

# Success Story

## Tuscaloosa City Schools

*What's your "E"?*

Ensuring college and career readiness through collaborative planning and implementation



### District Information

Tuscaloosa City Schools (TCS) in western Alabama, serves over 11,000 pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in its 21 schools. The student population is 68% Black, 23% White, 5% American Indian/Alaska native, and 2% Asian. Special Education services (excluding gifted) are provided to 12% of students and 64% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.



### Recap/Key Points

- Using collaborative tools helped clarify needs and develop a cohesive, coordinated plan
- Internal and external stakeholders helped maximize resources and student opportunities
- Proactive implementation produced quantifiable results beginning in Year 1

### Problem/Challenge

TCS' new district strategic plan identified College and Career Readiness (CCR) as a critical priority. The goal was for each graduating student to attain at least one College and Career readiness indicator (CCRI) and have firm post-secondary plans in one of three "E's": employment, education, or enlistment. While difficult to fully assess the effectiveness of CCR efforts, data showed that some student populations were not getting what they needed. In addition, students' post-graduation plans were not being tracked and resources within the system and surrounding community were underutilized, Opportunities for students were being missed. Student focus on college and career readiness needed to start much earlier and provide a continuum of learning at every level.

"Tuscaloosa City Schools' dedication to fostering College and Career readiness through its comprehensive plan exemplifies its commitment to preparing students for success in an ever-evolving world. TregoED processes have transformed the way we approach complex issues and make informed decisions."

Kelly Norstrom, Director of College & Career Readiness  
Tuscaloosa City Schools

## Solution

TCS college and career readiness leaders and staff determined the district needed a coordinated and cohesive CCR strategy. This would ensure the district better served every student, capitalized on existing resources, filled in gaps and made the right data accessible. The team wanted to ensure transparency and build confidence and trust by involving multiple stakeholders throughout the process. The team accomplished the following:

**Clarified the district's graduate profile** to identify competencies and expectations for TCS graduates and initiate thinking about what needs to happen for students to build desired competencies. Internal and external stakeholders were involved.

**Examined advisory processes** through process mapping of career and technical education courses and Situation Appraisals identifying strengths and needed improvements for middle and high school advisory programs.

**Selected a new CCR platform** using Decision Analysis to develop criteria and evaluate platform options.

**Identified key changes to related systems and processes** using Situation Appraisals to identify strengths and needed improvements to scheduling, registration and work-based learning.

**Prepared for implementation of state CCRI requirements** using Potential Problem Analysis to help identify barriers and how to address them.

**Developed a comprehensive College and Career Readiness plan** to ensure coordinated programs and efforts for students at all levels. The plan was developed by a diverse group of internal and external stakeholders, including industry leaders, community leaders, counselors, administrators, parents and students. The plan outlined goals, measures of success, needed actions, responsibilities and timing. A communication plan helped ensure sufficient, timely and consistent internal and external communication.

## Results

After only one-year of implementing the new CCR plan, TCS has seen the following results:

**Increased district CCRI rate:** from 74% to 79% for the four-year graduation cohort (this includes students who withdrew, dropped out, or were no longer enrolled).

**Increased CCRI rate for class of 2023:** from 44% at the beginning of the school year to 79% at the end.

**Improved confirmed post-secondary plan rate for the class of 2023:** from 73% for the graduating class of 2022 to 89% for the class of 2023.

**Improved CCR outcomes for underrepresented groups:** the number of English Language Learner (ELL) students who earned a CCRI prior to graduation increased by 3% and increased for Special Education students by 11%.

Implementing TCS' College and Career Readiness Plan has resulted in other key changes and improvements:

**Strategic Curriculum design:** a rigorous advisory curriculum aligns with the demands of higher education and the professional world. Real-world applications are integrated with core academic subjects to equip students with relevant skills.

**Individualized guidance:** personalized guidance and advisory support helps each student identify interests, strengths, and goals. Each high school has a dedicated career coach who works with social workers and school counselors to help ensure each student receives tailored support and achieves academic, career and personal success.

**Experiential learning opportunities:** internships, job-shadowing, and hands-on projects allow students to explore different career paths, build practical skills and make connections. CCR activities featuring exploration and exposure now happen for students at all levels—elementary, middle, and high school.

**Community and industry partnerships:** Greater involvement with external partners has resulted in meaningful partnerships with local businesses, industry, and post-secondary institutions. Partnerships allow students to engage in mentorship, networking, and collaborative projects, thus enhancing understanding of potential career options and helping secure positive post-secondary placement.

**Enhanced problem-solving and decision-making capacity:** using TregoED tools and building in-house expertise has changed the ways complex issues are addressed. A continuous improvement mindset will optimize not only CCR, but other district priorities as they move forward.

