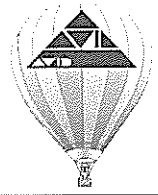


# ACCESS



## Staying Awake Through a Revolution: The Goal of AVID Site Teams

by Mary Catherine Swanson, AVID Founder and Director

Most of us have read Washington Irving's story "Rip Van Winkle." What we usually remember from the story is that Van Winkle slept twenty years; however, another message in the story is often overlooked. A sign above the Inn in the little town on the Hudson where Van Winkle goes up into the mountains for his long sleep has the picture of George the Third of England. When Van Winkle comes down from the mountains, the sign above the Inn has a picture of George Washington, the first President of the United States. Van Winkle had not merely slept for twenty years, he had slept through a revolution, a revolution that would change the course of history. One of the great liabilities

of history is that all too often we find ourselves amid great periods of change, yet we fail to recognize the change and we maintain our former ways of doing things. A revolution is taking place in America today, and schools are in the middle of it. The challenge facing every educator is to stay awake through this revolution.

The needs of today's students are vastly different from the needs of students twenty years ago, yet we must prepare students for postsecondary standards which have not changed appreciably in the past twenty years. Today's teaching is extraordinarily demanding of teachers' expertise, energy, and enthusiasm, yet the most common scenario remains one in which teachers labor on

their own to decide what instruction works best, what standard of student work is good enough, and what additional knowledge, skill, or insights would best serve them and their students. Teachers find themselves struggling against hectic paces, splintered schedules, and fragmented tasks, compounded by physical isolation.

It is obvious that today's teachers need to collaborate with one another in order to focus on best practices rather than to teach in the traditional isolated classrooms and schedules of twenty years ago. The need for ongoing learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and experimenta-

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## Dr. Jeannie Oakes: Focusing on Equality and Opportunity for All Students

The Fall, 1997 Access Interview

After 20 years of researching and writing about the inequities faced by students attempting to navigate curriculum tracks and overcome the effects of ability grouping, Dr. Jeannie Oakes still remembers her initial recognition that grouping students based on perceived abilities had a negative

impact on them and on her own ability to function well as a teacher.

"In my first year as a teacher," recalls Oakes, who taught English for seven years, "I was teaching in a tracked middle school. I got an honors class, a basic class, and a regular class. I still have this

vivid memory of the first day of teaching, when my 6th period, basic class came in. They looked at each other and said, 'Oh, this is the dumb class.' As the year went on, I noticed how difficult it was for me to be an effective teacher in the basic class and how easy it

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### *Staying Awake*

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tion comes from the inherent complexity of today's teaching. In order to meet the educational challenges, teachers need a collective focus on and responsibility for student learning. The fundamental interdependence required by such difficult work requires us to form more deliberate supports and structures, teams in which rigorous, sustained collaboration is possible rather than the periodic sharing or advice-giving that seems to dominate many descriptions of teacher collaboration. The formation of AVID site teams as professional communities serves such a purpose. This professional community is founded on both mutual support and mutual obligation.

Available evidence suggests that students' academic achievement is greater in AVID schools where teachers report high levels of collective responsibility for student learning, schools in which AVID teachers collaborate consistently about student work, giving the teachers a common basis for discussion, planning, assistance, and assessment focused on students' needs. Guthrie and David

in their 1994 research on AVID entitled "Strategies for Dissemination" cite strong site teams as a key factor in the successful implementation of AVID and emphasize that "The more effective teams function on behalf of students." The most typical structure for this site team collaboration is a common daily preparation period; however, the structure alone will not ensure student benefit or an environment for teacher learning. It is the professional culture — the value placed on the achievement of AVID students, the disposition toward teaching and learning, the norms regarding professional expertise and collegial exchange — which determines whether the structure results in effective collaboration.

Most teachers we talk with say they learn from their students, describing processes of instructional trial and error, or occasional insights yielded by special events or relationships. Few say they teach in circumstances where their own observations of students and their explanations of student progress matter to anyone else, or form part of an ongoing assessment of effective teaching. Yet this is exactly the kind of collegiality

afforded by an AVID site team where teachers share responsibility for students and listen carefully to what students are saying about their own learning. In effective AVID site teams we find an established process through which teachers investigate the relationships among the academic work students are asked to do, the support they are given to do it, and the work they produce. These teachers are engaged in focused investigations of problems arising from practice and these teachers have the satisfaction of knowing they are becoming more and more successful in meeting the needs of their students.

When teachers engage in the learning process with one another, the entire intellectual climate of the school is improved. Through what they do in AVID site team collaboration, they illuminate for students and for one another what it means to be educated; the teachers embody the pursuit of learning, taking enjoyment in doing the work of the mind. These teachers stay awake through the current revolution; indeed, they lead the educational revolution.



## EXAM CONFUSION

### Admissions and placement tests lack standardization

By Michael W. Kirst

Like many states, California is highly agitated by the academic problems that university freshmen experience. Students who score below a specific level on standardized tests may not proceed in regular freshman English and math courses, and an uncomfortably large number of first-year students require some form of remedial education. For example, about half of the first-time freshmen in the 22-campus California

State University system who were tested in fall 1994, required remedial work in either English or math.

There is much hand wringing and blame shifting about the causes of this expensive remediation. Universities blame high schools for low standards; secondary schools blame elementary schools; and elementary schools blame parental neglect. Recent California legislative propo-

sals include one to deduct part of the cost of university remedial courses from state aid to high schools.

In my view, many secondary schools and students are caught in a no-win situation which is caused in part by the fact that prospective university students receive conflicting signals from universities about what knowledge is most worth possessing.

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