



MIDDLE SCHOOL AVID: CHANGING THE STARS

The Dual Credit Pipeline



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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Improving Instruction,
Closing the Gap*

The contribution middle schools make to closing equity gaps, generating readiness for a strong transition into ninth grade, and preparing students for dual credit opportunities in high school should not be overlooked. At Chinook Middle School in the North Thurston Public Schools, where I proudly serve as principal, our AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program is laying the foundation for making dual credit a reality for many students who have traditionally not had access.

A DIFFERENCE MAKER

Diane (not her actual name) is an eighth grader at Chinook. Her father is Asian and her mother is Hispanic. Her parents are divorced, but collaborating to raise her. Diane's dad was a fifth-year senior, but did graduate with a high school diploma. Neither parent attended college, but both are hoping for a bright future for their child. When Diane came to Chinook, she emerged as one of the "high drama" girls: Our assistant principal was on a first-name basis with Diane's parents for all of the wrong reasons.

During the first semester of her seventh grade year, Diane skated by with a 2.0 GPA, but her teachers saw academic potential that was being wasted. Those teachers recommended Diane for our AVID program as an eighth grader, and she decided to give it a try.

I am proud to share Diane just completed her first semester of her eighth-grade year with a 3.0 GPA, has not earned a single office referral all year, is slated to take Honors English next year as a freshman, and sees herself as college bound. If you ask Diane what the "difference maker"

was for her between seventh and eighth grade, she'll tell you bluntly, "You know why I'm not in the office (visiting the assistant principal) this year? Because of AVID!"

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL

We are in our fourth year of AVID implementation and the effects of the program are life-changing for the students enrolled in our AVID eighth-grade elective class. As we invite students to apply for the elective, we seek out students who have not traditionally been represented in the honors and advanced placement classes at the high school level. They are students who are "in the middle": Their academic history does not identify them as a high-performing student, but their teachers see them as having potential to become college bound, if given strong support.

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We recruit students who fit a variety of characteristics: free and reduced lunch; underrepresented racial groups such as African Americans, Hispanic, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders; students whose parents did not graduate from college; English Language Learners; and others who just need the support and the "nudge" in middle school in order to be ready to access honors and Advanced Placement coursework as they enter high school.

When students are accepted into our eighth-grade AVID elective course, we work hard to build skills and remove barriers that might otherwise prevent them from becoming a college bound student. First and foremost, we teach our AVID students to be organized. They learn how to maintain a planner and organize a binder so

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they never lose an assignment, misplace their notes, or forget a due date. We explicitly teach them how to take notes and study for deep understanding of concepts.

We work hard to demystify the college path by taking them to visit college campuses, familiarize them with tests (like the SAT), engage them in career interest surveys, and introduce guest speakers as role models who overcame obstacles on their way to post college success. This helps students see the path to college is one that they are capable of navigating. Lastly, we ensure that our eighth grade AVID students — 100 percent of them — make the transition to high school and enroll in at least one

honors or advanced placement class as a freshman.

CHANGE THE STARS

AVID has helped to "change the stars" for many of the students involved in the program at our school. If given intentional support in middle school, so many students who are traditionally overlooked when it comes to the college bound pipeline could be capable of accessing dual credit opportunities in high school.

Expanding support for middle level college and career preparation programs, such as AVID, is key to widening access to dual credit and closing equity gaps. ■



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