

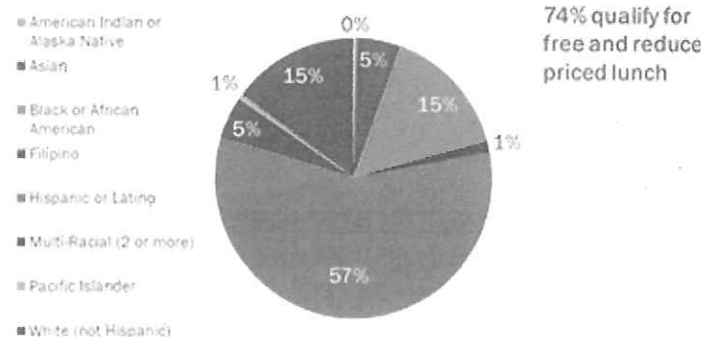
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State of Black Asheville
AVID

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AVID, or Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a national college readiness program for elementary through higher education that is designed to lower the achievement gap by increasing school wide learning and performance. AVID was started in 1980 by Mary Catherine Swanson, a high school English teacher in San Diego, California. At first, the AVID program consisted of just a single elective class offered by Swanson at Clairemont High school in San Diego. Over 30 years later, AVID has now reached over 700,000 students in 45 states and nearly 5,000 schools ("What is AVID?").

The AVID program specifically targets students "in the middle" who have GPA's between 2.0 and 3.5. The reasoning behind this is that programs already exist for the academically gifted and academically struggling, but often times the "average" students are ignored and left behind. AVID aims to raise the standards that these students are held to while providing a support system that will empower them to succeed. The vast majority of AVID students are underserved Latinos or African Americans, many of whom will likely be the first members of their family to attend college. In 2013, 57 % of AVID seniors in high school were Latino, 15 % were African American, and 15 % were white. 74 % of these students qualified for free and

Ethnicity of 2013 AVID Seniors



reduced-lunch programs, showing that the students who are accepted into AVID tend to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds ("Data & Results").

Asheville City Schools began offering the AVID program in 1997, and in 1999 UNC Asheville was invited to become an AVID partner. Since its inception, AVID has shown amazing results both nationally and locally and the program continues to be expanded. AVID is a large program with a plethora of different initiatives, but the bottom line remains that AVID students attend college at much higher rates than non-AVID students. In 2013, 86 % of AVID graduates nationally applied to college while 76 % were accepted ("Data & Results"). The rates for AVID students in Asheville City Schools are even higher than the national average! 100 % of AVID students in Asheville City Schools apply to college with 90 % acceptance rates. AVID students in Asheville City Schools also have consistent median GPA scores of 3.1 and enroll in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses at far higher rates than non-AVID students ("The AVID Program in Asheville City Schools: A Partnership between ACS + UNC Asheville").

The AVID program has its roots in secondary education. The original AVID elective course was offered to students in grades 7 through 12 but has now been expanded to begin in grade 4. Usually students must complete an application before they are accepted into the program. The application consists of basic familial and academic information, questions about how the student does in school, and recommendations from both math and English teachers. The purpose of the application is mainly to make sure that students want to be in AVID and will actually try to succeed if they are accepted. Examples of the types of questions they are

asked include, "Will you be the first in your family to attend college," "Are you willing to make a commitment to the AVID program," "How do you overcome academic challenges," etc ("PUSD AVID Application").

After being accepted into the program, students are enrolled in a daily AVID elective class that is focused on teaching organizational skills, note taking and study skills, critical thinking, and other general instruction related to the basic skills necessary to succeed in an academic environment. AVID students also benefit from interaction with trained tutors as well as enrichment and motivational activities such as visits to colleges. AVID students are also typically required or encouraged to enroll in at least one honors or AP class in addition to the AVID elective. AVID believes in acceleration rather than remediation. The idea is to remove students from their unchallenging classes and instead provide a support system to help them succeed in more challenging classes.

The curriculum used in the AVID elective was developed by middle and high school teachers in collaboration with university professors. The end result of this collaboration is the WICOR method. WICOR incorporates teaching and learning methodologies in the following critical areas: Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading to Learn. ("WICOR: AVID's Foundation for High Engagement Teaching and Learning"). Writing is introduced as a tool that can help students think, learn, and grow. Students are encouraged to consider issues in new and complex ways and are challenged to clarify and order their experiences and ideas through writing. Effective writers also tend to be effective critical thinkers,

which is another key foundation of the AVID program. Writing is an essential piece of the college experience, and AVID seeks to prepare students for this early on.

Inquiry can also be referred to as critical thinking. AVID's focus on inquiry is designed to increase student's metacognition skills. In other words, AVID aims to make students more aware of their actual thinking process. This is achieved not by overloading students with information, but rather by helping them learn to ask progressively harder, more detailed and complex questions. By focusing on the questions instead of the answers, AVID students are building a foundation for necessary critical thinking skills that will help them tackle literally any problem they have to deal with in life.

The collaboration aspect of WICOR involves creating intentionally designed student groups where students can work together on solving problems and reaching meaningful learning outcomes. AVID faculty facilitates these groups, but it's the students who actually do the teaching. In these groups, students can ask for help with what they're struggling with and work through their problems in a supportive, group environment. Helping another student understand a concept is a great way to deepen your own understanding of the concept. Students also gain insight into how other students approach their work and gain valuable experience working in groups and getting along with others. These are all skills that are crucial in a college or workplace environment.

Organization is one of the fundamental skills necessary for academic achievement, yet we rarely spend much time teaching organizational skills in school. For this reason, AVID helps teach students how to effectively manage their time and

energy, as well as organize their materials, assignments, assessments, handouts, and notes. Oftentimes students are so disorganized that they can't even stay on top of what work they need to get done. Establishing foundational organizational skills helps students spend more of their time focusing on their actual work. One of AVID's primary focuses is promoting "individual determination," and learning organizational skills helps prepare students to look after themselves and succeed in life.

The final aspect of the WICOR method is called reading to learn. Reading may seem like a basic skill, and it is, but many students are still reading at levels below their grade. "Critical reading" is essential to succeeding in college-level courses. AVID employs research-based strategies to help students read more effectively. Using a scaffolding system in which information builds on top of previous lessons, AVID students are taught to "read with purpose." Classroom exercises ensure that students are connecting their reading to prior knowledge, understanding the structure of texts, and using text-processing strategies during and after reading in order to improve comprehension abilities.

The combination of all aspects of the WICOR method truly helps students build a foundation for future learning. Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading to learn are all crucial skills for anyone who wants to succeed in a college environment. By introducing these skills at such a young age, AVID is giving students a leg up and showing them that they do have what it takes to make it into college.

While the AVID program started out as just a single elective class, it didn't take long before others began to realize the potential of embracing AVID's philosophy across all levels of education. Today the goal isn't to simply institute the AVID elective for selected students, but rather to institutionalize the AVID methodologies and teaching/learning techniques throughout entire schools and school districts.

Implementing AVID on a school-wide level does not happen overnight. It's a comprehensive multi-year effort that requires the concerted effort and dedication of teachers, administrators, and students. During the first year or two of implementation schools only focus on offering the AVID elective course to selected students. School faculty must receive training and professional development and an appropriate amount of student tutors must be trained. Eventually, as more teachers are impacted by AVID training and begin using AVID's research-based teaching strategies in their classrooms, more and more students begin to see the benefits of AVID. AVID is considered school-wide once it successfully transforms the leadership, systems, instruction, and culture of a school so that everyone is prepared for a college education. The following are the official AVID school-wide definitions:

"AVID School-wide Leadership: sets the vision and the tone that promotes college readiness and high expectations for all students in the school.

AVID School-wide Systems: when systems are in place that support governance, curriculum & instruction, data collection & analysis, professional learning, and student & parent outreach to ensure college readiness.

AVID School-wide Instruction: when the entire instructional staff utilizes AVID strategies, other best instructional practices, and 21st Century tools to ensure college readiness for all students.

AVID School-wide Culture: when the AVID philosophy progressively shifts the system of beliefs and behaviors thus increasing all students meeting college readiness requirements" ("Schoolwide/Districtwide").

Once AVID is implemented school-wide, the next step is district-wide implementation. District-wide implementation of AVID requires an articulated combination of academic rigor and support systems for students in grades 4 through 12. An opportunity must exist for upper-elementary students and teachers to become trained in WICOR and college prep study skills. The AVID program must be fully developed at the middle and high school level with the ability to accommodate all students who need support. Finally, AVID should be noted as a multi-grade program in the school's mission and goals and AVID district and site teams should work together to effectively transition AVID students across grades 4 through 12. Once AVID becomes district-wide, the focus shifts away from a site-based approach and towards a more holistic approach (Gira, Robert).

As the AVID program has grown and expanded over time, it has continued to embrace this type of holistic, all-encompassing approach to education. Today, the AVID system has extended its reach far beyond the single elective class it started as and can be thought of as fitting into three main categories: elementary education, secondary education, and higher education. Secondary education covers grades 4

through 12 and is the primary focus of AVID. While the secondary education component of AVID can function independently of the others, the program truly works best as a unified system that is able to support students throughout their entire educational careers.

AVID Elementary (AE) was created as a part of AVID's larger mission to provide district-wide support to students. AE is based on the same general foundation and philosophy as the AVID elective for secondary education, but is designed to be embedded into the daily instruction of all elementary classrooms across grade levels. It is not intended to be taught in isolation or as an elective class. In this way, the program is able to, at a young age, create an academic culture that values learning and success and will prepare students for college.

AVID Elementary is divided into three stages that support students from Kindergarten through 8th grade: Beginnings, Foundations, and Bridges. AE Beginnings addresses the first years of formal education when students are just emerging as learners. At this stage, students use the WICOR method in order to learn how to read, how to write, and how to learn. AE Foundations is focused on the foundational years of education when students are becoming independent learners. At this stage, the WICOR method is used by students who are reading to learn, writing to learn, and learning to reflect on their own learning. AE Bridges addresses the transitional years of education when students are becoming independent thinkers and helps to prepare students for the transition into middle and high school and beyond. At this point the students are capable of metacognition (thinking about thinking) and are actively learning about their learning process. AVID helps

students build the foundational skills to truly take control of their own learning process.

There are four essential elements to the AVID Elementary program:

Instruction, Culture, Leadership, and Systems. These four essentials are what AVID facilitators are required to focus on as they design and implement the program at their school. Instruction involves the WICOR method, which has already been discussed at length. Writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading to learn make up the foundation of the AVID curriculum for students. The second essential, culture, is less concrete. AVID Elementary sites strive to create a school-wide culture that values learning and academic achievement and promotes college readiness for all students. The idea is to incorporate rigorous, relevant, and differentiated opportunities for students so that from a young age they are already thinking about attending college. Changing your academic environment from one of expected dropouts to one where students expect and want to go to college can make a huge difference in how and what you learn.

The third essential is leadership. The leadership essential is focused on the implementation and administration of the AE program and is mainly concerned with finding faculty leaders who are willing and able to oversee this process. The fourth and final essential is systems. The purpose of the systems essential is to align the AE program across grade levels and within the broader AVID system to ensure consistent and successful implementation and administration of the program. The systems essential is based on four pillars of excellence: accountability, articulation, assessment, and calibration. Schools must be held accountable to quality

implementation of the program. They must articulate the goals, as well as any potential problems, of the program between and across grade levels. They must assess the performance of AVID students in order to gather data on the effects of the program and inform future instruction. Finally, they must calibrate the program within and across subject areas. Following the four pillars of excellence contained within the systems essential helps to provide consistent expectations for students across and throughout all AVID programs.

The four AE essentials (instruction, culture, leadership, and systems) were designed in order to help elementary schools better implement the AE program into their schools. Elementary schools must enter into a multi-year process in order to fully implement the program and become certified. This involves choosing an AE Liaison for the school who must complete a two-year training cycle in AVID Elementary training. The principal of the school as well as direct AVID teachers at the school must also go through training. Schools then must maintain an annual membership with AVID that allows them access to a number of resources as well as the right to use the AVID name and logo.

The AE program is still in its infancy in terms of implementation. There are a handful of schools that have been chosen as pilots and have begun the process, but the 2013-2014 academic year actually marks the inaugural certification process for eligible elementary schools. The implementation process will take at least four years. This may seem like a long time, but it is necessary for faculty to receive the proper training and to make the institutional changes within the school.

Implementation begins with the exit level grade and then moves down so that

students who become involved in the AVID program will be able to continue as they move through school.

The AVID Elementary program is based on the research of Dr. Carol Dweck. Dr. Dweck, a Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, is one of the world's leading researchers in the field of motivation. The AE Philosophy is centered around the concept of a "growth mindset." The idea is that students can be taught a "growth mindset" that will empower them to "believe that their talents and abilities can be developed through passion, education, and persistence" (Dweck, Carol S.). The AE program also incorporates the research findings of Marzano, Gaddy, and Dean (Marzano, R.). This research has identified nine instructional strategies that have the highest probability for enhancing student achievement. These strategies include; identifying similarities and differences, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, activating prior knowledge, setting goals and providing feedback, etc. All of AVID's instructional methods across all of their programs are heavily supported by leading academic research in the area ("Overview AVID Elementary").

AVID for Higher Education (AHE) is AVID's newest program. The first AHE pilot program was created in 2009 and included six universities from four states. The intention was to expand the AVID support system to universities to help undergraduates who may be underprepared for college. AHE also assists higher education professionals in systemically addressing the barriers to success that students typically face during college. These two goals are the focus of AHE's two main initiatives: Student Success and Teacher Preparation.

After studying the pilot program, AVID determined five essentials for the implementation of the Student Success Initiative in AHE. Essential 1 is Administrative Leadership and Support. In order for AHE to be successfully implemented, it is crucial that a dedicated and passionate AVID Liaison is selected to lead the AVID campus team. Essential 2 is AVID Campus Team: Campus-wide Collaboration. The AVID campus team, directed by the AVID Liaison, is responsible for the development and management of the AVID Campus Plan. This plan includes provisions for student services and faculty development as well as plans for program growth and development. AVID staff members are required to meet with the AVID Campus Team at least four times a year during the first two years of implementation for formal Campus Facilitation Days. These facilitation days are used to train the Campus Team in implementing the program.

The third essential is Faculty Development and Professional Learning. During the first two years of the AHE program, selected members of the Campus Team are sent to a three-day summer institute developed by AVID specifically for the AHE program. AVID liaisons are also encouraged to attend meetings in the fall and spring semesters to share experiences and network with other AHE liaisons. In addition to these conferences and trainings, all institutions working with the AHE program receive a variety of different resources as well as phone and online support from national AHE staff.

Essential 4 is AVID Experience: First Year Through Completion. AHE campuses are required to either create or modify existing freshman seminar courses to include WICOR in the curriculum. Additional opportunities for mentoring and

tutoring with AVID trained tutors must be made available to students. AHE institutions must also develop an AVID Student Center where students are able to meet in learning groups, arrange tutoring sessions or participate in special workshops or lectures. Essential 5 is Assessment and Research. AHE institutions must collect consistent data on their programs so that the outcomes can be thoroughly reviewed and evaluated (AVID for Higher Education).

In the 2012/2013 academic year, 25 institutions of higher education are in the process of implementing the AHE Student Success Initiative (AVID for Higher Education). The formal AHE Certification process is just becoming publicly available for the 2013/2014 academic year. Since the program is still in its infancy, there is not as much data available as there is for the main AVID program. However, there are still preliminary results available from a study performed by the Gibson Group that looked at eleven institutions of higher education in Texas that have begun implementing AHE.

The Gibson study looked at two main areas: Grade Point Average and Persistence to Spring Term. Seven out of the 11 institutions reported data on GPA, and in all seven cases AHE students outperformed their peers who were not a part of the program. GPA's for AHE students were anywhere from .04 to .81 points higher, which is statistically significant. Ten out of the 11 institutions reported data for persistence to spring term. AHE students in all of these institutions were more likely to stay in school, but the results were only statistically significant in four out of ten institutions. Among these four, AHE students were anywhere from 8 to 66 % more likely to remain in school than their non-AHE peers (AVID for Higher

Education). There will be much more research as this program continues to expand but the limited amount that there is serves to highlight the importance of AHE's 5th essential – Assessment and Research. It is crucial that institutions keep consistent data on their programs so that the effectiveness of them can be measured over time.

In addition to AVID's elementary, secondary, and higher education programs, they are also working on a number of equity initiatives in an attempt to provide additional support to groups of students who have historically been underrepresented in higher education institutions. AVID's two main equity initiatives are Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) and the African American Male Initiative (AAMI). These initiatives aren't separate from the AVID programs. Rather, they are designed to be integrated into all AVID classrooms in order to effectively reach students from all backgrounds.

The Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) initiative was developed by AVID as an attempt to bring students from different backgrounds together, increase their understanding of one another's cultures, and break down the barriers to equity in education. CRT is offered at the AVID summer institute as well at annual national conferences. This training provides teachers with new pedagogical tools that will help them deal with cultural differences head on instead of ignoring them. CRT training forces teachers to examine stereotypes and cultural differences so that they can determine the best way to deal with them in the classroom.

Examples of CRT in action include showing students connections between the classroom and the real world, equipping students with racial and cultural knowledge and pride, and using a variety of teaching techniques that will appeal to

different types of learners (left brain, right brain, etc.). The end goal of CRT is to create a classroom environment where understanding and acceptance of different cultures becomes the norm. AVID is currently working with nine schools in the US to implement research-based CRT practices into classrooms ("Initiatives"). The number of schools using these teaching methods will likely increase as time goes on.

The African American Male Initiative (AAMI) was launched in 2007 to provide additional support and educational opportunities to African American males, one group which has historically been underrepresented in institutions of higher education. The goal of the program is simple – to increase graduation and college entrance rates for African American males. AAMI is not reinventing the wheel or making any major changes to the AVID philosophy. This initiative is simply an attempt to specifically recruit black males into the AVID program in order to lower achievement gaps between races and improve equity in the education system. Culturally Relevant Training is strongly emphasized in the AAMI in an attempt to create a culture that values education and views academic success as "cool."

Like the CRT initiative, AAMI is still in the pilot program phase and is only available in select schools. Because of this, there is still much data left to be collected before we can be sure of the total impact of this program. However, we do have some early predictors. A snapshot of African American AVID seniors in 2010 showed that 99 % will graduate from high school, 92 % will have completed requirements for entrance into a four-year college, 62 % will have taken at least one AP or IB course, 91 % will have taken either the ACT or SAT, and 85 % plan to attend an institution of higher education ("AVID: Adventures in College & Career

Readiness - Blog - Black Male Students –the"). With a national African American graduation rate of 52 % in 2010, it is clear that AVID and the AAMI are having an impact on students ("Black Male Graduation Rates").

The AVID program has come an incredibly long way since it's start in 1980. After starting in just one San Diego high school, the AVID program has now impacted students across the entire country. While it's great to look at the national picture, the true value of AVID is really best experienced on a community level. In 2012, Asheville City Schools had 149 students enrolled in the AVID elective (Ray, Carol). Many of these students are on track to become the first members of their families to attend college. This begins the slow process of changing the culture of Asheville City Schools to one in which everyone feels like they are capable of attending college, regardless of their culture or background.

Every year 80 AVID trained tutors from the University of North Carolina at Asheville are given the opportunity to work with AVID students. The tutors visit AVID classrooms to help instruct students and facilitate group discussions four days out of the week. This experience is not only helpful to the AVID students but to the AVID tutors as well, many of whom are studying to become educators themselves. AVID students also get to participate in UNCA sponsored campus visits where they can attend college classes, participate in workshops, and get a feel for what the college experience is like. AVID Students in Asheville city schools also have the opportunity to participate in an AVID summer bridge program at UNCA, which helps smooth the transition from middle to high school (AVID, Asheville City Schools, and UNC Asheville).

The AVID program isn't even fully implemented in Asheville City Schools, but it isn't hard to see how the impact of AVID's philosophy can spread quickly. The AVID program is unique in that it is an example of a public policy solution that is already in the process of implementation. The data is clear – With the use of research-based pedagogical techniques AVID students graduate from high school and attend college at far higher rates than non-AVID students. As mentioned earlier, 100 % of AVID students in Asheville City Schools apply to college and 90 % are accepted. These numbers speak for themselves. The AVID program works.

AVID comes along with its own public policy suggestions, which are simply to continue expanding the AVID program. Fortunately, Asheville City Schools seems to be committed to this expansion. While the main focus of the AVID program is to expand secondary education initiatives to reach school-wide and eventually district-wide implementation, AVID Elementary is also in the process of coming to Asheville City Schools. Fletcher Elementary School is currently running an AE pilot program for students in the 4th and 5th grades that will help to strengthen the AVID program and create more opportunities for district-wide collaboration and support (Grant, Gordon).

UNC Asheville is also in the process of developing an AVID Scholarship award, which will be awarded annually to three or four “promising students who are current attendees of Asheville City Public Schools, current Asheville AVID participants, qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program, maintain at least a B average, are civically, socially, and/or community engaged and considered rising juniors or seniors.” (University of North Carolina at Asheville). This

scholarship will cover the complete cost of tuition and is a huge symbol of support of the AVID program coming from UNCA.

Asheville City Schools, with the help of UNC Asheville, are already working towards an eventual full implementation of the AVID program. This is good for all students, but especially African Americans. The current state of the education system may look bleak as far as African Americans are concerned, but it is comforting to know that there are solutions out there that have been proven to work. There is still much more research to be done, but we don't have to wait any longer to actually begin addressing the serious disparities in our education system.

*"While others talk about what should be done to prepare students for college, AVID is doing it. For more than 30 years, the AVID College Readiness System has helped thousands of students, many of whom are overlooked and underserved, rise above the obstacles they face to achieve academic success."
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