



ACT[®] and SAT[®] Test Prep as an Integral Part of the Curriculum

A case study of the Hapeville Charter Career Academy and
The Princeton Review from an interview conducted with
Candace Bethea, Principal | Dec. 2019



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hapeville Charter Career Academy (HCCA) is a locally funded public charter school located in Atlanta in the Fulton County, GA school district. The school serves 585 students in grades 9-12. Originally founded as a college and career academy, today the school partners with the Georgia Military College and Atlanta Technical College. Approximately 88% of the school's students are black, 10% are Hispanic, and most are economically disadvantaged.

CERTIFIED THE PRINCETON REVIEW INSTRUCTOR WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE HAPEVILLE TEAM

Prior to joining HCCA, Principal Candace Bethea was an Assistant Principal at Creekside High School in Fulton County, where instructors from The Princeton Review (TPR) provided ACT and SAT classes. Because of this prior relationship she recognized the value TPR could bring to Hapeville to help meet the challenge of students' low ACT and SAT scores. "The experience I had working with TPR instructors for two years provided the rationale for introducing this program to HCCA," Bethea says. "Our Hapeville classroom teachers lack the certification to teach these classes and their primary responsibility is to focus on meeting state and national standards in their subject areas. In order to make a true impact on ACT and SAT scores, we needed to have a certified instructor in our school week in and week out."



The HCCA program provides ACT and SAT daytime classes for fall and spring semesters. Bethea says it is important for Hapeville to offer these test prep classes during the school day to accommodate students' schedules and avoid after-school transportation problems that would prevent students from attending class. Hapeville works on

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a block schedule so students attend one set of classes on an A day and other set of classes on a B day. Students attend the classes with a TPR certified instructor every other day for SAT and ACT test prep. Students can take both ACT and SAT prep in one year, taking ACT prep in the fall semester and SAT in spring semester or vice versa. Bethea says that most seniors have taken the course and many of the juniors. All students, regardless of their grade level, are welcome to take the classes if they can fit them into their schedules around required classes.

“Our TPR instructor is seen as part of our team of educators,” says Bethea. “He develops a relationship with our teachers and is invested in the success of our students. He works in large groups, small groups, and will even do one-on-one tutorials with students who need that level of help.”

THE PRINCETON REVIEW INSTRUCTOR HELPS MEET STUDENT AND ACADEMY GOALS

HCCA began working with TPR in the 2017-2018 school year. When she came to the Academy, Bethea says, the graduation rate was high and students were getting into college, but not necessarily into the top-tier schools. “We want our kids to step outside their comfort zone and have the confidence to apply to more schools outside of Georgia and more top-tier schools. Raising their ACT and SAT scores helps bolster their confidence and, for our student athletes, can make the difference between acceptance and rejection.”

Bethea stresses the importance of the personal relationship with their TPR certified instructor, who worked with them through the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. She says that much of what he covers for test prep is applicable in other academic areas as well. For example, she says, although he is specifically teaching how to prepare for the ACT and SAT, the test-taking skills he covers carry over to other areas of test taking. In addition, if he's reviewing math

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the information he is conveying can be applied by students in their math classes. Plus, she says, the students have access to the best materials through TPR that they use in class and can take home with them.

“The Princeton Review is in a class by themselves. They have an excellent reputation and their materials and instructors live up to that reputation every day. Our instructor is committed to the success of our students. In addition to the classes, he takes a personalized approach to our students, reviewing their practice drills and their test scores to recommend a structured plan outlining what they need to work on to improve their scores.”

VALUE OF AN OUTSIDE INSTRUCTOR IN THE SCHOOL

When asked about the value of using a certified Princeton Review ACT and SAT instructor, Bethea points to several key benefits:

- **Flexible, personalized experience** - The Princeton Review instructor works within their schedule to offer classes in the morning or the afternoon, based on what works best for their students and the school.
- **Quality of the resources and the instruction** - their TPR instructor uses a comprehensive, proven curriculum with TPR-supplied course materials. In addition, he can offer students tutorials in math or English Language Arts.
- **Dedicated resource committed to student success** - regular teachers might treat ACT and SAT classes as electives whereas at HCCA these are required classes for which kids get credit. These classes are embedded into their day, not seen as something extra. The TPR instructor has a singular focus—improving SAT and ACT test scores is his priority. His job is to support HCCA's college-going culture by teaching SAT and ACT test prep skills.

HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE THEIR COLLEGE DREAMS

For Bethea, the importance of using a TPR certified instructor comes down to a straightforward goal. HCCA wants to prepare students to get into the schools of their choice and give them the confidence to apply to top-tier schools and schools outside of Georgia. Raising test scores helps students see what is possible and the results support the value of the program.

To highlight these results Bethea points to the lists of colleges at which HCCA graduates were accepted in 2018 and in 2019. The 2018 graduation program shows students accepted by about 56 different colleges. In 2019, the number more than tripled, with the graduation program showing students accepted by more than 180 different schools. There is also a greater range of geographic locations represented in the schools at which the 2019 graduates were accepted.

Bethea says that the HCCA school board has a vested interest in supporting the TPR instructor-led program for preparing kids for the ACT and SAT. She says that when she started work at the school in 2017 she had to make a case to the school board for the funding for the program. Now, she says, “The school board has seen the growth over the past two years. They are fully supportive of the value our TPR certified instructor brings to our ACT and SAT program, which means I don't have to fight that battle any more. The success speaks for itself.”



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