



Commencement Address3
Dear colleagues, partners and friends8
Three Decades of Groundbreaking Dropout Research..... 14

Focus: Commemorative Issue

A Tribute to Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel Crossing Borders with Faith, Courage, Insight & Persistence

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

Ismael and Paula Robledo crossed borders. They lived in Mexico, and they lived in Texas. Their four children knew Laredo, and they knew Mexico City and General Treviño. Cuca was the youngest of four. Her much older brothers experienced military life and work in the U.S. Midwest. Her sister, Lupe, was born with serious heart problems, and her parents had to focus on her health as little Cuca crossed borders with them.

Growing up in the Chacon area of Laredo, once marked as a dangerous barrio (unless you lived there), to go from El Chacon to downtown Laredo, the family had to cross on a bridge over the railroad tracks.

They struggled to survive, migrating to California and Wisconsin. Theirs was a home rich in love and warmth.

Cuca also crossed the border of class when going to high school. She attended Ursuline Academy, which was host to girls from Laredo’s most important families, and the nuns catered to her privileged classmates. Even as she excelled academically, she was reminded that she came from a family that was not wealthy.

Every border she crossed left a mark. She would remain steadfast in her love and pride in her family and everything they were: Spanish speaking, working class, religious and loving. Whether having to go to Chicago to live with her oldest brother so that her father could find a job, or picking crops, or living in a neighborhood that some

Laredoans stigmatized, she knew her value and that of those she came from and grew up with.

The intense love never diminished. She supported her sister when she was going through a difficult divorce, and she became second mother to her niece and nephew and later supported her sister through her cancer to the point of seeing her pass away in her son’s bedroom, surrounded by a roomful of loving family. Those are tough borders to cross.

Cuca crossed an international border with Lucas, her husband and father of their two children, Ismael Gavino and Xavier Mario, from Texas to Ecuador.

Cuca is a practicing Catholic and a lector and Eucharistic Minister at St. Matthew’s Church. She is also a Zen teacher with dharma transmission by a Catholic priest and Zen master who also walks those two paths simultaneously.

Border crossing has also permeated and strengthened her professional work. Research, policy and practice are usually kept separate and, when advocated by groups, are seen as different domains that don’t easily connect – not so under Cuca’s leadership.

When Dr. José A. Cárdenas announced his retirement in 1992 in his 19th year as founder and director of IDRA, Cuca earned the position and has been President and CEO of IDRA for over 26 years – a major border to cross!

(cont. on Page 2)



Dr. María del Refugio Robledo Montecel

(Crossing Borders with Faith, Courage, Insight & Persistence, continued from Page 1)



Young Cuca with her family: [l-r, top row] Rosa Guadalupe Robledo (sister), Anselmo Robledo (brother), Alfredo Robledo (brother), Enedina Robledo (Alfredo's wife), Rosalinda Robledo (Alfredo's daughter); [l-r, bottom row] Paula Benavides Robledo (mother), Ismael Robledo Martínez (father), and María del Refugio Robledo.

Samples of her leadership can be seen in eight milestones.

Non-profit Management. After taking over the reins of a financially-sound IDRA from the founder, Dr. Cárdenas, Dr. Robledo Montecel expanded the reach, multiplied the coffers by 14 times and belied the data of non-profits: most go belly-up after the founder leaves, and few prosper. And IDRA is today celebrating its 45th year strong.

Dropout Prevention. She developed and guided IDRA's flagship program, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program through its research and evaluation, expanding it to England and Brazil, and continues to succeed in partnership with the Coca-Cola Foundation. Since it began in 1984, this research-based, internationally-recognized

dropout prevention program has been keeping 98 percent of its tutors in school, and the lives of more than 725,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by it.

Attrition Studies. Cuca led Texas' first official statewide attrition study, which continues to be a powerful annual study that reminds all Texans of the need to support all students in completing high school and enter college.

Fair School Funding. She has taken the IDRA founding issue of equity in public school funding and has guided it through policy and legislative challenges and continues to support it through the Texas Latino Education Coalition (formed under her leadership) and embodied in the José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program, which she created.



Don Telesforo Robledo Gutierrez and Doña Cuquita Robledo Martínez (Cuca's paternal grandparents), Sra. Paula Benavides Robledo and little Cuca Robledo in her mama's arms at the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City, circa 1953.

Systems Change. From her doctoral study on the connection between education research and application in systems, to current leadership in data science, Cuca distilled the essence of institutional transformation with the IDRA Quality Schools Action Framework.

Families and Communities. Dr. Robledo Montecel spearheaded IDRA's unique family leadership in education direction which moved family engagement from volunteerism and parenting skills to accessing the power in families and communities to create excellent schools for all children.

(cont. on Page 9)

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2018) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

Permission to reproduce material contained herein is granted provided the article or item is reprinted

www.idra.org

in its entirety and proper credit is given to IDRA and the author. Please send a copy of the material in its reprinted form to the IDRA Newsletter production offices. Editorial submissions, news releases, subscription requests, and change-of-address data should be submitted in writing to the IDRA Newsletter production editor. The IDRA Newsletter staff welcomes your comments on editorial material.

Portions of the contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.

Publication offices:
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101
San Antonio, Texas 78228
210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714
www.idra.org | contact@idra.org

María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.
IDRA President and CEO
Newsletter Executive Editor

Christie L. Goodman, APR
IDRA Director of Communications
Newsletter Production Editor

Commencement Address –

Our Lady of the Lake University, May 7, 2015

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

It is a great honor to be invited to speak at this commencement. Our Lady of the Lake University is a place where I learned much and is a community to which I owe much. Back in 1970, Sister Jane Anne Slater, then a young faculty member in the chemistry department, became my work-study supervisor when I arrived at 411 S.W. 24th Street and moved into Providence Hall. My deepest gratitude and admiration go to Sister Jane Anne Slater as she steps down as the eighth president of Our Lady of the Lake University next month and steps up in August as the first woman Chancellor of the Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio. Let’s thank her and give her a round of applause.

And good evening, trustees. I had the unique privilege of serving Our Lady of the Lake as a three-term trustee, and I know some of the challenges and the opportunities that come with your service. Thank you.

Greetings also to faculty and staff. Your work and dedication is what makes this university, rooted in Providence, a place to grow, to graduate and to lead.

A todas las familias y amigos de los graduados, felicidades! Sin el amor, el apoyo y quizá algunos empujoncitos por parte de Uds., estos graduados no estarían aquí.

Members of the 2015 Graduating Class of Our Lady of the Lake University, please take a moment now to look behind you and around you to your family and friends and thank them: your mom, your dad, your brothers, your sisters, your primos, your abuelitos, your padrinos – those who are here today and those who are not. Your family and friends hold you up. And held by them, you are lifted to where you will go and to whom you will be. Your family and friends are the energy and the spirit of who you are and who you are becoming – the special *levadura*, the leavening, that makes you rise and be strong.

As you all realize, today’s celebration marks the fact that one chapter of your life – the one

with classes, study groups, homework, fun nights, long nights—is now written. This chapter in the story of your life is now part of the larger story of Our Lady of the Lake University, of your family, of your neighborhood, of the great and ongoing story that is being written about our world.

Some of you may know that, today, scientists and scholars in the fields of astronomy, evolutionary biology, history and theology have begun to recognize that the world we inhabit, our universe, is not so much like a machine, as Western thinkers once imagined, but more like a story.

The world is an always-unfolding narrative, an epic of ever-emerging complexity and creativity, bursting with fantastic characters, profound relationships, surprise twists, and joy as well as tragedy. Ours is a world in motion, a world of intimate connection – a world that is story.

This evening, in your very own way with an ingenuity that is identical to that of no one else, you have contributed one more chapter to that story. And, God willing, there are many chapters still to come, still left for you to write. This future is what I’d like to discuss with you today, and if you’ll allow me, I’ll start by telling you a piece of my own story.

Some of you grew up like me in families or in barrios where not many had the opportunity to go to school, much less to college. My parents, Ismael Robledo Martínez and Paula Benavides Robledo, crossed the Rio Grande into the Texas side of the river and made their lives as immigrants, with little schooling, in a new land, and in a new language. They settled into the northern banks of the Rio Grande on the U.S. side, close enough to Mexico that, on Mexican Independence Day, I
(cont. on Page 4)



Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel with Sister Jane Anne Slater at Our Lady of the Lake University’s 2015 graduation ceremony.

“Wherever you find yourself, I urge you to lay claim to a new place in the world, in this world of great motion and intricate connections, because you are needed there – to serve others.”

(Commencement Address, continued from Page 3)

could hear the music and the sounds that came from las Fiestas Patrias.

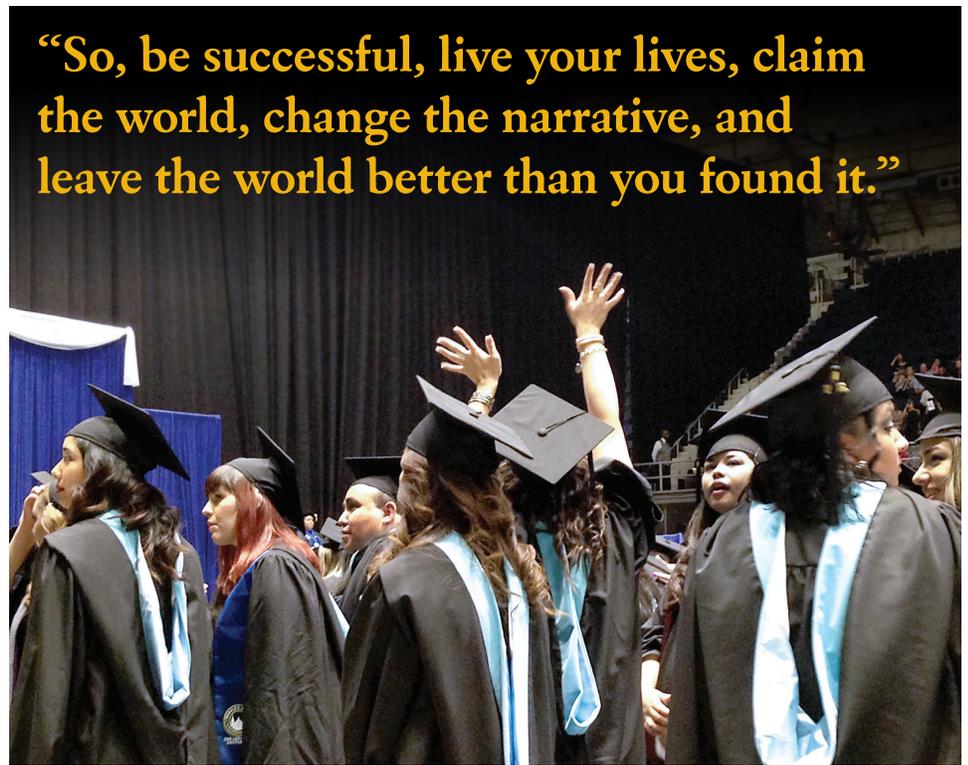
We visited my grandmother, my abuelita Albinita, on the Mexican side of the river every Sunday, and I grew up with rancheras and Mexican polkas and mariachi music and Spanish all around me. Rancheras and polkas and mariachis accompanied us on the radio on our long treks to Fresno and Selma California to pick grapes and peaches.

When my second grade teacher in Fresno decided that my name was Mary instead of María del Refugio and when she said that I was somewhat smart but too shy because I did not talk in class, nobody in my family paid any attention. After all, we were coming back to the borderlands of Texas where everyone knew that my name was not Mary and where being quiet was a sign of respect and not of shyness or lack of smarts.

At 17, I left my home at 307 S. Buena Vista in the barrio of El Chacon in Laredo, Texas. Laredo – or properly speaking Los Dos Laredos as these borderlands were called at the time – was what I knew. This was a time, by the way, before the narco-traffickers destroyed people and communities, and before ICE officials detained women and children seeking refuge. It was a different time, a different sort of place than now. And it was mine.

I came to San Antonio, and I was bewildered. The city seemed huge. Our Lady of the Lake University, where I had enrolled after judging other local universities to be cold and uninviting, became foreign to me. We were not allowed to cross the 24th Street bridge into the real West Side. It was dangerous, we were told. My classes, especially my English classes with Sr. Lora Ann, were harder than anything I had experienced. And the A's that I was used to were about to become C's. And most especially, I missed home. I missed my world.

A few weeks into the semester, a group of Mariachis came into the university cafeteria playing their violins and guitars and belting a song. I don't remember what they played or why they were there, but I do remember this: Every emotion I had in my body welled up suddenly, and I exploded into tears. For a brief moment, I was home again. But the three-hour drive from Laredo to San Antonio seemed like crossing the world at that time, and I felt so far away, in such a strange place. I felt like I didn't belong.



Eventually, of course, after time spent working, making friends, and building a sense of myself, I would discover that I did belong at the Lake. But I never stopped belonging to my borderland world, to my home and to my family.

In fact, looking on it now, I would describe my life as standing at the intersection of ever-expanding circles of “being home.” At any one time in the story of my life, I experience belonging in spaces that are known and those that are unknown, in the places where I am told that I belong and in the places where I am told that I do not.

As I have weaved my story by living it, there have been moments when, swept up in the motion and the power of interconnection, I was suddenly stopped in my tracks by a barrier, a category, that was meant to govern my place in the world.

Some person, some institution, or some convention would tell me, “No, Cuca, here you do not belong.” Or perhaps worse, I might be told: “Yes, Cuca, you have distinguished yourself, risen above that other place you come from. Now you belong here, and you cannot belong there.”

When a 17-year-old César Chávez joined the U.S. Navy in 1944, he found that the only job available for a Mexican American sailor was as a deck-hand or painter. He completed his military service, worked in the

fields, organized communities and showed the world “Si Se Puede.”

Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina Supreme Court Justice in U.S. history, was raised in the South Bronx, felt overwhelmed with the demands of Princeton University, claimed her belonging through Puerto Rican groups on campus that were her anchor in what she describes as a “new and different world” and graduated summa cum laude from that Ivy League institution.

Shirley Ann Jackson was born into segregation but went on to become the first African American woman to earn a doctorate at MIT. She stayed at MIT to open doors for others and to work on elementary particle theory. She became the 18th president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Graduates, as some of you already know so painfully well, there will always be those who insist that what you wish to write is impossible or wrong, that you and yours do not belong, that you are “other.” But please do not believe it. Have courage and claim belonging.

Whatever life calls you to do, claim space for yourself and for others, claim new categories, new ways of seeing and being in the world. Always, claim your past, your present and your
(cont. on Page 5)

Sample Publications Written and Co-written by Dr. Robledo Montecel

Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework (co-editor, 2010)

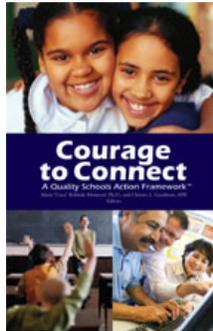
Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (2009)

“Costs of Bilingual Education,” in Encyclopedia on Bilingual Education, with Dr. Albert Cortez (2008)

Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English – A Guide, with Josie D. Cortez, Dr. Albert Cortez, & Dr. Abelardo Villarreal (2002)

Dropping Out of Arizona’s Schools: The Scope, the Costs, and the Successful Strategies to Address the Crisis, with Josie D. Cortez, & Dr. Albert Cortez (2002)

Hispanic Families as Valued Partners: An Educator’s Guide, with Aurora Gallagher, Aurelio M. Montemayor, Dr. Abelardo Villarreal, Ninta Adame-Reyna, & Josie Supik (1993)



Texas Dropout Survey Project, seven volume set, lead author (1986)

Successful Schooling for Economically Disadvantaged At-Risk Youth, with Aurelio M. Montemayor & Augustine Trujillo (Eds.) (1989)

The Answer: Valuing Youth in Schools and Families: A Report on Hispanic Dropouts in the Dallas Independent School District, with Dr. Albert Cortez, Michaela Penny-Velasquez (1989)

The Undereducation of American Youth, with Dr. José Cárdenas & Dr. Dorothy Waggoner (1988)

Utah: Bilingual Education Cost Analysis, with Michelle Guss-Zamora & Roberto Zárate (1979)

Bilingual Education Cost Analysis: Colorado, with Roberto Zárate & Michelle Guss-Zamora (1978)



(Commencement Address, continued from Page 4)

future. Wherever you land in this beautifully diverse world, I urge you to claim your belonging, even in places where you are told that you don't belong.

You may be told that you don't belong because you are a female in a male world, or because you are Latino in a White world, or because you are poor in a rich world, because you are Muslim in a Christian world or vice versa, or because your parents didn't go to college, or because you are from the West Side or from a colonia, or you have an accent, or your skin is too dark, or you love differently than others, or you don't have papers.

You may be told that you are meant to work and not to think, or that you are too much of an activist or that you are too passionate or that you are an idealist and should be a realist.

Here's a handy insight to guide you as you face these charges: whatever they tell you is the reason that you don't belong is precisely the reason that you must belong.

It is the element of newness and the seed of change that you have to offer in places and spaces that seem foreign. Be this newness and seed of change not only for the sake of saying you accomplished something but in order to bring new possibilities into existence. Here's one example where change and new possibilities are needed now.

Texas towns used to display signs that read “Dogs and Mexicans Not Allowed.” That these signs are no longer visible does not mean that opportunities are a fact in the lives of most Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans still have the worst access to early childhood education and healthcare and quality neighborhood schools and affordable colleges. Until we change this, that reality affects you and me, your families and mine, and those who will come after us.

Wherever you find yourself, I urge you to lay claim to a new place in the world, in this world of great motion and intricate connections, because you are needed there – to serve others.

So, be successful, live your lives, claim the world, change the narrative, and leave the world better than you found it.

Congratulations 2015 Graduating Class of Our Lady of the Lake University.

Que Dios los cuide y bendiga siempre.

The Quotable Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel

“Our future depends on us having an excellent public educational system, where all students graduate from high school prepared for college or the world of work, no matter what the color of their skin, the language they speak, or where they happen to be born. And this is a goal I believe we can achieve.”

“Our families and communities don’t need ‘rescuing’ by lottery. They demand strong neighborhood public schools.”

“Don’t take this on by yourself. Work with others. Work with people who agree with you. Cause others to agree with you. Work with people who are like you and with those who are unlike you. This could be in terms of race and ethnicity, age, social class, another part of town, etc. There is a great deal you can learn from each other, and you will have a much more powerful effect together.”

“The United States is still uniquely committed to one system that prepares us all for living in a great democracy – we should preserve this commitment. It is not ok to turn our public schools into poorly-funded government schools; public schools belong to all of us. It is not ok to turn our public schools into private schools, accountable to private boards; public schools are accountable to all of us. It is not ok to turn our public schools into charity schools; public schools are civic institutions, a central part of our social contract. Keeping the public in public schools is essential.”

“By 2005, we had lost close to 2 million students. That is like losing Austin or Dallas in a decade and a half. The important point is not if our data is better than the agency’s, but that we are losing children from our school system and that loss is persistent and unacknowledged.”

“The bottom line is: schools are responsible for the education of children – for all children, be they Black, Brown, White, poor, rich, female, male, disabled, non-disabled, English-speaking or not.”

“This problem of blaming the students – because their soul, their mind, their heart, or their community environment is unhealthy – is perhaps the main reason we have failed to reduce dropout rates. If we say that we are going to do business differently for young people but continue to use inadequate assumptions that shortchange the potential and possibilities of our youth, then our efforts will be in vain.”

“The only thing we have to change is the belief that some students deserve success and others do not. The new rule is: All students stay in. The new promise is: All students succeed. Failure is not an option.”

“Our dream and our work at IDRA is for a future in which the color of a child’s skin, the language a child speaks and the side of town that a child comes from are no longer considered barriers to a great education and a good life.”

“See yourself in the eyes of a child, remain hopeful and speak loudly and clearly. Children are not the enemy; they are, all of them, our future. Children are not the problem; they are in fact the solution. Children are not helpless victims; they are contributions waiting to happen.”

“Hope without action is completely useless.”

“I believe it is time to dream together – to dream about education not for a lucky few but for all. And it is time to make the dream of education for all become fact.”

“The greatest ‘at-risk’ circumstance students face may be the school’s low, and self-fulfilling, expectations.”

“Children need places that are safe, that are nurturing, that welcome their families, that welcome their culture, their language and have them really be able to learn and prepare themselves for life.”

“Make no mistake about it. Giving up on our neighborhood public schools means giving up on our communities. Justice, not charity; education for all, not for the few. *Los Vales No Valen.*”

“School accountability should not and need not mean that high-stakes decisions in children’s lives are made on the basis of tests nor that tests dictate what children learn.”

“A teacher who is caring, skilled, well-prepared, able to build on the strengths that children bring, and partners with families to co-create a challenging learning environment is a treasure.”

“We live to some purpose: Helping schools work for all children and valuing children, educators, families and communities. We care deeply about children and believe that the lives and choices of many hang in the balance of what you and I as educators are able to provide today.”

“Being poor doesn’t affect your brain. It’s what society does to you when you are poor that affects your brain.”

“When a school struggles with diverse children to make them easier to teach, it is not serving the best interests of the children. The emphasis should not be on making children ready to learn but on making schools ready to teach.”

“There can be no doubt: we need an excellent education for all our children. And where there is no equity, there can be no excellence.”

“Many feel that the ‘big’ fights are behind us: but it is now that our children need us most. Today, let us make good on the promise we have all made, in our hearts, to kids. Let us not look away, or look on and do nothing but transform our caring, our willingness to serve, into action.”

“I believe that so much is riding on the success of our public schools: democracy, overall economic strength, opportunity for all. I also believe that when we look at education from the perspective of a human right, we are talking about the powerful future not only of society but of each person and in each group in our society. This is a great promise.”

“The challenge before us is not that the faces of our nation’s children are changing. Our challenge is not our children at all, but rather our capacity, commitment and will as adults to achieve excellence in education for all students – every one.”

“The truth is that children do not fail because they are bad children. They do not fail because of the language they speak or the color of their skin. They do not fail because they are from poor families. They do not fail because they are not motivated, not determined, not focused, or not persistent enough. Children fail in school because we let them down. We, as a community, let them down.”

“By understanding how the school environment contributes to a student’s success or failure, we can change. We can create a future different from our past. As a foundation, we need fair funding for the common good, we need to keep the public in public education, and we need accountability systems that do not hurt kids.”

“We need a new national commitment to high school graduation for all – and ‘all’ must mean ‘all’ – high school with a path to higher education. Investment in change clearly must go beyond discrete dropout prevention programs. It must reflect our full commitment to quality public schools in all neighborhoods for children of all backgrounds.”

At the end of this day, I am left with deep gratitude for two facts: (1) we are alive, and (2) we are held up by a love all around us.

“Real, lasting change in schools comes when people are engaged at all levels, from state capitols to board rooms, from classrooms to community centers and kitchen tables, and where people have the knowledge they need to take the right steps on behalf of all children.”

“Our families contribute much. The day-to-day activities that families do with their children – storytelling, singing, playing games, reading, talking and listening – all these have intellectual, emotional and physical benefits that enhance the child’s development and are strengths that the school can use.”

“Students are far more likely to succeed and graduate when they have the chance to work with highly qualified, committed teachers, using effective, accessible curricula, when their parents and communities are engaged in their schools and learning, and when they themselves feel engaged. We know that this becomes possible when schools and school policy reflects good governance and the funding to provide excellent education for all students. To strengthen holding power, then, is to undertake actions that strengthen – not discrete areas – but schools as systems.”

“Many so-called solutions end up blaming the child for their poverty rather than looking at the poverty of the school.”

“Do not give up. Hay un dicho que dice: Mirate en la mirada de un niño, mirate en la esperanza. See yourself in the eyes of a child, see yourself in hope.”

“I ask you to imagine. Imagine a school, a city, a state, a country in which the amazing gifts of our young people are acknowledged, built on and celebrated. Imagine schools where every child really counts. As leaders in this community, we can make it happen. It’s up to us. But first, we have to believe it, truly believe that what we’ve imagined can be real.”

Dear colleagues, partners and friends: Greetings and abrazos, – A letter from Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel

Dear colleagues, partners and friends: greetings and abrazos,

2018 marks my 26th year as IDRA President & CEO, and as I plan to retire from my position in January of 2019, I do so with some trepidation and much excitement. I am deeply grateful for the kindnesses and generosity that so many have shown me over so many years. You have supported, applauded, challenged, encouraged, inspired, and educated me as we work side-by-side to put children first. It is time to make room for a new generation of leadership at IDRA that continues to move ahead with fulfilling the vision of educational opportunity for all.

IDRA is in a strong place.

The board of directors is uniquely committed to the IDRA mission, and staff include experienced and emerging leaders with demonstrated capacities. IDRA operating principles – advocacy, focus, independence, cohesiveness, responsiveness, innovation, cooperation, accountability, integrity and generosity – guide our work. Our strategic plan focuses on connections and networks that are sustainable, programs and models that are transformative, and research, policies and practices that secure real solutions to school inequality. Last year, we began a long-term grant initiative with 11 states and D.C. to develop capacity to tackle the most critical issues impacting students’ education and civil rights in the American South and its 2,341 school districts and 29,632 schools with over 1 million educators and 16 million students. This year, we began a new five-

year project that focuses on developing and evaluating sustainable school leadership teams that transform schools for students. Our fiscal picture is strong, and the IDRA board engaged in a national search process to identify the next leader of IDRA. Celina Moreno, J.D., begins her work on January 3, 2019, and as President & CEO on February 1, 2019, bringing her expertise and passion for advocacy in education and civil rights. I know she will be an excellent President & CEO to carry forward our mission to achieve equal educational opportunity for all students.

I will continue to work so that IDRA leverages its national voice for action and change in ways that benefit all children and with initiatives that are well-funded and sustainable over time. I will also continue our José Angel Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program (two of five cycles have been completed) to honor the memory of IDRA’s founder and to engage the nation’s most promising researchers in investigating school finance solutions to secure equity and excellence for all. The IDRA board of directors has asked that, after my retirement, I continue my association with IDRA as President Emeritus. I will.

I came to IDRA as a 23-year-old research assistant in 1976 and will leave a bit older, with a couple of more degrees, a lot more experience, and deep gratitude for the opportunities I have been given by so many people over the years. When my sons were young, I used to tell them that their job in life was to find out why they were put on this earth and then follow that path to leave the earth better than they found it. For



myself, I know now that my path in life has been, is, and will be to create opportunities for others.

Some of you know that I am an independent Zen teacher in the White Plum lineage and received dharma transmission from Roshi Robert Kennedy S.J. four years ago. After retirement, I intend to expand my work as a Zen meditation teacher. On another vein, a fellow “peregrina” on the Camino de Santiago and I, may start a monthly “Caminante” group here in San Antonio. I have also been asked about teaching a course or two in research or non-profit management at one of our San Antonio universities. I hope to have more time with family and friends and, among other celebrations, invite fellow Laredoans to a gathering of the Los Dos Laredos diaspora. Maybe I will finally decide that, yes, I can learn to cook for pleasure not just necessity. Or not. We shall see.

Gracias y hasta luego,

Cuca

Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel
President & CEO, IDRA

Sample Awards & Fellowships



American Educational Research Association (AERA) Hispanic Issues SIG Award for Research in Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018

Lifetime Achievement Award, Texas Association for Bilingual Education, 2018

Education Awards Gala Honoree, LULAC National Education Service Centers, 2016

Honored by American Graduate Day, 2015

MALDEF's Excellence in Community Service Award, 2013

San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame, 2011

Crystal Star Awards of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention and Prevention, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2006

Community Advocate of the Year, San Antonio Association for Bilingual Education, 2005

Community Advocacy Award, Texas Association for Bilingual Education, 2002

Headliner in Education Award, Association for Women in Communications, San Antonio Professional Chapter, 2000

Ford Salute to Education – Community Service Award, 2000

Lo Mejor de Lo Nuestro, Univision, San Antonio

Ramón L. Santiago President's Award, National Association of Bilingual Education, 2000

Peter F. Drucker Award for Non-Profit Innovation Recognition, Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

Profiles in Leadership Award, Mission City Business and Professional Women, 1999

100 Hispanic Influentials, Hispanic Business, 1997

La Prensa Hispanic Heritage Education Award, 1997

Title VII Doctoral Fellow, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1980 to 1982

Women and Minority Research Fellow, National Institute of Education, 1979

High Achievement Commendation, Antioch College, 1975

Magna Cum Laude, Our Lady of the Lake University, 1972

Alpha Chi Society, 1971

(Crossing Borders with Faith, Courage, Insight & Persistence, continued from Page 2)

English Learner Education. Having grown up in a home where Spanish was the first language and having experienced the treasure of being fully biliterate, she has always proclaimed the civil right of children to an excellent bilingual program and the potential of nurturing the home language while developing full proficiency in English. Under her leadership, IDRA has influenced policy, research and school practices to improve education of English learners in all grades.

Cuca has crossed many distant borders in Spain, twice making the caminata de Santiago de Compostela – once with her son, Xavier and once with her Dharma group from San Antonio. Not many cross the border between Christianity and Buddhism: Cuca does so brilliantly, compassionately and firmly.

Her family is a complex map of border crossing: Husband Lucas Montecel, military veteran with a degree in architecture, runs a thriving leather import business. Ismael, the eldest son, just having completed his service in the U.S. Air Force and

is now a senior data scientist who lives with his wife, Jill Potkalesky, in Washington, D.C. Xavier, the youngest, is close to completing doctoral work in theology. Cuca crossed a major cultural border with the celebration of her son Xavier's engagement to Ryan Bowley at their home in San Antonio and the subsequent wedding in Boston.

All this border crossing is sustained by four deep and powerful groundings: Faith, Courage, Insight and Persistence.

Her faith is grounded in people and community.

Her courage, nurtured in her defense of the dignity of her family, blossomed into taking a stand for children in the face of deep biases and strong bigotry against many children and their families.

Her insight is her clear vision of what reality is, uncovering and pointing to the brilliance and potential in all children in the face of stereotypic and deficit views that permeate our institutions and those who run them.

Finally, her persistence has kept her in the battle and fray for the long haul. Savoring the periodic wins in a stream of losses. Keeping on keeping on... for the children. Not only not giving up, but always planning with hope for transforming schools to be the places of safety, excellence and possibility for all children – especially for children who grow up poor, or are of color, speaking a language other than English, recent immigrant... or all of the above.

As she now crosses the border from president to president emeritus, she leaves a legacy that inspires us to keep our faith in the children, have the courage to keep the battle for the children as forces seek to not just limit the resources but create parallel systems that are not public, maintain a clear vision of what is in the best interest of children, and to persist with vigor and with strategies that will transform our schools.

Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is an IDRA senior education associate and directs IDRA Education CAFE work. Comments and questions may be directed to him via email at aurelio.montemayor@idra.org.



Dr. Robledo Montecel (center) with her mom, Paula Benavides Robledo (left) and Dr. Adrian Chan, her dissertation chair (right) after conferring of Ph.D. in December 1985 ceremony at the University of Wisconsin-Mikwaukee.



Family: (l-r) Cuca Robledo Montecel, Lucas Montecel (Cuca's spouse), Ryan Bowley (Xavier's spouse), Xavier Montecel, Ismael Montecel, Jill Potkalesky (Ismael's spouse)



Dr. Robledo Montecel was pleased to welcome guest Dr. Kent McGuire (center), then President of the Southern Education Foundation, as they looked together at what must be in place to prepare a new generation of teachers across the American South, 2015.



Cuca with Laura Tobin Cárdenas. She and José Angel Cárdenas, Ed.D., were married for 42 years. On the occasion of this inaugural IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow Symposium, she presented a \$1,000 scholarship to Our Lady of the Lake University for teacher preparation for English language learners in memory of Dr. Cárdenas, founder of IDRA, 2016.



Dr. María del Refugio Robledo, director of IDRA's bilingual education cost analysis project, 1978.



At the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program 25th anniversary event in Brazil. (l-r) Rodrigo Calderón, vice president of public affairs and communications for Coca-Cola Latin America; Jamie Guajardo, mother of U.S. essay contest winner; Gabriella Marie Guajardo, essay contest grand prize winner; Dr. Robledo Montecel; Marco F. Simões Coelho, vice president of communications and sustainability and director Coca-Cola Institute, 2009.



Pilar Oates, Rosie Castro and Dr. Robledo Montecel at the Leadership Launch-San Antonio, 2014.



Pausing during the busy conference at the Ford Foundation Urban Dropout Prevention Collaboratives in San Antonio are (l-r) Aurelio M. Montemayor, Dr. María del Refugio Robledo, Dr. Edward J. Meade, Jr., and Dr. José A. Cárdenas, 1988.



Dr. Robledo Montecel, IDRA President, and Ingrid Saunders Jones, Chair of the Coca-Cola Foundation at the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program National Institute in Atlanta, where Kennedy Middle School and the foundation received the 2010 A+ Award from Atlanta Partners For Education (APFE), 2010.



IDRA Board of Directors: (Standing, L-R) Mr. Jessie Rangel, Lubbock, Texas; Mr. David L. Benson, Houston, Texas; Dr. Max Spencer Castillo, Houston, Texas; Mrs. Rosalinda González, Mission, Texas; Dr. Ricardo R. Fernández, The Bronx, New York. (Seated, L-R) Dr. Sally J Andrade, El Paso, Texas, Board Secretary; Mr. Jesse S. Treviño, McAllen, Texas; Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO; Mr. Juventino "Tino" Guerra, San Antonio, Texas, Board Chair; Mr. Othón Medina, El Paso, Texas, Board Vice Chair. (Not shown) Mr. William Acosta, Dallas, Texas; Mr. Leo Zuñiga, San Antonio, Texas, 2017.



Dr. Robledo Montecel (center) with Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors from South San Antonio ISD during the program's 20th anniversary celebration, 2004.



RobledoWomen in Laredo, Texas, with Carla Gonzalez, Cindy Robledo, Cuca, Nora González, Rosalinda Botello, Anna Romanos, Claudia Robledo Gonzalez, 2018.



Dr. Robledo Montecel is interviewed in a documentary video by Emmy-award winning documentarian, Robert Currie, that presents a historical perspective of Head Start and Lady Bird Johnson's involvement in both Head Start and the war on poverty, 2012.



Dr. Robledo Montecel with Mr. Al Kaufman upon her receiving MALDEF's Excellence in Community Service Award, 2013.



Sensei Cuca Robledo Montecel with fellow Zen teachers in the White Plum Asanga, Spring 2018 at the installation of Sensei KoDo, 2018.

Cuca with fellow members of Dharma Boots Zen group as they begin the Camino the Santiago in Leon, Spain in September of 2017.



Winter in New England, 2017.

A Collection of Thanks and Farewells

Dear Dr. Cuca Montecel,

Words cannot express how much your passion, research and work have changed the lives of students across Texas and beyond. The San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce applauds your efforts in education and your long-lasting championship of helping students have brighter futures and more resources for success.

Congratulations on your retirement! It's well-deserved!

– Brianna Dimas, Chief Operations Officer,
San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Congratulations! You have been an outstanding model of what educator should be. Thank you for the wonderful years, wisdom, research and knowledge that you have given to hundreds of communities.

– Minerva Minnie Abrego-Sanchez,
Andrade Van de Putte & Associates

If it wasn't for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, maybe I would have just become another statistic and not the person you see here today. I strongly believe the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is invaluable to the kids and to the community. You made a change in my life, and I strongly believe it will keep making differences in others.

– Pablo López, former Coca-Cola
Valued Youth Program tutor

I want to thank you wholeheartedly for all you did in providing exemplary programs and services for all our students. During my tenure as an administrator at South San Antonio ISD, I considered it a tremendous pleasure and a privilege to have worked side by side with you and your superb and excellent staff.

Because of your leadership in the implementation of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, many thousands of students are now making San Antonio and Bexar County a better place to work and live. In a very positive way, you have touched many young lives and helped them prepare for their future and become productive members of society. I have always admired your cordial smile, hard work, professionalism, support and dedication.

There is no doubt that you will leave deep footprints at IDRA and with the many school districts. Please accept my most heartfelt congratulations and warmest best wishes.

– J. Gilberto Quezada, retired school district administrator

Vision, inspiration and leadership describe my comrade Cuca. As the nucleus of IDRA, she has led the organization on the path of providing quality education for all students across the country. When José passed the torch twenty six years ago, he too was convinced she would lead IDRA on a journey to national and international prominence. Her work and IDRA continue to light the way. Love, Laura

– Laura Cáardenas

Thank you for all you have done for the children of Texas! You are a scholar, advocate and beauty (inside and out)! Good luck in all your future endeavors.

– Sylvia Ramirez Reyna, retired chief
of school leadership with Dallas ISD

Cuca, what a joy and adventure it has been to walk el camino with you over the decades. Though one part of the journey is ending, we know more blessings and joy await.

– Albert and Josie Cortez,
former IDRA senior staff

Cuca is a brilliant thought leader, but more than that, she uses her heart combined with her genius to make extraordinary things transpire. Few executives can combine bottom-line decisions with cultural understanding that benefits everyone. I'm proud to say Cuca is one of them and I too have benefitted from her genius and good will.

– Becky Barrera, IDRA 1975-80

We are so indebted to you and your Servant Leadership. Mil gracias y Felicidades Amiga!

– Lorena Garza Gonzalez, vice president at Urban Strategies

Thanks for the opportunity to share some thoughts about Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, a courageous and visionary national leader whose actions have made such a profound impact on the educational arena and the educational opportunities of the many children who have been traditionally marginalized. Cuquita, I have always admired your path to success; you are “un modelo para seguir para muchas jóvenes.” While growing up you defied all expectations when this caring young girl from ‘el barrio del Chacón’ enrolled in one of the top high schools in Laredo, Texas, and continued her education at top universities graduating with a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin.

We at IDRA were blessed when you accepted to become IDRA’s President & CEO, and under your leadership, IDRA has made breakthroughs that took Dr. José A. Angel Cárdenas’ dream of a quality education for all to a much higher level. Nunca quitaste el dedo del renglón. People love you for many reasons, but the reason that outshines all others is your ability to inspire others to become true advocates for social justice in this world.

Cuquita, a duras penas, muchos respetamos tu decisión de jubilarte, pero todos sabemos que dejarás un vacío de liderazgo que tomará mucho esfuerzo para llenar. Me siento tan agradecido por haberte tenido como “mi boss, líder, mi colega y amiga del alma.” Aunque no lo creas, un Viejo como yo, logró aprender mucho de tu sabiduría, liderazgo, y tu generosidad. Dios te bendiga y te cuide y reine de bendiciones a toda tu familia. Te extrañaremos.

– Dr. Abelardo Villarreal, retired IDRA director of operations

Congratulations Dr. Robledo Montecel, on an extraordinary legacy of excellence in championing for children!

For me personally, you have been a source of inspiration and support, a mentor and guide. You exemplified for me how we can successfully meld together the things that we are most passionate about – service, leadership, career and family – and live our best lives.

A first-generation college graduate, my first full-time job was at IDRA. The four years I spent there were a launching pad for my professional career. The knowledge, experience and mentoring I received there have been integral to my professional and personal success.

I am forever grateful for your mentorship and your willingness to invest in me. I wish you the very best as you walk into this next season of your life.

With deep respect and admiration,

– Oanh Maroney-Omitade

Cuca, throughout the years your leadership in the field of education has ensured that our voices are heard and listened to. Your dedication to IDRA’s goals, to its staff, parent groups and funders has been a model for others to follow. But your love for children and your dedication to ensuring that they are given every opportunity to fully participate in the best educational opportunities this nation can offer leave a legacy much admired and appreciated by all of us. Personally, it is always a joy to see you, a shining beacon of perseverance, determination and love for humanity. It is an honor to know you and to call you friend. May your “second act” be as fulfilling as the first. Love Rosie,

– Rosie Castro

Cuca is a unique combination of smarts, class and guts. She is absolutely dedicated to low-income and minority students and is indefatigable in her advocacy for them. We are so lucky to have had her working for us for almost 50 years. Students all over the country – indeed the world – owe so much to Cuca for her devotion to a cause and energy and love to pursue it.

– Al Kauffman (a 40-year fan of Cuca)

Cuca, your impact on education is transformational – and will reverberate for generations of children. For me, your presence in my life – as a leader, mentor, colleague, and beloved friend – has been profound.

– Laurie Posner,
former IDRA senior staff

I was lucky enough to meet Cuca in the early 1990s as part of the Community Education Leadership Program. Wow! From the moment you meet Cuca, you are taken in by her grace, confidence, wisdom and passion. It emanates from her in every interaction. Her warmth and care embrace you in a way that makes you believe that you can do anything, and she leads with a vision for children and our community that makes clear the path. I learned what we now call an “equity lens” (long before it had such a name) from witnessing the way that Cuca approached challenges, and what and how she prioritized in her problem-solving. She was and continues to be a model of fairness, wisdom and leadership for me and all others who have the privilege of walking the path of education and community development with her. I am forever grateful for her mentorship, friendship and partnership over these many years.

– Shari Becker Albright, president, Raise Your Hand Texas Education Foundation

Three Decades of Groundbreaking Dropout Research – Reflections by Dr. Robledo Montecel, An Excerpt

by Bricio Vasquez, Ph.D.

This year marks the 33rd year that IDRA has published the Texas public school attrition study. First published in 1986, it was an influential report that led to critical public debate on education reform and mobilized policymakers in Texas. One key figure oversaw the development of this key study and observed the effects that actionable knowledge can have on an entire population.

Changing Economy Requires a More Educated Populace

After coming to IDRA in 1976, Dr. Robledo Montecel explains that she quickly learned how educational inequities were manifested in schools across San Antonio and the rest of Texas. She worked closely with data as a leader and evaluator at IDRA and saw the differentiated patterns of high school non-completion among minority youth.

She explains: “It was very evident that a fundamental part of educational opportunities for minority students and certainly for Hispanic students had to be increasing the graduation rate. Historically, some school districts in South Texas graduated only 10 percent of their Mexican American students.

Dr. Robledo Montecel further describes that changes in the economy over time led to a more focused awareness of the high school dropout issue facing the nation. A changing economy demanded an educated workforce, and slowly people began to take notice of the undereducation problem.

In 1968, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held a six-day hearing at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio on the civil rights issues of Mexican Americans in the southwestern United States. Data presented at the hearings revealed that, in 1960, the average number of years of formal education for the population 14 years and older was 6.2 years for Hispanics, 10.7 years for Whites, and 8.7 years for Blacks.

Dr. Robledo Montecel reflects on those times: “Those rates became the fundamental basis for

school walkouts. Students walked out of schools, like in Crystal City and in San Antonio’s Edgewood ISD, because they were not being educated, they were being allowed to disappear or were pushed out before graduating. And everyone seemed to be fine with that. And there were very few resources going toward doing something about it.”

IDRA’s First Dropout Study for Texas Raises Alarms

Dr. Robledo Montecel explains, “At the forefront of confronting the issues that were getting in the way of equal educational opportunity, IDRA decided to focus on dropouts and what was being done, or not done, about that.”

Dr. Robledo Montecel and a smart team at IDRA, including Dr. José A. Cárdenas (IDRA’s founder), Ms. Josie Cortez, Dr. Albert Cortez, Mr. Roy Johnson and Dr. David Ramírez, conceived of the first research to examine dropouts in the Texas.

“IDRA was commissioned to do this first-ever comprehensive statewide study by what is now the Texas Department of Commerce (back then it was called the Texas Department of Community Affairs) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Among other things, I was the director of the IDRA Center for the Prevention and Recovery of Dropouts. And so, this became the first major study of that center. I was asked to be the principal investigator. In collaboration with some folks in Austin and other places, we conceived of a study that would become the seven-volume Texas School Dropout Survey Project. The results were published in 1986.”

Figuring out how many students dropped out of school before graduating high school was a challenge at the time. The team would need to identify a cohort of students early in their middle school years and follow them through their high school senior year. No such data existed within TEA’s databases. Instead, Dr. Robledo Montecel and her team decided to approximate a dropout rate using an attrition methodology.



Cuca presented on a panel on “The Future of Children of Color in Texas” at a media briefing hosted by the Policy Studies Center in the UTSA College of Public Policy, in partnership with La Fe Policy Research and Education Center, New America Media and Kidswell, Texas, 2013.

She describes how they developed the attrition method still used today, “The methodology is an attrition methodology. It uses numbers collected and provided by TEA in terms of overall enrollment on the initial year, or the baseline year. And then it looks at what would be the senior year for that same group of students using the same data. Then we have a correction for in- and out-migration, taking into account whether the district was losing kids or gaining kids due to population shifts. We correct for that. And then came up with an attrition rate.”

The study published by IDRA was unlike any study published at the time. The results alarmed the public. IDRA found that 86,276 students had been lost from the class of 1986 by high schools across Texas. The study also estimated that losing these students cost the state of Texas upwards of \$17.2 billion in forgone income, tax revenue, state services and criminal justice costs.

Additionally, the study found stark differences in the patterns of attrition between racial and ethnic (cont. on Page 15)

(Three Decades of Groundbreaking Dropout Research, continued from Page 14)

groups. According to the 1986 attrition study, the proportion of students lost by race and ethnic category were 27 percent for Whites, 34 percent for Blacks and 45 percent for Hispanics.

Despite the findings of the study and subsequent mobilization by policymakers, the number of students who were lost to schools continued to accumulate over the years. The total students lost between 1986 and 2017 number 3,756,101. Out of the 3.8 million students lost over the years, 2 million (55 percent) were Hispanic.

Study Leads to New Major State Policy

The study's findings raised the alarm for policymakers and drew much-needed attention to the issue of undereducation in Texas. In the early years, as the attrition study was published annually, education professionals and policymakers mobilized to improve educational attainment. Increasing high school graduation meant increasing the quality of life for youth, and it also meant increasing the economic prosperity of Texas and the nation.

The Texas legislature passed a measure specifically targeting this issue: "Working with policymakers, we assisted in the development of a way to create metrics. Rep. Ciro Rodríguez introduced House Bill 1010. It required that dropout data be collected by school districts and be submitted to TEA for the first time. It required that TEA report those out publicly. It defined, in some way, the metric that was acceptable for measuring dropout rates, so that it was consistent with good practice of educational research but was also consistent with what made good sense. HB 1010 also provided dollars for addressing the issue, dollars for school districts. And among those things was a requirement and funding to have a dropout coordinator in every district in the state. And so, there was a kind of a rallying around to address the issue."

The State Moves from Taking Action to Making Excuses

In subsequent years, after the attrition study had been published several years, public officials and school districts shifted their attitudes away from owning the issue and doing something about it, to making excuses for high dropout rates. To some degree, this shifting of attitudes happened because school districts were now being held accountable for losing students, and there were emerging consequences for them if improvement did not continue.

Dr. Robledo Montecel explained: "It began to dawn on some people that this was showing the underside of education in the state of Texas in a way it never had before, because it was giving us real numbers about what was happening. And I think that as that continued, state and school districts moved toward a *justification* of the data rather than a *utilization* of the data to address the problem and create solutions."

In addition, there have been numerous efforts by researchers and policymakers to explain away the undereducation of poor and minority youth. Commonly, researchers employ a deficit framework that leads to faulty results. Dr. Robledo Montecel said: "There is no causal effect between being poor and dropping out of school that I have ever seen. Being poor does not erase a child's ability to learn and succeed. It just doesn't."

This deficit framework blames individual student characteristics as the reasons behind their lack of success within a culturally mismatched educational system. Dr. Robledo Montecel further emphasizes: "The reason that those explanations don't make sense is because there are poor schools that do a good job with poor students. And we as a country have not bothered to see what it is that has them do a good job. In other words, what are the variables that schools have control over that will have an impact on outcomes for schools? It does educators no good to talk about, 'Well the kids are poor and therefore we cannot do anything.' It takes the agency completely out of the educator. It takes the agency completely out of the schools. And it's completely useless."

It is now 33 years after the initial study of dropouts in Texas, and there is still much work to be done toward achieving universal high school graduation. The attrition study from 1986 has been replicated every year since then with consistent methodology and has shown that dropout rates have slowly declined over the years, though gaps remain and some are even worse. "We have to keep focusing attention on the issue in order to make any progress at all."

The New Assault on Public Education

Dr. Robledo Montecel says: "Education is, of course, useful to the individual, but it is also part of the public good. If you look at the dropout rate and consider the cost of not educating the 86,276 students who didn't graduate that first year of our study and if you consider that the state of Texas

lost \$17 billion in forgone income over the course of a lifetime of these students, it's very clear that education is not just a private good, that it is for the common good."

She explains: "The attempts to deal with education in ways that blame the poor for school failure, or that allow the state to grossly underfund public education, or that turn over the role of education to private interests who pretend to 'rescue' some kids at the expense of everyone else are all doomed to fail the people of Texas. Instead, we need courageous leadership at all levels to examine data honestly and to create solutions that work for all children."

This is the final year of Dr. Robledo Montecel serving as President & CEO of IDRA after 26 years of service. She provides a roadmap for moving forward with the work for education equity at IDRA. Among other things, she stresses the need to advocate for strong public schools and to work across different sectors.

The 33 years of IDRA's attrition studies themselves archive a historical pattern of education access in the state of Texas. The attrition study emerged as a need to solve an emerging workforce problem in the 1970s and 1980s but also provided a lens into how education structures in Texas work to subjugate marginalized youth and reproduce social inequalities. She developed the IDRA Quality Schools Action Framework to guide schools and communities in focusing on key leverage points to improve their schools and ensure every subgroup of students has access to high quality education.

Dr. Robledo Montecel states, "I think that the future has to look like meeting the promises that we make to kids and meeting the promises that we make to each other as a country, about what we stand for."

She believes that what we stand for as a country with regards to education is critical: "Our future depends on us having an excellent public educational system, where all students graduate from high school prepared for college or the world of work, no matter what the color of their skin, the language they speak, or where they happen to be born. And this is a goal I believe we can achieve."

Bricio Vasquez, Ph.D., is IDRA's education data scientist (bricio.vasquez@idra.org). The full version of this article is available in the "Texas Public School Attrition Study 2017-18."

Focus: Commemorative Issue

Dear Children,

We see you. We value you. We cherish you.

We promise to provide you an opportunity to learn in your own neighborhood with caring and qualified teachers. We promise you a curriculum that truly prepares you for college, in an environment that respects you and values you and your background. We promise to engage you – not only academically – but as an active part of the community and life of school. And we promise to support the commitment of your parents to high quality education.

We promise to your families and communities ... unwaveringly, we stand with you. Together, we will work fiercely to assure that youth, families and communities are heard – not as problems – but as partners in creating strong and vibrant schools. We promise to work with teachers and principals and superintendents and school boards to prepare all students so that we can all live in an America that keeps its promises to justice and opportunity. And we promise to tell the truth. We will share what we see honestly – to promote good and just public policy.

María Robledo Montecel

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

Letter originally printed in the 2016 IDRA Annual Report