



AVID Celebrates 20 years in 2000

In 1980, Mary Catherine Swanson set out as one teacher in one classroom in one district to change education for 30 inner city students by fostering their learning and supporting their determination to go to college. Twenty years later, some 1,000 teachers in nearly 900 sites pursue the same dreams and goals with 40,000 middle and high school students throughout 13 states and 13 foreign countries. In 2000, the AVID Center, divisional offices, and regional staff will be saluting the site staff dedicated to the successes of AVID students. Celebrate with us at Summer Institute and throughout the year!

Summer Institutes

International Site
July 10-14
San Diego, CA

Eastern Division Site
July 23-27
Charlotte, North Carolina

Northern California Site
July 30-Aug. 3
Oakland, CA

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An AVID Challenge:

Summer Institute Remarks by Mary Catherine Swanson, 1999
AVID Founder and Executive Director

For a complete text, see the AVID website

These are the Worst of Times, and the Best of Times, for American education. My apologies to Charles Dickens for putting the bad before the good. But if the English master were writing in the penultimate year of the 20th Century, he might choose to tell a Tale of Two Schools, contrasting the horror and the hope in education.

Will the revolution in American culture preserve public education, or destroy it as the backbone of the democracy we have grown to cherish?

We need look no farther than tragedies at schools throughout the country this past year to see the horror that has engulfed the American people's perception of public education. This nightmare of hate, bombs, and blood falls upon the heels of a drumbeat of an unprec-

edented criticism of public schools and teachers. Politicians decry low standardized text scores. Pundits, who have not been in a classroom for 30 years, condemn the committed, dedicated work of teachers like you and me, who give our lives to our students. These are the Worst of Times in the American People's estimation of public schools.

What we don't see in the media and in the public's opinions of our schools are the stirring stories of thousands of positive, hard-working students—your students, our students—who have overcome incredible obstacles to succeed in hundreds of schools across the United States. Peaceful schools. Productive classrooms. The Advancement via the Individual Determination of 40,000 students in 26 states and foreign countries worldwide who are in AVID.

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AVID Graduates: Two Success Stories a Decade Apart

The Fall/Winter '99 ACCESS Interview

When Ana Banos entered the AVID Program at Southwest High School in 1987, she was among the first 300 AVID students in world, and she had no idea that nearly 40,000 students would follow in her footsteps. Her remarkable journey, which would take her to UC Berkeley for a BA in Comparative Literature, to Stanford (MA in Education), and to a career in teaching English and Spanish, began when her parents emigrated from Tijuana, Mexico, when she was eight.

They settled into a quiet neighborhood not far from the US/Mexico border to raise Ana and four other children. "My neighborhood was full of immigrants," she recalled. "I remember being surprised when someone had a mom or dad who spoke English. Some people might think my neighborhood is a little scary or run down, but to me it's perfectly safe. And a lot of first generation Americans are produced there."

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These are the Best of Times for AVID students, 3,000 of whom are now heading to college this fall. How can we balance the horror with the triumph? I wish I had the talent of a Dickens to tell you what is going on in our schools. But I am an English teacher, not a novelist. My characters are real, not made up. Nevertheless, their triumphs are heroic, and their drama is compelling.

In the extremes of the Worst and the Best of Times, children are lost—children from homes where neither parent attended college, who don't know the path to college, whom society does not expect to succeed.

The children in the middle—like the very children who are the victims and the outcasts of many of America's schools—are the focus of AVID, children who are victims of ignorance, prejudice, poverty, and despair. These kids need to be challenged by academic rigor; they need to belong to a group which supports each individual. Students in the middle must not be ignored or our system of public education will fail. If the middle falls, so will America. If the middle rises up, so will the United States in the 21st Century.

When tragedy strikes, people throw up their hands. What can be done?

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ACCESS is provided free to all AVID sites. Yearly subscriptions for other organizations are \$20. Checks should be made payable to the AVID Center.

AVID Facts 1999

- AVID was founded in 1980 by Mary Catherine Swanson at Clairemont High School in the San Diego Unified School District.
- AVID identifies underachieving students in grades 6-12 and prepares them for four-year college entry.
- AVID serves over 40,000 students throughout California, Nevada, Colorado, Texas, Illinois, Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Europe, the Far East, and Central America.
- Since 1990, more than 12,000 students have graduated from AVID Programs.
- More than 90 percent of AVID's graduates enroll in college.
- More than 60 percent of AVID's graduates enroll in four-year colleges.
- The AVID network of schools includes nearly 900 sites
- Some of AVID's awards include the *Salute to Excellence Award for Staff Development and Leadership*, National Council on Inservice Education; the *Charles A. Dana Foundation Award for Pioneering Achievement in Education*; and the *A+ Award* from the U.S. Department of Education.
- AVID has been chosen as a model program for the GEAR UP initiative to assist more families and children with college entry.
- AVID was chosen by eight districts and over 30 middle schools and high schools in Texas as a Comprehensive School Reform effort.
- AVID is a state-funded program in California with 11 regional centers.

But America doesn't have to re-invent the wheel. The answers lie within the people in this room. In the program that brings us together, today, from Georgia to Germany, from California to Kentucky. These are the Best of Times for AVID, which will celebrate its 20th Anniversary in the Year 2000. Our success is based on hard data, documented by research. Yet the story is as gripping as Dickens' fiction.

AVID is now being implemented in more than 900 schools in 26 states and foreign countries. AVID graduates thousands of students each year. An amazing 93 percent of AVID graduates enroll in colleges and universities. AVID's college enrollment rate is 75 percent better than the national average. Two years after enrolling as freshmen, 89 percent of AVID students remain in college. Our retention rate is 56 percent better than the national average. Schools with mature AVID programs are seeing a 48 percent increase in the number of all students completing four-year college entry requirements.

But for those of us who devote our lives to educating the young, it seems that within the big picture we

have almost no effect at all. Report after report reminds us that American dominance of public education is falling in the international community. Take high school graduation rates as a measure of comparison. The graduation rate in the United States is 72 percent. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development declares that this places the United States second to last of the world's 29 industrialized nations, with only Mexico below us. In the 1950s, the US high school graduation rate was 80 percent. This placed America among the highest in the developed world. "Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 1998."

Let's look at recent reading tests. According to the March 1999 report of the National Center for Educational Statistics, 12 percent of fourth graders scored at the basic level. Sixty-two percent of eighth graders scored at the basic level. By 12th grade, 77 percent of high school seniors in the U.S. scored at the basic level.

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At the advanced level, America's failure is nearly catastrophic. Only seven percent of fourth graders, three percent of eighth graders, and six percent of twelfth graders scored at the advanced level in reading.

I could continue by citing one damning educational statistic after another. But you can read them in the newspapers yourselves. I know that you are as frustrated as I that all our hard work seems to make so little difference in the public's perception.

However, AVID educators do have the perspective and the tools to dramatically brighten the educational landscape of their schools—and to slowly but surely transform the lives of students. That is why you gather in school teams at Summer Institute each year.

You have devoted a week of your summer vacation not to improve the lives of just a few students but to improve lives of all students at your school. That is the purpose of AVID. Recent research shows that the most effective AVID schools are those that have been implementing the program for five or more years (Guthrie and Guthrie, 1999). These are the schools in which AVID is having an intense positive effect school-wide. These are the schools in which teachers are in control of the educational process and proud of its outcomes.

What is profoundly unique about this finding?

Research shows that most well meaning programs have an initial first blush when educators are looking for silver bullets. But quickly the program becomes amalgamated into the dominant school culture and is unrecognizable (Mehan, 1996). Innovations proposed from outside the school are absorbed into the culture of the school. After an initial impulse of reform, educators at the school site once again routinely circumvent procedures prescribed by the innovation. (Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihes, 1985).

But just the opposite is true in AVID schools. AVID is not a silver bullet that invades a school with ex-

plosive speed—a destructive force that is doomed to failure within a few short years.

Unfortunately, as I learned building my own family, building the program in a new school, a new district, a new state takes time. Progress is made each year, until a threshold is crossed. In rough terms, the maturation process takes four or five years. According to Guthrie, an independent AVID researcher, we find that schools that have been in AVID less than five years often do not understand how to make AVID a school-wide effort.

So what have schools with mature AVID programs discovered about meeting the needs of all students? How do you leave Summer Institute with the knowledge, the plan, and the manpower to bring these changes about in your schools? And how can we create the effective schools that will change public opinion about the positive power of public education?

First, there is no magic formula or miracle potion that solves all the problems. What teachers and students and communities must be prepared for is hard work, devoted to well-researched and practice-driven educational practices. In simple terms: Hard work. Good practice. Research. Contrary to the stereotype about Southern California where AVID was founded, AVID is not a touchy-feely program, parroting bird-brained maxims, where teachers just wing it. AVID demands substantial investments in time, energy, and a healthy dose of common sense.

And as obvious as it sounds, educational reform must be focused on student outcomes. John Goodlad, often described as the Henry Ford of education, says that AVID is the only secondary school reform program that focuses on students. What a travesty! How much time we must be wasting in our schools if our focus is elsewhere.

Over 33 years, I have seen educational reform movements come and go. Some are benign. Some are beneficial. Some are plain disruptive and dangerous. The reform movement is at it again. Promising the moon. Often delivering frustration, false promises, and lost hope.

If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it.

Editor's note: *Mary Catherine's speech provided many stories of her own struggles and the triumphs of AVID students and teachers. For a complete text see the AVID website.*

But as Charles Dickens wrote in *HARD TIMES*, educating young, impressionable minds is more than just *FACTS, FACTS, FACTS*. Behind every statistical percentage there are a hundred human faces.

The stories of AVID students who have overcome incredible obstacles abound. Those of us who have had the privilege—and the occasional pain—of teaching AVID students know that we have made a difference. The reward of seeing AVID students move forward and the joy of seeing them return from college to say “Thank you for changing my life,” last a lifetime.

The stories of our AVID students have convinced me that Dickens got it right. This is the Best of Times for hundreds of students who feel that they belong and have something to study, work and live for.

This is also, sadly, the Worst of Times for kids who have nowhere to belong, for teachers who are hounded from their classrooms, and for parents who wonder if the public schools are good enough anymore.

We see the conflicting visions, and long we must make a choice—to abandon the public schools or to have the individual determination to make them the backbone of America.

We cannot make revolutionary changes from the top down, but we can continue our quiet revolution from within the heart of our schools. When the center cannot hold, we need to embrace the middle.

Students who fall through the cracks can cause a school-wide catastrophe. Therefore, we cannot do less than make our AVID efforts a school-wide effort at healing and hope. We have the know-how and the rewards. This is why we have all chosen this profession.

Let's not allow the power of AVID to reside with only a few students and teachers within our schools. We need

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to AVIDize all of our colleagues and students. This is our time in history, and if we do not rise to the challenge, our time will be gone. We have the tools, and we must have the will. We have the vision of what our schools can be. This is what AVID is all about. AVID is about having the dream and sharing that vision. It is about developing a plan of how to get there and how to make it happen, and then working together to change all that needs to be changed—step by step, discovery by discovery, victory by victory. AVID is an invitation to dream not the impossible but the possible.

That is why I am so proud to be a part of you—professionals dedicated to our work, proud of our profession, yet humbled by our choice to be teachers; those who will most profoundly change the future. Thank you for allowing me to join you in this grand adventure we all call “AVID.” ▲

A Decade Apart

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Leaving Mexico was a bittersweet experience for Banos, who, in one day said goodbye to her grandmother, her pet dog, and her old neighborhood. “I did not want to come here,” she said, “but in Mexico I went to a pretty run down public school. And at home, we had no running water and an outhouse. My parents say that one Christmas I wrote a letter to Santa asking for running water and an inside toilet. They told me that was part of their motivation for coming to the United States.”

Though neither of her parents went past the eighth grade in school and still speak limited English today, Banos gives them credit for understanding the importance of educational opportunity. “My parents have always been readers, and they’re smart,” she said. “They’re a little different from the average parents in our neighborhood, but not all that different.”

Upon arriving in the U.S., Banos spoke no English and was in bilingual classes through seventh grade. In 10th

grade, she was picked for the newly formed AVID program at Southwest High School, which had an impact on her entire family. All five children are now AVID graduates, and her parents know the essentials for college preparation.

“My mom knows how important a good GPA is and that you need to get through at least trigonometry to be eligible for a good school,” she says. “I think the AVID Program fine-tuned my parents into the way they are today. Before AVID, they weren’t that into school. They told us to do well, but in an abstract way. It made everything more concrete for them. It went from the idea to the action.”

Today, Banos is in her sixth year of teaching, working as an English teacher in the Sweetwater Union High School District. Two brothers and two sisters followed her through the program at Southwest High School, with AVID Coordinator Helene Matthews. Counting Ana Banos, the family has had two UC Berkeley graduates, one UC San Diego graduate, and a UC Santa Cruz graduate. Her youngest brother is now a freshman at UC Berkeley.

Chris Balch attended Ramona High School, located in a rural portion of San Diego County, and graduated in 1997. Throughout high school, he lived with four different families as his own family endured difficult and disruptive times. During those years, his mother drank heavily and spent time in jail. His younger brother was taken into protective custody on more than one occasion. “I was nearly on the streets a few times,” recalls Balch, who has recently reconnected with his father and now lives with him.

He gives the AVID Program and his AVID Coordinator, Carole Cameron, credit for his survival and for his academic success, which included enrollment in Advanced Placement courses in high school. The AVID Program at Ramona enrolled a diverse group of students, including Latino students, as well as white students like Balch, who were the first in their families to attend college, were from low-income families, or met special circumstances. Upon graduation from Ramona High School, Balch en-

rolled at San Diego State University and received an AVID scholarship from the San Diego Scholarship Foundation. Now a junior at San Diego State, he is majoring in finance, with a minor in political science. Balch’s future plans include an MBA program or law school.

With nearly 3,000 AVID graduates in 1999, the program now has over 15,000 alumni throughout the world. As AVID’s 20-year anniversary approaches, ACCESS will feature throughout the year stories of students, parents, and teachers from the past two decades.

Recently, Ana Banos and Chris Balch sat down together to discuss their experiences as AVID students and graduates.

ACCESS: How and why did you enter AVID?

BALCH: Being in eighth grade, I was getting ready for the transition to high school. I had friends in AVID, and I talked to them about my goals, my future. I didn’t know my direction, and they recommended AVID. Carole Cameron, the AVID teacher, did the interviews, and she recommended I enter the program.

BANOS: I went to grades seven through nine at a junior high school through 1987, and my first week in high school someone pulled us out and asked us if we wanted to go to college. I wanted to go, but I had no idea what it would take. I thought that if I were in this AVID class, I would automatically go to college. Initially, it was really an after-school program, seventh period, the first time they had done AVID at the school, but at the semester they turned it over to Mrs. Helene Matthews during the regular school day. I remember that I went home the first day after being offered the program and told my parents that if I did this program, I’d be going to college. They said, “OK.”

ACCESS: Did you have any initial misconceptions about the program?

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