

## Leadership and AVID Implementation Levels in Four South Texas Border Schools

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A recent report by the RAND institute found that nearly 45% of schools adopting a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) design were still below implementation level after two years (Olson, 1998). Evidence emerging from studies on CSR efforts reveals that effective CSR implementation is dependent upon a campus leader who is able to communicate the vision of reform to all of his or her constituents (Goldring & Rawlis, 1994 as cited in Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Fullan, 1991; and Murphy, 1994). Though extensive research has shown the importance of strong administrative leadership in implementing change (Block, Everson, & Guskey, 2001; Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 1993; Goldring, 1993; and many others), others (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Heck & Brandon, 1995; Ogawa, 1993; Taylor & Bogotch, 1994) argue that any and all stakeholders are as important as the administrator in implementing and incorporating school-wide change.

School-wide reform efforts are designed to change the existing organizational structures in a school, to sustain such efforts and eventually institutionalize after the first few years of implementation; however, many meet their demise even before proper implementation has taken place. Implementation is defined by Fullan (1991) as "the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change." (p.65)

A CSR model recently implemented on four Texas secondary campuses has been examined in this study to determine what, if any, leadership actions impacted the implementation efforts at those campuses. The CSR effort, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), "un-tracks" secondary school students who are in the "academic middle" and places them in rigorous courses with a support elective called AVID. According to the AVID Center in San Diego (1996, as cited in Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002), the mission of AVID is,

All students, but especially students in the middle with academic potential, will succeed in rigorous curriculum, enter mainstream activities of the school, increase their enrollment in four-year colleges and become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society. (p.146)

The AVID program is designed around the implementation of 11 essentials. These are: 1) student selection; 2) voluntary participation; 3) the AVID elective class; 4) rigor; 5) writing instruction; 6) inquiry instruction; 7) collaborative grouping; 8)

college tutors; 9) data collection; 10) resources and staff development; and, 11) site team.

In 1998, AVID was one of 27 reform models accepted by the federal government to be implemented as a CSR effort. AVID is aligned with the nine components of CSR in several ways. First, AVID uses research-based methods and strategies. AVID's pedagogy of academic support and social scaffolding has a research base that includes Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan (2002); Guthrie & Guthrie (2000); Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz (1996); Maeroff (1999); Pauk, (1974); Treisman (1992); Watt, Yanez, & Cossio (2002), and others. AVID employs innovative strategies such as collaborative practices, academic support systems, and social "scaffolding" to increase the achievement and four-year college enrollment of minority students ([www.avidonline.org](http://www.avidonline.org)). Slavin (1998) deemed AVID as "worthy of consideration by other schools serving many students placed at risk" because of the high numbers of AVID students served in the United States who enroll in college after graduation (pp. 86-87). Slavin and Calderon (2001) described AVID as a program designed to enhance the likelihood of Latino students enrolling in 4-year colleges or universities.

Through the examination of four AVID CSR schools, the researchers asked the following questions: 1) what leadership actions, if any, affected the implementation of AVID at four selected secondary campuses during the first two years of CSR implementation; and, 2) what other actions were found to be imperative in the process of implementing AVID at these four secondary campuses?

### Perspectives on Reform

In 1997, federal legislation was passed to authorize the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program, also known as the "Porter-Obey" program, named after its congressional sponsors (Block, Everson, & Guskey, 2001). CSRD allowed schools to implement change strategies without mandating particular programs. "Comprehensive school reform is grounded in the idea that there is a systematic process to help schools improve." ([www.goodschools.gwu.edu](http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu)) The initial Porter-Obey provisions stated that the school reform models should integrate the following components in a coherent manner: 1) effective, research-based methods and strategies; 2) comprehensive design with aligned components; 3) professional development; 4) measurable goals and benchmarks; 5) support within the school; 6) parental and community involvement;

7) external support and assistance; 8) evaluation strategies; and 9) coordination of resources. (Block, Everson, & Guskey, 2001); ([www.goodschools.gwu.edu](http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu)).

Fullan (1991) identified three main categories of key factors in the reform model implementation process. They include the characteristics of the change project, local roles and external factors. The local roles include the district, community, principal, and teacher. Of particular importance is the role of the principal. Fullan (1991) cites Berman and McLaughlin (1977) on the importance of principals attending workshops or training sessions. Without an understanding of the components of the reform program, principals cannot fully understand teachers' concerns. In addition, appropriate staff development must accompany any implementation of reform efforts and must be coordinated, not fragmented or unrelated to the reform effort (Moffett, 2000). Ideally, campus personnel should receive staff development before deciding on a reform model.

Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) studied leadership in AVID schools and illustrate the difference between active and passive support of principals. An active AVID principal works with the AVID site team to try and achieve comprehensive school reform through teacher inservices, increased student recruitment, acquisition of resources and expansion of AVID to other schools in the district. A passive principal, on the other hand, offers either "ideological" support or financial support — but not both.

## Methods

Four Texas secondary school campuses that implemented AVID as a CSR model in 1999-2000 were examined in depth for the purposes of this article. All four campuses were found within the same district, which is located 15 miles from the U.S.-Mexican border. The district was chosen because it was the only CSR district in Texas with schools that did not receive CSR grant funds for implementing AVID. Two schools of study, Middle School B and High School D, received a CSR grant, while High Schools A and C did not.

The four schools of study had similar student populations with regard to ethnicity (94% – 98% Hispanic), socioeconomic status (82% - 86% economically disadvantaged), and second language learners (31% - 33% Limited English Proficient). Teacher demographics were similar to student demographics with regard to ethnicity (88% Hispanic) ([www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us)).

The primary data collection instruments used in this study were the *Texas AVID Certification Form* and the *Texas AVID Student Data Collection Form*. These forms were developed by The Center for Applied Research in Education at the University of Texas Pan American. Secondary data collection methods included surveys and focus group interviews.

The *Texas AVID Certification Form* allowed

schools to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to determine whether or not they were meeting the goals of the program. This instrument outlined each of the 11 AVID essentials and levels of use (*Not AVID*, *Early Use*, *Routine Use*, and *Institutionalization*). The *Texas AVID Student Data Collection Form* included student demographic data (ethnicity, gender, grade level, socioeconomic status, special population status), course enrollment (pre-AP, AP, or Honors), attendance rates, testing results (End-of-Course, state-mandated TAAS, AP, SAT and ACT), and graduation plan information. Other information reported included number of AVID tutoring hours and number of AVID elective sections. These data assisted in triangulating (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the data that were also examined on the certification form.

A focus group interview of site team members at each of the four campuses was conducted in the spring of 2001 and responses were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interviews were imported into Ethnograph 5.0v for review and coding. In addition to the site team focus groups, a student focus group at each campus was conducted. The data gathered from these focus groups were also reviewed and coded using Ethnograph 5.0v.

Administrator, teacher and student surveys were administered to the four AVID schools in late spring, 2001. By this time, the CSR model (AVID) had been in place for two years at three of the campuses (campuses A, B and D) and for one year at a new campus (Campus C). The three surveys solicited responses to statements chosen from five categories: *highly agree*, *agree*, *unsure*, *disagree* and *highly disagree*. Several open-ended questions were also asked in the survey instruments.

## Findings

*Certification Results.* Each of the four schools underwent a certification process by an outside evaluation team. Certifiers found that High School A had only one indicator below *Institutionalization*, and it met criteria for *Routine Use*. High School A was recognized for their achievement and is now an AVID National Demonstration site. Middle School B met all criteria for *Routine Use* and in some instances was at the level of *Institutionalization*. The school was also asked to apply for National Demonstration status but was not chosen among the finalists. High School C met the criteria for *Routine Use* in all essentials except 1, 9, and 11. In these areas, the criteria were met for *Early Use*. The certification team found High School D to have met *Early Use* criteria in six essentials, and criteria for *Routine Use* in the other 5 essentials.

*Student Performance Data Collection Results.* The researchers examined the following areas related to student achievement: growth of the program through increased numbers of students participating in AVID, numbers of AVID students enrolled in advanced coursework, numbers of AVID students on advanced

graduation plans, attendance rates, and testing results. Of the three second-year campuses, levels of implementation varied in number of AVID elective sections, student enrollment, and student scheduling. These results are displayed in the table below.

**Table 1 – AVID Student Data**

	High School A 2000-2001	Middle School B 2000-2001	High School C 2000-2001	High School D 2000-2001
<b>School Demographics</b>	94% Hispanic 2,500 students	96% Hispanic 1,400 students	98% Hispanic 1,800 students	96% Hispanic 2,700 students
<b>AVID Student Enrollment</b>	6 sections, 120 students	5 sections, 85 students	5 sections, 66 students	4 sections, 75 students
<b>AVID Teacher Assignments</b>	AVID Elective Teacher and Coordinator	AVID Elective Teacher and Coordinator	AVID Elective Teacher and Coordinator	History Teacher, AVID Elective Teacher, AVID Coordinator, Coach
<b>AVID Students Enrolled in Advanced Courses</b>	100%	100%	100%	89%
<b>AVID Students on Advanced Graduation Plans</b>	100%	N/A	100%	100%
<b>Attendance Rates</b>	97%	96%	90%	95%
<b>TAAS Test Pasing Rates: math/reading</b>	98/95	98/98	81/96	96/100

*Survey Results.* Of the four schools that were administered the Administrator Survey, only three schools (campuses A, B, and C) responded. Eight of twelve surveys were returned from administrators who have implemented the AVID program. Over 62% highly agreed and nearly 38% agreed that AVID had been effective in their schools after the first two years (or one year for campus C) of implementation. There was a consensus among administrator respondents that the AVID program has brought about academic improvement from students in the AVID program, and that they exhibit higher expectations and goals for themselves. Thirty-eight percent highly agreed and 62% agreed that the AVID program will better enhance student achievement than any other program of its kind. Also, one-hundred percent of the administrators either agreed or highly agreed that AVID students were “on track” for college participation and success.

When asked about AVID strategies, nearly 38% of the administrators were unsure whether they were being used in most classrooms in the school. All others agreed that they were being used to some extent in most classrooms. Seventy-five percent felt their employees reacted positively to the program, while 25% were split between unsure and feeling negative toward the program. Twenty-five percent were unsure if the program would continue to be implemented regardless of whether or not it would be supported by grant funding. The remaining 75% felt the program would be supported.

Several open-ended questions were also asked of administrators. All of the administrators responded positively toward encouraging other area schools to implement the program. Administrators also explained that AVID was developed on the campus due to work of the principal, the AVID site team, and their school-wide implementation of AVID strategies. Duties of the AVID administrators included supporting teachers to use AVID strategies,

empowering the site team, following through with implementation, ensuring student success and placement in rigorous classes, conducting inservices and parent meetings, recruiting teachers and students into the program, scheduling AVID teachers and students, and collecting data. Another administrator felt it was his/her responsibility to provide financial and instructional support to AVID students and teachers, and to ensure that AVID is supported by all staff members through staff development.

All four schools returned completed Teacher Surveys and 17 of 20 teachers responded. To the statement about all students having access to a high-quality, relevant curriculum, 88% responded affirmatively. The remaining were unsure. Eighty-eight percent also agreed that the campus principal had reconfigured time, space, and staffing to provide AVID students the support they need. Eighty-eight percent also agreed that the success of the AVID program depends upon a comprehensive school-wide reform effort designed to transform the entire learning environment. The others were unsure.

Two-hundred and fifty-four students of 305 from four schools responded to the Student Survey. Only 15% of the students disagreed that they have received more personal attention and help from AVID teachers than regular education teachers. Thirty-nine percent disagreed that they have received more attention from principals and counselors since becoming part of the AVID program. Only 8% disagreed that by staying in the AVID program they would enroll in a college or university. Also, only 8% disagreed that their parents were very supportive of their being in AVID.

Table 2 illustrates the differences in implementation at each of the campuses. These data were gathered through review of school records, certification reports, and focus group interviews.

**Table 2: AVID Schools Compared**

Characteristics	Campus A (1999-2000)	Campus B (1999-2000)	Campus C (2000-2001)	Campus D (1999-2000)
<b>Site Team Selection</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> grade team teachers who met the criteria for site team membership	6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , and 8 <sup>th</sup> grade teachers who met the criteria for site team membership	Teachers who served on campus D's Site Team the previous year; and others interested	Teachers willing to attend Summer Institute regardless of their teaching assignment
<b>AVID Summer Institute Participation</b>	Principal Attended	Principal Attended	Principal Attended	Principal did not Attend
<b>AVID Site Team Scheduling</b>	Common Planning Period	Common Planning Period	No Common Planning Period	No Common Planning Period
<b>AVID Student Scheduling</b>	100% hand-scheduled into Advanced and Pre-AP Classes	100% hand-scheduled into Pre-AP Classes	100% hand-scheduled into Pre-AP Classes	Not hand-scheduled, 25% of AVID Students were not in any advanced class first semester
<b>Staff Development Opportunities</b>	AVID methodologies presented regularly throughout the year by Site Team	AVID methodologies presented regularly throughout the year by Site Team and used by principal in faculty meetings	AVID methodologies presented throughout the course of the year by Site Team	AVID methodologies taught only at beginning of year by External Coach
<b>Certification Status</b>	<i>Institutionalized</i>	<i>Routine Use/ Institutionalized</i>	<i>Routine Use</i>	<i>Early/Routine Use</i>

## Conclusions and Implications

Researchers cross-referenced survey data with certification data and other data in an attempt to arrive at answers to the questions that were explored in this study: 1) what leadership actions, if any, affected the implementation of AVID at four selected secondary campuses during the first two years of CSR implementation; and, 2) what other actions were found to be imperative in the process of implementing AVID at these four secondary campuses?

One finding that emerged from this study reflected the limited support of the administrator at Campus D. Principal D was detached from the implementation process as demonstrated by his lack of participation in the AVID Summer Institutes, lack of support for campus-wide AVID training and high turnover rate in the AVID Site Team. Berman and McLaughlin (1977) emphasized the importance of the principal attending training on the reform effort, and Moffett's (2000) analysis of a 1977 RAND report confirmed that teacher turnover must be reduced in order to sustain reform efforts. Researchers were unable to utilize Administrator Survey data from Campus D because the surveys were never returned. According to Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002), Principal D would be considered passive and lacking in demonstrated support needed for full implementation of the AVID program.

On the other hand, Principals A, B and C exhibited support for the reform effort by attending the Summer Institute, expanding their Site Team memberships, providing campus-wide training, and recruiting a large number of students for the program. Principals at these campuses provided their Site Teams with common planning periods. In addition to financial support, these principals provided their teachers with ideological support for the AVID program (Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan, 2002).

Moffett's (2000) analysis of the 1977 RAND report emphasizes the importance of relevant coordinated staff development in the implementation process. Essential 10 of the certification document requires that schools provide the necessary resources for AVID implementation by providing on-going staff development. Campuses A and B were *Institutionalized* in these areas, and non-grant-funded campus A outperformed all other grant-funded campuses.

Site Team members from campuses A, B, and C chose to participate in the implementation of AVID (Essential 2). Bailey (2000), Huberman and Miles (1984), and McLaughlin (as cited in Fullan, 1991) emphasized the danger of "top-down" reform models. Both campuses B and D were chosen by district administrators to participate in AVID; whereas, campuses A and C chose AVID as their reform model.

At Campus D, although a few Site Team members were voluntary participants, nearly the entire team left after the first year of

implementation. Limited turnover at campuses A and B led to continuity of the reform effort after the first year of implementation. Fullan (as cited in Busick & Inos, 1992) cited shared responsibility (of stakeholders such as site team members) as a necessity in the reform process. Campuses A, B and C took on the responsibility of implementation by working together as a team, while the reform effort at campus D reflected limited participation of the principal and campus personnel. Instead of developing into a comprehensive school reform effort, AVID became "just another program" on Campus D.

Resource allocation is required for any reform implementation effort, and is covered in Essential 10 of AVID's certification process, and in Fullan's third implementation factor, pressure and support (Busick & Inos, 1992). Campuses A and C were not awarded grant funding, but their principals worked hard to implement the reform effort by providing funding, staff development and common planning time for teachers and by expanding Site Team participation and responsibilities.

Supportive and involved principals led to successful AVID CSR implementation efforts in the district of study, as reflected by their levels of certification. From the available data, researchers can conclude that leadership actions that have an impact on effective CSR implementation involve more than just adopting the CSR model for their campuses. Shared responsibility (Fullan, as cited in Busick & Inos, 1992) and full participation (Heck & Brandon, 1995), appropriate staff development (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977), low teacher turnover (Moffett, 2000), and appropriate resource allocation (Fullan, as cited in Busick & Inos, 1992) have been shown in this study to be key in successfully implementing AVID reform efforts. In addition, administrative support in areas that do not involve financial resources, such as providing common planning periods for Site Team members and providing opportunities for Site Team members to share AVID strategies with other faculty members, were found to facilitate AVID implementation.

Implications of these findings suggest that principals who intend to implement a reform model must plan properly for the process of implementation once a reform model is chosen. More specifically, when implementing AVID, principals need to select their Site Team members carefully and choose teachers who are eager and willing to be change agents through proper implementation of AVID. Providing financial support alone for AVID does not guarantee successful implementation, as was demonstrated by High School D. Two of the non-grant funded campuses in the study were successful in their implementation efforts. Planning for continued resource allocation after grant funding ends is imperative, as well as planning for the expansion of Site Teams.

Though AVID is the only CSR model examined in this study, researchers have found that the implications of this study can be extended to other CSR model implementation efforts. That is, the actions of the principal are key to proper implementation, as measured in this study by a formal certification process.

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## Talking to Administrators About the School Improvement Model Transitions: Going Beyond NCLB

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We cannot talk to fellow educators these days without the now infamous subject of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation rising to the surface. First, we hear teachers and administrators say that they completely support the effort to meet

the needs of all children. Second, we hear of the stress, anxiety and frustration with a "law that has several profound design flaws" in terms of testing, assessment, school improvement and accountability (Elmore, 2002).