

IDRA Valued Youth Partnership
Winning Essays
2021-22



IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Congratulations to our 2022 Essay Contest Winners!



High School First Place
LIZBETH RODRÍGUEZ
12TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"The impact I am having on their lives is as big as the impact they are having on mine. Every time I walk into their classroom and see their excitement to come with me, to read or work on math brings me so much joy. It shows me that they are happy to learn with me and that I am doing my best to help them and motivate them."



Middle School First Place
SELENA TAVERA
8TH GRADE • DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

"Once I joined the program and I started tutoring those little kids, it made me realize and remember why I started working hard in the first place. When I tutor them, they get so excited to see me, and they run to me with books or letter games to do with them. They are so eager to learn, and it has made me eager to learn now too, again."



High School Second Place
JADE HERNANDEZ
11TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"I have come to appreciate the opportunity IDRA has given me. I have been able to connect with my tutees in a way that brings joy to my life. I love seeing the kids have a blast while working with me. I feel proud that I am actually doing something good. Being a tutor has taught me so much about children and how they learn. Seeing this in action has inspired me to be a teacher."



Middle School Second Place
ELIZABETH SAUCEDA
8TH GRADE • DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

"I used to wake up exhausted, wanting to skip school – which I actually did out of being burnt out – and falling asleep in some of my classes, like math or English language arts. When I went to Athens to tutor, I wanted to be a role model for the students at Athens. So, I started to sleep earlier, pay attention to class, actually do some more work and started to think more positively. I even started to be happier at home and nicer to my siblings, which led to me helping them more often with homework or in little projects for school."



High School Third Place
ROSLYNNE ORTIZ
9TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"Since I became a tutor, I have grown a lot myself which is something I did not think would happen. I learned to sympathize with others' struggles in learning and focusing on things since I now know how hard it really is. There is also this proud feeling I get from being in the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership, there is that feeling of knowing I am helping the younger generation to grow and succeed in their education and knowing that I am actively making a difference for my tutee's education."



Middle School Third Place
MATTHEW HERNANDEZ
8TH GRADE • DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

"What tutoring means to me is a lot more than some job that I have been hired to do. It is more special than that. It provides me with the opportunity to bond and help children who do not understand subjects like math and/or reading. Even if I was not being paid, I would still volunteer to help because I like to see the tutees grow and learn to finally understand what did not make sense before."

Scan this code to see the full essays and learn more about the IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program!



See the full essays online!





Lizbeth Rodríguez

12TH GRADE
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL,
ODESSA, TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership High School First Place Winner

Life Impact: IDRA

The impact that a single student can have on another is amazing. Being a senior and being able to teach and watch my first-grade tutees grow and learn has given me an enormous sense of accomplishment. They have shown me that my career path is teaching, and they have been the ones teaching me also. Not only that but also, I have been trying to get into this program since I was a first-year student in high school, I always wanted to be able to start my dream of teaching, but the program was always full. Finally, in my senior year, that dream came true, and I was genuinely excited.

The IDRA program has impacted lots of lives because of the opportunities they give students like me. The amazing opportunity of giving us a salary to help us out and the free laptops to be used for college is an amazing gift, and I am super grateful for it. However, not only does the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership program impact us by giving us tools and resources but also allows us the opportunity to be able to follow our career path, do what we love and figure ourselves out. I have always struggled to find my passion and find a career that I would love for the rest of my life. Being able to sit down with tutees and help them and teach them has assured me of my path. The impact I am having on their lives is as big as the impact they are having on mine. Every time I walk into their classroom and see their excitement to come with me, to read or work on math brings me so much joy. It shows me that they are happy to learn with me and that I am doing my best to help them and motivate them.

My first tutee to meet was Sophia*. She is a very bright little girl. She loves math and works hard to get her spelling right. She is outgoing and always tries to be the leader of the group. My second tutee was Emily*. She always wants to be called Emi. She is a girly girl that also loves math and is a big talker. She is a social butterfly, but she is

incredibly open to learning anything. If she has a difficult day, she openly tells me how she feels, and we try to work through it. My last tutee is Remi*. She is also a big talker, but she is not a huge fan of math, and she does love reading. She is always adding a new name that she finds beautiful to her name.

All my little girls are so unique in their own way which just makes everything more exciting to me. Knowing that every time we meet, they will have a new story to tell me. I am overly blessed to have these beautiful little girls to start with. Everything in this program has been so amazing and full of memories.

My teacher for VYP has also guided me through every step and any question I have. If sometimes I was stuck on how to correctly keep a connection with my tutees, she has helped me because she has a connection with us. So, it just makes the program for me one hundred percent more comfortable to be around.

On the first day of school walking into her class and being her only student was nerve-racking because how did no one know about this program. From my experience, I have been trying to find a spot since my first year of high school. I knew this program was going to help me find my career path. I have always feared making the wrong decision on a career and having the pressure of my parents on always being an A student and not making mistakes. Also, we are not a wealthy family, and that is another reason I was extremely thankful for the computer. But everyone knows college is not cheap and wasting my parents' money over me making a mistake about my career is something I can prevent.

Being able to take this class in my last year of high school was the best decision I ever made. It amazed me to see my growth from when I just



started this class until now. All the impacts in my life it has made me proud to say I am a part of the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership. It is going to be a sad day to have to let go of my tutees because they were my first students, but I made a promise to them to come back to teach them in high school and keep seeing them grow. From all the laughs we had, to me bringing them small gifts just to see the smiles on their faces brightens up my day. Even on their bad days, with them being able to trust me, I was able to help them through the tough times.

The VYP program has been a wonderful experience. My tutees have been angels to help me grow as a future teacher and bring a smile to my face, to even my teacher being helpful and guiding me to my future of being a teacher and shaping me to be one. Overall, the impact it has been on my life is amazing, and I have no idea what I would do without this program and my tutees from the laughter, the stress, and the good days and bad days will always have an impact and a place in my heart.

**name changed for privacy*



Jade Hernandez

11TH GRADE
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL,
ODESSA, TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership High School Second Place Winner

My Tutees and Me

I have come to appreciate the opportunity IDRA has given me. I have been able to connect with my tutees in a way that brings joy to my life. I love seeing the kids have a blast while working with me. I feel proud that I am actually doing something good. Being a tutor has taught me so much about children and how they learn. Seeing this in action has inspired me to be a teacher.

There were many times I did not quite know what I wanted to do with my life. I always thought I was going to have to end up like my parents. No not in a bad way, they are a major part of this journey I recently stepped into. My parents always had big dreams as well, but they didn't have the support at home to help guide them in the right direction. That's why when I got the opportunity to be in the Valued Youth Partnership and work with students, I thought to myself that quite possibly I might have a chance to do what my parents didn't get to. They taught me that even though they didn't have the help, they are proud that I found a passion for teaching and are overwhelmed with joy that I get to participate in an amazingly good program.

On the first day, my teacher told me who my little tutees were. I was so excited to get started with them. I've always wanted to work with younger kids, and I'm so glad I have had the opportunity to do so. I was very anxious to meet my kids. I planned to work with fifth graders because I felt I could communicate better with them. But after observing different classes, I spoke with my teacher, and we agreed that first graders would be a better fit. I am so glad that I went with first graders because it's always a different day with them. They say the funniest things.

The first kid I tutor is Liam*. Liam is an outstanding first grader. He is ahead in reading and mathematics. Learning comes very easy to him. He grasps new concepts easily. I love to

challenge him because he enjoys it. I challenge him by encouraging him to try difficult things on his own before asking for help. When he figures it out on his own, he gets excited and feels good about the accomplishment. When he gets excited, he does a little dance afterward; he wiggles his shoulders and smiles. Then I give him a high-five to help build his confidence even more about his work.

The second kid I tutor is Daniela*. Daniela is such an amazing little girl. She is outgoing and will share the first thing that comes to mind. When I first met, her she used very short sentences. Now she has expanded her vocabulary and storytelling abilities. Her "no-filter" stories have become more detailed, and she is fun to listen to. Daniela is great at multiplication. She still needs help here and there but can do a lot on her own now. I taught her how to do her nines with her hands, and she was so excited each time we did them. She loves to be independent and does it by herself now.

The last kid I tutor is Corey*. Corey is a magnificent kid, and he is a fast learner. I love working with him especially because he's always laughing and giggling. He loves to do sight words. When I first met him he was only doing about 20 to 30 sight words. His fluency has increased so much, he now knows more than 100 to 125 sight words. He's improved so much at sounding out larger words than what he was able to do at the beginning of the year.

Overall, I've had such a great time working with my students. Every day is an adventure with these three. If it weren't for these kids, I think I wouldn't have considered continuing a career in early education. They inspired me to be a teacher and have shown me the importance of building a good relationship with my students. By working with them, I have learned that not only should learning

be fun, you should also connect with the students beyond the lessons in the classroom.

The Valued Youth Partnership has given me so much more than a chance to work with kids and discover my passion for teaching. It has given me a remarkable teacher and a chance to be somewhat financially independent. My teacher, Mrs. Granado, has helped me every step of the way. She was excited to find out that our program

was getting us personal laptops. I have never had my own laptop before, and it is the best gift I have ever received from the school. IDRA has also helped with some financial independence. I've gotten to open my own bank account and learn all about how to manage money. I even got to take my siblings to the movies for the very first time. I am so grateful for the opportunity that IDRA has given me. This is an experience that I will continue to cherish and value.

**name changed for privacy*



Roslyne Ortiz

9TH GRADE
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL,
ODESSA, TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership High School Third Place Winner

In all honesty I did not intentionally go into this class because it was something I wanted to do. Going into high school, I did not really know what I was doing or what I wanted to do for my classes. But then I heard about this program. My dance teacher had been the one to tell me about the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership. And when she did, I had no idea what she was talking about. She explained it to me. When I heard I would have to tutor kids I was very hesitant to participate. But when I heard I would get paid for tutoring, I was quite excited.

Going in, I was so nervous since I do not have the greatest social skills and I did not know how to interact with younger kids. But getting paid made it a little more worth it. Over time though, things got easier. And when I got started teaching, it was much better than I had thought.

Meeting my tutees was a very nerve-wracking experience for me since I would be teaching third graders who were young and energetic. As we worked together each passing day, we started to grow a connection, and my tutees began to feel more comfortable with me as their tutor. Of course, they are still kids, so getting them to pay attention was a challenge sometimes. But the more I worked with them, I found more techniques to help them with their work.

Usually, two of my tutees pay attention to their work, but my other tutee was more energetic and anxious than them. He would move around a lot and would get distracted by little things around him, so it was hard to get him to do his work. It was frustrating at first, but I started to understand him more since I realized he was a lot like my younger sister who had trouble focusing on school. I found that taking small breaks between his assignments helped him to focus a lot better. Whenever we would finish an

assignment or if I noticed he moved a lot, we would stop and wiggle our arms around to get out all those “ants in our pants” as I like to put it. Seeing how these techniques helped him was so rewarding, especially when I saw that he was in fact improving in his work and his abilities in the classroom.

Tutoring these kids has made me have so much more respect for teachers and everything they must deal with since, admittedly, at times it was incredibly stressful. Sometimes I find myself feeling tired after a difficult lesson, which happens. But the next day, I find myself feeling happy I got to go back and help my tutees grow. As hard as it was sometimes, I think my love for tutoring those kids was so much greater and seeing them succeed made every grueling day so worth it.

Since I became a tutor, I have grown a lot myself which is something I did not think would happen. Instead of being nervous to talk to younger children I now communicate with them so much more smoothly and even communicate with adults better as well. I learned to sympathize with others’ struggles in learning and focusing on things since I now know how hard it really is. Becoming a tutor, I even learned to help my younger sister as well since I use my techniques that I use with my tutees with her when she needs help with her schoolwork. And I see she is also improving with her work.

There is also this proud feeling I get from being in the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership, there is that feeling of knowing I am helping the younger generation to grow and succeed in their education and knowing that I am actively making a difference for my tutee’s education.





Selena Tavera

8TH GRADE
DWIGHT MIDDLE
SCHOOL, SAN ANTONIO
TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership Middle School First Place Winner

How tutoring has helped me...

While being a part of the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership program, I have realized a lot about myself. I went into this with a mentality of “this should be easy, fun and a good way to make money.” But I came out with a lot more than just those things, and I’m thankful.

I have always been a successful academic child from a young age. In elementary school, I worked hard for the “A honor roll,” but I worked so hard that it became normal for me to do well, grades-wise. I noticed that, in these passing months in eighth grade before I joined the program, I was putting less effort into my classwork and kind of just doing the bare minimum.

Once I joined the program and I started tutoring those little kids, it made me realize and remember why I started working hard in the first place. When I tutor them, they get so excited to see me, and they run to me with books or letter games to do with them. They are so eager to learn, and it has made me eager to learn now too, again.

One of the little girls was done with a math worksheet and asked me to check the work. She

had gotten every question correct. I told her she got them all correct and the look on her face the disbelief. She asked if I was lying. I told her “No.” She got so happy like she couldn’t believe she was that smart. I remember being like that. It is the best feeling in the world.

The Valued Youth Partnership has helped me remember what I’m doing all of this for. What I am trying so hard for is, my future. And I am also doing this for elementary school me, to make her happy too.

This program has also helped me with pacing myself. Sometimes, I bring out different kids to tutor. I’ve noticed that I have to go at different paces with them. It has really just helped me understand that being at a different pace is okay.

I want to say thank you for the opportunity to be in this program, to be able to help these kids and for them to help me in a way too. I hope once I end this school year and have my last tutoring session with them that they can be able to say I have helped them a lot.





Elizabeth Saucedo

8TH GRADE
DWIGHT MIDDLE
SCHOOL, SAN ANTONIO
TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership Middle School Second Place Winner

Since I became a tutor, I have had a clearer mind and understanding of things. I listen more in class and am eager to learn more. I find that it is good for my health to spend time with children, and I love helping my tutees. They listen and, if they have problems, they have no problem asking me for help. I believe that, since I became a tutor, my mind has expanded more than I would have imagined, and I even gained a more positive attitude and focus in class.

Each day I wake up, I wake up thrilled to go to the elementary school, Athens. I used to wake up exhausted, wanting to skip school – which I actually did out of being burnt out – and falling asleep in some of my classes, like math or English language arts.

When I went to Athens to tutor, I wanted to be a role model for the students at Athens. So, I started to sleep earlier, pay attention to class, actually do some more work and started to think more positively. I even started to be happier at home and nicer to my siblings, which led to me helping them more often with homework or in little projects for school. For example, last year my siblings needed to make a Halloween jack-o-lantern. I helped them by helping to sketch the face.

I like going to Athens to work. Even if I didn't get paid, I still would have volunteered. At Athens, I can speak both languages if the teachers ask me to or, if a child doesn't understand, I can help

explain. At home, I speak Spanish, so it's a habit to speak Spanish primarily to others I know who also speak that language. At school, I speak mostly English because most students and teachers I speak with may only speak English.

The reason I wanted to work as a tutor for Athens was that I wanted to save money to help my mom. I so wanted some type of work experience, even if it's not really the type of job I'll be doing frequently outside of school. But it's still something. I enjoy doing other than our work in class during school hours.

I am very thankful to IDRA Valued Youth Partnership for allowing me to participate in the program. I love this work, and I want to continue it, meaning I don't want to get kicked out or back out. I feel so much better helping other younger kids other than my siblings who can make things more difficult. My uncle dropped out of high school so that he could get engaged to his girlfriend. I found that dumb, but I guess I can't judge him. That was his choice, not mine.

I think that maybe since I became a tutor, I might have chosen teaching as a possible career in the future. Since I became a tutor, my world has changed a lot. I am more optimistic, and I pay attention in class so that I can see the students from Athens. I also feel the need to be more respectful around others. I hate being disrespectful, and I don't like being a bad influence. Tutoring really has changed and helped me in many good ways.



Matthew Hernandez

8TH GRADE
DWIGHT MIDDLE
SCHOOL, SAN ANTONIO
TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership Middle School Third Place Winner

What tutoring means to me is a lot more than some job that I have been hired to do. It is more special than that. It provides me with the opportunity to bond and help children who do not understand subjects like math and/or reading. Even if I was not being paid, I would still volunteer to help because I like to see the tutees grow and learn to finally understand what did not make sense before.

Even though it can be challenging when trying to teach them what I already know, it is rewarding to see the tutees smile when they realize they can do the work on their own because they finally understand the assignment. We come from an underprivileged area in town, and not all parents have the time or the financial means to ensure their children are receiving the help they need to succeed.

I am a former student of F.M. Elementary, where I struggled to read fluently. My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Speights, noticed that I was having a difficult time and took the time, at the end of her day, to offer tutoring to those of us who needed it. It made a difference in my ability to get that extra attention. I take this opportunity to pay it forward and give the tutees the same chances that were given to me.

Working in the Valued Youth Partnership program has given me a glimpse into a different career path. Before this year, I did not consider teaching as an option for my future. However, seeing the excitement of the tutees has moved me to reevaluate my feelings about teaching. I look forward to exploring my opportunities and maybe one day providing this opportunity to one of my own tutees.



The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is a research-based, internationally-recognized dropout prevention program that has kept 98% of its tutors in school.

The Valued Youth Partnership, created by IDRA, is an internationally-recognized, cross-age tutoring program with an unusual twist. This dropout prevention program works by identifying junior high and high school students in at-risk situations and enlisting them as tutors for elementary school youngsters who are also struggling in school. Given this role of personal and academic responsibility, the Valued Youth tutors learn self-discipline and develop self-esteem. Schools shift to the philosophy and practices of valuing students considered at-risk. Results show that tutors stay in school, have increased academic performance, improved school attendance and advanced to higher education.

Learn more at
www.idra.org/valued-youth



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