



# IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

## Winning 2018 Essays



**Intercultural Development Research Association – June 2018**

5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101 • San Antonio, Texas 78023

210-444-1710 • [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) • [www.facebook.com/IDRAed](https://www.facebook.com/IDRAed)

# IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest

## **Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Winning 2018 Essays**

Copyright © 2018 by the Intercultural Development Research Association

### Cover photos:

Top Left - Ector County, Texas, tutors

Top Right - San Antonio tutors

Bottom Left - New York City tutors

Bottom Right - La Joya, Texas, tutors

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or by the publisher.

Requests for such permission will be most generously handled by: Intercultural Development Research Association; 5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101; San Antonio, Texas 78228; Ph. 210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714; E-mail: [contact@idra.org](mailto:contact@idra.org); [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)

No ISBN. Distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association. Manufactured in the United States.

This document was prepared with funds in part provided by The Coca-Cola Foundation. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of The Coca-Cola Foundation and no endorsement should be inferred.

# IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest

## Winner: High School First Place



**Santiago Sosa**

11<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

Have you ever been told “no” by an adult before? If you said “no,” then you must have had the best childhood ever. Every day a child is told “no” by an adult. Why? Why must adults say “no”? When a child does something either good or bad, they will always learn from it. These actions will always better a child’s intellect, because they are learning and growing their mindsets.

When I was in elementary school, I was put into a dyslexic program to better myself in reading. No problem, right? I was in the third grade and around that time, my peers were checking out chapter books. I had a lower reading level and never got the chance to read chapter books. One day, I got the courage to check out a Junie B. Jones book. I went to check out the book, and the librarian told me, “I know your reading level isn’t that high, please get another book that’s at a dyslexic level.” My high hopes were shattered because of what the librarian told me. I turned around and went back to my class with no books. My classroom teacher asked me, “Where are your books?” I told her the situation, and she marched me right down to the library and checked out the Junie B. Jones book for me. I realized that she believed in me.

There are many reasons as to why I joined this the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and I could go on and on as to why I stayed. I wouldn’t even be writing this if it wasn’t for my tutee who reminded me how hard it can be to learn differently from others.

A few months ago, I walked into his classroom, and I noticed that he wasn’t as cheerful as usual. I walked to his desk and asked him why he was so down. The thing is, my tutee is always in a great mood; nothing really brings him down. Then he told me that he made a low score on his AR book test. I told him that it was okay

and that it just means that he would just have to try harder next time. I thought I was in the right that I told him that, but when I looked at his face, tears were falling down his cheeks. I told him that I didn’t mean to make him sad and asked what was wrong. He told me that one of his classmates called him “dumb,” and I instantly understood why he was so mad. His so-called friend then told him, “That’s exactly why you have a tutor because you need help because you’re dumb.”

This is exactly why I stayed in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program: I know the struggles of being pulled out of class and the embarrassment of being pulled out in front of your classmates. I told my tutee to let them make fun of you, but in the end, they are the ones who are dumb, that there is nothing wrong with you learning and getting extra help from me and your teacher.

To this day, I thank my third-grade teacher because she believed in me when no one else did; and I hope I am leaving that kind of impact on my tutee. “Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not. Wear it like armor, and it can never be used to hurt you” (Game of Thrones, George R.R. Martin). Our experiences make us who we are. While my experience in third grade was hard, I learned that teachers are the ones who can help you see your true value. It also prepared me to work with my tutee, to show him that there are people who care, and that’s what is important in life.





## IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest

### Winner: High School Second Place



#### Daniela Urquidi

12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

In all honesty, I had no idea that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program even existed until a friend told me about it. When I asked more about the program, she let me know that they tutored elementary kids. I thought that was nice and all, but after she said that they got paid for it is when I wanted in.

I was never too psyched over kids until I had my own last year. I thought to myself, how I wish I could have had some extra help in school as a little girl. I've always struggled with math and science, and it would have been nice if I could have had someone to help build me up where I was weak. I wonder how different school could have been for me if I would have had a tutor to educate and help me understand things like math; I think about how much better I could have been. Because of that, I decided that I wanted to do and be that for someone else's child. I would want my son to have any extra help he needed if it was necessary.

As a tutor, I learned how difficult it really is to be on the other side of education and become the teacher. My teachers deserve all of the credit they can get because of everyone they have to deal with daily. The tutees who I was assigned to this year have taught me so much over the time I've spent with them. They taught me and reminded me how essential education is and that you'll need it throughout a lifetime. They taught me patience and kindness – something that I lacked and needed. They taught me about life,

things I never knew I needed, all while I was teaching them things they would need in life as well. The fact that you never really know what's going on in another's household is another reason it makes this opportunity so special. I feel that I've grown such a strong bond with my tutees just because I don't know what all goes on in their lives outside of school, and I accept them anyway.

I may be the adult figure or friend that they needed in their lives, someone that they can come to in search of guidance, comfort or even play the role of a secret keeper. I've realized that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is more than just tutoring little kids. It's also you becoming part of an innocent child's life and them becoming part of yours. Knowing that, at the end of the school year, I may lose all contact with my tutees saddens me and breaks my heart. However, I go on knowing that everything I taught them will go with them for the rest of their lives. The knowledge I have given them will leave an imprint on their lives, and everything that they taught me will forever leave an imprint on mine, making it all worthwhile.



## IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest

### Winner: High School Third Place



#### Melanie Esparza

9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL, SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD, TEXAS

#### How the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Changed Me

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program made me open my eyes and has given me reasons that I should come to school every day, and that's exactly what I'm doing for my Pre-K tutees.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program not only opened my eyes but also taught me to be responsible with my schoolwork and attendance. My grades used to be from 40 to 60 in English and Algebra. I was losing interest in school because of my grades being low. I now feel good about seeing my progress reports and report cards! Even though some people tell me they're not good enough and make me feel like giving up, I stop and think that I do work hard and do my best not only because my Pre-K tutees inspired me, but because my teacher for Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, Mrs. Ortega, pushes me to work harder than any other teacher has done for me.

However, all those good grades have made my attendance much better as compared to other years. I used to skip classes or not show up to school. I'm always in class and especially on time, and not only that, I'm sometimes even the first person to get to class.

I see no reason to miss a day of school, especially the days I tutor my tutees: Janie, Lee, and Alan.\* I know they enjoy me being there, and I wouldn't want to miss a day of seeing their smiling faces. That makes my day go on a lot better. Those good morning little hugs they give me really make me love being there and giving them the help they need.

Being in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program really made me think a lot about my future. I've never thought about being a Pre-K teacher until now. Me tutoring the Pre-K classroom tutees gets me thinking about my future. I can actually see myself loving to wake up every morning with no hesitation, to teach the smiling faces that made my day, to be my own Pre-K classroom in the future. I have learned that responsibility and dedication are important to be a good role model and a teacher one day. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has changed me, and I am determined to follow my dreams.



*\*names changed for privacy*

## IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest

### Winner: Middle School First Place



**Marely García**

7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

TREVINO MIDDLE SCHOOL, LA JOYA ISD, TEXAS

Tutors are here to help kids learn, understand and grow academically. Ever since I started tutoring, I learned more about how younger kids accomplish tasks they are given. I have two young siblings and one of them is four years old, which is the same age my tutees are. By working and interacting with them, I was able to understand the ways they learn faster. This helped me teach my little sister, which made my parents proud of me. Also since I became a tutor, I learned to be more responsible. For example, I help my parents with my siblings; turn in all of my unfinished work and save money. Since we get paid for tutoring, I had to learn to save the money I earned. My parents would also help me with that because they wouldn't let me waste money after I got to a certain amount.

My tutees also taught me to be patient because not all students work at the same level. Before I started tutoring, I would easily get frustrated with people who worked too slow or too fast, wouldn't understand what was told to them, or needed instructions to be repeated more than once. It was also extremely hard for me to work with smaller children, because I would easily become impatient with them. After I started tutoring, everything changed. I learned to work and be patient with younger students. I also became more understanding and helpful toward my peers and siblings. Being a tutor has showed me that not only do we teach our tutees, but they also teach us and help us mature.

Even though we get paid to tutor them, I would gladly do it for free. The reason for that is that I've learned so many different things from my tutees and this experience. I love helping these kids learn while at the same time they give me an understanding of how everyone works differently. Another thing I love about this tutoring program is that now my tutees are showing progress in their test scores. Their teacher is also extremely happy about me going to tutor them because they are better behaved and excited about attending school.

Thanks to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program I was able to experience these amazing changes within myself. My tutees are wonderful students to work with, and they are also very intelligent. I'm glad I was chosen to be in this program because it has made me a better person. I hope that these students I'm tutoring remember this opportunity that was given to them so that they will be the best they can be in the future.



## IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest Winner: Middle School Second Place



**Isaías Zavala**

7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

MEMORIAL MIDDLE SCHOOL, LA JOYA ISD, TEXAS

### How the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Transformed Me

When I first started attending the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I thought it was going to be the hardest job on earth, because on the first day my partner's tutee was on the chair jumping on top of other students. Ever since I joined the program, I started doing my homework earlier, which gave me time to play afterwards. Before I joined, I couldn't go outside to play after school because the rules of the house are no work, no play. During the first few days of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I didn't think I was going to make such a great impact on my tutees. I never imagined being a role model for them until a tutee told me that he was going to be like me when he grew up. Ever since I joined Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, my life has changed a lot because I get to practice my English more frequently, and I've gained knowledge from the field trips that we have attended.

My life has changed a lot. Before I joined Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I had shoes that were super tight, and the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program helped me buy some new shoes for my family and myself. My mom was studying to become a nurse, and she was having trouble making ends meet with money for an HESI exam she had to present. Luckily, I was able to help with my paycheck, which helped her become a RN.

Before I joined Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I was sometimes feeling kind of depressed because my parents are divorced but now that I'm earning money, it has turned my whole life around. I can go out more often and enjoy some good restaurants with my family. It feels good to be able to help my mom financially. I also like to get money because I donate five dollars from every paycheck to my church. I truly believe that the

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program should be offered in all of the grade levels in middle school.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has molded me into a better person because when the tutees disrespect me, I get a personal experience of how the teachers feel when I talk back to them. I have learned a lot from program because the teacher always gives me advice when I'm having trouble with teachers or with school work. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped me become a more responsible student and person. In school, I would often misbehave, and now that I have been in the program I'm afraid to get a [disciplinary] referral, because I don't want to get exited out of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.

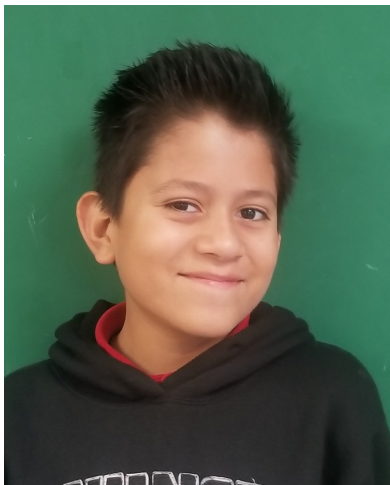
I enjoy tutoring my tutees because I express my happy feelings when I am teaching little kids. When I teach, I want the tutees to believe that I am very smart and that they can become smarter than me. It has been a pleasure tutoring at the elementary school, because when they see me walk into their class, the tutees get very happy. The spark in their faces helps me forget all the problems that are happening at home and school.

Being part of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has made a very positive impact in my life. It has been a great pleasure helping tutor my tutees. I always felt appreciated and welcomed at my school. I am truly glad I was able to participate and learn a lot from this awesome program.





## IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest Winner: Middle School Third Place



### Sipriano Badillo

7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

MEMORIAL MIDDLE SCHOOL, LA JOYA ISD, TEXAS

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is not just a normal class that pays you to attend. It changes lives and even the coldest of hearts. I honestly thought I was going to change my tutees, but I guess I was wrong, because they changed me.

This program changed my personal life and my life at school. I was not supposed to be in this program. However, I was one of the 16 students out of the 240 seventh graders from Memorial Middle School that was lucky to be chosen to be in this very awesome program. This has really benefited my family because my family struggles financially. Sometimes there is nothing in the refrigerator. I have three sisters and two brothers. Sometimes there is nothing to eat. With the paychecks that this very awesome program has given me, I get to put some food on the table for my family and me. This makes me really very proud of how I can contribute to my family!

Since I became a tutor, I started to feel a very strong love for young children. This impacted my personal life because my little brother and I would constantly fight, but not anymore. This changed the relationship between my little brother and me. The

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is magic! It has transformed me into a stronger person. This opportunity is not for everyone who attends this middle school. I am just an ordinary boy who goes to school, does homework, eats, takes showers, and now my life has made a massive change because of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. I love going to the elementary school, because it brings so many memories from years ago when I used to attend that same elementary.

I am looking forward to giving more and more of me, to become a way better tutor than what I already am. I don't know what

I could have done if I was not one of the lucky ones who was chosen to attend the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Thank You Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program for changing my life! Keep changing lives because that is what this program does best.





## IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2018 Essay Contest

### High School Honorable Mention



**Andrea Perea**

11<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR  
COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

### Academy School Winner

Charles C Ball Academy, San Antonio ISD, Texas



**First Place**  
**Amber Ortiz**

7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

"I'm just excited that I get to teach little kids. This is all I'm here for. It is not for the money, it's for the kids' education... I'm very thankful that I get to teach kids and help them learn what they need to learn... I love seeing them happy when I get there to help them."

### Middle School Honorable Mentions



**Jazara Quintero**

7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
MEMORIAL MIDDLE SCHOOL, LA JOYA,  
TEXAS



**Mía Villaseñor**

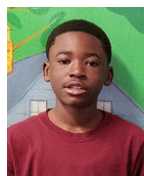
7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
DOMINGO TREVIÑO MIDDLE SCHOOL,  
LA JOYA, TEXAS



**First Place**  
**Barbara Rosario**

5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

"I started to reflect on my life as a tutor. I saw a boy named Joseph\* misbehaving. I realized that he was just as bad as I was when I was in my class. I thought to myself, is this really how I act? It was embarrassing and disgusting. From that point on, that is when I realized that I wanted to change."



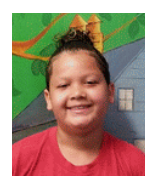
**Second Place**  
**Ashraf Abudulai**

5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE



**Third Place**  
**Quentin Curry**

5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE



**Fourth Place**  
**Jeyrum Andujar**

5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE



**Fifth Place**  
**Carmelo Reel**

5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE



**Honorable Mention**  
**Ahmad Kabba**

5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

*\*name changed for privacy*



**The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a research-based, internationally-recognized dropout prevention program that has kept 98 percent of its tutors in school.**

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by the Intercultural Development Research Association, 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/coca-cola-valued-youth-program](http://www.idra.org/coca-cola-valued-youth-program)



## **Intercultural Development Research Association**

María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., President & CEO  
 5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101 • San Antonio, Texas 78228

210.444.1710 • [www.IDRA.org](http://www.IDRA.org)



[facebook.com/  
IDRAed](https://facebook.com/IDRAed)



[@IDRAedu](https://twitter.com/IDRAedu)



[budurl.com/  
IDRALinkedIn](http://budurl.com/IDRALinkedIn)



[flickr.com/  
photos/idraedu](https://flickr.com/photos/idraedu)



[slideshare.net/  
IDRAedu](http://slideshare.net/IDRAedu)



[pinterest.com/  
idraedu/](https://pinterest.com/idraedu/)



[budurl.com/  
IDRAYouTube](http://budurl.com/IDRAYouTube)



[budurl.com/  
IDRAsubscribe](http://budurl.com/IDRAsubscribe)