



GRADUATION FOR ALL

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Making a Difference: Middle School • www.idra.org • February 2010

The move from middle to high school could be a great time in a student's life. It's a chance for students to stretch out and test out what they've learned and to set the stage for all that is next. But a huge number of students is lost from school at that pivotal point. Over a third of all students who drop out are, in fact, lost in 9th grade. It turns out that zip code—where you happen to be born and go to school—is a big factor. "More than 40 percent of the student loss in high-poverty districts occurs at the 9th grade, compared with 27 percent in low-poverty settings," according to research by Editorial Projects in Education.

If we want to make sure that youth have access to a great education, wherever they live, we need to start far earlier than high school. This issue of *Graduation for All* focuses on middle school, offering several resources to help you in your work.

Schools and Communities in Action

Middle School Matters. Educators and researchers have long known that dropping out does not happen overnight. The process of becoming disengaged from school—whether academically, socially, emotionally, or all three—typically takes time. A recent study of student cohorts in Philadelphia confirms this finding and goes on to find that sixth grade students who failed English/reading or math who had attended school less than 80% of the time or had received an unsatisfactory behavior grade in a core course "had only a 10% to 20% chance of graduating on time." In a policy brief on the study, Dr. Robert Balfanz recommends three key areas that need particular attention: recognizing absenteeism early, reaching out to students who are absent and separating attendance from course performance; engaging students cognitively, socially and academically; making sure all students receive high quality instruction and curricula; and—when support is needed—providing the right kind of support early on. To learn more, visit: [Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path](#).



Student Perspective as Key to Engagement. In "Youth Matters" (an IDRA Newsletter article), Josie Danini Cortez, M.A., points out that the best way to engage students is to "first acknowledge they have a voice and truly believe that what students have to say about their education matters." For the full article online, visit: www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/January_2010_Curriculum_Quality/Youth_Matters/

9th Grade is Pivotal. IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a cross-age dropout prevention program, with a track record of keeping 98 percent of participants in schools. The program works by valuing youth who are at risk of dropping out by engaging them as tutors of younger students. Since the late 1980s, the program has focused on engaging student tutors starting in middle school, based on research by IDRA that found that half of Hispanic students in Texas were lost from school before reaching ninth grade. A new publication captures seven vivid lessons from the transnational implementation of this program, sharing the voices of teachers, parents, and the youth tutors that make this program work. To learn more, visit [Continuities - Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program](#).

Or *Listen In!* to "[Continuities with Lessons in Dropout Prevention](#)" a podcast conversation with IDRA president and CEO, María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., on how lessons from the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program can serve as a guide and catalyst for future actions to transform education in this country.

Toolbox

Commemorate Black History Month...“Beyond Heroes and Holidays.” Working to make sure that Black history is recognized and integrated into the curriculum and culture of your school? Take a page from E. Lee, D. Menkart and M. Okazawa-Rey, whose book “Beyond Heroes and Holidays,” points out that treating racial, ethnic and cultural diversity as “additive content” to a given curriculum is a superficial shift at best, and trivializing at worst. As author Sonia Nieto writes: “The most common understanding of multicultural education is that it consists largely of additive content rather than of structural changes.” To shift the focus to lasting, structural change, visit “[Helping Schools Address Issues of Race](#),” a podcast conversation with Dr. Bradley Scott, director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity, on how attitudes toward race manifest in school outcomes and what public schools can and must do to make changes.

Middle School. In “[Middle School—The Critical Link in Dropout Prevention](#)” (video clip) Dr. Joyce Stallworth, senior associate dean of the College of Education at the University of Alabama discusses the importance of middle school in keeping students in school.

More Resources on Tap. You will find a host of new resources on engaging students and strengthening teaching and curriculum quality at your school at IDRA’s Newsletter Plus. A web-based supplement to the IDRA Newsletter, you can use this feature to view videos, hear podcasts and get resources related to each article. It is now free and open to the public without registration. Visit Newsletter Plus at: www.idra.org/newsletterplus/January_2010/

Youth Voices

“A lot of people believe that once you grow up in a bad neighborhood surrounded by bad influences, you will become one yourself. It is hard to break that cycle. If it wasn’t for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program maybe I would have just become another statistic and not the person you see here today. When you are that age and you are given that type of responsibility, it makes you yearn for more and it makes you want to become something in life. Now I am a police officer for the city of McAllen, Texas. The best thing about my job is helping those in need.” - Pablo López, former tutor, Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program ([reprinted from the Illinois Business Journal in Continuities](#)).



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. 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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