Destination 2025:
2020 Shelby County Schools Annual Report

Executive Summary

Without question, the 2019-20 school year marked a time of historic change and unanticipated challenges for Shelby County Schools' (SCS) families and staff. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and subsequent school closures, students ultimately missed a full quarter of full-time, in-person instruction in SCS and across the United States. Consequently, our priorities have expanded beyond improving traditional academic outcomes to ensuring our families have the resources to learn safely and effectively while navigating the health and economic crises affecting the whole Shelby County community. While some of our traditional measures of success regarding Destination 2025 are therefore limited, SCS and its many partners are proud of our collective efforts to adapt quickly to unprecedented challenges and respond to our community's needs. These efforts include:

- The rapid distribution of over 88,500 devices and 13,500 hotspots to SCS students to prepare for all-remote digital learning in fall 2020
- Providing of instructional materials, online learning opportunities and meals to thousands of students during the spring and summer of 2020 in response to school closures
- The mobilization of community partners to establish "learning pods" for students whose families need childcare support during SCS' remote learning fall semester
- The expansion of technical support call centers and user resources for families and students on our Access for All website (http://www.scsk12.org/accessforall)
- Achieving our highest levels of community confidence in the District since the inception of Destination 2025 with 89 percent of survey respondents agreeing that we are on track to improve student achievement in June 2020

While Shelby County Schools and its community partners have risen to the immediate challenge of re-engaging students in full-time instruction, there is significant work remaining to help students regain lost learning time and access the academic and non-academic supports they need to recover from the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. With limited performance data available, emerging priorities from our Board and Superintendent, and new student and school needs in light of this crisis, this 2020 Annual Report will serve as a bridge between SCS' priorities and performance to this point and a revised strategic plan to be established in 2021. In the report that follows, high-level summaries of progress and performance data (where available) are provided for the five priorities of Destination 2025 as well as details on our emerging priorities to promote student equity and adapt to digital learning.

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Annual Progress: 2020

Priority 1: Strengthen Early Literacy	2019 Actual	2020 Target	2020 Actual	Change Since 2019	Target-to-Actual
By 2025, 90 percent of SCS third graders are proficient in English & Language Arts (ELA).	23%	47%	**Not Available**	N/A	N/A
Priority 2: Improve Post-Secondary Readiness	**2019 Actual**	**2020 Target**	**2020 Actual**	**Change Since 2019**	**Target-to-Actual**
By 2025, 90 percent of SCS students graduate on time.	79.3%	82%	**77.7%**	-1.6 points	-4.3 points
By 2025, 100 percent of college- or career-ready SCS graduates enroll in a post-secondary opportunity.	83.1%	77%	**TBD[1]**	N/A	N/A
Priority 3: Develop Teachers, Leaders & Central Office to Drive Student Success	**2019 Actual**	**2020 Target**	**2020 Actual**	**Change Since 2019**	**Target-to-Actual**
By 2025, 60 percent of students are proficient on TNReady assessments.	23.7% (K-8) 15.6% (HS)	44.5% (K-8) 36.3% (HS)	**Not Available**	N/A	N/A
Priority 4: Expand High-Quality School Options	**2019 Actual**	**2020 Target**	**2020 Actual**	**Change Since 2019**	**Target-to-Actual**
By 2025, SCS student market share increases by 5 percent.	64.3%	63.7%	**63.4%**	-0.9 points	-0.3 points
Priority 5: Mobilize Family & Community Partners	**2019 Actual**	**2020 Target**	**2020 Actual**	**Change Since 2019**	**Target-to-Actual**
By 2025, community confidence in SCS increases to 90 percent.	82%	84%	**89%**	+7 points	+5 points

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[1] *Due to the timing of available data, the post-secondary enrollment rate reflects the percentage of 2019 graduates who enrolled in a post-secondary opportunity during the past year.*

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Priority 1: Strengthen Early Literacy

2025 Goal: 90 percent of SCS third graders are reading on grade level.

2020 Progress: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TNReady assessments were not administered in spring 2020.

Because the State canceled TNReady testing at the end of the 2019-20 school year, we are unable to update third-grade ELA proficiency results for this report. Instead, results from the District's formative assessments administered in fall 2019 and winter 2020 serve as our best available measure of early literacy progress. In 2019-20, the District began using the Fastbridge Early Reading (K-1) and AReading (2-3) assessments to measure literacy progress for K-3 Students. Fastbridge uses national comparison data to rank student achievement scores on each assessment, and SCS uses the Early Reading 50th percentile as a benchmark for students to be considered kindergarten-ready. 35 percent of K-1 students achieved the 50th percentile rank or higher on the winter assessment compared to 48 percent in the Fall, indicating a decrease in achievement. 40 percent of 2-3 grade students achieved the 50th percentile rank or higher on the Winter AReading assessment compared to 37 percent in the Fall, demonstrating an increase in reading achievement for 2nd and 3rd graders. One factor that may contribute to these upward and downward trends is that the Early Reading assessment is administered one-on-one by teachers while the AReading assessment is computer-adaptive.

Percent of Students 50th Percentile or Above
Fastbridge Reading Assessments
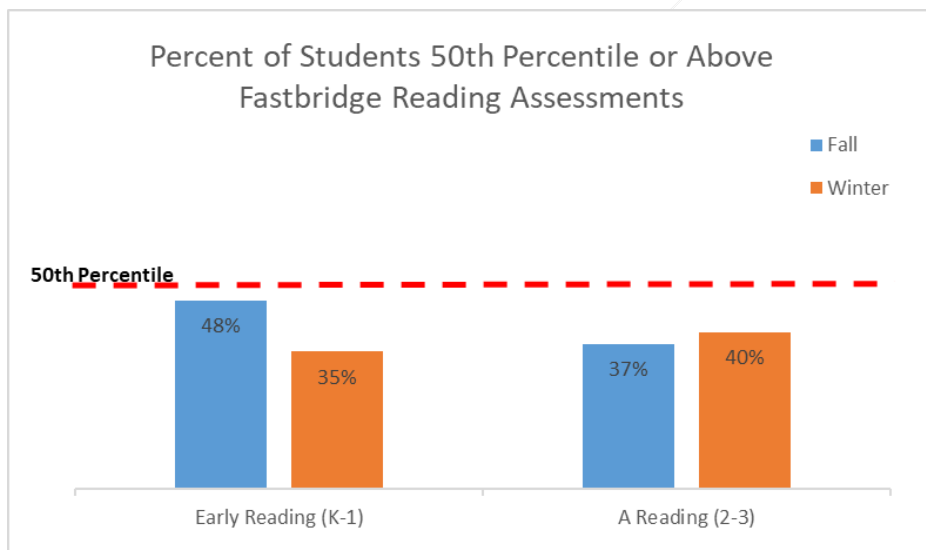
Key Progress

Pre-K – A key strategy of Priority 1 has been to increase the number Pre-K seats available for students with the greatest need prior to entering kindergarten. When assessed for kindergarten readiness, economically disadvantaged students who attend Pre-K consistently outperform peers of the same socioeconomic status who did not attend. In 2019-20, Pre-K enrollment increased to 5,798, exceeding the number of economically disadvantaged kindergarten students (5,500) who typically enroll in SCS. This means enough seats were filled to potentially meet the need for all eligible students who will enter kindergarten in the 2020-21 school year. During the 2019-20 school year, Pre-K students made academic gains on early literacy assessments. Based on iStation

assessment results, 73 percent of participating students were academically ready for kindergarten (Tier 1 in Literacy) as of March 2020.

Virtual Summer Learning Academy - The Virtual Summer Learning Academy provided a fun and enriching learning experience for 2,000 K-5 students. Participating educators received training in developmentally appropriate practices and quality programming standards primarily to reinforce instruction that occurred during the 2019-20 academic year. Students participated in a full day of literacy and math lessons via Microsoft Teams and iReady online platforms and enhanced their cognitive skills through the incorporation of curriculum that promoted communication, cooperation, and problem solving.

Third Grade Commitment – The Third Grade Commitment (3GC) is a collaborative effort to ensure that SCS students have the necessary reading skills to be successful before entering third grade. Third grade marks an academic transition in which students are no longer "learning to read" but "reading to learn." As a part of 3GC, students must meet certain success criteria to be eligible for promotion from second grade to third grade and receive Academic Support Plans to get back on track if they miss any success criteria. The Office of Academics collaborates on an ongoing basis with internal and external partners to focus on four levers of implementation: Continuous Pathway to Learning; Quality Instruction and Support; Social and Emotional Support; Community Engagement and Awareness.

Foundational Literacy Laureates (FLLs) – All elementary and K-8 schools have a designated Foundational Literacy Laureate (FLL) who coaches and guides their K-2 colleagues in best practices for teaching foundational literacy. Additionally, FLLs engage in five to seven customized modules of professional learning in foundational literacy standards, skills and strategies and receive ongoing coaching support from Early Literacy Advisors. In 2019-20, over 90 percent of Laureates engaged in all modules and provided more than 2,700 hours of school-based foundational literacy support to their K-2 colleagues, students and parents.

Second Grade Paraprofessionals – All elementary and K-8 schools have designated at least one paraprofessional to provide instructional support to second grade students. These paraprofessionals support literacy within the classroom by asking probing questions, ensuring students understand the core instruction and/or conducting a teacher-led small group during workstations. Paraprofessionals may also support students outside of the classroom in "pull-out" settings using the Wonders curriculum. District Early Literacy staff provide paraprofessionals with monthly professional learning sessions that focus on phonics and Wonders curriculum resources. In 2019-20, over 70 percent of paraprofessionals completed every monthly session offered.

Response to Instruction & Intervention (RTI^2) – The Department of Curriculum & Instruction RTI^2 Team worked diligently throughout the 2019-20 school year to build schools' capacity to provide intensive, small-group support to students struggling in math and literacy. A major portion of building capacity with school teams involved providing training and support targeting the new assessment platform, Illuminate Fastbridge, used to screen and prioritize students for intervention based on academic need and monitor students' progress during intervention. Students in grades K-8 participated in the universal screener in fall and winter during the 2019-20 school year. As schools adapted to the Fastbridge system, the percentage of eligible students who completed the RTI^2 placement process increased from 55 percent in the fall to 89 percent in the winter.
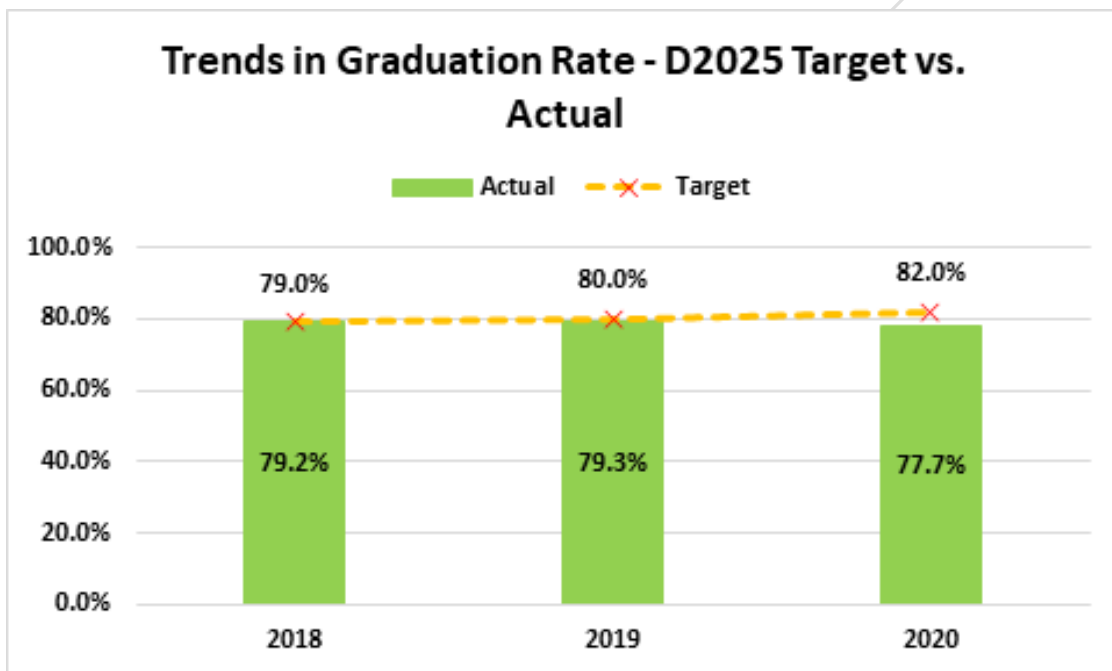
Priority 2: Improve Post-Secondary Readiness

2025 Goal: 90 percent of SCS students graduate on time, and 100 percent of college- or career-ready graduates enroll in a post-secondary opportunity.

2020 Progress: 77.7 percent of students graduated on time in 2020, and 52.1 percent of 2019 graduates enrolled in a post-secondary opportunity.

High School Graduation Rate

In 2020, 77.7 percent of SCS students graduated on time compared to 79.3 percent of students in 2019. Although the graduation rate decreased from 2019 to 2020, 53 percent of SCS high schools earned a graduation rate of at least 82 percent, meaning they are on track to meet our 90 percent on-time graduation goal by 2025. Additionally, 26 percent of SCS high schools have already achieved a graduation rate of 90 percent this year, and 29 percent maintained or improved their graduation rate from 2019 to 2020.

Trends in Graduation Rate - D2025 Target vs. Actual

Legend: Actual (green bars), Target (dashed line with X markers)

Year	Actual	Target
2018	79.2%	79.0%
2019	79.3%	80.0%
2020	77.7%	82.0%

Ready Graduate Rate

The Tennessee Department of Education (TNDOE) considers students who meet certain college- and career-readiness criteria by the time they finish high school to be Ready Graduates.[2] TNDOE computes each district's Ready Graduate rate, with a one-year lag. Thus, the latest available data are for the class of 2019, of whom 20.9 percent were Ready Graduates. This represents a 1.3 point increase from the class of 2018, whose Ready Graduate rate was 19.6 percent. Note that TNDOE computes this rate by dividing the number of Ready Graduates by the

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[2] https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/ccte/ccte_ready_graduate_overview_2018-19.pdf

total number of students in the cohort, including non-graduates. The rate among graduates only was higher: 26.3 percent for the 2019 graduates, which was a 1.5-point increase from the rate for the 2018 graduates.

Post-Secondary Enrollment Rate

The post-secondary enrollment rate for 2020 graduates is not available yet, but 52.1 percent of all 2019 graduates have enrolled in a post-secondary school. Among students considered Ready Graduates, 83.1 percent enrolled in a post-secondary school.

Key Progress

ACT Prep – To help more students reach the Ready Graduate milestone of earning an ACT score of 21 or better, SCS developed a concerted plan to increase exam preparation opportunities. SCS' Academics Office released the ACT Playbook—a series of strategies and initiatives from formative assessments to student performance incentives—to help schools boost students' ACT outcomes. Additionally, Academics required all high schools provide ACT Prep courses in English and mathematics to assist students who have not yet earned a score of 21 or higher on the ACT. All ninth graders were also provided the opportunity to take the PSAT exam to help students, teachers, and leaders learn where students may need support as they prepare to take the ACT in eleventh grade. The Academics Office also held quarterly ACT workshops, making use of District teachers and subject-specific ACT preparation materials for high school students. In spring 2020, schools were given the opportunity to offer MasteryPrep's workshop *Decoding the ACT* to core content teachers, and school-based *ACT Bootcamp* training for students to increase ACT awareness and test-taking skills. Finally, in May 2020, SCS Academics released the ACT Field Guide as an evolution of the ACT Playbook, laying out a plan for continued support in 2020-21.

Improving Career-Readiness – In today's career landscape, preparing students for success after graduation is not "one size fits all." During the 2019-20 school year, the Division of College, Career, and Technical Education (CCTE) continued to strengthen its vertical articulation opportunities that link K-12 and post-secondary education to the workforce, as students earned over 2,500 industry certifications in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand areas. On a mission to provide students with intellectually demanding, real-world curricula that include the integration of academic, technical, and employability skills, the CCTE division opened over 50 new CCTE programs of study in 23 high schools, over 20 high school Information Technology programs, and 35 new middle school STEM and career exploration programs. CCTE continues striving to align the three stages of learning—secondary, post-secondary, and the workplace—by increasing CCTE Dual Enrollment capacity by 400 percent with over 2,000 college credit hours earned. Phase III of the CCTE Redesign also focused on further developing ways to expose students to multiple opportunities for meaningful work-based learning experiences. As a result, over 100 Signature Partnerships with area businesses and community organizations were formed. These partnerships help bridge the gap between education and career, as seen in the virtual MPLOY Summer Experience, a paid internship in which over 1,000 SCS students participated and obtained 231 work-based learning credits.

CLUE – During the 2019-20 school year, the Department of Exceptional Children used the Illuminate Fastbridge assessments to screen every student in kindergarten through the eighth grade to determine a potential need for gifted services. This universal screening process represents a change from the previous method of relying primarily on teacher referrals for gifted testing. The universal screening approach aligns with new best practices in gifted education to reduce the impact of bias and increase equity in identifying children for gifted services. From the

universal screener, 4,500 students were identified as working above grade level and considered for placement in CLUE. By the end of the first semester, 601 students from grades K–2 were immediately placed into Primary Enrichment CLUE, because they were assessed as reading two grade levels above their current placement. In addition, more than 600 students were identified for comprehensive testing for the gifted IEP, which is still in progress because of school closures for the pandemic.

Advanced Coursework – The Division of Optional Schools and Advanced Academics serves all schools offering early post-secondary opportunities (EPSOs) which include Advanced Placement (AP), Dual Enrollment (DE), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Statewide Dual Credit (SDC). EPSOs are highly rigorous courses that enable students to graduate better prepared for college and careers, compete globally and have a positive impact in our community. In 2019-20, EPSOs were offered at 100 percent of SCS-managed high schools, including 129 AP courses offered in 21 high schools and Memphis Virtual School. Moreover, all District-managed high schools developed an Advanced Academics Expansion Plan to facilitate increased access to EPSOs. In addition, 95 percent of DE students earned college credit for the 2019-20 school year. To identify students for advanced course offerings (Honors, Pre-AP, AP, IB, DE, SDC), 88 percent of ninth-grade students (included in the baseline enrollment report) in SCS-managed high schools took the PSAT 9 as a universal screener.
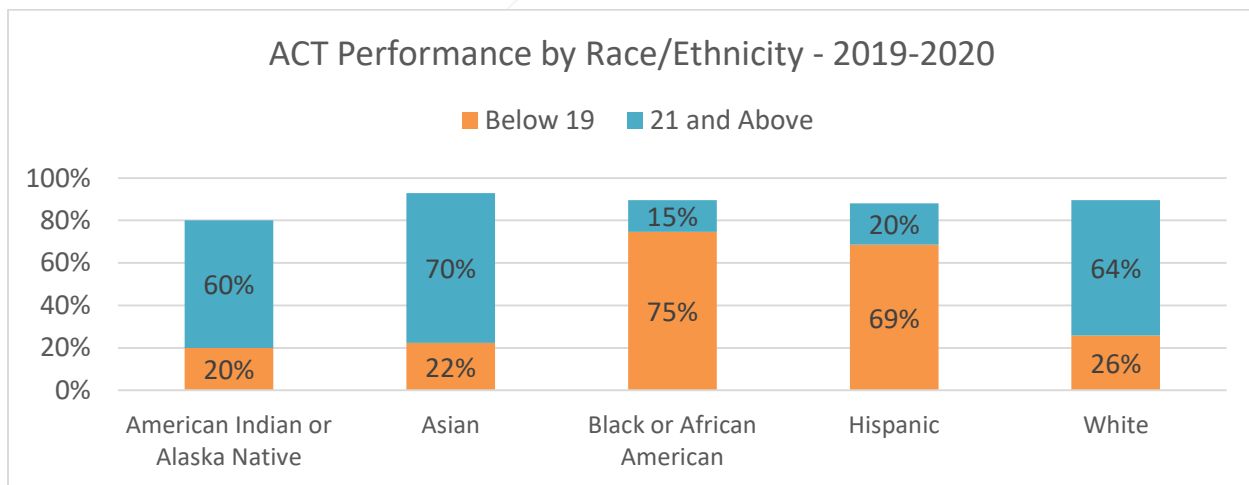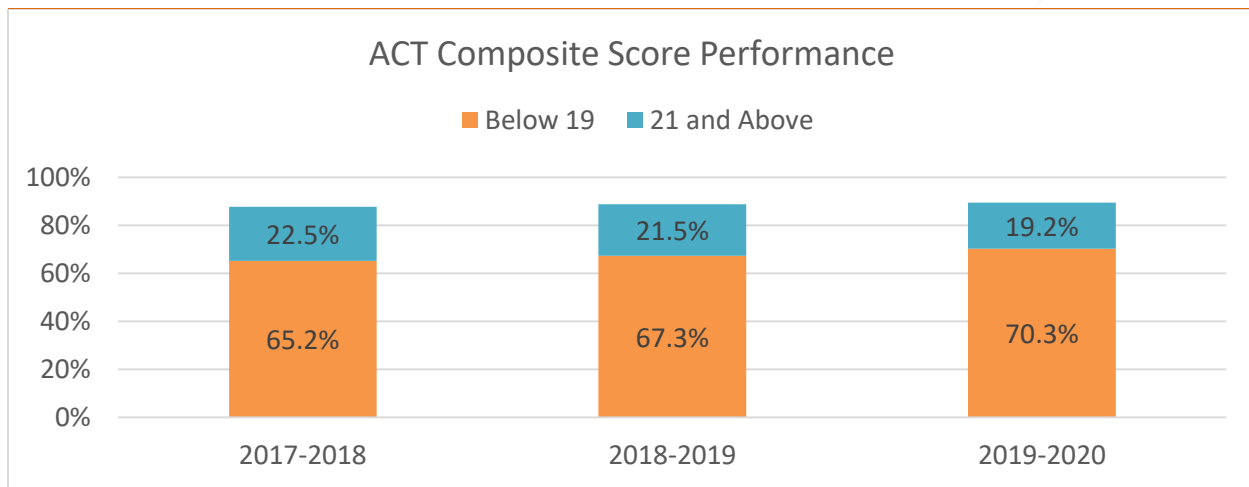
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Priority 3: Develop Teachers, Leaders and Central Office to Drive Student Success

- **2025 Goal: 60 percent of students are proficient on the TNReady assessment.**

- **2020 Progress: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, State TNReady assessments were not administered in 2020.**

2019-2020 ACT Performance -

The percentage of students scoring at 21 and above on their ACT composite score saw a decline during the 2019-20 school year compared to the previous year, continuing a trend over the last two years. By race and ethnicity, Black students had the largest percentage of students scoring below 19 (75 percent), while Asian students had the highest percentage of students scoring at 21 and above (70 percent). In terms of special populations, only four percent of English Learners and Students with Disabilities earned a score of 21 or higher, and 11 percent of all economically disadvantaged students met this benchmark.

ACT Composite Score Performance

ACT Performance by Race/Ethnicity - 2019-2020

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Key Progress

L3 Principal Pipeline – The Office of Schools and Leadership is now in its fourth year offering the SCS principal pipeline program, L3. This program is designed to prepare Vice Principals, Assistant Principals, and PLC Coaches through training and hands-on experiences on the roles and skills needed to become Principals and build the prospective candidate pool for future principal vacancies. As part of the program, L3 Fellows are provided training in current leadership research trends, operational best practices, and District policies as well as coaching and mentoring. Fellows are provided intense support, practical application opportunities, and tailored coaching to prepare for a rigorous principal selection process.

Content Cadres – To reach the goals of Destination 2025, teachers need to acquire the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of all of their students. For that to happen, teachers must have dedicated time to engage in professional learning opportunities tailored to their specific needs. Content Cadres are professional learning networks of educators engaged in customized learning experiences to enhance content-area knowledge and instruction. Content Cadres launched August 2019 and continued throughout the school year providing teachers with differentiated support via the online training platform, Canvas. Over the course of the year, more than 250 Canvas courses were offered, providing teachers with the content they needed when they needed it.

Response to Instruction & Intervention for Behavior (RTI-B) – RTI-B is the behavior companion framework to RTI-A for academics. It provides a strategic systems approach to building positive school culture; high expectations for academic performance; and social-emotional development for school, career, and life. RTI^2-B helps staff and students make informed choices that reduce school disruptions and keep students actively engaged in the classroom. It consists of multi-tiered systems of support provided by Behavior Specialists, School Counseling, and Mental Health professional staff. During 2018-19, 100 percent of SCS schools completed three days of training on Tier 1, which has a heavy emphasis on prevention-oriented practices and reinforcing clear behavioral expectations for all students. In 2019-20, all schools began fully implementing the Tier 1 process. In the two years of training and implementation, 2018-19 saw a 2.6-point reduction of exclusionary response rates, and 2019–20 had a further reduction of 1.7 points (adjusted for the shortened school year). Reduced expulsion and suspension rates are key goals for a fully implemented RTI^2-B state framework across all schools.

Socioemotional Learning Strategies – Shelby County Schools has invested in ensuring that school and District-level staff are adequately prepared to address students' social and emotional needs in addition to academic needs. As such, the District provides training in Social Emotional Learning and ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) to all teachers and administrators to increase staff's capacity to recognize and support factors outside of the classroom that can affect students' well-being and ability to learn. In 2019-20, 90 percent of teachers received ACEs training in both face-to-face sessions and virtual training platforms, and this training is also now available to parents. Additionally, as part of the move to virtual learning, the District began offering teletherapy services to students unable to receive in-person support.

Building Capacity for Continuous Improvement – SCS' Department of Research & Performance Management (RPM) provides multiple supports to school and District leaders to improvetheir capacity to use data effectively and continuously improve progress toward performance goals. In 2019-20, RPM published numerous interactive dashboards to help leaders track implementation progress and outcomes for several District priorities including

the Third Grade Commitment, Response to Instruction & Intervention (RTI[2]), Ready Graduates, student performance, teacher performance and central office department goals. RPM's Continuous Improvement team also established a quarterly District Data Week for central office and school leaders to review data trends and develop corresponding action plans, delivering 20 training sessions with total attendance exceeding 1,100 staff on various continuous improvement topics such as mapping data review processes, conducting root cause analysis, and strengthening the culture of effective data use.

Priority 4: Expand High-Quality School Options

- **2025 Goal:** SCS student market share increases by 5 percentage points.

- **2020 Progress:** 63.4 percent of school-aged children in Shelby County are enrolled in SCS.[3]

Shelby County Schools' student market share is currently estimated to be 63.4 percent based on Pre-K-12 enrollment counts on the 40th day of the 2020-21 school year and the most recent U.S. Census estimates of the county-wide school-age population. This means that nearly two thirds of all school-aged children in Shelby County are enrolled in our District. SCS' market share decreased since 2019-20, although this calculation may fluctuate as the Census' school-age population estimates are revised. The overall student enrollment count decreased by roughly 2,100 students from 2019-20 to 2020-21.

SCS Market Share from 2014 to 2020 Using 40-Day Enrollment
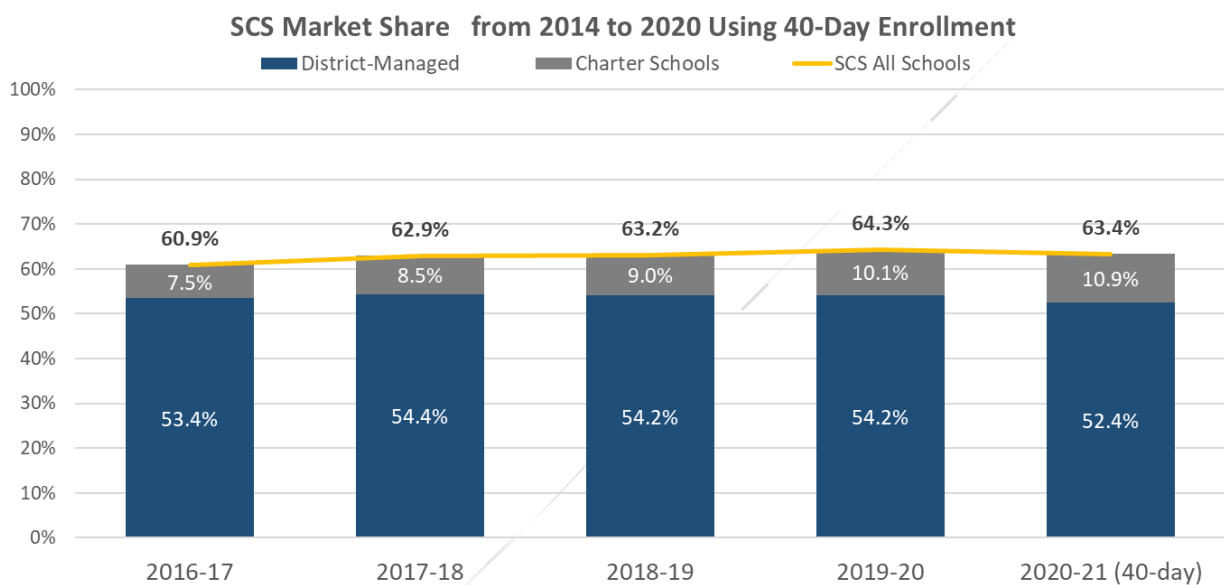
Key Progress

iZone – SCS has invested in multiple school turnaround efforts to expand the number of high-quality options available in our District including the Innovation Zone, or iZone. The iZone is a subset of SCS schools that work to move from the bottom 5 percent of schools to the top 25 percent in student achievement in Tennessee. This turnaround work relies on additional resources for students and teachers as well as greater flexibility in curriculum and extended instructional time. iZone schools implement innovative strategies to improve academic achievement. The iZone's goals are to support shifts in student equity by improving culture and climate, decreasing chronic absenteeism, and increasing on-track mastery in ELA and Math. Improving the learning environment provides students with consistent behavioral and academic expectations along with promoting safe and more conducive learning environments for students. With improved learning environments and more

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[3] American Community Survey 5-year estimates are subject to change after the date of publication, which means market share is an approximation based on the best available data at a given time. The 2019-20 market share percentage was updated with the 5-year estimates date from 2019. This figure was also used for the 2020-21 market share calculation, as the Census Bureau has not yet released results for 2020.

intervention opportunities, chronic absenteeism rates declined across elementary, middle and high iZone schools in 2019-20 compared to the same point in time in 2018-19.

Continuous Improvement Zone – The Continuous Improvement (CI) Zone's top priorities are to sustain positive gains among 15 schools that were formerly part of the iZone (the lowest-performing schools in the District), but which have transitioned out of that zone due to improvements in student performance. Through job-embedded professional development, CI Zone school staff are immersed in content-specific professional development, focused on building effective instructional leadership teams, data-driven decision making, instructional leadership for standards-based instruction (Math and ELA), and leading toward student equity.

Whitehaven Empowerment Zone – The mission of the Whitehaven Empowerment Zone (WEZ) is to provide all students with great first teaching through objective-driven instruction, rigorous tasks on the table, and instructional time management that is evident in the curriculum taught at each school. WEZ schools receive targeted investments and instructional flexibility to improve student outcomes and keep schools off the State Priority List. Providing a curriculum that promotes College and Career Readiness is one of the primary foci for the schools in the Empowerment Zone. To date, two WEZ schools have exited the Priority list: A. Maceo Walker Middle School and Holmes Road Elementary School.

Charter Portfolio – As of 2020-21, SCS has authorized 56 active charter schools serving more than 17,000 students – over 15 percent of all students in the District. In 2019-20, three new schools opened, two schools closed voluntarily, and one charter school's status was revoked. The 2019-20 school year marked the first year of implementation for the Board of Education's recently revised charter school policy (Board Policy #1011), designed to improve the quality of the charter portfolio. The Office of Charter Schools has implemented updated practices around annual reports and site visits to strengthen schools' commitments and goals for students. Additionally, 100 percent of schools in the charter portfolio scored at a Level 3 (Good) or above in operations based on SCS' Operations Scorecard, indicating they are in compliance with non-academic operational requirements and using resources efficiently and ethically to serve students.

Student Based Budgeting – The District has employed student-based budgeting (SBB), a funding model that shifts budget decisions from the central office to school leadership teams. SBB empowers schools and communities to decide what is best for their students by basing resource allocations on the student population through school-level budget planning. SBB helps address inequities in academic resources by funding schools based on financial weights for different student educational needs (e.g., gifted, poverty, mobility, low academic performance) and by creating a model that allows funding to follow the students when transfers occur. With increased transparency for students, parents and community partners, educators have more flexibility to make budget decisions at their respective schools, yielding improved support tailored to students' needs.

Priority 5: Mobilize Family & Community Partners

- **2025 Goal: Community confidence in SCS increases to 90 percent.**

- **2020 Progress: 89 percent of surveyed staff and community stakeholders agree that the Superintendent and central office are on track to improve student achievement.**

Based on SCS' most recent annual survey of parents, community members, and District staff, 89 percent of stakeholders are confident in the District's efforts to improve student achievement and progress towards our Destination 2025 goals. This increase (up from 82 percent in 2019) is the highest level of agreement in seven years. The percentage of stakeholders who agree that the District is on track grew from 44 percent in 2019 to 51 percent in 2020, while those who completely agree remained high at 38 percent. (See the first chart below.) Additionally, stakeholders' confidence in SCS schools themselves saw a 10 percent increase to the highest level to date at 92 percent in 2020. (See the second chart below.)
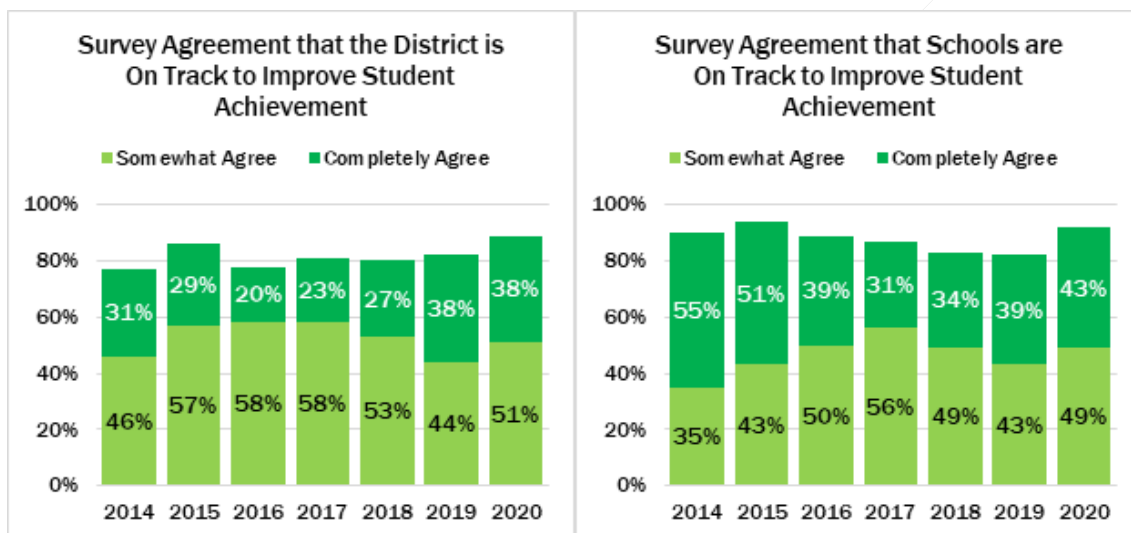
Since 2017, the survey also asked SCS parents for their level of agreement on whether *their* children's schools are on track to improve student achievement in addition to asking whether they believe *all* SCS schools are on track. This year also show a stark increase where 91 percent of parents agreed that their child's school was on track (up from 83 percent in 2019). A larger percentage of parents completely agreed that their child's school was on track (58 percent) compared to SCS schools in general (43 percent). The District is on the cusp of meeting the Destination 2025's goal of 90 percent confidence, though continuing to garner support from the community remains key to that success.

Key Progress

Ongoing Communication – By maintaining strong mass communication channels, the District has delivered timely news and reliable information to our all stakeholders. The SCS social media accounts added over 23,000 new followers, topping out at over 130,000 across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram with over 2.2 million engagements with the content, nearly double the previous year. A total of 260 stories received a combined 4.3 million views in

2019-20, which helped contribute to an overall tonality rate of 97 percent positive/neutral for all media coverage. The Voice of SCS launched three new "Voice of SCS+" streaming channels, and produced over 350 school, District, and Board videos, and listenership on 88.5 FM grew to 73,000+ listeners daily. Dr. Ray also began a weekly update series on YouTube that highlights the most important information for that week for parents and families.

Parent Welcome Center – Continuing its mantra of providing excellent service to every customer, every day, the Parent Welcome Center remained steadfast in the approach of offering superior service as the first point of contact for constituents. During the 2019-20 school year, the Parent Welcome Center (PWC) received 143,000+ calls, over 1,000 walk-ins and approximately 2,000 emails from those who requested immediate support. The Customer Service WORKS framework was developed to establish District-wide expectations for exemplary customer service. All current and newly hired employees were offered online customer service training. The creation of the Five-Star Customer Service Award was also initiated during 2019-20. This prestigious recognition was bestowed to 11 schools exemplifying the five core values of excellent customer service: welcoming environment, orderly environments, respectful and responsive communication, knowledgeable staff, and sensitive and sincere interaction.

Expanded Partnerships – In 2019-20, SCS was able to secure external partners for 100 percent of SCS schools on the State's Priority list. The Adopt-a-School Partnership program included 692 adopters, and SCS increased school volunteers with more than 300 new volunteers. An expanded partnership with FedEx provided mentoring and a weeklong logistics training session for 50 juniors and seniors along with recruiting over 600 students and parents for employment opportunities through FedEx Cares. Additionally, the FACE Department was awarded a $10,000 grant from Bank of America to support college and career readiness, workforce development, clothing closets, and food pantries.

Community Programing – SCS' Family Resource Centers provided support to more than 15,000 families in the areas of Citizenship/Immigrant Information and School/Student Success. More than 5,500 grade-level appropriate books were distributed to students to assist the District's early literacy work. Through the Mexican Consulate ID program, over 1,100 Hispanic/Latinx families received legal ID documentation. SCS hosted a student-led virtual round table, We Matter, that provided a platform for students to discuss social justice and activism in the community. SCS hosted a College, Career & Technical Education Expo to expose students to life after high school and partnered with the University of Memphis for an English as Second Language (ESL) college fair. Students gave back to their community through work with the Hospitality Hub of Memphis. Additionally, a trauma-informed center opened at Geeter K–8 that provides robust socioemotional supports to students. Lastly, SCS continued to recognize the work of our military by honoring over 400 military bound students and their families for their service.

Community Support During COVID-19 – All Shelby County schools shuttered in March 2020 due to the global pandemic. Many community partners stepped up to support students and their families during this uncertain and challenging time. The YMCA of Memphis and the Mid-South provided meal distribution throughout the spring semester as well as free child care to essential employees. The support of community partners allowed for mobile food pantries, book giveaways, and printed learning guides for all students. During this time SCS provided public and parent information sessions, new website/subscriptions for instructional resources, planning and health and safety updates, live stream events, video lessons, and social emotional supports for students and families.

Emerging Priorities: Student Equity & Empowerment

Over 75 percent of SCS' 110,000 students are African-American, 16 percent are Latinx, and over half of SCS students are economically disadvantaged (56.9 percent).[4] Therefore, understanding the unique needs of our student population is paramount to ensuring their success. In February 2019, our Board passed a resolution to promote equity and become a trauma-informed District. The resolution affirms the Board's belief that all students have the right to an equitable educational experience and a commitment to addressing institutional barriers such as academic rigor, educator quality, and disparities in resources that contribute to inequity. Moreover, one of Superintendent Ray's first actions during his tenure was establishing an African-American Male Empowerment plan and an Office of Equity and Access to carry out this plan and lead system-wide efforts to improve student equity. Some of our areas of focus for closing the equity gap as well as the strategies the District is using to address them are discussed below.

Post-Secondary Readiness

The figure below presents the rates at which students met ACT benchmarks by demographics. Students meeting these benchmarks have 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher and a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing courses.[5] The percentage of Black and Latinx students that reached ACT benchmarks in English, Math, Reading, and Science was substantially lower than that of White students and students in other groups. Additionally, Black male students had the lowest benchmark rates in every subtest out of all groups.


Rate of Students Meeting Benchmarks by Demographics

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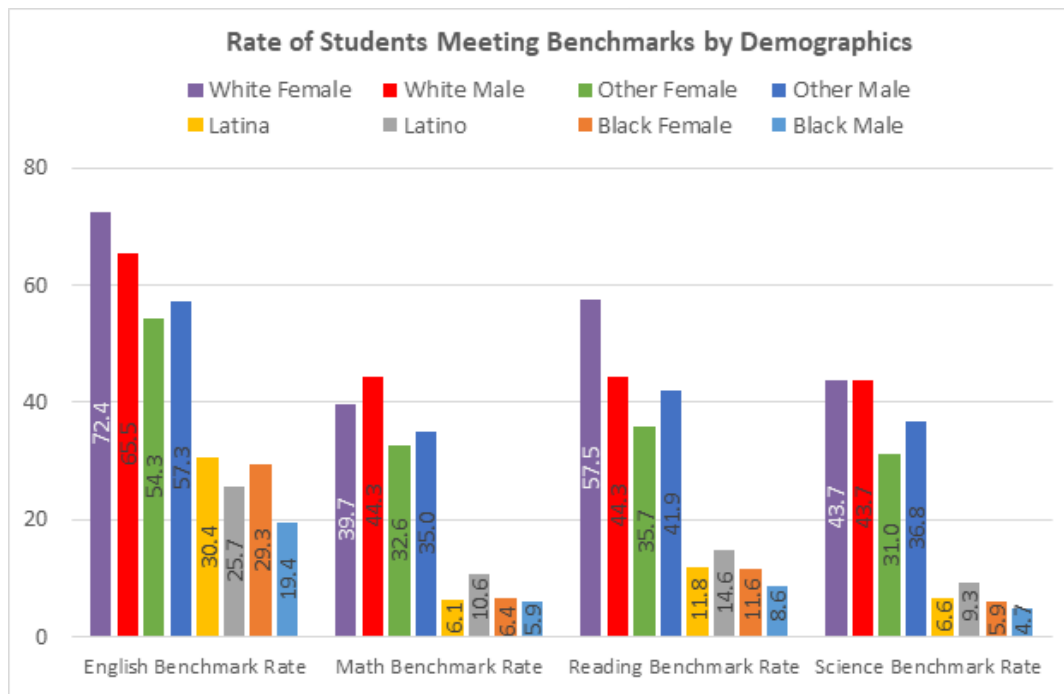
[4] Students are classified as economically disadvantaged if their record has any of the following flags: Direct Certified Economically Disadvantaged, Runaway, Homeless, or Migrant (TN Department of Education, 2019).

[5] Retrieved from https://www.act.org/content/act/en/college-and-career-readiness/benchmarks.html

Attendance & Discipline

Demographic disparities exist in students' attendance and disciplinary outcomes across the District. In 2019-20, 21 percent of African-American students were considered chronically absent (missing 10% or more school days) compared to 13 percent of all other race/ethnicity groups. Economically disadvantaged students were over twice as likely to be chronically absent (25 percent) compared to their non-economically disadvantaged peers (11 percent). Office disciplinary referral (ODR) rates refer to the unique number of students receiving an ODR divided by the number of enrolled students within each demographic group. Exclusionary ODR rates refer to the number of students who receive an out-of-school suspension or expulsion for a referral. The figure below shows that in the 2018-19 academic year, not only were Black male students sent to the office more often than all other groups, but they were also excluded from school at higher rates for their ODRs. The largest disparities in ODR rates existed in middle school when Black male students were 8.2 times more likely than White female students and 5.6 times more likely than Latina students to be referred to the office.
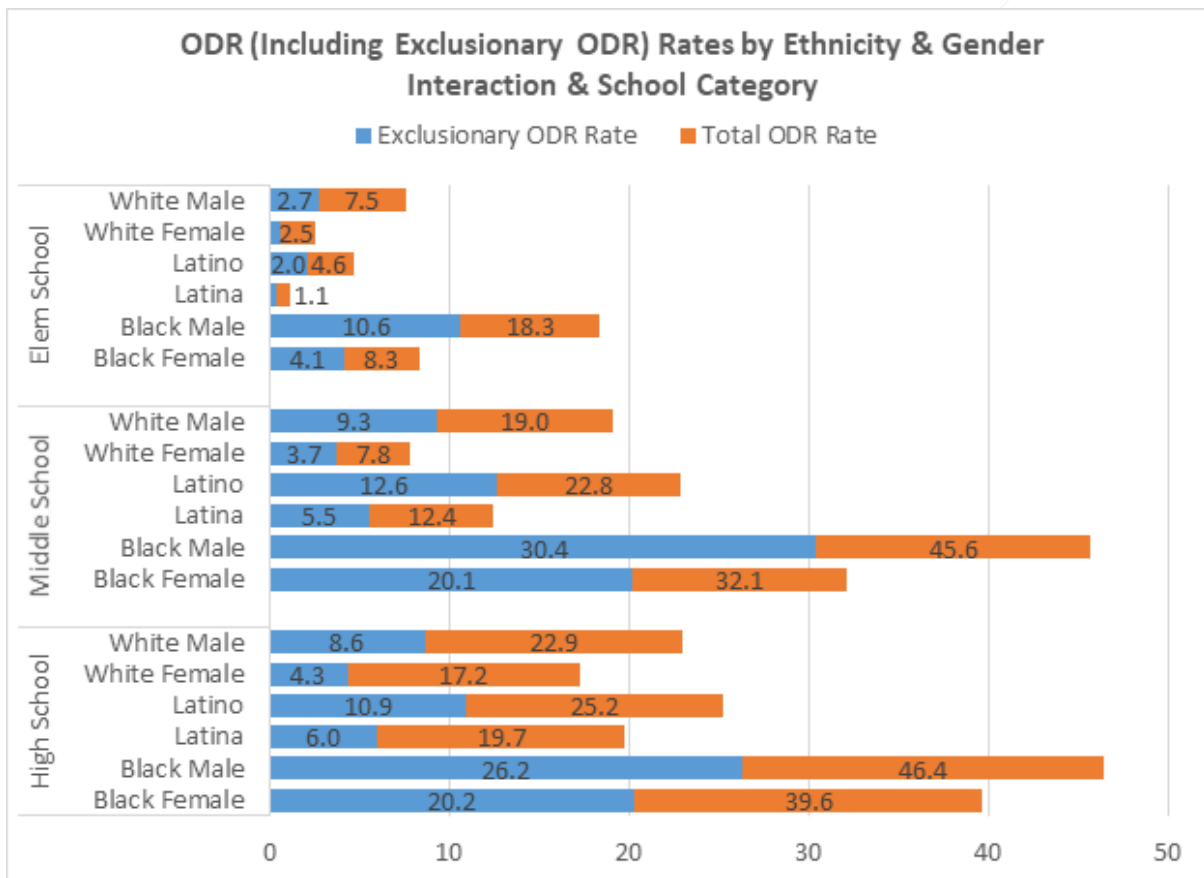
Strategies & Progress

Equity Office & Advisory Committee – In 2019-20, Superintendent Ray established the Office of Equity to build a District-wide culture of equity and collaborate with internal stakeholders to enact an equity policy to serve as a foundation for this work. The Office of Equity will develop a matrix to help SCS' central office and schools prioritize equitable achievement in literacy, school climate and culture, discipline, and college and career readiness. Additionally, the District will establish an Equity Advisory Committee consisting of philanthropic, non-profit,

government and business leaders to build partnerships and coordinate strategies across sectors and geographic areas. The Committee will also work to identify and address long-term funding needs to accelerate SCS' student equity goals.

ACT University – In collaboration with our high school tutoring partner Peer Power, SCS has offered a six-week intensive ACT course to prepare high-need, African-American male students for upcoming ACT exams. The course will focus on test-taking skills such as question evaluation, pacing strategies, and setting target scores.

Restorative Discipline – SCS has made concerted efforts to promote the use of restorative disciplinary practices to provide schools and students with supportive alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices wherever possible. During the onboarding process, over 2,000 new teachers, administrators, Special Education staff, behavior specialists and monitors have received training to address student behavioral challenges. Additionally, discipline & classroom management trainings occur District-wide on an ongoing basis. As a result, exclusionary suspension rates have decreased year-over-year overall and for both African-American male students and students with disabilities. In 2019-20, the suspension rates for students with disabilities and for African-American students decreased by 2 percentage points compared to the same point in time in 2018-19. SCS will also work more intensively with a subset of schools with low attendance and high exclusionary ODRs among African-American male students and implement appropriate strategies to improve student outcomes.

Equity Institutes – The Equity Institute trains all educators to interrupt patterns of implicit bias, social inequality, and internalized oppression that can lead to negative outcomes for marginalized student groups. Equity Champions from each school attend four training sessions each academic year.

Secure the Chalk Educator Fellowship – This initiative aims to diversify SCS' teacher pipeline by providing a supportive, professional opportunity for African-American men interested in teaching with a particular focus on K-5 classrooms. As part of this effort, SCS is working to develop strategic partnerships with Man-Up, the University of Memphis, Lemoyne-Owen College, and regional historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to attract and recruit more African-American male educators.

Band of Brothers – A mentoring program and career-planning initiative for middle and high school students, Band of Brothers offers tutoring to increase literacy as well as mentoring to champion the work of successful African-American men. The career-planning initiative provides targeted employment opportunities, internships and externships at local businesses and corporations during the summer and later in high school.

Destination 2025:
2020 Shelby County Schools Annual Report

Emerging Priorities: Digital Learning

In 2019, the District's annual budget included money to begin phasing in laptops for high school students. This was one of the first steps in implementing the District's plan of bridging the digital divide by eventually providing a digital device for every student, with the ultimate goals of expanding learning opportunities and furthering equity through technology access for all SCS students. The arrival of COVID-19 and the subsequent closure of schools in spring 2020 fast-tracked this plan when the District shifted to prepare for virtual learning. SCS acquired virtual curriculum resources in summer 2020, and the Board approved the purchase of over 95,000 devices for students funded by the Federal CARES Act, the City of Memphis and other contributors.

In late May, select teachers and students participated in a Year-End Connect event via Microsoft Teams to bring closure to the school year, and in the summer, additional teachers and students participated in summer school conducted 100% online. SCS gathered survey feedback following two events provided opportunities to gauge the strengths and challenges of virtual learning and prepare to scale up all-digital learning for the 2020-21 school year. Feedback from teachers revealed they thought that the District's Microsoft Teams training was helpful, that by the end of summer school they were relatively comfortable using the computer for virtual instruction, and that students were generally engaged during summer school lessons. Students reported that they could follow the teacher's lesson on the computer, that they learned new things during summer school, and that they would like to do more schoolwork on the computer. In addition, most summer school students at all grade levels answered questions that indicated using a computer for virtual learning was manageable for them.

2020 Summer School Student Survey Responses
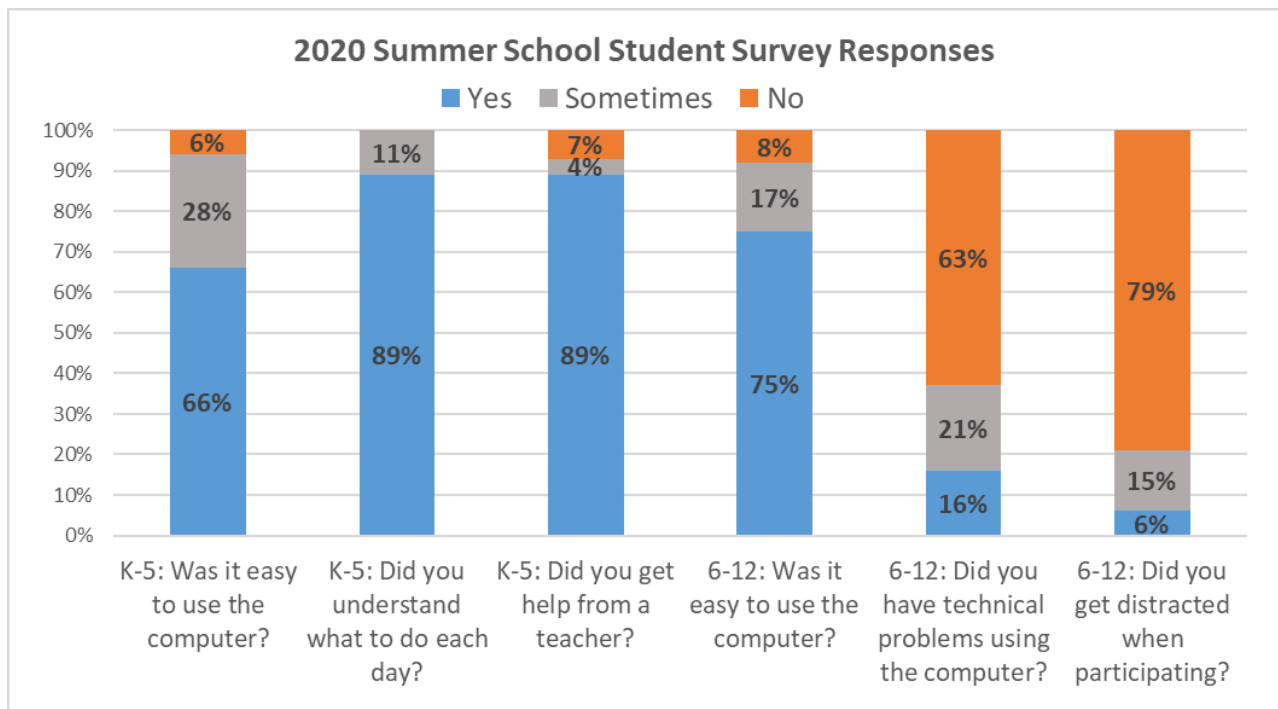
Both teachers and families also reported challenges including technical problems with devices and connectivity, training needed for students and parents on virtual learning and concerns about virtual communication among teachers, students and parents. Thus, the District has developed several strategies to support virtual learning.

Strategies & Progress

Device Distribution and Internet Connectivity – During July and August, SCS distributed digital devices to all enrolled students. Students in grades Pre-K-2 received tablets, and students in grades 3-12 received laptops. Open-air distribution sites were located throughout Shelby County and families were assigned a pick-up time according to their student's grade and school. To assist with connectivity, the District distributed internet hot spots for eligible families without access to WiFi. The District also added additional IT support positions to help with any student device problems that may occur during the year.

Teacher Training and Support – SCS developed several professional development and learning sessions to support teachers with multiple aspects of digital instruction and learning. Sessions focused on gaining technical expertise in the various digital platforms, using the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) curriculum, and student and family use of digital devices. To further support teachers with FLVS, the Department of Curriculum & Instruction developed a series of crosswalk maps by subject and grade level that show the links and gaps between the FLVS curriculum and Tennessee state academic standards, and an FAQ reference resource.

Parent and Student Training and Support – Prior to the beginning of the school year, SCS offered several remote parent and student training sessions to help familiarize families with various aspects of virtual learning. These sessions have continued into the school year and include Microsoft Teams, Office 365, the SCS digital devices, digital citizenship, digital learning, the virtual curriculum, inclusive classrooms, and other relevant topics. In addition, SCS developed a device loaner handbook and a digital learning guidebook for students and parents. Finally, the District established two technical support locations to help students whose devices malfunction during the school year.

Virtual Classroom Observations – During the first few weeks of school, the District's Continuous Improvement team conducted weekly virtual classroom observations with the goal of identifying areas in which teachers and students needed additional support to effectively engage in virtual instruction and learning. In addition to identifying challenges, the virtual classroom observations also made note of successful strategies and techniques to share as best practices. The observations focused on teachers' use of lesson time, technical issues, student engagement, and digital citizenship. In 38 classrooms observed, 82 percent teachers used lectures/presentations at some point, 52 percent of teachers facilitated student discussions and 52 percent of teachers incorporated software or app activities. 29 percent of the observations reported no student disruptions (intentional or unintentional), 53 percent of classrooms had one to three student disruptions, and 18 percent of classes experienced four or more disruptions.

Community Support – To support the virtual learning experience, several community entities have stepped up in a variety of ways. For example, the YMCA coordinated with the District to create "learning pods" for students whose families are working during the school day. The learning pods allow students to attend virtual school in a small, socially distanced groups with adults to assist as needed. Additionally, WMC-TV News coordinated with SCS to solicit monetary donations for headsets students can use to help stay focused during online instruction. Numerous area businesses, foundations, sororities and sports teams have contributed to the goal of being able to provide a headset for each student.

The Plan Ahead

As the District ends an unprecedented year of a global pandemic, we have an opportunity to not only reimagine the way students learn, but the way we engage the community and utilize our spaces to ensure every student reaches his or her fullest potential.

In spring, 2021, Shelby County Schools will launch the long-anticipated Reimagining 901 Plan – a blueprint that aligns the District's transformative education models in 21st-century spaces that will serve as the intersection of the classroom and community.

This Annual Report Was Prepared by:

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