



# GRADUATION FOR ALL

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## Education and the American Dream • [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) • September 2011

**The American Dream promises “a system of opportunity, so that regardless of background each individual has an equal chance to prosper.”** - H.B. Johnson, *The American Dream and the Power of Wealth*

Earlier this spring, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities found that in the face of fiscal crisis, at least 46 states had made budget cuts that [“hurt vulnerable residents and the economy.”](#) Of these, 43 states implemented cuts to public college and universities or increased college tuition to compensate for funding shortfalls. Many states cut need-based financial aid programs for students; others raised tuition costs. Cuts like these might make more sense if the nation were not already facing persistent—and in some ways, growing—disparities in college participation. Consider the facts:

- In almost every year since 1972, college enrollment of youth from the lowest-income families has trailed enrollment of youth from the highest income families [by 20 percentage points](#).
- Since 1998, college [enrollment rates for middle-income families have actually declined](#) (from 63 to 61 percent).
- To send one child to a four-year college, low-income families pay or borrow [the equivalent of three-fourths of their family income](#).

At the same time, around the country, there is growing call for recognizing that education is at the core of individual, family and national vitality—and that we need to invest in opportunity and preparation that gives all youth, regardless of means, a meaningful shot at going to college. This issue of *Graduation for All* shares resources and stories about this work. As always we welcome your comments, questions and input at [gradforall@idra.org](mailto:gradforall@idra.org).

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## Schools and Communities in Action

**Successful South LA Press for College Prep Curriculum.** Serving over 700,000 students, Los Angeles Unified School District is one of the largest school districts in the country. Over 70 percent of students in the district are Latino, 11 percent are African American and 38 percent are English language learners. In serving the diverse communities of South LA, the district historically has been plagued by disparities both in overall resources and resource allocation. Graduation rates in district high schools have ranged from around 50 to 63 percent, according to the California Dropout Research Project. These were among the concerns that Community Coalition took up, when, in 2000, organizers shifted from a focus on facilities to a campaign to increase student access to college preparation.



Their successful effort to pass a college-preparatory curriculum for LAUSD students is profiled in “Securing a College Prep Curriculum for All Students” as part of the Annenberg Institute’s Organized Communities/Stronger Schools Series. The Institute found that the LA campaign had six key components that can be used by other communities, organizing for change:

- (1) mobilization of students, parents, and communities;
- (2) using data to dictate action;
- (3) committing to new levels of collaboration;
- (4) active media engagement;
- (5) targeting decision-makers and compromise; and
- (6) understanding future challenges to implementation.

To learn more about this and other community-based efforts, visit:

[Securing a College Prep Curriculum](#) and [The Strengths and Challenges of Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy](#)

**Pell Grant Pulls Through.** It was touch-and-go for the better part of the year for the Pell Grant program, federal aid that annually helps over 9 million students attend college. Fending off budget proposals that would have cut Pell awards by as much as 45 percent, limited eligibility or capped grants at \$3,040 per student, Pell proponents fought for an award that has, since its early years, helped provide a path for millions of low-income, minority first-generation students to go to college. In 2007-08, more than a third of Pell grantees were students whose parents had completed high school or less, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

This is why thousands of students and families around the country spoke out to preserve Pell grants and are likely to keep fighting for the program. Education Trust gathered some of the stories of why college aid matters so much. Here's one: "I am currently entering into my final year as a student at Howard University, and my life has forever been changed because of my education here. I would not be able to celebrate my soon to be graduation if it were not for Pell Grants."

[For more stories, visit Education Trust.](#)

For more information on the federal Pell Grant program, visit the [2009-10 End of Year Report](#) published by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education.

To learn more about trends in Pell funding, visit the [National Center on Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#).

**Go Big: Lumina's Goal 2025.** Citing the growth of the knowledge economy and the links between higher education, job creation and prosperity, the Lumina Foundation has proposed a "Big Goal" of increasing the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025. Reaching Goal 2025, the foundation asserts, calls on us to increase college participation and attainment for all students and close gaps for underrepresented groups through a three-part strategy: (1) Students are prepared academically, financially and socially for success in education beyond high school; (2) Higher education completion rates improve significantly; and (3) Higher education productivity increases to expand capacity and serve more students. [To learn more about Goal 2025.](#)

To see snapshots on how each state is currently faring in degree attainment and state-by-state targets to reach a national 60 percent goal, [visit A Stronger Nation.](#)

**Go Local.** GenTX. Generation Texas (GenTX), which kicked off last year in San Antonio and Fort Worth, is a grassroots project of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), started with funding from a federal College Access Challenge Grant. GenTX aims to "bring together state and local resources to support Texas public school students and their families in understanding and taking the necessary actions to prepare for, apply to, and secure the necessary financial aid to pursue college or career education beyond high school." Today, Texas trails national average in degree attainment; the state [ranks 40th](#) in the percentage of 25 to 34 year olds with an AA degree or higher. Analysts project that if the state of Texas were to achieve THECB's Closing the Gaps goals, it could expect to see [an increase in annual output of \\$194.5 billion.](#)

[To find out more about the GenTX campaign.](#)

## Toolbox

**Visit IDRA's award-winning Classnotes Podcast series** for conversations on how high schools can build bridges to college, and how schools, families and youth can partner to help students prepare for and succeed in college.

- In [College Access for Low-Income and Minority Students](#), Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., director of the IDRA Texas Parent Information and Resource Center, gives examples of how K-12 schools can actively support college access for their students.
- In [College for All](#), Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., describes an effort that built relationships between high schools and a local university to remove barriers of school-level low expectations, student academic preparation and college-level instruction.



[Achieve College ~ A Guide for College Access / ¡Hacia Adelante! ~ Una Guía para Estudiantes, Familias y Educadores](#)

This newly-updated bilingual (English/Spanish) guide by Rosana Rodríguez, Ph.D., Nilka Avilés,

Ed.D., and Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D. promotes a collaborative approach to goal-setting and decision-making among students, family members and their schools. It includes four steps: getting ready in high school, making a good choice of a college, applying early to several colleges, and planning to get financial help.

### **Es El Momento - Univision Campaign**

Visit Univision's online [Es El Momento](#) campaign for Spanish-language resources for families (including video segments and an interactive resource map) on college preparation and enrollment. IDRA's President, Dr. María Robledo Montecel, is an advisor to the campaign.

### **Did you know...(more quick facts):**

- The U.S. [ranks 17th in graduation rates and 14th in college graduation rates.](#)
- In the past 20 years, [only households headed by a college graduate saw their incomes rise.](#)

## **Youth Voices**

**"I didn't think I could get into college and now I do."** - Joseph Cuellar, senior, after participating as a Youth Tekie and peer counselor in IDRA's TECNO 2.0 project. To hear an interview with him and the team of Youth Tekies, visit: [High School Youth Tekies on College Access.](#)

**"I'm Having an Out of Money Experience,"** college student's t-shirt, first week of classes at St. Mary's University.

Thanks to Marcella Zapata, an intern with the Southern Education Foundation's Southern Education Leadership Initiative, who worked with IDRA this summer, for her contributions to this edition of Graduation for All. Thanks also to Bernard Kauffman who worked with IDRA this summer and begins his first year of college this fall. We wish each them the best in their studies.

And thanks to you, too, for reading. All our wishes for a great school year.

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