



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practioner’s Best Friend”
www.wsascd.org

‘Critical Questions’ Series
February 2007

How Can AVID Change a School Culture?

During the three years that Mt. Spokane High School researched AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, we heard how the AVID philosophy and practices would permeate a school’s culture. Many of us were excited about this anecdotal information. However, some were concerned that only those students in the AVID elective would be the recipients of philosophies and instruction that should reach all students.

Since its second year of implementation, AVID philosophies and strategies are becoming embedded throughout Mt. Spokane High School.

The first elective AVID class began fall of 2005. Fundamental to that class are active learning strategies. Examples include Socratic Seminars, Cornell note taking, SLANT (sit in the front, lean forward, ask questions, nod your head, take notes) Learning Logs, interactive note books and philosophical chairs. Teachers on the school’s Site Team who have attended AVID summer institutes as well as locally offered AVID workshops are implementing these activities in their classes too. Examples include Cornell notes in Algebra, interactive notebooks in Biology, and philosophical chairs in World History. The resultant increase in student engagement has drawn attention and queries from other staff members.

Within the first few weeks of school that fall, teachers began noticing some freshmen arriving to class with an organized binder. By second semester, a proposal evolved through the school’s Council for Learning Improvement that supported a school goal to reduce the number of D’s and F’s in freshmen classes. All ninth graders would be required to have a 3-ring binder with a designated section for each academic course.

Opening the previously restrictive doors of the honors and Advanced Placement courses to all students was a philosophy that was beginning to change at Mt. Spokane about the same time the AVID research was beginning. Students are now invited rather than selected for college prep

courses and are provided the support to succeed in the more rigorous coursework. Fifty percent of the honors, A.P. and college prep teachers at Mt. Spokane are members of the AVID Site Team and have participated in AVID professional development offerings. These teachers are eager to learn new strategies to support a different type of learner.

AVID has quickly spread beyond the high school. Mead Middle school, Mt. Spokane's feeder school, has implemented its first AVID class at the eighth grade this year and will be offering both a seventh and eighth grade class next year.

A major component of the AVID elective is the twice a week tutorial sessions lead primarily by college students. These tutors are trained to guide the AVID students in how to answer their own questions about school work through active problem solving strategies. Mead is very fortunate to have an outstanding college in its community, Whitworth College, which produces highly qualified teaching candidates. Whitworth's Education department is supporting AVID by accepting the tutoring experience for the required student contact time in their Education coursework.

Can AVID impact a school culture? Yes, when the staff, administrators, district and community support the idea that all students can learn the strategies to be successful in rigorous curriculum and work together to make it happen.

Danette Driscoll
Director of Instruction
Mead School District
ddriscoll@mead.k12.wa.us