

DOINGWHATWORKS



Slideshow

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Using the ACT to Signal College Readiness

Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences, Tennessee

February 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College

Practice: Assess and Intervene

Highlights

- A high school principal explains how she works with teachers to develop goals that will better align their instruction with the ACT college-readiness standards.
- Students' assessment results are shared with students and parents beginning in eighth grade so they have an early awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.
- For students needing to fill gaps in their college-readiness skills, advisors invite them to attend after-school courses.
- In order for students to feel comfortable with the college-readiness test format, teachers model the ACT in their classroom.

About the Site

Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences

Chattanooga, TN

Demographics

52% White

42% Black

4% Asian

2% Hispanic

26% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences is a college-preparatory magnet school that supports all students in becoming college-bound.

- Students are required to complete preliminary college entrance exams in eighth (EXPLORE), tenth (PLAN), and eleventh grades (PSAT, ACT).
- Teachers use assessment results to align curriculum and enroll students in college-readiness skills classes.
- Staff plan a weeklong college tour to kick off the college application process and expose students to a variety of colleges and universities.
- Counselors manage and track students through the college and financial aid application process using systems that include checkpoints to make the process routine, predictable, and explicit.

Full Transcript

Title slide: Using ACT to Signal College Readiness

The principal of Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences (CSAS) explains how all students take the ACT assessment series. Teachers align their curriculum to these college-readiness standards, discuss assessment results with students and parents, and provide support to help students address gaps in key skill areas.

Slide 1: Aligning to rigorous standards

Text: In order to ensure rigorous college-prep instruction for all students, CSAS aligns its course standards with those of the ACT, a college-readiness assessment. The principal works closely with staff in identifying goals for every class and then looks at ways to increase the level at which they are teaching.

Audio: One of the primary roles I have in supporting postsecondary access and success for students is working to scaffold the college readiness of the students. The teachers do the hard work of the instruction, and I help them set up a program where we looked at their classes and identified the goals of what they were teaching and where they aligned with the ACT college-readiness standards. A couple years ago our state standards, quite frankly, were not as rigorous as the ACT standards. So we decided, since we want our students to be ready for college, that we should be operating for a more rigorous set of standards. Our teachers identified the goals of every class they taught, and then we looked at it and we looked at what

level we were teaching. Our teachers then set goals for themselves and for their instruction on what they needed to beef up, and were there any gaps in what they were teaching, and set their goals according to the ACT standards.

Slide 2: Curriculum and instruction changes

Text: Staff use the assessment to make adjustments to curriculum and to help students master college-readiness skills identified in the ACT standards.

Audio: For one example, our science department decided after analyzing test results that the students seemed to know many of the answers but became very confused with the very wordy problems that the ACT had. They were unable to pick out what the important information was and what information could be discounted. So they started working into their curriculum some test questions that engage the students in the same way as the ACT science questions did; a lot of verbiage and a lot of critical reading skills were required. The same thing happened with our history department when they realized they needed to improve the critical reading of the students. So what they started doing is using primary resources and asking more essay questions so the students were reading and writing more and needing to do more critical reading. This is aligned specifically with skills that they need to be successful at college.

Slide 3: Students presenting results

Text: For each assessment, staff meet with students and parents to review and discuss the assessment results. Tenth-grade students present their PLAN results at a student-led conference that is attended by their parents and advisors.

Audio: In eighth grade each parent and student sits down with a guidance counselor to discuss the EXPLORE results. In tenth grade we have what we call a PLAN Parent Night that we invite parents in to explore and review their results of the PLAN test, looking at the different levels in terms of Reading, English, Science Reasoning, and an overall composite score, as well as their areas of interest. We are very deliberate in the way that we engage students around the examination and explanation of their data.

Slide 4: Discussing assessment results

Text: To ensure that students have an early awareness of their college-readiness levels, CSAS begins working with students in eighth grade. All students complete the ACT assessment series, beginning with the EXPLORE test in eighth grade, followed by the PLAN test in tenth grade, and the ACT in eleventh grade. CSAS staff use the assessment results to explicitly inform students and families about their readiness for college and next

steps for addressing gaps.

Audio: We scaffold in the instruction in that after our students take the PLAN as tenth graders, they get information back that tells them what their predicted college-readiness level is. We look at those scores and we look at the students' results. For those students that are at college readiness, we suggest to them that they may want to take a course which further familiarizes them with the test-taking format. As we become more comfortable in using the data, it helps us work downward so we can basically start at a younger level, even at eighth grade, when we are telling those students, "This is where you are predicted to be in terms of college readiness when you are in college based upon where you are now."

Slide 5: Developing college-readiness skills

Text: For students who are not at the college-readiness skill level, CSAS offers courses to help fill any necessary gaps. Staff communicate to students and parents which skills are lacking and develop a plan that focuses on skill-building and test-taking strategies.

Audio: If we have students who are not at the college-readiness skill level, for instance, in math or in language, we look at where the gaps are and then we suggest to them that they may want to take a college-readiness skills course. We send letters home to the parents; we go into their advisories, and we talk to the students about that and we explain to them that they may be a good math student but they have got a gap in the area of elementary algebra, and so they can go into the college-readiness skills courses, which are offered after school, and fill in some of those gaps.

Slide 6: Mastering skills leads to growth

Text: CSAS's focused instruction and individualized skill-building opportunities have had a positive impact on student achievement. The increase in the number of students achieving college-readiness skills has been seen in the school's ACT data and in the number of students eligible for scholarships.

Audio: For our 2009 ACT data, we showed more than one year's expected growth in four out of five areas on the ACT, being English, Reading, Science Reasoning, and our overall composite score. In fact, it is especially exciting to note that our composite score nearly doubled the expected growth amount. A direct impact of the college-readiness courses is that we have nearly doubled the percentage of African Americans who are eligible for the HOPE scholarship. We went from 19% in '08 to 36% in '09 who are eligible to receive this lottery scholarship. The Tennessee HOPE Lottery Scholarship is awarded to every student who has demonstrated college readiness by either earning at least a 21 as a composite score on the ACT or earning a GPA of 3.0 on their core courses.

Slide 7: Modeling the test format

Text: Teachers focus on using the test to develop students' key skills for success in college. CSAS staff administer and structure assessments that mirror the format of the ACT so that students become familiar and comfortable with the process.

Audio: Another thing, we talked to our teachers about the fact that we are not teaching to the test for the ACT or any college-readiness test. What we are doing is giving our students skills that they need to be successful in these college admissions tests and indeed to be successful in the college setting. Part of the reason that we include assessments that look like the assessment on the ACT is, when you find out that a student knows the answer to a problem but they get confused by the test format, that's an issue; that's an issue that we can correct. And sometimes it involves nothing more than doing some timed reading, or some timed writing, some timed responses, because many students get nervous with the timing aspect of a test. So if we can expose them to a similar test format, then we are preparing them. We don't view it as teaching to the test. We view it as putting them in an environment where they are comfortable and they are ready to be successful.