

# The Dallas Morning News

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Opinion: Editorials

## Keeping Kids in School: Texas needs more success stories

For 13-year-old Ariana Beltran, going to college was like winning the lottery.

Almost impossible.

That is, until she joined AVID – Advancement Via Individual Determination – an elective course for kids like Ariana, who teachers know are capable of completing a college-prep graduation plan but need some extra guidance at school.

With high school dropout rates estimated at more than 50 percent in some areas – particularly among growing Latino populations – programs like AVID can provide the crucial guidance that keeps students from falling through the cracks.

"Now I think that everyone is capable of going to college, even if you come from a low-income family," said the Sellers Middle School eighth-grader in Garland. "Even if I don't have

the money, my potential will help me all the way through."

It's not enough to tell kids they should graduate from high school and go to college – although that's certainly a good (and too often overlooked) start. Effective programs like AVID offer concrete guidance with the pep talk.

Through AVID, Ariana and her classmates visit university campuses, talk about high school requirements, learn to organize their binders and how to take notes they can actually study from. AVID participants – mostly C students with potential – are pushed to take honors courses.

The philosophy: It's better to struggle through an honors class than breeze through a regular one. The lesson for the rest of us: Expectations matter.

The program's curriculum emphasizes critical thinking and strong reading skills. It's important that students pass a standardized test when they graduate, but it's also vital that they learn the skills necessary to keep up with a college load.

Founded in 1980 in San Diego, there are nearly 1,200 AVID sites across the country. Fifty-nine Texas school districts offer this elective, but there should be more – especially here in North Texas, with our growing Latino populations.

But the reality is these programs cost money. And they rely on paid college student tutors to help.

In Ariana's class, they're usually a few tutors short. Log on to learn more about local AVID sites, or contact your school district.