

1. **Blythe, CA** Ten years ago, Palo Verde High School embarked on an experiment we now know as AVID with 25 freshmen. At that time, our site team of 7 was looking to increase the number of students eligible to apply to a four year university. When AVID first began, we had so few students ready for college, the achievement gap was not a real factor. We were more concerned with creating a culture where students wanted to continue their education beyond high school. The achievement gap at the time was more evident through socioeconomics than ethnicity. During the first few years, student were subjected to placement tests for honors and Advanced Placement courses as well as selectively picked to take the SAT test and almost no one took the ACT test. Students were not encouraged to consider college by taking the PLAN test or PSAT test. In fact, the district made is mandatory for all 11th grade students to take the ASVAB test and promoted enlistment over college enrollment.

As AVID began to grow, the students enrolling in rigorous courses for the first time were harassed by other students and doubted by the teachers. The site team become advocates for the students in the classroom and in committee meetings. Slowly, the requirements to enroll in an AP course went from a single placement test to multiple measures to finally open enrollment for anyone willing to work hard. During this same time, the composition of students wanting to enroll began to change and the achievement gap began to be looked at. It was noted that many of the EL students struggled in English but excelled in math and science. AVID became a place they wanted to be because they could challenge themselves in those classes and gain the support they needed in their English course. While we sometimes see the hard work ahead of us to close the gap completing and focus on the new issue of recruiting and retaining males, over time, we have worked to completing remove the barriers that prevented students from enrolling in rigorous courses. Our final barrier is removing the apathy of the students themselves.

2. The Palo Verde Unified School District has moved to a model of all 8th grade students enrolling in Algebra 1 and completion rates are not yet available. In grades 9-12, AVID is a driving force in our most rigorous courses. For the 2009-2010 school year, 28% of English 9 honors students are AVID students, 66% of English 10 honors students are AVID, 50% of English 11 honors students are AVID and 44% of the AP English Literature students are AVID students, in History, AVID students make up 59% of the World History honors and 75% of the US History honors courses; (AP courses were not offered for English and History students in grades 11 and 12 due to staffing issues in the 2009-2010 school year). Similar results are seen in math and science, with 75% of the students enrolling in Physics and AP Physics being AVID students and 66% of the AP Calculus enrollment. One of the greatest achievements of the AVID program is the number of students who enroll in rigorous courses during their 4 years of high school taking courses above and beyond the minimum A-G requirements.

3. For the 2009-2010 school year, the enrollment at Palo Verde High School is 927 students. Of that population, 45% are male, and 55% female. The ethnic makeup is 58% Hispanic/Latino, 31% White/Caucasian, 10% African American and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander/American Indian. These figures are fairly representative of the population over the last 10 years. While AVID has reflected similar figures (57% Hispanic, 34% White), the students in the honors and AP courses did not. AVID has worked with the content teachers to bring in materials that are culturally more appropriate for our population as well as providing some of the background knowledge that may have been missing for some of the students that had been viewed previously as lacking of ability. Through efforts in the registrar and counseling department, AVID has been able to open the doors for more students to enroll in rigorous courses. Currently, the course offerings have expanded to include multiple sections of honors and AP English courses as well as full rosters in Advanced Placement math and science courses.

4. At Palo Verde High School, the definition of leadership has changed from the principal and administration to teachers due to the fact that administration has changed 7 times in 12 years. During this same time, faculty and staff has changed greatly with each administration and the goals and programs that came with them. AVID however, has remained a constant. The site coordinator has remained the same for 9 of the 10 years of the programs existence and has continued to find ways to fund Summer Institute training. Given the fact that a different group of teachers were taken each summer and introduced to the ideas and methodologies taught, change in attitude began to be seen by the staff. Additionally, as students began to succeed in rigorous courses, the staff started to take notice of the idea that more students should be given opportunities to challenge themselves. Today, the AVID program is a leader on campus and has been the driving for in removing barriers such as placement tests for Advanced Placement courses, increasing the number of students taking the SAT and ACT tests as well as enrolling in community college coursed while still in high school. AVID has taken a lead role by providing students with hope and a desire and teachers with skills to feed that hope and create a safe environment for them to learn. While we would like to say that we have 100% of our students taking the most rigorous coursed available to them, we cannot. It is the belief of our site team in order for us to come closer to achieving this, we need to start to change the culture of the community we live in and work district wide to promote equity and rigor at the lower grades.

5. In an attempt to change the culture of the school and create opportunities for all students, the staff of Palo Verde High School and revised our mission statement to read “Our purpose is to prepare all students to prepare for and transition into a college or career upon graduation”. Given that, we are committed to making sure that all students realize they are not on a K-12 track but need some type of post secondary training. For many, this is translating into becoming college ready and our staff is looking at the difference between college prepared and college ready. While the definition of rigor is still being defined at the site level, all realize that it will vary from

student to student and class to class. The greatest accomplished is that rigor means more in-depth work not more work; practice now needs to catch up with this realization but is in progress.

As barriers such as placement tests have been removed from enrolling in AP and honors courses, students from a variety of backgrounds have enrolled in them and challenged the assumptions that many had regarding their abilities. In the 2008-2009 school year, a recent reclassified resource student enrolled in AP English Literature. Although she struggled, she found success and ultimately, challenged the teacher to become better at her chosen profession by using research based instructional strategies which benefited all students.

Students at Palo Verde High School are encouraged to enroll in our local community college and are allowed to take less fewer classes during the school day to do so. This Spring, discussions began with Palo Verde College to offer more courses to our students both at the high school campus and college campus that would allow them to graduate high school with more transferable units. We believe that this will create a culture where more students will want to enroll in a university upon graduation.

Staff development is ongoing and continuous support for quality researched based teaching strategies is a must. With this in mind, the administration is transitioning the current AVID coordinator/teacher into an academic coach for teachers in all subject areas. The idea is to provide teachers with the support much the same way we provide students with support. Our student support includes after school tutoring staffed by AVID trained teachers, tutorials for the AVID students, lunch time tutoring in the AVID room for all students and the counseling department completing 4 year plans yearly with all students. Additionally, all 10th grade students now take the PLAN test to provide them with feedback on careers as well as college readiness abilities.

While 10 years seems short in the scheme of things, many changes have been made at the site level. Continuous attendance at AVID Summer Institute has had the greatest impact on changing the culture of the school. While we feel we must continue to improve in areas such as tracking the success of students once they leave us we know that we continue to have success in our AVID program which in turn spreads through-out the school. Currently, we are working to increase awareness to all parents and students about the importance of taking rigorous courses and changing from a k-12 mentality to a k-16 mentality.