



ACCESS



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## AVID and the National Debate Regarding Access to Higher Education

Mary Catherine Swanson, AVID Founder and Director

The media is filled with the latest hot topic — for whom is higher education intended. California's Master Plan for education has guaranteed every qualified high school graduate a place in a public college or university, a commitment which we in AVID laud, but the state no longer fulfills. Higher fees, enrollment reductions based on a scaling back of faculty, and narrower definitions regarding who is qualified for admission all conspire to limit the numbers of high school students who enroll in postsecondary institutions, constituting a reduction of more than 215,000 students since the 1990-91 academic year. The reduced number is even more alarming in light

of the fact that in California 450,000 more prospective students will be ready to enter institutions of higher learning by the turn of the century.

AVID believes that education is the hope of society, that only through educating to the fullest degree possible all of our citizens will our society be able to solve the global problems facing us. And yet we find our public institutions, our legislators, our neighbors, and we ourselves embroiled in a debate about who should be allowed to proceed to the next level of education.

In California and elsewhere these phenomena have taken the form of anti-affirmative action movements and admission re-

quirement debates. Polls suggest most believe that college admission should be based on merit alone; the problem is that merit is a complicated concept.

As an English teacher, I had difficulty holding an absolute standard for awarding an "A" grade. I was clear regarding the quality required for the final product, but different students achieved the end results in different ways. Some students completed outstanding work with little effort, but other students needed to work hard, stay after school to meet with me, write and rewrite papers, each time improving their knowledge and skills, and eventually producing a paper

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## PATRICK CALLAN: Charting a Path For Higher Education and High School Graduates

As K-12 school systems nationwide focus on higher academic standards and better preparation of their students, the impact of these efforts on colleges and universities is inevitable.

However, studies by the RAND Research Review and the Education Commission of the States' "Rising to the Challenge" report, along with the well-publicized declining performance of college

freshmen on English and mathematics placement tests, have raised key questions that must be answered by both the K-12 and postsecondary systems if student potential is to be maximized.

Who should attend college? Can the postsecondary system handle the projected huge increase of potential college students that looms in the near future? How can students be better

prepared to handle the rigors of college?

Improved articulation between colleges and the K-12 system might provide some answers, but facilitating that communication is not easy.

Patrick Callan, Executive Director of the California Higher Education Policy Center, has discovered the difficulty of unifying

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## National Debate

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that was of "A" quality. As I pondered the assignment of grades, it was clear to me that the students who spent a copious amount of time producing an excellent paper may have learned more than those who wrote papers with ease. Shouldn't those who put in so much time and energy, learned so much, and played by the rules be equally rewarded? Should time to produce quality work be the determining factor in awarding a grade or should the final product be the goal?

All of us mirror the environment of our homes. If we were lucky enough to be raised in a family that spoke grammatically

correct English, so do we. If we were from a home where broken English or a language other than English was spoken, then the academic struggle in American schools is greater for us, and the time for us to produce a quality product is lengthened; however, the educational disadvantage is not a reflection of intelligence. Particularly in California schools, where more than 50 percent of our students do not possess English as their first language, holding all students to the same standard on timed exams written in English seems discriminatory, and yet time-governed SAT or ACT exams and university-specific placement exams are determining factors of who is admitted into college and

into regular college credit or remedial coursework.

AVID students come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and in most cases would not be considered in the top cut of those who are admitted to four-year universities, although they do meet the eligibility requirements as outlined in college catalogs. Nevertheless, the retention of AVID students after two years of college is 89 percent, while retention of the average California college student after one year is 50 percent. Clearly, the reason is that AVID students have learned how to learn, they are eager to learn, and they are willing to devote the time required to reach academic excellence.

Josefina came to San Diego from Tijuana when she was in the eighth grade. She spoke no English and read her first book in Spanish at the age of thirteen. She entered the AVID program, where she learned English and took college preparatory courses. She graduated from high school with a "B" grade point average and entered San Diego State University. It has taken her six years to graduate from college, but today she is not only reading books in English, she is writing one while attending law school.

Armand entered the AVID program as a "C" student. His reading level was four years below grade level. He came from a home where there were no books, magazines, or newspapers. He, too, worked diligently to conquer college preparation courses and entered San Diego State upon high school graduation. During his college years, he tutored elementary students in mathematics, was in the Black Pupil Mentor program, tutored high school AVID students, served on the California Department of Education's High School

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## Curriculum Revision

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school career, as well as a student's readiness for college and career. New coordinators and those who have ongoing AVID programs can look forward to using the new libraries to support all of their AVID endeavors. The *Implementation Library* will aid them in sharing the AVID program with their site administrators and counselors and with the community. The *Site Team Library* will allow the AVID coordinator to easily share the AVID methodologies with departments integral to the support of the AVID students. The *Tutorial Library* is important to the development of the collaborative skills of the AVID students; it can also be extremely helpful in training tutors schoolwide. The *Writing Library* has been developed to give coordinators who are not English language arts teachers the specific directions and activities that they need to ensure that their students are exceptionally well-prepared for any writing program in high school or in college. The *College and Careers Library*

guides the coordinator and student through the complete process of planning for college, preparing for college entrance examinations, and applying for college. The students are also encouraged to explore career options. The *Strategies for Success Library* introduces the AVID student and family to those skills that support lifelong learning.

Throughout all of the libraries are materials that will provide the AVID coordinator and the site team with ongoing support for enriching the experience of the AVID student.

With the completion of the new AVID libraries for high school, the newly-selected summer 1996 middle school curriculum committee begins the writing that will culminate in the AVID libraries for the middle level.

*Carolyn Bamberg was the AVID Coordinator at Valhalla High School in the Grossmont Union High School District for seven years. In February of 1996 she joined the AVID staff at the San Diego County Office of Education.*

## National Debate

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Task Force Committee, and received a \$5,000 scholarship from the Martin Luther King Recognition Committee for his overall academic achievement and community involvement. Today Armand teaches sixth grade in the San Diego Unified School District.

Alicia is a senior AVID student in San Diego struggling through college preparation courses while also helping to support five younger brothers and sisters because her father was killed three years ago. She has already opened a day care center at her local Salvation Army and hopes to attend a four-year college next year.

None of these students would fit the profile of the most highly qualified to attend college, and

yet each of them, along with many other young people, is making a positive contribution to society. If we deny them access to the education which will allow them to achieve their dreams, we have robbed them and society. If we believe that the purpose of education is to lift everyone up, then very able students from differing backgrounds should not be denied access to the highest educational levels. If secondary teachers and college professors seek merely to teach facts, then they will prize students whose ability to memorize quickly and whose knowledge of basic skills is firmly in place. If, on the other hand, those instructors believe that in a global society it is also important for all students to succeed at the highest levels possible and to

learn from one another, they will value a broad mix of learning approaches, talents, experiences, backgrounds, and skills.

If one of the missions of public education in the next century is to teach the next generation of students to be critical thinkers, then I would argue that it is important to have all kinds of students in our educational institutions. Perhaps students who will make colleges more diverse should be as coveted as are athletes or artists or math geniuses. The choice should not be whom to admit or whom to exclude; it is incumbent on society to educate all who qualify. If our postsecondary institutions admit only the most likely winners, then, indeed, we will not be prepared to face the challenges of the next century.

## Callan

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the efforts of the two systems throughout a career in higher education planning and research that has spanned over 20 years. In Montana, Washington, and California, Callan has worked with state leaders to formulate master plans for higher education and to study issues such as educational policy, reform of teacher education, and minority access and achievement in higher education. He has also served as a consultant to other nations to help them plan their higher education efforts.

Callan, who has led a number of research studies and published many articles in publications such as *Commonwealth*, *The California Journal*, and *The Educational Record*, served as Executive Director of the California Postsecondary Education Commission from 1978 to 1986, a period that saw significant K-12 reform efforts in California and a

concurrent growth in the state's college population. He has not been reluctant to express his opinions regarding California's antiquated master plan for higher education, which he has noted may limit the college and university options for future California high school graduates.

A lecturer at both Stanford and Harvard, Callan also worked as an elementary school teacher early in his career. In his current role as Executive Director of The California Higher Education Policy Center (a privately funded, non-partisan center), he has the opportunity to influence the thinking of university leaders, government officials, and K-12 educators. The Policy Center focuses on public policy questions such as who should fund higher education and how the system can better serve the public. In April, he served as moderator for an educational panel at UCLA examining the issues and implications of abolishing racial and gender

preferences at the University of California. Panelists included Henry Levin (Accelerated Schools), Anita Madrid (Berkeley Pledge), and AVID Founder and Director Mary Catherine Swanson. In an interview with ACCESS, Callan focused on the challenge of trying to unite the K-12 and postsecondary systems, along with other issues.

ACCESS: If California does not have a plan to accept an additional 450,000 potential college students within the next decade, how should the K-12 and higher education systems work together to develop one?

CALLAN: It's not that enrollment will be cut but that we'll have significantly more young people graduating from high school, with no plan to accommodate them. A whole set of steps might be taken, but as a preface I would say that money is not the only solution. Yet, if the state disinvests the situation will get

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