

## **Pleasant Valley Middle School AVID- A Case Study in Equity and Rigor for All**

**Wichita, KS** Can you believe five new administrators in the last eight years and the school is an AVID National Demonstration Site? How did this happen?

A new administrator, Denise Wren, came to Pleasant Valley Middle School. She had learned of the AVID program at North High School and thought it would be a good program for Pleasant Valley. The Wichita Public School district includes approximately 49,000 students, with an even mix of 51% male to 49% female students. The district is ethnically diverse with the following student populations: Whites 38%; Hispanics 24%; African-Americans 20%; and, students classified as “other” at 18%. The majority of students can be categorized as economically disadvantaged (70%). Sixteen percent of students throughout the district are English Language Learners and 13% of students have some disability. Pleasant Valley Middle School is home to almost 600 students, with approximately 200 sixth graders, 210 seventh graders and 190 eighth graders. Demographics include a mostly Hispanic population (66%) with almost sixteen percent of the student body Caucasian, seven percent African-American and almost 11% of the population categorized as “Other” (mostly Asian or Indian). In addition, most of these students live below the poverty level with 89.3% of the student body classified as economically disadvantaged. A little over 46% of students are classified as English Language Learners and almost 13% of students have some disability. The gender breakdown includes a 51% male and 49% female student body.

Eight years ago, Pleasant Valley had a reputation for high levels of violence, high numbers of gang members, and low state test scores. The AVID program would be the catalyst for change needed at the school. After attending Summer Institute, a core group of teachers brought AVID to the school. The new site team shared some of the strategies they had learned. At first, the staff was very reluctant to “buy in” to the program. They often expressed, “a program for a small group of kids, something new...heard this before.” Our planning year ended with 16 new students and a very enthusiastic teacher/coordinator ready to begin a new chapter in Pleasant Valley history.

Our second year of AVID started off with huge changes. These critical changes were our principal left us to go to North High School, our AVID teacher/coordinator decides to be an administrator and leaves, and one of our site team members, becomes the AVID District Director and leaves us as well. However, through it all, our site team remained strong and positive advocates for the program. The new principal’s vision was to utilize AVID to stimulate school wide change. Our second year of AVID also saw huge growth within the program itself.

As we increased our AVID enrollment from 2 classes to 4, the vision of school wide AVID emerged. Every student at Pleasant Valley was now using a 3” binder and Cornell notes in all classes. The site team taught AVID strategies at monthly staff meetings, and the staff was required to use them.

Recruitment was going well until an ESOL newcomer (new to our country) was recommended for AVID. Diego had just moved from Mexico a year before with no English ability. Teachers had seen that Diego had the determination to be successful. During the AVID interview, Diego and his family was told that if accepted into AVID, he would be removed from the ESOL class and put in Advanced

Language Arts. Diego was placed into AVID and with the support of his family removed from the ESOL program. However, there was a snag. The ESOL teacher did not want to release him, reasoning, “he is such a good student, I don’t want to let him go.” Diego was determined to succeed and graduated from Pleasant Valley with a 3.4. Currently, Diego has graduated from North High School and is currently enrolled in college. The success of students like Diego has opened the door for the possibility of ESOL Newcomers to succeed in the AVID program. This success has continued throughout the program.

Currently, two students who have been in the United States for less than two years were among the 35% ESOL population chosen to be in our AVID program. These two students have excelled in rigorous courses and have taken on strong leadership roles in AVID. The student from El Salvador, Ismael, was a ESOL Newcomer as a sixth grader, was accepted into AVID, placed in Pre-AP Language Arts and has flourished in all areas with a 4.0 grade point average. Khanh-Phuong, a student from Vietnam, has only been in the country for 16 months. She applied for the AVID program and was placed in challenging classes. She is no longer in ESOL classes and thrives with a 4.0 grade point average. Moreover, she was accepted into the Bio-Med program at North. Both of these two students are going to continue their AVID experience at the high school level.

With our growing ESOL student population we have provided the opportunity for these students to be part of the high rigor that advanced classes offer the student. This is illustrated by the following chart:

6th grade Pre- AP Language Arts	15 of 38 are ESOL	39%
6th grade Honors Math:	25 of 57 are ESOL	44%
7th grade Pre- AP Language Arts:	15 of 59 are ESOL	25%
7th grade Pre-Algebra:	17 of 67 are ESOL	25%
8th grade Pre- AP Language Arts:	19 of 57 are ESOL	33%
8th grade Algebra:	18 of 66 are ESOL	27%
	109 of 344 are ESOL	32%

As enrollment grew, the entire school continued to transform to a rigorous, college-bound atmosphere. Continuing to expose the staff to AVID strategies, the learning coach teaches AVID strategies in staff development once a week. By this time, most of the staff has embraced AVID because we are starting to see the affects.

In the last few years, we expanded AVID classes into 6th grade and continue to refine our AVID school wide program and curriculum. The 6th grade curriculum and program have continued as strong support of students and the growth of the AVID program.

What has kept our program solid amidst adversity? A strong site team and low staff turnover. Over the years, the staff has seen our school climate change, state test scores improve, and a college-going atmosphere blossomed. In the classrooms and in the halls, college is everywhere. Our first AVID graduating class at North High netted \$1.4 million

in scholarship money, and one of our students was a recipient of the Gates and Dell scholarships. The site team has been the core of the program, which has grown from 16 to 140 students presently, and it is strong and viable. In addition, Pleasant Valley Middle School has been honored to have had two alumni as AVID Summer Institute speakers.

Students at Pleasant Valley Middle School experience all aspects of the AVID principles of Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration and Reading. Every teacher in the building is trained in basic as well as content-specific AVID strategies and uses them liberally in their classroom settings. From “I AM” Poems in Physical Education, to dialectical journals in social studies rigor can be seen in every classroom at Pleasant Valley Middle School. With a high proportion of disadvantaged and ELL students, AVID methods provide a cooperative and rigorous learning experience for all students while still allowing differentiation for those who need to develop basic academic skills. At Pleasant Valley, we define rigor by using WICR strategies school wide to challenge and engage every student and AVID strategies are often modified by teachers to meet the learning modalities of our students, helping them to experience successes in academics that assist them in progressively stepping up to more rigorous levels of learning.

Initially, students are placed in academic classes based on a variety of data points including teacher recommendation, state and district tests and screeners. The teacher recommendations involves a large group of educators including but not limited to ESOL, Special Education, Gifted Special Education, the regular education teacher, instructional coaches, data leaders, counselors, principals and AVID site team members. These points are considered in an effort to provide students with the most rigorous coursework whereby causing an updraft approach. Also, if a student or parent requests an honors class, we provide them with the opportunity to excel. Furthermore, we have provided students the opportunity to take Geometry through dual enrollment at North High School to meet their academic needs as well as placing students in advanced math classes such as Course II Honors Math, Pre-Algebra and Algebra at PVMS. For the 2010-11 school year, we will be adding Geometry, Honors Science and Honors Social Studies to our curriculum in order to address our student needs for more challenging courses to better prepare them for high school and college.

In addition to academic placement in challenging coursework, we also provide each grade level with career presentations and career inventories. In the 6th grade, students are given the Career Game in order to peak their interest in various occupational areas. This is followed by the Kansas Career Pipeline in 7th Grade, which is an extensive online website resource with multiple assessments including a skills inventory which also helps them see the career clusters they might be most interested. This program continues to be built on as they enter high school, attend college and become an adult. Students are able to research colleges and apply for jobs along with countless other options. In 8th grade, students are given the ACT Explore and they are explained the results individually. The Kansas Career Pipeline is printed to be used as a comparison as well. Indeed, each year students are given opportunities to become cognizant of possible future endeavors. In turn, this encourages the importance of preparing for high school and college through the need for rigorous coursework.

Our district and school has seen the need for rigorous programs by increasing the amount of AVID school sites, honors classes and AP classes. As stated earlier, we have provided students the opportunity to take Geometry through dual enrollment at North High School to meet their academic

needs as well as placing students in advanced math classes such as Course II Honors Math, Pre-Algebra and Algebra at PVMS. For the 2010-11 school year, we will be adding Geometry, Honors Science and Honors Social Studies to our curriculum in order to address our student needs for more challenging courses to better prepare them for high school and college. In summary, we do not limit students with individual determination by keeping them in regular education classes. On the contrary, we encourage these students to do their best by placing them in the most challenging classes in which they will be successful.

AVID students are encouraged to be leaders – both in and beyond the classroom – and are held up as examples of how to succeed in school. In addition, Pleasant Valley has the only Sixth Grade AVID program in our district. Since implementation of this program during the 2008-2009 academic year, we have seen much more solidity in the growth of our AVID students from their first year at middle school to their second year. The 2010-2011 school year will provide data on how implementation of the program at the 6th grade level impacts the retention, grades and matriculation of AVID students from middle school to high school.

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

What a difference AVID has made at Pleasant Valley Middle School! No longer is Pleasant Valley seen as a low achieving school, but as a top middle school in Wichita, a leader. Now we have so many students that want to come to our school, we have to turn special transfers away. Teachers want to be here now more than ever, and it is not unusual to have many applicants for a single position. 100% of our staff are AVID trained, 4 of our site team members are on the school leadership team, and 4 site team members are trainers of trainers. Families flock to Pleasant Valley Middle School for family nights, with a feeling of belonging come see our family, it is a great place to be!