



Application to Submit a Case Study:
(Pleasant Valley Middle School, Wichita, Kansas)
An AVID National Demonstration School

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Our Journey to School wide AVID:

Pleasant Valley Middle School
Wichita, Kansas

Can you believe five new administrators in the last seven years and the school is an AVID National Demonstration Site? How did this happen?

Seven years ago a new administrator, Denise Wren, came to Pleasant Valley Middle School. She had learned of the AVID program at North High School and thought it would be a good program for Pleasant Valley. Pleasant Valley Middle School is located in Wichita, Kansas; has an enrollment of 600 students, 87% of which live at or below the poverty level, 70% of whom belong to a minority group, and 35% of whom qualify for ESOL services. Seven years ago, Pleasant Valley had a reputation for high levels of violence, high numbers of gang members, and low state test scores. The AVID program could be the catalyst for change needed at the school.

Our first step was to send seven enthusiastic teachers to AVID Summer Institute. Summer Institute was successful in two ways, (1) the teachers learned the AVID strategies and became invested in the program, and (2) bonded into a group with a single vision, determined to make this program work. This core group then moved to the next step- bring AVID to the school, choose a class, and a teacher/counselor. The new site team shared some of the strategies they had learned. The 60 minute AVID video was shown to the staff at a meeting. The staff was very reluctant to “buy in” to the program. They often expressed, “a program for a small group of kids, something new...heard this before.” The site team kept promoting AVID with a positive outlook. The site team set out to choose the first class. First, 8th grade teachers were asked for recommendations of students, and then personal invitations were mailed home. Keeping the recruitment personal, the principal talked to each student individually, and those who were interested, applied. Each applicant was interviewed by two

site team members. Our planning year ended with 16 new students and a very enthusiastic teacher/coordinator, Lura Jo Atherly, ready to begin a new chapter in Pleasant Valley history.

Our second year of AVID started off with huge changes. These critical changes were our principal left us to go to North High School, our AVID teacher/coordinator decides to be an administrator and leaves, and one of our site team members, Melissa Dimeo, becomes the AVID District Director and leaves us as well. However, through it all, our site team remained strong and positive advocates for the program. The new principal, Antwan Wilson, went to Summer Institute and fell in love with the AVID program. His vision was utilizing AVID as a catalyst for school wide change, sending more teachers to Summer Institute and experienced site team members to become trainer of trainers. Our second year also saw huge growth within the program itself.

As we increased our AVID enrollment from 2 classes to 4, the vision of school wide AVID emerged. Every student at Pleasant Valley was now using a 3" binder and Cornell notes were required by all teachers. The site team taught AVID strategies at monthly staff meetings, and the staff was required to use them. Two of the site team members stepped up and became the AVID teachers. Mary Honeck taught 2 8th grade classes, and Michelle Simmer taught 2 7th grade classes as well as being the coordinator. As the size of the program grew, our recruitment needed some adjustments as well. Keeping it personal, each recommended student received a personal letter, however instead of the principal talking to each student individually, now the principal talked to the applicants as a group in the auditorium. Recruitment was going well until an ESOL newcomer (new to our country) was recommended for AVID.

Diego had just moved from Mexico a year before with no English ability. Teachers had seen that Diego had the determination to be successful. During the AVID interview, Diego and his family was told that if accepted into AVID, he would be removed from the ESOL class and put in Advanced Language Arts. Diego was placed into AVID and with the support of his family removed from the ESOL program. However, there was a snag. The ESOL teacher did not want to release him, reasoning, "he is such a good student, I don't want to let him go." Diego was determined to succeed and graduated from Pleasant Valley with a 3.4. Currently, Diego is an AVID Senior at North High, and has applied for Harvard University.

Principal Wilson ruled the school with his strong presence, demanding the use of AVID strategies and higher order thinking skills. After two years, Wilson wanted to move to a high school; he found one in Denver and left us...once again with a new principal.

Our fourth year brought a new administrator, Charles Wakefield, with limited knowledge of AVID. The 8th grade AVID teacher decided to move to ESOL, but remained a positive leader on the site team. Michelle Simmer remained as the AVID coordinator and now teaching all four of the AVID classes. Our enrollment in our AVID classes grew to full capacity and another adjustment to recruitment came when students applied without teacher recommendations. This change was brought on by one student, Mikayla, a special ed. 6th grade student.

When she was a 3rd grader, Mikayla and her family were poisoned with carbon monoxide, they were all hospitalized, but tragically Mikayla suffered the most. Her brain was damaged from the poisoning; struggling with reading, school was a challenge every day. Mikayla insisted on getting an AVID application. Her single and very supportive mother attended an informational meeting. Mikayla was selected for AVID and removed from her special ed. classes. With her mother's support, individual determination, and AVID, Mikayla has been successful. In all of the most challenging classes at Pleasant Valley Middle School,

Mikayla graduated from Pleasant Valley with a 4.0 and is currently in AVID at North High School. Her ultimate goal is to be a lawyer, and we believe she will.

Wakefield continued with the AVID school wide program- binder, Cornell notes and strategies used in every class. New members were added to the site team, excited and ready to support the program. A new district staff development position, learning coach, was utilized at Pleasant Valley to further AVID strategies. Now during our staff development time, once a week, the learning coach teaches AVID strategies. By this time, most of the staff has embraced AVID because we are starting to see the affects. In the meantime, Wakefield leaves us and a new administrator, Michael Archibeque, steps in.

Archibeque, a first year principal, was enthusiastic about what he had learned with the AVID program and its effects on Pleasant Valley Middle School. Both administrators, Wakefield and Archibeque, encouraged the site team to apply for Demonstration status. Shortly after becoming a demo site, Pleasant Valley Middle School received bad news... Archibeque was called into active service, and off he went to Kuwait. The vice principal, Ron Vansickle, moved up to principal and with continuous support of the program and envisioned expanding the program even more. This year we are expanding AVID into 6th grade at semester and continuing to refine our AVID school wide program.

What has kept our program solid amidst adversity? A strong site team and low staff turnover. Over the years, the staff has seen our school climate change, state test scores improve, and a college-going atmosphere blossomed. In the classrooms and in the halls, college is everywhere. Our first AVID graduating class at North High netted \$1.4 million in scholarship money, and one of our students was a recipient of the Gates and Dell scholarships. The site team has been the core of the program, which has grown from 16 to 140 students presently, and it is strong and viable.

Building a successful AVID program begins with confidence in the potential of the program, courage to, institute a change, and following these few simple words of advice. First, build a strong, dedicated, hard working site team; they are the muscle that keeps the program going in difficult times. Then, start small and take small steps; change doesn't happen overnight. Choose an AVID elective teacher that truly cares and can connect to the students; they need him/her. Finally, believe that AVID can completely change a school.

What a difference AVID has made at Pleasant Valley Middle School! No longer is Pleasant Valley seen as a low achieving school, but as a top middle school in Wichita, a leader. Now we have so many students that want to come to our school, we have to turn special transfers away. Teachers want to be here now more than ever, and it is not unusual to have many applicants for a single position. Families flock to Pleasant Valley Middle School for family nights, with a feeling of belonging come see our family, it is a great place to be.