

From Engagement to Independence: How Shearer Magnet School Builds Future-Ready Learners

A TK–8 school's journey toward engagement, coherence, and college and career readiness

Demonstrating the Impact of AVID

Since implementing AVID in 2019, Shearer Magnet School has built a schoolwide approach that is helping students become more engaged, organized, and independent learners. Findings from a recent study of AVID Elementary implementation (ECONorthwest, 2026) identified Shearer as a high-implementing AVID site within Napa Valley Unified School District, showing strong evidence of educator alignment, widespread use of WICOR® instructional practices, and a learning culture designed to promote student engagement and agency.

School Snapshot

- TK–8 School | AVID implemented in 2019
- Approximately 520 students; over 85% Hispanic/Latino
- 163 students in AVID-implementing grades
- Growing number of AVID-trained teachers and instructional support staff (Shearer Magnet School, 2026b)
- Strong implementation across instruction, leadership, and culture with continued growth in assessment systems (Shearer Magnet School, 2026a)

Educators reported clear shifts in students' day-to-day learning behaviors:

- 70% of surveyed educators reported that students are more engaged during instruction
- 70% reported improvements in students' organization of materials and supplies

Educators also described students becoming increasingly responsible for their learning by using notes, collaborating with peers, setting goals, and solving problems with reduced reliance on direct teacher intervention.

These outcomes reflect more than isolated classroom practices. They are the result of a sustained effort to create consistent expectations and learning experiences across grade levels. What began as a focus on student engagement has evolved into a schoolwide model where students are active participants in their learning and where college, career, and future aspirations are woven into everyday instruction.

A Phased Journey Toward Schoolwide Implementation

Students at Shearer now experience consistent expectations for organization, collaboration, and learning across the TK–8 campus. This coherence is the result of a deliberate, phased implementation of AVID that expanded over time to build educator capacity and instructional alignment.

Initial implementation began in fourth and fifth grade, where educators focused on establishing foundational practices such as organization systems and note-taking. As one educator explained, “We started mainly with the binder and just getting organized... and a little bit of the note-taking that we tried out at first.” These early efforts created a shared instructional baseline that bolstered expansion to additional grade levels.

Over time, AVID was expanded sequentially to the next lower grade, third grade, then into middle school, and eventually into the primary grades. This gradual expansion allowed educators to refine practices and build consistency across classrooms. Today, AVID practices are embedded schoolwide, supporting students in developing the skills and habits needed to navigate learning with increasing independence.



Bringing AVID to Life in the Classroom

Students at Shearer are increasingly taking ownership of their learning, demonstrating stronger organization, more effective collaboration, and deeper engagement in inquiry-based tasks than ever before. Educators attribute these shifts to the intentional integration of AVID strategies across classrooms and grade levels, creating a more consistent and student-centered learning experience.

As AVID has expanded across the TK–8 campus, staff have established shared expectations that support students over time. Educators are developing vertically aligned organization systems so students build skills progressively from the early grades through middle school.

Younger students use folders to manage materials, while upper elementary and middle school students transition to planners and binders, helping them build goal-directed behaviors and independence. Across classrooms, students use these tools to track assignments, monitor progress, and take increasing responsibility for their learning.

In addition to organization, educators are intentionally fostering student collaboration and communication skills. Professional learning focused on collaborative structures has given educators the tools to create more opportunities for students to engage in collaborative structures. As a result, educators report that students collaborate more effectively and communicate more productively during classroom tasks than before (ECONorthwest, 2026).

Bringing AVID to Life in the Classroom (cont.)

Instructional practices also emphasize inquiry and critical thinking. Educators have incorporated Costa's Levels of Thinking to move beyond surface-level responses and engage students in deeper discussion.

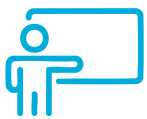
As one educator noted, the focus is on asking “not just...questions that got one-word answers...but some real thought-provoking questions,” encouraging students to analyze, explain, and justify their thinking.

Writing and reflection further promote the shift toward student ownership. Strategies such as focused note-taking, close reading, and analytical writing are embedded across content areas, enabling students to process and apply new learning.

As one educator shared, “We use focused note-taking...close reading...writing higher-level questions...goal setting—really too many strategies to list,” illustrating the breadth of implementation in daily instruction.

Together, these practices are contributing to a more consistent instructional experience for students across grade levels. As they progress through Shearer, students are increasingly able to organize their thinking, collaborate with peers, and engage in meaningful inquiry, skills that foster both academic success and long-term college and career readiness.

The school's 2024–2025 Certification and Coaching Instrument (CCI) ratings reflect its depth of implementation:



At least 70% of teachers routinely use WICOR® strategies



Students across multiple grade levels actively engage in inquiry and Costa's Levels of Thinking



Students regularly process content through writing



Students consistently engage in the Focused Note-Taking Process (Shearer Magnet School, 2026a)

Shifts in Student Experience

As AVID practices became more consistent across classrooms and grade levels, educators began noticing meaningful changes in how students approached learning. AVID-trained educators reported that students are more engaged during instruction and better organized with their materials and supplies. These types of behaviors are often linked to stronger academic participation, self-regulation, and long-term success (Loyola-Carrillo et al., 2025; College and Career Competency Framework, 2022).

Shifts in Student Experience (cont.)

Beyond these improvements, educators described students becoming increasingly independent learners, demonstrating greater ownership of their work and persistence in problem-solving. Rather than immediately seeking assistance, students are more likely to use organizational tools, reference their notes, collaborate with peers, and persist through challenges. As one educator observed, “There’s more independence... more active learning is happening.”

This shift reflects a deliberate move toward the gradual release of responsibility, where educators have intentionally moved from modeling and guiding to providing opportunities for students to take the lead in their learning. In the intermediate grades, this is especially visible as educators move away from providing answers and instead guide students in developing the skills to find solutions on their own. One educator explained, “Instead of giving answers, we guide them to find it in their notes or with a peer.” Through this approach, students are building the confidence and skills to think critically, collaborate effectively, and take increasing responsibility for their learning.

As students grow more confident with the tools and strategies embedded throughout the school, they increasingly take an active role in their learning. What begins as educator-supported practice evolves into student-led application, reflecting a clear progression toward independence. Through the gradual release of responsibility, students are building the habits and mindsets needed to organize their work, collaborate effectively, and think critically in new situations. These shifts reflect growth in student agency and self-directed learning, as students become more confident in navigating academic challenges both inside and outside the classroom.

Looking Beyond the Classroom

In addition to building engagement, organization, and independence, Shearer helps students connect their learning to future opportunities. As a Career Exploration Magnet School, college and career readiness is woven into students' daily experiences rather than treated as a standalone initiative. Across grade levels, educators regularly help students make connections between classroom learning and future pathways. As one educator explained, “We mention career, college, job connections... every single day.”

Students explore a range of postsecondary options including community college, four-year universities, skilled trades, military pathways, and entrepreneurship while developing an understanding of how their interests and strengths connect to future goals. These conversations reinforce the message that future opportunities are attainable and that the skills students build today can lead to success long after they leave Shearer.

Building Systems That Sustain AVID Implementation

As AVID implementation expanded across grade levels, educators developed greater consistency and confidence in their use of instructional strategies. This growth has been supported by intentional structures designed to build capacity and sustain high-quality implementation over time.

An active AVID Site Team helps guide the work, while ongoing professional learning ensures that strategies are not only introduced but continuously refined in practice. Educators consistently pointed to coaching, collaboration, and shared learning as critical drivers of this progress. As one educator explained, “The coaching piece is huge... co-planning and co-teaching really help secure the strategies.”

Building Systems That Sustain AVID Implementation (cont.)

Together, these pillars create a system in which educators can deepen their practice, align instruction across classrooms, and maintain momentum beyond initial training. This sustained focus on professional learning and coaching reinforces consistent implementation and contributes to the long-term impact of AVID on both teaching and student learning.

These systems have helped align grade levels and classrooms, ensuring that students encounter consistent expectations and instructional practices throughout their school experience. They have also led to the gradual expansion of AVID from a small number of upper-elementary classrooms to a schoolwide TK–8 effort.

Evidence from Shearer's 2024–2025 Certification and Coaching Instrument (CCI) further illustrates how this happens:



Sustaining Growth and Looking Ahead

While Shearer has made significant progress in building engaged, organized, and independent learners, educators remain focused on continuous improvement. Leaders and teachers recognize that sustaining success requires ongoing reflection, refinement, and support. As one leader acknowledged, "We're not necessarily at that stage yet... but we know where we're going."

As implementation continues to mature, priorities include strengthening consistency across classrooms, improving vertical alignment, expanding the use of student data, and strengthening new educators as they join the school. Educators noted that maintaining momentum in training and implementation can be challenging, particularly as staff turnover occurs and new teachers are introduced to AVID practices. Continued coaching, collaboration, and professional learning remain important strategies for ensuring all students experience the same high-quality instructional practices across the TK–8 campus.

Looking ahead, Shearer is focused on deepening coherence and sustainability. Plans include defining clear schoolwide expectations, expanding coaching opportunities, and strengthening systems for monitoring student progress. These efforts build upon the strong foundation already established through years of intentional implementation. Underlying this work is a shared belief that AVID has become more than a program or initiative, it has become part of the school's culture.

Shearer's journey demonstrates how sustained implementation, shared instructional practices, and a commitment to continuous improvement can transform student experiences over time. What began as a focus on increasing student engagement has evolved into a schoolwide approach that helps students become more organized, more independent, and more confident in their ability to pursue future opportunities.

Applying Lessons from Shearer Magnet School

Start with a small number of high-leverage practices and build over time

- Begin implementation with foundational WICOR strategies such as organization, note-taking, and goal setting.
- Expand thoughtfully across grade levels as staff confidence and consistency grow.

Create a consistent learning experience across classrooms

- Establish a shared set of instructional practices (e.g., organization, collaboration, inquiry) that students encounter throughout their school day.
- Align expectations across grade levels so skills build progressively over time.
- Provide students with frequent opportunities to take notes, ask deeper questions, collaborate with peers, and take an active role in learning.

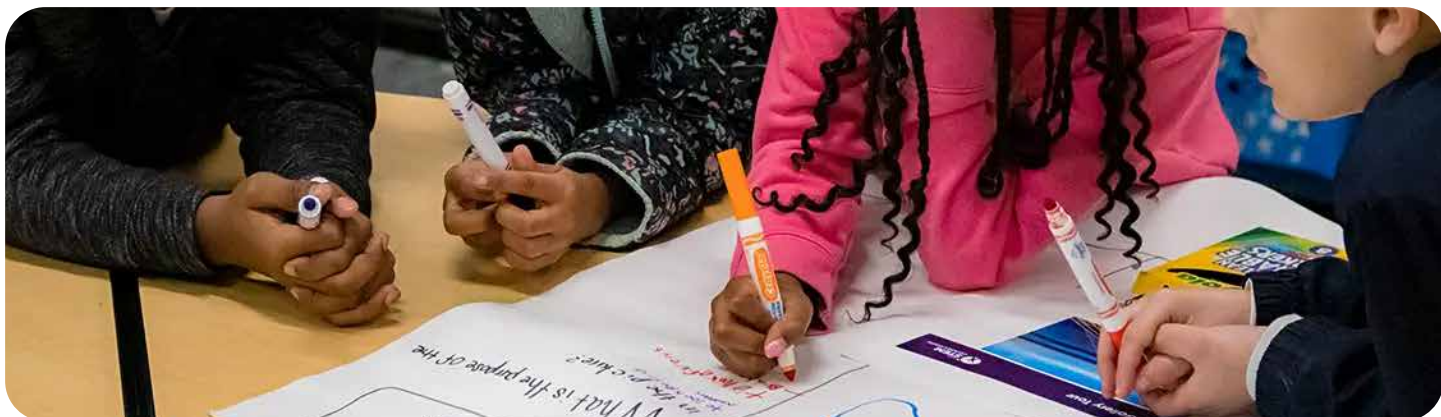
Connect learning to students' futures

- Incorporate college, career, and life pathway conversations into everyday instruction.
- Help students understand how the skills they develop today lead to future opportunities.

Invest in the systems that sustain improvement

- Establish strong site-team leadership, coaching, and collaborative planning structures to shore up implementation.
- Prioritize ongoing professional learning and onboarding processes that help maintain momentum as staff and school needs evolve.
- Revisit goals regularly and use reflection to strengthen alignment and consistency across classrooms.

Shearer's experience demonstrates that meaningful student outcomes are not the result of a single strategy or initiative. They emerge when schools commit to building consistent instructional practices, supporting educators, and creating learning environments where students are engaged, organized, independent, and prepared for future opportunities.



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avidcare@avid.org.

