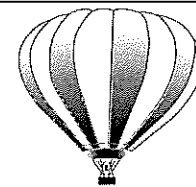




ACCESS



AVID Stays the Course

Mary Catherine Swanson, AVID Founder & Director

Presidents rotate in Washington, bringing with them new Secretaries of Education. Federal funding for education is ever victimized as popular issues of the moment assume center stage. State governors change, state boards of education shift, state superintendents of education rotate as they are constantly elected or appointed, priorities for state funding of education are inconsistent. The electorate passes education legislation often without the wisdom of understanding the issues, duped by campaign media. School district superintendents and site principals come and go, sometimes by their own choice and in other instances by political whim.

In response to political and public pressure, the cries of politicians, policy experts, and public officials, school reforms immerse districts like waves on the sand, often washing away past efforts to make room for a few short-lived footprints. Amidst the winds of popular trends, savvy educators consider signs of how the reforms might affect the classroom. AVID bases its approaches on what the data tell us about student achievement and prepares students for the realities of what colleges and businesses nationwide are requiring—an idea so simple, so logical, yet so unusual in educational reform. John Goodlad, often referred to as the “Henry Ford of education,” has noted AVID as “the only national educational reform movement which bases its program on student results.”

Because AVID’s goal is to prepare underachieving students for college and the world of professional work, popular educational trends are not a focus for the program. If the colleges, for example, require increasing numbers of Advanced Placement courses, then AVID will prepare students to succeed in those courses. If standardized tests tell us that students have difficulty with reading comprehension, then AVID will attack the problem. If data show that the greatest barrier for students in achieving four-year college eligibility is inadequate math preparation, then AVID will focus on that problem. Will AVID join public debate regarding broader educational issues of whether raising college admission standards is a solution for an

inadequate number of institutions of higher education for example? Of course, but AVID will not sacrifice a generation of students’ futures because it does not condone a current trend. AVID will make its programmatic decisions based on what works in the classroom that prepares students whose futures would not be promising without our intervention. AVID will give teachers practical classroom strategies which hold the course as the fickle winds of change billow beyond the realities of the classroom.

AVID Initiatives for 1998-99

As AVID stays the course in the ever-changing educational environment, underachieving students’ preparation for four-year college eligibility and enrollment remains our focus. To that end, each year we establish initiatives which will better prepare both teachers and students to achieve that goal.

Advanced Placement Initiative

As colleges nationwide require more honors/Advanced Placement course work for entry, AVID will broaden student selection to include both “B” and “C” level students and will give those students the support to be successful in the most rigorous curriculum. To that end, it is our expectation that all

high school AVID sites will dramatically increase the number of AVID students—both middle level and high school—who enroll in and are successful in honors and Advanced Placement courses. To assist AVID sites in opening access and keeping standards high, AVID will collaborate with the College Board in specially designed “opening access” staff development, which will include specialized institutes.

Recently, Rosalinda Vasquez, an AVID graduate from San Diego County and now a freshman at the University of California, San Diego, addressed the local AVID Policy Board composed of university chancellors, deans of admissions, district superintendents, and other educational leaders regarding the importance of her experience in both AVID and Advanced Placement during high school.

“I remember being afraid of honors and Advanced Placement when I was in junior high because I heard it was so much work” said Vasquez, “but I was just not well-informed about what it meant for me. My AVID coordinator took the mystery out of it. She explained the importance of the courses, that they would make us highly competitive.”

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Jay Mathews: Insight Into Education’s Class Struggles

The ACCESS Interview

In a journalistic career that spans nearly 30 years, Jay Mathews has covered national, foreign, business, and educational stories for the Washington Post, from Hong Kong to Los Angeles, and he now serves as an educational correspondent for the Post. Along the way, Mathews has also published several books, including *Escalante: The Best Teacher in America*, which grew out of his six-year study of Garfield High in Los Angeles and the school’s now famous calculus

teacher, Jaime Escalante, who defied traditional wisdom regarding success on Advanced Placement exams. Escalante’s mostly poor and immigrant students took and passed the AP calculus exam at astonishing rates, greater, in fact, than those at many more affluent schools. Escalante went on to become a cult figure of sorts after his story was told in the film “Stand and Deliver.”

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COURSE (from Page 1)

Rosalinda's AVID teacher at San Dieguito Academy, Michelle Mullen, encouraged her to take more challenging courses, adding one initially and subsequently adding others as her comfort level increased. Vasquez took honors English as a sophomore, and as a junior took AP US History and honors English. As a senior, she completed AP Government and AP English, along with AP Spanish. Mullen sees Advanced Placement enrollment as a logical progression for AVID students, especially those bound for UCSD, one of the most competitive of the 13 University of California campuses.

"Each year, on several occasions, I meet with AVID students to talk about where I see their strengths and to decide mutually in which directions they are ready to be pushed," said Mullen, who has been teaching AVID for seven years and is currently on loan to California State University, San Marcos as a Distinguished Teacher in Residence. "I am also on the GATE (Gifted) screening committee so I can approach AP teachers and individually advocate for my students. Sometimes the students have to go in on a probationary basis, but at least they're in."

Vasquez, who entered UCSD with 11 semester units of both AP and honors, notes that Advanced Placement coursework did more than make her transcript shine.

"My AP courses prepared me for success in college," she said. "My AP English class, for example, helped me with inference skills in reading difficult texts. And in AP you're required to think analytically, go beyond the surface."

AVID's increasing work with the College Board will focus on developing more students like Rosalinda and on assisting more AVID teachers like Michelle Mullen in developing their students' confidence and skills to take more challenging courses.

Literacy Initiative

The preparation of students for entry to four-year colleges and universities requires that they develop proficiency on placement exams, which will often determine their access to appropriate college coursework. Our research studies with universities such as San Diego State University indicate that, while AVID students do well on writing placement tests, their weakest area of achievement is reading. Moreover, other standardized tests indicate that reading is a continuing problem for all students. To address the problem, AVID staff development for content teachers and AVID coordinators will assist them in becoming fa-

miliar with the reading portions of standardized tests such as the Stanford 9, as well as the reading strategies necessary for success on the PSAT, ACT, SAT, and university placement tests. In addition, AVID staff development will strengthen pedagogy to enhance reading achievement in mathematics, science, and the social sciences for English only, FEP (fully English proficient students) and English learners.

With the recent development of grade level standards for both the AVID middle school and high school curriculum, it will be a natural progression for AVID staff development to focus on state and district curriculum standards as a means to construct instructional activities to enhance student reading achievement. This approach will also lead to the examination of student work as well as the ongoing collection of student reading achievement data.

Mathematics Initiative

AVID's national data collection indicates that over 80% of AVID's graduates complete a sequence of courses necessary for acceptance to four-year colleges. However, examination of the barriers to success in completing necessary coursework indicates that mathematics is the most consistent impediment to completing the necessary sequence. Moreover, AVID middle level data indicate that, at middle schools which offer a college-preparatory mathematics course such as algebra, less than 50% of AVID's students gain enrollment into those courses.

As a result, AVID will this year focus on creating seamless "vertical teaming" strategies for grades 6-12, emphasizing the inclusion of algebra in the 8th grade and readiness for calculus in the 12th grade. AVID's staff development program will support teachers in implementing these strategies.

Ahmed Heusain, an AVID graduate of Hoover High School in San Diego now attending San Diego State University, also spoke recently to the AVID Policy Board. He noted the importance of mathematics acceleration for non-native speakers of English such as he.

"Mathematics is the universal language," noted Heusain, who emigrated from Ethiopia and began speaking English at age 15. "It is important the students have the chance to take calculus in high school. We should not be satisfied with just the basic course sequence."

After three short years of living in the U.S. and being in AVID, Heusain completed Advanced Placement calculus, chemistry, and physics. He is now an AVID tutor.

DID YOU KNOW?

AVID students are staying in college once they enroll; 89% of those who started are in college two years later, (*Constructing School Success*, 1996)

Schoolwide AVID Curriculum

As ever greater attention is brought to AVID as a catalyst for schoolwide change and the mantra in many schools becomes, "this is good for all students," in order to protect the unique success of the AVID class setting, while at the same time serving all teachers with AVID professional development and all students with AVID curriculum, the AVID Academic Press has developed three volumes of AVID schoolwide curriculum, known as the AVID Path Series.

The "Student Success Path" presents a sequential program to build study skills, test taking ability, critical thinking, motivation, organization, goal setting and time management. The "College Path" provides a sequential approach to college-preparatory study skills, the admissions process, decision making and goal setting, notetaking for college, admission and placement exam preparation, a master education plan, and preparation for a wide variety of tests, including the PLAN, PSAT, ACT, and SAT I and II. The "Tutorial Path" is designed for use by subject area teachers, tutors, and tutor trainers, and covers levels of questions, writing-to-learn, effective collaboration, reading strategies, and mathematics tutoring.

Technology Initiative

With an expected increase to nearly 1000 AVID sites by the beginning of the 1999 school year, the continued success of the AVID Program rests on intense, regular communication among site coordinators and regional directors. Thus, in the coming year, the AVID Center will develop and implement the AVID Intranet, a web-based tool for AVID regional directors that will provide regional, district, and site support, including calendar information, file downloading and uploading capability, and a "smart form," to make data collection easier and more accurate. In addition, the AVID Center will develop and pilot a web-based tool for supporting AVID coordinators and tutors directly with a variety of software tools and systematic communication. This is a cooperative effort with the RAND Corporation, and, if successful, could lead to large scale implementation.

(Continued Next Page ... Course)

Course (Continued from Page 1)

Research Initiative

In recognition that AVID is a research-based program and that program improvement can only be achieved when we know what we do well and not so well, the AVID Center will this year initiate several research efforts. First, working with independent researchers, we will track AVID middle grade students through their high school years to determine the effectiveness of middle grade AVID. We will also measure AVID's effectiveness by measuring student attendance and citizenship as well as the successful completion of four-year requirements. Finally, again working with independent researchers, we will engage in research that measures the quality of AVID implementation as the program continues to "scale up."

These are ambitious initiatives, but it will be through such efforts that the AVID Program will continue to successfully serve thousands of students.



Excerpts From Jay Mathews' *Class Struggle*

- We ought to pay more attention to what happens in all of our high schools. Few of us appreciate how much our secondary school educations define us. Many of the politicians, industry leaders, and celebrities I have met as a journalist over the last thirty years mention their colleges in their official biographies and in interviews. When I began asking a few years ago where they went to high school, they often seem surprised at the question. (Introduction to *Class Struggle*)
- Jaime Escalante's first rule was to let everyone into calculus who wanted to try it. His second rule was to cajole or bully into the course everyone else who had the faintest chance of success. If at the end of a tough year an Escalante student scored a disappointing 1 or 2 on the test, he saluted the student and welcomed him back for another try the next year. Many of his students acquired new confidence in themselves by the mere act of sticking with the course and taking the test. When they took the course a second time, they were more prepared for calculus's odd vocabulary and complex thought structure...In

Mathews (from Page 1)

From a different socio-economic standpoint, in his most recent book *Class Struggle: What's Wrong (and Right) with America's Best Public High Schools* (Times Books), Mathews examines how America's elite public high schools have raised the standards of American education yet have also denied many students a chance to take the most demanding courses. In *Class Struggle*, Mathews chronicles many high schools, but his primary case study is Mamaroneck High School in Westchester County, New York, where he follows a group of students through a three-year period in an affluent environment where educators, parents, and other community members argue over curriculum, tenure, and ability grouping. As he researched and wrote the book, Mathews discovered that he had many misconceptions about why wealthy schools did well, assuming initially that their success could be attributed to the fact that they had the strongest tax support, the best-paid teachers, and smaller classes.

In fact, Mathews learned that elite public high schools were more complex organizations, and, as he says in the introduction to *Class Struggle*, "Many of them suffer from the same kind of expectation gap I had encountered in low-achieving schools. Many students at rich schools, like poor ones, do not do as well as they could because they are not thought capable of doing very well. Teachers, counselors, and administrators try to make them comfortable rather than smart and then blame the sad results on inattentive parents, badly wired brains, cultural isolation, or some other fashionable excuse."

[... The implications for gatekeeping practices reach beyond the affluent schools ...]

Yet, in studying over 75 high schools, Mathews also discovered that many elite schools produced excellent results and turned out well-educated graduates. He hoped to find approaches that could be replicated in any system and have a broad impact for many students no matter what their economic circumstances. At affluent schools, Mathews takes particular note of Advanced Placement programs, which he had seen work miracles at impoverished schools like Jaime Escalante's Garfield High in Los Angeles. As he studied the means by which students are granted and denied access to AP programs, Mathews discovered that even in America's wealthiest educational environments, where there are relatively few significant differences in family backgrounds, students can encounter extreme difficulties in gaining entry to AP classes.

As part of his book, Mathews developed a system for rating schools' performance regarding AP. "The Challenge Index," as he calls it, is a ratio based on the number of Advanced Placement exams taken at the school divided by its graduating seniors. Taking the AP exam is, according to Mathews, more important than passing it. "Some schools don't rank very high on my index," he said, "because they offer sham AP courses, listing the course but not allowing many kids to take the test." *Class Struggle* includes a ranking of 230 U.S. high schools according to the Challenge Index.

The implications for gatekeeping practices reach beyond the affluent schools Mathews studied. "When the best schools in the country cannot resist labeling some of their students as mediocre and denying them the most challenging courses," he says in his introduction to *Class Struggle*, "then all schools, no matter how ambitious and affluent, are in trouble."

(Continued Next Page ... *Mathews*)

1987 two thirds of the 129 Garfield AP calculus students scored 3,4, or 5, despite the fact that the school had more students taking the test than all but four schools in the country. (pp. 284-285).

- ...My estimate, based on interviews at 75 schools, is that at least 20,000 students a year are denied admission to AP courses at elite public schools in the United States. Access to such courses at less ambitious schools appears in many cases to be even more restricted, although there are also not as many students at such schools eager to work that hard. I estimate that each year at least 100,000 American high school students who would have done well in AP are denied the opportunity to take the course or are not encouraged to enroll. (pp. 139-140)
- Several studies have suggested that on average, American students are not performing at the same level as their foreign counterparts, but the reports obscure the variety of the US schools. When studies and contests focus on schools that emphasize achievement, American students jump to the front of the line. (p. 19)

DID YOU KNOW?

Forty-eight percent of the 'untracked' (AVID) students who graduated in the classes of 1990, 1991, and 1992 enrolled in 4-year colleges. This figure compares favorably with the local average of 37% and the national average of 39%. (*Constructing School Success*, 1996)