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3A

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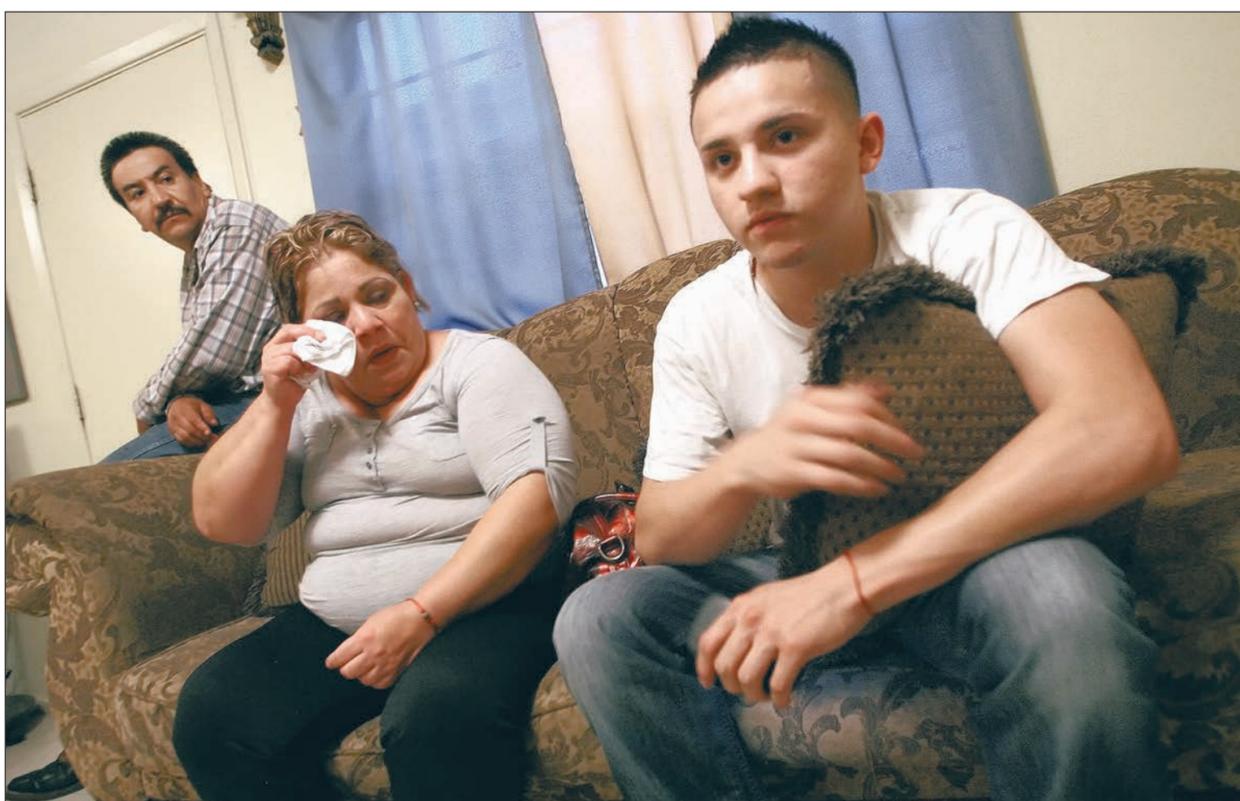
SUNDAY, AUG. 26, 2012

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Victims of cheating

They come from various backgrounds and struggles. But they share one thing — they were moved, turned away and urged not to attend high school in EPISD. Records indicate that the schools' unwillingness to enroll them was tied to a cheating scheme to raise district test scores. These former students face lives without a high-school diploma and questions about what happened.



Grisel Avalos wipes a tear from her eye as her son Roger, 21, talks about being kicked out of Bowie High School before his sophomore year. Roger's father, Jorge, is at left.

Students were removed, says Bowie administrator

By **Zahira Torres**
EL PASO TIMES

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A Bowie High School administrator admits he helped remove students who might keep his campus from meeting federal accountability standards as part of a districtwide scheme that has shaken the El Paso Independent School District.

Johnnie Vega, an assistant principal at the South El Paso campus, said in an interview with the El Paso Times that he and others feared for their jobs and followed district and campus directives to prevent some students from enrolling, kick others out and award credits to yet other students who should have failed courses for not showing up.

"I feel terrible," Vega said. "I have nightmares. I don't want to say that it is post-traumatic stress, but in a way it is. I have nightmares about what we did. I have nightmares about the FBI coming to my office and handcuffing me and taking me out and EPISD firing me."

One of the students Vega admits pushing out of school is Roger Avalos, now 21, who said he was angry that he and his two brothers were kicked out of Bowie.

"It was not justice but really an injustice what they did to us," Avalos said.

Vega's disclosure is the first time an El Paso Independent School District employee has admitted participating in the scheme led by former Superintendent Lorenzo Garcia to artificially inflate student test scores and make it appear as if campuses were meeting state and federal accountability standards.

Please see **Removed 6A**

Inside

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Monday

- **TEA** monitor gets to work at EPISD.



- **Read more** on the district at elpasotimes.com/episd.

Please see **Victims 4A**

'Knowing that they had to accept me, I feel like I want to strangle them, but what do I do now?'

Damaris Dominguez — Turned away from Austin High School in 2010

By **Zahira Torres**
EL PASO TIMES

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Frustration grew as Damaris Dominguez, 20, scrolled through dozens of employment ads that offered her no prospects.

Bilingual salesperson needed, one job posting said. Another ad called for a food truck worker between the ages

of 21 and 40.

The day care where she dropped off a résumé told her to come back when she earned a high-school diploma or had a GED. But Dominguez had been pushed away from Austin High School when she attempted to enroll in 2010, at the height of a districtwide cheating scheme that targeted students like the recently arrived immigrant from Mexico.

Dominguez — one of several students who have shared stories with the El Paso Times about being kept from enrolling or being pushed out of school by El Paso Independent School District administrators during a districtwide cheating scheme — struggled for months to find a job.

She was hired a few weeks ago at a small grocery store in Northeast El

InsideBusiness: Downtown overhaul of 2 blocks near San Jacinto Plaza begins

By **Vic Kolenc**
EL PASO TIMES

El Paso's years-old dream of Downtown redevelopment may be ready to finally take off.

Two groups of investors and a national drug-store chain have plans that could drastically change the face of two massive blocks near San Jacinto Plaza.

The Borderplex Community Trust, an El Paso real estate investment trust aimed at acquiring Downtown properties, wants to tear down

two buildings catty-corner from San Jacinto and build an unspecified mixed-use project there.

Another group of El Paso investors led by Lane Gaddy, who operates a metal recycling company, have bought one historic Downtown building at Stanton and Mills and expect to complete the purchase of another this week — the five-story Banner Building across the street from San Jacinto Plaza. The group wants to renovate the buildings for retail, office and residential uses.

CVS pharmacy, the nation's second-largest drugstore chain, last week completed the purchase of the former McCrory Department Store building at Texas and Mesa. It plans to renovate the dilapidated 30,000-square-foot building, and put a store there as it enters the El Paso market.

"This is an opportunity to redevelop a key corridor in the heart of Downtown," said Gaddy, 29.

"Any development Downtown is good," he said. He added that what's needed is one uni-

fied, safe, clean corridor that can become a true "lifestyle component" to get young professionals to move Downtown.

The redevelopment won't be without controversy. Some think it unwise for Borderplex to tear down the building at 230 N. Mesa, a former Payless Shoe Store location, which records indicate was designed by El Paso's most famous architect, Henry Trost.

► **Get more details** about the Downtown redevelopment plans in today's Business section.

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