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EDITOR'S PICK

## Madison AVID/TOPS students celebrate academic achievements, college acceptance

OGECHI EMECHEBE | The Capital Times | oemechebe@madison.com May 13, 2016



PHOTO BY SAIYNA BASHIR

A group of AVID/TOPS students posed for photos Thursday night at the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County's college acceptance

Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, has long wanted to celebrate college bound students the way scholarship athletes are treated, with a recognition ceremony complete with kids donning hats representing the colleges they're planning to attend.

That's what brought 121 Madison area high school seniors together Thursday evening at the Gordon Dining and Event Center on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. Over 400 parents, teachers, donors and educators joined the students and Nichelle Nichols, director of Family and Community Engagement for the Madison Metropolitan School District, hosted the event.

The students, all part of the Boys and Girls Club's AVID/TOPS program, were called to the stage one by one to receive their acceptance award and pose in hats representing several UW System campuses: Madison, Milwaukee, Stevens-Point and others.

AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and TOPS (Teens of Promise) is an initiative of the Boys and Girls Club in partnership with the MMSD targeting students in the "academic middle" at all Madison high schools and several middle schools.

Once accepted, students focus on techniques that will prepare them for college and beyond such as organization, writing, reading and self-advocacy. The program also takes students on college campus tours and works to place them in paid summer internships.

Johnson said Thursday that donors have given \$1.4 million in scholarships for the students.

"This celebration is about you," he told the students. "The community is here to support you and we'll support you throughout your journey. You will persist and succeed."

The keynote speaker was Gloria Ladson-Billings, UW-Madison's Kellner Family Chair in Urban Education. Her speech was delivered using several phrases millennial youth today use such as "turn up," "stay woke," and "take several seats." She advised students to "turn up" for class by showing up on time and taking their studies seriously.

The evening featured a video presentation that highlighted the AVID students in their classrooms talking about their academic and career goals. Cynthia Maduka, a Madison East High School student, said she will attend UW-Milwaukee to pursue nursing. She has been in AVID since her freshman year and she said joining the club was the “best four years she’s ever had.”

“I cannot help but think about the role AVID played in my academic life. It taught me to challenge myself and I refuse to let statistics about people like me be the reason my questions go unanswered,” Maduka said. “I’m confident we’re all better due to the AVID program.”

Frank Ariola, a senior at Madison LaFollette, said AVID prepared him for college courses. He’s also been in the program since his freshman year but shared how he almost failed and felt like quitting. One of his teachers encouraged him to stay and doing so has been the best decision he said he’s made in high school. He will attend UW-Stevens Point in the fall to major in athletic training.

“AVID taught me not to give up because everyone has a purpose. When I started high school I started hanging out with a new crowd to fit in. My self-esteem was so low and I wanted to drop out of AVID because I was almost failing,” he said. “The program helped me so much and I enjoyed all the college visits we took. The one I liked the most was UW-Stevens Point and that’s where I decided I will go.”

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Photos: Madison AVID/TOPS college acceptance ceremony  
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