

HIDALGO EARLY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Summer Programs and Opportunities for High School Students

EARLY COLLEGE
DESIGN SERVICES



As an integral part of its early college district approach, Hidalgo Early College High School treats summer as an opportunity for academic growth for all students, from those excelling in school to those who need to get back on track.

Transforming Summer School for College Readiness

Hidalgo Early College High School has transformed summer. It's not the weather that has changed; puffy clouds still billow across the vast Texas sky. But gone are the days when the main purpose of Hidalgo's summer school was to provide remediation. As with the rest of the school year since the district adopted early college for all students, the aim of Hidalgo's summer school is now to prepare all students for college.

When the district began implementing early college five years ago, administrators realized they needed to use the summer months to accelerate learning for all levels of students. Now the high school provides differentiated instruction in the summer, directed toward earning college credits.

Instructional opportunities range from credit recovery for students who are below grade level to free college courses at a nearby community college and university. In the afternoons, students receive tutoring and other academic supports. Many

students also work as clerks or assistants in the office or library, gaining valuable work skills while earning a weekly paycheck, through a program called Workforce Solutions.

By summer's end, ninth and tenth graders have prepared for and taken the state college readiness assessment and eleventh and twelfth graders have earned college credits. Students who were behind have recovered credits and have prepared for the state graduation exam, and many students have earned wages to help their families.

Five years ago, only about a tenth of Hidalgo's students were enrolled in classes during the summer. Now it's almost two-thirds: 573 high school students, out of a total of about 900, participated in academic programs during summer 2010. In effect, the school year has been expanded—to support students' college-going needs and to ensure that all students receive an academic and financial head start on college.

SUMMER PROGRAMS FOR HIDALGO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

PROGRAM	PARTICIPANTS IN 2010	GRADE LEVEL	LENGTH	DESCRIPTION
THEA PREPARATION ACADEMY	232	Rising 9th, 10th & 11th graders	4 weeks in June	Students prepare for and take the state college readiness test in reading, writing and math
COLLEGE COURSES AT UT-PAN AM	115	Rising 11th graders	5 weeks in June & July	Students take Intro to Communications 1302 and Computer Info Systems 1301
COLLEGE COURSES AT STC	61	Rising 12th graders	5 weeks in June & July	Students select among Psych 2301, Sociology 1301, and Criminal Justice 1301
CREDIT RECOVERY	72	Returning 9th and 10th graders	5 weeks in June & July	For students below grade level
TAKS INTERVENTION	74	Rising 12th graders	6 weeks in June & July	For students who have not passed state tests required for graduation
SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAM	19	9th to 12th graders	6 weeks in June & July	For those identified as having special needs
21ST CENTURY	400	9th to 12th graders	6 weeks in June & July	Afterschool activities for students, from sports to tutoring
WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS	64	Age 16 and older	All summer	Students gain experience and income by working for the district in office jobs

Note: Participant figures are not mutually exclusive. Students have the opportunity to participate in 21st Century or Workforce Solutions in addition to their academic coursework.

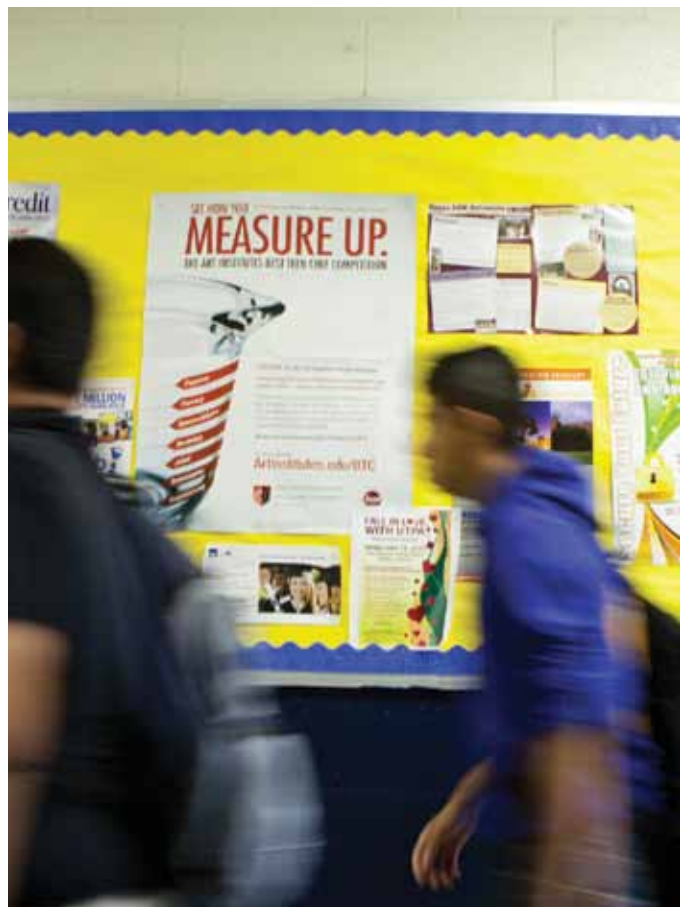
CHANGING PARENT ATTITUDES

“Before summer school started this year, we had a parent session at the high school. The stands on one side of the gym were packed. We went over everything about the college classes: the expectations on students and families, the homework.

“We emphasized the importance of making this [summer session] a priority; they can’t just go on vacation in the middle or take their children with them up north to follow work. We’ll give their children supports, we told them, we’ll help them succeed. But if a student drops the class just because they’re not doing well, then we would have to charge them. Otherwise the college credits are for free.

“There was 100 percent agreement. They asked great questions. Of course, the majority of the meeting was in Spanish. It was nice to see how we’ve grown: a packed gym, with parents involved, asking questions about summer school, and wanting their children to participate.”

Former Superintendent Ed Blaha



A Typical Summer Day at Hidalgo Early College

Since many of Hidalgo's families are of modest economic means, the district provides summer transportation and meals for students. Buses bring students to the high school for breakfast at 7:45 a.m. By 8:15, juniors are piling into the first buses leaving for college classes at University of Texas-Pan American, a four-year university. An hour later, another bus takes the students going to South Texas College (STC), a nearby community college. Meanwhile, many students study in the cafeteria or computer lab. Some clock in for an hour of paid work through the Workforce Solutions program.

Throughout the morning, rising ninth graders are preparing for the Texas Higher Education Assessment or THEA by taking intensive courses in reading, writing, and math. Students who pass this college readiness test at the end of the session qualify for college-level courses. Meanwhile, rising tenth and eleventh graders are taking similar classes to help them pass THEA subjects they have not mastered previously.

In another hallway, freshmen and sophomores who are below grade level are studying online through a credit recovery curriculum. Rising seniors are taking classes in English language arts, math, science, or social studies—whichever subjects they have not passed on TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills), which they must pass in order to graduate from high school. And students with special needs are also working on their academic skills with teachers and specialists.



After lunch, the juniors and seniors return from UT-Pan Am and South Texas College. Study labs equipped with computers are open all afternoon for all students, with teachers available for support. Many students clock in for Workforce Solutions in the afternoons. There's also a program called 21st Century, which includes tutoring and other activities on campus. The final buses take students home at about 4 p.m.

The span of the instructional and support activities, from credit recovery to college classes, shows Hidalgo's commitment to having every student earn college credits in high school, not just those who excel academically. "We attempt to open the door for each student to postsecondary education of some kind," said former Principal Marilu Navarro. "It's our job to prepare them."

Culture Shift

Creating a culture that embraces summer school instead of thinking of it in a punitive fashion required a shift in perspective. Ms. Navarro explained how the district had to help parents see that summer school is not just about credit recovery. "It's about advancement and college courses... and getting ahead. Now they get to see, I can get two years of college for my child."

Why do students participate in all these summer programs? Rayann, a rising freshman who participated in THEA prep, explained his priority is school. "They said we could take college classes if we passed the THEA. That gives you a head start." Nelly, a junior who took summer classes at UT-Pan Am, said that the college classes are challenging, but interesting: "I was afraid to go. I thought it was going to be too hard. But if you do your job, it's fun." Nelly added that earning college credits for free was a strong incentive, both for her and her parents. "I'm going to take advantage of everything I can from this school," she said. "I'm going to be prepared [for college], because it's like college here already."

"When you offer these classes, there's a lot of nurturing that needs to take place. If you nurture them [students], they are very receptive to moving beyond their comfort zone, taking those college courses, pushing themselves, even in the summer," said Ms. Navarro. Assistant Principal Brenda De Hoyos noted: "Most of them [students] want to participate. It's become a point of pride. They want to keep with the tradition of their brothers or sisters."

THEA Preparation Academy

Since 2006, Hidalgo has offered a summer program to prepare high school students to take the THEA. Having students take the THEA early in high school is a key strategy of Hidalgo's early college district approach because those who pass sections of the test can begin taking college courses in the areas they pass. Even those who do not pass it can take some dual enrollment classes, such as art and music appreciation. Without taking the THEA, students are not eligible to enroll in these courses.

Hidalgo's THEA Preparation Academy is a crucial component of the district's early college approach. First, the district has found that its students need preparation and multiple opportunities to pass the assessment. Second, early THEA preparation and test-taking also sends clear signals to students and parents concerning student readiness for college, so that students can catch up



CHANGING TEACHER ATTITUDES

Teacher attitudes about summer sessions have changed over the past five years at Hidalgo. Before becoming an early college district, Hidalgo sometimes found it challenging to fill summer teaching positions. That's no longer the case. "This summer," said Principal Navarro, "we had more applications than positions available."

Renee Palacios, a teacher in her third year at Hidalgo, said she signed up "to help guide the kids through the university experience." She also appreciated the college courses herself. "It felt like a refresher class."

academically, if needed, to earn college credits by the time they graduate. Also, identifying the students who need extra support in passing the THEA helps the school target resources to them during the school year.

Rising ninth graders participate in a dedicated program focusing on all THEA subjects: math, writing, and reading. Rising tenth and eleventh graders focus on the subjects they have not yet passed. At the end of the session, the high school administers the THEA for free for all students, including those who have not participated in the summer academy. The THEA is also offered during the school year at the high school, and the district pays for multiple tests for students.

Support for Students Taking College Courses

As part of its early college strategy, the district encourages as many students as possible to enroll in college classes during the summer. For many students, the summer classes are their first college experience. "It's for them all," said Ms. Navarro. "The

mystery about college is greatly diminished once they take college classes. It makes all the difference in the world."

In summer 2010, the college classes were offered at University of Texas-Pan American and South Texas College, though in past summers they have sometimes been provided at the high school. No matter where the classes are offered, Hidalgo has found that most of its high school students need additional support to succeed in these challenging courses. The support ranges from academic tutoring to help in knowing how to study.

This year, Hidalgo had five teachers attend classes with students at University of Texas-Pan American, and three teachers attended classes at STC. The teachers also served as monitors on the college campuses and provided homework support, test preparation, computer access and assistance, and tutoring at the high school from 12 to 4 every afternoon. Few Hidalgo students have computers at home.

Sandra Serna, a career and technology teacher at Hidalgo, attended college classes with the students and helped them afterwards in the high school's computer lab. She showed the students how to set up spreadsheets to track how well they were doing, which also helped her identify those who needed academic tutoring. She said that helping them with the course content, however, was not the main thing students needed from her. "It was the college knowledge that they needed a lot from me," she said. This included: how to prioritize their time, how to plan for projects and tests, how to understand each teacher's grading system, how to read and understand textbooks on their own, and how to form study groups to help one another.

Former Superintendent Ed Blaha said that having high school teachers attend college classes with students also benefited teachers: "It's in-service and professional development for our teachers. They have a first-hand look at college expectations—from content and curriculum to study habits. They get to see what college is like today."

Credit Recovery and TAKS Intervention Programs

The Hidalgo School District continues to view summer as a crucial time to help students who have fallen behind in their academic progress, so that they can recover and earn college credits prior to graduation. This includes many students who may have arrived in the United States recently and who speak English as a second language (about 85 percent of Hidalgo families speak Spanish at home).

Most of the students needing credit recovery are freshmen and sophomores. Students receive individualized instruction through online NovaNet and Odyssey software, and they receive additional support and tutoring from teachers.

The TAKS intervention program targets seniors and some juniors who have not passed sections of the statewide assessment, which is required for graduation. Before the end of each school year, a counselor meets with each junior who has not passed the TAKS, along with their parents, to establish a three-way contract to clarify each party's responsibilities—student, parents, and high school—regarding passing the exam. During the summer, students receive instruction targeted to their needs.



SUMMER COSTS AND NEXT STEPS

The primary additional costs of offering college courses in the summer in Hidalgo are: transportation, college instructor costs, and the cost of books. Tuition is waived for high school students.

In order to minimize transportation and college instructor costs, Hidalgo High School plans to offer college courses on the high school campus next year, taught by Hidalgo teachers who have master's degrees and who attain adjunct status at STC.

Workforce Solutions

For summer 2010, Hidalgo crafted a partnership with Workforce Solutions, a regional workforce development program, to provide jobs in the district for Hidalgo students. The program, which was funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, provided students with office jobs that the district scheduled around the students' summer school commitments. This was instrumental in motivating students who needed a summer income to also be able to take college classes or participate in other programs like credit recovery. The jobs also provided students with work experience in an office, as well with paychecks at the end of each week.

Hidalgo students were hired through and paid by Workforce Solutions. District and school administrators oversaw the student employees.

Edna, a rising junior, who worked in the high school's main office, said the biggest lesson that she learned was how to respond helpfully and respectfully to parents of students with questions. "I had to think like an adult."

"For so many of our students, particularly those learning English," said Mr. Blaha, "we've found that when we put them in an environment where they're dealing with adults at a work situation, then their communication skills and sense of responsibility improve. And the sense of financial responsibility they gain, that's important for them and their family."

College for All

Hidalgo's vision for summer school is to continue to develop and improve its wide range of summer programs that help all students prepare for and take college courses before graduating. This ranges from TAKS remediation and credit recovery to THEA preparation and college course-taking. The result is that Hidalgo has created a unique summer environment that accelerates the learning of all students.

"Summer school at Hidalgo is almost like a college atmosphere, with students working independently and with teachers, many travelling to college campuses and coming back in the afternoons to work on their homework," said Mr. Blaha. "You really see the students maturing. That's the major shift that takes place."





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