

Support for Struggling Students

By Kevin Fritz

AVID helps students at Westridge Middle School get a second chance.

For the past two years, Westridge Middle School in **downtown Orlando** and the Orlando Marriott World Center have worked together to create incentives for students and their parents to participate in AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a national educational reform program designed to prepare students for higher education. The program focuses on students who fall in the academic middle—not the straight F student or the A-plus student—who show potential but need assistance to flourish. AVID has been adopted by nearly 4,500 schools worldwide, serving approximately 400,000 students. In Florida, 256 schools are AVID participants.

Gabriel Berrio, principal at Westridge Middle School, says he realized when he was hired three years ago that it was essential his school participate in AVID. He saw the immediate need for increased parent involvement, and AVID thrives on reaching out to both students and their families.

To assist with getting AVID off the ground, Marriott Orlando World Center adopted Westridge as part of the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association's (CFHLA) Adopt-a-School program, which began in 2002 to develop community partnerships between CFHLA and Central Florida's public schools. Today, the program consists of 95 partnerships, one being the Marriott-Westridge venture. The Orlando Marriott has also adopted Jones High School and Dr. Phillips Elementary School.

Rich Maladecki, CAE, president/CEO of CFHLA, says some participating association members offer part-time jobs to high school students, while others read to elementary school children. One partnership led to the remodel of a faculty lounge area.

"It's all about actively doing things for the schools," says Maladecki.

According to **Dorathy Nevitt**, director of human resources for the Marriott Orlando



CFHLA honors the Orlando Marriott World Center for its partnership with Westridge Middle School.

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World Center, the hotel has been partnering with Westridge Middle School for three years, mainly providing complimentary catering-type services for parent-night events.

"Westridge has had such a dramatic turnaround in the past few years," she says. "We like to think we are playing a small part in helping them energize the parents."

Westridge teacher and AVID coordinator **Roqual White** cites Marriott's catering as a major incentive to get parents to attend AVID parent-night programs and bring the whole family. The Marriott also provides other support for Westridge beyond the AVID program, such as offering speakers for Teach-In (a Seminole County career-day initiative), coordinating a clothing drive and allowing students to shadow employees at the hotel. But it's the growth in AVID that makes the participants in this partnership most proud.

Three years ago, Westridge had 80 students in the program; it now has 160. "Our goal each year is to increase the number of students in AVID," says Berrio. "The goal for next year is 200 students." **L**

To find out more about AVID, visit our website at CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.