

**Sonja Dotson**

**Shelby County Schools  
160 S. Hollywood St.  
Memphis, TN 38112**

**901-237-1422**

**dotsonsp@scsk12.org**

***Key words:***

Focus Plan of Study, Transition, Kuder Planning System, Ready Core Academic Requirements,  
Career Focus/Interest

**Funding Sources:**

Shelby County School's revenues come from Shelby County, City of Memphis, State of Tennessee, Federal Government, other local sources, transfers and planned use of Fund Balance. All funds in the operating budget are for the Period July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020.

**Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

The proposed budget was prepared by using the District Mission Destination 2025, the 80% 90% 100% strategic plan, which by 2025 sets the following goals:

- 80% of students will graduate from high school college-or-career ready,
- 90% will graduate on time, and
- 100% of students who graduate will enroll in a post-secondary opportunity.

The operating budget has six major categories: General Fund, Capital Improvement, Special Revenue Non-Federal, Nutrition Services, Federal Programs, and Internal Services. The expenditures for this program fall under the category of Instruction and Professional School Counselors and are budgeted for each school. The counseling staff shall be included in the budget planning. The current student to counselor ratios are calculated in the Basic Education Program (BEP) Formula and are as follows:

- Elementary School Counselors- Grades K-6 1:500
- Secondary School Counselors- Grades 7-12 1:350

**Project Description:**

The Focus Plan of Study is one of the many necessary planning steps for students as they prepare for the transition from middle school to high school. The Focus Plan of Study is completed with the student, counselor/advisor, and parent. A flyer is sent home with the second quarter report card sharing information with the parents/guardians. A data team parent meeting is held in the third quarter and parents learn more about the Focus Plan of Study. The students must first choose an elective focus from the selections below:

- Career & Technology- includes three credit hours in one Program of Studies. not a random collection of CTE courses.
- Science/Math- any combination of the two areas beyond the core requirements
- Humanities- English, Language Arts, Foreign Language, and Social Studies- any combination of three credits will meet the requirement
- Fine Arts- any combination of three credits from a broad offering of courses in music, dance, theater, arts
- JROTC- requires choosing either for use as an Elective Focus or substituting for core requirements
- Physical Education - includes courses identified by Health, Physical Education, and Lifetime Wellness (HPELW).
- College Readiness – composite score of 21 on the ACT
- Career Readiness – academic skills needed to work in the industry of their choice
- Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate /Dual Enrollment- can be any combination of AP/IB/Dual Enrollment and can overlap with core requirements.
- Liberal Arts/General Studies - English, Language Arts, Foreign Language, and Social Studies- any combination of three credits will meet requirement

Next, the students must choose a career focus/interest using information gathered from a Career Interest Inventory using the Kuder Planning System from their seventh-grade year. The Kuder Planning System helps students learn about themselves, build an education plan, and explore and prepare for various options after high school. Students can learn about themselves, explore occupations, search and compare colleges and careers, plan for an education, plan for work, explore financial aid opportunities, build resumes, find a job, and create a portfolio.

The students then must consider their post high school plans and choose from the following options:

- 2 Year College
- 4 Year College/University
- Technical School
- Apprenticeship
- Employment
- Military Service

Once these steps are completed, the students work on their High School Plan. All students must complete 16 “Ready Core” of academic requirements. Twenty- two units are required for graduation for students who enter the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2013-2014 and for years thereafter.

Students enroll in a math class each year. Students must complete Biology I, Chemistry or Physics and a third lab science. The required Social Studies courses shall include U.S. History, World History or World Geography, Economics and Government. Students must take the ACT and Civics Test as a Testing Requirement. End of Course exams are administered in English I, English II, Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, U.S. History and Biology.

Beginning in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students will select courses in English, math, science, lifetime wellness, fine arts, social studies, world language and an elective. In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, students will select courses in English, math, science, social studies, physical education, elective focus, world language and an elective. Students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade will select courses in English, math, science, social studies, personal finance, elective focus and two electives. Students in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade will select courses in English, math, science, social studies, elective focus and three electives.

**Staffing Pattern:**

The expenditure falls under Instruction and Professional School Counselors budgeted for each school. The counseling staff shall be included in the budget planning. The current student to counselor ratios are calculated using the Basic Education Program (BEP) Formula and are:

- Elementary School Counselors- Grades K-6 1:500
- Secondary School Counselors- Grades 7-12 1:350

**Population Served:**

All eighth-grade students currently enrolled as of January each year.

**Project Origination:**

This project originated as a need to prepare students for the transition from middle school to high school and inform them of the high school opportunities that are available to them. This project serves as a planning guide tool for students, counselors/advisors, and parents/guardians. The High School Plan is reviewed annually by the student and school counselor/advisor and is revised based on the student's academic progress, career interests, and goals. The plan of focused and purposeful high school study shall:

- (a) Cover grades nine through twelve (9-12);
- (b) Connect the student's goals for high school to the courses or training that shall equip the student with the skills necessary to meet his or her goals after high school.
- (c) Consider a variety of indicators, such as student academic needs and strengths, attendance, behavior, and course grades.
- (d) Include information regarding programs of study, a student's readiness for specific early post-secondary opportunities (EPSOs), and elective focuses aligned to the student's interest inventory results.
- (e) Provide students with opportunities to begin building technical skills in a field of interest, in addition to employability skills required to be successful in that job..

**Issues Addressed:**

Increase awareness of the following:

- High school options and programs
- Optional school requirements
- The focus Plan of Study in preparation for high school
- High school course selections

**Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

- Increase by 80% the number of students who are informed of the requirements for graduation, honors, and testing.
- Increase by 80% the number of students who are informed of the options for elective focus selection.
- Increase the number of students by 80% who know the graduation rate for Shelby County Schools and how being a high school graduate has positive effects on the community.
- Increase the percentage of students by 80% who know their academic plan from grades nine-twelve.
- 80% of students will complete the Focus Plan of Study by February of each year.
- 80% of parents/guardians will review and sign the Focus Plan of Study in February of each year.
- 100% of students will complete Focused Plan of Study by May of each year.

**Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:**

- Inform students/parents via schools' websites and flyers of the Shelby County Schools' Choice Fair, Optional School Open Houses and Focus Plan of Study.

- Host parent workshops to share information with the parents/guardians about the graduation requirements, coursework, high school offerings and programs.
- Conduct small group sessions with eighth grade students to complete the Focus Plan of Study.

**Results (Outcomes and Achievements):**

- Increased the number of students by 80% informed of the requirements for graduation, honors, and testing.
- Increased the number of students by 80% informed of the options for elective focus selection.
- Increased the number of students by 80% who know the graduation rate for Shelby County Schools and how being a high school graduate has positive effects on the community.
- Increased the percentage students by 80% who know their academic plan from grades nine-twelve.
- 80% of students completed the Focus Plan of Study by February.
- 80% of parents/guardians reviewed and signed the Focus Plan of Study in February.
- 100% of students completed their Focus Plan of Study by May.

**Project Timeline:**

The Focus Plan of Study project starts in the fall of each year.

Each December, eighth grade students have the opportunity to attend the eighth grade Transition Fair. At the Transition Fair, eighth grade students learn about High School Course Offerings and Programs (AP, IB, DC), High School Extracurricular Activities, College, Career and Technical Education (CCTE) Opportunities. Careers, Colleges and Universities, and Military Programs.

Each December, students and parents also can attend the Shelby County Schools' Annual Choice Fair. At this event, students and parents can visit perspective high schools in the district to learn more about the academic programs and extracurricular activities offered.

Each January, the Optional High Schools will host an open house on a designated evening. The Optional Schools Program has a legacy of excellence in Shelby County Schools. Each of the optional high schools has a specialized learning focus, such as: College Preparatory, International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, Creative and Performing Arts, T-STEM, Business and Finance, International Studies and Global Health Studies. In addition, flyers are sent to parent/guardians sharing information about the Focus Plan of Study and informational sessions are held.

In February, the counselor/advisor meets with the students in small groups to complete the Focus Plan of Study. Once complete, the plan is reviewed and signed by the parents/guardians.

In April/May the Focus Plan of Study is forwarded to the receiving high school counselor/advisor.

**Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:**

The outcomes include a tentative graduation cohort list for the class of 2024 as they prepare to make the successful transition to high school. This is reviewed and monitored yearly. Progress monitoring of students each year will ensure they are on-track for graduation. Hosting information meetings with students/parents each year will ensure they are on-track for graduation. Having enough certified educators in each core subject area and elective focus courses is a major factor for increasing the graduation rate.

**Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:**

Knowledge of the following is necessary:

- High School Offerings and Programs
- Optional School Programs and Requirements
- Graduation Requirements- Honors Diploma, Testing
- Student Guide of Secondary Education
- Core Subjects with End-of-Course Exams
- Elective Focus Choices
- Various Post High School Plans
- Graduation Rates- State of Tennessee, Shelby County School, High Schools
- Ready Graduates Indicators
- Schools Performance Scorecard-School Performance Data
- County Schools Board Policies (Graduation, Advanced Courses, Grade Classification)

**Current Status of Project:**

This project is on-going.

**Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:**

- Facilitate/advise students and parents/guardians.
- Share information with the students on the Focus Plan of Study.
- Share information with the parents on the Focus Plan of Study.
- Conduct small-group sessions with students to complete the Focus Plan of Study.
- Send the Focus Plan of Study home for parent/guardian signatures.
- Send the Focus Plan of Study to the receiving high school counselor/advisor.

**Lessons Learned:**

- It helps to connect students' goals for high school to post-secondary education, training, and work.
- Students can monitor their progress towards completing the Ready Core requirements for graduation.
- The Focus Plan of Study must be reviewed each year with student, counselor/advisor and parent.

- Course selection of honors, AP, IB, Dual Enrollment coursework will depend on the availability of high school options.
- Our district must implement stronger effective recruitment efforts and compensation packages to recruit and retain certified candidates in each high school as we strive to increase our graduation rate and prevent students from dropping out of school.

**Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:**

My advice for the Dropout Prevention Practitioners is that it is imperative to start early sharing information about the various opportunities to learn more about the high school programs and activities with the students and parents/guardians. Additionally, collaboration with all stakeholders (counselors/advisors, graduation coaches, teacher, parents/guardians, community members) is very important. Finally, sharing and posting information on the school website, utilizing Blackboard messenger to parents/guardians, sending flyers homes, and hosting parent data workshops on the importance of students graduating from high school are key communication tools.