

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

Family and Community Engagement

Family Support

## Families Are Key

### Implementation Description

Doral Academy of NC (DANC) opened in August 2021-2022 at the tail end of the COVID crisis. School leaders knew that families, both parents and students, were feeling disconnected after nearly two years of remote learning so DANC staff wanted to create a welcoming school climate to meet families' needs. Research consistently shows that when families are engaged with their children's education, student achievement increases (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). The work of building trust with parents began the year before the school opened when DANC was recruiting its first students. The school hosted Zoom meetings with prospective families to share their curriculum, school schedule and the overall vision for the school. As things opened up and in-person meetings were possible, the administration held small in-person gatherings with parents who were interested in enrolling their child(ren) at DANC. During these gatherings, school leaders shared the school's vision and mission and learned from parents what they valued most in a school. When these parents learned of the recruitment challenges the school faced due to the pandemic, they took the initiative to share information through their own social media outlets which significantly increased the school's outreach potential.



August 3, 2022

Parents were responsive to DANC leadership's efforts to connect with families. One Mom inquired about a school PTO which led to the formation of Cardinals In Action (CIA), a parent organization that partners with school leaders to implement activities aligned with the school mission. Understanding the needs of school leadership has been shown to be an important factor in a successful parent volunteer initiative (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). CIA grew as other parents noticed the positive impact the group was making on the school. The parents supported a number of activities throughout the school year, including a Yearbook signing and Kona Ice party, spelling bee

### About This School

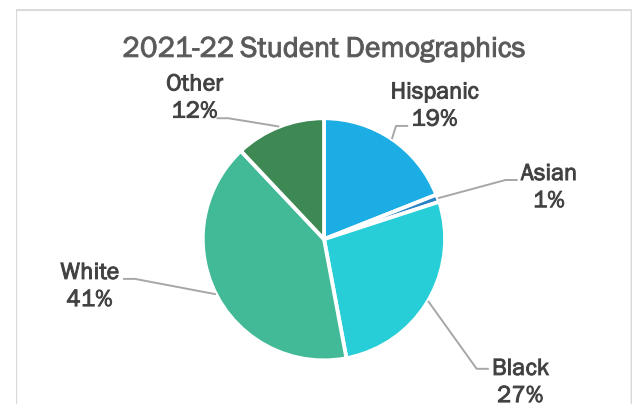
#### Doral Academy

Doral Academy North Carolina delivers an exceptional educational experience that engages students in rigorous learning through STEAM education, empowering them to be lifelong learners and successful future leaders.

**Year School Opened:** 2021-22

**Grant Awarded:** 2021-22

**Initial Grade Levels Served:** K-3



**% ED Student Population:** 28%

**Urbanicity:** Urban / Raleigh, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Wake County)<sup>3</sup>:** 7.4%

decorations, and a Spring Fling. The Spring Fling event occurred on a Saturday to accommodate parent work schedules, and the school sponsored the event to ensure cost was not a barrier for families. The event served a dual purpose: promoting strong family-school connections and networking with others outside the DANC community. Families were encouraged to bring friends who may be interested in learning more about DANC. School leaders anticipate Cardinals In Action will continue to grow as enrollment increases in the coming years.



In addition to CIA participation, parents volunteered in other ways as well. For example, one parent assisted with morning and afternoon carpool, while another, who is a trained counselor, delivered an anti-bullying session to students.

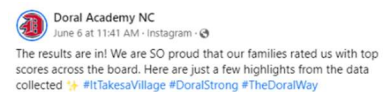


At the end of the school year, school leadership hosted a volunteer appreciation breakfast. Over 70 parents were invited, and about 40 were able to attend. For a school serving about 200 students this indicates that about 50% of families were volunteering in some capacity. Honoring these volunteers helps to ensure that they partner with the school in the future. Also, school leaders shared updates via [social media](#) to highlight student celebrations and family involvement opportunities.

The school utilized NC ACCESS funds to purchase staff professional development, curriculum and technology, therefore delivering the exceptional education they promised parents. Because both parents and students were pleased with the school experience, parents were motivated to support the school. NC ACCESS funds supported DANC's effort to provide a quality education that would earn the trust of families and ultimately promote a strong school-family connection.

## Results

These parent survey results show the level of satisfaction parents have with their connection to the school as well as their children's education.



Around 50% of families are volunteering at the school. Others support the school by donating materials as needed.



## Challenges

Opening a school is time consuming, and school leaders found it difficult to plan parental involvement activities in addition to their other managerial responsibilities. However, the team continued to prioritize making connections and building a culture of collaboration between the school and families. At the start of the year, progress was a bit slow and bumpy, but after winter break the school was able to increase the number of activities by utilizing the solid parent community that they worked to establish during the first half of the school year. The CIA eagerly took on tasks allowing school staff to focus on optimizing the educational experience for all students.

## Future Modifications

Next year, DANC will continue working with the CIA to provide activities and events tied to the school's mission and vision that will strengthen the school's connection with families.

In addition, parents have expressed their desire for the school to offer clubs and sports. While completing end of year interviews with staff, school leaders realized many of their staff members already have interests and skills which qualify them to sponsor clubs. In 2022-23, the school plans to offer these before/after school clubs free of charge to mitigate barriers for participation among low income families.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

Before opening the school to parent volunteers, it is important to establish a volunteer background check process to ensure the safety of students.

### Ongoing Supports

Transparency with families is critical to establishing a trusting connection between school and home. The school maintains a commitment to open and honest communication as they keep students' best interests at the forefront of their decision making.

## Equity Connections

Building trust is an essential step in promoting parental involvement with diverse families. While factors such as negative past experiences or historic discrimination can be initial barriers for productive school-parent relationships, a school's culturally sensitive approach can be effective for engaging historically marginalized families (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). DANC works to ensure parent communication is a two way street in which parents feel heard. Also, they recognize and seek out parental involvement opportunities that may be more conducive to diverse families' needs, such as offering opportunities outside of school hours. Additionally, the school ensures cost is not a barrier to participation for various activities, such as offering the Spring Fling as a free event. Forging school-home connections with the 25% of DANC's student population who qualify as educationally disadvantaged will reap significant benefits in both meaningful relationships and improved academic performance.

## Research

1. Brewster, C. & Railsback, J. (2003). "*Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families*". Adolescent Literacy. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Accessed on June 18, 2021. Retrieved from <http://www.adlit.org/article/21522/>
2. Cotton, K. & Wiklund, K. R. (May, 1989). "*Parent Involvement in Education. School Improvement Research Series: Close-Up #6*". P. 3. Accessed on April 13, 2021. Retrieved from <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/parent-involvement-in-education.pdf>
3. United States Census Bureau, "*Quick Facts North Carolina*", Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>