

Evaluating the Impact of AVID on Ninth-Grade Students' Learning and Study Skills

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Objectives

Many school districts, including Chicago Public Schools (CPS), have implemented the AVID program as a means of increasing college readiness and access. AVID targets students in the “academic middle” and places them into honors and AP courses, while at the same time providing social and academic support for students to succeed in these advanced courses. Despite the popularity of AVID, there is a surprising lack of rigorous evaluations using methods that control for measured and unmeasured differences between treatment and control groups. This study seeks to fill this gap and examines the relationship between participating in AVID and the study behaviors the program teaches as strategies for learning, as well as critical 9th grade measures of learning (core GPA, English GPA, math GPA, and test score gains) that set the path for college readiness.

Theoretical framework

The core of AVID is a daily elective class taken throughout high school. The class is intended to provide AVID students with the supports and skill-building practices that research has linked to improvements in learning, school performance, and college access (e.g., Conley, 2007; Farkas, 2003; Kilgore & Pendleton, 1993). In particular, AVID provides schools with curricular materials in the areas of study and organization skills, writing in the content areas, and college guidance and planning.

Methods

In order to address the selection effects associated with a voluntary program such as AVID, this study uses two propensity score methods to evaluate the effect of AVID on 9th grade study behaviors and learning outcomes. The first method estimates students' within-school propensity for AVID participation for 9th graders. The second, more rigorous method uses the propensity estimates generated in the first method, and applies them to two prior cohorts of 9th graders to simulate what these students' propensity for AVID would have been if they had the opportunity to participate in AVID. For both methods, we conduct tobit and logistic regressions of 9th grade outcomes using propensity matched strata of AVID and non-AVID 9th grade students.

Data sources

This study uses data from the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR), including school records, transcripts, test scores, and student surveys. The survey measure of study behaviors was developed using Rasch rating scale analysis. The study examines first-time CPS freshman from 14 AVID high schools, including 7,357 students in pre-AVID cohorts (2002 and 2003) and 14,031 students in post-AVID cohorts (2005 to 2008; 2,521 AVID students and 11,510 non-AVID students).

Results

Using the first method, we see strong effects for AVID on core and English GPAs. However, once we use more rigorous method of controlling for selection effects, we do not see any systematic effects on 9th grade learning outcomes and study behaviors.

Significance

AVID is becoming an increasingly common program in recent years in providing the supports for students to be prepared for college. Given the rapid expansion of the program and the importance of finding strategies to promote college readiness, understanding whether and why the program is working is critical.

References

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