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Texas Underfunds ELL Education; Impacts Student Achievement

New Research on Education of English Learners in Middle School & High School Released at IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow Program Symposium



(February 23, 2015) English language learners make up the fastest growing segment of the student population but they are one of the lowest academically performing groups of students, and the achievement gap widens as students progress through school. Dr. Oscar Jimenez-Castellanos, IDRA's inaugural José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow, presented his research findings on securing educational equity & excellence for English language learners in Texas secondary schools at a symposium in San Antonio.

“English language learners, who are almost one out of five students in the state of Texas, are not being well served by schools in Texas. They continue to be placed in underfunded, poorly monitored, segregated programs that do not produce results, particularly in middle school and high school,” stated Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President.

“We are taking a look at what needs to be done to assure they are prepared for college. Right now, for example, only one out of 10 English language learners is prepared to go to college. That’s outrageous,” added Dr. Robledo Montecel.

Dr. Jimenez-Castellanos began: **“Before conducting the study, I had a perception that Texas was at the leading edge of educating English language learners. I was expecting to find real solutions to national issues related to secondary English language learners. But I learned that Texas is not the utopia I had envisioned.”**

In person and via livecast, the event gathered more than 80 education and community leaders, and experts in law and education research around the critical question of how we can improve secondary education quality and access for English learners. A panel of experts reflected on key themes and questions raised by the research and participants explored important implications of the research for education quality and equity for English learners in policy and practice.

Important points from the research, the event and our work in this area:

- This study found no secondary schools in Texas that are consistently exceeding academic benchmarks with ELLs. The schools with highest ELL achievement expend significantly more general funds than other schools.
- Texas is significantly underfunding ELL education (with supplemental funding of only 10 percent despite research indicating much higher weights are needed).
- Though increasing ELL weighted funding is important, the funding weight alone is not sufficient without also increasing funding for the base program for all students.
- Reporting on the status of ELL education in Texas schools has not been providing a clear picture since much of the data lumps elementary and secondary grade level data.
- The majority of ELL students are U.S. born.

- While Texas only mandates schools to provide ELL programs if they have at least 20 ELL students in a grade level, federal policy requires schools to serve every ELL student – as was reiterated recently by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice.

See Symposium Video and Coverage

You can [see photos](#) of the event or watch the event's archival [video online](#), livestreamed in partnership with NowCast-SA.



Some initial news coverage generated from the event include:

- “[Extra help in schools where needed](#),” an editorial by the San Antonio Express-News (“It is as if the state really doesn’t want them to succeed in school and then in life.”)
- “[More money for bilingual education urged](#),” by Francisco Vara-Orta of the San Antonio Express-News
- “[Finding the Keys to School Funding in your Pocket](#),” by Julian Vasquez Heilig (one of the symposium panelists) on his Cloaking Inequity blog
- “[Lessons from Texas on the Relationship Between School Funding and the Academic Achievement of English Language Learners](#),” by Amaya Garcia of the Education Policy program at New America Foundation

This symposium was convened by the Intercultural Development Research Association and hosted with the Center for Mexican American Studies and Research, Our Lady of the Lake University.

The following day, IDRA briefed legislative staff in Austin on the research and implications for policy in a forum hosted by Senator José Rodríguez and held in collaboration with the Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas at Austin. Sen. Rodríguez stated, “**What we heard from the research is confirmation that Texas is not doing right by our English language learners. Texas needs to do better at investing in education.**”

IDRA established the José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program in 2013 to honor the memory of IDRA founder, Dr. José Angel Cárdenas. The goal of the program is [engage the nation’s most promising researchers in investigating school finance solutions](#) that secure equity and excellence for all public school students.

The **Intercultural Development Research Association** is an independent private non-profit organization dedicated to realizing the right of every child to a quality education. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.

We are a small organization with a powerful mission: to create schools that work for *all* children.

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