landscape safely. **This free online toolkit guides schools in making informed decisions about increasing students' access to broadband Internet, computer technologies, and digital skills training for supporting their success.**

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
			
Introduction to Digital Equity	Using a Digital Equity Audit	Digital Literacy & Misinformation	Advancing Digital Equity with Data
Get an intro to digital equity and how schools can support students and their families in accessing the Internet and digital technologies necessary for engaging in the digital world.	Explore what a digital equity audit is and how this tool can support school leaders in making effective and equitable decisions that increase digital equity within their district or campus.	Get resources and tools to help students and educators understand the importance of navigating the digital world.	Learn about digital redlining, disproportionate access of broadband Internet, and community-led solutions for bridging the digital divide.

<https://idra.news/DigitalEquityToolkit>

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.

October 2022

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Teens Win 2023 National Essay Contest Awards

IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Tutors Share Stories of the Program's Impact on Their Lives

"The thing that gets me up in the morning is the kids. Every morning I get up because I know I have to tutor them, and they depend on me to help them with their work... I think that's what makes the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership amazing."

— eighth grader Brianna Garza



Six students received prizes in a national competition among participants in the IDRA [Valued Youth Partnership](#) program, a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program. The VYP tutors wrote about how the program helped them do better in school and how they had helped their tutees to do better.

This story shares highlights from the students' essays.

Keep reading [VYP Essays](#) article



Learn more about the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Program



The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is a research-based, internationally-recognized dropout prevention and student leadership program that has kept 98% of its tutors in school.

Visit our [VYP website](#) to see how the program operates, its research base and how to bring it to your school.

And get a factsheet on how VYP transforms student socio-emotional learning and relationships with school. The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership directly addresses socio-emotional factors that are essential to reconnecting and re-engaging with students.

You can also see the read the full text of the six winning essays.

IDRA Evaluation of USDA Program to Cultivate Diverse Food and Agriculture Professionals

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in July 2023 launched an innovative program to train a diverse group of future food, natural resources, human sciences and agriculture professionals. This program, funded by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, seeks to lower costs, expand market access, and strengthen U.S. supply chains while fostering a clean energy economy.

IDRA will serve as the meta-evaluator to monitor and report on the benefits and impact of the program "NextGen."



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, announced the NextGen program at an event in Washington, D.C., attended by [l-r] Joanna Sánchez, Ph.D., IDRA senior policy researcher; Dr. Manjit Misra, director of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

[Learn more.](#)

Food and Agriculture; and Celina Moreno, J.D.,
IDRA President & CEO.

Paving the Way for Educational Justice
IDRA 50th Anniversary Archives Donation Reception

November 16, 2023
6 - 8 p.m. CT
UT Benson Latin American Collection Reading Room
2200 Red River St., Austin, Texas 78712
Complimentary food and beverages will be served.

Partners: LUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY, The University of Texas at Austin Center for Mexican American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin College of Education, William Vance Justice Center for Public Interest Law, The University of Texas at Austin Department of Mexican American & Latin American Studies, TEXAS A&M School of Education.

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Paving the Way for Educational Justice – IDRA 50th Anniversary Archives Donation Reception

On November 16, the University of Texas at Austin welcomes IDRA for its celebration of 50 years of advocating equal educational opportunity across the nation and leading today's fight for educational justice. Come see highlights of IDRA's historic archives!

Hear from students and community leaders on the importance of connecting past social justice movements with the current struggle to protect our histories and civil rights.

[Get details and register](#)

Recent News

Media Coverage

In the Texas school voucher debate, a key question remains: Would they be legal? by Taylor Goldenstein, Houston Chronicle, October 23, 2023 (Also ran in San Antonio Express-News, October 23, 2023)

Zombie Voucher Scam is Back! by Tatum Owens, Progress Texas, October 23, 2023

Is data the new oil? Why South Texas should pay attention to the well-worn cliché, Commentary by Jordana Barton-Garcia, for the San Antonio Express-News, October 19, 2023

'Our taxes shouldn't be paying for discrimination': School choice opponents rally against SB 1, by Lily Kepner, Austin American-Statesman, October 18, 2023 (Also ran in Yahoo News, Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, October 18, 2023)

'No to voucher schemes' | More Texas advocacy groups battle against school vouchers, by Melia Masumoto, KVUE-TV CBS, October 18, 2023

Texas Freedom Network delivers anti-school voucher petition to lawmakers, by Carissa Lehmkuhl, Fox 7 Austin, October 18, 2023

Texas School Choice Opponents Rally Against Education Savings Accounts, Citing Lack of Accountability and Equity Standards, by Leo Gallagher, Bollyinside, October 18, 2023

Voters to decide several Atlanta Board of Education seats this November | Everything you need to know, by Rachel Aragon, Atlanta News First, October 17, 2023

A 50-year-old court case still shapes Texas school funding today, by Camille Phillips, Texas Public Radio, October 14, 2023

Why you should take those 'best schools' lists with a grain of salt – or maybe the whole shaker, by Henry Krausse, San Antonio Express-News, October 9, 2023

Happy Hour 130: Why School Vouchers Are Bad For Texas, And How To Fight Back, Progress Texas Podcasts, October 6, 2023

Commentary: It's past time for corporal punishment to end in schools, by Morgan Craven, San Antonio Express-News, October 6, 2023

Editorial: State it clearly: No 'padding' in Texas' schools, San Antonio Express-News, October 4, 2023 (Also ran in Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 12, 2023)

Texas's Governor Is Trying to Destroy Public Education – and Dim Those Friday Night Lights, by Nora de la Cour, Jacobin, October 2, 2023

[See these news stories and other recent media coverage with links on our website](#)





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