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Is AVID really worth it?

Being a child of immigrant parents is hard. It's your responsibility to prove your ability to succeed. First generation students are often at a disadvantage when applying to college because many don't have the support to apply and many first generation students come from low income households, especially students from a racial or ethnic minority. Being the first in your family to go to college can be daunting, and the idea of college may seem out of the question entirely due to the difficulty of the college process or financial issues within your home but what if there was a program that could help?

AVID is a class that helps first-generation students get support for the college process and is implemented in over 7000 high schools across the country. (*What is AVID*). Hundreds of thousands of immigrants come to the United States every year in search of a better life for themselves and their children. How can children of immigrants get the support they need to go to college?

Advancement Via Independent Determination is a class that helps students get into college, founded in 1980 by a woman named Mary Catherine Swanson, who worked as an English teacher for 20 years. Swanson wanted to create a program where underachieving students could get the support they needed to enroll in a 4 year college. (*Mary Catherine Swanson*). That support includes helping kids stay organized by having the kids use a weekly planner to track what work they have to do, and using a 3 ring binder to keep their homework organized. (*Why You Should Consider AVID*).

These techniques are used to help kids have better time management skills which they'll need for college.

At Los Altos High School, there are only 2 AVID periods which allows for a tight-knit community of first generation students. One of these students is Angely Vargas, a junior at Los Altos High School, whose parents immigrated from Peru and moved to Mountain View, California, in search of a better life. Angely was born and raised in Mountain View, and being a first generation student is a big part of her identity.

In her freshman year of high school, her English teacher recommended Angely for AVID because of her writing abilities and her academic potential. She drafted an email to Jonathan Kwan, the head AVID teacher at Los Altos High School, recommending her for his class. In order to get into AVID, you need to go through an interview process, but with Angely, she just got in; no interview or anything.

Mr. Kwan explained, "I've been here at Los Altos for 15 years. I have not seen somebody flex the right brain and left brain in the same capacity that Angely does... she's just immensely talented." (Kwan). Angely is the first ever AVID student to get into Advanced Scientific Investigation (ASI), a highly competitive science class that requires an interview to get into. She was named student of the month in January, she's won multiple AVID academic achievement awards, five Los Altos High School Latino awards, and won first place in the school wide slam poetry competition, just to name a few achievements she has under her belt. (Vargas).

Even with all of this going on, she still finds time to help and spend time with friends. Mr Kwan explained that while she's incredibly smart, "She's sensitive in the fact that she's so observant of people and the environment. She always notices when

somebody's struggling...Like, 'this student's having a hard time' and she'll notice that even before I do." (Kwan). He explained that even though she isn't an AVID tutor, she actively helps out her friends and students who are struggling.

While AVID has many benefits for children, some people have their reservations claiming that, "it's insulting to blame poor students for the fact that they are struggling." Some claim that AVID doesn't help the root of the issue and instead puts the blame on low income students which leads to them carrying the burden of having to go through the college process by themselves. (*The Ugly Truth About AVID*). When asked about this, Angely responded, "We can't change anything about the government to help us, so we might as well try as hard as we can to help ourselves." (Vargas). Unfortunately, this is the harsh truth. Many low income families get little to no financial help from the government and many immigrant parents don't know how the US college system works, much less how to apply to scholarships or financial aid. AVID helps in the fact that it offers support for low income students, allowing them opportunities to apply to colleges that they otherwise wouldn't have.

One thing that's implemented in AVID is that every student is given a three ring binder to keep their work organized. In "The Ugly Truth About AVID," there were multiple AVID students saying that the three ring binder didn't help them and was counterproductive as they had their own way of organizing themselves (*The Ugly Truth About AVID*). Mr Kwan explained that while they do implement the three ring binder rule, they only really enforce it Freshman year. (Kwan). AVID is supposed to help you learn to organize yourself and your work so that you can better succeed academically so it makes sense that they teach a more conventional way of organizing yourself as a foundation that kids can build on. The three ring binder allows for students to learn one

way to stay organized but still choose their own way to organize themselves as they mature into the rest of their high school career.

AVID provides a community of like-minded people in similar situations and helps them to reach their full potential. While AVID can put pressure on the students to navigate their life, it benefits a lot of students in providing guidance and aid to those who wouldn't get it otherwise. AVID is something that every low income student hoping to go to college should consider because it can help you tremendously with the college process. When asked what Angely wanted to do with her life, she responded, “ I just want to help people or help the environment” (Vargas). She expressed the interest she has in space exploration but explained that, “I feel like I would be a hypocrite to go into that field if I did because, why would I focus on something out there when I have to focus on what's going on in our world here?” (Vargas).

AVID is meant to prepare low income students and first generation students for college by teaching them organizational strategies, helping with financial aid, helping students academic success, and going on college visits. While AVID is very useful for students, Mr. Kwan explained that “Angely would be immensely successful either way” however, “being immersed in a community of first generation people has given her more of a place here.”(Kwan). With that said, if you weren't thinking about doing AVID, I hope this essay gives some insight on why it might be a good fit. I hope all first generation students and low income students consider taking AVID because it might just be the class that changes your life.

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