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EDUCATION

Madison East nationally recognized again as an AVID model school

AMBER C. WALKER Oct 26, 2016



PHOTO BY SAIYNA BASHIR

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A group of AVID/TOPS students posed for photos at the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County's college acceptance ceremony last spring.

For the second time, Madison East High School has been named a national model for the AVID college readiness program.

The Advancement Via Individual Determination program initially recognized East as an AVID demonstration school in 2013. Only 2 percent of the 5,700 schools nationwide that participate in the AVID program receive this distinction.

East will retain this designation for three years until its next evaluation.

Students in AVID are in the academic middle but show a work ethic and desire to succeed in college. The program teaches organizational and critical thinking skills to prepare kids for honors and AP classes. AVID students also have access to academic tutors and other activities to enrich and motivate them.

Madison East's model differs from the traditional school-based AVID program because of its unique partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. The Teens of Promise (TOPS) program couples AVID's high expectations in the classroom with opportunities for students to excel in the community through internships, tutoring and mentoring.

"The use of AVID strategies school-wide has positively impacted students and staff, and we continue to see a more engaged and college-ready student body," East High School Principal Mike Hernandez said in a statement.

Langston Evans, who grew up in the Madison public schools, is the district-wide coordinator for AVID and worked at the Boys and Girls Club for nearly nine years.

He said he does not remember a program like AVID/TOPS when he was a student. Over the years, he's seen students grow as scholars and community leaders. Data from the 2014-2015 school year shows 100% of AVID/TOPS students graduated from high school on time, with 90% of those students enrolled in college by September.

"Anecdotally, we've seen that (AVID/TOPS) helps make students make better choices," Evans said.

AVID started at East High in 2007 with 25 students. Since then, the program has expanded to four high schools in Madison and 11 middle schools. This past school year, AVID/TOPS enrolled 261 East students.

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"AVID is a key strategy for equity," Evans said. He said it's been successful "despite a reduction in school funding and more students coming in with fewer resources."

"Despite all the challenges we've had in education, we've made significant gains in equity," Evans said.

Although the demonstration school distinction is a great honor for AVID/TOPS, it is not the apex for the program. Evans said Madison's model will continue to innovate by supporting AVID/TOPS alumni after they graduate from high school.

"We have an entire team of people (at the Boys and Girls Club) dedicated to college success," Evans said. "Getting to college is one thing, but we want to make sure our students are really ready to thrive, make good decisions and move on to successful lives."

In a statement, Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, said AVID/TOPS is "making a difference in the lives of students by putting them on the path to realize their greatest potential."

Amber Walker

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