

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

Marketing and Recruitment

Community Engagement

## The Neighborhood Spiderman

### Implementation Description

Reflective practitioners at Lincoln Charter School (LCS) recognized a need to implement formal initiatives to address diversity and inclusion at their school. Research has shown that diversity has a variety of benefits for both students and professionals (Phillips, 2014). In order to ensure adequate personnel time could be committed to diversity initiatives, the school hired a dedicated Outreach Consultant (OC) with the availability of NC ACCESS funds. The applicant selected to fill the OC role has over 10 years of experience at LCS, both as a former staff member and a LCS parent, giving him intimate familiarity with the school. The OC collaborated with school administration, the MTSS team, and counseling staff to build positive relationships with community stakeholders, ensure students' academic progress, and promote LCS community expectations.

Building relationships with community stakeholders involved increasing engagement and recruitment efforts. In order to reach prospective families during the COVID-19 pandemic, the outreach consultant leveraged the school staff's networks through a recruitment incentive program. Staff members were challenged to promote the school during the Open Enrollment period by targeting community pre-schools, day care centers, local businesses as well as their friends and neighbors. Each week, participants were entered in a prize drawing for Chick-fil-a gift cards. Studies have shown that team incentive programs engage employees and increase

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### About This School

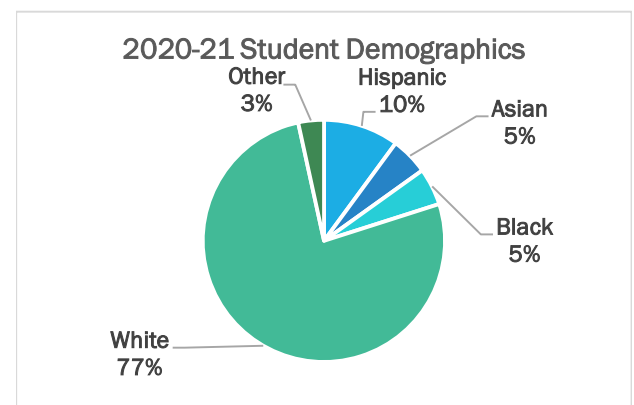
#### Lincoln Charter School

The mission of Lincoln Charter School is to facilitate the development of college ready individuals through emphasis on rigorous academics and our community expectations: honesty, respect, empathy, responsibility, service and preparedness. Lincoln Charter's Class of 2020 cohort graduation rate was almost 100%. These graduates accumulated over 625 acceptances, were offered over \$13.8 million in merit aid, logged over 18,000 service hours during their time at Lincoln Charter and more than 1 in 10 are entering post-secondary studies as first-generation college students. Lincoln Charter is the largest brick and mortar charter school in NC with campuses in Lincolnton and Denver serving over 2,200 K-12 students during the 2020-2021 school year. The Lincolnton campus is currently under construction. Once completed, this project will add over 50 new classrooms and complete over 80,000 sq/ft of new buildings.

**Year School Opened:** 1998-99

**Grant Awarded:** 2020-21

**Initial Grade Levels Served:** K-12



**% ED Student Population:** 18%

**Urbanicity:** Rural / Lincolnton & Denver, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Lincoln County)<sup>8</sup>:** 10.3%

their productivity by 44% (Stolovich, 2010). In addition, the outreach consultant visited targeted communities and met with individuals whenever possible. Studies have shown that engaging with community members improves school culture and student outcomes (Reform Support Network, 2014).

Furthermore, the OC focused on supporting newly recruited students through academic programming and family involvement. Studies have shown when recruiting for diversity, it is important to put procedures in place to create a sustainable and safe environment for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Due to COVID-19 safety guidelines, new students were not in the school building to experience the LCS culture as in a typical year. The OC was intentional to connect with families and ensure they had everything they needed to be successful at LCS, which included providing laptops and hotspots. Research has shown that providing technology for students is an important step in achieving academic equity (Anderson, 2019). In many ways, the OC at LCS is seen as the “neighborhood spiderman”, a person who is willing to step in any time a child, family, or staff member is in need of support.



Another component of the Outreach Consultant’s responsibilities was to promote Lincoln Charter’s community expectations for diversity and inclusion. To that end, the OC facilitated discussions with staff members, families, and students based on Emmanuel Acho’s [“Uncomfortable Conversations With a Black Man”](#). The Anti-Defamation League recommends involving students in conversations about race issues to improve their critical thinking and social-emotional skills (“Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism”, N.d.). Additionally, the OC created a [Spotlight on Diversity](#) feature on the school’s website to highlight the wealth of diverse cultures represented in the student population. The website features information on Hispanic, Black, and Native American heritages, as well as information about Women’s History and Human Rights Day. On these carefully curated pages, online visitors are able to learn about various cultures from members of the school community through webinars, stories shared by guest speakers, and links to resources that families can use at home. In addition, teachers can share the resources with students to promote cultural awareness in the classroom. The outreach consultant’s efforts have brought diversity initiatives to the forefront of everyday life at Lincoln Charter.



## Results

When families were surveyed about the impact of the OC position on their child(ren) or family overall, over 66% reported a positive impact and the remaining responses were neutral on the topic. One family member commented, *“You have done everything possible to help and made things easier; couldn’t have found a better school or a better person”*

## Challenges

The Coronavirus pandemic created significant challenges during the 2020-21 school year by greatly restricting any ability to have large gatherings, such as Lincoln Charter's Cultural Night Festival. The outreach consultant quickly adapted and created the school website's Spotlight on Diversity feature as an alternate way to explore and celebrate diverse cultures. Social distancing during the pandemic also hindered the school's ability to interact with current and prospective families in person, so the school leveraged social media and other avenues to keep families informed and connected.

## Future Modifications

Based on survey feedback, the school will modify its open house procedures to ensure families meet the OC at the start of the school year and better understand how he is able to support them and their child(ren).

Next year the OC will initiate a bimonthly opportunity for students of color to meet in a safe space and discuss concerns, ideas, and dreams for the future. Additionally, the students' families will be invited to participate in a cohort which will meet monthly to communicate needs and to share with each other.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

Funding to hire a dedicated staff member to facilitate outreach initiatives was essential to addressing the needs of all students at LCS. Furthermore, school leaders emphasized the importance of hiring an outreach consultant with the necessary skills to accomplish the work. The applicant must be passionate about the mission and vision of the school and committed to the community it serves. Additionally, the OC must be flexible, patient, and able to have difficult conversations when necessary to ensure that everyone is heard and feels valued as a member of the community.

### Ongoing Supports

The outreach consultant plans to continue facilitating meetings with students, staff members, and families of color to ensure students receive the support needed for success and families maintain two-way communication with school leaders.

## Equity Connections

Anthony Abraham Jack, researcher and Assistant Professor for Harvard Graduate School, has written extensively about students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are recruited to elite schools in the name of diversity only to be shocked and obstructed by cultural differences upon arrival (Illing, 2019). LCS is committed to ensuring achievement, both academically and relationally, for their Educationally Disadvantaged students. They hired an outreach consultant in the 2020-21 academic year to specifically focus on recruiting, building relationships with,

and supporting students and families throughout their time at LCS from enrollment to graduation.

## Research

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