



GRADUATION FOR ALL

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Canton Youth Picture Pathways • www.idra.org • March 2012

Mississippi faces a major challenge. About four in ten high school students do not graduate on time with a diploma—among the lowest graduation rates in the country according to the National Center on Education Statistics. Looking at public education across the Southern states, the Southern Education Foundation finds that the need for statewide preK in Mississippi may well be intertwined with this challenge: [one in 14 kindergarteners and one in 15 first graders have to repeat their grade](#). But in tackling the need for statewide preK, SEF points out, the state can draw on several existing assets, including Head Start programs, the new Early Childhood Advisory Council, “Building Blocks” pilot and preK classes offered by most local school districts—and the long-term benefit will far outweigh short-term cost.

An expanded commitment to invest in education for all students, even in lean times, could gain critical support from local, grassroots family, community and education leaders—and students themselves—who are examining the state of education in Mississippi and taking up the call for the change. This issue of Graduation for All spotlights some of their efforts.

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Schools and Communities in Action

Canton Youth Picture Pathways to College. The blooms were already out on the Bradford pear trees last month when students from Canton Public Schools presented to members of the church and civic community, families, and the mayor on their vision for expanding pathways to high school graduation and college. Convened at South Liberty Missionary Baptist Church on East Dinkins, the event was part of a broader set of community-based dialogues on how, today to fulfill the promises of landmark civil rights decisions, like *Brown vs. Board of Education* and *Mendez vs. Westminster*.



For students, the question was personal and specific—and they expressed their vision in documentary photographs and presentations. Opening paths to college means overcoming costs and barriers to transportation; juggling family responsibilities; learning about what is possible, affordable, and unknown. Supports that matter include: the encouragement of their teacher; information about college options, how to apply, requirements, and how to pay for college; valuing of higher education by a teacher or family member; help in maintaining a steady focus on higher education; information about college from someone who has gone to college and succeeded and local role models in various careers; and encouragement from local faith leaders & congregations.

"There is no more important thing to be doing on a Saturday than hearing the perspectives of youth about education" - Dr. William Truly, Mayor (pictured above with participating Canton High School students and their teacher, Ms. Anderson).

The project, led by IDRA in collaboration with the nonprofit Critical Exposure, Canton Public School District and South Liberty Baptist Church, with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, builds on a framework for community blueprint meetings that engage youth, community, family and school leaders in community-based dialogues and planning to improve public education.

To find out more about how community, school and youth leaders are using cross-race dialogues and action planning and for a launchkit on Fulfilling the Promise:

Visit [Ideas for Fulfilling the Promise - IDRA's Mendez and Brown Website](#)

Hear [Latino and African-American Communities Leading for School Reform](#), an IDRA Classnotes podcast, featuring a conversation about the initiative with Dr. Rosana Rodríguez and Dr. Bradley Scott.

To learn more about [Critical Exposure's work with youth and documentary photography](#).

Parents for Public Schools. In 1989, a small group of parents founded Parents for Public Schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Within two years, that chapter's 800 organized families helped pass a \$35 million bond issue. Today, PPS has 16 chapters in 11 states. Ensuring that students of all backgrounds have access to a high quality education is central to PPS' mission. To learn how the organization fulfills this mission, hear a podcast interview with executive director Anne Foster by IDRA's Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed.

[Hear the interview with Anne Foster](#)

[Learn more about Parents for Public Schools' strategy](#)

Southern Echo. Also in Jackson, Southern Echo is a leadership development, education and training organization that strengthens grassroots leadership and works in African-American communities in rural Mississippi and the surrounding region through comprehensive training and technical assistance programs. Using an intergenerational model, Southern Echo, engages both young people and older adults in leadership development, who are taking up issues that include affordable housing, employment, and educational opportunity. Each issue is part of a larger effort to develop stronger, healthier, and more vibrant communities in the south and southwest. Southern Echo recently released a set of 2012 maps on educational outcomes by school district, including 2010-11 graduation rates. [Visit Southern Echo's online data maps.](#)

Southern Echo is one of a network of nonprofit organizations, working in Mississippi and the south to improve the quality of public education for all students as part of a national Equal Voice for America's Families campaign. [Learn more about how the campaign is promoting educational excellence and equity.](#)

Toolbox

For more resources, see:

[Framing the Context for Fruitful Cross-Race Community Dialogues to Strengthen Local Education](#)

[IDRA Publications on Race and Equity](#)

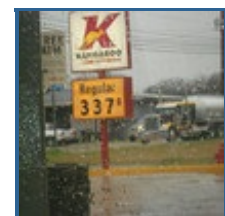
[Schott Foundation for Public Education - 50 state report on Opportunity in America \(with searchable map\)](#)

[New, searchable U.S. Department of Education Data on Civil Rights and Education](#)

Youth Voices

"At the age of 18, I can work for Nissan Motor Company, where most jobs pay over \$10/hour. Having a good paying job without a degree can stop me from going to college to make a better salary with benefits." - Tyrick Manning, 11th Grade, Canton High School

"The price of gas is getting so high that just having enough money to pay for gas going to and coming from school would be hard" - William Kittrell, 9th Grade, Canton High School, whose photograph (pictured, right) as well as images by Tyrick Manning and other participating students were featured in the student gallery and presentation in Canton, MI.



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. Forward to a Friend! Feel free to [share Grad4All](#) with anyone who shares your passion for every student's success.

Special thanks to Grant Kreegel, a senior at Trinity University and intern with IDRA through the university's Mexico, the Americas and Spain Program, for assisting with the translation of this

issue.

Thanks for reading!

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