

Blythewood High School

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Richland School District Two

In 2005, Blythewood High School became the fourth high school established in Richland School District Two, located in the suburban town of Blythewood, SC. Blythewood's population continues to increase rapidly in size as well as demographic diversity. Residents include those who have lived in Blythewood their entire lives to those who have been moved into the area from other states and countries. Occupations for families in the area are both professional with advanced degrees, as well as less educated hourly jobs. Area businesses include: Bose Corporation, Computer Sciences Corporation, and Spirax Sarco, Inc. Additionally, there are small, local businesses providing services such as: insurance sales, oil sales, restaurants and hotels. According to 2010 census information, the median household income of Blythewood residents is about \$98,333, with approximately 1.2% of the population living in poverty. The median age of residents is 40.6 years. Seventy-one percent of households reported married couples, 42% of which have children under the age 18 living with them. The population of Blythewood High School for the 2013-14 school year was approximately 1,651 students. The demographic breakdown of the student population was: 49% African American, 42% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian and 2% Other. Meeting the needs of this diverse and rapidly growing community of families and students is a challenge that Blythewood High School continually strives to achieve.

During the 2011-2012 school year, the BHS School Improvement Council aspired to make a long term, positive impact on the rapidly growing Blythewood High School community by supporting the school leadership in its quest to increase student achievement, beginning a three year journey to identify challenges, classify priorities, and create an action plan that would ultimately increase student achievement and improve college and career readiness for students. During the first year, the BHS School Improvement Council conducted a "SWOT Analysis" to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of Blythewood High School. Of significance was the rapidly increasing student population, which reached an all-time high of 2,160 students during the 2011-2012 school year. While the student population continued to grow each year, the *graduation rate* struggled to keep the pace, in spite of the continued increase in the *number* of students graduating on time each year.

The 2012-13 school year was spent categorizing the results of the SWOT analysis, prioritizing the "major issues," and then planning action steps. The top 3 issues determined to have the most impact on student achievement, including college and career readiness, were identified to be: 1) SAT/ACT preparation, 2) Individualized Guidance, and 3) and Career Planning. Since each of these issues related to guidance and career counseling, the entire Blythewood High School Guidance Department supported the SIC's work by participating in meetings. SIC meetings fostered collaboration and development of innovative ideas by allowing smaller working groups to further explore the complexity of the priority issues from the varied perspectives of the educators, students, parents and community members involved. During the spring of 2013, a survey was developed by the SIC for the purpose of gaining more information and feedback from the larger school population of parents. The survey was sent out via email to all Blythewood High parents, receiving over 270 responses. The additional parent responses were used to further develop

the solutions drafted to address each priority. The SIC then compiled the recommendations and presented to the BHS Leadership Team for review. This resulted in a formal action plan that was created by the BHS Leadership Team with input from the entire BHS Faculty. The final action plan was presented to the BHS SIC in May 2013 by Keith Price, former principal of BHS. The strategic planning process ensured that all Blythewood High School stakeholders had opportunities to provide input for the development of the final plan, which would require ongoing support from all during its long term implementation, which began in July 2013.

During the 2013-14 school year, Blythewood High School implemented an action plan that provided students, parents and the BHS community with more frequent information about numerous opportunities for: 1) SAT/ACT Preparation, 2) Individualized Guidance, and 3) Career Planning. Action steps included:

- Purchase of the **Naviance Software Program** – a comprehensive, web-based program that houses all information for students: classes, grades, schedules, college information, scholarship information, career information, etc. This program can be accessed by staff, students and parents. It is used during guidance and career counseling sessions, making it easy for all of those concerned to find information and have common understanding of each student's individual goals. It is also accessible to families at home to continue college and career discussions or planning at their own pace. The program was purchased during the summer of 2013, during which time the entire Guidance Department received training for its use. Every BHS student received individual account login information on September 2013, followed by training with staff.
- Development of the **Bengals and Beyond: The Next Step Toward Success** student guide. This booklet was developed by guidance staff over the summer of 2013 to be used with juniors and seniors in their individual guidance advisement meetings for the school year. It is a comprehensive booklet that includes all the information students and parents need to know about the guidance department, graduations requirements, career clusters, junior/ senior checklist, college requirements, college application tips, SAT/ACT information, scholarship information, financial aid, timelines, etc. This print guide was given to every student, to be used as an ongoing checklist for ensuring completion of essential requirements.
- **Increased Exposure to College and Career Opportunities.** Of importance was the need for students to be allowed to explore post-graduation options well before their senior year of high school. Additional opportunities for: trips to colleges, college representative visits on campus, more frequent SAT/ ACT Preparation Workshops throughout the school year, trips related to career exploration (ie. Boeing in Charleston, SC for students interested in engineering), internships, and more work-based learning options were provided.
- **Varied and Ongoing Communication** with students and parents to include: continuing Guidance Newsletters, updated Guidance website information, school event information, student/ parent information meetings (i.e. New Family Orientation, Financial Aid Workshops, etc.), individualized

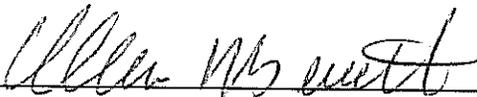
parents about upcoming events, such as: on/off campus college visits, scholarship opportunities and deadlines, testing information, career shadowing experiences, student checklists/ reminders, and more. The Guidance Department (including the College and Career Center) are in regular contact with parents, students and staff, providing clear and consistent information to all stakeholders.

By the end of the 2013-2014 school year, Blythewood High School achieved the following outcomes:

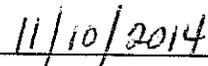
1. Increased graduation rate to 97.3%, based on 361 of 371 seniors graduating (up from 87% at the end of the 2012-2013 school year).
2. Increased college acceptance rate to 91%, based on 330 of 361 students accepted to attend a 4 or 2 year college (up from 66.9% at the end of the 2012-2013 school year).
3. Increased scholarship money awarded to \$15 million (up from \$10 million awarded at the end of the 2012-2013 school year).
4. Increased LIFE Scholarship eligible graduates to 109 students (up from 103 eligible graduates at the end of the 2012-2013 school year).
5. Provided Individualized Guidance Advisement to 100% of the 1,651 enrolled students (no change from 100% of 1,601 students in the 2012-2013 school year).
6. Increased Naviance usage to: Seniors = 2022 logins, Juniors = 1221 logins, Sophomores = 1088 logins, and Freshman = 757 logins (up from 0; new resource made available at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year).
7. Hosted at least 15 on campus college visits, including 1 college fair with multiple colleges represented.
8. Hosted at least 12 SAT/ ACT workshops for students to prepare for college entry testing.
9. Hosted at least 6 workshops for parents and families to learn more about graduation requirements, financial aid for colleges, etc.
10. Organized 6 out of school trips for students to visit up to 8 colleges and universities.
11. Arranged 40 internships for students to explore career interests.

In summary, the strategic and comprehensive approach to achieving these outcomes has already made a significant impact for students and families. The work of the SIC are a result of collaboration by all stakeholders to meet the needs of individual students, whether college or career bound. These actions will positively impact Blythewood and the surrounding community for years to come, by helping to better prepare students for post-graduation college or career experiences.

Respectfully Submitted By:



Clarissa V. Bennett, 2014-2015 SIC Chairperson



Date

November 7, 2014

Dear Riley Award Committee:

I have worked directly with School Improvement Councils for the past six years in my role as a school principal at the middle level and now high school level. I have seen amazing initiatives created and implemented as a result of the hard work of dedicated parents, teachers, students, and community members. When I arrived at Blythewood High School this past summer, I met with our SIC chair in order to gain an understanding of the measures that have been taken on the committee and our work ahead.

It was shared with me that over the past few years, the improvement council has focused on identifying what the school does well and then identifying areas of needed improvement. Students, parents, and faculty participated in this process. The council considered this feedback and spent hours analyzing data in order to identify the focus of their work. Ultimately the improvement council identified three key areas centered around guidance services for our students: SAT/ ACT Prep, Individualized Guidance, and Career Planning.

Last year we began focusing our efforts on these areas in order to create a pattern of improved services. First, we held our inaugural New Parent Orientation two nights prior to the beginning of school to give parents a detailed overview of our school as well as an awareness of the services we provide. Parents were broken into four smaller groups, dictated by which house their students was assigned to, and were able to meet with their house guidance counselor, lead teacher, and assistant principal. Next, our guidance staff worked to create a booklet called *Bengals and Beyond: The Next Step Toward Success* for our juniors and seniors. The booklet focuses on information that parents and students need to begin their exploration of college and careers. For the first time ever, our counselors met with every junior and their parents to go through the guide and begin discussing college and careers. Finally, our school invested over \$10,000 in a comprehensive program called Naviance. It is an online college and career planning program helps students and families to track test scores, compare college, research careers, and submit applications among other things. Our counselors have done many class visits introducing students to this program as well as showing parents how to navigate the system. Our college information specialist offered twelve testing workshops last year, arranged over twenty college visits, held a college fair, college application workshop, as well as a workshop for financial aid and our military families.

Blythewood High School is connecting with families unlike ever before. I have received a number of compliments about the new things that have been implemented over the last year. Ultimately, our students and parents are reaping the benefits from these new additions. It is the hard work of our SIC that has made these improvements possible and for that, I am grateful. The Blythewood High School SIC is very deserving of this recognition.

Sincerely,



Brenda Hafner, Ed.D.

Principal

November, 7, 2014

Dear Riley Award Committee:

Over the past fourteen years as a school administrator, I have been involved with several different School Improvement Councils. I have seen topics focused on beautification, after-school programs, and tutoring. Seeing teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members working together to help make a school the best it can possibly be has always been rewarding for me. In my last three years as principal at Blythewood High, I took special pride in seeing the time, energy, and effort that went into their efforts in improving a process that ultimately had an impact on every student and parent at our school.

Three years ago, we began a thorough reflection of our school through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. Students participated. Faculty and staff participated. And SIC parents and community members participated. We spent the entire year analyzing our data and we spent numerous hours identifying what should be the focus of our work. We eventually identified three key areas that centered around guidance services for our students and parents: 1. SAT/ACT prep 2. Individualized guidance 3. Career planning.

Two years ago, we began focusing our efforts on these three areas to come up with a plan for improvement. We held our first-ever New Parent Orientation two nights before school started to give parents a chance to get a detailed overview of our school as well as services that we provide. BHS has done this each year since. Parents are broken into four small groups where they are then able to meet their guidance counselor and administrator, ask specific questions, and begin forming quality relationships with other staff members.

The BHS guidance department worked throughout the following summer to create a guidance booklet called *Bengals and Beyond: The Next Step Toward Success for Juniors and Seniors*. The booklet focuses on information that parents and students need to begin their exploration of colleges and careers. For the first time ever, our counselors met with every junior and their parents in the fall to go through the booklet together and begin discussing options beyond high school. Later, they developed a similar booklet for freshman and sophomores and have integrated the booklet into their annual planning sessions with our underclassmen. As a result, our counselors now meet with every student and parent each spring at scheduled times to discuss their schedule for the following year as well as life after graduation. Juniors and Seniors now have an additional meeting with them in the fall.

BHS invested over \$10,000 in a comprehensive program called Naviance. It is an on-line college and career planning program that assists students and families in tracking test scores, comparing college entrance requirements and course offerings, researching career interests, and submitting applications. Guidance staff attended comprehensive training on the program and now use it regularly when doing classroom guidance sessions as well as student/parent planning meetings. The program has been funded and renewed each year because of its direct alignment with our SIC goals and because of its effectiveness with our families.

BHS guidance is connecting with families unlike ever before. Now that I am no longer at the school, I have been through these planning sessions as a parent and learn something new each time we meet. I have received a number of compliments on the new initiatives that guidance has begun. Each time, I give most of the credit to our SIC for recognizing an area of needed improvement and for investing the time to craft such an effective solution. I sincerely feel that this is the essence of what the Riley Award is all about and earnestly feel that the BHS SIC is most deserving of this recognition.

Sincerely,



Keith Price

Assistant Superintendent, Richland School District Two

November 6, 2014

Dear Riley Award Committee,

It is my pleasure to write a letter of support for the Blythewood High School SIC on behalf of the School Counseling Department. During the 2012-2013 school year, areas of improvement in SAT/ACT preparation, individualized guidance, and career planning were discussed. Committees were formed consisting of parents, students, school personnel, and members of the community to address the concerns of students, parents, and staff.

In collaboration with SIC, the School Counselors attended some of the SIC meetings to help identify and clarify some of the issues that had been presented. As a result, the School Counseling Department and the College and Career Center created a college and career information booklet for the 2013-2014 school year: **Bengals and Beyond : The Next Step Toward Success**. This guide was developed as an informational tool to help students, parents, and staff, gain a more comprehensive understanding about graduation requirements, career clusters and majors, college readiness, scholarships, college application process, NCAA, transcript request, and checklists for juniors and seniors. A Senior Night and Junior Parent Breakfast were also held to discuss this information. The information was posted on our school website. School counselors also held individual conferences with senior and junior students and parents to review the information booklet. During this time, School Counselors made recommendation for the students to take the SAT or ACT and informed them of practice workshops that were being offered at the school for SAT/ACT. The College and Career Specialist and School Counselors provided classroom guidance to help students complete career and college readiness assessments through a new college readiness program called Naviance.

As a result of these changes, the School Counseling Department has received positive feedback from parents, students, and staff about the information they were given. Both parents and students gained access to valuable information that will assist them as they make post- secondary decisions. These changes have proven to be a success. The completion rate of graduation increased from 95.8 in 2012-2013 to 98.4 in 2013-2014. Blythewood High School scholarship money awarded in 2012-2013 increased from \$10 million to \$15 million in 2013-2014. School counselors increased college and career readiness individual counseling by 50% during the 2013-2014 year as they continued to have a 100% review of Individual Graduation Plans with students. The use of Naviance has also proven to be very effective. Since the implementation of this career readiness program last year, students have accessed the program 5088 times to complete college searches, scholarships, and career assessments.

Both parents and students have learned to access information and gain a clearer understanding of the resources that are available to them from the School Counseling Department and College and Career Center. Overall, communication has greatly increased between the School Counseling Department, parents, and students.

In a collaborative effort, the School Counseling Department and SIC will continue to meet the individual needs of all students at Blythewood High School.

Sincerely,



Sharlene B. Drakeford, Ed. S., NBCT, Director of School Counseling

Blythewood High School

During the 2013-2014 school year, the Blythewood High School Improvement Council assisted in the planning and monitoring of activities that supported SAT/ ACT preparation, individualized guidance advisement, and career planning to prepare students for college and/or career readiness. Specific action steps taken to address these priorities were: 1) the purchase of the Naviance® Software Program, 2) the creation of the *Bengals and Beyond* student success guide, 3) increased exposure to college and career opportunities, and 4) varied, ongoing communication. Blythewood High School implemented new processes created to increase the opportunities it provided to students to explore and prepare for college and career options. Due to the success of the Class of 2014, the following processes that began last year continue during the 2014-15 school year, with some enhancements:

- The Guidance Department now provides individualized counseling sessions for 100% of students to provide: a grade level planning checklist, curriculum guide information, and course advisement based on post-graduation goals. Juniors and Seniors receive advisement each semester. *The 2013-14 school year was the first year the ASSET (a college freshman placement test) was offered at BHS to further extend course advisement by planning college entry coursework to 330 out of 361 students in the Class of 2014 that were accepted to a college.*
- The College and Career Center plans paid and unpaid internships for career exploration, college representative visits to the school, trips for students to visit college campuses, parent information workshops (i.e. Financial Aid, Junior Parent Information), student events (ie. College Application Day), and test preparation workshops. *The 2013-14 school year was the first year an ACT workshop was offered. During the 2014-15 school year, the ACT workshop was offered each semester. Test preparation workshops are now offered during evenings and weekends to allow more students to attend. October 8, 2015 was the first College Application Day at BHS. This was a day for seniors to apply to colleges with the help of college admissions counselors, the SC National Guard and the Midlands Education and Business Alliance.*
- BHS provides each student with a Naviance account, which can be used throughout their high school career to: discover their personal strengths and interests using surveys, explore careers related to their interests, research potential colleges, apply for scholarships, create goals, and track their progress towards college or career plans. *The Class of 2014 received \$15 million in scholarships. As of January, 2015, the Class of 2015 has currently been awarded \$8.3 million in scholarships of their \$20 million goal.*
- Communication continues to be an area of focus during the 2014-15 school year. The SIC and BHS leadership work together to monitor communication with students and families to ensure information is received. In May 2014, the SIC developed a Communication Survey to find out how various stakeholders prefer to receive school information. In June 2014, the survey received 302 responses from students, teachers and parents. Feedback indicated a need for adjusting the communication plan to meet the needs of the respondents. The SIC provided input to school leadership at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year, resulting in an updated plan. BHS now communicates school-wide events using various methods, such as the school website, Connect Ed phone calls/emails, and social media. *The College and Career Center converted from using Pinterest in 2013-14 to using Twitter and Instagram in 2014-15 in order to push information out to students using the social media that is popular to them. The school has switched from a newsletter to Facebook and Twitter, which is more popular among adults.*

This work represents the aspirations of Blythewood High's *current and future* students, their families and educators. The collaborative effort of the BHS School Improvement Council will continue to make a positive impact in the academic environment of the school, while preparing students for life after high school for years to come.