

From left, McKean juniors, Destiny and Jennifer, work on their AP lessons while AVID and Social Studies teacher, Shana Mattes, offers some instruction. Photo by Thomas Nutter Photography.



Bridging the Gap

AVID prepares students for the college and career transition after high school

BY DANIELLE FAHEY

FOR MANY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, college preparation can be a daunting and stressful task. While course curriculum aims to get kids as academically ready as possible, many students still need individual assistance. A number of schools within the Red Clay Consolidated School District found that students from low socioeconomic status were less likely to achieve academic potential than those of median socioeconomic status. Looking for resources, the district discovered the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. The AVID program seeks to instill teaching practices that best prepare students for college coursework and post-high school careers. About six years ago, Thomas McKean High School in Wilmington implemented this initiative, and the result has been immensely successful. Thomas McKean is now one of the proud winners of the Superstars in Education Award.

Thomas McKean offers AVID courses for participants, where students can develop themselves personally and academically for college. Teachers

trained in the program provide notetaking, study and time management skills, tutoring, and service and leadership opportunities. Students then learn more about the college experience and how to prepare for it efficiently, so they won't feel overwhelmed or intimidated by the process.

"We aim to expose students to a wide variety of college options and give them the best choice possible," said Mary Caputo, the overseeing administrator of the AVID program at Thomas McKean. "We want to allow them to envision their individual needs and desires for college."

Over the years, the AVID program has developed a synergy within Thomas McKean High School. Out of 850 students, 60 of them participated in the AVID program, with an 85% college retention rate. Last year, nine AVID seniors earned over \$1 million in scholarship money to go towards college funding, and this year the seniors have earned over \$1.2 million.

At Thomas McKean, the teaching methods of the AVID program aren't limited to AVID-specific courses. Brandi Mycoff, one of the AVID coor-

Superstars in Education

dinators and elective teachers for the program, says that the program's policies can be found in almost every class. "We decided to implement AVID teaching methods into all of our courses, so all of our students can prepare for college efficiently."

With abundant support from both faculty and staff, as well as a universal AVID model schoolwide, where is the program headed for Thomas McKean in the future? "We don't have as much impact at the middle school level, and we want to change that," said Caputo. "We would love to see our ninth grade cohorts grow to reach more and more kids."

Sandra Lopez, a Thomas McKean student and now first-generation college student, has been very thankful for the teachers and staff in the program. "When I had a hard time, they never let me give up," she said. Lopez will attend Delaware Technical Community College in the fall on scholarship to study dental hygiene.

Overall, the success of the program at Thomas McKean has been outstanding. "Our site team is amazing," Caputo said, "More and more teachers are willing to be trained in the AVID curriculum. The faculty and students really believe in this process." ■



A group of AVID students discuss the day's plan with teachers (left to right standing) Lowell Buford, Junior AVID co-coordinator, and Brandi Mycoff, Senior AVID teacher. Photo by Thomas Nutter Photography.



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