

**Professional School Counselors the AVID College Readiness System**

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**Abstract**

For the past 35 years, the AVID College Readiness System has worked to prepare students to enter the college and the workforce with the required skills for success. This paper will review the history and mission of AVID, as well as provide a brief overview of the AVID materials/curriculum and the evaluation standards. Finally, there is discussion of the role professional school counselors play in the campus-level AVID program, and how they can provide guidance to an even greater number of students.

### **Professional School Counselors the AVID College Readiness System**

For over 35 years, Achievement via Individual Determination (AVID) has served students through exposure to rigorous coursework and providing opportunities for students to further their higher education. Taken from the Latin *avidus*, for eager for learning, AVID provides knowledge through a combination of research-based curricular models, improving student study skills, and providing students with the necessary knowledge to navigate the college admission process (Plano Independent School District, n.d.). AVID students continue to enter and complete college degrees, thus changing their lives, and the lives of their families.

### **Description and Background**

Since 1980, AVID has grown from a small class project of a single teacher to an international program, found in 44 states, the District of Columbia, and 16 other countries. AVID classes exist in 4,500 schools, serving 1,2 million students in grades 4-12. The most recent data from the AVID Center shows 71% of all 2014 AVID seniors enroll in college vs the national average of 68% (AVID Center, 2016).

The mission of AVID has transformed over its 35 years of existence to: “AVID’s mission is to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society” (The AVID Texas State Office, p. 2). This newest mission statement is the result of the AVID Center trying to clearly define what AVID is and is not. AVID is not an At-Risk program, or a program only for minority or low socioeconomic students; it is a program to support underserved students attend and graduate from four-year schools. The typical AVID student meets at least one of the following criteria:

1. Traditionally underserved students.
2. Students who are in the academic middle.

3. Students whose parents did not attend college.
4. Students who have special circumstances. (The AVID Texas State Office, p. 4).

Of the 35,115 AVID Seniors of 2014, 74% qualified as low socio-economic status (SES). Of the 2014 seniors, 51% identified as Hispanic, 15% African American, 15% white, and 13% as other. Even more impressive, the rate of AVID graduates who persisted in college into year two was 85%, compared to the national 78%. (AVID Center, 2016)

The AVID program began in San Diego, California, by English teacher Mary Catherine Swanson. Swanson found that her students lacked information regarding the college admission process, and few were enrolled in college preparation level courses. Through providing support through tutoring, organizational skills, and teaching the fundamentals of a college going culture, AVID students are better prepared to meet the rigors of college level courses. Smith, Elder, and Stevens (2014) note the Swanson's inquiry model of AVID was based on a belief that questioning and the search for answers lead to higher levels of learning and retention, and that the knowledge of how to search for the answers was as important as the actual answer. "Increasing structure and guidelines for learners is the basis of the AVID program. Providing a support system for inquiry and learning by focusing instructive interventions at each stage of the inquiry process develops higher order thinking skills" (p. 26).

AVID has grown from the single classroom project into a global program that supports teachers and students in ensuring all students have the needed skills to be college or career ready. The AVID Center website (2016) describes AVID as:

A college-readiness program designed to increase the number of students who enroll in four-year colleges. Although AVID serves all students, it focuses on the least served students in the academic middle. The formula is simple- raise the expectations of students

and, with the AVID support system in place, they will rise to the challenge (AVID Center- About, para. 1).

Support systems for AVID students are delivered through enrollment in the AVID elective class, taught by an AVID trained teacher. Within the AVID elective class, students spend time in tutorials and learn long-range personal and professional goal setting. Besides the AVID class, students enroll in the schools most rigorous level of courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or dual credit level courses.

### **AVID's Curriculum and Foundation**

AVID's core belief lies in students improving their future through furthering their education. Thus, all social changes are advanced through higher education. Increased student enrollment in AP/IB courses, through providing organization, time management, and study skills remains a major focus in AVID, since its inception. Weekly tutoring, with trained tutors, prepare the AVID students to meet the challenges of advanced course work through focusing on writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR). In a fully institutionalized AVID school, all teachers utilize the WICOR strategies in their classrooms, supplementing their knowledge of the academic curriculum with pedagogical methods from the AVID center, such as the use of the Cornell Notes system and higher levels of questions to show mastery of knowledge. The *AVID College Readiness: Working with Sources* (2007) guide provides culminating activities for students, such as developing a summative project in the form of a major research paper with classroom presentation. The AVID Center provides a full curriculum of of material, including multiple texts, and a course and sequence through its *AVID Weekly* resources.

### **Core Principals of AVID**

Much of the AVID Curriculum focusing on improving basic scholastic skills in all areas through providing learning strategies appropriate to each student “based on best teaching practices in writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR)” that “support state and national content standards” (AVID Center, Curriculum Resources and Training). The AVID curriculum also supports learning through incorporating, “Write Path content-area, college-prep teacher guides and student materials that model content literacy skills in science, mathematics, history/social science, and language arts, for both regular and advanced courses, including AP/IB and Honors” (AVID Center, Curriculum Resources and Training).

One component of AVID certification looks at student enrollment in a variety of courses, including electives, as there is a strong correlation between active participation in school activities and future college completion. The *College and Careers* teacher guide (Caine et al. 2005) outlines a possible six-year sequence of activities design to help students explore their own strengths and weaknesses in addition to locating information on specific colleges and career fields. Over the course of high school, students keep a log of all school and community activities and service hours and develop their resume and personal statement, as well as research college cost, such as tuition, textbooks and housing. A large portion of *College and Careers* (2005) and *Strategies for Success* (2005) look at improving student situations through identifying lifetime earning potential, establishing goal setting exercises, and providing skills necessary for college and future employment opportunities. Risi, Schiro, and Serret-Lopez (2005) provide specific lessons setting and visualizing future goals.

In addition to the necessary academic skills needed for higher education, the AVID curriculum also focuses on improving the needed life skills for success in college and future employment. Lessons are in the different teacher guides that focus on students identifying their

preferred learning style, building better communication skills, organization, and goal setting/prioritizing. These essential life skills are often missing in students that come from families that do not place an importance on education, or do not foster a high work ethic. These skills are necessary, however, in ensuring future success of students in their endeavors.

### **AVID College Readiness System**

In the past 35 years, AVID has expanded from a single classroom, to a global system that now begins in elementary campus and continues into institutions of higher education. AVID strategies that begin in early classes, such as Cornell Notes, tutoring, and WICOR strategies are applied throughout secondary schools, and are being used by college students. In a study by Huerta and Watt (2015), the authors found that there was a greater Fall-to-Fall retention rate among AVID students than in the published rates, at both the university and community college level. They further suggest that “AVID strategies learned in high school continue to benefit students in college” (p. 33). More recently, AVID for Higher Ed has begun initiatives that focus on seminar classes that foster these skills, and the implementation of AVID strategies in teacher preparation programs. By teaching pre-service educators these researched based strategies, AVID continues to provide a high level of instruction for all students.

### **AVID Standards and Evaluation**

The national AVID office, through its regional and state offices, provides a structured curriculum and alignment, as well as an evaluation tool with the 11 AVID Essentials. All curricular and alignment materials are produced by the AVID organization, in the form of teacher and student manuals and guides. These guides focus on both the traditional curriculum aligned with core subjects, such as English, mathematics, social studies, and science as well material

related to improving student lives through further education, such as college admissions, and securing funding for college.

The AVID Essentials are the standards and evaluation tool to which all schools utilizing the AVID curriculum are accountable. For each of the 11 Secondary Essentials, school's self-report for their level of achievement: "Level 1-Meets Certification Standards, Level 2-At Routine Use, Level 3-Is Institutionalized" (AVID Center, Quality Control). Schools seeking to maintain or improve certification levels must provide documentation to support each of the 11 Essentials. This self-report undergoes review by district level coordinators, and then later state and national offices to assure standards at each AVID campus. Schools reaching the Institutionalized level may apply to become a National Demonstration School, where visiting educators may view AVID in its fullest implementation level.

Each essential looks at the various components of the AVID program in the school. While control of some essentials are by district level decisions such as staffing, schedule and budgeting, other areas focus on student and teacher behaviors, such as curriculum and course selections. The AVID Secondary Essentials focus on:

1. Student selection
2. Voluntary participation in the program
3. Scheduling of the AVID elective during the school day
4. Enrollment in rigorous coursework
5. Incorporating writing and reading into the curriculum
6. Incorporating inquiry into the curriculum
7. Incorporating opportunities for students to collaborate
8. Including trained AVID tutors into the AVID classroom

9. Collecting all required data
10. Staff development and budgeting
11. Maintain a strong site team, including all stakeholders

AVID Elementary focuses on four Essentials. These are Instruction, Culture, Leadership, and Systems. Essentials have specific indicators, designed to measure multiple facets. Schools receive a score for each essential based on the averaging of the indicators.

### **Implications for School Counselors**

School counselors play an integral part of the AVID structure and there is alignment with the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model as well. The Position Statement Summary on the School Counselor and Academic and Career Planning states, “School counselors collaborate with administrators, teachers, staff, families and the communities to ensure all students have the opportunity to design a rigorous and relevant academic and career program preparing them to be college and career-ready” (ASCA, p.1). This echoes the mission of AVID as well. The position statement on the Comprehensive School Counseling Program includes in the rationale the need to ensure equitable access to a rigorous education for all student, which is also the foundation of the AVID system. Regarding equity, the ASCA Position Statement on Equity for all Students recognizes in the rationale that historically, underrepresented populations have faced barriers to participating in a rigorous curriculum and higher level classes and affirms that counselors develop and implement a comprehensive school counseling program promoting equity and access for all students.

As stated in the ASCA description of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs, effective school counseling programs are a collaborative effort between the school counselor, families and other educators to create an environment promoting student achievement.

Within AVID systems, school counselors serve as required members of the campus site teams, and are often a huge resource for the AVID program. They often play important roles in scheduling, recruitment, and may serve as college experts that speak to classes, and assist in college readiness lessons. The nature of the AVID College Readiness System ensures equal access to college and career resources for all students. As schools move to a campus-wide model, the AVID curriculum can serve as a primary tool to deliver guidance lessons to all students. By working with AVID teachers, professional school counselors can gain more contact with students, to assist them in the post-secondary planning. Additionally, school counselors can play a major leadership role in the AVID site team, and help design guidance lessons that are used school-wide.

### **Conclusion**

The AVID program, and later curriculum developed out of an immediate need one teacher saw for her students. These students were under-served and lacked the necessary skills or knowledge needed to change their social situations. Through education, teachers expose students to a wide realm of possibilities, many that previously were closed to them. By taking this program to a larger national and international level, AVID offers students new opportunities to better themselves and their communities. Social responsibility, confidence in their own academic abilities, and increased determination remain the key elements for creating change in individuals through education. The AVID curriculum provides a vehicle for each of these, for a wide range of students, with over 35 years of research to support the positive changes in student lives.

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