

Falls Church High School AVID Program Journey

We restarted our program in 2001 with one class of sixteen students, comprising of 9th, 10th, and 11th graders. Prior to 2001 AVID at FCHS was a holding class for wayward students. 2001 was a challenge is an understatement. We did make it through the year, thanks to the support of four core teachers and no tutors. We did see success and enough promise to continue the program. Starting in December of 2001, we made the decision to follow the model. If you do not follow the AVID model, you may witness some success however, you will not be building a program that will develop and mature into a college preparatory program. One of the critical elements is the Site Team. You, coordinator, cannot build a strong program alone. You need to have the support of your administrators, teachers, and staff. You need to start with a core group of teachers who have the same goals as you, support the student in making their dream of going to college a reality. You must share the need of the core teacher in your program but more importantly, you must also demonstrate what AVID is able to do for their student in their class. In our first year we only had five teachers however, they were dedicated to the ideologies of AVID. During the spring of the first year we went recruiting other teachers. We interviewed prospective teachers just as we do prospective AVID students. It is critical that your Site Team support the AVID strategies in their classroom. Our second year we had twelve teachers, one administrator and two tutors on our team, we screened and interviewed students for one 9th and one 10th grade section, forty students. From there, each year we added an additional section of AVID until we had four sections, one at each grade level. As we expanded the elective classes we also recruited additional teachers and tutors; we trained with them each year in Atlanta's Summer Institute. Today that same process continues; our program renews itself each year. We continue to expand, add additional students and team teachers and tutors. We lose tutors and teachers, for various reasons, each year. It is imperative that we continue to add new staff with new ideas that support the renewal of our program.

Our site team this year is composed of energetic AVID administrators and core subject teachers in the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. We are excited about the upcoming academic year and proud to celebrate with you as the only AVID National Demonstration Site high school on the east coast.

Our program now consists of thirty-four teachers and staff with two AVID elective sections per grade, totaling 184 students. We are honored to have several of our AVID parents working with Ms. Susanna Emerson as AVID liaisons this year. They include: Mrs. Lotta Moschopoulos, Mrs. Jean Welch, and Mrs. Eugenia Alderete. Also, our own FCHS Parent Liaison, Mrs. Maria Del Carmen Mateus, will be working closely with our families. With parent support, we look forward to helping each student reach his/her goal of entering the four-year college of his/her choice. Our parents are a very important part of our team; only together, as a team, can we ensure that our students will be prepared to fulfill their unique potential.

Critical also is building a bond based on trust with our students. We are asking a lot of the young folks we want to help, as well as of the teachers we want to support our program. First we are talking a student in the middle academically to enroll into a rigorous college preparatory curriculum. To enroll into AVID in the 9th grade our students also enroll in algebra, a foreign language, and at least on Honors core class. Not only are we asking this of them but we are also asking them to give up their only elective to take AVID. If they continue to stay with us, in the 10th grade we encourage them continue with that curriculum and take their first Advanced Placement (AP). In the 11th grade, we encourage enrollment in two AP classes. In the 12th, our AVID take either 3 AP classes or two AP classes and a Dual Enrollment class with the community college here on campus. Why would a student want to put themselves into such a rigorous curriculum, perhaps it has something to do with the ninety-five percent of our AVID graduates go on into four year colleges and universities. It is not enough that our AVID students gain access into these prestigious colleges but that they are successful once there. We track our

graduates throughout their college career. To date, eighty percent of our graduates are still in college and our first class will graduate college this year. We built a bond with our students that we would be there to support them in their travels of rigorous academia. We have four AVID tutors who support our students in all core classes from algebra one to calculus B/C, from biology to AP Physics, from English 9 to college English 111 & 112.

Our success did not come easily, it took time but more importantly, it was a bond built on trust. Our students learned that our team was here for them, they could come to us for help knowing they would never be turned away. This program is an undertaking that cannot be done in the traditional school day. It is one that demands time and patience from our students and our team. Our students know they can come for help in the morning before school and in the evenings after school.

We are fortunate to have four community partners serve with us in our common goal, "allow each of our students reach their unique potential". A critical element in our success is understanding that students wanting to do well and doing well in their classes is not enough to get them through college. Many of our students are minorities and from single parent, low-income families. We make sure our students are enrolled in rigorous curriculums, so that they are competitive candidates for the top colleges and successful, once there. With our students enrolled in the higher-level, core curriculum classes Honors and Advanced Placement there is and has been a need for additional support outside the classroom. Through one of our community partners, Raytheon, we were able to provide our students with that much-needed support in an after school tutoring program. Raytheon engineers volunteer their time to provide individualized tutoring for our students after school. A group of six Raytheon engineers, two per day, come Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays to work directly with our students.

Mike Berzonsky, AVID Core Member (History):

To me, AVID in a school is about two things -- strategies, and communication. If I were a beginning teacher, the strategies that AVID encourages would help me become a better teacher. Looking at *The Write Path* and thinking about WIC-R would enhance my professional development. However, I'm an experienced teacher and without trying to come across as smug, already know that information. The key in being with AVID is the communication that it inspires. I know that if I have a problem with a student, I can let that student's AVID teacher (or the AVID program coordinator) know about it, and almost invariably the problem is resolved. AVID also encourages communication between teachers -- sometimes about specific students, and sometimes for broader educational goals. It also encourages teachers to communicate with their students, often students they had in the past in addition to their current students. To me, communication is a true key to academic success, and AVID is a vehicle that promotes that success.

Some data that validates our program, in 2005 our students were taking .5 Advanced Placement classes, today 1.7. In 2005 our average SAT score was 970, today 1074, well ahead of the national average of 1032. In 2005, we graduated our first senior class of 22, 18 of those went to four year college and 4 to community college. In 2008 we graduated 40 AVID seniors, 38 went to four year universities and 2 to community college. This year we have 42 seniors and fully expect 100 percent to attend college.

Thank you for the opportunity of becoming a National Demonstration Site, it has served us well and we are honored to serve.

Respectfully,

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