

Awakening the Nation

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2001 was a wake-up call for AVID teachers and schools everywhere. While we were shocked and horrified regarding the events of September 11, we were not ignorant of the underlying causes of why some people become suicide bombers and killers of thousands of innocent people and others become pillars of communities who are knowingly prepared to give their lives to save others. Indeed, AVID teachers have for the past two decades dedicated themselves to educating all students well to overcome the perverse effects of malingering poverty which separate classes of people within countries and align one country against another.

Once again AVID teachers lead the nation with their knowledge and conviction, and they understand that their mission is ever more important in the 21st Century.

A few months ago “Raising our Sights: No High School Senior Left Behind,” released by the National Commission on the Senior Year, received much publicity based on its assertion that “students need at least two years of postsecondary education in order to meet the financial demands of raising a family in the 21st Century.” While this finding is not news to those in AVID, it is startling to learn that “only 38 percent of the teachers consider helping students prepare for college to be ‘very important.’” The researchers also

found that only “43 percent of our nation's high school students are on a rigorous college preparatory track.”

As a nation are we trying to sabotage ourselves and the future of our students? Surely if two years of postsecondary education is required to live a middle class existence in the United States and only 43 percent of our students will have access to that preparation, then we are doomed to become an ever increasingly classed society.

Strong public education is the foundation of our nation's future as a fair and equitable society. We can no longer view postsecondary education as optional for graduating seniors—it must be a goal for all students. School districts need to adopt a

rigorous college preparatory curriculum as the default course of study in middle and high school. AVID has demonstrated that by supporting students, honors and advanced placement classes can be inclusive rather than exclusive, bettering entire schools in the process. Secondary and postsecondary institutions must align graduation requirements with entrance expectations, and use the freshman year of college as a continuation of learning rather than as a mechanism for weeding out those who will no longer be allowed to pursue the dream of an American middle class life.

Yet none of this will be meaningful without that most basic component of education: teachers who believe that all their students are capable of learning. The high expectations AVID teachers have of their students inspire those students to have high expectations of themselves. This gives them the strength to achieve higher goals than they ever believed possible. These flourishing students serve as role models for their peers. Seeing these students rise above themselves motivates AVID teachers to continue to inspire every child who walks through their classroom doors.

For two decades, AVID teachers have been leaders on school campuses, creating teams of teachers with the goal of bridging the divide between education and ignorance, between wealth and poverty. Together, teacher by teacher, we will help the other 62% of our peers across the nation realize that preparing students for college is not only “very important,” it is our highest calling as educators in the 21st Century.