



YOUTH LEADERSHIP LAREDO

Powered By



ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026

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MISSION

To provide a comprehensive youth program that creates confident, leadership-oriented, empowered citizens who can achieve personal success.



Goals

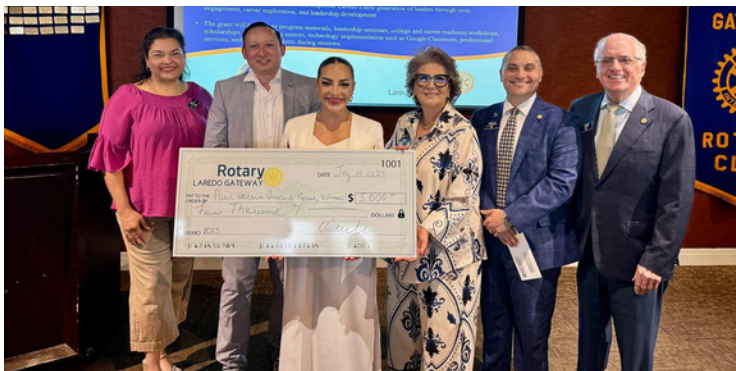


Develop future leaders by providing educational and leadership opportunities focused on civic engagement, workforce readiness, financial literacy, and personal growth, while awarding scholarships to eligible program participants to support higher education and career advancement.

Funding



Youth Leadership Laredo maintains a minimal program tuition to help ensure accessibility for students and families across our community. In an effort to further reduce financial barriers and expand opportunities for participation, the program received generous grant support, including \$10,000 from the PNC Foundation and \$5,000 from the Laredo Gateway Rotary Club. These investments helped support scholarships, educational programming, leadership development activities, and student enrichment experiences that foster college and career readiness among participating students.



LAREDO CHAMBER FOUNDATION

LEADERSHIP



Board of Directors

- Jorge Leal-Laredo Medical Center: Chairman of the Board
- Rossy Chase-PNC Bank: Vice-Chair
- Elizabeth Alonzo-Villarreal (NeighborWorks Laredo): Secretary/ Treasurer
- Dalia Martinez-IBC Bank
- Werner Johnson-Ancira Laredo
- John Kilburn-TAMIU
- Adrian Zapata-PAD Specialists
- Veronica Castillon-Laredo Independent School District
- JD Delgado-Delgado Insurance



COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

- Adrian Zapata: Committee Chair; PAD Specialists
- Renee Ambrose: Class of 2029 Chair; Modern Woodmen of America/Border Bail Bonds
- Nohely Zapata: Committee Member; Laredo ISD
- Edna Garza: Committee Member; Laredo ISD
- Lourdes Hernandez: Committee Member; Harmony Public Schools
- Yanett Guerra: Committee Member; Royal Invitations
- Claudette Soto Molina: Committee Member; Cresta Advisors
- Rene Molina: Committee Member; Capital Farm Credit
- Gabriela Trevino: Committee Member; Killam Development
- Karen Covarrubias: Committee Member; City of Laredo
- Mara Cortez: Laredo College Student
- Alejandra Carrillo: Laredo College Student
- Nicolas Carranza: Laredo College Student



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2025-2026 KICK-OFF EVENT

Texas A&M International University

September 6, 2025

The Youth Leadership Laredo Kick-Off Event was held at Texas A&M International University on Saturday, September 6, 2025. The event officially launched the Youth Leadership Laredo program's 2025-26 session, bringing together participants and mentors for an introduction to the curriculum, networking opportunities, and a motivational overview of the year ahead. The event also featured keynote speaker Bernice Sanchez, PhD, Interim Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Texas A&M International University, who shared valuable insight and encouragement with students as they begin their leadership journey.

Breakout Session 1

Youth Leadership Laredo launched the program year with Session 1 of the YLL Kick-Off, featuring community leaders and educators who provided students with valuable guidance in leadership development, networking, teamwork, conflict resolution, and community service.

8th grade students and parents participated in a YLL Parent Presentation led by Adrian Zapata. 9th grade students engaged in a Speed Networking session presented by Ruben Villarreal of Laredo College. Patricia Perez of Laredo College facilitated a Team Building session for 10th grade participants, while Amanda Flores led an impactful Conflict Resolution session for 11th grade students. Seniors participated in the introduction of the Class of 2026 service project, "Purses of Love" benefiting Casa Misericordia, presented by Dr. Marissa Guerrero and Marisa Parra of Laredo College.



Breakout Session 2

Session 2 of Youth Leadership Laredo continued to build leadership and communication skills through a series of engaging breakout sessions led by local professionals and community leaders.

8th grade students participated in introductory activities facilitated by Adrian Zapata to help foster connection and engagement among participants. 9th grade students attended a session led by LeAnn Bernal focused on the power of storytelling and effective communication. Felipe Romero guided 10th grade students through a Public Speaking Exercise designed to strengthen confidence and presentation skills. 11th grade students received valuable information regarding higher education opportunities during a presentation by a representative from the Texas A&M International University Office of Recruitment. Seniors participated in a Civic Awareness session led by Cecilia Jimenez, emphasizing the importance of voting, civic engagement, and active community participation.

These sessions continued to support the program's mission of preparing students to become informed, confident, and engaged future leaders.



Breakout Session 3

Session 3 of Youth Leadership Laredo provided students with opportunities to learn about community leadership, career pathways, personal development, and future planning through interactive breakout sessions led by local professionals and educators.

8th and 9th grade students attended presentations led by Monica Martinez, Executive Director of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, where they received an overview of the Chamber's role in supporting local businesses, economic development, and community leadership initiatives. Julie Tijerina presented a session on the importance of Family Meal Time for 10th grade students, highlighting communication, wellness, and healthy family engagement. 11th grade participants explored agricultural career opportunities during an Ag Career Exploration session led by Jeffrey Hester. Seniors participated in an Independent Planning Session focused on organizing and preparing for their senior year schedules and responsibilities.

These sessions continued to expose students to leadership opportunities, career exploration, and real-world skills that support both personal and professional growth.



YLL GIVES BACK DAY

October 18, 2025

LAS PALMAS NATURE TRAIL CLEAN UP

As part of their community service and civic engagement experience, 8th grade Youth Leadership Laredo participants participated in a cleanup project at Las Palmas Trail along the riverbank. Students worked together to remove litter and debris from the area, helping promote environmental stewardship, community pride, and beautification efforts within the City of Laredo. The purpose of the activity was to encourage students to understand

the importance of protecting natural spaces, serving their community through volunteerism, and recognizing the impact individual actions can have on the overall health and appearance of public spaces. The project also reinforced teamwork, responsibility, and civic leadership through hands-on community involvement.



Sacred Heart Children's Home

9th grade students volunteered at Sacred Heart Children's Home by assisting with car washing and various cleaning tasks. Students helped wash the vans used to transport the children, contributing to the organization's daily operations while gaining hands-on experience in community service, teamwork, and civic responsibility. Special thanks to Marissa Guerrero and Prime Impressions Mobile Auto Detail, LLC for guiding our students throughout the project and sharing their expertise, professionalism, and commitment to community service.



Habitat for Humanity

10th and 11th grade Youth Leadership Laredo participants volunteered with Habitat for Humanity by assisting with landscaping projects, flower bed preparation, fencing, fence staining, and planting flowers and plants. The activity provided students with an opportunity to contribute to community beautification efforts while promoting teamwork, service, and community involvement.



WINTER LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

Laredo College

December 13, 2025

The Youth Leadership Laredo Winter Leadership Seminar brought together students from all grade levels for a day of leadership development, career exploration, and professional growth through interactive breakout sessions led by local business and community leaders. During Breakout Session #1, students learned from presenters representing a variety of industries and professions, including media, financial advising, architecture, transportation, and the energy sector. Speakers included Marcela Delgado of KGNS, Jeronimo Martinez of Cresta Advisors, Angel Trevino Arch of Angel Trevino Architecture, PLLC, Andres Garcia of Mone Transport, and Javier Morales of Killam Oil.

Breakout Session #2 continued to expose students to leadership and career opportunities through sessions led by Bianca Ceballos of PNC Financial Planning, Sheldon Gallegos of Galegos Paving, Adrian Garcia of GateGo, Angel Trevino Arch of Angel Trevino Architecture, PLLC, and Evelyn Gomez and Luis Vazquez from the City of Laredo.

The seminar provided students with valuable insight into different career paths while strengthening communication, leadership, networking, and professional development skills.



HEALTHCARE SEMINAR

January 10, 2026

As part of the Youth Leadership Laredo Healthcare Seminar, students visited local healthcare institutions to gain exposure to careers and services within the medical field. 8th grade students toured Doctors Hospital of Laredo, while 9th and 10th grade participants visited Laredo Medical Center. 11th and 12th grade students attended sessions at Gateway Community Health Center. Throughout the seminar, students learned about healthcare operations, career opportunities, patient care services, and the important role healthcare professionals play in supporting the community.

Doctor's Hospital of Laredo



Gateway Community Health Center



Laredo Medical Center



VOICES & VERDICTS DAY

February 28, 2026



Ninth grade students visited the United States District Court to begin preparation for their upcoming mock trial experience, learning directly from members of the federal judiciary and legal community about courtroom procedures, the structure of the judicial system, and the principles that guide the administration of justice. During the visit, students were introduced to the various roles involved in a trial, including judges, attorneys, witnesses, jurors, and court staff, and gained an understanding of the responsibilities each plays in ensuring a fair and impartial legal process. As part of their preparation, students received guidance on the specific roles they would assume during the mock trial and began developing the skills necessary to effectively fulfill those responsibilities.

Through this hands-on learning experience, students strengthened their critical thinking, public speaking, teamwork, and analytical abilities while gaining a deeper appreciation for the legal profession and the importance of civic engagement. The visit served as a foundation for the mock trial experience, helping students build confidence and prepare for their participation in a real courtroom setting.



Senior students visited the studios of KGNS-TV for an interactive Media & Communications Seminar that provided a behind-the-scenes look at the world of broadcast journalism, television

production, and digital media. During the tour, students learned about news gathering, reporting, anchoring, videography, editing, and the technology required to deliver news and information to the community.

As part of the experience, students also had the opportunity to film a Public Service Announcement (PSA) promoting the senior class's Purses of Love service project. Working alongside media professionals, students gained hands-on experience in message development, on-camera communication, and media production while helping raise awareness for a cause important to their community. The seminar highlighted the vital role local media plays in informing, educating, and connecting the public while exposing students to a variety of careers in the communications industry.

CIVIC DISCOVERY DAY

March 21, 2026

Students participated in an immersive Mock Trial experience at the United States District Court, where they gained firsthand insight into the federal judicial system and the rule of law. Throughout the program, students learned about courtroom procedures, the roles of judges, attorneys, witnesses, and jurors, and the importance of due process in the American legal system. They then applied their knowledge by participating in a simulated court case, allowing them to develop critical thinking, public speaking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills in a real courtroom setting.

This unique educational experience was made possible through the generosity and dedication of United States District Judge Diana Saldaña, United States Magistrate Judge Diana Song Quiroga, United States Magistrate Judge Brian C. Bajew, and the dedicated team of federal law clerks who volunteered their time and expertise to mentor students and guide them through the mock trial process. Their commitment provided participants with an invaluable opportunity to interact directly with members of the federal judiciary and gain a deeper understanding of careers in law and public service.



SERVICE & SYSTEMS DAY

April 11, 2026



8th Grade – Downtown Laredo History Tour

Eighth grade students participated in a guided tour of historic downtown Laredo, where they explored the city's rich heritage, civic institutions, and cultural landmarks. Led by Andrew Carranco and John Woodward, the tour provided students with a deeper understanding of the people, events, and decisions that helped shape Laredo into the vibrant community it is today. The experience encouraged civic awareness and fostered an appreciation for local history and community leadership.

11th Grade – JAMCO Group Logistics & Supply Chain Tour

Eleventh grade students visited JAMCO Group to gain firsthand insight into the logistics, transportation, and supply chain industries that play a critical role in Laredo's economy and international trade. Through presentations by Juan de Dios Benavides, Karla Guerra, and Ana Tena, students learned about transportation technology, supply chain management, and the movement of goods across borders. The tour highlighted career opportunities within the industry and demonstrated how Laredo serves as a vital hub in the nation's commerce network.





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LAREDO FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING FACILITY TOUR

April 18, 2026



The program year concluded with a visit to the Laredo Fire Department Training Facility, where students gained firsthand insight into the critical role first responders play in protecting the community. Students learned about emergency response procedures, firefighting operations, and the extensive training required to serve as firefighters and paramedics. The experience included a tour of the facility, demonstrations of specialized equipment and tools, and meaningful discussions with public safety professionals about their careers, responsibilities, and commitment to service. The seminar provided students with a greater appreciation for public safety and the dedication required to respond to emergencies. Special thanks to District Chief Ismael Cisneros, Captain Jesus Tapia, Captain Charles Edwards, Driver Isaac Castillo, Firefighter/Paramedic Jose Gaona, and Firefighter Chris Vallejo for sharing their expertise and making this memorable learning experience possible.



LAREDO CHAMBER FOUNDATION **SMASH FOR SCHOLARS**

The annual Smash for Scholars Tennis Tournament was held April 30 through May 3, 2026. As one of the Foundation's premier fundraising events benefiting the program's scholarship initiative, the tournament brought together an impressive 240 participants and showcased the community's commitment to investing in future leaders. Hosted in partnership with the City of Laredo Parks and Recreation Department at the George Pappas Tennis Courts and Laredo College tennis courts, the event featured four days of competition, camaraderie, and philanthropy. Special recognition is extended to title sponsor Clear Choice Physicians Group, along with the many sponsors, volunteers, and community partners whose generosity made the tournament a tremendous success. Their support directly funded scholarships awarded to graduating Youth Leadership Laredo students, helping them pursue their educational goals and continue their leadership journeys.

240 total participants



135 Male
Participants

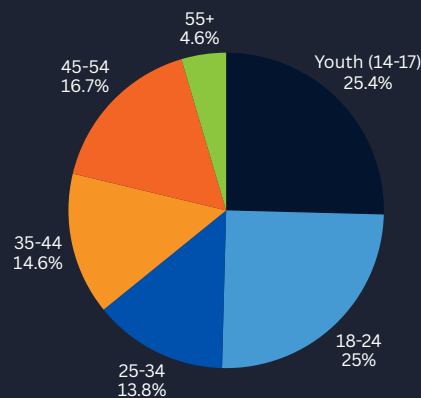
56%



105 Female
Participants

44%

Participant Age Demographics



50%

of all participants were age 24 or younger, directly reflecting the tournament's commitment to investing in youth leadership and educational opportunities.





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END OF YEAR RECOGNITION CEREMONY

Laredo College
May 6, 2026

The Youth Leadership Laredo program culminated with its End-of-Year Awards and Graduation Ceremony, celebrating the achievements of participants and recognizing their dedication to leadership development, community service, and personal growth throughout the year. A total of 146 students successfully met all program requirements and were recognized for their commitment to the program. The ceremony also honored the graduating Class of 2026, whose members completed the five-year leadership journey and demonstrated exceptional dedication to civic engagement and leadership. Through the generous support of sponsors, donors, and the Smash for Scholars Tennis Tournament, each graduating senior received a scholarship to assist in pursuing their educational goals. Congratulations to Caleb Benavides, Danika Brewster, Sarah Collins, Olivia Costabella, Orlando Garza, Audrina Hernandez, Daniel Llera, Christopher Luna, Jorge Madrigal, Genesis Martinez, Isabella Mendoza, and Alberto Vargas on this significant achievement and milestone.



YLL PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

The 2025–2026 Youth Leadership Laredo cohort reflects the diversity of our community. Participants represent multiple school districts, educational settings, neighborhoods, household income levels, and demographic backgrounds across Laredo. The data below demonstrates the program's ability to engage students from throughout the community and provide equitable access to leadership development opportunities.

Program Completers

146 students

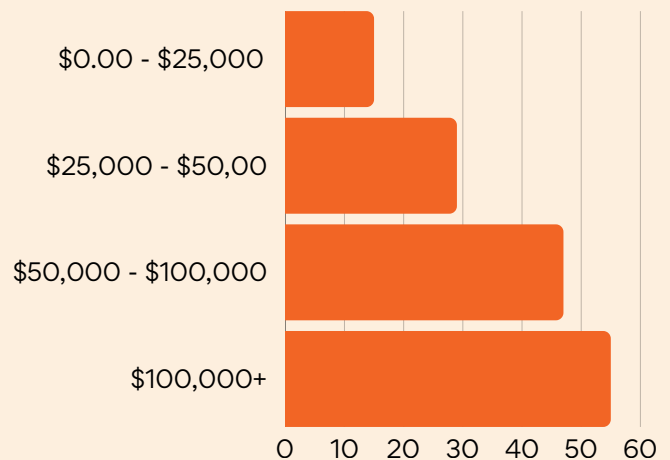


40.1%
Male

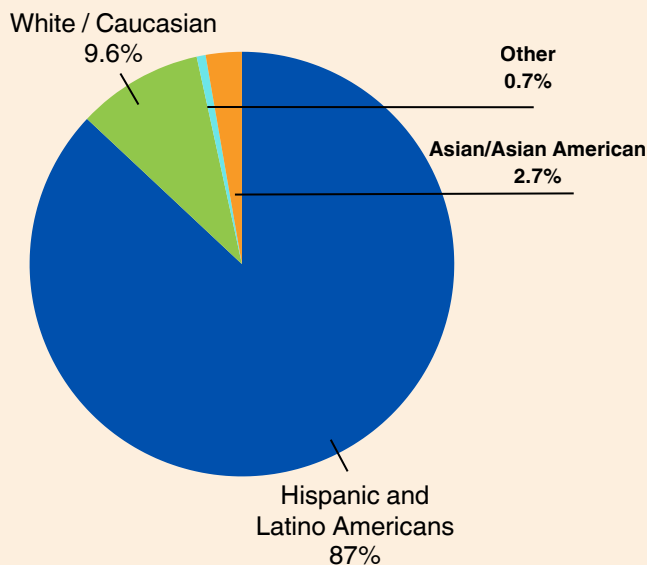


59.6%
Female

Income Distribution

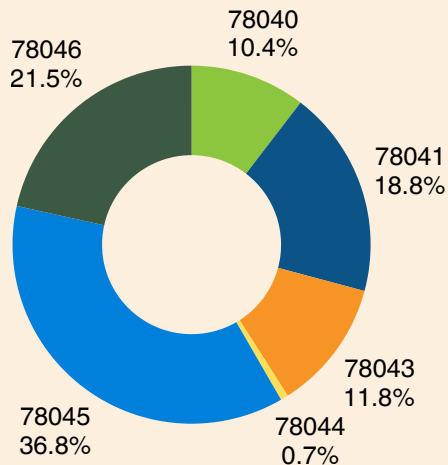


Race/Ethnicity



Youth Leadership Laredo serves students from a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic areas across Laredo. Approximately 44% of participants come from households with annual incomes below \$50,000, while 56% come from households with annual incomes above \$50,000. Participants reside throughout the community, with representation from ZIP codes 78040, 78041, 78043, 78044, 78045, and 78046, encompassing north, south, east, west, and central Laredo. This geographic and economic diversity creates a richer learning environment, exposes students to different perspectives and experiences, and helps ensure the program remains accessible to youth throughout the community.

Geographic Distribution



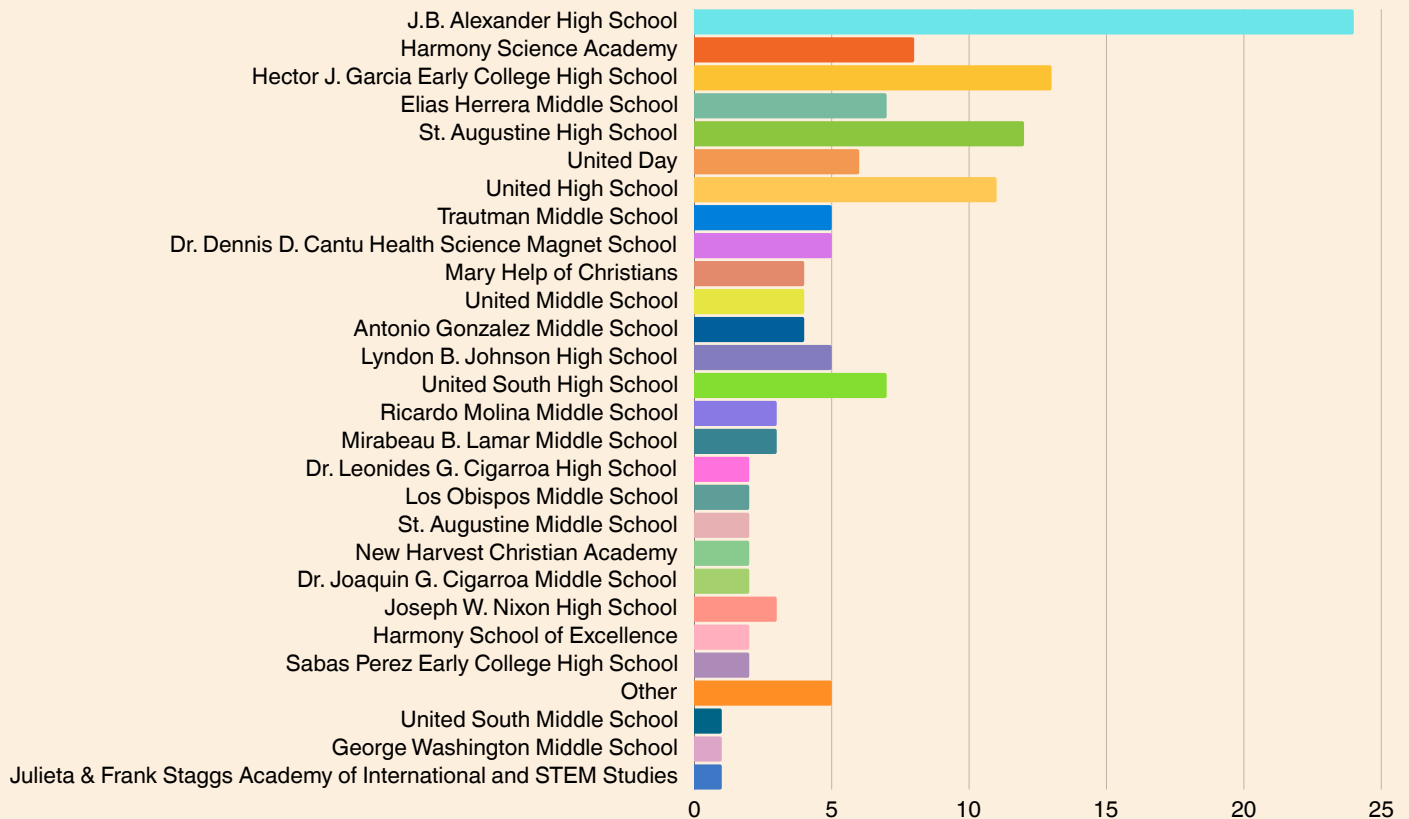
School Reach

29 schools represented

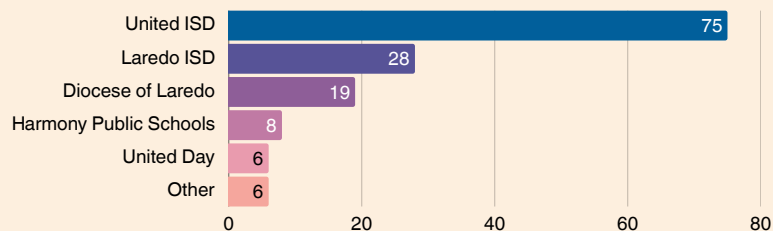


Public, private, charter, and early college campuses.
Students from LISD, UISD, Harmony Public Schools, Diocese of Laredo schools, United Day School, and TAMIU Staggs Academy

School



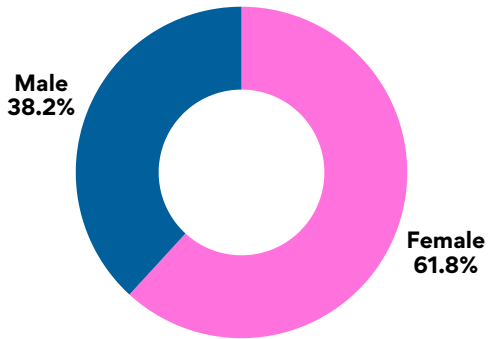
School District



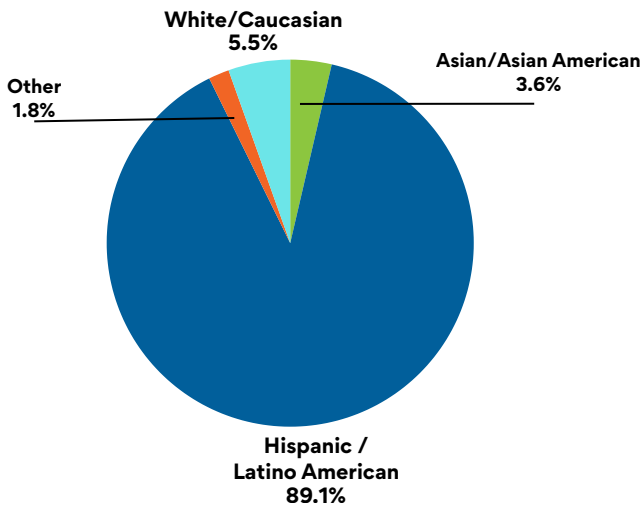
8TH GRADE DEMOGRAPHICS

TOTAL STUDENTS : 55

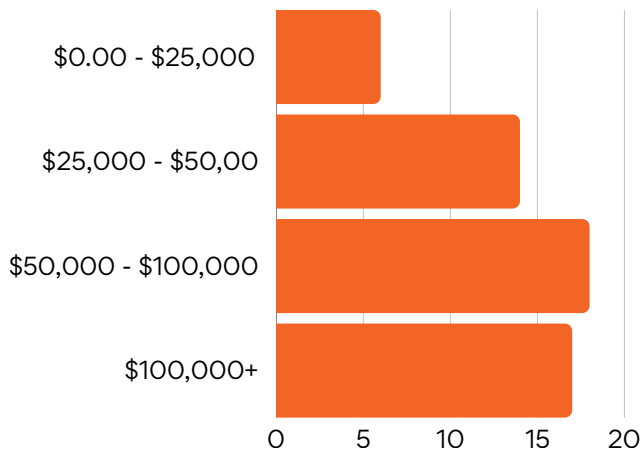
GENDER



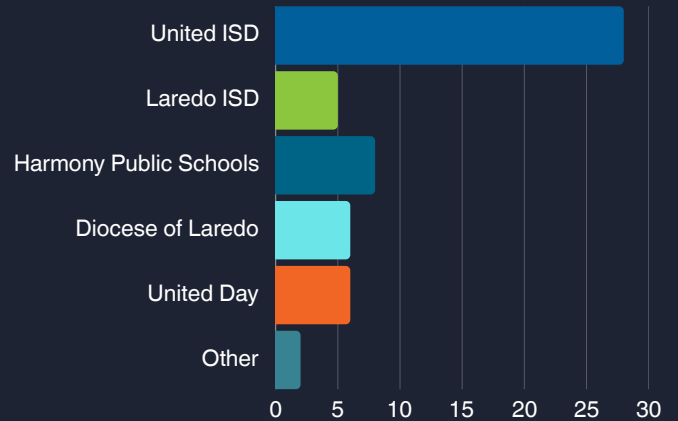
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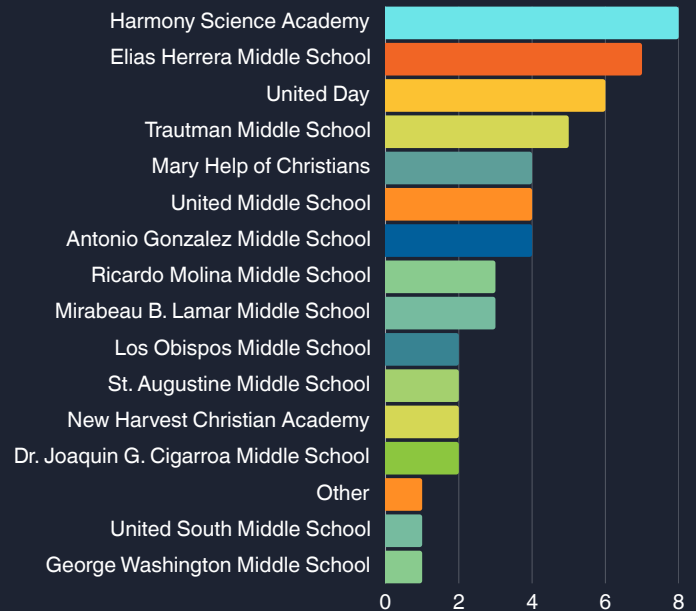
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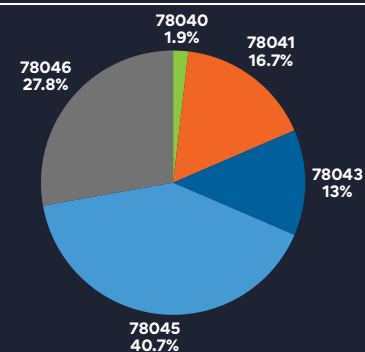
SCHOOL DISTRICT



SCHOOL



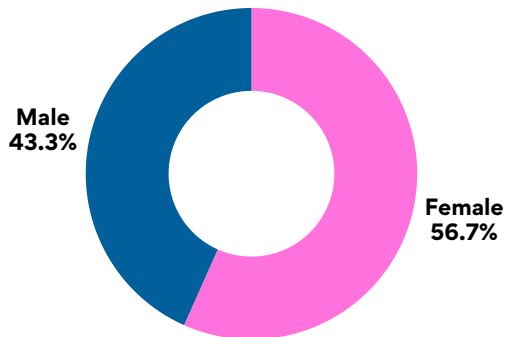
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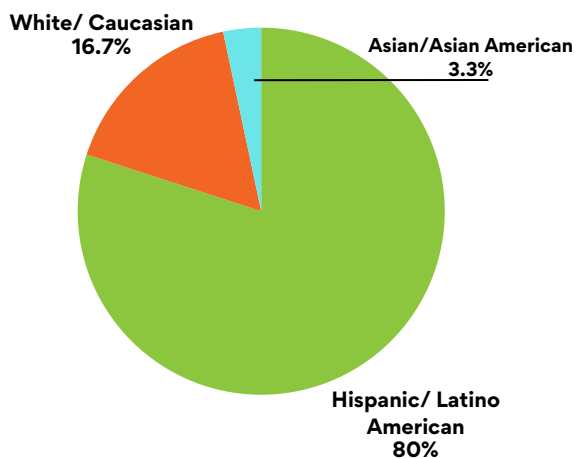
9TH GRADE DEMOGRAPHICS

TOTAL STUDENTS : 30

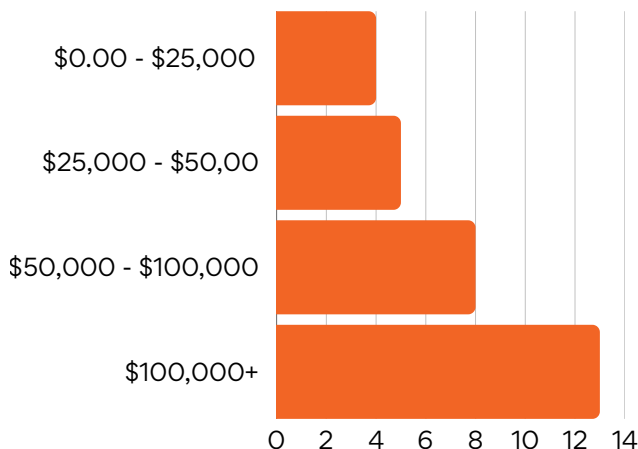
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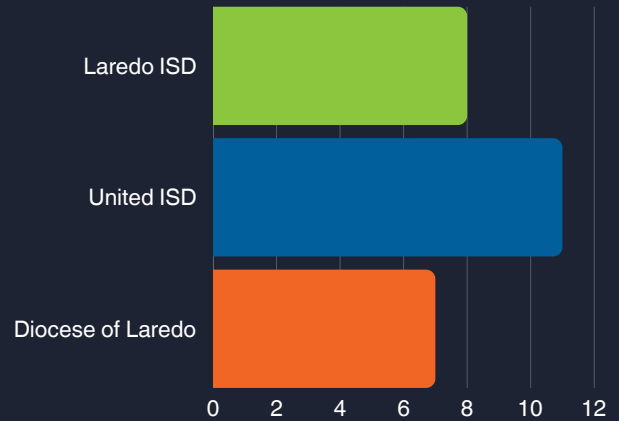
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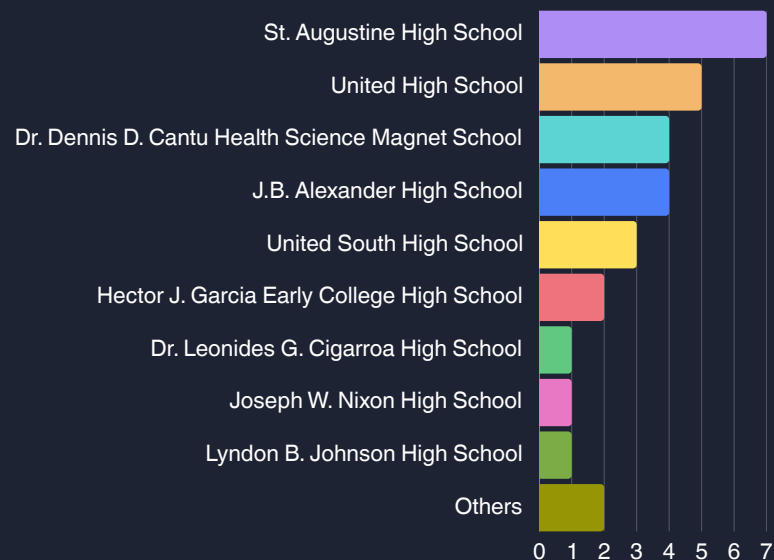
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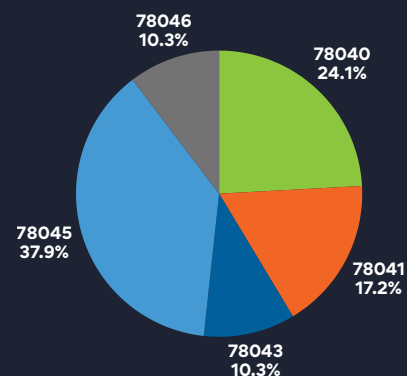
SCHOOL DISTRICT



SCHOOL



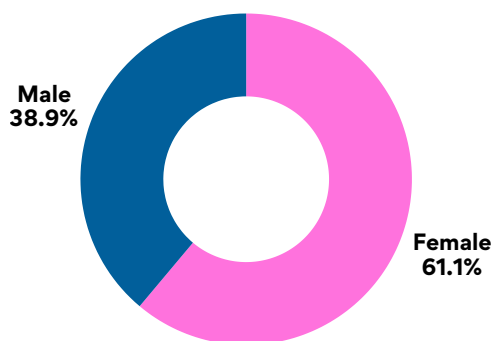
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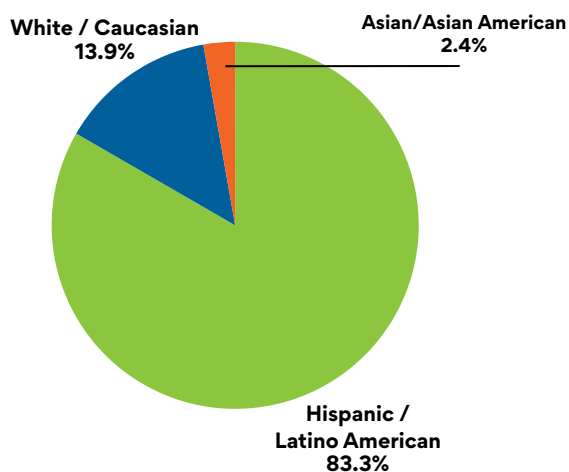
10TH GRADE DEMOGRAPHICS

TOTAL STUDENTS : 36

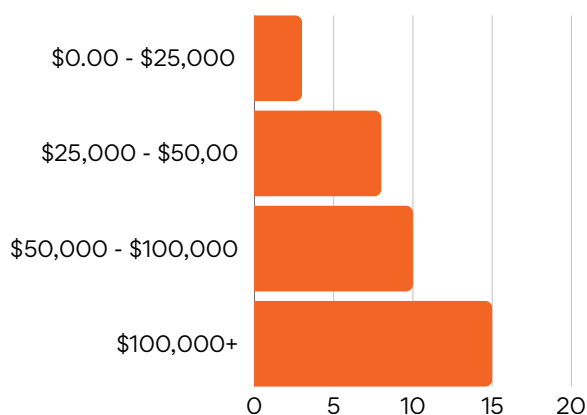
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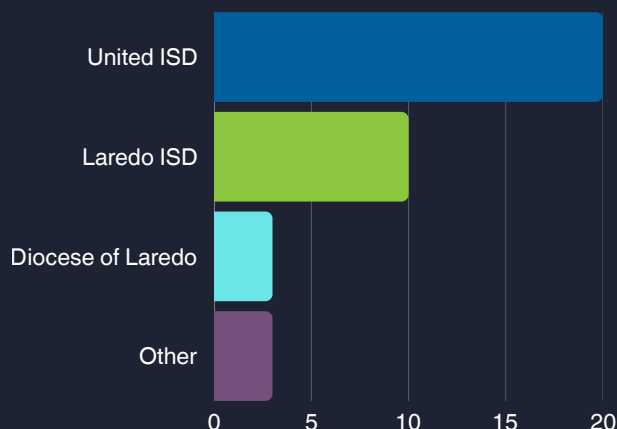
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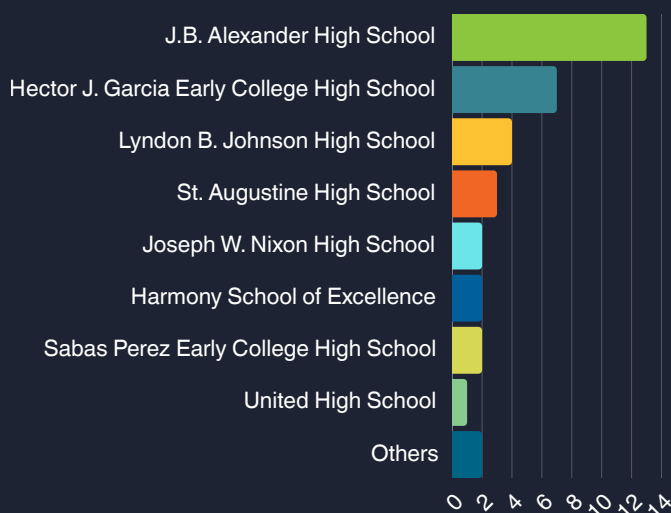
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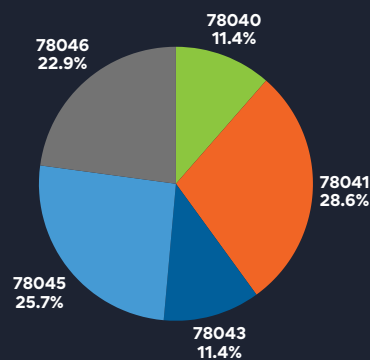
SCHOOL DISTRICT



SCHOOL



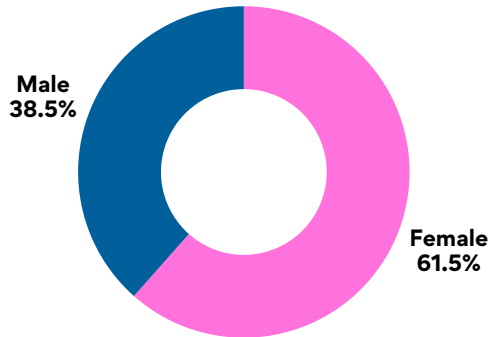
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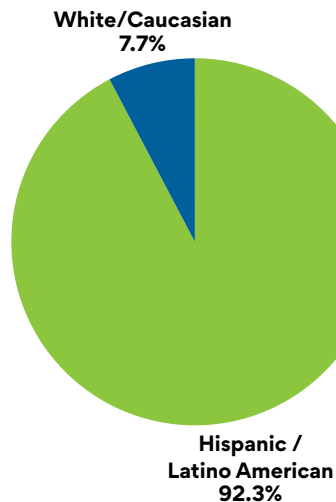
11TH GRADE DEMOGRAPHICS

TOTAL STUDENTS : 13

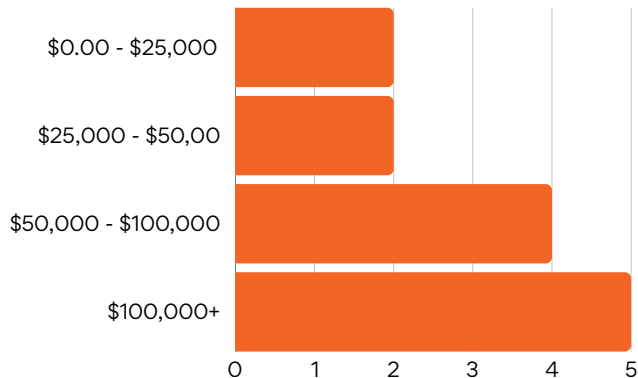
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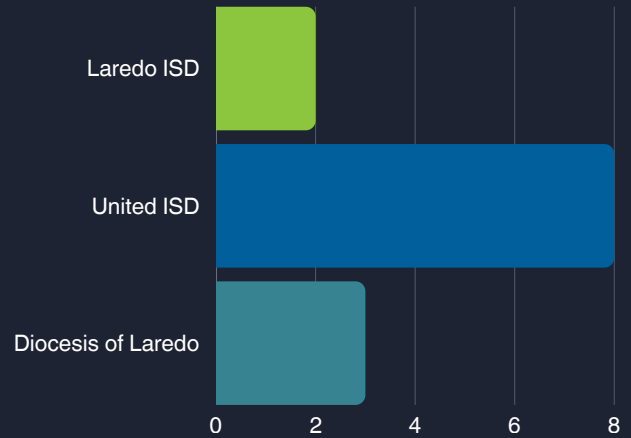
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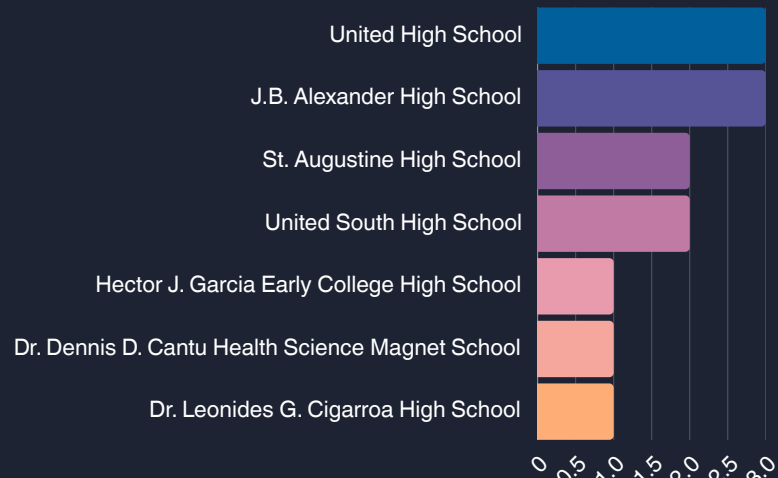
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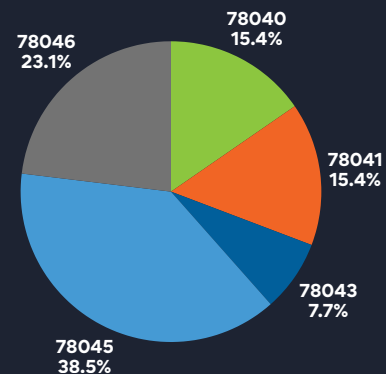
SCHOOL DISTRICT



SCHOOL



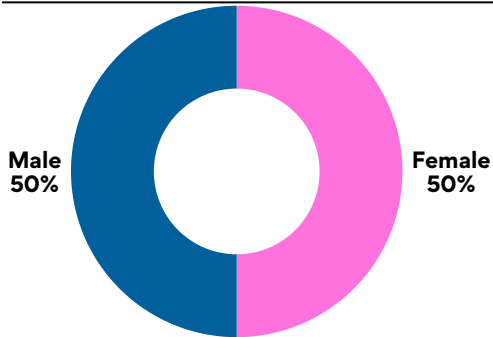
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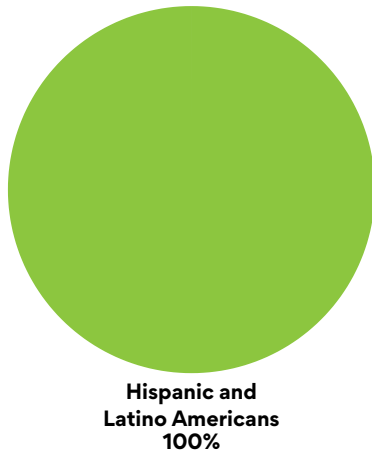
12TH GRADE DEMOGRAPHICS

TOTAL STUDENTS : 12

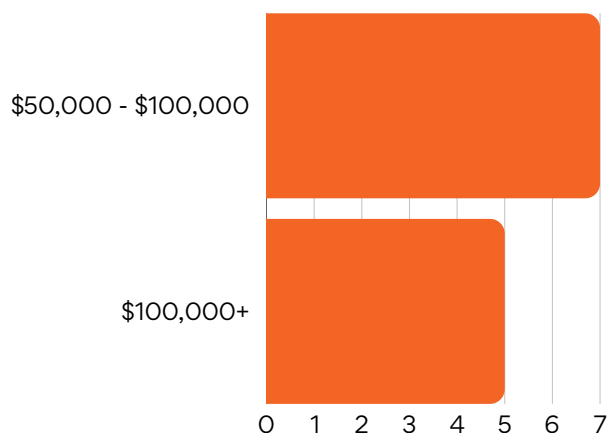
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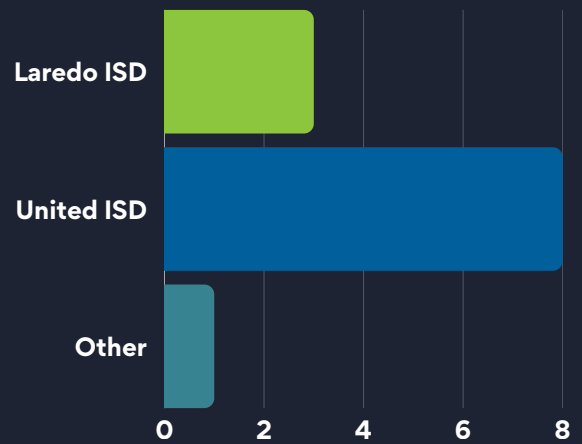
DEMOGRAPHICS



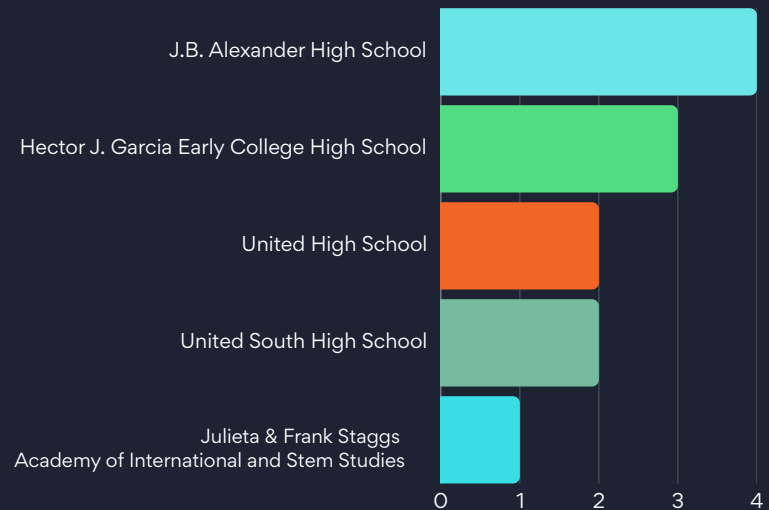
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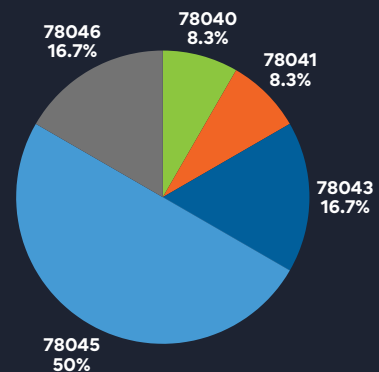
SCHOOL DISTRICT



SCHOOL



ZIP CODE



WHAT YLL ALUMNI HAVE TO SAY



Santiago Garcia Rosales

Class of 2022

"Youth Leadership Laredo motivated and inspired me to take on the world with a leader's perspective. I was able to gain real-world leadership experience while learning about my community and its needs. Through my college experience, I was able to take on leadership positions and travel the world using the many tools learned through this revolutionary program. Youth Leadership Laredo remains as the prominent organization inspiring Laredo's future leaders!"



Kiara Ramon-Lozano

Class of 2025

"Youth Leadership Laredo not only provided me with a place to explore multiple career paths, but it also helped me find a community of students who want to make an impact. Furthermore, YLL helped me take an introspective approach to leadership where I discovered my strengths and areas for improvement and developed better public speaking, communication, and critical thinking throughout my years in the program. These skills helped me manage leadership roles and earn recognitions throughout high school into college and eventually start my business."



Alberto Vargas

Class of 2026

"When I joined Youth Leadership Laredo in eighth grade, the thought of speaking in front of an audience made me incredibly nervous. Five years later, I am heading to UT Austin as an Amazon Future Engineer Scholarship recipient, an achievement made possible by the confidence and leadership opportunities YLL instilled in me. The program pushed me beyond my comfort zone, gave me meaningful responsibilities in my community, and helped me lead and speak from the heart. I plan to return to Laredo and be someone the next generation of youth in this program can look up to just as YLL was for me. I will carry these lessons with me as I pursue a career in the field of information technology."

INVEST IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

The success stories shared throughout this report are made possible through the generosity of individuals, businesses, foundations, and community partners who believe in developing future leaders.

Your support helps provide scholarships, leadership development opportunities, educational seminars, community service projects, and life-changing experiences for students throughout our region.

By investing in the Laredo Chamber Foundation, you are investing in the future of our community.

Scan the QR code below to make a contribution and help us continue empowering young leaders, strengthening our workforce, and building a brighter future for Laredo. Thank you for making a difference.



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