A Personal Charge to Defy the Odds and Close the Achievement Gap
A first-hand account of growing up as a Latino American and overcoming the associated challenges in order to achieve the college dream.

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A Personal Charge to Defy the Odds and Close the Achievement Gap

By Dr. Aliber Lozano
AVID Director of Professional Development

AVID has shown to be effective in supporting academic success for English Language Learners. The achievement gap remains far too wide between White students and Latino students. We have asked Dr. Aliber Lozano, Director of Professional Development for AVID, to share his story of growing up in a home where English was a second language. His story demonstrates the challenges, but also shows that the statistics do not have to be as alarming as they are and that all students can learn if properly supported.

Immediately after successfully defending my doctoral dissertation, I drove to my parents’ home to tell them the news, “Ya soy doctor!” My mother began to weep, uncontrollable tears and deep moans, not of pride but of embarrassment and disappointment. She explained she didn’t think I would ever do it. It just was not part of her dreams for me because she did not know she “could dream so much” for me. School and education had not only provided personal and professional success for me, but it had created new dreams for my mother. As for my dad, he remained stoic although a simple smile crept up on his face. It was not difficult to comprehend why they had not imagined this dream for me.

At age 28, my father, Aliber Lozano, arrived in this country with only a third grade education from Mexico. He met and married my mother Consuelo, who had dropped out of school in the eighth grade. Although they may only have a few years of formal education, I believe my parents to be among the most educated people I know. Their lessons did not come from textbooks, but from life, working as migrant farm workers, raising five children, and helping support and guide my father’s mother and eight brothers and sisters who eventually came to the United States as well.

“Lo único que les puedo dejar es una educación”; the one thing I could leave you is an education. These words echoed and at times haunted me throughout my educational journey. My father knew that the one thing he could leave my siblings and me was an education. Though he rarely spoke to us, he repeated these words to us, often at the end of the day after working in the fields. The first time I heard these words was as my mother and I walked out of the car and toward Sacred Heart, my first day of pre-school.

Both in pre-school and when I entered kindergarten at William
B. Travis Elementary, my school days were a mixture of Spanish and English lessons, a dual language approach. It also mirrored my home life, as I spoke English with my brothers, sister, cousins and friends and Spanish with my mom, dad, aunts and uncles. After first grade, English was the only language used for learning in school. I remember teachers correcting students when Spanish was used in the class; it was especially addressed during my elementary years.

I enjoyed school and overall had a very positive experience throughout my primary and secondary education. Toward the end of the school year, I would have to check out of school and check into another school that was near the area to which my family had migrated. However, this only happened at the beginning of my education. At one point, my father would leave to go work in the fields in the northern part of Texas, and my mother and my siblings and I would join him when school was out. By my own constructed definition I was a good student. I knew my older sister was a great student, receiving academic recognition at school and home. She was my benchmark. Every grading period, I would open my mother’s tin box where she kept our school report cards, certificates and ribbons. I would pull my sister’s report card from the same grade level and ensure that I not only matched her grades, but surpassed them as often as I could.

My sister, Arminda, would not only guide my academic success in public school, but would later navigate my entry into college. Even though I was in the most rigorous of classes in my high school, played sports and participated in extra-curricular activities, somehow I fell through the cracks. At the end of my senior year, I had not applied to any colleges, had not completed any financial aid forms, nor had I taken any college entrance exams. Arminda took charge. She helped me apply to our local university and complete the necessary paperwork to receive financial aid. During the first semester of my college career, I sat in an auditorium full of hundreds of primarily Hispanic students, taking the ACT residual; most of us had not taken a college entrance exam which was needed to take any classes beyond the 12 hours (a full class load) most of us were taking first semester. In 1992, I was not fully aware of how many of my peers in that room, including myself, had overcome the challenges most Hispanics face while on the road to entering college.

To put the situation in perspective, consider that of 100 Hispanic children who begin at the elementary level, 56 will drop out at the high school level; out of the 44 who graduate from high school, only 24 will enroll in a four-year university or community college; only eight will persist into the third year; six will earn a bachelor’s degree; two will earn a graduate or professional degree; and less than one will obtain a doctorate (Solorzano and Ornelas, 2002).

Out of five children in our family, three of us have a college degree. My youngest brother, Aaron, has a bachelor’s degree and is a high school journalism and speech and communication teacher. My only sister has two master’s degrees and is an assistant principal at a high school. Both Aaron and Arminda work on AVID campuses. My brother, Juan Alberto, entered the university but did not complete his degree. My oldest brother, Arnulfo, is a high school graduate.

My charge is to defy the odds and close the achievement and opportunity gaps, as I have experienced first hand with my family and friends. One doctorate out of 100 students should not be the exception, 100 should be the expectation, no matter what the ethnic background, socio-economic status, or other variables, we as educators cannot change. What we can change is their social and academic preparation and our expectations. “No matter how one divides the universe of students, the curriculum measure produces a higher percent of earning a bachelor’s degree...” (Adelman, 1999). A bachelor’s degree is only one step towards an expectation of a doctorate. We must support such lofty dreams so that, like my mother, we can dream more than we thought we could for our sons and daughters. I echo my father’s words, “Lo único que les puedo dejar es una educación”; the one thing I could leave you is an education. This, too, will be my legacy and my educational goal for the community I serve, the AVID world and beyond.
AVID: At the Core of a World Class School District

Dr. Wendell J. Brown is superintendent of the Uvalde Consolidated School District in Texas. In its second year of AVID, UCSD has a large Latino population, representing 78 percent of the district's students. Brown and his staff are working hard to develop and implement the concepts of a “world class school district.” In the following article, Brown explains what it takes to be a “world class school district” and the important role that the AVID program plays.

By Dr. Wendell J. Brown
Guest Contributor

At the core of a world class school district exists research-based best instructional practices. These best practices, to be effective, must have a delivery system that is coherent, consistent, collaborative, and assessable. There are aspects of schooling that can provide the structure necessary to develop world class schools. A program that meets those criteria is Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID).

The primary mission of AVID is to serve the typically and historically underserved students in the academic middle. It is a research-based program that has been in existence some 28 years. When examined from a more global view, the critical attributes of the AVID program and philosophy can be used as the catalyst for districtwide change and ultimately the foundation for a world class school district.

To be considered a world class school district, the school system must graduate students who are well prepared for, and ultimately successful in, the world of higher education. To be prepared to take on the challenges of the world's most prestigious colleges and universities, students must be presented intense, expansive and rigorous curriculum. There is no doubt that the knowledge and preparation of the instructional team is a major factor in the ultimate academic success of students. The development of that aspect of a world class school district is likely to manifest itself during the assessment aspect of the overall organization plan.

AVID establishes a coherent process of instructional delivery that can be used by each academic discipline. At the core of AVID are the essential learning modalities for success in school. These learning modes are Writing to learn, Inquiry to learn, Collaborating to learn, and Reading to learn (WICR). AVID establishes clear expectations for students and teachers with regard to how to effectively use these modalities for learning. Specifically, students are taught through the AVID classroom and schoolwide initiatives, how to use for example, writing as an instrument to learn. Strengthening a student's ability to write is a critical aspect of higher education. Mastering this aspect of learning will enhance a student's understanding of the content while providing the necessary skills to be successful beyond the public school setting.

Whether the students and teachers are implementing WICR skills, the thorough use of all of the modes for learning is essential to the development of the prepared high school graduate. Therefore, these skills must be an institutionalized part of the learning environment. Ideally, the philosophies of the AVID process should be stated as part of the district's mission and vision. The strategies should become central to the instructional delivery practices for all content. The consistent use of the strategies when delivering instruction will allow students to internalize the skills and be able to better adapt to new learning situations. Likewise, if teachers consistently expect students to perform these skills at high levels, the quality of student work will increase and the atmosphere to continually expand the levels of rigor will become more abundant. Ultimately, the global expectations for high achievement will increase and the academic climate for learning will be heightened.

It is evident that WICR enhances the performance of students and teachers. However, there is often too much effort spent trying to protect teacher autonomy. Although autonomy and creativity are important in our profession, the concept of best practices...
establishes what has been proven to work. WICR does not limit a teacher’s creativity. It establishes the foundation for implementing, monitoring and measuring the pedagogical practices used to prepare students for college. School leaders must maintain focus to the vision and expectation of producing students who are well prepared to achieve beyond graduation from public school.

At the core of education is assessment. The outcome of the various assessment instruments or strategies must provide the necessary data for the teacher to determine the degree of effectiveness of each of the strategies used. Moreover, the data will determine whether or not the concepts will need to be re-taught to all students in order to determine exactly which concepts/objectives need to be reinforced in planned tutorial sessions.

The AVID program has Eleven Essential Elements that are used to measure the implementation of the program. The AVID program assessment process serves as a guide to institutionalize the program. The assessment process is just as intense and focused as the assessments developed to monitor student achievement. The clearly stated Essentials form the cornerstone that illuminates academic excellence.

The concept for developing a world class school district is simple but actually implementing it is difficult. The methodologies of AVID provide the critical components for a world class school district in ways that enhance the productivity of students and teachers. Likewise, a framework is readily available for district and campus leaders to use to construct aggressive instructional and academic goals that will better prepare students for post high school success. A world class school district will enhance the community and create legacies of excellence that will change the face of the world. 🌍
Deepening AVID in California

By Granger B. Ward
AVID Executive Vice President

The AVID program continues to grow and thrive in California. Between the 2005-2006 and the 2006-2007 school years, the number of AVID sites rose by 7.5%, the number of sections by 12%, and the number of students by almost 13%. AVID is now in place in about half of all the middle and high schools throughout the state.

However, after 28 years, the challenge in California is not just the expansion of AVID to more sites; it's the issue of quality, of deepening the program to existing sites and districts, and of teaching AVID methodologies schoolwide and districtwide to impact the lives of more students. In California, AVID is meeting that challenge with strategies now being offered to more students at every site, not just as an elective, but in many content area classes.

Demonstration schools have traditionally used AVID strategies schoolwide; it is part of the validation process criteria for becoming a National Demonstration School. In these schools across the nation, Cornell notes, tutorials and Socratic seminars are evident in content areas as well as in the AVID elective, benefiting all students in the school.

As the number of AVID students grows on campus, the AVID culture begins to expand. Content area teachers attend Summer Institute and discover that AVID methodologies will also work in their classroom; the entire site team gets involved in the planning process and old thinking that AVID is just an elective for struggling students is replaced by the realization that AVID methodologies work for everyone. Other students see that AVID kids enjoy a close-knit, supportive community with a college-going focus. When this culture permeates the entire school and expands throughout the district, real change begins to happen.

There are some good examples around the state:

At Farb Middle School in San Diego County, every member of the site team attends Summer Institute. AVID strategies are taught throughout the school by a motivated and dedicated group of educators. This is evidenced by the use of AVID strategies across all curricula areas and schoolwide use of Cornell notetaking by the students. Thursday is AVID T-shirt day and all teachers wear the same color AVID shirt selected by the team at Summer Institute. They hold mandatory weekly site team meetings, attend various regional and district workshops and assist each other with AVID curriculum questions and specific challenges.
Garden Grove Unified School District in Orange County, California, has taken AVID a step further. They have an AVID teacher on special assignment who, in concert with the Orange County Office of Education and AVID staff, provides support for AVID implementation of the elective to new and existing schools and coordinators, as well as schoolwide and districtwide use of strategies. Superintendent support for districtwide implementation is a critical component in expanding AVID with quality and Garden Grove is fortunate to have an enthusiastic AVID proponent, Superintendent Laura Schwalm, at the helm. The district hosts an “AVID Strategy Academy” four times per year devoted to schoolwide strategies. The district also hosts a mini-conference for all department chairs with featured guest speakers, as well as ‘hands-on’ breakout sessions on various AVID strategies. Schools in the Garden Grove USD report increased college admissions for all students.

El Monte High School in Los Angeles County began with 40 students in 2003-2004. Five years later the program has grown to 244 students enrolled in 10 AVID elective class sections and an 18 member site team that actively supports AVID implementation throughout the entire school.

Targeting English Language Learners is another way that AVID is deepening in California.

With the assistance of a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, Hacienda La Puente School District, also in Los Angeles County, has piloted a summer course to teach English Language Learner students and others, key academic literacy and AVID skills that move students into regular 9th grade classes. We now see these strategies to support ELL students being used throughout many other AVID schools and districts in California, affording them more opportunities as they strive for four-year college acceptance.

In the Sweetwater Union and San Ysidro High School Districts in San Diego County, deepening AVID means involving parents and the local community. In early November, more than 700 teachers, students, parents, district administrators, district liaisons and superintendents participated in the 8th annual AVID Parent Night at the new Olympian High School. Highlights included a keynote address and breakout sessions with college admissions representatives from the University of California and California State University systems. Students from school feeder patterns also conducted presentations to the parents on AVID tutorials and writing assignments.

Since deepening AVID requires the commitment of the entire administrative staff at a site, AVID Center continues to support the expansion by offering administrator strands to train AVID leaders. In January 2008, AVID Center hosted the first two-day Principal Training Academy in California to provide structures and processes that create a college-going culture for all students.

In 2007, there was an approximate 24% increase in the number of California educators attending Summer Institute. Early projections for 2007-2008 show a continuing increase in the number of students to sites ratio. After 28 years, AVID continues to expand in California, not just by the number of sites, but by the number of students served and the number of students going to college. 🌟
Understanding and Action:

How One School is Helping Latino ELL students through AVID

By Valerie Rivas Martínez
Guest Contributor

At Sunnyside High School, a large urban school in Fresno, California, a movement began several years ago to help ELL students through the AVID program. Teachers noticed that there were large numbers of Latino students who were enrolled in Spanish for Native Speakers classes who dreamed of a college education and yet were not enrolled in courses that would lead to their dream becoming a reality. It became a topic of conversation amongst teachers at Sunnyside, and a decision was made to take action.

In discussions with the students, it was understood that most wanted to attend college, but did not have the cultural or social capital to access the resources needed to get there. Some of the students had been born in the United States, others in Mexico and Central America. Somehow, these students had been overlooked throughout much of their academic careers. They weren’t the GATE students; they weren’t the troublemakers. They were simply kids in the middle, wandering through high school apart from the mainstream. None were in AP® classes. Few were on what could be considered a “college track” and even fewer were involved in extracurricular activities of the school, except perhaps for the soccer team. Why were these students so overlooked?

An AVID program had been started at Sunnyside a few years earlier, and Latinos in the program, along with the rest of the students, were experiencing great success in meeting university entrance requirements. Because one of the AVID teachers also taught Spanish, a decision was made to combine aspects of the AVID program with the Spanish for Native Speakers classes. If the methods used in AVID were so successful, why wouldn’t they be successful in these other classes? Here was a way to serve large numbers of Latino students, in their primary language, using a proven program with a long history of student success.

AVID materials were translated into Spanish and used in both the Native Speakers and AP Spanish classes. Major components of this new curriculum included AVID’s tutorial process, Cornell notetaking, weekly binder checks, Reciprocal Teaching, Socratic Seminars, and AVID’s ELL writing curriculum – they were simply done in Spanish.

What evolved out of this is that the Spanish teacher now acted as a quasi-AVID teacher. A four-year plan – one specifically addressing the needs of English learners – was developed and used with students. Student progress was monitored by the Spanish teacher in collaboration with the AVID Coordinator. Financial aid, college applications, and immigration concerns were all addressed in these classes. Many of these students applied to AVID so they could get a “double dose” of the program. Through the nurturing, supportive environment of the AVID class, ELL students were able to make phenomenal progress in their English language proficiency. In time, the school began to see increased enrollment of Latino students in advanced classes, with AP Spanish Language being the doorway to the world of AP. An added benefit was that these students were passing the California High School Exit Exam on the first try. The school also began to see greater involvement in school activities from these formerly disenfranchised students.
We developed an understanding of some systemic barriers that needed to be overcome in order to provide ELL students access to college. These were addressed as part of a schoolwide effort. Some of the barriers that were discovered and the actions or strategies taken to overcome them were:

1. **Counselors overburdened with caseloads**  
   **Action:** Identify and train a bilingual staff member to serve as an additional counselor to ELL students; providing support, monitoring their progress, and working in conjunction with the AVID and Spanish for Native Speakers teachers.

2. **Misinterpretation of foreign student transcripts**  
   **Action:** Provide training of counselors and registrars so incoming students receive the proper credit for courses taken in their country of birth. Prior to this, many students had to repeat courses they had already successfully completed in Mexico due to misinformation. This action has now been implemented districtwide.

3. **Long-term ELL status**  
   **Action:** Develop a one-page guide to identify key criteria for placing students and moving them forward in their ELL classes. Provide training in AVID ELL curriculum for ELL teachers and content area teachers working with English learners. By keeping a constant vigil, students can be guided forward and helped to achieve English language proficiency.

4. **Lack of time for college-bound immigrant students**  
   **Action:** Place recent immigrants in Spanish for Native Speakers classes which follow the AVID model. Develop a high school plan for each student that will enable them to meet the college entrance requirements via summer school, migrant coursework, etc. Too often our goal for these students is merely high school graduation.

5. **Lack of involvement in school**  
   **Action:** Model the Spanish Speakers classes after the AVID classes, creating a nurturing, supportive environment for students. Intentionally seek out ELL students to foster an attitude of inclusion. Make ELL students an integral part of planning for school activities, especially those events featuring culturally relevant topics. This gives ELL students a high profile on campus, and the entire student body will benefit as a result.

6. **Parents unfamiliar with U.S. educational system**  
   **Action:** Work with local universities to develop a series of workshops, in Spanish, for parents. Personally invite parents to school and provide them with the information and resources needed to support their child’s effort to obtain a college degree. College entrance requirements, testing, financial aid, immigration issues, and scholarships are topics of utmost importance. Follow-up is essential. Make the workshops culturally relevant. Plan a field trip for parents to a local or out-of-town university, arranging for Spanish-speaking guides who can address parent concerns and alleviate their fears.

7. **Lack of schoolwide focus on English learners**  
   **Action:** Develop a long-term strategic plan to send key administrators, counselors and teachers to an AVID Summer Institute every year. The more staff trained in the AVID philosophy, the easier it is to create a “college-going culture for all” school. And once word gets out about success at one site, the AVID philosophy can’t help but spread to other schools in the district.

Understanding and action: understanding what English Language Learner students need and making a decision to act will ensure academic success. Dr. Kenneth Magdaleno, Assistant Professor at California State University, Fresno, says, “for Latino students, it is often the acceptance of their capacity to learn and the acceptance of who they are as a person and as a culture that can make AVID so important in the life of a child.” Acceptance and understanding of these students must lead to action. Only then will English Language Learner students flourish, achieving their dream of a college education. 🎓
Two years ago, AVID Center received a grant from the Irvine Foundation to engage in an effort to increase the graduation, passage of the high school exit exam, and college going rates among English Language Learners who begin high school in Hacienda La Puente School District in the lowest quartile of academic achievement.

Several objectives were set, including developing AVID ELL curriculum with strategies to address the specific needs of ELL students in the lowest academic performance quartile; revising the district’s ELL curriculum in core subjects; training teachers from the two participating high schools to utilize the AVID Lowest Quartile ELL curriculum in their classes; and training tutors across the two schools in AVID tutorial strategies.

Over the course of the grant, many objectives have been reached. Curriculum piloted last spring has been modified for use in the follow-up training to include the addition of student data analysis, collaborative lesson planning, and classroom management strategies.

“We trained 30 teachers from the two participating high schools to utilize the AVID Lowest Quartile ELL curriculum in their classes, by January 2007,” said Michelle Mullen, an AVID project consultant. In an effort to build capacity and impact longer-term work habits, teachers have been invited to continue their collaboration to review student data and design strategic lesson plans outside of our designated training sessions.

Twenty-four teachers from the two schools participated in the training, which consisted of four three-hour, after-school sessions. Sixteen to 18 teachers attended each session. Of the 17 teachers surveyed in May, nine said they had attended all four sessions; of those who didn’t, most pointed to scheduling conflicts to explain their absence. Many of the teachers chose to take advantage of the follow-up support offered by AVID. The trainers conducted 39 follow-up sessions, 19 observations and 20 discussions with teachers.
Teachers were clearly satisfied with the training. Over half rated the training as “very effective,” and the remainder, “effective.” No teachers considered it to be only “somewhat” effective or “not at all” effective. Interviews corroborated this attitude.

**Teachers’ Attitudes/Expectations about ELL Students’ Potential**

The survey showed that teachers raised their expectations of ELL students over the course of the training. Nearly half of teachers considered most or all of their ELL students to have the potential to succeed in college. When asked to compare their attitudes from fall 2006 to May 2007, there was a dramatic shift in the percentage of teachers who thought their students had a strong academic potential. In the fall, for example, nearly half the teachers rated their students’ potential a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale; by spring, only 6% rated them 1 or 2, and nearly 60% rated them a 4 or 5.

Teachers considered writing skills and motivation as the most important barriers to ELL students’ academic performance. To address these, teachers suggested an expanded focus on basic skills – writing, reading, and vocabulary – as well as additional one-on-one tutoring. Ways to motivate students further were also mentioned.

**Use of AVID Strategies In Content Classes**

As part of the training and follow-up, teachers were provided with a wide range of AVID ELL strategies in Lesson Planning, Writing, Reading and Vocabulary, Inquiry and Collaboration. Over the spring semester, they used these strategies to varying degrees. “Teachers acknowledged that it was too early to see changes in students’ academic performance as a result of the ELL strategies said Mullen. “Some did, however, observe that students’ participation improved when the AVID ELL strategies were introduced.”

**Tutors Training and Deployment**

College tutors were identified through the AVID Regional Center at the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Most were students at Cal Poly Pomona. Tutors were placed in classes throughout the week; however, because of tutor absences, the actual number of classes in which tutoring took place was smaller.

“In addition,” Mullen admits, “because of occasional miscommunication between teachers and tutors, there were times when tutors showed up, but there was no class or the teacher was giving a test or showing a movie, so the tutor wasn’t really needed.”

Despite the occasional problem with scheduling, nearly two-thirds of teachers reported that tutors helped out in their classrooms more than 10 times, and almost three-fourths thought they were effective.

Today, the work continues strengthening the schools’ AVID programs and their support systems for ELL students as they work toward increased rigor, to support the district’s efforts and to solidify a districtwide ELL curriculum. 🎓
Algebra is a Key to Success

Enrollment in an algebra course during the eighth grade is an important indicator of which students will go on to take advanced math and science courses in high school and, in turn, apply and be accepted to a four-year college or university. This is true because of the sequential nature of math courses. The following chart compares the algebra taking rates of all AVID eighth graders with those in the top five U.S. states and the U.S. overall.

These data are particularly important as nearly 70% of all middle school AVID students are either Hispanic or African-American. More evidence supporting the notion that AVID can have a significant impact on the closing of the achievement gap.

AVID 2007: General Data Collection [Database], 2006-2007. n = 38,383

U.S. Values: Education Watch, The Nation and State Summary Reports, Key Education Facts and Figures; High Level Course Taking, 2006; The EducationTrust.

The Proving Ground

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Advancement Via Individual Determination