



**IDRA**  
Youth TechXperts

# Reflection Contest Winning Entries 2025-26





## **IDRA Youth TechXperts** *Building Students' STEM Identity & Leadership*

Despite increased investments in technology initiatives for youth, participation rates in IT fields for students of color, girls and emergent bilingual students remain alarmingly low. IDRA Youth TechXperts is our answer to this challenge, built on a solid foundation of research that shows students thrive when they can perform, be recognized and cultivate a deep interest in computer science.

In 2025, IDRA launched the program in Brownsville ISD in 2025-26, serving middle school students who are in at-risk situations. The students become technical support specialists for their schools. IDRA provides dynamic, hands-on, and student-led project-based learning (PBL) modules and year-long technology support experiences in collaboration with the participating districts' IT departments. Students gain mentoring relationships with local STEM professionals, and IDRA facilitates workforce development-related paid summer internships.

Learn more at

<https://www.idra.org/services/idra-youth-techxperts>

**“I didn’t expect the helping people with technology would change me. Because of the Youth TechXperts program, I want to learn more about computers and STEM jobs.”**

*– Youth TechXperts student, Diony Ahumada, Faulk Middle School, Brownsville ISD*



## Diony Ahumada

8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
FAULK MIDDLE  
SCHOOL, BROWNSVILLE  
ISD

### First Place



### Transcript

I didn't expect that helping people with technology would change me. In the IDRA Youth TechXperts program, I learned how to solve technology problems at Falls Middle School.

People trusted me to help them with their stuff and that made me feel proud and responsible. When I fix their problems, I feel proud because I know I made someone's day better.

Because of the Youth TechXperts program, I want to learn more about computers and STEM jobs.

The IDRA Youth TechXperts program showed me I can make a difference using technology.

Hi, my name is Diony Ahumada. I'm an eighth grader in the IDRA Youth TechXperts program.

Thank you for providing every fun field trip for us.

Thank you IDRA Youth TechXperts.

See video: <https://idra.news/YouthTechXpertsReflection26VideoKR>



## **Katia Ramírez**

8TH GRADE, VELA  
MIDDLE SCHOOL,  
BROWNSVILLE ISD

### **Second Place**

#### **How IDRA Youth TechXperts has helped me**

IDRA Youth TechXperts has helped me in many ways. Ever since got into this program, I learned many ways to support myself through technology. For instance, I now realize how important that women need to be in these male dominated fields to increase job opportunities and equality. I have also learned that teamwork allows me to prepare for future job tasks. Another last but important thing I have picked up from Youth TechXperts is the crucial role of leadership. This is needed all throughout life and to be successful.

To begin with, Youth TechXperts has helped me notice the importance of women in male dominated fields that have to do with technology. This experience has truly opened my horizons and inspired me to excel in technology, allowing me to pursue a successful path that few women currently explore. I would love to be part of the difference in innovation and enhancement of decision making along with improving economic performance through diverse perspectives. All in all, IDRA has helped me notice how much I want to make a difference and be among the few to persuade women into these male dominated fields.

In addition, Youth TechXperts has also allowed me to realize the significance of teamwork and how very demanding it is if you thrive in it for future careers. The IDRA has taught me how to better my teamworking skills that I

will need throughout life, especially through technology. I have realized that teamwork allows effectiveness and the enhancement of my communication skills. I have learned to be most productive while working in a team. I came to realize that teamwork increases productivity, manages efficient information sharing and boosts engagement. This is very important for future job opportunities in everything, but most particularly in technology.

Furthermore, this program has taught me the key of leadership. I have learned that through leadership you get your voice heard and many opportunities come with this crucial skill. There's a vast amount of experience you can grasp with this skill, for many will look for this capableness. Participating in this program helped me transition from being hesitant to lead to confidently managing a team, largely due to our collaborative efforts.

In conclusion, this wonderful opportunity of being in a technology program has induced me to be many things I wasn't before. For example, I now realize the importance of leadership skills, teamwork ethic, and the significance of women being in male dominant fields. I am very appreciative of the opportunity to grow with this program and to explore new skills I had lacked before.



## Bryana Martínez García

8TH GRADE, VELA  
MIDDLE SCHOOL,  
BROWNSVILLE ISD

### Third Place

### Since I became a IDRA Youth TechXpert, I believe I can...

Becoming an IDRA Youth TechXpert has helped me believe I can become a better person with things I enjoy doing and helping those around me who don't know how to use the technology. It made me be able to learn new things and how to build many things dealing with technology. And it has also helped me learn that not everything can be done independently. Sometimes you need someone to help you or maybe a group of people to build something.

It has helped me believe I can handle anything, such as a new career. I started enjoying this class since we learn plenty of new things. I enjoy learning how you can handle technology, and you don't always have to do it independently since there will always be other people there to correct you and others. And if something goes wrong, you can always retry and learn from your mistakes, which makes you understand the problem and resolve it.

Becoming an IDRA Youth TechXpert was the best decision since it's my passion and is what I want to do in the future. I'd rather do something that I enjoy doing in the future than do something I hate and won't look forward to.

I honestly believe that understanding how to deal with technology is a great thing because everything we do nowadays has been online. I also believe that this class was such an opportunity to learn more things so that if in the future when I come across problems, I would know how to deal with them since I started when I was in eighth grade and have more experience.

Most people usually don't know how to deal with technology, so being with the IDRA Youth

TechXperts programs is helpful. I can help those around me who need help learning how to use technology and help them build businesses.

I honestly enjoy building things for the IDRA Youth TechXperts because of the opportunities they give us to learn new things and the time they give for us to learn something new and be able to accomplish things. They have helped me and the rest of my class by learning how to put wires together, building a desktop, knowing what goes inside a mother board and figuring out how to put together a mother board, etc.

Being in the IDRA Youth TechXperts program has helped me learn how to replace a keyboard and take apart the bottom on the laptop and learn how it's built. They have helped me learn how to put it back together. My teacher, Mr. Salazar has helped me throughout all these moments of me struggling, and he has always helped me accomplish it and taught me many more things.

I enjoy and love being in this class because my teacher, Mr. Salazar, has helped me become a better person with these things and be able to learn how to do things. He has also been able to help me become a better person so I can start learning how to be able to have patience and do things slowly and not have to rush and that not everything has to be perfect because everyone makes mistakes. I honestly think that has helped me because I used to be such a rushful person and wanted to do everything right and faster than everyone.

But taking my time and being able to do it is so much better than getting rushed. You can learn how to do it better and be able to get it perfect

by taking your time. Rushing will just take more of your time since you're going to be messing up and not doing things carefully. Mr. Salazar has helped me be able to help me through all the breakouts I have when I can't do something right. The patience he has had with me to accomplish something has made me realize you don't need to rush to do anything.

This class has helped me realize that I can do so much more than I thought I can do. When I started doing something, I started thinking I won't be able to do it. But when I got the hang of it, I was able to realize that I could do it. I just need to have patience, and I can ask people around me for help. And that it's not bad to not understand something. Nobody knows how to do something right away. You need to look at how someone else does it, and you need to get instructions on how to do something or you will do it wrong.

I started to realize that I can do anything that I chose to learn. I just have to work hard so I can get it right and not have to struggle as much as I used to. When I get older, I can help those around me do the things that I thought I would never be able to do and help them accomplish it without overthinking so much that they have to have no passion in doing it. When I started this class, I thought I was not going to be able to do anything. Then I started to learn how to do everything, and I started getting the hang of it.

This class has made me believe I can do anything as long as I have a passion and patience for it. Since I started having this passion, I realized I can help those who don't really understand technology.



## Victor Espinoza

8TH GRADE, VELA MIDDLE SCHOOL, BROWNSVILLE ISD

### Honorable Mention

### How Youth TechXperts has helped me

IDRA Youth TechXperts has helped me in multiple ways. However, there are three specific ways that it has helped me since I have been in the program. One way is that before I was ever in the Youth TechXperts program, I never knew how to code. Another way is that, before I didn't know how to work with people until I joined the program. Finally, the program also helped with my personal problems like my social anxiety.

Firstly, IDRA Youth TechXperts helped me believe that I can complete any problem dealing with technology. As well, it has also boosted my confidence. I started feeling this when I started to learn coding and I also learned what hexadecimal were as well as I also met a lot of new people while in the program and this was when another middle school went so we could all work on and make Internet cables. This is how it has boosted my confidence while I have been in the Youth TechXperts program.

Secondly, IDRA Youth TechXperts has helped me learn how to cooperate with teammates and learn from one another. An impact that I made in the community is to help fix elderly's computers and restart their Internet if it's not working and troubleshooting whatever they need. I have done this before when I was at my elderly neighbors house, and they couldn't find out what was wrong with their phone. I restarted it and it helped them and they were very grateful. At home I helped reset the Internet and fix a broken laptop for a family member. As well, I cooperated with my teammates to build a stadium and also build a robot car, which took a lot of cooperation to finish and test for any flaws. This is how Youth

TechXperts has helped me to develop my team management skills and help my community when they need it.

Thirdly, Youth TechXperts has also helped with my social anxiety. I have discovered a strength that I have is that I can stay composed during an interview. I also can learn and remember things more now since I have learned a lot of things I need to remember. So I think that has also helped make me smarter. The way I learned that I can stay composed during interviews is when my class went on a field trip to build a stadium. After we were finished, I was interviewed and also asked some questions, which also helped with my social anxiety. During the field trip, I also needed to talk to some people who were in my class who I never talked to before. I learned new things and I also met new people who I had conversations with. This is how Youth TechXperts has helped me with my social anxiety. And it has helped me discover stuff that even I didn't know about myself at the time before joining the organization.

In conclusion, the Youth TechXperts program has helped me with learning coding, cooperation with teammates and my social anxiety as well as how I help my community. And it has helped me discover my strengths. It has also helped change the way I think about my future. I used to not want to go to college, but now I want to go for tech so I can get my degree and get a good job. And I think it has, overall, helped me become smarter in life. This is how the incredible program, Youth TechXperts, has helped me achieve and change my mind about multiple things.

# A Legacy of Valuing Students



For decades, IDRA has upheld a belief that all students have intelligence, potential and power beyond what schools often expect.

But it is not a mere attitude. It requires intentional strategies, like creating purposeful experiences in classrooms, recognizing student strengths and contributions, and maintaining positive relationships between teachers and students.

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership's 98% success rate over 40 years demonstrates what happens when schools use asset-based practices. IDRA has applied the bedrock qualities of youth leadership to many other programs over the years.

Here are our most recent examples.

## IDRA Valued Youth Partnership

Our philosophy came alive in the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership (VYP) where teenagers who are deemed at risk of dropping out become tutors of elementary students.

Tutors turn from struggling to having higher attendance, lower discipline rates, stronger academic skills, and higher self-esteem. And 98% stayed in school.

In four decades, **over three-quarters of a million people's lives** have been changed as schools and communities see what is on the inside – the inherent value and potential of each child.



## IDRA Youth Leadership Now

Starts with VYP for high-need eighth graders and expands impact schoolwide by also integrating teacher mentoring for high school transition with our IDRA Education CAFÉ family leadership model.



## IDRA Digital Ambassadors

Supports students as leaders who first conduct participatory action research to identify technology needs in their low-income community and then lead community training.



## IDRA Youth TechXperts

Middle school students build cutting-edge STEM skills to provide campus technology support while fostering leadership, inclusivity and real-world experience.



## IDRA VisionCoders

Asset-based college prep program through a computer science course in Title I (low wealth) middle schools where students learn about AI and problem solving while coding educational games for early elementary "buddies."



Learn more!  
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IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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