

NDPS Certification Field Project Report

Using ACT Prep On-Line Support to Strengthen Testing Confidence and Scores

Mario Bell
995 S. Lauderdale
Memphis, TN 38126
901-416-4020
Bellm4@scsk12.org

Shelby County Schools
Department of Student Affairs
Enrollment Management

Keywords: Test-Prep, ACT, Testing

Funding Sources:

SCS Academics General Fund, and Summer Learning Academy Budget

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

Student Cost = \$9.98/student

Projected Student Pilot Pool: 1000 students (11th Grade)

Total Projected cost for Pilot Program: \$10,000

Project Description:

The Shelby County Schools Academic Operations Office presented an opportunity for student academic growth and enhancement to coincide with the current District plan to have all 11th Grade students take the ACT in the Fall of their Junior year. The ACT Prep On-Line model was used during the Summer of 2018 for the Superintendent's Summer Learning Academy. The on-line student access account gives every student a chance to take a practice ACT exam. After testing, the on-line platform provides a tutorial & gives specific data regarding areas for enhancing scores based on testing results. The hope is that students will consistently work on their individualized areas of improvement in order to develop stronger skill sets in the identified areas. The practice test will yield composite scores for all subject areas. The District will allow access to this on-line account for a year through the students' senior year. As well, students who are eligible for a fee waiver will have additional access after applying for the fee waiver.

Two plans are as follows:

Structured Plan- Student will go through the On-Line platform by completing every area of testing Content

Adaptive Plan- Strictly based on student's strengths & weaknesses assessed from initial Sample/Practice test. Can be manipulated by administrator or student can use self-guided program completing areas of high need or working on areas where strengths prevail.

- ACT is willing to provide initial web-based training for Admin Teachers/Staff for the development of classroom based instructional curriculum
- Currently anticipating that the training format will be through webinars and should only take 1-2 hours for training.
- Any additional training can be in the "Train the Trainer" format though ACT is also willing to schedule an ongoing training cadence throughout the school year for any internal designated trainers.

Staffing Pattern:

Two District Administrators will serve as System Administrators for the platform. Both will have access to the roster of student participants and can record the statistical data for all students in the pilot pool. All data can be reported to both academic, curriculum/instruction, and research departments.

Population Served:

- 2 Classes Daily: ACT Prep Math & English- 5-week Summer Session
- 1 General Study Session with ACT Prep Teachers present for individual account review- 2 Hours
- Program was offered to 1,000 high school seniors but only 536 participated in the Summer program
- The remaining student logins were held to allow other students access after testing in the coming fall semester.

Project Origination:

The Shelby County School District has always been committed to improving student success and outcomes through enhancing both learning environments and providing access to educational tools aimed at strengthening academic outcomes.

This project was designed not only to improve the quality of public education, but also to create a more knowledgeable, productive workforce and ultimately benefit our entire community. The project originated when the Summer Learning Academy Director wanted to extend Summer Learning opportunities to both middle and high school students. As a result, I was tasked with developing a curriculum for the high school market that would both engage students and offer encouragement for continuing education in terms of high school completion and beyond. The project was developed based on my experience working with high school students in the Nashville area while working as Fisk University's Associate Dean of Enrollment Management. We offered a Summer course from Kaplan Higher-Ed for ACT Prep targeting rising 10th-12th grade students offering early college acceptance upon completion. The benefits from that experience prompted me to propose that we look for ACT Prep collaborators for the Summer Academy. I reached out to ACT's regional sales contact and started the conversation on how we could provide learning opportunities at the best cost for the District. Shortly thereafter, we reviewed several web-based trainings and calls about the ACT On-line access and the potential cost discounts for students that were a part of the free lunch program. Our city and district have always suffered from underemployment and students/parents with dire socio-economic issues. As a leading provider for education, we have always wanted to promote growth, exposure, and opportunity for our students by preparing them for post-secondary education and job-readiness/career goals. Through the use of ACT's on-line testing assessment, we were able to provide our students with an avenue to enhance their skill sets and scores while also providing a pathway to stay focused on school completion and their future educational endeavors

Issues Addressed:

The goal is to have students in this initial cohort take the ACT Practice Exam and improve their composite scores in each of the testing areas prior to them taking the District mandated ACT Exam. Currently, students that do not score above a 21 in math are required to enroll in the District's SAILS class and complete a set of year-long math modules so they will not be forced to take remedial math once they enter college. Having students work at their own pace with the on-line access should improve scores and reduce the number of students in the SAILS program.

Overall, the hope was to have students experience more success on the ACT exam and increase their chances for success in school, college admissions process and life.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

The desired outcome was to build student testing competencies in all areas of the ACT exam. With stronger test results, the assumption is that students would have stronger confidence and attitudes towards completing high school and more desirable outcomes with respect to applying for colleges in alignment with the District's Destination 2025 plan for achievement. Once initial testing is completed, the District's assigned system administrators will be able to post results for all students on the platform and report scores across the board. As well, we intend to work with all schools that offer ACT Prep course work to make sure that students with access will also be enrolled in Prep classes.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

SCS implemented a plan to have all Juniors (11th Grade students) take the ACT during the Fall of the school year. Prior to testing, the students that attended the Summer Learning program were given access to the ACT On-Line platform that assisted them with exposure to the test and yielded insight on specific areas of improvement to help in improving their test scores. During the summer program, the students worked for 5 weeks with teachers in the areas of math and English, and then within the platform took quizzes, practice exams, and study modules to sharpen their test taking skills and review of subject matter.

Based on survey responses, we found that all Summer Learning Academy students, after having been exposed to On-Line Test platform, felt more comfortable entering the fall school year with less anxiety about the ACT exam. Also, these students recorded higher test composite scores in those areas where the summer's practice exam revealed needed improvement.

Strategies and/or Interventions:

During the Summer of 2018, when students used the ACT platform for the summer program, students were exposed to the ACT exam at earlier stages in that many 10th graders and rising 11th graders had a first chance to take the ACT Practice test and get familiar with the exam. From there we were able to develop both a teaching and learning plan around their unique areas of need. The summer ACT classes centered on both English and math, and the teachers were able to log into the platform to assist students with other composite scores for exam prep.

Project Timeline:

The Summer Learning Academy ran from June 11th - July 13th, 2018. Students were tracked and log-in accounts were monitored through the Fall of 2019 to record testing outcomes post fall ACT exam.

Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry out the Project:

As a system administrator, we were required to complete an on-line training to become familiar with the system with respect to adding/assigning student logins and assigning teacher user credentials for monitoring student accounts. As well, we provided all teachers with training on accessing the system and checking their respective student accounts. We were required to have weekly virtual meetings to verify that all users and user roles were correctly updated. Also, as

lead system administrator, I had to visit all high school sites across the district to monitor progress and levels of achievement.

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

The overall goal was to provide students with strategies on how to improve their test taking skill sets and build confidence going into the fall mandatory test. Also, we hoped that this would encourage students to remain both in school and college bound. The results of testing from the fall ACT were tracked by the Department of Academics and counselors at the students' respective schools were given a list of those individuals that had participated in the Summer Academy and had on-line account access.

Current Status of Project:

As a result of this project, the Shelby County School District has launched additional ACT Prep classes and help sessions throughout the school year and during all school breaks, i.e., fall break, teacher in-service breaks, and spring break. Though the District did not buy into the need to provide a wider range of students' on-line access accounts, there has been an increased awareness of the fact that exposing students to the test earlier and preparing prior to fall of the junior year is beneficial.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

I served as the lead system administrator for the ACT On-Line platform, and project leader responsible for planning the scope of the ACT On-Line Assessment for the Summer Learning program, requested funding for the user roles, presented the information to required internal parties, and served as the primary contact for ACT. As well, I worked with ACT contacts to align initial training sessions and led any subsequent trainings with internal staff. I also worked in conjunction with our secondary system administrators to verify that, once we kicked off the on-line access, additional support was provided as needed for any sites.

Lesson Learned:

- Students benefit from exposure to ACT Practice Test and identifying problem areas early
- Increased and differentiated means of ACT Prep was beneficial and encouraging to participants
- Male and female students saw both the need and benefit of self-practice and accountability in having individualized plans of improvement
- ACT Prep teachers welcomed additional means of guiding students and on-line assessment tools

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

As anticipated, this was a very good approach to extending both borderline drop out and inquiring college bound students with an opportunity to increase their confidence and redirect their efforts scholastically. Students took advantage of an excellent opportunity and found confidence in themselves and their learning ability and a reduction of test anxiety. This opportunity can be easily executed with the assistance of ACT and their account associates and can have long term benefits for school systems with students struggling to experience success and achievement with college bound testing.