



50<sup>th</sup>

est 1973

Anniversary

Children First  
**IDRA**  
Transforming Education

IDRA 50th  
Anniversary  
*Gala*

Bold Legacy  
Bright Future

November 2, 2023



## Presenting Sponsor



IDRA is grateful for the generous support of our presenting sponsor, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. In addition to sponsoring IDRA's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala, the foundation has been a critical partner in our efforts to expand our work in Texas, Georgia and other states across the U.S. South.

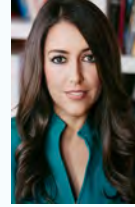
With funding from the Hewlett Foundation, IDRA launched the Southern Education Equity Network (SEEN) to bring together advocates and organizations across states and communities that share a commitment to educational equity. Through SEEN, IDRA has provided support to community-based organizations fighting for an end to harmful discipline practices, intergenerational collaboratives seeking to improve educational programs for emergent bilingual students, and youth-led coalitions leading advocacy campaigns against dangerous classroom censorship policies.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has also supported the IDRA Education Policy Fellows program, a nine-month fellowship designed to train and support advocates from historically-marginalized communities who are deeply impacted by education policies but are often excluded from decision-making spaces. Through the fellowship program, IDRA is changing the landscape of state-level policymaking in Texas and Georgia to ensure it is inclusive of diverse perspectives and voices. As Kent McGuire, the foundation's program director of education, has said: "The IDRA Education Policy Fellows program affirms that creating space for more students, families and impacted communities at the education policy table is key to building strong schools."

We thank the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation not only for its support, but for its vision and commitment to supporting programs and organizations like IDRA that are dedicated to achieving excellent and equitable schools for all students.



### A Message from Celina Moreno



Good evening! As IDRA's President and CEO, it is my honor to welcome you to IDRA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala – a celebration of five decades advocating excellent and equitable public schools for all students.

Tonight, we celebrate with the theme **Bold Legacy, Bright Future**. We pay tribute to the legacy, audacity and strength of the advocates who organized five decades ago to challenge injustice in their schools. We honor the vision of our founder Dr. José A. Cárdenas and the incredible decades-long leadership of Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel. And we recognize the hard work of the IDRA familia who, for over 50 years, have brought their talents and passion to the work of achieving our mission.

As we celebrate this bold legacy, we also look to a bright future. Even when the circumstances we are in seem darkest, we find light and hope in the young people for whom, and with whom, we do this work. At IDRA, we will never stop dreaming of and fighting for a world where all believe in the truth we have long known: all children are valuable; none is expendable.

Our work would not be possible without you: our friends, supporters and allies in the struggle for educational justice. Tonight, we also celebrate you and your invaluable partnership. You have come from near and far to be with us, and I sincerely thank you.

I hope you spend this evening reminiscing with old friends, meeting new ones, and enjoying the night's festivities.

Bienvenidos!





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### Tonight's Program

*Music presented by Mariachi Students from  
South San Antonio High School and Judson High School*

#### Emcee

Mr. Chuck Cureau, Spurs In-arena Host & SeaWorld PR Manager

#### Messages

San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg  
Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai

#### Remarks

The Honorable Juventino "Tino" Guerra, IDRA Board of Directors, Chair  
Dr. Maria "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President Emerita

#### Dinner

#### Student Remarks

Mr. Kaleb Dunn, Inaugural IDRA VisionCoders Student  
Mr. James Wilson, Georgia Youth Justice Coalition

#### 50th Anniversary Video

Bold Legacy, Bright Future

#### Remarks

Ms. Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO

#### Gadfly Award Presentation & Keynote Address

Ms. Dolores Huerta, Founder & President  
of the Dolores Huerta Foundation

#### Closing Toast

Dr. Carmen Tafolla







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IDRA 50th Anniversary  
*Gala*  
Bold Legacy  
Bright Future

**Tonight's Menu**

**Reception**

**Compressed Watermelon**

*Lime + Mint + Cotija*

**RK Chicken Bites**

*Jalapeno + Bacon Wrapped + Buttermilk Dressing*

**Sweet Corn Empanadas**

*Poblanos + Oaxaca Cheese + Lim + Voodoo Salsa*

**Texas Dairy Farm Fresh**

*Cheddar + Smoked Gouda + Garlic Dill Harvarti +  
Texas Chevre + Chefs Ricotta*

**Dinner**

**Farmers Market Salad**

*Cucumbers + Garden Tomatoes + House Ricotta + Pickled Red Onions +  
Seed & Nut Flatbread Crisp + Champagne Vinaigrette*

**Coffee Braised Beef Short Ribs**

*Cocoa + Butternut Squash Puree + Heirloom Carrots + Celery +  
Pearl Onions + Cocoa Nib Jus*

**Vegetarian Selection: Butternut Squash Steak**

*Smoked Paprika + Wild Rice + Pomegranate + Goat Cheese  
Warm Dinner Rolls*

**White Chocolate Raspberry Cake**

*Sweet Vanilla Cake + Layered Fresh Pressed Raspberries +  
Buttercream Icing + White Chocolate Chips*

**Tea, Coffee, Chilled Water**







## Dolores Huerta

### Founder & President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation

Dolores Huerta is a civil rights activist and community organizer. She has worked for labor rights and social justice for over 50 years. In 1962, she and César Chávez founded the United Farm Workers union. She served as vice president and played a critical role in many of the union's accomplishments for four decades.

In 2002, she received the Puffin/Nation \$100,000 prize for Creative Citizenship, which she used to establish the Dolores Huerta Foundation. The foundation is connecting groundbreaking community-based organizing to state and national movements to register and educate voters; advocate education reform; bring about infrastructure improvements in low-income communities; advocate greater equality for the LGBTQ+ community; and create strong leadership development.

She has received numerous awards: among them the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award from President Clinton in 1998. In 2012, President Obama bestowed Ms. Huerta with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States.



In 2004, Ms. Huerta was part of IDRA's Ohtli Encuentro in New Mexico nurturing leadership by women of color. We convened 30 women leaders of color from Native American, Black and Latina traditions to capture, honor and share their inspiring stories of leadership.

### The Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel Gadfly Award

A number of years ago, a reporter from a major national newspaper wrote an article on IDRA's work in education reform and referred to it as a "gadfly" organization. The dictionary defines "gadfly" as someone who rouses others from complacency. That's exactly what IDRA does and will continue to do – be an organization that rouses others from complacency in the face of dreams yet fulfilled for children! On the occasion of IDRA's 50th anniversary gala, IDRA President & CEO Celina Moreno, J.D., is pleased to formally establish the award as the Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel Gadfly Award for her continued dedication to IDRA and its mission. We are pleased to name Dolores Huerta as the first recipient of that award. IDRA commissioned an original *alebrije* for Ms. Huerta by artist Paul Blas Tomas of San Pedro Canonos, Oaxaca.





### Chuck Cureau

A professional emcee/host, actor, and television personality, Chuck Cureau is the arena host for the San Antonio Spurs basketball team, and he manages public relations at SeaWorld San Antonio. In addition, Mr. Cureau is a professional actor and has appeared in commercials, Emmy-nominated television shows and major motion pictures.



### Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai

Judge Peter Sakai's career in public service spans over 30 years. He graduated from the prestigious University of Texas in 1976 with a bachelor's degree and the University of Texas School of Law in 1979. He started as an Appellate Assistant D.A. in the Bexar County District Attorney's Office, and in 1983 opened his successful solo law practice. In 1995, he was unanimously appointed by the civil court judges as the Associate Judge of the Children's Court, where he created revolutionary new programs that protected children and put struggling families back together. Under Judge Sakai's leadership, adoptions in Bexar County of foster children increased by 1000%.



### Juventino "Tino" Guerra, J.D.

Mr. Guerra is chair of the IDRA Board of Directors. He is a retired chief magistrate for the City of San Antonio and served as a municipal judge for 21 years. He held several positions in the Edgewood ISD, including teacher, director of federal programs and associate superintendent. Mr. Guerra has a J.D. from the UT Austin and a BBA from St. Mary's University. He was the first employee of Texans for Educational Excellence, the forerunner of IDRA. He served as legal advisor for the City of San Antonio, Institute of the Americas.



### María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

Dr. Maria "Cuca" Robledo Montecel is president emerita of IDRA where she served as president & CEO from 1992 until her retirement in January 2019. A nationally-recognized expert on the prevention and recovery of dropouts, Dr. Robledo Montecel directed the first statewide study of dropouts in Texas. She has authored and co-authored a number of publications focusing on effective bilingual education, school holding power and parent leadership.

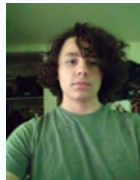


Dr. Robledo Montecel is an associate member of Hispanics in Philanthropy, a founding member of CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation, a three-term trustee of Our Lady of the Lake University and served on the founding board of directors of the Mexican and American Solidarity Foundation, an organization created to strengthen ties between Mexican citizens and the Mexican American community. She was named among the top 100 Hispanic influentials by Hispanic Business magazine and was inducted into the San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame.

She earned her doctorate in research and evaluation from the Urban Education program at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. Dr. Robledo Montecel was named a Women and Minorities Research Fellow by the National Institute of Education.

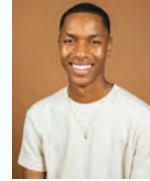
### Kaleb Dunn

Kaleb Dunn is a freshman at South San Antonio High School. Last year, he became an inaugural participant in IDRA's VisionCoders program, an eighth-grade computer science course for underserved middle school students. The experience led him to select high school courses that focus on technology. He is now in the school's e-sports club and enjoys exploring computers and programs and sees himself going into the IT field as a career.



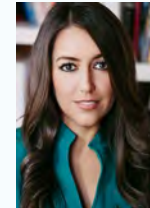
### James Wilson

James Wilson attended school in Covington, Georgia, and is now a Georgia State University student in Atlanta. He works with the Georgia Coalition for Education Justice, a collective of students, educators, parents and advocates convened by IDRA in 2022 dedicated to advancing education justice for all children across the state. As its chief of staff, James provides payroll and hiring support for one of the largest youth organizations in the state with dozens of paid organizers each month. Additionally, for two years, he led legislative work during Georgia's legislative sessions, which included training, policy and coalition-building. He is best known for his role in the victory of stopping Georgia's legislature from cutting over \$1.5 billion from public education to punish Black students and educators.



### Celina Moreno, J.D.

Celina Moreno, J.D., is the president and CEO of IDRA. She previously directed policy and litigation for the Southwest Office of MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund). She successfully represented DREAMers to defend DACA and the *Texas DREAM Act*. Ms. Moreno also served as co-counsel in the challenge to Texas' school finance system. She represented Bexar County and the cities of San Antonio, El Paso and others against Texas' anti-immigrant Senate Bill 4 (2017). She served as co-counsel in the Texas redistricting case seeking to protect the rights of Latino voters. She also co-authored a U.S. Supreme Court brief on behalf of 20 Latino organizations supporting UT-Austin's race-conscious admissions plan. Ms. Moreno chaired three statewide coalitions: the Texas Latino Education Coalition (now TLEEC); the TRUST Coalition, a group of business, faith, civil rights and law enforcement leaders focused on immigrants' rights; and the Texas Election Reform Coalition.



Ms. Moreno previously directed Texas RioGrande Legal Aid's School-to-Prison Pipeline Project. She has served as a Texas A&M-Commerce professor in its Department of Educational Leadership and as a 2018 German Marshall Fellow. Ms. Moreno is the recipient of the 2020 Community Leader Award by the Mexican American Bar Association, the 2017 Future of Texas Award by Every Texan, and the 2017 Women of Distinction Award by the Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce. She was appointed to the Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women in San Antonio and served on the board of Empower House, a non-profit seeking to empower women and girls.

Ms. Moreno received a master's degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School, a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin, and a law degree from the University of Houston. She is passionate about dance, national parks, and international travel and loves spending time with her three stepchildren, her husband Lucio, and their baby Yazmín.

### Carmen Tafolla, Ph.D.

Named State Poet Laureate of Texas in 2015, Dr. Carmen Tafolla is an award-winning poet and children's author, storyteller, performance artist, motivational speaker, scholar and university Professor Emeritus. Tafolla had also served from 2012-2014 as the first City Poet Laureate of San Antonio and presented at more than 300 schools, universities, professional conferences, and community arts centers in her two-year tenure. In 2018, she became the first Latina to be elected President of the Texas Institute of Letters. The author of more than 40 books and a Professor of Transformative Children's Literature at UT San Antonio, she holds a Ph.D. in bilingual education from the University of Texas and a B.A., M.A., and a Doctorate Honoris Causa in Humane Letters from Austin College.





# It Started with A Vision

On Tuesday, November 21, 1972, a group of interested citizens met at the Menger Hotel in San Antonio to formalize an organization dedicated to the development of an equitable system of school finance for the State of Texas. Prior to this meeting, various persons from San Antonio had formed an informal organization named Texans for Educational Excellence (TEE) to discuss the implications of the recent decision in *Rodríguez v San Antonio* by a federal three-judge panel that had unanimously found the Texas system of school finance unconstitutional.

Knowing that the U.S. Supreme Court could reverse the *Rodríguez* decision, Dr. José A. Cárdenas proposed that TEE (1) act as a coordinating agency for organizations interested in school finance reform, such as the League of Women Voters, the Panel of American Women, NAACP, LULAC, American G.I. Forum and other community-based organizations, (2) be a voice for groups with limited access to the normal channels of education communication, and (3) serve as a research organization conducting four activities: school finance research, developing alternatives for model legislation, analyzing proposed legislation, and disseminating information to organizations, institutions and individuals interested in school finance reform.

The meeting resulted in the planning of a statewide conference for December 1, 1972, on school finance reform

**“My dream is for an ideal educational system where success and rewards are dependent on the student’s capability and effort and are not constrained by the circumstances of their birth, their family or their environment – an educational system in which all students can and will learn.”**

**“The end result of an educational program for minority children – and for all children – is freedom.”**



to begin the process of identifying key issues and building a statewide network of concerned and informed citizens. Lanny Sinkin ended the meeting with the following summary: “The task is great, the resources limited and the time short, but [the participants] were hopeful that the impact of TEE would be significant.”

TEE continued as an informal organization until 1973. On April 1, 1973, immediately following the reversal of *Rodríguez* in the U.S. Supreme Court, Dr. Cárdenas resigned as superintendent of the Edgewood Independent School District and became full-time executive director of TEE. As proof that the move was not an April Fool’s joke, the following day, TEE was notified of a \$95,000 grant from the National Urban Coalition acting as fiscal agent for the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ford Foundation.

On September 1, 1974, Texans for Educational Excellence was reorganized as the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) with a wider scope. The original commitment to finance equity was supplemented with a broader commitment to all aspects of improvement of educational opportunity for all students.

*– Excerpted from Texas School Finance Reform: An IDRA Perspective, by Dr. José A. Cárdenas, 1997*

## Dr. José A. Cárdenas’ Reflections on IDRA’s Beginnings

“When I started with Texans for Education Excellence in 1973, many people in positions of power – the Texas governor, legislators and school superintendents – said they would be happy to change the school finance system but did not want the federal government shoving it down their throats.



Naive in my heart, naive in my soul, I figured in a few years, two maybe four, that we would devise a system that everybody would support and that the problem would be solved quickly.

TEE, which later became the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), was

formed as a short-term organization to provide assistance in the formulation of an equitable system of school finance. Proof of this is that we did not have any money for a long period of time.

We didn’t institute fringe benefits, retirement, insurance, or anything because nobody thought the institution would be around for more than a few years, four years at the most, during which a system of school finance that was equitable would be established in the state of Texas.

It was not until about four or five years later that it started to dawn on us that it was not going to be as easy as we thought it was.”

*– Excerpted from Destined to Get an Equitable System of School Funding, interview by by Anna Alicia Romero, IDRA Newsletter, September 2001*

## IDRA’s Founder

In 2010, when Edgewood ISD rededicated its early childhood center, the district installed a set of plaques with the text below about the school’s namesake: José Angel Cárdenas.

### The Student and Patriot

Dr. Cárdenas started college at the age of 15 at the University of Texas. He earned a master’s in education from Our Lady of the Lake University and a doctorate in education from UT. He later was a professor at both universities as well as at the University of Texas at San Antonio. From 1951 to 1953, Dr. Cárdenas served in the U.S. Army Infantry in Korea.

### The Educator

As a classroom teacher, Dr. Cárdenas worked in multicultural settings with limited resources. He later was the first Hispanic school superintendent in San Antonio, where he constructed the first school in Texas designed for preschoolers. He recognized the systemic barriers to providing the excellent education he envisioned. He dedicated his life’s work to make his vision a reality.

### The Advocate

Dr. Cárdenas founded the Intercultural Development Research Association, dedicated to improving educational opportunities for all children. He was an expert witness or consultant in more than 70 education civil rights cases and is known as the father of Texas bilingual education. He led decades-long efforts to achieve school finance equity and was instrumental in the Edgewood court cases.

### The Visionary

Dr. Cárdenas believes that all children are valuable. His work has moved people to understand cultural diversity and how it is used to enhance or deny opportunities for students. A champion of the most vulnerable children, Dr. Cárdenas played a central role in litigation that ensured that children of undocumented parents were not denied access to education.







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## A Bold Vision

Every student is valuable,  
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IDRA works to ensure all  
students have access to  
excellent, equitable and  
welcoming public schools  
that prepare them for  
college and life.





## Serving Emergent Bilingual Students



IDRA helped write Texas' first bilingual education law, one of the strongest in the nation. IDRA is now helping shape bilingual education policy and training thousands of teachers of emergent bilingual students every year across the U.S. South.



## Securing Equitable School Funding

IDRA has provided expert witness testimony, written school finance laws, organized communities and fiercely advocated equitable school funding systems in Texas and Georgia. IDRA's José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program engages the nation's most promising researchers in investigating school finance solutions.







## Leading Culturally-Sustaining Schooling

For five decades, IDRA has worked hand-in-hand with educators, young people and families to make schools welcoming for diverse students. Through teacher training, policy advocacy, legal strategy and community engagement, IDRA fights to ensure every student can feel safe bringing every aspect of their identity into their classrooms.

IDRA is helping students and families in complaints filed to the Office for Civil Rights to challenge racially discriminatory practices in their schools.



## Fostering Family Leadership

IDRA's Education CAFE™ model is a research-based innovation for school-family-community collaboration. Education CAFEs have coordinated parent organizing and parent participatory action research.

IDRA's family leadership work has changed how school districts in Arkansas, Georgia, Texas and across the U.S. South support all students to be on track for college, to graduate bilingual and bicultural, and to reduce exclusionary discipline.





# Ending Harmful Discipline & Ensuring Real School Safety



IDRA works to ensure schools are safe and welcoming every day, for every student. We have provided expert testimony to Congress about school safety and against corporal punishment, led coalitions in Texas and Georgia to challenge school policing policies, and trained teachers in research-based strategies like restorative practices. We have helped school districts rewrite their codes of conduct, and produced policy briefs that shape narratives about what real school safety looks like for all students.



## Elevating Student Voices

Since our founding 50 years ago, IDRA has remained committed to centering students as education policy and practice change agents. We are proud to partner with youth-led and intergenerational organizations through our statewide coalitions in Texas and Georgia and our Southern Education Equity Network.

IDRA's Youth Advisory Board, comprised of high school students, advises IDRA's policy and advocacy staff, provides critical thought leadership through published writing, and conducts original research on equity in education.





## Dropout Prevention & Youth Leadership

IDRA created a new methodology, "attrition," to pioneer the study of dropout rates. IDRA's research also informed the award-winning Valued Youth Partnership program with a 98% success rate among students considered at risk of dropping out. The program has created transformations in almost a million students, teachers and schools.



## Building College Access & STEM Pipelines

Through legal briefs and strategy, IDRA has helped to challenge harmful policies that limit access to college for students of color. Our research and policy advocacy has promoted the critical importance of rigorous coursework and college preparation for all.



The Defense STEM Education Consortium recently named San Antonio's Alamo STEM Ecosystem, led by IDRA, as one of four STEM hubs in the country. IDRA is also leading a new generation of computer scientists with our VisionCoders eighth-grade course in underserved schools.



## Equipping Teachers & Principals



Through several federally-funded Transition to Teaching accelerated teacher certification programs, IDRA added more than 1,000 bilingual, science and mathematics, English as a second language (ESL), and bilingual-special education teachers in more than 20 high-need urban and rural school districts over a decade.

IDRA trains educators to improve teaching strategies and school programs, including to expand college access, implement ethnic studies courses, and understand the use of artificial intelligence in education.



## Combatting Classroom Censorship

IDRA leads statewide coalitions in Texas and Georgia that bring together hundreds of individuals and organizations to advance a strong vision of educational equity and fight against classroom censorship policies and their chilling effects.

IDRA launched the Southern Education Equity Network to connect and support families and community advocates throughout the U.S. South.

As part of SEEN's virtual platform, IDRA launched the "We All Belong – School Resource Hub" to promote accurate and inclusive education by providing lesson plans and tools for teaching history and current events about race and gender in today's classroom censorship climate.





# Visionary Leadership



## José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

“If students are faltering, failing, or leaving school, then their schools – not the students – need to change in fundamental ways. Every child has the right to a quality education.”

- Founder 1973
- Executive Director 1973-1992



## María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

“Let us make good on the promises we have made to children. It is not the time to look away or look on and do nothing. Now is not the time for despair or timidity. Now is the time for hope and action.”

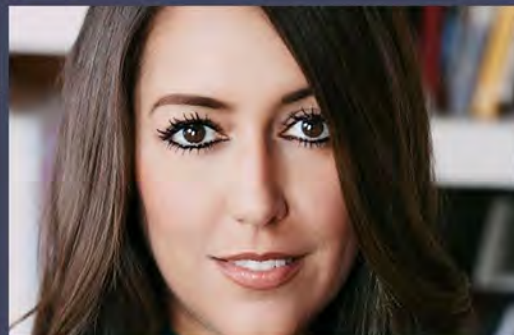
- President & CEO 1992-2019



## Celina Moreno, J.D.

“There can be no excellence without equity. The false choice between the two is unjust and anti-democratic. What is good for the children of the most powerful in our society must be the expectation we set for all students.”

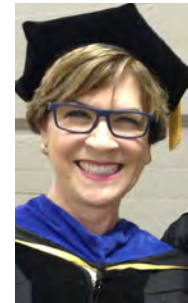
- President & CEO 2019-



# Reflections on IDRA Work Across 50 Years

## A Story of Innovation, Connection and Faithfulness

by Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel  
IDRA President Emerita



2023 marks 50 years of IDRA work, contributions and impact. I have journeyed with IDRA for 47 of those years, 26 years as IDRA President & CEO and the last four as IDRA President Emerita.

From the age of 23, I was shaped by the people of IDRA in the most profound ways, learning about moxy and leadership from IDRA founder Dr. José Angel Cárdenas, about compassion and brilliance from Dr. Bambi Cárdenas, and about systems and how to change them from Dr. Abelardo Villarreal.

I am grateful to them and to the women and men of IDRA across the decades who taught me about the key principles of advocacy, focus, independence, cohesiveness, responsiveness, innovation, cooperation, accountability and integrity.

My two sons, Ismael Gavino and Xavier Mario, are IDRA babies who are now 35 and 33. They taught me how to be a mother and IDRA President & CEO at the same time.

As I reflect on the work of IDRA across five decades, my sense is that our story is primarily a story of innovation, connection and faithfulness.

**Bold innovation** has been our way of disrupting the habit of schools and policymakers to act on the mistaken belief that students’ language, immigrant or migrant status, zip code, parents’ education level, or color of skin are the reasons for underachievement by big swaths of students in primarily poor and Brown and Black schools.

We asserted and have demonstrated that students who are poor or immigrant, are of one color or another, or live in poor neighborhoods, or do not speak English,







do not make poor schools; rather underfunded schools, poor policy, and poor educational practices make for underachieving students.

With a 1973 \$95,000 start up grant, IDRA began (as Texans for Educational Excellence) to conduct school finance research and advocacy. Rejecting the U.S. Supreme Court judgment in the *Rodríguez v. San Antonio ISD* school finance case, we fought in Texas courts providing equity research analyses, identifying needed reforms, and providing technical assistance and expert testimony in each of the *Edgewood* school finance trials. The Texas courts have declared that the state's school funding system is equal enough. It is not.

IDRA has and will consistently fight for fair funding for all. We will continue to fight in collaboration with our partners until we have a truly equitable funding system.

In other key court cases, we fought policies that sought to exclude undocumented immigrant students from public schools. We provided extensive data for one of the first court cases dealing with the education of undocumented children in Texas, *Doe v. Plyler*. IDRA provided testimony in the Tyler, Houston and Dallas cases. Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children could not be excluded from public schools in the country.

Forty years later, *Plyler* is still strong as a U.S. Supreme Court decision and as law. At the K-12 level, IDRA publishes a yearly school opening alert about the legal requirement to educate undocumented students. We continue to monitor implementation of the law in public schools.

However, the fate of students who are undocumented and complete high school in the United States but are excluded from college continues to be a patchwork of inconsistent and deficit oriented policies across states. We continue to work to create and put in place Dreamer policies that do not exclude college students.

Among other policy innovations, IDRA helped write Texas' first bilingual policy: the *Bilingual Education and Training Act* specifying conditions for bilingual instruction in elementary schools. We also studied the cost of bilingual education in Texas, Colorado and Utah, providing needed information about the costs and benefits of educating bilingual education students.

Since Texas was unwilling to fund needed programs, IDRA worked with MALDEF providing testimony and analysis in another court case showing that the school finance system was inequitable and that it under funds bilingual education and the education of students in families with low incomes.



Turning policy into practice, we established a bilingual training resource center, hosted bilingual training institutes for parents and school administrators, established the first parent information resource center in Texas, and pushed for and passed policies that help with funding and refer to students as *emergent bilingual* students rather than "limited" this or that.

Much remains to be done so that emerging bilingual students are enrolled in programs that have parity with monolingual or dual language programs. And bilingual programs at the secondary level continue to lag behind elementary schools.





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DOE V. PLYER  
RODRÍGUEZ V. L.A. USD  
EDGWOOD V. KIRBY

EDUCATION EQUITY  
BILINGUAL EDUCATION  
DROPOUT PREVENTION  
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RODRÍGUEZ V. SAN ANTONIO  
DOE V. PLYER  
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EDGWOOD V. KIRBY



From 1975, IDRA focused directly on professional development and school practices via innovation in managing multicultural and multilingual education. We developed targeted systems of technical assistance and training focused on educating underserved students in Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas.

Over many years, we worked with the U.S. Department of Education and the Office for Civil Rights to define student rights and to work with schools to implement court-ordered desegregation in areas of race, national origin and gender.

Over a 10-year period, IDRA operated a comprehensive technical assistance center in Texas serving bilingual and migrant students as well as identifying the critical characteristics of high-poverty, high performing schools.

Five years ago, we began a long-term initiative with 11 states and Washington, D.C., to develop innovations that tackle the most critical issues around race, national origin and gender – impacting students' education and civil rights in the U.S. South and its 2,341 school districts and 29,632 schools with over 1 million educators and 16 million students.



At the preschool level, innovations in curriculum resulted in our *Amanecer* program, the first comprehensive bilingual early childhood curriculum in the nation. Evolution of the materials as they were put to use in early childhood centers included *Nuevo Amanecer* and the current *Semillitas de Aprendizaje*™.

All our early education work is evidence based and focuses on student and family assets. Student and family assets are featured in two decades of Annual IDRA *La Semana del*

*Niño* early childhood and parent institutes. IDRA recently co-led the Early Childhood English Learner Initiative. This led to required development of an early childhood statewide plan for support of emergent bilingual students.

Adding to innovation in teacher development, IDRA designed transition to teaching programs. Throughout a 15-year initiative, we partnered with universities and more than 55 school districts across Texas to prepare a new generation of skilled and effective teachers to lead and innovate in schools that needed them most. IDRA recruited over 800 recent graduate and mid-career professionals working in fields other than teaching. They took up teaching as a career, many focused on teacher shortage areas, including mathematics, English as a second language, and bilingual education.

We also launched a U.S.-Mexico binational and interdisciplinary program, *Alianza*, for teacher preparation and leadership development that launched a nationwide initiative.

In 1986, IDRA designed and conducted the first statewide research study of dropouts in Texas. The study was commissioned by the Texas Department of Commerce and the Texas Education Agency. That 1986 study found that 86,276 Texas students dropped out that year without completing high school at a cost of \$17 billion to the state.

This research resulted in Texas House Bill 1010 that defined the term *dropout*, mandated dropout counting and reporting, and funded dropout prevention programs and staff across the state.

IDRA's annual studies show a cumulative total of 4 million students have been lost to Texas schools before graduating high school. While rates have gone down, we are far from universal high school education.

IDRA also conducted a major dropout study of students who did and did not drop out of Dallas ISD schools. We found that Latino immigrant students had lower dropout rates than non-immigrant Latino students. We created





Founded in 1982, by 55 Texas school districts, the Equity Center now proudly represents more than 600 districts across the state – covering from Texarkana to El Paso, Amarillo to Brownsville and ranging in size from less than 100 students to well over 150,000. Our expertise and knowledge in school finance is unparalleled. The Equity Center is proud to be the only non-profit education organization in Texas exclusively representing the interests of children and taxpayers across the state.

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a change model to guide the district in dropout prevention innovations.

IDRA's Valued Youth Partnership program began as a "concept program" in Edgewood and by 1984 we had expanded to other schools in San

Antonio. Over several decades of expansion and research, this award-winning IDRA model program grew to include 35,000 valued youth tutors in the United States and Puerto Rico and England and Brazil. The lives of more than three-quarters of a million students, families and educators have been positively impacted by this program.



The VYP program selects secondary school students who are considered at risk of dropping out, turns dire predictions upside-down and engages so-called 'at-risk' tutors as tutors of little ones in elementary schools. The program brings in families and communities, supports teacher initiatives and builds the capacity and willingness of the school to hold on to students until graduation.

Research has shown that 98% of tutors stay in school. So, schools see new possibilities in their valued youth tutors and tutees, and students and families see new possibilities in themselves. For example, Pablo López was an eighth grade VYP tutor in Brownsville ISD. Years later, he became a police officer in McAllen and even later an investigator at the University of Texas at Pan American. He said that everything he learned about protecting and serving was in the Valued Youth Partnership program.



Other VYP tutors share that they learned to speak up for themselves, to see a future for themselves in college and even to consider teaching as a profession. And VYP teachers marvel at the transformations once the adults in the school recognize students as leaders.

Former San Antonio Councilman Rey Saldaña was a VYP tutee in second grade. And he is always happy to credit his tutor and IDRA for what he learned via the program.

We heard these stories in many places: whether in the southside of San Antonio or the South Side of Chicago, or in Sacramento, L.A., Santa Monica, California, and in the Bronx, New York.

Taking the important lessons from VYP, we have applied them to new ideas, like our Youth Leadership Now program in the El Paso area that integrates VYP, teacher mentoring and family engagement. IDRA also launched VisionCoders for middle schoolers to become software designers while supporting younger students. This program also furthers our history of supporting students' STEM education.

Most recently, the Defense STEM Education Consortium named IDRA and the Alamo STEM Ecosystem as one of four STEM hubs in the country. As co-lead of the Alamo STEM Ecosystem, which brings together educators, industry and other partners, we are increasing opportunities for young students to work directly with technology to expand their problem-solving skills.

Even this partial list of IDRA accomplishments and impact make it clear that the innovations I have described would have been impossible without connecting various parts of our work.

I believe IDRA is itself an innovation. Our evolving and growing ability to work strategically across research, policy and practice is crucial and is part of what we believe gives IDRA's work its value added.





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Most organizations are either research organizations or they are policy organizations, or they are practice organizations, working with

educators and providing technical assistance. We do all of that. And, importantly, we work across departments or divisions or disciplines. We apply interdisciplinary ideas and solutions to what we do.

Our research affects our educational practice work, which informs our policy and legal advocacy, and each domain is grounded in our community and student engagement. Each domain intersects the others to have the greatest impact. And I think that if we deepen those links and deepen our interdisciplinary, inter-sector, inter-perspective work, IDRA will continue to create innovations that disrupt school failure and promote education for all.

**Courageous connections** are also fundamental to our work for equal educational opportunity. Two decades ago, we founded the Texas Latino Education Coalition, now called the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition focusing on fair funding, teaching quality, school holding power, and college access and success. Cofounders included MALDEF, Mexican American School Board Association, NAACP and LULAC. The Georgia Coalition for Education Justice, which IDRA created last year, has already convened a broad base of organizations and had key victories including stopping voucher bills in that state.

In 2010, IDRA published *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework*. The book details our theory of change model, based on experience and empirical evidence, for taking a look at a school's conditions and outcomes, and identifying leverage points for improved and informed action.

Our IDRA story is one of bold innovation and courageous connection and, most fundamentally, **uninterrupted faithfulness**.

We are faithful to our mission: to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

We are, at our core, faithful to children: All children are valuable; none is expendable.

Back in the late 1970s, an administrator at TEA sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Education saying that, because IDRA was testifying against schools, we should not get federal monies to help train educators.

We are not against schools. We are for students – all of them. That is why we testify in key court cases, why we publish seminal research, why we developed groundbreaking bilingual legislation and early childhood curriculum and materials, why we model effective professional development, why we organize and lead education coalitions, and why we create innovations in student leadership and authentic family engagement programs.

From the same agency, I was thanked by a different administrator for always being able to count on IDRA to tell the truth.

Some years back, I was talking to a Washington Post reporter. The resulting article, published in 2000 said IDRA was a gadfly organization. I did not know what to make of that as a descriptor of IDRA. I looked in my handy dictionary and found among other definitions that a gadfly is someone who rouses others out of complacency. And that we are and wish to be. Our gadfly awards remind us of who we are. And who we will continue to be as we step into a brilliant future for all students.



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## Examples of Our Work in 2023



### VisionCoders

In this high-quality, SEL and asset-based eighth-grade computer science and leadership course, students in at-risk situations are becoming software designers for their elementary buddies. The program is in eight San Antonio schools this year.



### San Antonio STEM Hub

The Defense STEM Education Consortium named IDRA and the Alamo STEM Ecosystem, which IDRA co-leads, as one of four STEM hubs in the country to work with students, teachers and industry to build STEM pipelines for underserved students.



### Student Research & Activism

We are supporting teams of San Antonio students studying, for example, the state of Mexican American Studies. Ten high school students across Texas comprised IDRA's Texas Youth Advisory Board, informing our policy work with their insight.



### Valued Youth Partnership

IDRA's research-based dropout prevention program keeps 98% of its tutors in school. This leadership development and career pathway program has been successful across the country since it began in 1984. The White House named it a "Bright Spot" program."



### Youth Leadership Now

YLN is an in-school program for eighth-grade students in West Texas that combines three winning strategies: IDRA's VYP tutoring by middle schoolers deemed high-need; teacher mentoring to prepare for high school; and family engagement through our Education CAFE model.



### Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Schooling

IDRA coaches principals and trains thousands of teachers each year across the U.S. South to address fundamental equity concerns. For example, we currently train thousands of teachers of bilingual students in South Carolina.



## Examples of Our Work in 2023



### Education CAFE™

IDRA's authentic family leadership model builds strong family-educator partnerships to improve schools and raise students' academic achievement. Education CAFES have improved access to and success in college prep courses and much more.



### State & Federal Policy Change

IDRA is a leader in drafting legislation and policy agendas. Our work has led to critically important laws for bilingual education, school funding equity, school discipline practices, immigrant students' rights to attend school, and much more.



### Education Policy Fellowship

IDRA is preparing the next generation of policy advocates. Our fellows gain real-world advocacy experience and training during the Texas and Georgia legislative sessions.



### Legal Advocacy

IDRA has provided legal strategy and expert testimony in every major education civil rights case in Texas in the last 50 years. Our current legal work includes writing amicus briefs to protect the *Texas Dream Act* and race-conscious admission and filing federal complaints on behalf of parents whose children are targets of race-based bullying and anti-LGBTQ+ school district policies.



### Southern Education Equity Network

IDRA's virtual network is a forum for community and coalition advocates to collaborate across the U.S. South. Its award-winning We All Belong – School Resource Hub provides lesson plans and tools for teaching about race, culture and gender in the classroom.



### Research, Evaluation & Data

IDRA's data analyses inform policymaking, litigation and school planning. We put actionable data and dashboards in the hands of community groups as they explore ways to support their schools. The USDA selected IDRA to conduct a meta-evaluation of its 33 grantees in multiple states and territories.

**There's more...** Like our early childhood bilingual curriculum, family and teacher convenings, and expertise in bilingual education, school discipline and safety guidance, fair school funding, rights of immigrant students, and college preparation and access.

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## On the 50th Anniversary of IDRA



**The Family of Erasmo & Sally Andrade**  
wishes to

**Honor and cherish the founders of IDRA**

Dr. José A. Cárdenas  
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Give thanks for the accomplishments of IDRA staff, present and past

### Acknowledgments

IDRA would like to thank the following students and consultants for their work and assistance with our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala.

#### Reception Volunteers

Ruth Youn, former IDRA Georgia Education Policy Fellow  
Melivia Mujica, former IDRA Intern  
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