



Focus: Principal Leadership

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The Power of Partnerships in the Pursuit of Leadership Development to Transform Schools

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., Joanela De León, Ed.D., and Jesse Jay McNeil, Ed.D.

Leadership effectiveness is second only to instructional effectiveness in defining a school's ability to increase student performance in culturally-diverse settings. In the pursuit of increasing leadership effectiveness in partnership with the San Antonio ISD, IDRA is implementing its School Turnaround and Reenergizing for Success (STAARS) Leaders project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Over a period of two years, this school transformational initiative has supported low performing campuses by providing differentiated and comprehensive professional development and technical assistance for a set of campuses in the district.

IDRA provided school leaders with coaches who are former principals and have demonstrated leadership skills and a record of success in turning around low performing campuses. And in collaboration with the McNeil Foundation, the project recruits and prepares motivated, self-reflective, and culturally-proficient aspiring principals from within the ranks in the district to acquire state certification to become effective school leaders.

This program for preparing aspiring principals is designed to achieve three major objectives:

- Create and sustain a critical mass of high performing and aspiring campus leaders with strong potential for success, and prepare them through the McNeil Foundation alternative certification program for school leaders to successfully lead turnaround efforts;
- Create and strengthen a system to recruit and

select school leaders with the skills to turn around a SIG* or SIG-eligible school, with special emphasis on the principal and turnaround team leaders and advocates for English learners; and

- Strategically place, support and retain these leaders through a high powered ongoing professional development supported by coaching tailored specifically to their individual and campus needs.

As a result of the project to date, 15 candidates have completed preparation in the McNeil Foundation's program and are currently in the San Antonio ISD pool of applicants for placement in a campus leadership position.

Candidates for the program were selected through collaboration with school district administrators, IDRA and the McNeil Foundation. To be eligible, candidates had demonstrated teacher leadership experience, a master's degree and a strong background in curriculum and instruction. The certification process itself, is completely field-based, intensive and accelerated (six months), and it combines job-embedded coursework experiences (Saturdays) with their daily field-based practicum requirements. This grow-your-own program fully prepares and credentials candidates to be ready to assume leadership positions in high-need schools within the district.

(cont. on Page 2)

*SIG schools are those that have received school improvement grants from the U.S. Department of Education through state education agencies.

“IDRA research and work with schools has demonstrated that the principal is the nucleus of a school’s instructional leadership team. The current shortage of principals in urban and rural districts serving diverse students, highlights the importance of excellent principal preparation.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

(*The Power of Partnerships in the Pursuit of Leadership Development to Transform Schools, continued from Page 1*)

The primary recipients of the support provided by IDRA's STAARS Leaders project are schools in the Highlands High School feeder pattern. These schools also participate as the second cohort of a school district initiative with the University of Virginia (UVa) Turnaround – Partnership for Leaders in Education program. Bringing together IDRA, the McNeil Foundation, UVa and San Antonio ISD as partners to collaborate in this effort has proven to be effective in strengthening leadership competencies of all stakeholders.

The UVa School Turnaround Program is dedicated to building transformative leadership capacity to establish school system conditions that set the stage for positive change. Collaboration with UVa has included professional development at the university as well as in New Mexico during its mid-winter conference.

Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, author of *Leverage Leadership* (2012), *Driven by Data* (2010) and *Get Better Faster* (2016), is one of the experts who has helped enhance instructional leadership competencies in the UVa program. Unlike traditional programs, UVa focuses on the practices and processes that build the internal capacity needed to create and sustain changes that lead to academic success in turnaround schools. This includes understanding organizational change, removing barriers, redefining relationships between the school system and school leaders, addressing root causes and developing action plans, implementing a school culture of high expectations, building collaborations and partnerships, continually using data to drive next actions, and supporting leaders to become instructional leaders rather than focusing on building management.

Together, as partners, we have been able to create structures and processes to enhance professional learning communities (PLCs) with a strong focus on establishing a data-driven culture. This en-



compasses assessments, data analysis, action and culture.

Through formative assessments and data analysis to inform instruction, leaders have responded with a sense of urgency to create systemic change for sustainability efforts. Leadership team members have taken ownership in embracing the district's vision (to provide a quality education driven by an unrelenting determination to graduate all students, preparing them for success in higher education) and mission (to transform San Antonio ISD into a national model of an urban school district where every child graduates and is educated and prepared to be a contributing member of the community) to align their work at the campus level.

By providing cognitive coaching seminars led by Dr. Michele De Bellis, IDRA has strengthened leadership teams composed of self-reflective, self-directing, self-monitoring, self-managing and self-modifying individuals. The project also has provided job-embedded coaching of leadership teams and aspiring leaders through the principal certification program.

Leaders then connect with teachers and provide professional development to ensure the rigor of curriculum and the levels of language proficiency of English learners are addressed. Leaders have been able to mediate their thinking by using planning, reflection and problem-solving conversation maps in ways that foster positive outcomes impacting instruction and academic

achievement.

San Antonio ISD participants in the STAARS Leaders project intentionally work to develop a cohesive workforce with high morale while building trusting relationships with open and transparent conversations. This promotes holding each other accountable so that teachers and students achieve the state academic performance goals.

STAARS Leaders coaches visit the five schools regularly to foster opportunities for principals and leadership teams to share experiences and provide insights to address promising practices using reflective questioning. Additionally, the coaches support the campus leadership teams with analysis of the schools' state assessment data to align curriculum with assessment and to customize professional development.

Based on the analysis of data, IDRA developed two customized professional development series for Years 2 and 3 of the project to strengthen: (1) inferencing and reasoning, and (2) numeracy and number-sense. The series emphasized teaching through metacognition, focusing on leading students by modeling mental thinking processes as a habit of the mind. Elements are embedded that stress the importance of developing a growth mindset to increase teacher and student efficacy and resiliency. (For information on IDRA's training on instructional strategies for building inferencing skills, see <https://budurl.me/2-IDRAinfer17>.)

Consistent with the innovative partnerships (IDRA, McNeil Foundation, UVa and San Antonio ISD) designed to increase capacity, partners have focused on strengthening curriculum and instructional leadership at each of the campuses. The partnership supports principals' (cont. on Page 6)

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Publication offices:
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101
San Antonio, Texas 78228
210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714
www.idra.org | contact@idra.org

Maria Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.
IDRA President and CEO
Newsletter Executive Editor

Christie L. Goodman, APR
IDRA Communication Manager
Newsletter Production Editor

How Transformational Leaders Develop a Growth Mindset for Student Success

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., Gerald Sharp, M.A., and Kristin Grayson, Ph.D.

We live in an era of accountability where success or failure is measured primarily through test scores and intelligence tests. This can lead to an undermining *fixed mindset* that believes some students can learn while others cannot. But successful schools, such as turnaround campuses, share one important practice: they operate within a *growth mindset*, knowing that all students can and will learn. Intelligence is malleable and can be bolstered; the mind is always growing.

Educators benefit when they understand how students' brains learn. The same is true for teachers of students who are learning English. They are no different from other students who already own many ideas and are endowed with thinking processes, experiences, and a growing vocabulary that enable them to be proficient learners. Teachers can empower their students to tap into what they already know and what they already can do through classroom experiences, collaborations and assessments.

We are endowed with a brain that selectively responds more positively to stimuli and does so in an atmosphere of affirmative relationships. As educators, we are tasked with establishing an atmosphere of affirmative relationships in classrooms by building a growth mindset not only for students but for all staff (Dweck, 2006; David, 2015).

By inspiring teachers and students to foster these affirmative relationships in the classroom, we provide a learning environment that is relevant, engaging and challenging. Leaders and teachers strengthen students' persistence and resiliency to engage and succeed academically. This intentional development of a growth mindset directly impacts the success of students, teachers, leaders and schools alike (David, 2015).

School leaders must ensure that teachers see that they can strengthen their own competencies as well. This is a growth mindset that improves efficacy throughout the school community by motivating and supporting aspirations that lead to achievement.

Modeling Skills

For example, a growth mindset is a prerequisite when educators **model the metacognitive skills** required for inferencing and reasoning. These are critical skills that become more complex as students go from grade to grade. By modeling thinking aloud, students learn to become strategic thinkers and independent learners who are continuously growing intellectually by accessing knowledge and applying that knowledge to new situations.

Inferencing and reasoning require that students develop these skills as "habits of the mind" because their use is needed constantly throughout their lives. We cannot leave the development of these skills to particular lessons taught at certain times during the school year nor to chance.

Building Confidence

Sarcasm and criticism have no place in the classroom because of their damaging effects to students' engagement in the learning process. They extinguish learning opportunities. Instead, students need to hear about the strengths and skills they own and can be enhanced to increase possibilities for success, learning to never give up and to seek help when necessary.

When a student says, "It's too hard" or "I can't do it," our response needs to focus on the things he or she has done that were partially successful and, as Dweck states, shows the student is "not there yet." Consequently, the **idea of "not there yet,"** gives the student hope that promotes confidence and increases purposeful efforts. We must help students develop beliefs of their most basic qualities. With a growth mindset, their intelligence, talents and personalities are thereby cultivated throughout their life through dedication, determination and intentional effort. However, if students have not been told that they have an innate ability and potential to accomplish success in their schoolwork, and people do not acknowledge they believe so, how will students be able to do so? Therefore, educators must ensure this message is communicated daily, validating to students that abilities and effort lead to greater

(cont. on Page 4)

The intentional development of a growth mindset directly impacts the success of students, teachers, leaders and schools alike.

(How Transformational Leaders Develop a Growth Mindset for Student Success, continued from Page 3)

success and they can do so in spite of all odds and challenges they face, such as racial discrimination and oppressive behaviors (Wood & Harris, 2016).

Using Social Persuasion

Building a growth mindset also involves the use of **social persuasion**. This is an environment where students receive personalized messages that they have skills and capabilities to handle any situation. In this environment, students feel more competent to make greater effort, persisting even in the face of setbacks (Harris & Franklin, 2007).

Through social persuasion, teachers and students are aware of the thoughts, motivations and feelings of others, which fosters a collective identity in the pursuit of common goals. In this environment, teachers and students tap into what others are thinking and use this to enhance their own thinking to increase their learning. This is an environment with a growth mindset promoting the sense of efficacy needed.

Coaching

As educators, we must **encourage and coach students** to strengthen their efficacy and success. We must acknowledge that all of us can slip back into fixed mindset behaviors. We must be constantly vigilant to not creep back into dysfunctional behaviors. And we need to coach students to realize that setbacks are temporary. In an administrator or teacher coaching experience, the focus is not just on eliminating a fixed mindset but recognizing it as a learning experience that allows one to succeed.

Educators can guide students to **monitor** their own thinking to recognize the negative thoughts and emotions that inhibit their success. Then they will have a choice to adjust their thinking and realign it with the growth mindset. Educators do this by modeling the positive behaviors of a growth mindset. This instills in students the belief that they have the power to transform their life circumstances by being fully engaged in learning opportunities and experiences (Yeager & Walton, 2011).

For instance, educators can name an academic behavior that a student has demonstrated previously and then guide them to transfer that named strength to their new situation where they have experienced frustration. As a result, thriving even through the most challenging times, students demonstrate a growth mindset.

During setbacks, students also can learn from others who have excelled under difficult circumstances. As stated by Pierson (2013) "Every kid

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— previous participant

Get details:
<http://www.idra.org/events/la-semana-del-nino-parent-institute>

[everyone] needs a champion!" Students can be inspired by teachers, historical figures and community leaders. Observing how others overcame challenges to be successful show students the pathways that they can emulate and make their own. Teachers engage students to reflect on the experiences of others and this inspires them to use a growth mindset to learn and persevere.

Students can be models for other students as well. Observing and listening to students with similar backgrounds who have succeeded can help students believe that they too can accomplish challenging tasks.

In partnership with the San Antonio ISD, IDRA's STAARS Leaders project embraces the development of a growth mindset for all (see story on Page 1). By preparing leaders and educators to guide students to use metacognition and reflection

during problem solving and content learning, teachers and students can meet and surpass all expectations. Despite the odds that life can bring, everyone is better equipped to accomplish greater things not only in school but in life itself when we have the perspective of a growth mindset. Continually, by generating effort and implementing new strategies to overcome challenges, everyone can meet the goals and expectations that have been set.

Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., is an IDRA senior education associate and directs the IDRA STAARS Leaders project. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at nilka.aviles@idra.org. Gerald Sharp, M.A., is an IDRA STAARS Leaders consultant. Kristin Grayson, Ph.D., is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at kristin.grayson@idra.org.

References for this article are online
<https://budurl.me/IDRAnd17b>

Leadership for ESL Teacher Recruitment and Retention

by Kristin Grayson, Ph.D.

As the numbers of English learners continue to rise in U.S. schools, the need also rises for schools and districts to increase the number of qualified (content and pedagogically proficient), culturally competent, and credentialed teachers prepared to teach them. Schools often face difficulty in recruiting, hiring and retaining quality teachers for English learners (ELs). However, with an intentional approach, schools and districts can have the best teachers in place to provide them an equitable education.

Nationwide, English learners account for roughly one out of every 10 students, ranging from 22 percent of the student population in California to 1 percent in West Virginia (McFarland, et al., 2017). Yet, large achievement and opportunity gaps between ELs and non-ELs continue to exist (Quintero, & Hansen, 2017).

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), integrates for the first time, English language proficiency and academic achievement fully into school and district accountability systems, with the potential of ensuring that their needs are fully considered by educational systems. Nevertheless, there are concerns about how this can happen with the current shortage of teachers who are experienced, knowledgeable and/or certified in teaching and implementing effective programs for English learners.

The *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 guarantees that all students, regardless of national origin, have an equal and equitable opportunity to learn in U.S. schools. And the *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court decision further defines this as the right of students to be given the support necessary to learn and achieve even if their home language is not English.

Schools cannot simply force ELs to sink-or-swim in a mainstream classroom. They must implement appropriately designed language programs that consider the variation of educational needs due to different backgrounds, such as age, refugee status, country and language of origin and/or previous amount of formal schooling. In addition, schools must provide English learners with

teachers prepared to meet their needs in a personalized environment (Lhamon, & Gupta, 2015).

Research consistently indicates that ELs perform better when they have teachers who are trained and certified to teach in specialized language programs integrated throughout grade level and content area classrooms (López, et al., 2013; Robledo Montecel, & Cortez). Yet, at least six southern states still do not require such certification, and other states lack strong, relevant certification standards with a wide variation in requirements (ECS, 2014).

With the projection of a teacher shortage for all students expected to increase in the coming years across the country, the shortage of qualified teachers for ELs remains an even bigger concern. States need to pursue and implement specific policies with the necessary resources to sustain an effective quality EL teacher workforce. Importantly, states must resist efforts to water-down teacher certification requirements that undermine having well-prepared teachers for ELs.

Darling Hammond (2016) suggests three specific ways to improve the pool of qualified teachers for English learners:

- Develop career ladder programs in partnership with local universities to empower paraprofessionals to become certified teachers with specializations or certifications in bilingual education or ESL;
- Renew or continue the *normalista* programs that, through university partnership, certify teachers from other counties in bilingual or ESL instruction (see also Cortez, & Robledo Montecel, 2002); and
- Continue partnerships with local universities to enhance their teacher education programs with the pedagogy for EL education.

Harris & Sandoval-Gonzalez (2017) also promote the enrichment of university education programs to prepare teachers to fill the increasing demand for teachers of dual language programs as more families – English-speaking and non-

Research consistently indicates that English learners perform better when they have teachers who are trained and certified to teach in specialized language programs integrated throughout grade level and content area classrooms.

IDRA Establishes Scholarship Endowment in Honor of Dr. Ricardo R. Fernández, Lehman College President Emeritus

In recognition of Dr. Ricardo R. Fernández's service on the IDRA board of directors and to higher education, IDRA has established a scholarship endowment at Lehman College in his honor. Dr. Fernández has served on the IDRA board for 16 years and is president emeritus of Lehman College.

Dr. Fernández became the second president of Lehman College in 1990 and served both the college and its home borough of the Bronx with distinction for 26 years. Throughout his tenure, he expanded the college's commitment to excellence and increased access to higher education for students who are economically disadvantaged. In addition to his service to IDRA, Dr. Fernández's leadership positions in education have included the American Council of Education, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and the National Association for Bilingual Education.

Dr. Ricardo R. Fernández Scholarship Endowment Fund is designated for students pursuing a degrees in education who are committed to a career in the New York City public schools or in an urban school district.



(From left) David Hinojosa, J.D., IDRA National Director of Policy; Dr. Ricardo R. Fernández, Lehman College President Emeritus; Dr. José Luis Cruz, Lehman College President.

(Leadership for ESL Teacher Recruitment and Retention, continued from Page 5)

English-speaking – acknowledge the benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy for their children.

Current teachers should be allotted sufficient professional development time to learn how to better serve their EL students, explicitly recruiting, training and retaining bilingual/bicultural teachers (Lavadenz, & Colon-Muiz, 2017). Another approach is exemplified through IDRA's Transitions to Teaching alternative certification programs that prepared science and math content area experts to be teachers with specializations in ESL or bilingual education (IDRA, 2017).

Once qualified teachers are in schools and districts, it is important to retain them. It is critical that schools have an asset-based atmosphere of cultural competency that celebrates diversity of students and staff and acknowledges the benefits of a diverse teaching force (Darling Hammond, 2016).

Teachers require authentic support from their districts. Teachers need the best resources to use with their students. They also need opportunities to continually enhance their professional capacity by learning best practices from the latest research within a network of support. Financial incentives for education, recruitment and retention are other ways that districts can recruit and retain qualified teachers.

While there are no easy or quick fixes to the shortage of qualified teachers for English learner education, it is imperative for states, districts, schools and teachers to promote and demand that equitable education for ELs is not only a wish but is a moral obligation to protect the rights of students.

The IDRA EAC-South provides technical assistance and training to build capacity of local educators in the U.S. South to serve their diverse student populations, including ELs. Please see our website for additional information and ways to request assistance from an equity center in our or your area. Working together we can build and maintain the number of qualified and certified teachers that English learners deserve.

Kristin Grayson, Ph.D., is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at kristin.grayson@idra.org.

 **References for this article are online**
<https://budurl.me/IDRAnd17c>

(The Power of Partnerships in the Pursuit of Leadership, continued from Page 2)

efforts in analyzing their campus data to identify root causes for student underperformance. They develop action steps to remove barriers that impede teacher and student success. They also share common goals that include working to turn around schools, develop leadership capacity, and capitalize teaching and learning to increase academic achievement of all students. Just two years into the project, the school board officially recognized IDRA and the achievements of the participating principals. One principal in particular had dramatic student progress schoolwide in a single year.

Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., is an IDRA senior education associate and directs the IDRA STAARS Leaders project. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at nilka.aviles@idra.org. Joanelda De León, Ed.D., is the assistant superintendent for turnaround schools for San Antonio ISD. Jesse Jay McNeil, Ed.D., is President & CEO of the McNeil Foundation.

 **References for this article are online**
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What People are Saying about IDRA's STAARS Leaders Project

IDRA's School TurnAround and Reenergizing for Success (STAARS) Leaders project is a unique model for school improvement that focuses on cohesive, meaningful change for struggling schools through mentoring and supporting campus leadership. The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is operating in the San Antonio ISD. The goal of the project is to enhance student academic success by empowering school leaders to build a culture dedicated to equity and excellence for all students. IDRA's STAARS Leaders model is especially unique because of its focus on helping educational communities who teach English learners. Below are thoughts shared by participating leaders.



"I've been honored to have Dr. Avilés (IDRA) as one of my principal coaches. With our efforts, we were able to focus on student achievement at Ball Academy. Through her work and my team's effort, we were able to

move out of "Improvement Required" status to "Acceptable" status in one year by closing the achievement gaps. What we are most proud of is the improvement our ELs have made, which is an emphasis of IDRA. We were able to close the gap completely in math, and in other areas we have made gains of 12 to 15 points on the state assessments. With IDRA, we were able to build capacity among our leaders and teachers, and we focus on parent engagement, as well. It has been a great partnership for Ball Academy and for our students and community."

— Gregory Rivers, Principal of Ball Academy



"The STAARS Leaders program has provided me a scholarship and opened doors for me that I never believed were possible. Dr. McNeil (McNeil Foundation) inspired me to focus my energy on my school, students and their needs. The program reiterated my vision that an administrator leads with integrity, fairness and a skill set that is unmatched with other programs. I was blessed with having Dr. McNeil teach my cohort. During our classes, everyone's ideas were heard and respected. It helped our talents and skillset flourish without judgement. I sincerely thank the STAARS Leaders project, the McNeil Foundation, Dr. Avilés from IDRA, Dr. McNeil and Mr. Rivers for nominating me and guiding me in the program and my success in attaining my principal certification."

— Rebecca Pinales, Professional School Counselor at Ball Academy



"The IDRA STAARS Leaders project has been instrumental in supporting our school improvement efforts. Not only have our students benefited from the services and support provided by IDRA but I

also directly benefited from Dr. Avilés' coaching and mentoring. I have gained much insight and professional development through the resources and professional learning offered by IDRA. We have engaged in purposeful data disaggregation, which has resulted in developing targeted interventions for all students. Our students and staff of Highlands High School have been blessed to have received the support and coaching of IDRA's dedicated staff."

— Dr. Luz Martínez,

Principal at Highlands High School in 2016-17



"I am pleased and proud of our recent UVa [University of Virginia] site visit report on October 20. I hope you were too. Great job! With all of us and our partners continuing to work together and rallying support around our Champion Schools, I know we will see great improvement and success this year! Our first quarter CBA data is showing improvement and trajectory to meeting state standards for the 2017-18 school year. I remain focused and continue to reach out to IDRA, the Education Service Center for Region 20, UVa and the district Office of Academics as we address campus needs. Please know that I appreciate your commitment and efforts very much. I can not do this heavy lifting alone. I am very blessed to have a coalition comprised of colleagues and partners like you."

— Dr. Joanela De Leon, Assistant Superintendent for Turnaround Champion Schools



"One of the strategies for talent management is to enhance the pool of high-performing applicants. We realized that we cannot do this alone, and therefore building relationships with multiple associates is

extremely important. IDRA and the McNeil Foundation are two valued partners. IDRA supported SAISD the past two years with a federal grant and will continue through this year. They provided over \$84,700 in scholarships for 22 of our employees for principal certification and have provided cognitive coaching for 103 of our assistant principals, principals and implementation specialists in five of our campuses. In addition, they have provided \$100,000 each year to the district for professional development and leadership incentives. I want to recognize and thank IDRA and the McNeil Foundation for their efforts."

— Dr. Matthew Weber,

Deputy Superintendent for Talent Management



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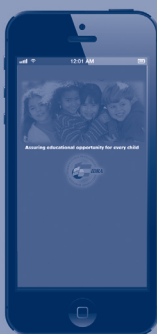
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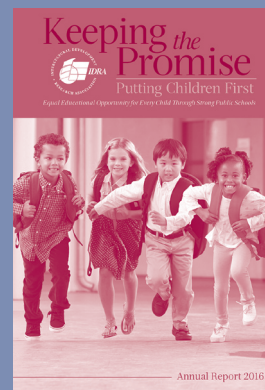
Annual Report Released

Keeping the Promise – Putting Children First

Equal Educational Opportunity for Every Child Through Strong Public Schools

IDRA's 2016 Annual Report, *Keeping the Promise – Putting Children First – Equal Educational Opportunity for Every Child Through Strong Public Schools*, is now available online. Grounded in the promises to children, families and communities that guide our work, the report highlights how IDRA and our partners are building national connections and networks for strong public schools, elevating transformative models for education equality, and crossing borders from research to practice to secure systemic solutions.

The report is online at <http://budurl.com/IDRAar16is> and as a PDF at <http://budurl.com/IDRAar16pdf>.



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