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*Focus: Equity Auditing*

# Using Equity Audits to Assess and Address Opportunity Gaps Across Education

by Paula N. Johnson, Ph.D.

Education leaders today are able to compile all kinds of student achievement data. However, many do not intentionally look for signs of systemic inequity. To recognize root causes of inequities, educators and communities can use equity audits to examine their school’s culture, trends, practices and policies. These audits are especially needed now as inequities are exacerbated by COVID-19 school closures. Uncovering opportunity gaps is the first step in developing a plan to address them.

This article discusses the purpose, measures and outcomes of an equity audit. It showcases examples of how the information from an audit can assist schools and districts in addressing inequity.

**The Role of Accountability**

The Learning Policy Institute suggests that productive accountability systems acknowledge that each level of educational leadership has various responsibilities (2016). Inputs, processes and outcomes related to student achievement vary among schools, districts, and state and federal agencies. Each entity must leverage its capacity and resources appropriately to promote equity and quality education for all students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the nation’s chief law regarding public education. It holds public schools responsible for ensuring that all students receive quality instruction that will prepare them for college and career success. The law aims to safeguard educational opportunities

for students who are historically undeserved, including students of color, students in poverty, English learners and students in special education. Equity audits guide schools in conducting a critical review of their data to inform ways of addressing systemic inequities.

Prior to the ESSA, IDRA developed the Six Goals of Educational Equity (2006). The goals provide a yardstick for school leaders to measure their progress and as a “lightning rod to galvanize change” (IDRA, 2006). Below is a summary of each goal.

- Goal 1: Comparably high academic achievement and other student outcomes** for all groups of learners, as evidenced by disaggregated data.
- Goal 2: Equitable access and inclusion** that affords all learners unobstructed entrance and participation in academic and extra-curricular activities.
- Goal 3: Equitable treatment** in a welcoming and inclusive learning environment.
- Goal 4: Equitable opportunity to learn** in an academic setting with high standards that offers a strong system of supports.
- Goal 5: Equitable resources** that include fair allocation of funding, staffing, facilities, instructional materials and equipment.

(cont. on Page 2)

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**Goal 6: Accountability** that assures all stakeholders hold themselves and each other responsible for the success of every student.

IDRA operates the IDRA EAC-South, which is the federally funded equity assistance center that provides technical assistance to state education agencies and school districts in 11 states in federal Region II and Washington, D.C. (covering most of the U.S. South).

The IDRA EAC-South uses the six goals as a foundation for our equity audits. We facilitate equity “walks” in districts across the southern region of the United States. Some school districts in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Virginia now use these goals to constantly gauge their success in meeting the needs of each student.

**The Purpose of an Equity Audit**

The goal of an equity audit is to identify institutional practices that produce discriminatory trends in data that affect students. Schools and districts conduct audits to analyze data in three key areas: programmatic equity, teaching quality equity, and achievement equity (Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009).

Below are examples of guiding questions related to each of the three areas of equity. These questions help school leaders find areas of concern that may require further investigation.

**Programmatic Equity**

- Which population groups are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes or honors classes?
- Which groups are overrepresented or underrepresentation in special education classes?
- Which groups are disciplined more often and more severely than other groups?

**Teaching Quality**

- Are the most experienced teachers teaching the students with the greatest needs?
- Are most of the new teachers teaching in the schools with the greatest needs?
- Are there certain schools where there is high teacher mobility? Why?
- Are teachers in the high needs areas, like special education and bilingual education, certified?

**Achievement Equity**

- Where are the achievement and opportunity gaps among population groups based on the state assessment exam at each grade level?
- Which population groups are graduating at lower rates than others?
- Which students are being retained in grade?
- Which students are dropping out of school?

When the IDRA EAC-South facilitates equity audits with district teams, we work together to discover the institutional changes that will ensure equitable, diverse and inclusive environments for all learners.

**Data Collection and Review**

An equity audit requires input from stakeholders across a school district. Schools collect data in many forms to provide them with a wide range of influences that contribute to student achievement. Data collection can come from a variety of sources, including:

- Listening sessions with district leadership;
- Classroom and campus observations;
- Focus group interviews with teachers, students and parents;
- Reviews of school discipline policies and code of conduct;

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**6 Goals of Educational Equity**

Public schools do what they choose to educate their students within certain limits and parameters, but they are accountable for educating all learners to high academic standards and outcomes regardless of the differing characteristics of those learners. To help schools and communities work together to ensure that systems for equity are in place, IDRA outlined the Six Goals of Educational Equity. The IDRA EAC-South uses these six goals as a foundation for school and district equity audits.

- Goal 1: Comparably High Academic Achievement and Other Student Outcomes**  
Disaggregated data on academic achievement and other student outcomes should show high comparable performance for all identifiable groups of learners, and achievement and performance gaps should be virtually nonexistent.
- Goal 2: Equitable Access and Inclusion**  
Schools ensure undistorted entrance into, involvement of and full participation of learners in schools, programs and activities.
- Goal 3: Equitable Treatment**  
Patterns of interaction between individuals and within an environment should be accepting, welcoming, respectful, supportive and secure such that students feel challenged to be involved in the pursuit of learning and excellence without fear of threat, humiliation, danger or disregard.
- Goal 4: Equitable Opportunity to Learn**  
All learners, learning opportunities should ensure that every child, regardless of characteristics and identified needs, is presented with the challenge to reach high standards and receives the requisite pedagogical, social, emotional and psychological supports to achieve the high standards of excellence that an environment.
- Goal 5: Equitable Resources**  
Resources – including money, time, qualified staff, appropriate facilities, materials, instructional hardware and software, and academic and other supports – must be distributed in ways to ensure that all students achieve high academic standards.
- Goal 6: Accountability**  
An education institution should accept responsibility and hold themselves and each other responsible for new learning being lost even to quality resources, qualified teachers, challenging curriculum, full opportunity to learn, and appropriate sufficient support for learning so they can achieve at excellent levels in academic and other student outcomes.

Learn more at [www.idraeacsouth.org](http://www.idraeacsouth.org)

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The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2020) 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 across the United States.

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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.

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# Ensuring Equity in Online Learning – Considerations in Response to COVID-19’s Impact on Schooling

*Editor’s Note: In a crisis, we have to cut corners. As schools closed to slow the spread of COVID-19, educators across the country shifted quickly to support their students to continue coursework in some form. They extended deadlines, adjusted grading policies, revised attendance recordkeeping, and much, much more. Educational equity, though, is one responsibility that cannot be set aside or overlooked in this crisis.*

IDRA launched *Learning Goes On*, a resource for schools and communities (see box) and developed an issue brief focused on equity considerations for online learning. The following is a reprint of the brief. See our *Learning Goes On* webpage (<https://idra.news/LearningGoesOn>) for the shareable version and for our supplement, “Best Practices for Online Instruction in the Wake of COVID-19.” Both are available in Spanish as well.

In the wake of the COVID-19-propelled public health crisis, schools around the nation are turning to online learning for students. Technology presents a huge opportunity to engage students to continue their schooling.

However, online education also brings a host of equity and access concerns, misperceptions around students’ technology abilities, lack of access for students with no home internet access, and unique challenges for some student populations, including special education students and English learners.

This special edition issue brief provides educators ideas on how technology can best serve us during these times. The following suggestions rely on best educational practices, logical conclusions drawn from school district equity audits and classroom observations, research on technology access, and our collective empathy toward families and students.

## Ensure Internet Access for Students

Online education does not work when students cannot access it. Many students do not have access to the internet, laptops or tablets necessary for full participation in online courses or activities. Pew Research Center analyzed 2015 U.S. Census Bureau data, finding (2018):

- 15% of households with school-aged children do not have a high-speed internet connection at home;

- One in four teens whose annual family income is less than \$30,000 does not have access to a home computer; and
- 17% of teens often or sometimes are unable to do their homework due to a lack of access to a computer or the internet.

Many students do have access to the internet through their cell phones, but completing schoolwork through the phone is extremely difficult and hinders the learning process. While conference platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts and

*(cont. on Page 4)*

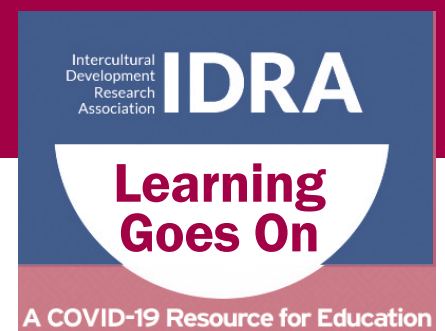
*Online education brings a host of equity and access concerns, misperceptions around students’ technology abilities, lack of access for students with no home internet access, and unique challenges for some student populations, including special education students and English learners.*

## See IDRA’s new Learning Goes On resource!

- ✓ Weekly policy updates
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- ✓ COVID-19 Education News Dashboard
- ✓ Data Map – Texas College Responses to COVID-19
- ✓ Equity Connection – IDRA’s free online community of practice
- ✓ Online technical assistance academies for school districts

The eNews and policy updates are available in English and Spanish.

<https://idra.news/LearningGoesOn>





(Ensuring Equity in Online Learning, continued from Page 3)

online video streaming are the most interactive components of online education, they can burn through a phone data plan in one day, leaving many students to search for a Wi-Fi spot. Also, many students have no access to a printer.

To help, some school districts are providing devices for parents to check out and others are parking mobile units in neighborhoods with little or no internet access. Several companies announced that they will provide free or discounted internet access to students. When such strategies are not possible, schools provide hard-copy materials for their students.

### Create Asynchronous and On-Demand Opportunities

Synchronous online activities occur at a specific time, like a web-conference, chat, or a live lecture delivered through a conference video or audio platform. Asynchronous online activities allow students to access at any time recorded web-conferences, emails, bulletin boards, and recorded lectures on video or audio. We suggest avoiding delivery of activities or lessons solely through synchronous, real-time platforms. Even if a real-time activity is planned, always create an asynchronous version.

Asynchronous and on-demand activities and lessons also give you the opportunity to modify lessons according to Section 504 and individualized education plans for students with special needs. For example, if a student needs large print text or presentations, you can create these ahead of time, while a real-time online activity does not lend itself to differentiated activities. The same is true for activities for English learners.

### Do Not Replicate an Entire School Day Online

Replicating an entire school day through online conference platforms is possible but may shut out students who lack broadband or camera access, students with learning disabilities and English learners. Still, there are multiple reports of schools attempting to do this. This is a very difficult and unproductive way of conducting online classes. Expecting students to sit, alone, for hours on end does not work. Neither students nor teachers can sit for such long periods of time in front of a computer screen. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization recommend no more than two hours of screen time for older children and less for younger ones (EyePromise, 2019).

### Remember: Less is More

Do not increase the amounts of work and reading just because this is an online class. Be judicious and consistently ask, “What single objective do I want my students to master with this activity?” This is a time to find creative ways for students to master single skills or content. Provide high-interest opportunities that are not simply rote answers or test prep. Those can be anything from multidisciplinary artistic explanations of STEM concepts, communication with students from across the world through social media to present on historical topics, or leadership opportunities for students to present on pressing current events. These are strong ways of expressing mastery.

The curriculum in an online course should be different from a traditional classroom to create a more personalized learning experience. Because online courses tend to require student-led pacing,

should ensure that educators have access to the technology they need to facilitate online instruction and that instructors have the necessary training to properly use virtual classroom hardware and software (Hanover Research, 2015).

Professional development for online instruction should help teachers develop skills in online instruction, course management, technology and socialization. Specifically, teachers may need professional development support to:

- Understand how to motivate individual learners (Hanover Research, 2015).
- Enhance student learning without the presence of visual cues (Hanover Research, 2015).
- Modify lessons, especially for students with special needs (DiPietro, et al., 2008; Hanover Research, 2015).
- Develop skills for communicating primarily in emails and text. This includes being aware of nuance and tone of word usage because the lack of tone and inflection in an all-text format can lead to misunderstandings (Hanover Research, 2015).
- Better understand how online tools can apply to their own lessons and curriculum (Oliver, et al., 2010).
- Conceptualize different ways to assess student learning and outcomes (Oliver, et al., 2010).

IDRA provides technical assistance, teacher training and coaching services on site and online based on the unique needs of your district, campus or classroom. Contact us for details at [contact@idra.org](mailto:contact@idra.org).

### Create or Find Resources for All Student Subpopulations

Creating just one version of a lesson or activity, asynchronous or synchronous, will set up portions of your student population for failure. Your lessons and activities should match the needs of your students. This can be burdensome, so we suggest developing “resource creation” communities among your colleagues. If you need a large print PowerPoint for students with visual discrimination problems, share it with others in your grade level team to create them for the department. Create podcasts together for students. Assign one person or group to find online resources for English learners and other populations.

(cont. on Page 5)

consider expectations for student assignments, participation, and pacing to ensure active learning and engagement (Hanover Research, 2015). Prepare curriculum to support learners of various reading levels and learning needs and provide supplementary materials for students who may struggle or need a different type of instruction (Hanover Research, 2015).

### Support Teachers with Training and Assistance

Teachers who move from face-to-face to online instruction must make numerous changes to their pedagogy and overall instruction. School districts

(Ensuring Equity in Online Learning, continued from Page 4)

Create multiple opportunities to assist students online through live chats and live conferences. While we discourage providing lessons and activities through live web conferences, we do suggest that you make yourself available through chats and live web conferences to field questions and problems. The best scenario is to create a recorded version of the activity and then have multiple chats or live web conferences for students who need additional instruction or help.

Also, it is a best practice to document student-teacher interactions. Other students are likely to have similar questions and problems.

### Do Not Assume Students Can Immediately Transfer their Non-School Online Skills to Coursework

A simple example of this has to do with students' creativity in using Instagram, recording quick Smartphone videos, designing memes, and communicating via Snap Chat. Even though your student can create such projects for personal use it does not mean that they can do similar projects for your content area.

Plus, this may be the first time you ask them to present online, and it may be threatening or intimidating, particularly to students with language differences or students with special needs. Many students do create online products for their own sets of friends but will not be ready or comfortable doing so for a whole class of peers and a teacher.

### Join Online Communities Dealing with Similar Issues

Multiple online communities exist with educators who are facing this situation. Many of the issues reviewed in this article have come from researching what teachers and college professors are implementing.

- **Pandemic Pedagogy** is a Facebook group where educators, students and others share insights, best (and worst) practices, advice, successes, challenges, and research about converting to fully online instruction during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The group was created in April and already has over almost 30,000 users.
- **Math Teachers Professional Learning Network** is another Facebook group with math teachers at all levels of instruction where they gather to discuss curriculum and best practices in their classrooms.

## Meet Dr. Bricio Vasquez – Education Data Scientist

Bricio Vasquez, Ph.D., is IDRA's education demographer and data scientist. He has worked in education and applied data analysis for over 10 years. Bricio is a passionate educator and previously taught sociology, statistics, and demography courses in the department of sociology at St. Mary's University in San Antonio and Texas State University in San Marcos.

As a second-generation American, Bricio is vividly aware of the sacrifices his Mexican immigrant parents endured for him to be raised in the United States and seize educational opportunities.

Growing up in border city, Bricio witnessed the juxtaposition of poverty on the Mexican side of the border versus the middle-class opportunities on the U.S. side. That view of the world prompted him to never to take anything for granted.

Education fosters social mobility, civic participation, better health, longer life-expectancy and life satisfaction. "I have gained much from my educational pursuits and have witnessed education transform others' lives," Bricio said. Educational equity has been his life mission and he aspires to continue this work for decades to come.

Bricio serves on the Texas Counts Census Campaign as the co-chair of the education subcommittee. The Texas Commissioner of Education recently appointed him to serve on the statewide compensatory education advisory committee that will review school funding changes adopted in 2019 and advise the state agency on rules for implementation.

He earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Texas Tech University, a master's degree in sociology from Texas State University, and a doctorate in applied demography from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He is originally from Brownsville, Texas, and lives in San Antonio. In his free time, he enjoys backpacking Big Bend National Park, saltwater fishing in the lower Laguna Madre with his father and brother, and dancing cumbia, salsa and two-step.



- **Equity Connection** is IDRA's online Community of Practice where educators, researchers, parents and community members discuss and take action to strengthen public schooling.

Also see New America's **Online Learning in the Wake of COVID-19** for tips and resources for PreK-12 with "equity in mind."

### Resources

- Anderson, M., & Perrin, A. (October 26, 2018.) "Nearly one-in-five teens can't always finish their homework because of the digital divide," Pew Research Center.
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This webinar helps teachers rethink their lesson plans for an online platform, including resources like teacher-created YouTube channels and explainer videos, tools for sharing resources with your peers, and ways of working with your district to ensure students have access. Presenters also give an intro to using Zoom and provide a sample math lesson using the Zoom whiteboard.

##### Digital Divide: Connectivity, Infrastructure and Devices

Featuring Jordana Barton, Federal Reserve Bank; Rene Gonzales, Lit Communities, and Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA  
Get practical solutions to addressing the digital divide for your students. This webinar explores immediate and sustainable long-term strategies that preserve the integrity of district fiscal policies.

##### Tools and Tips to Alleviate the Homework Gap - Interactive Teaching with Limited Internet Access

Featuring Dr. Stephanie Garcia, IDRA; Michelle Vega, IDRA  
The homework gap is not a new problem. But with the move to system-wide distance learning, it's not just a homework gap any longer. This webinar presents ways to support students who do not have internet access or computer.

##### Facilitating Online Math Sessions

Featuring Dr. Paula N. Johnson, IDRA EAC-South; Heather Aguilar, elementary teacher, Judson ISD; Takiasha Martínez, middle school math teacher, San Antonio ISD; and Susan Hernández, high school math teacher, Northside ISD  
Get some tips you can use right away! Compare ways of supporting students in Google Classroom in shared spaces versus virtual learning environments. And see how to use Zoom Whiteboard, Explain Everything, and Google Classrooms and Training.

##### PBL at Home & Across the Curriculum

Featuring Dr. Stephanie Garcia, IDRA; Ryan Beltrán, Founder, Elequa; Dr. Carmen Fies, UTSA Associate Professor of STEM Education and Instructional Technologies; and David Padilla, Teacher, Dwight STEM Academy, South San Antonio ISD  
Project-based learning (PBL) is a powerful approach for educators to use with distance learning because it creates quality home learning experiences. Through hands-on experiences, students can explore, create, engage and connect what they are learning to the real-world. In this webinar, we explain PBL components of this interdisciplinary and inquiry-based learning approach with an equity lens and discuss applications of PBL across the curriculum.

##### Three-Part ELAR Series on Journal Writing

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## A Win for Equity – Texas Board Adopts Curriculum Standards for African American Studies Course in Historic Vote

IDRA applauds the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) for its approval of the proposed curriculum standards for a state-approved African American Studies course. With the unanimous vote, the State Board of Education took a step in the right direction to create excellent and equitable schools in which all students learn about the rich contributions to this country that African Americans have made in all disciplines.

“At a time when the nation is divided and students feel disconnected from their schools, a more inclusive and accurate version of history is as critical as ever to building a more connected and cohesive society,” said Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO. “The vote gives us hope that past debates over whether to adopt a racist Mexican American Studies textbook or exclude from history standards African American heroes like Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall will be left in the past.”

Researchers at the Stanford Graduate School of Education and the University of Arizona found that students who participated in ethnic studies



*Morgan Craven, J.D., IDRA National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Community Engagement, presented IDRA's testimony before the Texas State Board of Education, November 13, 2019.*

courses had higher attendance rates, standardized test scores, GPAs and graduation rates. A 2019 study also showed improvement in self-identity and a reduction in prejudice. Many Texas student leaders have attested to these benefits, joining to advocate expansion of Mexican American Studies courses and adoption of the new African American Studies curriculum standards.

“The study of African American history by all students provides opportunities to address the issue of race and racial inequalities in the United

States,” said Dr. Paula Johnson, director of the IDRA EAC-South. “The important conversations that will result from this course offering are long overdue and are necessary for our society to understand and address historical disparities.”

Dr. Johnson is a member of the San Antonio African American Studies Course Curriculum Advisory Team under the leadership of State Board of Education trustees Aicha Davis and Marisa Pérez.

IDRA and its allies in the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition continue to call on the State Board of Education to prioritize multiculturalism and cultural relevance when developing the entire core curriculum for a more representative Texas public education system.

IDRA provides services for educators in offering African American Studies. Learn more at: <https://www.idra.org/services/african-american-studies-idra-services>.

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- Information provided on the campus or district website;
- School climate surveys;
- Student graduation, attrition and retention reports; and
- State report cards and assessment data.

Several student characteristics help tell the story of school data. These include race, gender and gender identity, family income, national origin, special education, and disability. Data indicators for student achievement include graduation, in-grade retention and attrition rates (for students and teachers); discipline rates; advanced placement, honors and advanced course enrollment; extracurricular participation; and family and community engagement and leadership.

### The Product of an Equity Audit

Equity audits guide schools in answering several questions: What supports do students need at each intersection? How well is the district providing these supports? Which students are disengaged? Where can the district improve? An audit has the power to confirm equity concerns and bring new ones to light.

IDRA EAC-South staff review the results of each of its school's equity audit with the district team. We provide district leadership with recommendations that outline a plan for technical assistance as needed. IDRA EAC-South staff work together with district staff to draft an agreement that details intervention goals, timelines and targets.

### Equitable Education Outcomes for All Students

Achieving educational equity begins by initiating some uncomfortable conversations about relevant data: the good, the bad and the ugly. “Systemic equity can only be created in an environment that embraces a set of underlying assumptions about the right of every learner to receive the best possible public education” (Scott, 2001).

Equity audits provide schools and districts with clear indicators for how well they are meeting the needs of their students and which areas need more attention.

IDRA EAC-South can be a free technical assistance resource to schools in the U.S. South. *(cont. on Page 8)*

## Focus: Equity Auditing

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Contact the IDRA EAC-South or visit <https://www.idra.org/eac-south> for more information.

### Resources

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## Free Webinars for Immigrant Families

IDRA and the Consulate General of Mexico in San Antonio are partnering to help Mexican and Mexican American families navigate the U.S. education system and learn about important educational opportunities in both countries. The program, called Ventanilla de Orientación Educativa (VOE), provides information on the civil rights of immigrant and English learner students, local educational services, and resources on how to access and succeed in college. Since the Consulate General of Mexico in San Antonio is closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IDRA launched a webinar series to provide information to families online. This webinar series is made possible by support from the IDRA EAC-South, the IDRA Re-energizing Leadership to Achieve Greater Student Success project and the Government of Mexico.



### Seminarios Web en Español

- Derechos de los Estudiantes Inmigrantes en Pre Kinder-Secundaria
- Navegando por el Sistema de Educación K-12 en EE. UU.
- Oportunidades de Ayuda Financiera Universitaria para Inmigrantes
- Oportunidades Educativas para Adultos en Español
- Oportunidades Educativas en México para Mexicanos en Ambos Países

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- Rights of Immigrant Students in PreK-12 Schools
- Navigating the U.S. K-12 Education System
- College Financial Aid Opportunities for Immigrant Students
- Adult and Community Education Opportunities in Spanish
- Educational Opportunities in Mexico for Nationals Living in Both Countries

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