

Kanto Plain students take part in AVID conference

By Vince Little, Stars and Stripes
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YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Hoping to groom themselves for future academic success, Kanto Plain-area students gathered here Tuesday for the 3rd annual Middle School AVID Leadership Conference.

The Advancement Via Individual Determination program is designed to help students develop the academic skills and study habits needed to flourish at present and upcoming levels of education, including college.

The class is an elective offered in DODDS middle and high schools.

About 150 students from Yokota, Camp Zama and Yokosuka Naval Base took part in Tuesday's session, the only one in Japan crafted specifically for middle schoolers.

"The focus is on collaboration," said Melanie Bales, the Pacific AVID coordinator. "High school students have lots of Far East activities where they can meet other students. Our middle school kids don't often get this."

College preparation through rigorous coursework is a major part of AVID, she added.

The program is built on developing solid organizational skills, effective note taking and time management.

Students also must maintain a binder that contains all the work they do for class, including notes and homework.

Bales said students are selected based on grade-point averages and test scores.

"It's all about preparing for college — starting in the sixth grade," she said, adding that emphasis is placed on taking courses that will get students into college and keep them there.

According to Bales, 30 percent of students who enter the nation's colleges wind up dropping out. However, there is a 95 percent retention rate among AVID students, she said.

Last month, 35 AVID teachers held a conference at Department of Defense Dependents Schools-Pacific headquarters on Okinawa.

On Tuesday, students participated in critical-thinking, team-building and writing activities. They also engaged in a philosophical debate and heard college-prep tips from a University of Maryland representative.

Next year's Kanto Plain conference will be hosted by Zama American Middle School.

Many kids improve performance

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Middle school students who attended Tuesday's AVID leadership conference say the program has sharpened their work habits and put them on a path toward loftier academic goals.

Lajoie Bradley, 13, an eighth-grader at Yokosuka Middle School, said she's gone from being an "A to B" student to collecting almost all A's on her report card. And now, the second-year AVID student is aiming for Yale.

"I did not want to go there before," she said. "I knew it would help me prepare for college and the SAT, but it helped me choose a college to go to. And it's boosted my grades a little..

Zama American Middle School seventh-grader Shaun Dettman said he attends AVID classes two to three days a week, depending on a rotating schedule.

"I chose AVID because I'm having a little bit of trouble in study skills and time management ... and it's really helping me a lot," said Dettman, 12, adding that he's become better at organization and listening. "I want to make sure I'm ready for college, so I'm not just blank in my head."

Seventh-grader Devonte Jackson, 12, said he was recruited into the program at Yokota Middle School.

"It's taught me organization skills and also helped me get better at working in a group," Jackson said.

"And it's helped with my auditory learning. I feel like it's going to help me get into college ... AVID is a good class to take."

Branden Sharbutt, 13, an eighth-grader at Yokota, said friends encouraged him to join a year ago.

"It's a really good program if you're serious about going to college and getting organized," he said.

— *Vince Little*