



# GRADUATION FOR ALL

Get informed. Get connected. Get results.



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## Make Every One Count • [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) • May 2008

You've probably seen the news. In March, the New York Times reported that many states are inflating graduation rates for federal reports, while reporting lower rates at home ("[State Data Obscure How Few Finish High School](#)"). One week later in "[U.S. to Require States to Use a Single School Dropout Formula](#)," NYT reported that Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings seeks to require all states to use one federal formula to calculate graduation and dropout rates. No Child Left Behind already requires that states and high schools report their graduation rates to the federal government, but the law allows states to set their own criteria for counting. For more about the proposed regulations, visit: [www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/proposal/aat.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/proposal/aat.html)

**Count Every Student; Make Sure Every Student Counts.** Are undercounts and a confusing mix of reported dropout and graduation rates keeping people in your school or community from taking decisive action to strengthen school holding power? Below are three steps for taking action.

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## Schools and Communities in Action

**1) Get informed.** *What is your school district's graduation rate and attrition rate?* Look both at the overall rate for all students and rates for specific student groups. For a quick overview, you will find a policy brief with your state's rates at Education Week's [Diplomas Count 2007 initiative](#). In Texas, IDRA has collected research on attrition rates for more than two decades. This year's annual attrition study found that in 2006-07, across the state, one in three students (34 percent) is lost to attrition. For the latest study, see: "[Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2006-07 - Texas School Holding Power Worse than Two Decades Ago](#)" or [look up rates for your county over the last 10 years](#).



**2) Get Connected.** *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools*, a hot-off-the-press [preview of research findings from the Annenberg Institute](#) found that "successful [community] organizing strategies contributed to increased student attendance, improved standardized-test-score performance, and higher graduation rates and college-going aspirations in several sites." Take action by forming a school-community action team. With others, be frank about the data, what's being done now and what steps must be taken. School, parent and community leaders are using IDRA's school holding power portal in Texas to learn about attrition rates and student preparation in their schools and partner up to strengthen schools. To visit the Texas portal, [click here](#).

**3) Get Results.** Beyond counting, set out and implement a measurable action plan. Beware of pitfalls like never-ending fights about whose rates are right and shell games that show "progress" by pushing students out. For a cautionary tale, see: [Avoidable Losses: High-Stakes Accountability and the Dropout Crisis](#) by researchers at Rice University and UT Austin. To avoid getting "stuck in a cycle of knowledge and denial" and guide effective action, read: [Knowledge and Action: From Dropping Out to Holding On](#), a keynote address presented by Dr. María Robledo Montecel, president and CEO of IDRA, at "Texas Dropout Crisis and Our Children: A Conference on Graduation Rates, Causes and Policy Solutions," sponsored by Rice University and the Harvard Civil Rights Project.

...And **visit the Grad4All Toolbox (below)** for a series of IDRA Classnotes podcasts that can help you take action to strengthen school holding power.

## Toolbox

**Podcasts on dropout prevention and strengthening school holding power from IDRA's award-winning [Classnotes podcast series](#):**

**[Dropout Prevention for Students with Special Needs](#).** Learn how a planned variation of IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is engaging students with disabilities as valued youth tutors, with dramatic results.

**[School Holding Power for Every Child](#).** Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel discusses the essence of the problem and what actions can be taken to guarantee graduation for every student.

**[Professional Learning Communities in Schools](#).** A growing body of research has found that professional learning communities in schools, combined with mentoring, result in clear improvements in outcomes for staff and students. Find out how a south Texas middle school is transforming teaching and learning through a new learning community.

**[Leading a Diverse Campus to Success](#).** Learn how one principal in southern Louisiana is transforming this Jefferson Parish campus in a time after Hurricane Katrina of dramatic change.

**[Learnings from the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program](#).** The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a research-based, internationally-recognized dropout prevention program that has kept 98 percent of its tutors in school. What is the source of its success?

**[Using the New High School Allotment in Texas](#).** In May, 2006, the Texas Legislature passed a measure to fund an initiative to help prepare and graduate all Texas students from high school. Learn how high school allotment funds can be used and how to maximize impact for students.

## Youth Voices

"I've been a student for almost 13 years, and never did anyone ask me how I wanted a school to be." -- Chiquita Hall, ISTE Student Technology Leadership Symposium member from: [What Makes a Good School: Students Speak Up at Leadership Forum: Teens design their own ideal school environment on Edutopia](#).

**We want to hear from you!** You received this e-letter either because you've expressed interest in the topic or somebody who likes you forwarded it to you. Have a story of school-community partnership that's raising graduation rates? - Let us hear from you. To submit question or comment, send e-mail to [gradforall@idra.org](mailto:gradforall@idra.org). Feel free to forward Grad4All to anyone who shares a passion for every student's success.

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

Thanks for reading!

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