



From School Improvement Status to Success:

Holbrook Junior High's Path to College and Career Readiness



Discover How Holbrook Junior High School Created a College- and Career-Ready Environment for Every Student

Holbrook Junior High School educators successfully transformed their academic landscape, shifting to a comprehensive, student-centered learning environment. This success story highlights how Holbrook Junior High School's partnership with AVID helped align staff, so they could approach teaching and learning cohesively and collaboratively.

This new approach led to the campus-wide implementation of instructional strategies that enhanced rigor, opportunity knowledge, and academic growth among Holbrook Junior High School students.

The Challenge: Exit School Improvement Status

Holbrook Junior High School (JHS) is located in northern Arizona, roughly 3 hours from Phoenix. Holbrook Unified School District #3 spans over 1,500 square miles and sits within the Navajo Nation region.

Holbrook JHS has a population of 364 students, with 56% identifying as Native American and 20% identifying as Hispanic¹. Many students live on the Navajo Reservation, and it takes some students 4 hours to travel to and from school each day. One hundred percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In the 2019–2020 school year, Holbrook JHS was assigned a D rating from the Arizona Department of Education and put on a School Improvement Plan based on factors such as state test scores and attendance rates. District and school leadership recognized they needed to make changes to the way the school functioned, as not all staff were moving in the same direction with common language and strategies.

Having been on a School Improvement Plan before, school staff had tried various programs and strategies, which helped temporarily but did not result in profound and lasting systems-level change. As a result, the school continued to fall back into school improvement status over time.



“Sixteen years ago, we were in school improvement, just like we were last year or the last few years. We never seemed to get out of it, like we’d just get up high enough, and then we’d go back. It seemed like for the longest time, every single year, we implemented something different.”

— Elizabeth Baloo, Teacher

¹ <https://azreportcards.azed.gov/schools/detail/5609>

Holbrook JHS needed a lasting way to exit school improvement status. They partnered with AVID with three main goals in mind:

- 1 Align staff's thinking and actions to get them working toward the same goal.
- 2 Transition to student-centered learning.
- 3 Create rigorous learning experiences for every student.

The Solution: Aligning for Student and Educator Success

In the 2019–2020 school year, district leadership asked educator Cheri Grau to help lead AVID implementation at Holbrook JHS to address the school's improvement goals. The district included AVID in their Integrated Action Plan to help them navigate a pathway out of school improvement status. The plan outlined utilizing AVID strategies such as WICOR® (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading) in every classroom to support student success.

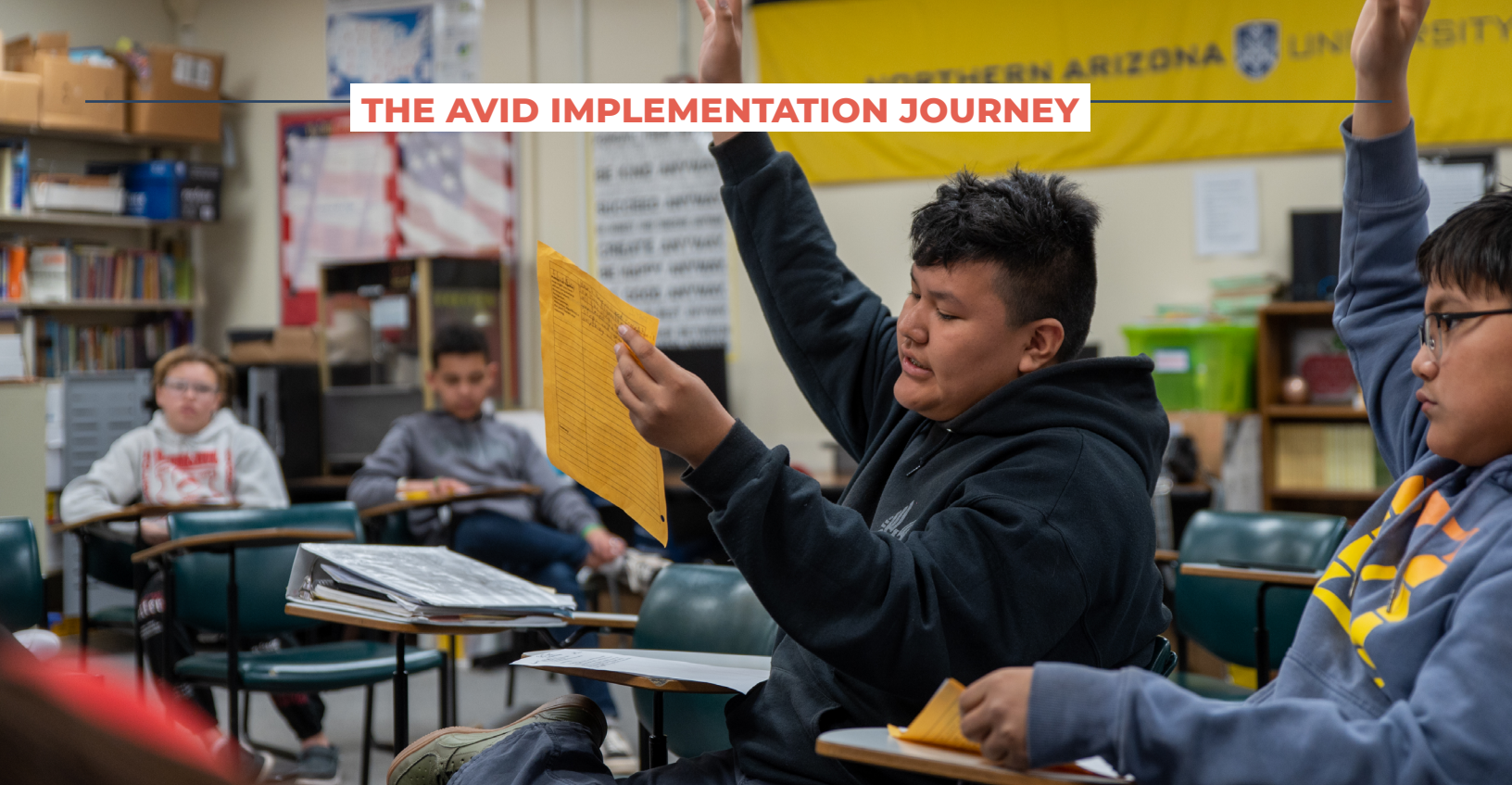
The following year, the superintendent invited Cheri to step into the principal role at Holbrook JHS and continue to lead the school in implementing their AVID College and Career Readiness System. Cheri found that approaching implementation incrementally, versus trying to implement every component at once, made the process manageable and easier for staff to embrace. She started with a focus on professional learning and selected several core AVID strategies for teachers to implement in classrooms. From there, implementation took off, and she kept it going by providing ongoing support and fostering continuous improvement, assessing impact by directly interacting with and observing teachers and students.



“...Holbrook Junior High successfully came out of School Improvement Plan, and we know that is because of AVID and using AVID and all of the strategies in the classroom with all the students, schoolwide from PE all the way down to math classes and English classes.”

— Cheri Grau, Principal

THE AVID IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY



Engaging Educators in AVID Professional Development

To begin the AVID implementation journey, **a group of 6th grade teachers from Holbrook JHS attended AVID Summer Institute, AVID's immersive 3-day learning experience**, and engaged in Communities of Practice in their content areas, such as math, English language arts, and history/social science. These educators learned from their peers and were equipped with new strategies and tools to implement in their classrooms.

Leadership also attended Summer Institute that year; Holbrook JHS's AVID Site Coordinator, Principal Grau, and the district superintendent learned how to successfully implement components of the [**AVID College and Career Readiness Framework**](#), which focuses on transforming adult actions, the learning environment, and organizational structures at the school and district levels to increase equity and access to what students need to successfully engage in a future of possibility.

During the school year, Cheri complemented AVID-facilitated professional development with in-house professional development focused on AVID strategies. She utilized the AVID Professional Learning Module resources included with AVID membership—each of which include a syllabus, agenda, PowerPoint, and handouts—to facilitate 90-minute professional learning sessions on the strategies she wanted to see students and educators utilizing in classrooms across the campus.

After the first year of AVID implementation, Holbrook JHS educators continued to engage in both in-house and AVID-facilitated professional development to sustain and further the work.

Sharing Instructional Strategies to Implement in Each Classroom

After attending these professional development sessions and events, Cheri expected educators to start implementing the following AVID strategies in their classrooms: focused note-taking, binders, organization, and using essential questions to guide their thinking. AVID supported Holbrook JHS staff in bringing new strategies, ideas, and a different way of viewing content from a student's perspective.



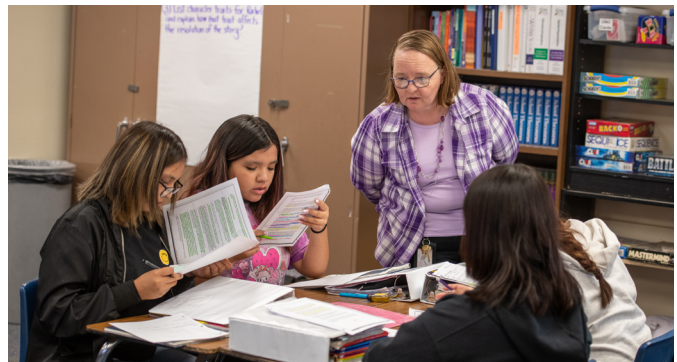
One of the ways Cheri accelerated the use of AVID's student-centered strategies in the classroom was through [AVID STEM Connections®](#).

These hands-on STEM lessons are rooted in AVID methodology and designed for use across all content areas. Using these lessons exposed Holbrook JHS students to areas critical to their success in the

twenty-first century and provided educators with ready-to-use, tangible ways to apply the AVID strategies they learned in professional learning sessions.

Another critical element of Holbrook JHS's success in implementing AVID strategies in each classroom was communicating expectations and encouraging students.

The goal was to get teachers out of their comfort zone, which would help them shift from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning.



Cheri started to include AVID strategies in the weekly staff newsletter for teachers to try in their classrooms, along with a connection to AVID resources to support those strategies. They focused on one strategy for 2 weeks at a time. By gradually implementing components of AVID, teachers didn't become overwhelmed, and the adoption of AVID strategies felt helpful rather than "another thing to do."

Using these strategies across classrooms supported teachers in holding every student to the same high expectations. Students were expected to use AVID strategies to process their learning. Once students familiarized themselves with the strategies, teachers didn't have to model "how to learn/engage." Rather, they focused on content and higher-order skill building, which maximized instructional time.

Evaluating Strategy Implementation Progress and Providing Support

Principal Cheri Grau conducted instructional learning walks to assess the effectiveness of AVID implementation. She also created a Google Form containing different components of AVID instructional methodology that she could use to gauge how her team was doing as they worked to create a rigorous yet supportive learning environment where students gain knowledge of their opportunities and develop the agency required to pursue those opportunities. She gathered data to determine patterns, see where teachers showed strength, and learn their struggles. Cheri looked to the teachers and students to measure progress.

After gathering this data, Cheri provided support via staff meetings based on the observations. In addition, each teacher had a “buddy” with whom they compared strategies and shared what was and was not working. These structures helped Holbrook JHS educators to align their work and support each other in achieving common goals—critical components of Collective Educator Agency, a concept from the AVID College and Career Readiness Framework that emphasizes educators taking intentional actions based on shared beliefs and trust that, together, they can increase opportunity and measurable success for all students and each other.

“For me, the biggest thing when I go in and visit classrooms is not so much what the teachers are doing, but what the students are doing,” Cheri said.

“I like to talk to the kids; ask them what they’re doing, what they’re learning—why they’re doing it.”



Outcomes: From “Needs Improvement” to Exponential Growth and Empowerment

Partnering with AVID brought positive change to Holbrook JHS—for students, teachers, and the school.

As a result of this partnership, the Holbrook JHS community achieved the following outcomes:

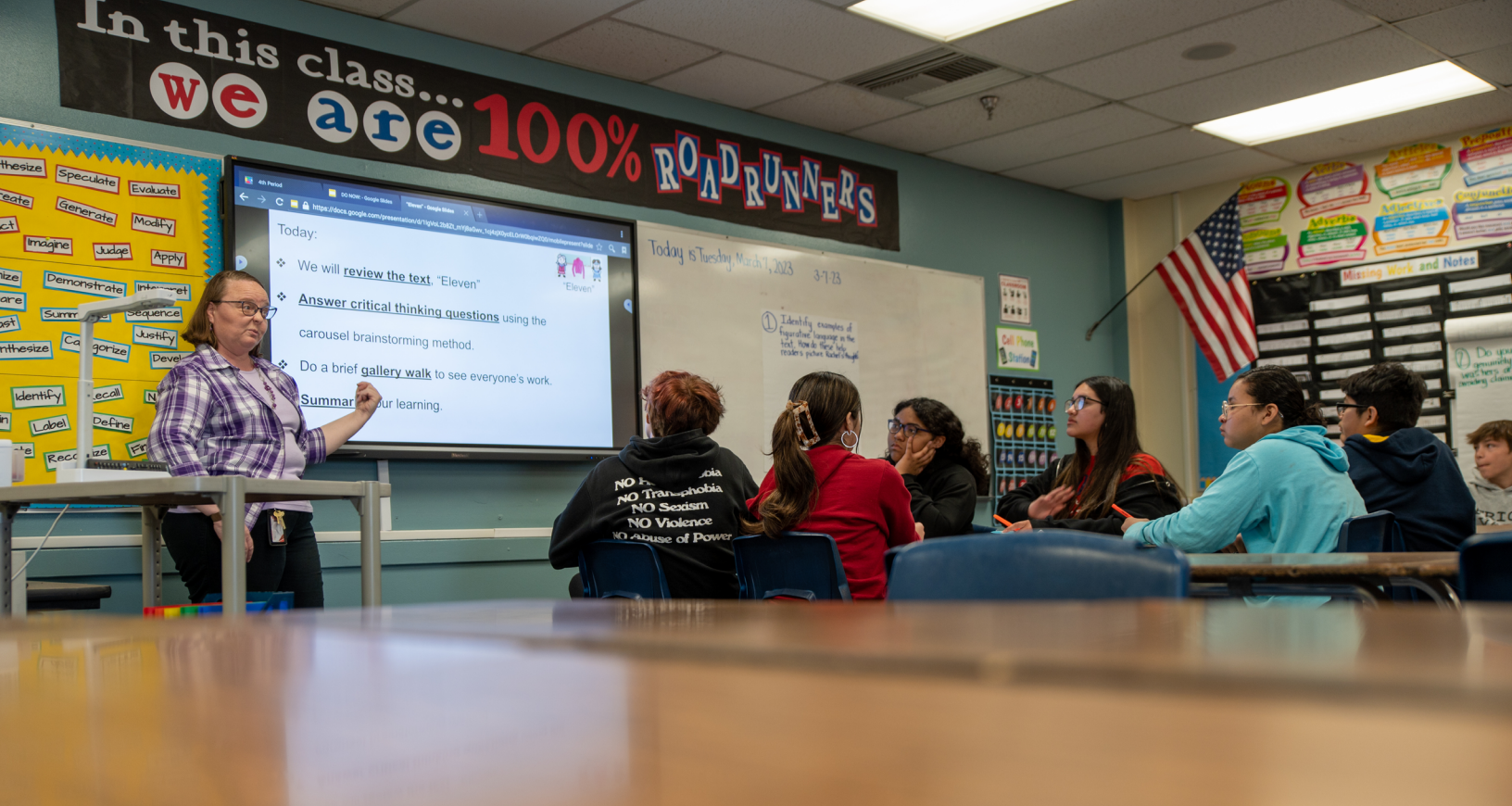
Rapid and Significant Academic Growth

In the 2022–2023 school year, Holbrook JHS moved out of school improvement status, taking their rating from a low D to 0.2 points away from a B. In the past, they had been averaging 10/50 growth points; in the 2022–2023 school year, they achieved 45/50.

These are impressive results, but even more encouraging is the confidence Holbrook JHS educators have that this change will be lasting. While previous interventions were temporary, AVID has helped educators address the root causes of the challenge in a way that has altered school culture and systems.

Increased Student Engagement and Agency

- ✓ AVID strategies helped teachers move from a lecture-style learning environment to one where trusting relationships were established between adults and students, and learning was placed in the students' hands.
- ✓ Classrooms are now characterized by collaboration and group work among students. In observing classrooms, Principal Grau noticed that teachers weren't answering their own questions anymore—students were more engaged and participating.
- ✓ For the first time, students looked up their grades and devised a plan of action for success. They were thinking critically and asking questions to ensure they understood the content and had the knowledge to complete assignments.
- ✓ In addition, students were now talking about what they were learning, why it was important, and how what they were learning would help them in the future.



Improved Educational Equity

- ✓ AVID provided Holbrook JHS educators with strategies for creating a schoolwide learning environment that engages all students in rigor with support so that high expectations are set for all and every student has the opportunity to learn and achieve. It is no coincidence that this focus on deeper learning—which promotes critical inquiry and thinking—was accompanied by significant academic growth. The impact is apparent in the growth that occurred among Holbrook JHS students, evidenced by Holbrook JHS achieving 45/50 growth points in the 2022–2023 school year².
- ✓ AVID-trained educators at Holbrook JHS were able to equip students with a consistent approach to “doing school” so that students and teachers alike could focus on deeper learning in content and skill-building.
- ✓ Plus, with an intentional focus on helping students develop “opportunity knowledge,” students began to research and understand opportunities, set goals, and take steps to achieve them. Students are now making connections between the skills they are learning and what they can do with those skills after graduation. With exposure to different postsecondary educational opportunities and careers, students are starting to talk about careers and opportunities they had not considered.

² <https://azreportcards.azed.gov/schools/detail/5609> The Arizona Department of Education determines how many growth points a school has earned “by how individual students perform compared to their previous scoring history and if they are on target to continuously improve or stay within the highest rankings of proficiency.”

Conclusion

During the 2019–2020 academic year, Holbrook JHS faced a significant challenge as it received a D rating from the Arizona Department of Education, necessitating the implementation of a School Improvement Plan.



Determined to spark change, the dedicated staff at Holbrook JHS fully committed themselves to engage in comprehensive AVID professional development, integrating AVID strategies into every classroom, and continuously assessing and advancing their progress.



As a result of their unwavering efforts, not only did Holbrook JHS successfully emerge from the school improvement status, but a profound transformation occurred in the way educators approached teaching and learning.



The school underwent a fundamental shift from a teacher-centered learning approach to one that prioritized student-centered learning, thereby empowering students with enhanced agency, a broader range of opportunities, expanded knowledge, and improved academic readiness.



Ready to **activate**
a culture of success
at your school or district?



Watch Holbrook Junior High's story
and connect with AVID today!



[AVID.org](https://www.avid.org)