

Research Brief

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Supporting College-Going Pathways in SFUSD: Longitudinal Evidence from the AVID Program

Stanford–SFUSD AVID Research–Practice Partnership

Background: The AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination) in SFUSD is an in-school college and career readiness program delivered as an elective course to students in grades 6-12. The goal of AVID is to support students to enter and succeed in higher education. AVID addresses this goal through a multi-year curriculum that integrates:

- **Academic skill-building** (e.g., organization, note-taking, study strategies)
- **Structured exposure to college-going expectations and pathways**
- **Supportive relational support with teachers and peers** that help students see themselves as capable, college-bound learners and develop the academic habits needed to achieve that goal.

In AVID classrooms, students find high expectations, encouragement, day-to-day help, a vision of college as an expected and attainable goal, and guidance in and skills for reaching that goal. Moreover, AVID provides a viable resource for academic, social, and emotional support as students work to succeed. Within SFUSD, entry into AVID varies by school site and may be based on teacher/counselor recommendation, student self-selection, or family request. The typical GPA range for students taking AVID courses is 2.0–3.5 which is often defined as students who generally receive As, Bs, or Cs as grades in courses.

Methodology: The Stanford-SFUSD AVID Partnership analyzed 18 years of SFUSD administrative student data (2006–07 through 2023–24) to examine patterns of AVID participation and associated academic trajectories. This longitudinal study included 9,885 AVID students and 111,573 non-AVID students across middle and high schools. The sample was balanced across gender, and most AVID students participated for one academic year, accounting for approximately 62% of participants. The primary outcome is semester core GPA, calculated from grades in subjects like English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies courses.

To estimate academic trajectories across high school, we used multilevel growth models that account repeated GPA observations for students who take AVID for multiple academic years.¹ These models estimated: overall GPA change across grade levels; differences associated with AVID participation; whether effects differed for students with an 8th grade fall GPA below 2.0. In SFUSD, this GPA threshold is one of two indicators used as one of the Early Warning Indicators (EWI) for identifying students entering 9th grade who may need extra academic support during high school to graduate on time.

Two types of counts appear in this brief:

- **Distinct student counts** (students who ever took AVID)
- **Grade-level AVID enrollments**, where students may appear in multiple grades if they took AVID more than once.

Overall Findings:

- **Most students take AVID in 9th grade or 12th grade.** Analysis of longitudinal course-taking data shows that AVID enrollment peaks during important academic transition points. Participation is highest in 9th grade (n=2,832; 17% of all grade-level AVID enrollments), corresponding to the transition into high school. Participation is also high in 12th grade (n=2,945; 17.7% of all grade-level AVID enrollments), aligning with the period when students navigate college application milestones and graduation planning.²
- **AVID serves a higher proportion of Black and Hispanic/Latinx students relative to district enrollment proportions for these historically marginalized subgroups.** Specifically, compared to the SFUSD population of Black (10.9%) and Hispanic/Latinx (29.2%) students, AVID has enrolled a greater share of Black (n= 1,099, 12.1%) and Hispanic/Latinx (n= 3,358, 36.8%) students. These enrollment trends are consistent with AVID’s mission to expand access to college-going pathways for students historically underrepresented in higher education.

¹ GPA trajectories were estimated using multilevel linear growth models with semester GPA observations nested within students across grades 8–12. Models included grade level, AVID exposure categories, Early Warning Indicator (EWI) status, and interaction terms to examine how academic trajectories differed across groups.

² Because students may take AVID across multiple grade levels, counts reflect student-grade enrollments rather than unique students. As a result, counts are not mutually exclusive across grades, meaning students may appear in multiple grades. Across the dataset there are 16,643 AVID grade-level participations, of which 2,832 (17%) occur in 9th grade.

- **AVID participation is associated with more stable GPA Trajectories.** Across all students, GPA declines slightly across grades ($\beta \approx -0.04$ per grade level, $p < .001$). However, students who participate in AVID experience have more stable GPA trajectories over time. Results from multilevel growth models indicate that students with **1–2 semesters of AVID** participation show statistically significant smaller GPA declines across high school compared with non-AVID peers ($\beta = 0.024$, $p < .001$). This interaction reduces the expected GPA decline from approximately -0.043 GPA points per grade to -0.019, indicating much more stable academic performance across high school among students with 1-2 semesters of AVID participation.

Students with greater cumulative participation in AVID tend to maintain the strongest academic trajectories overall. In particular, students with five or more semesters of AVID entered high school with the strongest academic preparation and maintained the highest GPA levels throughout high school. These patterns suggest that AVID’s combination of academic skill-building and relational support helps students’ sustain academic momentum during the high school years.

- **The strongest gains associated with AVID participation are among students identified as needing academic support when entering high school.** The analysis tracked 785 students (7.9%) who participated in AVID and 9,100 students (92.1%) who did not participate in AVID and who had $\text{GPA} \leq 2.0$ in 8th grade (which, as noted, is below the suggested GPA threshold for entry into AVID). This GPA threshold is one of two indicators used in SFUSD’s measure of an Early Warning Indicator (EWI) as students enter 9th grade to measure the extent to which students will need extra academic support during high school.³

As shown in Figure 2⁴, students identified with a $\text{GPA} \leq 2.0$ in 8th grade who participated in AVID during high school achieved stronger GPA trajectories across high school relative to similar non-AVID peers. While their GPAs were similar to non-AVID students early in high school, AVID participants with a $\text{GPA} \leq 2.0$ in 8th grade achieved significantly higher GPAs than comparable non-AVID peers by the end of 12th grade (approximately 3.2 vs. 2.2).

³ John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. (June 2011). Developing Early Warning Indicators for the San Francisco Unified School District. Youth Data Archive Issue Brief. Stanford University.

⁴ Students who took AVID only during middle school are excluded from these figures so that trajectories reflect participation during the high school years when GPA outcomes are observed.

Figure 1: Academic Performance for AVID vs Non-AVID for students for students above 2.0 GPA

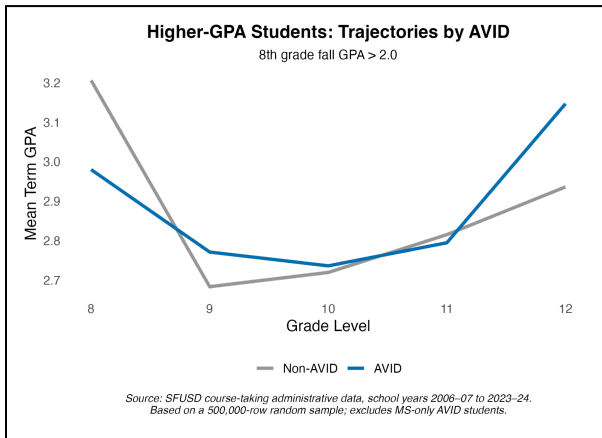
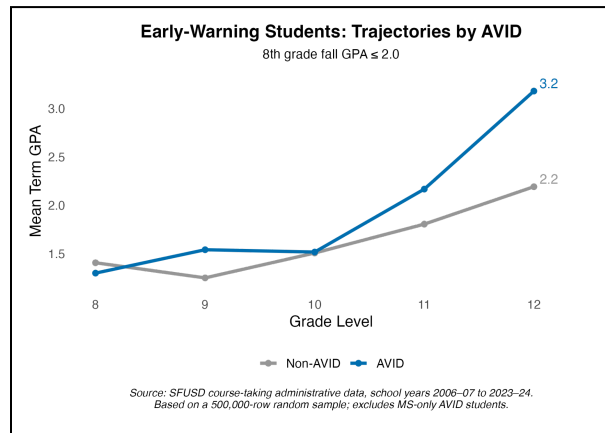


Figure 2: Academic Performance for AVID vs Non-AVID for students for students below 2.0 GPA



Key Takeaways:

- GPA growth for AVID students:** AVID participation is associated with stronger and more stable GPA trajectories throughout high school, with even short-term involvement yielding measurable benefits and taking AVID classes for more semesters leading to the most significant academic gains.
- Support for Black and Latino students:** AVID serves a high number of Black and Hispanic/Latinx students and helps expand access to college-going pathways, offering meaningful academic and social benefits for historically underserved groups.
- Large gains for students below 2.0 GPA:** AVID Students entering high school with GPAs \leq 2.0 show significant upward GPA growth, and because these data are correlational, more research is needed to determine the causes of this improvement. Students in this category are a small subset of a larger AVID population and many factors influenced their enrollment into AVID classes. For this reason, AVID should not be used as a replacement for targeted academic or attendance interventions.