

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

School Culture

Student Engagement

Meeting Students' Needs

Implementation Description

MINA opened its doors to students in fall 2020, but due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements they opened as a 100% virtual school. In their first year of operation, MINA identified and addressed three primary areas of need for their students: adequate resources for learning, targeted instruction to improve academic achievement, and accessible transportation once in-person instruction resumed.

With the goal of making a high-quality educational experience available to all, it became clear that administrative staff would need to actively break down technological barriers to student achievement. MINA achieved this by providing Chromebooks and internet hotspots to all students to ensure that they were able to attend live meets each day and complete assignments from home. Additionally, the school recognized parents' need to contact teachers in a timely manner during virtual instruction. Therefore, the school issued cell phones to teachers to facilitate two-way communication in real time. With the help of NC ACCESS grant funding, MINA purchased GoGuardian to improve the remote learning experience. GoGuardian is a tool that easily integrates with Google Classroom and other platforms to create one easy to use portal. It allows teachers to monitor student browsing activity, reduces distractions during instructional time, and alerts staff members to signs of depression or bullying. Finally, it assists administration with understanding the amount of time a teacher is spending providing assistance and support to individual students.

Once students had access to adequate technology, school efforts were directed towards identifying students' strengths and areas of need in order to plan for targeted instruction. Since it was MINA's first year in operation, the school decided to assess all students using universal screeners. This testing revealed considerable learning gaps. For example, the NC Beginning of Grade testing found that 77%

About This School

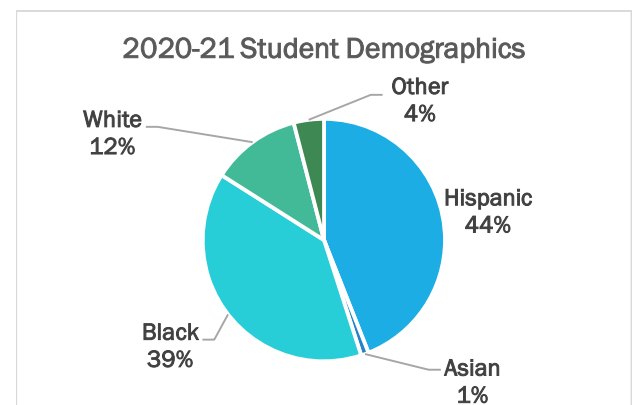
MINA (More Is Now Achievable) Charter School of Lee County

Our philosophy is to embrace all students regardless of their background and ability level providing a strong academic setting that is supportive, innovative, creative, and effective. As a STREAM school, we stress reading across the curriculum, a non-suspension policy, and the use of mindfulness as a tool to help our students.

Year School Opened: 2020-21

Grant Awarded: 2019-20

Grade Levels Served: K-5



% ED Student Population: ?%

Urbanicity: Rural / Sanford, NC

Persons in Poverty Lee County)⁴: 14.2%

of MINA's third grade students were below grade level in English Language Arts. The administration immediately began seeking remediation strategies to address this disparity. They established a partnership with Lexplore, a program which uses artificial intelligence to track eye movement while a student reads. The assessment results provide recommendations for instruction based on each student's specific needs. By the time MINA facilitated Lexplore testing in March 2021, only 14% of the student body was below grade level in reading, 42% were at grade level, and 6% were above grade level (34% of students were not yet old enough to read). MINA's Reading Specialist & Hispanic Liaison was especially impressed with Lexplore's reading assessment program, commenting that by using *"the results and intervention we can provide students with the best education and support, with the latest technology and learning strategies"* (K. Gonzalez, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Utilizing NC ACCESS funding, MINA implemented Great Minds Curriculum, which produces virtual learning curricula for math, ELA, and science. Students were moving through the rigorous curriculum as dictated by the pacing guides, but they were not consistently achieving mastery. The school administration met with staff and asked them to shift their thinking from pacing guide driven instruction to mastery driven instruction. The administrators encouraged teachers to let student learning set the pace, even if it meant not covering all topics by the end of the year. Teachers embraced this new approach and were empowered to move at a pace that prioritized student learning, which has resulted in increased student achievement scores.

The administration also scheduled professional development (PD) in order to provide teachers with tools they needed to support student academic growth. Teachers participated in Lexplore assessment training to ensure they were able to implement the program with fidelity and maximize results. Additionally, teachers joined a Teacher Leader Course and attended a virtual PD session with DreamBuilders of Charlotte, which was paid for with available NC ACCESS funds. The DreamBuilders session provided teachers with data-driven remediation strategies and included training for utilizing music to teach reading and math.

When MINA transitioned to in-person learning (Plan A) in April 2021, 202 students began learning in the school building and 40 students continued learning remotely. Students were now better equipped to achieve academically, but the school began to address a new need: transportation. School-provided transportation was the only solution for many of the families in their geographically large service area which includes Lee County, where the school is located and four surrounding counties: Chatham, Harnett, Cumberland and Moore Counties. Using available funds from the NC ACCESS grant, they were able to purchase four buses. Initially, they established satellite stops, but this still left families with the burden of finding transportation to the area bus stop. Consequently, corner stops were established, which offer nearly door-to-door student pick up and are much more accessible for families.

Results

Lexplore assessments and NC Check-ins showed academic improvements for all students over the course of the school year, and MINA staff also witnessed qualitative growth. One kindergarten teacher remarked *"There was a student in the earlier parts of the year who I had recommended to be retained; that same student is now my best reader in the class and has made extraordinary progress"* (C. McCormick, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Because of the work MINA administration has done to remove barriers, no student is left without school transportation, technological access to school work, or academic support.

Challenges

Since MINA opened during the pandemic as a 100% virtual school, it was a challenge to transition to in-person learning, especially when it came to student transportation. Bus routes had to be tested and reevaluated before the school was able to find a system that worked for all families.

Future Modifications

Based on MINA's success with Lexplore's data-driven assessment and instruction in 2020-21, they plan to build on this progress moving forward by purchasing iReady in 2021-22. This program, and others like it, use frequent assessments to gather data and personalize every student's educational plan by targeting instruction based on assessment results. They also plan to pursue PD opportunities that will help the entire school staff understand how to effectively interpret and apply assessment data from programs like Lexplore and iReady.

Critical Components

Getting Started

Students would not have been able to experience so much academic growth if MINA had not first provided them with the resources to learn, namely laptops and internet access. Additionally, increased personal contact between families and teachers through school-issued cell phones and GoGuardian played a role in student success.

Ongoing Supports

As schools integrate new technology into their educational plans, it is essential for families and staff to be provided with ongoing support and training for using these programs to their full potential.

Equity Connections

Studies have shown that technology has the potential to decrease educational inequalities ("Technology can close achievement gaps, improve learning," 2014). In an effort to make education more accessible for all, MINA provided devices and internet hotspots to all students and provided training for teachers to ensure the success of online instructional programs.

Providing free transportation to families increases their educational options (Sanchez, 2017; Valant & Lincove, 2018). MINA purchased buses and offered corner bus stops to alleviate transportation concerns and empower families to send their child(ren) to their school of choice.

Research

1. Sanchez, J. (June 1, 2017). "What Good Is School Choice for Low-Income Families If It Doesn't Come With a School Bus?". Education Post. Accessed on May 14, 2021. Retrieved from <https://educationpost.org/what-good-is-school-choice-for-low-income-families-if-it-doesnt-come-with-a-school-bus/>
2. "Technology can close achievement gaps, improve learning". (September 10, 2014). Stanford Graduate School of Education. Accessed on May 14, 2021. Retrieved from

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3. Valant, J. & Lincove, J.A. (March 16, 2018). "The Barriers that make charter schools inaccessible to disadvantaged families". Brookings. Accessed on May 14, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/03/16/the-barriers-that-make-charter-schools-inaccessible-to-disadvantaged-families/>
4. United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts North Carolina, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>