

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

Family and Community Engagement

Family Support

Comprehensive Services for Human Needs

Implementation Description

Bradford Preparatory School (BPS) is committed to creating a school community in which every student can thrive, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status. The school leadership constantly seeks strategies to ensure equity for their students. Therefore, they recently added two new positions to address student equity needs and made other significant changes to remove barriers to learning.

In the 2020-21 school year, the staff welcomed a Family Engagement Coordinator (FEC) whose responsibilities included identifying students and families who were in need. Although many BPS students were already identified as Economically Disadvantaged (ED), the staff knew other families were likely in poverty, but were not identified. Research has shown that some families are unable or unwilling to complete the qualifying paperwork, because they are *“concerned about their immigration status and don’t want to create a paper trail [or]... are culturally opposed to accepting government handouts”* (The Hechinger Report, 2015). The Family Engagement Coordinator built rapport with families in order to better understand the needs of individual families, whether or not they were formally identified as ED. The next step was to seek and employ local resources and beneficial community partnerships to address families’ needs. As the FEC collaborated with families, communication was streamlined and the families began to trust the FEC and view her as a confidential liaison. The FEC became a conduit connecting families to the school community, resulting in increased family engagement. Studies have shown that increased familial involvement in an educational institution can improve educational outcomes for students as well as create a better school environment (Bogenschneider & Johnson, 2004).

July 27, 2021

About This School

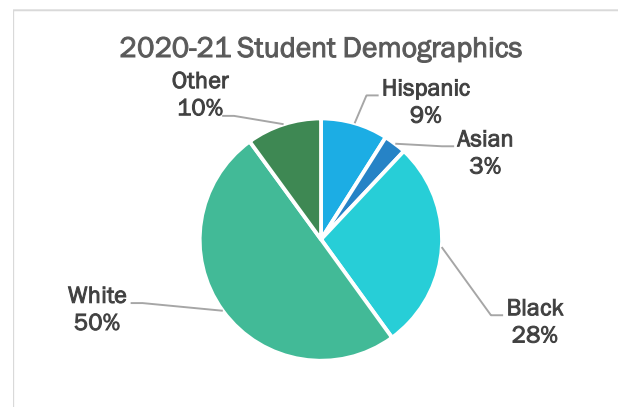
Bradford Preparatory School

Bradford is a college preparatory school committed to academic excellence, nurturing personal relationships, and inspiring a growing passion for creativity and learning in all of our students.

Year School Opened: 2014-15

Grant Awarded: 2020-21

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-12



% ED Student Population: 27%

Urbanicity: Urban / Charlotte, NC

Persons in Poverty (Mecklenburg County)¹¹: 10.3%

Secondly, the school hired a Spanish Speaking Marketing Specialist (SSMS) to work in conjunction with the FEC by engaging Spanish-speaking students and families currently enrolled at Bradford as well as prospective families. One of her duties was to ensure that all recruitment materials and school communication were available in both Spanish and English. Translation of written materials into Spanish has been shown to effectively help Spanish-speaking families stay informed and involved with their child(ren)'s educational experience (Bickmore, 2013). The SSMS also provided translation services during parent conferences and family information sessions. Facilitating communication for Spanish speaking families was critically important during the COVID-19 crisis (Rosales, 2020). The SSMS utilized What'sApp, a free messaging app, to communicate with Hispanic families in an accessible manner. Frequent, real time communication in their native language helped Hispanic families stay informed and equipped to support their students, especially during virtual learning.

In addition to hiring two new staff members, school leadership utilized NC ACCESS funds to remove common barriers to school choice, including establishing school provided transportation, providing school uniforms, lunches, and technology, and implementing a weighted lottery. The school purchased a bus and established a route that provided



transportation for any family who requested it. Studies have shown that a lack of access to transportation can be a significant barrier for families' school choices (Valant & Lincove, 2018). The school purchased uniforms and school supplies for students in need. Uniforms have been shown to act as an equalizer for students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds (Perez, 2018), and relieving the cost of school



supplies for families in need eases a financial burden (Williams, 2017). Moreover, the school established a free school lunch program for students experiencing food insecurity. Staff members distributed bags of food biweekly on Fridays to families in need. This food delivery service was made possible through the support of local non-profit organizations, donations from within the school community, and a



partnership with a local grocery store. School staff-maintained confidentiality and protected student dignity by providing the food service without attracting the attention of classmates. These steps were important, because food insecurity is a significant aspect of living in poverty that can negatively impact student achievement (Cookson, 2020). Additionally, NC ACCESS funds enabled BPS to purchase an iPad for every student.

Ensuring equitable access to technology levels the playing field between students of all socio-economic classes. When implemented effectively, studies have shown that school-provided technology can significantly lessen the achievement gap in students (Anderson, 2019). The school also implemented a weighted lottery with most open slots in kindergarten, so increases in ED enrollment will take place slowly over the next several years. Weighted lotteries have been shown to increase socioeconomic diversity in schools, which has the potential to “*produce strong results for students and society*” (Potter, 2019).

Finally, NC ACCESS funds were utilized to secure training for all staff around the topic of Racial Equality. The school year began with a 1 day in-person Professional Development (PD)

session with Steph Jenson's The Lost Boys Seminar designed to help educators better meet the needs of their male students. Dr. Brian Williams, an urban education professor at NC A&T, facilitated two half day virtual sessions in February and May. The BPS staff is approximately 35% minority, and this session increased awareness and laid the foundation for productive race discussions among staff. As a result of the training, staff members increased their understanding of how cultural and ethnic differences can impact student learning and the greater school community. Educating staff members in the area of racial and gender equity ensures all students have equitable access to a high-quality education.

Results

For the 2021-22 school year, BPS enrolled 9 additional ELL students through the weighted lottery and an additional 14 ED students. Increases in enrollment numbers for ED students will go up slightly each year as the only open slots are in kindergarten.

As a result of the school's research-based equity initiatives, many families received timely and relevant support. The FEC and SSMS were instrumental in engaging families with the school community, especially Hispanic families and families in poverty.

Challenges

Some aspects of the Lost Boys and racial equity PD sessions proved to be challenging as the staff expressed frustration with policies and laws outside of the administration's control. Also, they felt additional training sessions and discussions were necessary to address the needs of other historically marginalized groups, such as the Hispanic community - which represents a growing percent of their student population - and those struggling with gender identity. Overall, however, the training created a space for open and honest conversations between staff members and the administration about racial issues and experiences.

Future Modifications

Both the FEC and SSMS will continue building rapport with Bradford families through open dialogue to identify potential barriers to student success. Additionally, they plan to increase two-way communication between home and school through in-person meetings as COVID-19 safety restrictions ease.

School leadership also plans to implement gender identity training and Hispanic culture PD during the 2021-22 academic year.

Critical Components

Getting Started

School leadership commented that an understanding of the Hispanic culture was an essential job skill for the SSMS as her primary responsibility was to engage with Hispanic families and offer relevant ideas on ways the family can support their child(ren)'s education.

Setting up and utilizing What'sApp for school communication was also shown to be quite effective.

Initiating a dedicated FEC staff member at the school allowed BPS to meet the needs of families, which may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Ongoing Supports

As the school's enrollment numbers increase, the FEC and SSMS will continue to call and host virtual or in-person meetings with families to assess needs, connect them with sources of support, provide information about upcoming school events, and develop trusting relationships.

Equity Connections

Peter W. Cookson, Jr. - a Senior Researcher at the Learning Policy Institute - wrote in 2020, "*For those of us who believe in educational equity, making the invisible visible is the first step in overcoming deep disadvantage*". As referenced above, an unknown number of families who would likely identify as economically disadvantaged could qualify for free meals and other school-provided aid, but they do not seek access to these services. BPS sought to make these invisible needs more visible by dedicating two staff members to working with families experiencing poverty and Spanish speaking families. The FEC and SSMS were able to effectively connect with families and provide much-needed support during the 2020-21 academic year.

Research

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