



# ACCESSES



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## AVID and a Complex Postsecondary World

Mary Catherine Swanson, AVID Founder

Seldom have the topics of education and employment been intertwined in discussion more than they have recently within the United States. Educational reform documents such as the U.S. Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) (1991) and California's High School Task Force Report, *Second to None* (1992) focused their attention on the readiness of high school graduates for the world of work as well as for education beyond high school.

Both reports, along with Federal legislation to encourage schools to develop a School-to-Work approach, pose important questions. What should students know and be able to do when they graduate from the K-12

system? What are the competencies necessary for successful employees? Should the K-12 system be more responsive to the concerns of employers? To add to the debate, in 1995, some leaders in the U.S. Congress and Senate proposed the elimination of the Department of Education as a separate entity, noting that it should become part of the Department of Labor. At the same time, affirmative action policies in both workplace and educational settings have been called into question, and the position of disadvantaged and underrepresented minorities at work and in school has become increasingly precarious.

For all students, according to the SCANS report, "the market

value of a high school diploma has fallen." The report also notes that the proportion of men between 25 and 54 with only high school diplomas who earn less than enough to support a family of four above the poverty line "is growing alarmingly." For white men in this category, the figure is now one in five; for Hispanics, one in three; and for African American men, two in five. Among all three groups combined, for high school graduates, the percentage in the "low income" category rose from 15% in 1969 to 34% in 1989. Clearly, education beyond high school is a necessity if individuals want a reasonable chance to raise a family above the poverty line.

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## Gary Hart: A View into Education Reform

Gary Hart sees education from many perspectives. As a parent, he's had three daughters attend California's public schools. As a teacher, he's instructed at both the community college and the K-12 levels. In the political arena, Hart served as a member of the California State Assembly and Senate for 20 years, and while chairman of the Senate Education Committee (1983-94), authored significant legislation impacting teacher credentialing, school

safety, charter schools, and assessment. Finally, as an educational reformer, Hart now directs the CSU Institute for Education Reform housed at the California State University, Sacramento.

With an overall emphasis on providing assistance to K-12 schools which are involved in restructuring efforts, the Institute, which has been in existence less than a year, will focus on both education reform and teacher training.

When he was approached by CSU Chancellor Barry Munitz with the notion of working together on issues affecting both K-12 and postsecondary education, Hart was enthusiastic. "I jumped at the chance," he says, "because it seemed to be an opportunity to continue what I had begun in the legislature."

With over 20 significant pieces of education or children's legislation to his credit, Hart has

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Meanwhile, students continue to graduate from high school and face economic and educational futures in large part determined by the choices they made during the previous years. But how much choice they really had was in part determined by the curriculum offered and the options presented to them.

AVID provides students with the academic support to succeed in rigorous curriculum and assists them in keeping their postsecondary options open. In California, the AVID Program has produced nearly 4,000 graduates since 1990. Over 90% of these students have enrolled in college and over 60% at four-year institutions. Both figures are far beyond state and national averages. Research data indicates that 89% of the AVID graduates are still in college two years after enrolling.

At the high school and middle school levels, AVID teachers, collaborating with site teams that include administrators, counselors, subject area teachers and college tutors, produce graduates who embody the SCANS competencies. These include using resources, interpersonal skills, information systems, and technology productively. AVID students also master the SCANS foundation skills, which include basics skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. These competencies and foundations were set forth by the SCANS Commission as part of their proposal for reinventing K-12 education and preparing graduates for the workplace.

AVID's mission, however, has always had at its center the preparation of disadvantaged students for an additional system, that of four-year colleges and universities, and for

academic success in those environments as well. Why, in light of the emphasis on School-to-Work, should a program like AVID continue to focus its efforts on producing graduates who can not only enter the world of work but also the world of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees? In looking at the economic and political world, the answers appear obvious. Few political leaders in American society have reached their level of professional status without a college degree, and the same is true for those who manage and own businesses, and hold top-level jobs in education, health care, and the high-tech industries.

For disadvantaged students, higher education has often implied a "level playing field," yet according to U.S. Census data, only 12% of African American high school graduates and 9% of Hispanic high school graduates are going on to earn bachelors degrees or more. The figure for Anglo high school graduates is 23%. Yet the same Census Bureau data indicates that an individual with a professional degree can earn five times as much as a high school graduate. AVID puts students on the path to a professional degree by enrolling them in rigorous courses, setting their sights on a college degree, and by teaching them a system that combines academic independence with collaborative interdependence so that they can achieve at the necessary levels.

California has long boasted of having a superior public university system. Indeed, the University of California, despite recent tuition hikes impacting its nine campuses, remains an attractive financial option. Complementing the UC system are over 20 California State Universities, and a large network

of community colleges and private and independent colleges. What kind of impact will the School-to-Work movement have on college enrollment within California? It is still too early to tell. However, high schools are already responding to the SCANS recommendations and *Second to None* report with vigorous restructuring efforts. Career academies, career paths and clusters, villages, houses and other new configurations have sprung up throughout the state's secondary schools, in response to the School-to-Work philosophy and other initiatives. At the same time, it is not uncommon to hear educators say that our K-12 system is sending too many students to college and that more effort should be focused on preparing high school graduates to enter the world of work directly after high school.

Recent college enrollment rates tell a different and disturbing story. According to the California Postsecondary Education Commission, enrollment in four-year colleges and universities by California's high school graduates has declined from a figure of 23.8% in 1987 to a low of 16.8% in

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1993. Add to the picture the fact that 8.2% of California's total population was enrolled in postsecondary education in 1975 compared to a figure of 6.4% in 1992, and it appears that the K-12 system is not sending enough high school graduates to college.

AVID site teams continue to work with disadvantaged students to help them complete rigorous courses and to understand the complex process of applying for and gaining admission to college. At the same time, the AVID Center is not ignoring the recommendations of the SCANS report and has initiated a School to Professional Career curriculum project that will assist AVID students in making the connection to professional careers during their college experience and following their college graduation. The SCANS foundations and competencies are interwoven in the new AVID curriculum, which is being piloted at a number of California high schools during the 1995-96 school year. These efforts are being carried out with the advice and assistance of colleges and universities, along with the consultation of AVID alumni who are now professionals working in business, education, politics, law, and government.

As new structures and curricula are developed within the K-12 system, schools would be wise to involve colleges and universities in the discussion and in the development of new courses. Key questions must be asked. What, for example, will be the impact of School-to-Work efforts on the four-year college enrollment of disadvantaged students? Will structures such as career paths or academies lead more students of all backgrounds to complete the sequence of rigorous courses necessary for

college or university enrollment? Will restructuring efforts increase or limit the options for students and strengthen the curriculum? School-to-Work programs have the potential to broaden and enrich the college preparatory curriculum if properly planned and implemented. Yet School-to-Work programs should not deter qualified students from attending college.

The AVID Program, as it has for the past 15 years, will continue to focus on assisting disadvantaged students in completing the courses necessary for college enrollment. As secondary schools embrace changes suggested in documents such as SCANS and *Second to None*, they would do well to consider the impact on college enrollment for all students, and especially the disadvantaged students whose academic and economic futures are in their hands.

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#### *Gary Hart*

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received numerous recognitions, including the Albert S. Rodda Award for Lifetime Achievement, presented by the California School Boards Association in 1994. One comprehensive piece of legislation Hart authored, Senate Bill 813, launched an academic surge in California in 1983 and provided the impetus for much of the state's subsequent reform efforts.

"It strengthened graduation requirements and provided an infusion of new money," says Hart. "We had been through long years of neglect in California and SB 813 gave us a fresh start and was consistent with (state superintendent) Bill Honig's reform agenda."

Educational reform remains an important subject to Hart, who

will lead the Institute for Education Reform's efforts to improve student achievement and work directly with schools that are undergoing major restructuring, using alternative assessment techniques, redesigning categorical programs, or becoming charter schools.

Hart, who developed California's Charter School legislation, recognizes that public schools need significant change but notes that the discussion needs to be broadened. Thus, the Institute will sponsor a series of seminars on public policy issues associated with education.

"We want to involve three different communities," he says, "including K-12, state policy makers, and the academic community, which too often are not well connected with one another."

An advocate for programs like AVID, which have demonstrated effectiveness at a reasonable cost, Hart provided the keynote address at the fall AVID conference in San Diego. There he discussed impending changes in the California State University System, including the phasing out of remedial coursework, the need for AVID teachers to reach out to the community, and K-12 education's place in the larger political and social contexts.

Recently, Gary Hart also agreed to an interview with ACCESS.

ACCESS: Your own teaching background varies from high school social studies to college political science instruction. What has changed for teachers since you received your M.A. in education from Harvard in 1966?

HART: At least three things have changed. First, the support system for students is substantially weaker. We have fewer counselors and nurses and

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