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BC AVID Pilot Project – Briefing note

The BC AVID Pilot Project is testing a new way to ensure that more young people have access to post-secondary education and achieve their full potential in today's knowledge economy.

Post-secondary education (PSE) plays an increasingly important role in helping individuals achieve social and economic success. While Canada enjoys one of the highest rates of PSE attainment in the world, many students experience barriers to accessing higher education, such as a lack of finances or information. Academic barriers – including a lack of engagement in high school, poor course choices, and poor academic performance – deter significant proportions of young people from making the transition to PSE. The BC AVID Pilot Project in British Columbia was developed to test the effect on PSE access of a Canadian version of a college preparatory program widely adopted in the United States.

The AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program focuses on helping "middle-achieving" students achieve their academic potential. It does this through a combination of high expectations and intensive supports. Students are expected to enrol in their school's most challenging courses as well as an ongoing AVID elective course, in which they are taught the specific academic and organizational skills they need to succeed in future studies. Students also engage in tutorials and motivational activities (including field trips to PSE institutions), and receive personal and academic support from their AVID elective teacher and other trained staff. Research in the U.S. has found AVID students were more likely to choose advanced-level courses and to enrol in college.

The BC AVID Pilot Project was established in 2003 as a partnership between the BC Ministry of Education and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, one of several experiments established by the Foundation to identify new policies and programs to increase young people's access to PSE. As a demonstration project, BC AVID uses an experimental research design, which makes it possible to observe precisely what happens to equivalently-eligible students with and without the program. Students from 14 different school sites across the province were randomly assigned to either the AVID program group or to an equivalent comparison group. Implementation of the BC AVID program is also being studied at four additional "case study" schools, in more remote regions of the province. In total, 1,522 students are involved in the pilot project.

All students are being tracked through time, and their educational outcomes compared to one another through data collected from surveys and school records. The main outcomes of interest are graduating from high school, enrolling in PSE, and persisting through the first year of PSE. Many interim impacts are also of interest because they are considered precursors to post-secondary enrolment. These include course selection, grades, and attendance.

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The new report presents the interim impacts of BC AVID, based on the analysis of data collected until the participants completed Grade 11. There are already indications that BC AVID may be achieving some desired outcomes:

- **Students received high levels of exposure to AVID techniques**, many of which are considered educational "best practices," such as Cornell note-taking, higher levels of questioning and problem-solving tutorials. Students offered AVID were more likely to be exposed to these strategies, by up to 60 percentage points.
- **Students were more likely to be enrolled in rigorous courses in grades 10 and 11.** For example, in Grade 10 those offered BC AVID were 7 percentage points more likely to enrol in Principles of Mathematics (the most rigorous mathematics course in Grade 10) and more likely to enrol in 4 to 8 courses that were university prerequisites. In Grade 11, these students were significantly more likely to take and to pass the provincially examinable Social Studies 11 course – another common university prerequisite.
- **Students had somewhat lower marks in grades 9 and 10 – likely as a result of the more rigorous course load – but fewer received failing grades**. By Grade 11, program group students' marks were even with those of students in the comparison group and fewer were failing their courses.

While there are promising signs that BC AVID may have the intended impacts, tracking the participating students for an additional two years will inform researchers of the longer-term effectiveness of these strategies. A full account of the program's effectiveness in increasing PSE access will be possible when data from education records and longitudinal surveys of the participants are analyzed. A final report in 2012 will include any impacts detected on the types and locations of PSE programs that participants attend, and the financing they obtain to help them.

The final report will also include a benefit-cost analysis to determine whether the BC AVID interventions produce a net benefit to participants, governments, and society as a whole. Through rigorous evaluation, BC AVID will provide much-needed knowledge to inform the selection of programs that deliver the most benefit to Canada's economy and best support youth in achieving their potential.

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