



**Celina Moreno, J.D.**  
*President & CEO*

August 19, 2020

**Re: A Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis and to Establish Stronger Efforts to Promote Racial Equity in San Antonio**

Dear San Antonio City Council Members:

We urge you to adopt the resolution declaring racism a public health crisis and committing to take more steps toward racial equity in San Antonio. As an organization focused on educational equity, IDRA recognizes the forces and linked systems that impact school communities: racial inequities in access to high-quality healthcare, food, housing, justice, transportation, jobs, and public education have impacted the school experiences and life trajectories of generations of students.

Since 1973, IDRA has fought for equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all students. IDRA's founder, Dr. José A. Cárdenas, was a superintendent in Edgewood ISD. Like many others, he observed how his Latinx and Black students and families had far fewer resources and opportunities in their schools and communities than their mostly white peers in districts just a few miles away. Dr. Cárdenas founded IDRA with a clear understanding that racism, as codified in federal and state laws and carried out through local policies and practices, was leading to poor, long-lasting outcomes for students of color.

**Racism in public education is a public health crisis.**

We continue to see the negative and persistent impacts of a long history of racism today. Because education is a key social determinant of health, racially unjust policies that impact educational attainment can compromise the health and lives of people of color. Inequities in our public education system are deeply-rooted, but several major policy decisions have had clear and profound impacts on schools in communities of color.

Federal government-sanctioned residential segregation practices known as redlining centralized the racial separation policies already in place in many communities and cities, including San Antonio.<sup>1</sup> Under these official policies, white suburban communities were subsidized by the government while people of color were denied the opportunity to build intergenerational wealth through property ownership. They

---

<sup>1</sup> In San Antonio, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) created the now-infamous maps that labeled Black and Latinx neighborhoods as "hazardous" for lending, leading to the denial of mortgages and services to people in these communities (these maps can be viewed at <https://digital.utsa.edu/digital/collection/p16018coll12>). However, racial segregation existed in the city before then. We urge all Council Members to review the film *Walk on the River: A Black History of the Alamo City* ([www.walkontheriver.com](http://www.walkontheriver.com)) and take the accompanying Freedom Black History Bus Tour when it is safe to do so.

were instead corralled into communities that were intentionally and systematically underserved and under-resourced.

School funding policies based on property wealth, like those challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court in *San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez*, guaranteed that the public schools serving these communities were similarly under-resourced, contributing to differences in facilities, instructional materials, and educational outcomes for Black and Latinx children that continue today.

Now in our schools, Black and Latinx children experience the harmful effects of discipline and policing policies that target their behaviors and allow for prejudicial implementation practices. Despite being no more likely to misbehave than their peers, Black children in particular are more likely than their peers to be suspended, sent to alternative schools, arrested, and referred to juvenile probation for school-based behaviors. This push-out of students of color—who are often targeted for minor, vague offenses—results in missed classroom learning and socialization time and an increased likelihood of grade retention, high school dropout, and future contact with the justice system.<sup>2</sup> Along with other harmful policies and practices like those that limit access to advanced coursework for students of color, underfund programs for English learners, and track students of color away from college, punitive school discipline contributes to higher attrition rates for Black and Latinx students and lifelong barriers to success and health that compound over generations.<sup>3</sup>

### **The importance of naming racism as a crisis.**

Racism is a threat to the lives of people of color and declaring it as such through this resolution is critical. In naming the many victims of racial violence we commit to honoring their lives and actively challenging the systems that contributed to their deaths. This is why so many people around the world insist on saying the names of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Atatiana Jefferson, as they said the names of Longino Flores, Emmett Till, Antonio Rodríguez, and the countless other Black and Latinx people who have been murdered in this country. As we name racism as the cause of this violence and of so many other linked systemic inequities from public health to public education, we must also commit to do the hard work to address it.

We each play a part in the movement to fight racial injustice—some protest, some write, some walk out, some give generously of their resources. And some, like you, are able to shape the policies that impact entire communities through your elected positions. Your decision to vote in support of this resolution is courageous because it will challenge the beliefs of some of your constituents who, despite history, data, and the lived expertise of people of color, do not believe systemic racism is real and assume all outcomes are the result of individual choices or cultural predisposition. But, your decision to support the resolution is also clear. As elected officials you understand that many systemic inequities are the result of policies that were put in place with malice or racist apathy in the past and must be undone with goodness and a clarity of purpose now.

We urge you to vote in support of the resolution and join the states, cities, and counties like Michigan, Memphis, and Dallas County that have adopted similar resolutions. In addition, we urge you to follow

---

<sup>2</sup> See IDRA's letter to school district leaders and other resources on school discipline and policing at [https://www.idra.org/education\\_policy/school-policing-resources/](https://www.idra.org/education_policy/school-policing-resources/).

<sup>3</sup> See IDRA's attrition studies that have tracked Texas' school holding power and made policy recommendations at [https://www.idra.org/research\\_articles/attrition-dropout-rates-texas/](https://www.idra.org/research_articles/attrition-dropout-rates-texas/).

the declaration with concrete actions that dismantle systemic oppression, including robust data collection and publication, sufficient funding to support proven programs and organizations, and authentic engagement with impacted communities. We look forward to working with you on this and other initiatives that impact students in our community. Should you have any questions, please contact me at [morgan.craven@idra.org](mailto:morgan.craven@idra.org).

Sincerely,

Morgan Craven  
National Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement  
IDRA