



GRADUATION FOR ALL

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This January issue starts off the new year right by sharing as many award-winning essays from IDRA's *2010 National Essay Contest for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program* as we could pack into one edition. And if you visit this edition's Youth Voices section, you'll find a special podcast interview with a cadre of youth *Tekies*, students who provided peer guidance on college-going to over 600 high school students in San Antonio, Texas.

Across the board, students remind us why valuing youth matters, what youth leadership in learning can mean, and why--even in these lean times--we must not pull back but press forward in promoting educational excellence and equity for all.

[Graduation for All is now on Facebook - click here to visit us there.](#)

Schools and Communities in Action

I made sure that by 9:10am he felt like a somebody(From the award-winning essay by Andre Merritt, Cumberland County Schools in North Carolina) "It was scary, horrifying because this 10-year old boy that I only knew for maybe a month or two, was acting the exact way I acted when I was his age...He was my 'mini-me.' No one understood him. He saw himself as a nobody, a failure, even a mistake. I made sure that by 9:10 a.m. he felt like a somebody, a winner and a blessing. I made sure that I encouraged him to never give up and to always do his best no matter what. I am grateful that I could make a difference in the lives of our future generation, because they have certainly made a difference in mine."



I am important to someone (From the award winning essay by Valeria Acevedo, La Joya ISD in Texas) "One sunny day, I found myself sitting on a yellow school bus. I was headed toward an elementary school. I walked into a classroom full of students, they all turned and stared at me. I thought to myself, 'I wish I would have never stepped in.' One hour was passing, every minute was another fast beat in my heart... As the days were going, I felt a little bit better. There was more confidence in myself. Being with my tutees made me know that I am important to someone in life. There were so many feelings at times, when I was sad my tutees would cheer me up, they became the light of my days."

I am proud to show people...what I worked hard for(From the award-winning essay Kwame Weatherall, Houston ISD, Texas) "When my mother and I took one step and moved to Houston and I discovered the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, things began to change for me. I finally started listening to my parents. For the first time ever, I am proud to show people my grades and tell people what I worked hard for."

I realize that staying in school is good for my future(From the award-winning essay by Wendy Ramirez, La Joya ISD in Texas) "Since I entered the program, I have thought about the future and how I have helped the tutees. In these thoughts, I have included myself and the changes in me. Before, I thought that staying in school was a waste of time, that my brothers did not need my assistance and that they should move ahead on their own. But all those thoughts changed since I entered this program. Now, I realize that staying in school is good for my future and for those who surround me."

- [To visit all of 2010 award-winning essays](#)
- [Para ver un ensayo premiado presentado en español](#)

[To learn more about how IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program can help your district keep students in school](#)

For a teleseminar on the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program produced as part of the [Solutions to the Dropout Crisis Problem](#) by Clemson University Radio Productions in partnership with [NDPC/N](#)

Toolbox

Visit “Conversations” produced by KLRN and powered by PBS video to learn why former San Antonio City Councilmember, Maria Berriozabal, [joined youth in pressing for the Dream Act](#). From the interview: “My story is like so many other people...people who work hard to make life better for the children...and people of great faith.”



For a host of new resources on Student Success, visit [the latest issue of IDRA's Newsletter Plus](#), where you will find research articles, news, and multi-media presentations.

Youth Voices

Listen In! to [High School Youth Tekies on College Access](#), a Classnotes podcast in which Aurelio Montemayor and Hector Bojorquez interview four high school students (participants in IDRA's TECNO 2.0 project) on how they engaged with 600 of their peers to help them apply for college. From the interview: “You have to let [students] know that college is not as impossible as everyone says it is.”



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

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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