



Leading for Change: How San Marino Elementary School Enhanced Teaching and Learning Through AVID Implementation



Discover How San Marino Elementary Enhanced Student and Educator Excellence

San Marino Elementary School's implementation of AVID's College and Career Readiness System has raised the bar for student and educator success in every classroom. This success story delves into how AVID helped inspire elevated teaching and learning methods, leading to site-wide success and a supportive learning community. By examining critical success factors, this study provides valuable insights for schools looking to implement AVID on their own campuses.

The Challenge: Enhance Teaching and Learning Across the Campus

San Marino Elementary, located in the suburbs of Buena Park, California, is comprised of more than 500 Kindergarten through 6th grade students—60% of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. San Marino is rich in diversity, with enrollment reflecting 75% students of color and 28% English Language Learners.¹ San Marino's principal Dr. Omaira Lee set ambitious education goals when she stepped into her role in 2016. Driven by a desire to enhance academic performance and set the school up for ongoing success, she aimed to improve the educational experience for both students and educators. After a careful assessment of San Marino's current state, she determined two goals:

- 1 Provide teachers with a way to challenge themselves and enhance their teaching practices.
- 2 Ensure high quality, rigorous instruction was present in every classroom.

With a renewed perspective and clear goals top-of-mind, Dr. Lee embarked on a mission to identify solutions that would achieve both objectives and position her staff and students for a successful future.



"When I first got to my school, my teachers needed something to hold on to, something to thrive for, something that was going to make them more successful than they already were, and they attached to AVID. I also attached to AVID."

– Dr. Omaira Lee, Principal



The Solution: Align the Work and Build Relational Capacity

Dr. Lee was familiar with AVID, a college and career readiness system, from previous experiences in her career and set out to learn more by visiting local schools implementing AVID. She included staff in this process as well, understanding the value of their input and support.

With staff “all-in” to partner with AVID, they began implementation in 2017.

AVID was a vehicle for change and provided resources to help administrators and teachers alike hit the ground running as they embarked on their effort to enhance teaching practices and ensure rigorous instruction.

One of these resources was access to world-class professional development through AVID Summer Institute.

During these sessions, Dr. Lee and San Marino educators discovered the actions AVID has identified as critical for educators to take in order to promote college and career readiness within their school:

- **Insist on Rigor** — Educators provide learning experiences in which every student is challenged, engaged, and develops a greater ownership of their learning through increasingly complex levels of understanding.
- **Break Down Barriers** — Educators actively identify and work to eliminate structural and perceptual barriers that limit students’ access to relevant and challenging learning opportunities.
- **Align the Work** — Educators increasingly align policies, practices, and beliefs to the shared vision of all students succeeding in college, career, and life.
- **Advocate for Students** — Educators extend social, emotional, and academic support to students and challenge policies, practices, or beliefs that limit potential.

These actions supported San Marino’s goal of ensuring teachers are challenged and enhancing their teaching practices by providing a framework they could align around and pursue collectively. San Marino teachers—new and veteran alike—were committed to continuing their learning and enhancing their practice and found that their impact would be greater by working together.

Collective Educator Agency—where educators on a campus take intentional actions based on shared beliefs and trust that, together, they can increase opportunity and measurable success for all students and each other.

“Make sure it’s a shared vision,” advised Dr. Lee, “And make sure you distribute your leadership so that everybody has a say and everybody is participatory in where you want the school to go.”

Aligning the Work

In this vein, San Marino educators focused heavily on the key action of Aligning the Work, supporting each other in the schoolwide implementation of a core set of five instructional methods informed by AVID strategies and other best practices. This customized approach was possible because AVID is designed to flexibly integrate with existing initiatives and additional instructional resources to meet schools' unique needs.

San Marino Elementary's Five Instructional Strategies

1. Stand and Deliver

When teachers ask a question, students are required to stand up and answer that question. This action builds academic discourse and lets students know what they are contributing is important.

2. Random Selection

Teachers draw a stick, ping pong ball, etc. with a student's name to determine who they will call on. This strategy reminds students that you never know when you'll be called on, so it's important to pay attention and stay engaged.

3. Turn and Talk (Partner A /Partner B)

Students pair up and take turns listening and talking to one another. The strategy supports listening skills and focusing on what the other person has to say.

4. White Boards

Each student has a personal white board they write their answer on so the teacher can see several responses with a quick glance. It allows teachers to check for understanding.

5. Checking for Understanding

This strategy consists of utilizing roughly 10 minutes to talk, and two minutes to check for understanding.

Critical to a successful implementation of these strategies across every classroom, from kindergarten through sixth grade, was not only direction and support from Dr. Lee as principal, but also information sharing and collaboration among educators.

"The staff here is very open to saying 'What's new?', 'What could I try?', 'How could I be better?'" shared Kris Schmidt, Instructional Coach.

Building Relational Capacity

Underlying all of the components in AVID's College and Career Readiness system is the concept of relational capacity – the connection among individuals that develops over time when interactions are built on respect, trust, and authenticity. Dr. Lee recognized that for this connection to exist among students, among educators, and in their interactions with each other, it must first be built between administrators and educators.

...The kids aren't gonna learn if you don't care, but the teachers aren't gonna learn if I don't care, as the administrator.

– Dr. Omaira Lee, Principal

“...As administrators, we have so many things to do on our list, and we're checking the boxes, but relationship building [must occur] all the time,” shared Dr. Lee. When Dr. Lee first came to San Marino Elementary, she dedicated time to getting to know the teachers by talking with them and obtained a sense of the school culture by visiting classrooms. She realized that in order to build trust, your staff needs to believe in you. By being accountable, following through on her commitments, and extending support to teachers, she strengthened their trust in her.

With this emphasis, it made it natural for teachers to embrace AVID's practical approaches for building relational capacity with each other and with students – and to integrate these approaches into instruction, establishing a culture in which both students and educators are more likely to take risks, fail without fear, and take advantage of the opportunity to learn in the most teachable moments.



The Outcomes: Empowered Educators and Students

The investment San Marino leadership and staff made in implementing AVID resulted in a positive school culture where students and educators are learning the tools needed to be successful, all while being in a supportive environment. Below are a few notable outcomes.

San Marino is Providing Students with the Tools Needed to Learn

Learning strategies play a key role in helping students grasp the information they are taught. Whether it is using a graphic organizer to help them process new content, or notetaking skills to put the content into their own words, these strategies empower students to engage with their learning and gain a deeper understanding of the concepts being taught. According to the 2021–22 Parent and Community Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) survey, “97% of San Marino students believe that their school provides them with the resources that they need to learn.” “I think AVID made me use more academic words,” shared (Xian, 6th grade student), “...I’ve gotten better at notetaking.”

“I think AVID has helped me using the Costa’s Levels of Thinking,” shared 6th grader Jaxon. “I think that has clicked something in my brain, and I feel like that has helped me think of the problems I want to solve and the person I want to be when I grow up.”

San Marino Is Preparing Students for Their Futures, and They Are Excited

San Marino students have expressed eagerness for what lies ahead in middle school and beyond, and are thinking about their future careers, and the skills they would need for those careers. Parents are also confident in the school’s ability to prepare students for the future. Data shows that 97% of San Marino parents “believe that the school will prepare their child/children for their future plans.”²

Students have Positive Relationships with their Teachers

Student-teacher dynamics play a significant role in learning experiences for every student, with positive interactions between students and teachers contributing to a nurturing classroom environment. Data from the

2021–22 California Healthy Kids Survey, which is administered to 5th graders, shows that at San Marino, 97% of students felt “teachers treat students fairly most/all of the time.

Another factor that impacts a student’s learning experience is their perception of how their teachers view their potential. According to the 2021–22 Parent and Community LCAP survey, “92% of San Marino students” and

“97% of San Marino parents believe that teachers have high expectations for them to learn.”

“I really like the teachers,” shared 6th grader Aimee, “They really try and help you feel comfortable in the class...They also try and make the subjects really fun and not boring, which helps a lot with the learning.”

Students are Academically Motivated and Engaged

Motivation and engagement play a significant role in student

performance. These two factors rank high among San Marino students. According to the 2021–22 CA Healthy Kids Survey, at San Marino, 92% of 5th grade females and 88% of 5th grade males surveyed report having academic motivation. Similarly, the survey showed that 92% of students surveyed work harder when they get a bad grade all/most of the time, demonstrating motivation, grit, and a growth mindset.

Parents also feel their students are engaged. Data demonstrates that “99% of San Marino parents believe that their child/children are engaged in classroom instruction and their work.”³

“I like Cornell Notes and just notes in general because they help out with learning, they help out with tests,” shared Angel, “It’s in my own words, so I understand it.”

Conclusion

San Marino Elementary was in need of a way to help educators hone their skillset and ability to provide rigorous instruction, and help students develop critical skills to support them in elementary school and beyond.



In implementing AVID, San Marino staff were provided with a support system that helped transform instruction and build trust across the campus.



These changes resulted in a culture on campus where both students and educators felt connected and supported and were motivated, engaged, and equipped with skills needed to be successful now and in the future.



Through San Marino's continued partnership with AVID, the school persists in expanding possibilities for both educators and students every day.

¹ https://www.cesd.k12.ca.us/pdfs/School%20Accountability%20Report%20Card%20Files//2021%20-%202022/2021_School_Accountability_Report_Card_San_Marino_Elementary_School_20220124.pdf

² 2021-22 Parent and Community LCAP survey

³ 2021-22 Parent and Community LCAP survey



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