

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

Family and Community Engagement

Family Support

Seeing Each Other F.A.C.E. to Face

Implementation Description

Every year, Lakeside Charter Academy (LCA) collaborates with Scholastic Books to host a book fair for students. Because of this partnership, Scholastic representatives offered additional services, including their [Family and Community Engagement \(FACE\)](#) program for staff and families. Family engagement has long been a priority for LCA, so school leadership decided to use available NC ACCESS funding to participate in the FACE program, which included a school assessment, eight training sessions, and ongoing coaching. According to research, family engagement initiatives similar to the FACE program have the potential to continuously improve school culture for everyone (Reform Support Network, 2014).

FACE coaching began in fall 2020 with an assessment on LCA's current strengths and areas of need. Scholastic's evaluation process included an on-site visit, interviews with staff members, photographs from inside the school, and a faux phone call. Scholastic coaches compiled their observations and shared the detailed report with LCA's school leadership. Coaches then used the data from the report to drive the objectives and learning goals of the professional development for LCA staff and the Parent Advisory Council (PAC). While FACE training is typically two full days of in-person training, COVID-19 safety guidelines necessitated virtual training, which was divided into three-hour sessions occurring every Wednesday over an eight-week period.

About This School

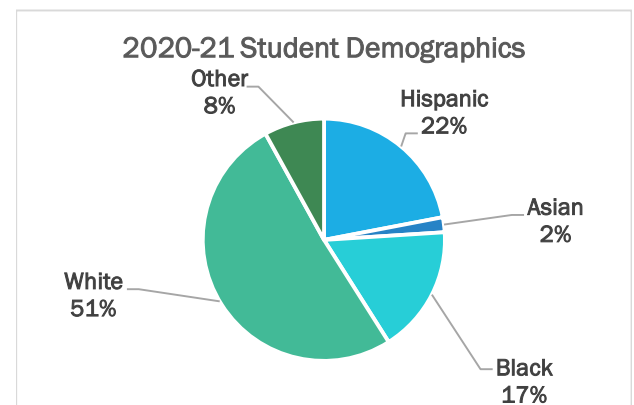
Lakeside Charter Academy

The fullest development of our students will occur through our pillars of scholarship, leadership and citizenship. These pillars include a challenging comprehensive academic program that can be differentiated for a large range of competencies. Our leadership curriculum is designed to develop confident and capable students that will participate in community service, civics instruction and focus student responsibility on becoming productive citizens in the community.

Year School Opened: 2014-15

Grant Awarded: 2020-21

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-8



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Scholastic representatives facilitated the training, which addressed topics, such as equity, diversity, family engagement, and practical strategies for effective and respectful parent communication. Specifically, the training increased the staff's understanding of cultural differences and how those differences impact families' styles of engagement. Research shows that families, particularly those of underrepresented minorities, support their child(ren)'s education and character development in ways which are often *"overlooked by school personnel because this involvement does not fall within traditional definitions of engagement and in many instances takes place within the community and at home, away from school"* (Marrero, 2016). For many families, an established trusting relationship with school leaders is a prerequisite for families to engage with the school community. (Brewster & Railsback, 2003).

In order to help staff members apply the principles addressed in the training, they received practical, interactive homework assignments. One such assignment included having teams plan a curriculum night that incorporated the engagement strategies from the training and appealed to a diverse range of families. During the next training, these plans were shared and discussed. The school's Parent Advisory Council was an integral part of these discussions, because they gave helpful insights into what kind of engagement families are interested in and how that perspective may sometimes differ from staff expectations. LCA leadership commented that these conversations with families led to many *"a-ha moments"* among the staff (Jim Montague, personal communication, June 29, 2021). LCA's efforts to engage families and elicit parent input aligns with research which shows the countless benefits of family involvement in schools (Bogenschneider & Johnson, 2004; Cotton & Wiklund, 1989; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013).

While these initial trainings have ended, LCA continues to increase engagement with their school families. The school has a designated account manager and Scholastic liaison who consistently checks with school leadership to offer ongoing support with their engagement goals. School staff have already implemented what they've learned by planning and hosting more community events for families. Based on a suggestion from the PAC, on June 11, 2021, the Huntersville Aquatic Center was rented for a last day of school celebration. School staff expected about 100 guests to attend, but were pleasantly surprised to see around 300 staff, students, and family members participate.

Results

LCA teachers commented that FACE was the most valuable professional development they had experienced. As a result of this training, trust between staff and families increased as perspectives were broadened and dialogue improved. School leaders observed that as teachers gained a better understanding of student motivations and experiences, the number of discipline-related issues decreased (Dr. Jim Montague, personal communication, June 29, 2021).

Challenges

FACE is typically a two-day, in-person training session; however, Scholastic trained LCA's staff virtually due to COVID-19 safety guidelines. School leadership commented that the training may have been marginally more effective if it had been delivered in-person, but they felt that

the Scholastic facilitators went to great lengths to keep the training interactive and provide opportunities for small group discussions. Additionally, LCA and Scholastic both felt that it was even more beneficial for learning retention that the training sessions were spread out into smaller increments over eight weeks.

Future Modifications

School leadership will use Scholastic resources to train new staff members with the information gleaned from last year's sessions. LCA plans to pursue additional PD opportunities with Scholastic in the future.

The school also plans to begin hosting more events to increase families and staff interaction. So far, they have planned multiple Curriculum Nights, an Open House with food trucks and bouncy houses, and Specials Nights with art, music, PE, and Spanish related activities.

Critical Components

Getting Started

LCA learned about the FACE program as a result of their preexisting partnership with Scholastic. Scheduling time for training sessions was made easier, surprisingly enough, because of the Coronavirus. The school hosted virtual training sessions on Wednesday mornings for eight weeks because that was their dedicated remote day.

Ongoing Supports

In the upcoming school year, LCA will receive eight hours of coaching (or more if needed) from a Scholastic mentor who will help the staff implement what they learned during the 2020-2021 training.

The school's six-member Parent Advisory Council, which represents diverse demographics within their school community, will continue to meet monthly and be a guiding force at LCA.

Equity Connections

Studies demonstrate the critical need for school leaders to seek understanding and build trust with families from diverse cultures within their school community (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). This is especially important for families experiencing poverty who could benefit the most from school support (Parrett & Budge, 2016). LCA participated in training sessions and discussions with school families in order to improve parent-school connections. Additionally, the school increased two-way communication between school and families by asking their Parent Advisory Council for feedback on initiatives, paying special attention to how programs and strategies impacted historically marginalized groups represented on their diverse PAC.

Research

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