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PSJA Proves that a School District Can Assure that All Students are College Bound

IDRA releases “College Bound and Determined” – A report profiling what happens when a school district raises expectations for students instead of lowering them

(SAN ANTONIO • FEBRUARY 25, 2014) Today, IDRA is releasing a new report, [College Bound and Determined](#), showing how the Pharr-San Juan Alamo school district in south Texas transformed itself from low achievement and low expectations to planning for all students to graduate from high school and college. In PSJA, transformation went beyond changing sobering graduation rates or even getting graduates into college. This school district changes how we think about college readiness.



This transformation has resulted in the district doubling the number of high school graduates, cutting dropout rates in half, and increasing college-going rates. In fact, half of the district’s students are earning college credit while still in high school.

“Our vision can be boiled down to the phrase, College3, meaning that all students will be College Ready, College Connected and will complete College,” said Dr. Daniel King, PSJA superintendent.

Earning a college degree is more important today than ever before, according to a new Pew Research Center [report](#) on the rising value of a college degree and the rising cost of not going to college. The study found that “college graduates outpace those with less education on virtually every measure of job satisfaction and career success.”

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo is on the U.S.-Mexico border. It is 99 percent Latino. And it is extremely poor, serving colonias in Texas. **“But you notice that there is no deficit thinking and no excuses in this approach. There is no students-cannot-learn or parents-don’t-care or they-do-not-speak-English or we-can’t-do-it, we-have-too-many-minorities, or they’re-not-college-material,”** said [Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel](#), IDRA President.

“Instead, at PSJA, you find thoughtful, data-based, coherent plans that connect K-12 with higher education and community to improve educational opportunities for all children,” said Dr. Robledo Montecel.

With funding from TG Public Benefit (TG), IDRA examined data and conducted interviews with Dr. King, school principals, teachers, counselors and students to explore how PSJA has achieved the kind of success that it has. IDRA saw that PSJA’s vision and actions, clearly and independently aligned, with IDRA’s own vision for change: the [Quality Schools Action Framework™](#). This change theory helps communities and educators assess a school’s conditions and outcomes and identify leverage points for improvement and informing action.

IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework focuses change on what research and experience say matters: parents as partners involved in consistent and meaningful ways, engaged students who know they belong in schools and are supported by caring adults, competent caring educators who are well-paid and supported in their work, and high quality curriculum that prepares students for 21st Century opportunities.

The parallels between the framework, IDRA's vision and PSJA's processes are numerous, showing that when students are valued and seen as solutions, similar paths rise and converge. College Bound and Determined describes PSJA's changes using IDRA's framework and ideas as organizing principles.

In contrast with Texas' weakening of high school curriculum and institutionalizing a system of tracking many students into low-level and vocational courses, families want more for their children. Members of PTA Comunitarios in the Texas Rio Grande Valley recently urged the Texas State Board of Education to require the 4x4 higher level curriculum for all students, to support the PSJA model for all students to be prepared for college, saying "All of our children should be considered college-material and taught accordingly." (The PTA Comunitario is IDRA's model of family leadership in education that is based in the community.)

"In this publication we seek to make the case that all students deserve an equitable, excellent and college bound education by using the Quality Schools Action Framework to tell the story of how one school district has brought that ideal closer to reality for all students," added Dr. Robledo Montecel.

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College Bound and Determined Resources Online

[Read the report – College Bound and Determined](#)

[See the Quality School Action Framework™](#)

[See a video interview with PSJA Superintendent, Dr. Daniel King](#)

Hear Classnotes podcast interviews with a principal in PSJA, Linda Carrillo

- [A Principal on Setting Expectations for College](#)
- [A Principal on the Core Elements of School](#)
- [A Principal on Supporting Teachers for Student College Readiness](#)

Get info on [IDRA's PTA Comunitario model](#)

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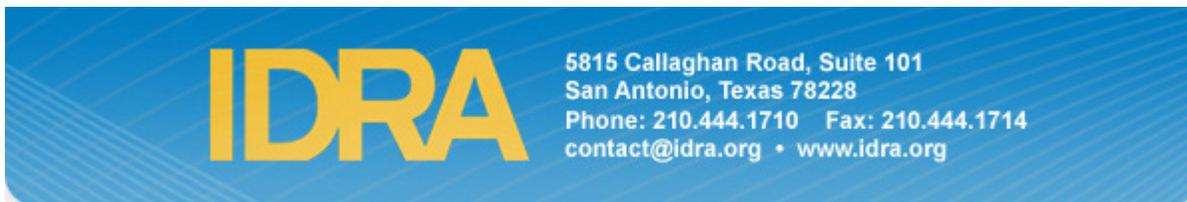
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