



The Mission of AVID

is to ensure that all students, and most especially students in the middle, capable of completing a college preparatory path will;

- Succeed in rigorous curriculum,
- Enter mainstream activities of the school,
- Increase their enrollment in four-year colleges, and
- Become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society.

2001 Summer Institute Schedule

Northern California Site
July 8-12
Oakland, CA

Southwestern Site
July 15-19
Austin, TX

Eastern Division Site
July 29-August 2
Atlanta, GA

International Site
August 6-10
San Diego, CA

What's Inside

✓ **Insights from Answers in the Toolbox**
Page 4

✓ **Vertical Team Training Preview**
Page 7

✓ **Wall of Fame Excerpt**
Page 10

Equity and Excellence: A Discussion with Mary Catherine Swanson

AVID Founder and Executive Director

AVID continues to promote increased opportunities in rigorous curriculum for all students, especially enrollment in Advanced Placement and pre-AP courses. Mary Catherine Swanson, founder and executive director of the AVID program, recently responded to a series of questions regarding rigor, acceleration, AVID's program components, as well as current and future efforts at increasing student achievement.

ACCESS: As a classroom teacher and subsequently the creator of AVID, how did you promote both excellence and equity?

SWANSON: First of all, AVID really is all about acceleration rather than remediation because most remediation lies in teaching isolated skills. When I first started AVID and took students into the

class who were on average two years below grade level in their academic skills—and frankly quite a few were below that—I really thought that I was going to teach a skills-based curriculum as well as accelerate them into rigorous classes. The truth was that time didn't allow for that. What happened was the students took notes in all of their academic classes and brought those notes to the AVID class. The tutors and I discovered that the tutoring sessions for the academic classes required all of our time. I also learned that once the students are given the reason to master a skill, they will learn that skill and be able to apply it. To learn the skill without a reason rarely works. As a personal example, I took statistics when I got my master's degree, and when I took

Continued on page 2

Dr. Clifford Adelman: Some Answers Regarding College Completion

With the publication of "Answers in the Toolbox: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment," educators, researchers, journalists, and even students have a definitive study regarding the factors affecting college graduation—not just enrollment in college, not just success through the second year in college, but the actual and final attainment of a college degree. The author of the 124 page monograph, Dr. Clifford Adelman, a senior research analyst with

the U.S. Department of Education, has studied issues related to K-12 student achievement and success in college since 1979, when he joined the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). Before that, Adelman taught at Yale University and the City College of New York, and served as associate dean at William Paterson College in New Jersey. In 1983, Adelman managed higher

Continued on page 4

the course I understood it perfectly and I got an 'A' in it. Ask me a week later to apply any of it and I could not do it. The reason for that was I had no need to apply it. So, it was an isolated skill that I learned and forgot immediately. In AVID, we know that if students learn to read for a purpose or if they learn to do mathematics for a purpose, they can be stimulated by the coursework where they have to apply the skill. In turn, they will learn the skill much more quickly and much more thoroughly. And that's the basis of AVID.

ACCESS: AVID operates on the premise that schools and classrooms can function at a rigorous level while still promoting equity. What are the program components that help do this?

SWANSON: In AVID, it's primarily writing, inquiry, and collaboration, which are carried out in our very structured tutorial groups and in curriculum lessons. One of the keys to it is training both teachers and tutors to use inquiry very deftly and to ask very probing questions of students regarding course content. When students are challenged with questions they really have to ponder and are asked to apply concepts that they have learned, they can

ACCESS is published quarterly by the AVID Center located at 5353 Mission Center Rd., Suite 222 San Diego, CA 92108

Phone: (619) 682-5050
FAX: (619) 682-5060
Website: www.avidcenter.org
Email: avidinfo@avidcenter.org
Editor: Freda Statom
Founder and Director:
Mary Catherine Swanson

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

Did You Know...

- **AVID is a model program for two federal initiatives: Gear Up (access to low income families and students to a college preparatory path); America Counts (nationwide mathematics initiative).**
- **AVID has committed to increasing AVID student enrollment in high level honors and Advanced Placement courses by working closely with the National College Board and the Western Regional College Board office on teacher training and access issues.**
- **As more K-12 schools incorporate the use of college tutors, AVID provides a model for tutor training and curriculum.**

conquer very difficult curriculum. When they are in a collaborative group focusing deeply on material and they hear one another's ideas, it sparks more and more understanding of course content. But it has to be more than just discussion, it also has to be a constant responsibility for that discussion. So, in AVID, we have students write in their own words their understanding about difficult course concepts, and until they can do that so it's perfectly clear, we keep going over those concepts. It's as if you have gone to a movie that had some depth to it and after the movie go out to dinner with a group of friends who saw that movie and all of you discuss the movie during dinner. You understand so much more about it from virtue of that discussion than if you saw that movie and just went home and never discussed it at all. That applies to all learning; we have to receive the initial input, but then the discussion, if the questions are really good questions, drives us much more deeply. For students who have not previously been in rigorous curriculum, it isn't so difficult to get them into the rigorous course concepts; the greater difficulty is for the teachers to make them comfortable with finding ways to express that knowledge because students tend to feel really intimidated by other students who are very facile at expressing themselves.

Teachers need pedagogy, which draws students out in a comfortable way. For example, having students role-play characters within novels so that they can speak in the voice of the character is a very comfortable thing for them to do and they can show their depth of knowledge that way. As they are developing writing skills, sometimes that's a more difficult way to express depth of ideas, because the mechanics of the writing may not be correct. But if teachers forget the mechanics when they read the paper, but read the paper aloud for what it says, you know that there was a lot of insight in it and it's a struggling writer who has meaning clouded by mechanical problems. Mechanics are one of the easiest things to teach; that's not hard. What's difficult to teach is depth of knowledge.

It's really through inquiry and constant collaboration that we are able to take students who haven't been in challenging courses and push them into rigor and get them thinking in those terms. An interesting piece of research is that students who do really well in school mix their social lives and academic lives. An example of this is when academically aware kids socialize and are hanging out at somebody's house playing ping-pong or something, the conversation while they are doing that

Continued on page 3

Swanson

from page 2

activity very often deals with school and academics. They don't see a separation. My AVID students would regularly throw a football around after school but when you heard the conversation that was going on while they were throwing the football, it was academic conversation. They were mixing social activity with academic activity in their lives. Well, that's something that AVID forces because it forces the collaborative groups. So you don't isolate home, school, and social activities. The more academic conversation that goes on, the more students learn.

ACCESS: Why do you think some schools and school systems struggle so much with issues of equity and excellence?

SWANSON: I think it's a huge access issue. What happens is perception, and it starts from the moment kids enter school. Boys are not as developed as girls in the early years, so they can't sit still as long and they can't concentrate as long. Their reading skills probably do not develop as quickly as girls' reading skills do, generally. Their large motor skills are more developed than girls' but their fine motor skills are

not, so they can't write as well in the early grades. All of those are skills which kids need to do well in school; they are things that teachers perceive they want students to do. So, for example, when I entered my own son in school, I remember the tests they gave him. One of them was to cross a very narrow bridge set just off the floor without falling off. Well, boys can do that very well because their large muscle coordination is really good. Then they asked him to cut a piece of paper with scissors and he couldn't do that at all. All he did was bend the paper. So, our expectations of what kids should be able to do when they enter school means that girls are going to succeed at an earlier age than boys do.

Now couple gender issues with the fact that many kids come into school not knowing what the school setting is supposed to be like. Parents who understand the system know to teach their children that they are supposed to sit still in school and to show interest. Yet some parents don't even know to teach these things; some kids have never been read to by their parents, so they don't understand the academic culture. Thus, the stereotypes start early on. If kids don't speak the language really well or they don't know how to act in school, the stereotypes will continue. By the

time we get the kids in high school or middle school, they are convinced that they may not be as smart as other kids who come from more privileged backgrounds. Teachers have observed these differences and made assumptions about who can and who can't achieve early on and that's why we struggle with it. One of the beauties of AVID is that kids, whom teachers stereotypically believe cannot succeed, do succeed and they do it through hard work. It's the AVID structure and the fact that they do their homework, they are willing to take notes, and they are willing to get involved in school and all of a sudden they start to succeed. One of the events I enjoy so much is we have huge AVID write-off competitions each year and we give awards to kids grades 7-12 for having written really good essays. And the kids come in with their parents, teachers, and principals and they always try to look so cool and pretend this isn't really important to them. Then as you call their names and you see them walk down the aisle towards the stage, you see the smiles. They can't control it and as they cross the stage, the smile just grows and grows. They go back to their seats and when they leave the place, their jeans are pulled back down and their hair is pulled back up and they act like

Continued on page 6

2001 AVID National Professional Development Calendar

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
March 6-9	RDC I, Modules 1-3 ED Cohort #4	Atlanta, GA
March 13-16	RDC I, Modules 1-3 CA-WD Cohort #5	San Diego, CA
March 22-23	Awareness Workshop	San Diego, CA
March 27-30	RDC II, Modules 9-10 CA-WD Cohort #2	San Diego, CA
April 3-6	RDC II, Modules 9-10 ED Cohort #2	Atlanta, GA
July 8-12	Northern California Summer Institute	Oakland, CA
July 15-19	Texas Summer Institute	Austin, TX
July 29-August 2	Eastern Division Summer Institute	Atlanta, GA
August 6-10	AVID National Summer Institute	San Diego, CA
September 25-28	RDC I, Modules 1-3 ED Cohort #6	San Diego, CA
October 16-19	RDC II, Modules 6-8 ED Cohort #4	San Diego, CA

Swanson

from page 3

they act on the street. But for an academic moment of pride they don't act that way. All of us who are teachers have had kids enroll in school and the minute we look at them we make the assumption that kid won't ever want to be studious. And we base it on how they are dressed and how they act. The truth is they can achieve and we have to find ways to get at that.

ACCESS: It seems that in recent years you have increased AVID's focus on rigor. Why is that?

SWANSON: College seats are becoming less plentiful and the admission requirements for state and private university systems have increased. Therefore, it is our responsibility to increase academic rigor among our students at the high school level. To encourage this, we have added to our certification criteria a measurement of how many AP courses AVID students take during their high school careers. We need to be very sensitive to the social supports that AVID promotes, but if we don't couple it with rigor, it's all for nothing. All we will have done is make kids feel good in school, but they didn't learn anything. When we received research on middle level AVID programs a couple of years ago, the researchers noted that we needed to focus on academics at the middle grades. They felt we were not pushing academics as much as we should have. With that in mind, we changed our certification criteria to focus on algebra in eighth grade. We really looked at our data collection and our certification process to focus more on rigorous opportunities at the middle level.

AVID has always been about both rigor and support. I think that many of us involved in AVID became very sensitive to the fact that every time we poll AVID students about what is most important to them within AVID, they don't tell us it's the rigor, they tell us it's a significant adult within the school set-

ting. They point to a 'family atmosphere' within the AVID classroom. The kids tend to recognize more the social structure and the social scaffolding, as AVID researcher Hugh Mehan calls it, that they receive in AVID. The social structure we provide in AVID is vital, but students must have rigor or our support is wasted.

ACCESS: What are some of the indicators of progress or hopeful signs that you've observed for AVID schools and students in terms of opportunities for rigor?

SWANSON: What's happening on a national scale is that new accountability systems are looking at academic rigor as an indicator of whether schools are doing well or not. A perfect example is the state of Texas, where schools receive their ranking based in part on how many students and which students take AP classes and AP tests. Thus, a state like Texas is very interested in AVID because it allows them to prepare students who typically would not take AP courses to be able to take them. In California, the statewide AP Challenge Grant requires schools to provide a minimum of four AP courses and part of the approach is to open access. Once again, AVID is a partner there in preparing students to take AP courses. In North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system, Dr. Eric Smith, the superintendent, has increased roughly fifty percent the number of students taking AP courses and he uses AVID as the avenue to be able to do that. More and more states are increasing accountability and rigor. I notice that one of President Bush's new proposals in his education plan is that diverse students must be given opportunities to succeed in rigorous courses.

ACCESS: What are your expectations for AVID programs worldwide in the next few years as far as rigor? And what are some the projects and efforts that would support those expectations?

SWANSON: Our instruction in the subject areas at Summer Institutes this year is going to be significantly different from what it has been in the past.

We have been working throughout this year on identifying course concepts, which need to be taught grades 7-12 in the various subject areas in order to allow a student to succeed in AP courses. In Institutes this summer, we'll be teaching content area teachers in vertical teams grades 7-12 what these course concepts are and helping them to find the concepts within their own texts as well as applying the AVID pedagogy for helping students to succeed. I think it is probably a novel idea that a seventh grade teacher has a responsibility to prepare kids for eleventh grade AP courses. But, indeed, this needs to occur, and we're leading the way. The hope is that this will strengthen AVID courses and schools worldwide. We're also beginning work on specific course content, not just pedagogy but rather specific coursework with guides for teachers. We're hoping to roll some of this work out in fall 2001, including guides on how to teach Shakespeare, for example, grades 7-12, with several Shakespearean plays included. It's really based on good questioning, deep inquiry, done collaboratively and then really strong writing pieces, which follow the inquiry. We're going to do that with each of the subject areas and we're beginning with English and history. We have several grant proposals being studied, so we can do this across the board, giving us very specific support materials for teachers on how to teach this very rigorous curriculum. We are developing a new tutoring module specifically for AP coursework. Another piece that we have been working on that we hope to carry out within the next year or so are some on-line tutorial pieces that would help teachers, particularly those who have never taught AP before. Of course, the tutorials would also be geared towards students, especially those who have never been enrolled in AP before. The on-line tutorials will be subject specific and so far we've been working on materials for AP U.S. History and AP English Literature. AVID is really looking to the future as far as how we can provide teachers and students all the support material using proven methodologies to support the most rigorous curriculum in the schools.

