

INTRODUCTION TO THE HIDALGO
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

BUILDING STRONG COLLEGE
PARTNERSHIPS

OPERATING AND FINANCING AN EARLY
COLLEGE DISTRICT

RECRUITING, DEVELOPING, AND
RETAINING TALENT

ALIGNING COURSES AND CAREER
PATHWAYS FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

CREATING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE
STUDENT SUPPORTS

ENGAGING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT SUPPORTS



As an early college district, we support every student in earning college credits—from the highest achiever to the lowest-ranked student in the class. If we expect every student to tackle college, we know we also must offer the intensive academic support and college and career guidance needed to bolster their success. Here are some key strategies we've used in Hidalgo to help students with a wide range of skills and interests experience college success.

CONNECT RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION WITH INTENSIVE ACADEMIC SUPPORTS. We match every student to postsecondary pathways that work for her or him, whether career tech or university-level math and English courses. And all students receive rigorous instruction and supports to help them prepare for and pass college classes. Here are some of the ways we support students academically:

» **College-ready instruction for all.** Hidalgo teachers, like those at all early colleges in Texas, are trained to use a set of common instructional strategies. These strategies are effective in engaging all students in activities and exercises that promote the kinds of deeper learning needed for success in college-level courses. This instructional approach fosters high-level discussion and inquiry, and it makes difficult material more engaging and accessible through problem-solving and hands-on activities. Through collaborative group work, their peers support and challenge students with diverse skill levels. Across every subject, students master academic language through questioning, classroom discussions, daily writing assignments, and literacy groups.

» **Academic tutoring and support.** Our teachers provide tutoring and other academic interventions during the school day, before and after school, and on Saturdays. (Teachers receive additional pay for working Saturdays.) Teachers have two planning periods daily, at least one of which focuses on student interventions. Our new learning center has a separate entrance, so the school does not have to keep all facilities open after hours. Busing is provided late in the day so students can stay after school for tutoring. In the summers, high school teachers attend college classes with students and provide tutoring in the afternoons. At the high school, we often offer semester-long college classes over a full academic year to provide students with additional time to assimilate the material.

» **College knowledge.** Beyond academic supports, many of our students need skills and knowledge that will help them succeed in college, including good study habits, the ability to manage their time well, and the resourcefulness needed to get help on campus. A college success class provides tenth graders with these skills. We also help students set up study groups for their college classes, so that they can learn from and support one another.

“I believe this is our sacred responsibility: to make sure that by the time the kids leave us, that we’ve empowered them with the skills and the academic strength that are necessary for their next transition.”

—FORMER SUPERINTENDENT
ED BLAHA



PLUG IN TO LEARN MORE!

Learn more by exploring the USB drive, which contains related resources and example documents from Hidalgo.

Access the web version of this toolkit at hidalgo.jff.org.



INCLUDE EVERYONE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Everyone plays a strong role in supporting student success.

At Hidalgo:

- Principals and assistant principals interact directly with students. They encourage all students to take challenging courses, and they connect students with supports to succeed.
- Teachers are trained to use a common set of high-impact instructional strategies in their classrooms. They have high expectations for all students, and provide tutoring both during and after school.
- Counselors help students plan for and access the range of college and career options available.
- Parents support college success at home and help their children plan for college, including helping them fill out forms. The district offers help to parents so they can provide the best support to their children.
- Bus drivers have routes that are flexible and that run late in the day so students can stay at school after hours for tutoring.

» **Accelerated learning and catch-up.** For tenth graders who have persistent difficulty passing the state assessments in language arts, we created the Success Academy on the high school campus to provide intensive literacy instruction. For English language learners new to the United States, we offer an accelerated program in English and math. For students who are at risk of not graduating, we offer more personalized instruction and wraparound supports at the Hidalgo Academy, a small alternative school. We expect all students to go to college, and we support them reaching their college goals.

TAILOR GUIDANCE TO STUDENT NEEDS. College offers a confusing array of options and choices. In Hidalgo, we've found that supporting students in earning college credits requires providing them with counseling and planning throughout their school years so that they can make more informed decisions about their educational and career options.

» **Educational and career planning.** We teach students about colleges and careers early and often, and we help them develop their own goals and aspirations. When they reach high school, they have already considered several occupations and have studied the steps it takes to prepare for careers in those fields. In Hidalgo, elementary school students learn about careers that are common in the Rio Grande Valley. Middle school students take a semester-long career awareness course, with several weeks dedicated to five career pathways. Every spring, counselors meet with eighth graders to help each select a career pathway and an educational plan for high school. In high school, counselors help students stay on track on their educational plans, which include passing the state college readiness assessment and enrolling in college courses.

» **Comprehensive counseling.** High school counselors each specialize in one or two specific career pathways that the high school offers, so they get to know their students and subjects well. Even for large meetings with groups of parents, counselors often prepare individualized packets of information for each family, such as the student's grades, status on the statewide college readiness exam, and high school and college credits earned. Every year, the counselors meet with students to help them adjust their educational plans. And they help students and parents fill out college admissions and financial aid forms.

ADAPT OLD STRUCTURES TO SOLVE NEW CHALLENGES. In Hidalgo, we encourage teachers, staff, and administrators to try new approaches and work as a team to help students succeed. As a result, we have been able to redesign programs and services to better meet the needs of students.

» **Class schedules.** Recognizing that all students need supports to help them reach our high academic expectations, our middle school changed its school day to create an advisory period. During this common time, all students receive tutoring and academic enrichment activities tailored to their needs. Likewise, our high school's eight-period schedule includes flexibility for tutoring during the school day. The schedule also provides common planning periods for academic departments, so teachers can share information about student interventions.

» **Bridge academy prior to high school.** For incoming ninth graders, our high school offers an intensive four-week academy of accelerated instruction in math and language arts. The program culminates with the state college readiness assessment. The high school uses the test results to help plan accelerated, pre-AP, and AP coursework and the supports that lead students into earning college credits before graduation.

» **Summer school.** Our redesigned summer school offers an opportunity for academic growth for all students. As well as operating the bridge academy for incoming ninth graders, we offer a range of college courses for rising juniors and seniors, many of which are on college campuses. Our Workforce Solutions program provides students with job experience, and our 21st Century program provides a range of activities, from sports to tutoring. We also provide accelerated instruction and credit recovery for students below grade level and for those who have not passed the state tests required for graduation.