



IDRA Education Policy Fellows

Building on a Powerful Legacy of Education Policy



Dr. Altheria Caldera

IDRA Education Policy Fellow – Preparation and Access to College

IDRA's ground-breaking program is changing policy advocacy because policymakers can make stronger education policy decisions by working with advocates who are connected to impacted communities. Our Education Policy Fellows work with coalitions, students and families to craft a community-centered education policy agenda and join a network of advocates and policy influencers focused on improving racial equity in education policymaking spaces. The program's inaugural cycle in Texas operated from November 2020 through July 2021.

About Altheria

Dr. Altheria Caldera is a scholar, writer and equity activist whose other identities include dog-lover, nature-enthusiast and college football fan. The Alabama native began her professional career as a middle school English teacher. As a teacher educator for the last four years, she aims to equip her students with the knowledge necessary to effectively teach students of color in P-12 schools. Through her research and scholarship, she aims to promote access and equity for all minoritized students in academic institutions that span the P-16 spectrum. Altheria earned her Ph.D. in education studies from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth and is looking forward to learning how to apply her classroom knowledge to state-level advocacy work. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, Altheria identified and pursued advocacy opportunities to expand access to and ensure success in postsecondary education spaces, particularly for students of color.

Fellowship Products

Analysis

- Culturally Sustaining Practices in Four Critical Levels – Overview, IDRA EAC-South, May 2021
- Equity-centered Pedagogies – An Overview of Terminology, IDRA, May 2021
- HB 3979 Conflicts & Redundancies, IDRA analysis, April 2021

IDRA Newsletter Articles

- Most Opportunities Missed to Expand College Preparation and Access in Texas, June-July 2021
- Texas HB 3979 Will Hurt Students by Curtailing Schools' Equity Efforts, May 2021
- Anti-Racist Schooling for All Students of Color, co-author, May 2021
- What the Term "Culturally Sustaining Practices" Means for Education in Today's Classrooms, May 2021
- Students of Color Deserve Culturally Responsive Instruction and Ethnic Studies, co-author, April 2021

Classnotes Podcast

- The Future of Education Advocacy and Being Pushy – #217
- Education Policy Fellows Get Things Done in the Suppression Session – #216
- An Inside Look at Advocating with Communities of Color – #215
- Education Advocacy Hinges on Community Collaboration – #214

After the fellowship, Altheria became assistant professor of language arts and reading at Howard University and director of its DC-Area Writing Project.

Op-Eds and Media Interviews

- Juneteenth is a federal holiday. Can it be taught after Texas limited teaching on race?, by Eleanor Dearman, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 18, 2021
- Texas educators, not the Legislature, should decide how to teach current events, op-ed, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 12, 2021

Community Engagement

- Education Policy Study Hall – IDRA Webinar Series
- Education Policy Testimony Help – Virtual Office Hours

Testimony

- Reject the Erasure of Race in Texas Schools in SB 3, IDRA testimony presented to the Senate State Affairs Committee, July 15, 2021
- Eliminate Bias and Discrimination Against Black Students – IDRA comment presented to the Texas House State Affairs Committee, April 29, 2021
- Equity Should Be Upheld in Top Ten Percent Plan – IDRA testimony presented to the Senate Higher Education Committee, April 28, 2021 (Video on IDRA YouTube)
- SB 1277 Supports College Access with Student Advising for Dual Credit – IDRA comments submitted to the Texas House Higher Education Committee, April 20, 2021
- HB 4403 Supports Student Advising for Dual Credit – IDRA comments submitted to the House Higher Education Committee, April 15, 2021
- Adopt HB 3638 to Establish an African American Studies Advisory Board – IDRA testimony presented to the House Public Education Committee, April 13, 2021 (Video on IDRA YouTube)
- HB 2554 Furthers the Inequitable Practice of Funneling Students of Color into Vocational Education – IDRA testimony presented to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 6, 2021
- Equity Should be Upheld in Eligibility for College, Career, and Military Readiness Outcomes Bonus Funding – IDRA testimony to the House Public Education Committee, March 30, 2020



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Araceli García

IDRA Education Policy Fellow – Emergent Bilingual and Immigrant Student Education

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About Araceli

Araceli Garcia grew up on the South Side of San Antonio and is the daughter and granddaughter of Mexican immigrants. As the culmination of her hard work and the sacrifices of her family, Araceli graduated from Stanford with a B.A. in Chicana/Latina studies and a minor in education. Araceli is the first person in her family to attend college, and she has held several leadership positions within the Stanford University Latinx community, where she found a home away from home. In addition to her studies, Araceli has worked alongside detained immigrants fighting for their right to seek asylum. She plans to pursue a law degree. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, Araceli identified and pursued advocacy opportunities that ensure equitable and excellent schools for emergent bilingual and immigrant students.

After the fellowship, Araceli entered the University of Texas’ School of Law.

Fellowship Products

IDRA Newsletter Articles

- Exciting Advances for Emergent Bilingual Students in Texas, June-July 2021
- Words Matter – The Case for Shifting to “Emergent Bilingual,” February 2021

Community Engagement

- Education Policy Testimony Help – Virtual Office Hours
- Texas Bilingual Education Family Advocacy Night
- Education Policy Study Hall – IDRA Webinar Series
- Coalition Against Texas HB3979 Virtual Press Conference
- Highlights for Creating a More Bilingual Texas – Webinar
- Mesa Comunitaria on Young English Learners’ Education

Podcasts

- A Case for Changing How We Label “English Learners,” Highest Aspirations Podcast, Ellevation Education, September 28, 2021
- The Future of Education Advocacy and Being Pushy – IDRA Classnotes #217
- Education Policy Fellows Get Things Done in the Suppression Session – IDRA Classnotes #216
- An Inside Look at Advocating with Communities of Color – IDRA Classnotes #215
- Education Advocacy Hinges on Community Collaboration – IDRA Classnotes #214

Testimony

- Allow Texas Students to Take in More Information, Not Less – IDRA testimony presented to the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee (Video on IDRA YouTube)
- SB 2066 Makes a Simple Change for a Big Impact to Emergent Bilingual Students – IDRA testimony to the Senate Education Committee, April 15, 2021 (Video on IDRA YouTube)
- Texas Must End Juvenile Curfew Ordinances to Help Break the School-to-prison Pipeline – IDRA testimony to the House Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee, April 12, 2021
- HB 1504 Supports a Robust and Equitable Curriculum for All Students – IDRA testimony to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 6, 2021
- HB 2256 Creates More Ways for Teachers to Serve Bilingual and Special Education Students – IDRA testimony to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 6, 2021



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Thomas Marshall III, M.Ed.

IDRA Education Policy Fellow – Digital Communications and Community Engagement Advocacy

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About Thomas

Thomas Marshall III is from Columbia, South Carolina and is new to the Houston area, residing in the Third Ward. He attended Clemson University for his undergraduate studies, where he received a B.A. in English with a minor in youth development studies. Educational equity is at the core of his heart and collegiate career. During his undergraduate career, he mentored and holistically developed men of color, ranging from first-year students to seniors in high school. To Thomas, educational equity is when the institution of education decides to take ownership of the inconvenient truth: the history of inequities in education put marginalized folks first. His research interests include the recruitment and retention rate of Black males at predominantly white institutions. He is currently a student in the master of education (higher education) program at the University of Houston. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, Thomas executed a strong digital communications and community engagement advocacy program for the 87th Texas legislative session.

Fellowship Products

Research

- Digital Destination – Texas Needs Broadband Connectivity for All Students & Families, IDRA Issue Brief, April 2021

Community Engagement, & Webinars

- Video Advocacy Campaign: Digitally Divided – Community United, spring 2021
- Education Policy Testimony Help – Virtual Office Hours, spring 2021
- Texas Legislative Wrap-up: Education Policy Study Hall, June 24, 2021
- Reimagining Student Engagement: Revamping School Policy and Practice and Fostering Student Advocacy, July 29, 2021
- Digital Equity and Inclusion – A Modern-Day Civil Right, July 29, 2021
- Texas Student Advocacy Convening, February 11, 2021
- Identifying Your Lane: From Direct Service to Social Justice Activism, Fort Worth ISD Dia Anual De Servicio de Cesar Chavez y Dolores Huerta, November 29, 2020

Media Interview

- Texas' plan to boost internet access for families nears finish line as lawmakers reach consensus, by Emily Donaldson, Dallas Morning-News, May 26, 2021

After the fellowship, Thomas joined the IDRA staff as a policy communications strategist.

IDRA Newsletter Articles

- Texas Legislature Takes Some Steps Toward Addressing the Digital Divide, June-July 2021
- Solving the Digital Divide Requires Authentic Family Engagement, April 2021
- Texas Needs an Equitable State Broadband Plan to Serve Students and Families, February 2021

Testimony

- Digital Health and Wellness are Essential to a Digital Citizenship Curriculum – IDRA statement to the Texas Senate Education Committee, May 13, 2021
- Texas Students Need an Equitable Approach to Accelerated Programming Learning Committees – IDRA testimony to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 6, 2021
- Texas Needs a Statewide Approach to Internet Connectivity Across Texas School Districts – IDRA testimony to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 6, 2021
- Texas Needs to Prioritize Rural and Urban School Districts through a Community Approach for Internet Connectivity, IDRA testimony to the House Public Education Committee, March 30, 2021
- Texas Needs a Statewide Approach to Internet Connectivity Across Texas School Districts, IDRA testimony to the Senate Education Committee, March 25, 2021
- Digital Health and Wellness Are Essential to a Digital Citizenship Curriculum – IDRA comments to the Texas House Public Education Committee, March 16, 2021

Classnotes Podcast

- The Future of Education Advocacy and Being Pushy – #217
- Education Policy Fellows Get Things Done in the Suppression Session – #216
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Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, M.Ed.

IDRA Education Policy Fellow – Equitable Response to COVID-19 in Schools

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About Christina

Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, M.Ed., is a second-generation Latina who grew up in San Juan, Texas, before moving to San Antonio in 2007. Christina is now a doctoral student in Applied Demography at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where she conducts research on educational inequities and health disparities. She earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2018, and recently her master's in educational psychology, with a specialization in quantitative methods, from the University of Texas at Austin in 2021. Christina believes that voices from students and other advocates of color are grossly under-represented in the policymaking space. She hopes to learn how to be a stronger advocate for families, students and educators in local communities, using advocacy and community-focused data collection strategies to identify their needs. As an IDRA Education Policy Fellow, Christina identified and pursued advocacy opportunities that address both the new and the existing systemic needs that schools, students and families have due to COVID-19. During her fellowship, Christina prioritized research and advocacy initiatives related to increasing school's engagement of students and digital equity.

Her Fellowship Products

Research

- Plugged in Tuned Out – Student Engagement Patterns in Texas Public Schools During COVID-19 Show Need for Statewide Broadband Access, IDRA Issue Brief, May 2021
- Digital Destination – Texas Needs Broadband Connectivity for All Students & Families, IDRA Issue Brief, April 2021

IDRA Newsletter Articles

- Student Health and Engagement Response to COVID-19 in Texas, June-July 2021
- Mental Health Implications of Virtual Learning on Student Engagement, April 2021
- Digital Divide Directly Impacted Student-School Engagement During COVID-19, March 2021

After the fellowship, Christina joined the IDRA staff as a research analyst.

Community Engagement, & Webinars

- Video Advocacy Campaign: Digitally Divided – Community United, spring 2021
- Education Policy Testimony Help – Virtual Office Hours, spring 2021
- Texas Legislative Wrap-up: Education Policy Study Hall, June 24, 2021
- Reimagining Student Engagement: Revamping School Policy and Practice and Fostering Student Advocacy, July 29, 2021
- Digital Equity and Inclusion – A Modern-Day Civil Right, July 29, 2021
- Texas Student Advocacy Convening, February 11, 2021
- Identifying Your Lane: From Direct Service to Social Justice Activism, Fort Worth ISD Dia Anual De Servicio de Cesar Chavez y Dolores Huerta, November 29, 2020

Testimony

- HB 3489 Supports Digital Health and Wellness, Which Are Essential to Supporting Students – IDRA comments to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 20, 2021
- School Counselors Must Gain an Increased Capacity to Serve Students Directly – IDRA testimony to the Senate Committee on Education, March 18, 2021
- Texas Must Increase the Presence of School Counselors in Public Schools – IDRA testimony to Senate Committee on Education, March 18, 2021

Classnotes Podcast

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Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed.

IDRA Education Policy Fellow – Georgia Education Policy

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About Mikayla

Mikayla Arciaga, M.A. Ed., spent the last five years teaching high school math and coaching swimming at Title I schools in both Florida and Georgia. While still in the classroom, she worked with multiple school districts in a variety of roles focusing on community engagement, curriculum improvement, teacher development and policy analysis. During her summers, Mikayla collaborated with and led a team of policy fellows assisting school board members in metro Atlanta and across the country. She contributed to several projects including a line-item review of an \$800 million budget, an equity audit of almost 200 school board policies, and an analysis of both school and state-level per-pupil expenditure data.

Throughout her work at the school district level, she recognized the need for high-quality accountability processes in the public school system, which motivated her to pursue a master's degree in program evaluation in the educational environment from the University of Florida. Mikayla's policy interests are centered around dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, accessibility for students with disabilities and digital accessibility. Outside of education policy, her other great love has been to make swimming accessible to learners of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. As a swim coach, she has worked to create a space focusing on sportsmanship, community, and joy, bringing home the first city championship in school history.

Her Fellowship Products

IDRA Articles

- Community Advocates Push Back as Georgia Legislature Targets Vulnerable Students, IDRA Newsletter, May 2022
- War on Obscenity is Classroom Censorship on Another Front, Knowledge is Power, December 15, 2021
- Priorities and Recommendations for the 2022 Georgia Legislative Session, with Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA Newsletter, November-December 2021

Community Engagement

- Coordination and weekly updates with the Georgia Coalition Against Classroom Censorship
- Legislative updates and overview sessions with multiple groups, including Atlanta Coalition for Educational Equity, Fayette County Democratic Women, and Jewish Community Relations Council of Atlanta.

Testimony

- Families and Students Deserve Authentic Engagements as Partners Rather than Adversarial School Environments – IDRA Testimony against House Bill 1178, submitted to the Georgia Senate Education and Youth Committee, March 23, 2022
- Schools Should Value Student's Lived Experiences, Not Censor Them – IDRA Testimony against HB 1084 in the Georgia General Assembly, presented to the House Education Academic Innovation Subcommittee, February 9, 2022

Media

- Bill would restrict teachers from 'divisive' race lessons in Georgia, by Doug Richards, 11 Alive TV Atlanta, February 9, 2022

Podcasts

- Education Policy: The Importance of Teacher Voice, Teaching Today, May 2022
- Uniting Community Voices in Georgia Policymaking – IDRA Classnotes Podcast #225 (coming soon!)



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