Supporting Student Success at Austin High School

Challenging students to understand and meet their highest potential is a primary goal of all schools. Austin High School has recently implemented two programs to support students and increase success.

In the fall of 2014, Austin High School made steps to curve the 4-year graduation rate with the implementation of REACH. Currently on par at 81.4% as compared to the state of Minnesota at 81.9%, students at Austin High are finding success!

REACH stands for Relationship, Education, Accountability, Character, and Hard work which are the five core values that guide the program as they support students’ academic, social, and emotional needs. REACH is a team consisting of 4 adults, each with their own specialty and strengths that work with about 90 students.

REACH strives to create a new culture of learning by flipping what a traditional classrooms may look like in order to dedicate time to blend accountability and hard work, with relationship building and some good old fun.

REACH is a two-period class offered five-days a week, for the whole semester. The philosophy of REACH focuses on building trust, security, and the comfort necessary to *change* the mindset of the way many students who may dislike school, are behind in credits, unorganized, have improper study habits, and in some cases an internal belief system that they are a ‘failure.’

After only three or four semesters, students are seeing a difference! Students’ successes have bridged from school to home. Many students commented how REACH has helped them feel more comfortable and happy while at school and have a sense of ‘home’ while at school. REACH has helped build their self-confidence about their academic potential, given them motivation and resources to do better in school, and the ability to advocate for their needs with teachers and other adults.

Graduating high school is the primary goal of REACH. Students are celebrating academic successes of all magnitudes; including passing grades on tests, passing classes, increasing GPA, and taking PSEO courses at Riverland Community and Technical College. Austin Public Schools is extremely proud of the work our students, the teachers at AHS, and our REACH staff have put in! A total of 77 students were being supported through REACH in the fall semester of 2015, and of those students 89% were able to pass ALL their classes.

Students have found success through another support called AVID. AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination. AVID’s mission is to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in our global society. Students enroll in the AVID Elective course which strategically teaches organization and study skills. Students develop critical thinking, learn to ask probing questions, and receive academic help from tutors and peers to prepare them to be college ready. AVID Elective fosters a family mentality that students will excel and succeed together. In addition to the AVID Elective, students are enrolled in at least one course that is more challenging as compared to the course the students would normally be recommended for; these courses include Honors, Advanced Placement [AP] and Pre-AP.

The success of AVID has spread throughout Austin Public Schools. Since starting in grades 9 and 10 in the 2014-15 school year, AVID support students in grade 11 at AHS as well as Sumner Elementary School and IJ Holton Intermediate School supporting learners in grades 4-6. Next year, AVID will be supporting learners at Ellis Middle School for students in grades 7 and 8.

In one student’s words, AVID is, “…a guide to your future.” Beyond academics goals, AVID pushes students past what they thought they were capable of doing and promotes the skills to access and be successful in college and in life.

“Engaging and empowering ALL learners for life,” is Austin Public Schools’ mission. Through programs like REACH and AVID, we are providing the right supports at the right time for our community to reach our true potential.