College Aspirations and Preparation: How AVID Students Beat the Odds

Dana Cronin
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

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College Aspirations and Preparation: How AVID Students Beat the Odds

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By
Dana Cronin

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
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UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

College Aspirations and Preparation: How AVID Students Beat the Odds

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

Sarah J. Noonan, Ed. D., Committee Chair

Thomas L. Fish, Ed. D., Committee Member

Chientzu Candace Chou, Ph.D., Committee Member

April 4, 2013

Final Approval Date
ABSTRACT

A study of “at risk” high school youth revealed how student participation in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program positively affected student achievement and increased college aspirations and entrance rates. The experiences of the students, teachers, and administrators were examined using a case study approach involving two high schools providing the AVID program within the same district. A combination of factors supported student success in the AVID program. Students found a safe place within the AVID classroom to take risks and learn due to positive relationships between teachers and students. The relationships within the “school family system” contained family-like members: teachers took on parental roles, and peer friendships resembled sibling relationships.

Several different components of the AVID program supported student learning, including professional development, rigorous curriculum, and the adoption of a new professional role as an AVID teacher. The AVID curriculum and pedagogy consisted of effective lesson design, strategy instruction, creating conditions to support autonomous learners, informal academic advising, valuing individual differences and diversity, and college readiness: selecting, applying and paying for college contributing to student success. Administrators played a supportive role in the AVID program by selecting effective teachers and providing resources for learning and teaching. Changing students’ academic identities through positive relationships and skilled coaching helped students discover the route to academic success and gain acceptance in college.

Keywords: AVID, at risk students, college aspirations, strategy instruction, student achievement, student affect
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Finally, I feel grateful to my parents’ individual inspiration to me, encouraging me to value education and become a leader. My mom passed away just weeks before the completion of my dissertation. She made me promise to complete it and be proud of it. Here it is, mom. Enjoy.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I trace my passion for helping students to a critical incident I experienced in college. One night in the inner city of Pittsburgh, I encountered a young woman determined to end her life. I met Danielle while working as a counselor at an adolescent shelter serving female residents who were homeless, having experienced significant mental health issues and/or abandonment by their parents or caretakers. The experience working at the shelter was part of my coursework in psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. Although the girls’ situations were heartbreaking and devastating, I found my work with them rewarding and challenging. I established relationships and helped many young women in desperate situations, but my encounter with one young woman stands out as life-changing experience. Her name was Danielle. I became very fond of her, enjoying her wit and sarcastic edge, and never guessed the severity of her problems.

One Friday night, I planned a walk with the girls in the shelter around an area of Pittsburgh with a phenomenal city view. That night, I noticed Danielle was not engaged and appeared to distance herself from others. I asked her if she was okay, and she nodded subtly. I did not question her, even though I knew she was obviously having a difficult time. I encouraged her to join the conversation but to no avail.

Although I was engrossed in my own thoughts while gazing at the city skyline, I could see someone climbing on the railing a few yards away. I discovered it was Danielle making her way to the top of the railing. My reaction was instinctual; I casually asked in a sarcastic tone, “What on earth are you doing?” Her eyes flooded with tears and her body trembled all over. She was a 16-year-old girl who thought she had more reasons to die than to live.

Danielle was an exception to the rule in the most dangerous gang-infested area of the city. She was not a high school dropout; she loved to learn and dreamed of going to college. She
was not a gang member; she wanted to join the National Honor Society her senior year. She was not a drug addict; she refused to walk in the footsteps of her crack-addicted mother. Yet the pressure of the odds against her was too much to handle. She felt ending her life was a better option than giving in to the drug dealers, pimps and criminals.

She looked at me in disbelief. I told her she was making a terrible decision, reminding her she was a much stronger person and should not give in to the circumstances surrounding her. My honesty penetrated her like a lightning bolt. I told her all of the negative factors in her life were reasons to be successful, not excuses to fail. Danielle calmed down, and she came back over the railing onto safe ground. Interestingly, no one else in the lookout area even noticed a girl was over the railing, ready to plunge down several hundred feet to her death. This incident was just between Danielle and me.

This occurred 20 years ago. Danielle and I still remain in contact and visit each other when we are in town. Danielle currently lives in a nice apartment in a suburb of Pittsburgh, earned a master’s degree in psychology, and works as a social worker for troubled adolescents. We have talked about that moment on Mount Washington only one other time. A few years ago, I received a card in the mail from Danielle. She simply said, “Thank you, Dana, for being you and saving my life.” I often reflect on the incident and revisit why Danielle walked into my life. This real-life experience significantly contributed to my lifelong commitment and passion to ensure all students have opportunities for success, particularly at risk students lacking the support, resources, or college readiness skills to enroll and graduate from college. This experience motivated me to finish college and become a teacher.

I left Pittsburgh, graduated from college, and started my career. I worked as a teacher and coordinator of special education, and most recently, as an administrator in a large public high
school. My passion for serving at risk youth has evolved and grown over the years. I believe every student has the potential for success, including at risk students likely to struggle to gain entrance into college.

My passion for helping students also stemmed from the example set by my high school teachers, who believed in me and fostered my potential. Because my father and mother did not attend college, my parents encouraged me to work hard in school and go to college, but could not help me beyond the gift of encouraging words. I received no support from my parents regarding postsecondary planning.

As a first-generation college student, I successfully navigated through the college application process and earned a four-year degree and two masters’ degrees without many advantages. Based on my family background, my enrollment in a doctoral program may even seem unusual. The route to higher education includes many barriers, but students become college-ready “when parents, schoolteachers and administrators, peers, and the community itself work together with the students” (Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee, & Franklin, 2006, p. 80).

Statement of the Problem

Programs for at risk students hope to change the historic underrepresentation of students in poverty or culturally/racially diverse students in college entrance and graduation rates (Slavin & Calderon, 2001; Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007). I conducted a study of an intervention program known as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID; Swanson, 1993) to contribute to knowledge regarding how to help at risk youth. AVID, a college preparatory program for at risk adolescents provides encouragement and support to students who lack the needed support or resources to enroll and succeed in college.
Martinez and Klopott (2005) examined the factors associated with college entrance and found “among the predictors of college-going behavior, academic rigor and strong social and academic support were the most crucial predictors of a student’s successful enrollment in, and completion of, postsecondary education” (p. 1). The AVID program in the California school system has a strong record of accomplishments, including a high number of AVID students attempting and completing college-level courses and enrolling in college (Slavin & Calderon, 2001). Using AVID strategies such as academic support and high expectations, at risk students succeed in a rigorous curriculum (Watt, Yanes, & Cossio, 2003).

AVID students outperform non-AVID students on standardized tests (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009). Additionally, studies show the AVID program positively affected students with regard to (1) standardized tests scores, (2) higher school attendance rates; (3) higher grade point averages (GPA); (4) increased enrollment in rigorous courses; and (5) college enrollment and acceptance rates (Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, & Siegle, 2008; Gandara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998; Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000; Hubbard & Mehan, 1999; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996; Oswald, 2002a; Swanson, 1989; Swanson et al., 1993; Watt, Powell, & Mendiola, 2004; Watt, Powell, Mendiola, & Cossio, 2006; Watt et al., 2002–2003).

The AVID program includes the following key components: rigorous courses, study skills support, and an expectation regarding AVID students and their future enrollment in a four-year college after high school graduation (Watt et al., 2007). While AVID success rates appear impressive (Black et al., 2008), minimal information existed regarding how the AVID program facilitates the learning and future college aspirations of high school AVID students beyond the key components (Watt et al., 2007). What makes the program work for so many students? How do people engage in the change process view the program and participate in it?
I studied AVID from the perspective of those engaged in the program, including teachers, students, administrators, and an AVID regional director. I learned how the AVID experience changed the lives of so many at risk youth by interacting with those involved in change. By conducting a case study of a high school AVID program at two high schools in one school district, I gained in-depth knowledge about how people involved in AVID describe their experience and participate in the AVID program. This included factors motivating students to engage and succeed in the program and also teacher, parental, and administrative support their learning within the AVID program.

**Research Question**

I adopted the following question to frame my study: How does the AVID program facilitate the learning and future college aspirations of high school AVID graduates? The following questions support my general question:

1. How do students describe their experience in AVID and its relationship to their learning and achievement?

2. What pedagogical approaches do teachers use? What assumptions guide their actions in working with at risk students?

3. How do program administrators and directors describe the key features of AVID? What assumptions guide their actions in working with at risk students?

**Significance of the Problem**

My study contributes to scholarly research on the AVID program by examining in detail the attitudes and approaches used by AVID teachers and administrators in planning the curriculum and providing academic support to at risk students. I also learned how students experience the program and what aspects appear particularly useful to them.
According to Hubbard and Mehan (1999), “The expressed goals of the AVID program are to increase access to rigorous and advanced coursework for typically underrepresented students as a means of increasing college attendance rates” (p. 122). I hoped to learn how students found success in the AVID program from the perspective of those engaged in the program. While many AVID strategies have been used previously in other intervention programs, AVID students managed to beat the odds. The knowledge gained from my findings may help educators learn how to more effectively close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged youth with regard to their college aspirations and graduation rates.

**Overview of Chapters**

I introduce the study and describe my interest and background regarding education for at risk students in chapter one. This includes the research question, significance of the problem, research goals, and definition of terms. In chapter two, I summarize a review of the literature regarding the background and context affecting at risk students, including educational racism and conditions associated with poverty. I describe factors affecting the college aspirations and acceptance rates of at risk students, pre-college intervention programs for at risk students, and the AVID program. I then describe several theories used to analyze the study, such as critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Dweck, 2006), learning theory (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010), and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003).

A description of methods used to conduct my case study appears in chapter three. I explain the qualitative methodology, including general approach, participant selection, recruitment, and protections, method of data collection and analysis, and issues associated with
reliability and confidentiality in qualitative research. Following the first three chapters, I describe my findings in chapters four and five.

In chapter four, I describe how students, teachers, and administrators helped students increase their rates of achievement and desire to attend college. Chapter five describes how teachers learned to become “AVID” teachers and the unique features of the AVID curriculum and pedagogy playing an important role in student success as described by teachers and students. Chapter six contains my analysis through the use of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Dweck, 2006), learning theory (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010), and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003).

I provide a summary of my findings and their implications for serving at risk students, and also recommend changes in practice based on my findings in chapter seven. I close with a description of limitations in my study and also offer a personal statement about the need for caring teachers and institutions in education. I hope to contribute to the knowledge helping educators learn how to more effectively close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged youth with regard to their college aspirations and graduation rates.

I begin with a definition of terms and then proceed to describe my study.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms and definitions have been adopted for this study:

**College readiness skills**: the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to complete a college course of study successfully, without remediation (ACT, 2008).

**At risk**: refers to a factor or combination of factors placing individuals “at risk” for academic underachievement, specifically students in poverty, racially diverse students, and first-generation students (first in the family to earn a college degree).
**Low-socioeconomic status:** refers to social status (class) and level of family income (generally limited family income allowing students to qualify and receive free or reduced school lunch in the National School Lunch Program).

**AVID pedagogy:** instructional methods used by teachers in the AVID program.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

How does the AVID program facilitate the learning and future college aspirations of high school AVID graduates? To answer this question, I conducted a review of literature pertaining to college readiness skills and college preparation programs related to at risk students and the AVID program. I organized my findings into three categories: (1) college aspirations and acceptance rates of at risk students, (2) pre-college intervention programs for at risk students, and (3) the AVID program. Following my topical review of scholarly literature, I then describe several theories used to analyze my findings, including critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory, learning theory, and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003). I begin by describing the circumstances of students overcoming the birth circumstances, such as race, parental involvement and educational level, and socioeconomic status by aspiring and achieving their dream through academic achievement.

College Aspirations and Acceptance Rates of At Risk Students

Several factors influence the college aspirations and acceptance rates of at risk students, including (1) educational racism and resisting oppression, (2) educational limitations of disadvantaged families and college access, and (3) academic achievement. While these factors overlap, the combined factors explain why the college aspirations and acceptance rates of at risk students do not match those of their advantaged peers. Next, I describe the role of educational racism influencing college aspirations.

Educational Racism

Spring (2011) defined educational racism as “the attempt by a dominant social group to destroy the culture of another group and replace it with the dominant group’s own culture” (p. 177). Educational racism, based on the dominant ideology of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants
WASP), favored certain groups based on a view of racial and cultural superiority (Raver, 2001; Spring, 2011; Takaki, 1993). Anglo-American culture controlled the goals, discourse, and means of power in education (Spring, 2011). I first describe historical examples of educational racism, show how diverse communities resisted this oppression, and describe differences in student achievement and graduation rates among advantaged and disadvantaged populations.

Evidence of educational racism can be traced from colonial days to the present day (Hughes, Newkirk, & Stenhjem, 2010; Spring, 2011). American education began its history with “a highly decentralized, local, and private approach to schooling . . . infused with a Eurocentric, fundamentalist Protestant ideology, which meant almost exclusive use of the Bible as the central curriculum” (Beach, 2007, p. 152). Beginning in colonial times, leaders provided educational opportunities to wealthy White students and denied enslaved people and immigrant groups (Takaki, 1993). The goal involved keeping people of Color illiterate so they could not challenge the dominant race (Takaki, 1993).

After the Revolutionary War, discrimination and violence against people of Color in the North fueled the circumstances of racial degradation, segregation, and poverty (Takaki, 1993). The threat to racial purity drove the White people’s demand for segregated schools for fear of possible interracial relationships and associations with an “inferior” race (Takaki, 1993). In addition to segregated schools, transportation facilities, such as streetcars and buses, required people of Color to ride only on designated cars and to sit only in certain areas (Takaki, 1993). Although some people of Color were not enslaved, they worked menial jobs and found themselves excluded from any decent wage-earning positions (Takaki, 1993).

Another example of early racism in education involved deculturalization (Spring, 2011). Spring (2001) defined deculturalization as “an educational process that aims to destroy a
people’s culture and replace it with a new culture” (p. 177). White people denied people of Color the right to keep their identities, cultures, and spiritual beliefs (Spring, 2011). American schools used the deculturalization process in their attempt to destroy the culture of Native American, African-American, Mexican-American and Puerto Rican people and replace it with the dominant Anglo-American culture and ideology (Spring, 2011). Deculturalization efforts caused educators to prohibit the use of non-English languages, particularly Spanish and Native American languages, and force the students to learn an Anglo-American-centered curriculum (Spring, 2011). Deculturalization and the U.S. government’s civilization policies shaped the very contours of the new American educational system in ways that magnified the significance of White power (Spring, 2011).

In the late 1800’s, boarding schools became the foundation of educational policy for equal opportunity (Bloom, 2000). Developed from the missionary model, boarding schools removed young Native Americans from their homes on the reservations and provided education to civilize and assimilate the students to Anglo-American culture (Bloom, 2000). Richard Henry Pratt founded the government-funded Carlisle Indian School to afford “Native Americans a chance to stand on their own feet as independent citizens, freeing them from living as subordinates dependent on federal aid” (Bloom, 2000, p. XV). The curriculum consisted of the study of English language, American history focusing on allegiance to the U.S. government, and vocational training for jobs (Spring, 2011) At the time the Carlisle Indian School closed in 1918, 25,396 boarding schools existed (Bloom, 2000). Spring (2011) described the reservation and boarding school system as an historical example of transforming an entire group of people through segregation and education.
Many claim educational racism continues today due to the perpetuation of the dominant status of White people (López, 2001; Spring, 2011). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued the underachievement of disadvantaged students today remains equivalent to the historical denial of education for people of Color. Racism functions daily in schools through educational practices such as biased instruction and assessment, curriculum aimed at representing the White experience and values, decreased financial support, and de facto segregation within schools due to grouping or tracking practices (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Teachers distribute knowledge to young Americans through public schooling (Spring, 2011). Spring (2011) argued knowledge stands not neutral and serves as another way to exert power and oppress those not affiliated with the dominant culture. Knowledge obtained in school occurs in the transmission and reproduction of the dominant culture through language, modes of reasoning, social relations and cultural experiences (Freire, 1985). Through these modes of transmission, the power of the school culture confirms the privilege of students from the dominant class and discredits the histories and experiences of the oppressed (Freire, 1985). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) found when students demonstrate knowledge according to “White norms” (e.g., speech, dress), they contribute to their own oppression. Those students who did not resist the White culture and language achieve academically. Conforming to succeed contributes to the perpetuation of their oppression (Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

Other evidence supporting White superiority may be found in the curriculum because it favors a White perspective, includes White history and images, and fails to represent diverse populations: “The lack of mention of the accomplishments of non-White people in many textbooks reinforces the notion that ‘White is best’ and that only White people are responsible,
Students of color . . . experience conceptual separation from their roots; they are compelled to examine their own experiences and history through the assumptions, paradigms, constructs, and language of other people; they lose their cultural identity; and they find it difficult to develop a sense of affiliation and connection to a school. (p. 4)

Omitting racially diverse curriculum reinforces educational racism and the imposition of a dominant White ideology in schools (Pine & Hilliard, 1990).

**Resisting Oppression**

People of Color knew what they needed to do to transition their status from emancipation to equality (Takaki, 1993). They desired education, political power through suffrage, and economic power (Takaki, 1993). Understanding the value of education, people of Color resisted oppression and educational racism through individual and collective action, such as: (1) establishing independent schools (DuBois, 1903; Spring, 2011) and promoting education for racially and culturally diverse people (Beach, 2007); (2) seeking legal action to gain equitable access to educational opportunities (Beach, 2007); and (3) resisting stereotypes and supporting the identity development of disadvantaged youth (Griffin & Allen, 2006).

**Independent schools.** Leaders within oppressed communities, such as DuBois, resisted dominant ideology, racism and cultural superiority, and instead, spoke against discrimination and promoted education for future leaders (Banks, 2002). More than a century ago, DuBois (1903) led the fight against White oppression of the African and Hispanic Americans by advocating “for the higher education of the Negro, which those who are interested in the future of the freedom cannot afford to ignore” (p. 31). DuBois sought to rectify the racial inequalities and save his race through the education of Black leaders: “DuBois’s ideal of an educated black citizenry struggling
against oppression became a reality even within a segregated society and educational system” (p. 220).

Members of diverse communities started and financed their own schools to provide an excellent education for their children with the help of contributions and taxes (Spring, 2011). The Anna T. Jeanes Fund and Julius Rosewald Fund funded the construction of schoolhouses for students of Color and paid teacher salaries. Other revenue came from donations provided by White and Black citizens and for a short time, public tax funds (Spring, 2011). Despite limited resources and other difficulties, the Black public schools remained very successful, raising the achievement rates of their students (Spring, 2001). The teachers’ and parents’ common commitment and passion for the success of the students solely contributed to the desired education. This same intense passion and commitment to improvement for people of Color ignited the legal proceedings for equality of education (Takaki, 1993).

**Legal action.** Another strategy to defeat White oppression involved taking legal action. In the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* case, the U.S. Supreme Court decided segregation based on race denies children of color equal protection under the law (Spring, 2011; Takaki, 1993). People of Color stood elated with the possibility of getting equal education opportunities; however, integration was a slow process requiring a supplemental ruling from the Supreme Court to desegregate with speed (Takaki, 1993). The Brown legal decision represented a critical barrier overcome by people of Color and set the stage for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Takaki, 1993).

Grassroots protests and non-violent confrontations led the way in the Civil Rights Movement (Spring, 2011). The movement began when a group of African-American college students sat at a lunch counter reserved for White people and refused to leave until they received their lunch (Banks, 2002). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the movement of non-violence
resistance as “the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom” (Spring, 2011, p. 390). King (1963) believed a person in an unjust society will either advocate and work towards equality or work in the system that continues to support inequality. The advocacy and tireless efforts of grassroots protests successfully won against discrimination and segregation in public and schools (Takaki, 1993). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided rights in the areas of voting, public accommodations, education, and employment (Spring, 2011). The legal actions of people of Color, starting with Brown v Board of Education, paved the way to establishing equal educational opportunities and focusing on the student achievement in the integrated school system.

**Resisting stereotypes and identity development of disadvantaged youth.** Resisting oppression and educational racism proved difficult for people of Color because of the powerful negative racial stereotypes (Takaki, 1993). White people labeled people of Color as lazy, worthless, immature, and inept (Takaki, 1993). Children of color, viewed as intellectually inferior to White children, experienced prejudice and hostility while attending integrated public schools (Spring, 2011). Research on racial differences in intelligence by Dr. Samuel Morton found a White person’s cranial capacity was much larger than persons of color; therefore, White people were seen as more intelligent (Takaki, 1993). The highly criticized theory was enough to support the intellectually inferior stereotype and make integrated schooling even more difficult (Takaki, 1993). To understand the resistance of stereotypes, I briefly explain the importance of supporting disadvantaged youth as they develop their identity and prepare for college.

Overcoming racial stereotypes in the public schools remains important for students of Color to develop a positive sense of self-esteem and a racial identity (McMahon & Watts, 2002). Unfortunately, Matrenec (2011) found racial stereotypes affect the identity development in
students of Color and how they see and define themselves. Racial identity development remains important to students’ overall growth, and it influences their psychological adjustment, decision-making ability, problem solving, and sense of belonging (McMahon & Watts, 2002). In addition, McMahon and Watts (2002) found “self-worth and ethnic identity are both important in relation to competency and adjustment among African American adolescents” (p. 423). These findings of racial stereotypes emphasize the need to resist stereotypes in school to cultivate a positive self-concept (Matrenec, 2011). Next, I explore how this racial identity concept influences academic achievement.

Adolescents develop a sense of personal identity and explore the meaning of race particularly while attending school (Matrenec, 2011). Racial identity plays a significant role in relation to adolescents’ attitudes, behavior, and adjustment (McMahon & Watts, 2002). Racial identity refers to “the social and political impact of visible group membership on psychological functioning” (McMahon & Watts, 2002, p. 412). McMahon and Watts (2002) found assessing and developing a student’s identity in school keeps the focus on student strengths rather than deficits. Additionally, understanding their experiences and building relationships with high-risk students creates a more effective learning environment.

In a study linking strengths of high-achieving students of Color, Morales (2010) reported some students of Color academically achieved out of obligation to their race. They acknowledged their racial history and the many incidents of racism and discrimination. The students “felt that their academic achievement somehow addressed and mitigated the racist transgressions characterizing American history by defying stereotypes and exceeding expectations” (Morales, 2010, p. 171). By developing a racial identity and consequently a
positive self-esteem, students of Color overcome educational racism and achieve academically (McMahon & Watts, 2002).

In the next section, I review the literature regarding educational limitations of disadvantaged families and college access as a common legacy of those experiencing racism and disadvantage.

Educational Limitations of Disadvantaged Families and College Access

A common problem identified by researchers in middle and high schools is the inadequacy of college preparation for minority, low social economic (SES), and first-generation students (Klopott & Martinez, 2004). Practices and policies of high schools do not provide enough social and academic support for students aligned with postsecondary institutions (Klopott & Martinez, 2004). Three problematic areas limit college access by disadvantaged students: (1) the cultural beliefs of teachers, (2) lack of parental involvement, and (3) parent education level.

Educators’ cultural beliefs affect disadvantaged students’ dream to attend college (George & Aronson, 2002). Teachers’ cultural norms and worldviews influence their expectations of student ability based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status and consequently lower the expected achievement outcome (George & Aronson, 2002). In addition, teachers’ and families’ cultural expectations, and teacher and parent roles regarding the education of the student are often in conflict (George & Aronson, 2002). This often leads “to a disconnect between schools and families/communities, limiting the effects of classroom learning for students who see few connections to the real world” (Martinez & Klopott, 2003, p. 1).

Parental involvement serves as another barrier between disadvantaged students and college aspirations and enrollment (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Parental involvement and peer influence affect the likelihood of the student attending college (Choy, 2000). Involvement also
increases both parental and student knowledge with respect to the student’s current educational situation and college aspirations (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Students with uninformed parents remain less likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). When students explore college opportunities before entering high school, it elicits behaviors from students and parents to secure the academic, social, and economic resources to accomplish the college admission goal (Cabrera et al., 2006). Students often fail to plan for rigorous courses, maintain a strong grade point average, and research college costs and ways to pay without the involvement of both parents and students, (McDonough, 1997).

In addition to parental involvement, parents’ educational attainment level influences the student’s decision to enroll in college (Bui, 2005). Academically capable students whose parents lack college exposure remain at a significant disadvantage regarding their aspirations and experiences in attending college and graduating (Choy, 2001). According to Martinez and Klopott (2005), first-generation students, mostly African-American and Hispanic-American students, have lower rates of postsecondary attainment than White students. To explain this, Choy, Horn, Nunez and Chen (2000) studied parent educational level and found first-generation students (whose parents did not attend college) remained more likely to drop out at some point in the five steps of the college application process. The five sequential steps in the pipeline to college follow: (1) aspire and commit early, (2) attain academic skills, (3) take admission exams, (4) complete college applications, and (5) gain acceptance and enroll (Choy et al., 2000). The loss of at risk students in the process increases significantly at each level if they make it in the pipeline at all.

Ogbu (2003) explained what happens to students with advantage: from a very young age, family discussions surround children about the importance of attaining a good education and
degree and how it affects future employment. These “internalized beliefs” become part of their identity. Parents may teach their children the importance of education, yet they do not demonstrate accessing and obtaining education. Children see their parents and other adults in their community as role models in the collective struggle against the American system (Ogbu, 2003). Parental attainment of postsecondary education contributes to positive attitudes and also provides a role model regarding the importance of educational advancement.

Financial factors play a significant role in whether or not students attend college (Burney & Beilke, 2008). The percentages of children who stayed living in poverty in 2009 remained higher for African Americans (34%), American Indians/Alaska Natives (33%), and Hispanic Americans (27%), than Asian Americans (11%) and Caucasians (10%) (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Compared to White families with children, African Americans and Latino families with children remain more than twice as likely to experience economic hardships (Wight, Chau, & Aratani, 2010). These hardships affect students dependent on their parents for tuition support, putting them at the mercy of the financial and occupational status of their parents. According to Snyder and Dillow (2011), annual prices for undergraduate tuition, room, and board were estimated at $12,804 at public institutions and $32,184 at private institutions for the 2009–2010 academic year. Students with low socioeconomic status (SES) lack knowledge of financial aid and lack access to higher education due to their families’ lack of resources.

Low SES students lack the information and resources for attending college. They attend college at a significantly lower rate—6.9% compared to 81% of their high SES peers, and only 22% of those who do attend college complete a four-year degree (HEA, 2008; Perna & Swail, 2002). Low SES students remain less likely to take college preparatory measures such as applying for financial aid and taking the appropriate high school courses. They may also suffer
from damaging labels, such as “juvenile delinquent,” hindering academic achievement, future job stability, and status achievement (Kane, 2002).

According to the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (2011), “the American education system is rather effective for children from middle- and upper-income families” (p. 3). Students with adequate family, financial, and community support generally get their needs met. Burney and Beilke (2008) believed overcoming the limitations of poverty would be the most productive way to influence academic achievement. Students with higher SES have access to books in the home, have learned how to use a computer, and have interactive reading skills. Students who gain reading skills before they start school have the readiness for academic instruction (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Low SES students do not have these resources and may start school already behind the peers.

Some students overcome the birth circumstances, such as race, parental involvement and educational level, and socioeconomic status by aspiring and achieving their dream through academic achievement. In the next section, I explore the literature on the academic achievement of disadvantaged students.

**Academic Achievement**

Educational racism and oppression of marginalized group members diminish the college aspirations and application rates of disadvantaged populations (Griffin & Allen, 2006; Ogbu, 1994) and negatively contribute to the academic achievement gap (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). The “Achievement gap” refers to the disparity in test scores on state or national achievement tests between various student demographic groups (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007). Warikoo and Carter (2009) stated, “Reports, books, and articles provide evidence of significant differences in test scores, high school completion rates, course selection, college attainment, and
other educational outcomes that exist between students of various racial and ethnic minority
groups and their White counterparts” (p. 366). Differences in achievement rates between White
students and disadvantaged students in college entrance exams, high school graduation, rigorous
courses, and college attendance reveal a persistent pattern of underachievement (Warikoo &
Carter, 2009).

College entrance exams, administered by ACT since 1959, contribute to a college or
university’s determination of a student’s college admission (ACT, 2010). The ACT test score
provides a snapshot of a student’s college readiness and indicates the possible academic
performance of a student’s first year at a credit-bearing college (ACT, 2010). About 47% of all
2010 high school graduates in the United States took the ACT while in high school, amounting
to 1.57 million graduates (ACT, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics
(2011), the average range of ACT composite scores from 1995 through 2011 for White students
was 20.8 to 21.2. The average range for African-American students was 16.8 to 17.8 and 18.4 to
18.7 for Hispanic students. These scores reflect the students’ college readiness and show the
achievement disparities found among racial groups.

Over the years, college access and preparation of disadvantaged students improved, but
an achievement gap persists. ACT-tested graduates varied based on diversity. 62% of Caucasian
students, 4% of African-American students, 10% of Hispanic students, and 4% of Asian students
took the ACT test in 2010 (Aud et al., 2010, p. v). From 2006 to 2010, the overall number of
ACT-tested high school graduates increased by 363,000 students, of which 76,000 were African-
American students and 72,000 were Hispanic students (Aud et al., 2012). Although
disadvantaged student access to college has improved, the disparity between students of Color
and White students remains constant.
Over the last 20 years, the percentage of high school dropouts declined (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). This percentage includes all 16-24 year olds without a high school diploma not enrolled in school. The percentages of students who dropped out of high school in 2010 remained higher for American Indian/Alaska Native students (15%), Hispanic students (10%), and African-American students (9%) than Caucasian students (5%) and Asian students (2%) (Aud et al., 2012, p. 11). Finn and Rock (1997) reported higher levels of engagement in school by disadvantaged youth led to greater resilience and higher graduation rates. With nearly one million students per year dropping out of high school, students need engagement to enroll in rigorous courses to challenge them and build self-esteem (Nowicki, Duke, Sisney, Stricker, & Tyler, 2004).

Academic rigor serves as the most crucial predictor of college-going behavior throughout a student’s high school experience (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). A significant difference exists in access to rigorous course selection between racial groups, contributing to the achievement gap and college access (ACSFA, 2010). Involvement in rigorous coursework in high school, such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses, serves as the single most important predictor of college success (Adelman, 1999; Hallett & Venegas, 2011). If involved in rigorous coursework during high school, students remain more likely to obtain an advanced educational degree than those with equal ability who stay uninvolved (Adelman, 1999; Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2004). Among African-American, Latino or Hispanic students, the intensity and quality of the secondary school curriculum remained a stronger indicator of bachelor’s degree completion than any other precollege variable (Adelman, 1999). Historically, White students accessed rigorous AP courses more frequently than students of Color (Leonard, Blasik, Dilgen, & Till, 2003) and remained evident in multiracial schools with relatively high enrollment in AP courses (Black et
Aud et al. (2010) reported from 1999 to 2008, the total number of African-American and Hispanic students taking an AP exam more than tripled, from 94,000 to 318,000 students. In 2008, Asians had the highest mean AP exam score (3.08 out of a possible 5.0 score) across all exams, while African-American students had the lowest (1.91). Despite the low scores, accessing the rigorous courses increases college readiness skills (Conley, 2007) and attempts to overcome educational racism.

In 2010, 23.5 million students were enrolled in colleges and universities (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). Students of all races attended college at higher rates than ever before; however, racial gaps in college attendance remained, representing racial inequality in higher education (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). From 1976 to 2009, college attendance of African-American students rose from 9% to 14%, and the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 3% to 12%. During the same period, White students fell from 83% to 62%, but the gap in college attendance between African-American and White students stayed at 48% (Snyder & Dillow, 2011).

Watt et al. (2007) reported Hispanic students had the highest growth of college enrollment between 1976 and 1997; however, the growth rate of Hispanics remains disproportionately lower than any other ethnic group of students. The many efforts to increase the enrollment of Hispanic students in college continue to grow. The efforts focus on rigorous academic preparation, enforcing postsecondary expectations, and assistance with college financing (Watt et al., 2007). Although greater numbers of students of Color take rigorous courses and enroll in college today, White and Asian students continue to outperform and access college more than students of Color and low SES (Snyder & Dillow, 2011).

At risk students may dream of overcoming their birth circumstances and aspire to get into the pipeline to go to college. Many local organizations, federal programs, and educational
institutions support college preparatory programs designed to assist disadvantaged students. Next, I describe some of the programs that support each of the steps of college access and attendance.

**Pre-College Intervention Programs for At Risk Students**

Giving disadvantaged students equal educational opportunities helps students and, in turn, helps the government solve social and financial issues (ACSFA, 2012). The Report to the U.S. Congress and Secretary of Education by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2012) emphasized the federal government’s concern for global competitiveness and the inequality in the nation’s income distribution. The report focused on attaining the world’s highest rate of college completion by the year 2020 and better serving the many nontraditional students through new the policies and practices of state and federal governments and postsecondary institutions: “Successful high school preparation for the nation’s students is key to the discussion of improving degree completion rates because lack of adequate preparation often requires remediation upon entering college or may be the cause of students leaving college without achieving their degree” (ACSFA, 2012, p. 74). The director of the Center for Education Policy Research, David Conley, consistently advocated for students to acquire skills and competencies such as note taking, study, organization, and time management skills. He endorsed college preparation programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), College Bound, and GEAR UP, since these programs focus on developing those college readiness skills (Hirsch, 2008). I explore these programs as well as the history of college preparatory programs in the United States.
College Preparation Programs

Since the enactment of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), intervention programs have helped students apply for financial aid, complete high school, and succeed in college (HEA, 2008). Additionally, the HEA provided aid to institutions to improve K-12 teacher training (HEA, 2008). Disadvantaged students received the HEA’s support services through federal TRIO programs and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) (HEA, 2008). The TRIO programs include: Talent Search, Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, McNair Post-baccalaureate, and Staff Training (HEA, 2008). In general, the programs help support disadvantaged students with completing high school, applying to college, and completing their degree (HEA, 2004). Through HEA and the college access programs, the U.S. remained committed to providing opportunities for underrepresented and disadvantaged students to go to college. Prestigious colleges and universities, such as Amherst, Brown, Harvard, and Wellesley, provided tuition-free opportunities (Hirsch, 2008). For the purpose of this study, I highlight two programs in addition to AVID to provide more examples of similar programs.

Currently in the United States, more than 1,000 college outreach programs provide college readiness skills and educational support (Domina, 2009; Gandara & Bial, 2001; Perna, 2000). They share a common principle: Attending a postsecondary educational institution stands as an expectation, not just a dream (Domina, 2009). Program effectiveness research remains sparse, but the findings remain encouraging (Domina, 2009). Findings show individually targeted programs offered under HEA have minimal effectiveness; however, school-based programs, such as AVID, produce slightly more significant results (Domina, 2009; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gottfredson, 1986). Martinez and Klopott (2005) reported the most effective pre-
college intervention programs counter the effects of negative schooling, lack of community resources, and negative influences on student learning and goal setting.

Equity and quality of education, especially with low-income and minority students, concern policymakers, administrators, and researchers in education (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Rigorous courses, such as AP, prepare the students for college-level learning with intense academics. The College Board (2005) considers students who take these courses and pass the end-of-the-year exam the most academically advanced students in the nation and that they have the requisite skills and knowledge to be successful in college. Students of Color or first-generation students in low-income high schools typically do not take an AP course (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). One intervention program assisting with academic support for disadvantaged students in rigorous courses is GEAR UP.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) stands as an early intervention program focusing on preparing underrepresented students for college (Lozano et al., 2009). Established under the Higher Education Amendment of 1998, GEAR UP provides six-year state and partnership grants (Watt et al., 2007). The goal of GEAR UP remains to increase college enrollment rates by providing supports and services starting in the seventh grade to teachers, students, and parents (Lozano et al., 2009). The unique program provided service to a cohort of low-income students in which at least 50% of the students received free or reduced lunch. According to Martinez and Klopott (2005), “GEAR UP worked to achieve this goal by building the capacity of low-income middle schools to provide a rigorous curriculum, and by fostering a seamless continuum between secondary and postsecondary education” (p. 34). The program design provided academic models and financial incentives to low-income, low-
performing schools. The program consists of mentoring, tutoring, after-school programs, counseling, curriculum support and professional development for teachers (Watt et al., 2007).

Watt et al. (2007) reported after five years of implementation with the University of Texas Pan American, 7,184 GEAR UP students from seventeen high schools (98% Hispanic and 88% low-income) graduated and attended college. Watt et al. (2007) stated they find importance in following “GEAR UP and AVID and their impact on academic preparation, educational aspirations, educational anticipations and expectations, and college knowledge” (p. 210).

Another college preparatory initiative for disadvantaged students, TRIO, coexists within a set of eight federal programs initially enacted in the Higher Education Act of 1965 to reach out to students who need assistance (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2012). The first program under TRIO was Upward Bound. Upward Bound, an individually targeted program facilitated by an outside institution, provided support to low-income and first-generation high school students (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2012). All Upward Bound projects included an instructional component in math, science, composition, literature, and foreign language (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2012). As of 2005, 78.4% of Upward Bound students enrolled in postsecondary institutions immediately following high school graduation, compared to the national average low SES attendance rates of less than 7% (HEA, 2008).

GEAR UP and TRIO programs helped support disadvantaged students with completing high school, applying to college, and completing their degree. Next I describe the AVID program, a non-federally funded college preparatory program.

The AVID Program

The focus of my study involved the AVID program, a college preparatory program for disadvantaged youth (Watt, Huerta, & Mills, 2009). The word “avid” came from the Latin word
avidus, meaning “eager for knowledge” (Black et al., 2008). An educational program for underachieving students, AVID serves students with academic potential and insufficient family, financial, and community support to prepare them for college (Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011). AVID emphasizes placing middle-achieving students into the same college preparatory classes as their high-achieving peers and giving them the academic support needed for success (Black, 2008).

The AVID program has many components to support students, including a year-long AVID elective class throughout the four years in high school (Watt et al., 2007). Students develop the skills needed for success in rigorous courses such as honors or Advanced Placement (Watt et al., 2007). The skills, commonly referred to as “college-readiness skills,” include note taking, assignment organization, and college-level writing (Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008). In addition to improving college-readiness skills, students participate in tutorial sessions two times per week to receive academic support in the rigorous courses (Swanson, 1993). Students and their parents receive many forms of encouragement from the AVID teacher and site team members throughout the four-year program (Swanson, 1993). The expectation and common message shared by all of the site team members involves the goal of attending college and earning a four-year degree (Watt et al., 2007). Field trips, college visits, and guest presentations by successful first-generation college graduates reinforce the possibility of college (Oswald, 2002). Since the establishment of the program, the AVID elective class supports students and helps them develop college readiness skills (Swanson, 1993).

The inception of AVID began in 1980 at Clairmont High School in San Diego County, California, during the court-ordered desegregation of the San Diego Unified School District (Swanson, 1993). Over 500 low-income Latino and African-American students were bussed to
Clairmont High School, a college-bound, middle-class school (Swanson, 1993). Mary Catherine Swanson, an English teacher at Clairmont, developed a program to help prepare those underrepresented students for four-year colleges. Swanson (1993) reflected:

My first course of action involved the principal. I told him that I would enable a group of underprepared ethnically diverse students academically and enroll them in four-year colleges where they would succeed. Because he was retiring at the end of the school year and would not have to face the faculty and administrators who undoubtedly opposed such an unrealistic idea, he gave me the “go-ahead.” I then contacted the head of student outreach at UCSD for help; he agreed to provide tutors for the program, which I supported with grant funds. The tutors worked three class hours per week; two hours were devoted to direct instruction in writing, which I conducted. (p. 4)

Swanson (1999) then recruited 30 minority students not in college prep courses who had a grade point average from 1.5-2.5 (out of a possible 4.0). She provided study skills and academic support for all 30 students placed into advanced, college preparation courses. Swanson’s students often disengaged in school due to boredom, lack of success, and lack of relevancy to their futures (Oswald, 2002). Swanson met some resistance and skepticism from the faculty; however, the AVID support program worked together as an academic family and approached problems and challenges as a team (Swanson, 1993). The original 30 AVID students all attended college; 28 attended a four-year college and two enrolled in a community college (Swanson, 1993).

Countering the effects of negative family and community influences and the lack of school resources for learning provided a support system needed to build the requisite skills to attend college (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Gullatt and Jan (2003) identified the characteristics of the most effective college preparatory programs, including high curricular standards, personalized attention for students, adult role models, peer support, timed interventions, whole school support, and scholarship assistance. The AVID program consists of all of these components and ensures all schools follow the strict AVID program guidelines.
The AVID program now partners with more than 4,900 schools in 46 states and across 16 countries (AVID, 2012a). In order to access the AVID professional development and utilize the AVID curriculum, school districts must first enter in a contract with AVID Center to establish membership. The “Nationwide Pricing per AVID Implementation Agreement” (AVID, 2012b) estimates a $3,385 AVID site membership fee for the first year along with $5,352 for 8 participants at the AVID Summer Institute and $4,915 for high school AVID libraries. In addition, school districts must pay the AVID district professional fee of $9,000, which includes national office support, assistance with site teams, school district administrators training, and supplemental materials (AVID, 2012b).

Summary

The literature review described the many factors explaining why the college aspirations and acceptance rates of at risk students do not match those of their advantaged peers. A revealing theme in the literature review shows the perpetuation of educational racism and oppression in the high schools largely designed for White middle class students. However, college preparatory programs such as AVID support the disadvantaged students to overcome the barriers diminishing aspirations to attend college.

Several theories proved useful in forming my conceptual framework and analyzing my findings. These included critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory, learning theory (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010), and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003). I describe each of these theories next.

Analytic Literature

Analytic theory provides a theoretical lens to view the study’s findings and to identify emerging patterns and themes (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell (2005) explained, “A useful theory
illuminates what you see” (p. 43). I explored four theoretical areas as a possible analytical lens: critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Dweck, 2006), learning theory (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010), and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003). I begin with a description of critical pedagogy to provide background and context regarding why at risk students lack sufficient success in school.

**Critical Pedagogy**

I adopted critical pedagogy to provide background and context regarding why the college aspirations and acceptance rates of at risk students do not match those of their advantaged peers. Freire (1970), a Brazilian philosopher, wrote one of the foundational texts of the critical pedagogy movement, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, arguing education should allow the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity and overcome their condition. “No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates. . . . The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption” (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

Freire (1970), a founder of critical pedagogy, offered a radical theory of education. He charged schools with contributing to the class-driven dominant society (McLaren, 2007). Critical educational theorists concern themselves with the political power involved with schools involving finance, curriculum, and the construction of student subjectivity (McLaren, 2007). More specifically, they “view school as historically and socially rooted and interest bound” (McLaren, 2007, p. 196) and never neutral or objective. They “are united in their objectives: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities” (McLaren, 2007, p. 186). Famous leaders and educators connected to critical pedagogy include John Dewey, Myles Horton of the Highlander School, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X (McLaren, 2007)
Teachers engaged in critical pedagogy attempt to influence the knowledge and identities produced within social relations (Giroux & Simon, 1989). Culture, context, customs, and historical events also influence social constructions symbolically through the mind (McLaren, 2007). Teachers encourage students to seek the meaning of events while seeking the meaning of the social (McLaren, 2007). Through social construction of knowledge, students learn to question why teachers more than likely understand the middle class White male student more than the low middle class African-American female student. Knowledge exposes deeply rooted power relations and creates the conditions under which domination and oppression weaken (McLaren, 2007).

Kress (2011) described critical pedagogy “as a dynamic process of being and becoming that is informed by present circumstances and historical context and is forward-looking into an unknowable future” (p. 262). The classroom reality becomes an awareness revival for normalization by attempting “to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (McLaren, 2007, p. 190) while rejecting the “mythical ideal humanity” from the historical past (Kress, 2011, p. 262). Teachers engaged in critical pedagogy critically question, seeking to expose the power implications of the “whys of education” (Kress, 2011). The critical awareness empowers the teacher to take action and push back against oppression by envisioning the students’ new way of knowing and being (Kress, 2011).

Teachers encourage students to acquire a particular moral character as an aspect of critical pedagogy (Giroux & Simon, 1989). Giroux (2001) asserted teachers must provide students with the competencies they need to cultivate critical judgment, politics and social responsibility, and recognition of sense of agency. Critical pedagogy creates a space for dialogue to question the dominant view, privileges assigned, and the existence of the oppression and
marginalization of various groups. The goal of critical pedagogy involves empowering the students of oppressed groups to take action (Giroux, 2006). The student’s awareness and critical consciousness of the inequitable distributions of power enables them to see oppression and resist it (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogy may serve as a lens to examine how AVID teachers raise student consciousness regarding their oppression and learn to resist educational racism (Freire, 1970).

**Motivational Theory**

I adopted motivational theory as a lens to examine student engagement in learning. Motivational theory describes how meeting human needs leads to increased or decreased student engagement in learning.

**Self-determination theory.** Deci and Ryan (1985) pioneered “self-determination theory,” (SDT) examining conditions affecting human potential, including how the social environment influenced student development, performance and well-being. Ryan and Deci (2000) theorized individuals must feel satisfied in the areas of competence, autonomy and relatedness to experience well-being. Additionally, Ryan and Deci found if conditions supported autonomy and competence, individuals experienced growth and a sense of satisfaction.

Healthy development necessitates the psychological need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). Intrinsic motivation occurs when individuals enjoy an activity for its own sake, rather than gaining an external promotion or recognition (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for competence draws individuals to explore and attempt to master the environment (White, 1959). Human nature pursues a challenge, a tendency contributing to personal growth and skill development and allows individuals to adapt to the changing world around them (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
When people receive little or no opportunity to master the environment, they remain less likely to achieve to the best of their ability (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Competence develops as individuals do what they find interesting and enjoyable (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) found students have a need for autonomy or control over their actions. Beyond feeling competent or effective with their behavior, students also benefit from experiencing a sense of creating something of value and importance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Deci and Ryan (2000) argued the need for autonomy provided significant advantages, including the ability to regulate one’s thoughts, actions, and emotions. Social environments should nurture and encourage the innate need for an individual’s desire for autonomy as this desire causes individuals to act with a sense of choice, flexibility, and freedom (Deci, 1995).

Relatedness, or the feeling of belonging and security, remains another psychological need essential for healthy development (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). Humans seek close relationships with others to achieve a sense of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Students receive support during difficult and stressful situations by engaging in mutually supportive relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In these supportive and caring relationships, the student’s feelings, thoughts, and beliefs stand honored and valued (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006).

Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) discussed the need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy:

All three needs are intertwined: relatedness provides the security that is required for students to take autonomous initiative; feeling autonomous and independent in completing tasks promotes competence; competence provides the confidence for individuals to feel accepted and related to those around them. (p. 337)
Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) considered contextual influences rather than individual rates of motivation and school. They examined teacher and classroom influence on student motivation. Classrooms promoting feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster intrinsically motivated students eager to learn and explore their creative abilities (Deci & Ryan, 1991). These motivational conditions promoted personal growth and adjustment, fostering highest conceptual learning and student engagement in learning.

Successful promotion of genuine enthusiasm for learning and accomplishment in students creates an ideal school setting (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Deci et al. (1991) found the interest and willingness of the students to learn develops flexible problem solving, knowledge attainment, self-worth, and social responsibility. Parents and educators often identify motivation as the explanation of whether or not children experience success in school (Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008). Teachers attribute the motivational deficiencies are beyond their control or the influence of the classroom environment (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). Parents often preach to their children to study hard so they will do well in school. However, motivation, as defined in SDT, concerns a multidimensional concept that varies in terms of quality “based on intrinsic, integrated and identified regulations” (Guay et al., 2008, p. 233).

SDT may explain how students experience success in the AVID program based on meeting psychological needs such as competence, autonomy and relatedness. I next discuss stereotype threat theory (Aronson & Steele, 2005) as it relates to threats to competence found in SDT.
**Stereotype threat.** Another motivational theory, stereotype threat, addresses the fragility and responsiveness of academic competence (Aronson & Steele, 2005). Stereotypes, considered as expectations based on category membership, can play a significant role in nurturing or neglecting a student’s competence (Aronson & Steele, 2005). Expectations of student performance contribute to the student’s academic performance, engagement, and self-concept, which in turn contribute to competence development. “How a student construes the way he or she is viewed and treated by other matters a lot. These perceptions can exert a profound influence on intellectual competence, on motivation and ultimately upon a student’s academic self-concept” (p. 437).

Confirming a stereotype of intellectual inferiority through low academic performance can impede a student’s motivation (Steele, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat contributes to the gap in academic performance between students of Color and White students by undermining performance, and even amplifies its effects regarding other individual risk factors (Aronson & Steele, 2005). Stereotype threat impedes competence, appearing competent, and acceptance by others, which ultimately threatens motivation (Aronson & Steele, 2005).

Social relations play an important part in developing competence. People’s thoughts and actions towards each other make a considerable difference in achievement (Aronson & Steele, 2005). The threat of discrimination and the pressure associated with being judged as a member of a marginalized group “contributes to the gap in performance between minorities and whites” (Aronson & Steele, 2005, p. 441). Students of Color must develop a positive sense of self-esteem and racial identity to overcome racial stereotypes in school (McMahon & Watts, 2002).

Beyond factors affecting student motivation to engage in learning, some at risk students may increase their achievement based on effective uses of growth mindset. Next, I describe
another theory related to competence in SDT, called “growth mindsets” (Dweck, 2006), to explain how learning from mistakes supports greater learning.

**Growth mindsets.** Experiencing academic achievements contributes to competency development (Dweck, 2006). “The view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life. It can determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you accomplish the things you value” (p. 6). As students develop competence, their view of the significance and impact of failure and the meaning of effort changes dramatically.

The mind set theory described how students’ internal drives influence learning in two different mindsets: “fixed” and “growth” (Dweck, 2006). A fixed mindset believes “that your qualities are carved in stone … [and] creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over” (p. 6). Students believing in fixed mindsets feel an urgency to succeed, and when they do, they feel a sense of superiority. Failure tends to devastate a student with a fixed mind set because they perceive intelligence as unchangeable (Dweck, 2006).

Students believing in a “growth mindset” see intelligence as malleable and cultivatable. They get smarter by stretching themselves and produce success (Dweck, 2006). A growth mindset sees adolescence as “a time of opportunity: a time to learn new subjects, a time to find out what they like and what they want to become in the future” (Dweck, 2006, p. 59). Students with a growth mindset know “the hand you’re dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts” (Dweck, 2006, p. 7). Students change and grow through application and experience despite the level of talent and aptitude starting points (Dweck, 2006).

Students with a fixed mindset may feel locked into low intelligence and, subsequently, low performance (Dweck, 2006). Participating in activities perceived as remedial may induce a
counterproductive attitude. Students may perform at a lower level because they feel labeled as less intelligent. A fixed mindset sabotages programs designed to improve college and career readiness skills. However, to change the fixed mindset of at risk students, teachers must help at risk students understand intelligence as malleable, including a strong emphasis on effort, thereby improving academic performance.

Unfortunately, some school cultures often promote, or at least accept, the fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006). When teachers praise what students accomplished through practice, study, persistence and good strategies, they support the growth-oriented process. A growth mindset removes barriers, helping students see change as a possibility and worth the effort. To improve achievement, students must become convinced of their ability to learn.

I adopted motivational theory to examine student engagement in learning. I described the motivational theories: self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991), stereotype threat (Aronson & Steele, 2005), and mind set theory (Dweck, 2006). In addition to meeting the student’s humanistic needs, students need strategy instruction to become more successful students. Next, I describe how various learning theories, such as metacognition, strategy instruction, and self-regulation theory, explain the characteristics and actions of successful students.

**Learning Theory: Metacognition, Strategy Use, and Self-Regulation**

Various learning theories explain the processes involved in acquiring knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for learning, and also the need for learners to monitor their progress in attaining goals.

**Metacognition and strategy use.** Metacognition (thinking about thinking or cognition) refers to an awareness “of strategy use and its impact on performance” (Waters & Kunnmann, 2010, p. 3). Successful students engage in metacognition to help them keep track of progress by
continuously assessing their use of strategies and the success of efforts on achieving goals (Waters & Kunnmann, 2010). As students learn and mature, they acquire knowledge about the processes involved in learning and also strategies used for mastering new information (Schneider, 2010). Metacognitive skills or the awareness of students of their own learning processes increases control over learning (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010). Teaching metacognitive skills helps students select and adopt strategies, monitor progress, identify barriers to learning, and continuously monitor the effectiveness of strategies adopted and accomplishment of goals (Waters & Kunnmann, 2010).

A strong relationship exists between metacognition and strategy use: the “executive” mind considers alternative strategies, selects and monitors their use, and uses this knowledge to achieve a goal (Waters & Kunnmann, 2010). Metacognition might be represented as the “brain” controlling the action, while strategy use involves the actions taken to achieve a goal. When students learn new and more effective strategies, they discard ineffective ones and increase their knowledge of learning and rate of accomplishment (Siegler & Lin, 2010). The process of discarding old strategies and replacing them occurs gradually; Siegler and Lin (2010) described this process as “wave theory”, representing a process of “overlapping waves” representing cognition change (p. 87).

Harris, Santangelo, and Graham (2010) described the importance of metacognition and strategy instruction in writing. The principles described apply generally to many learning conditions. Metacognitive knowledge incorporates “knowledge about cognition and awareness of one’s own cognition” (Harris et al., 2010, p. 227). General knowledge about thinking and strategy use, combined with self-knowledge and evaluation leads to more efficient and effective performance. The three facets of metacognitive knowledge include declarative knowledge,
procedural knowledge, and conditional knowledge. Declarative knowledge consists of the knowing and understanding skills and strategies needed to complete a task (Harris et al., 2010). An example of declarative knowledge involves awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses with regard to a task and the affective conditions, such as self-efficacy and motivation, affecting performance.

Procedural knowledge captures the “how” application of various strategies or actions (Harris et al., 2010). An example of procedural knowledge includes students’ understanding general strategies allowing them to achieve goals, such as planning, production, and correcting mistakes. Conditional knowledge assesses the “when, where and why” of conditions to apply the declarative and procedural knowledge (Harris et al., 2010). An example of conditional knowledge involves students carefully considering a specific task, determining what skills and strategies needed, applying various processes, and modifying any possible conditions. The successful application and coordination of declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge influences the academic development and performance of a student (Harris et al., 2010).

Successful students stay engaged in planning and evaluating the success of their efforts, and acquire new and more effective strategies for learning (Waters & Kunnmann, 2010).

**Self-regulation.** Self-regulated strategy, another concept associated with metacognition, encompasses the application of consciously planning, monitoring and evaluating cognitive activities (Harris et al., 2010). Self-regulation involves “self-instruction, goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement” to achieve goals (p. 237). The key word, “self” in “self-regulation” emphasizes the need for learning to take control of their learning and monitor their success.
Teachers advance the goals of self-regulation by (1) helping students become more skilled and independent in applying strategies to complete tasks, (2) introducing and emphasizing procedural, declarative, and conditional knowledge (metacognition) as strategy for learning, (3) helping students learn how to plan and manage tasks, and (4) fostering student engagement in learning by emphasizing “self-efficacy” and the importance of effort in learning (Harris et al., 2010).

Students become self-regulated in their learning by taking charge of their learning and keeping track of their progress. Next, I describe the ethic of care theory and how schools made up of caring teachers and administrators create a supportive environment for learning.

**The Ethic of Care Theory**

I adopted ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003) to analyze how teacher-student relationships affect student desire to learn. Noddings placed concern, as well as competence, at the center of the concept of care and caring relationships. Noddings (2003) described caring as an ethical ideal grounded in the memory of natural caring experienced as children. According to Noddings, a vision of our own “best moments” in ethical caring guide us in deciding whether there exists an obligation to care. Noddings emphasized, “This choice involves reflection influenced by concrete remembered feelings rather than abstract principles” (Noddings, 2007, p. 222).

The ethic of care, based on the idea of “relation”, labels individuals as “caring” by the regular establishment of caring relations. “A caring relation requires that the cared-for recognize the caring” (Noddings, 2007, p. 227). For example, if a teacher forces students to do things they hate and justifies it as in their best interest, a caring relation disappears. The ethic of care theory emphasizes caring as the root of our responsibility to each other (Noddings, 2007). Our
rootedness “in care” influences spontaneous responses during difficult human situations. This “natural” caring provides a motive to care in many situations and arises on its own; “it does not have to be summoned” (p. 222).

Contrasting “natural caring” with “ethical caring,” Noddings (2007) explained a key difference: “ethical” caring needs to be summoned (Noddings, 2007). “The ‘I ought’ arises but encounters conflict: An inner voice grumbles, ‘I ought but I don’t want to.’ . . . . On these occasions we need not turn to a principle; more effectively, we turn to our memories of caring” (p. 222). Individuals then form a picture or ideal of themselves as “carers”.

Dialogue establishes a “caring relation” to establish receptivity in an open and genuine way (Noddings, 2007). The dialogue provides a mutually constructed frame of reference only if it involves “receptivity, reflection, invitation, assessment, revision, and further exploration” (p. 227). Dialogue allows for greater knowledge of each other, an essential ingredient to act effectively as carers. The cared-for grows as they receive information, points of view, questions and attitudes in dialogues (Noddings, 2007).

Organizational norms can either nurture or destroy a teacher’s commitment to care, and many find themselves caught between a desire to care and the demands of an indifferent bureaucracy (Noddings, 2003). Noddings believed institutions cannot care directly, but schools made up of caring teachers and administrators create a supportive environment and permit them to act within their ethical ideals.

Noddings’ (2003) ethic of care theory suggested schools, not deliberately designed to support caring individuals, structure time for functionality rather than personalization. Reciprocal relationships, a form of caring, show forms of relational and responsive behavior (Noddings, 2003). Teachers and students interact in authentic ways, allowing an individual to be a real
person, not simply a role to each other. Teachers present themselves as persons as well as professionals, increasing the likelihood of building relationships with students.

Noddings (2007) made distinctions between the ethic of care and ethical principles. Ethical principles guide responses in certain situations based on experience, saving energy on mental labor. The ethic of care, in contrast, insists, “ethical discussions must be made in caring interactions with those affected by the discussion” (p. 223). Instead of considering principles of ethics, “a carer turns to the cared-for” (p. 223) and asks the questions about needs, potential harm, and best interests. Caring requires teachers to rise above their professional role (Noddings, 2007). Care theory helps explain caring relationships may positively affect at risk students due to their “outsider” status and disadvantage in school and society.

Summary

The content and theoretical literature review provided a description of existing literature and theory addressing my research question. I found a gap in the literature review regarding (1) the lack of specific information regarding the use of pedagogy for at risk students, and also the (2) factors motivating students and teachers to succeed within the AVID program.

I adopted four theoretical areas as a possible analytical lens: critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Dweck, 2006), learning theory (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010), and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003). These theories addressed different aspects of research associated with at risk students. After reviewing literature and identifying a gap in knowledge, I now turn to the selection of research method to investigate the AVID program.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I investigated how student participation in the AVID program positively influenced the college aspirations and entrance rates among disadvantaged or at risk youth. I adopted qualitative research as a method because it allowed me to closely examine the experiences of the students, teachers, and administrators participating in the AVID program, including their beliefs and pedagogical approaches (adopted and experienced), and also to identify factors described by participants as influential to student and teacher success.

I selected qualitative methods because of the unique advantages of qualitative research. Qualitative research focuses on establishing meaning in given contexts by collecting data and analyzing how people make sense of their experiences in their world (Merriam, 1998). This approach allows researchers to see “how all of the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 6). The qualitative approach to inquiry provides a framework to uncover the unexpected and explore new avenues (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Case study methods allowed an inside look at the experience of participants to identify the hidden factors contributing to student success in two high schools.

Case Study Research

Case studies seek to answer “how” or “why” questions with a focus on real-life or contemporary settings (Yin, 2007). The case study as a “bounded system . . . [uses] detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). This “descriptive” case study followed a single-case research design with a holistic analysis (Yin, 2007). Merriam (1998) described a descriptive case study’s overall intent as “one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon” (p. 38). I
sought to learn about the success of the AVID program based on participant experience, learning from AVID teachers, graduates, administrators, district level coordinators, and a regional director about the program’s success.

**Setting**

I examined the AVID program as offered in a suburban school district located 20 miles south of a large metropolitan city in the upper Midwest, serving approximately 10,800 students in two counties covering 86 square miles. In 2012, 12% of the families attending school in Readiness School District (a pseudonym) qualified for free or reduced school lunch in the National School Lunch Program. The student population consisted of 86% White, 5% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 4% Black.

The district’s two high schools enrolled 1850 students each. I created a pseudonym for the actual sites of my research study, Readiness School District (RSD), Readiness East High School (REHS), and Readiness West High School (RWHS). Readiness High Schools serve at risk students and have enjoyed a remarkable rate of success. In 2012, Readiness High Schools graduated 950 students with high college entrance rates. Seventy-five percent of the students enrolled in a four-year college, and 15% enrolled in a two-year or technical college. In 2012, RWHS’s participation in the ACT college readiness test increased 13% from 353 to 400 students. The average ACT score for RWHS class of 2012 students reached 24.2 out of a possible 36, compared with the state average of 22.8. REHS class of 2012 students averaged an ACT score of 23.9. Students of Color found success at RHSs, increasing their rate of participation in taking the ACT college entrance examination.

Readiness School District started the AVID program in 2008 and graduated its first AVID class of students in 2012. The class of ten AVID graduates at RWHS had the following
characteristics: six students of Color, six low-income students, and four first-generation students. The class of 13 AVID graduates at REHS consisted of four students of Color, four low-income, and seven first-generation students. All of the AVID graduates attend a two or four-year college or university. The AVID classroom class size in the two high school AVID classes averaged 20 students per class. I selected RHSs for my study because their success rate with at risk students needs an explanation: uncovering the factors explaining success for at risk students may contribute knowledge regarding how to help more at risk students attend college.

AVID requires several commitments of the school district and participating schools before and during implementation of the AVID program. In 2012, Readiness School District supported its fifth year of implementation and paid an annual fee of $3,315 per school site, which included the AVID curriculum library use, assistance from AVID national office, and the rights to use the name and logo. AVID teachers received extensive training prior to teaching elective classes and continued with professional development throughout the program. Students commit to attending a one-hour per day AVID class for a term of four years.

**UST Institutional Review Board Permission and Guidelines**

I submitted the appropriate forms and the study application to the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approved the study, agreeing my research proposal met the ethical requirements related to the protection of participants and standards for conducting Human Subjects research (see Appendix A).

**Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

Before initiating the research, I obtained permission from Readiness School District using the agency consent form (Appendix B). I selected participants based on their involvement in the AVID program. This included students, teachers, and administrative personnel.
I established criteria for participants, beginning with students. To qualify for the AVID program, students must have the desire to attend college and must meet the specific requirements (such as being a member of a racially or ethnically diverse group, low socioeconomic status, and/or first generation in their families to attend college; Watt, 2011). I invited students and adult participants via email (Appendix C). I obtained the student’s email addresses from the AVID teachers.

I did not initiate any other conversation with potential participants regarding the study and relied on a script to answer any questions of interested participants (Appendix D). In my initial contact with participants, I emphasized the voluntary nature of the study and the ability of participants to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. If I did not receive a response, I made two to three additional requests for participation beyond the initial email to participants, avoiding any possibility of coercion.

I obtained participant permission before conducting interviews (Appendix E). I kept track of interviewees by completing the intake form (Appendix F). I interviewed six out of a possible six identified AVID teachers from the two high schools with at least one year of experience (Table 1). I excluded one AVID teacher because of the participant’s limited experience in the AVID program. I assured participants regarding my role: to learn about the program and refrain from making judgments or using any information for performance reviews.

I interviewed three out of a possible four administrators associated with the AVID program, and the one regional AVID director associated with the school district (Table 1). I interviewed seven of the 23 AVID graduates from RHSs who had participated in the AVID program for three to four years (Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Travis</td>
<td>AVID teacher</td>
<td>Readiness West High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Mel</td>
<td>AVID teacher</td>
<td>Readiness West High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Silver</td>
<td>AVID teacher</td>
<td>Readiness East High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Schmit</td>
<td>AVID teacher</td>
<td>Readiness East High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jones</td>
<td>AVID teacher</td>
<td>Readiness East High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal BK</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Readiness West High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator Robinson</td>
<td>Past Educational Equity and Excellence Coordinator</td>
<td>Readiness School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator Howard</td>
<td>Educational Equity and Excellence Coordinator</td>
<td>Readiness School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Director Kraft</td>
<td>Upper Midwest AVID State Director</td>
<td>AVID Central Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usain</td>
<td>College Freshmen RWHS AVID graduate</td>
<td>North Dakota State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermey</td>
<td>College Freshmen RWHS AVID graduate</td>
<td>Normandale Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>College Freshmen RWHS AVID graduate</td>
<td>St. Cloud State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>College Freshmen RWHS AVID graduate</td>
<td>South Dakota State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makayla</td>
<td>College Freshmen RWHS AVID graduate</td>
<td>Augustana College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addison</td>
<td>College Freshmen RWHS AVID graduate</td>
<td>Normandale Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>College Freshmen RWHS AVID graduate</td>
<td>University of Central Florida</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If I could not successfully set up an interview time, I made three attempts to reach the potential participants through an email to the participant and the participant’s parents. Five of the seven AVID graduate interviews took place face-to-face and two took place over the phone.

I anticipated some potential risks or distresses with this study. I asked the teachers questions related to teaching philosophy, motivation, training, and other factors influencing teachers’ decisions and daily work. Before the interview, I reviewed the risks found in the consent form (Appendix E). I assured all data collected was kept confidential and in no way used against the teachers professionally. I asked the students questions related to sensitive issues such as personal values, experiences in school, parents’ views of education, and personal views of education. I assured the students all answers remained confidential and were in no way used against them for any reason. I asked the administrators questions related to personal values, educational philosophy, and leadership difficulties. Participants could request a break at any time and for any reason during the interview. A second potential risk related to breaches in confidentiality. Participants’ stories could potentially link to their identity. I followed all procedures to reduce the risk of confidentiality breaches.

I did not use any deception in this study. Participants remained free to withdraw at any time. No participants decided to withdraw; therefore, data collection did not cease and data was not destroyed. Participants may have opted to pass on answering any interview questions, but none requested to pass.

**Data Collection**

I collected data in three different ways, including interviewing participants involved in the AVID program, observations of lessons in the AVID classroom, and examining historical documents such as AVID curriculum manuals and teacher lesson plans. My presence in the
classroom or building was common and not a disruption to the natural learning environment, as I am an administrator in the building. Prior to collecting data, I reviewed any of my personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions with my committee. I explored and acknowledged my experiences with any barriers to my development of college readiness skills and my experiences supervising the AVID program.

**Interview**

I used intensive interviewing techniques that allowed for in-depth exploration of experiences, particularly the participant’s interpretation of his or her experience (Charmaz, 2006). I used a digital recorder in all interviews. Each interview took a total of 25-35 minutes to complete. I gained the participant’s trust by reviewing the process and allowing the participant time to ask any additional questions about the study, their participation, and the consent form. I took the additional step to determine participant understanding by asking open-ended questions (Appendix G). I explained to the participants the risk of possible identification through the participant stories.

I created interview questions (Appendix H) for the students, teachers, and administrators following the review of literature and some minor reworking following a pilot study from a qualitative research class in 2011. I limited the amount of preparation time before starting the interviews in earnest because I knew the participants through working at RWHS. The interviews served as the primary instrument of the investigation; therefore, I used caution while establishing a balance between my comfort with the participants and the formality necessary of the researcher and study participant (McCracken, 1988).

I asked all participants how the AVID program facilitated the learning and future college aspirations of high school AVID graduates. Supporting this general question, I asked students to
describe their experience in AVID and its relationship to learning and achievement, asked the
AVID teacher about pedagogical approaches, and asked the administrators about the key features
of the AVID program. Current research suggested the college aspirations and college acceptance
rates of disadvantaged students remains affected by educational racism, limited parental
experience in college, and limited financial resources. I returned to two AVID teachers in RWHS
to ask clarifying questions based on some topics of interest.

Upon completing each interview, I electronically transferred the interview file to the
transcriber. The transcriber signed a Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix I)
ensuring confidentiality of all research information and protecting data files by locking them in a
secure location at all times.

During the interviews, I wrote many observer comments and memos to myself about
what I learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I coded specific pieces of the data to identify
information about the data and interpretive constructs related to analysis to manage the large
amount of data (Merriam, 1998).

As I collected data from the interviews, I simultaneously analyzed the data through
emerging insights, intuition, and tentative hypotheses (Merriam, 1998).

**Historical Documents and Observations**

Qualitative data collection occurs through the means of interviews, observations, and
documents (Merriam, 1998). The observation and document method of collecting data played a
supporting role in data collection. I utilized observational data from the AVID classroom to gain
a first-hand account of the experiences in the AVID program. The observational data provided
details of the natural setting as a first-hand encounter. I reviewed AVID curriculum manuals for
details of AVID strategies and lesson plans as evidence of AVID strategies in the classroom.
Data Analysis

Simultaneous data collection and analysis kept the data focused throughout the collection process (Merriam, 1998). I accomplished this by collecting, organizing, coding, building categories and themes as they emerged, interpreting, probing for understanding, and writing about the findings (Maxwell, 2005). When I received the transcribed interviews, I uploaded the data to the NVivo research software. I initially coded and identified repeating themes and emerging categories by analyzing words, phrases, patterns of behavior, and ways of thinking that stood out (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). “Coding data is the formal representation of analytic thinking” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 212), and the development of “an emergent theory to explain these data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). I checked my assumptions after the initial coding and then began to form categories by comparing data and refining initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). I identified emerging themes of the facilitation of learning in the AVID program after categories formed and built an understanding of factors related to the motivation of the disadvantaged students. Next, selective and theoretical coding allowed me to identify hypotheses emerging from the categories (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

I collected and compared data until I identified viable categories for the findings by reaching a saturation point, where I had sufficient repetitive data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Saturation occurred “when gathering fresh data no longer spark[ed] new theoretical insights, nor reveal[ed] new properties of [my] core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). The constant comparative method allowed me to identify when participants continued to convey the same thoughts and perceptions on a specific aspect of their experiences, thus determining when a category shows saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I organized data into themes,
describing the methods used in AVID program as experienced by teachers and students. Results from this analysis appear in the next chapter.

**Validity and Evaluative Criteria for Qualitative Studies**

Validity acted as a critical component of the research design and consisted of strategies used to identify and rule out threats to the “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106). A test of validity happens when conducting qualitative research to identify the credibility of a description or conclusion (Maxwell, 2005). Researcher bias and the effect of the researcher on the participants can affect validity. I relied on the assistance of my dissertation chair and committee to identify and address my personal bias in this study.

“Credibility,” “dependability,” “confirmability,” and “transferability” represented criteria used for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219). Credibility reflects the accurate representation of what participants feel, think, and do by having a prolonged engagement in the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I ensured credibility by utilizing a system approach to coding the data from the interviews with the participants. Dependability refers to participant confirmation of data and interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I ensured dependability by having participants review the transcribed interviews. Confirmability occurs when the triangulation of data from multiple sources supports the findings. I reduced the risk of bias by using this strategy (Maxwell, 2005) and by providing corroborating evidence. Transferability refers to the possibility of a similar process working in a similar setting. I support transferability by providing extensive details and thorough explanations of my data collection and analysis.

**Protecting Confidentiality**
The records of this study remain confidential. I did not include information in any published reports making it possible to identify participants in any way. I protected anonymity and avoided references used to identify individuals. I stored all computer documents on my password-secured personal desktop, laptop, and back-up hard drive located in my home office. I locked all hard copies of documents, along with the recording devices containing audio from the interviews, in a file cabinet in my home office. The recordings remain downloaded to my password-secured home office computer. Transcripts from the recordings and other study documents (consent forms, memos, field notes) remain secure, viewed only by me, the transcriptionist, and Dr. Sarah Noonan, my dissertation chair.

I plan to delete and/or destroy all audio recordings, transcribed data, memos, field notes, consent forms, and any other confidential data six months after my successful defense of the dissertation. I will also destroy intake forms (Appendix F) or researcher’s notes with interview transcriptions using pseudonyms, and the original forms or notes six months after my successful defense of the dissertation. Transcriptions and additional documents contain only pseudonyms; these documents were stored on my password-secured personal computer, my personal laptop, and external hard drive. I plan to delete all confidential audio recordings six months, confidential transcribed data, consent forms, memos and field notes from both my desktop and laptop computers and shred documents after my successful defense of the dissertation. Data collected during my IRB-approved pilot study in May 2011 included one in-depth interview with an AVID teacher. I stored transcribed interviews with this participant on my password-secured personal laptop, desktop, and back-up drive in my home office. I destroyed all other documents from the pilot study.
Summary

I engaged in qualitative research methods and used a case study approach to address my primary research question regarding the motivational factors in the AVID program for disadvantaged students. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board provided the protection of study participants. This study involved two high school sites within the same district to examine the experiences of the students, teachers, and administrators participating in the AVID program.
CHAPTER FOUR: RELATIONSHIPS AND A SCHOOL FAMILY SYSTEM

I examined the AVID program to learn how students, teachers, and administrators helped students increase their rates of achievement and desire to attend college. The participants told stories to explain their success, reflecting on how their involvement in the AVID program changed them. Students and teachers described the importance of positive and nurturing relationships in AVID classrooms. Over time, these nurturing relationships developed into something unintended: a family system.

A combination of factors supported student success through the AVID program. Students found a safe place within the AVID program for risk-taking and learning due to positive relationships within AVID classrooms. I organized my findings regarding relationships and the “school family system” into the following categories: (1) family members, (2) teachers taking on parental roles, and (3) “sibling relationships” among peers. I first describe the family atmosphere found in AVID classrooms and later discuss different roles played by teachers and students.

Teacher and Peer Interactions and Relationships

Participant stories portrayed the ongoing establishment of unique relationships in the AVID classroom, which fostered a feeling of family connectedness. The classroom community became a second home for students. Teachers and students sometimes played roles similar to those found within a family system. Participants described their relational experiences as something not found in a regular classroom.

Twelve out of the thirteen participants described the AVID classroom as creating a family atmosphere. In addition, twelve out of the thirteen participants described the AVID teacher as playing a parental role within the classroom, which helped to ensure success for the
students. Students benefitted from relationships with teachers similar to those provided by nurturing parents. The classroom became a second home as students developed close friendships and supported each other’s success. I describe the family system and members found in the AVID classrooms next.

**Family Members**

The AVID classroom resembled a family system based on participant roles and relationships, communication styles, and feelings of acceptance and belonging. The unique relationships in the AVID classroom allowed the students to feel the unconditional love and support, which fostered academic achievement.

**Participant roles and relationships.** Ms. Silver explained differences in her experience building connections with AVID students as compared with her experience teaching students in “regular” classes. At Readiness East High School, the schedule provided high school advisory time, giving teachers an opportunity to talk with the students about school events. AVID teachers characterized working with AVID students as “a different form of building a connection.” Providing evidence of close relationships between teachers and students, Ms. Silver described student behavior after they took their last final in the AVID class on the last day of school.

They [AVID students] took the final and I bet I had a lineup of at least ten kids before they walked out. They had to give me a hug before summer. You don’t get those biology kids to give you a hug. They’ll put down a caribou gift card or something and say, “Thanks. My mom made me give this to you.”

Relationship building impacted teachers in different ways. Initially, the relational piece of the AVID program caught Ms. Silver off guard, but she now believed, “AVID is about building relationships, setting individual goals with each student, and helping them follow their goals.” Practically, Ms. Silver customized and followed 31 different curricula for each of the students based on relational data. Ms. Silver assessed the needs of each of her students and developed a
success plan with each of them based on their difficulties in the classes and how she could help them individually.

While teaching AVID for nearly five years, Ms. Mel found her strength in building relationships with students to be advantageous in the AVID program. As she witnessed the successes of the AVID students, it solidified the importance of relationship building in her pedagogy. Ms. Mel stated, “They need someone they can talk to. I think the number one way to support them is to be a person they can come to with any kind of question.” Whether they posed a life or a school question, Ms. Mel prioritized listening to students and then finding the right solution for them. Ms. Mel used story to establish positive relationships, asking them, “If you could tell your story, what would it be?” The students reflected and shared their stories, valuing their history and identity, and talked about themselves to affirm “they were going somewhere.” Ms. Mel’s AVID classroom offered a nurturing environment to student learning and achievement.

Mr. Travis taught AVID Advanced Placement (AP) Physics, one of the most rigorous high school courses. He related to the physics students on entirely different level than his AVID students. “AVID is at the next level. Not only do you have to know about their academic skills, but you have to know how their lives are changing, such as their parents getting divorced, applying for citizenship, or losing their home.” Many factors affected the AVID students on a daily basis.

AVID teachers opened the classroom for dialogue when the students needed it most. Mr. Travis explained he always lets the students know he has an open ear if they feel the need to talk. Every Monday, the AVID students participated in an activity called “high/low share.” The students took turns explaining whether they saw themselves at a high or low point in life. It
became a way for the students to share events or issues in their lives and for Mr. Travis to have a deeper understanding of any outside factors that may have affected their academic performance.

**Communication styles.** Ms. Silver recalled opening up to the students in her own way while her students tried to figure her out. “I put myself out there and rap to the students about cells in the second week of school. It makes the students look at me like ‘holy cow, she just put herself out there.’” Ms. Silver’s openness helped her foster a risk-free environment for sharing. She paired students together asking students to introduce their partners and share some interesting things about themselves.

Two kids told me they were in gangs, one kid told me he had to resuscitate his dad when he died, and one girl told me her mom was 15 when she had her and has had three different dads. It was all in that one day. I just thought, oh my gosh, this is more than I ever learned about a student in science class. They were letting me into their lives. This experience illustrates the need for psychological safety and the importance of sharing to develop trust. Ms. Silver said, “We do a lot of community building and sharing in the classroom. I make sure that as a teacher I share a lot so they feel comfortable sharing as well.”

Ms. Mel frequently opened up to her students as well. Hermey remembered all the times Ms. Mel told a story from her weekend and how much they enjoyed learning so much about her. One time, he recalled, “She brought in cookies on the first day of school with pink and blue icing. . . . I remember Randy jumped up screaming, ‘I knew it!’ when she asked if we got why the frosting colors were blue and pink.” The students listened intently when Ms. Mel announced her pregnancy with her first child.

**Feelings of acceptance and belonging.** The AVID class fostered the feelings of connectedness in a special group. Ms. Jones said, “They found support, true friends, forgiveness, and non-judgment. They found a place where they belonged.” This feeling of belonging may not have happened in the high school without AVID as a part of the students’ lives. She explained,
“The classroom is a safe environment to share ideas, be challenged, and if they fail, then they get support, not ridiculed.”

Another example of the AVID classroom as a healthy family occurred when two new students joined the AVID class in the tenth grade. The AVID group had already been together for over a year. Ms. Mel assigned every student to either write a letter about becoming a new student or write a letter to the new student. One of the new girls wrote about her gratitude for her membership in the AVID class. The new girl felt nervous because she did not know how she would fit into AVID, but after reading the letters she really felt like she became a part of the family. Ms. Mel stated, “It was sweet to see that and it made me feel great to know that she’s comfortable and feels she can bring something to everyone that not everyone can see.”

AVID students struggled relationally with teachers outside of the AVID program on some occasions. Randy explained a difficult time with a teacher who seemed to not understand him: “This teacher was rude and mean to me. I initially thought it was because I was Black.” Ms. Mel talked with the class and explained to them that some teachers lack cultural awareness and may misunderstand their actions or what they say. The students did not understand why they would stereotype them and have a perceived negative attitude with them. The learning process throughout the whole situation proved long and painful, but Ms. Mel recalled, “It was totally worth it.”

All seven of the students referred to the AVID classroom as a family and talked about what it meant to them. Hermey explained the AVID group of students was not like other students in the high school “who were backstabbing and petty.” They never talked about each other in a mean way. They talked to Ms. Mel if they felt concerned about one of the members. “We were
all a family so we called it our family. By the end of the four years, everyone was bawling their eyes out because we were going our separate ways. We just kept saying, “We don’t want to go.””

Comments from students showed how teachers cared for them. One student presented a heart-felt story to class, describing an experience when she felt like her world fell apart. “I felt lost, hopeless and alone.” Then, her AVID teacher approached her at the right time.

At first I wasn’t really sure if I could trust her. I thought to myself, was she like all the rest of the teachers, or was she different? Did she really care about how I felt or who I was as a person? I soon found out that she was one-of-a-kind. I spoke to her about things that I wouldn’t have even thought of telling anyone else. I thought she would treat me different and judge me, but she didn’t. She accepted me for who I am and I’m grateful for that. She helped me break out of my shell. She made me realize that there were good people in the world. I finally broke free and for the first time I could show people who I really am and didn’t have to worry about anyone judging me.

Although most of the AVID students felt connected to their peers and teachers, I found one student not connected in the way others described. Jamal explained, “Not all students are going to embrace it and find the whole family feeling in it.” He cautioned, “Not everyone wants to be that whole family thing but they still want to work hard and be there.” He further explained,

Like for me, I didn’t feel that whole family atmosphere but I was there to work hard and do what I needed to do. So it could be more student-oriented by being more focused on how the students see the class. I think that’s what the program needs to be.

While speaking to the tenth grade AVID class at Readiness High School, Usian told the younger students, “You are so fortunate to have this program. It is your support for the rest of high school and most importantly, it’s your second family.” He became teary-eyed and said softly, “Ms. Mel is the best teacher in the world. She saved me and the rest of the students here. She makes you feel like you belong.”

Interactions and relationships within the AVID classroom resembled a family system. The students and teachers considered the AVID class a family, hence acting like a family unit.
Next, I describe how teachers take on some aspects of a parent role in school, much like another (extra) parent in a blended family.

**Teachers Taking on Parental Roles**

The AVID teachers traveled on a journey, discovering new things about relationships with the students. Teachers sometimes interacted with students in the same way a parent might advocate for them. Ms. Silver stated, “That is what the best thing is about teaching AVID and it’s the scariest part about it too.” The “parental” role included functions such as advocacy, problem solving, and providing nurturing and caring to students. Interestingly, early on in teaching the AVID class, the teachers became aware of the shift in role from teacher to advocate. They soon found themselves in the role of the second parent and felt the same sense of awkwardness likely experienced in blended families when new members join a primary family system. Five teachers discovered early on that they would have to deepen their role with the students and could not act just like a teacher but would instead take on some duties often associated with parenting.

Teachers initially expressed surprise at becoming a second “school” parent. Soon after the students started their first year in the high school AVID program, the students referred to Ms. Mel as their mom. This appeared no surprise to Ms. Mel. “A lot of them called me Mama Mel. . . . I think because I watched them a lot and I stayed on them. I supported them whenever they need it and I think that they all knew that.”

For example, Randy, an AVID student, stated, “Well, Ms. Mel just started off pretty much acting like our mother right away.” Four students recalled that if something appeared wrong on a student’s face or with their disposition, Ms. Mel always asked about it. Randy explained,

I feel comfortable talking to the class about most things. AVID is the closest thing I have to a family besides my good friends and my immediate family: Ms. Mel is a big part of it.
I remember when I lost my only mother figure in the school, Ms. Mel, when she had her baby. It was tough but I pulled through it.

Soon after he started teaching AVID, Mr. Travis discovered through a community-building activity what his students perceived of him. Students wrote their name on a sheet of paper and then passed it to the next person, including Mr. Travis. Each person took turns anonymously writing something nice about that person on the paper. At the end of the activity, each student got their sheet back filled with positives about themselves.

Mr. Travis learned what his students thought about him. “The thing that really struck home with me was that it was just meant to be a 30-minute filler on a shortened class schedule and a lot of kids said they valued me. . . . nobody has ever said this about me before.” The students said he became like a dad to them. He said, “I was like, ‘Holy cow.’ And there were a couple of students that said (I could tell who they were by their handwriting) I’m like a parent, a teacher, and a friend who cares about them.”

Mr. Travis treasured the student comments on the sheet, valuing how students perceived his role in the AVID classroom.

If you were to ask me five years ago if I wanted to be described as a dad, I’d be like, ‘No!’ But I thought about those kids and . . . I love it. I love this class and the people in it because they’re important. I realize that they think of me like a dad. One of the students said I am like a goofy dad and I said, ‘I’ll take that.’ But the big thing is they said they knew that I cared about them. I’m glad because I do.

Although the students benefitted from protective and therapeutic relationships in the classroom, the teachers found themselves in unfamiliar territory. Mr. Travis explained, “It’s kind of like what education school didn’t teach you either. It’s like the practical thing when a kid comes to your class crying. The professors didn’t say, ‘Oh you should say this, this, and this to them.’” He wished he possessed the skills to deal with the students’ mental health more effectively.
Teachers struggled with differentiating between AVID class and their content class. If he mentored a new teacher, Mr. Travis would say, “You’re going to have kids who are going to have different emotional needs and just be OK with the fact that there is going to be some days when you’re not going to get stuff done.” Mr. Travis struggled with two slightly different pedagogies. He explained, “That’s hard for me because even in AP Physics we have fun, but everyday they get something done.” In the AVID class, he reflected, “Even when you don’t think you’re getting something done academically, you got some other need met, like an emotional need.”

Teachers took on parental roles without opposition. Ms. Silver admitted teaching the AVID class “is kind of like parenting.” During an observation of Ms. Silver’s AVID classroom, I witnessed an example of her parenting. While addressing the class during final exam preparation time, Ms. Silver stated caringly, “Wednesday, you have a study session in the morning.” The AVID students, as freshmen, did not know what to expect from semester final exams yet. “You do not need to come in to study. Stay home to sleep and eat a decent breakfast. Please have plenty to eat so you are not distracted by hunger and so you have enough fuel for brain energy.” Ms. Silver reviewed more dates and then they discussed the final project.

Teachers in the parental role became exposed to students’ lives. Later, Ms. Silver explained to me, "Once in a while, I have to be a parent. I have to be compassionate. I have to understand. And then I have to still give them curriculum and challenge them.” Ms. Silver’s classroom offered a structured, therapeutic setting for learning. She admitted, “I know all of their deep dark secrets. I know their trigger points and also what makes them happy. We figure this all out early on.” She saw the relationship as that between a parent and child: “I am not trying to be their buddy.”
Mr. Schmitt found the parental role as a valuable approach to supporting the AVID students. He treated them as if they became his own children. He said, “If they weren’t applying themselves in the AVID elective class, I got on my soapbox and lectured [to] them about it, just like a parent.” He also said, “If they weren’t doing well in a specific class, they heard about it every time. We checked grades and they had to explain why they weren’t doing well along with what they were doing to change it.”

Five of the AVID students interviewed emphasized the importance of the parental role of the AVID teacher. Amber explained, “Ms. Mel was like another parent at school. She was always very involved in our lives and that motivated me to keep pursuing the things that I wanted to do.” Amber felt a second parent’s opinion helped. “She was always so supportive of whatever decisions we wanted to make but she still gave us her input on what she thought would be better or if she thought what we were doing was really good, so that helped me stay very motivated to keep doing what I was doing.” Hermey even stated, “Ms. Mel was the one that kicked you in the pants, just like my mom would have done.”

Amber, an AVID student, recalled a situation where she became sick and missed a lot of school. “I was trying to catch up on all the work I missed and Ms. Mel helped me a lot. She was very understanding and a great listener. I appreciate how she really cared about what was going on.” The AVID teachers used direct teaching strategies while developing unique relationships in the AVID classroom.

The evidence suggested AVID teachers, like stepparents in a blended family, showed students they cared, appreciated and valued actions by their students, and embraced the added role of a second parent. The discovery of the parental role surprised the teachers. Teachers also
witnessed changes in peer relationships, including the way student friendships resembled sibling relationships in a family system.

**Peer Relationships More Like Sibling Relationships**

The ongoing establishment of unique relationships in the AVID classroom fostered feelings of family connectedness, which included same-aged peers as siblings. Amber explained her experience as “being able to talk through anything and not hold the hostility which was really nice.” The AVID class met every day for an hour for four years. Amber felt “fourth hour was a time to relax” and “just know that I can talk to Addison or Hermey or anyone in the class.” Amber could tell them “about a bad day” or that “she was stressed about a psych test or something like that.” Amber found it “really, really comforting to know that they were there every single day.”

Hermey described peer friendships and support.

I remember this one time, one of my AVID friends had a problem in anatomy class. I took that course before so I was able to help her get that problem fixed. Then the same thing happened with me with my friends, Usain and Amber. They were in a higher math class so we were able to get their help to figure out what we were doing. It was just like getting help from your older siblings, but not really since my siblings could never do this work.

The classroom became a learning environment where students felt comfortable enough to ask and receive help. During tutorials twice per week, students wrote a problem they struggled with on the whiteboard, and a group of four to five students helped solve the problem collectively. Principal BK noted, “We see students helping each other to become responsible learners in the classroom.” The students felt they could trust each other and counted on each other for support and help. Usian summarized, “People think it’s just a class, but I think it’s just more than a class. I have brothers and sisters that support me every day.”
One student found the development of the unique relationships “helped, but it was still pretty annoying.” Jamal explained that this was “because the students in the class know how you are. They know how you work. They know how to work with you and get on your nerves.” But as in all families, some sibling behaviors irritated the group or individual members.

In the AVID classroom, unique relationships fostered a feeling of connectedness in a family, allowing students to experience belonging and achievement of learning goals. Figure 1 is my visual representation demonstrating the components of the participants’ experiences.

![Students establish peer relationships like siblings](Teachers take on parental roles)

AVID classroom becomes a second home

Students experience belonging and support for learning and achievement

Figure 1. The AVID Classroom Experience

A family system functioned within the AVID classroom with teachers taking on some parental roles, peers treating other students like siblings, and the AVID classroom possessing the qualities of second home in school. Strong affective and sometimes therapeutic relationships created a sense of “belonging” and fostered increased “competence” as students and teachers challenged and supported learning. Positive relationships contributed to the success of at risk students, offering them a “classroom home” to begin their journey to post-secondary education. Another
important factor regarding the AVID program involved the curriculum and pedagogy designed to helps students become more successful students in AVID, a “college-readiness” program designed to prepare students for college through challenging curriculum and strategy instruction. A description of the curriculum and pedagogy follows in chapter five.
CHAPTER FIVE: AVID CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

AVID teachers established unique family relationships with students, providing a safe place for students to learn challenging content and experience personal growth and academic success. AVID teachers also adopted the recommended components of the AVID curriculum and pedagogy, a requirement of schools choosing to affiliate and claim membership in the AVID program. Teachers attend professional development activities and gain access to AVID curriculum materials and guides. The AVID curriculum consists of a college and career readiness resources as the resource to guide teaching. AVID teachers described how they learned to become an “AVID” teacher and the unique features of the AVID curriculum and pedagogy they believed played an important role in student success.

The AVID training contains additional resources related to culturally responsive teaching. These materials provided a “framework of effective methodologies that infuse the culture of all students in the classroom to enhance the curriculum and make relevant learning connections to increase comprehension” (AVID, 2013, para. 6). Coordinator Howard described the goal of using culturally responsive methods, saying, “It is critical to have your curriculum aligned with culturally relevant instructional strategies, such as AVID does, to develop an intentional racial consciousness. Teachers need to see race and see culture in order to be effective.”

For one period a day for four years, students learned organizational and study skills, engaged in critical thinking in response to probing questions, received academic help from peers and tutors, and participated in enrichment and motivational activities to prepare for college, making the goal seem attainable. Participants described how they implemented AVID curriculum along with learning strategies developed by the AVID teachers. Ms. Silver initially thought the
“AVID curriculum with all the great activities could be photocopied and used, making teaching a little easier. Then I realized that is not how I teach. I have to own the curriculum before I can present it to them.”

AVID methodologies consist of strategies and the framework for effective teaching of college and career readiness. I describe the AVID curriculum and pedagogy in five sections, including (1) WICOR lesson design, (2) strategy instruction, (3) informal academic advising, (4) valuing individual differences and diversity, and (5) college readiness: selecting, applying and paying for college. Then, I explain how the administrators supported the AVID program in their school.

**WICOR Lesson Design**

The Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading (WICOR) teaching and learning method serves as the AVID curriculum framework. WICOR provides “a learning model that faculty can use to guide students to comprehend materials and concepts, and articulate ideas, at increasingly complex levels (scaffolding) within developmental, general education and discipline-based curricula” (AVID, 2013, p. 73). “Academic reading” and “writing to learn” anchor the foundational curriculum framework of AVID. Next, I describe the WICOR methodology, including how WICOR influenced teacher’s lessons. Following this description, I describe how metacognition and strategy instruction help students become autonomous learners.

The first key methodology, “writing,” incorporates the use of writing activities, such as learning logs, quick writes and reflections, peer evaluation and authentic writing. Students complete learning logs to recap learning and build confidence with the content. Students write journal entries to process the work they do in class. Quick writes capture thoughts during timed free writing on a specific topic while reflections synthesize learning. Peer evaluation develops
students into critical readers and develops interpersonal skills. Authentic writing uses student journals and notebooks for content that reflects real ideas. “Writing consists of an essential, complex set of tools that enhance critical thinking—good writers tend to be good thinkers, and improving cognitive skill enhances one’s writing ability” (AVID, 2013, p. 73).

The second methodology, “inquiry,” engages students with their own thinking processes. It teaches students to think for themselves instead of chasing after “a right answer.” Students take ownership of the learning process as a result. Inquiry consists of skilled questioning techniques, tutorials, and Costa’s Level of Thinking (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2011). Skilled questioning techniques follow Bloom’s hierarchy of cognitive skills (as cited in AVID, 2013) along a continuum of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Tutorials engage students in all levels of critical thinking, from recall to knowledge and evaluation by collaborating on a question for a deeper understanding of the answer. Students record observations on the tutorial log sheets. “AVID’s emphasis on inquiry focuses on the application of Costa’s three levels of ‘intellectual functioning,’ whereby learning to ask progressively more complex questions is scaffolded and students become progressively more metacognitive—aware of their own thinking processes” (as cited in AVID, 2013, p. 73).

The third method, “collaboration,” establishes intentionally designed learning within student groups, working towards “meaningful learning outcomes, using active engagement activities planning to maximize learning, and facilitating the sharing of the workload” (AVID, 2013, p. 74).

“Organization,” the fourth method, teaches students how to manage time and energy while establishing priorities, so students effectively plan academic assignments. AVID requires students to maintain a binder that directly impacts a student’s success in all classes and accounts
for the majority of the AVID elective grade. Three-ring binders must contain six colored dividers, a zipper pouch to carry supplies, two pens, two sharpened pencils, filler paper, a daily planner, tutorial logs, learning logs, Cornell note paper, erasers, and highlighters.

The last method, “reading to learn,” includes reading with a purpose, so that “students are connecting reading material to prior knowledge, understanding the structure of texts, and using text-processing strategies during and after reading to improve comprehension” (AVID, 2013, p. 74). Students use the strategy “marking the text” to think critically about their reading. While reading the text, students analyze ideas, evaluate ideas, and circle and underline essential information.

**WICOR Lessons**

A part of the AVID professional development program during the summer institutes focused on how to “WICORize” lessons across the content areas. Each summer over the last five years, many teachers from Readiness District participated in the AVID summer institutes. The training encouraged teachers to incorporate AVID strategies, including WICOR, into their lessons. Three AVID elective teachers described how WICOR influenced their lessons.

Teachers participated in intense professional development, altering the way they planned lessons and taught students. Ms. Silver treated AVID just like any other curriculum. “I didn’t really ‘get it’ until the second semester that everything needs to be WICORized—about writing, pre-collaboration, inquiry, and reading. My entire curriculum is now based on those categories.” Mr. Travis found the inquiry piece of the training especially intriguing, saying, “As a science guy, I really liked the different inquiry activities, but I thought the writing portions were most helpful for me during the summer institutes.” Mr. Travis described the intensity of the summer
institute. “The first AVID summer institute is very overwhelming for teachers. We went through binder after binder of all of the activities.”

Teachers from the secondary schools in Readiness learned how to WICORize their lessons and train all of the teachers in the building how to WICORize. “My AVID students can identify when a lesson in social studies or any other core content area is WICOR-designed. They get excited when teachers do it our way,” said Ms. Mel. The WICOR strategy experience in other classes reinforced the student’s learning development.

Teachers develop the WICOR lessons in their non-AVID classes despite the large amount of time it takes. Ms. Silver appreciated the prepared AVID curriculum, saying, “All of the AVID lessons in the big AVID curriculum binders are already WICORized. That was very helpful that I don’t have to do that on my own.” Ms. Mel found the writing portion of the WICOR strategies to be her strength because she possessed an English teaching license and could model the writing process. “Each individual has a different skill that they need to improve, so I need to identify that skill and then meet one-on-one with them to help them improve,” said Ms. Mel.

Ms. Mel taught writing and inquiry skills; however, she learned to emphasize the skill of working with others as collaborators too. She focused her writing assignments on meaningful topics to teach students life lessons. “I had the seniors last year choose to write their final report and speech on making a difference culturally in this school. It was an impactful activity,” said Ms. Mel.

Next, I describe the second AVID curriculum and pedagogy area, strategy instruction.

**Strategy Instruction**

The AVID curriculum contains strategy instructions to foster better academic students. The strategic process incorporated modeling with many opportunities to practice over and over.
The goal integrated the student’s discovery of the utility of the strategy and execution of when and where it happened best to use the particular strategy. I describe four of the notable strategies: Cornell note taking, tutorials, getting and staying organized, and Socratic Seminar.

**Cornell Note Taking**

Cornell note taking, also known as “split page” notes, served as a staple in the AVID curriculum and provided an organizational way for learners to engage in learning and record their thoughts about classroom presentations. Students resisted the strategy at first because it forces them to write and think about their notes in unfamiliar ways. Principal BK explained, “The Cornell note taking training really organizes their thoughts and reflections and merely gives the kids a tool to being knowledgeable learners in the classroom.”

The strategy began with the students taking notes during a lecture or presentation. Mr. Travis, an AVID teacher, explained, “As immediate after the lecture as possible, students write questions (to the left of the notes) to clarify meanings, reveal relationships, establish continuity, and strengthen memory.” The sheet provided space located at the bottom of the page for students to summarize the notes, reinforcing the important concepts. Students then covered up the notes, answered their questions aloud, and then reflected on the material. Mr. Travis said, “They ask themselves, “What’s the significance, how can I apply them, and how does this fit in with what I already know?” The strategy of quizzing oneself and writing the summary ensures the student understands the content thoroughly.

Two AVID students specifically identified Cornell note taking as a key-learning concept. Before AVID, Amber took bullet point notes, but “throughout AVID I realized that in certain classes I needed to do Cornell notes so that I learned the material thoroughly.” Randy reflected, “I definitely think the Cornell notes helped me be a better student; we just had to do too many of
them.” Students value the Cornell note system as one of the most valued strategies of the AVID curriculum.

**Tutorials**

The AVID curriculum supported inquiry development by using tutorial sessions two times per week. Students prepared for the tutorial by identifying a “point of confusion” from their Cornell notes from a previous class. A group of five students worked with an adult tutor to address academic problems. Each student presented a problem he or she struggled with on a white board. The AVID tutors taught the students a strategy, such as self-questioning. If the goal involved solving a math problem, then the students questioned each of the steps used in problem solving. The strategy within the tutoring group allowed students and the group to understand each step and then determine the next step to meet the cognitive goal of solving the math problem.

Two students mentioned the benefit of the tutorials two times per week. Makayla commented, “The most valuable part of high school was always having AVID to come to for help with any class and having the tutors to help out with any questions.” Hermey said, “I think that one of the things that really helps is the tutorials because sometimes we have troubles in our classes, and sometimes we just don’t get it.”

Teachers and administrators felt the tutorials benefitted the students for support in their rigorous courses. Coordinator Robinson mentioned, “The AVID tutorials are what makes AVID AVID. The tutors take them through the problem-solving steps so they are conscious of why they are doing what they do.” Ms. Mel explained, “The environment is set to be very positive, and through tutorials, they support each other by working through the problem-solving steps.” Next, I
explore how the teachers transformed at risk, disorganized students into students who process how to organize and execute organization.

**Getting and Staying Organized**

Teachers taught students about the power of organization for learning throughout the four years of involvement in the AVID program. This included strategies such as how to establish a systematic way to budget time to read, completing and turning in assignments, and keeping track of due dates. Teachers provided practical examples to demonstrate how students control their success.

Mr. Travis described how he related meeting goals with getting good grades. “I’ll show them the grade book and demonstrate how it all works. I’ll say, ‘If you do this assignment, watch what happens to your grade, and if you don’t do it, look what happens to your grade.’” Mr. Travis showed them the results of their actions by taking the mystery or abstractness away from the impact of turning assignments in on time. His “goal was to break down the doors and those things that are built around them saying they can’t do it.” Mr. Travis hoped to show students how adopting the behavior of a conscious, responsible student would help them find success.

One of the requirements of AVID, a student-produced portfolio, developed the student’s organizational skills and showcased all of their accomplishments. When I observed Ms. Silver’s classroom, I witnessed her enthusiasm and organization as she explained the portfolio requirement due at the end of the year.

That just gives me goose bumps when I think about what your portfolios are going to look like at the end of this year and then at the end of next year! You are going to gather so much information and knowledge for your AVID portfolio. It’s very exciting to see all of your growth.

Setting up her AVID classroom proved not a challenge for Ms. Silver because she possessed strength in organization. She explained the reason: “I have to live my life kind of so
organized. I’ve got an organized junk drawer at home.” She patterned her daily and weekly
activities to show repetition and consistency for predictability. For example, “On every Tuesday
we grade the planners, and every Thursday we grade Cornell notes. Every other Friday we do a
binder check.” Each student had planner with a calendar so that the student could identify what
happened next. Ms. Silver explained, “It can’t be a fly-by–the-seat-of-your-pants kind of class.
It’s got to be one that you treat just like any other curriculum and that you really focus on.”

Four students commented specifically on how the AVID program helped them with
organization. Makayla found the workload amount overwhelming and the reading difficult. “The
most challenging thing in high school were my AP classes. It made me have to do a lot of work
that I wasn’t prepared to do.” Amber found the organizational piece of the AVID program most
beneficial. “I think organization was a huge help because in middle school I lost everything. I
had the motivation already but I needed mostly the organization stuff to keep everything.” Usain
mentioned time management and organization as the most important skills he learned “because
when you’re organized everything falls into place and when you know when things are due, you
prepare yourself for that. So AVID was there to remind us when these things are due and how we
should organize everything.” Jamal also gained organization, his most valued skill from the
AVID program. “I think organization is a really important part that I learned, along with hard
work and patience.”

Mr. Travis explored learning styles with his students. “A part of the AVID curriculum is
to explore what kind of learner the students are and have them understand what that means to
them.” In Mr. Travis’ class, they wrote a strategy plan of how they can maximize class time
learning and doing homework at home based on what they have learned about themselves. Ms.
Silver described her motto as “on a journey, not just because I know everything, but because I
am going to discover it with them.” She took the students through the reflective process of how they learn and how to succeed despite the living environment or past experiences.

The AVID program provided a nurturing classroom climate and helped students adopt strategies used by capable students. Principal BK explained, “AVID has a pretty rigid curriculum as far as expectations, WICR, Cornell note taking, and the binders.” Structure provided students a learning environment to discover themselves and become successful learners. Next, I describe the methods and benefits of AVID’s “Socratic Seminar.”

**Socratic Seminar**

Another AVID strategy employed by the five of the AVID teachers, “Socratic Seminar,” fostered active learning and structured discourse about ideas and moral dilemmas. Participants explored and evaluated ideas, issues, and values in a particular text and developed student-centered dialogue. Students learned the differences between dialogue and debate so that ideas expand and thinking deepened. “The Socratic Method creates a safe intellectual environment, leads to collaborative learning, creates curiosity, builds confidence and self-efficacy among participants, and develops the capacity to be accountable for creating one’s own learning” (AVID, 2013, p. 85).

Principal BK found the AVID strategies, especially the Socratic Seminar, empowering for the students to take control of their own learning. “The peer collaboration in the Socratic sessions helps them reinforce the higher-level thinking which they probably don’t have in other areas in their life.” Ms. Mel used the Socratic Seminar model “as a way for students to have group discussions based on the research done before the activity.” Mr. Schmit found the Socratic Seminar training valuable in his other classes. “I can ask significantly better questions because of
the training. I am confident in being able to pull out their information and work cooperatively for a solution.”

AVID teachers offered students choices in topics and in-depth projects and used small group learning and peer support so that they could overcome barriers to student achievement. Ms. Mel described a lesson she did on social networking in a Socratic Seminar format. She expected the students to have discussions prepared, based on the readings and research material under study. She wanted “them to explicitly draw on the preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.” The student-centered dialogue led to collaboration and students creating their own learning.

Ms. Mel’s lesson entailed students contributing to the conversation by posing and responding to questions that related the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas, actively incorporating others into the discussion and challenging ideas and conclusions. The students demonstrated the recognition of ethical standards and safe practices in social and personal media communications while understanding the consequences of personal choices. Ms. Mel stated, “The Socratic seminar is my favorite activity to do with the students. Students need to be able to make statements and back it up with references and research. That is a great critical thinking strategy skill to develop.”

AVID teachers allowed the students to own some of the direction of the class. When it came to writing, Ms. Silver allowed students to choose the topic and product such as writing a paper or doing a presentation. “When I told the class we needed to practice public speaking, they collaboratively decided the topic which was something that interested all of them. Instead of just writing a speech, I gave them options.” Ms. Silver put the responsibility of decision making onto
the student instead of simply telling the students what they must do. Ms. Silver respected students, asked for input, and gave them choices about their learning.

Mr. Travis taught a learning strategy that allowed time to stop and explore a topic even further. “I let them talk amongst themselves and inquire about it for as long as they need in order to get a self-directed in-depth experience.” Mr. Travis shared an analogy to explain his method, “When I’m at home trying to fix something I’ve never done before, I’m not the smoothest and quickest at it. I have to learn a process in order to make it work.”

Mr. Travis observed some teachers plowing through their curriculum and expressed his concern about the critical timing of learning. “The nature of learning is slower, and it’s not always neat. AVID has allowed me to realize that students may get a concept, but they need to talk amongst themselves and think about it even more.” He does not jump from one topic to the next right away. “It’s a little bit slower, but I always delve into a topic more with AVID kids.”

Socratic Seminars offered students choice in topics and work with in-depth projects, required students to apply disciplinary knowledge to contemporary issues. Teachers helped students become more aware of strategies used to increase understanding of concepts and the importance organizational skills. Reflecting on their cognitive experiences, students consciously identified how they learned, the difficulty of the task, and the steps needed to accomplish it.

Next, I describe the third factor in student success through the AVID program: informal academic advising.

**Informal Academic Advising**

AVID teachers raised students’ expectations for postsecondary plans by serving as positive role models and engaging in continuous discussions about the future. The function of informal academic advising: keep the goal in front of the students, discuss student strategy usage
to get to the goal, and to emphasize “successful students take rigorous courses” to get into the pipeline to college.

At risk students typically possessed lowered expectations regarding attending college for the reasons described earlier. AVID teachers raised student expectations through modeling, interactions including one-to-one and class discussions, and positive peer relations. Teachers modeled behaviors of a successful student by discussing positive attitudes and AVID graduates modeled what a successful student looks like. Teachers engaged in one-to-one conversations with the students so that the meaning appeared real. Class discussions entailed encouragement for academic and emotional support. Teachers fostered positive peer relations, nurturing the feeling of belonging.

**Modeling**

Raising students’ aspirations to go to college proved challenging. Mr. Travis found himself constantly trying to connect with students. “You’re trying to break down those doors and the things that are built around them that say they can’t do it.” He tried to do the little things by modeling the positive, academic behavior to help guide them onto the right track. Mr. Travis experienced kids who showed up for school with bad attitudes, but he retained his faith in them, saying, “But if you gave them the choice to be successful or to be a failure, students would always pick successful.” He further explained his view on student equity by saying

> Each student comes into school, and they’re not necessarily equal. Things happen at home, such as a student has to move to another home or a fight between their mom and dad at breakfast. So with AVID, it’s made me realize that every student comes from such a different background, even in Readiness, that it’s helped me have success with all students, especially understanding student behavior. So it’s a constant reminder that no matter how a student puts on the appearance that everything is normal, their behaviors are a direct result of what’s going on at home or in their lives.

Students’ issues at home or factors they could not control motivated him to continue fighting the
battle of raising their aspirations to go to college.

AVID speakers gave students a new perspective of their identity and future. The first AVID graduates visited the current AVID classes to explain their successes and failures. Usian explained the route to his success.

It’s like a freeway. All you have to do is just get in the car Ms. Mel has built for you and drive. It’s like a way to freedom, so it’s not just a class. For anybody to be in AVID, they have to reconsider their future, like what it’s going to do to them, like how it’s going to change them and what people think about them. If they want it, they have to stay in for the next four years.

AVID students experienced the need to proactively advocate for themselves, while understanding and adopting the habits and actions of successful students. They describe this knowledge and actions as the “unspoken curriculum.” Mr. Travis said, “One of the biggest challenges for the AVID students was the ‘unspoken curriculum.’” Mr. Travis often explained to the students, “If you’re missing this assignment or if you’re going to be gone, then this is what you should do.” He tried “to always model behaviors that are going to lead to their success.” Ms. Jones used another method to problem solve with the students. “I lead students to discover an answer rather than tell them how to navigate the unspoken curriculum.”

One-to-One Conversations

One-to-one conversations provided a deep sense of understanding of the student and teacher’s ideas and a sense of companionship. Coordinator Howard summarized her view on getting to know students personally and how it involves equity, saying, “The kids are up against a system that has institutionalized racism. The teacher must advocate for the student by peeling back the layers and navigate through the system so they get the resources they need.”

Understanding the barriers that lower the expectations of going to college greatly increases the teacher’s ability to be successful in raising the aspirations of the AVID students. One-to-one
conversations allowed the deep, important information to become real.

Both the teachers and the students experienced life lessons when they least expected it. Two students from Mexico attended Mr. Travis’s class. One of the students left Mr. Travis a phone message saying he “was worried because his family applied for citizenship, and they have not found out yet whether they will get it.” Mr. Travis remained speechless. “In my science-teaching world, that is not an issue for me. But to my AVID student, it is.” Mr. Travis tried a compassionate approach to this student, but he truly could not relate. “And so they might not be worried about the math test and solving for X because there are bigger things to worry about. I just worked through the life solutions with him the best way I knew how.”

Ms. Silver emphasized respecting oneself and others. She felt the responsibility to guide her students as much as possible in so many ways. She reported, “One time, I had to pull a student aside and tell her she was drawing a lot of negative attention to herself and whether or not that was her intention.” Students learned not only academic norms but behavioral norms as well through high expectations.

**Class Discussions**

Teachers introduced topics and facilitated discussions, emphasizing the need for high expectations for themselves and the need to take rigorous courses. Three students, Makayla, Jamal and Hermey, explained their experiences with taking rigorous courses, which they did because of class discussions. Makayla explained, “I’d have to say that being in AVID of course helped me because I wouldn’t have taken challenging courses or anything, and so I wouldn’t have been as prepared for college as I am now.” She felt challenged in high school, and that made the transition to college even easier. “I feel in control and confident in college.”
Jamal took advanced math classes in high school because “they [AVID teachers] kept telling me I had to because it was required to be in the AVID program.” Surprising to him, Jamal received good grades in the rigorous math courses and “actually understood the math. It just made me feel like I was more ready for college and I understood what more I had to do with these higher classes.” He credited his AVID teacher for giving him the confidence to be an all-around good student, including advocating for himself. “I think the biggest thing is that I learned to deal with different people and certain situations that I wouldn’t have before. I just figured I was being discriminated against when something went wrong.” Jamal learned throughout the program “that I can do good things, but I just need to apply myself and I can go far in life. My AVID family just kind of motivated me throughout the whole way so I wouldn’t get stressed.”

**Positive Peer Relations**

Teachers fostered positive peer relations to address the factors adversely affecting at risk students. The AVID classroom environment nurtured the feeling of belonging, and students benefited from a cohort-like effect. The positive peer interactions carried over the strong relationships established in the AVID classroom and became helpful in becoming a support group that revolved around one goal: going to college.

Students see each other in the AVID class every day and develop a secure bond. Coordinator Robinson explained, “With the AVID class, the same students and teacher see each other every school day for four years.” The shared experiences, in and out of school, become the foundation of their relationships. She stated, “They’re going through the same thing, both good and bad, together, but they have that common bond that supports each other, especially while taking rigorous courses.”
Teachers discovered they needed to work with the students’ underdeveloped skills that the teachers took for granted. Mel felt she needed to teach “them the skills that they need so that they can compete with anyone else in another class.” She worked with each individual to identify “a different skill that they need to improve, so then I can meet one-on-one with them and see how they’re applying, what they’re doing to improve, and so forth.” Students in the rigorous courses tended to display competitive edges. Knowing this environment, the AVID teachers protected the students by teaching them the skills they needed to compete.

Hermey struggled with self-advocacy and the interpersonal relations needed to successfully navigate through high school. “I think what was challenging in high school was the fact that you had to meet different people and teachers in new classes. That was one of the biggest challenges just because I wasn’t a very good talker.” Hermey found the students in the AVID program helped him significantly get over his social reluctance. “We did a lot of get-to-know-you activities in AVID. So that’s how I overcame that. I can talk to anyone now without being afraid or anything.” Hermey credited his successful transition to college because “that was one of the hardest things in high school, just because I didn’t really know a lot of people.”

The AVID teachers set the expectations of a respectful classroom without any exceptions. Ms. Silver recalled telling the students about her philosophy, “When you come to class, you will not poke fun at anybody for things they can’t control.” Ms. Silver set the class standards and norms by letting them know “if this is going to be a family, then there is going to be times where we disagree with one another, but we need to always work them out and respect each other.” Coordinator Howard explained, “We structure the environment so that when students open up and share their story, no one is running out of the classroom telling the stories because the
culture is cultivated at a deeper level of relationship and respect.” This philosophy “fostered an authentic community.”

Mr. Travis gave an example of the students embracing their diversity and building peer relationships, “I have a student from Mexico, Ethiopia, and Laos, and the three of them call themselves the United Nations.” When Mr. Travis asked them if they would let another student, even an American, in the United Nations group, they said they would let anyone in their group. “My big point is that anybody is accepted into their club, and I let them know I thought that was a pretty cool thing to include everyone.”

Three students commented on racial relations and its impact on the AVID classroom. Amber stated, “I think our class didn’t really have any issues with accepting one another. We were all really close, actually, so race was never really an issue.” Hermey commented, “I don’t think there was ever any race issues or discrimination in our class. We all loved each other equally, like a family. No one noticed differences.” Makayla found the message very clear, “I know the message in our class was race doesn’t matter as long as you want to go to college, you can go there. You just have to put in the effort and really try. You’ll get there.” Next, I describe how competency and belonging theory explains the findings described in informal academic advising.

Informal academic advising does two things: puts students on the right path to college and sets the goal of attending college. The views of others and outsider identification affect a disadvantaged student. Next, I describe how the AVID classroom fostered the sense of competence and belonging as the students became a member of the “advantaged” class going to college.
Valuing Individual Differences and Diversity

AVID teachers helped students resist race and class bias by discussing how membership in certain groups resulted in lower expectations and opportunities. The AVID teachers raised student expectations and helped students resist bias. Teachers addressed racial and class bias to raise expectations of academic performance and open discussions about the barriers to applying and attending college. AVID students developed competence and a sense of belonging through raised expectations and positive peer relations to resist assumptions.

Teachers used real-life situations and facilitated activities that taught equality in the AVID class. Amber, an AVID student, described an activity in the AVID class from a few years ago involving a video about a black woman who grew up in an environment where White people told her she wasn’t good enough. “I can’t remember her name in the video, but she turned out to be a very successful woman. Ms. Mel just made the point that your race or ethnicity doesn’t make a difference as to how successful you can be.” Teachers used real people as examples to promote valuing diversity.

Coordinator Robinson understood the barriers that preventing the students from going to college. Coordinator Robinson believed “the biggest barrier the AVID students need to overcome probably their own self-perception.” She explained further, “So they maybe have thought about college but just don’t see themselves as going to college, and if they do, they have no idea how to get there.” Teachers addressed the self-perceptions by focusing on high academic achievement while valuing each other’s differences.

Teachers planned activities but often discussed topics unrelated to the planned activity. One day, Ms. Mel’s class discussed the differences between a White woman’s hair and a Black woman’s hair. She explained, “We aren’t afraid to talk about things regarding race in class.”
told the class she “had no idea there was such a complex process to do a black person’s hair” and that she appreciated her new knowledge. Ms. Mel led many discussions about racial differences. “So I’ve loved that it’s made me a lot more aware, and I do think that it can help me guide them to being successful with embracing themselves as people.” The teachers gained more understanding everyday about the differences between students and themselves.

Ms. Mel shared another class activity emphasizing equality and raising aspirations. The activity involved students writing and sharing about an open topic: “If you could tell your story, what would your one story be?” Students talked about “what it was like to be black in a mostly White school, how it was hard being an outcast, and how they were so different than the honors and AP students.” Ms. Mel pointed out some of them struggled with listening to others’ stories because they said, “Well, I’ve had it pretty easy compared to this person.” Teachers used every teachable moment to raise expectations and discuss the barriers to attending college.

The AVID classroom supported the learning and allowed students to feel comfortable in the learning environment. Ms. Mel emphasized to the students about the importance of their story. “So embrace your story even if you don’t feel it’s coming from the depths of someone else, still embrace who you are and that you are going somewhere.” Coordinator Howard said, “The best in us is right next to the vulnerable part in us.” She believed in order to foster an authentic community, “we create a learning environment that allows kids to feel comfortable enough to bring their stories and feel the uncomfortable growth with their teachers.” The AVID classroom evolved into an authentic community, allowing for the discovery and understanding of the barriers by teachers and students.

Teachers learned about students and became aware of the racial and class bias so that they could support them and raise academic expectations. Coordinator Howard reiterated what
the teachers practiced, “Teachers must be culturally proficient even in a culture of poverty. It is critical to scaffold and build a bridge of what the teacher doesn’t know. It cannot be just the teacher’s way of doing something.” Participants provided support during stressful or difficult times by honoring student feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, which fostered a sense of belonging. Coordinator Howard explained the reasons for student success:

When students feel comfortable and safe, they show their vulnerable side of what they don’t know. The family system, unintentionally developed in the AVID classroom, fulfilled the needs for the sense of belonging; therefore, the student who was once considered an outcast, is now a family member of the “advantaged” class going to college.

Next, I describe the findings supporting the knowledge of college applications and financial assistance.

**College Readiness: Selecting, Applying and Paying for College**

Students need to learn and demonstrate college and career readiness skills to make a successful transition. Disadvantaged students face barriers to develop the basic readiness for college. Successful college-ready students “can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate or certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental coursework” (Conley, 2012, p. 1). The AVID program provided the curriculum and the training to overcome the barrier of lack of parental involvement or knowledge regarding financial aspect of college and the application process.

Financial hardship and a parent’s prior knowledge of college played a significant role in a student successfully navigating the college admission process. Principal BK provided the financial resources for field trips. He said, “There are activities which show students what their potential will be by making college visits and bringing in speakers. It shows them there is a
world that is much different than the world they go home to.” The AVID teachers prepared the students to understand the financial piece of attending college and what college campuses look and feel like. “They can overachieve or pursue the dream just like other kids in high school by getting the support and vision from school rather than from home.” Next, I describe how teachers assist students in familiarizing the college campus.

**College Visits**

Another component of the AVID curriculum, college campus tours with a college representative, occurred mostly in the students’ sophomore and junior years. Students learned the importance of meeting and networking with college representatives. The college representatives promoted the institutions they represented and provided information to AVID students. The AVID teacher and students took a bus to local colleges and focused on the different characteristics of the colleges. Ms. Mel stated, “It really helps them to have a visual of what a four-year public and a four-year private college or university is really like.”

Two students specifically mentioned the significance of the college visits in their planning or decision-making. When Amber started the AVID program, she knew she was going to college. “I never really started thinking about where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do until we started going on the college visits. That really kick started me thinking about it.” Makayla recalled, “We went on a lot of field trips, and it helped sort out which colleges I would like and like what type of college would fit best for me.” She said the field trips helped determine what college she really wanted to attend.

**Education on Scholarships/Grants by AVID teachers**

Students with low socioeconomic status often lack knowledge of financial aid and lack access to higher education due to their families’ lack of resources. During the second semester of
their senior year, Ms. Mel explained, “One of our last components of the AVID curriculum is understanding the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and scholarships.” Students completed the FAFSA in class, then asked their parents for their financial information to finalize it. Ms. Mel remembered a situation where two students’ parents would not give them the information, “It was sad to see yet another roadblock for these students to get to college. So, I called home and talked to the parents about it. Once they understood what it was for, they agreed.”

Once the students finalized the FAFSA, they researched scholarship opportunities on the Internet. Ms. Jones explained, “There are a lot of scholarship opportunities for AVID students. They practically qualify for every one, like low income, minority, first generation.” Ms. Mel took her students through writing effective scholarship essays. “The essays we write throughout the four year program, such as ‘what is your story,’ can be tweaked and used in just about every scholarship application. That’s why we work so hard on them.”

Incorporating speakers who discuss experiences of overcoming barriers, college admissions, financing college, scholarship opportunities, and other topics helped the AVID teachers with different expertise areas. Ms. Silver frequently incorporated speakers in her classroom. “We teach them how to be good listeners and how to ask questions while giving them the information they will need for applying to college.” College admission representatives visit the AVID classroom and answer any questions to help reduce their anxieties. Ms. Mel stated, “Having the representatives can be the best resource for the students. It’s a scary process for them.”

Three AVID students mentioned they worried about the financial means of going to college. Amber explained her fears, “The only thing that kind of scared me was the financial
aspect of it but Ms. Mel always said, ‘Don’t let the financial aspect scare you away because if a
college wants you, they’ll get you there.’” Amber found that “once she got that instilled into my
brain, I thought, ‘I can do this and it will be fine.’” Similarly, Makayla, an AVID student, said,
“I think the financial piece would be the only thing that really kind of scared me away from
college.” Hermey, another AVID student, reflected the most by saying, “I am the first one in my
family to graduate from high school and get a career. AVID helped with my decision of going to
college right after high school because it made me believe anything is possible.” He felt the
financial piece of college as the only barrier to him going to college. Hermey found the AVID
program as the motivator to focus in school. “It’s my future and I need scholarships or grants, so
I have to focus on my education a lot too.” Without the knowledge of financial aid, some of the
AVID students could not go to college.

Disadvantaged students face barriers to develop the basic readiness for college, such as
knowledge of a college campus and the financial aspects of college. Students learned and
demonstrated college readiness skills. The knowledge of college campuses and financing college
gave the students the feeling of competency and belonging. They now possess what all other
college-attending adolescents possess: knowledge of the college campus and how to pay for a
college education. The knowledge empowered the students and contributed significantly to their
sense of competency

AVID methodologies consist of strategies and the framework for effective teaching of
college and career readiness. Figure 2 is my visual representation of what I discovered about the
AVID curriculum and pedagogy in my study. In Figure 2, teachers use WICOR lesson design,
strategy instruction, informal academic advising, valuing individual differences and diversity,
and college readiness: selecting, applying, and paying for college. The AVID program
provided the curriculum and the training to overcome the barrier of lack of parental involvement or knowledge regarding financial aspect of college and the application process.

Next, I describe the fifth factor in student success through the AVID program: administrative support for at-risk students and the AVID program.

**Administrative Support for At Risk Students and the AVID Program**

Educational administrators express concern with regard to equity and quality of education, especially with low-income and students of Color. Student success relies significantly on teacher interventions and administrative support within a college prep program. Principal BK advocated for supporting the students and teachers, “If we are pushing kids to overachieve or take that higher AP course or take a course that normally they wouldn’t, then we better provide the support to get it done.” I organized my administrative support findings into the following areas: (1) teacher selection, (2) professional development, and (3) providing and advocating for support.
Teacher Selection

Building principals and district level administrators decide who teaches AVID classes. Some administrators choose to keep the same teacher with the same students for four years, while others change teachers every year with new students. AVID requires the AVID elective teachers to possess a teaching license in any licensure area. They do not need licensure in a certain area such as English or Social Studies.

When selecting the right teacher, the ability to connect with students resonated as the most important factor identified by all four administrators interviewed. Coordinator Robinson stated, “Teachers need to be able to connect with the students and be able to build the trusting relationships necessary for success.” Principal BK advocated for a teacher who connects with the students in a nurturing way, “Most of the students don’t have the family support or the family connection in order to have the pre-requisite skills that other kids have that are already successful in school.” Regional Director Kraft explained, “Every teacher has a history or story where they had to overcome some kind of obstacle. It may not have been race. It could have been socioeconomics.” However, that “feeling of being an outsider or seen like an outcast from the perspective of someone who doesn’t understand where they have come from fuels the passion for our AVID students.” The AVID teachers “don’t see the kids as students of Color. They see them as students with potential and gifts.”

Principal BK and Coordinator Robinson differed on their opinion of which type of teacher the AVID program needs: a White teacher or a teacher of Color. Principal BK explained, “If I could have my AVID teachers represent the demographic spectrum of the diversity in the class, I think it would be wonderful for the program.” He believed, “If I don’t have that, then I have to make sure I have culturally wise and diversely educated teachers so that they don’t get
stuck behind the cultural barriers that we have in education.” Moreover, Principal BK clarified, “Cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness is probably more different than the color of your skin, but I also believe the role models of like race that our students have, the more they believe and they identify with a person.” Coordinator Robinson explained that ethnicity or race remained a non-factor in determining a teacher’s effectiveness,

I just don’t think there’s a connection—you could be, especially when you’re getting to know students it’s probably easier to build relationships but everybody, even in the same culture, has all different types of experiences. So just because someone may look the same, their experience could be so very different that it wouldn’t matter.

She thought if teachers really believe in the students and commit to meet the needs as individuals, then the race or ethnicity of the teacher really does not matter. Coordinator Robinson explained, “The AVID teacher must be willing to understand their own perspectives through their own culture or experiences. I think that’s what makes an effective teacher of another culture.” AVID teachers must possess cultural awareness to reach all of the students, regardless of color or socioeconomic status.

AVID recommends AVID elective teachers attend “culturally relevant teaching” professional development training. Culturally relevant teaching “provides a framework of effective methodologies that infuse the culture of all students in the classroom to enhance the curriculum and make relevant learning connections to increase comprehension” (AVID, 2013, para. 6). Coordinator Howard believed the teacher’s self-reflection and deep understanding of themselves impacts how they teach. “It is not about the color of the teacher or the socioeconomic status of the teacher. It is about how well the teachers know themselves well enough to be vulnerable and feel comfortable around students from another race.” Regional Director Kraft stated she wanted her AVID teachers
to have a passion for learning, be a team player, be student-centered, consciously aware of the AVID students, have tenacity and persistence to push students, be passionate about the pursuit of making lives better for students, have asset-based thinking, be problem solvers, and be comfortable being vulnerable.

Coordinator Howard agreed with Regional Director Kraft’s descriptors, but added, “I want a teacher to have the humility and wisdom to say, ‘the students bring us brilliant things. I am the orchestra director helping them discover those great things even when they have not seen it yet.’”

AVID teachers play many different roles: teacher, advocate, parent, social worker, therapist, and many more to meet the needs of every AVID student. Selecting a teacher who can handle all of the roles proved crucial. Principal BK convincingly summarized, “Teachers make all the difference in the success of the AVID program.” Coordinator Robinson added, “They need to be able to connect with the families and focus on the AVID curriculum” to ensure success of the students. Next, I discuss professional development as an administrative support.

**Professional Development**

The AVID program conducts annual trainings at the “summer institutes.” AVID encourages AVID elective teachers to refresh their skills with intense WICOR trainings, cultural relevant teaching strategies, and other areas. Principal BK acknowledged, “The responsibility of the high school principal is to foster meaningful educational programming to prepare students for post secondary opportunities.” As a part of that responsibility, providing and supporting professional development for the AVID teachers remained a priority. AVID teachers need “yearly training and support in AVID strategy implementation, digital learning, post secondary program awareness, and how to connect with teachers of AVID students for tutorial support.”

Principal BK explained, “They also need time and support to meet national AVID program expectations and maintain AVID certification.” AVID teachers need to have “their own
professional support group such as weekly meeting groups, summer retreats, and knowledge that building administration recognizes and supports their efforts.”

Regional Director Kraft and Coordinator Howard advocated for the AVID teachers to attend the culturally relevant strategies professional development. Regional Director Kraft believed the challenge remained, “How do we teach students to get past those barriers or those experiences they have had in society?” Regional Director Kraft acknowledged another barrier for students of Color. “I think students may feel like society has given up on them because people in society give labels based on skin color before they have a chance to prove otherwise.” She insisted, “Teachers must recognize students are culturally conscious of how the teachers address them in school.” Curriculum aligns with culturally relevant instructional strategies to develop an intentional racial consciousness “to develop relationships that make it safe for students to show up as is” through culturally relevant professional development.

The AVID organization provides all the professional development for the school districts and teachers. Coordinator Robinson valued the AVID program as an organization and the professional development they provide. She said, “They stay on top of all the current research and the trends that are happening in education and they keep refining the program.” However, she identified the problem as “the expense of the AVID fees, professional development costs and the conferences . . . it’s a heavy burden for districts financially, and it’s hard to justify if you have a district that doesn’t really believe in AVID.” Districts who implement AVID need to commit the financial resources for professional development in order to run successful AVID programs in the schools. Next, I explore how administrators can support the AVID program in their building.
Providing and Advocating for Support

AVID promotes the principal’s role as the person who provides the philosophical and financial support for the AVID teachers, students, and tutors. Principal BK believed AVID played an integral role of Readiness High School’s delivery of instruction. The AVID strategies provided “the support that does not come from home.” The AVID program “creates a family that supports itself, as the students support themselves.” Teacher incorporated WICOR strategies into their lessons in many classes. Principal BK explained his financial commitment, “My job is to find the staffing so that we can provide the one-to-one direct teaching time to empower the students to take control of their own learning.” Principal BK explained, “The AVID program is a way for us to reach kids that are very hard to reach and is a good financial investment in that respect.”

Principals and other instructional leaders invest both time and money to make the AVID program a success. Principal BK reflected, “As we watch the students go through the four years, they take pride in picking each other up and in each other’s success.” He also shared, “It is unbelievable to watch them come out of their shell. They become academic students rather than just being wallflowers.” At risk students may struggle while observing other students’ success and not experiencing it themselves. With an administrator advocating for financial support to sustain AVID as a high priority, “it gives opportunity to students that otherwise just may or may not make it. We just don’t know.”

The responsibility of the high school principal “is to foster meaningful educational programming to prepare students for post secondary opportunities.” Principal BK explained further,

We can achieve that by [1] ensuring AVID teachers successfully implement AVID goals of teaching study skills, [2] supporting higher level high school course enrollment and

He believed his advocacy actions include

[1] working with teachers to make sure goals are being accomplished, [2] lobbying district curriculum leaders and Board of Education members regarding the merits and success of AVID, [3] helping AVID teachers recognize the value of never giving up on every AVID student, [4] making sure AVID certification status is in place, [5] lobbying state legislators to maintain adequate funding for AVID, a program that addresses many students who are victims of the achievement gap, and [6] find building level funds to support a program that meets the needs of AVID students.

Coordinator Robinson and Principal BK emphasized the importance of administrative and financial support in the buildings. Coordinator Robinson said, “If the administrators are not supporting the program, then is it because they don’t have enough information or perhaps they don’t philosophically agree with it.” Regardless, teachers need funding to purchase many instructional resources for the program to exist, such as material for AVID student binders, field trips to different colleges and community support activities, part-time tutors, parent-to-school connection opportunities, and AVID success celebrations. Principal BK stated, “Without these supports, the AVID program would not be able to thrive and support the implementation of the AVID curriculum.”

**Summary**

The AVID program supported disadvantaged students to overcome the barriers diminishing aspirations to attend college. Student success relied significantly on teacher interventions and administrative support within a college prep program. AVID methodologies consist of strategies and the framework for effective teaching of college and career readiness. Teachers used WICOR lesson design, strategy instruction, informal academic advising, valuing individual differences and diversity, and college readiness: selecting, applying, and paying for
college. Readiness High Schools received administrative support through teacher selection, professional development, and providing and advocating for support.

In the next chapter, I analyze the findings through four theoretical lenses: critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Dweck, 2006), learning theory (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010), and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003).
CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS

Chapter four and five contains descriptions of my findings regarding how student participation in the AVID program positively influenced the college aspirations and entrance rates among disadvantaged or at risk youth. In chapter four, I identified and described a combination of factors supporting student success through the AVID program. Students found a safe place within the AVID program for risk-taking and learning due to positive relationships within AVID classroom. The classroom resembled a “school family system” assimilating family members, teachers taking on parental roles, and peer relationships more like sibling relationships. In chapter five, I identified and described the pedagogical approaches teachers used, and how program administrators and directors described the key features of AVID.

I analyze the findings using several related theoretical lenses, summarizing and analyzing the findings in the following four sections: (1) increasing awareness of at risk students, (2) influencing students through relationships, (3) creating autonomous learners, and (4) “caring relations” between teachers and students. I adopted four theoretical lenses, including: critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), motivational theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Dweck, 2006), learning theory (Harris, Santangelo, & Graham, 2010), and ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2003). I begin with a description of AVID students as “at risk” students and how critical pedagogy applies to their circumstances and challenges in college entrance.

**Increasing Awareness of At Risk Students**

Educational racism and oppression of marginalized group members diminish the college aspirations and application rates of disadvantaged populations (Griffin & Allen, 2006; Ogbu, 1994) and negatively contribute to the academic achievement gap (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). The AVID students in my study manage these factors affecting their college aspirations and
acceptance rates, placing them in the “at risk” category. I define “at risk” as a factor or combination of factors placing individuals “at risk” for academic underachievement, specifically students in poverty, racially diverse students, and first-generation students (first in the family to earn a college degree).

An educational program for underachieving students, AVID serves students with academic potential and insufficient family, financial, and community support to prepare them for college (Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011). AVID emphasizes placing middle-achieving students into the same college preparatory classes as their high-achieving peers and giving them the academic support needed for success (Black, 2008).

Readiness School District started the AVID program in 2008 and graduated its first AVID class of students in 2012. The class of ten AVID graduates at Readiness West High School consisted of six students of Color, six low-income students, and four first-generation students. The class of 13 AVID graduates at Readiness East High School consisted of four students of Color, four low-income, and seven first-generation students. All of the AVID graduates attend a two or four-year college or university.

AVID students overcame the birth circumstances, such as race, parental involvement and educational level, and socioeconomic status by aspiring and achieving their dream through academic achievement and critical awareness. Teachers engaged in critical pedagogy in an attempt to influence the student’s knowledge and identities produced within social relations (Giroux & Simon, 1989). Through lessons in culture, context, customs, and historical events, AVID teachers influenced the student’s social constructions symbolically through the mind (McLaren, 2007). AVID teachers raised student’s consciousness regarding their oppression and ultimately learned to resist educational racism (Freire, 1970).
Teachers accomplished raising student’s critical awareness by presenting themselves as persons as well as professionals, increasing the likelihood of building relationships with students. The next section entitled relationships describes how self-determination theory explains the impact of relationships in the AVID program.

**Influencing Students Through Relationships**

The AVID classroom fostered the sense of belonging, as the students became a member of the “advantaged” class going to college. Teachers met the students on their level, then raised the academic expectations with the goal of overcoming the stereotype threat. Knowing individuals seek close relationships with others to achieve a sense of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the AVID teachers attempted to influence the knowledge and identities produced within social relations (Giroux & Simon, 1989).

I found teachers fostered positive peer relationships, and in turn students supported each other, encouraging their peers to take rigorous courses, develop skills so they could compete and overcome social reluctance and positive racial relations. Teachers used real people (success stories) as models or examples to promote and value the accomplishment of diverse students. One-on-one conversations and group discussions contributed to the students’ social and emotional well-being. Teachers addressed negative self-perceptions by focusing on high academic achievement, while valuing individual differences. Focusing on learning and achievement within the AVID classroom community increased students’ sense of belonging.

I adopted self-determination theory (SDT) to examine how students raised their level of engagement and increased their academic achievement by satisfying their human need for belonging, autonomy, and competence in the classroom (Deci & Ryan, 1991). SDT explains how students learn more successfully when feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster
their intrinsic motivation, helping them explore their creative abilities and become more capable learners (Deci & Ryan, 1991). These motivational conditions promoted personal growth and adjustment, fostering highest conceptual learning. I also adopted stereotype threat theory which stated confirming a stereotype of intellectual inferiority through low academic performance can impede a student’s motivation (Aronson & Steele, 2005) and mind set theory which described how the student’s internal drive influences learning in two different mind sets: “fixed” and “growth” (Dweck, 2006).

An underlying assumption of the AVID program involves the way stereotype threat operates with disadvantaged students. The lowered expectations come from the lack of family experiences in college and resources for college. Others do not expect students who live in poverty or who come from diverse backgrounds to attend college. Students need academic advising and positive peer relations to resist what negative influences wait for them and to resist the assumptions made by teachers, institutions, and society as a whole that they cannot successful achieve college admission.

The need for competence draws students to explore and attempt to master the learning environment (White, 1959). The students in the AVID program developed a sense of competency and motivation through the various components of the curriculum and teacher’s pedagogy, including informal academic advising and by valuing individual differences. The AVID classroom evolved into an authentic community, allowing for the teachers and students to discover and understand barriers and learn strategies, the “unspoken curriculum,” and academic norms. Students learned new strategies, resulting in actual achievement, increased feelings of competence, and mastery of learning goals through external validation of their performance. The AVID teachers modeled positive academic behavior, taught students the “unspoken curriculum,”
and emphasized high expectations. The students learned academic as well as behavioral norms, challenged themselves with rigorous courses, learned self-advocacy and interpersonal relations, and developed the habits of successful students. The deliberate actions of the teachers and the learned actions of the students added competence and created mastery of the learning environment.

The findings support Readiness High Schools as a culture that believes a growth mindset removes barriers, helping students see change as a possibility and worth the effort. When teachers praise what students accomplished through practice, study, persistence, and good strategies, they support the growth-oriented process. Principal BK supported AVID success celebrations by hiring teachers who would praise student accomplishments. The administrators see the students’ intelligence as needing to be cultivated and stretched with high expectations for success. The administrators provide the financial means so that opportunities of application and experience support the change and growth in the student. Principal BK viewed the AVID students as academic students with potential. A growth mindset philosophy of the administrators created a school culture allowing students to accept their starting point and then encouraged them to take advantage of opportunities and expend effort.

AVID students developed competence and a sense of belonging through raised expectations and positive relations, resisting negative stereotypes and limited expectations regarding a college career. Counteracting the views of others by having discussions about goal setting and academic advising and affirming the individual differences of diversity within the group created the feeling of belonging. The feeling of belonging shifted the perception of students from outsider to insider. The student became members of an “advantaged” class by applying and attending college.
The AVID classroom promoted feelings of competency and belonging, nurturing students with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). Teachers fostered an understanding of intelligence as malleable, emphasizing effort improves academic performance. The motivational conditions promoted personal growth and adjustment, fostering highest conceptual learning. AVID teachers used direct teaching strategies to help students develop learning and organizational skills, and addressed racial bias and stereotype threat, fostering their transition from a “disadvantaged” group to an “advantaged” group of students.

Next, I describe the AVID curriculum and pedagogy findings and how the learning theories explain the student’s transition to becoming a successful academic student.

**Creating Autonomous Learners**

WICOR, a form of lesson design, provided a template to ensure all students would gain more experience with active learning. Teachers incorporated the WICOR lesson design as a template to engage students in metacognition and benefit from strategy instruction. The Cornell note taking strategy provided a complete system, taking students through the cycle of learning, including questioning, summarizing, reflecting, reviewing, and assessing. Active learners recognized their weakness in comprehension and automatically employed the correct metacognitive strategy necessary to generate meaning from text (Baker & Brown, 1980). Cornell notes from readings or lectures provide the questions needed for the tutorials.

Tutorials develop the students’ ability to think independently, and to stimulate metacognition by analyzing their levels of thinking. Students articulate what they know about their question and group members ask questions to guide the student presenter through the inquiry process. At the conclusion, students write reflections on the learning, taking responsibility for their learning.
Organizational strategy helps students reflect on their goals, and break down their academic assignments to manage complex academic tasks. The skills include analyzing prompts, determining unclear directions with a task or assignment, establishing objectives, and effectively working in learning environments that maximizes their learning. Using self-regulated strategies positively affects students’ attitude, self-efficacy, and effort to enhance motivation.

The Socratic Seminar provided a means of making effective use of information and knowledge by asking pertinent questions, recognizing and defining problems, identifying the arguments on all sides of an issue, searching for and using relevant data, and arriving in the end at carefully reasoned judgments. Since metacognition relates to students’ knowledge, awareness, and control of their learning process, the Socratic Seminar strategy developed the skills needed to navigate inquiry-based learning activities.

Psychological studies associated with teaching students metacognition and strategy show how this type of learning contributes to the overall success of students. Harris, Santangelo, and Graham (2010) described the importance of metacognition and strategy instruction in writing. Metacognitive knowledge incorporates “knowledge about cognition and awareness of one’s own cognition” (Harris et al., 2010, p. 227). The successful application and coordination of declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge influences the academic development and performance of a student (Harris et al., 2010).

Self-regulated strategy, another major concept of metacognition, encompasses the application of consciously planning, monitoring and evaluating cognitive activities (Harris et al., 2010). Goals of self-regulated strategy development include (1) helping students become independent by applying strategies to complete tasks, (2) acquiring of procedural, declarative, and conditional knowledge to use strategies, (3) supporting students’ development of self-
regulation management, and (4) positively affecting attitude self-efficacy and effort to enhance motivation (Harris et al., 2010). Students become self-regulated in their own learning by directly learning this concept in teacher’s daily lessons. Teachers plan lessons using the WICOR strategy as a daily goal so the students become more efficient strategy users. The teacher’s lesson design shapes the student’s adoption of new and more effective learning strategies.

Psychological studies support effective ways of teaching students to be effective learners, including use of metacognition (Harris et al., 2010). The WICOR model incorporates these strategies in lesson design to help the students become better learners. When teachers design effective lessons incorporating strategies to learn how to think, students become more capable learners after practicing over and over again.

Teachers encourage students through Cornell note taking, tutorials, organization strategies, and Socratic Seminars to become autonomous learners. AVID curriculum and pedagogy focused on skills and activities promoting competence (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1991), such as tutorials, organization, study skills, and learning strategies. AVID students participated in tutorial sessions, an example of putting the mindset into action. Students present a “point of confusion” problem from their Cornell notes, and a group of students processes through the problem, producing possible solutions.

Learning from mistakes or struggling with problems emphasizes a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006) instead of just looking for the right answer. Cornell note taking takes the student through a process of writing, highlighting, asking questions, and summarizing key concepts. Students with a “growth mindset” believe intelligence needs to be cultivated and improved. They believe they can stretch themselves and get smarter through Cornell note taking. Socratic Seminars require students to wrestle with a moral question, research evidence supporting one
side or the other, and then present their ideas to their peers. According to Dweck (2006), to change the fixed mindset of at risk students, teachers must help at risk students understand intelligence as malleable, including a strong emphasis on effort.

AVID teachers focused specifically on teaching how to use metacognition in daily lessons. This included drawing inferences, reflecting on the notes, and using experience to identify mnemonic cues, critical in memory retrieval (Kornell & Bjork, 2009). Metacognition requires students to learn and apply competencies and steps designed to enhance not only memory but also understanding, transference of knowledge, and real-world applications (Kornell & Bjork, 2009).

“Caring Relations” Between Teachers and Students

I adopted care theory (Noddings, 2003) to analyze my findings regarding teacher-student relationships within the AVID classroom. Teacher-student relationships and the “family system” within the AVID classroom revealed a “caring relation” between teachers, students, and peers. The teachers clearly did not anticipate the shift to a “caring relation”; however, they placed a high value on relationships and witnessed great changes in their students. Teachers authentically interacted with the students, allowing students to be more engaged and present in AVID classes. Teachers and students let their guards down and changed the traditional boundaries and roles between teachers and students. The family system in the AVID classroom allowed students to feel the unconditional love and support from teachers and peers, fostering their sense of belonging and affecting their desire to learn and their academic achievement.

The ethic of care theory emphasizes caring as the root of our responsibility to each other (Noddings, 2007). Our “rootedness in care” influences spontaneous responses during difficult
human situations (Noddings, 2007). This “natural” caring provides a motive to care in many situations and arises on its own; “it does not have to be summoned” (p. 222).

Organizational norms can either nurture or reduce teachers’ commitment to care, and they may find themselves caught between a desire to care and the demands of an indifferent bureaucracy (Noddings, 2003). Noddings believed institutions cannot care directly, but schools made up of caring teachers and administrators create a supportive environment and permit them to act within their ethical ideals.

Noddings’ (2003) ethic of care theory suggested schools, not deliberately designed to support caring individuals, structure time for functionality rather than personalization. Reciprocal relationships, a form of caring, show forms of relational and responsive behavior (Noddings, 2003). Teachers and students interact in authentic ways, allowing an individual to be a real person, not simply a role to each other. Teachers present themselves as persons as well as professionals, increasing the likelihood of building relationships with students.

Noddings (2007) believed a caring relation requires dialogue to establish receptivity in an open and genuine way. The AVID classroom promoted caring relationships by providing structured time for interaction and support between AVID teachers and students over a four-year period. AVID teachers helped students address dilemmas and encouraged students to see themselves as capable students.

The AVID classroom encouraged dialogue, allowing greater opportunities for sharing and mutual understanding. Dialogue allowed teachers to act effectively as a “carers” and encouraged growth within their students as the “cared-for.” Teachers and students benefitted from the change in relationships. Noddings’ (2007) ethic of care theory explains the powerful effect of a caring relation on the learning and future college aspirations of AVID students.
Students changed as unique relationships fostered a feeling of connectedness in a family, allowing students to experience belonging and achievement of learning goals.

In summary, the AVID program fostered relationships, structured curriculum, and developed pedagogy (Figure 3). Critical pedagogy explains how disadvantage, bias, and oppression adversely affect at risk students. Self-determination theory explains how the desire for autonomy, belonging and competence, and avoidance of the loss of valued resources, affects decisions and actions. Learning theory reveals how metacognition, effective use of strategies, and self-regulation influenced goal accomplishment and achievement. Finally, the ethic of care theory (Noddings, 2007), explains how conditions of caring in nurturing relationships fosters student risk taking and achievement.

An overall theme in this study involved importance of relationships in learning and the effective use of strategy instruction to promote academic achievement and raise college aspirations of at risk youth. Relationships open up possibilities and strategies pave the way to graduation and college. I created a graphic model (Figure 3) to represent the theories used to analyze my findings.

![Figure 3. A Model of Theories Used in Analysis.](image-url)
Next, I provide a summary of my findings and their implications for serving at risk students, and also recommend changes in practice based on my findings in my study. I close with a description of limitations in my study and also offer a personal statement about the need for caring teachers and institutions in education.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I examined how student participation in the AVID program positively influenced the college aspirations and entrance rates among disadvantaged or at risk youth. I identified how students describe their experience in AVID and its relationship to their learning and achievement, the pedagogical approaches teachers use, and how program administrators and directors describe the key features of AVID. I describe my findings and make recommendations regarding the importance of relationships and a school “family system” in the AVID program, and then recommend changes in the school program based on the success of AVID curriculum and pedagogy. I end this chapter with recommendations for further research and a personal note to all teachers. First, I review my general and supporting research questions.

I adopted the following question to frame my study: How does the AVID program facilitate the learning and future college aspirations of high school AVID graduates? I found the AVID program changed students’ academic identities through positive relationships and skilled coaching, helping students to discover the route to academic success and gain acceptance in college. I used the following questions support my general question:

1. How do students describe their experience in AVID and its relationship to their learning and achievement? The AVID students found a safe place within the AVID classroom to take risks and learn due to positive relationships between teachers and students. Students described the relationships within the “school family system” as containing family-like members: teachers took on parental roles, and peer friendships resembled sibling relationships.

2. What pedagogical approaches do teachers use? What assumptions guide their actions in working with at risk students? I found the AVID curriculum and pedagogy consisted of effective lesson design, strategy instruction, autonomous learners, informal academic advising,
valuing individual differences and diversity, and college readiness with selecting, applying and paying for college contributing to student success. The teachers assumed students needed strategy instruction, so they used the AVID curriculum as a tool to teach strategies. Teachers originally did not realize the importance of relationships and how relationships affected the success of students participating in the AVID program.

3. How do program administrators and directors describe the key features of AVID? What assumptions guide their actions in working with at risk students? I found the administrators assumed students needed the support and knowledge about applying for and attending college absent from their home environment. Administrators supported the AVID program through teacher selection, professional development, and providing and advocating for program support, reducing class size and also selecting qualified personnel.

Next, I describe my findings and make recommendations regarding the importance of relationships and a school “family system” in the AVID program.

**Relationships and the Family System**

I identified and described a combination of factors supporting student success through the AVID program. Students found a safe place within the AVID program for risk-taking and learning due to positive relationships within AVID classroom. The classroom became a learning environment where students felt comfortable enough to ask and receive help. My findings revealed the need to support at risk high school students by fostering a sense of belonging in the classroom to increase their risk taking and achievement.

I recommend structuring the classroom as a learning community to support positive relationships between students and teachers emphasizing the importance of positive relationships to encourage risk taking and learning. This requires administrators to recruit and select
passionate and nurturing teachers to address the affective needs of at risk students, and also provide professional development opportunities to help teachers learn how manage and inspire positive relationships.

The study revealed the need to address peer relations in classes. AVID classes promoted “caring” relationships, helping students overcome their reluctance to engage in learning and increase their school affect and achievement. I recommend schools develop an academic seminar, occurring once per week, where students connect with teachers to build positive academic self-concepts and receive direct assistance with learning problems.

Teachers in the AVID program provided various types of support to personalize the learning experience for students. I recommend restructuring the school day to identify new ways to support students regarding their social, academic, and career and post-secondary goals. This should include instructional support during the school day for all students, and a flexible day schedule to foster more personal teacher student relationships.

Instead of an “indifferent bureaucracy” emphasizing structure over relationships, I recommend the implementation of one-to-one technology (a tablet for every student) to “flip” or reverse classroom instruction. Students receive content lessons accessing technology and use classroom time to receive tutorial help. This allows teachers to facilitate learning in the classroom, while the students receive content instruction through homework during non-classroom hours.

**AVID Curriculum and Pedagogy**

Various aspects of AVID curriculum and pedagogy offered a rigorous and more challenging curriculum to all students. I describe these strategies and recommend changes to the school program.
Effective Lesson Design

Teachers improved their instruction due to the adoption of the structured lesson plan involving writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR; AVID, 2012). WICOR changed the way teachers design lessons by creating a more effective way to help engage students to become better academic learners. Teachers should instruct students about the importance of metacognition and selection and use of effective strategies to help them become more accomplished students. This should include cognitive modeling and discussion regarding how students used various strategies to accomplish academic tasks.

I recommend the incorporation of Cornell notes (AVID, 2012) in all classes with sufficient training for all students and teachers to help students get more actively involved in learning through questioning, summarizing, reflecting, reviewing, and assessing. Active learners recognize their weakness in comprehension, and automatically employ the correct metacognitive strategy necessary to generate contextual meaning.

AVID teachers used strategy instructions to foster better academic performance. Strategy instruction proved effective because students understood what to think about, how to monitor their progress, and how to learn what to do to achieve goals. When students received strategy instruction, they became more accomplished and capable learners.

Growth Mindset

The AVID curriculum and pedagogy focused on skills and activities promoting competence, such as tutorials, organization, study skills, and learning strategies. AVID students participated in tutorial sessions, an example of putting a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006) into action. Students presented a “point of confusion” problem from their Cornell notes, and a group of students processed the concern, producing solutions. Socratic Seminars required students to
wrestle with moral questions, locate evidence supporting multiple positions, and present personal ideas to peers. I recommend incorporating a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006) style of teaching in classrooms, focusing on the learning and not specific grades. This requires students to present problems for solution in classes and greater emphasis on improving through multiple attempts at academic tasks.

Emphasizing accomplishment instead of grades, I recommend grading based on student mastery of standards only. Standards-based grading focuses student assessment on mastery of commonly defined learning outcomes or content mastery. Mastery of academic expectations, not attendance, behavior, or socioeconomic status should determine a student’s grade.

**Informal Academic Advising**

AVID teachers raised students’ expectations for postsecondary plans by serving as positive role models and engaging in continuous futuristic discussions. Informal academic advising maintained students’ goal focus, discussed student strategy use to meet or exceed the goal, and emphasized “successful students take rigorous courses” to get into the college pipeline. The AVID classroom evolved into an authentic community, allowing the discovery and understanding of barriers by teachers and students, learning strategies, the unspoken curriculum (involving strategies adopted to find success in academic settings), and academic norms. Informal academic advising does two things: puts students on the right path to college and sets the goal of attending college. Teachers should engage in informal academic advising with the students. This should include modeling and discussion regarding how to meet academic goals.

I recommend all students take rigorous college preparatory courses. Schools should provide the support needed to ensure success. This includes using tutors, such as successful alumni and parent volunteers. The study revealed the need to address the importance of modeling
successful, college-bound student behavior. Listening to the views of others and promoting student identification with accomplished individuals may positively affect disadvantaged students.

**Family Outreach and Resources**

At risk students learned and demonstrated college and career readiness skills to successfully transfer to post-secondary programs, despite facing issues impeding their progress and learning, such as parents’ lack of knowledge and school and college experience. The AVID program provided curriculum and training to overcome barriers, such as the lack of parental involvement or knowledge regarding financial aspect of college and the application process. Students and parents should receive information to become familiar with college application as a family unit.

I recommend restructuring parent/teacher conference time to facilitate teacher home phone calls or visits as a way to reach out to and engage non-traditional families. This should include community outreach programs to build help families support students at home. Alumni might share their knowledge and experience with family units. I also recommend a strong emphasis on college access knowledge for at risk students as well as individual tutorials, group visits to colleges, and sessions at the high schools with admissions and financial counselors.

Disadvantaged students faced barriers to developing basic readiness for college. Financial hardship and parents’ prior knowledge of college played a significant role in students successfully navigating the college admission process. All students and families should have college access knowledge.

**Administrative Support for At Risk Students and the AVID Program**
Educational administrators expressed concern with regard to equity and quality of education, especially with low-income students and students of Color. Student success relied on teacher interventions and administrative support within the college prep program. Administrators should believe students change and grow through application and experience, despite original estimates of talent level and aptitude. Administrators should foster this belief within the school culture through the professional development and symbolic acts, such as telling stories about successful students and honoring accomplishments of teachers and students.

I recommend administrators hire teachers who believe students can change and grow through learning. Students need praise when they accomplish things through practice, study, persistence, and establishment of good strategies. In addition, I recommend administrators advocating for the AVID class size to remain low (20-22 students) to continue fostering a safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable to take risks in learning.

**Valuing Individual Differences and Diversity**

Students participated in the AVID activities and gained feelings of belonging and competence. Teachers met students on their level, and then raised academic expectations with the goal of overcoming stereotypical threats to learning. Teachers should engage in academic advising and encourage positive peer relations to resist negative influences waiting for diverse students, and resist assumptions made by teachers, institutions, and society as a whole regarding the enrollment of diverse students in college. This should include the adoption of culturally relevant teaching strategies.

I recommend incorporating students’ culture in the classroom to enhance the curriculum and to ensure relevant learning connections to increase academic performance. Classroom texts
should contain characters or topics reflecting student cultures in the classroom to make relevant learning connections and increase comprehension.

Students resist the effects of educational racism and negative teacher assumptions by becoming successful students. Teachers resist limited assumptions about students and their abilities as a result of educational racism by developing relationships with students in a caring classroom. Professional development opportunities, such as book studies and involvement in professional learning communities, may help teachers uncover their bias and become more culturally competent.

In summary, the AVID program fostered relationships, structured curriculum, and developed pedagogy. I created a graphic (Figure 4) to represent my recommendations and changes for “at risk” student success based on my findings in the study. The recommendations focus on the importance of relationships and a school “family system” in the AVID program and also the success of AVID curriculum and pedagogy.
Figure 4. Recommendations and Changes for At Risk Student Success.

Recommendations for Further Research

Educational research changes with social issues. The primary focus of this study identified contributing factors of the AVID program’s success in overcoming barriers to college
access and admission. This study confirmed the existence of relational experiences between students and teachers in the AVID program and how various pedagogical approaches affected learning and achievement. Future research may augment these findings in several respects. Administrative participants differed regarding their opinions of whether teachers of Color may positively classroom relationships. A study regarding how the diversity of AVID teachers affects students might answer this question. Additional research on the AVID program with a broader sample size may reveal additional themes beyond this study.

**The Need for Caring Teachers in a Caring Institution**

My passion for serving at risk youth has evolved and grown over the years. I believe every student has the potential for success, including at risk students likely to struggle to gain entrance into college. The knowledge gained from my findings will help educators learn how to more effectively close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged youth with regard to their college aspirations and graduation rates. I recognize the limitations of organizational norms hinders a teacher’s commitment to care and places them between a desire to care and the demands of an indifferent bureaucracy. My hope for the future envisions caring teachers staying true to their values, ensuring students like my friend, Danielle, get to attend college.
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Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2012). *Pathways to success: Integrating learning with life and work to increase national college completion.* Washington, DC.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board - University of St. Thomas
211 Summit Ave., Mail #AQU019
St. Paul, MN 55105-1079
Phone: 651-962-5341 - Email: irb@stthomas.edu

DATE: November 5, 2012
TO: Dana Cronin, Ed.D.
FROM: University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [365695-1] College Aspirations and Preparation: How AVID Students Beat the Odds
REFERENCE #: 
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: November 5, 2012
EXPIRATION DATE: November 5, 2013
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # [enter category, or delete line]

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of November 5, 2013.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Eleni Rouili at 651-962-5341 or erouili@stthomas.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.
APPENDIX B

Agency Consent Form

**Agency CONSENT FORM**

Researcher: Please provide your agency with the information about your project and have your agency contact complete this form.

Agency: Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow this study to take place at your agency. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

<table>
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General Information Statement about the study:

I am conducting a study of the motivational factors within the college preparatory program, AVID. Based on a review of the literature, AVID students overcome many barriers to access and attend college. By undertaking this investigation, I hope to provide educational leaders and teachers a better understanding of what motivates disadvantaged students in a high school designed for White, middle-class students.

Your agency is invited to participate in this research. The agency was selected as a host for this study because:

The AVID program at Lakeville South High School has been in existence for four years. The 2012 graduates successfully participated four years in the AVID program.

Study is being conducted by: Dana Cronin
Research Advisor (if applicable): Dr. Sarah Noonan
Department Affiliation: Leadership and Policy Administration

**Background Information**

The purpose of the study is:

To explore the motivational factors that exists in the AVID program

**Procedures**

Study participants will be asked to do the following:

*State specifically what the subjects will be doing, including if they will be performing any tasks. Include any information about assignment to study groups, length of time for participation, frequency of procedures, audio taping, etc.*

Participate in one-hour interview. The interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will be interviewed in a private, mutually agreed upon location.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the study**

The risks involved for subjects participating in the study are:

There are potential risks/or discomforts anticipated with this study. For the teacher interview, I will ask questions related to teaching philosophy, motivations, training, and other factors that influence

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APPENDIX B

Agency Consent Form

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Participate in one-hour interview. The interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will be interviewed in a private, mutually agreed upon location.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the study**

The risks involved for subjects participating in the study are:

There are potential risks/or discomforts anticipated with this study. For the teacher interview, I will ask questions related to teaching philosophy, motivations, training, and other factors that influence
teacher’s decisions and daily work. For the student interview, I will ask questions related to sensitive issues such as personal values, experiences in school, parent’s view of education and personal views of education. For the AVID administrator, I will ask questions related to personal values, educational philosophy, and leadership difficulties. At any time and for any reason during the interview participants may request a break. A second potential risk relates to breaches in confidentiality. Procedures will be taken to reduce the risk of confidentiality breaches. See confidentiality statements later in this document.

The direct benefits the agency will receive for allowing the study are:

Benefits associated with participating include the opportunity to discuss their experience. They may also experience intrinsic value by contributing to a study that will inform educational leaders who influence the professional development of educators. There is no direct benefit for participating in this study.

**Compensation**
Details of compensation (if and when disbursement will occur and conditions of compensation) include:

Participants will receive not receive compensation.

**Confidentiality**
The records of this study will be kept confidential. The types of records, who will have access to records and when they will be destroyed as a result of this study include:

**Voluntary Nature**
Allowing the study to be conducted at your agency is entirely voluntary. By agreeing to allow the study, you confirm that you understand the nature of the study and who the participants will be and their roles. You understand the study methods and that the researcher will not proceed with the study until receiving approval from the UST Institutional Review Board. If this study is intended to be published, you agree to that. You understand the risks and benefits to your organization.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The decision whether or not to participate will not affect current or future relations with the researcher, Lakeville Area Public Schools or the University of St. Thomas. Participants are free to withdraw at any time. If participants decide to withdraw data collected will not be used or retained. Participants will also be given the option to pass on answering any interview questions.

Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will NOT be used in the study.

**Contacts and Questions**
You may contact any of the resources listed below with questions or concerns about the study.

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<tr>
<td>Research Advisor phone</td>
<td>651-962-4897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UST IRB Office</td>
<td>651.962.5341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statement of Consent**
I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I consent to allow the study to be conducted at the agency I represent. By checking the electronic signature box, I
am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I give my full consent.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of Agency Representative</th>
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Print Name of Agency Representative

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<td>☐ Electronic signature*</td>
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Print Name of Researcher

*Electronic signatures certify that:

The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the policies on research involving participants of the University of St. Thomas and will safeguard the rights, dignity and privacy of all participants.

- The information provided in this form is true and accurate.
- The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior approval from the UST IRB office for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
- Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported in writing to the UST IRB office and to the subjects.
- The research will not be initiated and subjects cannot be recruited until final approval is granted.
Dear (name of potential participant),

For the past four years, I have trained and worked with the AVID program. That experience has inspired a research study to better understand how the AVID program facilitates the learning and future college aspirations of high school AVID students. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Based on a review of the literature, AVID students overcome many barriers to access and attend college. By undertaking this investigation, I hope to provide educational leaders and teachers a better understanding of what motivates disadvantaged students in a high school designed for White, middle-class students.

Participation is voluntary and involves one in-depth interview that will last approximately 60 minutes and will occur in the next 3 months. Please note that all information you share will be held in strict confidence, and that pseudonyms will be used for all names and locations so that any published results will be completely anonymous. Should you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher, the school district or the University of St. Thomas.

There are several potential risks anticipated with this study. I will ask you questions related to your experience with AVID, motivations, and other factors that influence your desire to attend college. Answering these questions may evoke feelings that will be uncomfortable. At any time and for any reason during the interview you may request a break. A second potential risk relates to breaches in confidentiality. In an effort to ensure confidentiality, procedural safeguards will be put in place as noted in the formal consent. The benefits associated with your participation include the opportunity to discuss your experience and to contribute to a study that will help inform policy makers and educational leaders.

Prior to participating in the study, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board has approved this study. Please contact me if you are interested in participating in this study or if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dana Cronin
cron9008@stthomas.edu
612-306-7454
APPENDIX D

Participation Script Describing the Study

Thank you for considering volunteering for this study. The purpose of this study is to explore the motivational factors existing in the AVID program. I am a doctoral candidate with the University of St Thomas applying this research study to a doctorate degree in educational leadership (Ed.D.). Participant interviews will become an integral part of an opportunity to determine how AVID students overcome many barriers to access and attend college. By undertaking this investigation, I hope to provide educational leaders and teachers a better understanding of what motivates disadvantaged students in a high school designed for White, middle-class students.

The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes. We will meet in a private, mutually agreed upon location. The interviews will be documented via audio recording and observation notes. You may continue with the interview responses if you need extra time and desire to continue. Results of the interviews will be analyzed to determine commonalities of responses.

I will provide you a copy of the completed research study along with personal contact information as a thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. Signed permission from district administration will be available for your review.
### CONSENT FORM

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

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**General Information Statement about the study:**

I am conducting a study of the motivational factors within the college preparatory program, AVID. Based on a review of the literature, AVID students overcome many barriers to access and attend college. By undertaking this investigation, I hope to provide educational leaders and teachers a better understanding of what motivates disadvantaged students in a high school designed for White, middle-class students.

You are invited to participate in this research.

You were selected as a possible participant for this study because:

- You graduated and successfully completed the AVID program.
- You taught four years of the same cohort AVID class.
- You supervised the AVID program for four years.

**Study is being conducted by:** Dana Cronin

**Research Advisor (if applicable):** Dr. Sarah Noonan

**Department Affiliation:** Leadership and Policy Administration

**Background Information**

The purpose of the study is:

To explore the motivational factors that exists in the AVID program.

**Procedures**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

State specifically what the subjects will be doing, including if they will be performing any tasks. Include any information about assignment to study groups, length of time for participation, frequency of procedures, audio taping, etc.

Participate in an in-depth interview. The interview will be audio recorded and will last approximately 60 minutes. Participants will be interviewed in a private, mutually agreed upon location.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the study**

The risks involved for participating in the study are:
There are potential risks/or discomforts anticipated with this study. For the teacher interview, I will ask questions related to teaching philosophy, motivations, training, and other factors that influence teacher’s decisions and daily work. For the student interview, I will ask questions related to sensitive issues such as personal values, experiences in school, parent’s view of education and personal views of education. For the AVID administrator, I will ask questions related to personal values, educational philosophy, and leadership difficulties. At any time and for any reason during the interview participants my request a break. A second potential risk relates to breaches in confidentiality. Procedures will be taken to reduce the risk of confidentiality breaches.

The direct benefits you will receive from participating in the study are:

Benefits associated with participating include the opportunity to discuss their experience. They may also experience intrinsic value by contributing to a study that will inform educational leaders who influence the professional development of educators. There is no direct benefit for participating in this study.

Compensation
Details of compensation (if and when disbursement will occur and conditions of compensation) include:

Note: In the event that this research activity results in an injury, treatment will be available, including first aid, emergency treatment and follow-up care as needed. Payment for any such treatment must be provided by you or your third party payer if any (such as health insurance, Medicare, etc.).

Participants will not receive compensation.

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report published, information will not be provided that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records, who will have access to records and when they will be destroyed as a result of this study include:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report published, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify participants in any way. The types of records I will create include intake forms, recordings of the interviews, transcriptions of the interview content, and documents or software programs with content from the interviews that will be used for analysis. The recording devices containing audio from the interviews will be stored in locked file cabinet. The recordings will be downloaded to my home office computer which is password secured. Transcripts from the recordings and other study documents (consent forms, memos/field notes), will only be viewed by my transcriptionist, my chair, and myself. All audio recordings, transcribed data and memos/field notes, consent forms and any other confidential data will be deleted and/or destroyed within six months of my successful defense of my dissertation. Intake forms or researcher’s notes will be compiled with interview transcriptions using pseudonyms and the original forms or notes will be destroyed within six months after my successful defense of my dissertation. Transcriptions and additional documents will contain only pseudonyms and will be stored on my personal computer, my personal laptop and external hard drive which are all password secured. All confidential audio recordings will be deleted within six months of my successful defense of my dissertation. All confidential transcribed data, consent forms, and memos/field notes will be deleted from both my desktop and laptop computers or shredded within six months of my successful defense of my dissertation.

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with any cooperating agencies or institutions or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until the
You are also free to skip any questions that may be asked unless there is an exception(s) to this rule listed below with its rationale for the exception(s).

Participation in this study is voluntary. The decision whether or not to participate will not affect current or future relations with the researcher, Lakeville Area Public Schools or the University of St. Thomas. Participants are free to withdraw at any time. If participants decide to withdraw, data collected will not be used or retained. Participants will also be given the option to pass on answering any interview questions.

Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will NOT be used in the study.

**Contacts and Questions**
You may contact any of the resources listed below with questions or concerns about the study.

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**Statement of Consent**
I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I am at least 18 years old. I consent to participate in the study. By checking the electronic signature box, I am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I give my full consent to participate in the study.

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<th>Signature of Study Participant</th>
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*Electronic signatures certify that:

- The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the policies on research involving participants of the University of St. Thomas and will safeguard the rights, dignity and privacy of all participants.
- The information provided in this form is true and accurate.
- The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior approval from the UST IRB office for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
- Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported in writing to the UST IRB office and to the subjects.
- The research will not be initiated and subjects cannot be recruited until final approval is granted.
APPENDIX F

Intake Form

PERSONAL

Name:
Age:
Gender:

Contact Preferences
Phone:
Email:

Teachers/Administrators only:
Degree/s:

Licensures:

Additional certification/training relevant to your AVID teaching position:

Number of years as an AVID teacher/administrator:

Number of students on your AVID class:

Total number of years teaching:

Student only:
Number of years in AVID program:

College currently attending:
APPENDIX G

Questions to Clarify Participant Understanding

1. What do you understand this study to be about?

2. What is your understanding of how information will be kept confidential?

3. What are the risks of participation?

4. What are your options if you feel uncomfortable answering a question?

5. What can you do if you feel uncomfortable about participating in the study?
APPENDIX H

Interview Questions

Teacher interview questions:

1. What is your current teaching assignment?

2. What, if anything, did you know about AVID before you taught it?

3. How did it come about that you were going to teach AVID?

4. What were your initial thoughts or feelings?

5. Tell me about your experience at your first AVID summer institute.

6. What happened next?

7. What do you think are the most important ways to support AVID students and how did you discover or create them?

8. Tell me about how you learned to handle the different issues or circumstances of the AVID students?

9. How has teaching AVID affected how you teach your other core curriculum classes?

10. Tell me about how your pedagogy has changed since you became an AVID teacher.

11. The AVID training is intense and prescribed. Tell me about your strengths that you discovered or developed through the AVID program.

12. What changes, either positive or negative, have occurred in your life since you started to teach AVID?

13. Tell me how you would describe the person you are now. What most contributed to this change or continuity?
14. What do you most value about yourself as a teacher now?

15. What do others most value in you?

16. After having taught AVID for __ years, what advice would you give to someone who is just starting to teach AVID?

17. What do you think are the most important ways to teach AVID students? How did you discover these ways?

18. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand about an AVID teacher and the pedagogy of AVID?

Student interview questions:

1. Tell me about how you came to be in the AVID program?

2. When did you first think about going to college? What was that like?

3. Who, if anyone, influenced your actions?

4. How would you describe how you viewed going to college before you joined AVID?

5. Tell me how you would describe the person you are now as compared to before the AVID program. What most contributed to this change or continuity?

6. As you look back on middle or high school, are there any events that stand out in your mind in regards to college readiness?

7. Before joining AVID, can you identify any barriers to attending college in your life? What barriers still existed after joining AVID?

8. Could you describe the most important lessons you learned through the AVID program?

9. What helps you manage any problems in school that may occur? What are those problems?

10. Who or what has been the most helpful to you during high school?
11. Where do you see yourself in two years? Five years? Ten years?

12. What do you think are the most important ways to be successful? How did you discover these?

13. How have you grown as a person since graduating high school?

14. What advice would you give a high school student who was just told they could not go to college?

15. Is there anything else about the AVID program I should understand better?

Administrator interview questions:

1. What was your responsibility with the AVID program over the last four years?

2. What, if anything, did you know about AVID before you went to the summer institute?

3. What were your initial thoughts or feelings?

4. Tell me about the key features of AVID.

5. What features are worthwhile? Which are not?

6. What barriers do the AVID students have to overcome to be college-ready?

7. What do you think are the most important ways to support AVID teachers and students?

8. What is the most effective aspect of the teacher’s pedagogy in the AVID program?

9. What have you learned about your assumptions of disadvantaged students?

10. What do you most value about the AVID program?

11. After having supervised AVID for 4 years, what advice would you give to someone who is just starting an AVID program?

12. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand about an AVID teacher and the pedagogy of AVID?
APPENDIX I

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

**Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement**

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

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**Agreement**

I agree to transcribe data for this study.

I agree that I will:

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the researcher who is the primary investigator of this study.

2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while in my possession. This includes:
   - using closed headphones when transcribing audio taped interviews
   - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files
   - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer
   - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet
   - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data

3. Give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks.

4. Erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

**Statement of Consent**

By checking the electronic signature box, I am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I agree to the terms listed above.

**Signature of Transcriber**

☐ Check to sign electronically

Date

Print Name of Transcriber

**Signature of Researcher**

☐ Check to sign electronically*

Date

Print Name of Researcher

Dana Cronin

*Electronic signatures certify that::
The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the polities on research involving participants of the University of St. Thomas and will safeguard the rights, dignity and privacy of all participants.

- The information provided in this form is true and accurate.
- The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior approval from the UST IRB office for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
- Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported in writing to the UST IRB office and to the subjects.
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