



# **Breaking Barriers:** How Santiago High School Boosted College Eligibility by Over 30 Percentage Points







## Learn How Santiago High School Created a Culture of College and Career Readiness for Every Student

Santiago High School leaders and educators successfully partnered with AVID to create a culture of college and career readiness for every student. This success story highlights how, over time, Santiago High School increased college eligibility of their students by more than 30 percentage points.

The actions Santiago High School staff took, such as engaging in AVID professional development, utilizing AVID strategies schoolwide, and focusing on building relationships, resulted in positive changes for students and staff and inspired every school in the district to implement AVID.



### The Challenge: A Need for Every Student to Be College- and Career-Ready

Santiago High School, located in Garden Grove, between the cities of Anaheim and Santa Ana in Southern California, is home to a student body of more than 97% of students of color—83% of whom are Hispanic or Latino.<sup>1</sup> **More than twenty years ago, leaders and educators at Santiago High School were facing a critical challenge—only 19% of Santiago students were eligible for California’s public universities, as evidenced by pass rates on required “A-G” college preparatory courses. Additionally, Advanced Placement class enrollment did not reflect Santiago’s entire student population.**

A system and culture needed to be established to facilitate the success of every student and equip them for postsecondary opportunities. Furthermore, it was crucial to maintain a commitment to continuous growth and improvement, even after observing initial progress, as closing opportunity gaps requires ongoing growth and continuous improvement.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ggusd.us/schools/school-accountability-report/>

## The Solution: Enhancing Opportunity Knowledge and Access to Rigor Through AVID

In the early 2000s, Santiago High School received grant funding to support college and career readiness efforts. Wanting to explore their options, Santiago's leadership team took a group of staff to a nearby high school that had effectively implemented AVID, a systematic approach to positively impacting every student's learning and readiness to succeed.



Santiago's team was inspired by the students at the neighboring high school and decided to implement AVID in 2002 to address the root causes of opportunity gaps at their school.

**Santiago's staff began implementing the AVID Elective with a cohort of 56 freshmen and sophomores.** Over time, teachers across the campus began to recognize AVID students for their academic aptitude. More teachers began to broaden their perspectives on who could be enrolled in and thrive in advanced classes. Additionally, the school began to utilize AVID strategies schoolwide—not just in the AVID Elective class—enhancing rigor across the campus.

### Making Professional Development a Priority

Santiago leadership prioritized AVID professional development to help teachers understand how to practically apply AVID strategies, which emphasized rigor, and to nurture educator alignment and collaboration. **Staff engaged in AVID-facilitated professional development opportunities such as Summer Institute and were also offered in-house opportunities.**

The school started with sending a small team of teachers in different subject areas to Summer Institute and continued to send different educators each year, growing the number of staff who had engaged in AVID professional development. As more educators received training and engaged in dialogue within their Professional Learning Communities, an increasing number of teachers began implementing AVID strategies in their classrooms. **This resulted in greater access for students to a rigorous and engaging learning environment.**

### Moving from the AVID Elective to Schoolwide

Staff saw how AVID methodologies, such as WICOR® (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading), improved student learning and were committed to growing this impact beyond the AVID Elective class. Santiago educators worked collectively to make this happen, leveraging support from AVID's instructional resources and ongoing professional development.



***"We've taken a lot of the strategies that initially began in AVID classes, and we've made them schoolwide," shared Principal Christine Pijl, "So it's not just AVID students, it's students across the board [that] are getting those type of opportunities to use and build up their skills."***





## Focusing on Relationships and Empowerment

Santiago staff recognized AVID strategies weren't the only aspect of AVID needed to create a college- and career-ready culture; it was going to take investment in building relationships that foster agency in students and teachers alike.

*“What it means to be a Cavalier is a sense that we got each other's back—that we believe in each other—and that's not just us teachers... I think students also have that for themselves as well, that they're gonna believe in each other and support each other.”*

*– David Allen, Teacher, Santiago HS*



AVID professional development engaged teachers in learning that modeled activities **to grow relationships and build relational capacity**. In attending **AVID Summer Institute**, Santiago staff came together and exercised their own agency, creating a plan for schoolwide goals each year. They furthered these relationships by extending trust to one another through their open-door policy, which encouraged staff to visit one another's classrooms and observe their teaching.

Staff supported students in developing agency by equipping them with opportunity knowledge and encouraging continuous learning. **Curriculum for the AVID Elective class—Weeks at a Glance—gave AVID Elective teachers resources designed to build students' opportunity knowledge**. Different offerings like clubs provided additional spaces for students to connect and develop leadership skills, inside and outside of school.

## Outcomes: Increased Access to Opportunity and A Culture of High Expectations for Every Student and Educator

Santiago's progression towards college and career readiness for all students was the culmination of a sustained commitment, collaborative efforts, and tireless work on the part of leaders and educators. Through their intentional and gradual implementation of strategies, they successfully expanded opportunities and fostered a culture of elevated expectations, which produced remarkable achievements for both students and educators.



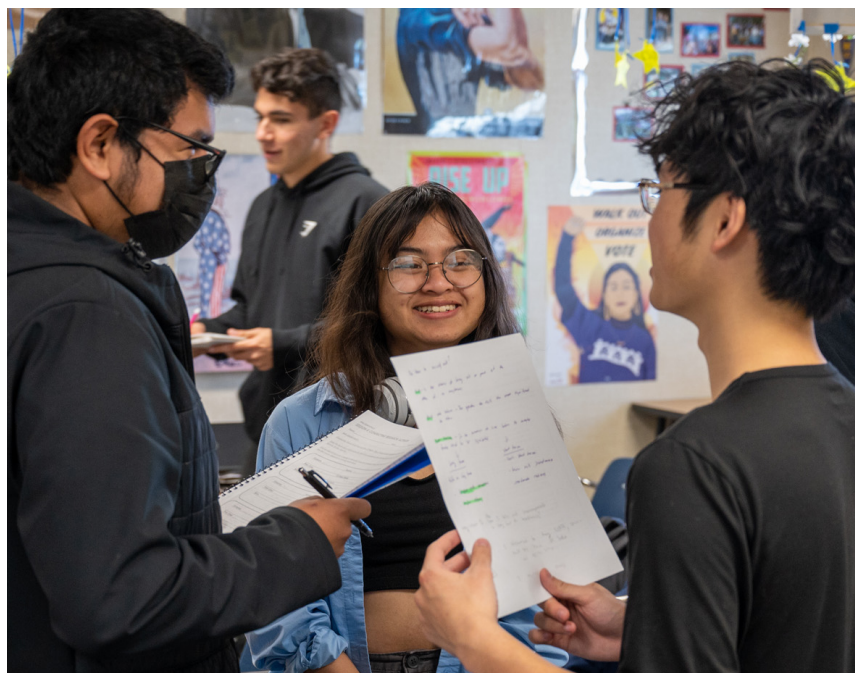
## Increased Access to Opportunity

Santiago High School chose to ensure the best interest of the students was always at the forefront. In doing so, they greatly expanded access to opportunity and equity for their students.

Before AVID, “You had one period of honors English per grade level... very much the traditional tracking system...limited opportunities for students,” reflected Nancy Montiel, a Santiago teacher and alumnus. **Now the school boasts more than 30 Advanced Placement courses alone**<sup>2</sup>. In the 2021–22 school year, 26% of 9–12th grade students took at least one Advanced Placement course.<sup>3</sup>

The school not only changed how many advanced classes they were offering, but who they were encouraging to enroll in those courses. AVID helped Santiago educators realize that with support—namely through the AVID Elective class—students who were often overlooked for advanced courses could thrive in these classes. In recognizing the potential of all students, staff began to see shifts in course enrollments, with advanced course enrollment more closely reflecting the overall demographics of the school.

By giving more students access to college preparatory classes, the percentage of students eligible for California public universities rose drastically.



**Around the time Santiago began implementing AVID, only 20% of students were eligible for California’s public universities; now, more than 55% are eligible**<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, **Santiago’s graduation rate rose, with a 95% graduation rate in the 2021–22 school year—far exceeding California’s graduation rate of 87%**.<sup>5</sup>

Santiago’s strong foundation set the school up for success when additional opportunities arose. In the 2019–20 school year, they started a **dual enrollment program with Santa Ana College** which empowers students to earn college credits while in high school. With a strong college-going culture established, **the program saw a favorable uptake in enrollment, with 50 9th grade students enrolling in the initial cohort**.<sup>6</sup>

The staff at Santiago High School also recognized the role clubs play in creating leadership and connection opportunities for students and helping create a more well-rounded experience, which is looked upon favorably by colleges and universities. To better support students, Santiago supported in the formation of several clubs to address students’ interests. **In the 2019–20 school year, there were nearly 40 clubs available for students to join**.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ggusd.us/schools/school-accountability-report/>

<sup>3</sup> AVID Secondary Site Data 21-22

<sup>4</sup> Santiago High School Mid-Term WASC Report: <https://4.files.edl.io/269e/10/01/21/182734-9e17068c-012b-4566-b355-919aae4f2a41.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ggusd.us/schools/school-accountability-report/>

<sup>6</sup> Santiago High School Mid-Term WASC Report: <https://4.files.edl.io/269e/10/01/21/182734-9e17068c-012b-4566-b355-919aae4f2a41.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Santiago High School Mid-Term WASC Report: <https://4.files.edl.io/269e/10/01/21/182734-9e17068c-012b-4566-b355-919aae4f2a41.pdf>

## Culture

In partnering with AVID and getting behind a mindset of college and career readiness for all students, Santiago was able to make tremendous shifts in the overall culture of the school. They moved from a school that was divided and not setting every student up for success to a community where students and teachers feel safe, welcome, engaged, and are thriving.

According to Santiago's Mid-Term Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Report (2020), survey data shows **98% of parents felt "Santiago is a supportive and inviting place for students to learn,"** and **97% of parents "are kept informed about district and school events,"** and **94% believed their "child feels safe at school."**<sup>8</sup>



*"I know everyone here at this school cares about each and everyone who walks on this campus, and I really love the support that you feel once you enter the campus."*

– Veronika, AVID Student, Santiago HS



AVID professional development played a large role in this culture shift. It equipped educators with strategies to enhance the level of rigor in their classrooms and a vehicle for growing their collective beliefs around college and career readiness for all students. The number of Santiago staff who attended AVID professional development grew over time, and it became the norm and was sought after by staff. **In the 2021–22 school year, 98 of the school's 107 teachers, counselors, and administrators had been AVID-trained, including CTE teaching staff.**<sup>9</sup>

The culture of support, care, and empowerment stays with students long after graduation, bringing alumni back in different roles—as AVID Tutors and even teachers—seeking to continue to be a part of a family-like environment.

Santiago's success did not go unnoticed. In seeing the culture and results Santiago had produced, other schools across the district wanted what Santiago had: a thriving culture that supported college and career readiness for all students that extended to the broader community outside the campus.



*"It's just the love and support I have here... I feel like I'm always able to use Santiago or even the AVID community as support—always"*

– Alani Hernandez, AVID Tutor, Santiago Alumnus



**Garden Grove Unified School District began implementing AVID at other secondary schools and eventually expanded to all 16 middle and high schools and, more recently, to the district's 45 elementary schools.**

As Garden Grove saw additional needs arise for English Language Learners, they sought AVID as a partner to address these needs. The district began implementing AVID Excel at multiple middle school campuses to ensure equal opportunity for middle school English Language Learners to learn, achieve, and prepare for high school.



<sup>8</sup> Santiago High School Mid-Term WASC Report: <https://4.files.edl.io/269e/10/01/21/182734-9e17068c-012b-4566-b355-919aae4f2a41.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> AVID Secondary Site Data 21-22



## Conclusion

Santiago High School was facing a challenge: students were not being adequately prepared to achieve their postsecondary goals, and some were not being provided with the opportunity knowledge to know what their postsecondary options were.



**Utilizing AVID as a partner, Santiago staff began to engage in professional development to support their goals of enhancing the level of rigor in every classroom, offering more advanced courses, and enhancing relational capacity among students and teachers.**



Through these changes, Santiago High School was able to create a college-going culture that increased the percentage of California public college/university-eligible students by more than 30 percentage points.



**Santiago's decision to improve outcomes and opportunities for their students resulted in large-scale change, benefiting all students in the district's 60+ schools.**



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



Watch Santiago High School's story  
and connect with AVID today!



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