

# Our Journey to School Wide AVID: Wichita North High School Wichita, KS

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An AVID National Demonstration School

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Prior to the implementation of the AVID program, many generalizations could have applied to the “old” Wichita North. The age old Hollywood stereotypes of gang violence, a low performing minority student population, underachieving, and non-graduating senior classes all would fit. Yet, somewhere along the line, tiny tendrils of smoke could be seen in the air, as the AVID program began to ignite an eight-year wildfire within the educational walls of North High. AVID has been a strong component in burning a college-going culture into our high school. Currently, North has an enrollment of over 1800 students, 305 are enrolled in an AVID elective class. Our school wide implementation is most evident in two areas. First staff training in AVID methodologies is school wide. We have a strong site team that includes 11 AVID elective teachers, who have one AVID class and loop with those students for four years. The AVID teachers also teach four other classes in their content areas, which means that we have 44 classes taught by highly-trained AVID teachers. Also, every staff member receives Path training in their first semester. As part of the professional development plan at North, we offer an AVID Awareness session for teachers new to our building. Since most teachers will have one or more AVID students in their classes, we want them to understand the philosophy of the program. At one of our fall in-services, our district offers Path training in the core classes along with strands on Counseling, ELL, Socratic Seminar and Strategies for Success. We send all new-to-North staff members to training. Currently, we have 18 who will be trained in November, which will then mean that, once again, 100% of our staff will be trained in AVID methodologies. The second area of evidence is with our tutoring program. The philosophy of AVID has allowed us to make a tremendous growth in tutoring of all students. With the support of intervention funding, North is able to provide tutoring in various situations. Any student has the option of receiving tutoring support during lunch, before school, after school and during seminar time. Tutors also go into classrooms to assist teachers with group activities or work with students who have been absent. We provide assistance to students at In-School Suspension and our Extended School Year program. Last year 709 North High students were able to attend 5,813 sessions of tutoring outside of the AVID classrooms. North High students participate in school wide AVID growth by peer tutoring during our seminar time. With their AVID methodology training, they assist other students on an individual or small group basis. Our Student Coaches’ training has expanded to include relevant AVID methodologies in addition to Cognitive Coaching skills for the coaches to use in their coaching classrooms.

In the summer of 2001, the staff and leadership at Wichita High School North began to stir up the embers of change that had until then lain smothered by the complacency of the status quo. The 48% graduation rate, the sad fact that only one in three students could pass a state math or reading assessment, and a paltry offering of six Advanced Placement sections had reduced the school’s standing to the bottom of the state’s largest school district. The first flame to flare up was the decision to adopt the AVID program at the site. This flame quickly spread via a strong interdisciplinary AVID site team of seven. The site began with a hasty but impassioned selection of “The 30”; these students would provide the fuel that would be our first AVID class. Today that number has increased ten-fold to a total population of 305 AVID students at the site.

As the flames of change began to lap at the foundations of the “Old School” complacency; small pockets within the institution remained resistant to take fire. The AVID program had to battle through racial and economic stereotypes to prove itself and its students capable of taking the rigorous, and until now mostly isolated, college preparatory classes. These AP classes were made up of only 8% minority students in 2001 and some of their instructors proved difficult to change. With the AVID program flaring up so quickly and the open access to AP classes, the “old guard” had to adapt or they would quickly burn out. Today the school offers 22 different sections of AP classes to 442 students, 53% of whom fall into minority subgroups. Today, the AVID program has provided both the fuel and the flame to help the “New” Wichita High School North arise from those once dormant ashes of mediocrity. It has proven to be the catalyst to almost double the graduation rate to nearly 80%. It has burned down many of the educational and cultural barriers that our large Hispanic population has had to fight against. In the eight years that the AVID program has been at North, the Hispanic population has increased its graduation rate from 30% for its males and 44% for its females to 73% and 83% respectively.

The AVID wildfire has emblazoned success among our AVID students. These are but a few of the sparks that started the fire. Brenda began high school as a member of a gang and spent many hours on the streets until late in her sophomore year when she was shot and then soon after became pregnant. Instead of dropping out, Brenda chose to change her life and focused on school. As a result, her GPA in her final semesters were consistently 4.0, she received the Dell Scholarship and is currently a senior in college majoring in education. Nancy has become more than an AVID tutor. As an AVID graduate, she has matured into a positive role model and mentor for Hispanics. She continues to have high expectations for herself and for all students while motivating them with her enthusiasm. Being told by her community that she wouldn’t be able to succeed, she defies the odds by working as a tutor, going to school full-time, being involved in her community and taking care of her siblings. Alfredo, a young man who never thought college was financially possible due to his undocumented status, has battled and overcome all cultural obstacles. He is a sophomore at Wichita State University, majoring in Business, and determined to be somebody! One young woman, Stephanie, used the AVID class as a true family support system when she had no real one at home. The safe confines of the AVID class allowed her the freedom to come out and be herself. It also allowed her the structure and support needed to increase her academic performance from one who scored in the bottom fifth percentile her freshman year on the PSAT to a confident young woman who earned a two on her Advanced Placement Literature test this past year. At the age of 12, Karla hid in her closet the night the police came to arrest her

mother and deport her to Columbia. Left alone, a Wichita family took her in as one of their own for the next 4 years. Karla worked hard, took many AP classes, graduated with a 3.8 GPA and earned a full ride scholarship to college. She is currently a junior majoring in international business.

So many positive sparks of AVID are evident in our school – and so little space to write! To add to the wildfire that has already been mentioned, we claim 9 Dell and 3 Gates Millennium Scholars as graduates of our program. AVID students are leaders in our school – 2 have been student body presidents and others have held various STUCO offices. AVID students completed over 5000 hours of community service last year. 80% of our current 10, 11, and 12 AVID students are enrolled in an AP program.

This year we struck a match on another fire through our CTC (Connecting to Community) plan. The initial goal as stated on our Site Team Plan was to find a way to reconnect 9 – 12 students and all elective teachers in our very large AVID program, while at the same time servicing the community. The CTC allows AVID students and teachers to get to know other members of the program outside of their own elective classes. North High AVID is helping with students with disabilities throughout the city of Wichita by partnering with the Circle of Friends program. Over 300 North High AVID students are paired with over 200 students in special education throughout our county. The eleven sections of AVID are going to Levy Special Education Center, Chisholm Lifeskills Center, and Catholic Charities Day Program. These are schools or centers with no regular peers to interact with. Not only does the AVID student interaction provide friendship and role models for the individuals with special needs but it helps the students in AVID give back to their community, to be a leader and role model and to help others. Often this aids the development of self worth and self efficacy of the North AVID students as well as the students in special education. In addition, some of the AVID students will be helping at Little Developmental Center with preschoolers as well as Chisholm Trail Elementary and Bryant Elementary. Some of the students are mentally retarded as well as on the autism spectrum. Having North High Students leading and investing in the special students helps them feel good about relationships and school. Initial reactions from AVID students have been positive. “At first I did not think that I could handle interacting with students that were different, but I came to realize that they are just like me.”--Camdin Brandt “It really made me reevaluate my life and the obstacles that I have had to overcome. The students [I worked with] face challenges everyday that I cannot even imagine.”--Stacia Boyle

Advice for new AVID sites? **Start your own fire with a strong site team!** In order to have the hottest burn possible, the interdisciplinary teachers of the site team must be well-respected members of the staff and influential in their departments. They are the role models in their classes for other teachers. They must also interact with other faculty through professional development sessions as well as when working with their AVID students. The site team will be the kindling in your building and district, the flames of AVID who ignite possibilities in your students.