

BRIGHT SPOTS

Serving high-need students
while performing above city average

Salado Elementary

Teresa Triana, principal at Salado Elementary School, knows her school and its needs well. Now in her 29th year—13th as principal—she has served as a teacher, academic facilitator, and assistant principal. While Principal Triana has seen it all, she continues to push the school, faculty, and students forward. Over the past few years, this school has seen **some of the highest gains in the city, and in just the past year its TEA accountability rating rose from a D to an A.**

Triana credits a number of factors, but says the biggest reason for the turnaround is the culture that's been built. **"For us, it's about truly knowing the kids; it's about the kids seeing that we see them,"** she says.



Trust and Communication

Salado is home to two programs, a dual-language academy that integrates native Spanish and English speakers and a leadership academy that is built on project-based learning. With a high number of emergent bilingual students, Salado's focus on dual-language learning has set the tone for both the school and its families. Triana says the fact that school leaders and teachers can speak to parents in their native language is hugely important. **"Parents trust us,"** she says. That she and many of her teachers have been at the school for so long is also helpful. **"With that level of longevity and our visibility, families are comfortable. They feel good about reaching out and asking questions."**

A Commitment to Progress

Salado's turnaround wouldn't have been possible without the effort the faculty and leaders have put in. The school's Professional Learning Community (PLC) fosters collaboration and learning between teachers, and faculty meetings include a high level of continued professional development. **"Our progress is really about the systems and high expectations we've put to work,"** Triana says.

District
East Central ISD

City Council District
District 3

Students on or above grade level:
Reading
56%

Students on or above grade level:
Math
50%

Irving Dual Language Academy

Irving Dual Language Academy is a choice school that opened in 2018 as a wall-to-wall dual language PK-8 academy. **Located in the most economically disadvantaged ZIP code within city limits, the school outpaced the citywide average by 8 points in reading and 15 points in math on the 2025 STAAR.** And they have sustained growth: reading proficiency has climbed from 36% in 2022 to 56% in 2025, while math rose from 17% to 48% in the same period.

Rompiendo Barreras

Seventh-year principal, Mayra Gutierrez-Ibarra, says that she wanted to work at Irving because she could clearly see herself in the students. **"That was me as a little girl,"** she says of her student body, which is 98% Hispanic and 92% economically disadvantaged. She says her teachers see themselves in their students, too. **"The teachers can relate to students, so there's passion from every single one of them. They want the absolute best for our kids,"** she says.

To that end, the school sets high expectations for its students—and **students expect a lot out of their school.** Gutierrez-Ibarra has been pushed to implement programming she might not have otherwise tried, like a class trip to Puerto Rico for eighth graders and the introduction of a new after-school folklorico group. The trip was the suggestion of a then-student, and Gutierrez-Ibarra understood what the opportunity would mean for her students. **"Of the 19 who went on that first trip, 17 had never flown before. Many hadn't stayed in a hotel before,"** she says. It makes sense that this school year's motto is *Rompiendo Barreras* (Breaking Barriers).

A Powerful Partnership

Irving is also **supported by UTSA's College of Education and Human Development.** The Dual Language Community Lab Schools Partnership connects the college with four dual language campuses in San Antonio. The partnership offers paid clinical teacher residencies in addition to funding, leadership support, and ongoing research to identify and replicate best practices.

District
San Antonio ISD

City Council District
District 5

Students on or above grade level:
Reading
56%

Students on or above grade level:
Math
48%



BRIGHT SPOTS

Serving high-need students
while performing above city average

IDEA Judson College Prep

At IDEA Judson, school leaders and teachers have set their scholars up for success by building a **culture rooted in growth, social-emotional learning, and student joy**. Scholars are empowered and challenged through student-centered learning and rigorous instruction, while teachers are equally committed to continuous improvement. Though IDEA Judson makes it clear that they have high expectations for their student body, a commitment to joy ensures students want to come to school and learn each day. With **65% of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards in reading and 47% in math**, it's evident that this is a recipe for success.

District Name
IDEA Public Schools

City Council District
District 10

Students on or above grade level: Reading
65%

Students on or above grade level: Math
47%

Growing Together

At the beginning of each school year, IDEA Judson scholars receive a “growth goal”—a personalized academic challenge that's tracked and, when met, built upon. By **helping students engage directly with their educational data**, IDEA Judson fosters an environment in which students, families, and educators are all on the same page about where each scholar stands and what it will take to reach their next goal.

IDEA Judson's culture of growth is mirrored in the continued development of its teachers. With a robust coaching system and ongoing, extensive training, **teachers continually receive real-time feedback and action steps** to further strengthen their instructional approaches.

Social-Emotional Learning Meets Academic Rigor

Part of IDEA Judson's educational philosophy is that **students should be challenged both in subject matter and in understanding their own social-emotional well-being**. At the start of each school day, students identify with a feeling and, if they want to, share more with a peer. School leaders and teachers say that this is important to the classroom experience, as students are able to work through emotions that might hinder their learning, and administrators are better prepared to intervene if needed.



Somerset Academy Lone Star

Somerset Academy Lone Star, a bilingual Pre-K through 5th grade school, has made impressive strides in recent years. Climbing from a C to an A rating in just one school year, Lone Star now boasts some of the highest student outcomes in San Antonio: on the 2025 STAAR tests, **63% of students met grade-level standards in reading and 66% in math, far surpassing the citywide average**. Principal Lily Collins says the school's shared, unwavering belief in its students and a commitment to collaboration will continue to serve Lone Star as it grows.

District Name
Somerset Academy TX

City Council District
District 1

Students on or above grade level: Reading
66%

Students on or above grade level: Math
63%

Setting Goals and Expectations

At Lone Star, school leaders and teachers have created an **environment where the entire school understands that each educator has a responsibility to grow students**. Principal Collins emphasizes that setting goals and expectations—for students, for classes, for the school—is a core part of the Lone Star approach.

Lone Star's collaborative mindset also sets students up for success. Teachers and school leaders focus on communication and working as a team—independent of teaching experience or tenure at the school. Moreover, everyone at Lone Star believes in working in partnership with families. **Teachers and staff meet with parents constantly, sharing students' achievement status each week and keeping everyone on the same page** with regular student “data chats”. “We believe in community, and we know that a strong community and village is what it takes to ensure a child achieves,” Collins says.

Ready to Grow

Lone Star's small size—currently at 112 students—has allowed **the school to foster strong relationships and implement effective strategies**. Currently, about 75 spots are open in Pre-K through 1st grade, and Collins is excited about the opportunity to welcome more students and families. The success and culture that has guided Lone Star to this point will undoubtedly continue to move this school forward. As Collins puts it, “We work together as a team—with love, respect, and always having our students top of mind.”



BRIGHT SPOT

A turnaround story

Jubilee Academies



Jubilee Academies, a local charter school network that opened 25 years ago, recently made an intentional decision to transform its schools. Jubilee's governing leadership understood urgently that the inherent culture of the schools needed to change. Dr. Atikah Shemshack, who soon joined as the network's Associate Superintendent of Accountability and Compliance in the fall of 2023 before rising to Superintendent, understood it, too—and knew what that level of change would require. **Through thoughtful, visionary decision-making,** Dr. Shemshack and **school leaders have led an incredible turnaround,** with some schools gaining 17 to 23 percentage points in math and reading in just a few years.

Reimagining Expectations

Dr. Shemshack joined Jubilee after carefully observing the district and schools for a month, learning where gaps persisted and identifying what needed to change. Her work began in accountability and data, and when she became Acting Superintendent the following year, she was given freedom to do what needed to be done to close the gaps. When community members credit the turnaround to her leadership, Dr. Shemshack is quick to point back to governance: "None of this would be possible without our board's trust and support. I'm grateful for the space they gave me to do this work—and to keep making an impact in our students' lives." That meant **ensuring strong leaders at every level, spending days retraining all teachers in rigor, classroom management, and instruction, and, above all, aligning expectations across the schools.**

With a student body that is 85% economically disadvantaged, Dr. Shemshack says the previous mindset was that the schools' outcomes were the best they could be—but that ceiling is gone. She challenged that attitude, ensuring that leaders and teachers believed as she did: that all of their students had the potential to learn and succeed. Current teachers—some of whom had been at Jubilee since its founding—were pushed to learn new approaches to instruction. At some campuses, Dr. Shemshack hired new principals who were more aligned with the culture shift. **"A turnaround starts with hiring the right people, people who believe in our students,"** she says. **"When we hire the right people, we just have to make sure we give them clarity and training."**

"A New Era" for Jubilee

This new mindset and continued commitment to accountability quickly proved effective. Jubilee Lake View University Prep, for example, saw **the number of students reading at or above grade level jump by 23 percentage points between 2021-25.** At another campus, Jubilee San Antonio, math outcomes increased by 17 points over the same period. Just in the past year, reading outcomes rose by 9 points at both of these campuses; math outcomes were 13 points higher at Lake View University Prep and 11 points higher at Jubilee San Antonio. For Dr. Shemshack, school leaders, and teachers, it feels as if they've ushered in a new era at Jubilee. **"We proved that no matter where our students are coming from—no matter the obstacles—they can learn if the adults are doing the work,"** she says. Dr. Shemshack is proud of the progress Jubilee has made—and excited about the change it can continue to lead. In addition to supporting Jubilee's own students and schools, she says she and Jubilee are ready to support other schools in identifying opportunities and overseeing turnarounds. **"This is about our students, our kids, our community,"** she says.

District Name

Jubilee San Antonio

City Council District

District 3

Increase in students on or above grade Level: Reading (2021-25)

+18%

Increase in students on or above grade Level: Math (2021-25)

+17%

Campus

Jubilee Lake View
University Prep

City Council District

District 5

Increase in students on or above grade Level: Reading (2021-25)

+23%

Increase in students on or above grade Level: Math (2021-25)

+25%

