



## The Transformational Journey: How San Gabriel High School Seniors Josue Zuniga + Brian Barrueta Changed Their Opinion of Themselves to Become First Generation College Bound

*With their own dedication, inspiring role-models + support from key school staff, the two students are transforming their fortunes and future generations*

April 9, 2019, Alhambra, CA — When San Gabriel High School students Josue Zuniga and Brian Barrueta met as sophomores in chemistry class, what they shared was a huge desire to quit the class that was just too hard.

In hopes of dropping the class, they went to SGHS Principal, Ms. Debbie Stone, to ask for her help. Instead, Ms. Stone offered them the Principal’s Conference Room as a place to study together. That handsome room with its big conference table for important visitors changed the way Josue and Brian thought about themselves. It made them feel like they mattered. It made them want to try. And they now had a place where they could concentrate.

When asked how that room made them feel, Josue said, “It was a privilege. But it eventually felt like I could belong in such an important place, like I deserved to be here.” Brian said, “We both thought, ‘I want to do what I have to do to *work* in an office like this.’”

*“It eventually felt like I could belong in such an important place, like I deserved to be here.”  
— Josue Zuniga*

*“We both thought, ‘I want to do what I have to do to work in an office like this.’” — Brian Barrueta*

And so began their transformation from two freshman Latino boys, who did not take school or studying seriously to motivated sophomore study partners who invented ways to teach themselves what they did not understand. Their chemistry teacher, Mr. Tran, met with them a few times, but it was their own diligence that changed their whole approach to school. Josue and Brian met every day in the Principal's Conference Room to research how to learn their chemistry. They helped one another, they found ways to tutor themselves. YouTube and Khan Academy videos made a difference. Both boys earned B's in that chemistry class. Brian said, "Being able to do that, working together to change D's into B's, I changed my opinion of myself."

*"Being able to do that, working together to change D's into B's, I changed my opinion of myself." – Brian Barrueta*

In the process, Josue and Brian began to see they could graduate from a comprehensive high school, something no one in their families had done. With encouragement from Ms. Stone, who told them about her own struggles and hard work, and from their AP Spanish teacher, Eliana Deniz, Josue and Brian learned to ask for help when they needed it. They dared to think they might be "college material." The combination of Ms. Stone believing in their potential, sharing her struggles, and the gift of the Principal's Conference Room to study in, together with joining the campus Latino Alliance Club, helped shape their new views of the possible. As Brian says, "We began to give our best."

*"In the beginning, I believed in them more than they did." – SGHS Principal Debbie Stone*

It was SGHS field trips to the Adelante! Young Men Conferences at Pasadena City College, organized by Ms. Bea Macias, School Community Coordinator for Spanish-speaking families, that opened their eyes to what they could dream of accomplishing — and what it would take.

At the annual November Adelante! Young Men Conferences, several thousand Latino boys and young men from across California take part in workshops led by successful Latino men from all professions, positive role-models, men who look like them. These role-models and mentors tell the students, "Today when you look at us up on this stage, in our well-tailored business suits, you cannot see the many struggles we went through and had to overcome to get here." Each man says to them, "The struggles and obstacles we overcame are the same ones every one of you are experiencing. We are here to tell you, if we can do it, you can do it. We are here to help." Josue and Brian were inspired and begin to redouble their efforts at school. Months later, they can still quote the men

they met, remembering the encouragement and using it to motivate themselves through hardships. “It was life-changing,” says Brian. Fittingly, Adelante! translates to “Ahead!” in English.

*“Today when you look at us up on this stage, in our well tailored business suits, you cannot see the many struggles we went through and had to overcome to get here.” Adelante! Young Men Conference speaker to the 2,100 Latino boys they came to inspire.*

With mentoring and their school successes, both young men began to think of careers that interested them. Brian wanted to go into criminal justice and become a probation officer. Josue wanted to start a business, go into construction. “We said, ‘we’ve got to go to college,’ ” said Brian.

Asked how they were able to make this journey of transformation, Josue and Brian will tell you that Ms. Stone always told them to succeed “you have to have a plan.” Their first plan began with tutoring themselves in chemistry in the Principal’s Conference Room. That room, a principal’s belief in them, their own dedication, and successes led to a shift in their opinions of themselves. They applied for college — a giant step for them and their families. With enormous commitment and effort and the SGHS staff who believed in them all the way, Josue and Brian are graduating in May. They are the first in their families to apply to college. Josue is awaiting word. Brian received his acceptance to Cal Poly Pomona. His fifth grade brother cheered and now he too plans to go to college. They will be one of 550 San Gabriel seniors taking part in the May 1st Decision Day to celebrate their plans after graduation.

Brian and Josue say how much their families sacrificed to make their education possible. When Brian says. “I want to make each and every sacrifice my parents made for me pay off for my family, for me and for my future family. I want to be a role-model,” Josue nods, quietly agreeing. That is their plan: Forge new pathways for themselves and for a whole generation. Give it their best.

*“I want to make each and every sacrifice my parents made for me pay off for my family, for me, and for my future family. I want to be a role-model.” – Brian Barrueta, graduating senior, San Gabriel High School*

###

*San Gabriel High School: Dedicated to ensuring that all students acquire the academic, vocational, thinking skills, and personal qualities essential to becoming responsible, contributing members of our multi-ethnic, democratic society. The school has approximately 2050 students, 60% of whom are Asian API, 40% Latino, 15% English Learners, 70% receive free or reduced fee lunch. [www.sghsmatadors.org](http://www.sghsmatadors.org) 801 South Ramona, San Gabriel, CA 91776 | 626-943-6800 | Principal Debbie Stone*

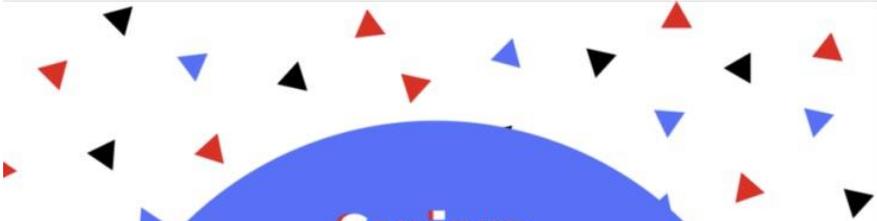
*Alhambra Unified: Relationship-Driven Excellence and Equity in a Global Haven*

*The dynamic and award-winning Alhambra Unified School District serves 16,665 K-12 students on 17 campuses in a richly multicultural community. In this unique multilingual haven, AUSD's dedication to excellence and equity in whole student learning is based on a system of Positive Behavior Supports for social, emotional and behavioral well-being. It is on that foundation of connection, relationships and emotional self-regulation that our rigorous education for competitive college and careers of the future can be truly empowering. [www.ausd.us](http://www.ausd.us)*

*Adalante! Young Men Conference (AYM)*

*By acting as real-life role models, presenters impart first-hand examples and scenarios of positive decision-making via 60 minute workshops. Attendees have the option of choosing three workshops of interest to them. The Conference also offers a Resource Fair, with colleges, universities and community service organizations sharing valuable information.*

*The purpose of the Adelante! Young Men (AYM) Conference is to provide boys and young men with tools for personal and professional growth, challenge them to raise their expectations, promote leadership and encourage them to pursue a post-high school education, so that they may achieve their goals and have a positive impact on lives and the lives of others. [www.adelanteya.org](http://www.adelanteya.org)*

A collection of small, colorful triangles in red, blue, and black scattered across the top of the page.

**Seniors,  
You're invited to**

*San Gabriel High School's  
2nd Annual*

**DECISION  
DAY**



**Come celebrate your post-  
high school plans with food,  
raffles and fun!**

**05.01.19**

**1:30 pm - 3:30 pm  
MPR**

**RSVP  
[tinyurl.com/2019decisionday](http://tinyurl.com/2019decisionday)**

**See College Advisers in the  
Career Center for more  
information**

**\* Must bring SIR to attend event**