

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



Office of Charter Schools
NC ACCESS PROGRAM
NC Department of Public Instruction

Marketing and Recruitment

Removing Barriers - Transportation

Bus Stops & Holiday Hams

Implementation Description

Achievement Charter Academy (ACA) opened their doors for the 2020-21 academic year, and despite the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic, were able to operate fully in-person for the entire year. As such, quickly establishing a transportation plan for the school was of utmost importance. Studies have shown that free, school-provided transportation is an important factor in eliminating barriers to school choice (Valant & Lincove, 2018). This is especially true for low-income families who are less likely to own a personal vehicle or may have work schedules that require irregular hours of availability (Teske, Fitzpatrick, & O'Brien, 2009).

In order to begin transportation service at ACA, school leadership organized logistics, such as hiring drivers, purchasing buses, and establishing routes. ACA had four trained CDL drivers on staff and made plans to have other staff members get their CDL license to ensure adequate coverage. They utilized their existing budget to purchase one bus and secured NC ACCESS funding to purchase a second bus. School leadership then established eight community bus stops, based on the housing locations of their prospective students. The school partnered with three local child care centers who offered before and after school programming that ACA students or their siblings already attended. Since ACA is located in a rural area, they had limited options for additional bus stop locations. One logical option, geographically, was a centrally located Food Lion grocery store. Store management was excited to provide a bus stop for ACA and asked for other ways to serve school families, which was the beginning of a widely beneficial community partnership (Anderson et al, N.d.). After this initial partnership was formed, ACA contacted three additional Food Lion stores to establish

About This School

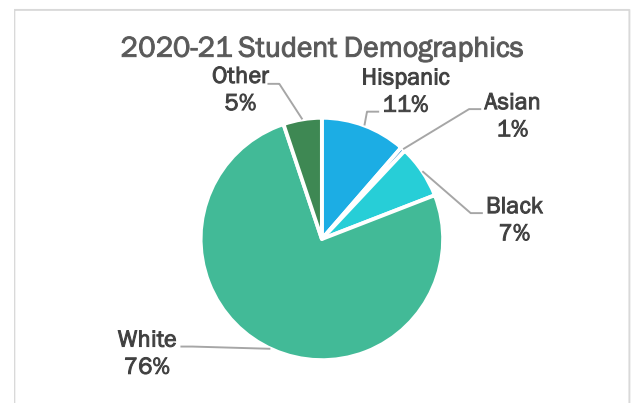
Achievement Charter Academy

Achievement Charter Academy uses the Glasser Quality School (GQS) model as a guide to create a school culture that teaches and uses Choice Theory to support relationships based on trust and respect. The GQS model emphasizes Total Learning Competency and producing Quality Work to encourage self-directed learning and individual achievement. The model emphasizes the value of respect, diversity, inclusion, and community and promotes a school environment that is viewed by stakeholders as a joyful place. The GQS model is an innovative learning approach that focuses on meeting the individual needs of students. The curriculum and method of delivery are fluid and flexible to maximize achievement of different learning styles and abilities in a diverse and inclusive environment.

Year School Opened: 2020-21

Grant Awarded: 2020

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-5



% ED Student Population: 23%

Urbanicity: Rural / Fuquay Varina, NC

Persons in Poverty (Harnett County)⁵: 15.6%

September 20, 2021

more bus stops. Some Food Lion managers required ACA to sign a contractual agreement and list the store on the school's vehicular insurance policy. Once the drivers, buses, and bus stops were in place, school leadership was able to communicate transportation options to prospective families and distribute flyers advertising this new service in their community.

Once the school year began, ACA established a back-up transportation plan. In the event of a bus breakdown, the school contacted Fuquay Transportation to utilize their Kids Shuttle. If Fuquay Transportation was not available, the school would rent vehicles to bring students to and from school. This was an expensive and time-consuming process for administrators, which helped influence their transportation planning for 2021-22.

Results

Sixty-three students rode ACA's buses every day, and 52% of the students served were considered Educationally Disadvantaged. This ridership was limited due to COVID social distancing restrictions on buses.

The community partnership between ACA and neighboring Food Lions resulted in more benefits than just bus stops. The grocery store generously provided hams and Food Lion gift cards for school families in need around the holidays. Food Lion also offered gift cards to students who qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch, but opted out of ACA's catering option. This allowed families to purchase groceries to pack lunches for their child(ren).

Challenges

The primary challenge for ACA was unexpected expenses associated with operating and repairing their buses. In hindsight, ACA found that it may have been beneficial to start by purchasing activity buses instead, because they are more reliable, more cost effective, and do not require a CDL license to operate.

Future Modifications

The school plans to have additional back-up transportation options in place moving forward. They are in the process of evaluating options, such as establishing a partnership with the Harnett County Bus Garage, purchasing an activity bus, and recruiting families who typically carpool to transport their bus-riding neighbors when needed. ACA would also like to offer a stipend CDL training for staff members to increase the amount of available bus drivers.

Critical Components

Getting Started

ACA commented on the importance of including hidden costs, such as repair costs and rental fees in the transportation budget as these expenditures can quickly increase overall spending.

Ongoing Supports

School leadership has been recruiting additional staff to pursue CDL training and creating back-up transportation plans to ensure the long-term sustainability of this initiative.

Equity Connections

Offering school-provided transportation reduces barriers to entry for families experiencing poverty (Sanchez, 2017). ACA purchased two buses and established eight community bus stops in order to better serve these families within their community.

Research

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