



Fontana Unified School District

Every Student Successful, Engaging Schools, Empowered Communities

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nationally Recognized Fontana Unified AVID Program Nominated for Global Achievement Award

FONTANA, CA – Fontana High School’s dedication to ensure students thrive after graduation has been recognized through their Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, with the school being named as one of four finalists for the college prep program’s inaugural AVID Global Achievement Site Team of the Year award. The winner will be announced at the AVID 2025 National Conference in December.

“This recognition reflects the hard work of our teachers and staff in helping students understand they have the potential to attend college or pursue any future path they choose,” Fontana High Principal Joe Malatesta said. “AVID is one of many programs that support our students in realizing their potential and exploring multiple options after high school.”

Fontana High’s AVID program has been a blueprint of success for more than 20 years, providing opportunities for underrepresented students to achieve their dream of attending college and serving as a model for other schools as an AVID National Demonstration School and AVID Site of Distinction.

Fontana High’s annual event, College Application Day, celebrates students submitting their college applications and has also been recognized by the California School Board Association with the prestigious Golden Bell Award.

Before joining AVID as a student, Mario Echeverria, a Fontana High Class of 2011 graduate, was struggling academically. After joining the program and being mentored by AVID coordinators Dawn Costa and Jo Shelly Sisk, he said he found the guidance and resources he needed to earn a bachelor’s in business administration from Cal State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) and a master’s in teaching and learning from the University of Redlands.

Even as a university student, he returned to Fontana High as an AVID tutor and track and field coach during his undergraduate studies. After earning his degrees, he became a resident substitute before continuing as a coach and becoming a math and AVID teacher to guide other students who may be facing the same challenges as he did as a high school student.

“I was the student that AVID was designed for, and it’s great to be able to provide these same opportunities to a new generation of Fontana High scholars,” Echeverria said. “I didn’t know where I was going and always needed extra support. Then I met Mrs. Costa and Ms. Shelly and began AVID and that opened up opportunities I didn’t know that I had.”

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The Fontana High AVID site team is led by Malatesta and Costa, who said she considers her site team a family, underscored by the many Fontana High alumni that have returned to school to teach and serve as AVID mentors.

“AVID is more than a class – it’s part of the fabric of the school, has a positive impact on school spirit, and inspires students to get more involved,” Costa, who has been a math teacher for 26 years and AVID teacher for 23, said. “The heart of our program is our returning Fontana High graduates. Their enthusiasm and desire to see students fulfill their dreams makes this job special.”

Fontana High math teacher Kevin Escobar learned about the power of AVID when his family moved to Georgia when he was a Fontana High sophomore. As a DREAMer looking to pursue higher education, Escobar faced prohibitive tuition fees if he attended school in Georgia.

Reaching out to his former mentor Costa, Escobar discovered that undocumented students in California can receive in-state tuition. He decided to move back to Fontana by himself to live with his aunt and graduated from Fontana High in 2015. While attending CSUSB, Escobar returned to Fontana High to serve as an AVID tutor. Now, he’s giving back by serving as a math teacher, AVID teacher, and co-coordinator at Fontana High School.

“AVID helped keep me stay in touch with my school, and inspired me to move back and continue my education, which I am extremely grateful for. If it wasn’t for the communication and support, I wouldn’t have made it back,” Escobar said. “I love this program and working with our students and an amazing team. It’s an honor to see that our hard work is being recognized by AVID.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_AVID1: Fontana High School is being recognized for their Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, with the school being named as one of four finalists for the college prep program’s inaugural AVID Global Achievement Site Team of the Year award.

FUSD_AVID2: Fontana High’s AVID students receive one-on-one guidance from counselors to help them apply to college and financial aid, and find their pathway after graduating from high school.

FUSD_AVID3: As part of Fontana Highs college-going culture, College Application Submit Day, an event recognized by the California School Board Association with the prestigious Golden Bell Award, celebrates students submitting their college applications.

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