

Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County: Continue AVID/TOPS and TOPS college success programs with help from community partners

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Madison, WI—The COVID-19 health crisis has created unprecedented challenges for students and families. The shift to virtual learning, adoption of pass/no pass assessment policies and a pause on external volunteers and tutors have disproportionately impacted students from low-income backgrounds and deepened existing disparities in opportunity and achievement gaps. Thankfully, the [Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County](#) are prepared to lend a hand. The Madison-based nonprofit offers a pair of school-based programs — Advancement via Individual Determination/Teens of Promise (AVID/TOPS) and TOPS College Success — aimed at addressing those very disparities.

Now, thanks to a community of funders that includes [Ascendium Education Group](#), those programs will continue through the 2021-22 school year. A longtime supporter of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County, Ascendium is providing a \$250,000 grant toward the programs, which help support learners from low-income backgrounds at every step of their academic journey.

AVID/TOPS began as an equity initiative in Madison Metropolitan School District in 2008 with a classroom of 28 students at East High School and has since expanded to reach over 900 students in 40 classrooms across all four Madison-area high schools. Participants receive a college readiness curriculum, supplemental tutoring, college field trips, mentoring, summer internships and career exploration. The TOPS College Success program assigns a college success coach to graduates of the AVID/TOPS program, following them through their undergraduate journey and

beyond.

Among the programs' many success stories is Matida Bojang, who joined AVID/TOPS as a sophomore at James Madison Memorial High School in 2014. Through working with Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County, Matida was able to graduate from high school, explore different careers and land a prestigious internship with UW Health. She is now an MD candidate at Medical College of Wisconsin and is co-founder and President of the Mbama Care Foundation, a grassroots organization that assists Gambian communities ravaged by poverty and maternal and infant mortality by providing aid in the areas of maternal care, physical and mental health, education and food insecurity.

It's Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County's commitment to post-secondary learners like Matida that made Ascendium want to support these initiatives. The majority of students accepted into AVID/TOPS are first-generation college-bound students from low-income and diverse backgrounds, and the TOPS College Success program supports those students in persisting through the college enrollment process to college graduation.

"We've long admired Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County and share with them a belief in the power of education and training beyond high school to transform the lives of learners from low-income backgrounds," says Ascendium Vice President - Education Philanthropy Amy Kerwin. "We're pleased to be able to contribute resources that help them continue these programs."

For Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County President and CEO Michael Johnson, the support couldn't have come at a better time.

"College enrollment is down 6.5% nationwide since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, [so] it's crucial that our teams continue to show up in support of the young people who need us the most," says Johnson. "Our staff build strong relationships with members to boost their academic engagement and support eliminating the barriers that prevent students from enrolling in and graduating from college. The AVID/TOPS and TOPS College Success programs fill this need."

[Learn more](#) about Ascendium's grants to local nonprofit organizations.