

# Jackson Central-Merry Academy of Medical Technology High School

332 Lane Avenue

Jackson, TN 38301

Principal: Michael Booker

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Jackson Central-Merry Academy of Medical Technology is an inner city high school serving predominantly high-poverty and high-minority population. In the 2008-09 school year the school (then called Jackson Central-Merry High School) was a chronically performing school in its sixth year of not making adequate progress. At the beginning of the 2009-10 school year, the principal and nearly one-half of the staff were replaced. At that year, preparations began to transition the school into a health-science magnet school. With the support of the U.S. Department of Education School Improvement Grant, the school contracted with external experts, formed partnerships with community partners, and invested in staff professional development. The school staff worked together to establish new instructional practices, increase school safety, and promote career and college readiness. Today, the school has improved graduation rates and a learning environment that is perceived by students, staff, and the community as conducive to student learning.

- ◆ 88% African American
- ◆ 8% White
- ◆ 3% Hispanic
- ◆ 89% Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch

## Supporting the Transition to High School

One of the first school improvement efforts was to establish a ninth-grade academy where students were closely tracked and intervention was provided if they fell behind. All freshmen at Jackson Central-Merry Academy of Medical Technology participated in a freshmen transition program, which provided additional support to them by physically locating freshmen classes in one area of the school and designating faculty members who were trained to teach freshmen level courses.

## High Expectations, Rigorous Instruction

The school created a rigorous curriculum with an emphasis on career and technical education. Learning opportunities included dual-enrollment with area colleges, universities, and technology schools, distance learning, summer health science camps, job shadowing, and internship opportunities for senior students. To ensure student success, an array of student support services was provided including tutoring, benchmark testing, and advisory. While high-achieving students were identified for enhanced learning opportunities (such as specialized summer camps), students who struggled were expected to perform at their best. For example, students did not receive a score of zero for a missing assignment but received an “incomplete” mark requiring the complete the work.

## **External Providers**

The school contracted with outside consultants to enhance its alignment of instructional expectations, formative assessments, classroom management, analysis of student data, and instructional practices. For example, the school sought consultation on evidence-based practices from Dr. Mel Riddile of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Dr. Mel Riddile provided professional development to staff on multiple topics including adolescent literacy.

## **Focus on Literacy Skills**

The school established a Literacy Council. The Literacy Council included one person from each core content area (e.g., English language arts, math) as well as the principal, the assistant principal, an instructional coach, and a media specialist. The Literacy Council was responsible for envisioning and overseeing the planning of literacy instruction across the curriculum. The Literacy Council added assessments of students' literacy skills, including the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. To increase rigor and improve instruction, every teacher was expected to make the most of available learning time by teaching bell-to-bell. In addition, every teacher was expected to dedicate time for reading and writing so that literacy will be continually practiced with every student, every class, every block, every day. The Literacy Council used the IES Practice Guide, Adolescent Literacy, and resources from the Doing What Works website under the topic, Adolescent Literacy to guide the identification of research-based practices. One of the new schoolwide literacy practices was explicit vocabulary instruction in all content areas. For example, all teachers worked with students to create word walls, a collection of words organized on classroom walls.

## **The Road to Success: Shared Responsibility**

Jackson Central-Merry Academy High School has made strides since the turnaround process began. The school staff attributes a large part of that success to the school leadership which empowered staff to take joint responsibility for school operations. The school principal worked with the staff to develop a culture of collaboration, with high commitment to the school mission. Consequently, the school has seen higher student engagement which led to a more positive school climate (according to staff reports) and a dramatic increase in graduation rates.