For Immediate Release
Contact: Tim Hensley, APR

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ACT participation reaches an all-time high for Hamilton County Schools

ACT results released today by the Tennessee Department of Education show the participation rate increased to 99 percent for all students in the 2019 graduating class for Hamilton County Schools. The rate is the highest participation the district has seen since the information began to be posted by the state. In 2016, 93 percent of graduates took the ACT compared to 99 percent last year, a 6 percent increase. The district had an increase of ACT participation in all students and all subgroups, with the English language learner participation rate increasing 9 percent and students with disabilities participation rate increasing 6 percent.

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The participation rate for Hamilton County Schools exceeded the participation rate of the state in all student and subgroup categories. The state had 98 percent of all students take the ACT in 2019. Hamilton County Schools exceeded the state by four percentage points for English Learners and Students with disabilities. Hamilton County Schools had 99 percent of those populations take the test while the state had 95 percent.

The rise in participation for Hamilton County Schools likely contributed to a slight decrease in the composite score for the district. The overall composite score for 2019 is 19.6, which is down from 19.9 last year. According to a 2014 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) analysis of college admissions regional test scores, generally, as a greater proportion takes a college admission test, the average score drops. The results for the district mirrors the rise in the participation rate and slight drop of the composite score for Tennessee and the decline in composite score at the national level.

“The rise in participation rates demonstrates the district’s commitment to all students being future-ready and prepared for success after high school and the importance our teens see in opening doors to opportunity,” stated Dr. Bryan Johnson. “The realization of the importance of the ACT and taking the requisite courses to be successful on college entrance exams among our students is establishing a culture of excellence that will lead to ultimate success on our goal to reach a district composite score of 21 for the Class of 2023.”

Seven high schools in Hamilton County Schools reached the goal of a composite score of 21 or above for 2019. Hamilton County Collegiate High at Chattanooga State students earned a composite score of 26.3; Chattanooga High School Center for Creative Arts (CCA), 25.9; Signal Mountain Middle/High, 25.3; STEM School Chattanooga, 23.6; Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences Upper, 23.5; East Hamilton School, 21.8; and Soddy Daisy High, 21.2.

One strategy the district has used to improve ACT results for students is a partnership between Hamilton County Schools and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) to provide ACT prep courses. Five high schools in the district host the Saturday prep sessions, but slots are open in the ACT program for high school students across the county. The programs started at Tyner Academy in the fall of 2018 and expanded to Brainerd High, The Howard School, Red Bank High, and Central High this year. Hamilton County Schools funds the sessions at Red Bank High and Central High with slots open to students from other high schools in the district. The average increase of students from Tyner Academy participating in ACT prep added an average of 2.64 points on their final score. Of those participating, 92 percent of the students saw an increase in their test scores. One participant increased the final score on the test by ten points. The district plans to expand the ACT prep offerings to other areas across the district beginning in January.

“A district ACT composite is difficult to move significantly in the short term because the test measures skills acquired over time,” said Justin Robertson, chief schools officer, Hamilton County Schools. “Our focus over the past year was to increase the number of students taking the assessment to expose more students to the opportunity and to provide more test prep resources.”

Students also participated in a district ACT video sharing tips from graduates on how actual students who had taken the test found success. ACT Prep Advice from Students

State data released today uses a students' best ACT score, meaning that if a student took the ACT multiple times, the score included in today's results reflects his or her highest score. The method of score calculation is different than ACT’s, which reports results based on the last score a student received. All ACT data released by the Tennessee Department of Education is available for download from the state’s website.
The ACT is an entrance exam used by most colleges and universities to make admissions decisions. It is a multiple-choice test administered by ACT, Inc. The purpose of the ACT is to measure a high school student's readiness for college and provide colleges with a method of comparison of applicants. The ACT includes English, math, reading, science, and an optional writing section.

Photo: Max Burke, a 2019 graduate of Signal Mountain High and achiever of a perfect score of 36 on the ACT, appears in the ACT advice video