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Focus: Education Policy

Legislative Sessions Constrained by COVID-19 Must Not Exclude Community Participation

by Morgan Craven, J.D.

On any given day, nearly any member of the public is able to walk into a state Capitol building. The buildings themselves are supposed to function as open centers where elected officials and their constituents can interact and address important issues. But, like in almost every other system in our lives, COVID-19 has threatened to intensify the already-inequitable access to our state legislatures.

Of course, states should put in place measures to protect the health of individuals and the public. But, if those protections are not intentionally coupled with measures to ensure safe access to policymaking spaces, they could harm the ability of communities of color, immigrant communities, poor communities, and others who have been historically marginalized and excluded to influence the decisions that impact their lives.

A recent analysis of individuals who control major systems and industries in the United States – including federal legislative, executive and judicial bodies, higher education, and the criminal legal system – shows the extreme racial and cultural disconnect between the people who hold power in those spaces and the people who are impacted by their decisions (Lu, et al., 2020).

For example, although 40% of the people in this country identify as people of color, only 25% of current U.S. Supreme Court justices are people of color (only six since 1789 have not been white

men), only one person of color heads a university ranked in the top 25, and only nine of our 100 U.S. Senators are people of color.

These extreme under-representations exist at all levels. The majority of the Texas legislature, for example, is white. In the 2019 legislative session 36% were people of color in a state where 58% of the population (Ura & Cameron, 2019) and 72% of K-12 public school students are people of color (TEA, 2019). And, many advocates have observed a similar lack of diversity within the education advocacy community (Craven, 2019).

Why does this matter? Good policymaking requires a diversity of thought and experiences and a fair representation of constituents. Education policymaking, in particular, shapes school spaces that are fundamental to ensuring the health, safety, liberty, and opportunities for individuals and communities. People must have an equal say in the decisions that impact their schools, not only through elected positions, but as advocates who have meaningful access to elected officials, even during a pandemic. When they do not, legislators can make harmful and uninformed decisions that widen opportunity gaps and harm students (Craven, 2019).

How Legislatures Should Adapt to COVID-19

In response to COVID-19, many state legislatures have adopted new practices and procedures, (cont. on Page 2)

The decisions about access to policy deliberations during the pandemic should be made with a careful focus on ensuring equity and correcting outdated and discriminatory practices that keep historically-marginalized communities out of policymaking spaces.

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including adjustments to session start times and quorum requirements (Alabama), convenings outside of the Capitol building and voting by proxy (Arkansas), temporary location spaces and

virtual meetings (Georgia), and suspension of bill drafting, consideration and passage deadlines (Mississippi) (NCSL, 2020).

But, while many states adjust to ensure access for lawmakers and staff, few seem as focused on ensuring the same access for constituents.
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IDRA Policy Priorities – State-Level Policies to Address Educational Inequities Now

Many policies and practices have led to inequitable educational opportunities for students. COVID-19 has intensified those existing inequities in our education system and created unique challenges for schools, students and families. In current and upcoming legislative sessions across the U.S. South, state policymakers should prioritize policy changes in the areas below. For additional recommendations, research, and resources see IDRA's Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement website at www.idra.org/education-policy.

Respond Equitably to COVID-19

- Use new funding sources and emergency aid, including federal relief funds and “rainy day” funds, to address new COVID-19-related costs and revenue shortfalls in schools.
- Do not cut state funding to schools as this will have a disproportionate effect on poorer school districts that rely more on state funds and are less able to generate sufficient local dollars by taxing their residents to fill funding gaps. Funding for programs that serve English learners, students from families with limited incomes, and students of color must especially be preserved to ensure equitable educational opportunity.
- Invest additional resources in the digital infrastructure to increase access to remote learning for rural students and families with limited economic resources.

Ensure Fair Funding for All Schools

- Determine the current costs of programs and fund them accordingly to serve English learners and students in families with low incomes.

End Harmful Discipline and Policing to Create Safe Schools for All Students

- Remove police from school buildings; end harmful and ineffective discipline practices like corporal punishment; and eliminate vague and discriminatory codes of conduct provisions and punishment (like for hair and dress).

- Prohibit criminalization of youth and families for pandemic-related behavior, including truancy for lack of digital engagement in remote instruction; assault for coughing or sneezing on other students; and suspension or expulsion from academic instruction based on attire or items in the home.

Ensure Excellent Educational Opportunities for English Learners

- Improve opportunities for English learners in early childhood programs by supporting quality bilingual education in early childhood programs and throughout the PK-12 pipeline; by reducing barriers to preparation programs and certification for quality bilingual education educators to teach; and by promoting transparent and consistent data monitoring for English learner success.
- Increase funding for the paraprofessional pipeline and grow-your-own programs to encourage people to become bilingual education teachers in their communities.

Prepare All Students to Succeed in College

- Strengthen student college preparation and, in the absence of statewide assessments or graduation exams, state and local education agencies must ensure that student preparedness for college is evaluated and disparities are monitored.
- Support college affordability and accessibility by

reducing student loan debt burden and by promoting and protecting in-state tuition and aid eligibility for undocumented students.

Grow and Sustain Healthy School Districts

- Provide funding and training to school districts to adopt teaching and learning assessment systems that are non-punitive and that identify and respond to growth and learning over time. These systems should include individualized, portfolio-based formative assessments, combined with testing of small but representative samples of the districts' student population.
- Incentivize and support the large-scale adoption of ethnic studies courses and culturally-sustaining curricula in schools.

Keep the Public in Public Schools

- End the expansion of charter schools and hold charter schools to the same accountability standards as public schools in achievement, expenditures, student progress and enrollment.
- Ensure COVID-19 emergency relief funds and other public monies are not used to support small group learning pods, individual voucher programs, or large-scale virtual learning programs that pull students, families and resources away from traditional public schools that serve most students.

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The Policing of Black People Begins in Schools

by Morgan Craven, J.D.

The people peacefully protesting in support of Black lives are part of a movement demanding the most basic of human dignities. Many of those demands started in schools, where generations of students of color have been harshly punished and denied opportunities to learn and succeed.

Black students are more likely to be punished and arrested in school and to receive harsher punishments than their peers, even for the exact same behaviors. Black students are not more likely to misbehave (Skiba & Williams, 2014; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Fabelo, et al., 2011). But they are overrepresented in disciplinary actions and school-based arrests.

The Office for Civil Rights reports that in 2015-16 Black students only made up 15% of student enrollment but accounted for 31% of all school-related arrests and law enforcement referrals (2019).

Research by the Yale University Child Study Center shows these discipline disparities exist even in preschool where young Black children are twice as likely to be expelled as their white peers (Anderson, 2015; Gilliam, 2005).

This mistreatment impacts students for their entire lives. Discipline methods like corporal punishment, suspensions, expulsions, alternative school placements, and the use of police in schools result in lost classroom time and an increased likelihood of grade retention, higher dropout rates, and contact with the criminal justice system according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2018).

Why does this “school-to-prison pipeline” happen? For the same reasons so many systemic inequities persist: discriminatory cultures and practices, enabled by bad policies that fail to address even the most obvious and egregious prejudices. Many adults in schools perceive Black students’ behavior, even when it is innocent or age-appropriate, as deserving of punish-

ment, arrest and other unnecessary interventions. Some see Black children as older, less child-like, and more culpable than they actually are, a phenomenon known as *adultification* (Epstein, et al., 2017; Texas Appleseed & TCCR, 2017).

Some assume the worst of Black students, even as they label similar behavior by other students as “normal,” “inquisitive,” and “creative.” These perceptions lead to harmful responses to students’ speech, actions, and bodies. Many laws and district policies codify these harmful responses.

Schools affirm and perpetuate deeply-rooted systemic prejudices when they suspend, paddle, and arrest students and punish Black students disproportionately. When Black teenagers are arrested in the halls of their schools for no reason, they and their fellow students are deeply impacted. When disparate punishment is sanctioned by schools – places with purported authority that are meant to ensure safety – it is no wonder that some students grow up to perpetrate atrocities or stand by silently and watch as they happen.

Those who cannot imagine schools without police need only look to the many school districts – like Minneapolis, Portland and Oakland – that have begun to dismantle their entrenched school policing systems. These districts have been pushed by students and families for years to stop harmful, overly-punitive approaches and to invest in mental health and other educational supports for students (Shockman, 2020).

Just this summer, communities in San Antonio and Austin pressed for similar measures. IDRA developed online tools, including a sample school board resolution as a resource and has cautioned the Texas legislature to shift its focus from policing to counseling (https://www.idra.org/education_policy/school-policing-resources).

That shift is an important step that every other school district should follow. We do not need

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Police officers in schools do not create stronger, safer schools or prevent school violence. Studies show that police have a negative impact on perceptions of school safety and attendance, graduation and college enrollment rates, particularly for students of color.

A People-powered Plan for the Texas Legislative Session

by Ana Ramón

COVID-19 will make traditional ways of advocating in the Texas legislature nearly impossible. While the details of how the legislature will function when it opens in January are still unknown (even to many legislators and staff), there likely will be a drastic decrease in the ability of the general public to interact with policymakers.

Legislative Barriers

Traditional opportunities for providing formal and informal public comment on an issue include testifying at hearings and visiting policymakers' offices. This year, such options will be limited and primarily offered through virtual platforms. The COVID-19-related restrictions placed on the legislative process will heighten the ever-present concern about limited access to decision makers and traditional gatekeepers.

The legislature might limit the scope of issues it addresses during the session (the Texas Legislature is only constitutionally required to pass a budget each session). Policymakers may feel less inclined to carry legislation brought to them by constituents and advocacy groups.

The Power of People

Despite these limitations, state-level advocacy will still be a powerful tool to bring forth important changes to education policies, particularly when students, parents and communities are involved. Three key strategies to ensure involve-

ment of students, families and others impacted by policies include robust digital advocacy, direct actions and network building.

Advocates can help bridge newly-formed communication barriers by reconfiguring traditional efforts through digital platforms and strategies. Digital advocacy encompasses messaging, social media, organizing and communication. We must build upon existing digital efforts and platforms and provide additional tools to voice our concerns to elected officials. This could include tweeting at your state representative or senator on a specific bill and asking them to oppose or support a piece of legislation important to you.

Advocates may still interact with the legislative process through direct action. Some activities, like community days of action, clearly must incorporate social distancing measures and adhere to other in-person restrictions. But these can still be highly effective in influencing decision makers around shared concerns. Most recently, community organizations have started hosting their own community town halls online to help facilitate conversations on critical issues. Some invite elected officials to join the conversation and listen to debate longer than they would have in traditional hearings. This highlights how digital tools can both help more individuals reach their elected officials and work past barriers brought on by COVID-19.

Finally, existing networks and relationships will provide pathways to communicate our concerns with key legislative targets. Using these relationships and continuing to grow diverse, cross-sector networks will help send direct messages to decision makers. For example, the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. Especially with the upcoming session likely to have very limited opportunities to share opinions on legislation, working in a coalition can help unify members and increase the strength of their message. For example, with interim charges now transitioning into online spaces and out of the traditional committee hearings, more advocacy organizations are asking groups to co-sign testimony and submit letters, which can streamline coalition member efforts and the information shared with legislators.

Collectively, we can employ these strategies to help center the power of people during the next legislative session to ensure equity in our state education system. For more information on IDRA's advocacy efforts or TLEEC reach out to us directly at ana.ramon@idra.org.

Ana Ramón is IDRA's deputy director of advocacy. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at ana.ramon@idra.org.

(The Policing of Black People Begins in Schools, continued from Page 3)

police officers in school buildings, even to maintain safety. Police officers in schools do not create stronger, safer schools or prevent school violence. Studies show that police have a *negative* impact on perceptions of school safety and attendance, graduation and college enrollment rates, particularly for students of color (Barnum 2019; Advancement Project, 2017). And, policing and extreme surveillance systems are unnecessary

costs when most school districts are struggling to manage budgets in a declining economy.

We must break down the discriminatory school discipline and policing system and build up excellent and equitable public schools for all students. We must have pipelines to college, to meaningful relationships, and to community-led engagement and policymaking. We must have culturally-relevant curricula taught by excellent

and diverse teachers. And we must believe in the value of all young people and encourage them to explore what they want their world to look like and how to make it so.

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Note: Citations online at <https://idra.news/1Sept20b>.

Trump Administration, During a Pandemic, Moves to Privatize Education No Matter the Cost to Most Children

by *Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D.*

The Trump Administration makes no secret that it favors strategies to privatize education. Even as students and families navigate the common struggles imposed by the pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education continues to attempt to siphon public education COVID-19 relief funds to benefit private schools. Consider examples from just the last nine months.

In January, the Department proposed new rules that subvert the foundational principle of separation of church and state. The rules would allow religious institutions to receive federal grants even if they use private, religious discretion to discriminate against who receives their services, such as members of the LGBTQ community or other religious denominations (ACLU, 2020).

In April, the Department granted excessive funds to charter school chains with ties to the Administration (Strauss, 2020). In particular, the IDEA charter chain received a \$72 million grant despite multiple red flags about inappropriate use of past federal funds and incomplete performance reports.

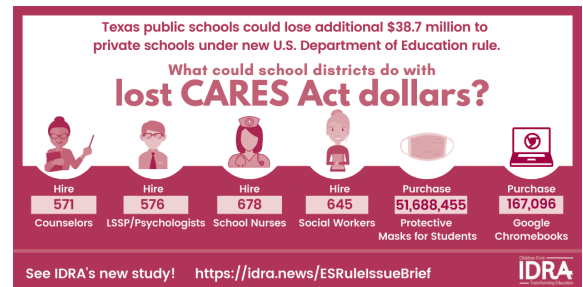
In May, the Department leveraged its discretion to spend \$180 million allotted under the CARES Act to create a grants competition for states to address students' technological needs related to COVID-19. One measure calls for states to develop "microgrants"—a moniker for vouchers – that individuals can use for private education services and technology equipment. These microgrants allow inequitable diversion of public funds away from public schools. The Administration has prioritized microgrants and other voucher programs despite public opposition (NSBAC, 2020) and poor academic results for students (Spector, 2017).

In June, the Department instructed public school districts to forgo federal guidance on how to hand over their emergency COVID-19 relief funds to private schools based on the number of students

from limited incomes. Since 2015, when the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became law, school districts were required to give to local private schools federal funds designated for serving high concentrations of students from families with limited incomes. But the Department issued a rule this summer attempting to require public schools to give away relief funds based instead on all students in private schools, regardless of their financial need. For instance, IDRA analysis showed that the new rule diverted an estimated additional \$38.7 million from Texas public school districts to private schools, with charter schools keeping 100% of their federal entitlement (Craven & Johnson, 2020). A federal judge recently sided with public school advocates to block the new guidance from taking effect.

Also in June, the Department lauded the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, which allows public funds to be spent in support of private religious schools even as public schools that serve the majority of the nation's students remain underfunded and face an economic downturn. The Court found that a Montana rule prohibiting religious schools from participating in a tax credit scholarship program discriminated against those schools and the families who wanted their children to attend them. The Court's decision opens the door for states to adopt or expand similar tax credit programs and other direct voucher programs. The ruling also empowers the Department to continue its push for "Education Freedom Scholarships," a federal dollar-for-dollar tax credit for individuals and businesses that give money to private school voucher funds.

Each of these actions contributes to private education strategies that undercut public schools to instead funnel money to private schools that admit only a select few. Undermining public



See IDRA's analysis:
Cutting Public School Relief Funds to Subsidize Private Schools
<https://idra.news/ESRuleIssueBrief>

schools' access to federal funding, including emergency relief funds, is to our collective detriment. Public schools remain the only free and open educational system that legally must serve all students, regardless of disability, race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, or religion.

The current COVID-19 crisis has made public schools' pivotal roles in our communities clearer than ever through their responses to feed our children, provide mobile hotspots in neighborhoods, and promote legal and healthcare information to families. Public schools do not just serve their enrolled students – they serve the whole community.

The pandemic also makes evident that we are all connected. Our personal health is only as good as our neighbor's health, and our children's educational success depends on their peers' success. With much uncertainty, one thing is clear: the only real way forward is to support steps toward the public good.

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Note: Citations online at <https://idra.news/nlSept20c>.

Every Scientist Named in the Texas Science Standards is a White Male

IDRA Recommends Accurate Inclusion of Scientific History

by Stephanie Garcia, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: The following is excerpted from the letter IDRA submitted to the Texas State Board of Education as it prepares to update the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Science.

A critical part of preparing students for success is teaching curricula that accurately portray the contributions of the diverse individuals and communities that are part of our collective story. As state board members consider revisions to the Science Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), IDRA urges inclusion of the scientific achievements of women and people of color – groups that are conspicuously and shamefully absent from the current standards. We also urge the board to confront social justice issues head-on – name them clearly, identify the scientists and scientific theories that have addressed or exacerbated injustices, and help students see science as a way to solve persistent social and systemic inequities.

Currently, every scientist named in the K-12 Texas TEKS is a white male. There is not a single contribution from a woman or scientist of color in the science standards for the State of Texas, where students of color make up about 72% of the public school population.

A recent study found that only 8% of scientists represented in textbooks (aligned to the standards) were people of color, resulting in a “significant underrepresentation” of Asian and Latina women, and no representation of Black women or Indigenous people (Wood, 2020). This portrayal of scientific history is patently inaccurate and extremely troubling.

As Texas State Board of Education members know from their work on the Mexican American Studies and African American Studies course standards, it is important for students to see themselves and their communities reflected in their coursework. And it is critical to equip teachers with the standards and materials to do their best work. Students and teachers are most successful,

and schools are safer, with culturally sustaining and truthful curricula and pedagogy.

As is true in every subject, research indicates that all students benefit from learning about diverse scientists who reflect their identities. These benefits include:

- Increased feelings of belonging in the science classrooms and in science fields (Garcia, 2019);
- Increased identity and interest in the subject area, cultural knowledge and academic self-concept (Moore Mensah, 2020); and
- Increased agency and civic engagement that connect to the science content in more meaningful ways (Byrd, 2006).

IDRA leads the IDRA EAC-South, one of four federally-funded equity assistance centers that provide training to schools, education agencies and teachers on issues related to race-, gender-, religion-, and national origin-based discrimination. We also coordinate the IDRA Texas Chief Science Officers (CSO) program, which empowers student leaders to connect with their communities and other CSO programs around the world to create a diverse pipeline of STEM leaders. Additionally, many IDRA staff are former educators with a keen understanding of the need for comprehensive TEKS that teachers across the state can build on to develop their curriculum.

From these vantage points, we have observed students struggling with making connections to the science content and the field. The current canon of white male scientists in the curricula makes it difficult for students to see themselves as scientists. When students cannot see themselves as scientists, they do not pursue careers in the sciences, and we are all denied the benefits of their creativity and brilliance.

As of 2019, only 17% of students in Texas selected the STEM endorsement and an even smaller number are graduating with this endorsement (TEA, 2019). Changes are immensely needed to
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When students cannot see themselves as scientists, they do not pursue careers in the sciences, and we are all denied the benefits of their creativity and brilliance.

(Every Scientist Named in the Texas Science Standards is a White Male, continued from Page 6)

strengthen the Texas K-12 STEM pipeline and students' overall success and trajectory in STEM. This work begins with cultivating students' STEM identities in K-12 classrooms.

In order to disrupt the current status quo and make explicit efforts to move toward equity and dismantle the systemic barriers our students continue to face, we must revise our K-12 science standards. Below are IDRA's recommendations for revisions to the K-12 science TEKS.

Directly confront social issues, such as racism and sexism, that exist in Texas' science standards and are present in today's STEM field. It is not a secret that social inequities are very present in science (historically and currently). Examples include medical research (unethical research that oppresses marginalized communities); men taking credit for women's contributions (the many "Hidden Figures" in science history); and people being denied rights because of their DNA (race, gender, ability and more). IDRA recommends the SBOE consult with an advisory group to collect feedback from communities and other experts about the contributions of historically marginalized groups.

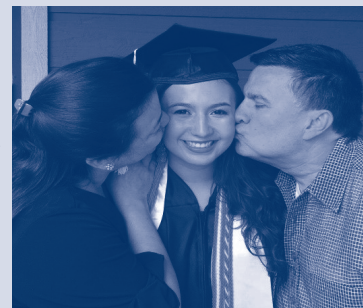
Create curricular connections to social issues to broaden students' understanding and increase authentic learning. Research shows that "a direct focus on race and culture in the classroom is beneficial" and avoiding this "promotes mistrust of the education system for students who are already aware of discrimination and leaves the others unprepared for the world outside of school" (Byrd, 2016). Middle and high school students have the cognitive ability and capacity to understand social inequities as they relate to the science field. We do them a serious disservice when we deny them the opportunity to learn about those inequities. IDRA recommends professional development for teachers to use to build their capacity to facilitate these conversations in science classrooms, making deliberate and authentic connections to science content.

Do not remove interdisciplinary connections, such as history, from our science standards. It is greatly beneficial to incorporate multiple disciplines and perspectives in a subject matter (Garcia, 2019). These connections leverage opportunities to incorporate culturally responsive practices and help students make meaningful connections to the curriculum, thus increasing academic performance (Byrd, 2016).

IDRA Names Two New Fellows

Meet Irene Gómez: IDRA's New Ethnic Studies and English Learner Research Fellow

Irene Gómez has joined the IDRA team as our newest Research Fellow. A daughter of Venezuelan immigrants, Irene has called Texas home for 14 years. As an undergraduate at the University of Texas, Irene led volunteers of a refugee coalition, coached Title I and first-generation students in writing, and research for equitable education policies. Post-graduation, Irene's time as a congressional fellow in Washington, D.C., youth civic engagement intern, and curriculum developer deepened her commitment to culturally sustaining content for students. Now a master's student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Irene will support IDRA in researching policies for high-quality ethnic studies classes and English learner education.



Meet Araceli García: IDRA's First Education Policy Fellow of Color

IDRA's new Education Policy Fellows of Color program kicks off with the naming of its first fellow, Araceli García. Araceli grew up on the South Side of San Antonio and is the daughter of Mexican immigrants. She is the first person in her family to attend college, and her passion for immigrants' rights stems from seeing her family and community insist on dignity while struggling to navigate their immigration and socioeconomic status. A graduate of Stanford University, Araceli has received several awards for her academic excellence and community service including the Newman Civic Fellow Award, Porras Award for Visionary Leadership, Chappell-Lougee Undergraduate Research Grant, and the Stanford Chicana/Latina Emerging Leader Award. Araceli graduated from Stanford with a bachelor's degree in Chicana/Latina Studies and a minor in education and credits her family's sacrifices for her success. In her fellowship with IDRA, she will focus on rights of English learner and immigrant students.



These connections also help to broaden perspectives and challenge misconceptions that science is only for white men.

Explicitly name those who have valuably contributed to the science field. Merely adding the word "diverse" to the eighth grade Science and Engineering Practices, as proposed (TEA, 2020) for example, is not an acceptable revision. There are many female scientists of color who can be incorporated in our science TEKS (Ignatofsky, 2016). This should not be an additive approach that only lists their names and briefly describes their contributions. There are authentic opportunities to connect their valuable work in the science field to our K-12 science content. It is not acceptable to erase their contributions from our science curriculum. Students' experiences in STEM coursework greatly impacts their STEM trajectories after high school, so this has

great implications for broadening representation in STEM degrees and careers (Johnson, 2016; Carlisle, 2020).

There are many women of color scientists who can be named in our K-12 science standards (see list: <https://idra.news/nlSept20d>).

We look forward to working with the board to expand access to equitable and excellent schools for all students, including future scientists.

Stephanie Garcia, Ph.D., is an IDRA education associate and directs the IDRA Texas Chief Science Officer program. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at stephanie.garcia@idra.org.

Note: Citations online at <https://idra.news/nlSept20d>.

Focus: Education Policy

(Legislative Sessions Constrained by COVID-19 Must Not Exclude Community Participation, continued from Page 2)

Recommendations to Expand Constituent Access During Legislative Sessions

- State legislatures should provide user-friendly, multilingual online platforms that enable people to testify, watch hearings and participate in meetings remotely. These platforms should be supported by personnel who are able to quickly respond to issues and answer questions from participants. If necessary, additional staff should be hired to operate the systems and ensure the state legislatures' tracking systems, like the Texas Legislature Online, are updated frequently with hearing and meeting notices and bill histories.
- All legislative offices should post daily meeting logs online if the Capitol is closed to most in-person visitors. The public should be able to easily see who is scheduling, and receiving, meetings with legislative offices at any time.
- Legislators must be intentional in their outreach to all communities in their districts, particularly those traditionally excluded from policymaking spaces, including people of color, people with limited wealth and incomes, and

immigrant individuals and families. Decisions that impact these constituencies should not be made without them.

- State legislatures should ensure translation services are available to assist people who testify in languages other than English, whether virtually or in person.
- Decisions to close Capitol buildings should be transparent and based on the guidance of public health experts, not on the political desires and whims of policymakers. If limited numbers of people are allowed to enter the building, that attendance should be randomized and not result in excluding the families, students and other education equity advocates who may not currently have direct access to lawmakers.
- Advocates and lobbyists with access to Capitol buildings and knowledge about the legislative process should work to ensure others have the same access and knowledge. Advocates should not push forward legislative changes without input from impacted communities and should insist on diverse working groups, meetings and hearings.

No matter what rules are put in place to close state Capitols or limit the scope or duration of legislative sessions, those who have always been granted access to lawmakers will continue to have that access – their personal connections and resources will guarantee that. We should think of policymaking as a critical system in our lives that, like education, housing or healthcare, is susceptible to systemic inequities. Therefore, the decisions about access during the pandemic should be made with a careful focus on ensuring equity and correcting outdated and discriminatory practices that keep historically-marginalized communities out of policymaking spaces.

To learn more about how IDRA works to expand access to state level policymaking, see our new Education Policy Fellows of Color program (<https://idra.news/EdPolicyFellowsofColor>).

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