

Focus: Education Policy Issues in Texas & Georgia

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What to Expect from Bids to Take Public Money Out of Public Schools

by Diana Long

Public schools have become the target of censorship attacks and a new wave of culture wars. Proponents of privatizing public schools levy false allegations against inclusive school practices and curricula as a new way to justify private school voucher programs proposed in the Texas legislative session.

Voucher proposals typically appear in one of three forms: education savings accounts, tax credit scholarships, and traditional school vouchers. In all forms, they divert public taxpayer dollars away from public schools to private entities that are not held to the same standards as public schools and have salient problems for school accountability and transparency.

In terms of accountability, private schools are not required to be rated under the state’s A-F accountability system, administer the STAAR test and end-of-course exams, or transparently account for their funds and spending (Burriss, 2022). While there are certainly flaws to address within our accountability system, it is problematic to shift public funds to a private system that has no requirements for comparable accountability measures.

Voucher programs misleadingly fail to cover the full cost of private school tuition, and they cut out students in rural areas. Private schools are not required to serve students with dis-

abilities, emergent bilingual students, or many other federally-required accommodations.

Voucher-like programs have historically faced bipartisan opposition in Texas. Many legislators do not want to funnel state money away from public schools that are already severely underfunded. The last ambitious voucher bill before the Texas Legislature was filed in 2017 but was killed in the Senate by rural lawmakers who have long opposed private school choice policies (López, 2022).

Proponents of vouchers appeared to also face opposition from the State Board of Education. In late 2022, the board voted to reject diverting tax dollars from public schools to private and religious schools as one of its legislative priorities (Wiggins, 2022). But in February, the board reversed its position.

At the same time, during a winter storm that left millions of Texans without power, Gover-

IDRA Education Policy Fellow Authors

The articles in this issue of the IDRA Newsletter feature the research and policy advocacy of IDRA’s education policy fellows. The IDRA Education Policy Fellows program is a nine-month fellowship designed to provide real-world training to advocates who represent the communities most impacted by state-level education policymaking. For more information about the program, including how to support the fellows’ work, visit: <https://idra.news/EdPolicyFellows>

5 reasons private school vouchers would hurt students

- 1 Private school vouchers drain money from public schools**
 Private school vouchers take money from public schools - that serve 90% of Texas students - and give it to private school operators who are not accountable to taxpayers. Public schools need to lose less than \$10,000 per voucher to cover their cost of funding. But the cost of running those schools increases. The lights have to stay on.
- 2 Funding private school vouchers means using taxpayer dollars to fund discrimination**
 Private schools are not required to serve all students, so they can deny admission, enrollment and educational services to their discretion. This includes students with disabilities, emergent bilingual students, students of different religions and diverse identities.
- 3 Voucher programs don't improve academic outcomes**
 Studies show that students who use vouchers to attend private school don't perform any better than their public school peers. Conversely, students attending private schools with vouchers did less well on tests relative to their peers in public schools.
 The best way to strengthen public schools is to strengthen public schools!
- 4 Voucher programs subsidize affluent students already attending private schools**
 Most voucher programs fail for about 80% of covering the full cost of private school education. The national average tuition for private school is more than \$12,000. The majority of families that can't afford that are the ones most in need making the real beneficiaries of voucher programs families who can already afford to pay the difference between the voucher and the actual cost of tuition. Only wealthy families end up enjoying the subsidy of a private voucher.
- 5 Private schools lack state accountability for academic and financial performance**
 Private schools have almost complete autonomy for how they operate, including how they manage their finances and what they are required to disclose to parents and the public. Public schools are not required to administer the STAAR, to be rated under the state's A-F school accountability system, or to transparently account for their funds and spending.

It is the state's responsibility to provide excellent, well-funded public schools for all students.
<https://idra.news>

<https://idra.news/5ReasonsVouchersHurt>

(What to Expect from Bids to Take Public Money Out of Public Schools, continued from Page 1)

nor Abbott emphasized his goal to establish private school vouchers. In a legislative session that should have focused on school safety, teacher pay and retention, and securing equitable school funding, state leaders are prioritizing vouchers that harm the vast majority of students. Voucher measures would exacerbate problems, like school segregation and disparities in the quality of education students receive.

School funding is just one piece of the education system, but research has shown it is the

most important when it comes to providing children with a high-quality education (Latham Sikes, 2022). Public schools serve 92% of Texas students and are held accountable to the public (TEA, 2022). And for many communities, they offer primary sources of employment, social services and community events. Public schools should be protected. Texas has the responsibility to educate all Texas students.

Resources

Burris, C. (April 2022). Public Schooling in America: Measuring Each State's Commitment to Democratically Governed

Schools. Network for Public Education.
Latham Sikes, C. (August 2022). How Texas Schools Are Funded – And Why that Matters to Collective Success, issue brief. IDRA.
López, B. (November 2022). Some Republicans are optimistic about enacting school choice in next year's session - but it might not be so easy. Texas Tribune.
TEA. (2022). Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2021-22. (Document No. GE22 601 05). Texas Education Agency.
Wiggins, M. (November 2022). Texas State Board of Education votes to reject private school vouchers. Teach the Vote.

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Bilingual Special Education Certification is One Step Closer in Texas

The Bilingual Special Education Educator Standards Advisory Committee presented its report to the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) this month. IDRA education associate, Lizdelia Piñón, Ed.D., was appointed to the committee and testified at the presentation hearing.



“The most important piece to me as a scholar and a mother is that this bilingual special education educator will need to be an advocate who knows best practices to serve dual-identified students while building capacity in the school community for our often forgotten multilingual and differently-abled students.”

Though Texas has tens of thousands of emergent bilingual students with disabilities, the state has not had a teacher certification program that equips professionals to meet the needs of those students. Until now. The Texas Legislature in 2021 passed HB 2256 to create such a program. HB 2256 came out of a year-long initiative, the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative.*

The State Board for Educator Certification is now developing the rules and standards. To inform the committee's work, IDRA held a series of roundtable discussions with professionals in bilingual special education.

*For the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative, IDRA served as a steering committee co-leader with Texans Care for Children; Philanthropy Advocates (formerly called Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium, TEGAC); Dr. Dina Castro, UNT Denton; and Texas Association for the Education of Young Children (TxAEYC).

All Pianos Have Keys & Other Stories – Serial Re-release

As we celebrate IDRA's 50th anniversary this year, we are re-releasing chapters from our founder's popular memoir, *All Pianos Have Keys and Other Stories*, that



is now out of print. Watch our social media accounts and the webpage below for each new release.

Stories released to date:

- All Pianos Have Keys
- Silence of the Lambs
- The Epidemic that Never Was
- Jesus Christ Was Not Bilingual

<https://idra.news/AllPianosHaveKeys>

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. 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.

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Remove Obstacles to Ethnic Studies for Georgia Students

by Ruth Youn

Ethnic studies courses positively influence the trajectory of a student's academic journey. These courses teach the experiences, perspectives and contributions of Indigenous, Black, Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander, and Latino communities in U.S. history. Course content ranges from comprehensive studies of one specific community to comparative surveys of various communities.

Researchers have consistently found these courses improve students' academic and psycho-social outcomes, like self-actualization, reduced attrition and increased performance on standardized assessments for all students, particularly students of color and those living in poverty (Dee & Penner, 2017; Cabrera, et al., 2014; Bonilla, Dee & Penner, 2021).

This is especially true when the course includes diverse student groups, teaches directly about racism, provides opportunities for dialogue across racial and ethnic lines, and is aimed at helping students grapple with multiple perspectives (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

Despite the incredible advantages students gain from ethnic studies coursework, few states offer a comprehensive statewide curriculum. Fortunately, Georgia approved creation of an ethnic studies course in 2008. In 2020, the state approved five more courses: African American/Black Studies, American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, U.S. Latinx Studies, and Women's Studies.

However, several barriers prevent ethnic studies coursework from being fully implemented in Georgia. For example, the courses are categorized as electives and do not have to be offered by schools. Even where these courses are offered, students may not be able to enroll if they lack space in their schedules for elective credits, despite the demonstrated benefits for students who may be struggling academically.

Additionally, individual school districts must secure additional funding to write new curricula and supply training to educators. And many educators have not had training in the specific pedagogies for the philosophy and framework for ethnic studies courses.

This creates obstacles both for school districts and students amid budget cuts, widespread teacher burnout and state classroom censorship laws legislation since 2021 discouraging educators from teaching topics like those included in ethnic studies courses.

To make these courses and sustained benefits accessible to Georgia schools and students, IDRA recommends the Georgia General Assembly do the following.

- **Categorize ethnic studies as core credits for graduation.** Encourage students to enroll in ethnic studies by making them count as a social studies credit to fulfill graduation requirements.
- **Codify inclusive curriculum in the Georgia state standards.** Student benefits compound if culturally inclusive curricula are incorporated into standards across the K-12 continuum.
- **Repeal Georgia's classroom censorship laws** (SB 226/Act 719, HB 1084/Act 720). These laws silence educators, mandate the adoption of inaccurate concepts and points of view, prohibit truthful classroom conversations, and punish schools that allow students and educators to engage critically with the impact of systemic racism and marginalization in this country (IDRA, 2022; GCACC, 2022).

Georgia schools will better contribute to the social-emotional, academic and future career success for all Georgia students by making these courses and sustained benefits accessible.

Enroll Your Child in Cultural Studies Courses

Give your child the opportunity of various communities in U.S. history.

- Intro to African American Studies
- Intro to U.S. Latinx Studies
- Intro to Asian American Studies
- Intro to American Indian Studies

Offer Cultural Studies Courses in Your School

Your school can now offer these courses...

Teaching Cultural & Ethnic Studies

6 Tips for Teachers of Cultural and Ethnic Studies Courses

1. Recognize that these courses are designed to benefit all students. Cultivate and encourage all students to explore, engage in, and contribute to the learning process. Cultural and ethnic studies coursework is designed to be relevant to all students.

2. Create safe spaces for students and teachers to explore and discuss the content of these courses. Encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings about the content.

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4. Encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings about the content.

5. Encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings about the content.

6. Encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings about the content.

Learn more: <https://idra.org/knowning-the-issues/#section-cultural>

<https://idra.org/knowning-the-issues/#section-cultural>

Resources

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Traditional School Discipline is Harmful for All

by Alisha “Tuff” Tuff

Across the country, student learning often is interrupted by harmful disciplinary policies and practices. Discipline strategies like suspensions, alternative school placements, corporal punishment and law enforcement involvement, especially ostracize students who are Black and/or Latino and students with disabilities, who are overrepresented in punishments.

Exclusionary discipline causes students to experience trauma. These practices have hurt students’ academic performance and led to students being pushed out of school (Rios, 2011, 2017; Morris, 2016).

In Texas, students of color, particularly Black students, are overrepresented in all types of school discipline. Often, when penalized, they are placed outside the classroom and receive severe punishment. These students are no more than their peers to misbehave (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba & Williams, 2014).

For example, in 2021-22, Black students received 32% of all out-of-school suspensions, 25% of in-school suspensions, and 23% of alternative school placements, though they only made up 12.8% of the Texas student population (TEA, 2022).

Students with disabilities represent 12% of the population and account for 22% of out-of-school suspensions and 20% of in-school suspensions (TEA, 2022).

There is a plethora of research on strategies that work for school discipline (Lyons, Duggins-Clay & Craven, 2022). Still, schools often use reactionary approaches that push students out of learning time and out of school altogether.

Instead, schools should take proactive steps to prevent disciplinary referrals. We must keep students in the classroom to create a better future for society.

IDRA recommends the Texas Legislature take up effective, evidence-based policy approaches to make schools safer and reduce disproportionate discipline, including elimination of exclusionary discipline policies, adopting restorative practices and building inclusive schools.

Eliminate Exclusionary Discipline

No-excuse and zero-tolerance policies have no place in schools. These policies lead to over-disciplining and high surveilling of students (Lyons, 2023). Schools should invest in effective alternatives, including asset-based approaches and culturally-sustaining classrooms (Craven, 2023).

Adopt Restorative Practice

Restorative practices are about relationships and community. The goal is to rectify harm that was done by establishing collective standards and respect. When the rules or the relationships are broken, there needs to be an immediate pause to understand what has happened, the harm that was done, and what steps can be taken to repair the harm so that the group can move forward. (Johnson, 2019; Johnson & Bojorquez, 2022)

Build Inclusive Schools

Students thrive when they feel seen, heard and valued. Schools should embrace the assets that students have and use those assets to build the curriculum. Research shows that culturally-sustaining classrooms that consider students’ cultures and lived experiences improve all student performance (Ladson Billings, 2002; 2009).

IDRA helps schools review their policies and practices and helps school leaders build safe, supportive school climates where all students can learn and succeed, including historically marginalized Black and Latino students. See

IDRA’s School Discipline – Online Technical Assistance Toolkit (<https://idra.news/DisciplineToolkit>) for research and strategies.

Resources

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Georgia Students Deserve a 21st Century Education for the Multicultural and Multilingual Future

by Jonathan Peraza Campos, M.S.

Georgia's public schools now serve the seventh largest population of emergent bilingual students. Besides English, the most common languages in Georgia households are Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic (Owens, 2020; Parker, 2019). This presents an opportunity for Georgia to support the potential of our culturally and linguistically diverse population by investing in multilingual and culturally sustaining education.

Educating Emergent Bilingual Students

However, emergent bilingual programs experience a stark lack of funding and investment of resources to support students' academic success. The reach of programs that fortify biculturalism and bilingualism are limited with only 71 dual language immersion programs available in Georgia, a state with more than 2,000 schools (ACIE, 2021).

The efficacy of these programs also is limited by the shortage of teachers for emergent bilingual programs and, importantly, the shortage of teachers who are bilingual. Contrary to evidence-based best practices, bilingual programs in Georgia often do not use an asset-based, culturally sustaining approach. Many, instead, promote a model of assimilation through the exclusion of bilingual materials and instruction (Owens, 2020).

As a result, the four-year graduation rate of emergent bilingual students was 66.2% in 2022 while Georgia's graduation rate counting all students was at an all-time high of 84.1% (GaDOE, 2022).

To ensure a generation of leaders who can communicate and negotiate across differences, borders and nations, we must equip our emergent bilingual students – and all Georgia students – with the tools that culturally sustaining

and dual language immersion education can cultivate. As our diverse population grows, so too can opportunities grounded in equity for Georgians to participate in the development of the years to come.

Educating Immigrant Students

While Georgia is among the states with the highest immigrant population growth in the United States, first-generation students and immigrant children who already possess strong bicultural and bilingual skills are not recognized for that achievement, with fewer than 3% of students receiving a seal of biliteracy from the Georgia Department of Education.

This matter is exacerbated given that emergent bilingual, Georgia-raised immigrant students are denied access to higher education. Talent in schools is stunted and driven away by anti-immigrant legislation. In 1982 the Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe*, that all K-12 students, regardless of immigration status, are entitled to their right to education, which benefits the state. However, in 2006, state legislators and the Georgia Board of Regents enacted policies that deny undocumented students access to in-state tuition rates.

In 2010, legislators passed a bill prohibiting the admission of undocumented students at the top five (now three) public universities in Georgia and prohibited their ability to pay in-state tuition rates (Atfeh, et al., 2019; Higher Ed Immigration Portal, 2023).

Georgia is one of only three states in the country that prohibit access to financial aid for undocumented students. The same southern states that ban undocumented students today once banned the admission of Black students until the 1964 *Civil Rights Act*, which also paved the way for bilingual education and culturally sustaining teaching (Atfeh, et al., 2019).

For a Georgia where all students can flourish and contribute to the state with all of their multilingual and multicultural talents, we must build infrastructure for bilingual education, such as through the recruitment of multilingual educators. We also must eliminate policy barriers to higher education for immigrant students who have so much to give in an atmosphere where their right to education is being deprived.

Resources

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Dual Credit Programs Give Students a Fighting Chance to Access and Succeed in College

by Steve Kemgang

A college education is one of the best ways to ensure young people can achieve their goals. Providing students with early support through counseling, advising and college preparation gives all students, particularly historically marginalized students a fighting chance to meet the social, career, and life objectives they have for themselves, their families, and their communities (Abel & Deitz, 2019; Torpey, 2021; Petrilli, 2017).

Students who do not attend college are 40% more likely to be unemployed (Torpey, 2021). They are four times more likely to remain in poor living conditions. At the height of COVID-19, they were three times more likely to lose employment (Kochhar, 2020).

Many historically-marginalized students continue to face systemic barriers to college, such as access to financial aid, grants, and scholarships and inadequate college preparation, that prevent them from either enrolling in college or completing a degree.

One powerful way to remove barriers is to invest in dual credit and aid programs that support affordability to advance educational equity and to create pathways for all students, especially those who experience these obstacles at disproportionate levels.

In dual credit programs, including early college high school programs, high school students enroll in college-level courses. The credits they earn can be applied to their college course requirements without paying college tuition for the class.

In Texas, students who enroll in these programs have a higher likelihood of remaining on track to complete their degrees and have better college outcomes (Miller, et al., 2017). Since 2000, participation and enrollment in dual credit programs increased by over 57% (THECB, 2018).

However, Black and Latino students and students in families with low incomes are underrepresented in these programs. The pandemic further contributed to an overall decline in dual credit enrollment (Villarreal, 2021).

Remote learning issues, students working to help with household necessities, and students pursuing alternative pathways to earn an income due to the burdensome cost of a college education have led to declines in college enrollment for Texas students, with Texas community colleges experiencing an 11% drop in enrollment since 2020 (McGee, 2021).

It is pressing that Texas establish a relevant and equitable funding model to help alleviate these hurdles. We must expand access to early college advising and invest in dual credit and financial aid programs that support affordability to help students access and succeed in higher education.

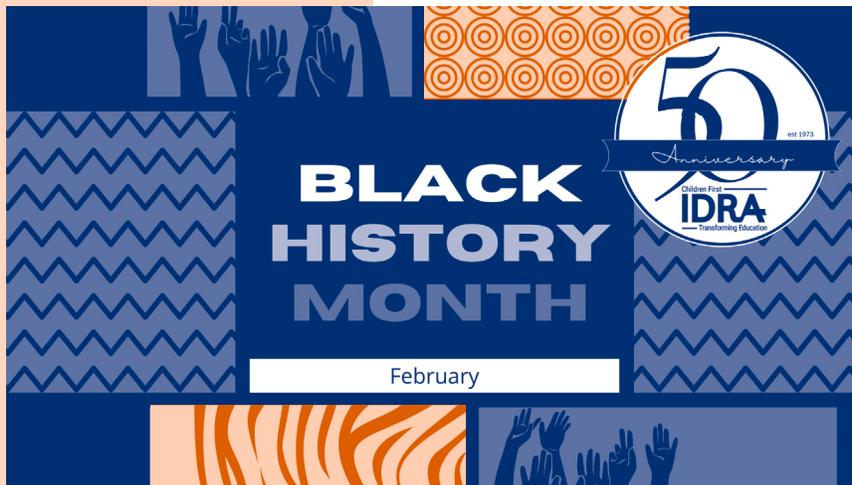
We also must strategically adapt these priorities to the recent challenges and circumstances that our students face. Students are our future and our collective investment in them is investing in the good of our state of Texas and our society at large.

Resources

- Abel, J., & Deitz, R. (2019). Despite Rising Costs, College Is Still a Good Investment. Liberty Street Economics.
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In Texas, students who take dual credit courses have a higher likelihood of remaining on track to complete their degrees and have better college outcomes.



February is Black History Month!

While we must celebrate the lives of Black people every day, we believe it is important to also take time during Black History Month to recognize the rich and complex history, hard-won triumphs, and persistent challenges faced by Black people.

We especially want to highlight ways to support Black students, who continue to face systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing excellent and equitable schools.

For five decades, IDRA has remained committed to achieving excellent, equitable schooling for diverse students in our pioneering style that intersects research, policy, practice and community engagement. We're happy to share news and resources with you as we kick off this special month.

Black Student-Centered Policy Agenda

Black students deserve excellent and equitable schools, just like everyone else. Policymakers can make changes at every level to achieve that goal, including those in IDRA's newly-updated Black Student-Centered Policy Agenda. These policy recommendations can be adjusted for adoption at the local, state and national levels.



Article Features

- The Story that Refuses to be Silenced, Terrence Wilson, J.D.
- The Father of Black History – What Carter G. Woodson Continues to Teach Us About Our Present Moment, Makiah Lyons
- School Segregation through Vouchers – What Policymakers Can Learn from a History of State Efforts to Use Vouchers to Avoid Integration, Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D.
- Texas Lawmakers Propose Laws to Support Black Students, History and Heritage, Chloe Latham Sikes
- Georgia General Assembly Considers Legislation that Would Support Students, Terrence Wilson, J.D.
- 33 Years Later, Tough on Crime Still Bad for Students, Makiah Lyons
- Bans on Black Literature and Learning are Nothing New – State Lawmakers Must Reject Calls to Reinstate Antebellum-era Policies, Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D.

The Pivotal Joys of Learning Black History

- We Must Do the Right Thing – Honoring the Legacy of a Southern Civil Rights Hero, Thomas Marshall III, M.Ed.
- Owning Our History – Henrietta Wood's Story, Alisha "Tuff" Tuff
- The Power of Music – A Reflection for Black History Month, Alisha "Tuff" Tuff
- It Takes a Village to Change the World, Steve Kemgang
- Black History through Music, Art, Song & Dance, Terrence Wilson, J.D.

Highlights of Classroom Lessons in IDRA's We All Belong – School Resource Hub

- Gladys Bentley – Gender-Bending Harlem Renaissance Performer and Musician, Unladylike2020
- African American History: Climbing the Wall, PBS History Detectives
- CulturED Collection #2 – E-raced: A Lesson Uncovering the False Science of Race, IDRA
- Yes, She Can: Michelle Obama, IDRA
- Leading the Fight with Lead, IDRA
- Successes and Failures in Resistance to Slavery, PBS Learning Media
- AIM Framework for Teaching Intercultural Skills – IDRA Classnotes Podcast Episode 230
- Tools for Teaching About Race and Culture – IDRA webinar
- The Real World: Understanding the Difference Education Makes, IDRA
- Sissieretta Jones – Opera Star & First African American Woman to Headline a Concert at Carnegie Hall, Unladylike2020
- The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, C-SPAN
- Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, David Waldstreicher with C-SPAN

<https://idra.news/BlackHistoryMonthFeatures>

Focus: Education Policy Issues in Texas & Georgia



IDRA 50-Year Leadership Legacy



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
- Director Emeritus 1992-until his passing in 2011



**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.”

- Staff Researcher & Project Director 1986-1992
- President & CEO 1992-2019
- Director Emerita 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.”

- Executive Program Assistant 2004-2005
- President & CEO 2019-

*achieving equal educational opportunity for every child
through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college*