



Summary of a District's Evaluation of AVID

Madison Metropolitan School District, Wisconsin

Title: From the (Academic) middle to the top: An evaluation of the AVID/TOPS college access program

Authors: Tammy Kolbe, Peter Kinsley, Rachel Carly Feldman, and Sara Goldrick-Rab, published in the *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 23(4), 304–335

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Year(s) of Data Being Evaluated: 2009–2015

Purpose of the Study / Research Questions:

1. To examine differences in outcomes between AVID/TOPS (Advancement Via Individual Determination / Teens of Promise) participants and a matched sample of Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) students who did not participate. Differences in outcomes for student subgroups, including students from racial and ethnic minority groups underrepresented in higher education (e.g., Black, Latino), low-income students, and first-generation students were also examined.
2. To develop estimates of program costs and compare those to potential longer-term benefits of completing high school and college attendance.

Study Participants: Samples were drawn from the population of students who entered the district's four comprehensive high schools as a freshman during the 2009–10, 2010–11, or 2011–12 academic years. The sample was comprised of 484 students who participated in the AVID/TOPS program for at least one year in high school and a matched comparison group of 641 students who were eligible but never participated in the program. Additional comparisons were made using a sample of 225 students who participated in the program for all four years of high school and a matched comparison group of 406 non-participants.

Is there a comparison group? Yes.

If yes, is it a matched comparison group? Yes. This evaluation utilized propensity score matching methodologies that included measures of students' pre-program academic performance (e.g., eighth-grade cumulative GPA); attributes known to be associated with students' academic performance (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, parental education, and free or reduced price lunch eligibility); and indicators for high school attendance and cohort year to account for variability in program participation related to unobserved institutional or temporal differences.

Summary of Findings: The following outcomes were examined: (a) cumulative high school GPA; (b) unexcused days absent; (c) attendance rate; (d) enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses; (e) the total number of AP courses attempted; (f) enrollment in "honors" courses; (g) the total number of honors courses attempted; (h) ACT exam participation; (i) on-time high school graduation; and (j)



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matriculation into to a two- or four-year college in the year following high school graduation. Significant differences between program participants and their matched peers were found in the following:

- **Enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses.** Program participation was associated with an increased likelihood of AP and honors course taking amounting to 18–19 percentage points on average.
- **ACT exam participation.** Program participants were significantly more likely than their matched peers to take the ACT test.
- **On-time high school graduation.** Program participants were significantly more likely than their matched peers to graduate high school within four years.
- **Matriculation into to a two- or four-year college.** Program participants were significantly more likely to enroll in a two- or four-year college the year following high school graduation. Estimates suggest that, on average, program participants enrolled in college at a rate 12–13 percentage points higher than their peers.

Conclusions:

The authors provide the following conclusions:

- *The study's findings suggest that AVID/TOPS is a promising program for promoting high school completion and college attendance, particularly for student groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education. (p. 326)*
- *Most notably, AVID/TOPS students were more likely to attend college immediately after high school than their peers who did not participate in the program. (p. 326)*
- *We also found that AVID/TOPS is a resource-intensive program that required sustained investments. Together, MMSD and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County (BGCDC) dedicated considerable human resources to implement the program. Our findings are consistent with the positive returns to investment effort for the Talent Search TRIO program. (p. 326)*
- *The study reaffirms that AVID and AVID-like programs are a promising policy direction for improving college matriculation rates for student groups underrepresented in higher education. (p. 327)*