



GRADUATION FOR ALL

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Seven Resolutions • www.idra.org • January 2009

Happy new year from all of us at IDRA! As we prepare for all that is next, Graduation for All brings you an at-a-glance review of key issues we need to tackle in 2009 along with an action agenda for school, community and family partners, and leaders.

What Henrik Ibsen once said still rings true, "A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm." What we achieve this year cannot rely on the actions of elected officials alone. Rather, we will shepherd in change through the coordinated mix of tiny and monumental actions by committed people in communities across the nation. Here's to your good health and fortitude and to our mutual, unwavering commitment to creating schools that work for all children.

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Schools and Communities in Action

● ● ● Seven Resolutions We Must Make and Keep for Kids ● ● ●

Resolution #1: Count All Students; Make Sure All Students Count

As 2008 drew to a close, the U.S. Department of Education set final regulations for a [uniform way to calculate graduation rates](#) across states. We're making progress on the issue. But a [2008 survey by the Data Quality Campaign](#) finds that just six states now have all 10 essential elements of a robust longitudinal data system.



Take Action: Be the voice for transparent counts and accountability in your community. Visit the [Data Quality Campaign](#) to find out how your state is faring, then press for all needed systems to be in place to count and account for every student. If you are a school leader, convert data to action by convening a school-community forum to set out a joint vision for students, look together at outcome data and form a plan for improving results. IDRA can help. For a model of how cross-sector, cross-race leaders have gathered for such forums as part of IDRA's Pathways to Graduation project in southern and southwestern states, see: [A Community Speaks - A Report on Little Rock's Coalition-Building for Education: Blueprint Dialogues for Action](#) or IDRA's [Blueprints for Action teamsite](#).

Resolution #2: Replace Silver Bullets with Sea Changes

Education Week's [Diplomas Count 2008](#) found that while graduation rates have "inched up" nationwide, still only 71 percent of ninth graders graduate with a diploma four years later. IDRA's most recent study of attrition shows that [eight Texas regions have higher school attrition rates than they did two decades ago](#). When one in three students doesn't graduate with a high school diploma, it's time to stop tinkering around the edges of the problem.

Take Action: Holding on to all students and preparing them for success calls for comprehensive action. We must make immediate changes to keep from losing students who are right now at risk of dropping out. But we must also transform teaching and learning so that all students thrive. For a model of coordinated action, visit IDRA's [Quality Schools Action Framework](#) or tune in to "[Action for School Change](#)" a Classnotes podcast episode that features IDRA president and CEO, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, describing the four elements needed for school success. In promoting systemic change, school-community-family partnerships are key. [Organized Communities, Stronger Schools](#), research findings from the Annenberg Institute, found that "successful [community] organizing strategies contributed to increased student attendance, improved standardized-test-score performance, and higher graduation rates and college-going aspirations in several sites."

Resolution #3: Value All Children, without Compromise

Research on IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, implemented in the United States and Brazil, shows that the single most important factor in keeping students in school is to ensure that there is at least one caring adult who values them, follows their progress and helps keep them on track. The results are evident: since the program's inception in 1984, over 98 percent of participating students stay in school. To date, the program has kept in school more than 25,000 young people who were previously considered at risk of dropping out.

Take Action: Refuse to define students in terms of deficits; instead, recognize and build on their strengths. To learn more about how to put a valuing model and service learning at the core of dropout prevention, visit the [Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program web site](#), listen in to: "[Learnings from the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program](#)," "[Dropout Prevention for Students with Special Needs](#)," "[Creating Leadership Opportunities for Students](#)," or visit "[Valuing Youth with Disabilities Educational Outcomes and the Art of Culture](#)."

Resolution #4: Start Early, But Don't Stop There

Investment in quality pre-K programs pays off, according to study after study including state data released by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI). In [Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation: Public Investment in High-Quality Prekindergarten](#), Robert G. Lynch reports that annual benefits of investing in pre-K education outstrip costs by more than 12 to 1. Lynch finds that the benefits don't fade over time: quality pre-K programs result in greater student success in school, higher graduation rates and job earnings.

Take Action: Support students from the start. To make the case in your community, [click here](#) for EPI factsheets on the costs and benefits of pre-K programs in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and [here](#) for data from Annie E. Casey's Kids Count Data Center. Beyond promoting access to early childhood education, press for high quality programs for children of all backgrounds. To learn more on how to transform early learning centers into "centers of excellence" visit: www.idra.org/Quality_Early_Education/Publications.

Resolution #5: Secure 21st Century Teaching Quality - for All Students

In spite of the emphasis on quality teaching built in to the No Child Left Behind Act, children in high-poverty schools in America are more likely to be taught English, science and mathematics by an out-of-field teacher than those in a low-poverty school. Teaching quality and student-teacher relationships are critical to success, but as education researcher Dr. Linda Darling Hammond asserted in an [interview with PBS](#), schools are still "constructed as though teaching doesn't matter."

Take Action: Take a lead role in promoting equity and 21st Century teaching quality in your district and state for all students. Help shape the conversation about teaching and learning for today's students and how this must be tied to professional development by visiting the Partnership for 21st Century Skills' "[Route 21](#)" [web site](#). To zero in on strengthening teaching quality, see: "[Seven Principles for Effective Professional Development for Diverse Schools](#)" by Dr. Abelardo Villarreal, director of Field Services at IDRA.

Resolution #6: Overcome Inequities

It is not news that we continue to face structural inequities in our public school system. As one example, citing "palpable injustice" in July 2008, Judge William Wayne Justice ruled that the state of Texas [failed to effectively educate secondary level English language learners](#) and to monitor school district compliance with the Equal Educational Opportunity Act. Texas is not alone. Education Week's [Quality Counts 2009: Portrait of a Population](#) points out that across the country, academic achievement gaps between English language learners and their peers are significant and persistent.

Take Action: Be an advocate in the capital, courtroom and classroom for quality schooling for every student. The basic rights of English language learners to a quality, equitable education are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, in federal and state legislation, and court rulings (EEO of 1974, Lau vs. Nichols of 1974, U.S. vs. Texas of 1970). For a review of court rulings that establish children's rights, visit: www.idra.org/mendezbrown/resources and "[A Framework for Effective Instruction of Secondary English Language Learners](#)" by Dr. María Robledo Montecel. To help schools and communities look together at questions of educational equity and create a plan of action, the IDRA [South Central Collaborative for Equity \(SCCE\)](#) has outlined [Six Goals of Educational Equity](#) (#1: Comparably high academic achievement and other student outcomes; #2: Equitable access and inclusion; #3: Equitable treatment; #4: Equitable opportunity to learn; #5: Equitable resources; #6: Accountability). You can use these as a yardstick to measure your progress or as a lightning rod to galvanize change.

Resolution #7: Open Pathways to College

We know that schools are most successful when they see high school graduation as a minimum milestone and look to prepare their students for the future beyond secondary school. At Ysleta ISD in El Paso, for example, kindergarteners don gowns and sashes naming their selected future university - an approach at the outset that is tied to the district's long-term goals for student achievement. But the future does not look so bright when students are not adequately prepared to succeed in college or find that college costs put this option out of reach. [Measuring Up 2008](#) national and state report cards on higher education awarded almost every state in the country an "F" in college affordability.

Take Action: Develop partnerships with local community colleges and universities, make sure all

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