

SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS

PLAN TO ELIMINATE OR REDUCE MINORITY GROUP ISOLATION AND IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

OVERVIEW

On July 1, 2013, Shelby County Schools (SCS) and the Memphis City Schools (MCS) merged to form a single school district under the name Shelby County Schools, governed by the Shelby County Board of Education (SCBE), with a goal of retaining successful features of both school districts. One of the successful features of MCS was its Optional Program (which is the community's name for what is commonly called a magnet program). The Optional Program is an integral part of SCS and aligns with the District's priorities to improve post-secondary readiness, expand high-quality school options, and mobilize family and community partners.

As it is currently constructed, the Optional Program supports school choice and promotes district strategic goals in two ways. First, it provides parents with the power to assist their children and the District in the education process by allowing them to select schools that match their student's current needs and interests and which have the capacity to challenge their student academically, as well as refine their student's talents. The Optional Program also ignites competition and learning among schools, motivating them to innovate and strive for excellence. Both goals promote a vibrant school system that is able to meet the needs of current and future scholars so that all students are equipped with the knowledge and skills essential to college and careers and participation in a diverse society.

Despite the development of choice and Optional Programs to eliminate or reduce minority group isolation and to ensure quality options for all students, a significant number of schools are educating students in settings that are racially and socio-economically isolated. SCS promotes the value of diversity and is committed to ensuring equitable access to high quality, educational opportunities and closing academic achievement gaps based on ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status. To meet these goals and those identified in the District's strategic plan, Destination 2025, SCBE seeks approval of a plan and resolution to eliminate or reduce minority group isolation through a Magnet Schools Assistance Program project to be managed by SCBE's Division of Optional Schools and Advanced Academics.

MAGNET SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PROJECT

SCBE's proposal to the United States Department of Education for Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) funding is designed to enhance and redesign the program offered at East High School (EHS), increase racial and socioeconomic diversity, eliminate or reduce minority group isolation of students, and provide high-quality instruction aligned with college and career ready

standards. The redesign offered under this project will provide rigorous, enriching learning experiences to students zoned to East High School, as well as students from all parts of Shelby County.

SCBE proposes, through the MSAP project, to redesign East High School and its current Optional programming so that it will become a new, whole-school T-STEM (Transportation-STEM or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) magnet school--in a city known as “America’s Distribution Capital.” Every student at East High School will have access to and benefit from a rich STEM curriculum, innovative instructional approaches (e.g., project-based learning, technology integration, focus on critical thinking and problem solving), career exploration and enrichment opportunities in the transportation sector, and aligned community and industry partnerships. In addition to benefiting students, the redesigned East High School promises to contribute to its families and the community-at-large, by preparing a larger share of Memphis students for graduation, college, future careers, and local and national opportunities for success. Likewise, the project promises to more actively engage family, community, higher education, and industry partners in EHS and Shelby County Schools more broadly.

East High School is centrally located close to the heart of Memphis, Tennessee, on the Poplar Avenue and Walnut Grove corridors, two major arteries well served by public transit. The school shares its block with the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library, which recently opened an innovative teen learning lab called Cloud901. The school is also easily accessible to the Intermodal Freight Transportation Institute (IFTI) at the University of Memphis, with which the school has an emerging partnership.

- The school, which opened in 1948, was designed to hold up to 2,000 students and initially served a white-only student body.
- In 1962, it became the first Memphis school to hold integrated high school classes.
- In 1976, the school added a stand-alone vocational-technology building, which now houses EHS classes, as well as laboratory space for SCS’s district-wide STEM Virtual School.
- East’s engineering-themed Optional program opened in 1984-85.
- In 2005, the school facilities underwent a major renovation.
- The school has strong and long-standing community partnerships with the University of Memphis, an active alumni association, and PeerPower Foundation, among others.
- The school’s sports teams have a strong record of excellence, with the boys’ basketball team recently winning the state championship and achieving a national standing of 19.

East’s 2015-16 enrollment is at its lowest point since its founding. In October 2015, 556 students were enrolled, with 61% residing within the school’s attendance zone. Other students at the school attend through a general choice transfer or through an Optional Schools transfer. Although once a flourishing Optional program, East’s engineering program is now very small,

with only 35 students currently enrolled. Twenty-seven are transfers from another attendance zone, and the remaining eight reside inside East's attendance zone. Minority isolation exists at the school, with 94% of the students identifying as African American, 3% as Hispanic/Latino, 2% as white, and the remaining students as multiracial.

The redesigned East High School will offer attractive, viable, industry-aligned academic programming options and use race-neutral selection methods to recruit and enroll motivated students and reduce minority group isolation and ensure high quality offerings for students regardless of where they live in SCBE's service area. The significantly revised magnet design for East will complement the menu of choices SCS provides to ensure students in Shelby County have the option of attending a school that is racially and socio-economically diverse. The school will provide excellent opportunities for engaging studies, the students' development of empathy and greater understanding of fellow citizens, and the exploration of strengths related to diversity.

For the 2016 MSAP grant application, SCBE's definition of minority group isolation at a school is the following:

- "A school is experiencing minority group isolation for a specific race or ethnic group if the percentage enrollment for that racial or ethnic group at the relevant grade level is at least 10% above the district's 2015-16 enrollments for that group."

MAGNET/OPTIONAL PROGRAM

Shelby County Schools (SCS) has identified six goals for its T-STEM proposal which are consistent with the purposes of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP):

- 1) Reduce minority group isolation;
- 2) Implement distinctive, high quality curriculum specific to the theme;
- 3) Increase the instructional capacity of specialized and core teachers to deliver unique, innovative T-STEM curriculum;
- 4) Increase industry, university, and community partnerships to support and enhance the magnet theme of Transportation Focused STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics);
- 5) Expand responsiveness to industry recommendations and community demand; and
- 6) Increase academic achievement for all students within each major demographic subgroup in Reading, Math, and Science.

IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY

Diversity is at the core of Shelby County Schools' mission and vision. The mission of SCS is "preparing all students for success in learning, leadership and life." The vision of SCS is that "[o]ur District will be the premier school district attracting a diverse student population and effective teachers, leaders, and staff all committed to excellence." Furthermore, according to its

Ethics Policy 0002, the SCS Board seeks “to provide equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of ability, race, color, sex, creed or location of residence.”

SCHOOL CHOICE

In accordance with SCS’s mission and vision, school choice ignites the spirit of competition, motivates excellence, promotes innovation, and empowers parents to match their children with the schools that best meet their children’s needs, interests, and/or talents.

- SCS will redesign East High School in a way that complements other school choice options within the community, that improves post-secondary readiness, and that is responsive to the needs and desires of the community, its present students, and future scholars.
- It is SCS’s goal to close achievement gaps between student groups and to use East High School as a model for future innovation.
- SCS will be proactive in the early identification of problems in the recruitment of an adequate number of students to provide adequate resources supporting the school’s T-STEM theme.

NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

In accordance with SCS’s Non-Discrimination Statements Policy 1009, “The Shelby County Board of Education prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color and national origin in the educational programs or activities which are operated by Shelby County Schools.”

ADMISSIONS

Admission to East High School’s T-STEM program redesigned under the Magnet Schools Assistance Program project will be made available to all students in Grades 9-12 annually. In order to be considered for admission, each prospective student’s family must submit an Optional Schools application and each prospective student must complete an essay and/or an interview as well as meet specific grade, behavior, and attendance standards. Grade, behavior, attendance, and program requirements must be maintained yearly in order to remain in the program.

The following students will be given first priority for enrollment if they indicate their intent to attend East High School:

- Qualified students who currently attend East High School or live in the attendance area of the school.
- Applicants who live outside of the attendance area, but have one or more siblings currently enrolled in East’s Optional program.

If sufficient space is available in the program, all applicants for the program who satisfy the entrance requirements will be accepted. If East has more qualified applicants than space, a lottery

process will be used, followed by an evaluation of the applications based on the entrance requirements. Criteria used in the lottery will include the following:

- Building capacity
- Grade level
- Enrollment of one or more siblings in East's T-STEM program

When East's enrollment is at capacity, a waiting pool of applicants will be established. As openings occur, names will be drawn from the pool of applicants submitting their applications by the stated deadline. If new enrollees are not obtained from this group, names will be drawn from applications completed after the initial deadline for submission of applications, followed by applicants from outside the District.

The following provisions shall apply to Optional Schools applications for East High School:

- All completed applications may be submitted electronically or in person. Applications submitted by the stated deadline – to be determined annually – shall be processed during Phase I.
- Letters or e-mails shall be sent to each applicant with program information and qualifying status by the established deadline – to be determined annually.
- Each family receiving an acceptance notification shall be responsible for informing East High School by the designated date of the student's intent to enroll.
- Applicants who have not responded to the acceptance notification shall be contacted by the T-STEM Optional School Coordinator.
- Applicants who do not respond to the T-STEM Optional School Coordinator shall be removed from the acceptance list to make those spaces available for other students.

TRANSFERS

Final acceptance of transfers shall be approved by the Division of Optional Schools and Advanced Academics. Students with approved Optional School transfers shall be locked into their transfer selections for one year (notwithstanding extenuating circumstances), effective on the August date specified each year. Transfer students who are accepted into East High School in 2016-17 shall participate in the T-STEM curriculum in 2017-18.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Building capacity will be reviewed on an annual basis, based on emerging changes in classroom use to accommodate the expanding T-STEM curriculum.

MAGNET/OPTIONAL TRANSPORTATION

District policy regarding Student Transportation Services (3004) shall be followed, with criteria for bus ridership eligibility for the general population determined by the District. Current

practice for SCS high schools is that students attending their zoned high school and residing more than two miles from the school are eligible for transportation services, as well as students whose IEPs or 504 plans require special transportation services. Otherwise, transportation for students transferring from other attendance zones to attend East High School is not an allowable MSAP expense. SCS will seek non-profit partners who may be able to contribute public transit bus passes to facilitate students' school attendance.

MAGNET/OPTIONAL RECRUITMENT

The Division of Optional Schools and Advanced Academics organizes and implements district-wide recruitment activities designed to create an ethnically diverse student body. Some of these recruitment strategies include the following:

- **Optional Schools Fair:** This event is open to the entire Shelby County community and is held in January at the University of Memphis. It provides an opportunity for prospective parents to meet school representatives and learn about each of the District's Optional programs in one location.
- **Optional Schools Open Houses:** These events are open to the entire Shelby County community. Individual sessions are held to answer questions that prospective Optional parents and students may have regarding respective schools' Optional programs.
- **Optional School Recruiting Visits:** Optional high school coordinators make presentations highlighting their Optional programs at the majority of SCS middle schools.
- **Parent/Guardian Magnet Awareness Month –** This event includes tours, orientations, night meetings, and other outreach efforts for families at each Optional program.

MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

The District will annually monitor and assess the effectiveness of its efforts to attain diversity and efforts to avoid minority group isolation, as well as academic performance, at East High School under the MSAP project. Monitoring activities will include an analysis of:

- The overall enrollment of students at East High School in comparison to the enrollment growth goals set by the District.
- The percentage of students at East from each racial/ethnic group.
- The percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students at the school.
- The effectiveness of East High School's Optional program.