

# An AVID Teacher Finds Success in Pikesville

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Mary Catherine Swanson, an English teacher at Claremont High School in San Diego, California, created the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program in 1980. She assisted students who could become first generation college students but lacked the academic support to successfully complete their high school careers. When students were told that they did not have the skills to enroll in rigorous classes, such as honors level and advanced placement classes, Ms. Swanson took the initiative to help the students who did not have a support system and nurtured them with encouragement. Ms. Swanson taught those students how to use tools that would empower them to excel in any class. Her dream grew, and she shared her success stories. Today, the AVID Center has developed a partnership with the College Board and they promote schools around the nation who use the AVID pedagogy.

## AVID

AVID students undergo an intense selection process. They must maintain a 2.5 GPA, provide teacher recommendations, submit a writing sample, and participate in an interview. If accepted, the pupils must volunteer to be in the program, possess determination to stay in the program, and take responsibility for their education. Parent involvement is also required for the students to remain in AVID. The purpose of the program is to restructure the teaching methods of an entire school and to open access to the curricula that will ensure four year college eligibility to students.

AVID is a program that promotes rigor. The driving force of the program is the WIC-R methodology: Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration and Reading. There are several writing activities: learning logs, essays, journals, and summaries. During the inquiry stage, students are



Natalie Bailey (third from left with hand on chin) and her AVID students at Pikesville High.

taught how to write and to recognize good questioning techniques using Bloom's Taxonomy and Costa's level of questions. Collaboration is used in discussion, group activities, and presentations. Reading is an on-going task that helps students to understand deeper meaning through the use of literature.

### **Pikesville High School**

The AVID program began at Pikesville High School in 2002. Much of the school was ambivalent about the program and its pedagogy. Principal Dorothy E. Hardin, T-C '86, selected me as one of a team of teachers to attend an AVID institute in Atlanta. We learned about the program and the progressive strides it would provide to help students across the board improve their academics. As a result, in 2002, a tenth grade AVID class was piloted on campus.

The program schedule has two days of curriculum, two days of tutorial assistance (provided by local college students), and motivational Fridays. During these Fridays, students extend their experiences outside the classroom by touring colleges, attending cultural events, participating in college preparatory lessons, and listening to speakers from the local community. Because of this type of exposure, the students are expected to take honors level, advanced placement, and gifted classes. The AVID team works closely with the parents and teachers to ensure academic success. The students participate in quarterly conferences, which focus on their grades, with the AVID team members and their parents. The parents also attend informative workshops.

Teaching the AVID class has given me an opportunity to be a well-rounded teacher and a leader. Using the WIC-R practices in the classroom has been effective. At the end of the first year, I discovered that this program could be a powerful way to do personal research and inquiry in a non-threatening manner. During the first year, the students were interviewed at the beginning, middle and end of the year. The data collected was astounding and was used to help improve the program by taking the students' concerns into consideration. Currently, Pikesville has four AVID classes, one each in grades 9-12. The 12th grade class is an honors level course.

The program has attained certification on its first level. The aim is to use ongoing data to attain the next level of certification with distinction. The Baltimore County Public Schools promotes and supports the AVID program in many schools. This support sends a strong message that the student in the middle has an opportunity to excel if given the necessary skills and resources.

Natalie is the AVID Coordinator and English teacher Pikesville High School. She is also an instructor at CCBC-Catonsville.

Note: In August 2005, Mary Catherine Swanson announced her retirement from the AVID Center. During the 2005-06 school year, the AVID program is operating in more than 2,200 schools nationally and throughout the world.

The AVID Center: <http://www.avidonline.org/>



*The MWP Professional Writing Retreat in April 2005.  
Back row: Art Kahn, Katie Bull,  
Cheryl North Coleman and  
Amanda Portner  
Front row: Sheila Cunningham,  
Barbara Laster, Anita Hairston,  
Valerie Josenhans*