

MARIACHI HIGH



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CREDITS

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Mariachi High is a documentary that captures a year in the life of top-ranked student musicians in "Mariachi Halcon," the varsity-level championship ensemble at Zapata High School on the border of South Texas. The experiences of these students can spark valuable discussions about the satisfaction that comes from pursuing excellence, the importance of family and community involvement, and how music education can motivate students to stay in school.

This guide is designed for use in both community screenings and with high school students in a classroom setting. By combining the stories of the students featured in the film with thought-provoking discussion, you can raise awareness about the dropout crisis in the United States, explore factors that help young people to stay in school, and inspire students, teachers, parents, and community members to get involved in the movement to improve local graduation rates.

Mariachi High is proud to be a part of public media's **AMERICAN GRADUATE: LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN** initiative (<http://www.americangraduate.org>), which seeks to effectively use media to increase community understanding of the dropout crisis, and to bring people together to develop and implement local solutions.

OVERVIEW OF THE DROPOUT CRISIS

According to the United States Department of Education, America loses one out of four young people to the dropout crisis each year. That's one every 26 seconds, or more than one million students each year. For African-American and Hispanic students, the graduation rate is *less than 65 percent*.

A high school diploma is an important step in preparing a young person to live an independent, secure and happy life and is an essential component of America's economic competitiveness to create a more educated, innovative workforce. Compared to dropouts, high school graduates earn more money, generate more jobs in the economy, are less likely to engage in criminal behavior, have better health, and are more likely to vote and volunteer. Dropping out makes it harder for young people to succeed in life, results in the loss of hundreds of billions of dollars in economic productivity, and generates enormous social costs.

You can find more detailed research data in the "Significance of the Dropout Crisis" section of the American Graduate Web site: <http://www.americangraduate.org/learn/research-center/get-the-facts.html>

WHO SHOULD ATTEND A SCREENING OF *MARIACHI HIGH*?

The dropout crisis affects everyone due to its impact on families, the economy, crime, and demand on social services. Finding and implementing solutions will require bringing together people from all parts of the community, including:

- Policymakers
- Educators
- PTA
- Business leaders
- Public media partners
- Parents
- Students
- Teachers exploring the significance of arts education to keep students engaged in school
- Organizations focused on the needs of youth and dropout prevention

HOW TO ORGANIZE A SCREENING

Mariachi High can be a valuable resource to spark discussion in community or classroom settings about helping high school students stay on the path toward graduation. The following recommendations will help you to maximize the effectiveness of your screening:

The Value of Partnerships

Successful events are best organized with the help and support of others in your community. A screening of *Mariachi High* offers the opportunity to collaborate with partners and build working relationships that can make a difference long after the screening is over. Ideally, you will work with your community partners to plan the screening, set the agenda, and promote the event to their networks. If your facility is limited, a community partner might also host the event. In addition, a community partner may be a great source for a discussion facilitator. After the event, you can keep partners and screening participants engaged by cross-promoting activities via social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and by collaborating on future initiatives.

Through the American Graduate initiative, public media stations in more than 30 states are working directly with community partners to join forces and coordinate action to help keep students in school. To sync up with these efforts, use the “Find Out More About What Is Happening in Your State” map at: <http://www.americangraduate.org/get-involved/find-your-community.html>

See also, “Our List of Champions and Partner Organizations” at <http://www.americangraduate.org/get-involved/our-partners.html> to identify some groups in your local community who are focused on the dropout crisis.

Tips for a Successful Screening

Size Matters

Consider how large you want your event to be. Does your video presentation equipment limit the number of people who can watch the films? How will size impact the level of discussion afterward? What type of facility will you need to ensure everyone’s comfort?

Be Comfortable

Make sure the temperature of the room is neither too hot nor too cold.

Provide signs that make it easy for people to find both the room for the event and the restrooms. Ensure that there is enough seating for everyone. Consider how much light will be needed during both the screening and discussion portions of the event. Make arrangements for translators, sign language interpreters, etc., as needed. (Please note that the DVD for *Mariachi High* has options to select Spanish subtitles and/or captioning.)

Get Help

Recruit some volunteers to help with the event. Your partner organization(s) may be a good source of manpower. The event will run more smoothly if you have a team or committee to assist with publicizing the event, setting up, greeting attendees, handling the audiovisual needs of the event, serving as timekeeper, cleaning up, etc. We recommend that you invite someone (e.g., educator, religious leader, human resource professional, community leader) to facilitate the discussion portion of the event so that you can focus on logistics.

Look at the Time

Decide what date and time of day will work best for you and those you want to attend the screening. Be sure to also allow enough time to promote the event.

Spread the Word

Develop a strategy in collaboration with your partners to promote the screening using a variety of communication methods, such as social media, posters, paid media, email, newspapers, partner newsletters, school announcements, etc.

Check Your Equipment

Make sure your audiovisual equipment is functioning properly before people arrive at the event. Have a backup plan in case something goes wrong.

Provide Refreshments

In addition to your organized discussion, give attendees the opportunity to interact informally to discuss what they've seen and learned and to network with one another. Setting up a table with something to eat and drink is a natural way to allow this to happen.

Strategies for Facilitators

Organize the Room

Work with the host of the event to ensure that the physical arrangement of the room will encourage the type of discussion you seek. Consider whether a portable microphone is needed to be certain that everyone can hear what is said.

Be Prepared

This guide contains background information on the film, the dropout crisis, and thought-provoking discussion questions. Be familiar enough with this material so that you can keep the dialogue moving, make smooth transitions to new topics, and listen to participant responses without being preoccupied with what should happen next.

Keep the Focus Local

High school dropout rates are a nationwide crisis, but the best place for people to make a difference is in their own community. Gather local data on the problem and share it during your event to provide context and areas of focus for the discussion. You can obtain local and state graduation data by contacting the related education agency or by using *Education Week's* "Graduation Rates Map" (<http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/>). Share local stories and brainstorm local solutions. Provide information about local volunteer opportunities so attendees have concrete ways to get involved right away.

Establish Ground Rules

Make it clear how people should indicate when they want to speak.
Encourage people to listen carefully as well as share their points of view.
Don't interrupt others. Try to understand one another. Show respect to everyone in attendance.

Know Your Audience

Are those at the screening already familiar with the dropout crisis in your community? Do they have related experiences they can share? How well do audience members know each other? We recommend devoting some time to introductions at the beginning of the screening. For example, ask people to state their name and explain what they hope to get out of the event. For large screenings, participants could introduce themselves before contributing to the discussion.

Involve Everyone

Allow as many opportunities for participation in the discussion as you can.
Ask how people feel about what they saw in the film or about what someone has said. See if an attendee can provide an example to support another's point. Move away from a person who makes a comment so he or she will speak up and outward, drawing everyone into the conversation. Don't let one person dominate the discussion.

Capture Important Ideas

Reinforce good points by paraphrasing or summarizing them. Assign someone to be in charge of writing key ideas on a chalkboard or flip chart so you can focus on what people are saying. Review or refer back to these ideas at appropriate points in the discussion.

Determine Next Steps

Summarize ideas shared in the discussion about how the community can encourage students to stay in school. Are there groups present that have common ground for taking action? What will participants do with the knowledge they gained during the screening and discussion?

Evaluate the Experience

Provide an opportunity for attendees to give feedback on what happened at the screening. This can be done orally or anonymously in writing. You might ask questions like:

- What did you learn from participating in this screening?
- What will you do with what you've learned?
- Who did you meet at this screening that can help you accomplish your goals related to the dropout crisis?
- Who else do you know who would be interested in helping with this issue?
- If you could have changed one thing about this screening, what would it be?

Where to Get the Film

Mariachi High can be recorded off the air and used for educational purposes until June 28, 2013. (Note: This is one year from the initial broadcast on June 29, 2012). Check the broadcast schedule of your local public television station for any upcoming broadcasts or contact your station's Education Director about your planned screening for assistance.

Mariachi High can also be purchased on DVD from ShopPBS. This DVD includes rights that allow for a public screening with a large group of people. (<http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=13050037>).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Music Education

Research shows that learning music in school contributes to student achievement in a number of ways:

- Schools with music programs have significantly higher graduation rates than do those without programs (90.2% as compared to 72.9%).
- Schools that have music programs have significantly higher attendance rates than do those without programs (93.3% as compared to 84.9%).
- Students in high-quality school music programs score higher on standardized tests compared to students in schools with deficient music education programs, regardless of the socioeconomic level of the school or school district.
- Students of music continue to outperform their non-arts peers on the SAT.

In addition, college admissions officials say they view participation in music as a valuable experience that broadens students' understanding and appreciation of the world around them, and that contributes to students' intellectual development.

Music education can also develop student discipline and teamwork.

Source:

The National Association of Music Education. "The Benefits of the Study of Music." <http://www.nammfoundation.org/support-music/new-advocacy-brochure-highlights-benefits-study-music>

Mariachi

Mariachi was born in the Mexican state of Jalisco sometime in the 19th century. The style blends instruments introduced to Mexico by Spain with original folk songs that tell cultural tales of revolutionary heroes, politics, machismo, love, heartbreak, and even animals. Some songs contain chauvinistic, scandalous or satirical couplets that reflect the culture when they were written. Musicians wear traje de charro – traditional suits of the horseman, only transformed into ornamented and elegant costumes.

The size of a mariachi band can vary, but common instruments include violins, trumpets, harps, guitars, vihuelas (a five-stringed relative of the guitar), and the guitarrón (a large-bodied, six string acoustic bass). These instruments work together to play festively and vibrantly, often with aggressive and rolling guitars punctuated by short bursts of trumpets and triumphant or encouraging yells. Other songs include soulful ballads.

Musicians in a mariachi ensemble are also singers, even if it is just during the chorus parts. To determine the lead singer of a song, mariachi bands typically match the right voice in the group with a particular piece in order to capture the true emotion of the music.

For many Mexicans, a mariachi band is an important part of the key events in their lives, such as baptisms, weddings, holidays, and funerals.

Sources:

Marrujo, Monica R. "Vocal Use in Mariachi Singers." <http://web.nmsu.edu/~lleeper/pages/Voice/marrujo/index.htm>

Collins, Camille. "What is the mariachi?" *Mexconnect*. September 1, 1998. <http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1875-what-is-the-mariachi>

Mariachi in Schools

In the United States, more than 500 public schools from Washington to Illinois and throughout the Southwest offer mariachi as part of their band classes. Many of these schools have large percentages of Latino students. Experts say that culturally-relevant music education is an effective way to bridge family, school, community, and cultures. Schools also report that mariachi helps students to foster cultural identity and self-expression, build self-esteem, improve their musical skills, strive for good grades, and stay in school.

Mariachi High features the varsity-level Mariachi Halcon ensemble at Zapata High School on the border of South Texas, where according to the 2010 U.S. Census, 95% of the population is Latino. Each year, competitive auditions are held to determine the top students who can participate in the award-winning band. Members rehearse extensively for performances and state and national mariachi competitions, and are expected to also do well academically. Many high schools have a "No Pass/ No Play" policy with regard to extracurricular activities in which students who receive a failing grade must abstain from participating until the failing grade or grades have been improved to passing levels. All recently-graduated seniors from Mariachi Halcon attend college, and the majority finished high school in the top 10 percent of their class.

Sources:

Brown, Patricia Leigh. "Sousa? Many Students March to Mariachi Instead." *The New York Times*. April 24, 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/24/national/24mariachi.html>

Kavnar, Lucas. "High School Mariachi Band Inspires Documentary, Enlivens Community In Zapata, Texas" *The Huffington Post*. June 18, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/18/mariachi-high-school-band_n_1600703.html

Omer, Sevil. "Mariachi has changed my life!: Mexican music grabs US students" *NBC News*. May 4, 2012. <http://usnews.nbcnews.com/news/2012/05/04/11526485-mariachi-has-changed-my-life-mexican-music-grabs-us-students?lite>

FILM SYNOPSIS

Length of Broadcast Version: 55 minutes

Note: This film includes some sections with English subtitles. This film is closed captioned.

At the beginning of the school year, hopeful and nervous students gather to audition for Zapata High School's championship ensemble Mariachi Halcon. The audition process is highly competitive, and band leader Adrian Padilla says, "For the size of the county, you don't expect this much talent." He selects those he considers the "cream of the crop," knowing that those not chosen and their families will be deeply disappointed.

The newly-formed ensemble begins feverish rehearsals in preparation for the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza national competition. Padilla helps the group to fine-tune their performance. Beto Perez, a senior who plays guitar, sees Padilla as more than a band leader. "Whenever I needed advice, he was there for me," says Perez. "I can tell him anything."

Finally the trip to the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza competition in San Antonio has arrived. Padilla is excited to, "get these guys out of this small town and experience the rest of the world." The students are both nervous and eager about their upcoming performance and talk about the pros and cons of competing. Padilla gives them a pep talk and sends them out on stage. The students perform beautifully, but competition is fierce, and they do not win. It is a huge letdown. Padilla tells them where they went wrong, and continues to set a high bar for them to reach.

Back in Zapata, Mariachi Halcon begins to work hard again in rehearsals in preparation for the state competition. Students talk about the benefits that they have experienced from being a member of the mariachi ensemble. Padilla explains that he used to see a real dropout culture among students, but now 100% of Mariachi Halcon members graduate, and many are in the top 10% of their class.

At the state competition, students are again nervous but hopeful. They perform well, and win their division. The victory feels wonderful after so much hard work, and the students have a great sense of achievement. Mariachi Halcon is invited to the Texas State Capitol to be recognized for both their win and their ongoing pursuit of excellence. They also perform at the

Capitol and impress the crowd there. Eloy Martinez, who plays violin, says Mariachi Halcon is changing people's perspectives about the abilities of Latinos.

PEOPLE IN THE FILM

Mariachi High was filmed during the 2010-2011 school year. Here is a list of those featured in the documentary, along with information on their activities as of Summer 2012.

Adrian Padilla has been teaching mariachi music to students for more than twenty years. A mariachi trumpeter himself, Adrian was born in the Rio Grande Valley. His wife is a school nurse and all three of his children are learning mariachi.

Ashley Guzman will be a senior at Zapata High School. She is debate team captain, a violinist with Mariachi Halcon, and a recent devotee of power lifting. She hopes to become a corporate lawyer and a Supreme Court Justice. She has been playing the violin since she was seven years old.

Eloy Martinez will be a senior at Zapata High School. He is first chair violinist of Mariachi Halcon, a member of the basketball team, one act players, and 4H. He hopes to become a doctor.

Humberto "Beto" Perez is a graduate of Zapata High School where he was first chair guitar in Mariachi Halcon. In Fall 2012, he will be a sophomore at University of Texas Pan American. He is majoring in music.

Jennifer "Jenny" Santos will be a sophomore at University of Texas, Kingsville where she is studying animal science. A graduate of Zapata High School, she was vice president of the senior class, and president of both 4-H and Future Farmers of America.

Marina Flores attends Remington College's Cosmetology School in Dallas. She wants to be a celebrity cosmetologist.

Victor Garza will be attending Texas A & M University Kingsville in Fall 2012, and plans on studying engineering.

Collin Moffet is hoping for a congressional nomination to apply to West Point. He would like to study electronic engineering.

Belen Padilla has been singing in mariachi and vocal competitions. She hopes to study music in college and become a children's choir director.

Charlie Rodriguez was the Zapata High School mascot in 2012. He's interested in studying Theater Costume Design in college.

Javier Zapata has completed his freshman year at Texas A & M University, College Station. He has an A average and will be majoring in Biomedical Engineering.

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

Provide context for watching the film and the later discussion by pointing out that there is a dropout crisis in the United States and sharing information provided in the Overview of the Dropout Crisis section of this guide. Be sure to also localize the problem with district and state graduation data, which can be obtained from the related education agency or by using *Education Week's* "Graduation Rates Map" (<http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/>).

Explain that the film *Mariachi High* shows how a school mariachi band program brings out the best in at-risk students and motivates them to stay in school. Ask viewers to take notes as they watch the film on the impact of the mariachi program on the students, their families, and the community. An optional Viewing Guide handout is included in this guide to help viewers organize their notes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions are provided as potential prompts to help facilitators guide a discussion about the film and how to address the local dropout problem. Choose those that will best meet the goals of your screening.

You may find it helpful to begin the discussion with one or two general questions, such as:

- With whom do you identify the most from the film? Why?
- Were you surprised by the musical skills and professionalism shown by Mariachi Halcon and their rivals in the film? What might account for this reaction?

Music Education

- What characteristics and skills did the students develop by participating in the school mariachi band? How do these qualities contribute to academic and life success?
- What programs in your community provide similar benefits to students? How could the community better support these programs? If no such programs exist, how could some get started?
- In the film, student Beto Perez said, “Sometimes you tend to go to the bad crowd because there is nothing to do, especially in a small town. I’m glad I stayed in mariachi and I didn’t turn to being a straight up druggie or just plain not doing anything with my life.” What role did music education play in Beto’s path to graduation? How could the problem of having “nothing to do” lead to someone dropping out of high school? How can students in your community be more engaged in productive activities?
- How does the mariachi band make the school more relevant to the community of Zapata? How can strengthening this school-community connection improve the graduation rate in your area?

Pursuing Excellence

- Why are the students in the film successful? What prevents them from dropping out of school? What lessons from their stories can be applied in your community?
- In the film, student Charlie Rodriguez said, “When I go up on the stage, I am a different person. Definitely. It gives me kind of a motivation to do my best and show everyone what I have.” What value do performances and competitions bring to the pursuit of excellence?
- What expectations does band leader Adrian Padilla have for his students? What do family members and the community expect of Mariachi Halcon? How do the students respond to these expectations? How do expectations and achievement play out in your community?
- How did the band recover from its loss at the Vargas Mariachi Extravaganza? How does failure contribute to the quest for excellence? How can students who are not succeeding in school get back on track?
- Students in the group have a variety of personal styles. What unifies them and drives the band to ultimately succeed? How does that process prepare them for dealing with different types of people in college and the workplace?

Teaching and Supporting Youth

- In the film, student Beto Perez explained that band director Adrian Padilla was more than just a music teacher for him. “Whenever I needed some advice,” said Perez, “He was there for me. I can tell him anything... He told me, ‘Girls come and go. All you need to think about is your education, your music, and just keep on going.’” How do teachers and other adults in your community offer support to students and guide them along the path to graduation?
- After Mariachi Halcon lost at the Vargas Mariachi Extravaganza, Padilla told students, “We did our best. Today it wasn’t good enough. Maybe next contest it will be... You are a very talented group. I have high expectations for the rest of the year.” Do you think he said the right thing to the students after their loss? Why or why not? What would you have said?
- Parents in Zapata offer strong support to their children in the mariachi band. The father of student Eloy Martinez said in the film that he has to stand in the back of the room for performances because he is so proud of his son that he gets emotional. In your community, how involved are parents in their children’s school experiences? What kind of impact could this level of involvement be having on graduation rates? How can parental support be improved?
- Mariachi music is a way for many band members in the film to connect with the cultural heritage of their families. How do students in your community connect with their parents?
- In the film, the father of student Jenny Santos said that he does not worry about his daughter getting involved in any of the local drug and criminal activities. He says he knows that she is focused on school and music and spends time with a good group of students. How can adults in your community help students focus on what is important? How can students keep from getting involved with drugs and crime?
- After winning their division in the state mariachi championship, the band was invited to the Texas State Capitol and formally recognized by the legislature for their achievement and their ongoing pursuit of excellence. What value is there in such recognition? How do political, business, and/or other leaders outside of school recognize student achievement in your community? What more should be done?

Mariachi High VIEWING GUIDE

As you watch the film, use the table below to keep track of the students in Zapata High School's varsity-level ensemble, Mariachi Halcon, led by Adrian Padilla.

Student	Instrument	Benefits of the Mariachi Halcon Experience
Ashley Guzman		
Eloy Martinez		
Beto Perez		
Jenny Santos		
Marina Flores		
Victor Garza		
Collin Moffet		
Belen Padilla		
Charlie Rodriguez		
Javier Zapata		

What impact do you think Mariachi Halcon has on the families of the students and the community as a whole?

RESOURCES

Film-related Web Sites

The Arts and Achievement in At-risk Youth

<http://www.nea.gov/news/news12/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.html>

This March 2012 study by the National Endowment for the Arts used four separate longitudinal studies to track students with high or low levels of arts engagement in or out of school. Findings show that 71 percent of low-income students with a high exposure to the arts graduated from high school and attended college. A greater percentage of high-arts students also had better grades and test scores in all subjects.

National Association for Music in Education

<http://www.nafme.org/>

This organization provides a variety of programs and events with the goal of advancing music education.

PBS Arts: *Mariachi High*

<http://www.pbs.org/arts/exhibit/mariachi-high/>

This online exhibit features a series of video clips that includes a mariachi performance, visuals of Zapata, TX, a quinceanera celebration, and a piece on mariachi freshman Charlie Rodriguez who discusses his motivations and dreams.

Dropout Crisis: Organizations and Tools

American Graduate

<http://www.americangraduate.org>

The hub for the multi-year public media campaign that addresses the dropout crisis includes statistics, a map tool to find out what is happening locally for the initiative, details on how to get involved, a list with links to community partners, and more.

America's Promise Alliance: Grad Nation

<http://www.americaspromise.org/>

America's Promise Alliance launched the Grad Nation campaign in 2010 to mobilize individuals, organizations, and communities to achieve the goal of a 90 percent graduation rate nationwide by the year 2020. Grad Nation provides dropout data, reports and indicators that provide context and illustrate progress, including the evidence-based work of the Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation.

Education Week's Graduation Rates Map

<http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/>

This map tool provides local and state graduation data.

Everyone Graduates Center

<http://www.every1graduates.org/>

This organization seeks to analyze the data that gets at the roots of the dropout crisis, provide tools and models that communities can use to address the issue, and builds local capacity to implement solutions.