

The AVID Circle of Life: Small Town, Big Impact

Within a rural school district in Northeast Texas, educators and administrators from Cooper Junior/Senior High School sprouted a love for the AVID program about 8 years ago. Quickly after attending demo schools in the Dallas area, we knew that we wanted this program for our students. We strived to make sure our students were supported and loved within the walls of our building, but while some students succeeded and went to college or trade school, we also saw some staying in our small town and walking the streets after high school. We believed that AVID was what we needed to help ALL students be successful in college and careers post high school. With the full support of our administrators, we jumped in with both feet and opened the AVID Elective class to grades 6-12 the very next year. Our school saw successes in teaching practices, in organization, in retention of curriculum, in standardized testing scores, and in college acceptance and future planning in areas where AVID was present. In the next few years, we were able to push our boundaries outward to encompass our Elementary School as an official AVID campus, hone our AVID strategies and systems, and become a school-wide certified AVID school district. Since our launch of the program, we have hosted several on-site AVID showcases for other local schools to experience what AVID did for us, and we were selected in 2023 to speak at the AVID National Conference in San Diego, California. Being a part of the AVID program has impacted the way we educate our students, and paired with the heart-work and care of our teachers, we are cultivating thinkers and problem solvers, and graduating young adults that are prepared for the next chapter of their lives. Some of these students who have been through the AVID program throughout their high school career have even chosen to come back to our community after graduating college and give back to our school in various ways. Pictured here are just some of the success stories that AVID has had a hand in from our school district, and how AVID graduates continue to circle around and give back. These individuals in particular know the impact this program can have in a child's life and education, were impacted themselves by the program, and have dedicated their career to producing successful, well-rounded individuals set to thrive in their career paths of choice.

Jacie Ballard, an AVID Elective Teacher and Coordinator for Cooper Junior/Senior High School, and her former student Randa Thompson created an unshakable bond through AVID. Randa attended Cooper High School and took the AVID Elective class for 3 years, came back after graduating to serve as an AVID Tutor for 3 more years, and hired on with Cooper ISD to teach middle school mathematics, promoting AVID strategies in her very own classroom and setting a whole new generation of students up for success. She is a believer in the Organization system that AVID instilled in her, and openly shares with peers and students that AVID taught her how to keep a planner and stay organized. She has been an integral part of planning Greek Life at her college, Texas A&M University- Commerce, and holds numerous officer positions. During her time as a tutor, she also helped Mrs. Ballard create a WICOR Spreadsheet of Strategies and WICOR workbook for teachers at Cooper ISD to use. Randa attributes her ability to plan meticulously from her time in AVID, and is still a key asset to the AVID program today in her math classroom.

Cayla Kimbrell is a recent AVID program graduate who is seeking a career in the education field and working as a tutor for our high school and middle school. Through her 6 years in the program at Cooper schools, AVID turned her mentality about grades around, taking

her from a student that didn't know the value of grades and hard work, to a college student who is now teaching other students the importance of investing in their own education. Her work ethic and morals are top tier, and she is dedicated to showing students how to be the best for themselves. She is in her second year working for Cooper as a tutor and a champion for the AVID program.

Iliana Hastings is a social worker who also attended the AVID elective in our high school, worked as a tutor for our AVID elective program while in college, and then was contracted with the school as a social worker to work with our students and provide social/emotional wellness for our students, as well as meet basic needs of students. She, too, chose to give back to Cooper ISD through her career, and is one of our top supporters for the AVID program, buying school supplies and AVID notebooks for students in need out of her own pocket. A true believer in its potential for students.

Another AVID impact was made through Derrick Robinson, a graduate of Cooper High School. He was attending college and was recruited to help us launch the tutorial program featuring college students as tutors for the junior high and high school. Through his training in AVID tutorials, he was able to help us create a rock solid foundation for what the model tutor should look like, and eventually graduated and came back to be an educator for Cooper middle school. He taught the 6th Grade AVID elective for several years, and blended seamlessly the concepts from his elective class into his core curriculum, 6th Grade English. He was awarded Educator of the Year from our school, and continues to excel in promoting the AVID Way in his core classes.

The group photo is made up of administrators and teachers that attended the 2023 National Conference in San Diego to speak about implementing AVID in a rural school district. They shared our story and how we implement the program school wide. We have a big heart for our students, and want them to be able to tackle anything that comes at them in life. We believe in AVID, and we are true advocates for the program's ability to change the trajectory of lives.

These stories are very special to our hearts, and while they don't feature all of our success stories, they do show how some students in the AVID program never really leave the program and the lasting impact it can have on individual lives. It sets students up to be the best version of themselves, and the skills learned carry over into creating successful adults with caring hearts that want to create a new generation of AVID success stories. This program captures hearts and minds, and no school is too big or too small to implement AVID. The impact the program leaves in its wake is far greater than anything we could have imagined, and we will continue to produce successful students with the help of AVID, and are forevermore blessed when those students circle back around and give back to the school and program they believe in.