

If you have ever taken a road trip from Los Angeles to Las Vegas you have probably enjoyed the views of the Mojave Desert. In this region, known to some as the High Desert, you will find the Town of Apple Valley and our beautiful school, Apple Valley Adult Education School (AVAES).

Small but yet mighty, AVAES consists of 11 buildings, which include three computer labs, seven instructional rooms and a courtyard. We pride ourselves on building a program that is centered on the ever-evolving needs of our 21st-century learners.

Through the years we have seen our student population grow from 460 to over 640. In an effort to help our community and reach more student needs we have been partnering with Victor Valley College (VVC), through a facilities-use agreement, to extend our ESL program and meet the needs of an additional 250 ESL students.

This is not the first time we have partnered with VVC. Over the past 6 years we have attempted 5 pilot programs with this ESL non-credit pilot being by far the most successful pilot yet. Together we are trying to accelerate our combined learner's matriculation rate to both credit-bearing courses and into the workforce.

AVAES would not be the school that it is without the great crew that makes the magic happen, which consists of our Program Coordinator, Adele McClain, School Office Coordinator, Claudia Escobar, our Administrative Clerk II, Melina Bezada, one full-time Adult Education credential teacher, two paraeducators, one who oversees all of our CASAS tests, eight ISP teacher, three CTE teachers, and our Student Information Coordinator, who makes sure all our reporting is on point.

Adele McClain, Claudia Escobar and Melina Bezada currently participate in the DLAC cohort. With 27 years of teaching and 7 years as an administrator, Adele McClain, brings a remarkable knowledge of teaching, resources and techniques. Claudia Escobar, an immigrant from Honduras, has 30 years of experience in the education field and holds a Bachelor's Degree in Human Development and Families Studies, which helps to be able to provide the best assistance to our learners. Melina Bezada, brings to our school a personal student perspective, since she is a product of both AVAES and VVC. Her student story as a successful bilingual single mother of two helps to encourage our hesitant students.

Faced with the problem of how we could better service our students to transition to a post-secondary school, like VVC, we had to come up with what we could do that was actionable to support, our DLAC goal, of a shared student orientation process. IDEAL 101's educational resources, communication activities, in depth search of individual strengths and activities that required sharing our hurdles, ideas, and doubts with other schools has been of great assistance in creating, organizing and implementing our site plan and fulfilling a better working partnership with VVC that helps our EL students much better.

When we started this journey, we wanted to accomplish one simple thing, a good orientation/transition process for our EL community. Our second year of DLAC helped us accomplish this. We were able to create an orientation specific to adult learners. Increasing their access and equity to all the opportunities available at VVC. We have been able to do so much more, not only, for our EL community but the whole school. In the 2023/2024 school year we increased classes for ESL learners from one to five classes, with four hosted by VVC and the other from AVAES, which is a level one course with continuous open enrollment. We also added a citizenship class and began hosting monthly citizenship clinics at our site for the community. AVAES EKG 12 Lead also had two successful ESL cohorts complete the course. The accomplishments did not stop there. We had the opportunity to pilot the Northstar Digital Literacy Program with tremendous success.

From training sessions that included team building to handling conflicts each one brought, not only new knowledge but also a much, needed reset to the individual and the group as a whole. The project demonstrated to the team the unique strength of each individual and how we could leverage these strengths and work as a successful unit. With the guidance of Dr. Porter and the OTAN team, we have been able to fine-tune the art of compromise through constructive disagreements and creating a foundation of trust. As a team we made a commitment for collaboration time and to reflect on our progress. We began to hold each other accountable and still honor this commitment we have made. Identifying each member's strengths and having team building sessions helped to tackle tasks such as outreach, public relations and marketing expanding our help to our community.

Like with any life journey not all is always rainbows and butterflies. We encountered our share of obstacles and barriers along the way. Our first setback early in our adventure was realizing that we needed to focus our efforts on one specific goal. We were so eager to solve too many issues in transitioning students, that we were not realizing this task was not one problem but a puzzle that needed to be solved by placing the right pieces together. Another challenge was attempting to navigate two educational systems, with two different hiring and registration processes. Our administrator, Adele McClain, had to find ways to engage and build relationships with different district departments from maintenance to human resources, and that was not an easy task, but one that had to be addressed in order to create positions and facilities use agreements to backup locations for program expansion. Our classified staff, from frontline office staff to paraeducators, had to encounter the hurdle of learning the various pathways to student registration and identification, which included knowing the various enrollment systems and processes at our local community college, VVC.

Facing all the challenges in this journey required making changes on the way we viewed things and how we approached each hurdle. Removing the frame of thought that because AVAES is a k12 school and VVC was not, and that there was no way we could work together was the first

change our staff had to do. We had to realize that to better assist our students to transition to VVC we had to not only work with them but we had to understand not only their process but also have the knowledge of what resources the college had to offer. Having a day in which VVC staff guided us not only through the registration process, from a student perspective, but also giving us a tour of each service location and introducing us to key staff in each department, helped the AVAES staff understand the complexities of the college. The approach of professional development also changed by offering training not only to certificated staff but also classified staff. Having OTAN and CALPRO provide professional development to both k12 and college staff together provided opportunities of team building and helped staff that typically does not participate, have a chance to learn new skills and connect with new people.

Even though this journey started with an elaborate roadmap and morphed into an intricate puzzle we are still not done. There are still many steps, or puzzle pieces, that need to be completed. Besides continuing to support the ongoing enrollment process, the orientation and registration days at our campus we plan to work on institutional MOUs to support CASAS data sharing and cut down duplicated efforts to test students. We hope this will be the start to a better transition system between AVAES and VVC.

We have learned and made great strides on our site plan and we are still not done. We will continue to need support and help to finish our puzzle. For example, we will need additional assistance on navigating Google, which is used by AVAES, and Microsoft, used by VVC. Being able to have knowledge of both softwares will help in communicating and completing tasks between both institutions. Having DLAC staff, like Dr. Porter, holding training sessions to aid the team in developing their strengths more would also be a great support.

So, what can you take away from this journey with us? In summary, we hope you have learned that you can take two different institutions, with different processes and views, come together to work towards one goal and have great outcomes to both. That sometimes it is much easier to reach a goal when you zoom in from the bigger picture and focus on the details. That a small, rural k12 school can be of great support not only to the community but also to higher education institutions. We accomplished our goal of a new orientation and registration process to transition to VVC but we are not done yet. We will continue to strengthen our collaboration with VVC and support each other to increase student retention and persistence in each institution but also build the bridge for our students to transition and reach their full potential.