



## Pax3- and Pax7-mediated Dbx1 regulation orchestrates the patterning of intermediate spinal interneurons

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2 **Pax3- and Pax7-mediated Dbx1 regulation orchestrates the**

3 **patterning of intermediate spinal interneurons**

4

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23 **Abstract**

24 Transcription factors are key orchestrators of the emergence of neuronal diversity within the  
25 developing spinal cord. As such, the two paralogous proteins Pax3 and Pax7 regulate the  
26 specification of progenitor cells within the intermediate neural tube, by defining a neat  
27 segregation between those fated to form motor circuits and those involved in the integration of  
28 sensory inputs. To attain insights into the molecular means by which they control this process,  
29 we have performed detailed phenotypic analyses of the intermediate spinal interneurons (IN),  
30 namely the dI6, V0<sub>D</sub>, V0VCG and V1 populations in compound null mutants for Pax3 and Pax7.  
31 This has revealed that the levels of Pax3/7 proteins determine both the dorso-ventral extent and  
32 the number of cells produced in each subpopulation; with increasing levels leading to the  
33 dorsalisation of their fate. Furthermore, thanks to the examination of mutants in which Pax3  
34 transcriptional activity is skewed either towards repression or activation, we demonstrate that  
35 this cell diversification process is mainly dictated by Pax3/7 ability to repress gene expression.  
36 Consistently, we show that Pax3 and Pax7 inhibit the expression of *Dbx1* and of its repressor  
37 *Prdm12*, fate determinants of the V0 and V1 interneurons, respectively. Notably, we provide  
38 evidence for the activity of several *cis*-regulatory modules of *Dbx1* to be sensitive to Pax3 and  
39 Pax7 transcriptional activity levels. Altogether, our study provides insights into how the  
40 redundancy within a TF family, together with discrete dynamics of expression profiles of each  
41 member, are exploited to generate cellular diversity. Furthermore, our data supports the model  
42 whereby cell fate choices in the neural tube do not rely on binary decisions but rather on  
43 inhibition of multiple alternative fates.

44

45 **Highlights**

- 46     • Pax3 and Pax7 control the spatial organisation of spinal differentiation  
47     • Pax3 and Pax7 repressive activity spatially restricts *Dbx1* and *Prdm12* expression  
48     • An intronic *cis*-regulatory module recapitulates *Dbx1* expression  
49     • The *Dbx1* intronic *cis*-regulatory module is sensitive to Pax3/7 transcriptional activity

50 **Keywords**

51 Neuronal patterning; Pax3/Pax7 transcription factors; *Dbx1*; repression; spinal cord  
52 interneurons; *cis*-regulatory modules.

53 **Introduction**

54 The developing vertebrate neural tube is a classical and well-studied model to address how cell  
55 diversity is generated and organised within a tissue. The stereotypical arrangements and  
56 numbers of neuronal subtypes composing the adult spinal cord emanate from two rounds of  
57 cell-fate choices operating during embryogenesis (Lai et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2015). During the  
58 first phase, “naïve” progenitor cells acquire distinct molecular signatures depending on their  
59 position along the dorsal-ventral (D-V) axis of the neural tube (Del Corral and Storey, 2004;  
60 Lai et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2015). These signatures are then further variegated when cells undergo  
61 post-mitotic differentiation. Ultimately, cells will express unique sets of genes imposing  
62 stereotypic physiological and morphological traits upon each neuronal subtype. This process of  
63 cellular determination is largely controlled by transcription factors (TFs) (Lai et al., 2016; Lu  
64 et al., 2015). These proteins operate at the level of non-coding *cis*-regulatory modules (CRMs)  
65 where they recruit factors impacting on the activity of the basal transcriptional machinery  
66 and/or the chromatin state. Thereby, their activity underpins the overall levels of gene activation  
67 or repression within cells (Spitz and Furlong, 2012). Although the extent of TF diversity within  
68 the developing vertebrate neural tube can now be estimated (e.g. Armant et al., 2013, see also  
69 Supp. Table 4), how their activity at the level of CRMs generates robust gene expression  
70 profiles and cellular phenotypes is still poorly defined and hence remains under intensive  
71 investigation (e.g. Bailey et al., 2006; Borromeo et al., 2014; Kutejova et al., 2016; Mazzoni et  
72 al., 2013).

73

74 To delve into this issue, we focussed on the activity of two paralogous and highly related  
75 proteins, Pax3 and Pax7 (Mayran et al., 2015). These TFs are amongst the first to be induced  
76 within the dorsal part of the developing spinal cord; in mouse, Pax3 is induced by gestational  
77 day (GD) 8, while Pax7 appears 24 hours later (Goulding et al., 1991; Jostes et al., 1990). It has

78 been known for a long time that these factors are essential to spinal cord development and  
79 control several key cellular processes ranging from neural tube closure to timing of post-mitotic  
80 differentiation (e.g. Epstein et al., 1991; Nakazaki et al., 2008). In addition, several studies have  
81 led to the idea that these factors orchestrate cell type specification not only within the dorsal  
82 neural tube where they are expressed (Moore et al., 2013; Nakazaki et al., 2008) but also within  
83 the intermediate neural tube (Mansouri and Gruss, 1998). In this region, 3 adjacent progenitor  
84 pools, dp6, p0 and p1 (from dorsal to ventral), are fated to become dI6, V0 and V1 interneurons  
85 (IN), respectively (Lu et al., 2015). The V1 and V0 IN populations are further diversified into  
86 discrete neuronal subtypes. For instance, the most dorsal p0 progenitors give rise to two GABA-  
87 and glycine-secreting populations, termed V0<sub>D</sub> and V0<sub>V</sub> IN, while the ventral p0 progenitors  
88 give rise to two excitatory neuronal subtypes, the cholinergic V0<sub>C</sub> and glutamatergic V0<sub>G</sub> IN  
89 (Lu et al., 2015). Within these populations, it was previously shown that the position and the  
90 number of V1 and V0<sub>VCG</sub> IN are regulated by Pax3 and Pax7 activity; in their absence, the V1  
91 IN are produced in excess and are intermingled with V0 IN (Mansouri and Gruss, 1998).  
92 Whether Pax3 and Pax7 regulate the fate of the other intermediate cell types remains to be  
93 tested and the molecular mechanisms by which they repress ventral fates needs to be  
94 established. Notably, it is still unclear whether they are able to directly repress the expression  
95 of ventral specifiers. Indeed, even though both Pax3 and Pax7 possess an octapeptide motif  
96 capable of interactions with the Groucho/TLE co-repressors (Muhr et al., 2001), most studies  
97 suggest that they act as transcriptional activators. For instance, Pax3 and Pax7 have been shown  
98 to be necessary to promote the activity of CRMs regulating the expression of key patterning  
99 genes such as Pax3 itself or Neurog2 (Moore et al., 2013; Nakazaki et al., 2008). Further  
100 supporting this, the expression of a single functional allele of Pax3 encoding an activator form  
101 of Pax3 is sufficient to rescue many of the morphological defects of Pax3 single mutants (Relaix  
102 et al., 2003).

103 Altogether these data prompted us to assess the precise contribution of Pax3 and Pax7 to the  
104 patterning of the intermediate neural tube and to test whether their active and/or repressive  
105 transcriptional activity is involved in this process. To this end, we have analysed the distribution  
106 of intermediate interneuron populations in mouse embryos carrying either compound null  
107 mutations for these two genes or dominant active or repressive forms of Pax3. These analyses  
108 revealed that the modulation of the levels and the type of transcriptional activity determines not  
109 only the position but also the number of neurons generated. Furthermore, they led us to identify  
110 Prdm12 and Dbx1 as target genes, the latter being capable of sensing the levels of Pax3 and  
111 Pax7 transcriptional activity through several *cis*-regulatory modules.

112

## 113 **Material and Methods**

### 114 **Mouse lines and *in ovo* electroporation**

115 Mice carrying *Pax3* null, *PAX3A*, *Pax3R* and *Pax7* null alleles were previously described  
116 (Bajard et al., 2006; Mansouri et al., 1996; Relaix et al., 2005, 2003). Notably, *PAX3A* and  
117 *Pax3R* alleles encode for proteins made of Pax3 DNA-binding domains fused to either the  
118 FOXO1 transactivation or Engrailed repressor domain. These are expressed from the *Pax3*  
119 locus upon activation of the Cre recombinase driven by the zygote specific *PGK* enhancer  
120 (Lallemand et al., 1998). Electroporation constructs expressing Pax3 and Pax7 variants and  
121 Dbx1 from the *pCIG* vector engineered to bi-cistronically express nuclear-targeted GFP  
122 (Megason and McMahon, 2002) were generated. The *CRM4.8kb*, which contains the *Dbx1*  
123 minimal promoter and the *CRM4.8kb::iCRM* were cloned into a *pBluescript* vector, while  
124 *CRM1* to 3 and the *iCRM* were inserted into a *bGZA* vector (Yee et al., 1993), upstream of a  
125 minimal *HBB* promoter. For detailed cloning strategies see Supp. Material and Methods.  
126 Reporter plasmids (0.5 $\mu$ g/ $\mu$ l) and *pCIG* based constructs (1.5  $\mu$ g/ $\mu$ l) were electroporated in

127 Hamburger and Hamilton (HH) stage 10-11 chick embryos according to described protocols  
128 (Briscoe et al., 2000).

129

130 **Immunohistochemistry and *in situ* hybridisation**

131 Mouse and chick embryos were fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde for 45 min to 2 hr at 4°C. Fixed  
132 embryos were cryoprotected by equilibration in 15% sucrose, embedded in gelatin,  
133 cryosectioned (14 µm), and processed for immunostaining (Briscoe et al., 2000) or *in situ*  
134 hybridisation (ISH) (Yamada et al., 1993). Details of the reagents are provided in the Supp.  
135 Material and Methods. All quantifications were performed at brachial levels using ImageJ  
136 v.1.43 g image analysis software (NIH) on usually more than 3 embryos and on 2 to 4 transverse  
137 sections per embryo (Supp. Table 1, Table 2). The number of cells per section was determined  
138 using the cell counter plugin. Fluorescence intensity of β-Galactosidase and of GFP in chick  
139 embryos and the evaluation of dorsal–ventral boundaries position were determined as described  
140 in (Balaskas et al., 2012). The heat maps were generated using MATLAB (Mathworks, Natick,  
141 MA) and correspond to the mean of the ratios of β-Galactosidase fluorescence intensity over  
142 that of GFP on the number of sections and embryos indicated in Supp. Table 2. The heat maps  
143 provide a color-coded scale for individual datasets by associating the lowest value in the data  
144 matrix with dark blue and the highest value with dark red. All statistical analyses were  
145 performed using a Mann-Whitney U test in GraphPad Prism and all the p-values are given in  
146 Supp. Table 3.

147

148 ***In silico* analysis of *Dbx1* locus**

149 The mouse sequence of each CRM was used as the query sequence for cross-species BLAT  
150 searches, performed with the Ensembl genome browser (<http://www.ensembl.org/>). The  
151 alignments of enhancer sequences across anole lizard, cat, chicken, chimpanzee, Chinese soft-

152 shell turtle, cow, horse, human, mouse, rat, xenopus and zebrafish genomes were produced and  
153 analysed using ClustalOmega (<http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/msa/clustalo/>) and phylogenetically  
154 conserved motifs were defined using MEME (<http://meme.ebi.edu.au/meme/tools/meme>).  
155 Putative TF binding sites within the conserved motifs were identified using the Tomtom tool in  
156 the MEME suite (<http://meme.ebi.edu.au/meme/tools/tomtom>). The alignments of enhancer  
157 sequences were searched for putative Pax3 and Pax7 homeodomain and paired binding sites  
158 using position weight matrices (PWMs) for these sites using FIMO ([http://meme-  
159 suite.org/tools/fimo](http://meme-suite.org/tools/fimo)). PWMs for Pax homeodomain binding sites were either taken from work  
160 by (Jolma et al., 2013) or created *de novo* from Pax3 and Pax7 ChIP-Sequencing data  
161 (Soleimani et al., 2012) using MEME (Supp. Fig. 3A, Supp. Material and Methods). To  
162 characterise the functionality of Dbx1 CRMs, H3K27ac, H3K4me1, DNase-seq and enhancer-  
163 like predictions from mouse GD11.5 and/or GD12.5 neural tube reference epigenome data were  
164 obtained from the ENCODE data center (Encode project consortium, 2012). Data were  
165 produced by the B. Ren (UCSD) and Z. Weng (Umass) laboratories and can be retrieved under  
166 the ENCODE project accession numbers ENCSR111SYT, ENCSR362MIE, ENCSR003PNR,  
167 ENCSR448TTC and ENCSR263CKR. Sox2 and Sox3 binding events in neural progenitors  
168 were obtained from Bergsland et al. (2012). Pax7 binding events in muscle were obtained from  
169 Soleimani et al. (2012). Processed data in mm9 assembly coordinates were transformed into  
170 mm10 using the UCSC LiftOver tool.

## 171 RESULTS

### 172 **Modulations in the levels of Pax3 and Pax7 transcriptional activities impact on the** 173 **specification of intermediate spinal interneurons**

174 In order to analyse the fate of intermediate dp6 to p1 progenitors upon the modulation of Pax3  
175 and Pax7 transcriptional activity, we analysed the expression profiles of several TFs allowing

176 the identification of dI6, V0<sub>D</sub>, V0<sub>VCG</sub> and V1 IN in several mutants for Pax3 and Pax7 (Fig.  
177 1)(Lai et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2015). To distinguish dI6 IN we performed immunolabelling for  
178 Lbx1 together with AP2 $\alpha$  and/or Brn3a; the dI6 express only Lbx1, while the abutting dorsal  
179 dI5 population is Lbx1 $^+$ , AP2 $\alpha$  $^+$ , Brn3a $^+$  (Supp. Fig. 1A-D, Fig. 1Ai, C). Detecting Pax2 and  
180 Lbx1 allowed us to identify V0<sub>D</sub> IN, as a Pax2 $^+$ /Lbx1 $^-$  population ventrally flanking  
181 Pax2 $^+$ /Lbx1 $^+$  dI6 cells (Fig. 1Aviii, C). The identification of this V0<sub>D</sub> population can be  
182 facilitated by the additional labelling of Evx1, allowing to distinguish between Evx1 $^-$  V0<sub>D</sub> and  
183 Evx1 $^+$  V0<sub>VCG</sub> IN populations (Fig. 1Aviii). Finally, V1 IN were observed by visualising FoxD3  
184 expression (Fig. 1Axv, C).

185 These immunolabellings revealed that the generation of dI6 IN is not dramatically affected by  
186 the loss of either Pax3 or Pax7 (Fig. 1Ai, ii, Bi and data not shown). However, their number  
187 greatly decreases in Pax3 $^{-/-}$ ;Pax7 $^{+/-}$  embryos and even more in double knock-out (dKO) embryos  
188 (Fig. 1Aiii, iv, Bi). This indicates that production of dI6 IN requires both Pax3 and Pax7  
189 activities and is sensitive to gene dosage. Similar conclusions can be drawn for the V0<sub>D</sub> IN. The  
190 decrease in their number seen in Pax3 $^{-/-}$  single mutants is accentuated by the loss of one allele  
191 of Pax7 (Fig. 1Aviii-x, Bii). The dKO embryos display barely any V0<sub>D</sub> cells (Fig. 1Axi, Supp.  
192 Fig. 1E). However, precise quantification was compromised by the GFP expressed from Pax3  
193 mutant alleles and the absence of the Pax2 $^-$  V0v population that normally separates the Pax2 $^+$   
194 V0<sub>D</sub> from the V0<sub>CG</sub>/V1 cells (Fig. 1Axi, Fig. 1C, (Lai et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2015)). In contrast  
195 with dI6 and V0<sub>D</sub> IN, the number of Evx1 $^+$  V0<sub>VCG</sub> IN is increased in Pax3 single null mutants  
196 (Fig. 1Axv, xvi, Biii). This expansion is further increased in absence of one allele of Pax7,  
197 indicating that the generation of this population is restricted by Pax3 and Pax7 and that the  
198 restriction is dependent on Pax3/7 levels (Fig. 1Axvii, Biii). Intriguingly, the V0<sub>VCG</sub> population  
199 is very much reduced in dKO embryos (Fig. 1Axviii, Biii). This can be correlated with the  
200 dramatic dorsal expansion of FoxD3 $^+$  V1 cells observed in absence of both Pax3 and Pax7 (Fig.

201 1Axv, xviii, Biv), which was also previously observed using *in situ* hybridisation labelling of  
202 *EN1* mRNA, a V1 determinant (Mansouri and Gruss, 1998). This dorsal expansion of V1 IN  
203 was also observed, although to a lesser extent, in *Pax3<sup>-/-</sup>;Pax7<sup>+/-</sup>* embryos and is even less  
204 pronounced in *Pax3<sup>-/-</sup>* embryos (Fig. 1Axvi, xvii, Biv). Taken together these analyses  
205 demonstrate that the number and the position of dI6, V0D, V0VCG and V1 IN are regulated by  
206 the levels of Pax3 and Pax7 proteins, with dorsal fates being progressively converted to ventral  
207 ones upon loss of Pax3/7 alleles.

208

209 To assess whether Pax3/Pax7-mediated patterning of the intermediate spinal cord involves  
210 transcriptional activation or repression, we performed the same immunostainings on brachial  
211 sections of embryos expressing a dominant active (PAX3A) or repressive form (Pax3R) of Pax3  
212 from the Pax3 locus (Fig. 1). Upon PAX3A expression, the generation of dI6 IN is completely  
213 lost, while the expression of Pax3R has little, if any, effect on this population (Fig. 1Av-vii,  
214 Bv). Taken together with the progressive loss of dI6 IN when Pax3/Pax7 alleles are successively  
215 removed, this indicates that the generation of dI6 IN requires Pax3/7 repressive activity.  
216 Conversely, the V0D population, which is also decreased upon loss of Pax3/7 alleles, expands  
217 upon the expression of PAX3A and recedes slightly upon expression of Pax3R (Fig. 1Axii-xiv,  
218 Bvi), suggesting that the fate of this population is more dependent on Pax3 positive activity.  
219 V0VCG IN are also affected by the expression of the transcriptional active and repressive forms  
220 of Pax3. Expression of PAX3A increases the population, while it is reduced in *Pax3<sup>KIPax3R/-</sup>*  
221 embryos (Fig. 1Axix-xxi, Bvii), suggesting that Pax3 repressive activity prevents V0VCG IN  
222 generation. Finally and intriguingly, contrasting with the dKO phenotype, the V1 population is  
223 neither affected by the expression of PAX3A nor by that of Pax3R. Several hypotheses can be  
224 drawn to explain this phenotype. First, the ventral restrictions of the V1 population by Pax3 and  
225 Pax7 depend on a complex regulatory network, implicating both their positive and negative

226 transcriptional potential. Second, the remaining two alleles of Pax7 in embryos carrying the  
227 Pax3R and PAX3A alleles may interfere, thus rendering the interpretation of these results  
228 difficult. To conclude, our data demonstrate that the levels of Pax3 and Pax7 activity, notably  
229 those leading to transcriptional repression, play a key role in the positioning and numbering of  
230 four distinct interneuron populations of the intermediate neural tube.

231

232 **Pax3 and Pax7 repressive transcriptional activity restricts the Dbx1 dorsal  
233 boundary**

234 Amongst the known TFs that regulate the fate of neurons within the intermediate spinal cord  
235 and that could be targeted by Pax3 and Pax7, Dbx1 stood out. Dbx1 is mainly expressed by p0  
236 progenitors in a domain that just overlaps with that of Pax7 ((Dessaud et al., 2010; Dyck et al.,  
237 2012; Lanuza et al., 2004; Pierani et al., 2001) and is able to direct spinal progenitor cells  
238 towards a V0 fate by preventing them from adopting either a V1 or a dI6 fate ((Lanuza et al.,  
239 2004; Pierani et al., 2001), Fig. 4A, Supp. Fig. 1F). To evaluate the possibility of Pax3/7  
240 regulating Dbx1, we first compared the dynamics in the expression profile of these three TFs  
241 in mouse embryos in which the stable reporter proteins GFP and  $\beta$ -Galactosidase are expressed  
242 from *Pax3* and *Pax7* loci, respectively (Fig. 2A, Supp. Fig. 2A, data not shown). Pax7 is induced  
243 in the neural tube concomitantly with Dbx1 around GD9.0 (data not shown; (Jostes et al., 1990;  
244 Pierani et al., 1999)) and at all stages analysed their expression only overlaps within the most  
245 dorsal row of the Dbx1<sup>+</sup> domain (Fig. 2Aii', Supp. Fig. 2A). Within this row of cells, Pax3 is  
246 also detected (Fig. 2Aii), with Pax3<sup>+</sup> cells representing less than 20% of Dbx1<sup>+</sup> cells (Fig.  
247 2Aiii). This contrasts with the presence of Pax3 lineage marker GFP in more than 98% of Dbx1<sup>+</sup>  
248 cells (Fig. 2Aiii). Dbx1 induction, thus, appears temporally correlated with the dynamic dorsal  
249 restriction of Pax3 expression (Fig. 2B). Dbx1 induction may then be stabilised by a Dbx1

mediated repression of Pax3, as illustrated by the downregulation of Pax3 and, to a lesser extent of Pax7, upon *Dbx1* gain of function in chick embryos (Fig. 4Aii, iii).

We then assessed whether *Dbx1* expression is modulated by the loss of function of Pax3 and Pax7 by performing *in situ* hybridisation against *Dbx1* transcripts in *Pax3* and *Pax7* double null mutant mice at GD10.5 and GD11.5 (Fig. 2C, Supp. Fig. 2B). At both stages, the *Dbx1*<sup>+</sup> domain is dorsally expanded within the neural tube of double mutants and reaches a size double that of control embryos. To further determine the contribution of Pax3 and/or Pax7 to *Dbx1* ventral restriction, we examined *Dbx1* protein distribution in several compound null mutants for both genes at GD11.5 (Fig. 2D, Supp. Fig. 2C, Di). In *Pax7* null mutants, the *Dbx1* expression profile remains unchanged (Supp. Fig. 2C). Conversely, a slight, yet significant, increase in the number of *Dbx1*<sup>+</sup> cells was observed in *Pax3* single mutants (Fig. 2Di, ii, v). This phenotype appears stronger upon removal of one *Pax7* allele (Fig. 2Diii, v). Indeed, in *Pax3*<sup>-/-</sup>; *Pax7*<sup>+/-</sup> embryos, not only is the *Dbx1*<sup>+</sup> domain dorsally expanded (Supp. Fig. 2Di), but also all of the cells within this domain express *Dbx1* protein. By contrast, in control embryos, *Dbx1* protein distribution is present in a salt-and-pepper pattern (compare Fig. 2Diii to Fig. 2Di). Intriguingly, despite the large expansion of *Dbx1* transcript distribution in *Pax3;Pax7* double mutants (Supp. Fig. 2Di), we observed a reduced number of cells expressing *Dbx1* protein compared to control embryos (Fig. 2Div, v); suggesting post-transcriptional down-regulation of *Dbx1* in the absence of Pax3 and Pax7. This could explain the reduction of V0VCG IN production previously observed in dKO mutants (Fig. 1Axviii, Biii). Taken together these results indicate that both Pax3 and Pax7 are required to position the dorsal border of the *Dbx1* expression domain.

We then sought to evaluate whether gain of function for Pax3 and Pax7 impacts on *Dbx1* expression. For this, we electroporated chick embryos at Hamilton and Hamburger stage HH10-11 with constructs driving the bi-cistronic expression of either Pax3 or Pax7 together with GFP (Fig. 2E). At 24 hours post electroporation (hpe), both Pax3 and Pax7 ectopic expression are

275 sufficient to prevent the induction of *Dbx1* transcription, while electroporation of the empty  
276 *GFP* containing plasmid (*pCIG*) has no effect.

277 Altogether, these results prompted us to investigate whether Pax3- and Pax7-mediated  
278 restriction of *Dbx1* expression occurs by transcriptional activation or repression (Drouin, 2014).  
279 First, we analysed the distribution of *Dbx1* mRNA and protein in mouse embryos expressing  
280 Pax3R or PAX3A, at GD10.5 and GD11.5. (Fig. 2F-H, Supp. Fig. 2Dii). Embryos carrying the  
281 *Pax3R* allele display a reduction in the levels of *Dbx1* transcripts and protein (Fig. 2F, G). Upon  
282 quantification, no significant changes in the position of *Dbx1* D-V boundaries were noted in  
283 mutants carrying a *Pax3R* allele compared to control embryos (Fig. 2Fv, Supp. Fig. 2Dii). By  
284 contrast, in *Pax3*<sup>Pax3A/+</sup> embryos, the *Dbx1* domain is more than doubled in size at GD10.5 (Fig.  
285 2Fiv, v, 2Giv, v) and further expands with time to encompass the entire dorsal region of the  
286 spinal cord in GD11.5 embryos (Fig. 2Hi, ii). In addition, this expansion occurs both dorsally  
287 and ventrally, unlike the purely dorsal expansion observed in double knockout embryos (Fig.  
288 2Fv, Supp. Fig. 2Dii). Taken together these results show that while Pax3 and Pax7 have  
289 previously been mainly demonstrated to act as transcriptional activators during embryogenesis  
290 (Budry et al., 2012; McKinnell et al., 2008; Relaix et al., 2003), in the neural tube these TFs  
291 contribute to neural tube patterning through transcriptional repression. It is also noteworthy that  
292 *Dbx1* expression is hardly ever detected and only occurs at very low levels in the somites of  
293 wild-type embryos (Fig. 2Hiii) but that it is strongly induced in *Pax3*<sup>PAX3A/+</sup> embryos (Fig.  
294 2Hiv); therefore suggesting that Pax3-mediated repression of *Dbx1* also occurs in Pax3  
295 dependent myogenic lineages. This hints that our work may prove relevant in a spectrum of  
296 tissue types.

297

298 ***Dbx1* locus harbours several Pax responsive *cis*-regulatory modules**

299 We next decided to evaluate whether Pax3 and Pax7 could directly control *Dbx1* transcription  
300 by acting at the level of *Dbx1* associated *cis*-regulatory modules (CRM). To identify these  
301 CRMs, we first compared the *Dbx1 loci* and the surrounding 10kb intergenic regions of several  
302 vertebrate species ranging from human to fugu. This approach revealed the existence of 5  
303 blocks of conservation: three of them located within 4.2kb upstream of the *Dbx1* transcription  
304 start site (CRM1, CRM2, CRM3); the other two within the second intron (iCRM1, iCRM2)  
305 (Fig. 3A). In addition, ENCODE epigenetic data on the neural tube of GD11.5 or GD12.5  
306 mouse embryos further supports the functionality of these CRMs (see Material and Methods).  
307 Notably, DNase hypersensitivity and histone modification H3K27ac, whose combined  
308 occurrence defines active enhancers, are both present at the level of the two iCRMs.  
309 Additionally, the H3K4me1 epigenetic mark of active and/or poised enhancers is detected at  
310 iCRM2, CRM2 and CRM3 (Fig. 3A). Furthermore, in ESC-derived neuroprogenitors, binding  
311 events for Sox2 and Sox3, two TFs involved in *Dbx1* regulation (Rogers et al., 2014), have  
312 been identified within the *Dbx1* iCRM (Fig. 3A)(Bergsland et al., 2012). Finally, the 3  
313 intergenic CRMs are located within a 5.7kb region capable of driving the expression of reporter  
314 transgenes within the intermediate spinal cord of mouse and chick embryos (Dyck et al., 2012;  
315 Lu et al., 1996; Matise et al., 1999; Thelié et al., 2015); while CRM3 on its own has also been  
316 reported to be active in the intermediate neural tube of chick embryos (Oosterveen et al., 2012).  
317 In order to test the ability of the candidate CRMs to respond to Pax3/7 individually or  
318 collectively, we generated reporter constructs and tested their activity in the neural tube of chick  
319 embryos 24 and 36 hours after their electroporation at stage HH10-11 (Fig. 3B,C, data not  
320 shown). Amongst the three intergenic CRMs, only CRM3 displays any activity, as previously  
321 described (Oosterveen et al., 2012)(Fig. 3Bi-iii, C), yet, the expression of the reporter protein  
322 driven by this element is weak, as it was detected in only 4 embryos out of 14. In addition, it is

323 not restricted to the  $Dbx1^+$  domain (Fig. 3Biii). Likewise, the CRM4.8kb module, which  
324 contains CRM1, 2 and 3 (Fig. 3A) is poorly able to induce gene expression in the neural tube  
325 of chick embryos (Fig. 3Biv); only 4 embryos out of 21 display any  $\beta$ -Galactosidase expression.  
326 When detected, the activity of this module is not restricted to the  $Dbx1^+$  domain but  
327 encompasses the entire dorsal neural tube (Fig. 3Biv, C). This is consistent with previously  
328 identified ectopic dorsal activity of a 5.7kb CRM in the neural tube of mouse embryos (Lu et  
329 al., 1996; Matise et al., 1999) and indicates that the intergenic CRMs may not be the main  
330 drivers of the restriction of *Dbx1* expression to the intermediate spinal cord. We next evaluated  
331 the ability of the two intronic CRMs to induce gene expression using a construct, containing  
332 both modules and the region between them, termed iCRM (Fig. 3A). The iCRM construct  
333 systematically promotes  $\beta$ -Galactosidase expression in the neural tube 24hpe and 36hpe. The  
334 overall levels of this reporter are weak, but expression is always found exclusively within the  
335 *Dbx1* domain (Fig. 3Bv-v'', C and data not shown). Hence the iCRM contains all the necessary  
336 information to recapitulate *Dbx1* induction and D-V restriction. Strengthening this argument,  
337 adding the iCRM to the CRM4.8kb was sufficient to abolish the CRM4.8kb ectopic dorsal  
338 activity and promote strong *LacZ* gene expression in the  $Dbx1^+$  domain alone, as assessed at  
339 36hpe (Fig. 3Bvi). It is worth mentioning that *Dbx1 LacZ* KI reporter mice have previously  
340 been generated, where *LacZ* replaces the four exons and three introns (including the iCRM) of  
341 *Dbx1* (Pierani et al., 2001). Interestingly,  $\beta$ -Galactosidase expression matches with that of *Dbx1*  
342 in these animals, thus, the iCRM is unlikely to be the only module responsible for *Dbx1* gene  
343 regulation in the neural tube. It is tempting to hypothesise that it behaves as a shadow enhancer  
344 providing robustness to *Dbx1* transcription.

345 We next used *in silico* approaches to evaluate whether these CRMs contain putative Pax3/7  
346 binding sites. We first identified the most phylogenetically conserved 15 base pair long DNA  
347 motifs contained in these CRMs using MEME (cf. Materials and Methods). Then, we searched

348 within the extracted motifs for putative Pax binding sites using the TOMTOM database, or  
349 using FIMO and Pax3- and Pax7-specific position weight matrices (PWMs)(Supp. Fig. 3A), as  
350 Pax binding domains have some level of family member specificity and Pax3 and Pax7 PWMs  
351 are not defined in TOMTOM databases (Jolma et al., 2013; Mayran et al., 2015). These were  
352 either previously defined by HT-SELEX (Jolma et al., 2013) or Pax3 and Pax7 ChIP-Seq  
353 performed in myoblasts (Soleimani et al., 2012). These two methods identified putative Pax3  
354 and Pax7 binding sites in iCRM, CRM2 and CRM3 (Fig. 3Axii). Further supporting this, Pax7  
355 has been shown to be able to bind to the 2 sites identified in iCRM and one of the sites located  
356 in CRM3 in myoblasts (Soleimani et al., 2012) (Fig. 3Axii). Probing this further, we noted that  
357 the electroporation of either Pax3 or Pax7 induces significant changes in the activity of iCRM,  
358 CRM4.8kb and CRM3 in the neural tube of chick embryos 24hpe (Fig. 3D, Supp. Fig. 3B, data  
359 not shown); promoting the activity of the latter and repressing that of the other two. These  
360 results provide one possible explanation for why the intergenic CRM3 or CRM4.8Kb harbour  
361 ectopic activity in the dorsal neural tube which expresses Pax3 and Pax7, while the iCRM is  
362 restricted to the intermediate domain. Furthermore, electroporation of PAX3A stimulates the  
363 activity of all the CRMs (Fig. 3D, Supp. Fig. 3B). Notably, its impact was stronger on that of  
364 the iCRM than on all other constructs. Conversely, electroporation of Pax3R inhibits the  
365 activity of iCRM, CRM4.8kb and CRM3 (data not shown). Altogether, these results support  
366 the idea that Pax3 and Pax7 directly regulate *Dbx1* by modulating the activity of several CRMs,  
367 repressing transcription through iCRM, CRM1 and CRM2, and activating it through CRM3.  
368

369 **Pax3 and Pax7 mediated *Dbx1* regulation involves an additional genetic interaction**  
370 The progressive attenuation of *Dbx1* expression in the dKO embryos observed between GD10.5  
371 and GD11.5 (compare Fig. 2C to Supp. Fig. 2B) could not be solely explained by the repression  
372 of *Dbx1* locus activity by Pax3 and Pax7. We, thus, looked for candidate TFs that would be

regulated by Pax3 and Pax7 and whose activity would impact onto *Dbx1* expression. *Prdm12*, a p1 fate determinant known to repress *Dbx1* expression, as well as the activity of CRM4.8kb in chick embryos (Kinameri et al., 2008; Thelié et al., 2015), appeared an obvious candidate. We analysed its expression by *in situ* hybridisation in GD11.5 Pax3 and Pax7 mutant embryos (Fig. 4B). In single mutants for Pax3 and Pax7, we did not detect any defects in the expression profile of this TF (Fig. 4Bii). In contrast, in dKO embryos, the *Prdm12* expression domain is dorsally enlarged and overlaps with the extended *Dbx1* domain (Fig. 4Biv, Supp. Fig. 2Di). *Prdm12* is also ectopically induced in *Pax3<sup>-/-</sup>;Pax7<sup>+/+</sup>* embryos, but to a much lesser extent than in the dKO embryos (Fig. 4Biii-iv). These results indicate that Pax3 and Pax7 are both required to position of the dorsal boundary of *Prdm12* domain. To assess whether this is mediated by a repressive activity of the Pax TFs, we assessed for *Prdm12* in embryos carrying Pax3A and Pax3R variants (Fig. 4Bv-vii). Expression of the latter Pax3 variant has no effect on *Prdm12* expression (Fig. 4Bvii), while the dominant active form of Pax3 induces ectopic dorsal expression of Prdm12 (Fig. 4Bv). Taken together these results indicated that Pax3 and Pax7 repress *Prdm12* expression. As Prdm12 is a repressor of *Dbx1* (Thelié et al., 2015), Pax3/7 mediated Prdm12 repression provides an explanation for why the removal of Pax3 and Pax7 results in the attenuation of *Dbx1* expression. This also shows that the regulation of *Dbx1* by Pax3 and Pax7 is complex and includes both positive and negative components. The latter is a direct regulation while the former is indirect. It is tempting to hypothesise that this incoherent regulatory network formed by Pax3/7, *Dbx1* and *Prdm12* explains, in parts, why the levels of Pax3 and Pax7 repression play such a key role during the generation of intermediate neural cell fates (Fig. 4C, Alon, 2007; Balaskas et al., 2012).

395 **Conclusion/Discussion**

396 First of all, this paper provides strong evidence that progenitor cells of the intermediate neural  
397 tube are able to sense and interpret the dose and the levels of Pax3 and Pax7 transcriptional  
398 activity, as shown by the progressively more dorsal fates seen upon increasing Pax levels (Fig.  
399 1). This is highly reminiscent of the mode of interpretation of TF-based morphogen gradients  
400 (Rushlow and Shvartsman, 2012). Our data further suggest that in the case of Pax3 and Pax7,  
401 graded activity throughout the D-V axis of the intermediate neural tube is likely to be  
402 established thanks to the temporal restriction of their expression profiles. It is also tempting to  
403 hypothesise that Pax3 and Pax7 diffuse ventrally over a short range and thus form a gradient  
404 sufficient to provide robustness to pattern formation, as proven for Pax6, another member of  
405 the Pax family (Prochiantz and Di Nardo, 2015; Quiñinao et al., 2015). Second, we have  
406 highlighted the importance of the repressive transcriptional activity of Pax3 and Pax7 in this  
407 process, especially for the spatial restriction and numbering of the V0 and V1 IN. This contrasts  
408 with Pax3/7 mediated cell fate specification in other tissues, which is rather based on  
409 transcriptional activation (Budry et al., 2012; McKinnell et al., 2008; Relaix et al., 2003).  
410 Whether this is due to differential usage of their DNA binding domains or specific protein  
411 partners remains to be studied (Mayran et al., 2015). Finally, our study has identified several of  
412 the genetic interactions of the gene network by which Pax3 and Pax7 regulate the organisation  
413 of cell fates within the intermediate spinal cord. Dbx1 displays a central position in this network  
414 and we have demonstrated that it receives both a likely direct negative input and an indirect  
415 positive input from Pax3 and Pax7 (Fig. 4C). On the one hand, we provide several pieces of  
416 evidence for the direct repression of Dbx1 by Pax3 and Pax7. We have shown that *Dbx1*  
417 expression displays a dose response to levels of Pax3 and Pax7 activity and that several Dbx1  
418 *cis*-regulatory elements are responsive to the modulation of Pax3 and Pax7 transcriptional  
419 activity. Not only do these harbour putative Pax3 and Pax7 binding sites, but physical

420 interactions between Pax3 and Pax7 and two of these CRMs have also been observed in  
421 myoblast cells (Soleimani et al., 2012). Importantly, our data indicate that the negative input of  
422 Pax3 and Pax7 on Dbx1 plays an essential role in positioning the dorsal border of the Dbx1  
423 expression domain. As we and others have demonstrated that Dbx1 promotes V0 fate by  
424 inhibiting the expression of determinants of the adjacent dI6 and V1 cell populations ((Karaz  
425 et al., 2016; Lanuza et al., 2004; Pierani et al., 2001), Fig. 4A), this genetic interaction provides  
426 a fairly simple mechanism for how the Pax TFs impact on the size of V0 and dI6 IN populations  
427 (Karaz et al., 2016; Lanuza et al., 2004; Pierani et al., 2001), Fig. 1, Fig. 4A, Supp. Fig. 1E,F).  
428 On the other hand, we have shown that Pax3 and Pax7 repress Prdm12, a known repressor of  
429 Dbx1 (Thelié et al., 2015). Interestingly, this regulatory loop provides a molecular explanation  
430 for the massive ectopic dorsal generation of V1 cells in Pax3 and Pax7 double mutants  
431 described twenty years ago ((Mansouri and Gruss, 1998), Fig. 1). Furthermore, it supports a  
432 model whereby D-V progenitor pool determinants not only repress genes expressed in adjacent  
433 pools, but also expressed in pools located further way (e.g. (Kutejova et al., 2016)). Altogether,  
434 our paper supports the ideas that (i) the patterning potential of TFs is extended by the ability of  
435 progenitors to read and extrapolate discrete levels of TF activity, that (ii) these levels can be  
436 modulated thanks to genetic redundancy induced by gene duplication and/or dynamics in their  
437 expression profiles and that (iii) the generation of the diversity of progenitor pools in the  
438 developing neural tube might not be mediated by multiple binary cell fate choices between  
439 adjacent progenitor pools but by the active repression of several alternative fates.  
440

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611

## 612 **Figure legends**

613 **Fig. 1: Pax3 and Pax7 regulate the production of interneuron populations in the**  
614 **intermediate part of the spinal cord**

615 **A.** Immunostaining for Lbx1, AP2α, Brn3a to identify dI6 IN (**i-vii**), Pax2, Lbx1 and Evx1 to  
616 reveal V0D IN (**viii-xiv**) and FoxD3 and Evx1 to label V0VCG and V1 IN populations,

617 respectively (**xv-xxi**) performed on brachial transverse sections of GD11.5 mouse embryos of  
618 the indicated genotype. In **ii**, Ap2 $\alpha$  is not labelled. In **ix-xi** Evx1 is not marked. Scale bars:  
619 50 $\mu$ m. Dashed lines delineate the pools of interneuron subtypes. Asterisks in **iv** and **vii** mark  
620 the lack of dI6 cells. In **xii** and **xiii**, V0\* indicates that the V0<sub>D</sub> and V0<sub>VCG</sub> are intermingled.  
621 Arrowheads in **xvii** and **xviii** point at ectopic V1 cells and limited V0 cells, respectively. **B.**  
622 Quantification of the number of each neuronal subtype in GD11.5 mouse embryos with the  
623 indicated genotype (dI6 IN are Lbx1 $^+$ /Ap2 $\alpha$  $^-$ /Brn3a $^-$ , V0<sub>D</sub> IN are Pax2 $^+$ /Lbx1 $^-$ /Evx1 $^-$ , V0<sub>VCG</sub> IN  
624 are Evx1 $^+$ , V1 IN are FoxD3 $^+$ ). Red bars denote the mean values. Mann–Whitney U test p-  
625 values are represented as follows: \*: p $\leq$ 0.05; \*\*: p $\leq$ 0.01; \*\*\*: p $\leq$ 0.001; \*\*\*\*: p $\leq$ 0.0001. **C.**  
626 Representation of the pools of progenitor cells in the spinal cord and the neuronal populations  
627 they give rise to. The dI6, V0 and V1 populations are highlighted and the expression of TFs  
628 that allows their determination are shown. The distribution of these populations in the  
629 Pax3/Pax7 mutant backgrounds that were analysed are summarised.

630

631 **Fig. 2: Pax3 and Pax7 repressive activity positions the dorsal boundary of *Dbx1* expression**  
632 **A.** Immunostaining for Dbx1/ $\beta$ -Galactosidase/GFP in thoracic transverse sections of GD11.5  
633 *Pax3*<sup>GFP/+</sup>; *Pax7*<sup>LacZ/+</sup> embryos (**i-i''**) and Dbx1/Pax3 at brachial level of GD10.5 wild-type  
634 embryo (**ii-ii''**). Quantification of the proportion of Dbx1 $^+$  cells expressing Pax3 or Pax3 lineage  
635 marker GFP at GD11.5 in thoracic transverse sections (**iii**, mean $\pm$ s.e.m, n=4 embryos). **B.**  
636 Schematics showing the temporal dynamics of Pax3, Pax7, Dbx1 and Prdm12 expression  
637 profiles in the dp6, p0 and p1 spinal progenitor pools and the neurons they will generate. **C-H.**  
638 *In situ* hybridisation for *Dbx1* (**Ci-ii; Ei-iii; Fi-iv, Hi-iv**) and immunolabelling of Dbx1 (**Di-iv,**  
639 **Gi-iv**) in brachial transverse sections of either mouse embryos of the indicated stage and  
640 genotype (**C, D, F-H**) or in chick embryos 24hpe with the indicated plasmid (**E**). For the latter  
641 samples, nuclei were also labelled with DAPI and the electroporated cells with

642 immunofluorescent labelling of GFP (**Ei'**, **ii'**, **iii'**). Graphs in **Ciii** and **Fv** display the absolute  
643 D-V position of the *Dbx1* expression domain from the floor plate in  $\mu\text{m}$  (mean  $\pm$  s.e.m on 6  
644 sections for each embryo subtype). Graphs in **Dv** and **Gv** show the number of  $\text{Dbx1}^+$  cells per  
645 transverse section at brachial level in GD11.5 embryos of the indicated genotype. The mean  
646 value is indicated by the red bar. Mann–Whitney U test p-values are represented as follows: \*:  
647  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*:  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*:  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*\*\*:  $p \leq 0.0001$ . Scale bars: 50  $\mu\text{m}$ .

648

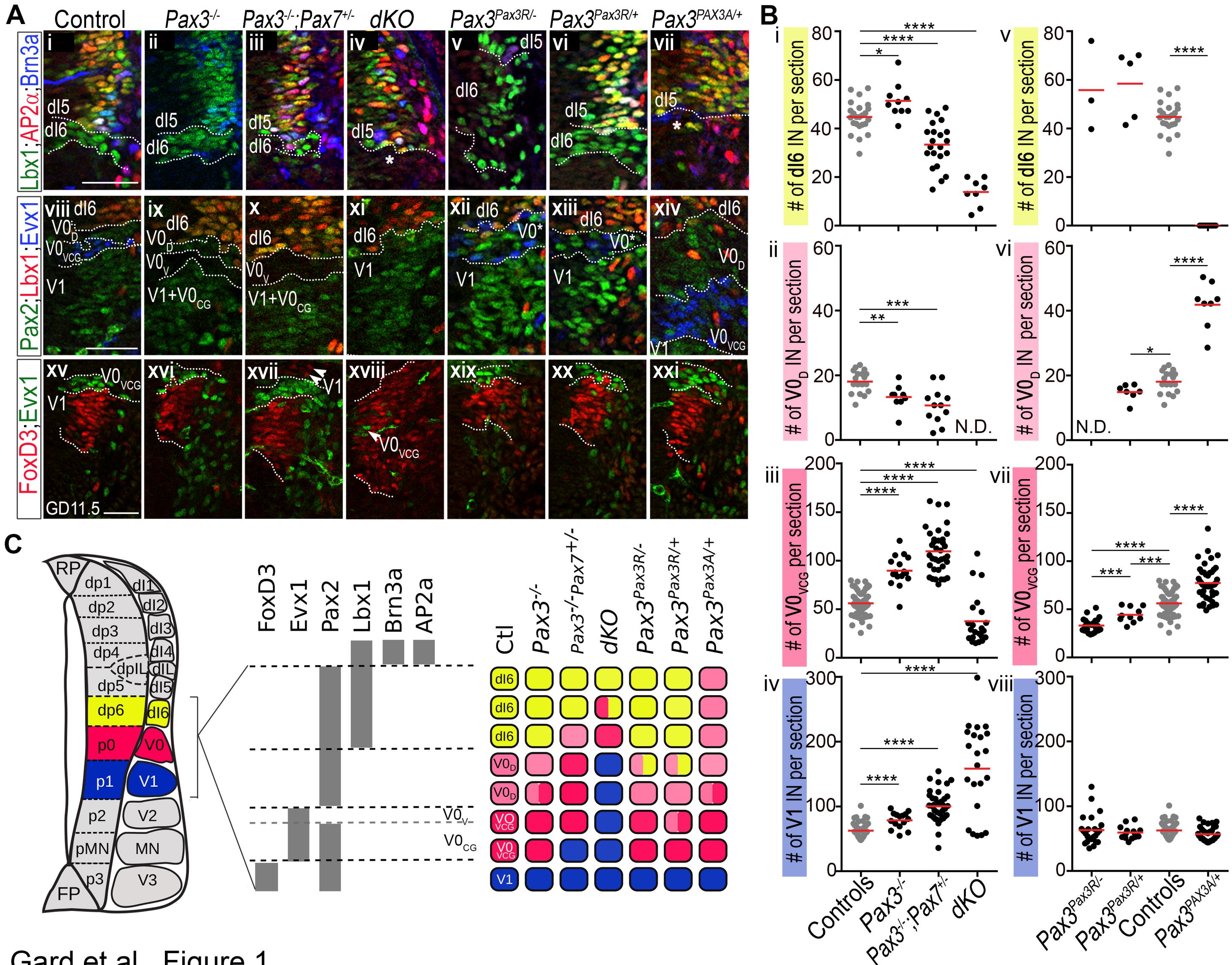
649 **Fig. 3: Dbx1 CRMs are responsive to Pax3 and Pax7 activity**

650 **A.** Schematics displaying the *Dbx1* locus (**i**), regions of conservation across 60 species of  
651 vertebrates (**ii**) and putative *cis*-regulatory modules (**iii**). iCRM is located in *Dbx1* intron 2,  
652 while CRM1-3 are located in a 4.8kb region upstream the *Dbx1* TSS (CRM4.8kb) and all show  
653 high sequence conservation. DNase-seq (**iv**), H3K27ac ChIPseq (**v**) and enhancer predictions  
654 (**vi**) in GD11.5 neural tube (NT) support the potential enhancer role of iCRM. H3K4me1  
655 ChIPseq signal at GD11.5 (**vii**) and GD12.5 (**viii**) is enriched in iCRM and in CRM2 and CRM3  
656 within the CRM4.8kb. Moreover, the iCRM region shows Sox2 (**ix**) and Sox3 (**x**) binding  
657 events. Pax7 binding events in muscle cells (**xi**) coincide with the iCRM and CRM4.8kb  
658 putative regulatory regions, which also harbour *in silico* predicted Pax3/7 binding sites (**xii**). **B.**  
659 Immunostaining for *Dbx1*/ $\beta$ -Galactosidase/GFP in chick embryos 24hpe with *pCIG* and the  
660 indicated reporter constructs carrying *Dbx1* CRMs. Scale bars: 50  $\mu\text{m}$ . **C-D.** Heatmaps display  
661 the levels of  $\beta$ -Galactosidase expression normalised to that of GFP along the D-V axis of the  
662 neural tube of chick embryos 24hpe with the indicated *Dbx1* CRM reporters and either *pCIG*  
663 (C and columns 1 in D), *Pax3-GFP* (columns 2 in D) or *PAX3A-GFP* (columns 3 in D).

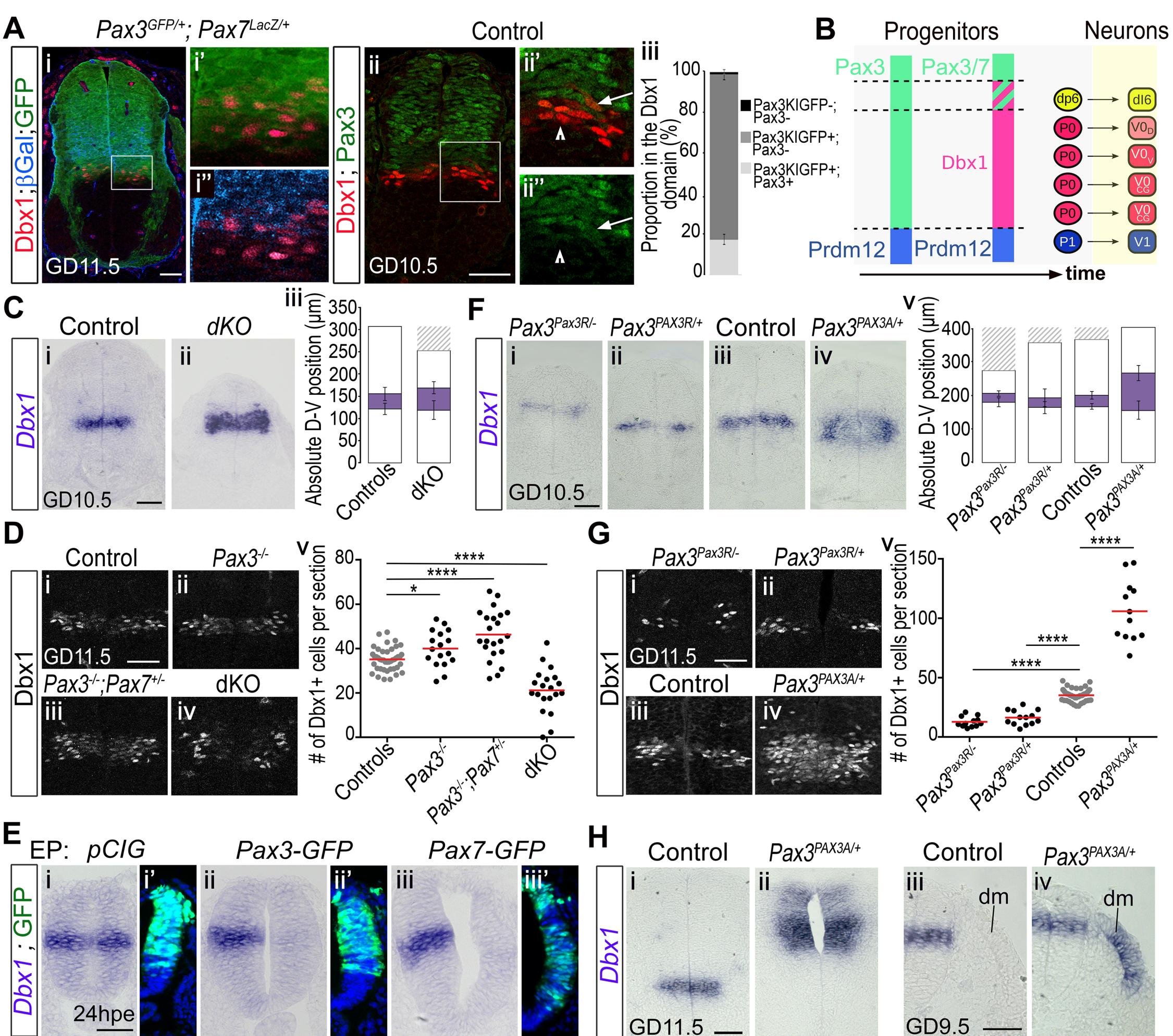
664

665 **Fig. 4: Characterisation of genetic interactions within the Pax3 and Pax7 linked gene**  
666 **network**

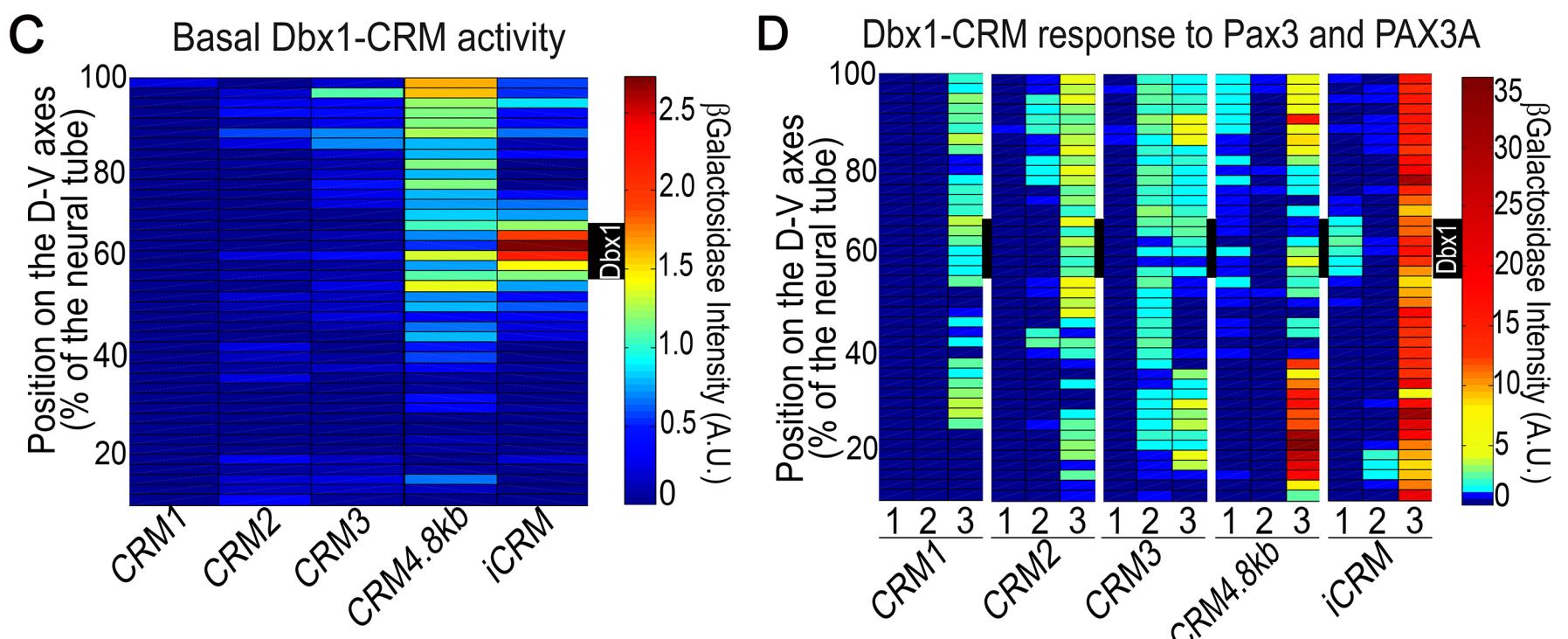
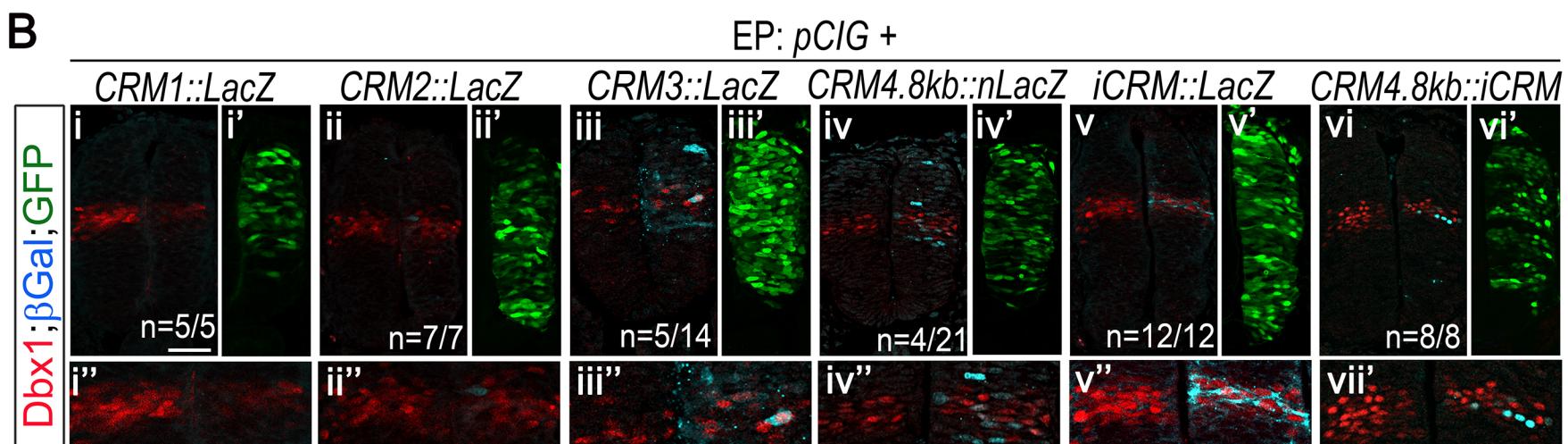
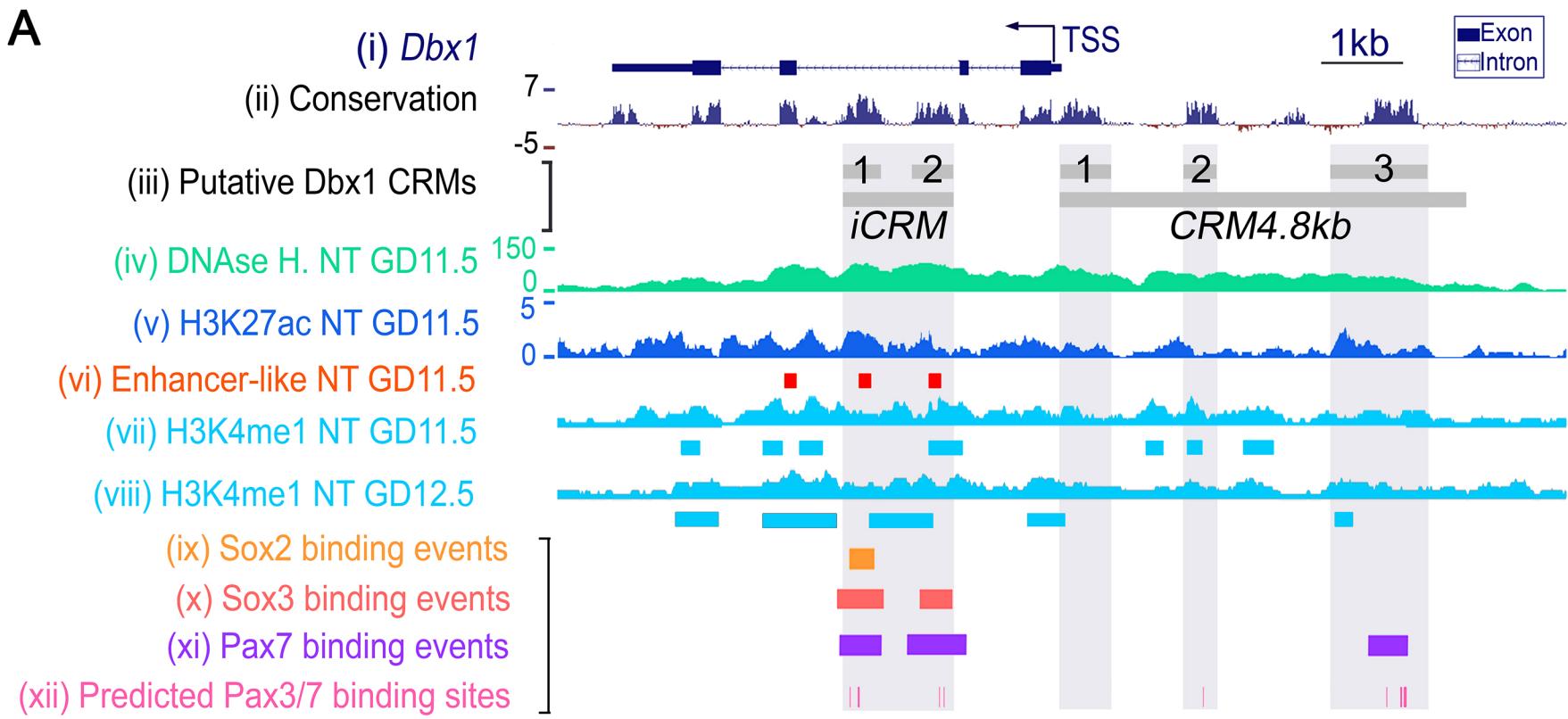
667 **A.** Immunostaining for Lbx1, Pax3, Pax7 and GFP on chick embryos 40hpe with *mDbx1-IRES-GFP* constructs, indicating that Dbx1 overexpression is sufficient to inhibit the generation of  
668 Lbx1<sup>+</sup> neurons (**i**, **i'**), shut down Pax3 (**ii**, **ii'**), and decrease the levels of Pax7 expression (**iii**,  
669 **iii'**). Scale bars = 50 µm. **B.** *In situ* hybridisation for *Prdm12* in brachial transverse sections of  
670 GD11.5 (**i-v**) and GD10.5 (**vi, vii**) mouse embryos of the indicated genotype. Graphs below the  
671 ISH panels display the absolute D-V position of the *Dbx1* expression domain (pink, the striped  
672 domain indicates low levels of expression) and the distribution profile of *Prdm12* mRNA (pale  
673 blue) along the D-V axis (y axis gives the D-V position from the floor plate in µm, mean ±  
674 s.e.m on more than 6 sections for each embryo subtype). **C.** Schematics representing the  
675 regulatory interactions within the gene network that is responsible for Pax3 and Pax7 mediated  
676 Dbx1 gene regulation; (a) refers to Fig 2C & E, (b) repression in dashed line as the repression  
677 of Pax7 is partial, see Fig. 4Aii,iii, (c) refers to Fig. 4B, (d) refers to (Thelié et al., 2015).



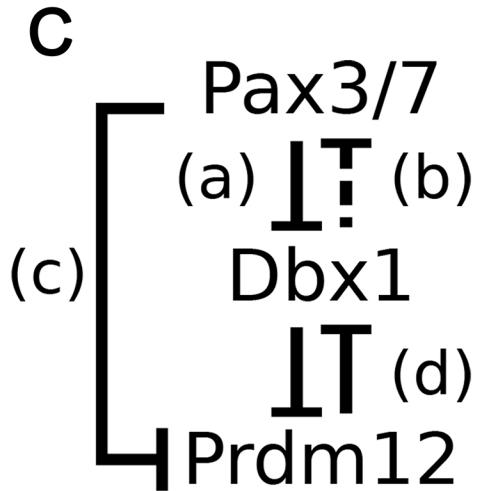
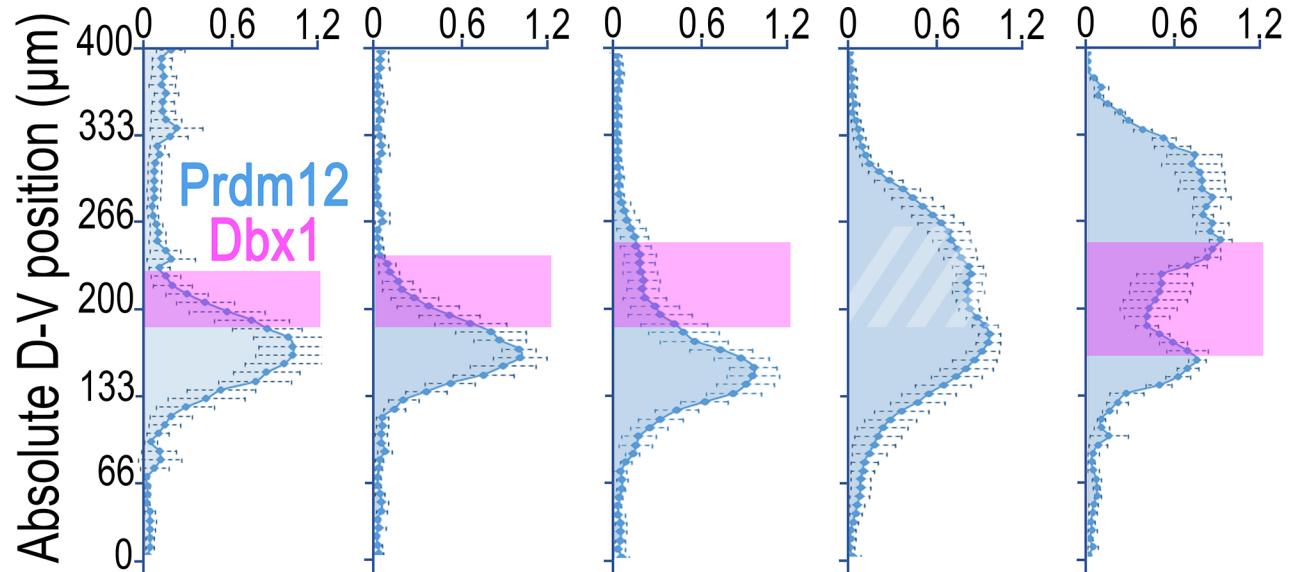
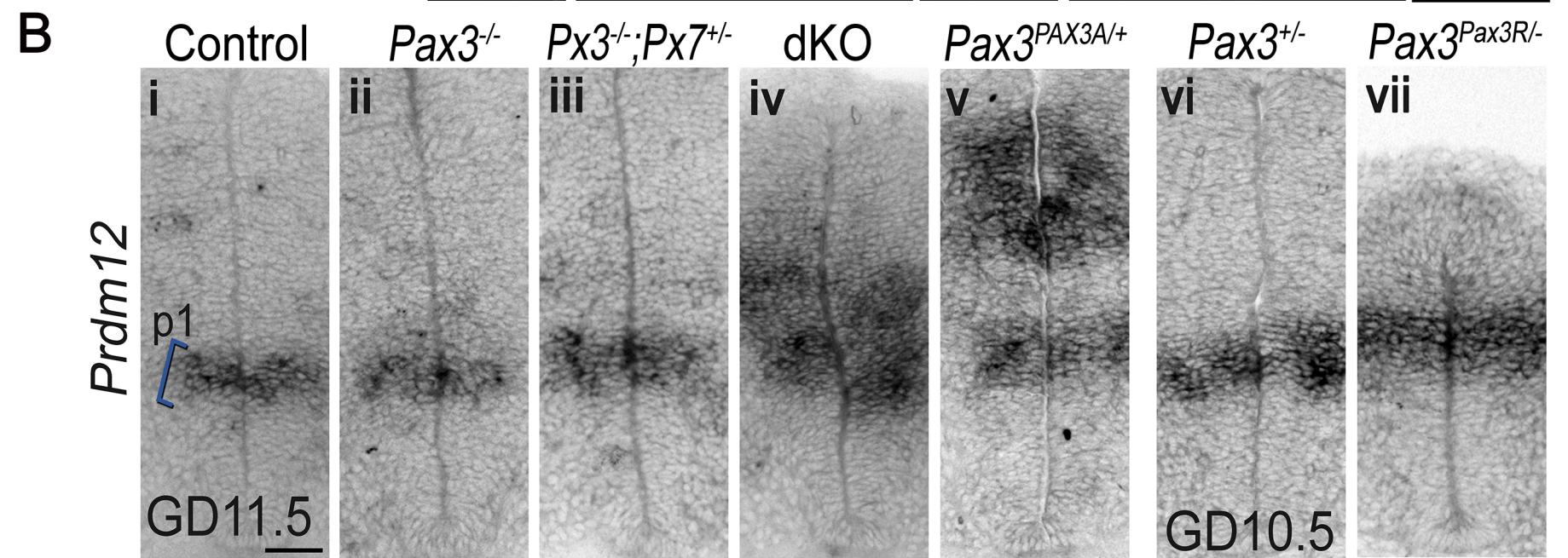
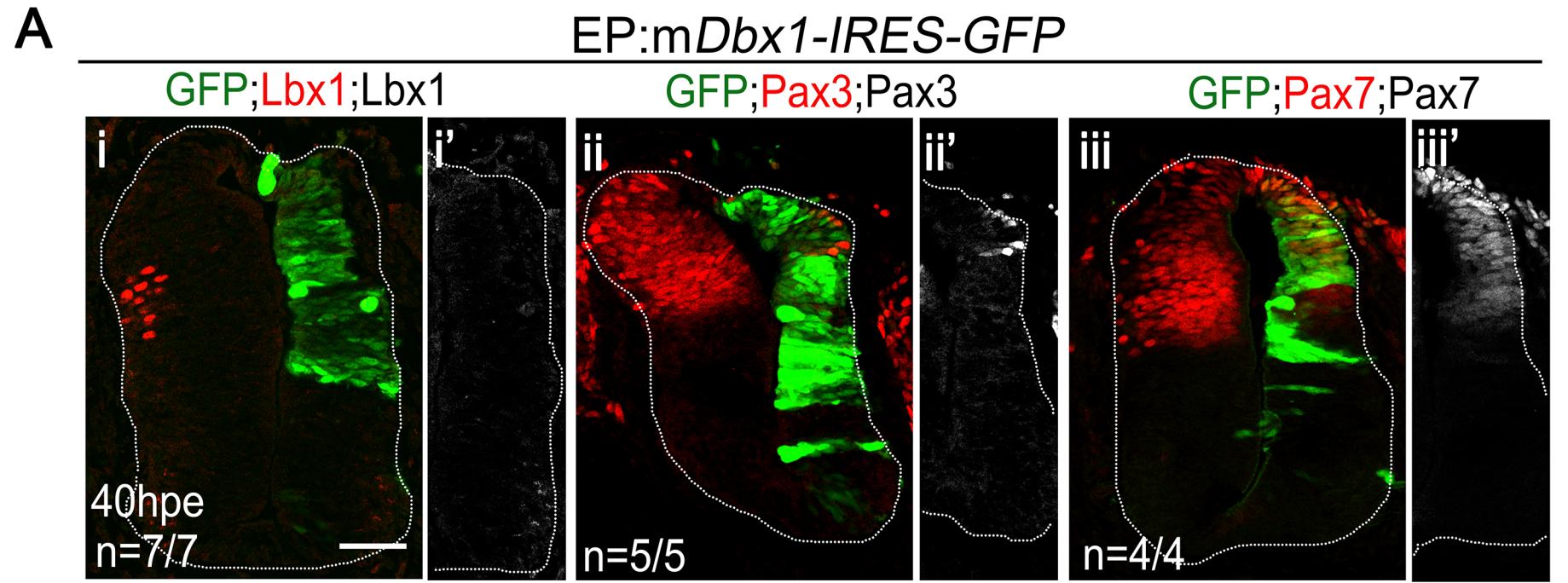
Gard et al., Figure 1



Gard et al., Figure 2



Gard et al., Figure 3



Gard et al., Figure 4

## **SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

### **Pax3- and Pax7-mediated Dbx1 regulation orchestrates the patterning of intermediate spinal interneurons**

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## Supplementary Material and Methods

### Electroporation constructs

#### *Pax3 and Pax7 variants in pCIG vector and Dbx1 in pCAGGS vector*

*Pax3R* and *Pax7R* were blunt subcloned into a *pCIG* EcoRV site from intermediate plasmids that were respectively cut by EcoRI or XhoI/SpeI. *Pax3* was inserted into a *pCIG* EcoRI site from a plasmid kindly donated by P. Gruss. *Pax7* was taken from the *pPax7cp* plasmid (gift from M.A. Rudnicki) using XhoI and MfeI restriction enzymes and inserted between XhoI and EcoRI sites in *pCIG*. The PAX3A construct was previously described (Relaix et al., 2003), while PAX7A was amplified by PCR from cDNA provided by F. Barr and cloned into XhoI and XmaI *pCIG* sites. We used a *pCAGG-IRES-EGFP* plasmid containing an HA tagged version of the mouse *Dbx1* gene (Karaz et al., 2016).

#### *Reporter constructs for Dbx1 CRM activity*

To generate the 4.8kbCRM reporter plasmid, a 4.8kb BamHI/BstEII fragment corresponding to sequences located immediately 5' to the *Dbx1* TSS (Pierani et al., 2001) was inserted upstream of an *NLS-LacZ* cassette in a *pBluescript* vector. Sequences corresponding to CRM1, and CRM2 were individually amplified using the 4.8kbCRM construct as a template and the following primers:

*CRM1-Fwd: AAAGCGGCCGCATCTGCTCTACGAGTCCCAT*

*CRM1-Rev: AAAACTAGTTACTGGCGTCTGCGAGT*

*CRM2-Fwd: AAAGCGGCCGCCCTAAATAACTTTAACATTGA*

*CRM2-Rev: AAAACTAGTGCTCTGAGCCTCCACTGC*

The iCRM sequence was amplified by PCR from mouse genomic DNA using the primers:

*iCRM-Fwd: AAAGCGGCCGCTCCCTACCCCGAAGTCGTAT*

*iCRM-Rev: AAAACTAGTCGTTTAAAAACTACATATG*

PCR products were subsequently cloned into the BGZA vector using NotI/SpeI restriction sites in order to match with the CRM3 reporter plasmid (Oosterveen et al., 2012). For the 4.8kbCRM+iCRM construct, the sequence corresponding to the iCRM was inserted into the 4.8kbCRM reporter plasmid after the *LacZ* cassette, in order to mimic the genomic context.

### **Dbx1 mutant mouse line**

The knock-in mouse line carrying *LacZ* in the *Dbx1* locus was previously described (Pierani et al., 2001).

### **Immunohistochemistry and *in situ* hybridisation**

The following primary antibodies were used: rabbit anti-Dbx1 (Pierani et al., 1999), chick anti-GFP (1/1000, Abcam), mouse anti- $\beta$ -Galactosidase (1/500, Promega), mouse anti-Evx1 (1/500, DSHB), mouse anti-Pax3 (1/100, DSHB), mouse anti-Pax7 (1/100, DSHB), mouse anti-Brn3a (1/500, gift from C. Parras), guinea-pig anti-FoxD3 (1/10,000, gift from T. Muller/C. Birchmeier), rabbit and guinea-pig anti-Lbx1 (1/10,000, gift from T. Muller/C. Birchmeier), rabbit anti-AP2 $\alpha$  (1/500, Santa-Cruz), goat anti-Lhx2 (1:250, Santa Cruz), rabbit anti-Pax2 (1/500, Thermo Scientific), goat anti-Sox9 (1/500, R&D). Secondary antibodies were all from Thermo Scientific, coupled to Alexa Fluorophores (A488, A568, A647) and diluted 1/500. Immunofluorescence microscopy was carried out using a Leica TCS SP5 confocal microscope. For *in situ* hybridisation experiments, we used probes against mouse *Dbx1* (Lu et al., 1994), chick *Dbx1* (Pierani et al., 1999) and mouse *Prmd12* (Kinameri et al., 2008). Pictures were then taken with an Axio Observer Z1 microscope (Zeiss). All the images were processed with Photoshop 7.0 software (Adobe Systems, San Jose, CA, USA) or Image J v.1.43 g image analysis software (NIH).

### **Defining Pax3 and Pax7 specific position weight matrices**

Position weight matrices (PWMs) for Pax homeodomain binding sites were taken from work by (Jolma et al., 2013) or created *de novo* from Pax3 and Pax7 ChIP-Sequencing data (Soleimani et al., 2012) using MEME (Supp. Fig. 3A). Pax3 and Pax7 peak location data were retrieved for the top 500 ChIP peaks and 100bp sequences either side of their centre were fetched using Galaxy (usegalaxy.org). A Pax7 HD PWM was created using 200bp sequences of the top 500 peaks using MEME. The PWM for the Pax3 paired domain binding site was created by selecting 51 sequences from the ChIP-Seq data that contained at least three consecutive bases of the core GTCAC motif. These sequences were reduced to 100 base pairs in length and used in MEME to establish the PWM.

### **Defining the transcription factors expressed in GD11.5 mouse neural tube**

Genes with an expression level below 0 TPM in the ENCODE RNAseq screen performed on GD11.5 mouse spinal cord (ENCODE project, accession number: ENCSR337FYI) were annotated with gene ontology terms using the Bioconductor packages AnnotationDbi (Pagès H, Carlson M, Falcon S and Li N (2017). *AnnotationDbi: Annotation Database Interface*. R package version 1.36.2.) and Mus.musculus (Team BC (2015). *Mus.musculus: Annotation package for the Mus.musculus object*. R package version 1.3.1.). Genes annotated under the GO term “sequence-specific DNA binding” were selected (Supp. Table 4).

**Supplementary Table 1.** Number of embryos and sections used for quantifications of cell number per sections at GD11.5

<i>Pax3<sup>-/-</sup></i>	<i>Pax3<sup>-/-</sup>; Pax7<sup>+/+</sup></i>	<i>dKO</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>Pax3<sup>Pax3R/-</sup></i>	<i>Pax3<sup>Pax3R/+</sup></i>	<i>Pax3<sup>PAX3A/+</sup></i>
Number of dI6 cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Bi,v						
4	10	9	21	3	8	13
Number of V0 <sub>D</sub> cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Bii, vi						
2	9	<b>6</b>	11	nd	nd	7
Number of V0 <sub>VCG</sub> cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Biii, vii						
7	15	<b>14</b>	35	<b>8</b>	21	<b>31</b>
Number of V1 cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Biv, viii						
7	14	<b>15</b>	36	<b>9</b>	21	<b>27</b>
Number of Dbx1 <sup>+</sup> cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 2Dv, Gv						
5	16	<b>7</b>	21	<b>5</b>	19	<b>17</b>

In **bold** are given the numbers of embryos analysed

In *Italics* are given the numbers of sections considered

**Supplementary Table 2.** Number of embryos and sections used for generating the heatmaps in Fig. 3C and 3D

<i>CRM1 + pCIG</i>		<i>CRM1 + Pax3</i>		<i>CRM1 + PAX3A</i>		<i>CRM2 + pCIG</i>		<i>CRM2 + Pax3</i>		<i>CRM2 + PAX3A</i>	
5	5	5	5	3	4	7	7	5	7	5	7
<i>CRM3 + pCIG</i>		<i>CRM3 + Pax3</i>		<i>CRM3 + PAX3A</i>		<i>CRM4.8kb + pCIG</i>		<i>CRM4.8kb + Pax3</i>		<i>CRM4.8kb + PAX3A</i>	
7	7	5	5	5	5	10	17	4	6	6	6
<i>iCRM + pCIG</i>		<i>iCRM + Pax3</i>		<i>iCRM + PAX3A</i>							
9	9	5	8	6	9						

In **bold** are given the numbers of embryos analysed

In *Italics* are given the numbers of sections considered

### Supplementary Table 3. Mann–Whitney *U* test probabilities.

All comparisons are done to control embryos.

<i>Pax3</i> <sup>-/-</sup>	<i>Pax3</i> <sup>-/-</sup> ; <i>Pax7</i> <sup>+//-</sup>	<i>dKO</i>		<i>Pax3</i> <sup><i>Pax3R</i><sup>-/-</sup></sup>	<i>Pax3</i> <sup><i>Pax3R</i><sup>+/+</sup></sup>	<i>Pax3</i> <sup><i>PAX3A</i><sup>+/+</sup></sup>
<b>Number of dI6 cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Bi,v</b>						
0.0167	< 0.0001	< 0.0001		0.3446	0.0992	< 0.0001
<b>Number of V0<sub>D</sub> cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Bii, vi</b>						
0.0024	0.0002	NA		NA	0.0233	< 0.0001
<b>Number of V0<sub>VCG</sub> cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Biii, vii</b>						
< 0.0001	< 0.0001	< 0.0001		< 0.0001	0.0009	< 0.0001
<b>Number of V1 cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 1Biv, viii</b>						
< 0.0001	< 0.0001	< 0.0001		0.2658	0.3328	0.0072
<b>Number of Dbx1<sup>+</sup> cells per section at GD11.5 - cf Graphs Fig. 2Dv, Gv</b>						
0.0223	< 0.0001	< 0.0001		< 0.0001	< 0.0001	< 0.0001

Significant differences are highlighted in orange













ENSMUSG0000021457	Syk	3.05	ENSMUSG0000031079	Zfp300	1.96	ENSMUSG0000044934	Zfp367	11.37	ENSMUSG0000079056	Kcnip3	2.67
ENSMUSG0000021466	Ptch1	15.38	ENSMUSG0000031103	Elf4	1.81	ENSMUSG0000045179	Sox3	8.7	ENSMUSG0000079215	Zfp664	123.24
ENSMUSG0000021469	Msx2	16.02	ENSMUSG0000031162	Gata1	3.89	ENSMUSG0000045268	Zfp691	9	ENSMUSG0000079277	Hoxd3	43.5
ENSMUSG0000021488	Nsd1	25.28	ENSMUSG0000031241	Tbx22	0.07	ENSMUSG0000045302	Preb	81.64	ENSMUSG0000079487	Med12	32.8
ENSMUSG0000021506	Pitx1	2.05	ENSMUSG0000031311	Nono	522.48	ENSMUSG0000045333	Zfp423	31.54	ENSMUSG0000079509	Zfx	19.23
ENSMUSG0000021514	Zfp369	7.96	ENSMUSG0000031323	Dmrtc1a	0.64	ENSMUSG0000045466	Zfp956	7.16	ENSMUSG0000079560	Hoxa3	16.02
ENSMUSG0000021540	Smad5	44.7	ENSMUSG0000031328	Flna	192.32	ENSMUSG0000045515	Pou3f3	9.01	ENSMUSG0000079681	Zglp1	0.92
ENSMUSG0000021546	Hnrnpk	2038.29	ENSMUSG0000031365	Zfp275	14.31	ENSMUSG0000045518	Onecut3	1	ENSMUSG0000087598	Zfp111	9.49
ENSMUSG0000021604	Irx4	1.73	ENSMUSG0000031393	Mecp2	11.64	ENSMUSG0000045519	Zfp560	24.68	ENSMUSG0000089756	Gm8898	3.33
ENSMUSG0000021685	Otp	6.38	ENSMUSG0000031431	Tsc22d3	121.11	ENSMUSG0000045639	Zfp629	29.92	ENSMUSG0000090125	Pou3f1	13.59
ENSMUSG0000021690	Jmy	2.86	ENSMUSG0000031451	Gas6	5.05	ENSMUSG0000045757	Zfp764	5.98	ENSMUSG0000090272	Mndal	0.38
ENSMUSG0000021775	Nr1d2	3.74	ENSMUSG0000031540	Kat6a	19.68	ENSMUSG0000045903	Npas4	0.09	ENSMUSG0000090641	Zfp712	4.12
ENSMUSG0000021779	Thrb	0.36	ENSMUSG0000031618	Nr3c2	0.92	ENSMUSG0000045991	Onecut2	6.39	ENSMUSG0000090659	Zfp493	2.19
ENSMUSG0000021796	Bmp1a	40.53	ENSMUSG0000031627	Irf2	4.98	ENSMUSG0000046160	Olig1	0.38	ENSMUSG0000091183	Gm5141	8.71
ENSMUSG0000021848	Otx2	0.26	ENSMUSG0000031665	Sall1	27.99	ENSMUSG0000046179	E2f8	13.09	ENSMUSG0000091764	Zfp964	1.23
ENSMUSG0000021938	Pspc1	53.72	ENSMUSG0000031681	Smad1	55.43	ENSMUSG0000046351	Zfp322a	48.52	ENSMUSG0000092260	Zfp963	6.96
ENSMUSG0000021944	Gata4	0.49	ENSMUSG0000031688	Pou4f2	2.1	ENSMUSG0000046470	Sox18	14.32	ENSMUSG0000092416	Zfp141	9.07
ENSMUSG0000021994	Wnt5a	9.97	ENSMUSG0000031706	Rfx1	6.28	ENSMUSG0000046518	Ferd3l	0.57	ENSMUSG0000093668	Pou5f2	0.82
ENSMUSG0000022010	Tsc22d1	518.92	ENSMUSG0000031728	Zfp821	39.55	ENSMUSG0000046532	Ar	0.08	ENSMUSG0000094483	Purb	10.19
ENSMUSG0000022015	Tnfsf11	0.21	ENSMUSG0000031734	Irx3	13.31	ENSMUSG0000046572	Zfp518b	35.94	ENSMUSG0000094504	Gm5294	0.1
ENSMUSG0000022018	Rgcc	41.02	ENSMUSG0000031737	Irx5	15.81	ENSMUSG0000046668	Cxxc5	59.84	ENSMUSG0000094870	Zfp131	23.96
ENSMUSG0000022053	Ebf2	34.24	ENSMUSG0000031738	Irx6	1.81	ENSMUSG0000046714	Foxc2	12.24	ENSMUSG0000094942	Gm3604	3.37
ENSMUSG0000022061	Nkx3-1	0.45	ENSMUSG0000031832	Taf1c	12.09	ENSMUSG0000046873	Mbtbps2	20.59	ENSMUSG0000095139	Pou3f2	24.81
ENSMUSG0000022096	Hr	0.55	ENSMUSG0000031860	Pbx4	24.62	ENSMUSG0000047036	Zfp445	42.88	ENSMUSG0000096014	Sox1	1.49
ENSMUSG0000022228	Zscan26	12.29	ENSMUSG0000031870	Pgr	0.13	ENSMUSG0000047143	Dmrt2	0.1	ENSMUSG0000096225	Lhx8	0.21
ENSMUSG0000022286	Grhl2	0.89	ENSMUSG0000031902	Nfatc3	2.37	ENSMUSG0000047171	Helt	0.12	ENSMUSG0000096433	Gm4944	3.04
ENSMUSG0000022297	Fzd6	5.28	ENSMUSG0000031930	Wwp2	42.62	ENSMUSG0000047342	Zfp286	22.31	ENSMUSG0000096795	Zfp433	20.7
ENSMUSG0000022329	Stk3	21.73	ENSMUSG0000031965	Tbx20	0.15	ENSMUSG0000047407	Tgif1	52.54	ENSMUSG0000096916	Zfp850	7.27
ENSMUSG0000022330	Osr2	0.21	ENSMUSG0000031987	Egln1	15.83	ENSMUSG0000047473	Zfp30	7.2	ENSMUSG0000097084	Foxl1	0.88
ENSMUSG0000022335	Zfat	4.09	ENSMUSG0000032033	Barx2	0.24	ENSMUSG0000047591	Mafa	0.23	ENSMUSG0000098022	Zfp82	7.95
ENSMUSG0000022346	Myc	22.66	ENSMUSG0000032035	Ets1	27.25	ENSMUSG0000048047	Zbtb33	7.85	ENSMUSG0000099083	Atf7	11.03
ENSMUSG0000022361	Zhx1	25.59	ENSMUSG0000032119	Hinfp	13.95	ENSMUSG0000048138	Dmrt2	12.02	ENSMUSG0000100235	Zfp708	3.92
ENSMUSG0000022383	Ppara	0.19	ENSMUSG0000032187	Smarca4	138.4	ENSMUSG0000048249	Crebrf	2.47	ENSMUSG0000101174	Hoxd4	8.89
ENSMUSG0000022389	Tef	10.82	ENSMUSG0000032228	Tcf12	165.62	ENSMUSG0000048251	Bcl11b	7.41			

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## Supplementary Figure Legends

### Supp. Fig. 1: Characterisation of AP2 $\alpha$ expression profiles in the embryonic dorsal spinal cord and roles of Dbx1 in restricting the generation of dorsal interneurons

**A.** Immunostaining for AP2 $\alpha$ /Sox9/GFP on thoracic sections of GD11.5 Pax3<sup>GFP/+</sup> embryos showing that Ap2 $\alpha$  is induced in the post-mitotic dorsal GFP $^+$ , Sox9 $^-$  neurons of the spinal cord. **B.** Immunostaining for AP2 $\alpha$ /Lbx1/Brn3a on brachial sections of GD11.5 wild-type embryos showing that Ap2 $\alpha$  expression largely overlaps with the profile of Brn3a and Lbx1 with two exceptions. First, it is excluded from the most ventral Lbx1 $^+$  cells and its ventral boundary matches that of Brn3a (arrowheads). Hence its ventral expression includes the Brn3a $^+$  dI5 IN and excludes the Lbx1 $^+$ /Brn3a $^-$  dI6 IN. Second, it is excluded from the most dorsal cells expressing Brn3a, likely the dI1 IN (arrows). **C.** Immunostaining for AP2 $\alpha$ /Lhx2 on brachial sections of GD10.5 wild-type embryos confirming the exclusion of Ap2 $\alpha$  from dI1 IN. **D.** Representation of the spinal cord showing the distribution of Ap2 $\alpha$  protein in red, characterised by the markers whose D-V extent are depicted in grey. **E.** Immunostaining for Pax2 and FoxD3, as well as GFP detection, on brachial sections of GD11.5 of *Pax3*<sup>KIGFP/+</sup> and *Pax3*<sup>KIGFP/GFP</sup>; *Pax3*<sup>KILacZ/LacZ</sup> (dKO) embryos, showing that, in absence of both Pax3 and Pax7 Pax2 $^+$ ;GFP $^+$  cells express the V1 marker, FoxD3. The white dashed line in **i**, **i'** marks the border between dI5 and dI6 cells; the light green one in **i-ii'** segregates dorsal GFP $^+$  cells from the ventral GFP $^-$  cells. **F.** **i-ii** Immunostaining for AP2 $\alpha$ /Lbx1/ $\beta$ Galactosidase on brachial sections of GD11.5 *Dbx1*<sup>KILacZ/+</sup> and *Dbx1*<sup>KILacZ/LacZ</sup> embryos showing that, in absence of *Dbx1*, p0 progenitors give rise to Lbx1 $^+$ ; AP2a $^-$ ; Pax2 $^+$  dI6 interneurons (see brackets in **ii**, **ii'**). **iii** Quantification of Lbx1 $^+$ ; AP2a $^-$  dI6 cells that derive from progenitors that have or have not expressed the  $\beta$ Galactosidase under the control of the *Dbx1* locus (mean $\pm$ s.e.m., n=4 *Dbx1*<sup>KILacZ/+</sup> embryos, n=2 *Dbx1*<sup>KILacZ/LacZ</sup> embryos). **iv.** Immunostaining for Pax2/Lbx1/ $\beta$ Galactosidase on brachial sections of GD11.5 *Dbx1*<sup>KILacZ/LacZ</sup> embryos showing that Lbx1 $^+$  neurons derived from p0 progenitors express another dI6 marker, Pax2.

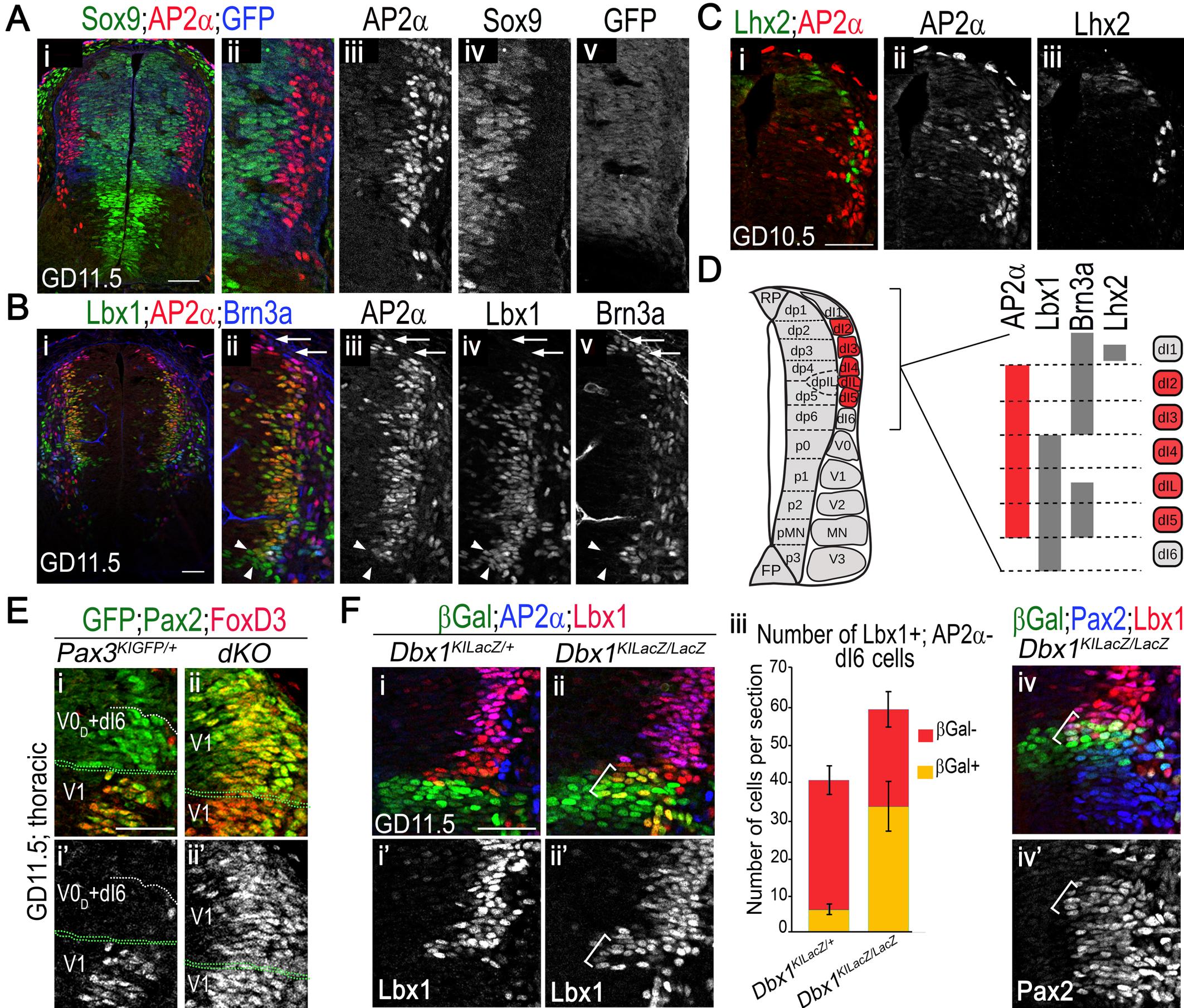
### Supp. Fig. 2: Characterisation of Dbx1 profiles in wild-type and Pax3/Pax7 mutant embryos

**A.** Immunostaining for Dbx1 and Pax7 in thoracic transverse sections of wild-type embryos at the indicated stages. **B-C.** *In situ* hybridisation for *Dbx1* (**B**) and immunolabelling of Dbx1 (**C**) in brachial transverse sections of GD11.5 mouse embryos of the indicated genotype. **D.** Graphs displaying the absolute D-V position from the floor plate in  $\mu$ m of Dbx1 protein

expression in GD11.5 mouse embryos with the indicated genotype (mean  $\pm$  s.e.m). Scale bars: 50  $\mu$ m.

**Supp. Fig. 3: Pax Position Weight Matrices and response of *Dbx1* CRMs to Pax3 and PAX3A**

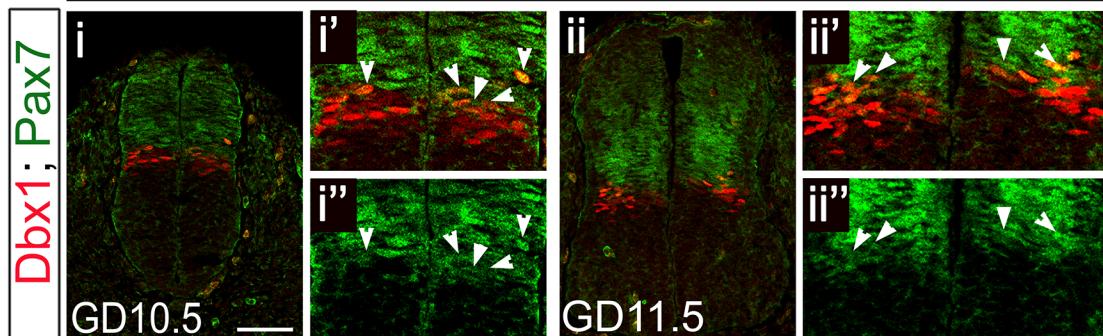
**A.** Position Weight Matrices retrieved from data generated by Jolma et al. (2013) (1), identified by MEME from ChIP-Seq data generated by Soleimani et al. (2012) (2), or created using MEME by compiling sites previously identified by Soleimani et al. (2012), Moore et al. (2013) and Relaix et al. (2003) (3). **B.** Immunostaining for  $\beta$ -Galactosidase and GFP combined with DAPI labelling performed on sections of chick embryos 24hpe with the indicated reporter constructs carrying *Dbx1* CRMs and either Pax3-GFP (**i-v'**) or PAX3A-GFP (**vi-x'**). Scale bars: 50  $\mu$ m.



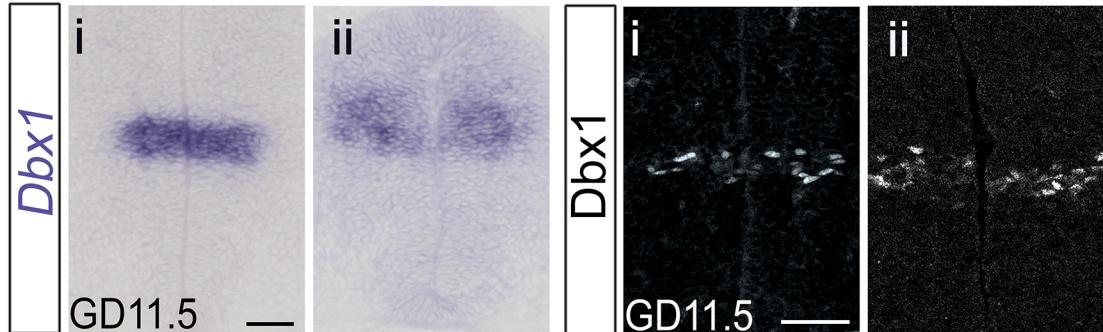
Gard et al., Supp. Figure 1

**A**

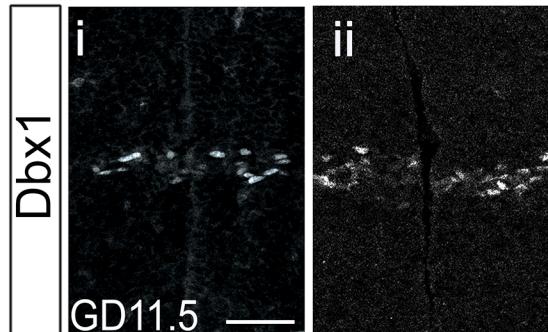
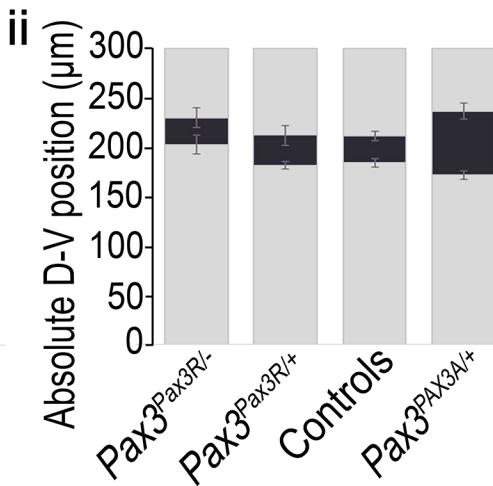
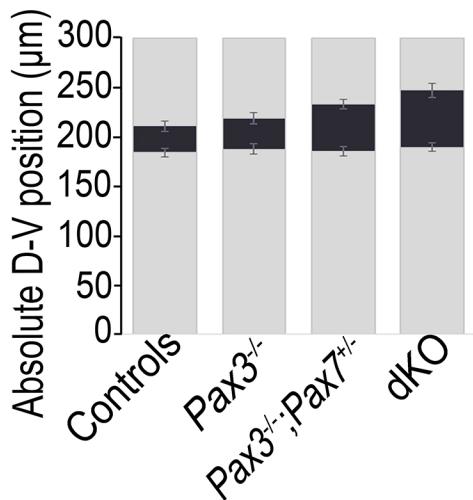
Control

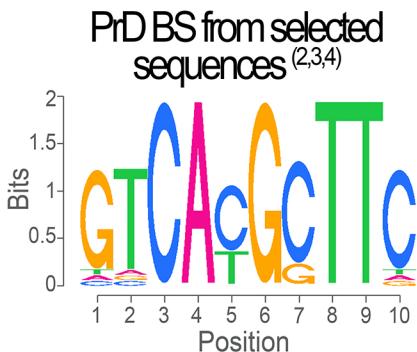
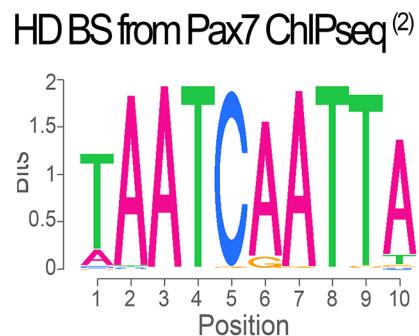
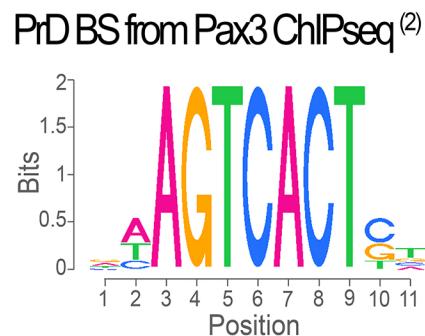
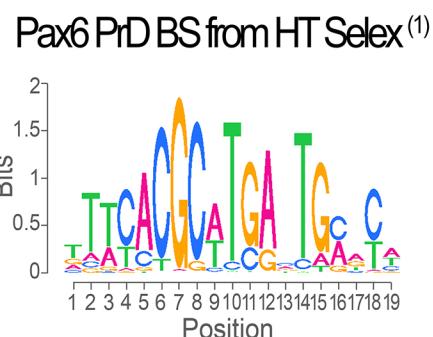
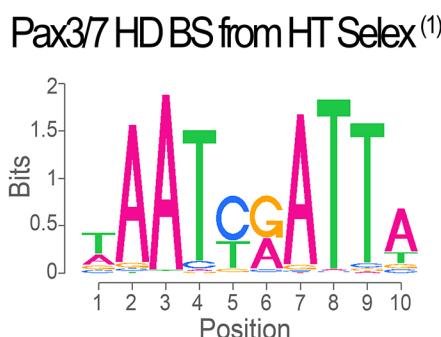
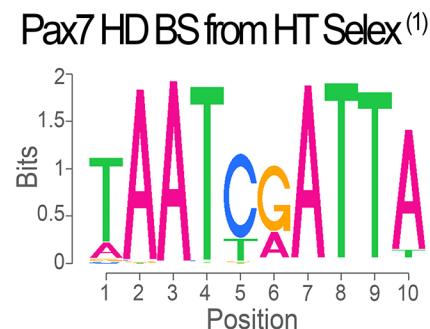
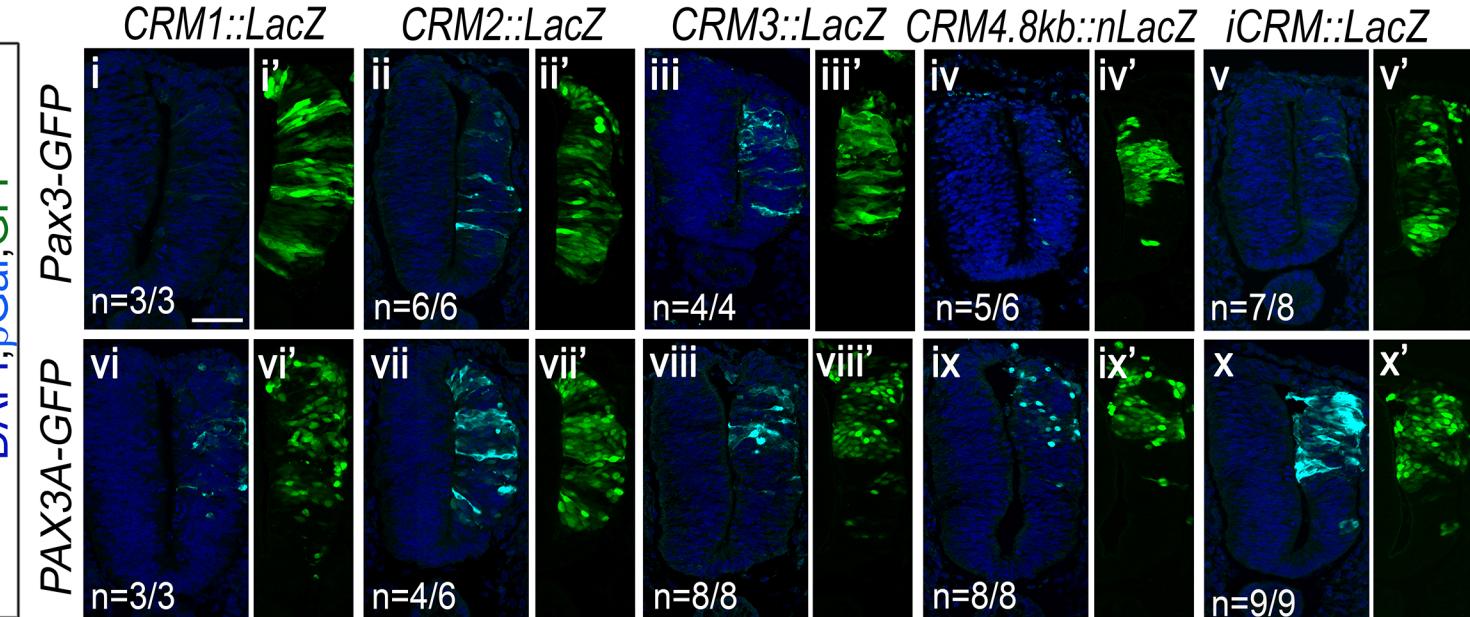
**B**

Control

*dKO***C**

Control

*Pax7<sup>-/-</sup>***D**

**A****B**

Gard et al., Supp. Figure 3