

RETENTION OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE-GOING SENIORS IN THE COLLEGE PREPARATORY PROGRAM AVID

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the retention behaviors of high school seniors in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) elective class. The design involves a multiple case study of eight high schools chosen from California and Texas. Focus groups of high school seniors were conducted in four schools in Texas and in four schools in California. The personal bonds formed among students and between students and teachers were

critical to students staying in AVID for four years. School structural barriers placed on students did not deter them from reporting that AVID prepared them for college and for the future.

Upon examination of AVID high schools across the nation, those who have been implementing AVID for at least four years show very different student retention rates. This study examines the retention behaviors of California and Texas seniors in the Advancement-Via Individual Determination (AVID) elective class at selected high schools. This study begins to explain how and why selected AVID high schools retain students in the AVID elective class through the 12th grade, and how and why other selected AVID high schools do not retain their AVID students through the senior year. Various factors need to be considered in this study that may explain retention and attrition. Some of these factors are structural (such as scheduling configurations), ideological (such as teacher perceptions of students and student perceptions of self), financial (such as lack of personnel to teach additional AVID electives and students' need to work), political, academic, and personal (such as students' reasons for leaving AVID). Other factors may include teacher and/or student perceptions about AVID.

ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION (AVID)

AVID is a college preparatory program that was established in 1980 in one English teacher's classroom as a means to serve underrepresented students in a newly desegregated suburban high school. To assist this group of students in rigorous courses, a social and academic support elective class called AVID was created with the premise that students can succeed in the most rigorous curriculum, such as Advanced Placement classes, but only need extra support. Of the 30 students who began AVID in 1980, 28 went on to college (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996).

AVID targets students from the academic middle – those who earn Bs, Cs, and Ds and who have the willingness and potential to succeed in more rigorous coursework. Student selection for AVID also takes into consideration whether students are members of underserved groups. Most AVID students are underrepresented minorities (19% African American; 49% Hispanic) who are often economically disadvantaged, first-generation college-goers (AVID Center, 2006a).

The AVID program is made up of 11 essentials that must be imple-

mented in order for a school to be considered an AVID site. These essentials include student selection; voluntary program participation; the AVID elective class; rigorous coursework; instruction focused on writing, reading, collaboration and inquiry; data collection; budgeting for resources; and, an interdisciplinary site team. The crucial aspect of the AVID program is in the strength of the AVID site team and specifically the lead teacher or coordinator who is in charge of coordinating student eligibility, college preparation curriculum, tutoring, professional development, fund raising, and parental components. Selected students are exposed to college level classes and are academically supported with an AVID curriculum and academic assistance provided by the AVID elective class. Other AVID activities are developed to increase student and parent involvement in the college preparation process (Swanson, 2000; Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007).

AVID's approach to college preparation involves placing students in an advanced curriculum that will ensure that students graduate with the requirements for entrance into four-year colleges. AVID also provides students with exposure to an academic environment similar to what is found in college classrooms. College entry skills and academic survival skills including study, organization, time management, critical reading skills, and standardized college entrance exam preparation are areas targeted by the AVID teacher and tutors in the AVID elective class.

The significance of AVID in schools has been documented in studies conducted within the California school system. Students enrolled in AVID on a continuous basis demonstrated a greater propensity towards attempting and completing college-level courses, thereby producing a larger number of AVID students enrolling in colleges or universities than AVID dropouts or students with no AVID background (Slavin & Calderon, 2001). Currently, there are over 3,500 AVID schools in 45 states and 15 countries (AVID Center, 2006b).

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, AND DATA SOURCES

The design of this study involved a multiple case study or collective case study approach (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Mixed qualitative methods were utilized to triangulate data sources and make the study more trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The multiple cases represent four California and four Texas AVID high schools, and purposive sampling techniques were used (Patton, 1990; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Schools were chosen from California and Texas, and not from any other states, because these two states represented states with the

most high schools with mature AVID programs. Two schools from each state were chosen because of their success in retaining their AVID seniors, and two schools from each state were chosen because they have been unsuccessful at retaining their seniors. Researchers chose to examine both ends of the retention spectrum to try and explain differences and commonalities among AVID schools that may reveal why AVID students stay in AVID or do not stay in AVID during their high school careers.

This study proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) for approval prior to carrying out the study. Consent forms and access permission letters were developed, approved, and distributed. Access was provided by the superintendent and principal of each site. In order to capture a broad explanation of why some schools retain AVID students and others do not, several data collection methods and sources were considered (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

SITE SELECTION

Eight AVID sites were selected for this study, and two major criteria drove this selection. First, sites that have retained their AVID students were considered. These sites were chosen from AVID Center's national database and were those that reflect high AVID student retention rates from grades 9-12. Selection was based on the percentage of students retained in AVID from 9th through 12th grade. In Texas, these included the two high schools with the highest retention rates (71% and 65%) and two sites with very poor retention rates (21% and 22%). In California, two sites with very high retention rates (78% and 100%) were chosen along with two sites with lower retention rates (38% and 34%). An initial site in California was removed from the study for lack of desire to participate in the study, and was therefore replaced with a site that had a similar retention rate. Other selection criteria included the number of years a site has maintained an AVID program; all sites have implemented AVID for at least four years. It should be noted, however, that the demographic makeup and geographic locations were very diverse across the eight sites (see Tables 1 and 2).

SURVEYS

The perceptions of students, teachers, and principals were documented through the use of a survey instrument for each of these groups. Surveys were distributed to over 200 AVID seniors in the eight schools of study. One hundred and eighty surveys were returned. Of the 160 teacher

TABLE 1. Characteristics of AVID High Schools with Low Retention of AVID Students

	Camp High School	Cascabel High School	East High School	Tenaris High School
Location	South Texas	San Antonio, Texas	Southern California	Southern California
Retention Rate	21%	22%	38%	34%
School Enrollment	2,200	1,500	2,420	2,800
Ethnicity (%)				
African American	0.1	1.0	5.0	2.4
Latino/Hispanic	85.0	98.0	84.0	22.0
White non-Hispanic	4.9	1.0	6.0	68.0
Asian, Pacific Islander, Filipino	0.0	0.0	4.0	5.2
Native American	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6
Other Notes	Nat'l Demo School --- 95% of AVID Students are Hispanic, with English as their Second Language	Difficulty w/ Implementation --- Very Small AVID Program --- High Turnover of AVID Teachers	Significant Personnel Changes	Nat'l Demo School --- Principal Support

surveys that were distributed to teachers, 138 were returned. All eight principals completed the administrator survey, as well as four additional assistant principals. The surveys included 20 statements on a Likert scale as follows: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Not Sure; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree. There were also two open-ended questions that solicited answers about why some students remain in AVID for 4 years and why others might drop out of AVID prior to their senior year.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were conducted with current AVID high school seniors and high school seniors who formerly participated in the program and were no longer in AVID. In a discussion format, students verbally expressed

Table 2. Characteristics of AVID High Schools with High Retention of AVID Students

	Lucero High School	Greatwood High School	Country Club High School	Davis High School
Location	San Antonio, Texas	Houston, Texas	Northern California	Southern California
Retention Rate	71%	65%	100%	78%
School Enrollment	1,700	1,800	2,100	2,100
Ethnicity (%)				
African American	2.0	69.0	33.0	8.0
Latino/Hispanic	94.0	28.0	26.0	53.0
White non-Hispanic	3.0	0.6	8.0	34.0
Asian, Pacific Islander, Filipino	1.0	0.5	32.0	3.0
Native American	0.0	.01	.05	0.0
Other Notes	Nat'l Demo School --- Principal Support --- Small Program w/ the Same AVID Teacher	Low-performing School --- District-wide Support --- Little Turnover of AVID Teachers	Nat'l Demo School	Offers 18 Sections of AVID Elective to Retain a Large Number of Students

themselves by responding to open-ended questions concerning their personal views and experiences in their AVID program. These responses were placed in categories to reflect an overall view and possible reasons for the retention rate of AVID students. A total of 13 student focus groups were conducted over the period of one semester: seven in the four Texas schools and six in the four California schools. Overall, a total of 67 students participated in the focus group interviews.

In all cases, a focus group was conducted with current AVID seniors. In one Texas school and in two California schools, a former AVID student focus group was unable to be assembled. Reasons for this included difficulty by school officials to locate former students, unwillingness of students to participate, and unwillingness of teachers to release students from class to participate in the interview. Focus group interviews were

conducted at each school site, usually in a private room set aside by the AVID teacher so that interruptions and distractions were minimal. Students were overwhelmingly open, honest and eager to talk about their experiences as AVID students.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. "Group interviews can also be used for triangulation purposes or used in conjunction with other data-gathering techniques" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 704). Although results and conclusions in this study are primarily generated from qualitative data analyses, surveys were designed and responses were entered into SPSS and examined to offer guidance in formulating conclusions. All focus group discussions were audio-taped and video-taped for easier transcription. To document retention indicators, the researchers transcribed and analyzed focus group discussions and synthesized the open-ended survey questions. Transcripts were coded by hand and with qualitative software and themes were extracted. Data were then "chunked" and data reduction methods were used to harvest recurring themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gay, 1996).

Themes were generated as the interviews were transcribed and then were coded using NVIVO qualitative software. First, commonalities among student focus group interviews were identified. For example, when a theme recurred in the discussion, and then emerged in subsequent focus group discussions, then this theme was notable and used in the findings. Second, as new contradictory themes emerged, these were noted and used in the findings.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Appendix A shows students' average response on the 5.0 Likert scale for each of the 20 survey items. Teacher responses are shown in Appendix B, and administrator responses are illustrated in Appendix C.

THEMES FROM FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS AND OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS

Upon reviewing the survey data and analyzing the focus group discussions and open-ended survey questions, several themes emerged explaining the reasons why students stay in AVID. The recurring themes include AVID family, senioritis, scheduling, family support, financial pressures, teacher preparedness, and AVID support and strategies.

AVID FAMILY

Focus group students reported that being in AVID was like having a second family, or in some cases, AVID was their family. "They weren't just teachers to us, they were more like family," one Camp High School student shared. This perception of the AVID program was expressed throughout the interview responses. An AVID senior from Country Club High School added, "Our AVID teacher really gets involved with what you are doing."

Students not only found encouragement and support; but, they found a feeling of personal acceptance and security with their AVID teachers.

My sophomore year, I started struggling a lot and my AVID teachers noticed that my grades had been dropping. It was because my grandmother had passed away, my aunt had passed away, and I had just given up. They both set me aside and they talked to me. I was giving up on everything. I didn't want to deal with my classes and they both pushed me (Camp HS Senior).

Students also shared their personal reflections on friendships. "You make friends in AVID," said one East High student. Another student added, "I like the bonds that we made with everybody. AVID helped me bond with other people." A Greatwood student summed up the total feeling the effect AVID has on the lives of high school students, "The moral support from AVID is really there to help you out. It's just an extra boost, saying, 'You know you are doing the right thing, keep on doing it.' I think that AVID definitely helps us out."

Two students explained that the extended AVID family was a necessity for them in their academic pursuits:

... in elementary my dad helped me as much as he could because I was in a bilingual class, but once I got into middle school and high school it got harder for him to help me, because he didn't finish school in Mexico and it was harder for me to translate for him, so he liked that AVID were second parents that can help... (Greatwood Senior).

My mom was always like "oh you need to go to college, I want you to go" she was like really supportive but you know my mom didn't know anything about it, so how was I going to get to college? If I wasn't in AVID, I mean I wasn't going to make it as far as I have... there's a lot of things that keep you from being in school and stuff like that, but AVID helps you out a lot and just everything that is involved in it (Davis Senior).

In an open-ended item on the student survey, nearly 20% of the students cited the "family-like" support and structure to be the main reason for staying in AVID. The support gave them confidence to take more risks, trying new and more difficult things. Teachers were perceived as "looking out for them". "Teachers won't allow them to drop out."

Only 7% of the teachers credited the family-like support characteristic of AVID programs. Although an equal number of these responses came from each state, five times as many total responses were received from Texas teachers as from California teachers. Fifty percent of administrators responded affirmatively about the supportive family-like structure in which AVID students, teachers, and counselors form close bonds: "they know that they have support here from [the] principal down."

SENIORITIS

Senioritis characterizes the lack of motivation and effort on the part of high school seniors, is often a common threat to the work ethic of high school seniors. Many seniors claimed they would suffer from laziness: "I mean, it's your last year [in high school], you really just want to kick back and have fun," said a senior from Tanaris High School. Most students felt that they needed to overcome the senioritis craze to maintain good grades and stay focused. Temptations of skipping school and procrastinating on class work were reported to be problems related to senioritis. A Cascabel senior shared the following:

A lot of people get senioritis. Luckily, I haven't gotten it, but there were a couple of times that I didn't want to read, I didn't want to do something. You just have to keep focused. You don't want to get side tracked. You really just want to get it done and not waste your time.

A former AVID student from Greatwood High School explained, I don't know if all seniors say this but its senioritis, so we start to get lazy you know, most teachers don't give a lot of work, well my teachers don't give a lot of work to seniors as opposed to the underclassman.

A Cascabel Senior also explained what students often encounter their senior year:

There's also a lot of temptation, like somebody saying let's go here, let's just not go to school today, let's go here. It is hard. You want to have fun, but then you know you still have a responsibility here at school.

AVID was mentioned as a means of keeping students focused to avoid senioritis. A Country Club High School student stated, "It keeps ... me motivated. We have study days two days a week ... I can actually do my work and learn more than I do at home."

SCHEDULING

Upon reviewing student responses concerning leaving the AVID program, scheduling conflicts were the most common reason given. Some students gave up athletics or credited English classes to remain in AVID; however, others were faced with the choice of taking a required class and taking the AVID class. A Greatwood senior reported,

I had to choose between staying in the AVID program or taking athletics. [The AVID teacher] sat me down and ... went down the list and told me about the benefits about being in AVID opposed to being in athletics. And as you can see, I'm in AVID.

Others indicated that they could not take AVID due to their need to meet graduation requirements. Often, scheduling conflicts centered around the fact that AVID may have been offered only once in the class schedule, as noted by a Country Club High School senior. "I had to take Computer Technology first period. I didn't want to leave AVID, but I had to, anyways, to graduate." A student from Lucero High School added,

I had the option to have college English or AVID; but, they were both in second period. Those were the only two periods each class was having. I just chose AVID. I can take the college English in the summer.

One Camp High School student mentioned the extra time commitment AVID requires.

I got out of AVID because there were other classes that I had to take. Not only that, but I have a job now. I didn't have time for taking notes, keeping my binder organized, or anything like that so other than that—basically that's why I got out of AVID.

Other students requested to get into AVID just to take something their senior year. A senior from Country Club High School explained, "Well, I took it because I needed to fill up like a space for my schedule; but, now that I took it, I wished I would have maybe taken it in past years because it really helped me."

FAMILY SUPPORT

The family support received at home varies from little backing to continuous encouragement. Some AVID students have met obstacles in gaining parental support. A Greatwood student stated, "My dad said, 'you aren't going to college.'" A Tanaris High School senior added, "Well, I don't have 100% support from my parents; because of that fact, I'm living nine hours away from my house." One Cascabel Senior felt that she was carrying a heavy burden to be the first in her family to succeed in school:

They [parents] look upon you to succeed and do what they didn't do. And sometimes it's just a lot of pressure especially when your whole family looks upon you as you're the one that's going to succeed - you are not going to be like your cousins or your brothers or like everyone else nowadays. It's just too much pressure and the fact of you being scared of not succeeding and then making you, making you like the bad person because you didn't get to, like they wanted you to succeed for them.

Others have verbal support from their parents, but must carry other family burdens that could prevent them from succeeding. A Davis senior reported,

I have six younger brothers and sisters; so, I am expected to help them keep their grades up and help them get to places. I'm the oldest; so, I'm supposed to be a role model for them. Yet, I'm still supposed to go to college and have good grades—it's hard.

Most of the AVID students indicated that they would be "first-time" college students in their family. Lack of family funding to finance a college education also seemed to be a prevalent problem - even though some students reported their parents were willing to make sacrifices to ease this burden. A Camp High School senior said, "Both of my parents didn't attend college, but they're pushing me to go to college." A Greatwood senior added that her mother told her, "I'll support you if I have to sell cans on the sides of the streets so you can go to college." A Cascabel senior explained the support he has received from his mother:

My mom, she's always pushed me ever since I was in elementary to make sure my grades were good. Till this day, since I've turned eighteen, she still pushes me and grounds me and takes my car and my cell phone if I have bad grades. I do admire that [discipline] because it makes me focus more on school. My family looks up to me and I feel like I need to reach my goals because I don't want to fail.

In several cases, AVID teachers have provided assurances to families about their child seeking a college education. A Country Club High School senior reported,

My parents weren't as educated about college until [the AVID teacher] talked to them to educate them on that. I get a lot of motivation from that now that they know the advantage I get from going to college and receiving my college degrees. Until they knew what college can bring for me, they thought it was a waste of money.

Another student cites AVID as helping her parents better understand the educational process:

[My parents] know AVID is one of the programs that has made me stay in school to be determined to graduate. Now that I'm going to graduate, [my mother] is telling my little brother - he's going to be a freshman next year—get in AVID, get in AVID, get in AVID.

A Country Club High School senior attributed his comfort with attending college, and keeping his parents informed, to belonging to the AVID program. He claimed "you are not really going to get too much information if you are not in AVID." Encouragement to stay in AVID also came from siblings who had been through the program. "My brother was pretty smart, like a 4.0. He would say, 'Don't blow your senior year. Just stay in AVID,'" added a Davis senior.

Some students stated that they came to the U.S. from other countries. Education was important to this Greatwood High School student and his family:

My whole family, they want me to go to college and do well because most of them didn't finish high school. They told me, 'You came here to this country'—because I'm not from here, I'm from Mexico—but they told me, 'you come here, you better do something better.'

A Lucero High School senior added,

My parents didn't go to college. I think my dad only finished junior high and my mom finished high school. My parents are from Mexico. My brother was the first to graduate and went to the military. Then he went to college and he has talked to my parents about college for me. I was on the honor roll. My mom is very proud of me for that. They are in heaven right now because they just found out that all of my college is paid for every year! They give a lot of support and my brother just advises them on how hard it's going to be for me.

FINANCIAL PRESSURES

Most students indicated that their families fell into a low-economic classification; therefore, monetary support from their parents would be limited - or even non-existent. These students felt that they would have to work to help pay for their post-secondary education and expenses. Many students also felt that they would have to seek loan opportunities to acquire enough money to make up the difference. A Davis High School senior was in a dilemma:

How am I going to work? How am I going to get money to pay for college? My parents are hard-working people; but, the amount of money they make is not going to pay for the whole thing. I wanted to help them out by getting financial aid. My dad wasn't always there for me or with me. I had to ask every other week just to get [financial aid information]. He got it done, but a little late.

Just knowing that my parents and some of our parents won't be able to help us, because they have to maintain a roof over our head and food and stuff like that, and they don't have money to help us out... if we can have a job, but there is only so much we can pay as well (Cascabel Senior).

Another Cascabel High School student lamented, "My parents don't have the money to help me out."

Student responses varied from a feeling of hopelessness to a positive attitude that reflects the philosophy of AVID. For example, this Camp High School student explained, "money is never an issue to go to college ... there's money out there. You just got to look for it." A Tanaris senior added, "My mom doesn't work and my dad doesn't have a good job. I don't get enough financial aid to pay for everything. I am getting loans, but I don't really want to."

One graduating Lucero senior commented about the lack of guidance for her fellow students saying,

There are still some seniors that have not applied for financial aid and have not even known that they are supposed to apply for it or apply to any schools. They didn't have those opportunities that we did, that AVID gave us, opening the doors and seeing colleges and stuff like that, its hard to see someone struggling. They never had the opportunities like we did with AVID:

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS

Generally, the students felt that AVID teachers were very prepared - an asset for helping students stay focused and prepared to continue their education beyond high school. A Camp student commented,

My mom saw my AVID teacher. She gave my mom her number so when I needed help for a scholarship or a letter of recommendation, she could call and my AVID teacher would be there for us. I was just like WOW!

AVID students mentioned the constant encouragement they received from the AVID teachers, the high trust level, and the continual monitoring of student progress - academically and personally. A Lucero High School senior added, "Well, the teacher has to do a lot with us, he's like not only our teacher he's like our friend. If we have family problems, we go tell him and ... he helps us out a lot." Another student commented, "The best thing about AVID is the teacher. She was always there for me. I can always depend on her and she has helped me a lot with personal and school stuff, too."

The AVID teacher also counsels students on college admissions and financial aid. A Country Club High School student stated, "The AVID teacher actually asks you what steps you are on and helps us with college applications and scholarship applications." Her classmate added,

The AVID teacher really is on top of keeping track of each of us. We do what we need to do in order to actually go to college and don't miss the deadlines or don't miss any of the little stuff that colleges ask for.

Another important factor, which emerged, was the level of trust students developed with their AVID teacher, such as with this Lucero senior:

I consider my AVID teacher to be like a second father - my father here in school. He pushes us and helps us in school-work and in family problems. We're not shy to talk about anything with him. He's real open with us and he gives good advice.

A Country Club senior added,

The best thing about AVID for me is my AVID teacher. She was always there for me. She's like my mom. I call her my American mom. I can always depend on her and she has helped me a lot with personal and school stuff.

A Lucero senior explained the influence her AVID teacher had on her and others:

My freshmen teacher, she was very, she was like always a happy person, she always told us ... she told us everyday we wanted to go to college. We had to stay in AVID and you know and have that determination because AVID is your individual determination and she said that if you really thought you could stay in college, you need to stay in AVID and see.

One Cascabel student felt the AVID teacher was not adequately prepared, stating, "The teachers, they should be more trained to like actually know what they're doing and how they are going to do it to make sure that's the way it's supposed to be." This student did not specifically detail what attributes the teacher lacked to be prepared.

AVID SUPPORT AND STRATEGIES

Throughout the review of student responses to AVID, the program was praised for providing academic and personal support, as well as for providing guidance to succeed in high school and college. AVID gives students direction in planning for their future. A Greatwood senior commented, "the program helps us focus on our own classes. It focuses on getting us into college." His classmate added, "AVID helped me develop a routine. I think in college having a routine will work because it helps you stay in focus and helps you do what you need to do." "I feel my senior year has been successful because I have had support from different people in organizations, such as AVID to help me out," explained a Country Club senior. An AVID High senior added, "All of our students in AVID that are seniors got in a four year university."

Students felt that AVID also kept them focused on their future endeavors. An East High School student mentioned, "For me, the best thing I liked about AVID is it helped me with making decisions." "I remember my freshman year, I did not want to be put in AVID. Now, I'm glad I'm in, because without AVID I would be so lost," a Country Club High senior explained. Her classmate added,

AVID is such a great program for you. At first I hated it because I as a freshman. But, I got over it and grew to love AVID. It helps you a lot - it's not just a program at school, it actually helps students.

The program helps us focus on our own classes that are going to help us. Because really it focuses on getting us into college. It helps you to

think more about those classes you really need to pay attention in (Greatwood senior).

His classmate from Greatwood added,

AVID has helped me to stay in tune because Monday, Wednesday and Friday, we do oh well okay, Tuesday and Thursday we do homework. Monday, Wednesday and Friday we do AVID work, research paper. And it's helped me to like develop a routine, to go home, I do go study my basketball team and I get back to my homework. And I think in college having a routine, will be, will work because it helps you stay in focus and helps you do what you need to do.

The strategies used in AVID also made a positive impression on students. A Camp senior commented on the support of the tutors, "It was a comfort during my freshman year to have AVID tutors helping us out - helping me out." A Country Club High senior stated, "Now that I'm in AVID, my grades are way better than they would have been with the help of tutorials and the Socratic seminars. So, I'm glad I stayed in [AVID]." "Well, if it wasn't for notes, I'd be lost right now. I learned a strategy - how to take notes," a Davis High School senior explained. A Country Club High senior added:

In AVID, I learned Socratic seminars and discussion that would go deep. These would help us out later in college. You sat in a circle and were able to discuss anything with everybody in an orderly manner.

"I also like that in AVID you are required to take AP classes and it gave the kids a challenge, well it gave me a challenge like instead of taking regular classes and not have gotten anywhere." claimed a Camp senior.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing data from focus groups and surveys, researchers concluded that AVID students in Texas and California, as well as their teachers and administrators, cited varied reasons for student attrition and retention in AVID. As students mentioned above, there were several factors influencing their decisions to stay or leave AVID prior to their senior year. They are summarized below.

The personal bonds formed among students and between students and teachers were a critical component. Students who felt nurtured stayed in the AVID program, and students who did not develop this feeling of

belonging dropped the AVID class. According to Wimberly (2002), this feeling of belonging and nurturing is important for underrepresented groups in their decisions to stay in school and develop the skills needed to pursue higher education. In addition, students who have a teacher advocate are more likely to be successful in school, particularly if they are at-risk (Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Salinas & Reyes, 2004; Slaton, 2005). By the time many AVID students were seniors, they had formed bonds with their teachers. Though some students were not formally enrolled in AVID their senior year, they continued to seek support and assistance from their AVID teachers outside of class time.

Numerous students spoke of scheduling problems and in the focus group discussions reported giving up another elective to stay enrolled in AVID for four years; however, several Texas students took an additional AP course their senior year instead of AVID. Although scheduling and meeting graduation requirements were factors that led to some students dropping out of AVID, lack of dedication and scholarship may have caused the scheduling problems in the first place. In other words, students who did not keep up with their grades either left AVID or were removed from AVID. Unfortunately, students who dropped out of AVID may have been the students who would have most benefited from such a program.

Too often students reported scheduling conflicts that could have been avoided with careful construction of the school's master schedule. Structures were in place at three of the schools that were both inhibiting to the students as well as unsupportive of the AVID program. For example, a principal reported that he fully supported the AVID program, yet the AVID elective class for seniors was scheduled the same period as the only AP Government class. This posed a dilemma for AVID seniors. In another school, an AVID class was scheduled during the period when athletics and band were held; hence, students had to choose between AVID and an extra-curricular. These are examples of structural barriers placed on students by the school itself (Canady & Rettig, 1993; Catterall & Brizendine, 1985; Hallinan, 1994; Useem, Christman, Gold, & Simon, 1997).

Some students dropped AVID to fit other non-elective courses into their schedules, while others dropped because they were "bored" or did not want to put work into an elective that was not essential for graduation. A few responses from California students referenced being "kicked out" because of falling grades. A few blamed the teachers. Some student responses indicated that students who left AVID did not understand the benefits of the program or were misinformed about them. Some inferred

that peer pressure played a role in their decision to quit. Other students shared that some of their peers had no interest in going to college and therefore felt they did not need the AVID classes. Because AVID requires note-taking and binder-keeping, seniors were said to want an easy senior year, and they did not want to work in this elective class.

AVID students reported that AVID prepares them for college and/or for their future. Students are required to keep up with daily note-taking. Their notebooks (binders) are organized for a weekly grade. According to the survey, AVID students learn to be organized and were able to manage their time wisely. Time management and organization are necessary skills to survive in college (Coffman, 2000; Wang & Pilarzyk, 2007).

Tutoring and other assistance was provided by qualified individuals. Several students appreciated the time provided to work on their AVID assignments as well as other assignments from other classes. Tutoring was provided specifically to help students with the demanding coursework from AP courses. That AVID provides tutoring during the school day was one of the main reasons college-going students stayed in AVID. The tutor model used in the AVID class was not a one-on-one style of tutoring, but rather a collaborative tutorial process in which the students led their tutor groups and the tutor merely facilitated by asking higher level questions (Bogan & Porter, 2005; Lord & Baviskar, 2007; Nelson, 2007).

Survey responses indicated the importance of early awareness of the AVID program's benefits in order to keep students enrolled for four years. Students who saw students ahead of them grow more successful in high school, earn higher SAT/ACT scores and get into good colleges, were likely to expect the same for themselves and thus stay enrolled.

Study skills are a main focus of the AVID elective class for the first two years of AVID. Students sign up for and take SAT tests and fill out applications for college admissions and scholarships in their junior and senior years. Several of the California AVID students left AVID after their freshman year, but re-enrolled their senior year because they wanted information on and assistance with college applications.

Administrators from Texas and California felt that meaningful rigorous classes were in part responsible for retention in the AVID program. Indeed, the administrators commented on the students' opportunities to be informed about and academically ready for college. One administrator from California gave these reasons that AVID students stay in the program: "Program and school expectations. Strong middle school articulation..." In other words, when vertical alignment is in place, middle school students who grasp the importance of furthering their education are likely to stay

committed to a program such as AVID in high school. Not unlike vertical articulation for core coursework, vertical articulation of the AVID program is important for an AVID student's success in high school and beyond (DeMott, 1999; Lipka, 2007; Neave, 1989; Weiss & Bearman, 2007).

According to survey responses, students, teachers and administrators agree that students need to be committed to the program. The students' willingness to do the work and meet the requirements is at the heart of their success. When put together, the survey responses indicate an underlying problem. No matter how much support one is given, the burden of accomplishment is on the student; such is why the program is touted for its "individual determination." Although this in itself serves as a lesson to inspire some, other students may see the note-taking and additional work load required by AVID as excessive. Failure to do the required AVID work has a snowball effect because students begin to fall behind in AVID and in their other classes.

For the most part, students drop AVID because of a lack of individual determination. If the AVID student believes that success is possible, the student continues to participate. If the student believes that success is not possible, the student eventually drops out. The "Advancement Via Individual Determination" (AVID) program mandates "individual determination." The survey responses suggest that regardless of the family-like support and the skills and information imparted, some students choose to not participate. Again, having a positive peer group provided by the AVID elective, and a teacher advocate, helps students believe they can be successful.

Students, teachers, and administrators alike expressed that students stayed in AVID because of the family atmosphere AVID provided. In many cases, this was the primary family for the AVID student. One student commented, "Because we are like family, we get attached..." A teacher commented, "AVID provides students with a familial environment that often enables them to pursue endeavors they might otherwise not attempt." One principal described AVID as a "family-like atmosphere." In most cases, AVID students do not have academic support at home, and will only benefit from college awareness through AVID.

Opinions were varied when students, teachers, and administrators were asked why students leave AVID. Many of the students felt that those who left AVID exited because they "couldn't handle the AP classes." One student said, "I think AVID students drop out because they can't handle the work and dedication needed for the program." Teachers also agreed that many of the students were not used to the workload and some were

not willing to work hard for their grades. Overwhelmingly, the principals felt that the students who leave AVID leave because they are not dedicated or willing to do the work required. None of them said that the students were unable to do the work required. One administrator said, "These students (the ones who leave AVID) refuse to make the commitment to meet the expectations of the program despite support offered by the program."

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

When examining AVID student responses in California and in Texas, two differences are noted. First, Texas AVID students who left AVID prior to their senior year reported that they left due to already feeling prepared for college. Overall, they were committed to pursuing a college education and were enrolled in rigorous courses, but failed to enroll in AVID during their senior year. California students who left AVID reported being "removed" from the program due to failing or near-failing grades. Often they returned to their AVID class in their senior year.

Second, California student respondents seemed much more concerned about deadlines for scholarships and college application, hence the need for AVID. On the other hand, Texas student respondents were more focused on the personal bonds formed between themselves and with their teacher, and they also focused on the academic support AVID provided them for 4 years. One reason for this might be because requirements for 4-year college entry in California are more rigorous than the requirements for Texas colleges and universities.

Regardless of the differences in responses from Texas and California students, the value and benefits of participating in AVID for 4 years while in high school are apparent in this study. Not all students may glean all of the benefits of AVID, but enough benefits or themes exist to provide a variety of support resources to assist a deserving population of high school students in fulfilling their college dreams.

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Appendix A. Student (Senior) Survey

Academic	Average Response
1. AVID helps me to be better prepared for college.	4.4
2. I want to take or am taking AP classes.	4.2
3. AVID helps me pass my classes.	3.9
4. AVID helps me learn more about scholarships.	4.5
5. AVID helps me get better grades.	4.0
6. AVID can help me get into a good college.	4.3
7. I am a good student.	4.3
8. I plan on attending a 4-year college after I graduate from high school.	4.7
9. Since middle school, I have been enrolled in AVID for at least three years.	3.8
10. Without AVID, I would not be prepared for college.	3.9
Personal	
11. Most of my friends are in AVID.	3.2
12. My parent(s) are supportive of my education.	4.5
13. AVID is like a family.	3.9
14. My AVID teacher is/was encouraging.	4.4
15. I have to work to support my family.	2.7
Organizational	
16. I have enrolled in AVID because I needed another elective.	2.2
17. AVID is required for all 4 years.	2.8
18. I could fit AVID in my schedule and still take all of my required courses.	4.3

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19. Our school has a good AVID program.	4.8
20. AVID students have privileges that other students do not.	4.1

Appendix B. Teacher Survey

Academic	Average Response
1. AVID helps students to be better prepared for college.	4.4
2. AVID students take AP classes.	4.0
3. AVID has helped students pass their classes.	4.3
4. AVID helps students learn more about scholarships.	4.9
5. AVID helps students get better grades.	4.3
6. AVID helps students get into good colleges.	4.1
7. AVID students are good students.	4.0
8. AVID students attend 4 year colleges.	3.9
9. Most AVID students have been enrolled in AVID for at least three years (including middle school).	3.7
10. Without AVID, students would not be prepared for college.	3.4
Structural/Organizational	
11. My principal supports the AVID program.	4.5
12. AVID parent(s) are supportive of the AVID program.	4.1
13. AVID is like a family.	4.1
14. Other teachers in the school are supportive of AVID.	4.0
15. We have a strong AVID program.	4.3
16. AVID students have to choose between AVID and another elective.	3.8
17. AVID is required for all 4 years.	3.5
18. Some AVID students cannot fit AVID into their schedules and still take all of their required courses.	3.3
19. AVID is a priority on our campus.	3.8
20. AVID students have privileges that other students do not.	3.4

Appendix C. Administrative Survey

Academic	Average Response
1. AVID helps students to be better prepared for college.	4.7
2. AVID students take AP classes.	4.8
3. AVID has helped students pass their classes.	4.6
4. AVID helps students learn more about scholarships.	4.7
5. AVID helps students get better grades.	4.8
6. AVID helps students get into good colleges.	4.8
7. AVID students are good students.	4.8
8. AVID students attend 4 year colleges.	4.5
9. Most AVID students have been enrolled in AVID for at least three years (including middle school).	3.9
10. Without AVID, students would not be prepared for college.	4.0

Structural/Organizational

11. Our AVID teachers and site team members work hard to maintain a strong AVID program.	4.8
12. AVID parent(s) are supportive of the AVID program.	4.3
13. AVID is like a family.	4.5
14. Teachers in the school are supportive of AVID.	4.4
15. We have a strong AVID program.	4.5
16. AVID students have to choose between AVID and another elective.	4.2
17. AVID is required for all 4 years.	3.5
18. Some AVID students cannot fit AVID into their schedules and still take all of their required courses.	3.4
19. AVID is a priority on our campus.	4.5
20. AVID students have privileges that other students do not.	3.2