



Press Release: Seventy Hours of SAT Prep Just Part of the School Day at Fulton's Westlake High

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"Just a hundred points higher on the SAT would open up the universe for these kids, and enable them to go to schools that they want, open up choices and scholarships," says Grant Rivera, principal of Fulton County's Westlake High School in Atlanta. Westlake's average SAT score was in the 25th percentile, and research told them that students were not finishing the test, and private tutoring was not an option.

So Westlake decided to partner with a local SAT prep provider and offer SAT prep classes as an elective class as part of the regular school day. The class, 7 sections of 25 students each, targets juniors, seniors trying to get their scores up, and second semester sophomores. Usual SAT courses or tutoring have about 24 hours of class instruction, but this custom course has 70 hours of SAT prep, with direct teaching, Saturday morning practice tests, and a textbook, plus SAT online resources available to all students.

"We're creating a culture of increased college readiness," says Rivera. "We're building stamina to sit that long and engage. Most of these kids don't do well on the SAT because they can't finish the exam. We're teaching test familiarity and stamina as well as content. It's a huge return on investment for both the school and students. The early results are quite promising! For the 150 students in the classes last fall, the average increase was 121 points superscored and 116 not superscored." All increases are based on official test scores before and after the course, not on mock tests. Interestingly, the increases appear evenly split across the 3 sections (30-40 points per section of verbal, math and writing).

"We're the only public school in the southeast offering SAT prep as an elective class," says Janelle Wingfield, Westlake High School's magnet coordinator, who also functions as the liaison with Applerouth SAT prep, who teach the classes, and also help students with online access. "Students in the classes take a mock exam in the first 3 weeks, then take it a second and third time to gauge growth and see where they need assistance. The mock tests get them mentally prepared, teach them to time reading passages, talk about the struggles of finishing, and give them strategies. We talk about time wasters, when to skip a problem and when to come back. We debrief after the tests. We're trying to increase student confidence — so they know they can do it instead of seeing it as a daunting task."

As an extra, any student at Westlake can take a mock exam, and then have online tutoring tailored to their needs, even if they can't fit SAT class in their schedule. Westlake also offers the SAT class to second semester sophomores who meet a PSAT cut score for National Merit Scholar or National Achievement, and offer a PSAT boot camp in the fall. "We're looking to expand and extend this program to help students with specifics of PSAT. As the ACT is growing in popularity here, we'll potentially offer 1-2 sections of ACT prep as well."

The SAT prep program is financed through Fulton County Schools Magnet funds and Seed Funding for special projects. "The SAT prep course meshes with our strategic plan to increase post-secondary availability for students," says Wingfield, "and make sure finances don't stand in the way. Higher SAT scores make these students more competitive for scholarships. This year we had two National Achievement Scholars, three Gates Millennial Scholars, and two Posse Scholars. We're working to make sure kids attend the college they want on ability, not finances; increasing SAT scores helps. We're trying to change the culture. We want students to boast about academic achievements just like athletics. We have 'academic signings' as well as 'athletic signings' in front of 9th and 10th graders, so they see there are rewards for academic talent as well."



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