

EDUCATION

AVID keeps Heaton students in a college state of mind

National designation is next on the school's agenda

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

For the past three years, Heaton Middle School has been rated a "Certified Advancement Via Individual Determination or AVID School" for its educators' work in preparing students for success in high school, college and beyond.

Now, Heaton is on track to become one of only 177 AVID National Demonstration Schools in the nation.

On Thursday, the school opened its doors to administrators and educators from Pueblo City Schools (D60), and Calhan and Englewood school districts, to showcase the extensive ways AVID strategies — including writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization and reading — are changing not only the lives of young Hawks but the entire school culture.

"We had been an 'Improvement' school in the state's school performance framework for as long as it's been in existence," said Principal Jayme Cardinal-Stangier. "So when we went into AVID, and by building those strategies, we started to see the increase slowly.

"But last year, we went into 'Performance' for the first time ever in Heaton's history, and I believe that AVID was the reason behind that."

As the Hawks avidly demonstrated the educational benefits of the Cornell Notes method — a systematic format for



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ABOVE: Heaton eighth-grader Natasha Finley explains the 'Certified Advancement Via Individual Determination' or AVID program to a group of educators gathered around her during an informational session at the school on Thursday.

RIGHT: Heaton eighth-grader Austin Chase recounts his experiences as a member of the school's AVID program.

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condensing and organizing transcriptions — the importance of binders as an organizational tool and the mind-enhancing power of tutorials, observers, including Calhan Superintendent David Slothower, listened intently.

"I was aware of AVID but not the details," Slothower said. "So I want to learn more about it. AVID is one of the things we're considering for our district. In education, we

are not losing the battle at the strategic level, we are losing it at the tactical level, the doing.

"And what I'm seeing today seems to indicate that they are giving students those tactics to learn. The organization, the note-taking, coming to terms with things we don't know about — those are life skills."

The most compelling testimony about AVID's life-changing capacity, however, came from the students themselves, including three confident and well-spoken eighth-

graders.

"The AVID program has helped me realize that I am destined to be the first person in my family to graduate from college," said Asia Thompson. "Just recently, I have received letters asking me to apply to Washburn (University) in Topeka, Kan., The University of Denver and the Coast Guard.

"AVID is not just a program to me. It's the road to my successful career. I don't know where I would be without it."

Thanks to AVID,

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eighth-grader Austin Chase already has a clear-cut vision of both his collegiate and career plans.

"I would like to go to the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs," Austin explained. "When done with college, I would like to become a middle-school teacher and teach social studies or science."

Tanis Chavez, another eighth-grader, said it was AVID that empowered

her to be dissatisfied with being a mediocre student.

"In sixth grade, my GPA was a 2.5, because I thought school was just for fun. In seventh grade, I applied for AVID and got accepted, and my GPA was a 3.7

"Now, after being in AVID, my heart is set on going to Stanford and becoming an OB-GYN doctor, and I'm proud to say my GPA is a 4.0."

For the past 18 months,

Heaton and its students have progressed along the path that leads to the national certification as a demonstration school. That process is expected to be formally validated in March, when members of the AVID Center and the AVID Western Division visit and survey Heaton.

"And I'm fully confident that we will receive that designation," Cardinal-Stangier said.

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