

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



Marketing and Recruitment

Community Engagement

## Developing Advocates

### Implementation Description

Community Public Charter School (CPCS) went into their community, leveraging Board member relationships with community organizations, like churches, to share their message about who they were as a school and to facilitate the spread of school-related information by word-of-mouth. This intentional outward facing approach is supported by Dana Altemeyer’s study of school marketing initiatives in both public and private schools in central Indiana suggesting that direct contact is an effective marketing strategy because *“education is a people based industry, placing emphasis on relationships”* and *“school employees rank as the number one influencer of impressions about schools.”*<sup>1</sup> As evidenced by the results of a parent survey conducted in October 2019, this proved to be the case at CPCS. When parents were asked why they chose CPCS, 58% indicated that either the school staff or a board member was one of their top three reasons for choosing to enroll their child(ren) in the school. This percentage rose to 67% when asked a similar question in a June 2020 survey, reinforcing the importance of community presence and intentional relationship development between parents and school personnel throughout the school year.

In order to expand their recruitment initiatives and effectively oversee their online and general outreach efforts, CPCS hired an outreach consultant to manage their social media presence, which became critical during the COVID-19 pandemic when all in-person community events ceased and school information was shared via Facebook, Instagram, and other virtual avenues. Prior to the pandemic, eight information sessions were held throughout the school’s current service area providing an opportunity for school personnel to share information about the school and its education program, strategically targeted churches and community events where they could reach families of educationally disadvantaged (ED) students. The school

### About This School

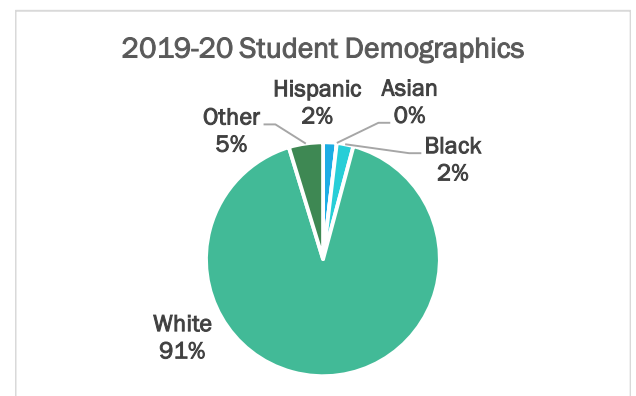
#### Community Public Charter School

Community Public Charter School is founded on the belief that a strong curriculum and welcoming school culture will create a rigorous and exciting learning atmosphere that will produce effective communicators, lifelong problem solvers, and engaged, informed American citizens. Through the delivery of a classical curriculum utilizing the Core Knowledge Sequence for reading, science, and social studies instruction and Singapore Math for math instruction, we will nurture well-rounded, highly educated, successful scholars.

**Year School Opened:** 2019-20

**Grant Awarded:** 2019-20

**Initial Grade Levels Served:** K-5



**% ED Student Population:** 35%

**Urbanicity:** Rural / Stanley, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Gaston County)<sup>4</sup>:** 14.2%

opened in August 2019, during project year one, with 237 K-5 students located in a temporary space prior to the completion of a more permanent building. Projected enrollment for the 2020-21 school year has increased significantly to 395 students pushing the capacity limits of the school's current facilities.

Why the increase? CPCS leadership credits the completion of a more permanent facility and increased interest due to word-of-mouth networking, which is primarily driven by positive experiences with the school's education program. According to a fall 2019 survey of CPCS families, 71% of respondents indicated that one of the top 3 reasons they chose CPCS was because of the school's education program. At the end of the same academic year, 82.5% of parents at the school indicated that the education program was one of the top three reasons they would keep their child(ren) enrolled. Based on CPCS' experience, it is important to reach into the community to ensure that families understand what a new school can offer their child(ren), but, once enrolled, if families find success for their child(ren), they become the school's best advocates and most reliable and cost-efficient marketing strategy.<sup>2,3</sup>

Families and students find success at school when they are properly supported. Beyond the education program, CPCS strives to support families through a lunch and transportation program, with the former including multiple bus routes to cluster stops and the latter providing meals to any family or student demonstrating need. Additionally, through the opportunity afforded by the NC ACCESS Program and Charter School Program (CSP) funds, CPCS also supports families through on-campus mental health services and targeted teacher professional development. When combined with the education program, these support services encourage student success and family support, thus concomitantly developing school advocates.

## Results

- 237 K-5 students were enrolled at the start of the first project year when the school opened in August 2019. At that time, the school's capacity was 350 as they were housed in a temporary space while waiting for the completion of a more permanent facility. Representing significant growth in the total student population, the 2020-21 projected enrollment currently stands at 395 students challenging the building capacity of 450.
- A June 2020 family survey showed that 98.4% of parents are likely or very likely to recommend the school to friends and family, thus indicating satisfaction with the school and, prospectively, continued growth in the school's population.

## Challenges

- When school buildings closed in spring 2020 due to COVID-19, all in-person recruitment efforts were impacted. However, as evidenced by the school's enrollment growth, word-of-mouth and parent advocate marketing persisted and contributed to interest among prospective families despite COVID-related impacts on marketing and recruitment.
- Space at the school is a limiting factor. Based on submitted applications, there is enough interest that CPCS could easily enroll additional grade level classes.
- What will likely be a perennial challenge for CPCS, as it is for most charter schools, is educating the community about charter schools and the role they play in the education landscape. Once parents understand that a charter school is a public school, they still need to understand that charter schools have operational flexibility when compared to a traditional public school. However, once

parents recognize that their children are having a positive experience and, as a result, are engaged in their learning, they become the school's best advocates. It is important to share a clear, concise message about the school, how it functions, and what it can offer to families before the doors even open. As evidenced by family survey results and the growth in the school's total student population, if that is done well and students are finding success, families will continue to promote the school and enrollment will increase.

## Future Modifications

- In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the next challenge the school faces will be preparing for the 2020 fall opening of school in such a way that meets the needs of all families. The school has already surveyed parents to understand their needs and concerns about the reopening of school, and this information is being used to guide CPCS' plans for the upcoming school year.
- Families are requesting opportunities to tour the building during the instructional day, so CPCS is planning for appointment only tours allowing the school to respond to this request in a controlled manner that does not disrupt instruction.
- CPCS wants to provide an opportunity for potential new students to experience the school from the perspective of a student, so they are developing a program that allows incoming students to sit with or shadow a currently enrolled student for a day.
- In an effort to ensure open and clear communication with parents, CPCS plans to establish a kindergarten day that provides families with information about the school, communication tools and kindergarten readiness screening.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

In order to gain community trust from inception, it is important to ensure that some member(s) of the School's Board of Directors are seen as trusted members of the community and willing to advocate and initiate strategic partnerships in the community. These initial Board contacts not only directly result in student enrollment, they generate interest and avenues of sharing information throughout the community. The next important step is to develop "talking points" about the school mission and vision and to share these with staff and parents as they share their experiences with friends, family and neighbors.

### Ongoing Supports

As students experience success at school, parents will share information with others, so ensuring that the school's education program is meeting the needs of all students is important for ongoing success. To learn more about the education program at CPCS see Students as Individuals [<https://www.ncaccessprogram.com/best-practices-and-strategies/2020/10/7/students-as-individuals>]. In addition, this strategy relies on continued advocacy by the Board of Directors, open communication with families, positive student experiences, and visibility in the community and on social media platforms. As evidenced by enrollment growth, commitment to these critical components will result in family advocates and continued word-of-mouth interest.

## Equity Connections

- While word of mouth remains a powerful tool across all walks of life, Prahalad states in low income communities it “is the single most important broadcast mechanism” (2004). Often these close knit circles are well connected and share feedback freely. Therefore, the power of community advocates is essential for achieving diverse school populations. The networks can grow and build upon the school’s reputation through currently enrolled students and local organizations.
- When recruiting, it is important for schools to consider the trusted sources of information already existing in the neighborhoods where educationally disadvantaged students reside. By forming relationships with local organizations, churches, and vetted outreach programs, schools are able to engage with families they would otherwise not be able to reach (Gadd, 2019).

## Research

- 1.) Altemeyer, Dana M. (December 2017). *Public and Private School Marketing Initiatives in Central Indiana: An Exploratory Study*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/20220/21865>
- 2.) Gadd, Sonja and Bettie Ray Butler, (2019) *Promoting Equity and Inclusion using Restorative Practices for Students With and At Risk for Disabilities*, National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED601052.pdf>
- 3.) LeRoy, N. (November 20, 2018). *A Comprehensive Marketing Guide for Charter Schools*. Retrieved from <https://brightmindsmarketing.com/marketing-operations/comprehensive-marketing-guide-for-charter-schools/>
- 4.) Mulvenon, S. *What Can Public School Learn about Marketing from Charter and Private Schools*. Retrieved from [https://www.nspra.org/e\\_network/2012-10\\_trendtracker](https://www.nspra.org/e_network/2012-10_trendtracker)
- 5.) Prahalad, C. K. (2004). *The fortune at the bottom of the pyramid : eradicating poverty through profits*. Upper Saddle River, N.J. :Wharton School Pub.
- 6.) United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts North Carolina, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>