

# AVID students blaze future path with individual determination

“I was never one to speak up or talk in front of a group of people,” Autumn Nation explains as she discusses White River School District’s AVID program. “Whenever I had to present an essay in front of the class or give a presentation I would get so nervous I wouldn’t talk.”

“After the six years of practice, I was able to speak last week at my high school graduation in front of thousands of people with ease. I will never forget the AVID program or my AVID family.”

That’s the individual determination piece in the Advancement Via Individual Determination program. The letter D could as easily stand for development or drive, both are at the center of the program that nudges students toward success. Nation plans to attend Western Washington University in the fall on a path to a doctorate in veterinarian medicine. Half of this AVID class will be first generation college students.

“They all came in as high school freshman and really truly some of them did not believe they would go to college, and they all did,” AVID teacher John Dorsey beams. The 20 young women and three young men he ushered in as freshman have all been accepted to the college of their choice and together they earned more than \$429,000 in scholarship and grant money to attend those colleges.

“John did a great job of pushing them, encouraging them, and helping them find their talent,” AVID District Director Amy Miller said. “This is a district supported program, and we are lucky to have a district that supports it. We have amazing kids doing amazing things.”

## What is AVID?

AVID is a structured college preparatory system, which focuses student’s academic skills on their preparation for acceptance to, and success in, four-year universities.

“They may have all the skills and tools and desire, but they are usually missing one piece,” Dorsey said.

Often the missing piece is confidence.

“I always struggled in school,” said Alexandra Pearson, who plans to begin working toward a career in nursing at Green River Community College. “I knew my parents supported me, but I knew I needed more support. I had to get myself to believe that I am more intelligent than I believe. I believed there was no way to go to college. The hurdles were too great.”

“I would not have decided to become a nurse if AVID would not have been part of my life.”

This is White River’s 10th year to offer AVID. White River students get their first introduction to AVID in the 7th and 8th grade

At White River High, AVID is an elective course and a four-year commitment for the approximately 25 students selected from each freshman class. AVID candidates must apply and interview for placement in the program. Test scores, grade-point average, college potential, desire and individual need are some factors for determining placement.

Once in, students are encouraged to take challenging classes including Advanced Placement courses and be involved in a sport or activity/club. Rigorous emphasis

is placed on writing, reading, critical thinking skills and Socratic seminars.

“They sign a contract,”

Miller said. “They are making a commitment to the program.”

Students are also expected to collaborate with peers.

Twice a week, tutors, hired from outside the district, come to the classroom and help students navigate a variety of subjects that may be tripping them up.

“The tutor may or may not know the answer, but serves as a guide so they can find the answer on their own,” Dorsey said.

“They learn to face problems. Instead of shutting down they’re setting up study groups, using books, notes or working with classmates to get the answers,” Miller said.

“When we do tutorials we break down our question into where our points of confusion are,” said Maddie Emerson, who plans to intern with a chiropractic clinic this summer and continue her studies at the University of Washington-Tacoma in the fall. “The tutorial method helps us break down our question so we can see exactly what we are confused about and makes it easier for others to help us.”

By their senior year, students focus on entrance essays, admissions and scholarship applications, financial aid and being prepared for the academic and social structure of college when they get there.

“They went from wide-eyed freshmen to seniors who are absolutely ready for the next step in their lives,” Dorsey said.

As a class, students tour college campuses of various sizes so they can visualize how they might fit there.

“We are lucky we have a superintendent that supports AVID and provides funding,” Dorsey said.

## More than academics, it’s family

AVID students come from a variety of backgrounds, but when they are together working toward a common goal, they become friends – family.

“The AVID program has changed my life for the better, I don’t think people realize the family that this program creates,” Emerson wrote in an e-mail. “When I first got into high school I struggled with anxiety, like many other freshman, but I didn’t know how to handle it. Mr. Dorsey and my fellow classmates helped me through some very rough times.”

“The same teacher stays with the kids through 7th and 8th grade and then again it is the same teacher with them for four years at high school. That’s why you often hear them call it their AVID family,” Miller said.

“The students in AVID rally around you,” Pearson said. “The last seven years have been amazing; honestly, a lot of it is the family.”



The White River High School AVID Class of 2018.

## The 2018 AVID senior class has:

- A **state champion** power lifter and a state judo champion, and they’re both the same kid!
- An **academic state champion** in girls wrestling
- Both the **Key Club president and treasurer**
- The **prom duchess**
- A student who earned a **CTE certificate in computer science** and another who is **certified in computer programming**
- The **ASB treasurer**
- The **Rotary Club Student of the Month**
- The **Drama Club vice president**
- The sophomore and junior **Student of the Year**
- An **Eagle Scout**
- A girl who can **deadlift 285 pounds**
- Half of the **top ranked** SPSSL doubles tennis team
- The Pierce County Skills Center **Senior of the Year**
- A student who entered a competition to **create a video game against college students and won it**
- Two **Meisenbach scholarship recipients**
- Six students who earned a cumulative **GPA above a 3.5** and three of those were over 3.7
- 11 students who participated in **postseason athletics** in soccer, cross country, girls wrestling, judo, tennis, fastpitch and power lifting
- Represented WRHS in **state athletic tournaments** 27 times
- A student who traveled to San Francisco, all expenses paid, to participate in a **nationwide technology conference**
- 14 students who have **part-time jobs**
- Taken **54 AP classes**; one student took more AP classes than any other student at WRHS

Each AVID family has a strong, compassionate leader and like AVID students, AVID teachers go through an application process. A social studies/history teacher, the Class of 2018 was Dorsey’s inaugural AVID run and had a learning curve.

“It’s different from U.S. History, where the North wins the Civil War every time,” he laughed.

For example, planners became a sticking point for this group.

“They hated planners,” Dorsey said. “They fought it at every turn.”

By the end of the first year, a few could see the value, he said. The following year a few more came on board. By graduation, everyone saw planners as a useful organizational tool.

“What’s best for these kids changes with each group. Now that I know how it works, I’m excited to come back with another group,” he said. “The program works. It’s a great program. I will miss the old group, but I am excited about the next.”