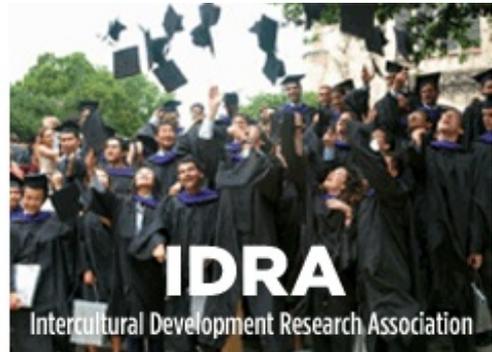




GRADUATION FOR ALL

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Dollars and Sense • www.idra.org • March 2011

"Education is not a luxury that can be taken away when times are hard...Our state is in a financial and revenue crisis. But defaulting on the state's responsibility to educate our students is not a solution."

- Dr. Maria Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO,

[IDRA E-News, February 2011](#)

Time to Take Stock. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has been keeping close tabs on how states are handling budget shortfalls. The Center reports that since 2008 in at least 34 states policymakers have sought to close funding gaps by making severe cuts to preK-12 education, public colleges and universities. School weeks are being shortened; teachers, librarians and counselors are seeing pink slips; bus services on rural routes are being cut; and crucial financial aid programs are on the chopping block.

Around the country core educational programs have already been cut and deeper cuts are on the way unless we can make clear that education is a staple, not a frill. This issue of Grad4All considers what cuts like these mean for students, families and schools; highlights how people are speaking out and urges everyone to promote education as a priority.

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Schools and Communities in Action

"Our states and communities bear the brunt of students' dropping out through costs to society, diminished quality of life, and—most important—the loss of productive, engaged citizens. This is not a problem that can be ignored until state economies improve." [National Conference of State Legislatures, A Path to Graduation for Every Child](#)



Defaulting on education hits low income families hardest, hurts everyone - Parents, teachers, students and advocates see this and are speaking out.

Since 2008, at least 46 states have "imposed cuts that hurt vulnerable residents and the economy," according to research by CBPP. California cut billions of dollars in K-12 aid to school districts and Arizona eliminated preschool for more than 4,000 kids. Low income families in Rhode Island saw cuts to K-12 education and Head Start Programs. School bus service was cut in Missouri. And youth in Michigan, Minnesota and New Mexico whose chances to go to college depend on grants and financial aid saw cuts to crucial college funding. [For the full report.](#)

As the US PIRG reports, cuts to the Pell Grant program just passed by the House of Representatives "slash the maximum award by \$845 for the students who can afford it the least...Millions of these students are already at the tipping point, many would be forced to drop out of school." [For the news release.](#)

Meanwhile, new research and tools show the importance of providing for equitable, excellent schooling:

Recent research by Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig (UT Austin) found that "test scores improve when urban schools increase operating expenditures, decrease student-teacher ratios and increase the number of bilingual certified teachers." [Heilig's work](#) looked at the impact of "inputs" on student achievement in large, urban elementary schools in Texas with primarily Latino/a student populations, using statistical models of Austin, Dallas and Houston.

Research by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett takes a global perspective. Their work "The

Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger,” examines how severe wealth disparities impact societies around the world and what it means to narrow the gaps. [For an interview by Tom Ashbrook on the authors' new research.](#)

The United Way's [Common Good Forecaster](#) helps to show how investing in education benefits our communities as a whole.

To examine the impact of school funding on educational opportunity, the U.S. Department of Education announced last month that it would be setting up the Equity and Excellence Commission, to be co-chaired by Christopher Edley and Reed Hastings. [To learn more about the Equity and Excellence Commission.](#)

Toolbox

“My fundamental question during the school finance effort was, ‘If money does not make a difference, why are the rich school districts fighting so hard to retain it?’” - Dr. José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D., [Courage to Connect - A Quality Schools Action Framework.](#)



Got Equity? In hard economic times, we should all share the burden of cutbacks, right? It seems like a no-brainer. But what if some have borne the brunt of hard times all along? That is certainly the case when it comes to the way we fund public schools. Despite grand statements about the importance of education, when it comes down to it, we still fund schools like some kids matter more than others. In some parts of the country, high schools separated by just a few miles are divided by tens of thousands of dollars in per pupil spending.

If you happen to be a parent in Wyoming, your state provides more than two-and-a-half times the amount of per pupil funding than if live in Tennessee, according to research by Rutgers University and the Education Law Center. And that same study found that twenty states have regressive funding systems, that is, they provide high-poverty districts less state and local revenue than low-poverty districts.

Resources for Assessing the State of Equity in Your State:
[Funding Fairness Report](#)
[Federal Budget Project](#)

Also see: [Fair Funding for the Common Good on IDRA's website](#)

Mark Your Calendars:

March 28, 2011 Latino Education Advocacy Days Summit, convened by the College of Education at California State University San Bernardino. [To learn more or host a viewing party.](#)

April 13 - 14, 2011 [Annual IDRA La Semana del Niño Parent Institute and Pre-Conference for Administrators and Parent Educators.](#)

July 28, 2011 - July 31, 2011 [Save Our Schools Days of Action](#), with events in D.C. and around the country, including workshops, a film festival, speakers and educational events.

Youth Voices

Youth and Youth Advocates Ask the Tough Questions - [from SparkAction's Ask Arne Duncan initiative...](#)

“Dear Mr. Duncan: I attend an urban public high school in a district with a high poverty rate. Since school funding is based on property taxes, our per-pupil funding is much lower than that of the surrounding, more affluent suburban districts. But students in my district have higher needs than many of those suburban students, and their families are less well able to meet those needs privately. This seems to be a root cause of inequity in public education. How would you propose correcting that inequity?”



“Secretary Duncan, Why are education or educational programs always the first to get cut whenever there is a budget crisis? Also teachers are being [laid off], and the number of people in classrooms are getting larger. What are you going to do to resolve these problems?”

“How can we possibly close the achievement gap if children of poverty have no access to books, the internet and strong school library with a credentialed school librarian and library aide?”

- Excerpts from questions submitted to *Ask Arne Duncan*, an online youth forum created by SparkAction at the Forum for Youth Investment. IDRA partnered with SparkAction to get the word out about this forum. Secretary Duncan agreed to field the top-rated questions at the U.S. Department of Education national youth summit convened in Washington, DC, on February 26, 2011. [To see more questions for Secretary Duncan and stream the summit.](#)

The [Intercultural Development Research Association](#) is an independent, private non-profit organization whose mission is to create schools that work for all children. [To follow IDRA's Grad4All on Facebook.](#)

We want to hear from you! Have a story of school-community partnership that's raising graduation rates? We welcome your comments, questions and suggestions at gradforall@idra.org. Forward to a Friend! Feel free to [share Grad4All](#) with anyone who shares your passion for every student's success.

Thanks for reading!

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