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Taking a Stand: Leadership for College Readiness

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Introduction

A cacophony of voices filled the hallways outside the conference rooms of the Marriott Rivercenter in San Antonio as educators from throughout the country convened for the AVID/College Board 2009 National Conference. Threading a theme of collaborative leadership, presentations by practitioners related the continued success of students following a rigorous curriculum in response to the College Board's message that success in the high levels of thinking and activity promoted by such a framework provides the appropriate preparation and is a good predictor for acceptance and success in the higher education setting. However, providing a rigorous curriculum involves commitment from leadership roles at all levels of an organization, beginning with the district's highest level of administration. Conference sessions provided insights into success through the perspectives of various levels of leadership. This paper, a collaborative piece between the authors, is not intended to provide a complete narrative of all presentations, but rather, to provide a panoptic overview of the conference topics and to serve as an archive for future reference. The organization of the paper is based on the smooth transition of a dialogic tone rather than on the four strands of the conference topics.

Taking a Stand for College Readiness: 10 Actions for School Leaders

Dr. Monte Moses, the keynote speaker, opened the conference with his presentation emphasizing an integral component to systemic change: the cultivation of committed leadership

who will stand up and advocate for college readiness for all students. Long recognized as a transformational leader, Dr. Moses used his experience as a former principal and superintendent of school districts in Colorado, Texas, and Wyoming, along with his role as a professor in Kentucky, to address the non-negotiable obligation to provide the opportunity for educational success to every student in our school systems. His speech initiated the leadership theme of the conference. Insisting that all students want and merit reaching their “American dream” and obtaining a college education, he explained that only success in a rigorous curriculum, such as that promoted by the College Board and facilitated by AVID, can ensure success in the higher education environment for all students. Adding that “the problem is not knowing what to do, but asking what can we do better,” he challenged leaders to take a stand for young people and set the stage for change in their respective educational organizations. He encouraged leaders to implement ten actions to provide opportunities to the student groups which have traditionally been left behind in the classroom, creating a dead end in their path toward a well-paying job and a bright future. The suggested actions, as noted in his keynote address at the conference, were:

- 1) Make a genuine commitment to college readiness for all;
- 2) Invert the curriculum planning model to establish a more aligned and coherent education system;
- 3) Develop college awareness among staff, students, and parents;
- 4) Implement a more robust academic propulsion model;
- 5) Build affective (non-cognitive) behaviors in tandem with academic skills;
- 6) Provide the support and scaffolding necessary to make college possible and tangible;
- 7) Acknowledge and address student deficits;

- 8) Abandon pride of ownership—and actively apply knowledge, research, tools, programs, and services from outside experts and companies;
- 9) Track former students relentlessly, use the information to analyze program success, and make needed changes; and
- 10) Provide energetic leadership to lead the way. Excellence requires both energy and intensity.

Highlighting the necessity for strong district leadership, he referred to a McREL study by Waters and Marzano (2006), which found two factors which are statistically significant and positively correlated to district achievement—district leadership and superintendent tenure. That study, which also found that “Effective superintendents focus their efforts on creating goal-oriented systems (p.3),” identified five specific district level strategies that are statistically significant and positively correlated to the district’s average student achievement. The strategic activities leading to systemic change and increased student achievement were:

- 1) Collaborative goal setting;
- 2) Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction;
- 3) Board alignment and support of district goals;
- 4) Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction; and
- 5) Use of resources to support achievement and instruction goals. (p. 3-4)

Dr. Moses referred to world renowned personas as examples of leaders who modeled commitment and fidelity to their central mission. He ended his speech by providing the audience with the charge of the conference’s vision: college readiness for all.

Luncheon Keynote Address

Some leaders like to make their entrance with a bang. Michelle Rhee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools, and the luncheon keynote speaker, may be one of those leaders. However, the bang does not come from Ms. Rhee: it comes from the reaction to her no-nonsense approach to leadership. With commitment to excellence as her focus, she stated that she was not afraid to make the necessary changes to ensure that the culture of her campuses was one of high expectations. Highly motivational as she spoke, Ms. Rhee explained the obstacles she had to overcome in her mission to provide quality instruction and quality teachers for all students. Her humorous comments did not detract from the seriousness of the actions she sometimes had to implement, from making herself highly visible in the schools to completely reconstituting schools. A true leader and champion of access to a rigorous curriculum, she will do whatever it takes to make all students academically successful.

AVID and College Board Initiatives

The conference emphasized the configuration of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program and College Board Initiatives into district leaders' initiatives for college readiness of "the forgotten majority" of low-income and ethnic-minority students who are frequently ignored by college preparatory programs in public school systems. The College Board is a non-profit organization that focuses on setting standards for a rigorous curriculum to increase all students' chances for success in post-secondary education. Well known for providing the SAT, NMSQT/PSAT, and the Advanced Placement[®] Program exams to millions of students, the organization also promotes college readiness initiatives and programs targeting underserved students. Touted in its promotional brochure as "a fourth- through twelfth-grade system to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college readiness," AVID also targets low-

income and minority students, who have the potential to succeed in a college-prep program, but for reasons beyond their control, have not been able to reach that goal. Core components of AVID are a site administrator, the AVID elective class, and trained AVID teachers. Recognized as a research-based intervention program, over 4,000 schools in a total of 45 American states implement its components to increase student achievement as it prepares students for the college classroom. The AVID brochure adds that its “teaching strategies, curriculum, and trainings are used not only in the AVID elective class, but by subject-area teachers schoolwide.” Teacher leadership and commitment are required to make AVID work, so it is not surprising to find that the program was developed by the epitome of such a teacher.

Taking a Stand for the Underserved

Insisting on equity in access to a rigorous curriculum, Mary Catherine Swanson, an English teacher in the San Diego Public School System, took responsibility for student achievement into her own hands and developed AVID in response to a concern that legislated desegregation would cause failure for unprepared students coming into privileged schools. Recognizing that the relocated students needed academic and emotional support to be successful in their new environment, she decided to provide the support through an elective added to the students' schedules. By improving a student's academic performance and self-image, Ms. Swanson attempted to create more self-confident and academically successful student leaders, who could serve as a role model for other students, while improving their own college readiness skills. Three components were built into the AVID system—instructional methodologies, tutorials, and motivational support.

Instructional methodologies are overseen by a teacher-leader, who also serves as a site-coordinator. Chosen by the building principal based on leadership and affective qualities

displayed, the teacher leader engages in intensive training to prepare for the role of assisting the AVID teachers in developing curriculum, developing activities, and implementing methodologies to support students through the academic rigor of PreAP[®] and AP[®] courses. The teacher leader also collaborates with school counselors and provides training on the AVID teaching strategies for teachers throughout the campus to allow all students to benefit from the best practice methodologies. AVID teachers, also trained in specific content and methodologies, interact with students during an elective period to engage them in tutorials and motivational activities that they will learn to internalize and implement to become successful in their rigorous high school courses and later when they enter college. But why are particular groups of students targeted for support through the AVID and College Board Initiatives systems?

The State of Education for Minority and Low-Income Students

Perhaps researchers recognize that a high school education is no longer enough to compete for a well-paying job or to become economically independent. Too many of our jobs now require higher levels of math, reading, writing, and science courses. The magnitude of economic need is even greater for African American and Hispanic students, whose enrollment in American schools is increasing at alarming rates. National statistics show record numbers of students from African American, Hispanic, and low-income homes enrolling in post-secondary institutions, however quite small percentages are graduating with a four-year degree (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009). The dismal rates show only 13% of Hispanics and 20% of African Americans reaching the college graduation milestone compared to 33% of Whites (Snyder et al., 2009). If these underserved students are not supported toward becoming successful college graduates, society places its economic system at risk with an overload of dependent citizens and large numbers of unprepared replacements for those currently in public or elected positions, or in

any level of professional employment. In addition, their wages with only a high school education, will be approximately half of what a college graduate would earn, and will not provide the taxes needed to fund our growing number of citizens dependent on income through our government's social programs.

So how do school systems propose to increase the success of these students who are so highly at risk of dropping out of school and of not pursuing a college degree? Currently academic tracking, irrelevance of the curriculum, and socio-cultural issues are creating unwelcome and unchallenging school environments for Latino and African American students, who are being left out of the higher education pipeline. The only way to correct this lack of access to a quality education for these students, whose academic success has been traditionally ignored in the American school system, is to provide whatever resources and support they need to receive an equal opportunity to college readiness. To achieve this goal, educational leaders have turned to research to adjust their entire approach to the delivery of a high school education.

Various studies have found that the single most effective way to eliminate the achievement gap and ensure college success is by providing a rigorous curriculum (Adelman, 1999; Kristin, 2005; Somerville & Yun, 2004). In research by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2004) the authors found that not test scores, or high school GPAs, or even class rankings were as well correlated to a 4-year degree as success in a solid high school academic curriculum, especially for African American and Hispanic students. They also concluded that the probability of obtaining a bachelors degree doubled if a student continued taking math courses beyond Algebra 2. Kristin (2005) found that the level of academic rigor in the curriculum was also a much stronger predictor of obtaining a bachelor's degree than the level of the student's parental education or family income, or a student's minority status. She

suggested that educators provide support structures, such as intervention programs and additional learning opportunities for minority and low income students to increase their chance for academic success in the higher-level coursework.

Inspiring, Leading, and Taking Risks in the Service of Education

Billy Madigan and Valerie Martinez Rivas' presentation identified social structures and attitudes that leaders must acknowledge and be prepared to eradicate in order to create equity in educational excellence for minority and low-income students. Beginning her presentation with a quote from James Baldwin, she read "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" to recognize that the present educational system continues to be a machine that promulgates established social reproduction as noted by Crawford & Dougherty (2001) in their article titled "Updraft/Downdraft." They write,

Under the norms of social reproduction, students who enter kindergarten with social privilege tend to leave high school poised for privilege in the future, while those who enter school underprivileged tend to leave underprivileged. Thus, students of privilege are more likely to operate in an updraft that nurtures and supports high achievement, while underprivileged students more typically operate in a downdraft that presses them firmly toward low achievement."(p. 37)

Ms. Rivas stated that to induce change, leaders must replace "Deficit Thinking" to "Asset Thinking," as espoused by Ken Magdaleno of California State University in Fresno, to allow the vocabulary to denote culture as a positive contributor to the learning experience in the classroom. Leaders must also insist on high expectations and a rigorous curriculum for all students, not just the privileged few. This means developing attitudinal changes at all levels of the organization from teachers to high-level administrators.

Bill Madigan continued the presentation on leadership by explaining how culture guides and impacts our communication processes. By understanding differences in a culture's communication patterns teacher leaders can better address learning in the classroom. Communications of various major cultural groups were presented. A second component to Mr. Madigan's presentation involved using brain research that states that how our brain is wired defines our capacity to learn, focus, and remember. By referring to these findings, teachers can modify their teaching and leading strategies when addressing students and others from cultures other than one's own.

AVID and Higher Education: Ensuring a Competitive Edge Through College Readiness and Cultural Competence

Led by Dr. William Darity from Duke University, several panel members discussed methods to create a college readiness culture at a campus in response to Dr. Darity's comment that at the classroom level, there is more segregation than at the broader school level; classes are more segregated (less diverse) as one moves up through the system. Recognizing that an achievement gap exists along racial, ethnic, gender, and economic lines, the panelists provided models to use to eliminate that gap. One exemplar presented as a model was Project Bright Idea in Wake County, North Carolina. It was described as an inclusive community model which uses AVID collaborative support to make its success possible. To accelerate students who have not experienced challenging curriculum, Dr. Darity suggested his "Advanced Layers of Curriculum" model. Using the "onion" as a pictorial model, he promoted building out from a "center" of core academics. The second layer of the model, which would envelope the core, would translate to extensions to the curriculum. The third layer would be enrichment activities, followed by a fourth layer of modified, adapted, or supplemental curricula. A complete supplemental program of study would be the fifth layer and academic acceleration would be the sixth and final layer of

support to guarantee college readiness. The professor reminded the audience that leadership at the building and classroom level must recognize any cultural barriers that can impede student success, in addition to develop competencies necessary to create the social and academic environments where the strategies discussed in this session can have the desired effect.

Reducing Variability in Adult Behavior and Performance

“A school district is a direct reflection of its leadership. Great districts have great leaders. Variability of behavior starts with the leader.” This comment by Mike Neece, Director of AVID Systemic Initiatives, emphasized the importance of the leader’s image and his/her commitment to the district’s purpose. Mr. Neece stated that in order to increase and deliver consistent quality instruction to students, a district leader must change the core principles of the entire system to reflect collective responsibility and accountability for the success of all students. Crucial to the systemic change is the expectation for uniformity of behaviors that have been proven to promote high performance of students and teachers and the provision of resources, such as staff development and materials. To accentuate the magnitude of providing teachers with resources (tools) to do their job well, he commented, “We don’t expect other professionals to do their jobs without the appropriate tools. So if I send my teachers out to the classroom without a toolbox, shame on me.” Mr. Neece reminded attendees that leaders must model the behaviors that they expect the organization to practice and institutionalize.

In addition, the leader must distribute leadership and provide whatever resources are needed to implement the district’s vision, recognizing that the structures and processes of a system impact individual performance and, eventually, the goals of the organization. He presented a model for collaboration among the various constituents of the system, adding that the leader can use the sample to build relational capacity after creating a social contract which

incorporates processes for accountability that keep all stakeholders engaged in dialogue and in making decisions that are aligned with the district's mission, vision, and core principles. An effective leader must manage change by using the model to develop an action plan which incorporates the resources, incentives, and skills expected to guide the organization toward their vision of continuous improvement and access to a uniform rigorous program of study for all its students. He ended his presentation by stating that none of the model's five components: the vision, the skills, the incentives, the resources, or the action plan, can be missing, or the systemic change will not occur, and adult behavior and performance will return to a pattern of inconsistency, leading to inconsistent student performance. By incorporating the AVID System and College Board initiatives, leaders can ensure they are promoting the uniform behaviors that will lead to consistently high student performance.

**Teaching Thoughtful Learners:
A Districtwide Approach to Rigorous Instruction for All Students**

Baltimore City Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Jesse L. Douglas, and his team incorporated the AVID system's components and College Board initiatives into the district's "Blueprint for Progress," in their successful effort to reinforce equity in access to a rigorous AP curriculum through the consistent use of the proven AVID strategies that support students in their educational and personal pursuits. Adhering to the premise that leaders must change the core principles of an organization to reflect collective responsibility and accountability for the success of all students, Dr. Douglas took the lead in promulgating district goals for developing a 21st Century Workforce through the following actions: 1) aligning all grade levels, 2) providing intensive preparation and support for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math courses, and 3) instituting the 3Rs of rigor, relevance, and relationships. By using Webinars, curriculum and instruction services support, and collaboration among teachers, his leadership team was able to

achieve a uniform level of academic rigor in content, instruction, and assessment. In this college-going culture, students are expected to become leaders themselves and to model leadership qualities for their peers. Indeed, by combining AVID, College Board, and district strategies, the leadership team was able to reach its goal of rigorous instruction for all its students.

Hillsborough County Public Schools' Districtwide High School Reform Model

The leadership team of Hillsborough County Public Schools District (HCPSSD) in West Central Florida also capitalized on the AVID and College Board systems to institute effective strategies at their district to create a college readiness environment for all students. Comprised of approximately 192,000 students spread over 25 high schools, 45 middle schools, and 139 elementary schools, 52% of its students are on free or reduced lunch and 27% are students who speak a language other than English. In 2008, HCPS Board approved the Superintendent's recommendation to implement a districtwide culture of college readiness within its schools. The EXCELEerator comprehensive school reform model was chosen as the vehicle for their vision.

To reach their goal, the district leaders first defined what "college ready" meant to them. They decided to use Conley's (2007) definition, which states that "students are college-ready when they have the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to complete a college course of study successfully, without remediation" and when the "students demonstrate an understanding of college and career options and the college admissions process." With this goal in mind, district leaders focused on specific initiatives to accomplish their mission.

Reform initiatives included the implementation of Professional Learning Communities, the Continuous Improvement Model, the Secondary School Reform Initiative, Smaller Learning Communities, and the Whole School Effectiveness Model. With all these tools in their kit, the district leader expected success from every campus involved. In addition, the AVID system was

implemented in 4th-12th grade. Some schools started at the 3rd grade. Although all middle and high schools were involved, only 45 elementary schools took part in the initiative due to funding. The SpringBoard staff development model provided teachers a means for professional development based on the students' needs. Data collection provided a method to check the district's progress in their endeavor.

The data collected over a two-year implementation period showed improvement in many areas of the district's student performance. Enrollment in AP[®] courses increased from slightly over 1000 students to over 2700. Attendance increased an average of 1%. Discipline referrals decreased from approximately 15,700 incidents to approximately 9,000. Minority enrollment in AP[®] classes increased approximately 19 percentage points for African American students and approximately 12 percentage points for Hispanic students. AVID student participation increased districtwide from 1,791 to 5,316 students. Finally, districtwide enrollment in AP classes increased from slightly more than 14,500 to slightly more than 25,000. The leadership team presenting the district's success emphasized the importance of recognizing that changing paradigms was not an easy task. However, through the use of continuous staff development, organization and planning, curriculum development, ongoing support, project management, and open and committed communication to all stakeholders, the district was able to meet its goal of providing more students the opportunity for college success.

Leading the Vertical Teams' Charge for College Readiness at the District Level

Delivering on the theme of collaborative leadership and unwavering commitment to excellence, the Wichita Public School System (WPSS) in Kansas, summarized the story of their journey toward their successful goal of providing districtwide college readiness through the development of vertical team leadership. Although highly diverse, with over 70% of its students

on free or reduced lunch, the WPSS presenters boasted of its tremendous success using AVID and the College Board system to increase enrollment in the AP[®] courses for all students. This district emphasized the development of teacher leaders, a formulation of a feeder system plan, and creative use of funding to accomplish its mission. Recognizing that leaders and schools must move from a paradigm of closed systems that retard improvement to an open system that promotes collaboration and innovation, the district made the commitment to be courageous and defy the status quo of low-level expectations; to get over themselves by collaborating to develop a vision, raising expectations, and building capacity; and to understand the dynamics at play in order to manipulate them to their advantage. Focusing on their vision, district leaders used data to monitor their implementation progress and to educate their stakeholders and community on the systemic change and its effects. They waited patiently for their data to show positive results and they were not disappointed.

North High School's AP enrollment increased from 65 students enrolled in 5 courses to 442 students enrolled in 14 courses over six years. The graduation rate increased 26.4% from 60% in 2004 to 86.4% in 2008; the state math results increased from 30% proficient to 45.6% proficient; the student attendance rate increased from 88% to 92%; the state reading results increased from 47% proficient to 61.4% proficient; and ACT scores improved from a score of 19.7 to 20.4 within two years. More important, however, were the results for the students AVID is designed to support. The graduation rate for Hispanic males jumped from 30% in 2003 to 77% in 2008 and for Hispanic females from 44% in 2003 to 39% in 2008. For a school that is almost 50% Hispanic, these numbers were quite encouraging. More impressive, though, is the minority enrollment rate in AP courses, which increased from 8% in 2003 to 53% in 2009, translating to an almost 700% increase. These impressive numbers proved their open-system leadership

worked to expand college readiness opportunities to all their students. What a story! But the tales of success using AVID and College Board initiatives do not end here.

Award-Winning School Shares Its Work

Edinburg High School (EHS), a College Board Inspiration Award winner, is located in the southern tip of Texas, where approximately 10 miles separate this city from the Mexican border. Situated in one of the most economically depressed areas of the United States, almost 95% of its enrolled students are Hispanic, 77% qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 66% are considered at-risk of not graduating based on state criteria. However, high percentages do not only describe its student body demographics: high percentages also describe the increases in the students' performance on various indicators of college readiness. Under the leadership of former principal, Ms. Maria Luisa Guerra, EHS produced the following statistics:

Change in Readiness Indicators

Indicators	Increase from 2001 to 2008
Completing College Prep Courses	131%
Earning College Credit	211%
Taking AP Exams	76%
Number of AP Exams Taken	177%
Graduation Rate	12%
College Acceptance	75%

Ms. Guerra and her teachers explained the process they followed to merit their distinguished recognition as a 2003 College Board Inspiration Award winner, a 2007 AVID

National Demonstration School with Distinction award, and a 2008 ACT College Readiness Award winner. Her group enthusiastically elaborated on implementation of a plan using the ACT Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS), the AVID Program, the College Board Instructional Report, Financial Aid Officer Support, and the University of Texas Pan American Gear-up Program. The combination of support systems provided data for placement, follow-up, and instructional support of their high school students.

The ACT Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) included using the EXPLORE Math score and the Algebra 1 End of Course (EOC) score to identify 8th grade students and invite them to a Summer Accelerated Geometry Course. The same students were enrolled in a cohort group to form the 9th Grade Algebra II class the following fall semester. In addition, the EXPLORE English scores assisted counselors in identification and placement of students in the Pre-AP English II cohort group. Another component of the EPAS system included evaluating all 10th graders with the PLAN test. The resulting Math and Science scores were used to identify the students to be placed in concurrent Pre-AP and AP Physics. The same students were also enrolled in Pre-AP or AP Calculus AB. Finally, the ACT was administered to all 11th graders in April. However, to ensure familiarity and increased opportunity for success, educators provided intense instruction on testing strategies through an ACT Academy which was held for two weeks before and after school and on Saturdays. This strategy was in addition to ACT workshops, which were also made available to all juniors for two months prior to the April test date.

A second component in EHS's plan for college readiness success was implementation of the AVID system. The team, composed of teachers from the core and elective courses, counselors, and administrators collaborated their efforts to provide college readiness activities

throughout the year, following a set schedule for each day of the week. A sample week for all AVID students included instruction in the AVID curriculum on Mondays and Wednesdays, tutorials on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and special activities on Fridays. The AVID curriculum emphasized instruction in writing, utilization of strategies for success, and participation in college and careers activities. AVID tutorials engaged students in collaborative study groups, writing groups, and Socratic seminars. Friday activities included field trips to colleges, motivational activities, and College-related speaker events. All AVID students also participated in all components of the Edinburg High School Plan for college readiness. Program participants showed an increase in attendance rates, in the number of students taking and receiving credit for AP exams, in their state assessment results, and in their ACT/PLAN scores. Quite impressively, all AVID seniors were accepted to a 4-year college.

The third item in Edinburg High's plan for college readiness incorporated the use of college board reports. The College Board Instructional Reports provided a comparison of each student's results on the various topics of the exam to all AP test-takers throughout the world. The EHS staff put these reports to good use. When the data reports arrived in September, the AP teachers analyzed them and designed improvement plans for their respective departments to improve their delivery of the content. The plans were integrated into the Campus Improvement Plan, leading to a focused alignment of instruction and resources to the identified areas of need. But the team still felt that was not enough, so they decided to use the Financial Aid Officer to support their efforts.

The Financial Aid Officer's role was two-fold. First, he provided both students and parents presentations on the topics of College Admissions requirements and Scholarship applications. As part of that responsibility the Financial Aid Officer also collaborated with the

University of Texas Pan American and South Texas College to walk parents through the process of completing the FAFSA, a federal application for financial aid, during a parent meeting specifically set for that purpose. The second component of the officer's role was to conduct sessions and provide resources to prepare the students to take the ACT and SAT exams, as well as to identify and monitor students with high scores to ensure their completion of scholarship applications. By facilitating these presentations and workshops, the Financial Aid Officer reached more of the families who traditionally are not aware of the process to follow in applying and financing a college education, creating an increased probability that their graduates would indeed attend college.

The final component for Edinburg High's plan to increase their number of college-ready students was using the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) support from the University of Texas Pan American. GEAR-UP is a 6-year federally-funded post-secondary program implemented from grades 7 through 12 at schools with high numbers of low-income students. The program's purpose is to increase the number of low socioeconomic students who are well-prepared to enter and be successful in a college setting. At Edinburg High, this goal is accomplished through various means. Students may attend after school tutoring with GEAR-UP tutors, or they may receive mentors to provide emotional support as long as needed by the students. They may also elect to shadow community members as they perform their job-related duties or to attend Academic Enrichment Camps to further enhance their academic performance. Leadership activities provide opportunities to bring out those qualities in all participants. Workshops for teachers in the math and science fields are encouraged, in order to help increase students achievements in those areas; also increasing the use of technology in the classroom helps. Finally, college visits, motivational speakers, and dual

enrollment classes complete the program's repertoire of activities designed to increase the students' expectation and comfort level of attending college.

As one follows this plan of action, a true collaboration of leadership roles, not only among the staff at Edinburg High, but among the various organizations charged with increasing the college readiness of targeted student groups becomes evident. For EHS, this collaboration has led to the school winning various awards and recognitions.

AVID and APIP: Blazing a Trail for College Readiness

Edinburg was only one of a handful of districts describing their leadership's efforts to link high school reform to college access and success for minority and low-income students. Another district with high percentages of Hispanic students (92%) and economically disadvantaged students (79%) that recognized the critical need for strong academic programs of rigor and for college readiness was Ysleta ISD in El Paso, Texas. Associate Superintendent Dr. Richard Bentley and District AVID Coordinator, Rachael Henley, described their district's vision statement, which includes that all graduates "will be fluent in two or more languages, prepared and inspired to continue their education in a 4-year college or university," aligning well with the AVID mission statement and reflecting a districtwide commitment to college readiness. Using funds from an APIP grant for its focus schools, Parkland Middle School and Parkland High, the number of AP[®] courses offered has increased markedly, allowing 85% of the AVID students to enroll in PreAP[®] and AP[®] classes. The leadership team has expended tremendous effort to train teachers in AVID strategies that support Middle School students' preparation for a rigorous High School curriculum with PreAP[®] and AP[®] courses. The number of members on the AVID site team has also been increased to enable open access to AP[®] courses for an increasing number of underserved and low SES students who are largely Latino. A partnership with

University of Texas El Paso and a GEAR-UP grant for students in grades 6 through 8 have provided the opportunity for articulation allowing expansion of the AP[®] course offerings. The success of the initiatives is reflected in the phenomenal rate (96%) of YISD's 2008 graduation class enrollment in college. Dr. Bentley provided the audience with his own "professional equation": $\{[SD+PI] + TS + [C+P (EQ) + APM]\} \times L = ISL$ which translates to "student desire & parental involvement + teacher skills + curriculum & pedagogy x excellent questioning + aggressive, progress monitoring x leadership = improved student learning. He emphasized the importance of a strong leader by referring to the "L" multiplier in the equation. If the leader is a "0" (ineffective) in the equation, the entire equation defaults to a "0" (failure). The analogy provided an innovative equation to internalize the seven components of the district's success.

AVID National Demo Schools Share Their Stories

Leading an educational organization through the process of developing a college-going culture is not without its struggles, as Fairfax county Schools' District liaison, Derek Steel, communicated in this session. As total AVID program articulation was being developed at both the high school and the middle school sites, the school personnel also had to contend with the pressure of being recognized as demonstration school candidates. Although this status gives the sites tremendous influence and entrée marketing of AVID to other sites in the district, it also adds stressors that must be overcome in order to continue progress on their goals. The team provided strong data from the results of their state's Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments and from increased numbers of AP course enrollees and test-takers to corroborate the effectiveness of the AVID and AP programs on student success. The presenters commented on the district's recognition that strong leadership at the site and classroom level was augmented by

vision from the superintendent. Site teams, in turn, recognized the important role AVID students had to play in building a college-going culture at the two partner sites.

AVID Elementary Awareness: Planting the Seed for College Readiness

Before expounding on the efforts of other organizations as they take the lead in changing the paradigm of school reform, a description of the latest component of the AVID system is warranted to familiarize the reader with the components of, and the process to follow in the introduction and support of the AVID principles for students in the elementary school setting. National Elementary Programs Director, Shannon McAndrews succinctly used the following quote, "Treat me fairly; I am going to be your boss some day," to emphasize the obligation to respect the needs of young learners. By providing them with the organizational, social, and educational strategies to increase the probability of their success in a rigorous curriculum when they reach the secondary school setting, educators demonstrate that respect.

Ms. McAndrews noted several systematic benefits that resulted from the implementation of AVID Elementary (AE). She concluded that it:

- Encourages consistent high expectations schoolwide;
- Promotes open communication with families;
- Fosters articulation across grade levels and with "destination" middle schools;
- Provides a foundation for common vision and goals; and
- Promotes a schoolwide college-going culture.

However, in order to reap these benefits, various factors must in place and must be monitored to ensure consistent implementation. Factors to look for include the use of student empowerment, of organizational tools (binders, agendas), of 2-column notes by all students, and of all levels of questioning with the rigor appropriate to each child's needs. Additionally, the leadership team

must ensure that various activities have occurred. First and foremost, they must verify that a certified AVID 7-12 program is already in place. Next, a formal multi-year plan for program implementation must be developed. A third step is the designation of a district-level AE liaison, followed by attendance of the site-team at an AVID Summer Institute for intensive staff development. The final step is the formative evaluation of the progress and effectiveness of the school's implementation through districtwide site visit days. The well-organized presentation enabled session participants to comprehend how well AE fits into a district's vision of providing a college-going culture at all levels of the K-12 organizational structure.

Districtwide Implementation of AVID on Elementary, Middle School, and High School Campuses

Armed with the previous session's knowledge, it is now easier to recognize the logic of the Uvalde, Texas CISD when its leaders decided to expand their AVID system to all campus levels of their school district. Principal Ken Mueller and his team from Uvalde Junior High spoke of his initial skepticism of the program; however, he was won over after observing the teachers as they implemented the instructional methodologies, especially the engagement of students in Socratic seminars and the successful results of the tutorials. Mr. Mueller also pointed out that he valued how AVID students provided leadership schoolwide by "serving" as role models and coaches when they met in the structured advisory periods that are a core component of the school day. Due to stakeholder "popular demand" and the positive academic success of the students in 2008-2009, the current program at Uvalde Junior High will be expanded from 2 sections this school year to 8 sections in the 2009-2010 school year. The speakers emphasized that strong district-level support and articulation with the High School played instrumental in their progress toward the district's mission of providing college readiness and success to all its students. After this session, it became apparent to this attendee that the AVID system of support

for all students, and most especially for the least served students, had received overwhelming evidence of success by the testimonials at this February conference. The only thing missing now was the student perspective about the AVID program's impact on their education.

How Graduates of AVID Program Transition into College

A presentation by Dr. Karen Watt provided results from her study involving both quantitative and qualitative data of former AVID students as they progress through college. The purpose of the study was to search for a correlation between the various components of the AVID system and the level of college success the students had experienced since they graduated from high school. The study found that the majority of the students were on track to graduate within six years and that the perseverance and retention rate for college enrollment was double that for the general population with a rate of 60% compared to 30-36%. Dr. Watt also found that three predictors showed significance in their effect on college success. Those predictors were: 1) meeting or exceeding the Higher Education Readiness scores in their state assessments in English Language Arts and Math, 2) earning college credit in high school, and 3) obtaining more AVID course credits. Based on the interview data, additional factors surfaced which influenced the high level of student success. Students' responses revealed that the AVID organizational skills, the college's academic support, and the AVID system's structure provided the tools for their success. Of great importance was the leadership and modeling from AVID teachers and the collaborative support provided through the cohort model. The results for the Dell Scholars indicated that similar skills helped them succeed.

Student Panel Discussion

The student panel discussion provided educators and students the opportunity to hear firsthand from the AVID participants themselves. Various students, ranging from the junior high

level to high school, responded to questions about their experiences with the AVID program and the teachers. The level of self-confidence the students modeled was extraordinary. They seemed eager to verbalize their opinions. If their AVID teachers were watching, they must have been proud of the upbeat student leaders they had produced. A practice of teacher involvement in the identification of possible program participants became evident immediately in responses to the question,

“How did you get into the AVID program?” The following are a few of the responses.

My teacher, she noticed I had potential to be an AVID student, so she recommended me.
–Monica

I don't know how, but I was one of the lucky few to get into the program.
– Brianna

I had a high math score, so my teacher said I should get in.
– Austin

I received a card. When they saw it, my parents knew I was going to be the first one to finish college.
-- Fernando

I don't know who recommended me, but I'm glad they did because if they recognized the potential in me to go to college, then that makes me feel good. – Vanessa

Various core components of AVID received positive comments from the students. An AVID teacher that cares, tutorials on content and learning strategies, organizational skills and materials, and motivational support are just a few of the support structures woven into the AVID system and praised by the students. Their effectiveness is corroborated in the following students' statements when asked how they were different now compared to their lives before the program.

I'm more focused on my work and I have 3 As and a B. – Student #1

If it weren't for AVID, I'd be behind in Algebra. Before AVID I was having trouble and was getting behind. AVID really helped me with my hardest classes.
– Student #2

I am more organized and plan out my courses. I probably wouldn't be taking the courses I'm taking now. AVID helped me with my study habits. -- Student #3

I r-e-e-a-lly don't like History. AVID is helping me through that. – Student #4

AVID's helped me tutorial-wise. My AVID teacher really drives me to work harder and keeps me working. I want to get my Masters degree in Literature. – Student #5

AVID's really helped me. It gets to the point that you can't do anything without your binder or without your notebook. I'm planning to go into Mechanical Engineering at Texas A&M next year. -- Student #6

I like it when mentors come in to work with us. I hate the binder, but it keeps me organized. It's a love-hate relationship. – Student #3

The AVID program supports students as they progress through a rigorous curriculum.

The students' description of what AVID meant to them tugged at the heartstrings. Those descriptions, however, provide evidence of the effectiveness of the program. The following are the students' perceptions.

The best part of AVID was that it was a support system. It was much more than just a class. It was a shoulder that picked you up when you were feeling like you were going to give out. The hardest thing for me right now is knowing that I'm not going to have it in college.
– Student #1

The most challenging thing for me was when I was scheduled for my AP class. When I got there it was like a war without bullets. And I thought, well, I speak English, so I should be able to make it. And Ms. Johnston helped me through it. She's a mother

figure. She's always serious, but sometimes she's just full of laughter.

-- Student #3

AVID gives you so many skills, like the binder helps with organization skills. AVID can become a family. We all have a common goal. We're all there to succeed so we can make it through a 4-year college. In the beginning it was hard to get into the cycle. Now, the hard part is leaving.

– Student #2

The best part of AVID was the great support system. The most challenging was the challenges AVID makes you take. It seems like it keeps you going and going. But it's always going to be there for you when you need help.

– Student #5

The best part was how everyone helped me. Because at the beginning I was so lost. My teacher always pushes me off a cliff. Like with History. I said, No, No, No, I don't want to take it. She looked at me and said, "You're going to do it anyway."

-- Student #4

I have a friend who is not in AVID. We both planned to go to college. But my friend decided to keep on doing things that weren't going to help her in school. My best friend won't be going to college. I see where I could have been if I had done the same thing, but I see where I can be and where I will be.

– Student #6

I was in football and we always had parties. When I got into AVID, my friends started asking me why I wasn't at the parties. If I hadn't been in AVID, I would've been the average stereotype jock.

– Student #3

Listening to the students recall how much they had changed as a result of their involvement in the AVID program was the most rewarding experience of the conference. By listening to the students we could definitely say that we know what to do to help those students who have the potential to succeed but have not been provided with the right tools to be prepared for rigorous classes. The answer: Be a committed leader and do what is right. Collaborate with your school's stakeholders to guarantee every student an equitable opportunity for college readiness. Then start the systemic change by implementing AVID and College Board Initiatives to reach your goal.

This last paragraph reiterates the message Dr. Moses charged us with in his keynote address. The challenge now is to act on that charge.

Conclusion

This paper provided a synopsis of the sessions provided by students, teachers, principals, district administrators, and superintendents; all leaders in some capacity within their school systems. Taking a stand for equity in education has long been a battle cry emanating from critical theorists and their followers. The battles won in the classrooms of these conference presenters bring us one step closer to meeting our moral duty to provide equal access to educational and employment opportunities to low-income and ethnic minority students, who currently comprise almost half of America's student enrollment and will provide the largest (or smallest, based on our action or inaction) financial contribution to the U.S. economy upon entering the workforce.

Note: Fifteen conference sessions were grouped into four different categories: 1) Successful Integration of AVID and College Board Initiatives; 2) Support and Strategies for Low-income and Underserved Students; 3) College Readiness Cultures, and 4) Elementary to High School Pipeline. However, not all sessions were presented in this paper due to the logistics in scheduling the writers' presence in all or complete sessions.

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