

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

## School Culture

## Student Engagement

### Don't Leave the Boys Behind

#### Implementation Description

Guilford Preparatory Academy (GPA), a K-8 school located in Greensboro, NC, serves a diverse population of scholars with 91% of students identifying as students of color. While the school has consistently focused on equity and closing the achievement gap, the Principal recently noticed a troubling disparity. At an annual honor roll celebration, there were a significant number of boys of color being honored in grades K-3, but in grades 4-8, there were only eight. The growth and achievement for boys of color was simply not keeping up with that for girls of color and this gap needed to be addressed. The disparity between boys of color and their peers has been a concern in education at large. In 2016, 62% of Black college students were young women, while only 38% were young men (U.S. Department of Education, p.vi, 2019). This inequity has significant implications, because high achievement in school decreases a child's chances of living in poverty as an adult (Giovetti, 2020). GPA's Principal shared this concern with his staff, and they began to brainstorm strategies to improve achievement outcomes for boys of color at GPA.

In August of 2019, using NC ACCESS funds, GPA provided a one-day virtual Professional Development (PD) session delivered by Dr. Chance Lewis of UNC-Charlotte. Dr. Lewis shared 25 concrete strategies for engaging with boys of color from his research in the field of urban education. School leadership shared this list of strategies with the entire teaching staff and continues to share a recording of the PD session with new hires each August. Following this training, the school modified their existing [lesson plan template](#) to ensure teachers were intentionally incorporating at least one strategy from the list into their daily instruction. This list continues to grow as the staff engages in additional PD, and they find new, effective strategies to expand their instructional tool box. One strategy that has been particularly successful is that of Making Learning Tangible. Studies have shown that

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#### About This School

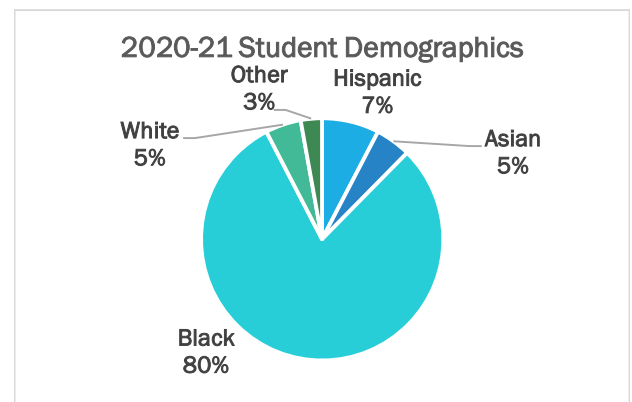
##### Guilford Preparatory Academy

We are a free public school open to all NC students offering a classical style of education, a rigorous curriculum, and a focus on our three core values - courage, respect, and the spirit of adventure. Our mission is to provide a rigorous classical education with high academic and personal expectations that inspires students to be productive and thoughtful citizens in their communities and beyond.

**Year School Opened:** 2001-02

**Grant Awarded:** 2020-21

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



**% ED Student Population:** 63%

**Urbanicity:** Urban / Greensboro, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Guilford County)<sup>6</sup>:** 16.0%

Black and Brown boys benefit significantly from opportunities to engage in creative and interactive



educational experiences (Wright, 2019). GPA teachers began including hands-on learning in all content areas. One instructor started his own YouTube channel, [Mr. Sargent](#), where he shared recordings of his experiments, and staff often heard students excitedly discussing the latest video (Bennie Bradley, personal interview, June 9, 2021). Hands-on opportunities occurred across content areas using manipulatives and interactive lessons that engaged students, and sometimes their entire family. During virtual learning, the school used ClassDojo, their parent communication platform, to share weekly experiments families could perform at home with common household items. When necessary, items were not readily available, teachers created supply packets for families to pick up at the school. Providing students with educational supplies is an effective way to ease financial burdens on families who are experiencing poverty (Williams, 2017).

After requiring teachers to include these practical strategies in every lesson, school leadership established an accountability and support structure. In order to ensure follow up from the PD, teachers were

asked to submit their lessons for review each week demonstrating their use of the 25 strategies. The school leadership also participated in Instructional Rounds, in which they visited classes to observe instructional time and ensure the new strategies were implemented with fidelity. The administration designed a [rubric](#) to collect observational data gathered during these rounds. Additionally, the staff utilized the strategies within their regular Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to provide additional modeling and practice for teachers. Finally, in January 2020 the staff completed a book study using the text [Becoming the Educator They Need: Strategies, Mindsets, and Beliefs for Supporting Male Black and Latino Students](#) by Robert Jackson. The school staff participated in two interactive virtual sessions, each lasting two hours, with the author. The school leadership continues to have dialogue at least twice monthly to reflect on their school's progress in meeting the needs of boys of color.

## Results

In comparing testing data from 2019-20 and 2020-21, third quarter benchmarks show a decrease in the achievement gaps between girls and boys of color. The 22-point gap in reading decreased to a 9-point gap, and the 11.7 gap in math decreased to an 8-point gap. In science, the changes were so dramatic that the boys have surpassed the girls' scores by 18 points.

Additionally, family engagement has increased through the implementation of tangible learning initiatives, such as family experiments.

## Challenges

Communication and engagement during the pandemic was the primary challenge for GPA. The school implemented Class Dojo, which promotes family engagement and real time parent-teacher messaging. Teachers and the Principal engaged in outreach, including home visits as needed, to motivate student attendance. Lesson plans began to include brain breaks, music, and hands-on activities to increase the engagement level for all students. School leadership also instituted a Daily Debrief at the end of each day to support the instructional team.

## Future Modifications

GPA hopes to build on their parent engagement efforts by developing an intentional Parent Engagement Plan with specific goals and outcomes to ensure the school offers ongoing support for scholars and their families.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

School leadership felt that it was paramount to identify a specific goal and then communicate it to the entire school staff. Thoughtful PD was then provided to offer practical strategies to address this concern moving forward.

### Ongoing Supports

In order to ensure effective, long lasting change, GPA facilitated ongoing discussions and instructional observations. The administration prioritized a structure of accountability and support for teachers to successfully work toward this goal.

## Equity Connections

Addressing disparities in academic achievement can provide a “*pathway out of poverty*” (Montecel, 2013) for Educationally Disadvantaged (ED) students. GPA promoted higher academic achievement for their students by initiating more targeted and engaging instruction, providing educational materials for families in need, and by training teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy.

## Research

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