



# GRADUATION FOR ALL

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## Excellence for English Language Learners • [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) • May 2012

In roughly a decade, the number of English language learners enrolled in U.S. public schools has increased by more than [50 percent](#), from 3.5 million to 5.3 million. But nationally, too few schools have been able to keep pace in improving learning outcomes for children who are learning English. Average mathematics scores for eighth-grade English language learners, for example, were higher in 2011 than in 1996 but showed little improvement since 2009. And [substantial gaps](#) persist between ELL and non-ELL students.

While English learners are among the fastest growing student groups in the country, information on graduation rates of ELLs remains "[a mystery](#)" in many states; depending on the district, anywhere from 20 percent to 70 percent of English learners could be graduating from high school.

This issue of Graduation for All highlights a set of strategies and resources that educators, parents and community members are using to make a difference.

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## Schools and Communities in Action

**#1: First Books: Quality Bilingual Education and Materials for 3- and 4-year olds.** Grounded in research and collaboration with early childhood centers, IDRA has developed a set of supplementary curricula and illustrated bilingual big books and small readers now used in more than a dozen school districts to improve teaching and learning for children who are English language learners. Semillitas de aprendizaje™ focuses on the creation of school-home relationships of mutual value and respect, bilingual materials and curricula that reflect children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and curricula that nurtures and prepares students to succeed.



### Want to learn more? Visit:

- [Bilingual Stories for Young Learners](#), a podcast conversation with IDRA's Juanita García, Ph.D., and Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., on how they are using Semillitas de aprendizaje™ with teachers in alignment with Head Start competencies and Ellen Galinsky's seven life skills every child needs.
- A sample of a [Flash-animated big book](#) and click here for more information on the [full series](#).

**#2: Math and Science for English Language Learners.** At a time when we need more students to excel in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) areas, we are not seeing the dramatic improvement we need in achievement, particularly among English learners. While some are quick to conclude a lack of interest or motivation on the part of the students themselves, Veronica Betancourt, M.A., and Kristin Grayson, M.Ed., IDRA education associates, take a different view. They have witnessed great improvements in science skills among secondary English learners by working with teachers to use a set of seven strategies for delivering instruction differently. In [Science Success for English Learners](#), Veronica and Kristin give an overview of these seven strategies. Veronica and Kristin are interviewed by Bradley Scott, Ph.D., director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity.

How can teachers organize instruction in ways that support both the learning of science and mathematics and the learning of English? How are teachers modeling and creating opportunities

for children who are learning English to develop and use academic language to interpret and analyze charts and graphs and data across the curriculum? These and other questions are the subjects of:

- [Science for English Learners](#), featuring a conversation with Veronica Betancourt, M.A.
- [Creating a STEM Focused School](#), a conversation with Robert Dingenary, ninth grade English teacher, on forming his school's STEM club
- [Data and Vocabulary in Math and Science](#), an interview with Paula Johnson, M.A., and Veronica Betancourt, M.A.

**#3: Building Opportunity through Dual Language.** Several decades of research and experience have shown that bilingual education is the best way to teach a student English while also teaching other subjects, like math and science. Dual language programs are a powerful type of bilingual education that serves English learners and English speakers with the goal of building literacy in two languages.

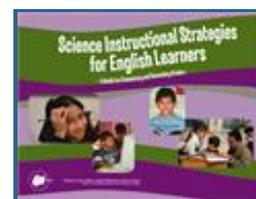
In [Building Opportunity through Dual Language](#), (Classnotes podcast) Adela Solís, Ph.D., discusses the growth of dual language programs across the country and important factors that must be in place. For another resource, visit: [Two-Way Dual Language Immersion Program](#) (article) by Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.

**#4: Parent Partners/Parent Leaders.** The plenary and breakout rooms are brimming with people, energy and ideas as parents and educators gather during the heart of San Antonio's Fiesta week for IDRA's Annual *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute™. This event provides one of the nation's only gathering places focused on the role of families as leaders and key partners with schools in promoting educational excellence for English language learners. It is a conference with a twist: parents take the podium, presenting to other parents on what works. Lessons learned from past institutes are captured in podcast interviews and conversations with organizers and participants:

- [Parent Institutes for Education](#) featuring Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., director of IDRA's Family Leadership in Education Center gives highlights from IDRA's recent *La Semana del Niño* Parent Institute™, where parents and school leaders shared stories and ideas about early childhood education, literacy in the home, bilingual/ESL instruction, dropout prevention, high school graduation requirements, and parent rights through Title I.
- [Parents as Leaders in Education](#) featuring a conversation with Frances Guzmán, M.Ed., sharing examples of parent leadership in action from a recent Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Parent Institute™, in which groups of parents from several school districts led sessions for each other on multiple education topics.
- [Reflections from Early Childhood Institute Attendees](#), hosted by Christie Goodman, APR, covers interviews with three participants from IDRA's Annual *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute™: Toni Rodríguez from Texas, Michel Cristina from Louisiana, and Pam Logan from Michigan.

## Toolbox

[Science Instructional Strategies for English Learners ~ A Guide for Elementary and Secondary Grades](#). This guide is designed to be a practical resource for elementary and secondary teachers who are determined to meet the needs of the diverse populations of students they serve. The guide presents seven research-based strategies for instruction of English learners in science. It is divided into four sections – teaching learning premises (theoretical underpinnings for each strategy); research support; essential teacher competencies (pedagogical skills necessary for effective implementation of each strategy); steps for strategy implementation – along with a matrix of techniques for implementation.



## Youth Voices

*Sometimes I go home with the faces of my students in my thoughts. When I arrive home, I plan what I am going to help them with the following day. In being in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I have learned to be more responsible. And the way I think of education and the need to continue in school has transformed from a "maybe" to a "yes I can." It motivates me that my tutees want to follow my example. Frequently, they say to me, "Wendy, when I grow up, I want to be like you."*

- Wendy Ramírez, Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutor, Middle School First Place, Dr. Javier

Sáenz Middle School, La Joya ISD, 2010 Essay Contest. [See the full essay.](#) [Learn more about the program.](#)

**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](mailto:gradforall@idra.org).

A special thank you to Grant Kreegel for his assistance with the translation of this issue of Graduation for All. This spring, Grant graduated with B.A. in Spanish (cum laude) from Trinity University. Congratulations, Grant!



**From all of us at IDRA: Congratulations to the graduating class of 2012!**

Thanks for reading!

Laurie Posner

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