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Wisconsin Community Targets Achievement Gap

Posted on [March 26, 2012](#) by [Guest Blogger](#)

Michael Johnson, Chief Executive Officer of Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County, in Madison, Wis., can hardly contain his enthusiasm about recent support his agency received from more than a dozen corporations and hundreds of local donors to help address the achievement gap in his city. "We have received more than \$1 million from our local community to target our achievement gap and I am proud the community is investing in our local students to tackle this issue."

While Madison and Dane County are often listed as ideal places to live in national magazines, the city is facing its educational challenge head-on.



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Even without federal funding, but proving what Secretary Duncan says—that some of the best ideas are generated at the local level—Madison is taking a hard look at the academic performance of its students, and examining test scores and other data along racial, ethnic and gender lines. What do the numbers show?



Michael Johnson (center) is proud of the Madison, Wis., high school graduates who have grown through the AVID/TOPS program.

Kaleem Caire, Director of Madison's Urban League, and whose African American family has lived in Madison since 1902, talks about how

- "85% of Latino students and 86% of African American students are in poverty;
- 45% of 10th grade African American males are proficient in reading, while 87% of white males are; and
- the graduation rate for African American males is only 52%, while the rate for white males is 88%.

This information is reinforced by the [Civil Rights Data Collection](#) report recently released by ED. The report show, for example, that 70.7% of white students in [Madison public schools](#) take Algebra 1 in 7th or 8th grade, but only 7.1% of African American and 8.1% of Hispanic students take it; and while 69.1% of white students take either the SAT or ACT exams to get into college, only 10.6% of African American and 8.1% of Hispanic students take these exams.

Where does Madison go from here? Sue Abplanalp, Deputy Superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District explains that the District's *Building Our Future* plan is moving Madison nearer to closing the achievement gap. "The Superintendent's plan pulls all the partners together to bring new focus on academic instruction," Abplanalp said. "There will be a strong literacy component with an extended day and expanded summer school to strengthen and sustain reading and math skills "

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school to strengthen and sustain reading and math skills.

She goes on to say, "In the higher grades, emphasis will be put on college and career readiness with a test prep program and expansion of the AVID/TOPS program, for example. And all of this will be conducted in an atmosphere of expanded culturally responsive practices and enhanced family engagement."

Students enroll in an AVID class in high school to receive intensive coaching, academic instruction and study skills. The Dane County Boys and Girls Club's Teens of Promise (TOPS) afterschool tutoring program buttresses the AVID structure so that there is academic continuity outside the school environment. According to program directors, 100% of the students in the AVID/TOPS program have graduated from high school and 95% have enrolled in college.

Boys & Girls Club of Dane County CEO Michael Johnson says, "Today there are more than 500 students in the AVID/TOPS program, and the Boys & Girls Club provides more than 40 tutors in the classroom. In 2010-2011 African-American and Latino students in AVID/TOPS had higher GPAs than their peers who were not in the program, and AVID/TOPS students had fewer behavior referrals than their peers not in the program." He continues, "We are excited about the community's support and the generosity of local donors like philanthropist Mary Burke, who co-founded the AVID/TOPS program in Madison, Great Lakes Higher Education Corp and the Madison Community Foundation for taking the lead to help fund such an effort."

-Cynthia Dorfman is Director of Regional Communications and Outreach

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30 Responses to *Wisconsin Community Targets Achievement Gap*

Jen says:

April 4, 2012 at 3:20 pm

It is great to see all of the hard work that AVID/TOPS is doing to help our students reach their full potential! I am proud of the work that my students are doing and the partnerships the AVID/TOPS program has made in the Madison community.

Giovanni says:

April 2, 2012 at 5:44 pm

I am proud to be part of the second class that graduated from Madison East High School in the AVID tops program. AVID helped me prepare for many the obstacles that I have been running into during my first year in school. Thanks to AVID and all the people that helped make it work I am able to pay for college which is a big help to me.

Kate says:

April 1, 2012 at 10:14 pm

AVID/TOPS epitomizes how positive change can happen when people work together and support one another. This partnership truly helps students, and the adults who serve them, reach even greater heights. It changes how I see my role

as a teacher!

Michele says:

April 1, 2012 at 6:37 pm

What a great program! It's so nice to see pro-active thinking & action. Nicely done!

John says:

March 31, 2012 at 10:17 am

What an exciting time we had hosting the Department of Education and showcasing our work through the AVID/TOPS program. We are so proud of the work we do for youth, and believe that others leaders/parents throughout our community have supported this initiative greatly! We are excited about the future!

Diana says:

March 30, 2012 at 9:52 pm

As a former Avid/Tops Alumni I am proud to be apart of this program and see it growing stronger and having national recognition it deserves. I am grateful for all the help I've received in this program from Cornell notes,tutors, scholarships, and internships. I feel as if I am ahead of the game and went into college more prepared than I would have if I wasn't in this program. I would not be the determined pre-med student I am now if it wasn't for Avid/Tops guiding me and

giving me the motivation I strive for today.

Wendy says:

March 30, 2012 at 8:15 pm

Nice work, Madison. It sounds like an effective program that will really help narrow the achievement gap.

Thi says:

March 30, 2012 at 5:15 pm

I was a part of the first graduating class and I still can't thank the AVID/TOPS program enough. In high school I was a pretty good student, but the program pushed me to be an even more organized (and trust me, I was pretty organized to begin with) and challenge seeking person. I used their tactics (collaborative binders, cornell-style notes, etc) to refine my own skills. AVID/TOPS wasn't just a class for me- inside the class room I felt empowered and supported, I knew I mattered; outside of the classroom it was a group of people building a family, it was an application of lessons in my every day interactions with life.

I strongly believe that everyone should have the opportunity to an education and that no one should be denied it based off of predetermined associations of worthiness or assumed capabilities. I wasn't forced into this program (I wasn't even talked into it). I chose to pursue enrollment, but more importantly, I chose to graduate as a part of it. Yes, the work and the curriculum can be tedious and annoying at times, but who better to get through it with than people who care

about you? Thank you AVID/TOPS.

Lisa says:

March 30, 2012 at 4:01 pm

Those numbers of kids graduating and going to college are great. Keep up the great work for our kids!

Dan says:

March 30, 2012 at 3:11 pm

This is a great working partnership between the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, the schools and our business community in Madison.

Coincidentally, I went to a press conference last week where organizational leaders along with the AVID/TOPS students & teachers had sincere and meaningful things to say about their participation and the impact on their lives.

All too often we hear only about the achievement gap or issue, and not enough about working models and partnerships in our community where hundreds of kids are benefiting. We do not have to start all over to build an effective solution.

Mark says:

March 30, 2012 at 2:43 pm

Sounds like a great program. Nice job, Madison.

Jason says:

March 30, 2012 at 2:32 pm

This is a focused use of resources which brings quality programming to those students that would be on the edge of being college-ready and accepted into college.

Steve says:

March 30, 2012 at 11:02 am

Wow! I love the partnership between the community and the schools. Utilizing proven successes like AVID and the Boys and Girls Club in our schools is a major way to address equity issues and have students succeed and truly reach their potential.

Lindsey says:

March 30, 2012 at 10:50 am

Congratulations to all the students who have made the commitment to AVID/TOPS and their futures! This program has the potential to positively impact the entire Madison community.

Jamie says:

March 30, 2012 at 8:40 am

As a TOPS Coordinator at La Follette High School, I've seen first hand the impact this program has on the lives of students. These kids have what it takes to succeed. They just need people to believe in them, help them believe in themselves, and give them the tools to realize their potential. AVID/TOPS is doing that and great things are happening as a result!

Langston says:

March 30, 2012 at 6:04 am

This is the most important civil rights work of our time. Our American democracy depends on everyone being educated and productive.

Helena says:

March 29, 2012 at 11:24 pm

This program is working – helping kids succeed in high school, graduate, and seek post high school education. It needs to continue and expand to middle schools! Community and district support will keep it successful.

Joe says:

March 29, 2012 at 10:52 pm

I worked for two and a half years in the Madison schools as a tutor, an in school

student coordinator and now as a college continuation manager for graduates of AVID/TOPS. I am seeing firsthand the value that the program has had for our alumni: their study skills, professionalism, relationship with each other, and drive to succeed and serve others is phenomenal! I am proud to have the opportunity to be a part of such an amazing and effective program.

Julie says:

March 29, 2012 at 10:39 pm

Great program, partnership, teachers, staff and students! Thanks for recognizing our community.

Jacquasha says:

March 29, 2012 at 10:18 pm

What a great partnership!! I hope more are created like this one to help those who need it most strive for excellence and achieve it!! Way to go BG CDC...
#trailblaze

Anne says:

March 29, 2012 at 6:56 pm

This is an outstanding program! Other cities and towns need to use this as a clear example of how community partners can work together to bring about effective change in education outcomes! AVID/TOPS rocks!

Claudia says:

March 29, 2012 at 6:04 pm

Madison has a lot to be proud of!

Sam says:

March 29, 2012 at 5:34 pm

When you have students talking about how helpful taking notes in class is or that they consider their AVID/TOPS class to be like a second family with a second mom or dad (their teacher) at the helm, it's impossible not to notice the benefit and value of the AVID/TOPS program.

I'm proud to represent this program!

Janine says:

March 29, 2012 at 5:16 pm

AVID/TOPS is an outstanding program that does great things for the youth in our community. I am very proud to see our community come together charged with facing the issue of the Achievement Gap! It takes a village to make change happen!

Kristin says:

March 29, 2012 at 5:04 pm

I have had the opportunity to meet with some of the students that participate in this program, and I am always amazed at their strength and initiative. This is truly a model that should be utilized in other communities.

Bonnie says:

March 29, 2012 at 4:58 pm

Truly a great program. Keep up the great work Boys & Girls Club of Dane County!

Jamie says:

March 29, 2012 at 4:54 pm

I am pleased and honored that the AVID/TOPS program is highlighted on the US Department website. This partnership is key initiative for Madison to ensure that first generation disadvantaged students have the access, skills and belief needed to graduate from high school college ready! Way to go AVID/TOPS! Keep up the good work!

Sigal says:

March 29, 2012 at 4:45 pm

This is an amazing program that truly helps students reach their full potential!

Michael says:

March 29, 2012 at 4:43 pm

Thanks for highlighting our efforts in Madison! Our community is serious about tackling this issue.

Tim says:

March 27, 2012 at 6:51 am

I am very proud of this program! This partnership is amazing and I this is how non profits and schools should work together.

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