



## Promising Practice: The Soulsville Charter School

**School:** Soulsville High School

**District:** Shelby County Schools

**Practice:** Preparation for the ACT and Postsecondary Success

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Rural  Suburban  Urban

■ Region: Southwest

### Connection to Strategic Plan:

<b>Goals:</b>	<b>Average public ACT composite score of 21 by 2020</b>		<b>The class of 2020 will be on track to achieve 55% postsecondary completion within 6 years</b>
<b>How best practice addresses:</b>	<p>The Soulsville Charter School (TSCS) has implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A junior and senior seminar to help students prepare for the ACT and apply to postsecondary</li> <li>- Integration of ACT into core instruction</li> <li>- After school support, Assigned Mandatory Tutoring (AMT), designed to support standards-remediation and student progress toward college and career readiness</li> </ul>		<p>From the moment a student becomes a Soulsville scholar, the expectation is that they will attend a postsecondary institution. Every aspect of the student experience is aligned to preparing and supporting them through the application and enrollment process.</p>
<b>Priority Areas:</b>	<b>Support Educators</b>	<b>High School Bridge to Postsecondary</b>	<b>All Means All</b>
<b>How best practice applies:</b>	<p>The high school dean of curriculum, Bryan Hearn, believes that growth on the ACT requires going beyond rigorous core instruction – there must be a coordinated, intentional connection between ACT standards and classroom instruction.</p>	<p>As part of their vision for postsecondary for all students, TSCS offers a junior and senior seminar where students are given the time to explore postsecondary options and be explicitly taught how to prepare for the ACT and postsecondary application process. Junior seminar focuses on ACT preparation through practice tests, goal setting, test-taking strategies, and subject-specific instruction for the ACT. The senior seminar guides students through essay writing, college search, FAFSA completion, and provides time and space to celebrate these important milestones.</p>	<p>The vision for TSCS is “As a Community, we RISE.” RISE represents: We show RESPECT because we hold others in high regard, we have INTEGRITY because it’s right, we are SCHOLARS because our future depends on it and we have EMPATHY because we care how others feel.</p>



**Practices:**

- Culture
- Accountability
- Funding
- Instructional
- Programmatic
- Other:
- Training/PD
- Policy Change

**Project Specific Indicators:**

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**Results:**

- Increased student achievement results
- ACT  TNReady/EOC/TVAAS  NIC  EPS
- Decreased remediation and/or subgroup gaps
- Increased student readiness results (non-academic)
- Increased partnerships / alignment
- Increased participation / program growth

**The Challenge:**

Soulsville is located in historic South Memphis, next to the iconic Stax Records. South Memphis is an area that has begun to experience positive economic changes, but Soulsville is still actively working against high levels of crime and poverty. Eighty-six percent of the student body is economically disadvantaged and 100 percent African American, statistics that mirror the surrounding community. The median household income is \$22,707.

The challenge is to change the culture expectations for students and to open the door to opportunities. Every teacher within Soulsville is working to prepare students so that gain admission and persist through postsecondary. Providing rigorous instruction for students, and continuing to push the growth of students' ACT scores and persistence through postsecondary, Soulsville is aiming to put students on a different life trajectory than the statistics surrounding them imply.

**The Vision:**

TSCS was founded on the mission "to prepare students for success in college and life in an academically rigorous music-rich environment." High School Director Ashley Shores and her administrative team have kept this mission at the center of their decision-making process. The vision is to ensure that students have access to rigorous instruction, data-based supports specifically targeted to student's individual needs, and teachers who hold high expectations for all students.

**Summary of To-Do's:**

- Offer ACT prep class to all juniors and support seniors through the process of applying to postsecondary
- Formalize a system of tutoring (Assigned Mandatory Tutoring) to make sure that students have the extra time they need to progress, and catch up, with their knowledge and skills
- Use data to drive decision making and share data, and growth, with students to promote student agency
  - o In junior seminar students can opt into having their ACT score displayed on the wall. Students getting above a 25 are celebrated have their score displayed in a special color. All students in the class are able to state their ACT goal and why they have set it there based on their postsecondary goals and starting score.
- Support teachers through high-quality coaching and professional development

**Lessons Learned:**

- Not everything is going to go exactly as planned or have the intended outcomes, but that is all part of the process of learning and growing as a school. For example, all 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students take a practice ACT once a quarter. Initially, students returned to classes after the practice exam but teachers soon discovered that students were too fatigued (and often frustrated) to be productive. In order to simulate the actual testing experience and emphasize the importance of putting all of your brainpower into the exam, students are now released early on days of practice exams.
- The junior and senior seminar are continually adapting to suit the needs of the specific students enrolled and the different postsecondary opportunities, such as TNPromise.
- TSCS hired former high school teachers to be their college advisors to meet their vision for providing rigorous academic instruction within junior and senior seminars.

**Communications:**

TSCS prioritizes strong communication with parents/ guardians to keep them abreast of their student's progress. TCSS works hard to cultivate a strong sense of community within the parents, teachers, and students to ensure that everyone is driving towards the same goal. Having an open and transparent system of communications is integral to the creation of a strong community.

**Stakeholder Management:**

An important element of teacher support is providing teachers with the knowledge of exactly how to implement changes or different styles of instruction into their classroom, as opposed to simply telling them or modeling for them what to do. Teachers need to experience how to integrate ACT into their instruction by actually incorporating it into a lesson and then receiving feedback on the lesson and how it was executed. TSCS has designed a rigorous system of professional development focused on teacher capacity and growth, and then integrated a feedback loop with classroom observations and coaching to help apply the knowledge directly to their instruction.

**Metrics & Measurements:**

Baseline Data	Progress to Date	Goals
<p><b>ACT Data – Average Composite</b>            2012 - 17.2            2013 - 20.2            2014 - 18.6            2015 - 17.0</p> <p><b>Graduation Rates</b>            2014 – 98.1            2015 – 98.5</p>	<p><b>ACT Data – 3-Year Average:</b> 18.6</p> <p><b>Postsecondary</b>            In 2014, 77 percent of graduating seniors directly enrolled in a postsecondary institution the semester after graduating.</p> <p>In 2015, 100 percent of the graduating class was accepted to a 2 or a 4 year institution.</p> <p><b>Tennessee State Assessments</b>            High school students outperformed the system average in all EOC courses, including outperforming the state in Algebra II, English II, US History, and Writing.</p>	<p>⇒ Annual ACT goal is a 21 composite.</p> <p>⇒ Increase the number of students who matriculate to postsecondary and persist through their degrees.</p>

**Practitioner Perspective:**

“Our staff come in the building everyday thinking about what is best for each student. That’s just how we operate.” – Ashley Shores

**Resources:**

- [Soulsville Charter School](#)
- **State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) – “Soulsville Charter Focuses on Propelling Students beyond Projections”**