

UW report: More promising results for AVID/TOPS college prep program



- PHOTO BY M.P. KING — State Journal archives

Students tackle an algebra III problem during an AVID/TOPS class at East High School last spring. A new evaluation of the college-prep program finds participants generally take more advanced placement and honors courses and have higher grade point averages and graduation rates than their peers.

Students enrolled in the AVID/TOPS program in Dane County have continued to show promising results, according to a [new report from the Wisconsin HOPE Lab](#).

AVID/TOPS is a college preparatory program for students of color, low-income and first generation students offered in partnership with the Madison Metropolitan School District and the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. The program is also available in the Verona Area School District. Through mentoring, tutoring, internships, college field trips and leadership opportunities, AVID/TOPS works to narrow achievement gaps, help students stay on track to graduate and prepare them for college. It also works with them to explore career options.

AVID/TOPS started in 2007 at East High School serving 28 students. In eight years, the program has

grown to over 1,400 students and is implemented in 11 middle schools and four high schools in the Madison School District. Earlier this year, the [Boys and Girls Club received a \\$3.3 million dollar grant](#) to help boost the AVID/TOPS program. It was the largest grant ever given to a college preparatory program in the Madison and Verona school districts.

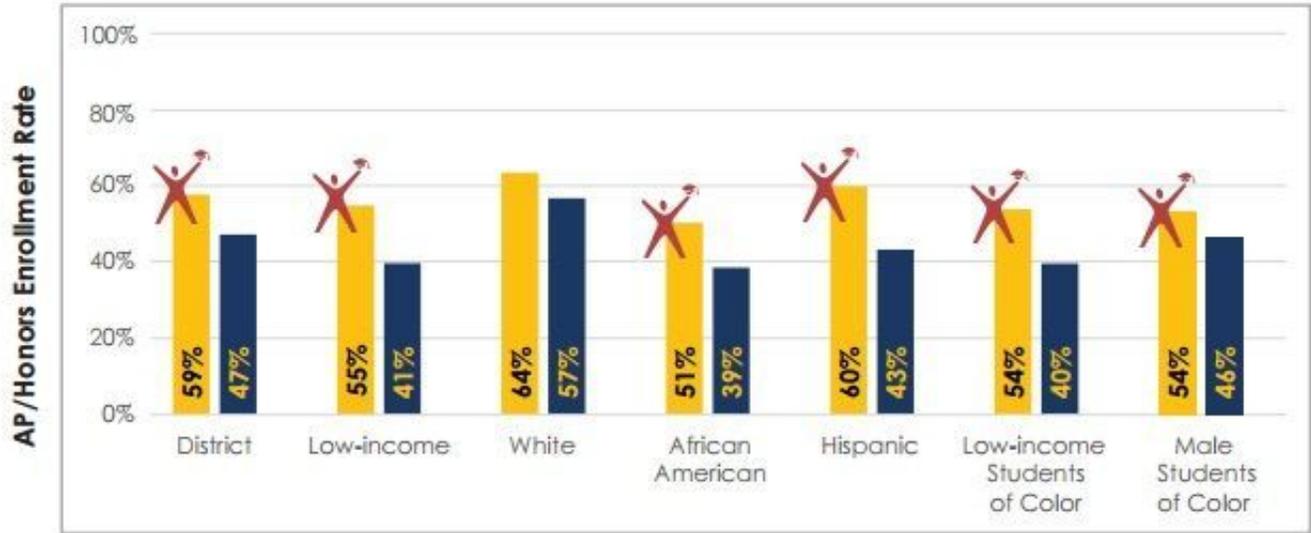
Students in MMSD involved in AVID/TOPS tend to have better academic records than those who are eligible to participate but don't, and also graduate at higher rates than their peers qualified to be in the program.

The report released Tuesday included data from 2014-2015 and showed that AVID/TOPS students exhibited the following:

- Ninth-grade students who participated in AVID in middle school had fewer unexcused absences (3.78 compared to 5.53) and higher attendance rates (94 percent compared to 93 percent) than their matched peers.
- Ninth-grade students who participated in AVID in middle school had increased credits earned (6.68 compared to 6.36).
- AVID/TOPS involvement led to a higher GPA for high school students in the district, 2.76 compared to 2.67.
- AVID/TOPS led students to enroll in more challenging coursework such as AP and honors classes (59 percent for students in AVID/TOPS compared to 47 percent not in the program).
- Students with any exposure to AVID/TOPS graduated high school on time at higher rates than their comparison group (94 percent compared to 89 percent).
- AVID/TOPS students had a 20 percent higher college enrollment rate than their peers. This number increased to 30 percent for male students of color.

“As we work to ensure that every child graduates ready for college, career and community, AVID/TOPS positions many of our students for success,” MMSD Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham said in a press release. “We are so grateful to all of our AVID staff and the Boys and Girls Club for this partnership, which continues to show consistently positive results for our students.”

FIGURE 21: IMPACTS OF AVID/TOPS HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM ON AP/HONORS ENROLLMENT RATE



Report by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab shows AVID/TOPS students enroll in AP/Honors classes at higher rates than their matched peers. Yellow bar represents AVID students, blue bar represents comparison group.

FIGURE 14: IMPACTS OF AVID MIDDLE SCHOOL PARTICIPATION ON NINTH-GRADE UNEXCUSED DAYS ABSENT

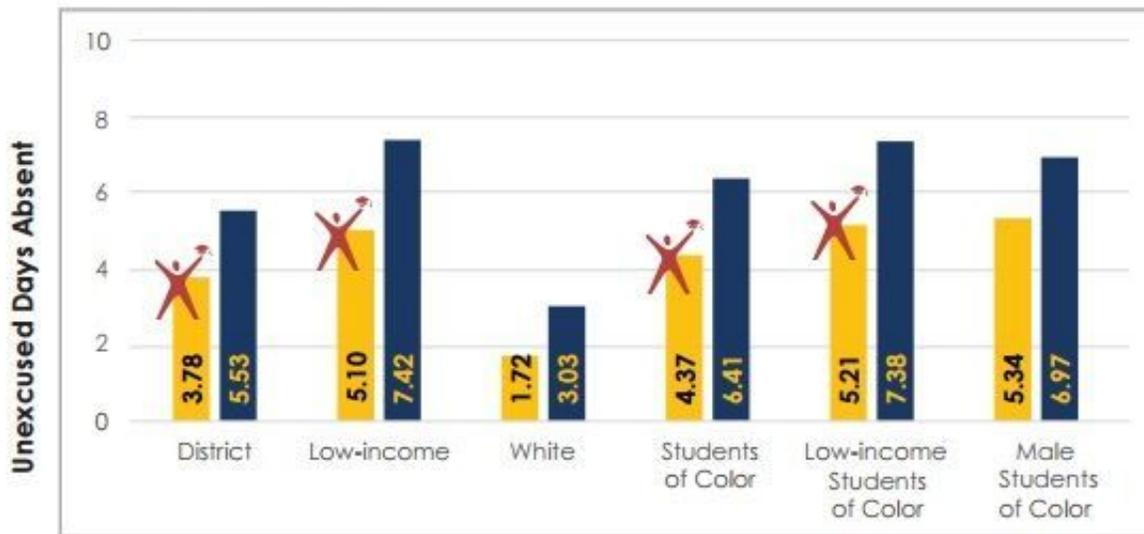
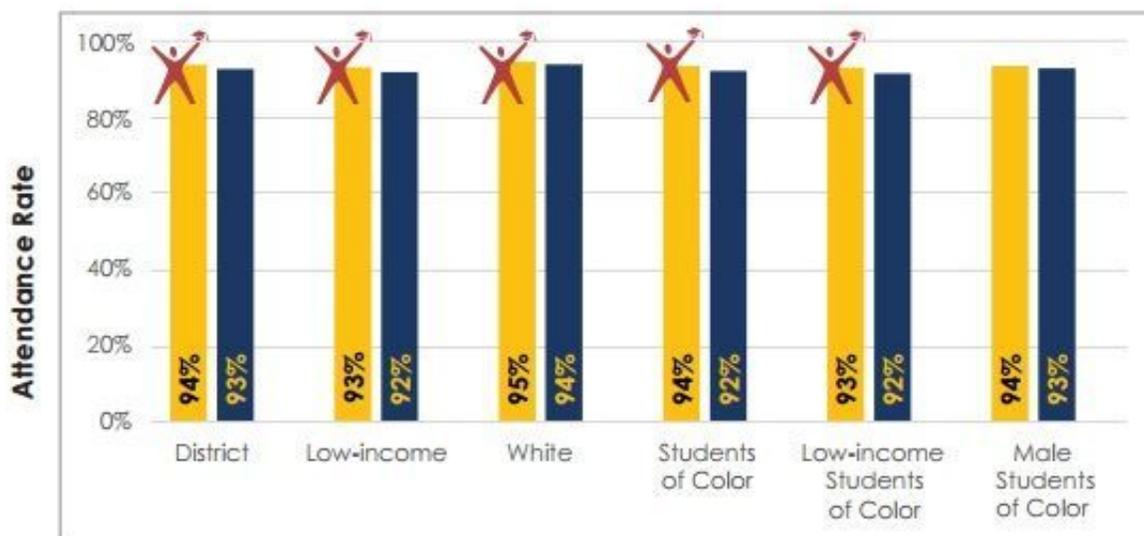


FIGURE 15: IMPACTS OF AVID MIDDLE SCHOOL PARTICIPATION ON NINTH-GRADE ATTENDANCE RATE



Report by the Wisconsin HOPE lab showed AVID/TOPS ninth-grade students have higher attendance rates their matched peers and have shown a decrease in unexcused absences. Yellow bar represents AVID students, blue bar represents comparison group.

Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, said he believes no other programs in the state have seen similar results for low income kids of color like AVID/TOPS in Dane County.

“We’re really excited about the progress we been making for our local kids. We believe it’s making a difference in kids’ lives. They’re graduating and going to college,” he said.

Around 335 students from AVID/TOPS are currently enrolled in college, with the majority either at Madison College or the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Johnson said the program is still tracking its first cohort of students in college to release their graduation rates and said he hopes to have at least 50

percent of the students graduate from college within six years.

The program provided \$232,000 in college scholarships in 2015. Every student that participated in the AVID/TOPS graduation ceremony last year was accepted into a college or university. MMSD and the Boys and Girls Club have provided over 100 paid tutors to support students and has placed 225 students in paid summer internships. Johnson said as students are excelling and graduating, more businesses need to step up and hire them.

“We need more businesses to step up and hire these kids and give them opportunities,” he said.

“Students need support in the classrooms, they need financial support, and they need to be mentored from people who have graduated and (are) working to show them it’s possible. We can do more exposing them to opportunities and teaching them they have choices in life.”

Johnson projects that AVID/TOPS will serve an estimated 1,750 students including college students by 2020.

"Improving college-going rates among marginalized students is difficult work. We are pleased that the AVID/TOPS program appears to be an effective approach and that the team is committed to rigorously and consistently evaluating it for improvement," Sara Goldrick-Rab, founding director of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, said in a statement.