

Where Are They Now?

Saul's Story: A Motivated Learner Soars to Academic Heights

Paula Dugger, Reading Recovery Teacher

Irving Independent School District, Irving, Texas



When he began his series of lessons in August 2000, Saul was reading below Level 1. His elementary school principal remembers him as a quiet boy who was a hard worker and very willing to learn.

Saul Membreno has faced a number of challenges in his young life, and through hard work and high aspirations he has conquered each one. This determined young man has also benefited from the support of his family.

Now in the seventh grade, he loves getting good grades and already knows that he wants to be a lawyer someday. His mother, Maria Membreno, tells him, “You can do it, because with good grades you can go on to the university and get a good education and do well in life.”

After attending a bilingual pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, Saul was an English language learner (ELL) student when he entered the Reading Recovery program at Barton Elementary School in Irving, TX.

“He was a very quiet boy, very observant,” remembers Lee Elementary School Principal Maria Elena Coronado, who was then vice principal at Barton. “But he was a very hard worker, and so willing to learn.”

When he began his series of lessons in August of 2000, Saul was reading at Text Level B (below a Level 1), and scored a 5 on the Writing Vocabulary task. In terms of stanines, he began

the program with four 1s and two 2s; by the end of his Reading Recovery lessons he had three 7s and three 9s. His Reading Recovery teacher was Paula Dugger, currently the reading coordinator and Reading Recovery teacher leader for the Irving Independent School District in Texas.

“From his early tests, he didn’t look like he’d be one of the first to discontinue,” Dugger said, “but he was a very smart little boy. “He made remarkable progress. He was probably one of the quickest of my students ever to discontinue his lessons.”

Even at a young age, Saul was a motivated learner. Coronado noted, “He really put a lot of effort into reading, because he knew it was important. He never gave up.”

Saul’s parents provided support at home while he worked through the lessons. Coronado said his mother “was always doing whatever she could to help Saul improve. His parents were incredible.”

By the fall of that year, Saul had come a long way towards mastering the skill of reading. After just 9 weeks of one-to-one instruction, Saul’s lessons were successfully discontinued in October. By Lesson 38, he was reading at Level 12, and scored a 44

on the Writing Vocabulary task. Even after his series of lessons, Saul's progress continued at an accelerated rate. By end-of-year testing in May 2001, his score rose to 63 on the Writing Vocabulary task, and he was reading at Level 20.

"It was a case of the right program for the right kid," Dugger said.

But Saul's successes have not ended there. In second grade he qualified for the Gifted and Talented Program, and in third grade he received the highest rating on his Texas Assessment of Knowledge Skills (TAKS) in reading—"commended." More commended performances on the TAKS exams followed in fifth-grade reading, math and science, and in sixth-grade math and reading. He received a Summa Cum Laude in sixth grade, indicating that his scores were among the highest in the class.

Saul's sixth-grade math teacher, Cheryl Guerin, had this to say: "In class Saul is an active participant, engaged in the lesson and ready to help a struggling classmate. He is always prepared and always ready to move on to the next thing."

Guerin adds that Saul is "a very charismatic leader," and he rises to

the occasion when asked to be a team captain for a class competition. "His easy-going nature and his comfort with students of diverse background and ability make him quietly popular with his classmates," she added.

His father, an engineer originally from El Salvador, passed away 3 years ago, and Saul's older brother abandoned his university education to help support the family. Now Saul's goal is to help his brother finish his interrupted education.

When not hard at work toward this and other goals, Saul plays the viola. He also likes to play basketball in the summertime.

Saul Membreno has successfully combined talent with hard work and is prospering through his school years. From the first grader struggling with learning to read, he has soared to be academically ranked as one of the top 10 students in his sixth-grade class.

His mother is a big supporter of Reading Recovery. "I wish all my kids had had that program," she said. "Any time a teacher offers my children extra help, I take it. I love that program. It gave Saul a love of books."



Ranked as one of the top 10 students in his sixth-grade class, Saul enjoys playing the viola and basketball. His goal is to be a lawyer and help his brother finish the college education that was interrupted by their father's death.