



GRADUATION FOR ALL

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Annual Attrition Study Findings • www.idra.org • October 2009

Chronically-high dropout rates demand bold action. Today, IDRA releases its 2008-09 study of attrition in Texas public schools. It is the 24th such study, using a consistent cohort methodology that affords us a longitudinal look at two and a half decades of data. Key findings are as follows:

1. **Nearly one in three students (31 percent) in the state is lost to attrition.** Although statewide attrition rates have declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 31 percent in 2008-09—movement in the right direction—we have still lost 125,508 youth from school enrollment.
2. **The “Graduation Gap” persists.** Almost everyone has heard of the achievement gap but another gap also demands our attention: the graduation gap. In 1985-86, there was a 7-percentage point gap in attrition rates between White students and African American students. Today that difference has grown to an 18-point gap. The gap between White and Hispanic students has also widened, from 18 to 25 percentage points.
3. **Attrition rates for male students remain at 35 percent in 2008-09** – the same rate at which boys were lost from school enrollment in 1985-86. The attrition of female students is on the decline, but over one in four 9th-grade girls (27 percent) still does not graduate with a diploma four years later.

For complete findings from the 2008-09 IDRA Texas Public School Attrition Study, visit [IDRA's press room and attrition research center online](#).

Nationwide, 1.3 million lost. Like Texas, the nation as a whole has seen slight improvements in dropout trends in recent years. But gains have come at a snail's pace: graduation rates are improving at just [three-tenths of a point](#) annually. The hard but undeniable fact is that in 2009, we are graduating only seven in ten high school students on time with a diploma. All told, [1.3 million students](#) are lost from school enrollment every year, or almost 7,200 students every day, according to the most recent research by Editorial Projects in Education. And graduation gaps persist. Students from low-income families, for example, were “[10 times more likely](#) to drop out of high school between 2006 and 2007 than were students living in high-income families” according to NCES.

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Schools and Communities in Action

Together, we can and must make a difference. But no silver-bullet solution will turn the tide. We must take up a range of sound school- and community-based strategies and public policies; work together, engaging school, family, business and community members; and use quality data and information to make sure that what we do matters. This issue of *Graduation for All* highlights three key directions you can take. They are offered as broad directions—rather than specific, discrete steps—with the view that the pace of change calls for much bolder action. You can count on us to continue to send you many more resources, research findings, and best practices in upcoming editions. As always, we want to hear from you. We welcome your comments, stories and insights at gradforall@idra.org.



Three Key Directions:

#1: Know the Issue. Knowledge is power. Whether you are a school, community or family leader, you can begin to take hold of the issue when you have the facts. Find out about dropout

rates in your district, county, or state. Here are a few good resources to have at hand:

For longitudinal data and attrition rates for every county in the state of Texas, visit IDRA's website: www.idra.org/Research/Attrition/.

- For a report on graduation rates in your state, see: [High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States](#) (NCES, 2009). Here you will find, for example, that for the class of 2005-06, the averaged freshman graduation rate (AFGR) across 48 states ranged from a low of 55.8 percent in Nevada to a high of 87.5 percent in Wisconsin. In ten states—Alabama, Alaska, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, and New York—AFGR rates were below 70 percent.
- For a map of graduation rates for every school district, visit [EPE's Research Center online](#).

Still, a daunting mix of data can keep people from shaping a plan of action. For help getting started or unstuck, visit: [What your Community can do to End its Drop-Out Crisis](#) by Johns Hopkins University.

...then Call for Change. How are dropout rates affecting young people in your community? What is the cost of the status quo in your community and state? Conversely, how would turning this issue around improve lives individually and collectively? A 2009 issue brief by the Alliance for Excellent Education finds that on average students who dropped out of high school earned \$9,634 less annually in 2005 than their graduating peers. In a job market already punishing for so many, youth who dropped out saw unemployment rates of 15.4 percent in July 2009. The report goes on to find that the cumulative impact for the nation of losing 1.3 million students a year is “staggering” but that taking action would yield dramatic benefits for individuals and the country as a whole. For the full brief, visit: www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf

#2: Take a Stand. Set your sights on graduation for all and beyond. A recent study by Civic Enterprises found that 35 percent of teachers and 24 percent of principals view dropouts as “[a minor problem or no problem at all](#).” Denying the dropout issue and its impact on youth nets us nothing. If you are a school leader or school board member, buck the trend by establishing a clear and unequivocal vision of graduating all students, prepared for their future. For resources, visit: [Diplomas Count 2009: Broader Horizons](#), where you can find out how 2,200 school districts pressed for progress and 20 states began to formalize definitions and a roadmap for college-readiness and see “[California High Schools That Beat the Odds in High School Graduation](#)” for research on six schools that are achieving graduation rates of 85 to 100 percent. You might also find it useful to see: “[principles for policymakers](#)” and school leaders.

#3: Adopt a Framework for Action. Many otherwise well-intentioned efforts to address the dropout issue are scuttled for various reasons: (1) they focus too discretely on programs, without altering school fundamentals like teaching and curriculum quality or student and family engagement; (2) they are too diffuse, excluding the use of data and information to assess what changes are needed most and to evaluate the value and impact of changes; or (3) they engage family and community leadership, but only for a rally or one-time town hall meeting.

To help school, community, family and business leaders to initiate and guide change, IDRA published the [Quality Schools Action Framework](#). This empirically-based change model incorporates both student- and school-level indicators that guide meaningful school reform. To learn about the model and to adopt this framework for change visit: [Holding On to the Goal of Quality Education for Every Child](#), an article by IDRA President and CEO, María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D. Or, *Listen In!* to [School Change Strategies](#), a conversation with Dr. Montecel on how schools and communities can make change happen through school and community capacity building and coalition-building. This Classnotes podcast is the third in a three-part series.

Toolbox

Resources to Take on the Graduation Gap

Listen In! to: “[Helping Schools Address Issues of Race](#),” an IDRA Classnotes podcast featuring a conversation with Bradley Scott, Ph.D., director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity. Dr. Scott provides an overview of both national progress and persistent problems in achieving equity with respect to race in public education today and describes how federally-funded equity assistance centers can help school leaders and communities achieve equity.

Also, visit: “[Six Goals of Educational Equity](#),” where you will find a framework developed by the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity that schools and communities can use together to build a plan of action for ensuring that children of all backgrounds have the opportunity to graduate and excel. IDRA's SCCE serves school districts in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. For links to the national network of equity assistance centers around the country (funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act)

and to find a center near you, visit [IDRA SCCE](#) online.

For more tools and resources, visit IDRA's [School Holding Power action page](#), where you'll find policy principles, strategies for individuals and communities, and action steps for parents (in English and Spanish).

Youth Voices

"My freshman class in high school was roughly 325 students. Approximately 150 students graduated and even fewer went directly into college. My school was segregated into two main groups: the college bound students and the students on the path for vocational school. It was no surprise that most students that dropped out were the ones restricted to the vocational track...How do we break a cycle so interwoven in our society? Just like my high school friends, many students struggle to see a life past their front porch." – Adam Perez, Youth Radio, 2009



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

We want to hear from you! Have a story of school-community partnership that's raising graduation rates? Let us hear from you. To submit questions or comments, send e-mail to gradforall@idra.org.

Tell a friend. Feel free to [forward Grad4All](#) to anyone who shares a passion for every student's success.

Thanks for reading!

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