Hearing that “all the children are above average” in Garrison Keillor’s fictional town of Lake Wobegon elicits a knowing chuckle, not just because it’s a mathematical impossibility, but also because most of us think our own children are special. No one wants to be considered “average,” even if you’re often in good company.

But this aversion is one reason we neglect average students in education. In recent years, our focus on the top and bottom has become more glaring, and we have largely ignored the vast middle in our schools. We’ve returned to a tracking system by default.

Who are these forgotten-middle students? Generally, they’re the silent majority—the kids who come to school regularly, sit in the back of the class, rarely say anything, don’t cause trouble, and get by with C’s. They are not failing, nor are they the math whiz or star pupil. They are nearly invisible. Their parents and teachers are content that they are making it through and no alarm bells are going off.

They constitute a large part of the middle two quartiles of students. They’ll graduate, but won’t be prepared for college. And many of them will wander around for years in dead-end jobs.
It's time to re-energize the discussion on how to serve those "average" students. Today, we're consigning millions of students to low expectations, ignoring their true potential, and denying them the education they need to get ahead. Schools are not making the achievement gains they could. And we're contributing to greater economic and racial polarization in our country, while failing to address national workforce and economic realities.

The persistent and growing divide we saw so vividly following Hurricane Katrina—thousands of people, predominantly African-American, trapped by floodwaters and poverty—exists nationwide. For moral and economic reasons, no society should condone this unconscionably extreme division of its people's access to opportunity.

**Making every child college-ready must start with giving students a clear sense of what they need to do to succeed.**

The economic consequences of ignoring the middle majority of our students are sobering. The lifetime earnings of a typical college graduate are close to $1 million more than those of someone with only a high school diploma. And the education-related income gap is widening. In the 1990s, real earnings for workers with a bachelor's degree rose at three times the rate of high school graduates' wages. The differing prospects of getting and keeping a job also are striking: The unemployment rate among college graduates is about half the rate for high school graduates.

Beyond the individual income potential, our society and the nation's economy pay a price as well. While China and India surge ahead, and a quarter of the scientists and engineers in U.S. research and product development today are foreign-born, so few American students are going into science and engineering that business leaders are calling for doubling the number of Americans with degrees in these disciplines. Yet we restrict our search for a solution to the thin slice of highest achievers. Instead, we should introduce more students to such coursework, motivate and support them, and create a bigger pool going into these fields.

Likewise, we lament that our college campuses are getting less diverse as our society gets more diverse. But we neglect first-generation college students, minority students, and lower-income students.
mind bring out the best in students. They rise to the challenge and become more driven and more focused. U.S. Department of Education research shows that a rigorous curriculum is the best preparation for college success, especially for Latino and African-American students. That's why colleges routinely place greater value on a C-plus grade in an Advanced Placement course than on a B-plus in a run-of-the-mill class.

But students need support to make it. That's especially true for those whose parents didn't go to college, who come from homes where English is a second language, or who face obstacles related to poverty. The support structures must be tailored to the different needs of individual students, and cannot be optional. They must be part of the regular school day, where they'll be a core part of learning and be recognized as essential.

We know that students can do it. Ninety-five percent of the students served by the Advancement Via Individual Determination, or AVID, program have gone on to college, enrolling at three times the rate of students without the rigor-and-support approach.

They show that Garrison Keillor's description of the children of Lake Wobegon is not really off. Most of the forgotten-middle students are really above average. We simply have defined our expectations and requirements for them too low. By raising the bar, instead of lowering it, and by providing the necessary support, we can ensure that students graduate ready to fulfill their potential.

Addressing the needs of the forgotten middle isn't just a nice thing to do. Increasingly, our nation's economic and moral position in the world depends on how effectively we respond to this challenge.

Mary Catherine Swanson created the Advancement Via Individual Determination, or AVID, system in 1980 to help prepare underachieving students for entry to four-year colleges. In 1992, she founded the nonprofit AVID Center to disseminate the program nationally and internationally (www.avidonline.org).
**Leadership Responsibilities**  
as defined by Robert Marzano, Brian McNulty, and Tim Waters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Responsibility</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Provides teachers with the materials and professional development necessary for successful execution of their jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum, Instruction and assessment</td>
<td>Directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum, Instruction and assessment</td>
<td>Knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Quality control and interactions with teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Rewards</td>
<td>Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Establishes strong lines of communication with teachers and among students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Advocates for the school to all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Recognizes school's accomplishments and acknowledge failures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspect of leaders and staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>Willingly challenges the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/beliefs</td>
<td>Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors/evaluates</td>
<td>Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Adapts his/her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational awareness</td>
<td>Aware of the details and undercurrent in running the school and uses the information to address current and potential problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>Ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample
Survey Questions
College-Going Culture

1. Are college pennants/banners/posters visible in most classrooms, halls, and main office?  
   Yes No

2. Are the names of state universities posted in classrooms?  
   Yes No

3. Is a list of university requirements posted in all classrooms?  
   Yes No

4. A. Do high school departments post courses which meet university requirements in each classroom?  
   Example: In “all” history classrooms there is a list of courses offered by the department such as World History, Honors World History, Economics, AP Economics, US History, AP US History, Honors US History, Government, AP Gov., Psychology, AP Psychology, IB classes, etc.?  
   Yes No

   B. Do middle school departments post the university requirements in all classrooms?  
   Yes No

5. Is there a College Corner in most classrooms with college banners, college information, colleges attended by previous students, colleges attended by staff, degrees earned by teacher, etc.?  
   Yes No

6. Are posters/banners hung in classes with sayings such as “Training Grounds for Academic Scholars,” “Training for University,” “College Education is Important?”  
   Yes No
Survey continued—page 2

7. Are “all” students required to take notes to develop their own study guides from lectures, media, and textual materials which require reading comprehension, asking high level study questions, and summarizing information learned? Yes No

8. Are students required to use their the notes for review and preparation for exams? Yes No

9. Are there motivational posters in each class room which address character traits as responsibility, respect, honesty, courage, success, caring for others, famous quotes, etc.? Yes No

10. Are there samples of good notes, learning logs, writing and projects posted in class rooms as good models for other students to view? Yes No

11. Do students regularly calculate their current gpa for each class, their overall gpa and know their class rank (if in high school)? Yes No

12. Is student organization of materials, assignments, and due dates reviewed by subject area teachers on a regular basis? Yes No

13. Does the school have “open access” for all students to take rigorous college work? Yes No

14. Are students prepared in 9th and 10th grade pre AP/IB classes to address equity and access to upper division AP/IB classes? Yes No

15. Do teachers, in general, believe that all students can achieve in higher academic level classes when the appropriate strategies or support structure is in place? Yes No
16. Do class discussions, activities, quizzes, and exams contain questions requiring higher level thinking skills such as comparative reasoning, summarizing, evaluating, analyzing in addition to Level I fact-based questions? Yes No

17. Do college students return to campus to speak with students on a regular basis? Yes No

18. Are adults (college graduates) invited as guest speakers in classes on a regular basis? Yes No

19. Do students visit college campuses? Yes No

20. Do college representatives visit campus and speak with staff and students on a regular basis? Yes No

21. Do family information nights relating to college and financial aid occur at least once a year? Yes No

22. Do teachers wear college shirts to school on special occasions? Yes No

23. Are t-shirts relating to academics/college available to student body for purchase? Yes No

24. Are students commonly referred to as “scholars?” Yes No

25. Is it the norm for students to form study groups during & after class to study for tests, assignments, projects, etc.? Yes No

26. Do students complete college-type research projects using the Internet at least once during a school year? Yes No

27. Other ideas as defined by group... Holmes, San Juan USD
AVID students are actively involved in their own education and grow academically and personally through the support of the AVID program.

B. AVID students become thoroughly grounded in AVID strategies (WICR: writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading).

C. AVID students become masters of each stage of the AVID tutorial and the inquiry learning process, as described below:

1. Students take Cornell notes in their academic classes.
2. Students complete the Tutorial Request Form (TRF), including two higher-level questions from their academic class, Cornell notes, homework, classwork, quizzes, and/or tests.
3. As students enter the room, the teacher/tutor checks and/or collects the Tutorial Request Forms. The resources students bring to class to support their questions are also checked.
4. Students are divided into tutorial groups of seven or fewer.
5. One student begins the tutorial by presenting a higher-level question to the group. Tutor and group members ask questions to guide the student presenter through the inquiry process.
6. Group members/tutor check the student presenter’s understanding of the answer to his/her question by asking clarifying questions.
7. Steps 5 and 6 of the tutorial process are repeated for all group members.
8. Students complete a written reflection on their learning (content and/or process).
9. Students turn in their TRFs to teacher/tutor for grading and feedback.
10. Teacher/tutors/students debrief the tutorial process. Students verify their learning in their academic classes.

D. AVID students develop personal pride in themselves and their work.

E. AVID students will:

- Be positive, encouraging, and supportive of their classmates.
- Arrive on time and prepared for class (bring completed TRF with higher-level questions and related resources—class notes, textbooks, past tests, etc.).
- Act as a role model in behavior for peers.
- Become familiar with the specific routines and expectations of their teachers’ classrooms.
- Understand the importance of learning and of achieving academic success.
- Take an active part in developing academic strength, personal pride, and self-advocacy.
- Demonstrate commitment to themselves, to AVID, and to their studies.
- Communicate effectively with their teachers, tutors, and other students.
- Discuss with AVID tutors common areas of concern.
- Learn by asking questions (inquiry), not by having answers provided for them.
- Maintain at least a 2.0 GPA and satisfactory citizenship and attendance in all classes.
- Maintain enrollment in college-preparatory classes.
- Maintain an AVID three-ring binder (with agenda/daily planner/calendar, Cornell notes, assignments in all classes, and TRFs).
- Take Cornell notes and/or keep learning logs in all academic classes.
- Complete all homework assignments (commit to at least two hours of homework every night).
- Participate in AVID tutorials at least twice a week.
- Participate in extracurricular activities, field trips, and community service.
- Attend summer school as needed to take additional coursework and/or to raise grades to maintain college eligibility. *(high school)*
- Prepare for and take college entrance exams such as the PSAT®, PLAN, SAT®, and ACT. *(high school)*

*Tutorial Support Curriculum Resource Guide*