

Dr. Debra Duvall:

Keeping AVID at the Forefront in Arizona's Largest District



As the superintendent of Mesa Public Schools, Debra Duvall has responsibility for 74,500 students and 76 schools. In 1999, she also brought AVID to the state of Arizona, where it is gaining increasing interest because of the state's accountability system and because of AVID's success in Mesa. A former classroom teacher in California and Arizona, Duvall was also an administrator in Virginia and North Carolina, where she developed a keen eye for programs to increase opportunities for all students. Recently, she responded to questions about AVID's role in Mesa, where the program currently serves Westwood High School, Kino Junior High School, Powell Junior High School, and Carson Junior High School.

Didn't AVID come to Mesa in an unusual fashion?

You could certainly say that. One of Mary Catherine Swanson's early AVID students, now in his thirties, approached our district and shared with us his experiences as an AVID student. Since he now had a son about to enter one of our junior high schools, he was interested in whether or not we could offer AVID. After listening to his story, I contacted the AVID Center, visited some AVID sites and talked with AVID principals. In 1999, we implemented the AVID program.

Why is AVID a good fit for your district and for the state?

We believe that AVID serves a group of students who are typically underserved on a number of our campuses. It provides the academic rigor, motivation, and resources necessary to make college attendance possible for them.

Why does AVID appeal to you, personally and professionally?

AVID relies on the competence and compassion of people. It is



Dr. Debra Duvall will be a featured panelist at the AVID/ College Board National Forum, “Answering the Call,” April 3 and 4 in San Francisco.

not simply a program or a set of materials. It is a process, philosophy, and an attitude that provides a strong base for teaching all students well. Success in school is a ticket to success in society. AVID provides support to young people to help insure their success in school. This success, coupled with continuing support, provides the motivation for college education. Schools control the conditions for success. AVID helps teachers and students overcome some negative influences. Teachers and students become more confident and, in turn, raise their expectations.

What impact have you observed so far for AVID students, families, and staff in Mesa?

First of all, AVID has made a significant difference in the AIMS Writing test (Arizona’s state accountability test), Stanford 9 Reading, Math, and Language, and our spring 2002 Math CRT exams. We elaborated on this through our research and evaluation team’s AVID Program Effectiveness report, in October 2002. AVID has also increased the number of our students who are enrolled in rigorous courses,

and has significantly increased parent participation in our AVID schools. For example, Powell Junior High School has developed a program called Journey to the Stars, through which parents are invited to learn more about what and how their children learn in AVID, through a formal program featuring AVID students’ portfolios.

Also, at Westwood High School, we have seen an increase in the number of students from the academic middle who are being accepted into colleges and universities. Some other benefits include many more students using the Cornell notetaking process and keeping organized binders. Finally, an unexpected bonus is that about half of our AVID tutors who have come to us as non-education majors have now decided to become teachers. That is exciting.

What does the future hold for AVID in Mesa Public Schools?

We will continue to phase AVID in at all four of our campuses, making sure we add an elective course at each grade level. We also intend to bring AVID to at least one other junior high school by the fall of 2004. 🍀

GEAR UP continued from page 7

students about various educational and career opportunities.

Recent successes in AVID schools in the Rio Grande Valley include a 100% college enrollment rate for the 2002 AVID graduates. Many of the AVID students received scholarships – one even received the prestigious Horacio Alger scholarship and is enrolled in the engineering program at UTPA. Even more remarkable are the numbers of AVID students who are recent immigrants, yet are succeeding in Advanced Placement coursework and are taking Advanced Placement tests. One hundred percent of the AVID students who took the AP Spanish language test passed. In addition, 44% of all the AVID students in the Rio Grande Valley are on track to graduate on the Distinguished Achievement Graduation Plan – the highest plan in Texas! The other 56% are on track to graduate on the Recommended Plan, which also provides students with the curriculum necessary to enter four-year colleges.

Currently, over 500 students are served by AVID programs in the Rio Grande Valley, and it is anticipated that the number of AVID students will continue to grow as programs develop and more schools choose to implement AVID. Since both GEAR UP and AVID are still in their early stages of development, and the results of these two initiatives have proven to be promising, the future looks bright for students in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. 🍀