



North Middle School football player James Muramoto, 13, said he wants to eventually attend college, but he lacked motivation to do well in school. This year, he said, two things are pushing him to get high grades — football and an elective college-prep class.

In just eight weeks of school, he said his scores have improved one to two letter grades.

Like Muramoto, Everett High School freshman Regan Beal, 14, attends a college-prep class. He said he'll be one of the first in his family to go to college, and the class has helped him develop a dream.

"I didn't expect to go to college, and I didn't really want to," Beal said. "This year I want to stay at 3.5 (grade point average) all year."

Muramoto, Beal and about 100 other students at North Middle and Everett High are taking Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), an elective class aimed to launch them into college.

It's new to the school district this year.

AVID, which started in the 1980s in California and has been widely successful throughout the country, targets students with average grades and those who are underrepresented among college students — minority students, the first college-goer in the family and low-income students.

Students learn study techniques, focus on inquiry and tackle tough class work in small groups. They spend one day each week exploring colleges and career fields. They are required in all their classes to sit near the front, ask questions, take notes, keep an organized binder of assignments and be on time.

Built into the program is interaction with parents to inform them about important topics like financial aid, North Middle principal Kelly Shepherd said.

"The goal is to create a college-going culture," Shepherd said. "We're trying to talk to kids like, 'when you go to college,' not 'if you go.' It's not a dream, it's a plan."

When asked, AVID students readily named the careers they want — architect, chef, firefighter, sales rep, journalist, paramedic, lawyer.

Everett High vice principal Jack Roy administers AVID at the high school.

“We’re focusing on those students who are generally overlooked, the kids in the middle,” Roy said.

Of North Middle AVID students, 41 percent are minorities and 63 percent are low-income, numbers that generally reflect the school’s population.

At a recent AVID class at North Middle, the class split up into three study groups all working to understand math. One group pondered how to calculate the slope of a line while another looked up “equation” in the dictionary. The third table discussed “what is so important about volume and density?”

Each student took thorough notes and asked and answered questions.

Amanda Criswell, 13, dreams of attending Harvard and becoming a lawyer. She said AVID is helping her figure out how to get there. “We talk about different colleges and scholarships and how to calculate your (grade-point average),” she said.

At Everett High, 49 percent of AVID students are minorities and 56 percent are low-income, higher percentages than the school as a whole.

On a recent Wednesday, the class of 25 ninth-graders’ task was to rate the qualities they want most in a career — adventure, high salary, outdoor workspace, travel.

“Because you will most likely work 20 to 30 years, it’s important to pick a career you enjoy,” teacher Jane Johnson said.

Trent Johnson, 14, said he enjoys the class. “I want to have a lot of choices for a job,” he said. “I heard (AVID) could help you get to college.”

Everett High principal Catherine Matthews initiated the program in the district.

AVID is well-known for success, she said. Approximately 94 percent of AVID high school graduates enroll in college, 77 percent at four-year colleges, compared with the national average of 35 percent, according to the AVID Web site.

A group of 81 North Middle School students are enrolled in another pre-college program called GEAR UP. With a federal grant, students get extra study help and instruction outside of class and obtain a \$6,000 scholarship when they graduate from high school.

Roy said he’s already seen encouraging trends at Everett High after just nine weeks of AVID. Out of 45 ninth-graders, just one has been sent to him for behavioral issues. Students already seem to be outperforming their peers in other classes, based on midterm progress reports.

Roy said he wishes the program was available to every student, but teacher training, time and curriculum costs are limiting.

Even so, he said the concepts of AVID are affecting the whole school. Teachers in each core academic area took AVID training this summer and are sharing note-taking and teaching techniques.

If the program is successful this year in Everett, plans are to add grade levels and possibly bring the district's other schools on board. Ideally, students would start AVID in eighth grade and finish in 12th.

“These kids are taking an active role in their education as opposed to being passive participants,” Roy said.

The message to students is “somebody believes that you have the potential to be a college student,” Shepherd said.

Jenny Zuvela, of the *Everett Tribune*, wrote this article in the November 1, 2006 edition. This article is reprinted with permission from the newspaper.