

Best Practices Newsletter

Making Schools Relevant and Students Better Prepared for Postsecondary Studies and Careers



Preparing students for the challenges of college and careers in today's global economy is a heavy lift. Success requires everyone to step up to the plate — teachers, principals, students, parents and the community.

This newsletter tackles ways to prepare students with the foundational literacy and math skills needed for success, accelerate degree attainment and counsel students to make good postsecondary and career choices.

The New HSTW Design: Making the Senior Year Count

Year after year, shifts in the economic landscape mandate changes in the educational landscape. Over the past 40 years, there's been a significant rise in the level of education and training needed to obtain jobs providing good family-sustaining wages, but the 20th-century public education system has failed to keep up with the demands of the 21st-century labor market. Thus, many young people are leaving school unprepared for the rigors of college or the demands of the workforce.

In response to these changes, in 2016 SREB's High Schools That Work (HSTW) initiative redesigned its school improvement model. While the mission still focuses on improving the ability of public schools to graduate students prepared for college, advanced training and careers, the new design encourages a stronger alignment among high school career pathway programs, postsecondary studies and rising workplace requirements.

This newsletter describes best practices presented at the 30th Annual HSTW Staff Development Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, July 2016

SAVE the DATE. Join us for the 31st Annual HSTW Staff Development Conference, July 12-15, 2017, in Nashville, Tennessee.

Come early for the College- and Career-Readiness Standards Networking Conference, July 10-12 in Nashville.

Central to the redesign is a senior year that ties a college-ready academic core with accelerated career pathway courses integrated with project-based learning assignments. "Give students a real taste of the workplace," says SREB Senior Vice President **Gene Bottoms**. "Have them take a challenging college-ready academic core — no more basic courses."



Gene Bottoms
SREB Senior Vice President

The accelerated career pathways blend academic, technical and technological knowledge and skills — blurring the line between high school and college and speeding degree attainment. Secondary and postsecondary educators and employers must partner to create career pathways in fields that matter to their local economies.

In all pathway options, students have academic and career pathway teachers who plan integrated instruction and project-based assignments; engage in ongoing career counseling and a progressive set of work-based learning experiences; and take the same challenging college-ready core.

Bottoms insists schools can provide time for pathway and academic teachers to plan together. "When you do that, you get higher-performing students. Teams of teachers take responsibility for getting students ready," he maintains.

Bottoms describes three career pathway options in the new HSTW design that feature dual enrollment courses — putting students on the fast-track toward an advanced credential or degree.

Senior Year Career Pathway Options

- The **Ready** option puts underprepared students on a path to college or advance training. Schools use state readiness assessments to identify ninth- and 12-graders who need extra help meeting literacy and math benchmarks. Specialized ninth and 12-grade readiness courses — taken as co-requisite in the senior year with pathway courses and academic graduation requirements — help students reach grade-level benchmarks. Seniors who pass their readiness courses after the first semester can graduate with up to 15 hours of college credit.
- The **Accelerated** option allows prepared seniors to complete graduation requirements and up to two semesters of college courses leading to an associate degree or an advanced credential. “This will greatly accelerate the number of students who have a credible credential by age 25. That’s what we must do,” says Bottoms.
- The **Accelerated-plus** option allows seniors to earn credits toward a four-year bachelor’s degree.

A Good Fit in Any High School

The pathway design can be adapted to any high school, notes Bottoms. In large high schools, the new design can be organized around career-themed academies that focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), health science, business or computer science.

In smaller high schools, the design can be organized around pocket academies or single pathway academies where career pathway teachers and two or three core academic teachers with students in common work together each day.

If the academy design is offered at career and technical education centers, students would be required to stay longer, and literacy and math faculty should be assigned to teach the literacy and math readiness courses.

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HSTW is the nation’s largest school improvement initiative for high school leaders and teachers. Become a member of the HSTW network and join more than 1,200 school sites in 30 states and the District of Columbia that have access to school improvement, curriculum and professional development services designed to prepare students for college and careers. **View a presentation** on the new HSTW design. For more information contact:

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Academy Programs: An Innovative Approach to Student Success

Pike County Schools (PCS) in Troy, Alabama, has spent the last few years developing productive relationships with local colleges and universities in cooperation with local business partners to create innovative, student-centered programs at the Troy-Pike Center for Technology. By utilizing dual academy enrollment and online learning opportunities, PCS has created a successful accelerated learning model where students can earn college credits.

Students begin this journey in the 10th grade, engaging in rigorous and relevant course work linked to local, in-demand career fields. Dual enrollment classes include: agriscience, arts, business and finance, exercise and health, first in flight, global studies and health information technology. More traditional career and technical education (CTE) offerings available to academy students include: health science education, information technology education, Project Lead The Way (PLTW)/pre-engineering, teacher education, welding and job cooperative education (school-to-work type program).



Jeff McClure
Director of Alternative Learning

Beyond the Building: Meeting Students’ Aspirations

The overall mindset of the district is to be responsive to the needs of students and the community. According to **Jeff McClure**, director of alternative learning, the district realized, “If we were a business, the community wouldn’t want to buy the product we were selling.” The district recognized a change was required, and making it would have a dramatic impact on student outcomes and a positive impact on the future labor force of the surrounding area.

Because of this push to update curriculum offerings in the district, many unique opportunities were created. A partnership that has prospered comprises Auburn University, Enterprise State Community College and Wallace Community College, Hanceville. The partnership created the agriscience and technology academies and the first in flight leadership academy in partnership with a local airport.

The agriscience academy now feeds students directly into Auburn University with course work completed in high school applied to a bachelor's degree program. The flight academy partnership is giving students a chance to earn a pilot's license in high school. This was a big win for the academy, always aiming for the sky. "When other students are learning how to drive, our students are learning how to fly a plane," exclaims McClure.

Raised Student Expectations

Raising the academic expectations at the school was another key goal for the system and the technology center specifically. Students are expected to be certified CTE pathway completers, which encompasses completing all the courses in their CTE pathway and passing the end-of-pathway examination.

Traditionally in Alabama, students are expected to earn 24 credits to receive a degree. Pike County pushed this requirement to 30 credits. A six-credit bump is no easy adjustment. To support this adjustment, Pike County transitioned to a semester block schedule with a rigorous credit recovery program for struggling students.

Pike County made another innovative move — implementing the Pike County Virtual High School. The school serves as the credit recovery program and the district's dropout prevention program.

Since its start in 2014-15, the program has graduated 13 students out of a senior class of 135. Students have also earned 128 credits toward graduation over the last year through virtual class offerings. The students take a combination of previously failed courses via credit recovery, complete new courses and even electives – all online. This is typically done in combination with traditional courses (PE, JROTC, etc.) offered on their

home campuses. Each student has the equivalent of an IEP (Individualized Education Program) – just not legally binding. McClure told one amazing story about a student completing 12 credits that counted toward graduation in one school year.

Extended Learning Opportunities

Being more responsive to the needs of high school students isn't the only change Pike County Schools has made. After recent ACT Aspire scores showed that students were struggling in math and science, the district had to identify the problem. After analyzing classrooms for the year, and recognizing that instruction in the classroom wasn't the problem, the district decided to offer students extended learning opportunities in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) by creating a middle grades STEM Academy.

Despite having completed a large amount of work over the last few years, the journey isn't complete. From branding and advertising the programs at the Troy-Pike Center, to building on current partnerships and creating new ones, Pike County Schools will continue to work hard on creating authentic and fruitful opportunities for its student body.

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Closing the Readiness Gap

Most students who go to college are not ready for the rigors and challenges of postsecondary work. Nearly two million students took the ACT in 2015, and results show 44 percent met the college-readiness benchmark in reading; 42 percent in math, and 37 percent did not meet any college-readiness benchmarks. "That's pretty staggering to think that 37 percent of high school graduates aren't prepared for anything," said **John Squires**, director of high school to college readiness at the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

Less than 10 percent of underprepared students who attend community college graduate in three years, and only 33 percent graduate in six years, according to the nonprofit, Complete College America.

To help close this readiness gap SREB, with input from state leaders and master teachers, developed Ready for College and Ready for High School courses to prepare students for success in high school, college and the workplace. Research by Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce indicates by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require education or training beyond high school — [highlighting the relevance of such courses.](#)



Ready for College Courses

Each year, high schools assess juniors to determine their readiness for college, but often do nothing in the senior year to help unprepared students meet readiness standards, maintains Squires. "So, let's address the problem before they get to college," he suggests.

SREB offers Literacy Ready and Math Ready courses designed to prepare students for college. The Literacy Ready course uses a disciplinary literacy approach that teaches students strategies for reading and understanding complex texts in various subject areas. Students learn to develop and defend ideas from textbooks and write about them in several disciplines such as English, history and biology on a college level.

The literacy course consists of six units — two in English and language arts, two units in history and two units in science.

The Math Ready course emphasizes an understanding of math concepts, as opposed to rote memorization of facts and steps. Math Ready students learn the context behind procedures and come to understand the “whys” of using certain formulas or methods to solve a problem. The course develops students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The Math Ready course comprises eight units: algebraic expressions, equations, measurement and proportional reasoning, linear functions, linear systems of equations, quadratic functions, exponential functions and statistics.

Target Students for College-Readiness Courses

The courses are designed for high school juniors and seniors interested in pursuing college or advanced career training but who, without intervention, are on track to take remedial college English or math. The courses are not for students who have ACT scores below 15. The courses are also not for students who have special needs and require significant assistance or students with a track record of regularly not completing assignments or who exhibit an extremely low work ethic in school.

SREB is working with eight states implementing the Readiness Courses by providing training for teachers who teach the course.

Improved ACT Scores

Pre- and post-exam studies indicate that students in Literacy Ready and Math Ready make significant gains in their readiness for college-level course work. Most students in Literacy Ready and Math Ready were able to improve both subject area sub-scores by 3 or more points, and their composite scores by 2 or more points.

Principals

Are your students transitioning from the middle grades to high school and from high school to college with the literacy and math skills they need to succeed? If you answer no, the SREB Readiness Courses can help you address these problems. The Ready for High School courses in literacy and math prepare students for the rigors of high school studies, while the Ready for College courses prepare students with the foundational skills they need before they enroll in college — saving them time and money, while boosting their chance for success after high school. SREB recommends the following steps to implement the Readiness Courses:

1. Engage key school leaders to support the program and commit to increasing student readiness and success.
2. Implement courses in literacy and mathematics to maximize the impact of the program at your school.
3. Select teachers who are enthusiastic about the program and desire to reach students in an engaging and challenging environment.
4. Require teachers to attend training for the SREB Readiness Courses, including follow-up support sessions as they implement the course.
5. Educate students and parents about the program, including the benefits and the potential cost savings during college.

By implementing a comprehensive program to increase readiness at your school, you can benefit students and parents by increasing high school graduation rates, college enrollment rates and college success rates. Training is available during the Readiness Courses Institute, July 10-13, during the 31st Annual High Schools That Work Staff Development Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Get started today by emailing Ready@SREB.org for more information or visiting the SREB website, <http://www.sreb.org/readiness-courses-literacy-math>.

Ready for High School Courses

The transition from the middle grades to high school is crucial and can be decisive as to whether students will ultimately graduate. Research suggests the greatest number of course failures in high school are in ninth-grade English I, biology and Algebra I, and most students who fail in their first year of high school will not graduate. SREB developed Ready for High School courses, implemented in eighth or ninth grade to prepare struggling students for high school and increase their prospects of graduating.

Ready for High School Literacy

“We try to use a disciplinary approach that teaches students strategies for reading and understanding complex texts in different subject areas,” says George Johnson, SREB school improvement consultant. “In science, they have to learn to read like a scientist.” The course is made up of two English units, two history units and two science units.

Ready for High School Math

Math Ready emphasizes understanding of math concepts rather than just memorizing procedures. It's about real-world applications. Eight units make up the course: the number system, ratios and proportional relationships, univariate statistics and probability, expressions and equations, geometry, functions and linear relationships, systems of linear equations and inequalities and a capstone project.

Target Students for Ready for High School Courses

The literacy and math courses are designed for students who: struggle after seventh grade in multiple subjects; score below Proficient levels on state and local assessments in seventh grade; and are in the above category and wish to pursue a postsecondary program after high school.

Course Pilots

The Ready for High School courses are being class-tested in the 2016-17 school year; courses will be revised based on feedback and ready for implementation in the 2017-18 school year.

Courses Available for Download

All the high school and college ready courses are available for download on SREB's website at no cost and may be printed for educational purposes.

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Finding the True Path for Students' Futures: Counseling for Careers



Too often students go to college having no idea what career path to take; many do not complete college and leave with a huge debt or graduate unable to find a job. Some accept a job paying less than what they expected — a job they could have gotten without a college degree.

It's important for schools to have an effective counseling for careers (C4C) program to help students determine their interests and aptitudes and ultimately steer students toward compatible high school career pathways and postsecondary programs of study. Doing so will result in more students being supported and will address the gap between jobs available and the knowledge and skills of the future workforce.

Achieving 100 Percent Parent Participation in Advisory

Fountain Lake Charter High School in Arkansas prides itself in getting nearly 100 percent parent participation in course planning and advisory. If you invite them, involve them and inform them, they will come. With a school curriculum that includes 15 pathway programs of study designed to prepare students for college and careers, keeping parents in the know is key. Research widely suggests parental involvement is critical to student achievement.

Schoolwide Advisement Day

Fountain Lake schedules a day each February for students and their parents to attend a 15-minute advisory session (sometimes lasts longer) with their child's academic adviser. They discuss career pathways, course selection and the student's six-year plan. A week or two before this meeting, students meet individually with their academic advisers to map out their course of study before it's presented to parents for approval.

The school suspends classes on advisement day. Students who attend the advisory appointment are counted as present for the entire school day; if they don't attend, it's a full day's absence.

The event is so popular that the few parents who cannot attend proactively use other avenues to communicate with teachers about their children's schedules. "I've had great feedback from parents who have come from other schools who love the way they are able to be part of the scheduling process and help pick classes," says counselor **Carmen Keys**.

Career Pathways

Project-based learning and career pathways for every student are paramount at Fountain Lake. Fifteen career pathways are offered to students:

1. Automotive Service Technology
2. Criminal Justice
3. Wood Technology
4. Medical Professions
5. Advertising Design
6. Machine Tool Technology
7. Pre-Engineering
8. Dietetics
9. Mobile Applications Development Program
10. Education and Training
11. CASE Plant Science
12. Small Business Operations
13. Informatics
14. Industrial Productions Technologies
15. Accelerated Academies

As early as eighth grade, high school counselors meet with middle grades students and introduce them to the career pathways. Then, in ninth grade they select a pathway and begin a six-year plan. “We are extending out two years past high school,” says Keys. “It’s been our experience that students are unprepared to choose their classes in college,” she adds. Keys maintains this is helpful because students may not be getting the guidance they need in some universities.

Most of the pathways afford students the opportunity to earn some kind of certification or college credit — giving them an edge when applying for jobs or postsecondary studies. Fountain Lake has an agreement with nearby National Park College (two-year school).

Students may take concurrent courses that transfer to four-year colleges. Students can potentially graduate high school with as many as 42 hours in college credit.

In Arkansas, an articulation agreement allows students to transfer recognized community college credits to a four-year college or university in the state after they’ve completed their freshmen and sophomore classes.

Fountain Lake’s graduation rate in 2016 was 95 percent. Forty-two percent of its students attended a four-year college, while 34 percent enroll in two-year community colleges.

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Supporting Success With Employer Engagement: Six Strategies

Employer engagement with schools is a critical component of preparing students for college and career readiness. Providing students with work-based learning opportunities, job shadowing, internships, and training and school-based enterprises assists students in determining what they enjoy in terms of a career and, more importantly, what they do not.



Mountain Home High School Career Academies (MHSCA) is a wall-to-wall career academy model with three academies in one high school. The Mountain Home, Arkansas, community is deeply entrenched in each program to assist students with postsecondary transitions. Over 100 business people commit once a month to come in and mentor academic advisory program classes.

The acronym “ENGAGE” outlines the ways in which MHSCA connects community partners with school programs and links students to real-world learning opportunities. ENGAGE stands for: evaluate, negotiate, guidance, advisory, give back and embrace.

Evaluate

MHSCA has several avenues community partners can take to be a part of the education system. When redesigning the entire high school around three career academies, school officers reviewed existing programs of study to determine natural fits for community partners.

Career Academies	Community Partner(s)
ACME - Agriculture, Construction, Manufacturing and Engineering	Baxter Healthcare, Jim Brown Company and Volt Industrial Plastics
CAB - Communications, Arts and Business	Wells Fargo, North Arkansas Food Bank and Arkansas State University Mountain Home
HHS - Health and Human Services	Baxter Regional Medical Center

From these partnerships grew programs such as advisory curriculum, community mentors, business advisory boards, student internships, teacher externships and service learning projects. The teacher leadership team provided input on programs of study and community connections that fit. Student voice and enrollment played a role in determining programs of study. Community partners who were leaders with civic organizations and the chamber of commerce were called upon to develop the business advisory board — the foundational group upon which the other partnerships were built.

Negotiate

By negotiating with community leaders to serve on advisory boards, MHSCA helped establish other programs such as the business advisory board, which operates in an advisory capacity under a set of by-laws that govern its involvement. The board’s purpose is to assist with integrated project development. “Private businesses think differently from educators,” Principal **Dana Brown** contends. “They want kids to understand soft skills.

She also explains that people help support what they create. With planning comes the opportunity for business partners to gain ownership of postsecondary transition projects by participating with students in panel discussions on expectations of employers. Negotiating also allowed some community partners to assist in other ways, including in-kind contributions or sponsoring projects and student engagement items such as academy shirts.

Another layer of community support that warrants negotiating is engaging parent organizations. High school is typically the venue where parents feel as if they are not needed. MHHSCA embraces parent partners as they assist with organizing the mentoring program, securing volunteers for the various projects and/or activities, and serving as a resource to other parents who are helping students transition not only into the freshman level but also the postsecondary level. “You cannot forget that you are not only transitioning a freshman student but also transitioning a freshman parent as well,” maintains Brown.

A final group to negotiate with for engagement is the local college or university. Partners from this organization can provide a plethora of postsecondary transitional information regardless of whether students will be attending college or trade schools.

MHHSCA includes this stakeholder group in developing the senior advisory curriculum. Opening the high school to partners such as a community college benefits students as they learn how to complete a college application, receive scholarship information and financial aid options, and review federal student aid information.

Guidance

MHHSCA has a variety of programs requiring guidance from community partners to help students engage with real-world learning opportunities. Programs such as student internships sometimes require tapping into those community partners when it is difficult to find a match for a student’s career focus area. These relationships also help community partners understand the philosophy behind the career academy model, making them more likely to host a student intern as a result.

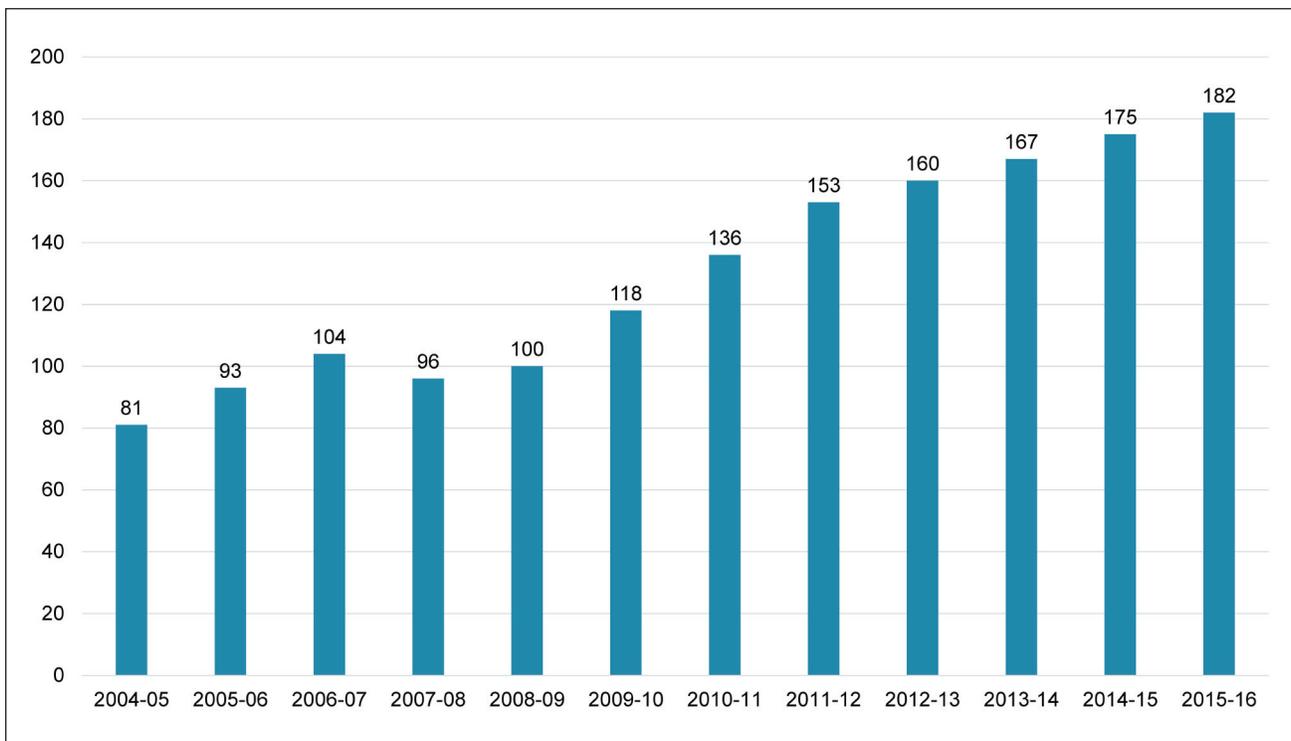


On the flip side, seeking guidance from community partners and establishing academy themes each year allow teachers to be placed in teacher externships for professional development. Teacher externships assist teachers in connecting real-world application with their curriculum, which in turn can become a thematic academy project.

Advisory

The advisory curriculum is the heart of MHHSCA’s engagement strategy. It is the platform for mentors and transitional programs, as well as the vehicle that ties the community and school together. Advisory lessons are created with assistance from the local community college, teachers and business advisory board members. The emphasis on advisory lessons is based on grade level and academy membership that apply to expectations for postsecondary transitions.

Number of MHHSCA Student Internship



Freshmen take a Keystone course and use the year to decide which academy they'd like to attend. Brown says this helps them “start to learn about themselves, what interests them and how they like to learn.” **Sophomore** lessons have a clear focus on career exploration. They learn about themselves by determining their learning styles through various activities, Gallup Strengths and career focus rather than simply asking “What do I want to be when I grow up?” The focus for **juniors** is on soft skills and assisting students with ready-to-work expectations. **Seniors** partner with the local community college and Arkansas State University to take advantage of their lessons on postsecondary transition emphasizing aspects such as college applications, scholarships and admissions interviews. Within the lessons, alternate options such as the military and/or trade school are also discussed.

The mentoring program has been a valuable component to the career academy model. Students are assigned to an advisory class as sophomores and will remain in that class until they graduate or change academies. The same is true for mentors. A mentor or group of mentors will be assigned at the beginning of each year with a sophomore group and remain with them for three years until they graduate. The relationship built between students and community members is priceless.

Give Back

The work with the business advisory board and mentors benefits students in multiple ways. One of its goals has been to build a sense of philanthropic ideals within students through service learning projects. This past year, ACME partnered with the Humane Society; CAB partnered with the local Food Bank; and HHS partnered with medical providers such as Reppell Diabetes Center and the Peitz’s Cancer House.

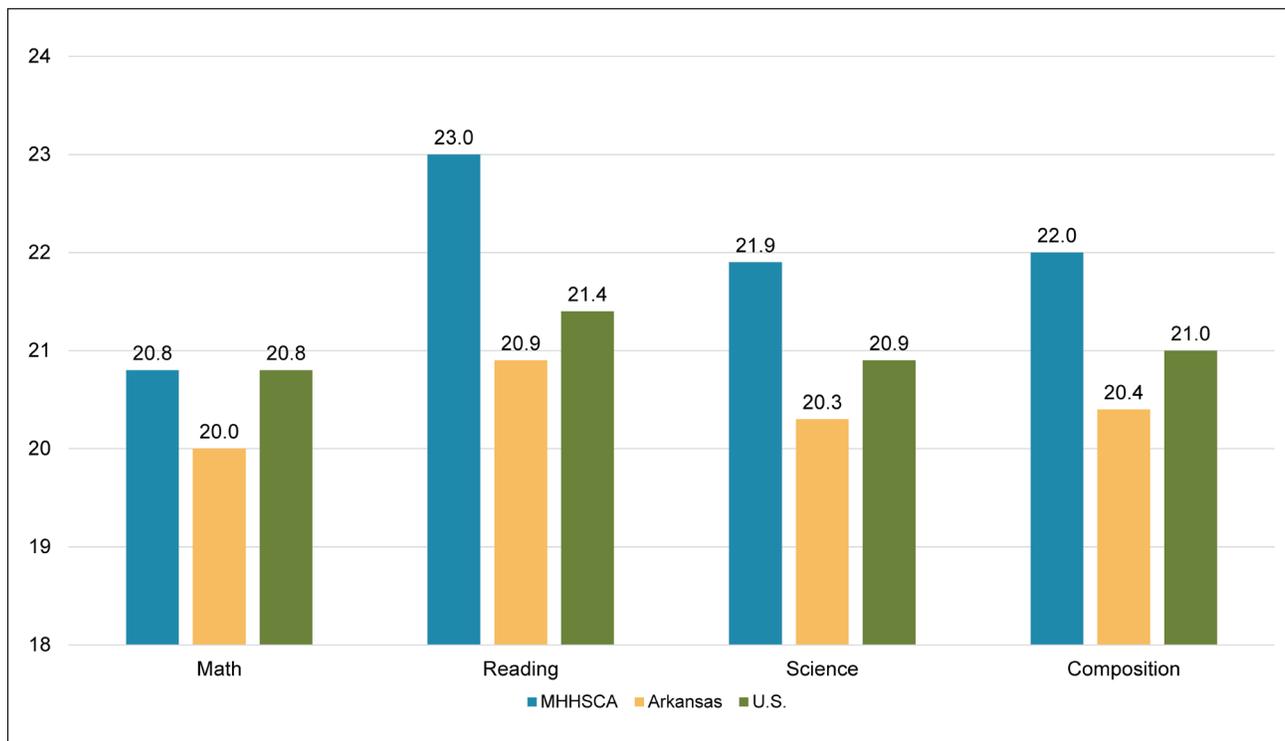
Embrace

Every program must take time to reflect, revise and re-energize its stakeholders. It is imperative each year to evaluate and embrace all community connections. Developing the most effective evaluation instrument to assess needs of improvement is a team effort. MHHSCA uses short surveys with Google Forms to quickly gather and disaggregate information.

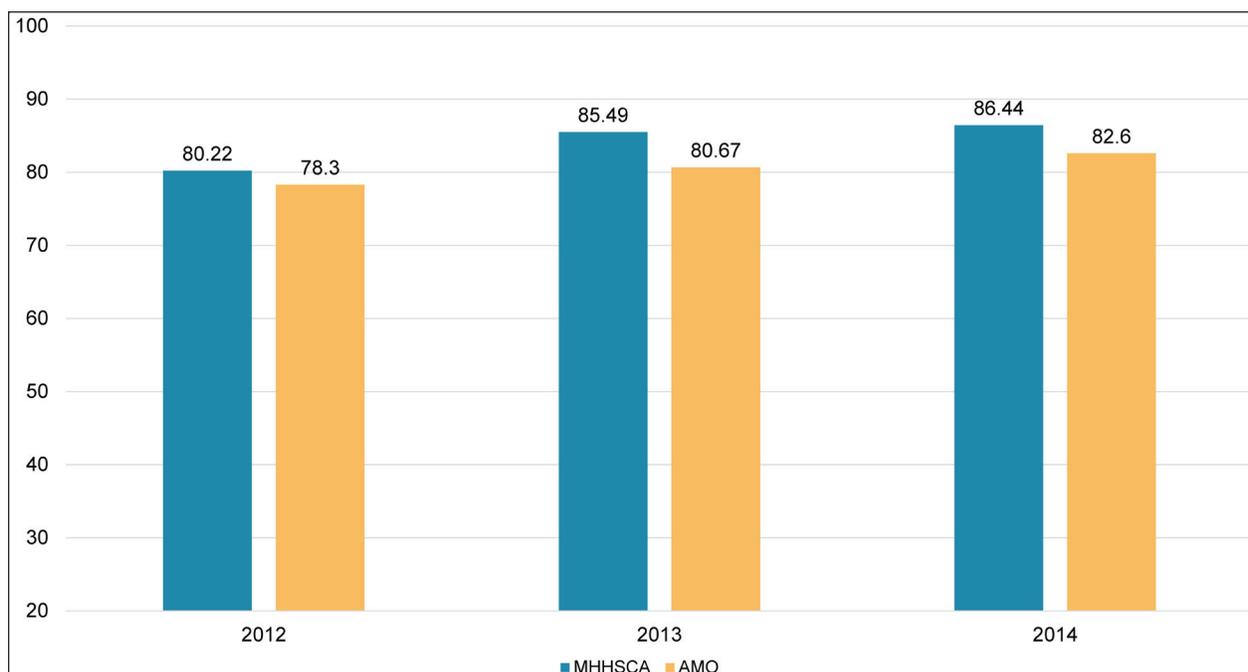
Evaluate, Negotiate, Guidance, Advisory, Give Back, and Embrace — When a high school engages a community using these strategies, students reap the rewards.

It’s hard to argue with the results. On average, MHHSCA students score higher on the ACT and exceed the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set for graduation each year.

Average ACT Scores



Graduation Rates



"I want people to know that our students excel and the reason for that is because they are given real-world opportunities and decision-making skills before they ever leave high school," Brown says.

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Preparing Students for Education and Career Decisions

At **Carroll County Area Technology Center**, it's all hands on deck when it comes to student success and making sure every student has an education and career plan for the future. At this tech center, SREB's Counseling for Careers (C4C) program is in force and making a difference.

Students are mentored during regularly scheduled advisement time. However, instructors have formed an allegiance with all students that goes beyond advisement day. Every day they speak with students about their futures and instructors are committed to making sure students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make wise decisions. The center is implementing the seven essential strategies of C4C and moving students toward success in high-wage, high-demand fields.

C4C is defined by seven essential strategies:

1. Classroom instruction and assignments allow students to see the relevance of their studies while discovering the connections between the classroom, careers and successful futures.
2. C4C takes an evidence-based and standards-based approach to academic, personal and career advisement.
3. C4C is an exploratory program that helps students transition from elementary to the middle grades, from the middle grades to high school and from high school to postsecondary options.

4. C4C places an emphasis on Career Clusters®, career pathways and programs of study.
5. In C4C, all students create individual, personalized education and career plans.
6. In C4C, all students have opportunities to engage in education and career awareness.
7. C4C places an emphasis on increased parental and community partnerships.

Planning for the Future

Mel Levine in his book, *Ready or Not, Here Life Comes*, encourages all adults, especially educators, to talk to students about the future daily; model and instruct students in good work habits and skills necessary for success in all careers; and promote the inherent worth of all people and all careers. Instructors at the center realize that constant modeling and discussion in these areas are essential for ultimate student success.

Teachers are encouraged to use Socratic teaching strategies, project-based teaching and learning and incorporate local career role models from local business and industry — a key C4C strategy. Students also participate in job shadowing, internships and work-based learning in addition to receiving constant mentoring and tutoring.

Engaging Students



Kevin Hoover,
AC Informatics Teacher

According to **Kevin Hoover**, Advanced Career Informatics instructor, making learning fun and interactive in any classroom is essential. Equally important is making sure instruction and assignments are relevant to a student's life and vision for a successful future.

He also suggested that teachers not make it easy for students by always "giving them the answer." "Have students investigate, research, work with their team to find the answer, or even contact a local career role model for assistance," he advises. Hoover notes the greatest skill we can ever teach our children is "how to find out what they need to know — a necessary skill for a successful future."

"Because of intense advisement, Socratic teaching and learning, and continually encouraging students to plan for the future, the school has seen improved attendance and increased academic achievement," notes Hoover.

Hoover says that possibly the most effective "career counselor" at their center is the school's front office administrative assistant, **Kim Dawson**, whom all the students know and love. "She literally calls students by name as they walk by the office and asks 'How's your day going?'; 'How did you do on that test?'; 'Have you registered to take the ACT yet?'; 'Where were you yesterday?'; 'Do you realize that you can't miss work like that or you'll get fired?'; 'So, what have you decided to do following high school?'; 'Keep working hard, everyone has a bad day once in a while; tomorrow is another day — make it your best!'"



Kim Dawson,
Administrative Assistant

Carroll County instructors "market their wares" at all middle grades schools in the district on a regular basis to ensure students understand their career pathway program of study options for their high school years.

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M&M's — Mentors and Mentees: A Sweet Solution for Solid Advisement



Western Middle School in Louisville, Kentucky, participates in SREB's Counseling for Careers (C4C) Initiative. School leadership selected C4C essential strategy number two — implementing an evidence-based and standards-based advisement program for all students — as their initiative for school year 2015-2016. This endeavor guarantees every student on campus a caring adult in addition to their classroom teachers. Students meet with their advisers weekly for 30 minutes to build relationships and receive support services.

Western's advisement initiative, known as M&M's — Mentors and Mentees — is student centered and addresses personal and social issues, academic support, education and career awareness and exploration opportunities along with additional avenues that need to be pursued to assist students. The program has been very successful, resulting in improved attendance, decreased discipline referrals and higher academic achievement.

Judith Wilson and **Emily Knox**, both counselors at Western Middle School, took the lead on advisement implementation. They were supported by school leadership, meeting weekly with student mentees.

Wilson notes the relationship linking C4C to evidence and standards-based strategies. "The lessons are based on evidence, data, and college- and career-readiness standards, which is a mandate for schools nationally. Those lessons also meet character education and positive behavior support standards, both of which are national efforts as well." **And who are the mentees?** "Every student who attends Western Middle School," says Wilson.

She notes the program's chief advisement challenge is building positive relationships with students and providing every student in the school with an advocate. Key areas of advisement include personal, emotional, academic, and education/career readiness.

Making Time for Advisement

To make time for the weekly 30-minute advisement sessions, seven minutes were taken from each of the six class periods. The extra minutes allowed for transit time from class to advisement and then back to class.

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Step Up: Middle Grades to High School Transition at Its BEST!

According to The National Dropout Prevention Network, 97 percent of students who drop out of high school make that decision mentally prior to Christmas their freshmen year. In addition, 80 percent of students who fail and/or repeat their ninth-grade year do NOT graduate from high school.

The counseling for careers implementation team at **Williamstown High School** in Williamstown, West Virginia, realized an effective transition initiative is essential for student success. That C4C team also realized there were district policies that needed to be audited and reviewed so they don't ultimately become road blocks for ninth-graders.

These policies included but were not limited to suspensions linked to attendance, automatic course failures based on attendance, and a grading system that made it difficult to build confidence and overcome failures.

The C4C implementation team led by Williamstown principal, **Pat Peters**, reviewed policies and adapted them to be more oriented toward the middle grades to high school transition. "Too many ninth-grade students were failing ninth grade core subjects (about 25 percent of the class). Many students had grades as ninth-graders that hurt their overall GPA because they were slow to see any relevance in their education until their sophomore or junior year. Students entered as ninth-graders with a middle school attitude. We wanted to make them aware they were embarking on a new academic journey — moving from middle school to high school," states Peters.

Meeting the Transitions Challenge: Stepping Up

Williamstown High School has completed Year 2 of a C4C pilot. Its exemplary implementation represents one of C4C's essential strategies: a transition effort from the middle grades to high school called "Step Up." Step Up provides students with the foundation, knowledge and tools necessary for navigating high school successfully.

Step Up is held in the spring for eighth-graders who are rising ninth-graders preparing to attend Williamstown High School. Much of the Step-Up program was developed, organized and led by upper class students with staff supervision. All stakeholders supported fun, meaningful activities for educators and students. Step Up Day activities included games and events on the high school campus, a campus/school tour scavenger hunt, an elective fair where upper class students provided hands on, interactive presentations for all elective possibilities, such as career and technical education courses, art, drama, music, ROTC, etc.

After an overall large group presentation by administrators, the rising ninth-graders are entertained by the pep band, and they meet freshmen academy teachers and counselors. The large group is broken into smaller groups for the scavenger hunt, followed with small-group presentations by seniors.

Upon completion of all activities, each rising freshman received a 'Class of' t-shirt, and then had their photo taken, on stage, in graduation cap and gown holding a sample diploma with their name imprinted.

The Step-Up effort was partly guided and supported by SREB's C4C initiative and West Virginia's Education Policy 2510, which assisted in 'forcing the hand' of administrators, teachers and counselors to develop a platform to further support students with essential life skills, academic support, and college- and career-readiness skills and knowledge.

Positive Outcomes

Peters reports upward trends in the school's learning culture. "Since initiating Step Up, we have seen major improvement in attendance; decreases in discipline referrals and an overall increase in freshmen academic achievement." We credit these improvements to Step Up, and getting the attention of rising ninth-graders early, since this is the only change in our process that we have made," notes Peters.

Counselor **Erin Deitzler** noted several of the older students assisting with Step Up expressed regret the program was not in place for them. "Sure wish we had done this when I was a rising freshman," was a commonly heard refrain.

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