

# Closing the Gap

AVID DESERVES PUBLIC SUPPORT AND FUNDING

**A**s a high school freshman Katelyn VanBerkel would carefully pick her way through the broken glass and muddied potholes of the trailer park in Glenwood, warily skirting a drunk prostitute, avoiding the local junkies until she could make it onto the warm and dry bus that would take her to the one place she felt safe, school.

Against all the statistical odds, Katelyn has worked through poverty, abandonment and homelessness to graduate with a 3.4 GPA. She will attend the UO on full scholarship.

Why? "I have people who support me to become somebody; they have faith in me," Katelyn says.

These people are Katelyn's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) class.

In a recent article [6/5] for *The Register-Guard*, Josephine Woolington, attempting to unearth some evidence of gross financial mismanagement, dredged up 4J employees who are attending AVID training and had the unmitigated gall to do it in someplace nice like Hawaii. "This is a real mistake," Superintendent Shelly Berman was quoted as saying, noting that the public perception in these cases matters, and school staff should avoid learning in Hawaii and Las Vegas.

A real mistake? To supply teachers with the tools to help determined students get to college? If the district were buying a fleet of Chevy Novas, that might be newsworthy. But training staff to help students achieve their college dreams is exactly what our district should be funding.

AVID isn't the latest flash in the pan, edu-service. It has been around for more than 30 years. Started in San Diego to help students who were bused from poorer neighborhoods into the wealthy white schools as part of desegregation, AVID targets the least served group of students — those in the middle. These kids are C and B students who come from subgroups who don't traditionally attend college. They are a combination low-income families, English language learners, students of color and kids whose families have faced difficulties that make it unlikely that parents have the time or ability to direct their child's education so they're on track to go to college.

Over 90 percent of AVID students meet eligibility for four-year colleges and attend college versus 36 percent of students nationwide. You read that correctly. Only 36 percent of students who enroll in high school are still in and on track to go to college four years later. AVID effectively closes the achievement gap between white and minority students.

"But what's in it for my kid?" I can hear my educated, middle-class sisters ask in hushed tones. We lovely Eugene liberals like to help the less advantaged, but not if our TAG kids are stuck in a corner with photocopied worksheets while what little money there is left in this district goes to somebody else's child.

AVID strategies permeate an entire school. All teachers are encouraged to teach Cornell note-taking strategies, organization and critical reading. That's why so many educators need to go to trainings. AVID is a nonprofit; it funds itself by helping schools implement superior educational strategies on a broad scale, and holding schools accountable by an extensive data requirement.

It's not perfect, and none of this comes cheap. But in 4J, a large percentage of AVID costs are defrayed by grants and donors. Some \$248,000 has been raised over the last few years to foot the AVID bill. The program is run on the generosity of donors, the support of the UO, and countless hours of parent volunteers. The program requires a great commitment, and long hours from its teachers. That might be a nice topic for the *R-G's* next article.

On June 8, Katelyn and 19 AVID scholars from South Eugene High School walked across the stage at graduation. They came into high school, some confused, some angry, many sassy, but all were hopeful. Over four years these students shared a first period AVID class; they shared annoying binder checks, awesome road trips to visit colleges, tutorials, in-jokes, moments of sheer educational beauty and times of despair. They became leaders in the Latino Student Union, the Integrated Outdoor Program, the dance team, the Black Student Union, the culinary arts program, the Philosophy Club, Kids Down South, in their churches and on their sports teams. Sometimes they got A's in hard classes and sometimes they pulled out C's at the last minute. They struggled and they laughed and they worked hard together. They became a family, a family that is going to college. And that is priceless.

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