



SUCCESSFUL

HOW AVID IS CLOSING THE
ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND MAKING
COLLEGE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL



Minority and low-income students are experiencing secondary school success and forging a path to higher education



Watch our online videos of Philosophical Chairs and Socratic Seminars in action at Roseland University Prep

www.scoe.org/avid

You've probably heard of AVID. Perhaps you even know something about it and the positive impact it's having on students. You may recognize it as an initiative that makes a difference for minority and low-income students, preparing and motivating them for college, but do you know what makes AVID tick?

This issue of the SCO E Bulletin explores what takes place in an AVID classroom to make it such a success. Five key strategies are described here: the AVID Binder, Cornell Notes, AVID Tutorials, Philosophical Chairs, and Socratic Seminars. Each offers insight into the educational needs and potential of the minority and low-income students in our schools and can help inform our efforts to close the achievement gap in Sonoma County. Blended together, the strategies are part of the unique characteristics of an AVID classroom.

AVID: ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION

"What makes AVID so special is that, as a teacher, you can connect very personally with a group of students who, without AVID support, would not go directly to a four-year university," explains Theresa Burke, the AVID teacher at Cloverdale High School. She has worked in this program for the past four years and has seen dramatic results in her students. She points to Kyle, now a freshman at the University of Nevada in Reno, as just one of many success stories. His mother describes the impact AVID had on him, saying she's not sure how he would have made it through high school without the support this program provided.

In schools small and large, AVID creates an in-school community that's focused on academic success and engages students who haven't necessarily been successful in our schools. Teachers often stay with a single class of students for more than a year, thus creating a classroom that feels like family



WHAT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT AVID

AVID has made a dramatic change in my grades and my GPA. I've gone from a 2.0 freshman year to a 3.0 now in my junior year.

—*Maricin, Rancho Cotate High*

AVID has greatly improved my organization. It has improved my public speaking. What I've taken most from AVID is knowledge about colleges. I had no idea how colleges worked until AVID.

—*Adam, Rancho Cotate High*

AVID has brought me amazing friends and great instructors. I look forward to the next two years with my AVID family.

—*Giovanna, Rancho Cotate High*

AVID has helped me realize I can get into college if I really put my mind into it.

—*Jenny, Windsor High*

AVID has improved my organizational skills. It keeps me on task with my classes and thinking of my future goal of going to college.

—*Luis, Windsor High*

and has the benefits of a small learning community. AVID teachers bond with their students, acting as mentors and encouraging them to strive to attend a four-year university or college. It's said that the program "levels the playing field for minority, rural, low-income, and other students without a college-going tradition in their families."

AVID started in 1980 with one high school and 32 students. It now serves nearly 300,000 students in over 4,000 schools in 45 states and across 15 countries. In Sonoma County, 17 middle schools and high schools now offer this program to their students. Policymakers and school administrators here and abroad consider AVID an essential strategy for closing the achievement gap and making college accessible to all students.

AVID reaches out to grade 7-12 students in the academic middle—B, C, and even D students—who have a desire to go to college and the willingness

to work hard. These students are capable of completing a rigorous curriculum, but are falling short of their potential. Typically, they are from low-income or minority families and will become the first in their family to attend college.

AVID pulls these students out of their unchallenging courses and puts them on the college track. They are enrolled in their school's toughest classes, including honors and advanced placement, then effectively supported so they can meet the demands of those classes.

This program is about *acceleration*, not remediation.

Support for students comes from an in-school AVID elective class. For one period per day, students learn organizational and study skills, develop their capacity for critical thinking, get academic help from peers and tutors, and participate in enrichment and motivational activities.

The AVID elective shows students how to work successfully in their content area classes and prepares them for high school and postsecondary success. It teaches them how to organize their schoolwork, take effective notes, delve into subjects with higher-level thinking, collaborate, and write. Students acquire these skills through strategies that lend structure to learning and discussions that require them to think clearly and express their ideas. Assignments focused on reading and writing are complemented by activities that assist students with test-taking skills, goal setting, choosing a college, and preparing for college entrance exams.

THE AVID BINDER

Being organized is an essential trait for success both in school and beyond, but for many students this is a skill that needs to be learned. Teaching students how to be organized is the purpose of the AVID Binder, whose unique feature is that it is *graded*.

Students begin with a simple binder that has dividers for each academic subject. They three-hole punch and file all of their assignment sheets, handouts, class notes, and completed tests in the appropriate section. Every other week, the



Philosophical Chairs

teacher or a trained tutor grades the binder of every student. Students may also peer-grade binders, giving suggestions for how to improve organization and neatness. In this way, the binder becomes a tool for academic organization and success across the curriculum.

Students are introduced to the binder as soon as they enter AVID and it continues to be used as they advance through the grades. In districts where students begin AVID in middle school and transition directly to the high school program, binder skills are taught early and reinforced in the upper grades.

CORNELL NOTES

Note-taking is one of the instructional strategies identified by education researcher Dr. Robert Marzano as having significant potential for raising student achievement. AVID gives its students a clear framework for processing, refining, and remembering information by teaching them the Cornell Note-Taking System.

Students prepare to take Cornell Notes by dividing a page into three parts: a large note-taking area on the right, a column for questions the left, and a summary section along the bottom. In the note-taking area, they record main ideas and important concepts covered in classroom lectures, textbook readings, and guest speaker presentations. After class, they formulate questions and write them in the right-hand column. The process of questioning leads students to think about what they've learned, clarify meaning, and reinforce connections. Later, they reflect on their notes and questions and add summarizing comments to relate the topic to their own lives, other subject areas, and previously acquired knowledge.

Cornell Notes are effective because they require students to stay alert to what they're learning, keep them engaged in lectures and readings, give them a resource for actively contributing to group discussions, and provide them with study guides for tests and assignments.

AVID TUTORIALS

Tutorials occur twice a week in the AVID elective class. They have a unique format, utilizing trained tutors

and a system of Socratic questioning to encourage students to think critically, analyze information, and express ideas.

For homework the night before a tutorial, students write two higher-level questions about a subject they need help with. They record these on a "tutorial request form," which they turn in to the teacher at the start of class. The teacher uses this information to assign students to groups based on subject area. Each group sits in a half-circle facing a white board. A trained tutor facilitates the group and begins by asking one student to pose his/her question. After the question is presented, others in the group respond by using probing questions to help guide the student to the answer. At the conclusion of the tutorial, each student writes a summary about what they have discovered.

These group tutorials are designed to support what AVID students are learning in their content classes and to develop the higher-level thinking skills needed for school success. Community volunteers, college students, and older high school students are trained to lead the tutorial groups. At Santa Rosa High School, veteran AVID teacher Levi Jones invites advanced placement and honors students to facilitate tutorials, while Cloverdale High teacher Theresa Burke and Comstock Middle School teacher Kathy Shanklin have both found community-based tutors by working with the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County.

The idea behind AVID Tutorials is that teaching students to think for themselves is more important than providing them with the "right answers."

PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

Philosophical Chairs is a format for classroom discussion used in AVID classes nationwide. It promotes dialogue and requires students to engage with one another to gain understanding of controversial topics.

To set up the classroom for this activity, chairs or desks are arranged in two lines facing each other, with a similar number of seats on each side (see photo at left). A pro/con statement is presented. The statement might be based on a reading or it could be a stand-alone issue. Either way, it should be something that divides the class in two—those who agree and those who disagree. For example:

- The voting age should be lowered to 16.
- School uniforms result in better behavior and academic performance by students.
- Legalizing drugs would lead to less crime.

Students who agree with the statement sit on one side of the room and those who disagree sit on the

Template for Cornell Notes	
<i>Questions</i>	<i>Note-Taking Area</i>
<i>Summary</i>	

other (neutral students move their chairs to the middle), then they argue their positions. To keep the process orderly, some teachers have students hold a bean bag, which gives them permission to speak, then pass the bag to the next speaker when they have finished. Ground rules, like not allowing a student to speak a second time until at least three other people have spoken, are also helpful.

In addition to participating in the discussion, students may express their opinion by moving from the pro to the con side, and vice versa. For example, a student might change sides when another speaker presents a convincing argument or rebuts their original statement. When a student changes sides, he or she physically moves to the other side of the room.

At Roseland University Prep, teacher Kristen O'Connor asks her students to always paraphrase what others have said before responding to the contrary. In this way, her students are encouraged to engage in active listening rather than simply planning their own responses.

Throughout the discussion, the teacher acts as a neutral mediator, calling on students to speak, clarifying what has been said, and deciding when to ask students to make final statements and bring the discussion to a close.

At the end of class, time is allotted for students to write their reflections about the arguments put forward. They are asked to explain the statement and their position. Did they change their mind? What did others say that influenced their thinking?

SOCRATIC SEMINARS

Socratic Seminars provide another structure to encourage AVID students to seek deeper understanding of complex ideas through thoughtful dialogue and develop fundamental learning skills such as listening, speaking, reasoning, comprehension, and teamwork.

Like Philosophical Chairs, the seminars require a specific room set-up. In this instance, chairs are arranged in a circle—or, if the class is large, there is an inner circle for students who will participate in the discussion and an outer circle of students who will observe, analyze, and reflect on the inner circle's dialogue. The teacher serves as the leader, although students may take over this position as they gain experience with the process.

Prior to the seminar, students are given a text selection to read. It may be a current event news

article, selection published by the Touchstones Discussion Project (www.touchstones.org), or content area text that is rich in ideas. Topics of interest to teens—the dilemmas of social networking, school rules, and effectiveness of block scheduling or a longer school year—can be especially effective at promoting lively discussions. Some teachers ask students to prepare a summary statement or question based on their reading, then use this input as a starting point for the seminar.

The leader guides the discussion with open-ended questions. Students are encouraged to engage in a collaborative dialogue, rather than debate, and to refer back to the text as they speculate, evaluate, define, and clarify the issues involved. They take turns speaking and work together to make connections between the ideas in the text and what they know from their own experience.

A Socratic Seminar generally lasts 10 to 20 minutes. At the conclusion, students may be asked to provide a written reflection and turn it in to the teacher for evaluation. It's not uncommon for students to leave a Socratic Seminar with more questions than they come with, which can spark additional research, discussion, and learning.

The combination of strategies that AVID offers has proven to be the right mix of structure, support, motivation, and challenge for the students it serves. The program encourages them to take individual responsibility for their learning and instills the confidence and determination they need to succeed. The result for Sonoma County is a growing cadre of minority and low-income students who are experiencing secondary school success and forging a path to higher education. ♦

Content for this issue was provided by Annette Murray, coordinator of the North Coast AVID Regional Center, and edited by Suzanne Gedney. Photos, by Annette Murray, are of the senior AVID class at Roseland University Prep taught by Kristen O'Connor. Contact the AVID Regional Center at (707) 522-3209 or www.scoe.org/avid.



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