

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)



Six Teens Win 2016 National Essay Contest Awards

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Tutors Share Stories of the Program's Impact on Their Lives



"These kids motivated me to push further in my education. When you have little ones who look up to you like you're some kind of super hero, you don't want to let them down."

- Irma Tinoco, Junior at Odessa High School

Six students received prizes in a national competition among participants in the [Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program](#), a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program of the Intercultural Development Research Association. Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors wrote about how the program helped them do better in school and how they had helped their tutees to do better.

- **First Place High School Winner - Stefan García**, 12th Grade, Odessa High School, Texas
- **Second Place High School Winner - Irma Tinoco**, 11th Grade, Odessa High School, Texas
- **Third Place High School Winner - April Bermea**, 11th Grade, South San Antonio High School, Texas
- **First Place Middle School Winner - Alexandra Sánchez**, 8th Grade, MS 331 The Bronx School of Young Leaders, New York City
- **Second Place Middle School Winner - Mykel Jones**, 8th Grade, John Still K-8 School, Sacramento
- **Third Place Middle School Winner - Melakii Uribe**, 8th Grade, Robert C. Zamora Middle School, Texas

There were competitions at both the middle school and high school levels in the United States. Winners from each competition are being awarded \$200 for first place, \$150 for second place and \$100 for third place along with commemorative certificates and trophies.

Highlights from the Winning Essays



In his essay, **Stefan García** wrote: "The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has been mainly about being a leader. To be a leader you must guide, care and nurture the people you are leading... Some people just understand that being lost is so close to being found. The night is darkest just before the dawn. So when everything seems hopeless, faith is an essence. The level of faith in a leader will show just how much they are willing to do for the people they are guiding... Another point I wanted to make about being a great leader is that you not only help others with problems, you help build their courage, confidence, intelligence, and as a human being overall. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program opened my mind to better thinking. Also the program reminded me every day that time is limited, not only in class, but in life." - [See Stefan's full essay](#)

Irma Tinoco wrote in her essay: "The first day I met my kids [tutees], I was pretty excited. As the days went on, I started to get closer to them, and then I realized that I didn't want to be a failure. These kids motivated me to push further in my education. When you have little ones who look up to you like you're some kind of super hero, you don't want to let them down. So every time I think about skipping, I think of how much I struggle in school, and I don't want that for them." - [See Irma's full essay](#)



"The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program really made a difference in me because, ever since I started high school, I never wanted to come to school," wrote **April Bermea**. "I would always tell myself: 'Man, I just want to drop out. When can school end already?' But look here, I am going to graduate next year, and I feel better about myself knowing I will walk the stage with my friends and graduate. I never felt so proud of myself and hearing my mom say, 'Wow, my daughter is going to graduate!' That makes me the happiest person. I wouldn't change any of this experience. I just want to make my family proud of me." - [See April's full essay](#)

In her essay, **Alexandra Sánchez** wrote: "Everyone needs that person who supports them no matter what, no matter the circumstances. That supporter builds a confidence in a person. After a while, a person starts doing the stuff on their own. My tutees at first called me all the time to help them with questions. After a while of motivating them and telling them they could do it, they started believing they could too... I felt like I accomplished something... When I look back at this job, it won't just be that I helped them with work, I helped them find the capability in themselves, even if they don't fully understand it themselves." - [See Alexandra's full essay](#)



Mykel Jones wrote in his essay: "'When I began middle school, I didn't worry about much. It was okay to have one F and average grades. Most of the time, I wouldn't participate in school... Without this job, I would have not gotten the inspiration to do great things. Now I am passing all my classes with A's and B's. I help my mom with anything she needs help with, and I am a more patient and understanding person. Also, I'm showing up to work right on time. I'm grateful to have this opportunity to be in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.'" - [See Mykel's full essay](#)

"This program changed my attitude because my attitude was negative in the beginning," wrote **Melakii Uribe**. "I've started to respect people more. The students [tutees] taught me how to have confidence and how to make other people happy too. It also has helped me to be more respectful to my family and teachers and classmates. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a great program for kids who get in trouble, like me. I've been getting into trouble ever since I can remember. I am a different person when I am in class with my tutees. I am

the one setting the example and helping them with work. I thought I wasn't smart enough to help them, but now I know I am. In the end, I'm proud of what I've accomplished through this program. I thought I was tutoring and helping [my tutee], but, really, he was helping me."

- See [Melakii's full essay](#)



Honorable Mentions

Honorable mentions were awarded to students in schools that submitted multiple student essays; these students had the highest score at their campus.

High School Honorable Mentions

- **Isabel Martínez**, 10th Grade, South San Antonio High School, Texas
- **Jessica Suchil**, 12th Grade, Odessa High School, Texas

Middle School Honorable Mentions

- **Sabrina Alemán**, 8th Grade, Dwight Middle School, San Antonio
- **Lesly Barba**, 7th Grade, César Chávez Middle School, La Joya, Texas
- **Mittzi Cantú**, 7th Grade, Dr. Javier Saenz Middle School, La Joya, Texas
- **Mariah De Luna**, 8th Grade, Zamora Middle School, San Antonio
- **Brittney Fernández**, 7th Grade, Irene M. García Middle School, La Joya, Texas
- **Shannon Holmes**, 7th Grade, Carstens Elementary-Middle School, Detroit
- **Jeffrey Rios**, 8th Grade, New Open World Academy, Los Angeles
- **Mabel Rivera**, 8th Grade, MS 331 The Bronx School of Young Leaders, New York City
- **Aria Russell**, 8th Grade, John Still K-8 School, Sacramento
- **Nikaulis Taveras**, 8th Grade, Captain Manuel Rivera, Jr. PS/MS279, New York City
- **Anai Treviño**, 7th Grade, Domingo Treviño Middle School, La Joya, Texas

While not yet in middle school, fifth grade tutors in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program PS94 Kings College School in New York City wrote their own essays. Below are the top three scorers.

- First Place Elementary School - **Abdul Abdulai**
- Second Place Elementary School - **Brian Martínez**
- Third Place Elementary School - **Skylah Nix**

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by IDRA, is an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program. Since its inception in 1984, the program has kept more than 33,600 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. According to the Valued Youth creed, all students are valuable, none is expendable. The lives of more than 661,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program.



See our video overview of how the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program impacts students and schools. [12 min]

[FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAM](#)

[Website](#) [Technical Assistance](#) [Newsletter](#) [eNews](#) [Annual Report](#) [Contact Us](#)



[SIGN UP FOR EMAILS](#)