

COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS DAY

Setting a Higher Standard to Increase Student Success

Three years ago, Affton High School in St. Louis, Missouri sought to improve student learning and readiness for college and career. To achieve their goal, administrators wanted to create a culture around college and career readiness and set a standard that all students who want a higher education have the academic skills to earn one. **By dedicating a day to college and career readiness, they have had success.**

Affton's college and career readiness day is a regular school day set aside for ALL grades to participate in college readiness assessments. While all Missouri secondary public schools administer the ACT® test at no cost to students, Affton takes it a step further by administering ACT assessments to lower grades. "It is the knowledge you build on year-after-year, starting in lower grades, that gets you ready for the ACT," said Principal Dr. Vince Powell. Their assessment plan is simple:

- First-year students take ACT Aspire®
- Sophomores take PreACT®
- Juniors take the ACT test
- Seniors celebrate completing ACT testing at an offsite picnic

"We try to instill in the students that this is a learning experience with Aspire and PreACT. If you're in a sport on the JV team, you're preparing for that big game or to play varsity. This is going to make you more confident, so when you take the real ACT, it will be old hat. You know you'll be able to do a lot better," said Dr. Powell.

With the high-stakes nature and classroom schedule changes required to administer the ACT, schoolwide testing has simplified administration. And, with seniors offsite for a picnic, there are fewer interruptions. "That was our main idea in the beginning: to get everybody on the same page, that way no one felt like they had to do this while everyone else was out doing their normal routine," said Dr. Powell.

School administrators devote time before testing to educating students and their parents on the value of ACT assessments and to get students excited about planning for their futures. To emphasize the importance of college and career readiness day:

- School administrators use multiple channels like classroom time, parent meetings, email, and social media to communicate with students and parents.
- Juniors are enrolled in a preparatory course that helps them with test-taking strategies, specifically for the ACT test.
- Parents learn how to interpret the ACT score report and take steps to help their child improve academic skills.
- Dr. Tim Luecke, Assistant Principal, gives students a pep talk after they have completed their pretest activities.
- There are even plans in the future for banners and pep rallies.

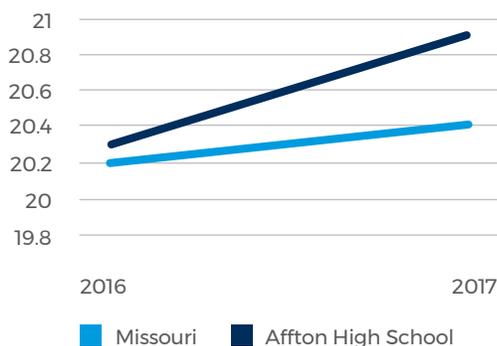
“We really want the students and their parents to have a positive experience leading into test day. I believe students who feel like they’ve been treated with their best interests in mind will step up and give it their best effort,” said Dr. Luecke.

After college and career readiness day, Affton uses the experience and ACT data to make improvements in everything from test administration to curriculum. Data are used to evaluate the curriculum with a complete picture of student performance, inform discussions at faculty meetings, implement new programs like reading and writing in noncore classes, and identify areas for professional development.

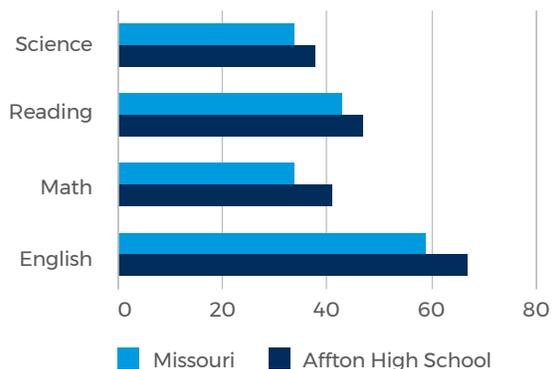
“Everybody in the school has the opportunity to reflect on what can be improved each year. We try to have students reflect so they can make themselves better test takers. Teachers can reflect and think about what they did to prepare students for whichever exam they are taking. Even us, we think about what else we could have done better,” said Dr. Powell.

Today, Affton produces students who are more prepared for success in college and career, compared to the rest of Missouri. **Affton’s ACT scores are higher compared to the state over the past five years. And, 41% of Affton students met three or four ACT College and Career Readiness Benchmarks, while only 35% of students statewide are at that same level.** At the subject level, Affton outpaces the rest of the state with a higher percentage of their students meeting each subject benchmark. English holds the largest margin of separation.

Average ACT Scores: Affton High vs State



2017 Percentage of Students Meeting College and Career Readiness Benchmarks



The results connected to Affton’s college and career readiness day have been impressive and demonstrate the value of **building a culture of college and career readiness** and **creating a testing environment that inspires confidence in students and educators.**