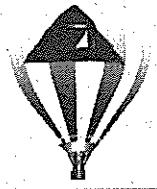


# ACCESSES



Winter 1995

## Dr. Thomas Boysen: AVID and Kentucky's Statewide Educational Reform

As the idea of systemic reform in education sweeps across the United States, Dr. Thomas Boysen, Commissioner of Education for the state of Kentucky, has a unique vantage point, having been involved in reform efforts in Washington, New York, and California before arriving in Kentucky in 1991.

In his opinion, no matter what changes occur, education remains a significant force for social change and equality.

"Even in the mid 60's, the need for change was becoming clear," says Boysen, who received his doctorate in education from Harvard in 1969. "When the Coleman Report came out, it noted that, as far as economic advancement, all other variables

paled in comparison to social class background. Thus, the education crisis in the 60's became the need for equality. Today, however, it has gone from a moral imperative to an economic necessity. Everything is riding on this generation of kids."

Boysen oversees an educational department that serves 176 school districts, 1,400 schools, and 640,000 students. The Kentucky Education Reform Act, (KERA) one of the most comprehensive approaches to statewide change, has been in effect since 1991 and will complete its six-year implementation cycle in 1996.

AVID has been part of Kentucky's reform picture since 1992, with 41 schools throughout the state now offering

underrepresented students a better opportunity to attend four-year colleges. As superintendent of schools for San Diego County from 1987 to 1991, Boysen played a pivotal role in disseminating the program in California. He gives the Kentucky legislature credit for foresight in its support of educational reform. It responded to economic changes in the state and supported programs like AVID as part of KERA's overall strategy to better prepare students for a different economic future from that of their parents.

"Because of the decline of two of our major industries—soft coal production and tobacco—our leaders probably had to look to the future earlier than some

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## AVID and Federal Legislation: An Excellent Fit

Three recent pieces of federal legislation—all of them interrelated and focused on systemic reform—will soon begin to impact school districts nationwide. AVID sites, districts, and regions are already targeting improved student performance and initiating schoolwide change. Thus, they will be in a unique position to accelerate their efforts through one or all of the federal programs, including Goals 2000, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and

the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA).

The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was signed into law in 1994. Title III of the legislation provides funding for states to engage in "systemic reform," a bottom-up effort to promote the development of coherent systems by linking the efforts of a variety of agencies. Rather than invent new programs, these consortia, which could combine districts, sites, county offices, community agen-

cies, and colleges and universities, will be encouraged to unite their successful efforts in order to meet the national education goals. These are:

**School Readiness** All children in America will start school ready to learn.

**Improved Student Achievement** All students in America will be competent in the core academic subjects.

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Boysen.

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states," he says. "You've got to give our political leaders credit. They've hung in there."

Married to another educator, Boysen, who has four children, received his B.A. from Stanford University and subsequently taught in Kenya before attending Harvard. He grew up with twelve brothers and sisters in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

In a series of interviews with ACCESS, he responded to questions regarding AVID's place in Kentucky's statewide reform efforts.

ACCESS: The key components of the Kentucky Education Reform Act include student engagement, performance standards, professional development, structure and organization of schools, collaboration, successful transition, and community participation. How does AVID bolster these diverse approaches?

BOYSEN: AVID is ingenious because it doesn't wait for the whole system to change. It uses the student as a system. The student is both in a system and is a system; and AVID teachers work with the student on several fronts. AVID accepts the 'givens' within the current system, including homework and a regulated school day. Then it addresses motivation and creates a sense of teamwork and identification with the future. The AVID teacher then assumes the role of mentor and coach, with the tutors providing practical support. In Kentucky, a fundamental tenet of our reform is that the student creates his or her own learning. Students cannot be objects; they must be actively engaged. That's right at the center of what AVID and KERA have in common.

ACCESS: AVID is a program that began in California. Why did you decide to bring it to Kentucky?

BOYSEN: It's so quick hitting.

There are many plans for restructuring, but I've seen a lot of the talk not leading to very practical change. However, I've seen AVID lead to practical change. You immediately impact teachers and students and they see how to change the system. Because we're so decentralized in Kentucky, we need a 'bottom-up' program like AVID.

ACCESS: Now that AVID is in its third year in Kentucky, in 41 schools, what is your opinion of its progress statewide?

BOYSEN: It's going very well, and according to our evaluation process, is right on track. AVID wins advocates very quickly, and, as I visit schools (65 so far this year), I hear rave reviews. High school teachers especially are relatively desperate for motivational and academic programs that will help them relate positively to students and AVID addresses this.

ACCESS: What major benefits does AVID provide to the educational community as a whole, including K-12 and postsecondary institutions?

BOYSEN: One immediate answer is that Kentucky and other states have a minority teacher retention issue. Only four to five percent of our teachers represent minority groups. Thus, it seems logical that we need more minority students going on to college. In Kentucky, about two-thirds of our AVID students are minority students. An additional benefit of AVID is the powerful teacher training and professional development aspect. Having an AVID program upgrades the staff development approach at the school. Moreover, AVID coordinators carefully monitor student performance, and this is something we should do for all students. It can serve as a model. Finally, I think the parent involvement aspect of AVID is a major benefit.

ACCESS: What student performance targets has AVID helped Kentucky improve?

BOYSEN: Our assessment program occurs at the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades. Every student creates a writing and math portfolio, and all students must develop their writing portfolio so that it has a variety of writing styles perfected over the years. AVID's writing emphasis helps. Of course, we also expect our students to complete the pre-college curriculum, and AVID supports that as well.

ACCESS: As the state of Kentucky plans to address new federal legislation such as Goals 2000, how do you see AVID playing a role?

BOYSEN: Right now, we're putting most of our efforts into what we call Integrated Systemic Instruction. We try to encourage schools to create a better fit with assessment, technology, and instruction. Expanding our AVID programs would allow us to do a better job of covering all those bases.

ACCESS: You were involved in groundbreaking AVID dissemination efforts in California. What

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have you observed about these same efforts in Kentucky?

**BOYSEN:** We've tried to keep the model as close as possible to the original. But in thinking about ongoing dissemination issues, we still need to get the attention of principals and superintendents toward AVID's vision and approach. After we do that, AVID seems to gain its own momentum. It's not just a razzle-dazzle program but is essentially good for students and teachers.

**ACCESS:** The AVID Office in San Diego County is about to embark on extending the AVID curriculum, providing new activities and suggested models, including career preparation components. What would you suggest that the AVID curriculum team emphasize?

**BOYSEN:** Within the School-to-Work emphasis, I believe it is important to keep the four-year college option open. Since I left San Diego, I've become more interested in technology, and being sophisticated in technology is a great advantage in college access. Affluent families have more access to interactive technology, and to the degree that AVID is trying to 'level the playing field,' technology is a great equalizer. Also, technology can elevate the use of language for students and can help them solve problems and understand data bases. It's all part of having equal opportunity.

**ACCESS:** You've mentioned that the state legislature has supported AVID. How do other, less direct funding sources support the program in Kentucky?

**BOYSEN:** Part of KERA's funding structure is our Extended School Services, and schools are given money based on their population of low income and low performing students. Part of that funding we can use for AVID, as a way to encourage schools to

enter the AVID program. In addition, I see Goals 2000 and the new IASA Title I funding as a perfect match for AVID.

**ACCESS:** Who is the target population of AVID students in Kentucky? Do they differ demographically from students in other states?

**BOYSEN:** They don't really differ. We targeted concentrations of low-income and minority students in our first 40 AVID schools, in both urban and rural areas. The way Mary Catherine Swanson described the program to me, it had to do with changing demographics and making all students successful. Before entering the program, some AVID students didn't have an equal push to do their homework and apply for college. It takes a lot of coaching and that's what AVID is doing for our students in Kentucky.

**ACCESS:** Why is systemic reform so important in Kentucky and throughout the U.S?

**BOYSEN:** It goes back to student performance. There is such a close tie to economic development and academic performance. To illustrate, I'll use an example from Lester Thurow, a professor of economics at MIT. He looked at land and natural resources as being relatively unimportant for the economic development of countries. Japan, for example, has little of either. It is instead our labor or workforce that makes us competitive. The current generation of students in the U.S. is challenged as never before and systemic reform takes all the factors into consideration. When you look at the National Assessment of Educational Progress data, we are holding our own, especially when you consider sociological factors such as the deterioration of the family. Yet the piecemeal change we've had is only incremental. Systemic change will give us the

jump we need.

**ACCESS:** What advice do you have for states that want to implement AVID programs on a large scale?

**BOYSEN:** Stay close to Mary Catherine's San Diego model. Sometimes after the first year, people say, 'Can't we do AVID our own way now?' I want us in Kentucky to stay close to the model until we've been involved long enough to develop our own expertise. Another piece of advice I'd give is to provide adequate resources to implement the program properly.

**For a listing of Kentucky's AVID schools or for information regarding KERA, contact the AVID office by fax or e-mail.**

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## Legislation

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**Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning** Every adult American will be literate and possess the skills necessary to compete in the economy of the 21st century.

**Teacher Education and Professional Development** All teachers will have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to prepare U.S. students for the next century.

**Increased graduation rate** The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%

**Best in Math and Science** U.S. students will be first in the world in math and science.

**Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools** Every school in America will be safe, disciplined, and drug-free.

**Parental Involvement** Every school will promote parental involvement in their children's education.

Goals 2000 legislation authorizes five years of support. During the first year, state and local

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