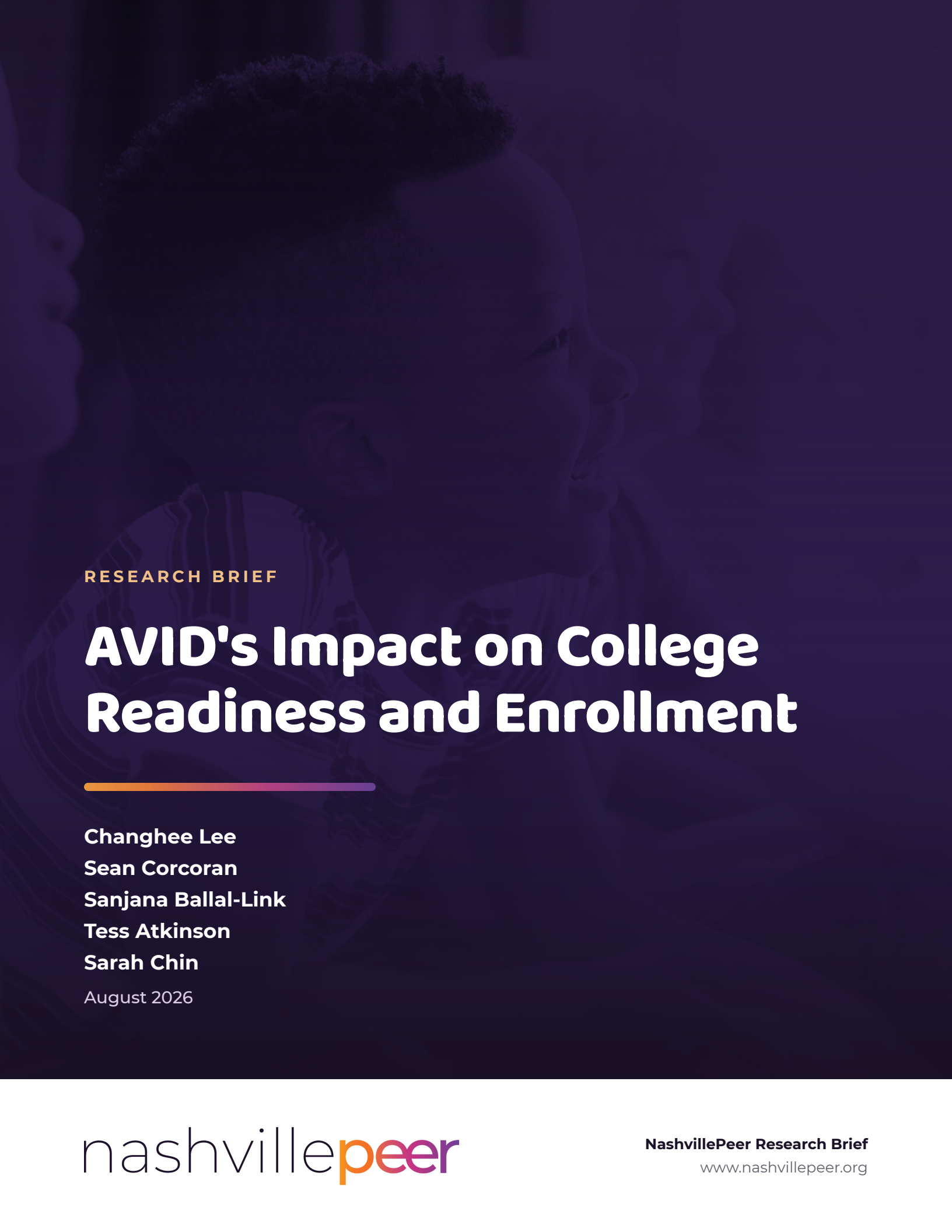




RESEARCH BRIEF

AVID's Impact on College Readiness and Enrollment

Changhee Lee
Sean Corcoran
Sanjana Ballal-Link
Tess Atkinson
Sarah Chin

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Executive Summary

As Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) continues to invest in college-readiness initiatives, understanding which programs help improve student outcomes is increasingly important. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program is a college-readiness program designed to strengthen long-term trajectories toward high school graduation and college enrollment by expanding access to college pathways and equipping students with the skills and support needed to pursue their college aspirations. Since the early 2010s, MNPS has implemented AVID as a cornerstone of its college-readiness strategy, with a particular focus on students historically underrepresented in higher education.

This research brief examines whether AVID has been effective in preparing students for college in MNPS. Specifically, we ask: To what extent does AVID explain differences in students' Early Postsecondary Opportunity (EPSO) participation and postsecondary outcomes, and how do these patterns differ across student characteristics? We examine the relationship between AVID participation and key college-going milestones, including participation in advanced coursework, high school graduation, and college enrollment.

Key Findings

- 1** AVID students are more likely than their non-AVID peers to both participate in and complete at least one EPSO course, especially for students identified as economically disadvantaged and those with low and medium prior achievement.
- 2** Participating in AVID modestly increases on-time graduation, with larger gains for English learners and students with lower prior achievement.
- 3** AVID participation increases likelihood of any college enrollment—especially at 4-year institutions—with the strongest effects for English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and those with medium prior achievement.

Overall, these findings suggest that the AVID program plays an important role in helping students move successfully through the steps to college. As MNPS continues to seek ways to improve college readiness and expand postsecondary opportunities, AVID appears to be an effective strategy for helping more historically underserved students prepare for and enroll in college.

Preparing students for success after high school is a central goal of school districts across Tennessee and the nation. As policymakers and educators place increasing emphasis on college and career readiness, districts have adopted a range of strategies to help students access rigorous coursework, graduate from high school, and enroll in postsecondary education.

One such strategy is the AVID program. Since the early 2010s, MNPS has implemented AVID as a cornerstone of the district's college-readiness strategy. AVID expands access to college pathways by equipping students with the skills and support needed to pursue their college aspirations, with a focus on students historically underrepresented in higher education. Now reaching nearly one in five students across grades 6–12 through 1,388 trained educators in MNPS, the program employs three research-supported strategies to prepare students for college, including developing academic skills through rigorous coursework¹; teaching college search, applications, and financial aid²; and cultivating institutional cultures where college is the expected next step³. AVID functions as a school-level resource that prepares and connects students for EPSOs, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate, Cambridge programs, dual enrollment, and state and local dual credit courses. In turn, the program aims to strengthen long-term trajectories toward high school graduation and college enrollment.

Studies in other states provide evidence that AVID makes a difference for students. Evaluations from Florida⁴ and Wisconsin⁵ found that AVID participants, particularly low-income students, were more likely to complete advanced coursework, graduate from high school, and enroll in college.

¹ Long, M. C., Iatarola, P., & Conger, D. (2009). Explaining gaps in readiness for college-level math: The role of high school courses. *Education Finance and Policy*, 4(1), 1–33.

² Oreopoulos, P., & Ford, R. (2019). Keeping college options open: A field experiment to help all high school seniors through the college application process. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 38(2), 426–454.

³ Roderick, M., Coca, V., & Nagaoka, J. (2011). Potholes on the road to college: High school effects in shaping urban students' participation in college application, four-year college enrollment, and college match. *Sociology of Education*, 84(3), 178–211.

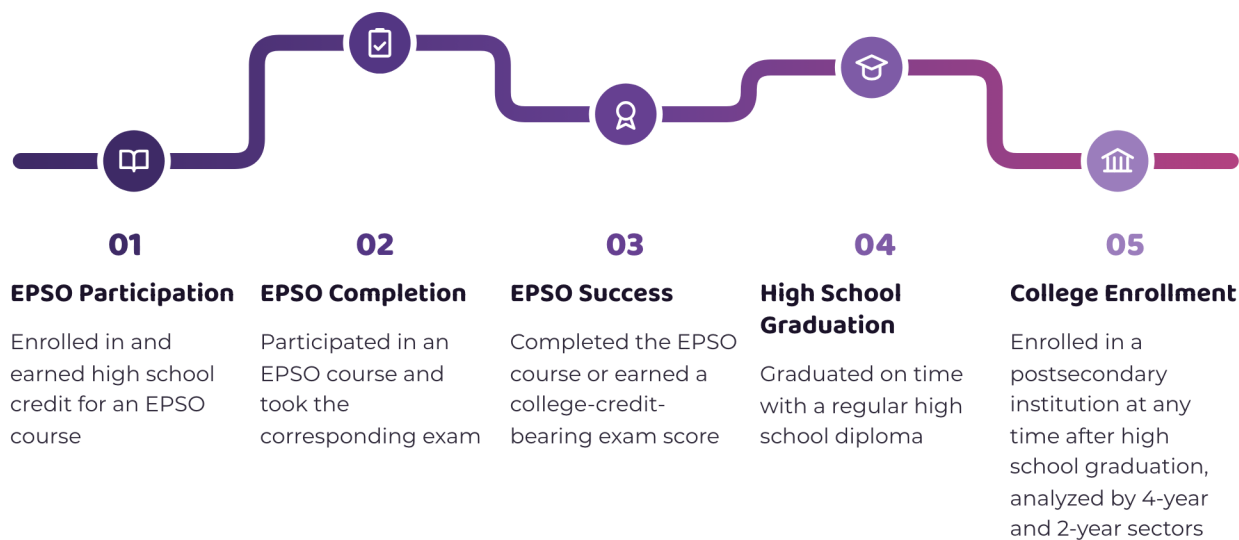
⁴ Todhunter-Reid, A., Burke, A., Houchens, P., & Howard, M. (2020). AVID participation in high school and post-secondary success: An evaluation and cost analysis. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 13(4), 679–701.

⁵ Kolbe, T., Kinsley, P., Feldman, R. C., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (2018). From the (Academic) middle to the top: an evaluation of the AVID/TOPS college access program. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 23(4), 304–335.

This study includes students who graduated from MNPS between 2014 and 2024. The data includes course transcripts, attendance, grades, test scores, school enrollment history, and basic student demographic information. We also link to college enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse to determine whether students went to college and what type of school they attended (e.g., 2-year or 4-year college). The analysis focuses on 19,226 students who attended traditional MNPS schools continuously from the 8th grade and whose transcript records through the fall semester of 12th grade are available.

The study identifies AVID participants as students who enrolled in and earned a passing grade in at least one AVID elective course between 9th and 12th grade (4,603 students met these criteria). The analysis then examines how participation in AVID may influence students' progression through high school and into college across five key milestones: participating in EPSO coursework, completing EPSO coursework, succeeding in EPSO coursework, graduating from high school, and enrolling in college. Because many factors beyond AVID can influence these outcomes, the analysis uses a *machine learning method* to estimate how AVID students would have progressed through high school and into college if they had not participated in the program, taking into account their backgrounds and prior academic performance⁶.

Figure 1. Definition of key college-going milestones



⁶ Chernozhukov, V., Chetverikov, D., Demirer, M., Duflo, E., Hansen, C., & Newey, W. (2017). Double/debiased/Neyman machine learning of treatment effects. *American Economic Review*, 107, 261–265.

The statistical models we use to estimate the effect of AVID account for student differences measured before high school, such as demographics (race, gender, English learner status, economic disadvantage, disability) and middle school performance (attendance, grades, test scores, prior AVID experience, and credits earned before 9th grade). We also look at whether AVID works differently for certain groups—students at different prior achievement levels, English language learners (ELL), and economically disadvantaged (ED) students. To measure prior achievement, we average students' test score percentiles on the TCAP in English, math, and science from grades 6–8. Students scoring in the bottom third are categorized as students with "low achievement," the middle third "medium achievement," and the top third "high achievement." See Table 1 for subgroup sample sizes.

Table 1. Sample sizes by AVID participation status, student subgroups, and college-going milestones

	EPSO participation		EPSO completion & success		High school graduation		Any college enrollment		4-year college enrollment	
	AVID	Non-AVID	AVID	Non-AVID	AVID	Non-AVID	AVID	Non-AVID	AVID	Non-AVID
All Students	4,603	14,623	3,962	11,261	4,585	14,519	4,506	14,040	2,593	6,813
ED	2,734	8,763	2,246	6,299	2,724	8,692	2,666	8,340	1,472	3,674
ELL	376	1,701	330	1,357	374	1,694	366	1,609	179	481
Low Achievement	1,716	6,246	1,361	4,387	1,711	6,197	1,665	5,894	749	2,108
Medium Achievement	2,177	5,308	1,923	4,225	2,166	5,281	2,139	5,158	1,352	2,829
High Achievement	656	2,504	628	2,348	654	2,484	649	2,471	470	1,781

Note: Sample sizes for AVID and Non-AVID students vary by outcome measure depending on data availability. 4-year college enrollment sample consists only of students who enrolled in any college

KEY FINDING #1

AVID students are more likely than their non-AVID peers to both enroll in and complete at least one EPSO course, especially for students identified as economically disadvantaged and those with low and medium prior achievement.

Figure 2 shows that MNPS students who participate in the district's AVID program are about 7 percentage points more likely to participate in EPSO coursework than similar students who are not enrolled in the program. They are also about 6 percentage points more likely to complete an EPSO. However, AVID participation does not seem to have a significant effect on whether students succeed in their EPSO coursework by earning college-credit bearing exam scores.

Figure 2. AVID students are more likely to participate in and complete at least one EPSO course.



Note: Solid-colored bars marked with an asterisk (*) show differences that are unlikely to be due to chance and therefore represent meaningful patterns in the data, while faded bars indicate results that could be due to random variation.

How to Read: Figure 2 shows the estimated differences in the predicted likelihood of reaching milestones for one or more EPSOs between students who took an AVID elective and those who did not for each student group. For example, for "All Students," AVID students showed an 86% predicted likelihood of EPSO enrollment vs. 79% for their non-AVID peers, outperforming by about 7 percentage points.

These positive effects are strongest among economically disadvantaged (ED) students and those with low or medium prior achievement in grades 6–8. ED students who participate in AVID are about 7 percentage points more likely to participate in EPSO courses and to complete them. Similarly, AVID students with medium or low prior achievement in middle school are more than 8 percentage points more likely to participate in EPSO coursework than similar non-AVID students, and more than 7 percentage points more likely to take the exam.

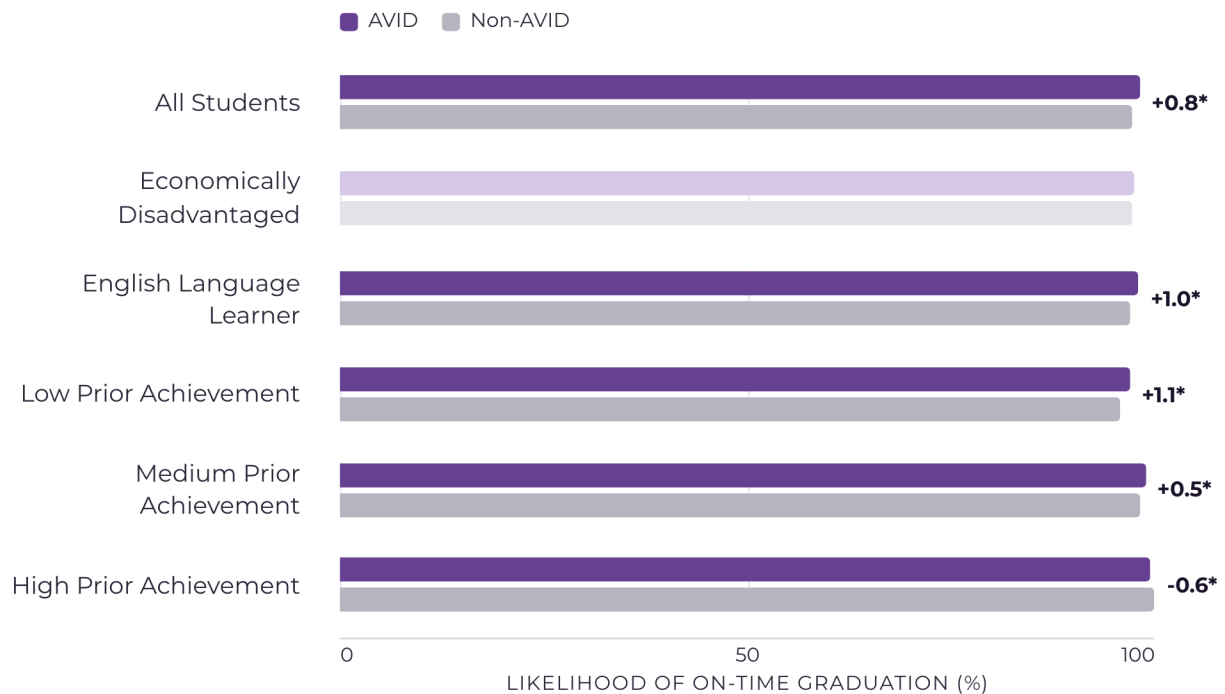


KEY FINDING #2

Participating in AVID modestly increases on-time graduation, with larger gains for English learners and students with lower prior achievement.

Graduating high school is an essential prerequisite for enrolling in college. We examine whether AVID students are more likely than non-AVID students to graduate high school on time (students who persisted to 12th-grade and graduated within four years of entering 9th-grade). Figure 3 demonstrates that AVID students generally see benefits in this area, although there is notable variation among student groups. On average, AVID students are slightly more likely to graduate on time—about 0.8 percentage points higher than non-AVID students. This positive effect is slightly stronger for English learners and students with low prior achievement, who are about 1 percentage point more likely to graduate on time.

Figure 3. AVID students are more likely to graduate on time than non-AVID students, though there is some variation across different student groups.



How to Read: Figure 3 shows the estimated differences in the predicted likelihood of on-time graduation between students who took an AVID elective and those who did not for each student group. For example, for "All Students," AVID students showed a 98% predicted likelihood of on-time graduation vs. 97% for their non-AVID peers outperforming by 0.8 percentage points.

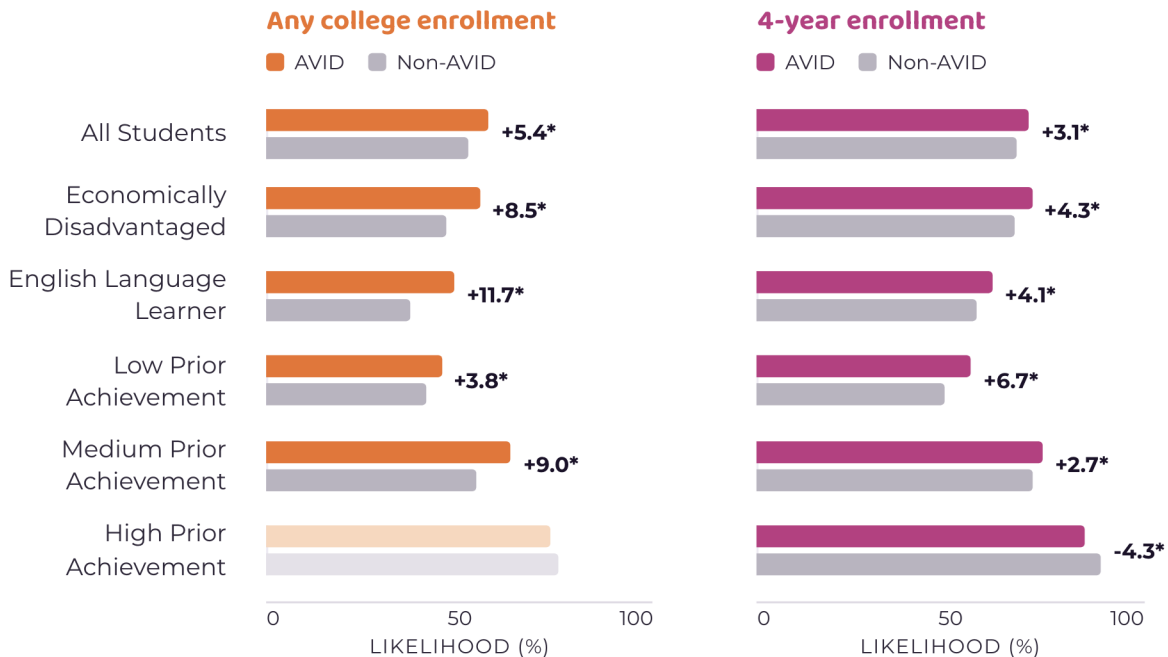
KEY FINDING #3

AVID participation increases likelihood of any college enrollment—especially at 4-year institutions—with the strongest effects for English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and those with medium prior achievement.

AVID's impact on college-going outcomes for MNPS students is striking—students who participate in the program are more likely to pursue college, with the strongest effects for underrepresented student groups. Students who participate in AVID are 5.4 percentage points more likely to enroll in any college (see Figure 4). The biggest differences are among ELL students (+11.7 points), students with medium prior achievement (+9 points), and ED students (+8.5 points).

Similarly, AVID students are 3.1 percentage points more likely to choose a 4-year college. The advantage is even greater for ED students (+4.3 points), ELL students (+4.1 points), and students with low prior achievement (+6.7 points).

Figure 4. Overall, AVID students are more likely to enroll in college and choose 4-year institutions than those who do not participate in the program.



How to Read: Figure 4 compares how likely AVID students and similar non-AVID students are to enroll in college and what type of college they attend. For example, AVID students overall showed a 57.6% predicted likelihood of enrolling versus 52.2% for non-AVID peers, outperforming 5.4 percentage points.

What We Know

Overall, these findings suggest that the AVID program plays an important role in helping MNPS students move successfully through the steps to college. Students in AVID consistently do better than similar peers on key milestones—taking advanced courses, graduating from high school on time, and especially enrolling in college. The biggest benefits from AVID show up for students who are consistently underrepresented in college enrollment and completion: economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and those with low or medium prior achievement. These groups make up a large share of the district and often face barriers to college access. They are also the population of students AVID is intended to serve.

For students with high prior achievement, participating in AVID has small, mixed effects on college-going milestones. Their advanced coursework, graduation, and college enrollment rates are already high, so participating in AVID may not yield as much benefit. Given that AVID is not designed for students with high prior achievement, other specialized programs may better serve those already on advanced academic pathways.

When it comes to advanced course success, AVID and non-AVID students perform similarly, though AVID students are more likely to take these challenging courses, in part because AVID participation requires EPSO enrollment. This suggests that AVID's biggest impact may be opening doors and encouraging students to engage in rigorous coursework, even if that means some struggle along the way. They may not earn college credit, but the experience can [build confidence and skills that matter for college readiness](#).

What Our Findings Don't Explain

Nevertheless, the analysis leaves several questions unanswered. For example, we do not know which specific mechanisms drive AVID's strongest benefit for students historically underrepresented in enrolling and completing college. This analysis also cannot capture to what extent unobserved factors, including students' motivation, access to informal guidance, differences in advising practices, teachers' high expectations for college-going, or college-oriented peer communities may contribute to varying outcomes for different student groups. Future work comparing AVID's implementation across different school contexts may help clarify where the program is most effective, and which conditions enable its supports to translate into stronger long-term outcomes.

Leveraging AVID to Build College-Going Cultures and Postsecondary Success

The AVID program has been a cornerstone of MNPS's strategy to create a college-going culture across the district. With AVID now in place at 88 MNPS schools, including all 12 zoned high schools, the program provides an essential framework for helping students develop important academic skills, mindsets, and behaviors. AVID's focus on college readiness, through note-taking, time management, goal setting, and critical thinking, directly aligns with the skills students need to excel in rigorous coursework and graduate prepared for college and beyond.

Early findings suggest that AVID students are more likely to take advanced coursework but also persist through completion, due in part to the program design. By embedding AVID's college-readiness strategies early, MNPS is equipping students with the tools they need to succeed in the most demanding academic environments—ensuring that they're not only college-bound, but also college-prepared.

Building a Stronger K–12 College-Going Pipeline

MNPS is strengthening how AVID supports students across grade levels so that students enter high school prepared to succeed in rigorous coursework.

- **Elementary school:** Expanding "AVID for All" by embedding AVID practices into all school operations to build a college-going culture and introduce foundational academic habits for all students.
- **Middle school:** Helping students develop the skills and knowledge needed to access AVID in high school, including preparation for the academic demands of advanced coursework.
- **High school:** Continuing to provide targeted supports for students with strong potential who would benefit from additional structure and skill-building, but otherwise might not receive other intensive academic supports.

Refining Student Access and Postsecondary Pathways

MNPS is also improving how students are identified for AVID and supported through the program.

- Clarifying the profile of an AVID student to ensure the program consistently reaches the students it is designed to serve.
- Using AVID as a pathway to postsecondary opportunities, including increasing the number of students eligible for University MNPS scholarships.
- Providing support through key transitions, such as the college application process and enrollment after graduation.

Strengthening Program Implementation

To ensure AVID is implemented consistently and with integrity across schools, MNPS is improving several key program structures.

- Improving course scheduling to provide AVID as a daily class.
- Expanding professional learning for teachers and building school-level capacity to lead AVID training.
- Creating an AVID walkthrough tool to guide implementation and support coaching and feedback cycles that strengthen instructional practices.

Together, these efforts reflect MNPS's commitment to using evidence to sharpen how AVID is implemented across the district. By leveraging AVID strategies as a pipeline for preparation, improving implementation quality, and ensuring the program reaches the students it is designed to serve, MNPS is positioning AVID as a key strategy for expanding access to rigorous coursework and preparing students for success in college and beyond.



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