

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

School Culture

Racial Justice

## A Window Into Students' Needs

### Implementation Description

When COVID-19 safety measures resulted in remote learning, ArtSpace Charter School's (ACS) teachers gained a daily glimpse into some of their students' realities, which included food insecurity, absent family members, and unstable internet connections. While these virtual windows showed school staff the resilience of their students, it also inspired them to grow in their understanding of effective strategies for serving educationally disadvantaged students. This season of remote learning became an optimal time for ArtSpace Charter leadership to deliver equity-focused Professional Development (PD).

ArtSpace Charter leveraged their existing partnerships with [NC ACCESS](#) and the Anti-Defamation League's [No Place for Hate](#) as a launching point for their staff's professional development. School leadership participated in equity-focused breakout sessions with other NC ACCESS subgrant awardees. Then, they shared the information with ACS teachers through small groups to promote open conversations (Hollis McKeown, personal communication, June 23, 2021), which aligns with research which states small groups are often more efficient and effective than large groups (Studer, 2018). School administration also collaborated with teacher leaders, such as their school's No Place for Hate Committee, to schedule peer-led equity PD. Studies have shown that peer-led PD promotes collaboration between teachers and empowers them to grow in their leadership skills (TTT4U, 2017). The No Place for Hate Committee

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### About This School

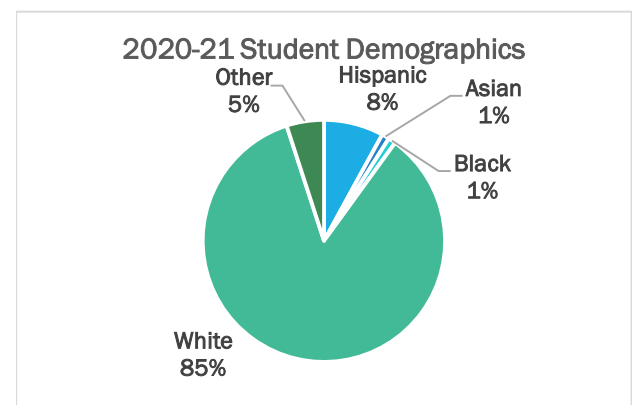
#### ArtSpace Charter School

ArtSpace Charter School offers a complete education, through an integrated curriculum centered around visual and performing arts, utilizing an experiential approach. We believe in a family-centered, cooperative approach to education that encourages parental involvement and community service in order to nurture responsible citizenship. We are dedicated to the vision that the ArtSpace Charter School community will be a national benchmark in educational excellence through integration of the arts. ArtSpace Charter School is part of the A+ Schools Program at the North Carolina Arts Council. The A+ Schools Program is the largest, longest running, most successful arts-based whole-school reform effort in the nation.

**Year School Opened:** 2001-02

**Grant Awarded:** 2020-21

**Initial Grade Levels Served:** K-8



**% ED Student Population:** 37%

**Urbanicity:** Rural / Swannanoa, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Buncombe County)<sup>7</sup>:** 12.2%

delivered two in-person sessions and two virtual sessions, allowing fellow teachers to select two to four sessions they would like to attend. Offering a choice of sessions promoted ownership and helped teachers feel less “*called out*” and more “*called in*” (Hollis McKeown, personal communication, June 23, 2021). The success of the school level professional development was evidenced by the staff member’s positive responses to the training and eagerness to learn more. Several teachers chose to enroll in additional PD opportunities beyond the school walls. Additionally, some staff members took the initiative to organize an equity-focused book study for the upcoming school year. School leaders plan to demonstrate their support for the book study by using available NC ACCESS funding to purchase the books (Hollis McKeown, personal communication, June 23, 2021).

While all of the PD sessions focused on equity, each session framed the issue in a unique way. Some sessions focused on culturally responsive teaching and Social and Emotional Learning, which studies have shown “*can advance educational equity and excellence*” (Niemi, 2020). Other sessions centered around Trauma-Informed Instruction, which includes “*creating a space for self-regulation*” within classrooms and building positive, caring relationships between teachers and students (Venet, 2017). Finally, some sessions facilitated discussions related to race, in light of recent events. ACS additionally has a school license with Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity ([ICS Equity](#)), which has been initially reviewed by leadership and the No Place for Hate staff committee. The staff who facilitated peer-led conversations have a plethora of training including work with the Equity Literacy Institute and the National Endowment for the Humanities. One member has an advanced degree in Urban Education with a focus in culturally responsive discipline and another is an A+ Fellow who has studied decolonization through NYC Arts in Education Roundtable. These conversations helped teachers process these events and equipped them to facilitate similar discussions with students using tools, such as ground rules and contingency plans (Landsman, 2016).

As the majority of students returned to in-person learning in March 2021, students experienced challenges with new routines, especially after the uncertainty and disruptions of the previous year. For some students, these changes led to inappropriate behaviors. Because of the equity PD teachers received, especially the training related to trauma and social-emotional learning, teachers viewed the behavior in a new light. They were able to see past the behavior to see students’ unmet needs, especially the needs for structure and security. When teachers applied the interventions from the training, students’ needs were met and discipline issues improved. In some situations, teachers experienced trial and error to navigate the concerns, but over time, students responded positively to best practice interventions.

## Results

During the 2020-2021 school year, school staff in total (independently or collectively) completed over 85 professional development sessions, which greatly exceeds the minimal requirement and demonstrates the staff’s commitment to equity. Staff feedback on the PD sessions was positive, and school leadership commented that they saw growth among their staff members as evidenced by staff-led discussions and classroom implementation.

Reading proficiency scores for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders are well above the state average (between 15 and 20 points) suggesting that students are benefiting from the focused staff professional development.

## Challenges

Equity-focused PD from outside organizations had been challenging for ACS in the past, because staff members often felt like they were being pointed out rather than invited into a larger conversation. The largely peer-led PD ACS staff participated in this year framed the topic in a more accessible, applicable, and meaningful way that helped staff members develop a shared vision to address educational inequities within their community.

## Future Modifications

ArtSpace Charter's Upcoming PD sessions will focus on strategies for effective engagement with the school's Latino population and addressing inequities in literacy and the arts for underrepresented minorities.

In addition, the school staff will start their book club in spring 2021; they will first study Ta-Nehisi Coates' [Between the World and Me](#), a book written from a father to a son recounting the historical and personal narrative of race relations in America.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

School leadership mentioned the importance of eliciting buy-in from a diverse group of staff across grade levels who encouraged others to participate. Similarly, ArtSpace's success was largely due to having teacher leaders facilitate the sessions, rather than contracting with an outside organization, because it promoted a positive climate and refined leadership skills in staff members. It was also essential for school leadership to communicate a growth mindset to staff, as challenges to implementation are common as teachers develop new skills.

### Ongoing Supports

ACS administrators will coordinate with their Student Support Team to convert the theoretical concepts studied in PD sessions into specific school-wide goals. They are also committed to facilitating ongoing conversations and growth through future PD sessions and an equity-focused book club.

## Equity Connections

"Positive teacher-student relationships...contribute to a welcoming, inclusive school climate that promotes equity, social and emotional learning and improved student outcomes" (Nishioka, 2019). The staff at ACS participated in PD sessions that improved their skills with Social and Emotional Learning, Trauma-Informed Instruction, and culturally responsive teaching in order to better relate to all students, but especially those considered Educationally Disadvantaged

## Research

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