

## **Southwest Middle School Case Study -- Our Journey to School-Wide AVID...**

**December 2010**

**San Diego, CA** A little red school house in our neighborhood? We truly believe it is. Our school may be blue and white, but it has the essence of a little red school house. Southwest Middle School is the heart of the community. Many multi-generational families live and work within the surrounding area. Early in the morning, neighborhood children, wearing blue and white uniforms and carrying backpacks, walk to school with friends from all corners and streets surrounding Southwest Middle School. Cars line up with parents dropping off their children. Principal and Assistant Principals greet students and parents. Professional painted murals of universities and their mascots speak boldly along the side of each building. Each new day brings an opportunity for college readiness and preparation for students and this community.

Southwest Middle School was built in 1929 and is one of the district's oldest schools. It is located minutes from the international border in a low socio-economic area. Southwest, school-wide, is Title I funded and has a population of 715 students. Up until the early 90's, principal, Ralph Mora, in order to create a more academic learning environment and ensure student success, set into place a system that required all students to wear uniforms, block scheduling was put into place, a strong AVID Site Team, and the AVID elective had been implemented as a means of meeting the needs of the students. Eventually, Southwest Middle School had been recognized as an AVID National Demonstration School.

In the late 90's and early 2000, the AVID coordinator and principal continued to invest in teacher training in the AVID Path curriculum for subject areas. By 2005, all Southwest Middle School Math Teachers had been AVIDized, there were 5 AVID sections, which included 1 Dual Immersion AVID and 1 ELL AVID section. Southwest Middle School had been consistently implementing school-wide cornell-notes, binders and planners.

In 2006, Southwest Middle School received a new principal, Steve Lizarraga, a new assistant principal, Robin Picket, and a new AVID Coordinator, Virginia Shaw. Both Steve and Robin had been former AVID Coordinators themselves, as well as assistant principal, Mr. Escalante. Virginia Shaw had over fifteen years of coordinating experience and was a veteran staff developer at the AVID Summer Institutes. This launched a whole new phase of school-wide AVID visionary efforts, with the mission of increasing rigor and equity for all Southwest Middle School students.

In 2006, a Roles and Responsibilities Document was created for all AVID site team members to take on responsibilities from the start of the year to the end of the year. Every subject area is represented on the AVID Site Team, many of the members being department chair. Every summer, Southwest Middle School is committed to sending at least two teachers from each subject area, counselors, AVID Elective teachers and tutors to the AVID Summer Institute Training. Here at Southwest Middle School, 100 % of Southwest counselors and tutors are AVID

Trained. Over 90% of Southwest Middle School Teachers are AVID trained in their subject areas.

Southwest Middle has achieved great strides in opening access and rigor to students. One-hundred percent of AVID students are enrolled into at least one accelerated course. The AVID Site Team has also developed an efficient and accurate recruiting system that supports our AVID 8th graders in the area of Algebra I, thus resulting in the increase from two to four 8th grade AVID Sections, with 71% of these 8th graders taking Algebra I. As a result, in 2009, Southwest AVID students had a 72% Algebra completion

rate compared to all of San Diego County AVID, which had only a 49% Algebra completion rate. The total number of 7th and 8th grade AVID Sections went from five to seven by the 2009-2010 school-year. Southwest went from 11% of the school being enrolled in AVID in 2007-2008 to 23% of the school enrolled into AVID by 2009-2010, the highest percentage among all the schools in the Sweetwater High School District. *“AVID, to me, is where I feel I am part of a family” - Jessica Lopez, 8th grade*

Because Southwest Middle School carries such a large population of English Language Learners, incorporating AVID Strategies school-wide has been made the pivotal center of our mission to promote rigor and equity. At Southwest Middle, 69% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Ninety-eight percent of students come from groups traditionally underrepresented: 3% African-America, 3% Filipino, 92% Latino, while 2% are white and 359 are considered English Language Learners. In order to achieve equity and rigor to such a large population of English Learners, specific school-wide AVID strategies have been systematically put into place in all content areas: 1) AVID critical reading strategies 2) Cornell note-taking 3) school-wide interactive notebooks 4) academic vocabulary and voice 5) summarizing 6) exit slips 7) collaboration 8) COSTA's . To encourage and ensure these are implemented, administration has incorporated these specific strategies into the required teacher lesson-plan model, as well as the administrator's teacher observation form. *“AVID, to me, is where I can be myself, where everybody can feel safe, where everybody can visualize their future, where I feel that I can make it.” – Sara Garcia, 8th grade.*

In order to build upon our site's educational leadership capacity in the area of equity and rigor, AVID methodologies are strategically and systematically institutionalized. At least two teachers, sometimes multiple teachers, from each subject area complete the yearly Summer Institute and Path trainings. AVID trained teachers then facilitate on-site school-wide staff-development at the beginning and through-out each year, focusing on WICR, Cornell-Notes, Critical Reading and COSTA'S. In addition, each AVID site team member takes a leadership role in communicating with their PLC's and departments on how to scaffold AVID strategies into their subject area-lesson planning. All English teachers are trained in the Critical Reading Path and incorporate these techniques into each lesson. These Critical Reading strategies align with our district assessments on annotating and identifying the author's claim. The Critical Reading strategies of

annotating and writing in the margins are also implemented in our social science, science and foreign language departments. In order to further support the staff with AVID resources, an AVID email icon folder has been created to supply teachers with many on-line AVID resources of all subject areas and strategies, such as multiple types of Cornell-Note templates and higher-level question activities. *“AVID, to me, is a place of college. AVID moves me forward to take advantage of great opportunities.” – Erick Lopez, 8th grade*

In addition to school-wide strategies, AVID counselors facilitate a “College Night” for all parents, informing parents and students about college requirements, financial aid and Compact for Success, which is an agreement between San Diego State and Sweetwater District that guarantees our students college acceptance if requirements are met. Semester fieldtrips to universities are facilitated and personal representatives from San Diego State conference with students individually on our campus as to college requirements. Through the use of *MyRoad.com*, each semester, AVID students complete extensive research and power point presentations on careers and universities. AVID Teachers, staff and site-team members coordinate a school-wide College Week, where various college games and activities occur throughout the week, ending with a school-wide College Fair created and presented by the AVID

Students. *“AVID to me is a place where I am back with people I’ve seen before. AVID to me is a place that helps me jumpstart my future. If it didn’t find me, I wouldn’t be able find myself and realize what I can become.” – Ghiezelle Simon, 8th grade*

High expectations and rigor among our Southwest Middle School students, especially the AVID students, are met with an infra-structure of multiple support systems. In order for AVID students to be a part of the Dual Immersion Program, zero period-Dual Immersion AVID has been incorporated into the master schedule. Historical records and data support how our Southwest AVID Dual Immersion students continue on to high school, completing an average of up to four advanced placement courses by senior year.

In order to ensure students are meeting the demands of high rigor and high skill course work, Southwest Middle has strategically utilized grant money to have 21 students per class for math and English has been implemented for the second year. By 2010-2011, all core subject areas will have 21 students per class. In addition to the institutionalization of school-wide AVID strategies, QTEL professional development across content areas are implemented, after school tutoring and Saturday support classes in math, English and writing are provided. Mandatory interventions are offered every Monday and Tuesday by subject area and individual teachers, where students that struggle with the content and tasks are given the intervention needed. Students are also asked to participate in Summer Support Camps in math, English and Dual Immersion for both 7th and 8th grade. SEI, bilingual, AVID and AVID Dual Immersion courses are embedded into the master schedule.

Our three 8th grade AVID sections, plus 8th graders in our 0 period Dual Immersion, focus solely on Algebra I content during tutorials. The tutorials have been restructured to increase rigor. The AVID elective instructors are implementing the new tutorial curriculum and have designed our tutorial forms to focus specifically in the area of math. When taking Cornell-Notes in their math tutorials, students are required to write down the steps, then identify each operation using the academic vocabulary (parallel to each step), and finally, write a summary, describing step-by-step, each operation, showing the work, as well as utilizing and high-lighting transition words. In addition to the restructuring of our tutorials, students that have scored “basic” on the CST’s or need Algebra support, are interviewed and placed into AVID, instead of a math support class. *“AVID, to me, is where my family is at, where I can ask questions and not be scared, where I can be myself.” – Yvonne Garcia, 8th grade*

*As a little blue and white school house, Southwest Middle School and our community strive to create a culture of inclusion, embracing open access to rigorous coursework by means of educating students and parents. Counselors facilitate presentations, such as College Making It Happen Night, PIQUE, Compact for Success, Incoming 7th grader Parent Nights, as well as Informative Parent Nights to discuss course selection and impact of grades. Administration has incorporated into the 2010-2011 master schedule heterogeneous classrooms, where rigor and high expectations are systematically implemented into the content area instructions. RSP students, mild to moderate, are included into mainstream courses. Because of our leadership efforts and strong visionary goals by all administration, staff and community, we hope to instill within all students the pursuit of academic excellence.*